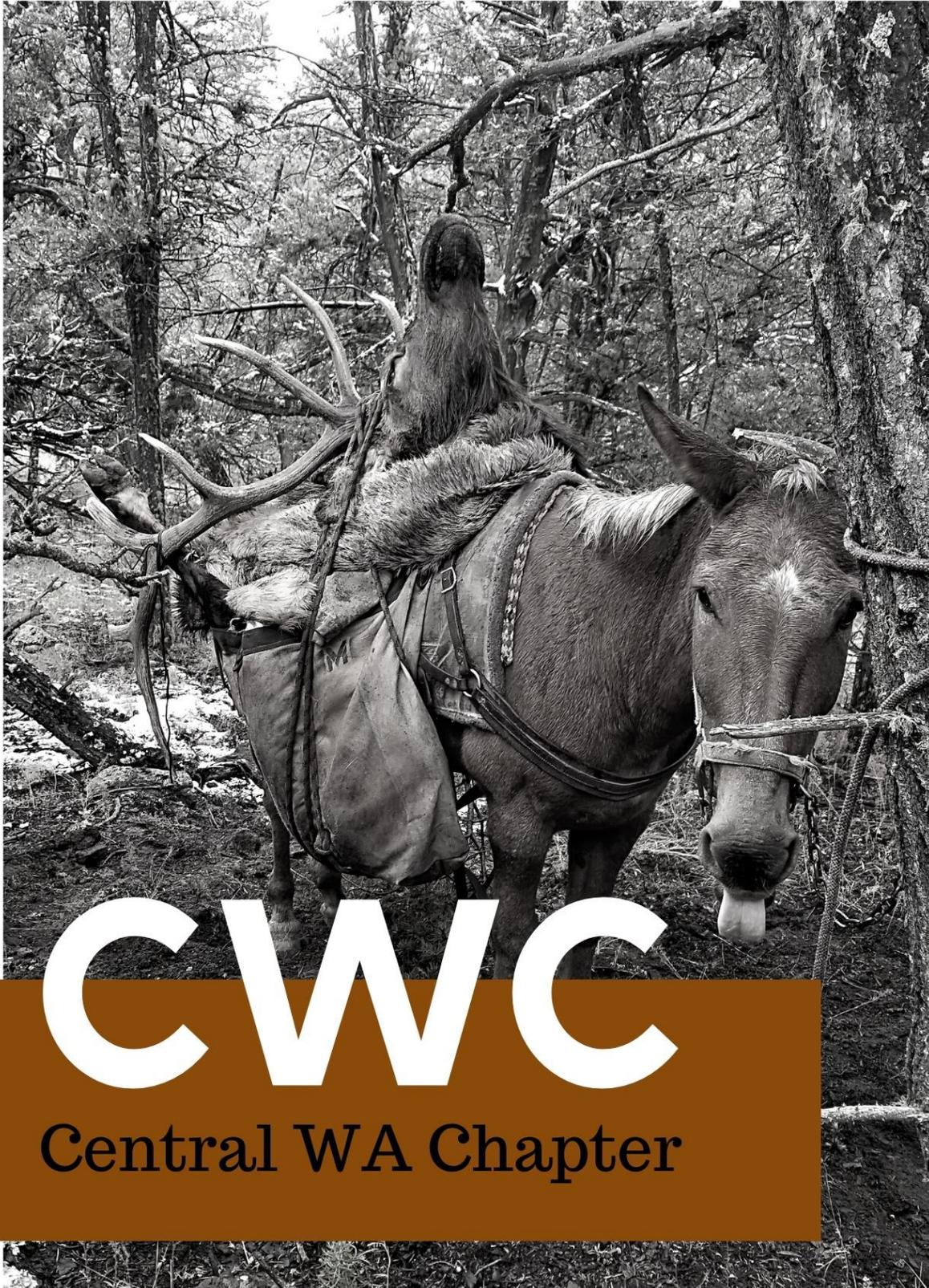


SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL



CWIC

Central WA Chapter

SUMMER 2020

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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As I sit down to type this message to our SCI family, it is the first day of the 4-phase re-opening plan for Washington. For those who love the outdoors, that is good news. Some may be able to salvage what's left of spring turkey and bear seasons, those who fish can get back on the water, our off-road vehicle areas are open and hiking trails and state parks can once again be visited.

I sincerely hope that everyone has remained healthy and found creative ways to stay busy as we have weathered this strange time from our homes.

For many of you, fishing and hunting trips have been cancelled or postponed. Family vacations and trips are on hold. But spring is finally here, the fruit trees have bloomed and there is a promise of new life, health, and hope as we race toward summer.

While we may not be able to travel as freely as before to our neighboring states, or jump on a plane to some exotic and far-away hunting locale or fishing hot spot, we can still get out and hunt locally. We can still go out and exercise our Second Amendment rights at a range of our choice and we can support our hunting and fishing lifestyle by continuing to purchase tags and licenses and taking a new person outdoors with us this year.

Our state conservation programs must continue. With hundreds of millions of dollars available to states through the excise taxes we pay on outdoor equipment, there is no excuse for the progress

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we've all made to stop because of this virus. But it will take all of us continuing to put skin in the game so the states can meet the 25% matching requirement to access the federal funds.

We must also be engaged in supporting local conservation, habitat and education initiatives through organizations like SCI, RMEF, Pheasants Forever and others. And finally, we must be actively engaged in communicating with our local, state and national legislators to be sure our rights are preserved and protected for future generations.

