



Roe in the snow



Mo Virtue gets bitten by the stalking bug as her husband and guide David stalks her into a roe doe – but the wintry conditions make things difficult

It was a freezing cold day in February when David suggested he take me out shooting again for my second roe. I was not often able to get the chance and keen to follow up my initial success; what was more, my husband was keen to make inroads into his cull quota. In minutes we had set off.

The afternoon was bitterly cold and I didn't hold much hope of deer being out and active. However, things were to change very shortly – I hadn't accounted for David's uncanny ability to home in on the deer. It wasn't long after we arrived at our destination that I heard him say: "Over there, can you see that group of does?"

We were just off the main road, not to mention near a village, and yet just two fields back I could make out a group of five or six deer. They were halfway up a hill close to a thick wood, about a quarter of a mile away.

"Right, we'll stop here and see if we can stalk down the hedge. We need to be low and quiet. It's totally different to buck stalking – here we will have six pairs of eyes looking out for us, not just one."

We crept silently along the hedge side, placing our feet carefully on the fallen leaves, which were crunchy underfoot due to the hard frosts that had frequented the area of late. "Right," David whispered, "we need to go along the side of this knoll to the end. I think they will still be there. Keep very low – she may

start to come over the hill towards us, and we can't risk her seeing us. If she is still lower down the gully then we should be able to get you a good shot from the top there."

We crept along the frozen field, the chill winter air wrapped around us. When we reached the far side, we dropped onto our elbows and knees and crawled uphill for the last 20 feet to the brow. This was the moment of truth. I would get a shot at the doe if she had not been spooked – the wind was in our favour, but the frosted leaves were like walking on corn flakes. I crawled forward, elbow by elbow, on the frozen earth. Reaching the top, I chanced a peek to see if I could still see our doe. She was there, but her head was up – she had been alerted to something.

David confirmed this. "Stay very still," he instructed. In the distance I could hear voices; I remembered there were cottages only a short distance away. David informed me that although the deer would be well used to people, human voices would still make them a little jittery, and if they felt under threat they would soon find sanctuary in the woods.

David instructed me to get into position, lying prone along the frozen ground in the early dusk. I could feel the icy ground beginning to prick at my legs. Looking through the scope, there was a bit of shrubbery obstructing my view. I mentioned this to David. "Just wait a

bit. If she moves a little to the left, you'll have a better view and you'll be fine," came David's hushed voice.

A few minutes later the deer did indeed begin to move, but not in the direction we were hoping. David had to think fast, and we quickly reversed back down the knoll and into a better position. Looking through a gap in the gorse bushes, I could see she was wandering along, occasionally stopping to take a bite at the winter barley. David set up the rifle once more and I settled behind it, watching her and waiting for my chance. She was in a great position – I just hoped she would stop long enough for a shot.

We were in luck. Obviously quite happy that there was no danger, she paused and started eating again. I looked through the scope but struggled to find her. David advised me: "Look just with your eyes for a moment, and try again." I did, and relief flooded through me as I picked her up in the scope. Adjusting myself slightly, I talked myself through the motions. The crosshairs went up the leg, just behind the shoulder and onto the heart. She was broadside – a perfect chance. Heart thumping in my throat, I slipped off the safety catch – but just then she started to move. David gave a few squeaks to try to get her attention without alarming her, and it worked. She stopped and turned her head towards us. I paused only long enough to ensure that the crosshairs were where they should



be; confident that my aim was right, I took a deep, steadying breath and gently squeezed the trigger, releasing the round. I couldn't believe how calm I felt as the resounding bang echoed through the evening air.

She jumped and ran forward. At first I feared I had missed, but then David, eyes still pressed to the binoculars, said aloud: "A perfect clean shot. I saw the blood come from the entry wound. Keep watching – she'll drop soon. It was lights out for her as soon as you pulled the trigger." No sooner had David spoken those words than the doe collapsed just below the top of the hill.

As we watched, we saw a spectacular sight unfold. The deer we had seen previously came out from their hidden feeding area in the gully below us, startled but not alarmed at the sound of the .243 going off. They went straight up to where my doe lay dead. Two came at first, then another one, and then another three. The first two sniffed at her; the group paused for a few seconds, then their heads went up and they bolted back to the wood.

I was desperate to see if David had been right about my shot, so we headed down the hill into the gully, over the stream and up the following hill to where she lay. As we walked David pointed out the blood trail, which – had she made it into the woods – our dog Flick would have had to follow.

"See, straight through the heart. A good 120-yard shot – well done." More praise from David? A rare but welcome occurrence. "I could get used to this," I thought as he turned over the roe; there was a neat little hole where the bullet had entered. "You could not have got better than that," said David. "She was dead the moment you pulled the trigger. Through the binoculars I could see the blood spray, and the way she ran you could tell she was not going far."

Confidence grew within me. I knew I had been seriously bitten by the stalking bug and looked forward to next doe culling excursion with my patient guide and better half. ■



Successful stalk: Mo took the doe cleanly with a well-placed shot



EQUIPMENT REVIEWED BY MO VIRTUE

Product	Distributor	Contact	Acquired from	Contact	Price	Rating
Tikka Stainless T3 Lite .243	GMK	01489 579999	Borders Gun Room	01835 822844	£950	★★★★★
Handmade gralloching knife	Paul Harris knives	07775 805411	Paul Harris knives	07775 805411	£200-500	★★★★★
Wildcat Predator 8 moderator	UK Custom Shop	01905 796610	Borders Gun Room	01835 822844	£215	★★★★★
Zeiss 3-12x50 scope	Carl Zeiss	www.zeiss.co.uk	Game and Country Supplies	01750 725225	£650	★★★★★
Winchester power point 100-grain ammo	Browning International UK (BWM Arms)	01235 514550	Game and Country Supplies	01750 725225	£22 for 20	★★★★★
Jacket/fleece	Game and Country Supplies	01750 725225	Game and Country Supplies	01750 725225	£40	★★★★★
Shooting agent D.V. Sporting	David Virtue	07866 901019		www.dvsporting.co.uk		
Harris bipod	Various	Various	Avalon Guns	www.avalon-guns.com	£132.94	★★★★★

★★★★★ = Excellent, ★★★★ = Very Good, ★★★ = Good, ★★ = Adequate for purpose, ★ = Poor