

SNOWY MOUNTAINS
AND DUSTY TRAILS

HUNTING FROM
ALASKA TO ZIMBABWE

EMBRY C. RUCKER, JR.

MacRucker Books

Snowy Mountains and Dusty Trails:
Hunting from Alaska to Zimbabwe
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Dedicated to
Russell Tarr of Zimbabwe and
Dennis Magnusson of Wyoming—
Two of the best guides a hunter could have.

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Introduction by Neville Blakemore

As Embry Rucker mentions in Chapter One, we first met when I was a senior patrol leader in Boy Scout Troop 109 at St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Our friendship has spanned decades since the early 1950s, and we have shared many experiences together, including bird hunting and even a brief stint as business partners.

This memoir makes for absorbing reading and successfully brings the reader into a hunter's world as Embry relates the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions of many and varied hunting trips. He writes in a style that is expressive, deft, spare, and complete. I think you will detect the unspoken nuances of a fine man of great character and solid integrity.

Many of the tales in Embry's hunting memoir are fascinating to me because they present additional experiences that we have *not* shared, and thus add further dimension to his life. They range from one of the most dangerous hunting situations (stopping a charging, wounded Cape buffalo with a double rifle) to one of the least so (hunting bobwhite quail with a light shotgun and dogs); the accounts are engaging and comprehensive.

His memories cover lots of geography: from African bush to western United States mountains; from Kentucky dove fields to southern quail plantations; from Canadian duck marshes to driven pheasant and partridge shoots in Scotland and England; and many more.

Hunting combines skill with firearms—or bow—and an understanding of the nature and habits of the quarry. It is not just shooting, which can be done at a firing range, but necessarily goes beyond shooting and requires knowledge of game and its habitat in order that the hunter has the chance of a shot.

In generous detail, these stories show how Embry skillfully understands and experiences this combination.

Embry's reminiscences demonstrate a bonding with nature which few people experience today due to the widespread trend for urban living. They give insight to the essential hunting paradox: the hunter's love and respect for the quarry, while seeking to take its life.

I hope you enjoy this book. I certainly did.

Neville Blakemore, Jr.
December 2022

Author's Preface



**Bull elephant tusks taken with Justin Seymour-Smith
in the Gokwe area of Zimbabwe, 1990**

Recently I was walking down some slick steps in front of my house to look for some missing letters which may have blown from the mailbox. I didn't discover any mail. What I did find was pain and embarrassment as I slipped and fell, whacking my arm and shoulder. As I tumbled down, the thought flashed through my mind that sometimes I don't have the sense God

gave a goat.

That incident led me to think about my luck on hunting trips. As you will learn in this book, I've done a lot of hunting. As I age, I sometimes reflect on incidents that happened during my hunts and think, "Wow, I was so lucky that day not to get trampled." Or "Boy, that was really a stupid thing to do." I believe that everyone has those moments of reflection in their life.

Sometimes it's more important to be quick with your rifle rather than to take careful aim. If it's dangerous game—a charging elephant, lion, or other menacing prey—you don't have time to carefully line up a shot. That's called instinctive shooting.

The science of instinctive shooting, according to writer and gunmaker Chris Batha, whom I will introduce later in this book, involves a combination of the fundamentals of stance, posture, gun mount, and technique that enables a shot to be taken without conscious thought. I stopped a charging Cape buffalo like that once when it was thundering at *me!*

In the memoir that I published in 2017 (*Coming in for a Landing: Ten Years Flying in the Islands*, Los Gatos, California: Transreal Books), I described many of the incidents in my life that shaped me as a person. Although I related some of my hunting exploits in that work, I didn't highlight any. So, I decided to feature them in another work.

In 2020 I engaged a professional to produce a large album of photographs from my hunts in the United States and around the world. That effort turned out well, but I realized that I wanted my adventures to be told not just through photos, but by the written word.

The older I get the more I seem to forget. I'm glad I

decided to tell Harry Rothgerber these stories now when they were fresh and lively in my memory.

Today it seems like more people are becoming emotionally opposed to the avocation of hunting. Their objections are usually sincere but often misguided and inaccurate, and I'd like to address that issue right now.

Hunting does a world of good for conservation by creating more ideal conditions for animals through population control. It is a pro-environment conservation tool, not just a bunch of rednecks throwing beer cans out of the back of a pickup truck while blasting signs and mailboxes with their shotguns. There *are* some of those, but they are the exceptions.

Indeed, the conservation standard is set by the Boone & Crockett Club, founded in 1887, whose goal is to promote the conservation, management, and habitat of wildlife, especially big game. I have always supported the ethical standards of "fair chase" and sportsmanship that Boone & Crockett support. More about the promotion of safe, legal, and ethical standards for hunters will be found in the pages that follow.

My origin as a hunter began decades ago when the Gudmundsson brothers, two of my business associates, asked me if I wanted to go duck and goose hunting with them. Although I knew that I needed a shotgun, I really had no idea what I was getting into. Duck hunting was only a vague idea in my mind. When I was a kid, I had a 16-gauge single barrel shotgun, but I don't think I ever killed much with it. More details about that shotgun and my development as a hunter will be revealed in later chapters.

Hunting has been a catalyst for my world travel. I used shooting and stalking as a way of exploring unique places in many different countries. My late wife Noreen and I first

decided—well, mostly *I* decided—which destinations we cared to visit rather than what animal I was going to hunt. For example, I thought that New Zealand would be a good place for a vacation, so we combined a regular tourist trip with hunting. We traveled all around New Zealand for three weeks, with one reserved for hunting. I looked for sambar deer on the North Island; although I came close to them, none were old enough to take, and I left empty handed. Nonetheless, it was fun and interesting.

There is also a strong social aspect to hunting. These days I still venture out with some of my school classmates plus buddies with whom I grew up and others I know from many prior hunts.

This passion for hunting does not exactly run in my family. Although my mother's father was a hunter in Germany, neither my own father nor his father hunted. My younger brother Rudy—a noted author and science fiction writer—showed zero interest in hunting. We have fished and scuba-dived in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but never hunted together. But that's his choice, and that's okay.

Hunting certainly has changed *me* over the years. On the following pages I hope to explain where and why I first started hunting, and how astonished I was to discover the world-wide industry that hunting has become. I am grateful that as I hunted in exotic locales, I gained significant knowledge about different peoples, cultures, and traditions—especially about that tribal woman smoking her calabash gourd pipe filled with legal cannabis.

—Embry Rucker, July 2023

1: My Wife Up a Tree



Noreen Smythe Rucker, an adventurous Irish lass

Hunting Cape buffalo in Africa is a forbidding challenge; they are highly dangerous to humans due to their unpredictable nature and size—up to 2,000 pounds. A member of the extremely perilous “Big Five,” they are highly sought by big game hunters; lions and humans are their only predators.

In 1994 my wife Noreen accompanied me to the Republic of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa on a safari with professional hunter (“PH” as they are typically called) Russell Tarr. He and

I first met in 1988 when he worked for Butch Walker, another guide-friend of mine, at the huge Lemco Ranch in Zimbabwe.

Russell was born in Zambia and also has both Zimbabwean and South African citizenship; he had served under his father in the Rhodesian Army in the wartime 1970s in that region. He originally went into the airborne division as a paratrooper and said that experience was much scarier than stalking elephants. A quiet type—not flashy or macho—he had an engaging personality and was an exemplary PH.

After Butch got the concession to hunt in the Omay area from the Batonka tribe, he built quite a business and became more interested in managing the entire operation rather than escorting hunters. Russell was general manager and head PH for that area, a beautiful, 800,000-acre property that included part of Lake Kariba, the world's largest artificial lake and reservoir by volume.

The Omay safari area is situated north along the shores of Lake Kariba between the Ume River to the east and the Sengwa River to the west. The Omay Communal Land hunting concessions encompass about two million acres altogether.

One day five of us were stalking a herd of Cape buffalo: Russell, our two trackers, Noreen, and me. Following the buffalo herd to a small clearing, we noticed that one was an older, non-lactating female whose calf-bearing days were long past. Deciding that it would be suitable to take, I made what I believed to be a perfect heart shot in the chest; it should have dropped dead. However, it didn't seem to bother her at all—she just turned around and took off running in the opposite direction. Crap!

As it dashed off, Russell shouted, "You hit her, let's go." So we quickly took off running in the same direction. Due to the

thick, high African bush that often obscured our view, we occasionally lost sight of the buffalo as we followed. We vaguely knew its location because we heard it thrashing about in the bush. After closely pursuing for a short while, we found it—or, more accurately, it found us.

We had paused briefly at a small clearing when suddenly and unexpectedly she charged out of the brush on the opposite side—coming straight at us! Russell was standing to my right, maybe five yards away, with his rifle up and ready.

Attempting to shoot up her nose into the brain to surely stop her charge, Russell fired and hit her but missed the brain. Two thousand pounds of angry, wounded Cape buffalo was still charging at us, closing the gap quickly, the ground thundering as it neared. In one quick motion I swung my rifle around like I would for any dove or quail in Kentucky and squeezed the trigger. Fortunately, I hit her directly in the side of the brain, and she dropped straight down—dead in her tracks.

After a brief, thankful moment as my adrenaline rush passed, I stepped off the distance. Its carcass was exactly four paces away—only 12 feet from where I stood! Its horns were impressive—and sharp. Russell would have been dead meat if I had missed.

He said, “Well done, thanks!” I replied, “What did you think I’d do, run?” He explained, “You may be surprised, but I’ve been in threatening situations like that where the client just threw down his rifle and disappeared, leaving me in a mess to worry about both the animal and the client.” My goodness! I could never envision a predicament where I would simply cut and run, although I believed Russell’s recollections about those encounters.

Through that experience early in my big game hunting

career, I developed confidence in my ability to immediately assess all the options in a dangerous situation and to stand and shoot, if necessary.



Flanked by Atlas and another tracker, after I took this Cape buffalo that charged Russell and me, and chased Noreen up a tree

When I turned around, I was amazed to find Noreen safely up a nearby tree—the trackers, too! In the excitement of the buffalo’s deadly charge, Kinias the tracker had climbed the tree, pushing Noreen aside and throwing his machete down to climb with two hands. The machete had struck her knee and badly sliced it open. Russell was furious, yelling at the trackers, “You are bad people, you are bad people!” At least it gave Noreen a good story after the wound was treated. Scarred for the rest of her life, she would display her knee and say to friends, “See what happens when you go hunting with Embry!”

Kinias and the other trackers caught hell from Russell, to say the least. Kinias later would play a prominent role in

another hunting adventure with Russell, Noreen, and me which I will relate in another chapter.

Humans have an excellent sense of smell, but any number of animals are superior, especially Cape buffalo and elephant in the wild. We always heeded their sensory abilities as we stalked them.

On one hunt we were in extremely heavy bush, searching for a buffalo that had scurried into foliage that was way over our heads. It was a headache. We were pushing grass aside, trudging through it, using our binoculars to look only 20 feet away to determine if that dark patch was the buffalo's hide or a piece of wood.

At one point I actually smelled the buffalo and pointed in that direction to the professional hunter who accompanied me. The PH also sniffed it and used basic sign language to concur. After checking the wind direction, we stayed together but circled around; we didn't want to get upwind of the buffalo. This stalk eventually ended successfully—for me, that is, not the buffalo.

Interesting situations like that thrilled me and kept me returning to Africa. Anyone can easily—and safely—see an elephant or buffalo out on the open plain; but when following animals into heavy foliage, the hunt becomes far more challenging. To stalk them in the verdant African forests and bush is extremely exciting.

Since the charging buffalo incident, I have hunted with Russell at least six times. A consummate professional, he has entertained us with many stories of the Rhodesian Light Infantry, one of the world's foremost anti-terrorist commando forces until it disbanded in 1980. Russell had the privilege of serving under his father, the Colonel Commanding. On one safari I

presented Russell with a Kentucky Colonel commission that I had obtained, informing him that he was now of equal rank with his father.

Although everyone wants to take a large, bull buffalo with wide horns, like the one displayed in my home, cow buffalo are just as dangerous. Of the many buffalo I shot in Zimbabwe, the only one that ever charged me was that cow.

2: Youthful Adventures and Indiscretions

How did a Pennsylvania-born, Kentuckiana businessman discover the joy and challenges of hunting big game in Africa? The answer to that question began long ago.

When I was two years old in 1943, my parents, Embry Rucker and Marianne von Bitter Rucker, moved to Louisville from Philadelphia. My brother Rudy was born in 1946. We were fortunate to grow up in a loving and caring family setting, and our parents were involved in a positive way in our lives.

My mother was an artistic soul who loved her gardening, painting, and pottery work; she had left her native Germany in 1937 to study art in the Philadelphia area. Pop, a graduate of Virginia Military Institute, worked as a civil engineer and businessman for various companies, and he achieved some distinction as an instructor in the business school at the University of Louisville. Although trained as a cavalry officer at VMI, my father was not allowed to join the military in World War II because he was married to a German national.

For the most part my childhood in suburban Louisville was routine and uneventful. My brother won many academic awards in high school, I managed to graduate, and we attended church regularly.

Before I was 10 years old, I joined the Boy Scouts and that was my first opportunity to become acquainted with outdoor activities and skills. Scouting taught me the basics of responsibility, citizenship, character development, and self-reliance. Although I was two or three years younger, I learned much from

Marshall Eldred (later a prominent attorney) and the elder Neville Blakemore (now a retired business executive of some note), who were the senior patrol leaders of Troop #109 when I was in the Scouts. Many years later I reconnected with Neville and have hunted many times with him.

Judge J. Paul Keith, our family friend and neighbor, was the local scoutmaster in charge. He was a good man, an Eagle Scout who devoted much of his life to scouting, becoming President of the Louisville Area Boy Scout Council in 1950. My father was an occasional adult leader of Troop #109, accompanying us on our field trips. Bill Straub, one of Pop's business associates in the plywood business, was also one of the troop leaders.

Occasionally my father would take me with him on business trips when I was young. We traveled together to Chicago, the Carolinas, and Tennessee. In addition, Rudy and I accompanied my mother on trips to Germany to visit our grandparents in 1950 and 1953. The first trip was on a TWA Super Constellation, the second on an old freighter, the *Karl Fisser*. These trips were always fascinating for me.

We also would sometimes go to Fontaine Ferry Park, an historic amusement park in Louisville's West End that dated back to 1905. Using a .22 rifle under my father's watchful eye, I enjoyed participating in the shooting galleries at Fontaine Ferry Park (five shots for a dime) and at the Kentucky State Fair in the summer.

I really enjoyed that target practice, and I liked fireworks too—the kind that exploded. I believe that was fairly normal for kids. We also played with cap guns then; it seems that no one has cap guns anymore. They were great fun. Hitting a large roll of caps with a hammer was also a unique, explosive experience. It's a good way to learn that's not a very good idea.

On these adventures with my father he would regularly sing, “Over hill, over dale, we will hit the dusty trail, and those caissons go rolling along.” That’s the chorus of John Philip Souza’s U.S. Field Artillery March which Pop learned at VMI.

When I was a kid I had my own BB gun—a Daisy Red Ryder rifle. People have told me about the movie *A Christmas Story* and Ralphie’s desire to own a Red Ryder rifle. Luckily, I was never involved in shooting anyone’s eye out. It’s easy enough to do if you think it’s only a toy. BANG! Ouch! In spite of its tiny size, a BB can seriously hurt. Because he had much training at VMI, a military college which some referred to as “the West Point of the South,” my father taught me how to shoot properly, using the BB gun as a model. He drilled basic things into me, such as never point it at anybody, never have your finger on the trigger unless you were ready to shoot, and other basic safety precautions.

By the way, I still have a BB rifle just like the one I had as a kid; not long ago, I bought an adult version of the Daisy Red Ryder to ward off a squirrel that keeps invading our bird feeder.

In 1953 when I was 12, I was sent by my parents to summer camp in Delafield, Wisconsin—about 27 miles due west of Milwaukee. This was the first of my two trips there. Mrs. Robert Becker, a genuinely nice lady, accompanied my friends, classmates, and me from Louisville. Her son Rob Becker also went to camp with us; we traveled by train from historic Union Station at 10th and Broadway in downtown Louisville. That was a pretty neat experience and a huge adventure for us kids.

Going away to camp for six weeks was a big deal back then. Camp St. John’s, founded in 1919 and situated on Nagawicka Lake, was the summer version of St. John’s Military Academy. They kept the military protocol throughout the entire summer;

we had to dress up every Sunday—called Parade Day—in khaki pants, a khaki shirt, and a tie. Then we marched and performed some simple maneuvers on the parade grounds.

We stayed in small cottages that were situated in a semi-circle, maybe four to six kids in each one. One of the cottages in each pod had a counselor, which was also a big deal—it was probably some 16-year-old kid.

Six weeks was a long time to be away from home; in retrospect, I think it was a way for our parents to get rid of us for a while. No firearms were kept in the cabins, but I shot a .22 rifle on the outdoor shooting range as often as we were allowed to. That was great fun!

There were all sorts of other outdoor activities, such as paddling a canoe, sailing a sailboat, throwing horseshoes, playing tennis, and swimming in the lake. In handicrafts, we learned a primitive form of repoussé metalwork: I created an ashtray from aluminum sheeting for my mother, who smoked. My mother was so grateful for it—she said it was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. She was really nice.

Also, there was a girls' camp across Nagawicka Lake, but their place was not military-based like ours. We seldom saw them, but occasionally the girls' and boys' camps got together for a dance. Being only 11 or 12, most of us weren't interested in dancing with girls. Although I was sweet on one young lady there, I wasn't brave enough to do anything about it—such as talk to her.

My friend Jonathan Bingham was also at camp, and he greatly enjoyed it too. Jonathan was the son of Mary and Barry Bingham, Sr. owners of the two daily Louisville newspapers and a radio station. During our stay we got into some serious trouble but escaped unscathed. More explanation is required.

We were both quite interested in explosives and guns, and one of us secretly brought some large firecrackers to camp. Jonathan and I tossed some of those fireworks into the gymnasium where the dance with the combined camps was taking place; of course, exploding in an enclosed gym ensured that there would be a great deal of noise. Then we took off running with some of the counselors in hot pursuit. Chased through backyards, we tore down sheets and other clothesline laundry—but we didn't get caught! We eventually lost our pursuers and circled back to camp. Not only were we not caught but we weren't identified. The guilty parties were never brought to justice!

Once every summer the administrators would put all the campers on a bus and go to Milwaukee for a major league baseball game. That was very cool. Although we played sandlot ball and had heard about major league baseball, most of us had never seen a real game in person. We saw the Milwaukee Braves play in County Stadium, a real big league stadium; to us, it was the biggest thing ever. It was also historic since 1953 was the very first year that the Braves played there, having just moved from Boston.

During the two years that I went to St. John's camp during the summer, my father came to visit me one time. He was nearby in Milwaukee or Chicago on business and told me that he wanted to make sure I was having a nice time. At the time I thought to myself, "Well, this is what Dads do." But later I realized that some dads do, and some don't. I am grateful that he was always very solicitous about the welfare of my brother and me; he always wanted to make sure everything was alright with us.

Those were memorable summers for me. You could do a lot worse than learning some basic outdoor skills and having

unique daily recreation for six weeks in the summer. I was sad to learn that Camp St. John's for boys and Camp Nagawicka for girls operated only through 1970, when they closed the cabins for good.

When I was sixteen years old I decided that I needed a shotgun. No doubt this involved a desire to emulate some of my friends who went dove or duck hunting on a regular basis. My trusting father bought me a single barrel 16-gauge shotgun—just about the perfectly wrong item. It only had one barrel, and 16-gauge was really an unusual gauge that wasn't used much; the standard guns were 12- or 20-gauge. But I don't think Pop knew much about shotguns at all. He had been trained only with rifles, handguns, and artillery, and he had no interest whatsoever in hunting. My mother's father did, but of course he was in Germany and not much help.

Single barrel shotguns were probably produced because they were inexpensive and a lot less costly to manufacture than a double-barrel. One bullet—BAM!—that's it. My father was probably more concerned that I didn't do any damage to anything or anybody. Some years ago, the death knell was sounded for 16-gauge shotguns, but Browning then produced a newly designed, improved version and, it's suddenly become popular again. Nostalgia may have something to do with it. In any event, that was my first gun.

After obtaining my shotgun I went on a couple of dove hunts with some of my friends. Dove hunting in the fall is still a popular activity. When the season opens around the first of September, there's always a huge number of doves around, and you can usually shoot up to 15 for every day you hunt. They are quite tasty.

It's more of a difficult challenge to shoot a dove than you

may think. Of course, you have to shoot them in the air. It really goes against hunter ethics to shoot birds sitting on a wire or the ground. Not sporting at all. "Fair Chase," as defined by the Boone & Crockett Club, is the ethical, sportsmanlike, lawful pursuit, and taking of any free-ranging wild animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over such game animals. "Fair Chase" also happens to be the title of the quarterly magazine published by the Boone & Crockett Club. I look forward to its arrival.

I took that shotgun out a couple of times, maybe with young Stephen Davenport and Peter Graves. Peter's father was choir master and organist at St. Francis of the Fields Church. Steve was the son of the Rector of St. Francis. At that time, my father was studying for the Episcopal priesthood, so the three of us were pretty tightly connected through that church community.

We would likely have gone to somebody's cornfield. The best crop to attract doves is sunflowers because they love sunflower seeds. People will typically plant maybe five acres of sunflowers, with the goal of cutting down part of the field as they ripen. That's considered legal, as opposed to "baiting." Scattering sunflower seeds or corn or similar substances to attract birds IS baiting, and that's illegal, and you WILL get arrested for that. State and Federal laws strictly prohibit taking migratory game birds with the aid of baiting—placing feed such as corn, wheat, salt or other attractant to constitute a lure or enticement on or over any baited area. Hunters need to be aware that a baited area is considered to be baited for 10 days after the removal of the bait. In addition, areas manipulated for dove hunting are not legal for waterfowl hunting. There are many rules and regulations governing hunting in Kentucky.

In any event, you can legally plant those fields of sunflowers through legitimate agricultural practices and begin to cut them down around the end of August to start drawing in the doves. Usually, five acres is enough to concentrate the doves. Whether those efforts are successful is random. Sometimes you will have a really good year, but the exact same thing the next year doesn't work and the doves go elsewhere.

After hunting doves for a few years, I graduated from Louisville Country Day School and was off to Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, the postsecondary institution that luckily accepted me; so, I didn't do any shooting at all for quite a while. That 16-gauge sat in a closet at my parents' house for a long time. Although I didn't take it to college, some of my classmates did keep their guns in their dorm rooms. That became less common over the years and is no doubt prohibited nowadays by a plethora of laws and school regulations. The sight of a shotgun on a college campus now would no doubt lead to an "active shooter" alarm since those drills are now routinely practiced in many schools.

3: Big Guns in Glenview



This cow elephant chased me up a hill in Zimbabwe. Not in Louisville! Be warned that a few of the photos don't match the chapters they're in.

Jonathan Bingham, a good friend during my high school years, lived with his parents and siblings in their historic house in Glenview, an eastern Louisville suburb somewhat close to the Ohio River. We used to enjoy picking on his sister Eleanor, who was several years younger. Barry Sr., their father, attired in his usual three-piece suit with tie, once took Jonathan and me to the downtown Armory to watch professional wrestling matches.

In the mid-1950s, Jonathon's two older brothers, Worth and Barry, had traveled to Africa on a hunting safari; upon their return, they stored their large-caliber guns in the Bingham's attic. Jonathan knew their whereabouts, and where the ammunition was kept, so one day we decided we would try out these rifles—in Glenview!

The Bingham's house was fronted by a large, circular driveway, and many giant trees decorated the front of the property. Mrs. Bingham spent much time in one of the front rooms—called the afternoon room or the library—which faced the driveway.

Jonathan and I hauled out several of these rifles which shot .470 Nitro Express cartridges, developed by an Englishman for hunting dangerous game in Africa and India. These classic cartridges, four inches long with a 500-grain bullet, are used almost exclusively in double barrel rifles, where two barrels are side-by-side, similar to a double-barreled shotgun. It had the reputation of being the fastest second shot on the planet. Only about 15 years old, we took aim and blasted some of the trees out front. Jonathan would shoot one, then I would shoot. The noise was deafening and thunderous!

With any other rifle it was necessary to lift the bolt handle, pull it back, eject the used cartridge, push a new one in and lock it down; whereas with a double rifle, you'd just pull the second trigger. BOOM! BOOM! The third shot was not so quick though. Then you'd have to break the rifle open and put two more cartridges in. Later in Africa I learned to carry the next two cartridges between the second and third fingers of my left hand, so I could break the rifle open, turn the gun so the empty shells would slide out, and put the two new ones in. Fast, efficient reloading became like second nature, with a minimum of

wasted motion.