As the summer progresses, hopefully we can all get together and share some stories, some good food and maybe do a little shooting. In the past, we have met in June to hold our annual meeting at various chapter members' homes or businesses. Stay tuned for updates. It would be great to see everyone and get out and enjoy a great afternoon together.

Be sure to check out our ever evolving website. Our friends at Site Savvy have helped us tremendously by reorganizing and making the site user and mobile friendly. We will soon have a section dedicated to archived copies of past quarterly newsletters for you to revisit any time. Our gallery page has also been updated and is more user friendly. Send in photos of your adventures outdoors to share with your hunting buddies.

Finally, we are planning to hold our annual banquet on December 5 at the Convention Center. Please plan to attend and be part of the fundraiser so your Central Washington Chapter can continue

to support multiple National Archery in the Schools programs, Youth Outdoors Unlimited and sending teachers to AWLS, plus dozens of other programs that get kids outdoors and help educate the public about the value and necessity that hunting plays in our robust wildlife populations.

Until we meet again...stay healthy, be safe and here's to many great outdoor adventures.

*Randy
Bauman*

Save the Date

Central WA Sportsmen Annual Banquet

Dec 05 Yakima Convention Center

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MY TIME AT AWLS

By Shane Polley

Knee-deep in the creek, I paused, lifted my eyes from the macroinvertebrate net in my hands, and looked skyward. High above me, a bald eagle soared on the thermals. Floating for a moment, it turned, sped off for the heights of Open-Door Mountain and disappeared into the surrounding wilderness. Sights like these were a daily occurrence during the time I spent at the American Wilderness Leadership School this past summer. Along with 24 other teachers, I had the privilege of spending a week learning about conservation, education, and shooting sports at the Safari Club International lodge in Jackson Wyoming. During this time, I learned a lot, made new relationships and came to understand the wilderness to a greater degree.

I first heard about AWLS from an email sent to the teachers at my school. It advertised a “Free Trip to Wyoming” in which participants would get to spend time outdoors, learn to teach archery, and go on a Whitewater Rafting trip. I love the outdoors. I spend as much time as possible hiking through the Cascade Mountains, running trail races and exploring the nooks and crannies of the nearby foothills. The unknown tugs at me and when I see a river winding through the forest, or catch a glimpse of sunlight peaks jutting forth on the horizon, I am captivated. I eagerly filled out my paperwork and signed up for the August session.

As August drew near, my excitement grew. I gathered the suggested items and packed up my car. I’d elected to drive the 759 miles to the Safari Club International American Wilderness Leadership School so that I could enjoy passing the beauty of the drive.

While driving through much of Idaho, the land seemed empty. The sagebrush of the barren shrub steppe habitat stretched on for miles. It seemed devoid of life. Gradually, as I came closer to the Idaho/Wyoming border, the land began to change. Wheat fields rose up along the highway, and then, in the distance, dark green mountains took form. I found

myself driving beside a sunlit stream surrounded by waving grasses and fluttering aspens. Soon, I reached the forested mountains and followed the Snake River up toward Jackson and on into the Gros Ventre Mountain Range.

The moment I turned off of the pavement of highway 189 onto Granite Creek Road, I felt a rush. I was almost there. The red dirt road stretched out in front of me with firs and pines bordering each side. The clear cold creek led into the hills and as I drove onwards, valleys and meadowlands opened up in stunning beauty. Above it all, Open Door Mountain stood, welcoming all who pass this way. Below, nestled in among the trees, on the edge of the meadow, stood the SCI AWLS Lodge and campus, a red and white contrast to the forest beyond.

It was in this place that I would spend the next week, learning new skills, absorbing new ideas, and encountering a group of people whose passion, excitement, and compassion were energizing and contagious.

The week went by in a blurr. The tightly scheduled days were jam-packed with activities. Whether we were shooting on the shotgun range, learning stream ecology in the riparian zone, or taking notes on various conservation topics, each moment was engaging and well-spent. I fully enjoyed my time at AWLS.

There are a few aspects of the school that made my stay especially wonderful. First of all, I must mention the food. We ate meals together three times a day in the dining hall. Every meal was superb. Each day the chef, who previously worked at high end skiing resorts in Colorado, would serve up a new dish that made the mouth water. From well-seasoned steak to gourmet pizza to soups, salads and deserts, each meal was delicious. One staff member even mentioned that for the three weeks that he’d been there, he hadn’t had the same meal twice. After each meal, I was the last to leave the dining hall; full and satisfied.

Another key aspect of my time at AWLS was

the archery training we completed. By the end of the week, each member of the class had not only learned to shoot a bow, but to teach others to shoot through the National Archery in Schools Program. Each day we spent at least an hour either on the covered archery range, in the NASP classroom, or at the 3D archery range. We practiced, and learned to teach the 11 steps to archery success. My favorite aspect of archery was 3D archery. I loved peering past the trees to see the foam animals set up as targets. The tree stand shot on the elk was especially fun. I stood on the railing, took a deep breath, let the arrow fly, and just missed the vital organ zone on the target. I could definitely see myself taking up archery as a hobby in the future. It would also be fun to teach it to a younger generation. I think many people could find joy in this activity as I did because of the focus it takes and excitement it elicits when the arrow flies true.

to them to mate. Each story we heard was fascinating



Director, Todd Roggenkamp giving a lecture on the Conservation of Sage Grouse

and it was inspiring to see the effects of conservation up close. Every person has a role they can play in conservation. Anybody can take steps to help wildlife and preserve the natural world around them.

Along with the conservation stories and places we visited, AWLS provided each teacher with curricula for teaching students about conservation and the beauty of nature. I found the Project Wild activities very engaging, even for adults, and I think they would be a great way to get students engaged and excited about animal life and conservation throughout our country.

