

## The Devil's Playground



Hunting the Devil's (chukar) playground is not for the faint of heart. It takes a certain amount of stamina, courage and in some cases you just have to get a little crazy. For the dog, it needs to be in shape for 15 miles of elevation gain and loss, have conditioned pads for razor sharp rocks and be very obedient for the times when the birds are flushing from a cliffs edge.

The typical terrain where I hunt in the West Desert of Utah, for better or for worse, is usually more rugged than the typical terrain I hunt in Idaho. It is generally steeper, with greater elevation gains and a few towering cliffs thrown in for good measure. Because of this I have started to call the location of one of my hunts the "Devil's Playground".

The Devils Playground can be reached from a couple of different angles, but usually requires a minimum of a 3 mile hike on the flatlands and then a brutal 2,500ft elevation gain before you reach the top. Total out and back mileage is 15+ miles. One angle of ascent requires going straight up the face where there is two areas where you must lift the dog up in order to continue on. It can be fairly taxing physically. You must be coordinated and light on your feet. The rewards however are usually great as it puts me on top of the birds and they usually hold tight even late in the season as they never get any pressure except from myself. It is not uncommon to flush 4-5 large coveys of chukar along this 1 mile stretch of plateau.





One note of caution, when navigating your own Devil's Playground is that you must have a very obedient dog. There has been many a hunter who has lost his loyal hunting partner over a cliff edge. Make sure that you have a dog that is broke to the shot and obeys the "whoa" command. No chukar is important enough to risk you or your dog's life.

Hunting the Devil in his element also means holding off on that easy shot. The chukar usually takes off from a cliffs ledge and makes suicidal dives in order to avoid my copper plated six shot. Because of that it is usually easier to hold off on the shot or else you'll end up having to hike down to the bottom of the cliff for the retrieve. I usually end up getting better opportunities when I flush the birds from their roost and hunt them up again on flatter terrain.



While hunting in the Devil's Playground is demanding, it is also very rewarding. It's not only for the reward of exciting wing shooting, but the sense of adventure and feeling of conquering the mountain itself. When you combine the adventure along with good bird work by your pup and some birds in the bag it usually doesn't get much better than that.