But as teenagers, Jonathan and I were not that skillful. We were just kids shooting trees, so quick reloading wasn't an issue. Indeed, we didn't even worry about what was on the other side because they were colossal, thick trees, and I didn't think any projectile could possibly go through one. Of course, if we had missed the tree at which we were aiming, it might have been disastrous. But there were more trees behind those.

After a while our shoulders were really getting eaten up with the recoil, because these rifles really kick. Then Mrs. Bingham came out and said, "Boys, it's time for you to do something else." She didn't get mad or blow her top or yell at us. Most parents would have gotten outraged at these young teenagers out in the yard discharging heavy African rifles. She was always very level about things, though. Her manner of speaking implied that you would not think of *not* doing what she had suggested. Jonathan and I returned them to the attic, and that was our adventure for the day.

During my high school years that was the only time that I fired a rifle other than the .22 at St. John's shooting range. We probably should have been concerned about damage to our ears because the explosions were unbelievably loud. But we were indestructible teens and didn't worry about that when we were 15.

The unfortunate conclusion to this tale is that Jonathan Bingham wasn't bulletproof after all. As was reported in the *New York Times* on March 8, 1964, "Jonathan Worth Bingham, 21 years old, the son of the Louisville publisher, Barry Bingham, was killed accidentally at his parents' home at nearby Glenview. He was electrocuted when he touched a high-voltage wire at the top of a utility pole and fell about 20 feet to the

ground. The accident happened as he and some friends were trying to install electrical wiring in an old barn. The victim was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Bingham.”

I heard about Jonathan’s death occurred when I was in the Army, and it saddened me greatly because he was my companion on two memorable adventures.

4: I'm in the Army Now!



Caribou on the mountain...still to come

After two so-so years at Kenyon College, I was introduced by my father to Sgt. Willoughby, an Army recruiter, and I signed up for a three-year hitch; on July 5, 1962, I was inducted. It was a good move and provided me with some focus and direction. Plus, it allowed me to master some new weaponry, courtesy of the U.S. armed forces.

Leaving Louisville, I traveled by bus to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina for eight weeks of basic training. In the middle of the summertime, the hill country of central South Carolina near Columbia is the hottest place on God's green earth. After running up and down sand hills for two months, I had never been

in better physical condition.

As for weapons instruction I first trained on the M1 rifle, which uses a .30.06 Springfield cartridge; that was enjoyable. Also known as the Garand, the M1 was the standard infantry rifle used in World War II and the Korean War. Produced from 1934 to 1957, some were even around in Vietnam. Gas operated with a rotating bolt, its effective range was about 500 yards; we could shoot 16 rounds per minute with its eight-round clip, including one reload.

Some military instructors said it was better to have NO prior firearms experience because then you didn't have any bad habits to un-learn. But I believe I had fairly good practices because of my father's instruction and the shooting range at St. John's. The U.S. military marksmanship qualification badges are awarded in three grades; from highest to lowest, they are: expert, sharpshooter, and marksman. In basic training I shot as well as one could, making expert.

In the Army I also trained on the M1911 .45 caliber semi-automatic handgun. This classic military handgun, designed by John Browning, is a single-action, semi-automatic, magazine-fed, recoil-operated pistol chambered for the .45 ACP cartridge. It was the standard-issue sidearm for the U. S. Armed Forces from 1911 to 1985. The .45 has only had eight shots, whereas the Beretta M9 that replaced it has at least 15.

In my training I had no involvement with machine guns, and I managed to avoid the well-known exercise where everyone was required to crawl on their bellies under machine gun fire with live rounds going overhead. They had us all believing it was just inches above our heads, and if someone stood up, they would be shot. However, I am 100% certain they were aiming much higher than six feet because the Army did not

want to mow down its recruits. And for all I know, they were just blanks making a lot of loud noise. I wiggled out of that experience because I was on fire duty and missed that training day. Thankfully, no one ordered a special re-do for me.

Army basic training certainly didn't help my hearing later in life. There were a couple of recruits who complained that their ears hurt after weapons practice. Our drill sergeant, an old WW II vet, had zero sympathy. He replied, "Well, if you don't like it, you know those candy-ass filtered cigarettes you smoke? You can put the filters in your ears." Back then If you didn't smoke Camels or Lucky Strikes, you got no respect.

But shooting an M-1 on the range could be loud—and repetitive! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! Not using ear defenders was dumb, and my hearing suffered as a result. Flying small planes, especially with the windows open, didn't help my ears either. The engines on a DC-3, situated right next to the cockpit, are also extremely noisy. No doubt those are some of the reasons that I just received new hearing aids from the Veterans Administration.

While in basic training I underwent a series of tests to determine my proficiencies. The results showed that I had excellent language aptitude—that would have shocked my Latin and French teachers in high school. It certainly surprised me.

We who qualified were sent to the Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey in California. The Language School would soon be in the process of transitioning to becoming the Defense Language Institute, West Coast Branch. In any event, since the German class I was assigned to wasn't starting for two months, I worked in a warehouse doing pretty much nothing until classes resumed. Easy duty in 1963.

This was early in the Vietnam War when that conflict was

just starting to heat up. On our first day of class, one of our instructors addressed us. He told us that we could put forth effort to study and learn our assigned foreign language, or we could go across Monterey Bay to Fort Ord for training in a combat infantry outfit and get shot at in Vietnam. “The choice is yours,” he concluded. An easy one for me to make.

The major in charge of the warehouse once recruited a group of volunteers to work at the Monterey Sports Car Championship, which had just been revived after a five-year hiatus. If the Major said you wanted to volunteer, you volunteered. Located near the army base, that event was a lot of fun because we were able to watch all the newest, hottest cars, such as the Chuck Parsons’ Lotus 23 Ford which won that year.

Six months later when I successfully completed Army Language School, my military occupation specialty became Interpreter/Translator, and I was assigned to Germany for two years. At that point, my fluency in German was superior.

On the move again, my Army buddies and I were sent to the National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters at Ft. Meade, Maryland for a month-long course. We learned about maintaining security in a foreign country and what our language training would be used for, in addition to tape recorder and recording machine operation. It was clerk-typist work but would become part of our daily routine once overseas.

Back then NSA headquarters was a huge building that was referred to as “Disneyland East.” It was the epicenter of our country’s global monitoring efforts—the agency that intercepted all types of communications from all over the world, not to mention Interplanetary transmissions. They were not spy-agency-active like our Central Intelligence Agency, but they were extremely security conscious. You weren’t allowed to say

anything—*anything*—about your duties or assignment. You were limited to the one floor you could access. All the security rules and regulations made our training there uniquely interesting.

Forty years later when I drove past the NSA complex at Ft. Meade, the number of buildings had grown immensely. The NSA is still responsible for foreign and domestic intelligence and counterintelligence gathering worldwide, plus the protection of U.S. communications networks and information systems. This is accomplished by a variety of clandestine measures. In plain words, they can easily intercept my personal telephone calls, as well as Putin's.

Arriving in Germany after a terrible week on a troopship, I learned that I was still under the operational control of the NSA. Assigned to the border area, I spent my time monitoring East German radio transmissions. Gratefully, I was able to visit some of my mother's relatives while I was there. All things considered, an excellent assignment.

During my Army years I took no part in any hunting in Europe. I wish I had done so in Germany because there's a great tradition of hunting—a very formal tradition—in that country. To obtain a German hunting license, you must pass a rigorous examination—you don't just slap \$3.00 down on the counter at Walmart. In addition to passing exams, you must also show that you know the responsibilities of hunting and how to break down your weapon, clean it, take it apart, and other mechanics. There were a couple of guys in our unit who qualified to hunt through the German training classes. Being German linguists, they knew the language, so that was no problem.

I wish I had taken Army Airborne training too, but I didn't end up on that list; however, I did make one parachute jump as

a civilian. One of the guys in my German classes was a Sergeant First Class and World War II veteran who had parachuted into France on D-Day nineteen years earlier. He was always referring to the rest of us as straight-legged candy asses and questioning our manhood since we had never jumped out of an airplane. As a result, several of us went over to Fort Ord and joined a parachute club where we underwent the civilian version of Army jump training. We learned that landing “straight-legged” meant your energy upon hitting the ground could only be dissipated by breaking bones. Although I only jumped once, I was no longer a straight-legged candy ass!

It was not unusual for a distinguished veteran to join us in class. In fact, there was a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Captain Hocker, who was taking German too. I had learned about West Point from my cousin, Tinsley White Rucker, who graduated from there and did a couple of tours in Vietnam where he commanded long-range patrols. He eventually became an Army physician and retired as a Colonel.

In July 1965, my Army hitch was up, and I was honorably discharged. However, I stayed in Germany for a couple of months, just driving around and visiting various friends and relatives. Although I wasn’t supposed to go to Berlin because I had a super-high security clearance, I did so anyway. Theoretically, my Army duties involved clandestine activities, and the East Germans were known to kidnap people. However, I knew that would be the nearest I would come to Berlin, so I took a chance. Unlike most GIs, I had a passport, so I went as a civilian, taking a train and staying there a few days.

That Berlin was quite different from the one that my wife and I visited in 2019, long after the reunification of East and West Germany and the demolition of the Berlin Wall.

5: The Turks and Caicos Islands

After my Army hitch, I didn't do any hunting or shooting for many years. But I did learn how to fly an airplane.

By the time I returned to the U.S., my family had moved to Virginia; there I met one of my father's friends, a pilot-captain for United Airlines. Inspired by his story of short working hours and high pay, I decided to attend flight school training in Manassas, Virginia while enrolled in night school at the University of Maryland.

I qualified for my multi-engine rating on a very unusual airplane—the Champion 402 Lancer, a twin-engine trainer produced by Champion Aircraft; basically it's a high-wing monoplane with wing-mounted engines. The Lancer seats two in a tandem configuration with dual flight controls; the pilot is in command with the student pilot occupying the front seat. Produced in 1963, only a few dozen Lancers were built due to criticisms of their flight performance.

For years my memory played tricks on me—I thought I had only imagined flying the Lancer. Then I found my old log books and, sure enough, they indicated three hours of flight time in the Lancer at Prince George's Airpark in Friendly, Maryland in 1966; my flight examiner was distinctly unenthusiastic about the idea. However, the Lancer was the cheapest way for me to acquire a multiengine rating.

Since then, I hadn't met anyone else who had ever flown one. But in a recent email, Barry Schiff, Chairman of the AOPA Foundation Legacy Society, stated, "We are members of an elite

club, those few who have flown and thankfully survived flying a Lancer.” Indeed. As of March 2019, only nine Lancers remained on the FAA registry.

From Maryland my travels led me to the Turks and Caicos Islands, an archipelago of about 40 low-lying coral islands in the Atlantic Ocean south of the Bahamas, for many adventures from 1966-1976. The story of my Turks and Caicos years cannot be complete without the mention of my former boss and colleague Fritz Ludington, the gentleman who started the development in the Islands. Please check out these stories of my flying everything from Cessna 180s to DC-3s in the West Indies in my book *Coming in for a Landing: Ten Years Flying in the Islands*.

I had become very friendly with the Islands’ Chief Magistrate, Finbar Dempsey. An Irishman, he and his wife Ann had lived there since arriving in 1964. Finbar and I bumped into each other in Grand Turk one day in December 1967, and he casually mentioned that his sister-in-law was coming to town, and maybe I’d like to meet her. Not having seen any girls in quite a while, I took him up on his kind suggestion.

Finbar threw a party and, as usual, I whizzed over there in my Twin Bonanza, parked it, and walked up the road to his house. As long as I live, I will never forget the moment that I stepped into his kitchen and beheld this beautiful girl in a yellow bikini making sweet and sour pork. She was my future wife, Noreen Theresa Smythe, from Dublin, Ireland. Born in Limerick and raised in Ennis, County Clare, she was a bright, intelligent, attractive, original Irish lass; she worked as a stewardess for Aer Lingus. A whirlwind courtship ensued, followed by my proposal of marriage.

Not long after, through a ham radio operator in Alexandra,

Virginia, I informed my parents that I was in love with a wonderful woman whom I wished to marry. My parents later visited Noreen and me in the Islands. Everybody met each other, they all approved, and the marriage was on!

Our engagement was announced officially on May 16, 1968, in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*: “Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Fannan Smythe of Ennis, County Clare, Ireland, announce the engagement of their daughter, Miss Noreen Theresa Smythe, to Mr. Embry Cobb Rucker, Jr., of South Caicos, British West Indies, son of the Rev. and Mrs. Embry Cobb Rucker of Alexandria, Va., formerly of Louisville.” My future father-in-law’s name should have read “Flannan.”

Noreen kept me well-grounded with her eye-rolling reactions to some of my ideas. At one point, I started planning a round-the-world trip in a DC-3. This included installing spare beds and carrying a spare engine. But after figuring out the total amount of fuel needed, Noreen helped me scrap that scheme. It would have been fun, but way too expensive.

I did a lot of fishing in the Turks and Caicos, a British Overseas Territory, but I did not shoot or hunt for those 10 years. Although I had missed Queen Elizabeth’s visit in early 1966, Noreen and I did meet the Prince of Wales—now King Charles III—when he officially visited the Turks and Caicos in 1973. We attended a very casual dinner for him at the home of Scottish friends Robin and Sheila Laing; I was the only Yank there.

For personal protection I owned a .380 semi-automatic handgun, which was illegal there. When I was leaving to return for good to the States with Noreen and children Siofra and Embry III in 1976, I couldn’t bring it back into the U.S. through Customs, and I surely didn’t want to pass it on to anyone on the Island. If I did so and someone committed a crime with it, word

would get around that it was mine, and there would be trouble. So, I climbed a cliff on the north end of Grand Turk, and threw it in the ocean, along with a couple of boxes of ammunition. It really rankled me to dispose of it that way, but it was the only thing I could do with it.

As we prepared to leave the Islands on which I had devoted so much time and energy, I received an unexpected honor—the Turks and Caicos Islands Medal. Engraved “EMBRY RUCKER 1967-1976” on one side, it was presented to me without fanfare or special ceremony. The medal was awarded to recognize my service with distinction in the field of aviation, especially for my accomplishments in the Islands during my ten years flying there.

6: Welcome to Hunting in Canada



A warthog I took in 1990—third shot was a charm!

When my family and I left the Islands and returned to the United States, we lived in Virginia until returning to Louisville in 1977. My father had asked if I was interested in taking over the business that he had founded and managed—Champion Wood Products in Jeffersonville Indiana. His business plan involved manufacturing wood parts for the kitchen cabinet industry. I decided to give it a shot, and Noreen called the movers again.

In a little less than two years I succeeded in turning Champion's financial fortunes around to the extent that we were able to acquire another company in August 1979.

During the regular course of business, I was buying a

significant amount of lumber from Northland Corporation, owned and operated by Jon and Orn Gudmundsson, Sr. and headquartered in LaGrange, Kentucky. Northland was an intermediate processor and distributor of hardwood lumber; their products were distributed throughout the United States and internationally.

Northland had an interesting background. It was founded in 1964 by their father, Jon Sig Gudmundsson, Sr. (1921-2004), who named the company in honor of his native Iceland. The brief story is that one of their ancestors, Porninnr Karlsefni, led the Viking settlement in the New World. Later, according to the Norse Sagas, he sailed to Norway and traded the carved maple prow of his ship, made in Vinland, the coastal area of North America explored by Vikings, to a German merchant for ½ a mark of gold in what is likely the first written account of an American hardwood export to Europe.

Jon Sig Gudmundsson had served as a Consul of Iceland and was awarded the Order of the Falcon from Iceland's President in 1996 for fostering relations between the United States and Iceland. He had come from Iceland to work for the MacLeans in their veneer and lumber mill. Angus MacLean owned the Wood-Mosaic Corporation in Louisville's Highland Park neighborhood; he was the son of the founder of that major business, which began in New York in 1883. Jon Sig eventually became president of Wood-Mosaic Corporation. Angus had four sons and two daughters, Lizzie and Joanie, the latter of whom I will introduce later.

In one of my key life-moments, his sons Jon and Orn asked me one day if I wanted to go duck and goose hunting with them. Never having done so and knowing little about it, I immediately answered, "Sure, I'd love to!" After they left, I worried about

what I had gotten myself into. However, I knew that I needed a shotgun if I was going to shoot geese or duck.

My first stop was the Oakwood sporting goods and gun shop in Middletown, a Louisville suburb. Established in 1952 by an employee who was in charge of guns at the iconic Sutcliffe's Sporting Goods in downtown Louisville, it used to be called simply, "the Oakwood." When it was sold to Keith Williams, whom I knew socially, the store became Oakwood Guns, Etc.

Because I might only need it one time, I didn't want to pay very much, so I bought a used double-barreled shotgun. Keith advised, "You're going to be a lot better off if you get a semi-automatic, it'll shoot three shells, blah, blah, blah." Turning a deaf ear, I replied. "I'll just take the old-fashioned kind with two barrels." Sadly, Oakwood, the oldest gun store in Louisville, permanently closed during the pandemic.

With my shotgun and ammunition, I drove off with the Gudmundssons, who proved to be very friendly and helpful throughout this new experience. We traveled about seven hours to a club to which they belonged in Ontario's countryside, about an hour from Detroit. On the last leg of the journey to Walpole Island, we had to take a ferry boat to reach the club, located on an Indian reservation.

The Gudmundssons were quite jovial and always playing jokes on visitors. Charlie, one of their new guests, once asked, "How does the ferry get to the other side?" I could see the Gudmundssons giving each other some special looks, and one finally said with a perfectly straight face, "Well, there's a cable underneath the river, and it winds up on the north side and pulls the ferry over." The target of the prank merely replied, "Oh, okay." For years Charlie accepted that explanation, discounting the

reality that it was just an ordinary ferry boat powered by an engine and propellor.

The Ojibwa and Pottawattamie Indian tribes, sub-branches of the Algonquins, had granted the hunting rights on Walpole Island to several lessees. Our headquarters was the Walpole Island Rod and Gun Club, a membership club in a log structure that had been built around the turn of the twentieth century by Christopher Columbus Smith (1861-1939), the founder of Chris-Craft Corporation, who had become interested in boating at an early age.

Chris Smith built his first wooden boat at the age of 13, and he also whittled and sold hundreds of wooden duck decoys. Living in an area abundant with fish and game, he and older brother Hank fished and hunted along the banks of the St. Clair River, becoming guides for recreational hunters from Detroit, 32 miles away. As teenagers, they built duck boats to rent to vacationing sportsmen and for friends upon request. Eventually their boat manufacturing business became quite profitable.

With a keen desire to do plenty of duck hunting, Chris wanted someplace for his friends to visit; so, he had this club building constructed, along with dams to contain water in the marsh. No doubt he spent a fortune on the setup. This particular parcel has been leased as a duck-hunting club ever since.

The Indians were excellent hosts and quite friendly to their guests. They staffed the place, cooked for us, and acted as guides. Built in the 1920s, the building itself was a five-bedroom cabin, fashioned from machine-cut—not rough-cut—logs. It was very unassuming and looked more like a double-wide trailer. Half the membership was from Toronto and, because of the Gudmundssons, half from Louisville.

I was somewhat anxious about this adventure. Although my

vision was good—I didn't require eyewear—I hadn't shot a fire-arm since I was in the Army. This hunting would be with a shotgun, about which I knew little, except for the 16-gauge, single-barrel days of my youth.

Gratefully to me, the Gudmundssons didn't laugh when they saw my shotgun; they just thought that I was an old-fashioned guy. In the field, I shot fairly well, taking a few birds—not a huge number, but enough to be satisfied with myself. The limit was only six ducks a day.

That first trip to Walpole was an intense learning experience for me, and the Gudmundssons were good teachers. They stressed that the duck was moving about 40 mph, and that meant that my gun had to be moving at 40 mph and sighted ahead of the duck; in other words, to lead it.

At the time, I also didn't know anything about blinds or decoys. Blinds are camouflaged places that allow a hunter to be concealed while waiting to shoot; at Walpole, ours were composed of reeds in the water. Our mostly plastic decoys—a few were carved from wood—resembled real waterfowl. Wild ducks see a decoy duck and think, "Oh, there's Uncle George and his family, let's stop in and see them." Then, BOOM! BOOM!

Out in the marsh the early morning sunrises were quite picturesque, with the sun coming up over the lake, highlighting the many colors reflecting off the water. Then we would hear the ducks and geese calling from different locations as they fed. It was pleasurable to both the eye and ear.

At night our large group—which usually included Louisville friends Billy Harrison and Richard Buddeke—would join together and eat a delicious supper, prepared by one of the Indian women cooks. Sometimes we would eat what we shot; on one day, that meant five geese, which is a lot of goose to eat. It

helped that, as we say in Ireland, “We had drink taken.” As for alcoholic beverages, bourbon was the drink of choice, perhaps some wine too. Then we’d rise at 6:00 A.M. to shoot again.

Walpole Island is bordered by Lake St. Clair, commonly called the “little Great Lake,” a freshwater lake situated between Ontario and Michigan. The lake connects with both Lake Erie to the south and Lake Huron to the north. That area has been called a “duck mecca” for a variety of reasons: The deepest part of the Lake is about eight feet; it’s directly on a main staging area for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl in their south migration in the fall and their north migration in the spring; and there are many marshes and grain fields nearby. The benefit of hunting a managed marsh is that it increased our chances for success.

The marsh is comprised of 1600 acres of natural wetlands habitat, bounded on the east coast by Goose Lake and on the west by Chematogan Channel. In the marsh, there are 26 duck hunting ponds and six marsh sanctuaries. Also on site are three field ponds, flooded cornfields, two field sanctuaries and a small staging area for dove shooting. In addition, the St. Clair region is the only location in North America where waterfowl appear from both the Mississippi Flyway and the Atlantic Flyway.

During my first trip there, I suddenly glimpsed an enormous ocean-going freighter on the lake, knowing perfectly well it must be drawing more than eight feet of water. I was quite shocked and asked myself, “Am I seeing things? How can this be taking place?” The mystery was solved when I learned that a 27-foot deep navigation channel was cut through the middle of the lake. Made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to accommodate those large freighters which travel south toward the Detroit River.

My travels to Canada would usually consist of two-day trips to Walpole. The reason for that short time frame was the regulation in Canada about bringing ducks or geese back to the United States. The limit in Canada was six ducks and three geese, and we were only allowed to bring back two days' shooting limit. There was no sense in staying longer than that, unless we planned to eat everything we shot, which was not an option. They're tasty, but the thought of eating ducks and geese for days on end was not gastronomically appealing.

Of course, we were not assured of taking home the maximum number of waterfowl; it was not like shooting "ducks in a barrel," to revise an old cliché that doesn't make much sense in the first place. Our success depended greatly on our shooting ability and the weather. Ducks and geese typically would not fly on a bright, sunny day; overcast, rainy days were the best because they gave us more targets. Duck hunters always hope for cold, rainy, windy weather because ducks are out looking for food. Whether we would shoot skillfully and accurately was also uncertain. Indeed, we were not always proficient enough to take the limit.

Because I always brought the waterfowl back to Louisville, it was necessary to stop at the United States customs center to undergo inspection and approval, whether we came by way of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel or the Ambassador Bridge. There's a government form for importing goods—and that document is typically used by people who are importing things like truckloads of onions or brand new cars—not just 12 dead ducks. So, we would fill out the importation form and the officials would inspect what we had, each and every time. To complicate the process, we had to leave at least one wing with feathers attached so they could determine the species—black duck,

mallard, teal, or whatever. Sometimes we'd have an agent who was excited about inspecting, but rarely. Usually, the customs officials had no clue what we were doing. They peppered us with silly questions like, "You all are what? Duck hunters? We got no ducks in Michigan?" Just regular guys getting bored.

Genuinely enjoying the experiences I had at Walpole as a guest of the Gudmundssons, I made the decision to join the club myself so that I could accompany my own customers there. It was perfect for those avid hunters looking for an exclusive hunting situation at a reasonable price.

This all began in 1978, when I was 37 years old. Most of the guys I hunted with at Walpole had been duck hunting since they were kids, so I learned much from them. I enjoyed sharing camaraderie with the other hunters, I was challenged by the many shooting skills to be mastered, and I liked eating duck, too.

I regularly traveled to Walpole until 2010 when I chose a different destination. Our new hunting venue was a well-operated, thousand-acre family farm that had been in operation for a hundred years. It consisted of extremely rich, dark, black soil on Lake St. Clair. The owners grew corn, onions—quite large—carrots, and other root vegetables. At some point they built several blinds in the cornfields along the marshy areas. It made for outstanding waterfowl hunting. The living quarters consisted of a three-story house with a dozen bedrooms.

