

COUNTRY WARDROBE

A shirt in the hand is worth two in the bush...?

Bruce Potts finds two new 'go-to' garments in the Bison Bushcraft Guide shirts and Bush shirt

I am not one for reviewing many clothing products, as over the years I have seen the same old theories invented and reinvented in many a differing guise. I tend to

use what works for me, as I spend 90% of my time out in the woods stalking deer with rifle or camera, so I need a quiet, warm, breathable natural product I can wear with out alarming any one. For the past 20 years that has meant wool shirts in the form of the Swandri, they have served me well over the years but as many of this type of garment now emanates from China I was increasingly on the look out for a true quality wool and preferably home grown garment to fulfil my needs.

As luck would have it I was at F.A.Andersons when a similarly clad chap in wool check shirt approached me, almost with a Masonic hand shake as a kindred spirit for natural products and honest

quality. That chap was Roger Harrington from Bison Bushcraft who takes a great pride in a real world straightforward approach to life, and provides good products from his (and his wife's) ever growing business.

Real living

Roger explained his interest in shooting and that he had started a business in 1996-7 to cater for the growing demand in bush craft skills and general out door life experiences, or in other words 'real living'. Roger has trained with the military and with some of the noted outdoors men on the planet notably Mors Kochanski and Mountain Mel Deweese. This grounding has instilled a need for clothing and products that live up to a clients expectations - you do not want to become disillusioned with your kit when stuck 200 miles from civilisation.

Roger explained that he too was a closet Swanni man, but hankered after a British made product aimed for our needs - now my ears pricked up! Roger then showed me a collection of some of the best out doors clothes I have seen, primarily because they were designed by him and to his spec and also to his discerning quality requirements. As such they are not cheap but boy are they good, in particular I was interested in the Guide shirt - as this represents a direct and possibly superior replacement for my ageing



The Bison Bush Craft Guide shirts are available in four seasonal colours, here are the Summer (left) and Spring (right) patterns

Swannies - and a hard wearing jacket called the Bison Bush Shirt.

Four seasons

The Guide Shirt is fabricated with 100% British wool and made solely on these shores; as time passes by that has started to mean a lot to me. There are a quartet of colour options that mimic the season's colours perfectly. The Spring colour offers a punchy green and brown check to simulate new growth in the woods and has accounted for several Roe bucks this year with out the aid of any other camouflage.

The Summer pattern is my favourite that has a 'straw' and dark green check that works extremely well in the Surrey hills or on Scottish Mountain side. The Autumn colours of brown and grey, and Winter block colour of dark green are equally good but untried by myself as yet.

The garment is superbly woven with thick - and I mean thick. Hold it up to the light and none will show through; that's heat staying in and wet staying out in my book.

I am 6ft 2 inches tall and struggle to find a shirt that fits my arms, the Bison Guide shirt has long arms that even at my full stretch still covers my wrists from the elements, that's good in my book. The collar is - as Roger states - a Granddad style with out fold over design. Again perfect, the collar sits upright to block rain or wind from the delicate neck but very importantly does not rub on this area causing

irritation; good design borne through experience in the field.

It's a smock

The overall design has a smock type format but uses a buttoned instead of a zip front. For bearded chaps like myself that's so much better... and although I prefer an all buttoned front, this 'cagoule' style still gives enough ventilation for cooling after a strong hill climb and conversely warmth when fully buttoned from the coldest wind.

The length is also cut generously so that if you bend or stretch to take a shot or cut a branch from a tree then your bodies climatic environment is not compromised. To the front is a single deep pocket and this is the only thing that I would change; it looks better with one pocket but a second would be handy for extra storage - I tend to pack documents, mobile phone and haggis sandwiches...

I bought two of these Guide shirts instantly after talking to Roger - that should tell you something about I how rate them. It would be a brave man to disrobe me from my Swanndri but Mr Harrington has done it...

It's a jacket

Next up was the Bison Bush Shirt, in fact not really a shirt but a highly practical smock type jacket for every day outdoor pursuits and very good as a stalking jacket too.

It is made from 100% Islay Tweed. I used to shoot on this Hibernian island on holidays,

every year for 20 years with my parents, and I can state that this is the best Scottish tweed that money can buy. The fabric is tightly woven and lined with a cotton moleskin of the best quality, as we would expect to add warmth and a quiet under layer. There is a built in hood which is highly practical for all out door pursuits, again Moleskin lined with twin breast pockets and a full frontal length warmer pocket (moleskin lined) for added comfort. To keep the wind out further is a drawstring hem, certainly useful to withstand unwanted drafts. The front aperture is not fastened by buttons but by a draw string arrangement located through four opposing eye loops and further cross bonded by an antlered buttoned strap. Just by looking at this garment you can tell Roger knows his stuff and has designed a jacket with all the practical attributes one would want for ones self.

Again the sleeves are generous even for a lanky lad like me and the overall pattern is a subdued tweed with an

earthy pattern that stalkers have favoured for years. It is highly water resistant and wind proof in my tests and importantly - as with all woollen garments - is silent when worn, so will not rustle when you change your position.

Bruce is a Bison convert

It is rare these days to find a product that lives up to one expectations, often it is made to a price, thankfully Roger is made of sterner stuff and refuses to compromise on quality, and because of that he is going to get a good loyal following - and he can count me in! I need good kit, as I live in it (Editor's Note: He really does...) and I'll be Bison clad in future.

The Bison Guide shirt is £86.50 and worth every penny in my view and the Bison Bush Shirt retails for £190. For more information, contact Bison Bushcraft on 0845 8387062 or visit www.bisonbushcraft.co.uk, you will be glad you did as Roger also has hand made bush knives and all sorts of outdoor kit available.



The Bison Bush Shirt is really a jacket with meticulous detailing and very practical features made from Scottish wool which makes an excellent out door coat.