

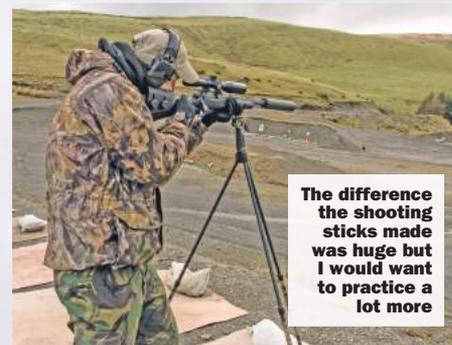
**Ed Jackson** continues his training with some simulated stalking with Orion Firearms

**A**s a new shooter and one who wants to get into deer stalking I foresee one of the biggest obstacles (apart from land access) is gaining experience. I wanted to find out what the options are for novices like myself; where can you go to learn more? Well it turns out Orion Firearms Training based in Wales has added simulated deer stalking to their portfolio. Owner John would be taking me through the course, but instead of live animals we had immortal steel replicas.

First what I was looking to gain from the day, my equipment choices and most important range safety! Since my first visit to Orion I have finally got my FAC though have not filled any slots yet. There are loan guns for those without, which allowed me to pick his brains as to what would suit me best. There is so much to choose from these days, it is all too easy to get confused especially while trying to decipher all of the information available.



**Taking aim at a target 200m away while kneeling was a real challenge!**



**The difference the shooting sticks made was huge but I would want to practice a lot more**

**GUN TALK**

There's a good selection; a Sako 75 in .243 which would be a great choice for most stalkers. It was however discounted due to the wooden stock and the current adverse weather conditions. A Brock and Norris Howa in .308, a lovely rifle and very tempting, unfortunately it has a 26" barrel and a composite stock making it heavy and not that huntable! Then a 308 Win, Desert Tactical arms, sporting, which is a compact package! Different but very nice!

However, we settled on a Remington 700 SPS in .308 with a 21" barrel, T8 moderator and a Schmidt & Bender 10x42 scope. Reasoning was it's compact, light and dependable in a synthetic stock with a no nonsense optic. I teamed it up with a set of 3-legged, Primos Trigger Stix IIs loaned by my

esteemed Editor Pete Moore. I was keen to learn the techniques of shooting off them in all positions.

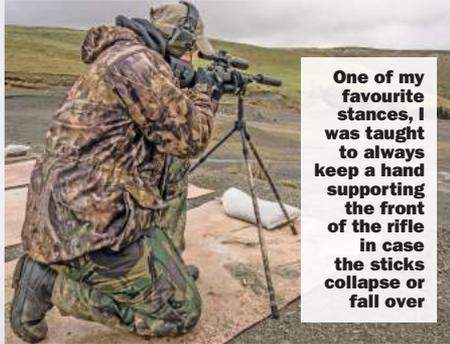
My choice of clothing turned out to be perfect for the cold, wet conditions. It included a base layer of skiing thermals worn underneath, some Lowa boots, 5.11 tactical trousers, with water proofs over the top, a hoodie and camo jacket. Finally and importantly a pair of McWet gloves proved invaluable on the day as the Remington was a top feeder.

**ZEROING AND TRAINING:**

When booking a day's training you can tailor it to meet your particular requirements. If you are an experienced stalker you may wish to tackle any weaknesses you have with your shooting or to expand your knowledge and experience with your chosen calibre. As a novice I wanted to learn everything, leaving no stone unturned!

**Walk,  
Stalk &  
Learn**





One of my favourite stances, I was taught to always keep a hand supporting the front of the rifle in case the sticks collapse or fall over



Scanning ahead for targets and the best route through the terrain

We started by zeroing, which allowed me to get comfortable with the gun. It goes without saying that it is a good idea to get a good grasp of your chosen setup and its capabilities. Zero was set an inch high at 100m with Winchester 147-grain ammo. So it would be pretty much point and shoot out to 200m to stay in the kill zone at that distance. So little to no range correction with just the fickle Welsh wind to contend with!

Most rifle shooting that I have done has primarily consisted of the prone position. I was therefore keen to try the other options too, which I would more likely have to adopt in a hunting scenario. I also expected to be able to use the shooting sticks in various ways too. I practiced free standing, standing supported, kneeling supported and then the standing and kneeling with the sticks.

### PRACTICE MAKES...

John who has clearly done the transitions between these positions many times, made me realise just how much I could benefit

from some decent practice! There is a lot to be said for getting the shooting sticks out and going for a walk, setting them up and making the movements from standing to kneeling and vice versa as smooth and efficient as possible. Afterwards I felt that I had the foundations sorted to form a good basis for my practice away from the range.

Once I was happy with transitioning through the movements and the positioning of the sticks, it was time to incorporate the actual shooting element as well using the 100m and 200m ranges. It should be noted that the wind by this point was really going for it! I had already found shooting standing and unsupported hard enough but add in the factor of being blown around too and it all proved exceptionally challenging to say the least! Thankfully, John's instruction ensured it was not long before I was ringing steel out to 200m off the sticks, and I can certainly see why they are so popular. I can vouch for just how much more confidence this practice gave me before a stalk, a definite advantage to any hunter.

### THE STALK

The idea behind the walked up deer stalk is very simple; using the features of the valley John has laid out a course over some fairly tough terrain periodically featuring steel deer silhouettes. This is carefully planned with a different lesson to be learnt from each target presented; this is practical instruction at its best! It is important to note that for the purpose of this exercise our scent and position relating to the wind would be ignored. Obviously this is very important part of stalking, but something for another day!

