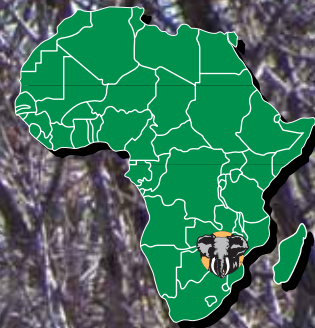




LIFE MEMBER

It was a hellishly hot October in 1992 on the shores of Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe. I was on the first buffalo hunt of my life. Having grown up around hunting, it felt like a rite of passage and a huge privilege to hunt the first of my Big Five at age twelve.



BY JOFIE LAMPRECHT

REDEMPTION

We were sharing the camp with a couple of Dutch hunters. On their first evening after hunting, they were sitting at the bar looking miserable. Their PH was in the far corner, not paying them too much attention. My father walked over to the gentlemen and asked whether they would like to join us around the fire. They accepted the

invitation, and now 18 years later, I am still annually hunting with one of those gentlemen and just recently hunted a buffalo in one of Namibia's great national parks with him. I will call him Henk.

Henk and his friend were upset that the PH was looking for only super record book buffalos, when all that they wanted was

old Dagga bulls with broken and worn horns. My father talked to the PH, and Henk's private plane took off at 11 a.m. the following morning, with two old bulls in the salt.

In 2009, one of the first major hunts conducted in our new concession was with Henk. He had booked a white rhino, roan, sable

and buffalo hunt and left with all his trophies, in addition to two fine eland bulls – but unfortunately no buffalo. Two days before the end of the hunt, he simply said, “I need to save something for next year,” and with that, a safari in 2010 was booked and planned.

Henk is 72 years old. His brain is as sharp as they come, but walking like a 30-year-old is not in the cards for him anymore. Knowing this beforehand, I was able to bring in extra hands, eyes and feet to help with this now annual expedition.

My hunting apprentice and his Bushman tracker found the tracks of two buffalo bulls with massive, heavy tracks. They dragged their feet through the red dune sand, making tracking them easy, but the thick bush of Waterberg made it challenging. I got a call on the radio for us to make our way over to these tracks. The buffalo must have been close at hand, with the heat of the August day having set in already. Looking at the tracks, I got a rush of adrenaline that only hunting this black beast can give you. Henk was eager, loads of cold water were packed, rifles were checked, and off we went.

We had not been on the track very long when our Bushman tracker fell on his side on the ground, as if struck by lightning, pointing his petite hand down a dark passage in the bush. We all crouched down, straining to see what the Bushman was pointing to. He said, “there is



The bush was thick but the buffalo prefers midday napping in the midst of that tangle.



You can get familiar with the flora and fauna of your hunting destination by crawling on all fours, but you can also surprise your prey, if you are lucky.

a bull lying about 60 yards ahead of us, sleeping.”

“Sleeping? I don’t even see a buffalo?” we all said. After some time, I finally saw the glint of a boss as our prey shifted his weight. “OK. I see him,” I said, “but I cannot see his horns. We need to get closer.” Bushmen have supernatural eyes!

The slight Bushman said that he would stay behind while we crept in. A thumbs-up means his eyes are closed and he is sleeping; a thumbs-down means he is awake, and beware! All that was left for us to do was, quietly, close the distance and find a lane to see, and then possibly shoot this bull. But where was his comrade?

We covered the first 25 yards with relative ease, crouched and walking slowly. With every few steps, a glance back at the Bushman was met with a childlike grin and thumbs up. We paused to assess our next move, 35 yards out. My heart sank when I saw the high tips of the horns. Could these big tracks really have led us to a young bull? Could other bulls have

joined them or just be lying on their tracks? Only after minutes of close inspection did I figure out that the bull was fast asleep on his side, legs out and one horn on the ground. Sleeping, literally, like the dead.

The bull’s horn was blunt as a rock, and I could see a huge chip missing from his ancient boss. The perfect buffalo for this hunter was laid out before us, like a gift from God. Spread? Who cares! What a prize this bull would be, but we first had to get there.

The next 17 yards were later described by Henk as the “longest 17 yards of my life.” We had no choice. I could see the bull and would probably get a good shot off, but my friend and hunter would never confidently take this shot. Closer we must get. I left Henk behind with my apprentice and crawled in as quietly as I could to a little tree growing about 18 yards from the bull, which coincidentally was the only tree between us and the target. Reaching the tree, a clear shot could be made. Our mission now was to get Henk there, quietly and

with enough presence of mind to make the shot. Time to crawl.

A muted discussion took place between Henk and my hunting apprentice. Later I asked what all the fuss was about, and it was simply explained that "Henk did not want to crawl and wanted to shoot from there." Then the question was asked, "Do you see the buffalo behind that tree?" They shortly thereafter started crawling, my hunting apprentice in the lead, with Henk's hands on his calves like a train making its way slowly toward me. Two movements and a pause, I would check with the Bushman, who gave me the thumbs-up, and another two movements. Henk reached my position, exhausted from crawling 17 yards through thick sand, having to contend with thorns and the knowledge that you were crawling toward danger rather than away from it. I made Henk lie on his side and rest. We had time now. The wind was consistent, we had great cover and it was just 1 p.m. These bulls were going nowhere for at least two hours.

Just another 18 yards away, I could hear the aged bull breathing through my hearing protection. Glassing carefully to see where the other bull was finally paid off because, behind and to the right of this bull, I could make out an ear – no more. We had no worries. If we shot here, the other bull will be in a good position to flee.

Henk was nervous, so I told him to relax and get ready for the shot. As I could see that the heat was putting Henk to sleep, I stood up and got a rest for the elegant .375 Sauer H&H rifle on my shoulder. The shooting sticks had been left behind, so my shoulder would have to do. I lined up the rifle when a twig snapped behind me. So comfortable, Henk had rolled over in his sleep and made a noise. A quick glance at our Bushman, and we saw the dreaded thumbs-down.

I turned my head 180 degrees in agonizing slow motion. The bull had rolled onto his folded legs, but was still lying down, broadside to us. His ears were alert, and he had heard that breaking twig. We waited quietly at our little bush for the



Jofie Lamprecht shows this fine old Dagga Boy.

bull to relax again. Minutes passed, when finally a thumbs-up was given. Through the binocular, I could see his eyes were closed, ears drooping.

It was time. Gently, we woke Henk up and instructed him to stand up slowly behind me. The rifle only needed a minor adjustment, which was to be turned down to 1.5X magnification.

As the shot rang, I ducked away from our small bush with my loaded .416 Remington toward the bull. I then gave him an insurance shot on the shoulder, reloaded, and called for Henk to come closer. We looped around behind the bull, not easy in dense bush, always making sure to keep him in our sight. A shot to the spine was administered by Henk, and it was done.

With relief and exhaustion after days of hard work tracking, buffalo, sable and roan were in the salt at the end of yet another fantastic expedition.

The age of this bull speaks for itself, epitomizing trophy hunting. Once having been a bull that would have scored high in the record books, he now would be hardly worth a mention in tape-carrying circles. How magnificent! I could run my fingers over his chipped boss, feel the curve of his horn and the bluntness of his horn tips, see his outstanding white scared face, and wonder to myself, *How many epic battles had these horns seen?*

Redemption. *GT*



The Bushmen trackers have uncanny, almost supernatural powers of observation.