



Croatia: Boar

# Balkan *boar*



Simon Barr braves the cold Croatian mountains for three days of open area hunting with an international team of hunters

**The debate on open versus closed hunting areas continues – but both can offer the authentic experience**

**M**ore and more British hunters are appreciating the thrill of driven big game in Europe. With UK law prohibiting such practices, legions of shooters make an annual trip abroad for what many believe is the most exciting form of driven shooting.

One topic that will systematically divide opinion among hunters from the UK is hunting driven game in fenced or open areas. Some argue fenced areas offer less of a fair chase, as the animals are driven to fences and behave in a less than wild manner. Having experienced both, I have found that most fenced areas offer an honest and genuinely wild experience. I appreciate that, should you be able to see the fence from your peg, it may feel less so, but if you ask the right questions before you book a trip, this can be less of a problem.

The likes of boar and deer are wild beings, especially if pursued by hounds, so I do not accept the argument that they are tame if in large fenced areas. All driven large game are prey species with flight instincts hardwired into them, so they will run from beaters and dogs.

What fenced hunts offer is a near certainty of some action and undoubtedly larger beasts, as the outgoing and subsequent

replacement beasts are strictly controlled throughout the season. Some find the concept of a fenced hunt morally reprehensible. To my mind, it is little different to shooting purpose-reared pheasants driven over a line of guns. Most shooters from the UK accept this form of hunting with gusto and take part on numerous occasions during the season. I fail to see why, just because you are shooting a mammal, increasing your chances of a shot becomes so morally unsound. As long as the animals are treated humanely and with respect (as, by and large, pheasants are in the UK), where is the problem?

With an open area hunt, there are no predictable outcomes. The weather has a large part to play in events, and numbers and the sizes of beasts cannot be predetermined.



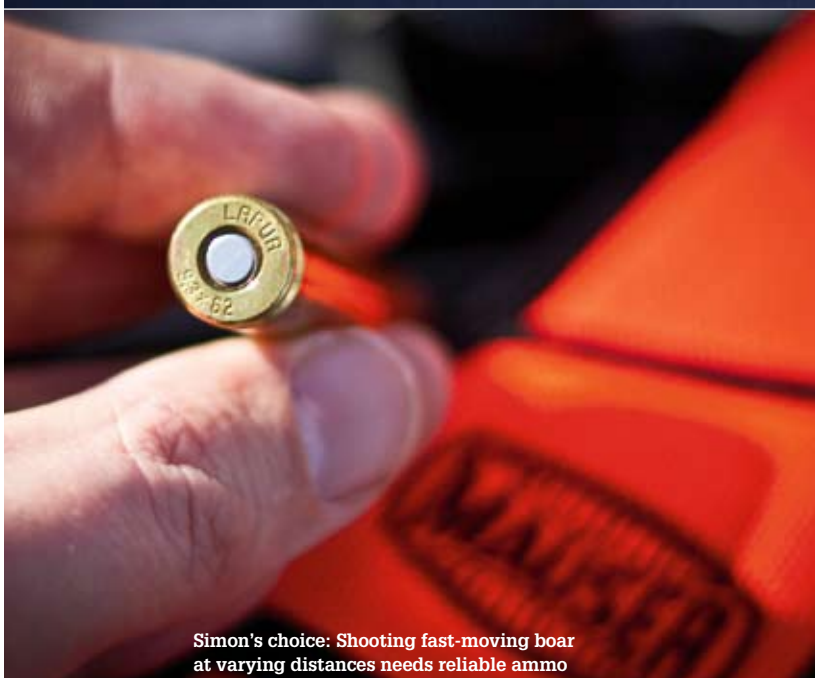
**Shot to splinters: Simon's first round left more than a small graze on this tree**

Animals may scatter in unexpected directions, with the definite possibility of fruitless drives that yield no action. Beaters and dogs will cover many more hectares to bring home the bacon and more time will be needed for each drive. All of this can lead to lengthy periods spent patiently waiting for the electrifying moment when movement draws your attention in the woods ahead of you.

