

sake of fairness and consistency of responses, a standard questionnaire is used for this series.

Around the Campfire

with Japie Schoeman



Some of the elephant tusks hunted in Mozambique in 1974 by the author and three friends. The heaviest was 113 lbs a side, shot by Bertie Guillaume.



Xavier Aznarez (right) and his son (left) shot a lion each one evening. They were from Barcelona, Spain.

When did you start your professional hunting career?

I started my professional hunting career during 1976. Prior to this I earned a living through farming in the old Northern Transvaal Province (today Limpopo Province) of South Africa. During this time I made use of every opportunity to hunt and collect trophies from countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique. After I had shot my first buffalo with Mike Cameron in Zimbabwe in 1970, I had one thing in mind – to become a professional hunter. I started Baobab Hunting Safaris in 1976 and guided my first overseas client during that year. I continued with my farming activities while operating as outfitter and professional hunter for three to four months a year. In 1986 I sold most of my farming properties and decided that what was once my hobby would now become my career. From 1986 to 1996, I was based on Letaba Ranch where I did most of my hunting. Located just north of the town of Phalaborwa and

bordering the western boundary of the Kruger National Park, Letaba Ranch was a paradise for hunting plains-game as well as big-game species. This was without a doubt the best 10 years of my life!

What is your favourite game animal?

I enjoy hunting all the animals but the most exciting for me is the elephant.

Tell us about your rifles

In my gun safe there has always been a big variety of rifles from a .410 shotgun to a .470 double. My first big-game calibre was a Sako .375 H&H – a very light rifle blessed with incredible recoil abilities, so much so that I did not like to use it. I used my Brno .458 Win Mag instead and shot my first elephants and buffalos with it. To be honest, the only good thing about the .458 Win Mag at that stage



Dye and Sally Tipton from the USA

was the fact that it could take four rounds in the magazine and one in the chamber. This came in very handy at times but with the quality of ammo those years, the .458 Win Mag did not have the best penetration and I converted it into a .458 Lott which had much better results. With the new bullet designs on the market these days the .458 Win Mag can definitely restore its bad reputation that it had over the years.

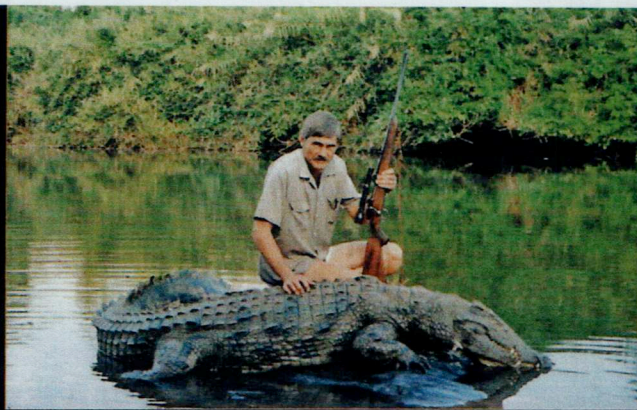
In 1974 I bought a .470 Rigby from a professional hunter from Kenya. This rifle cost me R1 700 and 100 rounds of ammo were included in the price. A few years later one of my clients wanted to buy this rifle from me and made me an offer I could not refuse. Included in the price he offered was his .470 Westley Richards that I used as a stopping and back-up dangerous-game rifle till the end of my career. I also have a great love for the Model 700 .416 Remington rifle that was given to me by a client in the early 1990s. I have passed this rifle on to my son Andrew, who has been using it with great success for the past 14 years.

For plains-game hunting as well as for leopard and lion the 9.3 x 62 was always my first choice. My favoured lighter calibres for plains-game hunting are the .30-06, .308 and 7 x 57. I have seen many big eland bulls killed with one shot with all three these calibres and when you shoot them just behind the shoulder it will whistle through with no issues. For young children and female hunters the 7 x 57 works very well; it has no recoil and with a 173-grain bullet you can kill any thin-skinned animal on this continent.



▲▲ **Bob Martin and myself at Letaba, Gazankulu**

▲ **Albert Stewing (right) from Germany with sable hunted with me in the Mumbwe West area, Zambia.**



The author with crocodile wounded by client. Three days after he had left I found the crocodile on the same spot but it took me another three days to get a shot and kill the croc.

Any regrets regarding the choice of PH as a career?

I will never regret my choice of becoming a PH but I do regret the fact that my career started too late and ended too early in my life. The 30 years during which I was living my dream of being a professional hunter was an incredible time of my life and left me with great memories and experiences that will stay with me forever.

