

The African experience

by Daryl Lenkic

As a hunter, my ultimate hunting destination has always been Africa. The diverse range of game animals on the 'Dark Continent', including big game, has great allure for the hunting enthusiast. However, Africa offers a broader and richer experience beyond the opportunity to hunt exotic species. While hunting was my trip's core activity, I was also keen to absorb and enjoy as many sights, sounds, smells, tastes and memories as I could. This article will focus on the hunting aspects of my trip.

I started by searching for a hunting outfit to use. It's a legal requirement to hunt with a professional hunter (PH) when visiting Africa. Having narrowed my list of intended countries, I sent out email inquiries. My American friend, Michael McCourry, a veteran of many African hunts, recommended a PH that he's used several times. Personal recommendations from someone you trust are hard to beat, so I contacted his recommended PH, Andrew Schoeman (pronounced 'Skoomun' in Afrikaans). Andrew quickly responded to my email and proposed options in line with my specific requests.

Andrew is South African, but guides hunters all over the southern African countries. The son of a PH himself, he began hunting at an early age, and with this experience, began working as a PH when he finished school at age 18. Andrew arranged the camps for both Zimbabwe and South Africa and assisted me by booking my flight from Johannesburg to Harare, which I was

having difficulty doing from Australia. With the preliminaries organised, I started to prepare myself and my gear.

I took two rifles, both in wildcat calibres. My dangerous game rifle was my Winchester Model 70 chambered in .50 B&M Long (see the story 'Big bores and B&Ms' in the July 2010 *Australian Shooter*). This cartridge was already well proven against the toughest African game by Michael McCourry. The controlled-feed rifle sports a handy 18" barrel. I took ammunition loaded with 470-grain SSK copper hollow-points over 68 grains of AR2207 at 2170fps for the first shot, and 515-grain SSK copper solids over 69 grains of AR2207 at 2105fps for any follow-up shots.

The hollow-points are not the usual type, but are of monometal construction. Following expansion, the solid shank continues to drive the bullet through, giving uncharacteristically deep penetration for an expanding bullet. Both of these loads are mild in terms of pressure, but contain as much powder as I could fit in the case, with the longer 470-grain projectile leaving less room for powder. Both loads shoot to a similar point of impact.

My plains game rifle was a reworked Remington Model 673 Guide Rifle chambered in my own .416 Compact wildcat calibre. This cartridge is similar to a .416 WSM, but is slightly longer at the shoulder and also overall. It is formed from cut-down Remington Ultra Magnum brass, or more easily from WSM brass with a slightly

Glassing the hills for kudu. Good compact bins are invaluable for finding, identifying and assessing game. Professional hunter Andrew Schoeman was practically glued to his.



short neck. My main load used a Woodleigh 340-grain Protected Point soft-nose over 65 grains of AR2219 powder at 2460fps. I also had dangerous game loadings including Barnes 350-grain Banded Solids over 62.5 grains of AR2219 powder at 2370fps. This attractive rifle, assembled by New South Wales gunsmith Shane Clancy, sports a 20" barrel and shoots extremely accurately - better than most of my smallbore and mid-bore calibres!

After arriving in Johannesburg from Australia, I went to the South African Police Service (SAPS) firearms office at the airport to get my SAP-520 form (temporary firearms permit). All went smoothly and I then checked in for my next flight to Zimbabwe. Upon my arrival at Harare Airport, I was met by my charter flight pilot, Sydney, who would fly me to the hunting camp. Sydney assisted me with my firearms permit for Zimbabwe and we then boarded his Cessna 206 and made the 80-minute flight north-west to the Gache Gache Hunting Camp.

The charter flight afforded me an excellent opportunity to view the landscape from relatively low altitude, as we did not exceed 9000ft. Villages with traditional round huts with thatched roofs called 'rondavels' dotted the countryside. We landed on the camp airstrip on the shores of Lake Kariba, on the northern Zimbabwe border. Lake Kariba



Trackers Sham and Cry and game scout Lamek take a break, while the other hunters, not featured, sit waiting for hippos to emerge from the water.

is a man-made lake fed by the Zambesi River, with a hydroelectric power station at one end. It is vast; 280km in length and is 32km across at its widest point. The lake offers excellent fishing for bream, kapenta and the famous tigerfish.

As we unloaded the plane, my PH Andrew and the owner of Track-A-Hunt

Safaris and PH himself Corris Ferreira arrived to pick me up in a cut-down LandCruiser, which I was to become very familiar with over the next week. The camp was a classic African hunting camp, with huts right on the shores of one of the lake inlets. The rooms were large and were typically African, with high exposed beam



Daryl Lenkie's Cape buffalo was an old bull, indicated by the hard horn bosses. Daryl's .50 B&M laminate-stocked rifle wears a Leupold VX-3 1.5-5x20 scope.

