



hunting season

Ptarmigan Winterhunting

with Rifle and Good Friends
by Evelina Aslund



So here we go again. Finally! It was almost two months ago that I was out with the dogs for hunting. Here in Jämtland where I live, it is hard to hunt grouse right between early autumn and the winter season. The period between the fall and winter Ptarmigan change color from dark brown to pure white, and during that time, they are often very shy and hard to get close to. But now has come the winter, the lakes are frozen, the mountains are completely covered with snow and ptarmigans are pure white. Then it's time for hunting winter grouse, which is another name for the Ptarmigan!



For me, who loves to go cross-country skiing, this is a great hunting style! When we hunt ptarmigan in winter we go skiing in the mountains and look for the grouse. My dogs are my best tool for they always find grouse before me. It is otherwise very difficult to detect the grouse with just the eye when they are so white against snow. Good dogs with a good sense of smell and very good binoculars and rifle scope on the gun is necessary for this type of hunting.

This weekend, I'm on the hunt with three girlfriends. I've been lucky that I have girlfriends who hunt AND likes to ski! They are hunters all three but only two of them, Anna and Liselotte, carry guns this weekend. Ingela has brought her youngster, Reco, which is an 8-month old Vorster and she want to concentrate on him and taking some nice photos of us.

When we reached the parking lot in Ljungdalen on Saturday morning, it took us almost an hour to make ourselves ready for the hunt and the ski tour up to the chalet. After binding on our skis, we slung our guns and backpacks, which were full with food and warm clothes, and began our 3 km march up to the chalet where we would sleep overnight.

This early in the season, in December, you often ride on untracked terrain. Later on in the winter when the days get longer and the sun begins to warm, more people dare to go out on the mountain on skis and snowmobiles. Then you can use tracks and snowmobile trails to ride in, but now it was just pulsing on the 40cm deep snow which had just fallen.

When we got up above the tree line the wind

was quite strong. It took us almost an hour to get the 3 km to the chalet. Once in the house, we made a fire so we could get some heat, preparing some soup for lunch before we set off on a short hunting trip. The days are short this time of year. In mid-December it will be bright at, 9:30 in the morning and dusk comes at 15:00, in the afternoon.

We skied out in the mountains after a good and warm lunch. First out of the drop was my Irish setter, Zero. He is a muscular male who is pretty heavy. With his 25 kg he is to heavy to run on the top of the snow and not as good as the two dainty setter femails I have. He fell sharply through the snow today. I know from experience that it is usually easiest for the dogs to run on the ice (frozen lakes), so we skied down to the lake chasing each other out on islets and islands where there is usually also ptarmigan sitting.

The wind subsided during the afternoon and it was really comfortable weather for hunting. After about 20 minutes with Zero out on release, I look at my GPS to establish our location and see Zero pointing for a bird. All of us skied up to him. >





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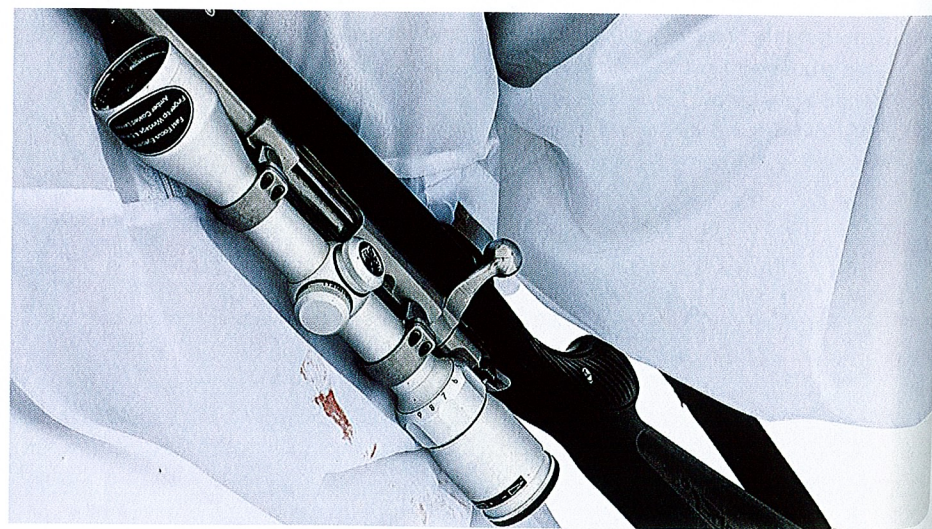


Ingela with her camera at the ready and we other three with our guns. Today we are prepared with both rifles and shotguns, depending on the situation, for short distance we use the shotgun and long distance we use the rifle. As we approach Zero, we see four or five grouse running on the snow about 20 meters in front of us on top of a snowdrift. Within seconds, they disappeared behind the crest. Zero sneaks behind and we are trying with great effort to prepare ourselves for the drive with skis on ... and guns ready. When we get up on the ridge, we see the flapping wings of the birds about 20 meters in front of us. Damn! I call Zero to heel and release Wilma, the English Setter. She takes a position after five minutes, about 250 meters in front of us. We see her clearly against the white background of the snow as she stands in a good position on the ice, pointing to another island.

Anna, me and Liselotte, ski cautiously toward her. I'm ready with my rifle and the others each with a shotgun. On line we ski up behind her. I go down on my knees and take support and am looking to see if I can see anything through the telescopic sight yes, there, I see one single grouse about 30 meters ahead. I aim carefully with support from my one knee and shoot the grouse with a shot

from my cal .22, and Wilma retrieves happily! Great! Ripa = Grouse number one in the bag.

We continue to ski for an hour and then we turned across the ice and skied up on land on the south side of the lake. Ingela and Anna decide to go back to the chalet to heat the stove up and and prepare the dinner. Liselotte and I wanted to hunt a little longer, as long as the light allows. Wilma is out on the search again and take a position about 200 metres from us in a small birch grove. Me and Liselotte ski up behind her. We could not see the grouse and so I told Wilma to advance.




One single grouse went up about 15 meters in front of us. Liselotte stood ready with her gun and BANG, BANG! Two shots and the grouse falls and Wilma happily retrieves her second grouse of the day. I'm so happy! And happy for Liselotte! Well done! Liselotte smiles happily and tells me it's her second grouse she ever shot, but the first dressed in winter white.

It starts to get dark quickly and we decide to quickly ski back to the chalet. It's a beautiful evening. The last light at dusk is called the blue hour. And it's true. Everything seems blue just before darkens. The air is cold and clear, and we're all alone on a large scale. Not one person, except ourselves, have we seen all day. It's easy to feel small when you are in this kind of great open landscape.

As we progress we see in the distance a glimmer of light from the chalet. It is also the only light visible, everything else we see is just a white landscape and a dark sky, with millions of stars. It looks welcoming and cozy like. As we approach, we also can smell the smoke of firewood from the fire in the stove. Now I'm looking forward to an evening with some of my very best friends and when I arrive the first thing I will do is serve my dear friends a hot punch. Then they will be served grouse as a starter and some good red wine to accompany the moose stew that Ingela cooked.



All in all a great day in the white wilderness with good friends and good dogs. Fresh, clean, cold air outside, a warm fire and good hot food inside. What more can you ask for? Not much! 

EA.