The time had come for me to do the walked up stalk. I knew they were only steel targets but I was still excited and a bit nervous but could not think of anywhere else I would rather be! Anyway, we made our way in a Polaris off road vehicle to the drop off point where we entered the course.

After having a quick scan with the naked eye my first target was spotted and it was quickly established that this would not be a safe shot under the circumstances due to a partially concealed track being directly behind the target. John gave me similar examples to think about, this first target was obviously planned in order to put me in the



In position to take my first shot at a steel roe!

► correct mind set for the rest of the targets to follow.

Moving forward to the 'no shoot' I spotted my first viable target in the form of a steel Roe, very common in these parts! Before taking up a position, we had a good look at the terrain and discussed what I thought would be the best route forward and why. Once I had sneaked into a suitable position about 60-70m away and was happy, I chambered a round and promptly got a good hit. We had previously discussed that this was also a good opportunity to practice a quick follow up shot and I am pleased to say the second hit its mark as well. The major benefit of shooting steels is that you can easily hear and see what is going on. While heading down to inspect the target we discussed various ways of approaching a shot deer which comes with its own set of potential dangers, like being charged! This would certainly be a surprise for a stalking novice such as myself.

**MULTIPLE EXPOSURE**

Throughout the day I came across a great variety of targets that were unsafe to shoot. These included scenarios that took into account the fragmentation of a bullet exiting a shot deer, the obstruction of a clear shot on the vital organs, vegetation obscuring the target, unsafe backstops etc. While we moved between these we were able to discuss obstacles such as barbed wire fences and how to safely get over them, basic stuff but important none the less.

The variety of targets on offer was exceptional, giving me the opportunity to repeatedly practice the thought processes required before taking a shot, as well as trying to find suitable firing positions in some tough and challenging ground. Early on in the course and once in position I was presented with a Muntjac, around 70-80m away, located in between two trees. I found that the only position that gave me a clear line of sight was kneeling on a reasonably steep slope whilst trying to support myself with a very small tree. I was quite uncomfortable, shot badly and was really disappointed. I consoled myself in the knowledge better to mess up on some steel than the real thing! This particular experience highlighted the need to practice kneeling more and very importantly never to push the use of a poor position or stance!

While moving through the tough ground and carting the shooting sticks, kit management and choice was a topic that came up. No clear rules, but some good guidance nevertheless, as it all depends on the type of stalking you are doing and whether it is highland or woodland for example. Did I really need the sticks in this

terrain? I wish I had them with me for that Muntjac!

**LOCAL SUPPORT**

Unsurprisingly I found I was more accurate from prone with the aid of a rucksack for support. My best and most satisfying shot was taken from a rocky platform, on a target just shy of 200m. Very satisfying! I got a lot of opportunities to try and guess the range, something I was getting quite good at. Trying to judge distance over dead ground was my nemesis however, a problem that could be solved by yet another bit of kit....a rangefinder. As the stalk went on though, the idea of carrying more weight made me realise that when I do choose what kit to buy, weight will be a major consideration.

Moving on and it wasn't long before I was forced to tackle another kneeler. This one would be the last shot of the day and on an even steeper slope. The only viable support being a barbed wire fence; the target was 150m +. I was hunched up trying to keep as much of myself out of the targets eye line so no post to rest on for me, just the wire. Luckily this time I was rewarded with a kill shot and music to my ears in the form of a loud 'ding!' Once back at base we were able to have a good de-brief... if only we had enough time for another round...

**CONCLUSION**

A one-on-one training day with Orion Firearms represents a fantastic opportunity to actively streamline the learning curve to becoming a competent deer stalker. As a novice I had a few questions to ask at the beginning of the stalk but they really started to come thick and fast once we moved further along the course. This type of training puts you in the perfect environment to learn as you are actually there doing it, creating your own set of experiences and coming across your own problems.

Whatever the issue, you can stop and discuss at length with John drawing on his vast knowledge and experiences all in a fun and safe environment. I highlighted areas that I would like to improve on, for example on several occasions I failed to notice some pretty obvious targets which amused John greatly! So my observational skills could do with some work. This course is by no means just for novice stalkers, I believe that no matter what your level of experience, you will highlight something that needs improving. Could you land a shot in the kill zone of each target first time? My advice: If you are looking for a challenge and you want to improve – contact Orion Firearms Training, pack your bags and go to Wales!





# ORION STALKING COURSE | FIREARMS

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

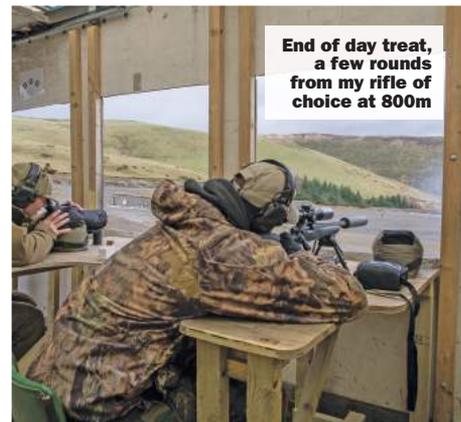
<b>Prices</b>	£500 Inc VAT per person for 1 to 1 tuition £750 Inc VAT for 2 people for 2 to 1 tuition
<b>Duration</b>	1 day - 9am to 5pm Stalk runs for approx 1 kilometre
<b>Contact:</b>	Orion Firearms Training, 01686 412113 info@orionfirearmstraining.co.uk



Eyeing up my next target for a safe shot



Last shot of the day and one of the most awkward and uncomfortable I have ever made, the picture does not do it justice!



End of day treat, a few rounds from my rifle of choice at 800m