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BIRDS IN PARADISE

CHEYENNE RIDGE LODGE

Few destinations are as legendary for hunting wild pheasant as South Dakota. In this state, the wild birds are plentiful and the landscapes are expansive, making it the premier destination for serious pheasant hunters from all 50 states. This centralized mecca of rolling hills and natural windbreaks is a place where hunters range in the birds' environment, with smart, strong, fast and elusive wild birds providing a much greater challenge than the stocked alternative. Cheyenne Ridge Lodge, a traditional wingshooters' paradise and the first lodge to receive a Beretta Trident rating, exists at the epicenter of this perfect hunting spot.

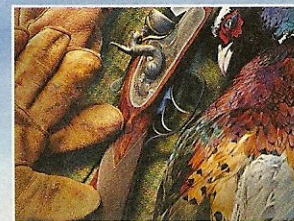
Sport Shop guide Michael Pepi, the hunt master and kennel manager at Cheyenne Ridge, is no stranger to introducing pheasant hunters to this paradise. "South Dakota is the holy grail of pheasant hunting. There are wild birds everywhere. It's just one of those places where if you are a pheasant hunter, you have to go. It's just big fields and pheasants everywhere, and you can tell the difference between a wild pheasant and a stocked bird," says Pepi. "When you go out and birds get up and they have this big chest and this big tail that is bobbing in the wind, you know that you are hunting the real deal instead of these stocked birds that are just hanging out and walking around on the trails. You actually have to hunt these to get them."

The quality of the hunting draws countless repeat visitors to the lodge, with some family groups coming back twice in the same season. But for Pepi, it is the process of introducing the South Dakota experience to a new group that is the most rewarding.

"It's great because you can tell the guys that really do enjoy it, because it's such a mecca. It's like a little kid in a candy shop," says Pepi. "They are there enjoying the birds and the dogs and the whole experience. So when they shoot a bird and you hold it up for them, they get this big smile even though it's their sixth bird of the trip."

» This homestead is the holy grail for pheasant hunting in South Dakota.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Terry Allen



MEN'S

UPLAND HUNTING