Of all the activities we participated in and all the presentations we heard, my favorite was the night when Harlan Kredit came to speak. Kredit is a remarkable individual. Now in his 80s, he has been working as a High School Biology Teacher in Lynden, Washington, and a Park



Shane's Group Posing Before 3D Archery

One of the main focuses of AWLS and the SCI is promoting conservation efforts throughout the United States and the world. As such, we spent much of our time in Wyoming learning about conservation, its history and presence in our country today. In class we learned of the successful reintroduction of wolves, bison and grizzly bears into Yellowstone National Park. We heard stories of invasive carp, trout and other fishes that need to be culled because they press the native fish to extinction. As we sat on the shrub-steppe plateau overlooking an oil field, we learned of the plight of the Sage Grouse and the efforts of nearby elementary school children and community members to protect the land surrounding each lex as grouse go to mate each year. Today, the oil rig machinery must be silenced during mating season so that the female sage grouse can hear the males and find their way near



Harlan Kredit

Ranger at Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming for 48 years. During his talk, he recounted stories of Grizzly bears and geysers; of frantically directing tourists out of the path of a raging bison and helping catch and remove invasive fish from Yellowstone Lake. He even shared about the night he spent searching for a baby who had been carried off by an animal. Around three in the morning, thinking that he had searched everywhere, something made him look under one last bush. There was the baby, cold, hungry, and safe, but miles away from the campsite. If he had decided to turn around one minute earlier, the child would probably not have been found.

From this story, Kredit turned to talking of his life as a teacher. How many times are we as teachers faced with a similar task? Though the circumstances may not be as dramatic, when we do our jobs for the sake of the students, pushing ourselves to connect and engage students on many levels, we can deeply impact their lives. That was Harlan Kredit's goal as a teacher, to love students and give them what they need to become great people, and, hopefully, great lovers of nature as well.

I found Harlan Kredit truly inspiring. He has been able to combine his passions into a life full of meaning and excitement. Through his dedication to his family, students, and his beloved Yellowstone National Park, Harlan Kredit has made an enduring impact on many people throughout the country. His is a life of adventure, love and meaning that I seek to emulate. Though I may not become a park ranger and stare down racing bison and grizzlies weekly, I want my life to impact others and help them become more than they think they can. I want people to change for the better because they have known me.

My time at AWLS this past summer served to reset my focus and re-energize me for the coming school year. Along with the great curricula we were given, and the new skills we learned, what sticks out to me is the importance of people. The organizers,

teachers, speakers, and classmates helped me remember that teaching isn't just about knowledge and getting the job done. Rather, it is about connecting with people along the journey, about walking side by side with other teachers and students in order to make relationships that can change lives.

I had a truly great experience at the American Wilderness Leadership School this past August and I would suggest that if you get the chance to participate, go for it and get excited!



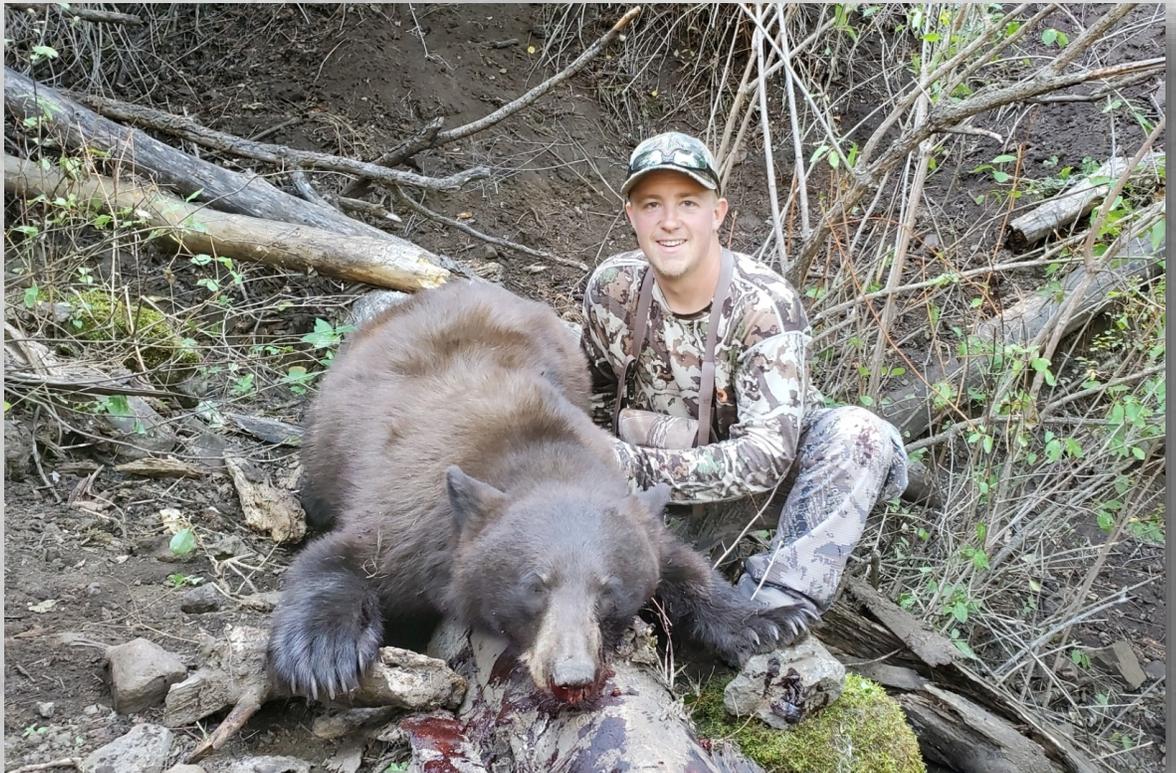
Bear Hunt

BY JAKE FIFE

Last week (September 2019) we both hit the road in search of filling our first bear tags. We drove all of Friday night to arrive at the trailhead for Saturday morning. We hit the trail in the dark and headed up the mountain to get to our glassing spot. As the sun rose, the crisp, early fall air filled our lungs with a beautiful sunrise and the anticipation of getting eyes on some bears. Within an hour we had bears coming out of the berry bushes below us. After looking over a nice sow with 2 cubs, two other

