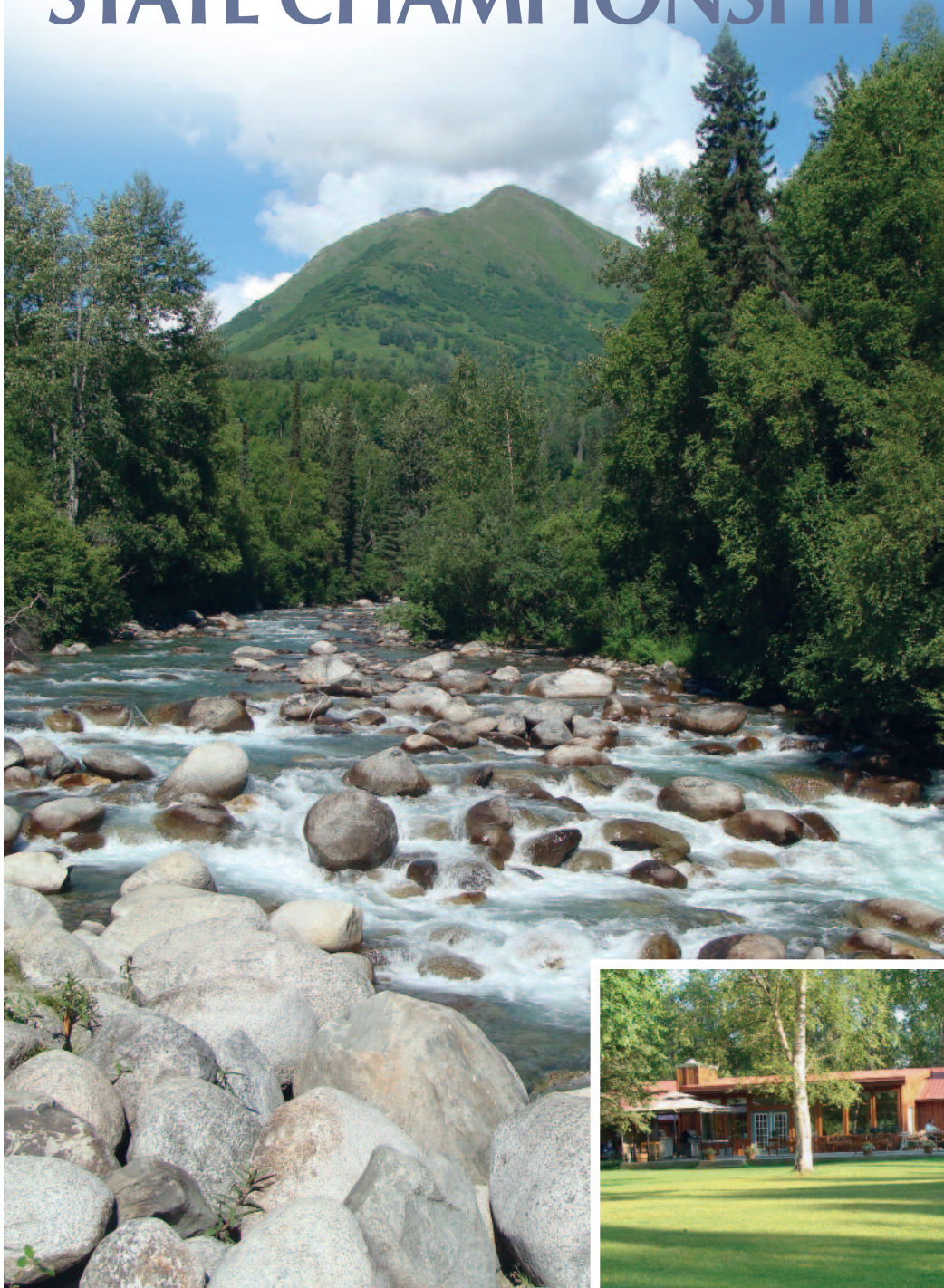


ALASKA

DANA FARRELL REPORTS FROM GROUSE RIDGE

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP



Alaska – land of the ‘Midnight Sun’. I realized the significance of the nickname when the night sky remained dimly lit as I turned back the bed sheets at 11:30pm on the first evening of my visit. As if to punctuate the weirdness of the previous evening’s night time sky, my first visit to the 49th State continued on a surreal note when I was awakened by a 5.3 magnitude earthquake at 6am on the first morning there!

