

## Shooting, the Accessible Sport

A while back Sean from Firearms UK published an article on our website about the inclusiveness of shooting sports; <http://firearmsuk.wordpress.com/2013/03/15/shooting-the-worlds-most-inclusive-sport-perhaps/>

Tom Mackintosh, a Firearms UK supporter, contacted us regarding his experiences. We are delighted to publish the following article from Tom;

I was born with a condition called Spinal Muscular Atrophy which is a condition that causes muscle weakness. Because of this I had mobility issues from a very young age. This meant that I was not able to participate in more physical sports, this is where shooting came into my life. I was about 6 years old when my father first took me out to teach me how to use an air rifle. From that very first day I knew that shooting was going to be my sport. Over the next few years I honed my skills plinking in the back garden and on the odd occasion I would go to friend's farms. As I got older I lost the ability to walk all together. That was when shooting really became a big part of my life. I would get as many shooting related magazines as possible to learn all that I could about shooting and field craft.

It wasn't until I was about 11 years old when I first got to use a real firearm. This was thanks to a friend of my fathers who took me on an Army range in Yorkshire. The rifle I used was an SLR. The rifle was almost as tall as me and I could barely lift it, but once I was set up in the prone position on a rest I was ready to go. That was one of the most enjoyable days of my life and it just re-enforced my passion for the sport.



*My game shoot transport*

To jump ahead a few years, I moved to Scotland to live on a farm. That was my chance to meet people who were also keen shooting sports men. I use my first shotgun, age 13, at the Highland Field Sports Fair on a try a gun stand. When I was 15 years old I chose to do clay pigeon shooting for my Duke of Edinburgh's award. This involved sessions of clay shooting over several weeks. To pass I had to show significant improvement, which to my surprise I did.



*Handgun shooting in South Africa*

When I turned 16 I was granted my shotgun certificate and got my first shotgun, an AYA No.3. Not the most extravagant of shotguns but it was my pride and joy. It was with that that I was to really start to learn the art of clay pigeon shooting and game shooting. The following year I was granted my firearms certificate and got my first .22rf rifle. With informal teaching from family and friends I learnt how to safely use it and started to go out rabbit shooting on nearby estates and farms.

When I went to university I was keen to carry on shooting, so I joined the university small bore rifle club. This was my introduction to competitive shooting sports. One of very few sports that someone in a wheelchair can compete side by side with able bodied people. It was there that I was awarded my half blues for representing the university at international level at the British Open Air Rifle competition at Bisley. I came 3<sup>rd</sup> in class. Not bad for only three months training I thought. The same weekend I was at Bisley I was given the great opportunity to shoot on the 600m range with a couple of Army snipers. In my second year at uni I was made captain of the club. A position I held for the next three years. In my third year I was looking for a bit of variety in my shooting sports, so I proposed the start-up of a clay pigeon to the uni sports council, it was accepted. I ran this mainly at weekends. This led me to start competing in the national 100 bird registered competitions. Again this was on a level playing field with able bodied shooters.

Since leaving university the competitive side of my shooting has gone on the back burner a wee bit. But a few years ago I got to go on a trip of life time, big game hunting in South Africa. This was only possible with the help of the friends that went with me and the PH's out there. The most of the shooting I do these days is pest control, game shooting, deer stalking and a bit of clay pigeon shooting. The clay shooting is more for the social aspect though.



*Shooting at Aberdeen Full Bore Gun Club*

Out of all of the shooting I have been fortunate enough to do over my life, the most important thing I can take from it, is the friends I have made doing it and the people I have met. I would urge anyone with mobility issues to try shooting because of the skills that can be learnt and the people to be met.

Tom Mackintosh.