

Column Name: Into the Wild

Title: The Doggy Days of Winter

Capt. Stephen George, Allwater Guide Service

For anyone that lives here in the northeast that and is an avid bird hunter with a loyal and trusted bird dog lives for the autumn when bird hunting season arrives. If you're like myself, the anticipation of the fall hunting season is overpowering. Once September comes around my thoughts surround all of the hunting and fishing possibilities that are coming my way for me and Boone, my four year old Labrador retriever. September brings early goose season and knocking down big birds is a thrill. Soon to follow will be the October openers of duck, grouse, woodcock and pheasant; bow hunting for deer kicks off too as if there wasn't enough to get excited about.

Throughout the year we work on endurance, tracking, land retrieves, water retrieves, gun boat etiquette and general obedience. Our season starts with pursuing early Canada geese and once pheasant and duck season starts, we are in the field as much as possible. Unfortunately for Boone, I also have a love for deer hunting and once deer season kicks in the poor boy gets left home too much. By that time the DEC stocked pheasants are thinning out, our inland ponds are freezing up so ducks move on and finding pheasants is tough. The look on Boone's face while I'm leaving early in the morning to deer hunt is enough to tear your heart out.

Fortunately for Boone I have a solution to our problem. Recently I found Stonewall Boarding Kennel & Game Preserve located on NYS Route 162 in Esperance (www.stonewallboarding.com). The 106 acre game preserve is run by Michelle Linnane a colorful woman who is a very accomplished gun dog trainer and breeder that has been field training dogs since 1980. I made arrangements in December for a "corporate outing/Christmas party" for my staff for a day of pheasant hunting. The acreage is diverse with open fields, hedgerows, dogwood thickets, swampy sections and despite some snow, it still had plenty of cover for birds. The birds were set out prior to our hunt so we had no idea where to start, but once afield Boone's "off-season I hate deer season depression" had lifted and he started quartering the fields like he had in earlier in the season. As soon as he caught scent, he was fully

focused and moments later the first rooster was up in the air. Seeing him retrieve the beautiful rooster was priceless. The day finished with a full vest and one tired pup. The opportunity to continue to hunt after the height of the season was a great feeling for both of us.

Recently Michelle hosted the New York Pheasant Championship. The competition was open to anyone who wanted to participate with either a pointer or flusher. 11 dogs participated including a Pudelpointer, llewellin pointer, Wirehaire pointing Griffon, golden retriever of course Labrador retrievers. Folks came from as far away as Long Island, Pennsylvania and western New York. Birds were released and the shooters were scored on the amount of time it took to get all the birds, number of shots fired, number of birds taken and the birds had to be retrieved by the dogs. getting to see the wide variety of dogs work by very experienced/professional and amateur owners was educational. Michelle provided a pot luck lunch was worth the price of admission itself at noon and a bon fire was lit to keep everyone warm while they waited their turn. This was the first competition for Boone and I and we were proud to bring home second place finish in a category. Michelle's boarding facility is second to none and Boone has a place to stay when we go away.

If you're looking to get afield for a quality pheasant hunt without going out of state, give Michelle a call at (518) 868-4566 or email her at michelleinnane@yahoo.com and keep your wing shooting eye and dog sharp all winter, you won't regret it.

Tight Lines

Capt. Stephen