**Taking a shot at shooting sports leads to fun new experience**

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My family has never been interested in outdoor recreation. While most children would come back to school in the fall discussing their latest camping trip or plans for hunting, my memories (which I cherish deeply) often involve somewhere with an accessible thermostat.

Only once did my parents, sister and I try camping – we were out in my backyard using a relative’s tent and blow-up mattresses. As the night went on, we all managed to find our way back inside the house. Other than regular trips to the beach and walks outside, any attempt at embracing the outdoors ceased after that.

As my childhood turned into adulthood, I always wanted to do more but never knew where to start. None of my friends were outdoor enthusiasts, and I had no clue how to get involved on my own. When I developed an interest in shooting sports, I did not really have anyone to share that curiosity with.

It took years for me to finally ask someone to go. I guess I just assumed that since I did not grow up in a family full of hunters and nature lovers, I wouldn’t fit in with the activity and those who do it.

I was scared to try something like this without prior experience. Not to mention, as a woman, I have never felt comfortable in male-dominated sports. However, when I finally visited the Michigan Department of Natural Resources-managed shooting range in Ortonville, I felt like it was a place meant for me.

I was able to go with my partner and his father, and they both graciously walked me through the steps of properly handling, using and – later, when we returned to their home for the evening – cleaning a gun. They also let me use a few of theirs, explaining what they are and the importance of using them properly.

Shooting sports can be dangerous, so it’s important to know what you’re doing. Everyone has to start somewhere, though, and with DNR-managed shooting ranges sprinkled throughout Michigan, there are many employees ready to answer questions and help us newbies who are trying to get involved.

While at the range, I was able to try out a 20-gauge shotgun, .22 caliber rifle and a .45 ACP 1911 style handgun – outside of their names, and general look and feel, I probably couldn’t tell you much more about them (I also had to double-check that these were even their names).

When it was time for me to start shooting, I went straight to the clay pigeons with the shotgun – maybe not the easiest task for a beginner.

Holding the gun, I was nervous that I would hurt myself. With its kick, holding it improperly could mean a bruised shoulder. And for someone who has only shot a bow and Nerf gun before (the latter at a church camp – again, my parents and sister had no interest), the field ahead of me and moments to come were filled with uncertainty.

However, when lifting the shotgun, turning off the safety and finally pulling the trigger, I realized I had nothing to fear. My worries about being knocked down and landing on my butt weren’t fulfilled, and I started having some fun aiming at the clay pigeons and feeling excitement as I hit them – although it took a few tries and shooting the ground once before I was able to.

The handgun proved to be just as fun, although such a different experience from shooting a shotgun. As an outsider looking in, once you’ve shot one gun you may feel like you’ve shot them all. However, both were totally different experiences. The handgun was arguably harder to shoot due to its different feel and kick compared to the shotgun, which I felt through my entire body when shooting due to its force.

The rifle also offered a different style of shooting – for this, I was able to sit down and rest the barrel on sandbags. I felt very comfortable with the gun and enjoyed seeing myself progressively get closer to a bull’s-eye with each pull of the trigger. I truly felt like I had given this activity my best shot (notice the pun?). And as a woman, the employees did not once make me feel out of place.

According to the Industry and Intelligence Report’s 2018 edition on hunting and target shooting participation, featuring a compilation of data from the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) Annual Sports Participation Reports (2003-2017), the number of participating women in shooting activities has been rising. From roughly 5.3 million total female shooters in 2006 to 8.5 million in 2017, women are getting more involved with firearms for hunting and target shooting – including me.

The takeaway for other women, I hope, is that shooting sports are meant for everyone – including us ladies and beginners of all skill levels. Driving down the dirt road away from the range when the day was done, I left feeling that the afternoon had been filled with success, excitement and learning – something I’m convinced other beginners will experience when they try shooting sports for the first time. My only regret is waiting so long to get involved.

Learn more about the DNR’s shooting ranges, and find other ranges around the state, at [michigan.gov/shootingranges](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79119_79149---%2C00.html).

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/**Note to editors:** Contact: John Pepin, Showcasing the DNR series editor, 906-226-1352. Suggested captions follow. Credit: Michigan Department of Natural Resources, unless otherwise noted.

**[Handgun](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083809/Handgun.jpg)**: First-time shooting range visitor Makenzie Schroeder of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources takes aim with a handgun during a trip to the DNR’s Ortonville range in Lapeer County.

[**Range 1**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083810/Range1.jpg), [**Range 2**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083811/Range2.jpg) and [**Range 3**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083812/Range3.jpg): The DNR’s seven staffed shooting ranges in southern Michigan offer a fun, safe shooting environment – for both beginners and experienced shooters – with friendly, highly trained employees and amenities like handgun, rifle and shotgun ranges and restroom facilities.

[**Rifle**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083813/Rifle.jpg): Makenzie Schroeder, shooting a rifle for the first time, enjoyed seeing her shots get progressively closer to the bull’s-eye.

[**Shotgun**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083814/Shotgun.jpg): As part of her first shooting range experience, Makenzie Schroeder tries out a 20-gauge shotgun.

[**Target**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/10/04/file_attachments/1083815/Target.jpg): Makenzie Schroeder with a souvenir target from her enjoyable and educational first shooting range visit./