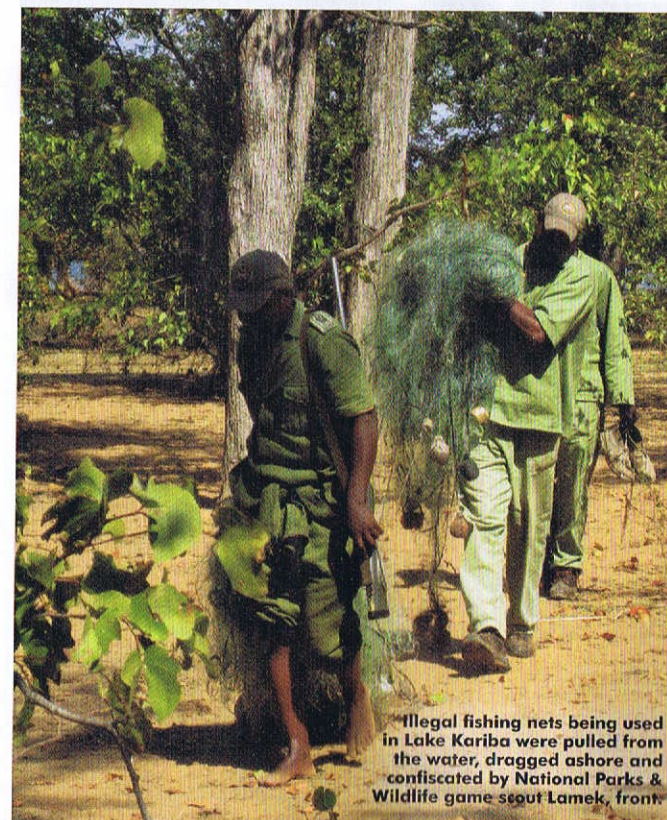
ceilings and thatched grass rooves. Each hut was made to sleep up to four people and had its own bathroom. The sides, open for ventilation but secured with mesh to keep animals out, indicated that it never got too cold here. Having come not knowing exactly what to expect from the camp facilities, I was pleasantly surprised.

That afternoon, Corris took us out on his boat to see hippos and crocodiles and we were lucky enough to spot a small herd of elephants feeding by the water's edge. Corris cut the motor and we drifted in to get a closer view and some photos. It was amazing how such a large animal could silently disappear into the bush.

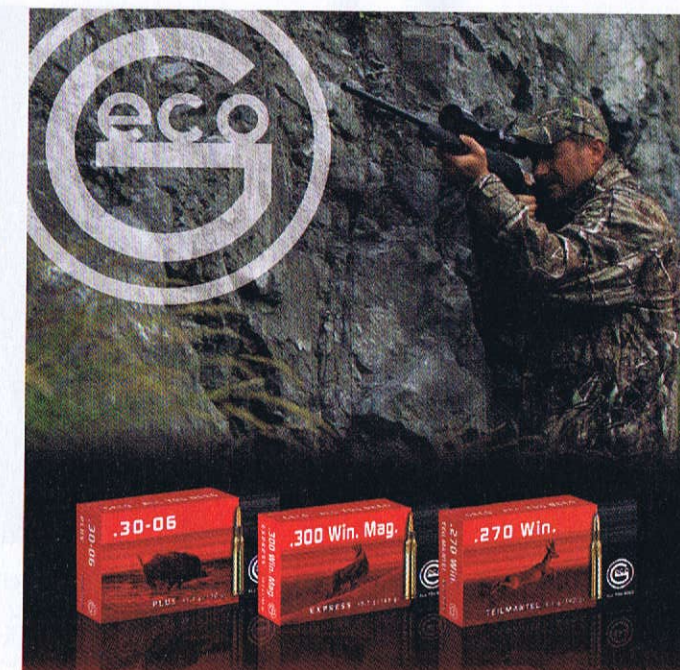
The next day, we began hunting in earnest, with buffalo in the morning and evening, and hippo during the middle of the day. Although we spotted a number of buffalo bulls, getting close to these wary creatures was not easy, as they have excellent senses and will move off once they detect a threat. We located several hippo pods and started looking for a good bull. It was fascinating to watch the hippos up close, as they would rush into the water if spooked on land. The most wary animals would submerge and only expose their nostrils to breathe before submerging again. Hippos spend most of the day in the water, but can travel long distances inland during the night to feed in grassy areas.