In 2020 they decided they weren't going to continue to operate their hunting business. Perhaps it was pandemic-related; or maybe the rumor was true that some wealthy Detroit businessman paid a large enough retainer to reserve it exclusively whenever he wanted to shoot.

7: Hunting and Shooting in Kentucky

Returning to Louisville from that first venture north, I put off buying a new shotgun, preferring to stick with my double-barrel 12-gauge. Three years later its stock cracked, maybe because I was using two-ounce lead #4 shot—too powerful for the gun. That shotgun kicked, by golly! Of course, it was 50 years old, too.

After that gun's demise I returned to the Oakwood and bought a single-barrel, semi-automatic, Browning 12-gauge shotgun that would fire three shots one after the other. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! It actually was built to fire five rounds, but to comply with U.S. and Canadian waterfowl hunting regulations, a plug was installed to prevent the last two from firing. Noreen took notice of this activity and called it my new obsession. As usual she was unmistakably correct.

I learned a lot about gauges and weaponry measurements. Gauge is most commonly used today in reference to shotguns, though historically it has also been used to describe large double rifles (such as the Bingham's'), which were made in several calibers during their heyday in the 1880s when originally loaded with black powder cartridges. These very large rifles, commonly called "elephant guns," were intended for use primarily in Africa and Asia for hunting large, dangerous game.

A shotgun will only shoot shells of the same gauge. The smaller the gauge number, the larger the shotgun bore—the empty interior space in a gun barrel through which the ammunition is pushed through when a gun fires. Gauge is determined

by the number of lead balls of a size equal to the approximate diameter of the bore that it takes to weigh one pound. Thus, it would take 12 lead balls with the same diameter as a 12-gauge shotgun bore to weigh one pound. The 10-gauge is quite large, then the 12, 16, 20, and 28. The 28-gauge is popular for my quail and dove shooting when I want to carry a light gun that is effective.

A hunter can get a harder-hitting shot at a greater effective distance with a 12-gauge rather than a 20-gauge, because a 12-gauge shotgun load is heavier and delivers more power than 20-gauge ammo. As a result, a 12-gauge is typically more effective to take larger game. The trade-off for that power is that 12-gauge shotguns have more recoil than 20-gauge and the firearm itself is heavier to carry.

And then there's my .410 shotgun; that's the actual measurement—it's .41 inch of the diameter of the bullet; the .410 is the only exception to the gauge designation for shotguns. Its bore diameter is approximately equal to 67½ gauge.

Since my first trip to Walpole, I have used shotguns to hunt doves and other birds throughout Kentucky annually.

During many dove seasons in September, I have joined the Gudmundssons at various sites in the Jefferson and Oldham County region. Early on through these avid hunting friends, I started receiving invitations to other local dove hunts. I came to know William "Hoke" Camp (1924-2021), the president of the Shippers Supply Company, who owned Cedar Hill Farm near Crestwood in Oldham County. A decorated combat infantryman, he served in World War II, graduated from the University of Virginia, and was a true Kentucky gentleman. (Coincidentally, Cedar Hill Farm is also the name of a farm that my great-great grandfather owned in Louisville, Jefferson County,

Georgia. General Sherman ordered his men to burn everything on it during his “March to the Sea” in 1864.)

Hoke’s son Henry, almost 20 years younger than me, is a more active hunter than was his father; I regularly go quail hunting with Henry.

My farm-owning friends typically plant sunflowers on a five-acre piece of land; with the emergence of doves at the end of August (hopefully), they chop the sunflower heads down to provide seeds to attract doves. This is an accepted agrarian practice and does not constitute baiting, which is strictly illegal.

My friends and I mainly hunt mourning doves in Kentucky. Geese don’t migrate as much as in past times; they will remain in various locations around Louisville, such as Cave Hill Cemetery, Beargrass Creek by Home Depot in St. Matthews, the marshland next to Bowling Boulevard, and near U.S. 42 in Prospect. Some stay here year-round because there’s enough to eat and the weather is reasonable.

My hunting agenda for September 2022 typified my fall activities over the years.

September 1 was opening day. Many older hunters don’t like getting up at 5:00 A.M., but by 7:00 A.M. I was in Elizabeth, Indiana with 20 others. For years, Richard Buddeke has leased eight acres in Elizabeth which are planted with sunflowers by the farmer-owner, who then mows it in a timely manner—no baiting involved. Buddeke and Mike Grisanti entertain friends and relatives in this manner. My only gripe is that the online application for an Indiana hunting license is not user-friendly and needs improvement.

That afternoon it was Eli Brown’s place in Bloomfield, Kentucky, where it was hotter than hell. You’re able to shoot twice as many birds in one day by being licensed in two states.

The next day I went to Paul Keith's farm in Shelby County; maybe 12 people were there for an enjoyable dove hunt. Two days later I joined 20 people at Henry Camp's farm; he usually has an outstanding hunt, but for some reason the doves were not flying this time—maybe they didn't like his sunflowers. I picked a bad spot to shoot and didn't get many; but he served an excellent meal afterwards.

Captain Johnson, the majordomo of the Pendennis Club, is one of the few Blacks I've seen involved in local hunting and bird shooting. He has accompanied me several times to shoot doves in Elizabeth and appeared to enjoy it. We always had a good time and shot a few birds.

Several times in September I was joined by Neville Blake-more and Billy Harrison, two good friends. Many of us ordinarily go to Al Horton's farm but his sunflowers were up late, so he looked to be several weeks behind. The season goes into October, plus periods in November, December, and January, for a total of 90 days. The first couple shoots have good turnouts, then attendance tails off—just the true believers after that.

Kentucky also offers a brief season for early wood duck and teal in September. Regular duck season opens in late November, on and off through January.

Although I've shot ducks all over the world, I haven't shot any locally for a few years. But I enjoy doing so at Deer Creek Lodge in Western Kentucky. Located in Sebree in Webster County, it's a nice arrangement. For years it was a shooting preserve for quail and pheasants only; then a Cuban family connected to the nursery business bought it, renovated the comfortable lodge—which now has large rooms and excellent food—and created a large lake to attract ducks.

In the last 15 years I've taken up quail hunting, at times in

the wild in Texas, at other times in Western Kentucky and Eastern Tennessee on “early release” preserves. That means that pen-raised quail and pheasants are released early in the summer so they’re basically wild by the time the season starts. Mainly due to habitat problems, wild quail hunting has almost ceased to exist except in parts of Oklahoma and Texas.

Among the challenges inherent in shooting moving targets are hard-to-see small birds flying helter-skelter. As I have aged my vision has worsened in a normal progression. Since about 2010 I have used bifocal lenses for reading and distance. Since I need protective glasses when I hunt, I make sure they match my eyeglass prescription for distance only. I don’t want bifocal protective eyewear because that would affect my shooting ability. For example, if I’m sighting a bird in the upper part of a bifocal lens, and it suddenly flies down to the lower part, the whole image changes and becomes confusing. In the field, I always carry a pair of over-the-counter “cheaters” if my close vision is needed.

It’s crazy that I pay only \$5.00 for a senior citizen hunting license. Maybe that’s supposed to encourage people to buy one, but it shouldn’t be that cheap. They’ve already paid for an expensive firearm; even a box of shells now costs \$15.00. Maybe raise the license fee to \$30.00 for a resident, more for a non-resident. However, it has become easier to buy one. Now I can purchase it online; back in the day, I had to make a trip to Walmart, a gun shop, or the local hardware store. Very few brick and mortar stores still sell licenses.

The day this chapter was written, we ate doves, taken last season and frozen. They are very good eating, but should be prepared very rare since overcooking dries them out.

8: Safari to Africa



Noreen and I with the eland taken with the help of Shorty the tracker

By 1988 I was well established in the bird-hunting community as a regular at Walpole and as a dove hunter locally. Winged creatures had been my only quarry.

Throughout my life I have been an active reader; as a youth I had read the stories in *The Jungle Book* by Kipling, featuring its main character Mowgli, raised by wolves. Those boyhood stories stimulated my interest in travel and adventure.

Several Ernest Hemingway books had also piqued my interest. Published in 1935, *Green Hills of Africa* was a popular nonfiction account of a monthlong hunting safari that Hemingway and his wife took in East Africa. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and other Stories* was a 1961 collection of short stories by

Hemingway, and its centerpiece was an African hunting tale. *Snows* had been made into a movie starring Gregory Peck in 1952—albeit with a completely different ending.

In 1980 I began noticing increasing references to hunting in Africa and other foreign locales in the books and periodicals that I read. I was always aware of big game hunting in Africa, but I didn't realize it was still taking place to the extent it was.

In one hunting magazine, I saw a reference to an organization called Safari Club International (SCI). After some investigation I joined that group, founded in 1973, and began to receive their bimonthly magazine *Safari*—and it introduced me to a whole new world. "Safari" is a Swahili word of Arabic origin, originally meaning "an expedition and all that pertains to it."

SCI is dedicated to protecting the freedom to hunt. Currently, it has more than 50,000 members and 180 local chapters worldwide. Its members agree to abide by the organization's code of ethics, which includes making a positive contribution to wildlife and ecosystems, complying with game laws, and assisting game and fish officers.

Even the advertisements in *Safari* and other publications were fascinating to me. One ad in a catalogue led me to phone a sporting goods employee in Memphis who was running its travel section and arranging foreign hunting trips. He said he had the perfect place to hunt if I was interested in Africa. He had just returned from the Lemco Ranch, a huge, million-acre farm, formerly owned by Liebig's, a noted Anglo-Dutch company in Zimbabwe. Liebig sold food and meat products under the LEMCO brand name, which stood for "Liebig's Extract of Meat Company."

Liebig's cattle ranch in Zimbabwe was one of the largest in

Africa. Situated in southwestern Matabeleland, it was originally established in the then-Southern Rhodesian lowveld in the 1930s by the cattle ranching family of Baron Justus von Liebig, supplier of canned “bully beef” to World War II armies, and the inventor of the Oxo bouillon cube. To say that Liebig was wealthy would be an understatement. One of the successors to LEMCO after Liebig sold it was Unilever P.L.C., a giant, publicly-traded, British-Dutch consumer goods concern, which acquired it in 1984.

Lemco Ranch had not been commercially hunted in many decades; however, by 1986, one of its employees had established safari hunting on the farm and began to advertise for paying hunters. My Memphis contact had just returned from participating in year one of that safari venture. He also had obtained a concession from Lemco to represent it in the United States. He mailed me information, and we talked on the phone several times. Quite an “old school” communication scenario since there was no internet or world wide web at that time.

My Memphis connection advised me to contact Butch Walker at Lemco Ranch. In turn, Butch and I traded many letters in which I asked questions, and he supplied the answers; it took at least two weeks for each letter to reach its destination. His responses to my inquiries were straightforward as he promised an exciting experience hunting for all manner of “plains game” such as antelope and gazelle, plus leopard. Any non-dangerous game species in Africa may be referred to as plains game, quite distinct from dangerous game such as crocodile, hippopotamus, and the “Big Five”—lion, elephant, rhinoceros, Cape buffalo and leopard.

With all this in mind at the age of 46, I decided to schedule an African hunting safari! A bird-shooter going straight to

Africa to hunt big game is analogous to jumping from the high school football team directly to the NFL. Going from Walpole to Zimbabwe is just not done.

When I finally—and hesitantly—informed Noreen that I truly wanted to go hunting in Africa, she looked at me like I lost my marbles. She knew I was enjoying myself at duck and dove hunts but was surprised that I suddenly wanted to take her on an African safari. She commented that it was a little strange, so we talked, and I explained how much it meant to me and what an adventure it would be for the two of us. Being the loving, supportive wife that she was, Noreen agreed and said, “Sure, let’s go, it’s something we’ll do once in a lifetime.” As you will learn, her estimate turned out to be totally inaccurate. In any event, we made a reservation to go to Lemco Ranch. Our excursion to the so-called “Dark Continent” would be for two weeks, plus travel time. We were going on Safari!

To prepare for this adventure I devoured hunting books and magazines to determine what kind of rifle, clothing, boots, and other accessories I should take. One book that especially held my attention was the great elephant hunting book *Karamojo Safari* by W.D.M. Bell. It’s the story of Walter Bell’s epic journey into Uganda and Kenya in the 19th century when that area was still completely unknown to Western man. Although it was about 100 years after Bell’s trip, I acquired significant information from that volume.

My research showed that big game hunters preferred to use a .375 H&H caliber rifle or a bigger double-rifle. I decided to purchase a Mauser action .375, made by CZ in Czechoslovakia, along with the proper ammunition. How to pack it on an airplane, how many rounds of ammo I could legally take, what type of footwear was best for the terrain, and what type of

weather we should expect were some of the many details that I researched.

After cleaning my new rifle, I practiced on a regular basis, becoming used to the scope and making sure my aim was accurate as I visualized a giant elephant charging me.

Old school hunters such as the Bingham shot with a double rifle—actually two separate mechanisms with two triggers and the barrels side-by-side—similar to a double-barrel shotgun. The double rifle is preferred by many because it's an extremely fast second shot. BOOM! BOOM! Such rifles are made in several calibers; for my later African trips, I purchased a .470 Nitro Express, which was made in the 1920s in Bombay by John Manton and Son of England. More on that rifle later.

Much time, effort, and investigation went into our preparation; no doubt I became somewhat obsessive about research. Today, the same information—plus much more—can be found on Google® or seen on YouTube® in minutes. The internet has become a tremendous, indispensable aid to my hunting research. For example, just Google “Is there hunting in Nepal?” and it turns out there is, especially if you want to hunt blue sheep, the world's highest-dwelling large mammal, or Himalayan tahr, a large, goat-like, hoofed mammal. Both can be found at about 13,000 feet or more, at a cost beginning at \$25,000.

As for Noreen, she was avid in researching the climate and geography of Zimbabwe so she would be prepared for this novel adventure. We would be staying in huts built years ago, rather than sleeping in tents. Knowing that we'd be outside mostly, she purchased appropriate pants and shirts—khaki color—and some ankle-high boots that were recommended for the difficult walking that we may experience.

We were scheduled to depart from New York City on

South African Airways with the megacity Johannesburg—AKA “Joburg”—as our first destination. At the NYC airport we discovered that the plane was at the end of a lengthy corridor which contained only two airlines: El Al, the Israeli national carrier, and South African Airways, the state-owned flagship of South Africa. It suddenly occurred to us that their isolated placement was due to being attractive terrorist targets.

In spite of any foreboding caused by that realization, we had a great trip. Halfway there, the heavily-accented Afrikaner pilot told us that he had “zum gut news und zum bat news” for us; the bad news was that strong headwinds had lessened our fuel supply; however, we could land in Namibia for refueling. That’s what we did in the midst of our 16-hour, exhausting flight.

To overcome the jet lag effects of the lengthy flight through several time zones, we stayed for several days in Johannesburg, South Africa’s largest city and one of the largest urban areas in the world. We had flown from the top of North America to the bottom of Africa, and we expected our sleep and mobility to be affected.

We stayed in the comfortable, historic Carlton Hotel in the central business district downtown; the city itself appeared to be well-run, neat, and peaceful. This was 1988 when South Africa was still under apartheid rule. Apartheid (“apartness” in the language of Afrikaans—the Dutch-Germanic-inspired language spoken in South Africa, Namibia, and a few other countries) was the legislative system that had enforced segregationist policies against non-white citizens of South Africa since 1948. At that time we were not well-versed in South African politics and culture and had not heard of Nelson Mandela, who was detained in prison until 1990. He became President in 1994.

We knew that there had been some problems at the hotel in the past because it was a major symbol of “white power” in South Africa, but Noreen and I neither experienced nor detected any unrest. We were most surprised that the hotel seemed to be totally integrated. In the restaurant and common areas there was free association of Blacks and whites, both staff and guests, so apartheid did not appear rigorously enforced. It appeared that one of the major aspects of apartheid was maintaining legislative control over where people could live. Under its Group Areas Act, people of certain races were forced to live in designated areas.

After a few days we flew to Bulawayo Airport (renamed The Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo International Airport in 2001), where Butch Walker of Mazunga Safaris met us. Bulawayo is the second-largest city in Zimbabwe; only the nation’s capital city, Harare, is more populous. Bulawayo’s current population is officially 653,000, although the city council claims it’s 1.2 million. At the time we visited, it was similar in size to Louisville, but had a totally different landscape. Although there were no high rises or office buildings, many small factories and businesses were spread out over the vast urban area.

We finally met Butch Walker in person. His appearance was striking: a powerful-looking guy with huge, strong shoulders, and a large, round, balding head. He was of English descent but had been born in Zambia, known as Northern Rhodesia until 1964. His father had emigrated there to work in the copper mines after World War II. Butch grew up there and later moved to Rhodesia, which became the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980 after many years of civil conflict. He had once been a member of the British South Africa Police (BSAP), a paramilitary and police force based in Rhodesia; it was renamed the

Zimbabwe Republic Police after independence. During Butch's service as a BSAP officer, he met his wife, also on the force. The political history of that part of the continent is best described as chaotic and confusing.

It took several hours for Butch to drive us to Lemco Ranch, which appeared as huge as described. Driving in his Toyota Land Cruiser, we chatted about a variety of subjects and seemed to get along well. I reminded him that I had never hunted big game—not even deer—although I was familiar with goose and duck hunting. He agreed that it was highly unusual to come to Africa for one's first big game hunt. For most people, this would have been the culmination of years of hunting deer and other large animals in the United States and Europe. I knew that Butch was evaluating me closely because I was an unknown quantity and there were dangers involved. I didn't know what to expect either; I only knew what I had read in books and magazines.

In like manner I didn't have any preconceived idea of what the ranch would look like. When we arrived, Lemco didn't resemble a strange planet or foreign country—it looked like Texas! We couldn't see much forest and it was fairly dry, just like the typical Western ranch.

The ranch was interesting because it was divided into several different sections: one for crops, several for vegetables, and one reserved for cattle. Each area had a separate manager—all white Zimbabweans. Each manager lived in his own large farmhouse and oversaw the activity on 200,000 acres. Butch had worked on the ranch as a section manager before the hunting business began.

Butch is a personable fellow who has a great way with people and quite comfortable in his role as a "PH"—professional

hunter. Having personally hunted on the ranch, he knew that the hunting aspect could become hugely popular. In the past, only the directors of the company who periodically visited from London would hunt for a few days. He contended that a non-fenced hunting venue with much wild game would be attractive to American and European sportsmen. The managers agreed to give his idea a try; when I arrived, it was only the second year for commercial hunting.

He told many amusing stories about his experiences on the police force. He was an officer who strictly enforced the law at all times. One of his children told me that the whole family was in their car in Bulawayo once when they saw a man beating up a woman on the street. Butch stopped, confronted the man, and head-butted him! Butch had a huge skull, and the guy just dropped. The woman who was being assaulted was really happy about it. Although there might have been other ways to handle the situation, he preferred instant justice.

In Zimbabwe at that time, there were two major tribes, the Shona and the Ndebele, plus several smaller ones. Uniquely, Zimbabwe has 16 official languages, including sign language. The country's main languages are Shona, spoken by over 70% of the population, and Ndebele, spoken by roughly 20%. English is the country's common language, used in government, business, and school instruction. It is the first language of most white Zimbabweans, and the second for the majority of Black Zimbabweans. In the Lemco area, Butch spoke English and the local dialect; there was a blended language that everyone spoke that covered the basics and emergency situations. The trackers who assisted Butch knew a fair amount of English although their accents were sometimes hard to decipher; the longer I heard them, the better I understood. Perhaps my experience at

the Army Language School helped.

Butch's main vehicle was his Land Cruiser with a bed in the rear similar to a pickup truck. In addition to the standard front seat, there was a high bench behind the rear window from which a seated passenger could look out over the cab. That way, Butch could still make use of the entire bed to haul a large animal.

Occasionally Butch directed one of the trackers to drive, someone he knew and trusted for a long time—usually Shorty, who was about 40-years-old. Sometimes in the field, Noreen would sit on the high seat in back. Butch or Shorty would either drive or be on the bench with her, accompanied by another tracker.



A sizable greater kudu that I took on my first safari

Native Zimbabweans' tracking skills were legendary, including Shorty's. For example, he located a specific eland we had been seeking as it stood in the middle of a large herd. After

the herd cleared out, he found the eland's tracks, followed it through all the other tracks. He knew which way it was going by the way it leaned and made an impression in the soil—just from the depth of the imprint. It was incredible how he tracked that eland.

We took no sidearms on our trip, but I brought a shotgun because Butch told me there were ducks, geese, sandgrouse, and Swainson's frankolin (or spurfowl) we could hunt. Sandgrouse have small, pigeon-like heads and necks, but sturdy compact bodies and long, pointed wings. In the heat of Africa, they travel in large numbers and tend to move around a lot seeking shade and watering holes at sundown and sunrise. The fast-flying Swainson's francolin is a bird species which the Zimbabweans call the chikwari, and it is considered a delicacy by hunting enthusiasts. We were fortunate to do some bird hunting which provided us with some good eating.

Noreen really loved Zimbabwe with the new sights and adventures she was experiencing. She became good friends with Liz, Butch's wife; they were raising three children on the ranch. Noreen probably spent more time with Liz and the kids than in the field with us. Their oldest child, a 15-year-old daughter, was extremely interested in riding horses; with Noreen's background in riding, they were a great match. Butch owned several horses, so the daughter, Liz, and Noreen went riding several times. Noreen said it was fascinating to be riding and suddenly glimpse a zebra here or a kudu there. Although I advised her that a lion was a possibility too, Noreen was never armed during our stay.

Amazingly, Liz kept a young, caged leopard as a pet; one of the ranch employees had found it as a cub. When I asked Butch about that, he responded pessimistically and said they were

destined to get rid of it, somewhere, sometime. Keeping one in captivity was not good for the leopard or for humans. It was not the type of animal that adapted well to captivity.

The first day that Butch and I went out hunting, Noreen stayed in camp. We figured that would be less distracting for us, and less dangerous for her. As for the animals we would encounter, I didn't have the experience or judgment to determine if any particular one was worth taking, or how we would sneak up on it. This hunting experience was entirely unfamiliar to me.

On that first day, Butch surveyed a herd of wildebeest and pointed one out to me. From all my research, reading, and preparation, I knew where to shoot the animal to kill it instantly. We got down on our hands and knees and crept through the bush to get closer; it was hot, dirty work. Eventually we stopped and I sat on my butt, put the rifle on my knees, carefully aimed and squeezed the trigger. The wildebeest spun quickly and collapsed in a heap, scattering the herd around it. It was quite an experience.

The trackers—two or three usually traveled with us—quickly came along and gutted the animal. After they loaded it in the back of the Land Cruiser, we all returned to the ranch for lunch, and I informed Noreen that I was now officially a big game hunter.

It's vital to hunt in Africa under the direction of an experienced professional hunter. A PH is required to undergo rigorous training to become qualified and licensed. In the United States, such pros are referred to as guides or outfitters, and may not be as skilled and trained.

Butch and I were hunting during our second week when we came to a small hill; I mentioned to him that it must be a magnificent site early in the morning when the sun rose and all

the animals came to life on the plain below.

The next morning, he woke Noreen and me early and took us back to that hill to see the sunrise. By the time we arrived, Butch's cook and trackers had it all set up with a fire going and camp chairs facing east. We had breakfast while watching a stunningly beautiful sunrise. We saw the entire animal-filled plain come to life—it was a wonderful, amazing experience for us to behold that scene on our first visit to the continent. I told Butch that single day's experience was worth the entire fee that we paid him. It was a totally unexpected gesture of kindness and friendship. His action reflected the genuinely nice human being he is.

Although I didn't research the history, politics, and culture of Zimbabwe prior to my first safari, I did so before future trips. It was obvious that opportunities were not equal for Black Zimbabweans, although tribal influences became more significant as the power of British culture waned over time. There was a viable educational structure in place and many jobs available. The country had several main exports: coal, gold, much tobacco, and some diamonds. The economy was sound, and those in poverty were not starving, unlike circumstances today.

Ranch staff and I talked much about the Rhodesian Bush War, the civil conflict that raged between three competing forces from 1964 to 1979. (All my interactions with native Zimbabweans were filtered through Butch or the English-speaking ranch staff.) That war for independence resulted in the end of white minority rule in Rhodesia and the creation of Zimbabwe in 1980. All the managers and staff had been active in the Rhodesian Army which battled the military wing of Robert Mugabe's forces and the army of Joshua Nkomo's people's union. As I indicated earlier, the political landscape is always in

disarray. Right after independence, most people—both white and Black—were fairly happy with Mugabe, who had prevailed in the struggle. He was well educated, said the right things, and he attempted to unify all the country's factions. A large percentage of the population was white, and many farms, which were a key economic resource, were headed by white owners and managers. Zimbabwe, like Northern Rhodesia, was actually exporting food to other countries in Africa, in addition to much tobacco and coal. When Mugabe took the reins, it may have been the most economically stable country on the continent.



