

I wake up next to 2 IR&WS's and we greet the day.

Bracken (KC Dalriach St Jocelyn) bred by Margaret Sierakowski, and Fernley (AKC Truly Love Long & Hold Fast) bred by Wendy Bockman, are outstanding examples of the breed we love.

Having lived and worked in the UK for 20 years, I discovered IR&WS at Crufts when Archie jumped on to my lap trailing his lead. One thing led to another and I acquired Bracken from Margaret after watching an Archie/Bruar litter for a week while she was away showing adult dogs. It was quite a week in rural Scotland, immersed in a pile of puppies in fine September weather. I had to convince Margaret that this was the dog for me. I clearly recall her raising a wise eyebrow and telling me that this dog was going to be a big strong boy, and was I up to it? I promised her that I would give this dog the very best life possible. I hope I have honored my word.

On the way south from the crofters cottage, 8 week old Bracken yowled/screamed/yodeled and generally carried on alarming for the duration of the 10 hour trip to the midlands and Woodhouse Eaves. Somewhere in the Cairngorms I rolled down the window and joined in with my form of howling as there seemed no other recourse.

For his first 9 years Brack was my constant play and work companion travelling once a year back and forth between England and Maine for 19 transatlantic trips. Our adventures included crossing frozen Rannoch Moor, roaming up on Kinder Scout, camping under full moons, hiking the Appalachia Trail in New England, white water canoeing, and roaming free on Dartmoor's magical terrain. I have memories of remote seaside romps by Holkholm Beach and in the NE around Bambra Castle. Bracken has working stock behind him and acquitted himself respectably in the GB IR&WS "Working Together" programme. Except there was the one time when he jumped the Dutch door to the barn of our field training hosts and emerged over said door carrying a young piglet squealing bloody murder. Good then that he has a soft mouth! Have you ever felt like your animal companion and you were the same. That's Bracken and me. Heme. We ken each other.

When Bracken was 9, I retired to Maine to finish my cabin on West Lake where I heat with wood, derive power from the sun and live 16 miles in on dirt roads and tracks. Dog heaven!

Then when Bracken was a fit 10, I spoke with Wendy Bockman who, with family members, runs the Truly Irish Red and White Setters kennel. This is a small family run kennel in PA that prides itself on beautiful, healthy and loving animals. Wendy & Co put extra effort into their dogs and get them off to such a confident start with puppy culture and constant socializing. I was a real nuisance to Wendy, bugging her and as luck would have it when a potential buyer dropped out, I nagged the Truly Team and was awarded young Fernley. My IR&WS #2.

Fernley is actually Bracken's great niece and they have lots in common! Fernley, who has two Maine winters under her belt can smell a coyote on the ice a mile away... even with a shoulder wind. She can track partridge who have dived into fresh snow for a winter's nap and she has a real nose for business. Last spring she led me to a day old fawn invisible in the forest duff. New fawns have next to zero scent but she found this one which we of course left quietly alone. Soon, she will sniff out this year's cow Moose afterbirth on the island and will eat/roll in it before I can grab her. P-yew! She is doing well in obedience and this young lass steals everyone's heart away. At 44 lbs she is the perfect size for me and her personality is sheer joy. She is game enough to winter camp at 0 degrees F and jumps off the dock in summer after her bumper. She is the easiest pup to train that I have ever had and she loves to learn...mostly good stuff!

Interesting for me to watch as Fernley has become Bracken's advance scout on our adventures. At a very active and healthy 12, he waits 'til she signals something of interest way ahead and then they hunt as a brace. To watch them point together is pretty special. Although Bracken is the boss, Fernley has him weighed up and wrapped around her paw. They look for each other in all things. Double Joy!

Fernley loves to ride shot gun with ears flapping in the wind when I row up the lake through white horses in our old 16' Heritage Classic. She looks every bit the AKC Champion she is, fit for purpose, lean and centred in her world. Bracken prefers the canoe we have paddled in together for 12 years. He is the bow lookout and barks alerts at submerged rocks while focusing on loons, beaver, and ducks, just as when he was in Scotland, and lay flat in the yard when an Eagle would go over head, he is alert to Bald Eagles and flattens in the canoe when he sees or senses one. He is an extraordinary athlete in his mid 80s with full sight and hearing as well as continued stealth for counter surfing.

Bracken and Fernley and I swim in West Lake from late May to late September. 10 Legs, 1 direction.

How can one person be so blessed to have two of these wonderful creatures? I used to think one selected the dog that caught their eye, then I learned one should pick the parents and grand parents, finally, I now know, one wisely chooses the breeder - thank you Margaret and Wendy for trusting me with two of your best