

FRIDAY 4th April – the Protea Match, by This Correspondent

Yet another early start brought in the day of what we had come for – the Protea Match and an attempt to win it for Great Britain for the first time over a full course of fire. But first came the Second Stage of the State President's. Once again, the first detail seemed to have the better of the conditions, not just at the opening range but even at 600m. Nevertheless people on both details managed scores of 50.10 at either 300m or 500m: Chris Watson, Gary Alexander, Ed Compton, Parag Patel and Nigel Ball. Parag achieved the best of a slew of 150s among team members, with a 150.25 to take a commanding lead in the South African TR Championship. Paul Sykes, Jumbo Lewis and David Dyson were among the others.

Among the 149s was Adam McCullough, who had an odd time of it – after two possible, he withdrew with a 15.2 at 600m after, in his words, his “trigger broke”. He was persuaded to go back into battle with a rifle borrowed from Chris Watson by team-mates while an attempt was made to fix his – he would need to use one of them in the Protea Match in the afternoon, after all. The Chief Range Officer was kind enough to allow him a re-shoot, and by the end of it David Dyson had fixed the sear on Adam's rifle so he could use it in the afternoon after a few shots on the zero range to ensure that it still felt about right.

This Correspondent was finally introduced to Zulu range (the furthest one to the right) at 600m and discovered that, on a hot day like this, the fact that the firing points were lower than on all the other ranges meant that the mirage effect from the road just in front was greatly exacerbated, such that the sight picture was affected and it was not even possible to make out scoring rings, spotting disc and scoring paddle clearly through the telescope. Alas that to a mirage off the road that contradicted the “main one” and the flags, which themselves seemed to be having something of an argument as to what the wind should be, and you had ideal conditions to mess up on both wind and elevation... which This Correspondent did. The highest score on Zulu range that detail was a mere 46.2 by a South African Palma team member. It strikes This Correspondent that there is a lesson to be learnt from that experience by all the visiting teams in 2009, but he can't quite work out what it is. Suggestions on a postcard please.

Thankfully the morning's shooting ended earlier than had been the case on prior days, such that even the second detail had the best part of two hours free before the start of the Protea Match. Everyone took the opportunity for some rest and shade after a very swift early lunch, with all focused on the job at hand.

The Protea Match, the one we had all been working towards, was shot under different conditions than we had experienced the whole time we had been in South Africa. At 300m, for the first time all meeting, the flags were entirely to be trusted and the mirage not. At 600m, it was virtually the same story, although This Correspondent tried in vain to favour the mirage that had previously been such a good friend. Then at 900m, the wind suddenly became a different beast altogether half way through:

where it had been a tricky, fickle, fast-shifting fishtail, suddenly it was a square, raging animal of 8 to 9 minutes right – the kind of thing we were used to at home but to which we had become unaccustomed in South Africa. As it picked up, it was greatly underestimated by most on the coaching team but turned out to be fairly steady, for those who were able to shoot tightly enough to take advantage of it.

Adam, whose trigger had malfunctioned earlier in the day, caused a bit more concern when he fired a couple of very high bulls to start at 300m, prompting the elevation change that resulted in the award of a low inner, subsequently challenged and changed to a bull five. Only that night did he admit to his coach that he had loosened his sling to shoot with Chris Watson's rifle earlier in the day, then failed to tighten it back up again. And the wee lad went and top scored with a 150.21...

During the day, Rick (our tour photographer) was caught out without his camera when he went to relieve himself. As he hitched himself up he saw a deer just a yard away from him, that immediately ran off into the brush. Impressive to be able to scare even the beasts, Rick!

After the match, the team retired, albeit briefly, to the range bar for a quick beer before going and changing ready for the Protea dinner. There, they were greeted by various locals and members of the GB U19 team, whose commandant was particularly welcoming.

