



JOHN MACNAB, we're out to get you

The Field and Hunter Balmoral Macnab Challenge is on. Fight ennui. Prepare for something “devilish difficult, devilish unpleasant, and calculated to make a man long for a dull life”, says **Alexandra Henton**

EXQUISITE shooting with expansive chums, and the prettiest cook north of the Border. A recipe for sure-fire fun, sterling sport and an appreciative thank-you note. If, instead of accepting with rat-up-a-drainpipe velocity you loiter like a rat cornered by a terrier, then you are suffering. The ailment is ennui and a stay at The Priory can do little to abate it. There is only one solution: look to John Macnab.

Who is John Macnab? “A tall bravo with a colonial accent” or “a gnarled Caliban of infinite cunning and gnome-like agility”, speculates Janet Raden, the indomitable female interest in John Buchan’s novel *John Macnab*. The second most popular of Buchan’s novels (*The Thirty-Nine Steps* claims top spot) was written in 1925. Unlike the majority of his work, sixpenny thrillers with spies and codes, *John Macnab* is a

When you've shot your stag will you be “over the first screens” before the mist clears, as Lord Lamancha is advised he must in the novel?

sporting adventure and required reading for any sportsman worth his powder. It is, after all, where the most modern and invigorating of sporting challenges kicked off.

Buchan’s novel follows three men, each successful and set fair but afflicted by a dreadful *taedium vitae*. No physical ailment hampers them, just a loss of spirit and a want of interest in life: the type of ennui that encourages you to watch an hour of the shopping network for want of finding the remote control. Or take up something truly horrid, like fartlekking.

The three protagonists are old friends: Sir Edward Leithen, barrister and former Attorney General; John Palliser-Yeates, City banker; and Lord Lamancha, cabinet minister. At their club, with the help of Sir Archibald Roylance, whose Highland retreat will be their base, the ruse that will shake off their boredom takes shape. ➤

“ ‘You’ve got to rediscover the comforts of life by losing them for a little,’ says Lamancha ”

As even the pleasure of shooting has palled, the three plan something “devilish difficult, devilish unpleasant, and calculated to make a man long for a dull life”. Adopting the *nom de guerre* John Macnab, they send letters to three Highland estates warning that a salmon or a stag will be killed and removed from the property during 48 hours, from midnight to midnight, and returned to the door of the big house. John Macnab will stand the cost. The cost of their success will be £50 to a worthwhile charity, the price of failure, double. Like Ripon caught practising with his loaders, they all know that their kudos could be seriously if not permanently damaged by discovery. The *frisson* of danger is a devilish attraction.