boars came out of the bottom on opposite sides of each other. One just had that big boar look to him as he swayed back and forth on a slow walk, he had a beautiful chocolate coat and I decided he was the bear I was

going to try and take. I got into a good position to shoot from and ranged the big boar at 236 yards. First shot from my Winchester .338 missed it mark high and the bear ran up the hill about 20 yards and stopped. I chambered another round and the second shot hit its mark, down he went. We hiked into the bottom of some nasty bushes to find the bear and took pictures and processed the hide and loaded up our packs with the hide and meat. On the way out we spotted a few bears way back down in the bottom



but we decided we would come back the next day with a good nights sleep under our belt. The next morning we arrived at daylight to our glassing spot and instantly spotted a very nice cinnamon bear side-hilling to our left, he was picking up and rolling boulders and making all sorts of noise. We tucked into the rocks to remain concealed as the bear continued to feed closer and closer. Initially at 480 yards, the bear had now worked his way to 230 yards right above us on the trail we had walked in on. Trevor let his trusty .270 bark and the first shot also missed it's mark slightly high. The bear ran down into a draw and we thought that was it, until he reappeared again on the other side coming out at 310 yards. Trevor took his time and made this shot count with a perfect shot and the bear dropped instantly! We high fived and couldn't believe it all happened so fast, 2 bears in two days and the first bears ever for both of us! We ended up seeing more bears that afternoon and figured we saw at least 12-14 different bears in those 2 days. Awesome trip with great company, our next bear hunt may come sooner than later, we had a blast!



KaLora's Recipe

CORNER

GRILLED BISON CUBES

20 ounces bison cubes

Marinade

3 cloves chopped garlic

3 sprigs chopped fresh rosemary

2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme

½ cup oil

1 lemon

Freshly ground black pepper

Mix all the ingredients for the marinade. Thread bison cubes on skewers and marinate for at least 30 minutes but not more than 6 hours. Drain. Cook on very hot grill until done to your liking. Serve over rice.

Oopsie! Eddie the Elk has done it again! Lost somewhere within the Newsletter is Eddie's missing shed. Quick, help him find it before the other one falls off!!!





Sixteen years had passed since Andy and I first (and last) hunted Africa, together. We had hunted the Meteke Hills of Southeastern Zimbabwe, with Rob Lurie, who at the time was a newly Licensed PH and has in the ensuing years become a close friend, through his annual visits to The States. That ten-day hunt had been glorious. You will be hard pressed to find a PH with more enthusiasm, drive and outright excitement about his profession... and in those days we were all relatively “young”; we had hunted hard and had been rewarded with a 196 lb. leopard, a pair of beautiful kudu bulls of 53 and 58 inches, two of only three Sharp’s Grysbok taken in Zimbabwe that year as well as “book” eland, impala, klipspringer, blue wildebeest and steenbok, with a Bruchell’s stallion to cap it off. The one glaring hole was the conspicuous absence of the buffalo I had sought, as my primary trophy. Six of the ten days had been spent on the trail of a beautiful 40” bull that we came to suspect was possessed by the spirit of Fredrick Selous. On four separate occasions we had him dead to rights, only to have the hunting gods smack us down. The hunt had been awesome, but as Rob pointed out on the last evening, as dusk brought an end to our last stalk... “Sometimes the buffalo win.” As an elk hunter, I am familiar with this fundamental truth.

For sixteen years I had carried my “buffalo infection”, a latent sickness that flared up periodically, like malaria. In those ensuing years we had several false starts as careers, kids and life, in general, got in the way of our plans to return. Ultimately we had both found ourselves at a point where “life” was, if not out of the way, at least predictable enough to allow us to finally and ultimately commit to our long planned return.

I managed to catch up with Rob at the SCI convention and after a couple morning meetings over coffee we had narrowed the buffalo hunt down to either Mozambique or Zimbabwe’s Buby Valley Conservancy. Due to work commitments, I had to hunt in July and Rob assured me that the thick, high grass of MOZ would preclude any chance of hunting that early in the season. Additionally, he was emphatic that the Buby would be the better hunt. Not only does it have a great population of buffalo, but also some of the best lion, rhino, elephant and plains game populations to be found anywhere in Africa. Additionally, I planned on bringing my daughter, Cori, and Andy, his son, Hudson, for their first safari. Rob was emphatic that if we wanted the kids to have a “true African experience,” like we had had in the Meteke, Buby was the place to go. As he described the variety of game, the

seclusion of the camps, hearing lions roar outside the camp at night and the type of stalking we would do in our own, dedicated area of over 100,000 acres, he had me sold.

After a few days of research I booked a 7-day non trophy (sub-35”) buffalo hunt, with Andy and the kids along as observers. Since I was also after gemsbok, springbok and black wildebeest (and having no desire to hunt South Africa) we booked a follow-on 8 days in Namibia, where all four of us would be on the hunting book.