Do you have any specific career highlights?

Every safari I did was a highlight of my career. To be in the bush tracking buffalo and elephant, sitting in a blind waiting for lion or leopard, and the times we were telling hunting stories around the campfire were all exceptional highlights.

Some other highlights were the narrow escapes. This particular day we were hunting for elephant with a Portuguese client, Tony de Almeida. We found three bulls that crossed into the hunting area from the park. We got out of the truck and I grabbed my brother-in-law's .460 Weatherby that I borrowed from him. I decided to give my .470 to my tracker to carry. I had just got my .470 back from the gunsmith after I had work done on it. As I did not have confidence that the rifle was in good working condition I decided to carry the .460 instead. I told my tracker to stay close to me with the .470 because I only had three bullets with me for the .460. Around my waist I had my belt with the .470 ammunition. The client, who was shooting a .375 H&H Magnum, went for a shoulder shot and as the elephant ran off I gave it a shot from behind. Now left with only two bullets in my .460, we stood and listened to the loud noises of trees crashing in front of us. The next moment we saw the two younger bulls running straight at us . . . I shot in the air but they continued coming. I then fired another shot over their heads which managed to turn them. I turned around to get my .470 from my tracker but with all the action he decided that standing close to me was not a good idea and he was already about 100



Baron Clemens Ostman van der Leye from Germany shakes hands with the author (left).



C Hudson from the USA and the author on the banks of the Little Letaba River, Gazankulu



Hans Walter Pfeifer with 35-inch waterbuck hunted at Letaba Ranch

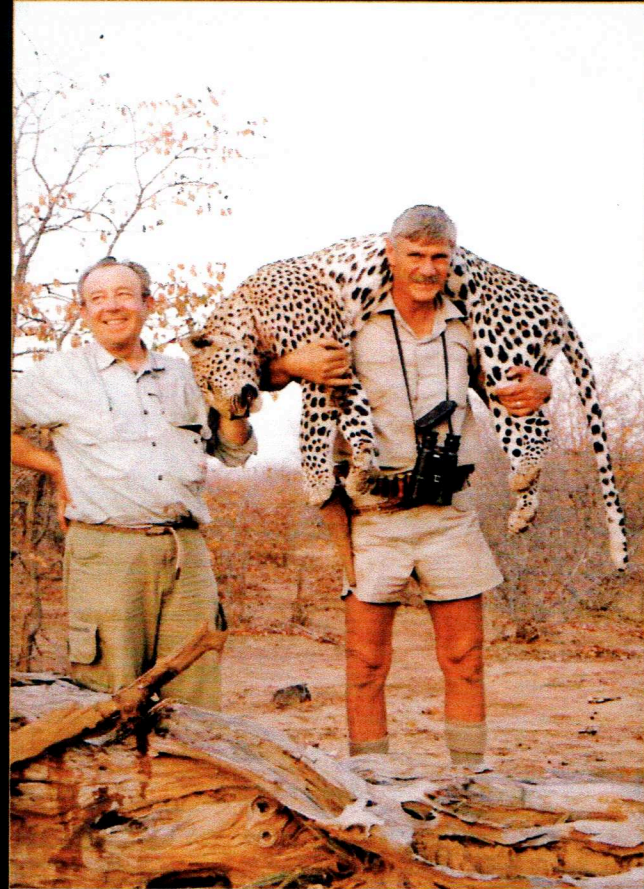


charging straight at me. I ran towards the tracker, waiting for the elephant to trample me at any time. While running in the direction I last saw the tracker, I stumbled over the .470 that he threw down on the ground. I picked up the rifle and heard a shot behind me. My biggest fear now was that the elephant was busy killing my client. I ran back and found the client standing in front of the elephant . . . Although the elephant was now very weak my client couldn't drop him. I put the elephant down with a brain shot and that was the end to a day where a lot of lessons were learned.

Some other narrow escapes were with lion. Still fresh in my mind is the lion charge in the Timbavati when a Spanish client wounded a big male lion by shooting it in the jaw. Tony Sánchez-Ariño (who was the agent), Tim Otto (a well-known and respected PH), Mossie Mosterd (who filmed the whole episode) and I were tracking the wounded lion. The lion ran away from us a couple of times in the thick bush before deciding to charge. We all managed to hit the lion with fatal shots in the chest and head. The cat dropped dead in front of me, so close that I could put my foot on top of its head . . .

What is your definition of a quality hunt?