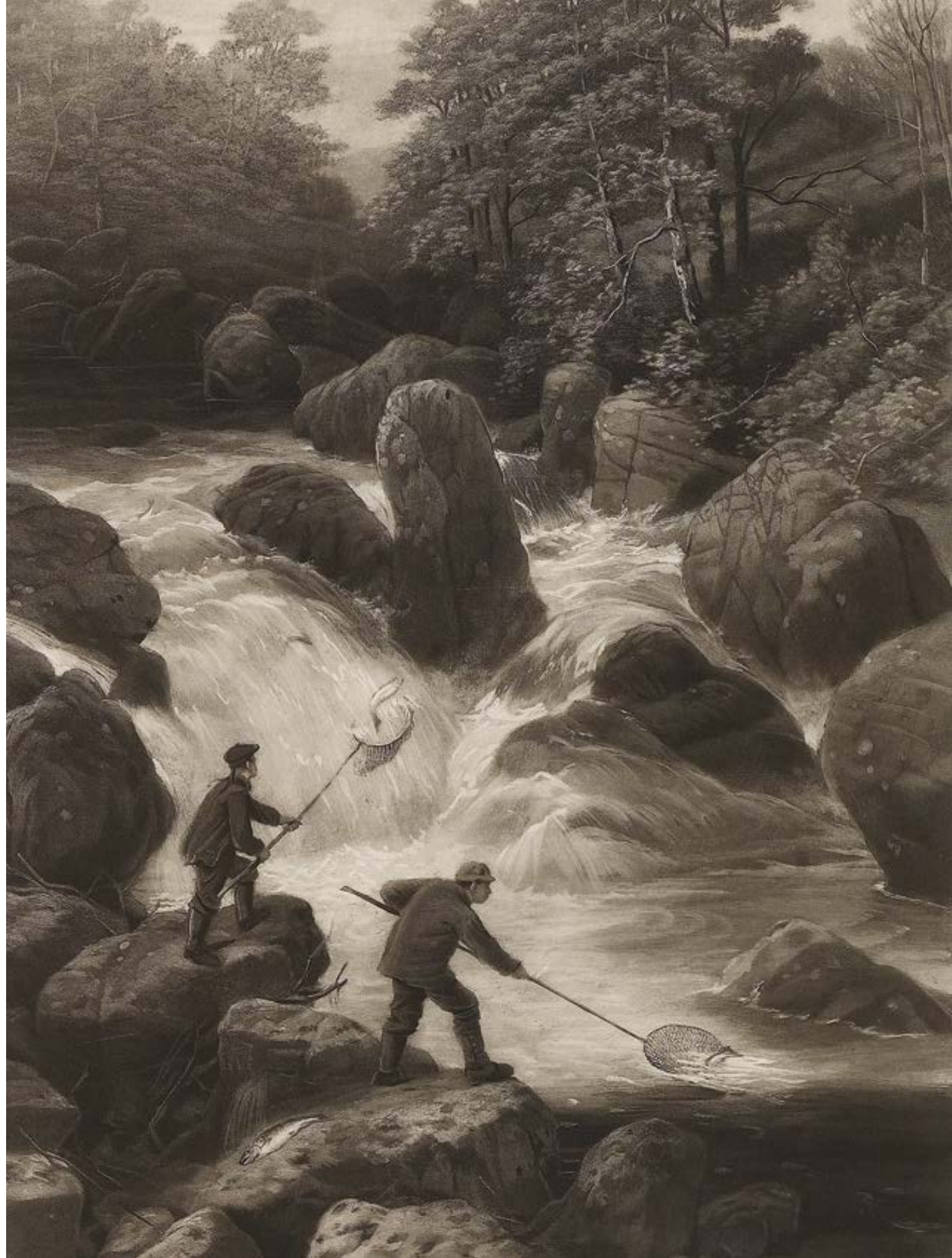
REAL-LIFE DERRING-DO

“You’ve got to rediscover the comforts of life by losing them for a little,” insists Lamancha, and so the gentlemen poachers make their way north to Roylance’s house at Crask in the Highlands. The three estates where they test their mettle epitomise British post-war society. Glenraden, owned by Lord Raden, accepts the challenge in suitable spirit. Strathlarrig, where Sir Edward Leithen takes his salmon, is well defended by the American incumbents, but Haripol, owned by the newly enriched and distinctly serious Lord Claybody, proves to be the most difficult bastion to crack.

The three champions are consummate sportsmen, essential when engaging in enemy territory. Palliser-Yeates is an excellent shot, having stalked nearly every forest in Scotland. Leithen is an artist on the river, and Lamancha no mean shot himself. Leithen’s straight delicate casts and skill with the fly are vindicated as he is the only one of the allies who brings off John Macnab’s dare.

The novel is derived from the real-life derring-do of Captain James Brander Dunbar. In a letter to *The Field* of 17 November, 1951 he clarified just what had given Buchan the idea. A dearth of shooting invitations and the assertion that he could kill a beast in any forest in Scotland was duly challenged by Lord Abinger. A .303 carbine rifle hidden inside a golf bag was his only attempt at mustering a semblance of stealth. After two blank mornings and on the verge of chucking in he took a six-pointer in the Iverloch Forest (not quite a match for the Earl of Lamancha’s 13-pointer). He evaded pursuit by crossing the River Spean and carried off the head and neck ready for mounting. Presenting himself at the castle in the afternoon he received a cheque made payable to J. B-D., POACHER. After the book was published Buchan wrote to Brander apologising for failing to get his permission to use the story, but his vim was a great hook for the tale.