Cape Buffalo in Omay, first one I took with my double rifle

That has certainly changed over the years. Now, many people are starving in Zimbabwe, which struggles to produce enough food for its own citizens, even before the inflation crisis of 2022. Much changed under Mugabe, who served as Prime Minister or President from 1980 until he was ousted in a 2017 coup, two years before his death. He began by supporting reasonable changes; but then he became arrogant, convinced that

he alone knew how to save the country. Not taking responsibility for the country's downturn, he made so many foolish missteps with the economy that he needed a scapegoat for his failures and blamed it on the whites, the Brits, and any other convenient group. In 2000, impatient at the slow rate of land redistribution, he fostered hatred of whites and encouraged Black Zimbabweans to violently seize white-owned farms. These actions severely impacted food production, which led to famine, economic decline, and Western sanctions.

The current Zimbabwean economic downfall is shameful. Since my first safari almost 35 years ago, they have nearly ruined themselves economically. Their money is so devalued that they have issued notes in the sums of \$10 million and \$50 million! It illustrates an incompetent government gone mad.

In the late 1950s on a meager budget, the British oversaw the construction of Kariba Dam in the Zambezi River basin between Zambia and Zimbabwe. That created Lake Kariba whose hydropower was sufficient to generate electricity for both countries. However, in recent years rapidly declining water levels have led to a reduction in hydropower, and now the water level in the Kariba reservoir steadily remains just above the minimum for power generation. In addition, many structural defects that need repairs have been identified in the dam since 2014, not to mention the lack of routine maintenance.

That dam was a fantastic sight. One extremely primitive tribe—the Batonka—had been living and fishing for centuries near the river until the dam was constructed. When that area became a lake, they were moved up to higher ground. Since the relocation area didn't flood as often, it wasn't as fertile as their original bottomland. Thus, many tribespeople started working for safari camps, hunters, hotels, and other fishing and boating

businesses that sprung up nearby.

One relocated tribal woman was smoking a huge calabash gourd pipe, puffing away, when I recognized that illegal smell. Later I learned that the tribespeople were “grandfathered in” and allowed to continue their age-old tradition of smoking dagga, a native-grown marijuana; indeed, many were frequently stoned.

During my first hunting foray in Zimbabwe, I took a variety of antelope, some in very challenging circumstances. After the wildebeest, I shot a large, adult-male greater kudu, a species of African antelope over five feet tall. Butch insisted on targeting only the oldest and biggest horned animals that were past the breeding cycle—not the young bulls of breeding age; this aids in the conservation of the species.

In like manner, I shot several impalas, which are medium-sized, slender African antelope, known for their great leaping ability. The trackers and skinners were happy since the impala were used mostly as meat for the camp. I was also successful in taking an eland weighing about 700 pounds. The common eland, slow-footed but keen-jumping, is the second largest antelope in the world, just smaller than the giant eland.

I took one bush duiker. The grey common duiker is a small-to-medium-sized brown antelope native to sub-Saharan Africa and found in savannas. Duikers are very shy, elusive creatures with a fondness for dense cover; those that tend to live in more open areas are quick to disappear into thickets for protection.

Many of the animals that I saw were just wandering around unaware of human predators nearby. I could easily find something to track just by scanning the area with my binoculars. The difficult part was identifying an older one and getting close enough to shoot.

One day I shot a Southern warthog, a tough one with both upper and lower tusks. These wild members of the pig family can be quite dangerous if they are cornered. We were hunting for these ugly mammals when we happened upon one weighing about 100 pounds. Although it was standing still when I pulled the trigger, my first shot missed, and the warthog took off running. So, I swung my rifle like I would do for a bird, pulled the trigger and knocked it down, quite dead. I am sometimes better lucky than good.

Every night we were dining on whatever we shot that day, prepared over an open fire; that warthog was especially tasty. The cooks were continually amazing. One night, they prepared “impala Wellington” on an old refrigerator grill with an open flame.

However, the most prized trophy that I took during that safari was an African leopard, an unexpected feat. During my preparation I had never considered shooting a leopard because I knew the difficulties involved. I had read about hunters traveling to Africa three or four times for a leopard, but leaving without success. It was Butch’s suggestion to hunt the leopard. Apparently, they were attracted to Lemco because there was an abundance of prey—other wildlife, plus cows and calves in the ranch’s cattle herds.



**A leopard, the first of the Big Five that I took
on my 1988 trip to Africa**

We began by tree-hanging an impala that I shot. Leopards frequently hide their kill on a tree limb to prevent other animals from poaching it. By duplicating this leopard behavior, we were deceiving a leopard to believe it had found another's stash, to climb the tree and start munching away.

Leopards are generally most active in killing prey between sunset and sunrise. So, just before dark we placed the impala in the tree and swept away all footprints and other human signs. Then we built a blind in a thicket of reeds 40-50 yards away. And we sat and waited. And waited, making no movement. And sat and waited some more. You get the idea.

For three nights we stayed in that blind for several hours until it became quite dark. On the final night, just when I suspected all our efforts would be fruitless, I saw movement through my binoculars. I could barely detect an image under the baited tree; eerily it appeared like a pair of eyes, or else my

own peepers were playing tricks. Butch quickly said, “That’s a leopard, I’m going to put a spotlight on it. You shoot it.”

Waiting for the spotlight I didn’t know exactly what part of the leopard I would see. When Butch turned it on, I was amazed—the sudden, bright red light didn’t bother the leopard at all. If someone spotlighted me in the dark of night, I would likely jump a foot in the air—but not this leopard.

As the scene unfolded, I thought I saw the leopard’s head—the rest was behind a log. Undaunted, I took a shot. BAM! The head disappeared, and at the same time, we heard the Land Rover start up. Earlier Butch had directed his trackers to remove the vehicle to avoid alarming the leopard. Once they heard my shot, they knew our cover was blown and they returned to assist.

The next scene was somewhat bizarre or surreal. We planned to approach the baited tree with the large spotlight to determine if I hit anything. However, the light malfunctioned, so the trackers had to carry an automobile headlamp attached to a 12-volt car battery. (Butch had just started his hunting business and was short of reliable equipment.) Butch said that he would hold the light, Shorty would take the battery, and I should carry the rifle, ready to shoot. The situation was dangerous; the three of us didn’t know what we were walking into: whether the leopard was dead or ready to pounce, or if another animal was waiting. Butch had armed himself with a shotgun, and as we approached, his instructions were, “Don’t shoot me, and don’t shoot the trackers.”

Considering all that could go wrong, I expected someone would drop the battery or the light, or that the leopard would make some terrifying noise and everything would go to hell with me shooting someone by mistake. These pessimistic

scenarios flooded my mind as I nervously approached dangerous game in the middle of the African night for the first time in my life. I remembered a video of a PH being attacked by a leopard; it was terrifying and gruesome. The leopard won, with all four claws sweeping back and forth, shredding the PH, who did not survive.

As we continued forward, Butch commented that he no longer believed it was a leopard, but some other nighttime animal; maybe he was trying to calm me down. However, when we focused the light and peered over the log, there lay a large, dead leopard with a hole in its head, right between the eyes. A big relief for all. Everyone was impressed with my accuracy, no one more so than me! Quite an achievement for someone who, until this trip, had only pursued birds, ducks, and geese. Breathing easier, we took the leopard back to camp, where it was skinned, salted, and prepared for the taxidermist in Bulawayo.

It was satisfying to successfully make a perfect shot in a very imperfect situation. If I'm going to tackle a project, I want to do it right, whether in flying, business, or hunting. I certainly didn't want a dangerous, wounded animal on the loose. Looking back on the experience, I realize that it was not a difficult shot: The target was fairly steady, and I had a good place to prop the rifle. Of course, my nerves were jingling. All things considered, it was a fulfilling, enjoyable, take-your-breath-away experience.

During our later hunting forays, I noticed that many giraffes grazed on the ranch. One day, Butch asked if I wanted to take one down, and I politely declined. He explained that periodically they have to remove some of them because of the trouble they caused.

Butch elaborated on the giraffe problem. He said that they

had tremendous size and strength; if they came to a fence, the front legs would go up and over, but the back legs would drag through it, taking the fence down. He concluded that maybe the message just didn't get through to the rear legs. Since fences are so important to ranch operations, the manager was alright with hunting them and selling their remains for dog food. Again, I said that was fine but let someone else do it.

In the two weeks we spent at Lemco Ranch there were no major problems, and all the people we met were quite friendly. Several animals that I took on this trip made the SCI Record Book. These include the African Leopard, Southern bush duiker, Southern impala, Limpopo bushbuck, Southern greater kudu, blue wildebeest, and Livingstone eland.

Concluding our hunting and leaving the ranch, we spent several days in a Bulawayo hotel, sightseeing with some of Butch's friends and later reconnecting with Butch and Liz for dinner and a night on the town.

We went to the Bulawayo Club, a private venue similar to Louisville's Pendennis Club. I noticed that our waiter had difficulty writing the order because of poor vision; he kept pressing his face close to the order pad. Eventually, I pulled out my pair of "cheaters"—reading glasses—and asked him to try them. He was jubilant when he could see properly and thankful when I told him to keep them. Not a big deal to me because they were inexpensive and I had extra; but a major improvement to his life because he could see again. It made me grateful too—for the life I have.

Noreen and I had some extra time, so we traveled 20 miles up the main road between Bulawayo and Victoria Falls and stayed overnight in Wankie Park, a game reserve of some note; it's now called Hwange National Park. Founded in 1928, the

park features several cabins near animal watering holes, where visitors are protected and can observe animals in their natural habitat.

Butch advised us that there would be plenty of places to camp there, so Noreen and I proceeded just like we were going to General Butler State Park in Carrollton. But it wasn't quite that easy. Although we rented a small cabin for one night, there was only one little shop that sold meager provisions, so we didn't eat well during our stay.

Checking out a watering pond that the government had built and stocked with a large variety of wildlife, we sat in a small, bleacher-style arrangement to view the action. Although subdued, security was present to protect all the guests. Just before sundown, we saw a virtual parade of animals lining up for water—elephant, antelope, lion, and other predatory creatures. It was impressive to view the wide array of African species at the watering hole. Some guests were astounded to see a creature the size of an elephant wander out of the bush to slurp up some water.

Returning to Bulawayo the next day, we visited the local taxidermist and made arrangements for some animals I took. For example, we had to decide whether to order a rug, a full head mount, or just a skull mount. It was a sizable, busy, and interesting enterprise with many animals on display and being prepared. I had a beautiful rug made from the leopard I took; unfortunately, one of my dogs attacked it many years later and damaged it beyond repair.

Of all the animals I shot I only ordered one “shoulder mount”—the entire head—of an impala, because they're quite eye-catching. For the rest I just requested skull mounts. Many months later the finished products arrived in Louisville.

Leaving Bulawayo, we flew back to Joburg airport, where we connected with a flight back to New York City, then home to Louisville.

Before I left Kentucky for this initial safari adventure I had some trepidations, mainly because I had never hunted big game, especially in a foreign country with a variety of languages, peoples, cultures, outlooks, and ways of living. However, none of my fears came to pass. Our entire trip to Africa, from beginning to end, was a wonderful experience. The memories of our daily outings to the Zimbabwean plains and thickets, during which we viewed hundreds of exotic animals that I had only previously seen in zoos, movies, or photographs, will remain with me all my life.

When I told Butch that Unilever, which owned Lemco, must be pleased with his performance, he questioned whether that information ever made it to the top level of management. So, upon returning to Louisville, I wrote a letter to the Chairman of Unilever, Sir Michael Angus (1930-2010), reporting how well the hunting operation was conducted under Butch's oversight, and how Unilever should be proud for supporting a conservation-minded venture. Not long after, I received a personal response back from the grateful Chairman. Butch was amazed, not only that I wrote directly to the chair, but that I received a pleasant letter of thanks in return.

In 1994 after political turmoil and a series of devastating droughts, the vast Lemco Ranch was sold to a consortium of investors. The new owners removed all the cattle fences and livestock and re-dedicated the property to wildlife only. It was re-named The Buby Valley Conservancy (BVC) after the Buby River which runs through it, and it was converted into a wildlife reserve, sustained by profits generated from venison

and commercial trophy hunting. In addition, anti-poaching initiatives were enacted and strictly enforced.

Headquartered in the village of Towla, BVC erected an eight-foot-high, double-electrified, 273-mile-long game fence around the entire perimeter to keep elephant and other big game within the preserve—much of which is dedicated to sport hunting, i.e., hunting for any non-food purpose. Some people enjoy hunting for fenced animals, but I do not—it’s just not “wild Africa” anymore. More on this in the Texas chapter.

There is good news according to several PHs with whom I occasionally communicate: The hunting is great, and the system works well. It appears that BVC’s care and managed hunting has increased the populations of black rhino, elephant, African lion, wildebeest, and zebra, which are all flourishing. In spite of the contrarian arguments of anti-hunting proponents, when lion and elephant hunting is allowed to occur with scientifically-deduced sustainable quotas, based on sound ecological assessments and independent monitoring, then both species can benefit. There is no doubt that trophy hunter spending has created a conservation umbrella under which all the above species can continue to thrive and expand.

9: Black Powder, Anyone?

In the late 1980s the idea of experimenting with black powder hunting piqued my interest, so I purchased a black powder rifle—a .50 caliber Thompson/Center muzzleloading model which shot a .45 caliber lead bullet in a sabot (a plastic casing). A newly produced model, it was built for modern black powder hunting; it was not the antique flintlock style with a flint-striking ignition mechanism. My rifle used a percussion cap, the same kind as found in a shotgun shell; that cap would set off the black powder and fire the bullet.

This was a rifle, not a musket. Old-time muskets had smooth bores which made them far less accurate than rifles with grooved barrels.

Loading and shooting the muzzleloader was quite an involved process. First, I needed some handy pre-measured plastic vials of powder for speed in reloading. I'd pour powder down the barrel, then use a wooden ramrod to push down a tiny cloth used as wadding to hold the powder in place. Then I'd push the sabot with the bullet down, again with the ramrod. If I used a rounded ball projectile, the process would be faster since no wadding would be used.

After that I would place the percussion cap in a small cone sitting under the place where the hammer is located; there's a tiny hole leading from that cone into the breech where the powder is located. The barrel is merely a pipe, at the bottom of which sits the powder and the bullet. To shoot, I would cock the hammer and pull the trigger, which would hit the percussion

cap and cause a spark to ignite the powder, sending the bullet through the air. It was indeed a very painstaking, complicated process.

All the loading steps had to be followed before I even sighted the target. Then if I merely wounded the prey and needed to reload to finish it, that same slow process would occur. Some people can do it speedily, but not me.

One mistake that frequently happens in muzzleloading is that the hunter, after using the ramrod to push the bullet down the barrel, will forget to remove the ramrod. Then, when the trigger is pulled, the ramrod is propelled like a spear! Although I never made that mistake, it is a common one.

As a muzzleloading shooter I needed to get closer to my target than I did when using a scoped rifle; in addition, my aim had to be more accurate because I wouldn't have a quick second shot.

My friend Irvin Abell III is an experienced lawyer who also owns a nice farm in Goshen in Oldham County. With my muzzleloader I hunted deer alone a few times at his place, just to experience the old style of hunting.

Although muzzleloading was quite fascinating, I was not well suited to it, especially with reloading; I was always too slow. I didn't relish the idea of having only one shot available, because my ethical hunting goal has always been to kill what I'm shooting. The whole process was just too much of a hassle for me.

Black powder-hunting was briefly an interesting diversion but I tired of it and decided to call it quits. After a local forestry professional gave me some free advice on trees to plant, I offered the rifle to him. A black powder hunter, he was grateful to receive the muzzleloader, just as I was thankful it would be put to good use by someone who cared.

10: Ducks in Egypt



**With the Colonel's guide and his duck-fetcher
after hunting in the Nile Delta in 1989**

Over the years I have been amazed at how intertwined the hunting community is, with connections and relationships spread around the globe. In 1989 I took advantage of this reliable network.

Noreen and I and our two children were planning an action-packed sightseeing trip to Egypt during Christmas, with free TWA tickets—New York to Paris to Cairo—courtesy of my frequent flyer miles. We even received an unexpected upgrade to first class! In addition, we had free lodging in Cairo, courtesy of Gray Henry, an interfaith book publisher who is now married to my hunting friend Neville Blakemore.

We planned the usual Pyramids and Sphinx tourist

activities, but we also wanted to travel to the Sinai Peninsula to visit Mount Sinai, where God presented Moses with the Ten Commandments. As we planned the trip, the thought of working in some shooting crossed my mind and I was off and running. That's how my hunting connections paid off.

I knew a British professional hunter who had been born and raised in Kenya but was living in Amsterdam with his Dutch wife; he also worked in the game department in Rhodesia and several other countries. Since I needed to speak with him anyway about possible guiding a buffalo hunt in Tanzania, I phoned and asked if he had any hunting contacts in Egypt.

He quickly responded that he had a friend who could take me duck shooting, maybe antelope hunting too. His contact was a retired Colonel in the Egyptian Army who had been heavily involved in the Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt in 1967. Although noting that the Colonel was "a good guy," my British friend suggested that I keep any opinions about that conflict to myself.

When I telephoned the Colonel, he responded, "Yeah, we can go duck hunting in the Nile delta." He told me to bring some waders, and—even though it's a pain to pack waders—I did, plus a camouflage shirt. The Colonel promised that the weather would not be a problem.

Upon our arrival, we—Noreen, Siofra (18), Embry (16), and I—stayed at Gray Henry's house. Her grandfather was her original connection to Cairo, and she had lived there for quite a while. She had always mentioned that if I ever traveled to Egypt I could use her house, and that her house staff would be there even if she was not; so that's what we did.

The Colonel and I made plans to meet. He said, "The easiest way is to take a taxi over here tomorrow night, and you can

spend the night here so we get an early start the following morning.” Since Cairo is an enormous, spread-out city, I knew traveling alone was not a good idea. Heck, I could barely travel around the block without getting lost. His plan sounded ideal so I taxied over there and spent the evening.

He also agreed that I could borrow one of his shotguns. That evening he bragged that he was an excellent marksman and he proved it with a pellet gun. How? We sat in his living room, shooting pellets at targets on the wall!

The Colonel was a most interesting guy. As we practiced with the pellet gun, I inquired about his limp; he indicated he was wounded in the '67 conflict, and he discussed his role in the war. It was a dismal topic for him since the Israelis had crushed the Egyptians, so we didn't spend a lot of time on it and I expressed no opinion. Having a few Jewish ancestors, I'd been rooting for the Israelis, but I didn't mention that to him.

Rising early the next morning, we piled into his too-tiny Russian Lada SUV, along with two other hefty-sized, prosperous-looking gentlemen who were coming with us. They were big shots from Saudi Arabia, connected to the Royal Family there. Although they didn't know much English, the Colonel's was excellent; my knowledge of Arabic was less than zero.

It was a fascinating duck-shooting experience. At some point two young boys joined us; they were to be the retrievers. It sounds strange but in the absence of dogs, the custom in Egypt was to use kids as retrievers. We dutifully placed our decoys and waited for the ducks to appear. Soon enough, ducks—mallard and teal, maybe migrating from Europe—started coming in; we began firing away and everyone had a fine time.

After they brought the ducks back to us, the boys made a great show of shaking the ducks and then slitting their throats

with a knife, though I suspected that the animals were already dead from the shot. The Colonel indicated that was to comply with the requirements of Muslim religious laws; to eat an animal, it had to be killed in a certain manner which did not include shooting. The assumption was that they were all a little bit alive when brought to us.

As for marksmanship, the Colonel and I did fairly well, unlike the Saudis. In addition, our comradeship was excellent on this brief duck-shooting foray. When I returned to Gray's house, I took ten ducks to her cook, and said, "Halal, Halal," to indicate they were killed the proper way and acceptable to eat. Halal is Arabic meaning "permissible" according to Islamic law regarding food. I showed her that the animals had been hung upside down and allowed to bleed dry. She replied, "Okay, okay," but she wouldn't touch or cook them until after the yard guy plucked them. Eventually, we had an excellent duck dinner that evening.

Noreen and our kids loved the trip. On our bus ride across the Sinai to Saint Catherine's Monastery, we traveled through the area where the Six-Day War occurred and viewed the grim remains of many wrecked tanks and trucks; I was reminded of the Colonel's limp.

At times the experience was terrifying. Our bus driver watched a soap opera on his portable television set as he drove, occasionally veering off the road. Since all the other passengers were also watching that TV, they didn't seem to notice. None of the locals appeared to worry about road safety. It was like, "If Allah wills it, it will be this way. Nothing you can do will change it." Friends later questioned why we traveled on a common Egyptian bus, but there was simply no other way to get there.

Upon arrival, we toured that amazing and historic Eastern

Orthodox monastery located at the foot of Mount Sinai; of course there was a gift shop. While there I met a monk who spoke English—and who surprisingly identified himself as a native of Salt Lake City. After further conversation I discovered that he was a high school classmate of my good friend and Kenyon College classmate from Utah, Zeese Papanikolas! It was so unexpected that I could hardly believe it. Zeese, a really creative guy at Kenyon, is a well-regarded, much-honored writer who has published many books. In fact, I stayed with Zeese and his family in Utah when I was returning from Language School in California. Small world indeed.

Another memorable incident occurred when young Embry, urged on by a camel-driver, suggested that he was willing to trade Siofra to the man in return for a camel. That proposed bargain is occasionally brought up in family discussions even today.

11: Wyoming Adventures



With son Embry in Wyoming, where I got lucky and took this mule deer in a snowstorm

Although Wyoming is the 10th largest state in size, it is the least populated of all the states. Almost half its land is owned by the federal government and controlled for public use. The state is a great plateau broken by many wild, remote mountain ranges, including the Rocky Mountains. I truly love The Cowboy State, a hunter's paradise which has offered me an abundance of experiences and opportunities.

Wyoming's habitat accommodates many game animals, including pronghorn, elk, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. Bighorn sheep are also highly sought, but few tags are available for them annually; a hunter receives one point for every year his name is not drawn in the lottery, and it may take

15-18 years to get a tag.

Elk are plentiful on public and private lands in both mountain and plain regions. Mule deer are found throughout the state, both on the plains and in the mountains, while whitetails are plentiful in the Black Hills region in northeastern Wyoming and in many farming areas and creek bottoms throughout the state. But Wyoming is best known for its pronghorn—more commonly called “antelope.” More pronghorn antelope exist there than anywhere else on the North American continent. Lesser-sought animals include bison, black bears, mountain lions, wolves, mountain goats, turkeys, and upland birds.

Wyoming mandates a strict system of hunter licensing and regulation; completion of a safety course is required for certain age groups, and a fluorescent orange item must be worn while hunting big game. All guides and outfitters are required to meet licensing requirements too. This state oversight benefits conservation and safety practices. Sometimes, regulation is okay.

In October 1988, shortly after my first safari to Zimbabwe, I received an invitation to hunt in Wyoming. I had not hunted big game in the United States and knew nothing about hunting in the American West. My progression as a hunter was somewhat reversed compared to that of most hunters. But I eagerly accepted.

On that first venture out West I was a guest of Pat Stanoschek, one of the lumber suppliers for my business. With his brother Tim, they had established a small outfitting operation by leasing the hunting rights on a ranch near Wheatland, about 70 miles north of Cheyenne. That is the largest “metropolis” in the state, but contains only about 64,000 residents, smaller than Bowling Green, Kentucky. In fact, there are fewer people in the entirety of Wyoming than in Metro Louisville.

Their camp was comprised of several spacious, comfortable tents; a half dozen people, mostly customers and friends, typically hunted there at any one time. They had hired one of their schoolmates to cook for the operation, which was fine with him—he didn't like to hunt, but he did enjoy drinking beer, which was fine with me and his bosses.

The Stanoscheks had grown up in Beatrice, a small town in rural Nebraska, and later moved to Wyoming. They both played football in high school and for Chadron State College. They had always been attracted to outdoor activities.



A 6x6 elk that I took in Wyoming in 2004

Pat Stanoscheck, an excellent hunter, was a respected executive in the lumber trading world and worked as a salesman for Teton Lumber Company. His brother Tim was an executive for the Burlington Northern Railroad, commonly called “The Big Nothing,” which operated from 1970 to 1996. In its heyday, that rail system crisscrossed the country and was a favorite of

tramps and vagabonds. Tim was also a superb hunter who had eyes like a hawk—literally! His distance vision was amazing; no animal escaped his attention.