What might be a quality hunt for one person might not be necessarily the same for the next. You get all kinds of clients coming to hunt in Africa; some are real hunters and some are not. Although the majority of clients do hunt for the enjoyment and the experience some are just doing it for the image.



Ramolo Dossi from Milan, Italy, and author carrying leopard, Gazankulu



Gert Mayer and his wife from Germany

For me personally a quality hunt is to hunt with someone who really enjoys and appreciates all aspects of the hunt – working hard for an animal, walking, stalking, climbing koppies and just spending as much time as possible in the bush looking and tracking, teaching your client all the little things of the bush, and then the satisfaction of getting the trophy you were looking for. I have seen too many professional hunters trying to get the trophy the easy way and spending most part of the day in camp. It is important that the client feels he is getting his money's worth out of a hunt.

Obviously there are also other factors that are important to ensure a quality hunt for your client. I have never really seen the need for five-star accommodation for a hunting client – what is important is that the accommodation is comfortable, food must be good, drinks must be cold and your equipment should be in good working condition.

The difference between an agreeable and a difficult client?

An agreeable client will trust his PH 100% when he has to judge a trophy or when they are in a dangerous situation. The difficult client will always ask whether you are sure it is big enough and then have an accidental discharge when in a dangerous situation.

The agreeable client will enjoy looking at the birds, tracks and insects, noticing all the little things in the bush while the difficult client will only focus on killing his next world-record trophy.

The agreeable client understands the fact that the PH knows more about the behaviour of the animals and will do exactly what his PH asks of him in any situation; a difficult client will always tell the PH what to do.

Can you single out a particular and favourite hunting area?

This is a difficult question because every single area that I have hunted is nice and unique in its own way. The Chewore concession in the Zambezi Valley during the seventies was truly amazing and we saw black rhino almost every day. I enjoyed the Caprivi Strip a lot; I hunted there for elephant, sitatunga and roan. Rungwa in Tanzania was very good for lion, leopard, sable and roan. The Gaza Province in Mozambique had many big elephants when I hunted there in the early seventies. A couple of friends and I shot eight elephants in 1973 and the average of the four biggest elephants was 92 pounds. Zambia's Mumbwa West was excellent for leopard and big sable.

Situated in the north-eastern parts of South Africa and adjacent to the Kruger National Park, Letaba Ranch was definitely my favourite hunting area. Our camp overlooked the Greater Letaba River. Every year I had a quota of 10 elephants, 4 leopards, 12 buffalos and lots of plains game. Lions were killing cattle regularly and I could hunt these cats with my clients.



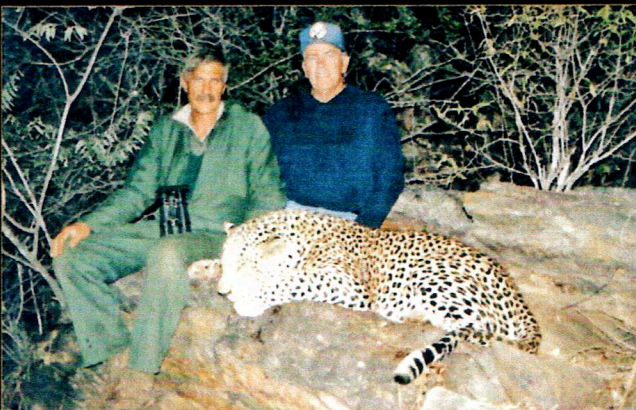
Xavier Aznarez and author with grey rhebuck in the Eastern Cape



Fransis Litges (left), Tony Sánchez-Ariño (right) and myself with the lion that was wounded by a client and charged us. We shot it when it was only 1 m away and it dropped dead between Tony and me.



Hans Pfeifer with hippo shot in the Great Letaba River



Wally Hudson (right) from the USA and author with leopard, Gazankulu



Hans Walter Pfeifer from Germany. Lion hunted in G-zankulu.



Fidel Guzman from Valencia, Spain with nyala, hunted in Zululand.



