

MACNAB vs Macnot

Alexandra Henton's guide will help the Macnabber pack the best kit but not the whole caboodle. Illustrations by **Oliver Preston**

THIS year *The Field's* Macnab Challenge – the ultimate sporting triplet – is sponsored by the impeccable triumvirate of Glenfarclas Whisky, Hine Cognac and Champagne Pol Roger. When it comes to the Macnab Challenge luck and levity make worthy sporting companions while coaxing a recalcitrant salmon or praying the pointer will find a brace before dusk. But there are ways to skew your chances before heading to the hill. Making sure the correct kit is in your bag is the most important. So when fate beckons and your Macnab attempt looms just what should you be taking with you? What is best for a Macnab, and what is a resounding Macnot?

In the manner of myriad Macnabbers, and the intrepid heroes of Buchan's book, if you start in the city (or beyond for that matter) your kit needs to be portable. Choose a bag that's capacious but equally at home taking soggy trews after a day on the hill and disgorging a jacket fit to wear to dinner.

BAG

John Field's 2 in 1 travel bag (€399) encompasses a hard case for two guns and soft case zipped together but detachable. Chapman's Cargo Kit Bag (£235) and boot bag (£125) are sturdy and waterproof. Don't take anything you can't carry yourself. If catching the sleeper be particularly careful how you transport your shotgun; staff can be tricky. A nondescript case (the additional of some Led Zep stickers can make it look like a musical instrument) rather than a gunslip is helpful. Travelling-trunk style is not to be encouraged.

Once you have the kit bag you need to pack light. As with any Mission Impossible, extra baggage is a drag. Tom Cruise doesn't struggle under the weight of wheeled Vuittons while saving the world, and undertaking a Macnab is just as arduous, and decidedly more thrilling.

GUN

Take your shotgun with you as a shotgun has to fit but leave the rifle at home. Estate rifles are reliable and the keeper will know their capabilities. Taking your own rifle is a Macnot. Remember, speed and agility are key to a Macnab attempt. Anything other than your shotgun will slow you down. And don't bother with your pair of London bests. Take your most reliable workhorse that can cope ➤



Boots? Check. Breeks? Check. Cap? Check.
Shotgun? Check. Piece? Check. Macnab...

with a yomp over the peat hags but make sure it's not too heavy – you may have a long walk at the end of a tiring day in search of that brace.

ROD

Now is not the time to attempt double-handed casting if you are a novice. The salmon is possibly the toughest part of the Macnab trio and you need to be on your mettle. Better half a river fished well than the full river fished poorly, especially if you can double-haul cast. A stiff #8 bonefish rod with a weight-forward line is the Editor's recommendation. Be guided by your gillie as to which flies are catching well and be prepared to vary size and weight. And don't go too light on the leader – you don't want to lose what might be your only taking fish, so use 15-20lb Seaguar Fluorocarbon, which combines thinness with strength.

“ Have a pair of sturdy breeks waiting for when the salmon is hooked and you head for the hill ”

FOOTWEAR

There may well be dashing, ducking and diving before dark so take something that can deal with the terrain without giving you a blister. We swear by Viking Dryboots. They have recently changed their name, becoming Harris

Dryboots (£60) but they remain as practical as ever.

No sporting wardrobe should be without them. Just wear with a good pair of gaiters. Macnabbing is not the time for gumboots that are too cumbersome to walk in. And pack some waders for the salmon. If you are taking your own an inexpensive pair that can be discarded at first leak might be useful, although those with feet attached tend to be weighty.

CLOTHES

Whatever you choose has to see you through all three phases of the Macnab. The shirt you don in the morning needs to be fit for fishing, stalking and shooting. A muted cotton check will suit. Cordings can be called upon to provide something suitable. Just remember to wear nothing white; the grouse will see you and your chances will be scuppered.

Ties can provoke paragraphs of praise and invective. We encourage the serious Macnabber to wear one; it's Macnab style. Go technical with base layers. Dhu's cashmere, silk and superfine wool base layer for men and women (£189)

works well. Musto's evolution merino long-sleeve

T-shirt (£75) is an option if your challenge takes place in the early part of the season. It will help you keep cool when covering the miles.

