

STOKE EDITH

Mike Barnes heads for the Herefordshire hills where he visits Stoke Edith, a pretty shoot with a good reputation, and now run by Mark Coleman.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCUS JANSSEN

Ask Mark Coleman what he likes most about shooting and he will tell you it's the rearing of game, creating drives and seeing a day unfold. A keen game Shot, since taking on two serious shoots and opening a game farm, his view of the sport has taken a sharp shift. Not that he regrets it for a moment. "I still love shooting," he explained, "but running the shoots and creating drives gives me more pleasure than I could have anticipated." Not surprising really, as the shoots he has taken on are Stoke Edith and Glanusk – both already top drawer.

Forty-three-year-old Mark is first and foremost a builder and property developer. Taking the shoots on was seen as something of a hobby. "But the way it's gone, the shooting and game farm have pretty much taken over."

Speaking to him, in just a short while you realise that this is a man in his element and yet his is far from the usual story of son of a

serious Shot, a handed-down .410 etc. "There was a gun in the house when I was a child but everybody had one in those days. My father wasn't particularly interested in shooting – he was a golfer.

"But I shot from a very young age. I got an airgun at eight, and a shotgun two years later." Pigeons and rabbits took top billing. "My father shot occasionally, and though he didn't share my level of enthusiasm, he used to take me to clay shoots where I competed and had some success in the under-16 category."

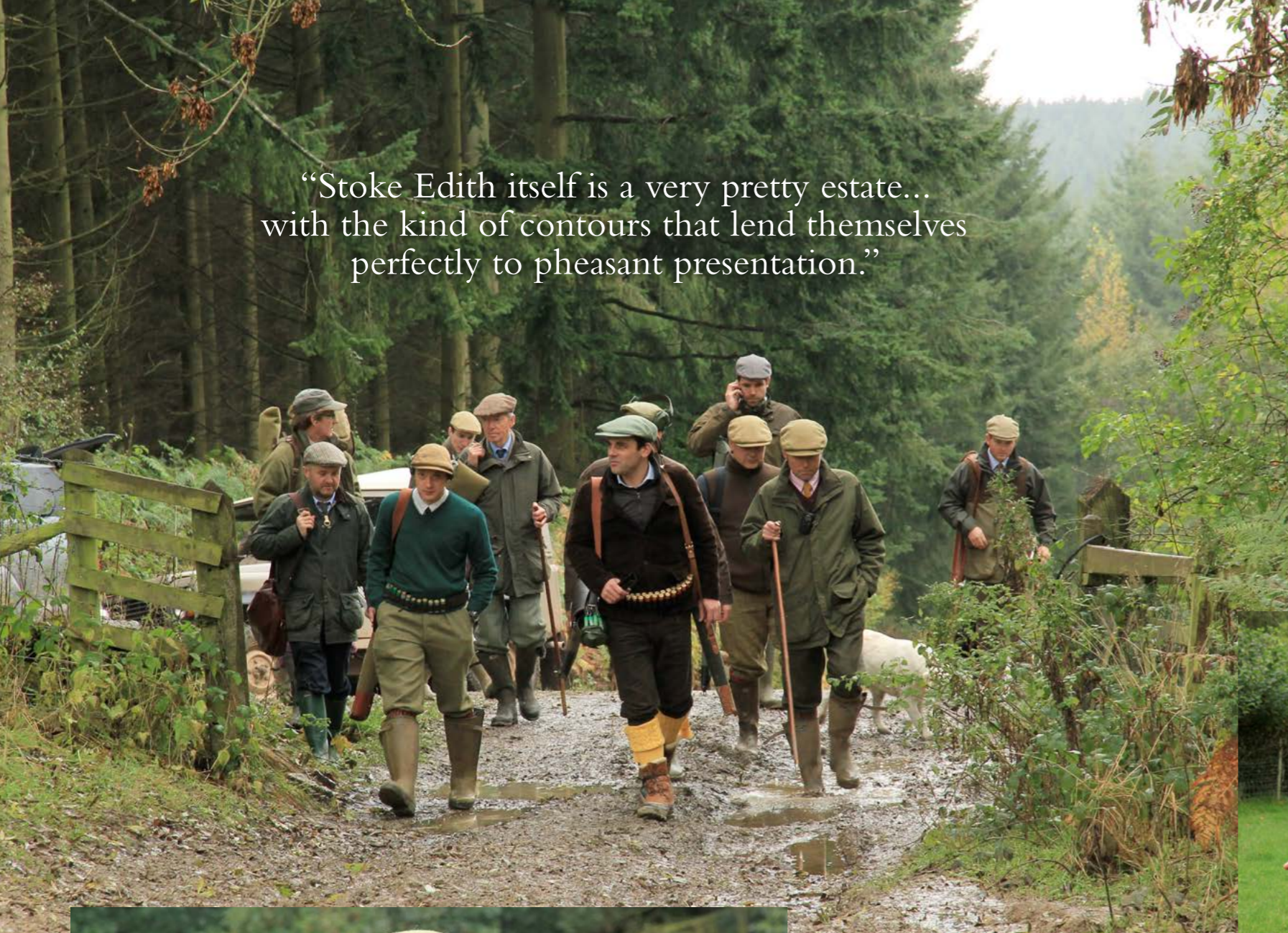
Mark and his wife, Rachel, and their two sons Thomas (17) and Max (15), live near Ledbury, just a short distance from Stoke Edith. He cut his shoot-owner teeth on a small shoot in the area, having shot in Hereford and the West Country. He is in his fourth season at Glanusk in the Brecon Beacons, a spectacular spot which will be featured in our next issue.