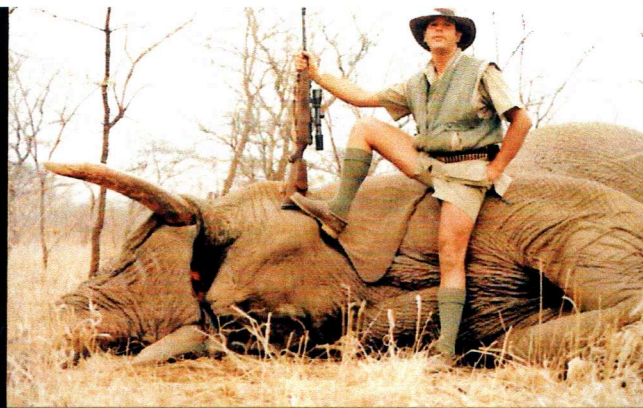
Author with elephant cow, Zimbabwe, 1972



My first leopard in Zimbabwe, 1972



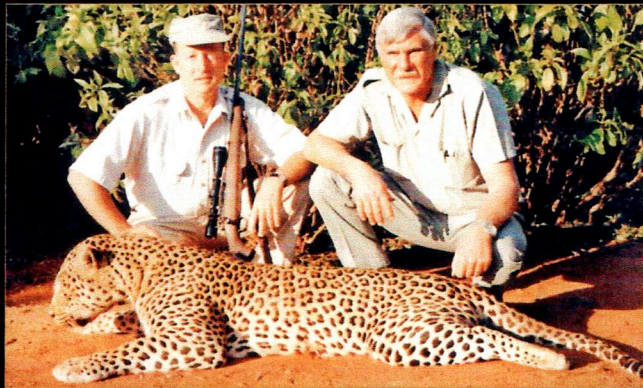
Portuguese clients with two lion males



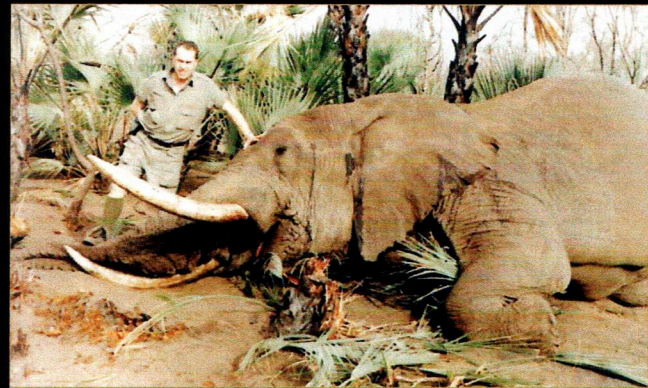
Tony de Almeida from Lisbon, Portugal with the elephant that charged them




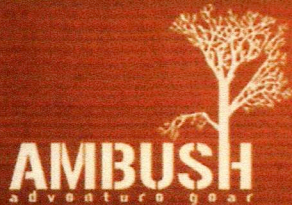
The author (right), his son and client (middle) with buffalo, Gazankulu



Bob Martin (left) from the USA hunted his beautiful leopard with the author.



Jaime Loteras with 81/79 lb elephant hunted at Letaba Ranch, Gazankulu 




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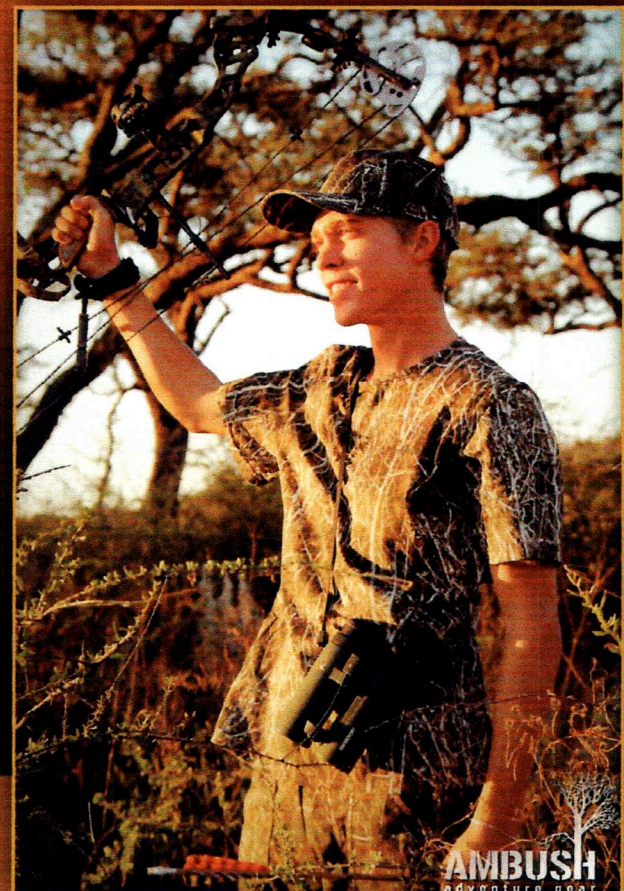
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