During one of our business transactions, Pat had suggested that I join them in Wyoming, and so I did. In retrospect it was another consequential decision on my part. Not only did I enjoy the hunt but they connected me with Dave Berry, a retired large animal veterinarian, who had recently purchased a large ranch outside Cheyenne.

I certainly received a basic education on that first trip, learning much about tracking, maintaining silence on the hunt, and how animals behave. For example, I was schooled on how to approach a mule deer for a decent shot while seeing only its antlers above the tall grass; how to slither on my belly, set up my rifle, and wait for the deer to stand.

When setting up the trip with Pat and “Hawkeye Tim,” I inquired about what clothes to wear in Wyoming in the fall. They said to bring everything I had and to plan for hot weather, cold weather, and wet weather. I thought to myself, “They’ve got to be kidding.” They weren’t. Luckily, I did pack apparel for all those situations. Choosing my firearm was easier; I took my trusty .270 Winchester rifle.

The hunting area consisted of several thousand acres including steep hills and accompanying deep valleys. The first day there was quite warm—although there was almost no humidity—and I wore a T-shirt as we walked several miles on local trails. I took an antelope that day, the first one I ever shot. Upon awakening the next morning we discovered about six inches of snow on the ground! That day I got a whitetail buck—not a big one, but also my first ever. I was quite satisfied with my shooting on those two days.

On the third day we quietly tracked some mule deer, an animal new to me. At one point, we saw a set of large horns sticking out of the grass—in actuality a mule deer buck bedded down. We slithered closer on our stomachs; then even closer to get some elevation. I still didn't have a decent shot because it was down in a shallow draw; all we could see was the top of its head, which wasn't an appealing target; we just waited and waited until it stood up and gazed around, inspecting its surroundings. BANG! One shot. It dropped.

Although those first animals I took were too small to make the SCI record book, they pleasantly introduced me to hunting in Wyoming. What a great trip!

The following year I returned to the Stanoscheks' camp. Soon I fell in love with hunting in the wide-open spaces of the great American West. In fact, I became so enthused about Wyoming, I inquired about land values and real estate. They laughed and asked in unison, "You want to come join us?" Shortly after that I connected with local rancher Dave Berry, the retired vet whom I have come to know well. Over time I formed a close friendship and working relationship with Dave, who is slightly younger than me.

When I arrived back home in Louisville, I was all fired up about hunting out West, and I told Noreen how scenic and beautiful Wyoming was; eventually, I proposed buying some land there and building a small cabin. She simply rolled her eyes—she did a lot of eye-rolling with my half-baked ideas—and replied, "Okay, let's go look."

In the meantime Embry Jr. enrolled in the University of Wyoming in Laramie, just down the road about 45 minutes away. Of course, my son thought it was a great idea for us to build a cabin nearby. When I discovered in 1989 that Dave

Berry was planning to sell parcels of his acreage, Noreen and I traveled there to seek Dave's advice on the subject of land-buying.

Driving his pickup, Dave took us on a tour of his humongous ranch and mentioned that he was willing to sell some parcels. As he drove, we bumped along ferociously on the cross-slope, hillside irrigation ditches dug long ago by mule-drawn plows to funnel rainwater. They were not that deep but provided plenty of bounce. Dave labeled it good hunting territory for mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, and elk.

Our view of the countryside was simply spectacular as the sun set—it seemed as if we could see forever. Dave observed, “When the sun comes up, you’ll be able to see Casper Mountain, 100 miles away.” He was correct—we easily saw that iconic central Wyoming landmark. Noreen joined me in falling in love with the state.

Much of Wyoming is mountainous; the Snowy Range in Medicine Bow National Forest runs north and south and separates Cheyenne—the capital—on the east side, and Laramie—the college town with about 32,000 residents—on the west side. The property we inspected was 8,000 feet in elevation and located between those two cities. We ended up buying one piece consisting of 640 acres and half of another section—about 1,000 acres total.

Wyoming land value has always been computed on animal units (AUs), a basis that standardizes how many cattle or other livestock the land can support for grazing and forage. A cow and a calf are generally considered to comprise one AU. The 1,000-acre tract where we lived—with high elevation and poor grass for grazing—would probably be computed as supporting only 15 AUs. Ranchers wouldn't pay more than 40-50 dollars per

acre for such land. I heard one local describe it as “40-60” land: It takes a cow with a mouth 40-feet wide going 60 miles an hour to get enough to eat.

Although I’ve told people that we bought the land because I saw elk tracks on the property, that’s an embellishment; we liked it because we wanted to vacation and hunt there and give young Embry a place to escape the rigors of college life.

Shortly after purchasing the property, we bought a 30-foot-long trailer to live in when we drove to Wyoming; then we moved it around the property to determine exactly where to build. We eventually selected a place that had the most scenic view, the best wind breaks, water availability, and hunting.

We first parked the trailer close to the unpaved, gravel state road. In no time a grumpy old man approached and told us to move, saying we couldn’t park there. We calmly explained that we had bought the property, and we quickly gave it back to Mr. Grumpy. “What are YOU doing here?” Noreen and I said in unison. Jack Radichal explained that he was our nearest neighbor on a ranch down the valley two miles away; he was watching out for squatters and trespassers.

Overcoming that rocky introduction, Jack and I got along pretty well. He had lived there since birth and had some interesting stories about the Dust Bowl era and the old cattle drives to the railhead at Bosler, twenty miles away. We eventually became good enough friends that he let me hunt on his property. Jack hated elk and wanted them *all* killed—they ate the valuable, sparse grass meant for his cattle.

There were hardly any other ranches in the area; Jack owned about 6,000 acres there and about 19,000 more on another ranch near Wheatland, where he lived most of the time. His neighboring place was a nice little setup: a 100-year-old log

cabin, a flowing stream, nice grazing land and hay; but no power or electricity.

In short order I suggested to Ray Garson, another neighboring rancher, that if he gave me first rights on opening week of the season to hunt on his 25,000-acre Strong Creek Ranch—and not admit any others—I would let his cattle graze on my land. Deal! So, I had about 31,000 acres on which to hunt in addition to my measly 1,000. Plus, Dave Berry has allowed me to hunt on his 80,000 acres for many years. Thus, I ended up with a huge hunting territory to which I would invite my customers, suppliers, and friends.

We lived in our trailer for a couple of years before deciding to build a permanent structure. I had become acquainted with craftsmen, carpenters, concrete contractors, electricians, and others who lived in the area, so I decided to act as general contractor, even though I was 1,100 miles away in Louisville. However, only a few special commutes were necessary to check on the work. The builders couldn't work much in the winter since it's typically 20 below zero with high winds.

That construction project turned out well. We selected a cabin design from a sawmill in north central Wyoming that specialized in log cabin kits, and they cut the logs for it. The logs were squared off and thick enough for insulation. I also bought a generator—it worked on diesel, gas, or propane—to power our collection of hand tools and as a backup for the solar electric system. We actually never needed it for the latter.

We hired John Lohden, an eccentric carpenter, who was experienced in log cabin building. Born in Pennsylvania, he moved to Wyoming as a youth and became zealous about hunting and the outdoors life; in fact, he had worked as a professional hunting guide in Alaska. John had extraordinary vision

similar to an antelope, which can see eight times better than humans. He, Embry, and I were hunting once when we spotted some mule deer at a distance; but it started snowing and we could barely see them. John said, “Okay, see the four standing there? Shoot the second one.” I couldn’t even see the deer, much less the antlers. However, I followed directions and luckily dropped it. With his and Embry’s assistance—my son worked during school breaks and summer vacation—a nice cabin began to take shape on our land.

When I asked the local power company to estimate the cost to run electricity to my new place, I received quite a shock. The customer service expert answered, “It will cost you \$70,000, Mr. Rucker, so I bet you’re probably going to find another way to get power.” I immediately replied, “You’re correct!” Our solution: We installed a solar electric system plus a refrigerator that operated on propane.

I had learned that Wyoming has many sunny days and is seldom overcast for long periods. So, we ordered expensive, early-version solar panels; then we bought several large storage batteries—about three feet high—typically used for forklifts. The panels produced voltage from the sun’s rays, charging the batteries that stored amperes. Our panel and battery arrangement could run the house for five days without sunlight—that was the longest period I thought we’d have to face. I was pleased that I concocted that plan.

When I described this setup to my godson—who recently graduated from college and works for a solar power company—he was amazed and said that I had been on the cutting edge of solar technology.

We needed a propane refrigerator because it would drain too much power if we kept it on the solar panel system. That

worked very well too. We also installed a microwave and several fans. Instead of a fireplace for heating, we used a wood stove in the living room; as a backup, there was a propane-operated furnace which didn't require electricity. It was old-style, to say the least; warm air would rise up through large grills in the floor—no power needed. Our cabin had a high ceiling with a large amount of insulation.

Our water source was a spring located on a hill at the rear of the property. Fortunately I discovered a local rancher whose specialty was developing springs. Also a pilot, he told us an amazing story about first arriving in Wyoming. Needing the cash, he removed the door from his Piper Cub and shot coyotes from the air for the bounty, using a shotgun as they tried to outrace his aircraft. Strange but true.

He said that the Cub was so slow that when he once flew from Cheyenne to the Laramie side of the mountain range, the wind was so strong he couldn't get across. I believed that—a 60 mph plane versus a 60 mph headwind!

As for the spring water, he stated that he would “employ gravity with a pump.” Long story short, he dug a hole near the spring with his backhoe, installed a concrete septic tank, piped the water from the spring into that tank, and placed a pipe from the tank down to the house. We installed a 12-volt pump, so turning on the faucet would trip the pump, giving pressure to the shower, washer, or whatever was connected. The tank had a storage capacity of a couple hundred gallons, and it worked perfectly from the git-go. Thus, we weren't paying a dime for water or electricity.

We also created a pond below the cabin to capture overflow from the spring. It was only a few hundred yards long but we even constructed a dam for it. Animals liked to drink and graze

there. Since under Wyoming law every water impoundment had to be formally named, we dubbed it “Lake Noreen.”

In addition to the two bedrooms and one bathroom on the main floor of the cabin, we had another spacious room which was our kitchen-living-eating area. Since the cabin was on a hill, the bottom floor had a walk-out with a bunk room for visitors, plus a bathroom and one-car garage. The mechanical apparatuses and batteries were also located on the lower floor.

Cabin-building from scratch took about one year to complete. The living space was not elegant but it was comfortable and Noreen enjoyed it, although she was never there for long periods. We would summer there just to enjoy the outdoor environment and watch the wildlife literally wander by. Luckily there were no hippos or crocodiles to disturb us.

Cell phone service was sometimes available if we trudged up a ridge above the house and situated ourselves by what we called the “telephone tree.” It may have worked even better if I climbed the tree. Back in the day we were using those huge, first-generation cell phones, big as a brick. I typically made those calls; Noreen seldom needed to do so. Strangely we were using a cell phone tower from Jackson, about 400 miles away at the other end of the state.

The closest town to our cabin was Bosler, a tiny cattle and railroad shipping spot named after an early 1900s cattle baron. Son Embry was surprised when he discovered they had no gas station. Although still on the map, it’s now basically a ghost town, with only a dozen residents and broken-down shacks, abandoned many years ago after the nearby highway was re-routed and the rail line became defunct. Only two buildings there still function: Doc’s Western Village, a furniture store which sells old items collected from the town; and Bosler

Consolidated School (1937-1983), sometimes open for viewing by visitors as an example of an old, rural Wyoming school.

I instantly connected with Wyoming due to my love for the wide open spaces of the American West and the hunting it provided. Deer hunting in Kentucky is very enjoyable, but basically it means sitting in a tree stand, hoping a deer decides to wander by. That sometimes gets a little old.

But in Wyoming, using my binoculars on top of a hill, I might see a mule deer or elk five miles away. Then I would employ my powerful spotting scope to determine that animal's size. If it was worth taking I would drive or walk as close as I could and start to stalk. The entire hunting process in Wyoming was much more challenging and satisfying.

During our cabin construction I occasionally hunted mule deer, antelope, and elk from the trailer. We were also fond of sage-grouse—large chubby grouse with small heads and long tails. They were very tasty—at least when prepared by Noreen.

A side note: When it comes to feathered fowl there are two ways of removing feathers—by peeling or plucking. Personally, I was a better peeler than plucker. I would slice the bird down the middle, pull the skin and feathers back, cut out the breast meat, then pull the skin off the legs. However, many say they are more flavorful if you pluck them and leave the skin on during preparation. In fact, electric plucking machines exist which have rubber fingers that swirl around the bird and pull its feathers off.

One October Noreen and I had several houseguests; six inches of snow was already on the ground—remember we were at 8,000 feet—and it was still coming down. My Louisville friend Irvin Abell reported seeing elk going into a valley on Jack Radichal's ranch, where I had permission to hunt; we decided

to investigate.

Concealed behind a large rock, I spotted 40-50 elk grazing. I handed my rifle to Irvin, who had an elk permit, and asked if he wanted to take a shot. He declined, saying the distance was too great and that I should do it. Since I too had a permit, I agreed. Although it was snowing, I had good vision and a decent rest on the rocks. The bull I targeted with my .270 was standing still; when I shot, he went straight down.

Everyone was congratulating me when a stranger suddenly popped up from behind a rock about 20 feet away. He had followed our tracks, unnoticed by us, though Noreen had seen someone from the house and assumed it was a guest.

Our conversation went like this:

Warden: I'm the local game warden from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. That's not your property over there, is it?

Me: No, that's Jack Radichal's ranch, but I have permission to hunt there.

Warden: You have a license?

Me: Yes, I do.

Warden: I understand you're running an outfitting business here, and people hire you to hunt.

Me: No, my guests are either friends, customers, or clients.

Warden: Well, You'll never be able to get that elk out of that position, and I'm going to return tomorrow to see if you do get it out. If not, I'm going to write you up and take further action. Blah blah blah.

Although very disagreeable, the warden was accurate in one matter; if I didn't retrieve the elk, I would be illegally "abandoning a kill."

As darkness came we returned to the house and enlisted Jon Gudmundsson's help; he had driven his new, all-wheel-drive Ford pickup truck with high ground clearance. We followed a challenging, narrow valley trail—his truck was powerful enough to squash any sagebrush—and immediately found the dead elk. Irvin, Jon, John Lohden, and a couple other guys helped me field dress it, load it, and haul it back to the house. I had an apparatus outside where I could hook up animal carcasses and skin them. We were pleased because we knew Ass-hole would return and the first thing he saw would be the elk, hanging and skinned.

Upon the warden's arrival the next morning, I asked, "Happy now?" Still irritated with us, he checked to make sure the carcass tag—part of the elk license—was correctly positioned. It was. Then he left, never to return.

Another unique incident occurred on that trip. Lohden, Gudmundsson, and I were hunting one day when we detected a herd of elk wandering in our direction. John hurried us toward some rocks on a little rise where we could look down on the elk. We hunkered down in a chamber similar to a small cave—large boulders on each side and another one on top. A great hiding place—we could see them, they couldn't see us.

We waited until a sizable bull came into view and Jon took the shot. BANG! Immediately we were all deafened by the rifle's resounding report. Together we realized it was exceedingly dumb to keep our ears uncovered. If Jon had moved up three feet, the rifle discharge would have been outside the opening with no reverberation. On the positive side he did make the shot and dropped the elk. We eventually recovered our hearing, trekked down, and loaded it up.

The first time that Jon Gudmundsson visited, I decided to

practice the concept of “flagging” antelope that I had read about. For a short time in the Fall, pronghorns—naturally curious animals—can be lured closer with a handkerchief or other item.

We crept as close as possible to a small antelope herd and slithered behind a small mound of rocks. One buck kept looking our way, so I placed my hat on the rifle, waved it, then lowered it, without showing myself. Jon first thought I was nuts; but the buck kept coming closer as I periodically raised and lowered my hat. Finally, it was so close that Jon couldn’t stand it anymore and had to shoot. BANG! It went down from a mere 60 yards. Jon totally believed that I was an antelope master, although it was actually my first try at flagging.

For years the biggest elk that I ever took was a typical, free-range Rocky Mountain elk in Albany County, Wyoming in 1995; John Lohden was with me. I took a larger elk in 2004 with Dennis Magnusson as my guide.

However, that changed in 2009 when I took a huge elk with the longest shot I’ve ever made. I was with Dennis on Dave Berry’s ranch when we saw many elk in the distance, but a thunderstorm was coming quickly behind the large herd.

We were too high to climb down and successfully reach the elk before the rain and lightning arrived. Dennis asked, “Wanna try the shot from here?” I quickly replied, “My rifle won’t do it. Too far. I can’t hit it.” He said, “Try mine, it’s been tested up to 600 yards accuracy. Trigger pull a few times to get used to it. Get a good rest, give it a try.” I thought, “Well, I can try that. I should take this opportunity.”

I targeted a bull with huge antlers in front of the herd, and I lined up on him. Suddenly, the bull started humping a cow. They’re going at it like elks do and I laughed to myself, thinking

“It would be cruel and unusual punishment to do this right now.” So I waited and waited until he had finished.

At that point he turned and faced us directly, which did not provide an ideal shot since my target was narrower. As the storm grew closer, I just lined it up and kicked it. BANG! One shot. I’ve only taken one animal at more than 500 yards, and that was it—508 yards. For some reason, I never submitted that elk for SCI record book entry even though it was larger than the other two.

Here’s the scientific backstory behind that shot.

Dennis had a distance-measuring rangefinder which allowed adjustment to a telescopic sight to verify it was on target. For example, if you were going to shoot an elk at 200-300 yards just by eyeballing it without an accurate measurement, you may conclude the distance was greater; then, with the curvature of the bullet’s path, you could easily hit the target off-center or miss it altogether. That happens to hunters quite often.

Dennis handed me a 7-mm Magnum rifle specifically built for long range shooting; it had a special scope that was adjustable for distance. When he measured the distance at an unbelievable (for me) 508 yards, I inputted that on the scope of the rifle. It was a very cool process and worked perfectly for me. I knew when I put the crosshair on the bull’s chest that the bullet would hit there.

To shoot accurately takes a trusty eye and a really steady finger. Instead of squeezing the trigger, hunters often erroneously jerk it, which can move the barrel one-eighth of an inch. Multiply that over the distance you’re shooting and soon you’re four feet off target.

Lucky for me the wind wasn’t blowing because it is always gusting in Wyoming. It was no doubt calmer because we were

ahead of the approaching front. To make that shot was a very satisfying moment for me as a marksman. After Dennis congratulated me for the shot, we drove over to the site, recovered the elk, and I posed for a photo. It had a nice rack of antlers which are now displayed in our house.

Noreen and I enjoyed our Wyoming cabin for about five years. Son Embry loved having his old man's place available while he was in college; but eventually he graduated and moved on. In addition, Noreen was not crazy about the location; it was a long trek to Laramie to buy necessities, and living at 8,000 feet elevation was problematic for flatlanders like us—it always took us a few days to get used to the altitude.

When we finally listed the property for sale, we set a low price that would attract attention and sell quickly, but it didn't. We had no offers whatsoever, and our realtor recommended lowering the price. Although it sounds weird, at young Embry's suggestion, I *raised* the price by \$100K! It worked—before long, we had a buyer. With the initial low price, potential buyers must have concluded something was wrong with it; but the higher price made it appear more exclusive. Such is the world of real estate.

A few years later we bought property in Buffalo, Wyoming—in the “banana belt.” It's called that because it's only 4,000 feet above sea level, with warmer temperatures and less wind. Noreen was moderately enthusiastic, thinking the lower elevation would be better; plus, Buffalo was a pleasant town of about 4,500 residents, and Sheridan was only 30 minutes away.

It was an old homesteaders place, a few hundred acres between two sections of state land; nobody would build on either side, and I had the freedom to hunt those 640-acre sections. It came with a gravel road, an electrical power line, and a nice

creek flowing through it. There was an old stone building, some outbuildings and sheds; we thought it would be fun to restore those.

We briefly considered buying and renovating the historic Occidental Hotel in Buffalo to begin a hotel business, or renovate it for apartments; eventually we decided not to. Someone else bought that hotel in 1997 and renovated it over 10 years; it's now wonderfully restored.

We were planning to build a cabin when we learned that the oil company that owned the mineral rights on the property had decided to build roads, drill for coalbed methane, and put in some ponds that would drain the wells. It was fortunate we hadn't spent a lot of money when we received that notification. We sold it at a profit to our neighbor for grazing. That was the end of our Wyoming land purchases.

When I travel to Wyoming now, decades after we sold our cabin, I stay with my friend Dave Berry. Although he started as a veterinarian, Dave once told me, "I finally figured out that sticking my hands up a cow's butt for a pregnancy check when it was 20 below zero for one or two dollars a head was not a good career plan for me." He is now considered an authority on Wyoming real property. Dave bought another ranch in Horse Creek, Wyoming (population 39 in 2010), including a stone house built about 100 years ago—extremely old for Wyoming. It was in shambles when he bought it; but after restoration and expansion, it's now a showplace on 80,000 acres.

In Wyoming, hunting guides are well trained and must pass certain regulatory tests to obtain a license. By any of these standards, my friend Dennis Magnusson is the consummate professional. How he achieved that success provides an interesting backstory.

I first met Dennis's mother Kathryn and his father Roger Magnusson, a veterinarian in Goshen in Oldham County, because he provided care for Noreen's horses. They are good people and we all got along well. Roger was aware that I traveled and hunted quite often, as did he and his son Dennis. Hunting, fishing, trapping, and camping were Dennis's loves from an early age.

Over time I heard that Dennis was being a bit troublesome and involved in teenage shenanigans; nothing serious, but escalating problems, nonetheless. One day Roger asked if I knew any options for summer work for Dennis outside of Kentucky; Roger thought it best to lead him away from some of his local haunts and friends. I knew that Dennis had been praised as a hard worker by people who had employed him for farm work. So I called Dave Berry in Wyoming and said, "I've got a great kid to work for you this summer."

Dave had probably heard that pitch before, and I expected him to be doubtful. Indeed he was negative at first, saying my young friend would no doubt screw up his farm machinery and be difficult to supervise. As Dave grumbled about it, I gave him the clincher to my plea—I was so sure of Dennis's success that if it didn't work out after one week, Dave could send him home and I would repay whatever out-of-pocket expenses he had incurred. Knowing that I had that much confidence in Dennis, Dave finally agreed.

It all worked out and I was not surprised that Dave called the following year and asked, "Embry, you got any more young workers like Dennis?" In no time Dennis had found a summer work situation that he loved in a state that became his second home; not only that but he enrolled at Bellarmine University and graduated with a BA degree. Dave immediately offered him

a job as a ranch manager and suggested that he also could run an outfitting operation on the immense property.

More good news followed. After graduating, moving to Wyoming, and establishing a business on Dave's ranch as a hunting guide, Dennis became friendly with Doug Samuelson, another Wyoming friend of mine. Samuelson offered him a house to live in, a job managing his ranch, and permission for Dennis to use his ranch acreage in his outfitting business.

What a dream come true! These two ranchers, with well over 150,000 acres between them—extending almost from Cheyenne to Laramie—told Dennis he could hunt anywhere on the property and encouraged him to develop his hunting operation.

Wyoming ranches typically don't require much close management except to check the fences, replace them when necessary, and move the cattle around. As a manager, Dennis must monitor ranch activities, delegate responsibilities when a problem arises, and be accessible. Only during certain times does it require his full-time attention.

When I go to Wyoming and stay at Dave's, Dennis is always my hunting guide—he is my first and best go-to guy. Among many attributes, his eyes are awesome. At times, he has spotted things with his bare eyes that I can't see even while using my eight-power binoculars.

He has been so grateful for my confidence and support that he initially never charged me for these trips. After a few years I said, "Dennis, your thanks are obvious and appreciated but enough is enough, it's time for me to pay you for your work." He replied, "You never have to pay me, Embry." When I responded, "Yes I do, or I won't come back," he agreed.

Dennis now manages two ranches part-time and operates

Iron Mountain Outfitters, which offers quality private hunts for elk, mule deer, and antelope in southeast Wyoming. He limits access to ensure trophy quality on over 100,000 acres of prime hunting lands. He also has become an authority on the cattle industry, outdoors recreation, and has begun to develop environmental measures that help both grazing and big game.

In addition, Dennis has become associated with a notable land brokerage company that matches people who love the outdoors with ranches that are available in the area. I recently learned that Dennis acted as the agent for an \$11M ranch sale.

Dennis's hunting business is greatly generated by word of mouth, and his customers return because he is an outstanding guide with a great personality. Some time ago he married Christine, a local girl from Wheatland who is a pediatric nurse at Cheyenne Hospital. She and Dennis have four young sons, all of whom are "energetic," as he describes them. He is in the midst of personal and professional successes, and I am pleased to have had a small role in shaping them.

