Hunting memories.

By Johnnie Bradley (Moyard)

When I was a teenager I saved up enough money to buy myself an airgun. I used to target shoot a lot at first until my aim improved. I used to tie a candle to a piece of string which would be attached to a tree branch and I would then make it swing from side to side. I would try then to hit this moving target and then when I got good at this , it was time to target small birds. I would search the wooded glens of the Sixtowns on a Sunday afternoon for woodcock and partridges. By the time I bought my first shotgun I was ready to shoot grouse, duck and hares on the mountains and loughs.

When I was a young man I used to make enough money on the grouse which I shot in the summer to keep me in pocket money for the whole year. I had an agent in London who would buy all my grouse and he was giving me 10 shillings a bird, which was a lot of money in the 1940`s. The official starting date for the grouse season was August 12th but I used to get out before that and my grouse would be on the hotel tables in London on the 12th morning every year.

It was essential for a grouse hunter to have a good dog to set on the birds. When you came on a pack of grouse some would take off immediately but others would remain in the cover of the heather for safety. If you had a good dog then it would set its nose in the direction of where the bird was sitting. It would sort of hypnotise the bird and make it freeze . A good dog could stand like that for a very long time, taking a step closer every so often until it could pounce on the bird. If you nudged the dog closer with your knee the bird would eventually rise and you could shoot it. I had a great pointer dog called Bruno and everywhere I went that dog went too. He could point birds or work with cows and sheep equally well. When he used to sit by the fireside at night he would play with the cat for his own amusement. No terrain was too difficult for him and he was a wonderful companion.

One day I was working in the turf in Moyard and I saw Bruno set on a bird. He was standing still with his nose pointing towards the bird in the heather. I slipped away and headed down for my house, got the gun and was back in twenty minutes or so. Bruno was still in the same position and in the same pose. Eventually as I nudged him forward, the bird rose and I shot it. I never went shooting without Bruno because he was so good. I remember one day while I was out shooting in Glenviggan, coming across a mound of thick heather. Bruno immediately stopped and pointed his nose in the direction of the mound. I got ready and the first bird rose and I shot it. Then one by one the birds began to rise at short intervals and I shot them as they did. It just went on and on as Bruno pointed them one by one and for half an hour they kept rising. When it was over I had a full bag of grouse. I never had a days shooting like that again. If it were not for the dog the birds would have sat on in the heather as I walked past and I would not have got one.

Grouse, partridge and woodcock were so plentiful in the 1930/40`s that I used to take the gun with me when I went up to the cuts to take the cows down in the evening, and often have a couple of them home with me.