Alaska is a vast landscape, brimming with a diverse assortment of natural wonders – including more shoreline than all of the Lower 48 States combined, countless glaciers, alpine peaks and a rich animal population running the gamut from Marmot to Musk Ox. Seemingly exotic to us visitors, Alaskans take their surroundings in step. While staying with local shooter Dave Quaid and his lovely wife Barb, we witnessed twin moose calves lounging in their suburban Anchorage yard – evidently not a particularly unusual sight.



Split Schedule

Sporting clays is very popular in Alaska and even with a comparatively small population, the State produces some excellent shooters. This year's Alaska State Championship was held over the course of two weekends – Birchwood Recreation and Shooting Club in nearby Chugiak featured the Sub-gauge, 5-Stand and pump gun events, with the second half the following weekend at Grouse Ridge in Wasilla for the Pre-lim, Main Event, FITASC and Side by Side competitions. The Alaska State board split the event, benefitting both clubs and allowing visitors to shoot both weekends with several days off in between to take in the sights. The fishing is fabulous this time of year – and many Out of State shooters took advantage of the halibut and salmon fishing while there.

DAVE QUAID



Grouse Ridge, host of the 2011 Main Event, is owned and managed by Arlene Brunnhoelzl, daughter-in-law of the late Harry Brunnhoelzl Jr., one of the first people to bring sporting clays to Alaska. A local legend of sorts, the elder Brunnhoelzl died in December of 2009, preceded in death by his son, Harry III, only a few weeks prior, leaving Grouse Ridge to Arlene and her mother-in-law. Shortly before he passed, referring to the business he so lovingly built, Brunnhoelzl told Arlene, "It's you and mom now, and she wants to retire – so it's your baby."

Having lost her husband and father-in-law in the course of two weeks, Arlene took the bull by the horns and never looked back, maintaining the momentum Harry Jr. had created and ensuring that Grouse Ridge would continue as Alaska's premier sporting clays facility long after he was gone. Working hard to keep his dream alive, Arlene manages NSCA events, corporate and charity shoots for the petroleum industry, Ruffed Grouse Society and Ducks Unlimited – along with well attended Fall and Spring shooting Leagues.

Great Facilities

The grounds have five well lighted fields, which is key, since the long, cold Alaskan winters have so few daylight hours during which to shoot. "As long as a machine is in a building that they can put heat on, we'll throw targets for anyone who wants to stand out there," says Brunnhoelzl. The lighted fields surprisingly include FITASC, 5-Stand, combination trap/skeet and a game dubbed 'Magnum Skeet'. According to Arlene, it's a game made up by Harry Jr. and is described by her as skeet on steroids. "The houses are higher,

the machines oscillate both up and down, and back and forth, and the targets are faster."

In addition to holding every Alaska State Shoot (save one) since 1996, they played host to the Zone VII back in 2006. Brunnhoelzl says her biggest events, though, aren't NSCA sanctioned. "We have bigger shoots than the State – we hold petroleum club events twice a year, the Ruffed Grouse Society usually draws about 150 shooters and Ducks Unlimited about 150." With their 75 machines, she says, "We have the ability to do two separate walk through courses at once."

Top Honors

New FITASC layouts for this year's championship were created in the birch forest, providing picturesque settings with nice vertical relief. Many targets were shot below the feet and target types were mixed nicely – on one of the Parours I saw the only 60mm target I can remember seeing in the last few years. Zach Kienbaum ran away with the FITASC, shooting a 141/150 – winning by six targets.