On open hunts, as would be expected, all animals are completely free to roam as masters of their own destiny. For some hunters, the challenge to bag one of these free-living animals with the unpredictability of the hunt is more fulfilling than getting plenty of shots off. Neither hunt is better than the other, and both (subject to how they are run) are sporting. The choice is completely down to the individual and what experience they are after from a driven hunt.

Personally, my urge to pull the trigger lessens as time goes by. I prefer the dice of success to be rolled, with more variables affecting the outcome. I feel more fulfilled when I shoot something knowing I have waited patiently and have earned it. A recent trip to Croatia for a three-day driven hunt across the Papuk mountain region in Eastern Croatia satisfied all of my driven hunting desires, with no fence in sight across a wild 22,000 hectares. Surrey-based Tomo Svetic, of Artemis Hunting, was hosting a three day driven hunt for a team of 14 guns. The team had been put together by Roo Ellis of the Hunting Agency and was a cosmopolitan mix to say the least. We consisted of English, Welsh and Scottish hunters as well as two Namibians who, having left their game-rich African back yard, were eager to experience the novelty of hunting driven boar in Croatia.

With a big group it took a full day to get out of the UK and into Croatia with as many firearms as hunters. We were the fourth group Tomo had hosted since the season had started in late October. The numbers of



**Simon's choice: Shooting fast-moving boar at varying distances needs reliable ammo**





boar shot had been a respectable average of 14 per day, meaning over the three days, every gun should see some action – sound odds for hunting open areas.

An early start the following morning focused our minds. The beating team of 10 hardy Croatians and hounds met us at the hunting lodge before light. We headed into the mountains as a sunny and sharp winter's morning unfolded. The team was split in two to cover the anticipated exit routes for the boar once the drive had begun. Tomo placed us onto pegs and showed our safety arcs, explaining the direction the boar would be coming from. Soon after drop off, the beaters' horns and hollering could be heard. I knew I had to be ready, as at this point the flighty animals in the area would up and leave the oncoming disturbance. To my immediate left, I heard the first shot of the trip boom out along the valley.

Over the brow of the hill to my left, a stocky boar with visible tusks burst into range with a hound in hot pursuit. Shifting at some pace, I was uncomfortable with the shot on offer. I tracked its mass with my illuminated reticle not 40 metres from where I stood. The keiler had craftily managed to skyline itself, and as I could hear the beaters directly behind, all I could do was watch it run from left to right and down the

hill towards the next peg. I heard three shots soon after it disappeared from view, so I was certain it had met its end, but disappointingly not to my rifle.

Next, a group of three boar ran the same line again, but much closer to me at 20 metres. I steadied myself and got a well placed shot off. The boar I had aimed at ran on after a shower of splinters covered the area it had just been in – I had hit a tree, an occupational hazard for this game. Cycling my bolt, I shot once more, finishing the boar's courageous escape attempt. The sound of shots had filled the valley for the duration of the first drive and after a couple of hours it drew to a close. Every gun on my half team had bagged something, which was an excellent start to the trip and spirits were high.

The next drive delivered the same frequency of shots as the first. The team was doing well and the standard of marksmanship was excellent. After the first two drives, 14 boar had been taken, and every gun bar one had shot at something. My expectations were high, and my peg on the third drive felt fantastic – I had clear views for 200 metres in all directions. Sadly for me on my prime peg, the drive came and went with not one shot being fired, proving unequivocally that hunting on open areas is an unpredictable business. Tomo only hunts each of the drives once every year to minimise disturbance for the animals. However, there are no guarantees when you are on open areas, as today's blank drive had demonstrated to us.

To the Namibians' amazement, we awoke the next morning to their first ever encounter of snow. After a snowball fight, we left for the mountains. The conditions were cold and challenging as I stood on my first peg of the day. I didn't see any game, although excitingly, a huge tree fell down the bank with the weight of the first snow festooning its branches. The team had bagged four animals on the first drive, and

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Now that's a barbecue: The 'Boy Scout' feast added to the atmosphere



## Croatia: Boar



Change of scene: A Namibian hunter swaps African game for a taste of European driven boar

With conditions remaining tough, the only shots fired on the second drive were from inside the beating line

the gun who had not shot anything the day before managed to get a left and right.