After two days of travel across six countries and five airlines, we arrived in Johannesburg. The following morning we caught our flight to Zimbabwe and were met in Bulawayo by Rob and his wife Michelle. With our weapons cleared and gear loaded, we headed out for our three hour and mildly frightening drive to Buby... the combination of no lines on the narrow highway and left-side driving never did quite normalize with me.

As the sun was setting we turned off the highway and drove down a short dirt road, stopping at a locked gate manned by two guards. Even though it encompasses over 800 *thousand* acres, the Buby Valley Conservancy is entirely electric, double-fenced, with a 50’, mowed, no-man’s land between. There are also armed patrols stationed in small concrete encampments throughout the perimeter of the conservancy... all of this to protect the conservancy’s substantial black rhino population from rampant poaching. There are nine camps in Buby and we were booked into the Nenga camp, in the Northeast corner of the conservancy. The camp was perfect... nice, but not too nice... in other words, a comfortable hunting camp and not a lodge. Perched over a small reservoir, the daily “water hole show” turned out to be a highlight of the trip. At one time or another, elephant, buffalo, lion, kudu, nyala, zebra, baboon, monkey, wildebeest, giraffe, warthogs, impala, sable, bushbuck and more waterbuck than I ever dreamed would be in one place, graced us with morning, lunch and evening shows. As promised, the nightly lion, and leopard chorus did not disappoint.

After a long trip, we were all eager to hunt. As we disembarked from the Land Cruiser on the first morning, Rob dropped into a low whisper. “Alright, everyone gather around, it’s time for your safety brief.” As we formed a small circle next to the truck, Rob slung his .470 NE over his shoulder, as if to add emphasis to the points he was about to make.

“OK, from now on we whisper, your normal voice will carry distances you won’t believe, in the bush.” We all

nodded our understanding.

“Second,” he continued, “no one goes anywhere without my permission and that includes wandering twenty feet away to pee. There are a *lot* of things out here that will eat you and you will not see it coming. I once walked ten meters from my Rover to take a piss and a lion stood up from behind a bush right in front of me. We clear on that?” Again, we all nodded as Andy grinned at me as we watched the kids’ expressions.

“Third, we stay together and walk in a straight line. When lions walk in a column the other animals know they’re not hunting; when they spread out, that signals danger, so stay in line behind me.”

“Fourth, if I say “freeze,” we all freeze and don’t make a sound, not any sound. If I say run, we all run, and I mean as fast as you can.” We all signaled we understood.

“Finally, if I say climb, you climb the nearest tree, as fast as you can, thorns be damned... unless you want a rhino horn up your ass, that’s up to you. There’s a hell-on-lot of rhino in our area, and they tend to be “a bit cheeky.” We all nodded again, but with less enthusiasm. I also wondered if I was the only one that noticed we were all surveying the immediate surroundings for what would be considered a “good tree” to climb.

“Good,” he smiled. “Let’s have some fun!” We fell into line as he turned to follow our tracker, Patrick and the Buby game scout, James.

The next six days were filled with tracking buffalo. Each morning we would make the rounds of the smaller waterholes until our trackers found dugga-boy sign that they deemed worth tracking. The lone exception was the afternoon of day four, which we spent getting the kids their first African trophies, a pair of beautiful Impala rams (is there a more appropriate and symbolic initiation)? That night, around the camp fire, Andy presented each of them with an engraved, hand-made skinning knife to mark their passage into the ranks of “Africa Hunters”. It was a great night as we drank cold gin and tonics around a small, hot fire and watched the kids repeatedly remove their new blades from the leather sheaths, turn them in their hands and gently slide them back again.

Rob had not exaggerated the abundance of the Buby Valley. Each morning we were engaged with buffalo, at close range and thick cover. On the morning of the second day, we had had a very short stalk, before Rob and I were on our hands and knees, crawling into a group of three old bulls, trying to put a positive ID on a good sub -35” dugga. The bush was exceptionally thick, and after about thirty minutes of maneuvering we had identified our bull. We had a quick look at him through our binoculars. He was old and grey and torn up, with broken and worn horns and a big solid boss... in other words, exactly what we were looking for. After that one cold glare, he turned and disappeared.

We called the rest of the crew forward and explained what had happened, as Patrick and James went forward to look for tracks. They quickly returned and I watched a mixture of hand gestures pointing alternately to the ground and the general direction of our buff, as they explained to Rob, what they had found, in a rhythmic

Shona exchange.

“Well, some good news,” Rob turned to us to translate. “It looks like our bull took off to the East, but not at a dead run. On top of that, he has a very distinctive back hoof that the boys are confident they can follow. Everyone up for a bit of hiking? I think we can run him down.”

For the next seven hours we doggedly followed our “distinctive tracks,” through dry washes, thick cover, long grass and mopane forest. About an hour before dusk, we stopped to gather ourselves for the last push of the day.

“We’ve covered about twelve miles today,” Rob announce as he looked at his GPS watch and passed around a baggie of shredded biltong. “We’re pretty close; there’s a good chance we can close on him before dark. Looks like he’s heading to a water hole on the northern boundary of our area.”

I washed the last of the dried meat down with a bottle of warm water from our day pack and fell in behind Rob as he led us out. As the shadows began to stretch long in the setting sun, we were passing a thick wall of thorn bush. Patrick fell back from the lead and whispered to me, “N’yati. Now-now, indicating we were close to our bull and he and Patrick dropped back to leave Rob and I in front.