Though both shoots cover around



Plenty of game at
Bella's Point

“Stoke Edith itself is a very pretty estate... with the kind of contours that lend themselves perfectly to pheasant presentation.”



David Comyn addresses a good crosser at Punch Bowl



Ben Randall & his two-times Championship winning FTCh Heolybwch Fatty were on-hand for picking-up duty



Mark Coleman, who runs the shooting at both Stoke Edith and Glanusk

4,500 acres, Stoke Edith is very different to Glanusk, and Mark says it is very much work in progress, but it is coming together nicely and he is surely being modest. Stoke Edith Estate is owned by the Foley family, purchased by ironmaster Thomas Foley in 1670. He was a man of great wealth, taking full advantage of the iron ore on which his land sits – it is said that at one point it was possible to walk from Stoke Edith to Birmingham without stepping off Foley land.

Stoke Edith itself is a very pretty estate, with lots of long established woodland and the kind of contours that lend themselves perfectly to pheasant presentation. Much of it was a deer park, though Mark does his stalking (which he loves) in Scotland, and had just returned from a week in Scotland where he divided his time

between Loch Choire and Loch Carron. He is also a keen fisherman and last year caught his first ever salmon on the Usk – a 23 pounder!

“The mechanics of the day are what really interests me. Not just the shooting, which of course has to be good, but from the arrival of the Guns on shoot day, it has to be right. That’s why we completely refurbished the shoot room at Stoke Edith House (the former Rectory) – the arrival and the shoot meal are very important.” The food on the day of our visit was excellent. We enjoyed four drives, with nibbles and drinks after the second. The opener was The Quarry, though the quarry was unseen due to the bank of trees over which the birds were flushed. Standing in grass, it was a classic setting, and this was only late October but delivered some very good pheasants.

Pheasant rearing
There are two gamekeepers, Leon Gladwin and Kyle Burden, and two underkeepers, brothers Brad and Tom Stokes. They rear sufficient game to shoot three days a week on both shoots. Hens are caught-up and sent to a colleague who has a closed flock. In return they get eggs or chicks, imported from France. They release only a few partridges, as Mark concentrates on getting the pheasants to fly exactly how he wants them. “Maybe some partridges next year. But we are experimenting with strains of pheasant and have tried some Japanese Greens which have flown well off the steep hills at Glanusk. About 70 per cent of their birds are Bazanti, the remainder Japanese Greens. The game farm is also thriving, and Mark now has a number of regular customers.

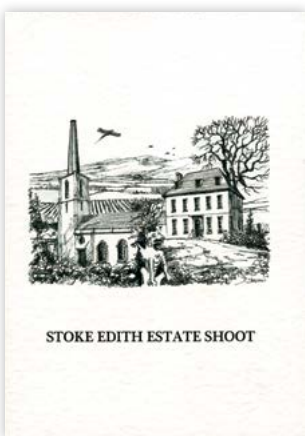
SHOOT PROFILE

This was followed by Bella's Point where there was a lot of game, although some were not yet fully feathered but flew well enough. Guns stood in an open field, backs to the wood. Punch Bowl was the first drive after a nibbles break. Here we were lined out down a road, with tall deciduous trees in front and behind – some excellent birds were presented.

Finally, Park Cottage, a first class pheasant finale. Guns were pegged out in a long disused, and grassed-over reservoir. All around were tall trees, behind which were extensive cover crops. The pegs were scattered to give everyone some action. The birds flew brilliantly and again there were plenty of them. Some excellent shooting.

Not surprisingly, the team were all delighted with their day. Damian Cox, (below, second right), an engaging character from the world of advertising, had been to Stoke Edith before and was a big fan. Indeed, it was easy to see why. Bag: 291 pheasants & 1 redleg partridge

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James Nelson-Sullivan reaching for a tall bird at The Quarry



From left: Harry Chichester, Mike Barnes, Robert Jones-Davies, Mark Coleman, David Comyn, Ben Randall (with FTCh Heolybwllch Fatty), Jonathan Chandler, Cennydd Roberts, Patrick Fisher, Damian Cox & James Nelson-Sullivan