With conditions remaining tough, the only shots fired on the second drive were from inside the beating line, to try to get the boar stirred up. Sadly it was to no effect – they were sitting tight today. The heavy snowfall had unnerved them and made hunting them incredibly difficult. On our way off the mountain for lunch, another tree had fallen and was blocking the road, requiring some quick thinking. We decided upon a manual heave as the best solution, and we were soon underway.

Lunch was taken round a huge fire – a welcome antidote to the cold of the morning. Optimism was high as we headed out for the last drive of the day overlooking an enormous bowl. The beaters would come through the bottom of the bowl and the boar would run up the sides to awaiting guns. The drive delivered well, and five beasts were taken with plenty more shots being fired, bringing the bag total for the day to nine. We had experienced less success than the day before, but given the bitter conditions, it was more than acceptable.

On the third day the skies had cleared. The first drive faced us all into thick cover, which looked like it held plenty of boar. As expected,

### Equipment reviewed by: Simon Barr

**Product:** MAUSER 9.3x62 M-03 EXTREME

**Distributor:** Open Season = 01865 891773 = [www.openseasonltd.co.uk](http://www.openseasonltd.co.uk)

**Price:** £POA

**Comments:** A pure testimony to why the Mauser action is the most copied in the world. Still making superb rifles a pleasure to use

**Product:** SWAROVSKI Z6I 1-6x24 RIFLESCOPE

**Distributor:** Swarovski = 01737 856812 = [www.swarovskioptik.com](http://www.swarovskioptik.com)

**Price:** £1,615

**Comments:** True 1x magnification means you have a wide field of view and can leave both eyes open. Perfect driven boar scope

**Product:** KIRUNA GTX BOOTS

**Distributor:** Bramwell International = [www.bramwell-int.co.uk](http://www.bramwell-int.co.uk)

**Price:** £289.99

**Comments:** A superbly warm and comfortable boot. Ideal for stalking in cold weather

**Product:** FJÄLLRAVEN G1000 HUNTER HYDRATIC TROUSER

**Distributor:** Fjällraven = [www.fjallraven.se](http://www.fjallraven.se)

**Acquired from:** Rosker = [www.rosker.co.uk](http://www.rosker.co.uk)

**Price:** £129

**Comments:** Tough, comfortable, plenty of pockets – what more could a chap need when out stalking?

**Product:** LAPUA MEGA 285-GRAIN 9.3x62

**Distributor:** Viking Arms = 01423 780810 = [www.vikingarms.com](http://www.vikingarms.com)

**Price:** £POA

**Comments:** Premium quality factory-loaded ammunition. Reliable, super-accurate – why bother home loading?

the drive went brilliantly, with shots being fired up and down the entire gun line. A fox and six boar fell to the rifles of my cohorts dotted over the Croatian mountainside. The second drive, although holding several large groups of boar, disappointed the guns and beaters alike. Many saw animals, but at too great a distance or leaving the drive, which is a frustration of hunting on an open area. Two were taken with a couple of confirmed runners which would be picked up later by the beaters with tracking dogs.

Lunch on the third day was a highlight, appealing to the boy scout in us all. We set a large fire, and sizzled sausages on sticks over the flames. A hearty way to enjoy our last field lunch.

After the sausage-fest, the final small drive delivered no further boar to add to the total bag of 33. This final figure was a little down on Tomo's seasonal average, but considering the awkward weather we had faced, we were all completely satisfied. Everyone had shot a boar and seen countless more. There were no glum faces as we headed back to the UK, and we all came back with more hunting friends than when we left.

For me this was a perfect example of driven hunting on open ground. The conditions were challenging, but each and every animal the team shot was fully deserved. There was enough action to keep everyone interested, but it was not in any way predictable, which for me made the hunt far more enjoyable. If open area hunting is your thing, you will not get much better than Croatia. I would highly recommend a trip with Tomo. ■

**Contact Tomo Svetic of Artemis Hunting on 07795 084055 or [www.artemis-hunting.com](http://www.artemis-hunting.com).**