The land I bought in Wyoming for \$100 an acre would sell now for more than \$1,000 an acre. The desire to own recreational properties in the mountains has driven land values to astronomical heights. As for us, we made a profit, not a fortune. Noreen thought a small cottage in Ireland or on Grand Turk would suit us better.

If only a trend would begin to make the mountains of Eastern Kentucky attractive to recreational buyers. Instead, those hills and hollers are filled with hopelessness. But that's another story.

12: A Mountain Lion at Twenty Below Zero

In February 1989, after my first deer hunt in Wyoming, I became interested in hunting other Western animals, and someone referred me to Dave Handrich. Based in Nevada, he was a full-time guide and outfitter who had hunted bears and mountain lions since 1963. He advertised “over 95% hunter success,” so I arranged a mountain lion hunt with him.

From old Western movies I became familiar with the large feline creature called a mountain lion, puma, or cougar. Those names all refer to the same animal, the second largest cat in the Americas. The terms mountain lion and cougar are used interchangeably in North America; it’s usually called a puma in Latin America. Only the jaguar found in Central and South America is larger.

Primarily hunting at twilight and nighttime, the mountain lion is territorial and avoids humans. However, as suburban areas and farms have expanded, the incidence of attacks on people have risen. Dave jumpstarted his hunting business by collecting bounties on mountain lions—the Nevada game commission paid \$50 a head for each one killed. That fee was a boon to him.

There are several ways to hunt these secretive, solitary animals. One is to bait an area and wait for the lion; it may come, it may not. Dave operated in the alternative manner—with a pack of well-trained dogs to follow the lion’s scent and track it down.

The first element of this new adventure was getting there. Reno-Tahoe Airport was snowed in, so my rifle and I were re-

routed to Sacramento, California, then bused 130 miles to Reno. We rode through the Donner Pass in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains; it was named after the ill-fated Donner party, which was snowbound during the harsh winter of 1846 and resorted to cannibalism to survive. As we passengers on the bus munched on our snacks, we noticed that the depth of the snow reached as high as the window of the Greyhound bus!

Arriving in Reno, I was greeted by a rough-looking woman sporting a full leg cast who asked, “You Rucker?” I responded quickly, “Yes Ma’am,” deducing that Dave had sent his wife to pick me up. “Get in the truck,” she directed, no niceties involved. After I loaded my luggage and gun in her pickup truck, we drove for several hours to northern Nevada where she and Dave owned a trailer from which they operated.

They were not a talkative pair. In addition, Dave had about as much personality as a chair—maybe somewhat less. His wife became a little more chatty: “Wanna drink?” she asked.

After I was shown one of the trailer’s bedrooms, the following conversation took place:

Me: “What time are we getting up tomorrow, Dave?”

Dave: “I’ll let you know.”

Me: “What will we be doing?”

Dave: “You’ll see.”

So much for establishing rapport with the paying client.

Arising early I saw that Dave had prepared and stocked his vehicle, a double-cab Ford pickup; the rear seat was filled with food and provisions, with cages on the flatbed for the dogs. Also in the rear were a large tent and several drums of diesel fuel, necessary because the Nevada wilderness was far beyond any

gas station. In addition, his rig pulled a trailer that carried a large snowmobile.

We headed south for the Toiyabe Mountains, a long and desolate range in central Nevada. The closest burg was Tonopah, a tiny town on the southern edge of that range, midway between Las Vegas and Reno. It was a lengthy drive with a not-too-chatty Dave and miserable, desolate countryside with nothing to see. The only evidence of civilization was an occasional jet trail overhead.

Meanwhile it was getting colder by the minute; the thermometer on the truck showed twenty below zero. When I mentioned the frigid weather, he said, “Yeah, it’s a little too cold to be sleeping outside in the tent.” That’s when I realized that he had the extra 55-gallon drums of fuel to keep the vehicle—and heater—running throughout the night. So we slept in the truck seats; they did recline slightly, but not far enough to be comfortable because of all the provisions and equipment in the back seat.

The dogs remained in their cages overnight—they needed no heat because they had their fur coats on. If they weren’t tough enough to exist in those conditions, they wouldn’t be much help for Dave.

The next morning we woke up to a clear blue sky that was absolutely beautiful; it seemed as if you could see forever in that western vista. Although the thermometer still showed minus 20, Dave said that wasn’t an accurate reading—that’s only as far as the thermometer went! It was no doubt colder.

One of Dave’s canines was a scent dog; in a cage on top of the truck, it sniffed constantly. The other six or eight dogs jumped around until the scent dog finally smelled something. Then Dave let all the dogs loose; after running around in circles

for a while, they tore off in the same direction with the scent dog leading. Dave and I hopped on the snowmobile and followed the energetic, racing pack. We sped along on a trail that had three feet of snow on it, but we kept close to the dogs. It was extremely cold and windy, and we must have been really crazy.

As for firearms, I had brought my .270 bolt-action Winchester, a fairly small caliber rifle. I would have to shed my gloves if it came to any shooting, and I was not looking forward to that. Dave had no rifle, although he did carry a pistol. He probably thought I was quite experienced, since he knew I had hunted in Africa, Canada and Wyoming. But I was a late bloomer, only having hunted big game for the first time earlier in Zimbabwe.

The dogs had raced frantically toward a small hill and were barking madly. We arrived at the base of that small, rocky rise, with a cliff maybe 50-feet high. Dave and I maneuvered around, climbed up the rear of the hill and walked slowly around to the front. There we discovered a small cave, in front of which the dogs were barking like crazy—meaning the lion was inside. One dog raced into the cave's opening and in no time came flying out, literally dripping blood. The cat had sliced him open—showing what a powerful animal we had cornered.

It dawned on me that Dave had no rifle because he knew this would be a close range action—either the cat was going to be 10 feet up a tree or coming out of a rockpile cave, the exact situation at hand. I don't know if Dave had his handgun out because I was completely focused on what was going to emerge from that hole and how I would react. I'm sure Dave was ready since he was experienced in these hunts.

My eyes were glued to the cave's four-foot high entrance as

another dog went in to harass the lion. When Dave said, “Get ready,” I suddenly realized I was in a precarious situation. Standing only 15-20 feet from the cave opening, I didn’t have room to back up because a drop-off was directly behind me. I had taken my glove off, and I knew that my freezing finger was good for one clean shot only. My senses were being bombarded, not just by the frigid weather, but by all the possible, exciting scenarios.

Then quite suddenly the cat sprang out of its lair. It looked directly at me, no doubt concluding it had only two choices: to angle off to the side near the barking dogs, or go straight at me and down the cliff. While he was computing his chances of escape, I decided I better shoot the darn thing. At that exact moment Dave yelled for me to shoot, and I quickly squeezed the trigger. BAM! I popped him once exactly in the heart-lung area of the chest. One shot and it instantly went down; it started flopping around so I shot it again. Then the dogs lit into the lion—they wanted to tear it apart. However, Dave stopped them after letting them chew on it briefly as a reward for their efforts.

Later reflecting on that danger-filled situation, I decided that I had expected the lion to charge towards me when it emerged and my shooting was just a split-second response—a mere reaction to danger.

After Dave got the dogs under control, we dragged the large male cat down the hill, loaded it on the snowmobile, and returned to the truck. Then Dave reached into one of the truck bed compartments and pulled out a bottle of Early Times bourbon! “Glug, glug, glug,” he went. “I don’t drink much but on occasions like this I do. Wanna drink?” I did. Good old Kentucky bourbon hit the spot.

A casual observer in the wilderness can usually spot a deer or elk or in the forest, but few will casually glimpse the quiet, reclusive mountain lion. Some hunters search for a mountain lion for days at a time and never even see—much less shoot—one. However, *my* hunt, which had only begun a few hours earlier, had successfully concluded.

We hauled it back to Tonopah where a game warden checked it out; closely examining it, especially its teeth, he concluded it was quite old. After that, Dave skinned the animal.

Then we drove back north to their trailer. It was obvious he was pleased with how I performed, but he was still very tight-lipped. We got along okay on that long trip; perhaps he opened up a little more.

Professional guides sometimes take on real clowns for clients. Some people dream that they're going to hunt a lion or some other dangerous predator but they don't even bother to break their boots in or practice with their rifle. They just show up. He liked that I performed the way I was supposed to—that I wasn't a total screwup.

When we finally measured this impressive-looking animal, it had a skull measurement of 14 and 5/16 inches—width and length added together. At the time, it was #27 in the SCI record book. Then his wife prepared a meal, and we had mountain lion filets for supper. I was unaware you could eat mountain lion, but apparently it was common; it was light-colored, similar to chicken. Although not particularly delicious, it was okay, especially considering the challenges involved in taking it.

Upon learning that Dave also did taxidermy, I asked him to prepare it and he agreed. Preserving a lion through taxidermy may sound easy, but it's a complicated process. For a mountain lion, the taxidermist generally purchases a foam form from a

supplier; these come in different sizes according to the lion's measurements. After a tanner prepares the skin, it is fit on the form and sewn together seamlessly. People generally want to keep the skull and original teeth, so a plastic skull is used for taxidermy. I still have the original skull, including the teeth, stored away.

I was amazed to have spent a mere three nights away from home—with just a half day of hunting—since landing in Sacramento. I went to Nevada specifically to hunt a lion and was fortunate to take one so quickly. Leaving from the reopened Reno Airport, I had an uneventful journey home—the way I like it.

Over the years I have concluded that Dave was quite skilled in the technical part of his craft. He knew exactly where to guide me and how to use the dogs and equipment. His lack of good conversation was off-putting—as were the negative temperatures—but he achieved results in the field.

It took Dave about six months to complete the taxidermy; the lion eventually arrived in a huge box. He did an outstanding job on one of my rare taxidermy orders.

This Nevada trip provided many new experiences for me: the bus ride through the snow, the bleak desert landscape of Nevada, the snarling lion, and a strange guy with great dogs.

13: Zambezi Valley—1990

During my second trip to Africa, I kept a written journal of the highlights of that expedition. It chronicled the daily events of a typical hunting safari, beginning with my airflight from New York City to Zimbabwe, by way of The Gambia, Zambia and Botswana.

It was later published by me in binder form and titled *Zambezi Valley 1990*, with drawings of an elephant, zebra and rhinoceros on the cover. What follows is a highly edited and much abridged version of that journal from summer 1990.



Home from the hunt

June 18. Before connecting with Zambia Airways in New York City, we discovered that the scheduled DC-10 had mechanical problems, and a chartered DC-8 was substituted. I made a point of finding the pilot to determine who the new

carrier was. It turned out to be Miami-based Rich International Airways, an outfit that I'd had some problems with while flying in the Turks and Caicos Islands—the owner still owed me \$700—but I didn't mention that to the new captain, who informed me that he had never flown to Africa before. I also knew that it was currently in Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection; in 1984, its license had been briefly revoked due to maintenance irregularities. In spite of these concerns, I was reasonably optimistic that we would arrive safely.

We finally left, only an hour late, flying about 7½ hours to Banjul, capital of The Gambia, to refuel. Our original scheduled stop was in Liberia, but it wasn't safe to do so due to the onset of the First Liberian Civil War.

The layover at the World War II-era Banjul International Airport became an adventure. When we arrived at 2:00 A.M., there were no lights on the runway. The pilot circled the town several times, flying low and buzzing the field before someone woke up and lit the field. Upon landing, nobody there knew much about refueling, so that task took three hours instead of the usual 60 minutes.

To compound the problems, the aircraft was turned off during refueling and we passengers were really starting to feel the intense African heat. A few started to leave the plane, only to be stopped by a stewardess who said we couldn't deplane until "the officials" arrived and approved it. I declared, "Sorry, we're leaving," and the person behind me repeated that; after that, everyone in the plane followed us down the rickety wooden stairs that had been provided. It could have been hours before any "officials" appeared. One of the passengers was outraged and exclaimed, "This is not very well run!" I replied, "Welcome to Africa."

We finally took off, flying another 7½ hours to Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. By the time we landed at Lusaka International Airport we had missed our connection to Harare, Zimbabwe, so we were booked on a plane to Sir Seretse Khama International Airport in Gaborone, Botswana, with another connector flight to Harare. Finally arriving in Zimbabwe we were only 10 hours late, which was not too bad considering the circumstances. I spent the night in the historic, five-star Meikles Hotel, built in 1915.

June 19. Peter and Jane Seymour-Smith, owners of Iwaba Ranch and Iwaba Safaris, picked me up at the hotel in the morning. I later went out into the field with Peter, an experienced 60-year-old hunter. He bought a cattle ranch in 1960, but decided in 1972 that he might do better with game. He sold his cattle, took down all his interior fences and installed a perimeter fence—around all 25,000 acres. Then he re-introduced all the original game for the area.

The first day out we walked many miles, seeing both white and black rhinos, kudu and other antelope, and many different plains game animals. Then we spotted a wildebeest that I could target. No doubt Peter wanted to see how well I could shoot before he sent me out with his son Justin to hunt dangerous game. Using my .270 Winchester, I made a brain shot, killing it on the spot. Peter was delighted—and probably somewhat relieved. He commented, “Well, you won’t have any trouble with elephants,” which was *not* a prophetic statement.

At one point our tracker yelled, “Puff adder!” and indicated that Peter and I had both stepped right over one without noticing it. It was the first time I had ever seen one, and this encounter was my luckiest moment on the trip. The puff adder, one of the world’s most dangerous poisonous snakes, is aggressive,

venomous and responsible for the most snakebite fatalities on the continent. When I *stepped over* the puff adder, it must have been sleeping—lucky for us—and that’s why I am still here to tell this story. The Africans were much better at detecting them than we were.

June 20. I connected with Peter’s son Justin, 33, who holds degrees in zoology and geology. We loaded up two Land Rovers and drove almost seven hours over paved and dirt roads to Gokwe camp area, where the Seymour-Smiths had leased hunting rights on eight hundred square miles of Zambezi Valley tribal lands. Land Rovers, the British four-wheel-drive, off-road-capable vehicles, are the transportation of choice—and necessity—in the African countryside. There was no road on the final leg to their base camp in the reserve, where wild animals are hunted in a controlled manner.



**A bull elephant—the first one I shot—
its tusks were record book size**

Since I was moving up in animal size from plains game to

elephants, I was also using a CZ-made Mauser action rifle with a .416 Remington cartridge in addition to the .270. At the base camp, we zeroed in our rifles, a routine calibration process to ensure that the rifle shoots where aimed. This was especially necessary because my gun cases had been loaded and unloaded at several airports. This procedure was vital to our safety, since our plan was to hunt the elephant that had killed a local woman recently. The local populace was upset and terrorized, to say the least.

June 21. Arising early we tracked several elephants down to a river and came within 40 yards of three young bulls. We observed them briefly then tracked through the hills, relentlessly walking mile after mile. Along the way we saw Cape bushbuck—a widespread antelope species—and frequent elephant marking.

From a high cliff, we saw many elephants, Cape buffalo, waterbuck—another species of large antelope—kudu and baboons. That day set the pace for the rest of the trip: We walked about six hours in the morning; rested for two hours and ate lunch; then walked for several hours in the afternoon.

Controlled hunting is the primary reason that wild game is so populous in this area. Part of the hunting fee and most of the trophy fee—each animal has a price tag—is forwarded to the local tribal council to fund schools, clinics, and other necessities. The locals understand the economic value of the game, and they help protect it from criminal poachers who hunt on restricted lands or with prohibited weapons.

Unfortunately we had no success in finding the woman-killing-elephant, and we moved on.

June 22. We drove into the Batonka area, about 2½ hours from the base camp. The Batonka tribe is the most primitive

one in Zimbabwe, maybe in all of southern Africa. They originally lived in the bottomlands of the Zambezi Valley before being displaced when Lake Kariba was created. Peter and Justin had been saving this rugged area for me to hunt since I was the only “single” hunter coming this year.

Bringing our own tents and equipment, we selected a place by the river and established camp under an extremely large tree. The bearers, trackers, helpers, and cook quickly cleared the ground, dug the toilets, constructed a shower enclosure and set up the tents. Our camp was quite comfortable.

That afternoon we sighted two young bull elephants and managed to get close while stalking through seven-foot-tall grass; that was thrilling because we remained downwind from them and vision was poor; occasionally, we sent the tracker up a tree, and he would sight them. Finally, we came within 30 yards, determined their age, and then managed to depart without the elephants ever knowing we were that near. It was exciting!

June 23. At breakfast I asked about the unusual noises during the night. Justin said they came from elephants making their way through the bush near camp. When we found their tracks, Justin and the tracker became very excited because one track was extremely large, which indicated a very old and sizable elephant.

We followed the tracks for many hours; to watch that process was fascinating in itself. The skill of Justin and the tracker was amazing: They tracked the elephant by the sharpness of the edges of the tracks, and by how much dust had blown in; They could tell how recently it was present by the temperature of its dung; They knew from examining the leaves roughly how long it had been since it stopped to eat; they could tell whether it

had passed through before dawn, denoted when the leaves were still covered with dew.

Working our way through some incredibly dense brush, we glimpsed the largest Cape buffalo that we would see on the trip, but we were focused on the elephant and couldn't stop.

While in the middle of dense foliage we finally found the elephant, only about 25 yards away. Justin's job was to direct my shot, meaning whether I was to shoot for the brain or the heart. He called "between the eyes," but I was slow and as I pulled the trigger the elephant moved its head, so my first shot did not hit its brain. Wounded, the elephant took off running with another one.

Justin and I raced through the thick, thorny bush, filled with mopane shrubs, trying to keep up with the elephants, which had cleared a slight path before us; we were being scratched badly. Justin told me to shoot again, and I fired one at the back of the elephant, striking it in the rear. It quickly turned around, obviously annoyed, while the second elephant took off in another direction.

When the elephant figured out where its problem originated, it started toward us, preparing to charge from only 20-30 yards. Justin shot first, followed by another shot into its chest from me. I finished him off with one in the heart. My big .416 caliber really worked well. The entire sequence of action was exciting beyond words! Jubilant with my success, I felt at once both satisfied and relieved.

Exhausted, Justin and I rested while the tracker caught up; he looked at us in disbelief because we were covered with blood—from running through the thorn-filled bushes. Later Justin recounted that he had asked me as we ran helter-skelter through the deep bush if I could keep up with him. Although I

did not recall that, I apparently replied, “I’ll keep up till I die!”

It was a first-rate elephant, 55-60 years old, with tusks weighing 52 and 48 pounds, six feet long along the outside curve. Within thirty minutes the Batonka people emerged from the bushes with axes, spears, knives, baskets, buckets, and a variety of other items, shouting “Nyama! Nyama!” which means “meat!” They crowded around as our helpers removed the hide and the tusks, and we had to gently fend away a few.

The number of locals eventually increased to about 200 and many edged closer and closer. Justin had to jump on the elephant with a stick and knock a few of them back to keep them from cutting up the elephant before we were ready. I climbed a mopane tree and started photographing this scene.



A large crowd of locals arrived to carve up this elephant for food in the Zambezi Valley in 1990

Finally, Justin jumped down and yelled to them, “Okay, it’s all yours!” At that point, a melee ensued for the free food. People hacked away at bits of meat, some stuffing it into their

mouths on the spot, others grabbing it out of someone else's hands. A few people even crawled inside the elephant and dragged out various internal parts. It was a stunning, fascinating, chaotic scene to behold.

One man outside the circle of locals had arrived late. Old, gimpy, and miserable, he watched everyone else get a share of the food. Because the gentleman didn't speak English, I persuaded a tracker to translate: The elderly onlooker was upset because he didn't get any meat. So I told one of our helpers to get a nice bucketful of meat and give it to him. The old guy was ecstatic and extremely grateful.

June 24. When we returned the next morning, there was nothing left but the skull and part of an elephant leg which we placed in a tree as lion bait, covering it with branches and foliage to keep the scavenging vultures and marabou storks—the “undertaker birds”—from disturbing it. We hoped the bait would draw lions underneath the tree; if so, we would find their tracks and follow.

While tracking impala, bushbuck, and warthog, we found black rhino tracks. Large, aggressive black rhinos—another of the “Big Five”—have no natural predators other than man. An endangered species, it was not on our hunting list.

In the afternoon we visited a village where the inhabitants had complained about Cape buffalo uprooting their farm crops. One old fellow was delighted to see us; he pointed out the six-foot high fence, adorned with six strands of barbed wire, that encircled his property. In spite of his efforts, buffalo had invaded, ate his cabbages, ruined his well, and generally terrorized his family.

The offenders were older, bachelor bulls living alone in the tall grass. Mature Cape buffalo bulls typically weigh one to two

thousand pounds and have large, solid horns that grow downward before curving back up. They are dangerous when aroused. We agreed to help and he pointed us to a nearby field of six-foot high grass. We invited him to accompany us but he quickly and politely declined, saying that he'd watch from a safer location.

A tracker with an extraordinary sense of hearing accompanied us, carrying a small bag of wood ash, similar to a tobacco sack, which he occasionally sprinkled so that he could tell the wind direction. Suddenly he heard a movement and stopped in his tracks. It was a very tense moment since we didn't know the buffalo's whereabouts.

Suddenly, an angry buffalo exploded out of the grass, speeding across a clear patch toward us. I quickly swung on him and squeezed the trigger. The buffalo dropped about 17 paces away, killed with one shot through the spine. What a moment! The ecstatic farmer appeared from his dwelling and another small crowd gathered. Everyone started cutting up the buffalo and telling us what great people we were. We were glad to have restored some normalcy to our farmer friend's life.

June 25. In the morning another farmer approached and told us about a buffalo that was bothering his crops; it moved slowly because it was dragging a four-foot log which some of the locals had used with limited success as part of a snare. Justin and I investigated but decided it was too dangerous to walk into seven-foot tall grass looking for it. Justin said, "It's pissed and will be looking to come after us in the long grass." For me, it was extremely exciting to stalk a creature that wants to kill you. We moved on and soon quietly watched several elephants, coming within 20 yards of one group of four.

Later that afternoon we looked once more for the old

buffalo with the log-snare. Stalking into the long grass, we listened, looked, and waited; we neither saw nor heard anything. After an interminable period of time we gave up the search and left, again concluding the effort was too dangerous.

June 26. We stalked a group of elephants and two buffalo herds but there were no big bulls to take. We found an impala that was hooked in a snare and released it, since it hadn't been caught for very long and was uninjured. Once again, we sought the buffalo with the log-snare; we still couldn't locate him. An exhausting day, to say the least.

June 27. That injured buffalo was weighing heavily on my mind. I told Justin I would just as soon use my other buffalo permit by putting this one out of his misery. We threw rocks into the grass and made noises from various places to discover his location; we didn't want to enter the bush blindly, that was way too dangerous. But we couldn't get him to move; he was obviously in there waiting. We finally departed and later found a grysbok, a small, solitary antelope, hard to get because it is so elusive. I took it with one shot.

We went back near the village and, although our vision was limited by the grass, I spotted a huge bull. After my successful first shot, it turned and started to circle around toward us, so I shot him once again. As the bull started to complete his circle, Justin thought he better join the action, so we both shot together. Four hits!

This buffalo was monster-sized. It would have ranked highly in the record books; however, one horn was broken off. According to the SCI record book measurer's guide, that disqualifies it from consideration.

June 28. As we hunted bushbuck along the river we saw impala, many unusual birds, and a large family of mongooses.

Yes, that is indeed the plural of mongoose, and there were a lot of them. Returning to the lion bait in the tree, we discovered some leopard tracks, but nothing sizable.

The scenery today was magnificent. Although there weren't many birds nearby, I did manage to down a few doves, enough for dinner. During our evening conversation I learned from Justin the "official" position of Zimbabwe regarding the outbreak of AIDS: It's a plot by the United States against the third world. How outrageous and ridiculous is that, I thought, especially considering the efforts the U.S. was making to combat the disease.

June 29. In the morning, we checked the lion bait again—still no tracks. We went hiking again for a great distance and saw many female bushbuck, several herds of impala, kudu, tracks from a family of black rhino, a large buffalo, and a warthog.

After a week in the deep bush we drove back to the base camp. Climbing the promontory overlooking the valley we spied a few elephants and some kudu and waterbuck.

June 30. Rising early we walked for about six hours and saw one very slow kudu and seven female bushbucks; not much game out for some reason. That afternoon we ventured close enough to a large herd of buffalo to take a photo. We later saw many elephant signs, including one gathering place under a grove of trees.

July 1. After a long drive back to the ranch at Iwaba starting at 5:00 A.M., I took a rare nap, followed by lunch. Heading out with Peter, we saw lots of female waterbuck, but no males. I downed a very large warthog with one shot at 50 yards; we had wildebeest and warthog for dinner.