The first day of the Main Event featured an inordinate number of low, incoming birds that curled off at the last instant, although overall the birds were good, with a fair

balance of target types and presentations. Shooter numbers, lower than many State Championships elsewhere, were doubled from last year, with 80 plus competitors.

Youth shooting programs are an integral part of the Alaska shotgun scene and I was impressed by the number of Junior and Sub Junior shooters on the course and how safely they handled their guns. There are a number of local shooting coaches who are heavily involved with youth programs at Grouse Ridge, Birchwood and also nearby Rabbit Creek in Anchorage, giving the local kids a great shooting foundation to build upon. Renowned coach Tony Monzingo, of 'Champs' Camp' fame, is a former resident and is credited with giving many of Alaska's young shooters their start. One pretty young lady, Andrea (Andy) Irvin, is a product of the area's youth program and won Master class, high Lady and Juniors in the Main Event with her score of 167, tying non-resident Haley Dunn. This mechanical engineering student at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, is starting her second year of college and hopes to get into the oilfield business after graduation. Andy has a dream of someday "retiring to Italy and building shotguns for Perazzi!"

TOP ALASKA LADY ANDREA IRVIN, (BELOW) AND HALEY DUNN (LEFT).





Todd Pulis (23) is another Anchorage area youth program success story standout. A Lindenwood University graduate, he has returned to the area and is working as a substitute teacher in the local school system. He took the Alaska State Championship title this year for the fourth consecutive year with a Main Event score of 181 – two birds back from non-resident and Runner-up Jon Kruger. Pulis also shot off for FITASC runner-up against AA shooter Jerry Soukup, both on 135 – and was victorious, capping a successful weekend. “My coach, Gerald (Atol), talked me into shooting all three State shoots this year, so I shot the State Skeet, State Trap and State Sporting. I won the trap, got rookie of the year in skeet and runner up in 20 gauge and am now the State Champion in Sporting.” After this event he was off to the biggest of all trap events – The Grand American – to try his hand, saying, “There’s a lot of money up for grabs and I can point a shotgun okay...”

Shooting Stars

Out of State shooters who made the trip this year included Jon and Cynthia Kruger, Haley Dunn and Army Marksman Unit member



TOP: TODD PULIS. ABOVE: JON KRUGER. RIGHT: ZACH KIENBAUM.

Mark Weeks. Californian Zach Kienbaum made the trip to Alaska for the first time and had a full schedule of Grouse Ridge students booked for the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday before the event. “Desi, my girlfriend is from here, so I’ve heard all about Alaska and seen all the pictures, but the pictures don’t necessarily do it justice – it’s gorgeous.” Kienbaum took the Pre-lim, FITASC and Main Events, outpacing Main Event RU Jon Kruger by eight targets.

Zach Kienbaum has had his share of podium appearances this year, having won the California State HOA, Runner-up at the US Open and third at the Triple Classic. At the Texas State championship he tied with HOA Joey Bolton but being a non-resident, wasn’t eligible to shoot in the Super Final. After the Alaska State Shoot he was flying off to

The Alaska State Shoot is a great opportunity for those of us from the Lower 48 to experience the grandeur of this part of the world.



Washington State to shoot the Western Open, followed by the Lobster Classic at Addieville East Farm in Rhode Island.

Cool Place

The Alaska State Shoot is a great opportunity for those of us from the Lower 48 to experience the grandeur of this part of the world. While temperatures were in the

90s and humid back home, the local weather saw daytime highs in South Central Alaska of around 65 degrees – definitely a welcome relief from the hot weather we’ve been having back in the Midwest. With great sightseeing opportunities, excellent fishing, cool temperatures and great shooting grounds, I can’t think of a better way to spend a week or two during the month of July. ■