Late afternoon of day two, we successfully stalked a group of four buffalo bulls after a 90m crawl on hands and knees. My bull presented standing roughly face-on, and using my .50 B&M with a 470-grain copper hollow-point and a tree trunk to steady, I fired the shot. It broke the left shoulder and passed through one lung. The bull went face down on the ground, but with its back legs still standing. Then it collapsed on the spot and after a few raspy breaths, expired. I paced out the range as 57m.

With my buffalo in the bag, the next four days were spent trying to find a hippo bull that was out of the water. We spotted a very large bull in one pod, but they were intent on staying in the shallow waters of Lake Kariba. The big bull stayed at the



Illegal fishing nets being used in Lake Kariba were pulled from the water, dragged ashore and confiscated by National Parks & Wildlife game scout Lamek, front.



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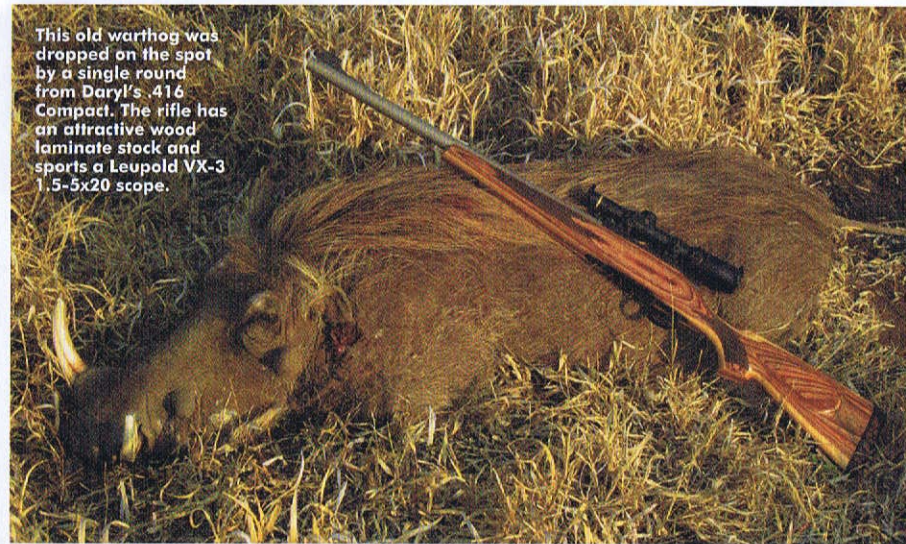
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back of the tightly packed pod, numbering around 25 animals. We visited the pod on a number of occasions, but even after a two-hour stint standing in the water using a lone Mopani tree as cover, were not afforded a shot.

On day six, an opportunity to take a hippo bull on land presented itself and I took it. The hippo was standing broadside close to the water's edge. Kneeling down and using a tree branch to steady my rifle, I fired a 470-grain hollow-point. The projectile punched through the right shoulder, passed through the top of the heart and smashed the outer ribcage on the opposite side. The hippo ran unsteadily a short distance into the water. To prevent him getting too deep, I followed up with a solid. This entered the right hindquarter and dropped the hippo immediately in the shallow water about 15m from the edge. Range was paced out at 47m for the initial shot.

Inspection of both carcasses during the meat recovery process not only indicated the wound channels, but also allowed recovery of the bullets. On both animals, the initial shot did enough damage to prove fatal, but with dangerous game, one should not hesitate to fire a follow-up shot if required. The extreme penetration of the flat-nosed solids proved decisive. I was pleased with the performance of the rifle cartridge combination, and Andrew was



This old warthog was dropped on the spot by a single round from Daryl's .416 Compact. The rifle has an attractive wood laminate stock and sports a Leupold VX-3 1.5-5x20 scope.

astounded at the level of penetration of both projectile types.

Back at camp, the food was abundant, diverse and of excellent quality. Of course, I had no option but to eat way too much of it. One must be polite when visiting a foreign country, after all! The dishes made from the buffalo and hippo I shot were especially enjoyed. Each evening was spent around the campfire, enjoying hunting stories and discussions about Africa, to the sounds of bellowing hippos in the water near camp or the cracking of

branches as unseen elephants fed, hidden by the trees on the other side of the inlet.