Today the competitive spirit outranks boredom as the driving factor for those taking to the hills in pursuit of the accepted modern version of a Macnab. It pits skill and endurance against the clock and unpredictable quarry. Anyone can stand in the line and crumple a stately pheasant, but to take three species in one day requires another type of expertise altogether – and good fortune if a stag, salmon and brace of grouse are to be taken within 24 hours. Perhaps a little less



Poaching a salmon may not be quite as easy for our would-be Macnabbers. And we’d expect them to use a rod, not a net

thrilling than Buchan’s original, it’s still a sporting feat that can delight the most jaded sportsman. Many sporting lodges offer the chance to notch up the Highland triple in return for an appropriately serious certificate and sporting satisfaction. So whether it’s at a lodge, on your own land or on the down-low, we encourage everyone to have a go.

In suitable spirit *The Field* and Hunter have joined forces to launch *The Field* and Hunter Balmoral Macnab Challenge. Whether the ennui has set in or Buchan’s poachers inspire a craving to take to the hills in the guise of a tramp, we urge you to take up the challenge, don the correct kit (Hunter Balmoral gumboots, of course) and start planning your assault. ➤

THERE ARE FOUR CATEGORIES IN *THE FIELD* AND HUNTER BALMORAL CHALLENGE

THE REAL MACNAB

A salmon caught on the fly and a stag, both poached in a legal, sporting manner from an owner who accepts the challenge in good spirit. If you are driven to make the challenge that bit more authentic, we recommend you attempt the Real Macnab. Too friendly an estate owner would seem rather at odds with the spirit of Buchan’s heroes, so choose a suitably choleric but game combatant.

THE CLASSIC MACNAB

A salmon caught on the fly, stag and brace of grouse (not necessarily a right-and-left). This Classic Highland version is the most popular. You’ll need backbone and military fitness if you plan to take to the hills and not employ GPS, helicopter transfers and all the extras that we think are probably not quite cricket.

THE MARSH MACNAB

A pike caught on the fly, a fallow buck and a foreshore goose. For any wildfowler this Macnab, bagged by *The Field*’s Editor, is well worth the early start.

THE SOUTHERN MACNAB

A grayling caught on the fly, a fallow buck and a couple of woodcock – not necessarily a right-and-left but a highly demanding challenge nonetheless.

All entrants, successful or flummoxed by the fish, the bird or the beast, will receive an invitation to *The Field* and Hunter Balmoral Macnab Challenge Dinner at Boisdale of Bishopsgate in December 2010. As well as the succour that flows from peer recognition and a lethal *Field* cocktail, the first 25 successful entrants but one will receive a pair of exclusive Macnab Challenge silver cuff-links. A similar pair, in gold, will go to one of those who have nobly picked up Buchan’s gauntlet and poached a stag and a salmon in a sporting manner, the size of the fish deciding the winner. (Photographic evidence and accurate measurements will be accepted if the fish is returned.) Hunter goodies will also be on offer. The rules are simple. All Macnabs are to be completed within a 24 hour period. A signed letter from two independent witnesses attesting to the achievement is necessary: estate owner, gillie, gamekeeper or other unimpeachably good sort. All Macnab entrants will also have the opportunity to upload their pictures and victories or tribulations on to our website, www.macnabchallenge.co.uk. Above all, the Challenge must be conducted in a sporting and gentlemanly fashion – no Uzis on the moor, extravagant gifts with the entry forms or Sementex in the river, no matter how frustrating or elusive the quarry. And, of course, any false claim to a Macnab exposes the culprit to an accusation of blackguardly behaviour.

Entry forms, rules and terms and conditions are available from the website, or apply by post to *The Field* and Hunter Macnab Balmoral Challenge, *The Field*, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU. The closing date is 10 November, 2010. Get the motor running, throw off the ennui and head for the Highlands.

THE FIELD AND HUNTER BALMORAL **MACNAB CHALLENGE**



Bag a Macnab and you'll be
a true monarch of the glen

***THE FIELD* AND HUNTER CHALLENGE YOU TO BAG A MACNAB BY 10 NOVEMBER 2010**

All successful Macnabbers, of whatever variety (and those who tried but, let's face it, failed), will be invited to a celebratory dinner at Boisdale of Bishopsgate in London.

The first 25 bagging a Macnab will be presented with a pair of specially designed cuff-links.

All entrants will have the opportunity to upload their efforts on to our dedicated website.

ENTRY FORMS AND RULES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT

www.macnabchallenge.co.uk.

THE FIELD[®]

HUNTER