Have a pair of sturdy breeks waiting for when the salmon is hooked and you head to the hill. Ptarmigan extreme breeks from Schöffel (£200) can handle any conditions. A pair of Cordings finest plus-fours, cut generously at the back, will give you room to move. While tweed trousers work in other contexts they are not at home on

an adrenalin-fuelled Macnab attempt. You can plump for technical fabric or tweed, both are legitimate choices, but we hanker for tweed when doing a Macnab; it fits our Buchaneering ideals better.

If your Macnab attempt is early season a lightweight tweed waistcoat, as made by Carters Country Wear, may prove sufficient but always take a light waterproof outer layer, too. There is no need to wear a matching shooting suit. Dexterity is



Macnot (above) – he should save the cigar to celebrate success (right). Waders (left) are recommended; and a nondescript case (below)

key, so something that can take a mauling on the ground as you crawl into position is ideal. Any jacket from Barbour's sporting range will work splendidly and we also recommend the aptly named Macnab jacket from Musto; it's fully waterproof and its tweed pattern blends into the hill better than many shooting coats.

Once kitted out don't forget the extras. The best mossie repellent is Avon's Skin So Soft original dry oil (£5). It contains citronella and you'll find it in the kit



bags of serious sportsmen heading to Scotland. A good pair of binoculars is essential and if you can manage a stick, take one.

Finally, don't forget your piece; it is vital to keep energy levels up during the day. And to catch that salmon you'll need good polarised glasses such as those made by Pilla and Costa del Mar. If the wind is perverse a hat is a must. We like the Bond tweed caps from Olney.

Salmon hooked? Stag felled? Grouse shot? Celebrate! The full tartan rig is over the top if you're not a Highlander but a velvet jacket and a pair of bright strides wear well. Oliver Brown and Favourbrook are easy choices for a smoking jacket and Cordings provides a truly eye-straining range of funky-coloured jeans for the sporting gentleman. Pair with the essential victory cigar.

The Macnab Challenge is the sportsman's zenith. The combination of skill, luck and sporting chance tops a driven day. Our tip – keep our guide in mind and avoid the pitfalls of a Macnot. ■

CELEBRATION DRINKS

Pol Roger Champagne, Hine Cognac & Glenfarclas Whisky are kindly sponsoring *The Field's* Macnab Challenge for the second year. No Macnab attempt is complete without something delicious in hand. Paul Graham from Pol Roger gives us his pick of the Macnab and Macnot of what to drink on your Macnab attempt.

It is important to choose the right wine-champagne to start (we might recommend the Churchillian favourite, Pol Roger) and if more than four are in your party, a magnum is essential. Should you succeed it must be vintage champagne; the Pol Roger Brut Vintage 2006 (Berry Bros & Rudd, £60), about to come on stream, is splendid, or for a real treat the 1988/1990 or 2002 hit the spot.

For an old-school favourite, a Côte de Nuits from the family-owned Burgundian house Joseph Drouhin, such as the Nuits-St Georges 2009 (Fine & Rare Wines, £55), would work; it is more concentrated with darker red fruits. Alternatively, a white from the Côte de Beaune, perhaps the Joseph Drouhin Meursault 2011 (Hedonism Wines, £38) boasting a beautiful golden colour and aromatic palate of honey and hazelnut.

For the adventurous a Californian red from the Napa Valley, such as Robert Sinskey Cabernet Franc 2010 (Selfridges, £48) or Staglin Family Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2008 (Amazon, £150). Pair with a white from the Alsace-Domaine Josmeyer Riesling Le Dragon 2011 (L'Art du Vin, £30) or Pinot Blanc "Mise du Printemps" 2014 (The Wine Society, £16) – which are refreshing, elegant and bright.

Something stronger. Glenfarclas whisky from those who know, family-owned, family-run and with a sense of place in the glass, and a sherried warmth (Master of Malt, Glenfarclas 15 Years Old £50). If you prefer a lingering, smoother *digestif* try cognac, an early landed or an assemblage from Jarnac or even a vintage like Hine Bonneuil 2005 (The Whisky Exchange, £75).