July 2 Justin and I began the morning by sighting a small

waterbuck male, plus some impala, jackals, kudu, eland, warthog, flights of ducks, wildebeest and cheetah tracks. As we walked up a river bed I learned much from him about the geology of southern Africa, including information about minerals, rock formations, granites, and agates.

July 3. In addition to impala, warthog, and sable antelope, we saw a white rhino. In truth, the white and black rhino are the same color—brown. The white rhino's name is derived from the Afrikaans word "weit," which means wide, because it has a different shaped jaw than the black rhino.

Justin and I took photos of the rhino and African crested porcupines—they may grow to 60 pounds—that we found. We stalked a few animals and unsuccessfully searched for cheetah. But the most fascinating sight were the ten-thousand-year-old bushmen paintings in a nearby cave.

As it was growing dark we spied a sizable waterbuck about 300 yards across the lake. I propped my .270 Winchester in a tree and shot once. We didn't see it run or fall, so we had to hurry around the lake on foot—about two miles—to investigate. When we arrived, it popped up in front of us, almost dead, so I fired once more and dropped it. By then we were a long way from the Land Rover, so Justin said he would get it and return in a couple of hours. Weber the tracker and I sat down and waited.

In the darkness we built a fire to stay comfortable as the weather grew cooler. Suddenly we heard a coughing sound out in the bush. Weber cheerfully said, "Lep- lep-, leopard!" I replied, "Oh, wonderful!" I thought, this is great—what am I going to do, is the leopard interested in the waterbuck, is he just curious about the fire, or have *we* become his prey and he's after *us*? Am I going to have to shoot a leopard that I can't see? Just

as I nervously visited all those scenarios in my mind, we heard the Land Rover—Justin had returned. Weber and I loaded the waterbuck and headed back to camp for supper, with no more thought of the leopard.

July 4. On the final day of the trip a very sick-looking zebra crossed our path. Justin asked me to put it down because it was starving due to age. The quick end I provided was certainly easier for it than starving to death or being ripped apart by a predator. Later I got a large impala at 120 yards with the final shot of the safari. The final night in camp was bittersweet: I had met many new friends and was sorry to leave them, but I was also glad to return home to my loved ones.

July 5. In the morning, Justin, accompanied by his fiancé Ruth, drove me to Bulawayo where we met Butch Walker, the PH from Lemco Ranch who had recently founded Bulembi Safaris. It was a happy reunion for two good friends.

After taking the horns and hides to the taxidermist's shop, we took tea nearby; in the evening, we ate dinner with more friends. Afterwards, I visited the excellent local bookbinder. Justin had given me a book on the Zambezi Valley which featured some of his photographs, and I asked the bookbinder to rebind the book in the hide of the elephant that I took.

That bookbinder's place was interesting; he had literally hundreds of bird cages filled with native African bird species captured over the years as a hobby. Many were songbirds.

July 6. Butch and I drove to Mazunga, a village on the Buby River. Although I had fired my final shot of the Iwaba safari, I was not entirely finished. I wanted to get a bigger wildebeest, and I did so, using the .270 Winchester—with one shot at 250 yards. I impressed nobody as much as myself with that shot.

Butch mentioned that he needed impala meat for the camp. There is a huge excess of impala on the million-acre Lemco Ranch; they must take 2,000 per year for conservation purposes so the remaining healthy ones have enough food. Accompanied by Butch and Shorty, his trusted tracker, I dropped one at 100 yards.

July 7. On the way to Butch's home we shot two more impala: one to provide food for his household, and one for leopard bait. It was nice to visit again with Liz, Butch's wife, and to relax in their comfortable house.

July 8. I missed a beautiful impala by clearly making the worst shot ever. Inspecting several baits, we found no sign of leopard activity. In the afternoon we downed a very sizable warthog. He was standing halfway behind a tree when I made my plan for a beautiful one-shot kill. Of course I hit the tree instead; the warthog started running flat out, so I shot twice again, missing both times. Finally, I discovered my error, corrected my lead, and killed it on the fourth shot. Although it had never slowed down, I hit it at 150 yards.

That night we hung out at the homestead of Roger and Hester Patching who live on the ranch. Roger is a retired British South Africa Police officer. We watched the World Cup final match between West Germany and Argentina, resulting in a one-to-nil victory for the Germans.

July 9. Butch and I arose early and went to an extremely rocky area and where I shot a sizable klipspringer on top of a hill at 150 yards. Klipspringers are small, sturdy antelope that typically inhabit inaccessible areas that are not favorable for hunting. I was in the right place at the right time.

There was still no sign of leopard near the baited areas so we returned to camp. Another hunter from the States had

arrived; he was eager, enthused, and ready to go. Seeing him brought back pleasant memories of my first Zimbabwean trip; through this fellow's eyes I started to relive my own greenhorn African adventures. I also realized it sure is helpful to have a bit of experience in the bush.

July 10. In the morning there were still no leopard signs at any of the baits; however, we got two large impalas, one of which was record-book size. Those were my final shots fired; in the afternoon we left for Bulawayo where we stayed with Butch's friend Chris, another PH.

Chris and his American wife live in Florida during our winter. He is a highly-decorated, former member of the Selous Scouts of Rhodesia. The Selous Scouts was a special forces regiment of the Rhodesian Army that operated from 1973 to 1980 and was dedicated to the elimination of terrorism.

We also visited Max Rosenfelts who owns UMLILO Safaris and maintains a huge ranch near Bulawayo. Butch and I then drove around the 7,000-acre property he was looking to buy and develop as his own game ranch as he expanded his Bulembi Safari business.

July 11. In the morning I took an Air Zimbabwe plane to Harare, where I spent a couple of days wandering around and exploring. Although it was difficult to find someone who would give me the black market rate on the U.S. dollar, I finally managed to make a good deal with a merchant on a tanzanite ring for Noreen. Found in just one place on earth—near Mt. Kili-manjaro—tanzanite is a relatively recent discovery, named in honor of Tanzania, where it was first unearthed in 1967. Cutters can fashion gems with a range of color from violet-blue to blue-violet, depending on how large it is.

Then I visited a co-operative where Shona sculptors work

together. “Shona sculpture” is a modern movement of stone-carved sculptures created in Zimbabwe, deriving its name from the Shona tribe, the largest in that country. It was fascinating to watch the artists working, and I met several of them. I purchased four small pieces; I would have bought bigger ones, but they were too heavy to pack.

After that, I visited the local Anglican Church and then had a nice dinner at the Meikles Hotel restaurant. The wines made in Zimbabwe are excellent.

July 12. On my last evening in Harare I caught a flight to Lusaka, where I laid over before boarding a Zambia Airways flight back to the states. After refueling in The Gambia—uneventfully, this time—we landed on time at 10:00 A.M. in New York City on **July 13.** Luckily, I caught an early flight back to Louisville.

Despite a few travel glitches, it was a great trip. Several of the animals that I took found their way into the SCI Record Book, including the Sharpe Grysbok, Klipspringer, Warthog, and Elephant.

Home in Louisville, I gave much thought to the people I met, the sights I saw, and the fragile relationship between humans and wildlife in Africa.

It’s quite frightening that the population of Africa is exploding, doubling every 30 years. In the past, the norm was for families to have 10 children—eight would die and two survive; now it seems to be the other way around. When Peter Seymour-Smith was a child, the population of Rhodesia was one million; now Zimbabwe has more than 14.5 million people, and it continues to increase.

Human population increase is a key factor in the

movement of wildlife and formation of reserves. The average underfed African peasants look at wild animals and see something to eat. They view a huge wildlife reserve or a many-acre parkland and see land that could be cleared to raise crops. It's difficult to convince them that such lands serve a societal purpose. Considering that many small African countries devote a greater percentage of land area to parks and wildlife reserves than do Western Europe or the United States, it is not surprising that problems arise.

Chizarira, a huge national park on the Zambezi Escarpment, contains 490,000 acres and is the third largest in Zimbabwe; however, only 200 people visited Chizarira in 1990. Such land use is difficult for the government to justify when it could be used to produce food for its starving citizens.

Similar land-use issues persist. The local peoples used to burn an area to clear it, then grow crops and move on; years would pass before anyone would return. Today, that land is in short supply due to the burgeoning populace, and people keep re-burning and re-farming the same land year after year, which ruins the soil. Erosion from the heavy rains then washes the topsoil downstream to rivers and lakes. In one area the rivers that used to flow quite freely now contain so much silt that one has to dig two feet down to reach water.

There is immense pressure on the government to redistribute the land. Most people desire to raise their own food by farming but the acreage for each family is quite limited due to overpopulation. People see large commercial farm operations, comprising tens of thousands of acres operated by whites, and they wonder why so few control so much. Why can't I have a part of that, they think. However, the current system is infinitely more productive and provides increased food for the

entire country, as opposed to the efforts of ten thousand people farming their own small subsistence gardens.

Places such as Lemco Ranch were remarkable because they had large canning, freezing, and cold-storage facilities and were shipping meat and foods throughout Africa. If some of its larger farms were nationalized, Zimbabwe's total food production would be lowered and its export earnings from the sale of food-stuffs decreased. Inevitably more people would starve.

As for population control and limitation, most Africans seem to regard any suggestion to limit the number of children they have as a foreign trick. From the locals' point of view, the larger the family, the more people are available to work their farm and support them in old age.

The effect of HIV/AIDS on this discussion is unknown at this time. Researchers can't determine how widespread AIDS is in Africa because governments don't want to admit the true numbers of those afflicted with that horrible disease. Some of the rumors I heard were just extraordinary, estimating 15% to 40% of the population as being HIV-positive.

Zimbabwe's growing pains are fueled by its lack of effective political leadership. The short-term pressure on the country's politicians is enormous. Perhaps unified governance is impossible in a country with 16 national languages and continual tribal friction.

The counterbalance to this negative discussion is the unsurpassed friendliness of the African people. Walking around cities and towns for many hours, I never received any strange or hostile looks nor felt the least uncomfortable. I believe that one efficient way to transfer wealth to impoverished African countries is to travel there and spend money, and that's what I enjoy doing.

All things considered, the long-term outlook in Africa is depressing, especially the effects of overpopulation and the squeezing of wildlife out of areas that best support it.

14: Black Bear in the Gila Wilderness

In early 1991 I started to consider hunting for a bear in the U.S. It's possible Dave Handrich planted that idea during our mountain lion hunt. In April I found myself back with (not) talkative Dave in the New Mexico Gila Wilderness hunting for a Continental (Inland) Black Bear.

Black bears range all over the continent; actually not all are black—some are brown or even blond. They are omnivores and typically live in forests, although they are drawn to human communities in search of food. They regularly climb trees to feed, escape enemies, and hibernate; they are great swimmers too. Hibernation for several months typically begins in October or November.

The Gila Wilderness, part of the Gila National Forest, is located in southwest New Mexico, near the Gila River. With a population of less than 10,000, Silver City is the largest nearby town; the village of Reserve is also nearby with a population of under 300. The Mogollon Mountains run through the Wilderness, which became the first-ever designated wilderness in 1924. Rich in western wildlife, the area is home to a wide variety of predators, birds, reptiles, and other animals.

Although Dave was definitely not the most witty and charming guide I ever met, he seemed to know what he was doing and I successfully took a mountain lion with him, so I notified him that I wanted to hunt for bear. “Ok, when you want to do it?” he replied. That was it.

After I pushed him for some details, he explained that he

ran bear with his dogs in New Mexico. It sounded like another unique experience; plus I knew and trusted his dogs from the mountain lion hunt.

After finalizing the deal with Dave, I flew into Albuquerque, New Mexico, about 230 miles northwest of the Wilderness. I wanted to work in a visit with daughter Siofra, a student at the Santa Fe campus of St. John's College, a top-ranked liberal arts school and the third-oldest college in the United States. Siofra attended its Annapolis, Maryland campus her first year, then switched to the New Mexico campus where she stayed for her final three years.

Siofra never had much enthusiasm for shooting or hunting as a hobby, although she had dutifully gone with me dove hunting—to pick up the dead birds. She was okay with my avocation and never gave me any grief over it. I was her father, and we loved each other, but she would not be hunting black bear with me.

Renting a car at the airport, I drove 65 miles northwest to Santa Fe and spent a day with Siofra; then I headed down to Gila Wilderness. I had a state-issued license for bear that cost a few hundred dollars; when an out-of-state guy comes to hunt, they're going to nail him with some exorbitant fees. That is a hunter's expectation.

Many people have taken part in similar hunts but have never even seen a bear, much less shoot one. Many others casually buy a bear license in conjunction with their deer hunts, but never glimpse a bear. One's success is highly dependent on the guide's familiarity with the terrain and the quality of the dogs—how well they can track.

I expected Dave to be somewhat more talkative and personable since we had established some rapport during our lion

hunt but that was just not Dave's way. His manner was the same on the second hunt as it was on the first.

There are several methods for hunting bear. Stalking is difficult and not often desirable; trailing with hounds was Dave's preference. Another popular way to hunt bear is to use bait, typically old bread or two-three day-old doughnuts. I'm not sure why, but bears prefer doughnuts.

We drove to an area in the Gila he had selected; once again his pickup was loaded down with dogs, fuel, and everything but the kitchen sink. In addition, it pulled a trailer holding two horses. Our search efforts on the first day went unrewarded so we stayed in the open wilderness overnight; thankfully the weather was temperate.

My hopes increased the next morning when one of the dogs found a scent and a bear track, and we began closely following that trail in Dave's truck. Similar to Nevada, the dogs were amazing—Dave just let them run, following the scents they detected.

I was impressed that Dave had become technologically adept since I had last accompanied him. He had installed a direction-finding device in the collar of one of the faster dogs. Although this was pre-GPS, the apparatus indicated to Dave roughly where the animal was within 50 feet. I thought this was a noteworthy development.

As we followed, the barking of the dogs increased. Occasionally we would reach the crest of a hill and hear their loud yelping. Dave could tell by the intensity of their barking how close they were to whatever they were chasing and whether they had treed their prey. It was quite fascinating to me.

Eventually, Dave concluded from the sounds that the dogs had cornered something. We parked the truck slightly up a hill,

mounted the horses, and continued following. Going up as far as we could, we dismounted, left the horses, and scrambled up the extremely steep slope. The ground was covered with shale and loose rocks, making our ascent difficult. Even though I was in great shape, it was awfully tough going for me; Dave was moving right along even though he was in his 60s, maybe 15 years older than me.

Finally reaching the dogs, we saw the reason for their frenetic activity—a bear in a medium-sized tree, surrounded by the yapping canines. Upon closer inspection, it was a scraggly black bear, sick-looking and not bulked up. Dave said it appeared to be really old. That was actually a welcome development since I'd rather shoot a bear that had reached its lifespan and would have trouble finding food. Dave commented, "Yeah, but won't make much of a rug."

Appraising the bear's condition, we determined that its left rear leg was drawn up and not moving. Dave concluded that it probably broke it in the past; when it hibernated, it probably grew together in a strange new, somewhat crippling, position. "Not long for the world," Dave surmised, "No great trophy, but you'll be doing it a favor."

Using my .270 Winchester I took careful aim and fired. Only one shot was needed; the bear fell out of the tree, dead before it hit the ground. As their "reward," Dave let the dogs bite and jump on it for a moment, then we led them back to their cages in the pickup; they must have been exhausted.

Our horses, tethered down the hill when we shot the bear, would not cooperate—they were greatly unsettled by the bear scent. Somehow we finally persuaded one of the horses that having an unmoving bear strapped to its back was not all that terrible. After we walked the horses down, we skinned and

gutted the bear; it was scrawny and weighed only about 150 pounds. Examining its teeth, Dave confirmed that it was quite old and barely able to eat, doomed to slow starvation. Its ability to scavenge was severely limited by its bad leg. My shot provided a merciful, ethical end to this malnourished creature's life.

Dave kept most of the meat because I didn't want any and daughter Siofra hadn't expressed much enthusiasm for a load of bear meat in her small refrigerator. In addition to feeding the dogs, Dave took some for his own use. The hide was messed up, discolored, and not worth being tanned. Dave had the head boiled down, treated, and sent to me in Louisville; it's in my basement. This black bear did have a fairly big skull, and was ranked #22 in the SCI record book at the time.

Before I left New Mexico, I traveled back to Santa Fe and said my farewells to Siofra. Thus ended another brief, but successful hunt with taciturn Dave.

15: Doves in Uruguay

In addition to the duck-hunting trip to Mexico that I will describe in a later chapter, I have been “south of the border” several times for hunting excursions to Uruguay and Argentina.

In 1992 I traveled to Uruguay with Noreen and Royden Peabody III. Royden and I had been dove-hunting comrades in the Louisville area for several years; hearing about the unique dove hunts in Uruguay with the birds flying all day, we decided to go there for an adventure.

Doves exist in the millions in that area. Although South American eared doves are slightly different in appearance than the mourning doves in Kentucky, they are close relatives. Eared doves live in savannahs and farming areas, often close to humans. They fly high, fast, and direct. As for eating, the two varieties taste about the same.

Doves are considered agricultural pests in South America because they eat crop seeds as fast as farmers can plant. For years the local farmers used various poisons to control them, but most were ineffective due to the overwhelming number of doves.

Although sport shooting is not engaged in by locals, someone determined they could get crazy Americans to visit and shoot the pests, plus they would pay good money to do so. In no time, the tourist agencies and outfitters began marketing Uruguayan hunting trips to North Americans.

Uruguay as a dove hunter’s paradise was a novelty then, so Royden and I were in the early wave going there. Today,

excursions to the country's many lodges that specialize in dove hunting have become extremely popular. The process is easy because the golden-eared dove doesn't migrate, and the season lasts all year.

Royden has been a Louisville friend for many years. He and I were classmates at Louisville Country Day school; he later moved to Colorado to pursue real estate interests, eventually returning to become executive manager of the Bashford Manor Mall. He was a heckuva good shot. I think he learned when he was young from a trick shooter who would toss a nickel in the air and hit it with a BB gun. Royden's outstanding hand-eye coordination aided his precise shooting.

I've been mostly a rifle shooter, totally different from shotgun shooting. With a scoped rifle I always aim by keeping one eye open and closing the other. With a shotgun, I hold both eyes open and look only at the bird. My instinct controls the aim as I swing the gun around. Royden might say that I'm a fairly good shot; I agree that I am a decent *rifle* shooter, certainly better than with a shotgun.

The two of us shot many clay pigeons together and we occasionally hunted doves in Kentucky in the fall. For a while we hunted on Annice Belknap Johnston's Land O'Goshen farm out US 42. The great-great-granddaughter of the founder of Belknap Hardware, she loved the sporting life and always welcomed hunters to her property; she passed away in 2019.

Royden, Noreen, and I flew to Argentina on Aerolineas Argentinas and for a short while stayed in Buenos Aires, the country's capital and largest city, situated on the western shore of the Rio de la Plata. Then we crossed that river by boat into Uruguay. The Republic of Uruguay is the second smallest nation in South America; however, it is quite progressive socially and has

embraced democracy since 1984. Situated on the Atlantic Ocean, it is bordered by Brazil to the north and by Argentina to the west and southwest.

We briefly visited Montevideo, the capital city, pleasant and charming in an old-time Spanish way; the architecture was impressive, and we ate huge steaks in excellent restaurants. All the Uruguayans whom we met were welcoming and extremely glad to see tourists, who were few and far between.

Once in the countryside we stayed in a comfortable little town some distance from Montevideo. The small lodge's living quarters were agreeable except for one thing. Noreen and I had our own room, but Royden shared a room with another gentleman. The other guy was a huge snorer and prevented Royden from getting any sleep; my friend was ready to put his roommate's bed out in the hall. They got into a huge, unpleasant argument over the situation.

A few years later we read this gentleman's obituary in the newspaper after he passed away. Due to Congress not moving quickly enough (surprise, surprise), it seems that there was no federal estate tax for individuals who passed away in 2010. Royden's roommate died leaving hundreds of millions of dollars in his estate, none of which was taxed. That's the same person whom Royden wanted to put in the hallway—the man who could have purchased the entire farm, town, and province. We laughed out loud when we realized who he was.

Noreen didn't bother accompanying us on our daily hunts. Her standard response was, "Why should I watch you kill these poor little birds?" Instead, she took part in her favorite activity—horseback riding. There were many horses on the farm, and she always found someone, including gauchos, to accompany her.

For shooting, I took my 12-gauge Benelli semi-automatic shotgun, which held five shells. Benelli, now owned by Beretta, an Italian company which has been in the firearms manufacturing business for 400+ years. They produce many shotguns used by the military and law enforcement, especially SWAT teams.

We weren't allowed to bring our own ammunition, so we went through many cases of shells purchased from the hunt operators. No problem because it would have been difficult to carry 50 pounds of ammunition. I'm sure they made a good profit. They also suggested that we not bring our own firearms so they could rent them. I declined because I preferred using my own shotgun.

The four days we spent there provided genuine fun and great exercise; it was almost like "practice shooting" because there was an unbelievable volume of doves on the wing. Some of the wingshooters there made it their goal to kill 1,000 doves in a single day; we did not. The others mostly met their objective, plus incurring significantly sore shoulders and buying much Aleve or Motrin. We shot "only" 300-400 doves each day. It's significant to note that the outfitter made sure the birds were collected and donated to the local community to provide food for the schools and townspeople.

Royden and I started and finished shooting whenever we wished; we had an outstanding time pacing ourselves and were supportive of each other. Camaraderie is important in hunting. You are more likely to get along if you have commonalities of interest with other hunters, even if you just met. Sometimes you run into a jerk, but that's rare.

Although the scale of this wing-shooting was enormous, the eared dove is in no danger of extinction. Indeed they are quite resilient, breeding four times a year and thriving on grain

from the vast commercial farms that support their shooting.

Completing our hunting, the three of us returned to Buenos Aires for more sightseeing, large steaks, and fine wine. It is a huge, attractive city; its main street, Avenida 9 de Julio—July 9 Avenue—is 18 lanes wide with a park in the middle that's absolutely gorgeous. Its name celebrates Argentina's independence day. The architecture and layout of downtown Buenos Aires reminds me of Paris—very captivating.

Royden accompanied us briefly in Buenos Aires, then our paths diverged; he went to Rio de Janeiro for some Brazilian sightseeing. Meanwhile, Noreen and I flew straight back to Louisville.

Although his father died in 2012 at age 97, my friend Royden III is still alive and shooting.

16: More Elephant and Buffalo Adventures



**An old Cape buffalo and my
old Manton .470 Nitro Express, made in the 1920s**

After my second trip to Africa I decided to buy a .470 Nitro Express double rifle to better address the dangerous wild animals I would be hunting. At a Safari Club Convention, I was trading with a merchant from Oklahoma who dealt in old style rifles and shotguns when he mentioned that he had a .470 for sale back home in Oklahoma.

When I heard that his asking price was almost \$10,000, I almost fainted and replied, “Let me think about that.” He responded, “Think quick, I might not have it when you return. They are always in demand.” So I made arrangements to travel to Enid, Oklahoma to try it out.

The dealer was an honest, likeable man whose family was in the oil business; he ran Champlin Firearms, Inc. on the side. A Belgian-trained gunmaker worked for him; Belgium is well known as the best training site for gunsmiths. Champlin was an incredible business in a tiny haven; hunters from all over the world had to fly into Tulsa and then drive two hours to reach Enid.

His Nitro Express was an attractive firearm. On the side of the rifle was an inscription: “By appointment to his Excellency the Viceroy,” referring to the Viceroy of India; it was also engraved, “John Manton and Sons, Bombay.” They were known as “Gun makers to the Royal Family.”

On my first test-fire, the recoil really pushed me back—it shoots a heavy, 500-grain bullet and has a real kick to it. It helped that the rifle was heavy—that takes up much of the recoil. The lighter a rifle or shotgun the more it kicks. It was fairly accurate—at 50 yards, the bullet holes from both barrels were only two inches apart. That’s the standard I wanted. After purchasing it, I used that faithful rifle for several years.

We were always in danger when hunting elephants; if they changed direction and started coming toward us, we’d make a lot of noise to divert them; several times they wouldn’t turn around and we had to scare them back by shooting over their heads. But we never had to take one down to stop them.

We were going down a road in Russell Tarr’s Land Cruiser once when an elephant suddenly bolted from the bush and began chasing us—angered for some reason. Knowing he could outrun it, Russell didn’t get too excited, but the game commission scout in the back with his legs hanging out made a poor decision and started shooting with his AK-47.

That was a total disaster. The AK-47 shoots a small bullet

and is not very accurate. One well-placed hit from a .470 is going to do much more damage than a series of shots from an assault rifle. To get a shot into its brain from a moving car is nearly impossible—plus, it wasn't necessary.