“After we break out of this thicket,” Rod whispered, pointing about ten yards up the trail in front of us to a hole in the thorns and brush, “be ready, I suspect he is only about thirty to fifty yards in front of us, bedded in the tall grass of the clearing. I nodded that I understood. It would be a quick, free-hand shot if the bull broke right away.

As Rob turned to go, he froze and turned to me and the group behind. With a sudden seriousness and urgency he waved us all up to him. “Everyone get close and don’t make a sound!” Surprised and slightly confused we all bunched up behind him.

“We’ve walked into a group of lions,” he whispered.

I looked around, but all I saw was the thick brush and thorn wall surrounding the trail. “Where,” I whispered back?

“About ten yards on the other side of this thick bush,” he indicated with a slight tip of his double rifle, which I noticed was no longer slung on his shoulder. “She’s pissed. Did you hear her?”

I admitted I had not. Rob indicated back to Patrick and James, at the end of our procession. They were both “on point” and staring intently into the wall of thorns. “The boys heard her to. Everyone be very quiet and very still.”

The four of us stood, frozen and straining to hear anything that might sound “liony.” It also occurred to me that I was the only other person with a gun and I was not sure what the protocol was for a lion engagement. I leaned in very close to Rob’s ear and whispered as low as I could, “What do we do if they “get interested” in us?”

Never taking his eyes of the thorn wall beside us, he whispered back, “We’ll yell and make a lot of noise.”

I silently considered this for a few seconds, picturing the seven of us bunched together “yelling” at an

angry lion, at close range. “Is there anything in particular we should yell,” I asked?

This caused him to give me a quick, confused glance. “What,” he asked, genuinely confused.

“We’ll is there a particular “anti-lion” call that we should be aware of... or better yet, is there something we should avoid? Maybe calling them names pisses them off even more.” I shrugged.

He gave me a blank “what the hell” look and then broke into a small smile. “Don’t make me laugh, this is serious.”

“Trust me,” I assured him, “that is not lost on me.”

As I finished my sentence, we both caught a flash of movement in the opening in the thorns we were about to walk through. We watched as a fully mature, black-maned lion slowly walked across the opening, ten feet in front of us and without breaking stride, turned his head, looked us both in the eyes and gave a long, low, rumbling growl and then he was gone.

I stared, frozenly, at the now empty passage in front of us, trying to bring some reality and perspective to the previous five seconds. Rob slowly turned his head toward mine. “THAT was bloody AWESOME!” He had a big grin on his face.

It occurred to me that I was also grinning. “That was bloody HUGE,” I whispered back!

“Yea, they look a lot bigger without bars between you, don’t they?” The tone of his statement indicated this was not the first time he had been this close to an uncaged lion.

“Big,” I countered. “That thing needed a saddle!”

The group behind us had heard the growl/roar and wanted to know “what that was?” I don’t think they completely believed what I whispered back to them. A few seconds later, in a normal voice, Rob told us that the lions were gone. He had heard them leave. I looked back at Patrick and James and their body language seemed to confirm Rob’s assessment. We were not surprised that our bull had not stuck around for the action. We left off the track, to return the next day, only to finally lose his track after a second day and ten more miles of tracking.

For the rest of the week, we tracked dugga tandems into large herds, snuck on singles that we could not get a look at, without busting ourselves and on several occasions, simply passed on perfectly reasonable bulls... five in one group that paraded past us at thirty yards, on day five. But I was after a “busted-up”, scarred, ragged, old and worn down dugga... like the one that still haunted my thoughts from day two. If that meant I went home without my buffalo, I had been emphatic in my commitment to *not* take a trophy I would not want to look at for the next thirty years. I had come for the hunt, with my best friend and our kids, and did not want to cheapen the experience just to bring home a random set of horns.

The talk around the campfire, the evening of day six, focused on everyone’s collective reassurance, to me, that “tomorrow would be the day. We had “paid our dues.” I asked Rob what our plan of attack would be for the last morning.

“The worst thing we can do is change how we’re

hunting just because it’s the last day,” he explained.

“We’ve been in buffalo every day, we know where they’re moving. We’ll get into them tomorrow.” “I’ve had clients get all gripped up and start changing what they do and all it accomplishes is to mess up a week’s worth of effort.”

This made a lot of sense to me. “Also, our clown-train (Rob, me, Andy, Cori, Hudson, Patrick and James), are a much more coordinated and “well-oiled” unit than we were 6 days ago,” I pointed out, with only the slightest tinge of sarcasm, as I sipped my gin and tonic.

“There is some truth to that,” Rob agreed with a grin. “We’ll head out at first light and check the northern water holes for sign. I’ll have the kitchen prepare a chop box for lunch afield and we’ll give it a full-day push if we need to, but I’m thinking tomorrow will be the day. I’ve had a lot of successful buffalo hunts go to the last day,” he stated with, what seemed to me, genuine confidence.

Our crew was in the Land Rover the next morning as first light broke, jacketed against the pre-dawn chill. It occurred to me that the morning “hello’s” we exchanged with our crew had grown familiar and friendly. “You guys ready to skin buffalo, this morning,” I asked them as I handed my rifle to my daughter and climbed into the shooting seat.

“Today!” Patrick answered with a big grin, reinforced with a hearty thumbs-up from James.

By the time the full sun was above the horizon, the guys had circled the first waterhole without finding any sign worth following. The buffalo had passed through early the previous evening, but they were confident we could find a fresher track at the next hole. Twenty minutes later, Rob and the boys returned to our vehicle from an inspection of the second water hole with an urgency that told us they had found what we were looking for.

