

THURSDAY 27th March – exercise at last, by This Correspondent

Thursday saw a more relaxed start. There was enough time between arrival at the range and the start of shooting for various Brits to indulge in their varied forms of “pre-shoot stretching”. For the younger members of the Great Britain team (and Nigel), that involved playing simultaneously with a rugby ball and a Frisbee, with impressively diverse levels of ability. That Correspondent managed to injure himself while trying to steal a catch from This Correspondent, tripping over the kerb in the process.

Meanwhile the UK Under 19s (inaccurately referred to earlier as the Athelings on account of their traditional pale blue shirts), or at least the female part of the team, were outside their hut indulging in what looked very much like dancing, led by the indomitable Emma Cannings. They waved back when someone pointed out all the scopes trained on their “dance floor”.

Moments later, Jumbo was doing a war dance after a brief effort to erect the gazebo resulted in the discovery that it was in fact a kiddies’ gazebo, not even tall enough for a Chris Watson to kneel under. The process of discovery was quite amusing, as was the simultaneous observation of angle grinding and hammering going on at the food caravan, which didn’t exactly inspire confidence...

In two details, everyone had a practice shoot at 300m, with those who had intended to have a second generally deciding not to do so once they had experienced the hot and very sweaty conditions of the late morning. Nigel introduced This Correspondent to a few of the South Africans, one of whom – Alex Coetzee – offered to take his broken stock to an armourer in town – the unrelated Henry Coetzee, to be fixed.

Thence the team retired en masse to the four open but shady shelter blocks that had been recce’d on arrival on Monday, there to finish snack lunches, lie back, rest in the shade and enjoy a little “light” music. A few sampled the canteen again, where they were joined by most of the Brits present who weren’t on the GB team. All had been told they were more than welcome to turn to any member of our team for help if they needed it – most of them are part of the future of our sport after all.

The afternoon saw the team divided into pairs for a match at 600 and 800m. Mixed fortunes for the pairs at both ranges saw our top two combinations finish top of our private pile of results with 196s out of 200 in some fairly challenging wind conditions. Local David Dodds and his partner waited until the second, relatively windless, detail that most of our pairs had not shot in, and they finished with 197.24.

This Correspondent enjoyed the afternoon immensely:

- i. he was pleased to offer Martin Townsend an opportunity not to finish last in the competition by shooting appallingly with the rifles he had borrowed from Jon Underwood and his pairs partner Gary Alexander;

- ii. he was impressed with the RightSight on Gary's rifle and determined to try out his own;
- iii. he tried to offer such help as a register keeper can to Under 19s team member Henry Day and his partner when it was apparent that they had a very, very errant wind zero;
- iv. and he was absolutely delighted to turn around after his shoot at 800m to find Alex Coetzee standing there holding his stock. It had been fixed, in one afternoon, with the aid of glue and a new bolt embedded deep into the pistol grip. The instruction was "Henry says you can shoot with it now if you like but if you can leave it overnight it is probably better"! Incredibly quick and incredibly kind – This Correspondent is now even more a fan of South Africa than before.

Oh, and he was also amused by Gary Alexander breaking his coaching chair... by sitting on it.

An early finish to shooting was welcomed by all, with the prospect of lazing in the garden with a cold drink for some and a visit to the gym for others. Discovery of the evening was that the Supersport gym down at the Waterfront offered free membership for a week – not a bad deal – and it was much closer than the Virgin Active gym of which This Correspondent was already a member, meaning there would be no problem getting there, working out and getting back in good time for the planned 7pm departure for the Beef Baron... except that the minibus taxi arrived 20 minutes early... and all but three of those who were meant to be going simply left at that time... still, a good meal of 300g or 500g steaks was eventually had by all, washed down by some excellent 60% home-made aguardente.