



Englishman *abroad*



Sporting Rifle's Nick Latus heads to France in search of a trophy keiler under the guidance of Soren Rasmussen, and finds the boar population of the Languedoc region staggering

Over the last few years I have hunted wild boar in Germany both for myself and with clients, so the offer to hunt *Sus scrofa* in the south of France was one I wasn't going to turn down. France has a long history of driven and high seat hunting. I made the flight from Stansted to Carcassonne, and my host for the next two days' hunting, Soren Rasmussen, was there to greet me. Soren, a Danish businessman and passionate hunter – especially for wild boar – spoke exceptional English, which was a relief as my Danish was non-existent and my French vocabulary very poor (not my words but those of my secondary school tutor).

During the 50-minute drive from the airport to Bois De La Gineste, Soren's hunting ground and villa, he told me a little about its history. It is nestled high up a hill side in the beautiful Languedoc region. Soren bought the land 15 years previously and set about making it accessible by literally bulldozing a road through the dense undergrowth. Once complete, Soren's builders then constructed his villa complete with swimming pool and four en-suite guest rooms to a five-star standard. This I couldn't wait to see.

Pulling into the driveway, we were met by Soren's wife Connie who had made a wonderful continental lunch for my arrival. Over lunch I

was told that hunting only ever takes place at Bois De La Gineste over a full-moon period and from high seats – although stalking for boar did occasionally take place on the ground. The actual hunting area was around 250 hectares in size and I was told it held 400-500 wild boar. To keep these numbers in check and healthy, around 250 head have to be shot each year. These were clearly big numbers for the acreage, and I couldn't wait for the evening to arrive for sport promised to be fast and furious. I wasn't to be disappointed.

To make life easier for visiting clients, Soren has an in-house arsenal of eight Sako rifles, all in 7mm Rem Mag and topped with Zeiss optics – so there is no need to bring your own rifle. What I had brought with me was a new Swarovski Z6 scope to test its low light capabilities. After changing scopes, it was down to the range to check zero. Five shots later, I was ready.

Over dinner Soren told me that I could shoot as many yearling boar as I wanted, but if I wanted to shoot a keiler it was best to wait. The big males would always hold back in the cover of the green oak trees while the rest of his sounder fed in the open, and if nothing untoward happened then he would usually break cover. That was the theory, anyway – time to put it into practice.

France: Wild boar



To say I was pleased with my trophy was an understatement. The weather had nearly beaten me tonight, but thankfully the hunting gods were looking down on me



First up: Nick spies a group of smaller pigs ahead of taking his first shot

Heading out in the pickup back up the hillside, my spirits were high to say the least. Soon we arrived at the seat I would be shooting from that evening. Ascending the wooden ladder, I made myself comfortable and waved to my host as he drove off on a recce to sit in a different seat - one that I was to use the following evening should nothing go to plan tonight. Loading the Sako with four rounds, I made safe and started glassing for movement. Unbelievably, I'd only been sat there 10 minutes before a group of six pigs broke cover and began feeding on the field to my right.

For the next few minutes I studied the group, which was all yearling females, and as the night was still early I decided to shoot the smallest one. I drew a bead on its vitals and squeezed the trigger. The 7mm barked out and the pig immediately collapsed in a cloud of dust, sending the remaining five back into cover. As with all continental pig shooting, you don't leave your position in the seat - the boar would have to lie there, so I chambered another round and sat back to let the dust settle. Unbelievably, only 30 minutes passed before more pigs broke cover to my right. These too looked to be yearlings with one pregnant female with them, so I decided to take the smallest one of the group again, it too not knowing what hit it.

With two 20kg boar shot in the first hour, I was more than happy. Thinking back to Soren's advice about not disturbing the small ones if you want to shoot a keiler, I decided to relax my itchy trigger finger and wait. For the next 90 minutes I watched more than 40 pigs come and go from all angles to feed on the field in front of me, but each was either a big sow or a yearling. Not one big male showed, so I decided enough was enough and a third small pig joined the other two in mortality. By now the sun had long since given way to the bright full moon, and using the quality optics I had brought with me, it was still possible to make out boar on the field. I had long since lost count how many, but my big keiler was still elusive.

To my left in the distance, I heard the noise of a diesel pick-up. It was Soren. He had heard my shots ring out and as the time was approaching 11.30pm, he decided we would call it a night. When I told him I hadn't seen a keiler he couldn't believe it. He had seen six in the seat he was sat in. That was good enough for me - I would sit in that one the following evening. Extracting my three small pigs to the larder for processing the following day, it was time to salute the animals with a bottle of scotch Soren had brought with him up the hill. This was a fitting end to an exciting evening - tomorrow couldn't come quick enough.



France: Wild boar



The Swarovski proved its worth in the wet, cold and dark – truly a sound investment

We continued on the whisky until the early hours once we were back in the villa, so the following morning I awoke with a taste in my mouth more akin to a stag stalking weekend than a boar trip to France. But not wanting to look a wuss in front of my hosts, I put on a brave face as I ate the English breakfast Connie had prepared before heading off back up the hill to meet the two French gamekeepers who were employed to look after the estate.

Pleasantries swapped, we drove off to see the field I would be sitting over that evening. It too showed massive boar damage, so things looked good. Hopefully I would see one of the six keilers Soren had seen the previous evening.

Stepping back into my hunting clothes, I joined my hosts around the barbecue for a steak dinner then set off up the hill again to my new position for the night. I once again made myself comfortable as Soren drove off. Tonight it was a keiler or nothing – I was determined to sit it out.

The dust from the departing pick-up had hardly settled before the first of the boar appeared on the field in front of me, all of them small or female. Surely it was only a matter of time now. Over the next two and a half hours I must have seen 60 pigs come and go – a sounder would appear and feed then disappear as another would break cover. Among them I'd seen a few males but they had either small tusks or none at all. I was going to have to play the waiting game a little longer – trouble was, the weather had taken a turn for the worse. A light drizzle was falling and the clouds blocked the moon's light, only brief moments of clear sky visible as the wind blew the clouds over.

It was in one of these brief clear spells that I caught sight of the pig I had come to shoot. He was about 60 metres out as I picked



Three little pigs: After filling his quota of smaller boar, Nick hit the jackpot

up the rifle, placed the crosshairs on his shoulder and squeezed the trigger in one motion. Absorbing the shot, the keiler never moved – he just dropped to his knees and rolled over dead as a gnat. Raising Soren on the phone, I told him what I'd shot, and he made his way back up to my position where we met by the fallen boar.

With a body weight of around 70kg and an age of only three years, the pig's 19cm tusks were exceptional – though I was told this was the norm for this hunting ground, where many big keilers are shot each year. To say I was pleased with my trophy was an understatement, The weather had nearly beaten me tonight but thankfully the hunting gods were looking down on me.

Back at the larder the pig was quickly dressed and hung, then just like the previous night the scotch made an appearance. Over the two days I had been at Bois De La Gineste I must have seen 150 wild boar – a phenomenal amount by any hunting ground's standard. I couldn't thank my hosts enough. ■

To hunt at Bois De La Gineste with Soren Rasmussen, visit www.keiler.fr or call 0045 4030 5450.



First prize: It took two days for Nick to even see a keiler, but patience paid off

THE SHOOTING SHOW

See Nick's hunt in full on the 27 May episode of The Shooting Show. Watch it at: www.theshootingshow.tv