“There’s two good sets of tracks,” Rob explained. “There’s a pair of bulls that headed south and a single, fresher, set that head west. We’re going to put a run on the single, and if he isn’t the one we want, we’ll circle back on the doubles. They all look like they’re just feeding, so as long as the wind holds we’ll get into them “just now”.

The morning was slightly overcast, and cooler than it had been all week, as Rob and I shouldered our rifles. “If this cloud cover holds, we should keep some good, consistent wind as the sun comes up,” he added as he looked around at nothing in particular. “I like it.”

Our trackers apparently thought it was plenty “cold” as they zipped olive drab coats over thick wool sweaters of the same color. Patrick grabbed the shooting sticks, lowered his head into the “tracking slouch” we had grown accustomed to following and headed west, into the mopane scrub. Our happy band of Klowns, fell into the well-practiced column and followed him, Rob and I in front, Andy, Cori and Hudson, in order, all primed for the final day of the hunt with various cameras in hand.

For the next two hours we followed the track as it meandered through the bush, the trail so erratic I doubt we covered one linear mile from the truck, in that time. At one point Patrick stopped and he and James began to walk in a wide circle around our position. “A small herd of buffalo walked through here this morning after our boy passed,”

Rob stopped and explained. "The boys will sort it out straight away." "He's definitely feeding, so as long as this wind holds, we'll catch up to him just now," he added with a confidence I was starting to share.

"How far behind do you think we are," I asked? I had been watching Patrick flip over our buffalo's dung and place the back of his hand against the underside of the cow pie all morning.

"If he doesn't change what he's doing, we should be on him in less than an hour," Rob whispered. In my mind that seemed pretty definite after six days and nearly fifty miles of tracking. Patrick and James soon returned, and led us off after the track they had reacquired. Within half an hour, the boys stopped and Rob waved everyone up to his position.

"We're getting close," he said in a low, urgent whisper. "You guys hang back a bit." "Stick close," he whispered to me, "This may happen very fast," and we crept forward to where Patrick and James were crouched. Rob nodded to them and they crept off, Patrick, head down following the track and James bent low scanning under the thick tangle of brush and trees ahead. Rob's prediction had held and the light overcast had kept the wind in our face and we slowly worked our way through the thorns. I looked ahead and could see where the cover thinned out about fifty yards ahead of us, when James froze and gave a soft, urgent whistle. He was in a low crouch and slowly pointing ahead and slightly to our left. We crawled to his position and through the mopane trunks and grass I could just make out what I was sure were two black legs of our buffalo.

Rob slowly shouldered the big double rifle and took the shooting sticks from Patrick, indicating for them to stay put as he waved me forward with him, flanking slightly to our right, to take full advantage of the steady breeze. A hundred yards later, we slowly emerged from the thick cover and slowly worked our way around its edge to a position about thirty-five yards directly behind what we could clearly see now, was the bull we had been tracking. Facing directly away from us, in a small depression, he had his head down, feeding. He had no idea we were there.

Rob slowly and silently set up the shooting sticks and I moved forward and placed my rifle in the pocket and dialed the scope to its highest power, 4x. I could clearly see the huge, black rump as it swayed each time the bull put his head down for a mouth full of grass. Without taking his eyes from his binoculars Rob leaned into me and whispered, "I'm 99% sure he's a proper old bull, but I need to see his head. He doesn't know we're here, so we'll just wait, but keep the scope on him and shoot quickly if I tell you to."

"I got him," I whispered back. "You think he's too big?" My buffalo tag was good for 35" and below, or roughly "horns inside the ears".

"We can't tell until he turns," Rob whispered, "but he's an old one, so we're probably OK, but we need to make sure."

I was on Rob's left side, with my scope centered on the bull's tail bone, when he turned his head slightly to the left and reached down to rip up a mouthful of dry grass. In that movement I caught a quick glimpse of smooth black

horn curving up under a shredded ear.

"I just saw horn under his ear, he's too big," I hissed to Rob, as a tinge of disappointment edged its way into my mind.

"You can't tell," Rob replied. "I need to get a look, you just stay ready."

For the next five minutes we stood, silently glassing the old bull not thirty five yards in front of us. It's amazing the thoughts that can run through your mind in such moments. It occurred to me that this was the first time in my life I had ever silently wished for horns to *shrink!*" As I was pondering this, the bull suddenly raised his head and spun around to face us. The wind hadn't shifted, we had made no noise, absolutely nothing should have triggered such a sudden reaction... it's as if he suddenly just "had a feeling" he was being watched.

All week long, every buffalo we had encountered broke and ran at the first hint of our presence... "Like huge, black, paranoid whitetail," I had commented to Rob.

"Yep, that's what they do... right up until you put a bullet in them," he had commented. This buffalo was not running. As he turned, he actually closed on us, to about thirty yards and dipped his head. As he did so, a soft, quiet "ooh..." leaked out of me.

"My God, is he as big as I think he is," I whispered to Rob, not taking my scope off the bull.

I heard a similar reaction from Rob. "Mike... that is bigger than you think it is. That is a "proppa sod." It was almost reverent in how it sounded.

I was frantically trying to find some frame of reference to help me understand what I was looking at through my scope, not thirty paces away. I could feel a certain amount of internal restraint leaving me as I briefly raised my head to look at Rob. "What's the fee to upgrade to a trophy buff," I asked?

He took his eyes from his binoculars and almost apologetically said, "\$6,500."

I was already back on my scope. I had waited for sixteen years to shoot a buffalo, and it was the last day of what had been an extraordinary hunt. My daughter and best friend we're standing somewhere behind me, filming, I was sure.

"Would you shoot him," I asked. I suspect I was looking for that last bit of "close the deal" assurance.