The time to get changed and return to the range was very limited; certainly too limited for poor Rick Shouler, whose room contained a bath but no shower. It was a big bath and there was no hope of running it in time to be able to make the RV at the buses. So Rick returned smelly. On telling the story over dinner, Rick was told that he ought to have run a small amount of water and then thrashed around in it so that it covered him. The ever-attentive Jumbo remarked that "you'd have been like a sparrow – a ***** enormous sparrow!"

At the Protea dinner, various speeches of varying quality were made. It has to be said, the one that gained universal approval was not from any of the senior team captains but rather that from Scottish U19 captain Tarni Duhre. Highlight of the evening, however, was Martin being prevented from getting anywhere near the front of the dinner queue.

Since alcohol was now allowed, following the big match, a lot of random banter resulted. Among these was a truly brilliant idea that on any future GB tour with button-down collared shirts, the team should also be supplied with clip-on GB ties. Some would say that no tie should ever go with a button-down collar, but the above seems an appropriate combination.

The last word for the evening was from Jon Underwood who, on being required physically to leave the party and go back to the hotel, announced to all and sundry

that he had been "pulled" by David Dyson, who could only reply "some of oos can't elp it!"

Not quite the last word, as it happens. There was a match today. The Protea Match. We won.

Shout out to eager beaver website reader Paul for texting Matty just after the match to ask all about it, and to Richard Macmillan for his early congratulations.

Anyway, the Protea Match turned out to be a hard fought affair. It looked like it might not be after 300m, when GB dropped only 3 points and South Africa 13. Then at 600m, GB dropped 9 and South Africa 12. So we took a lead of 13 into the 900m shoot. While the conditions (in terms of wind indicators) at the first two ranges had been different to any we had experienced thus far, at 900m it was not just the indicators but the wind itself that was entirely different to anything we had seen on this range. South Africa clearly coped slightly better with it than we did but, in defensive mode, GB simply chose to shoot when South Africa did, such that they wouldn't lose simply by dint of having experienced *different* conditions than the hosts. South Africa shot very well at 900m and gave themselves something of which to be proud by gaining 7 points, to lose by a mere 6. Not as close as Wednesday, but a lot closer than the Palma and uncomfortably so: 1765 points to 1759.

This had been an excellent match between, currently, the world's two premier target rifle nations. Both sides had relished and enjoyed the close competition and we look forward to future iterations.

Meanwhile, the future of our sport was shooting alongside in the Junior Protea match. Each of the three teams won a range and the Great Britain Under 19s ran out winners on 842 points out of 900, with South Africa U19s on 827. But of massive encouragement to Scotland, their Under 19 team (comprising six pupils of Dollar Academy) split the two teams, finishing second on 834. Well done the youngsters!

Scores from the Protea Match:

Captain: Steven Thomas

Adjutant: Gary Alexander

Main coach: Martin Townsend

Coaches: Matt Charlton, Jane Messer, Matt Ensor

Firers	300m	600m	900m	Total
Adam McCullough	50.6	50.7	50.8	150.21
Parag Patel	50.7	50.7	50.4	150.18
Rick Shouler	50.7	50.6	50.4	150.17
Jon Underwood		50.7	50.6	50.3 150.16
Nigel Ball	50.10	50.7	49.5	149.22
Paul Sykes	49.8	50.4	50.5	149.17
Ed Compton	50.7	48.3	49.3	147.13

George Gilpin	50.5	49.6	48.2	147.13
Toby Raincock	49.4	48.4	48.2	145.10
David Dyson	50.7	49.5	45.3	144.15
James Lewis	49.6	49.4	44.3	142.13
Chris Watson	50.6	48.2	44.2	142.10
GREAT BRITAIN	597.80	591.61	577.44	1765.185
SOUTH AFRICA	587.61	588.57	584.42	1759.160

We're off for a drink now, at long last... That Correspondent will report on the State President's Final tomorrow.

Meanwhile Jumbo, during that brief drink, explained TR to a football man at the bar, after explaining his preference for rugby, tried to explain shooting (with enthusiastic gesturing to describe each part of the phrase): "It's a much more precise, accurate, interesting sport than any of this contact 'throw the ball away' sport." We'll miss him...