In our discussions, I learned that wildlife protection measures are well-established in many parts of Africa to ensure that species are not overhunted. In addition to National Parks & Wildlife officers, local councils also employ anti-poaching units. While I was at camp, two Cape buffalo, a cow and a calf, were caught in wire snares in separate locations, thought to be the work of Zambian poachers from across Lake Kariba. While sitting around the campfire

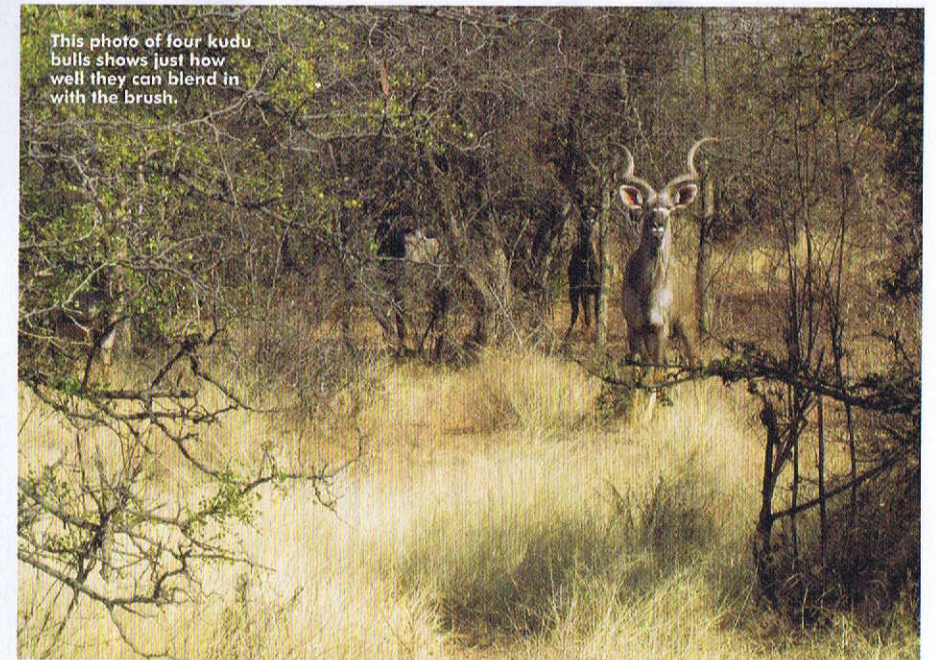


Daryl Lenkic, left, and professional hunter Andrew Schoeman with a hippo.

one night, we heard semi-automatic fire coming from the Lake area some distance away. In the darkness, we soon heard a motorboat power past the camp. Talking to the local anti-poaching unit the following day revealed that while posing as local fishers, they had surprised a boatload of Zambian poachers, who had motored past them. Two in the boat jumped overboard and swam to shore, while the leader, thought to be the most wanted Zambian poacher of all and nicknamed 'Saddam', had escaped because his 60-horsepower outboard was more powerful than almost any other on the lake.

The Communal Area Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) project was initiated in Zimbabwe as a means of both protecting wildlife numbers and helping local communities. This project provides the meat from hunted animals to local villagers. In addition, money from trophy fees and hunting concession fees go to local councils to fund schools, game scouts, grinding mills and many other community needs. Elephants are the single most important animal in the program and supply around 50 per cent of both meat and funds taken. This successful initiative has since been copied by several other African countries.

In addition to Andrew and our two trackers, Sham and Cry, we were also



This photo of four kudu bulls shows just how well they can blend in with the brush.

accompanied by a government game scout named Lamek. While hunting for hippo, we often encountered local fishers on the lake shore. Lamek would inspect their nets and found a number of illegal nets. These cheap-to-buy nets made of fishing line were available across the water in Zambia and had a smaller-than-allowable mesh size than the legal nylon-fibre nets. With the help of

the trackers, Lamek would confiscate the nets and record the boat numbers of the fishers who absconded upon his approach.

Having successfully bagged my two dangerous game animals, we set off on the long drive to South Africa and plains game. After a full day's drive, we arrived at our camp in the Limpopo Province in northern South Africa. The animals that were on my list comprised kudu, warthog, zebra and giraffe. Andrew also required a wildebeest cow for meat and asked me whether I would mind shooting one for him - I think the smile on my face said it all!

We averaged one animal per day over the first five days. I was using my .416 Compact with the Woodleigh 340-grain Protected Point projectiles. The wildebeest, kudu, warthog and zebra all succumbed to single shots while standing broadside, with all bullets punching through both sides of the animals to deliver fatal hits to the vital organs. The giraffe was taken with a single shoulder shot using a 350-grain Barnes Banded Solid. During the skinning and meat retrieval process on the giraffe, which occupied several hours, we found that the shot had hit the left shoulder, passed through the centre of the heart and exited the right shoulder - I couldn't have asked for better performance.

For me, hunting in Africa has been the pinnacle of my hunting experiences to date, but it was also much more than that. I thoroughly enjoyed my time there and the many different aspects that made up my trip. If you'd like to hunt South Africa, Andrew Schoeman can be contacted via his website at www.baobabsafaris.webs.com



A nice representative kudu, spotted and taken with the .416 Compact from a ridge top 180m away.