Rob looked at me with a sly grin and said, "I don't spend my clients' money."

But the look on his face told me all I needed to know. "I'm shooting him," I said as I settled in behind the rifle.

"Good thing," he half joked, "because if you weren't I was trying to figure out how I could."

I settled the cross hairs on the bull's chest as Rob whispered, "It's a tough shot, but you need to put it right below his chin... and if you bugger this up, it's going to get real interesting, real quick." Out of the corner of my eye I could tell that Rob had switched his binoculars for the big double rifle.

As I clicked off the safety and engaged the set trigger, the bull took a few steps towards us and turned his head slightly in my direction. At the last second Rob

hissed, “He’s turned a bit, put it just to the right!”

I shifted the cross hairs and touched the trigger. The shot surprised me as the .375 bucked off the shooting sticks. I had not taken my eyes off the bull as he reared, turned and began to run.

“Shoot him again!” I heard Rob yell, but I was already working the bolt. The first shot had been a 300 grain soft point, everything else in the rifle were Woodleigh solids. I lined up on the black figure running into the bush and fired again, worked the bolt and fired a third shot as the profile shrank in my scope. I vaguely remember Rob telling me to “Shoot him again!”

As I racked in my fourth round, Rob took off running after the bull with a quick “Let’s go!”

We didn’t have far to go. After the third shot had hit him, he had apparently decided he had had enough as he stopped and turned to face us, head low and obviously very pissed off. As we rapidly closed on the bull Rob was motioning me up to his side.

“He’s gonna come, get up here!” “He’s gonna come. He’s hurt and he’s gonna come!”

As we closed to about twelve yards, the old boy was standing on the other side of a small depression with his head down, following our movement as we crossed his face. We came to a stop, my rifle already at my shoulder; I could see Rob had his held at the ready, just in case. It occurred to me that there was a definite certainty to what Rob was saying... Not, “He might come,” or “Be ready if he decides to come”... but, “He’s going to come!” It was urgent and excited... like this is what he lives for and it was definitely not panicked or even worried... but very matter of fact and certain, like this was not the first time he had “sorted this out.”

Time was moving very slowly as my adrenaline surged and I thought to myself that this was just about everything I had ever hoped for from my buffalo hunt. As I settled the crosshairs on the old bull’s chest he started his charge but could only manage three or four steps before he stumbled. He was hit hard. As my fourth shot hit him from ten yards, he let out a deep bellow and fell to his knees and began thrashing massive horns into the mopane trees around him.

“Don’t shoot him again,” Rob said, putting a hand on my shoulder, as the only shot we had was straight on to his huge boney boss. “He’s about done”.

He may, in fact have been done, but this buffalo did not get this big and this old by accident. He was mad, very mad, and in his own heart, not done. Three times he raised to his knees, only to fall on his huge chest and bellow in rage. As my father used to say, he wanted “some ass” and he was going to get it. Rod told me to keep the gun on him as he guided me around behind him.

“When he raises his front leg to get up, put one in his arm pit,” Rob instructed. A few seconds later I fired my fifth and final shot from about five yards. The old Dugga stretched out his neck, laid his head down and let out the long, deep, sorrowful bellow I had waited to hear for over sixteen years. It occurred to me that this was the first moment in a good number of years that this bull was not wandering the bush, and a tinge of finality hit me.

I could feel the adrenaline draining out of me when Andy caught me in a hug. He turned to congratulate Rob, who raised his hand and said “I’ll high five you when I’ve poked him in the eye.” Rob was still working, and we weren’t officially done.

“Keep your gun on him,” Rob instructed. I brought my gun to shoulder as he circled around and nudged the huge rump with his foot. When the buff didn’t move he carefully walked around and poked the eye. I could see the physical tension release from his frame and he lowered his rifle and let out an Indian war whoop, as a huge grin broke out across his face.

“You get over here and check out this buffalo,” he yelled at me, just ten feet way. I could tell he was pleased.

As I stepped around the huge, black body and got my first, good look at the old boy, I did not hold my composure well. I am an ex-Navy man, and in retrospect, I wish I had “cleaned up” my language a bit... but the excitement was genuine. I was looking at a buffalo I never thought existed, let alone one that was now part of my hunting soul and therefore my identity. If you are not a hunter, this hard to explain.

The old bull’s neck and flanks were raked with broad, white lion scars. His ears looked like shredded lettuce and he had a half-healed battle scar, still seeping blood, between his eyes. His broad face was ash grey with deep, dried wrinkles and he was blind in his right eye. His massive boss was gouged and worn and the tips of his still



-broad horns were chipped away.

“That is a proppa legend battler,” Rob said as we all stood staring at the old bull. “He’s lived a long, hard life and nothing’s ever taken him down, until today... and we only got him because he made a mistake.”

“I believe you just named him,” I said. “Everyone, meet Proppa”. We all agreed we could do no better. For three hours we took pictures, smoked our victory cigars and cooked buffalo loin over a small fire.

According to Rob’s tape, Proppa measured in with 16 ½” bosses and 41 5/8” wide with a net measurement of 105”. He posted a picture of the old bull on his What’s-Up site and the next day we received word that Kevin Robertson had aged Proppa at over 13 years old.

That night Andy presented me with a hand-made knife, on which he had engraved the shadowy profile of a Buffalo head on the blade. “I was starting to worry that I might have to hold on to this for another sixteen years,” he joked as he handed it to me.

My daughter came up and gave me a big hug. “Congratulations, dad. I’m so happy for you. That was awesome”

That sealed the deal. It was the best \$6,500 I will ever spend.



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