The tribe that controlled the Omay reserve had a quota of elephant hunting licenses; they sold them for what the market would bear. When a scout killed one like that, he threw away thousands of dollars from the tribe's pocket because the Fish and Game department couldn't sell that license; the economic cost to the tribe meant that guy was in trouble.

Parts of the elephant are treasured as food; in particular we loved the excellent trunk steaks. However, we never acquired any during one Omay safari because we had agreed with the local tribe to give the trunk to the chief. Approaching him outside a hut in the middle of nowhere, we bowed to each other happily and handed the trunk over to him. Steaks made from the cross-section of the trunk have two holes—making their source apparent. It's still good eating. Steaks made from the temple are also very delicious; can you imagine how much meat there is on a skull that large?

During my 1992 trip to Zimbabwe I took my second elephant. The cost of elephant hunting had started to climb because everyone was afraid a total ban might be enacted. Butch advised me to buy a less expensive license to hunt cow elephants because of their surplus in Zimbabwe. Females are somewhat smaller and have modest tusks; with less ivory, they're not often hunted by smugglers and poachers. However, Butch warned, they are much more dangerous than bull elephants.

Bull elephants tend to congregate and they feel secure. Little is going to bother them except humans, whereas cow elephants are usually found in a family herd. A matriarch leads a

group of 5-10 elephants, including babies. The mothers all look out for the little ones which are sought after by lions, leopards, and other predators. Cows are always watchful and ready to attack anything too close that poses danger. Butch stated they are bad-tempered to begin with.

Most people hunt bulls because they want large tusks. But with the danger quotient it's much more challenging and exciting to hunt cows; also it certainly is cheaper. I agreed with Butch's plan to hunt female elephants and I took nine such cows over the next 10 years and no more bulls.

Russell could identify the leaders and the aged ones in the herd. He could determine their age by examining certain characteristics, especially the teats. We wanted an old one not of youth-bearing age and not a mother—we wouldn't shoot a cow nursing a calf.

In one exciting situation we were chased by a large cow elephant. We had found a herd with one large cow displaying a decent-sized left tusk and a right one curving under her mouth, not broken off or chiseled down. The right one was huge because it hadn't been used.

As we snuck closer one of the cows saw us and suddenly gave a mighty roar. About 40 yards away the large cow with the unusual tusk turned and immediately came straight for us. Russell said, "Let's go!" and we did—sprinting fast; the only available route was up a hill which was extremely steep. I was running faster than I ever did before.

As we reached the top the elephant stopped, thinking that was a safe distance. It trumpeted a few times at us and went back to its herd. I learned how fast they can move—much faster than we can run! I think she would have been perfectly happy to catch and stomp us. That's what they do—wrap their trunk

around someone, throw them to the ground, and stomp them. That was a good cautionary lesson for me—the importance of an unimpeded line of retreat.

Over the years I kept looking for that cow with unusual tusks; Russell said he had seen it a few times, so it was still around. Finally, we found it again when my son Embry accompanied me along with my friend Larry Florman. Embry actually photographed it.

By 1998 Noreen had been on enough safaris, so I invited young Embry and Larry to join me. Larry, a very successful plastic surgeon, wanted to go for the adventure, not to hunt. Butch, an expert on poisonous snakes, gave Larry a book on snakes since my friend was worried about them. I don't think that Larry slept that night! We did see snakes occasionally; but we were there in their wintertime—our summer—so it was fairly chilly and snakes were hibernating or staying in their burrows.

Russell and I were out front with the tracker as our group followed a herd of elephants which included the cow with the curved tusk. As it directly faced us a mere 20 yards away, I attempted a brain shot. When I fired, nothing happened. Russell told me to shoot again. I did—still nothing. I knew I was hitting it because we could see the puffs right between the eyes.

Finally, it collapsed; we didn't realize that it had been leaning against a tree, its knees locked, dead on its feet. Immediately after my final shot, several enraged elephants started toward us. Russell yelled at us to move quickly to a large rockpile on a nearby hill. "Move, quick, or you'll die," he commanded. Russell and I turned and started shooting over their heads and the elephants took off. We were safe; had we not bolted they would have tried to kill us.

We returned to field-dress the elephant after the others left. Although it was not as crowded as when I shot the first one, many local villagers again appeared, looking for food. We eventually removed the trunk and presented it to the local chief, bowed to each other, and departed.

Overall Larry seemed fascinated by his experiences in Africa despite the dangers. Those perils made it quite different than going on a totally controlled photographic safari in a large vehicle. Young Embry, armed only with a camera, also loved the exciting experiences. It's better for gun novices to be unarmed because they could easily become excited and shoot someone.

As for the unusual, curved tusk from that elephant, it was maybe six feet long—very long for a cow. Zimbabweans license the export of elephant ivory, if it is legally taken; it can be exported as long as it contains the proper government stamp. But as far as I know, it's still in Russell's possession—I told him to keep both tusks. It was impossible for me to take them home because I didn't obtain a prior federal permit to return with them. As usual, we make rules for the entire world, prohibiting citizens from engaging in transactions for anything containing ivory. Theoretically, that includes ivory teeth, guitar or piano keys, or an antique ivory-handled gun.

Russell thought he could eventually sell them for a substantial amount, but he was disappointed when Zimbabwe later prohibited any selling or trading of ivory. However, it's not illegal for Russell to possess them.

Embry, an excellent photographer, took some memorable photos on that trip. He also figured prominently in an earlier elephant hunt.

On that trip, although the two of us were supposed to meet in Atlanta to fly together to Bulawayo, he didn't show up. When

I finally arrived in Joburg I called him; I was furious due to all the planning and cost involved. He apologized saying he just screwed up the departure date and I quickly forgave him. Not only that, but my travel agent in Texas who specialized in hunters' travel somehow arranged for him to get to Bulawayo. My son learned a lesson and all was good after that.

We were hunting one day for elephant cows; Embry was quite interested in photographing those huge animals. As we were sneaking up on a small herd led by an aged matriarch cow that Russell had targeted, some of the others started coming toward us. When Russell told us to pull back, Embry said, "Well, let me get a couple more photos." He had no idea of the threat they posed. Russell replied, "Well, you may be the one who gets stepped on here, young Embry, so let's move!"

Although one came as close as 30 yards as we retreated, Embry still took some excellent photographs; he realized that this was serious business and that elephants were not always happy, Dumbo-like creatures—especially females with babies. They can outrun humans in a heartbeat from that distance. One photo that he took graces the front of the memory book that I later made. The two of us had an excellent time together.

When the safari concluded, we flew down to Cape Town for several days. From the airport, a taxi took us through extremely poor shantytown areas; then we arrived in Cape Town proper, a beautiful city. We visited the vineyard area outside the city, featuring beautiful rolling hills and farms that looked like California wine country.

We rented a car and drove to the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa. At nearby Cape Point, it was very cool to stand in the water with one foot in the Indian Ocean and one foot in the Atlantic—or so they claim. I was surprised to see a

lot of distinctive South African penguins there.

As we traveled, we stopped to sightsee once when suddenly the car was covered with monkeys—sitting on the hood, staring at us, trying to come in! It was strange and somewhat scary to be surrounded by all these frenetic creatures. If we had opened the window or door, they would have been all over us. Maybe their aggressiveness was facilitated by people feeding them. In any event we decided to drive off; it was up to the monkeys to disperse or be run over. They confirmed their reputed intelligence by jumping off and scattering.

Elephant hunting has been challenging and exciting over the years. It was tough sometimes because we'd track forever and not see one; other times, we'd be riding along and suddenly roll up to a herd of elephants several hundred yards away. We would then scout around to see if there was anything huntable.

Elephants' vision is subpar but their sense of smell is astounding. An individual elephant once sauntered our way without seeing us. Russell said, "Be quiet, the wind's with us, it's going a little slow." As the elephant approached us up a slight rise, Russell whispered, "Hold on, hold on, I want to see how close it will come before we have to shoot it." I thought it was close enough, so I shot at only 10-12 yards away. It went straight down, stone dead.

Another time we were in an extremely arid area of Zimbabwe. When the land becomes really parched there, the earth splits. We discovered a large fissure about ten feet wide; for some reason Russell suggested we jump down into the crack. He said, "Down here we'll be out of sight and able to take something by surprise."

So we did. We followed that crevice around as it widened until Russell saw fresh elephant tracks just ahead of us; we

couldn't hear it and had no idea how close it was. Not wanting to be trapped with an elephant in close quarters, we decided that discretion was the better part of valor and quickly clambered out.

A unique situation developed another time when we were under a tree having lunch and spied some elephants at the top of a nearby hill; Russell said they would probably come down soon. Sure enough, by the time we finished eating, eight of them were on the move; so, we headed in that direction.



With Russell Tarr and the elephant that I took with an unusual rear brain shot in Zimbabwe

We discovered a wide path that had been worn into the hillside by elephants over many years. Quietly situated on a cliff above them, we saw them approaching. Russell asked, "Can you shoot straight down?" I replied, "I guess so if you hold my legs." He said, "Okay, go for the third one that's coming, that's an old, dry cow." Hanging over the edge of the cliff as Russell held my legs, I shot straight down with my .470 Nitro Express into the

top of her head and she immediately dropped dead. With Russell's assistance after that unusual shot, I then pulled myself up.

Unbelievably, the same situation happened again on another trip when we saw elephants moving down a trail in that same area. Although not at the exact same spot, I leaned over the cliff with my double rifle as Russell held my legs. BOOM! Another one down.

From the side I usually aim at an elephant's temple between the ear and the eye so that the shot enters the brain, about the size of a loaf of bread. I must continually visualize the brain's position in relation to the temple; if its head is swaying, I must adjust my aim. Another preferred target is between the eyes—a little below that if I'm shooting *up* at the elephant, which means I'm too damn close. Shooting it just behind the shoulder into the heart and lungs will also work.

In 1994 an inexperienced hunter with us became nervous on his first elephant stalk and decided to quit; so, I got his permit for a cow elephant, making a total of three for that trip—in addition to a crocodile and tsessebe antelope.

Shortly afterward I saw a large cow elephant in the bush and decided to take it. Walking up a small, graded hill, it didn't detect us following behind. The hill became quite steep and I came fairly close behind her. At the right moment and directly behind her, I shot directly into the back of the exposed head and dropped her. Quite an unusual shooting accomplishment—a rear brain shot.

However, trouble ensued as the elephant rolled off the hill into the small valley below; prior to its demise we hadn't thought about recovering it. We had to slash our way down the steep hillside into a valley filled with water, trees, and bushes. It was dreadful and took every one of the trackers and helpers to

assist in hacking a path to the carcass so we could carry out the parts we wanted. That elephant-shooting quickly drew the usual large crowd of locals.

During one Cape buffalo hunt when Russell was temporarily away, I went with PH Mike Taylor, a camp manager with not much more experience than me. Tracking a large bull buffalo, we went into an area with dense growth and couldn't *see* anything; however, I could *smell* it. Pointing out the direction taken by the buffalo to Mike, I crept slowly until we saw a bit of black fur which quickly disappeared. Following it, we discovered a tunnel-like path that it had cleared out in the bush. We briefly waited, then followed the smell and the path. The buffalo had laid down and was napping. BAM! Got it.



A huge Cape buffalo, taken with my .416 rifle

In 1990 when I first hunted with Justin Seymour Smith, we spotted a buffalo from the “tick birds”—cattle egrets, a species that has a fascinating migratory history—that follow such creatures to land on them and eat the ticks. We finally found it but

the buffalo suddenly broke out running. I shot but only wounded it; then Justin shot and I shot again, and it finally went down.

It had a huge, beautiful horn on one side, but the other one was partly broken off. Justin said, “Well, I can’t charge you a trophy fee for that one, wouldn’t be fair, you can take another one.” Too bad—it would have been one of the largest I ever took.

I always enjoyed briefly playing the role of a professional hunter. Once Russell said, “Okay, Embry, you’ve done this enough, tell me how we’re going to stalk this buffalo herd.” I replied, “Well, we’re going to go downwind, by circling around over there, then move into position coming this way. . .” Being a PH was always fun for me.

I always appreciated my wife’s company. In addition to my first safari, Noreen accompanied me a couple other times and always enjoyed the trips but eventually it got old for her. She’d either accompany me in the field or if there was another couple, she’d hang out with the other spouse.

Oftentimes the assistant or apprentice PH would take her on a trip to see the sights which she always liked. The apprentice and tracker would be armed and select a local village in the Omay. She delighted in meeting the local, and sometimes purchased small handiwork such as carvings and spears.

As for our hunting camp, Noreen was interested in cooking, how the camp was organized, and what people did “while others went around shooting defenseless animals,” as she teasingly commented. She would often comment, “Embry has to slaughter another animal for lunch.”

I was never interested in keeping the horns of the cow buffalo because they were less impressive-looking. At first, I had a

couple of their hides tanned; but an entire Cape buffalo hide equals a lot of leather, so I stopped that. Over the years I had some boots and belts made, plus a gun case. Some chairs in my house are upholstered with buffalo hide. As for elephants, I brought back material from several safaris and had boots and belts made from the hide.

All told, I shot 10 African elephants and can remember each one of those situations. But I've also downed 22 Cape buffalo (12 bulls and 10 cows)—too many to remember all the details. I do know that they were always challenging. The locals were especially happy over a shot buffalo because it meant meat for the village.

If you believe animal rights supporters, no elephants exist on the face of the earth—or only just a few. That's simply not true—there are more than 400,000. Their main threats are poachers who will shoot anything with a speck of ivory in it. The money generated by hunters is what supports Zimbabwe's wildlife efforts, parks, and anti-poaching initiatives. Although it sounds counter-intuitive, hunting is the catalyst for maintaining an abundant elephant population.

17: The Nile Crocodile



My thousand-pound Nile croc

One incident is particularly memorable from the 1994 safari that Noreen and I took to Zimbabwe.

When I was growing up, my mother didn't care for Saturday matinees and seldom took Rudy and me to the movies. So I never saw any jungle pictures that featured Johnny Weissmüller (1904-1984), the famous Olympic swimmer who played Tarzan in the 1930s and '40s. I did watch those Tarzan movies later

in life—especially the one in which he fights a crocodile, a scene so exciting that it was shown in several of those movies. Little did I think that I would have my own personal experience with a monster croc.

A slight digression: In a bar in Fort Lauderdale, Florida In 1967, my Turks and Caicos friend and boss Fritz Ludington pointed out an older guy who always hung out there whom he said was Johnny Weissmüller. I approached the gentleman and we said hello. Later I learned that Weissmüller the actor retired in 1965, moved to Fort Lauderdale and lived there until 1973. So, it may well have been him.

Crocodile hunting is popular in many sub-Saharan African countries which provide a habitat for these giants that typically measure around 10-12 feet in length. They are relatively social animals and typically live in groups on watery terrain.

The Nile crocodile is quite dangerous and responsible for hundreds of human deaths annually. This common species is the largest freshwater predator in Africa and is the second-largest existing reptile in the world; only the saltwater crocodile is larger. Nile crocodiles are agile creatures with a powerful bite and sharp teeth; they often take large prey underwater and drown them. They can even “run” for short distances. Crocs are most definitely on top of the food chain.

These animals were on the verge of extinction in Zimbabwe 40 years ago until the locals started farming them to accommodate handbag makers who wanted croc skin. The government made an arrangement with farmers: For every certain number they sold they had to turn some baby crocs loose in the wild. Thus, the population grew fairly rapidly and crocs were no longer endangered, despite some regional declines. That’s why they can now be hunted.

Assisted by PH Russell Tarr of Bulembi Safaris and his trackers, Noreen and I were searching the Omay safari area for a suitable Nile crocodile to take. Earlier someone had reported sighting a very sizable croc nearby; since crocodiles are relatively inert, we hoped to find it in the same area.

Hiking along a small river we spotted the large croc on a sand bar. Russell became quite excited, saying it was enormous. It certainly seemed huge to this Kentuckian. The crocodile appeared asleep with its mouth open. It is normal for them to bask with their jaws open in sunny conditions, maybe to breathe easier or keep from overheating.

Noreen stayed safely back with the trackers while Russell and I crept closer, stopping behind a large, seven-foot-high termite mound for a better view and to start lining up the best shot.

While looking through my binoculars over the top of the mound, I got an unobstructed view of the creature about 20-30 yards away. Russell said that a croc's brain is about the size of a pack of cigarettes and located just behind the eye. He advised me to hit it there twice in quick succession, otherwise it would jump wildly after being hit and I wouldn't get another good shot.

I was using my Nitro Express .470 double rifle with open sights—not a telescopic sight. Having two barrels, the double rifle's advantage is a fast second shot without having to feed another round in. I only had to switch my finger on the two triggers. In dangerous circumstances, I would hold another two rounds in the fingers of my left hand underneath the barrel of the rifle; that would enable me to quickly reload.

Although a good distance across the river, the croc luckily was situated sideways to us. With a stable resting place for my

rifle on top of the termite mound, POW! POW!—I pulled off two rounds. The first shot was on target and, following Russell's instructions, I rapidly shot again. The second hit in the same place, taking the top of the head off; the croc was lifeless.

The distance was further than I anticipated so I was quite pleased by my accuracy. Noreen soon joined us; she too was impressed by my keen eye, although I believe she was mostly glad that the croc was dead.

Another problem arose: How do we secure the croc and haul it back over? Russell volunteered to wade across the river if I could watch for any crocs who showed an interest in him. Brave man! Kinias, the notorious tracker whose machete sliced Noreen during the Cape buffalo incident, followed Russell into the water.

I immediately became worried because the water was above Russell's chest, much deeper than he expected. Holding a rifle with one hand high over his head, he struggled onward; then Kinias started panicking. Kinias was about 18 inches shorter than Russell and didn't know how to swim. He too thought it would be shallower. Soon Kinias started comically climbing up Russell's back and clinging to his head. Russell was yelling, "Kinias, get down, get off, or I'll shoot you!"

The scene was side-splitting! Truthfully, I had trouble watching for other crocs since I was laughing so much. I wasn't the only one who appreciated this comic relief—Noreen was laughing so hard I thought she was going to wet herself.

Finally, Russell reached the dead croc and shouted to Lovemore, another skinner, to throw him a rope. Of course Lovemore threw the entire coil of rope, failing to hold on to one end. Russell, yelling profusely, was so boiling mad he could have shot the tracker. Again, much laughter from the peanut

gallery—Noreen and me. I'm glad that no crocodiles appeared while we were laughing our asses off.

Eventually order was restored by the PH, and with much effort the croc was towed to our side of the river. Noreen and I knelt to pose for a photo behind the colossal croc when suddenly she jumped up and screamed, "It's alive!" The huge tail had started swinging around menacingly, but after a brief panic we figured it was just caused by postmortem muscle spasms, similar to a chicken sometimes running around after its head is cut off. What was Noreen thinking—that it had come back to life after being dead for the last hour? When that tail came around—talk about hysterics! Whew, what a rollicking fun group we were!

That Nile crocodile, the only one I've ever taken, was reported in the Safari Club record book as the largest one of its species taken in Zimbabwe at that time. It was an amazing 14'11" and weighed over 1,000 pounds. The only other Louisvillian I know who has taken a crocodile is my friend Millard Cox.

After Noreen and I posed with the monster, we loaded it in the Land Rover and returned to camp; there we hung it up, cut the belly open, and looked for human bones, which are frequently found. We found only a partially digested baboon and several stones, called gastroliths, the size of your fist. Apparently the crocs swallow these stomach stones to aid the grinding of food during digestion.

The next photo, taken shortly afterward with the croc hoisted up next to me, showed its unbelievable size. Unfortunately we determined that its back wouldn't yield much good leather; it was way too rough. The only usable part was the belly skin which I brought back with me. Everything else was left for

local tribespeople. Although the meat in something that was old is not very tasty, the locals still took most of it.



A waterbuck taken in the Omay area of Zimbabwe, 1994

From the skins I obtained on that trip I ordered one pair of elephant-only boots and one pair composed of crocodile-skin lowers and buffalo uppers. These fancy pieces of footwear rest in my closet. They don't fit well now since my feet have widened somewhat over time; but if I wear some thin socks, I can still show them off. I have some croc and elephant belts too.

I once wore my croc boots to a party and someone asked me where and how I obtained my distinctive footwear. I thought to myself, "Finally, someone asked!" Then I responded, "First you go to Africa, then you shoot a croc. . ." The questioner asked me if I was kidding and I replied, "Certainly not." We both laughed at my hunter-humor. However, with so much self-righteous, anti-hunting sentiment prevalent in current

times, I must be careful about such interactions.

When I suggested a leopard tooth necklace to Noreen, she wasn't excited about that jewelry prospect—nor about the idea of a crocodile's back tanned and made into a floor decoration. She told me that we'd only trip over it. She liked the boots, though.

18: An African Lioness



**In 1995, I took a lioness, another of the Big Five,
in the Zambezi Valley**

It's been many years since I've seen the Academy Award-winning movie *Out of Africa*, which I found quite realistic and enjoyable—especially the scene in which Karen Blixen, portrayed by Meryl Streep, drops a charging lioness with one shot, disregarding Denys Finch Hatton's (Robert Redford) direction to drop flat on the ground if a lion attacked. Then, Denys turns and shoots an attacking adult male. That was an exciting scene in an excellent movie. About 10 years after that film, I had my own adventure with an African lioness and lion.

During my safaris we would occasionally hear lions roaring at nighttime as we slept in our tents; sometimes the next

morning we would discover footprints indicating that a lion had visited the camp. Perhaps it had entered our compound out of curiosity or to scavenge some antelope meat that was left from dinner. Those were times when I was grateful that my rifle was under my bed for quick access. It is well-documented that lions will attack and eat humans; they present a distinct danger to villagers throughout Zimbabwe.

Because of the dangers involved in lion hunting, they are very desirable to hunters. Zimbabwe is one of the dozen African countries where all the prized “Big Five” species can be found. I had already taken the leopard, African bush elephant, and Cape buffalo; the black rhino was unattainable due to it being critically endangered. Only the lion remained.

In 1995 I decided to focus on a lion during a fairly short Zimbabwe trip without Noreen. PH Russell Tarr and I obtained the appropriate license to shoot a female; males were not licensed at that time but there was a surplus of females. Female lions are smaller than males and don’t possess a prominent mane but they are still dangerous. Hunting helps curb the overpopulation of their species and ensures that the remaining ones will not starve or suffer from lack of food.

On our daily forays we were always accompanied by a government game scout, a representative from the nation’s game commission who was present on every safari. His duty was to monitor us to make sure we were obeying the law and taking only what our license allowed. In effect we traveled with our own game warden.

Being a scout was a coveted job because he got first crack at the meat from our kill. He accompanied us every day unless he chose not to. We’d go to the village to pick him up and if he wasn’t ready, Russell would take off without him. We wouldn’t

wait because the scouts often overslept. In typical Zimbabwean style, it was not a highly organized group.

These fellows only acted as witnesses to our hunting and never interfered with us. If we had been doing something illegal or targeting the wrong animal, they would have reported it and we would have been fined, or shot (just kidding), or sanctioned in some way. On the other hand, they were always glad to help if we needed an extra pair of hands.

Before Russell and his helpers started their lion-tracking efforts in earnest, we chanced upon three lions close by the road as we were driving the Land Cruiser back to camp—a lioness with another female and a young cub. Russell studied them with his binoculars. The bigger one was an older lioness, Russell observed, beyond cub-bearing age. She would be our target.

Creeping closer and closer until we were only 18-20 yards away, I took one shot with the .470 Nitro Express and obviously hit her, but she didn't go down and took off running. By that time it was dusk and darkness was quickly coming. Russell said he wasn't going to follow the lion on foot in the dark and I said, "I'm with you, Russell." I am not a fool when it comes to following lions in darkness. So we all loaded into the Land Rover and took off after the lioness.

Tracking it in our vehicle, we quickly—and fortunately—caught up with it. She was staggering around in her death throes in a small clearing in the bush, and I finished her with one shot. Then, quite suddenly, we started hearing tremendous, deafening roars from a nearby male lion that was apparently angry. Its roars were ear-splitting; I had never heard any sound like that. You could hear the amazing noise for miles in any direction. It was definitely the most terrifying sound I have ever heard from a living thing. Listening to those sounds, I

understood that this creature would be very happy to eat me, right there, right then.

Russell had the driver back up the Land Rover to where the lioness sprawled. He said, “Embry, you stand on top of the truck and be ready to shoot if that male attacks. I’ll get out with the trackers, and we’ll grab the carcass and throw it on the truck. Let’s hope we get out before poppa lion comes close.”

At one point while loading we saw the male lion come out of the bush, and I fired a few shots over its head, scaring it away. Meanwhile, Russell and the three trackers finally hoisted the 300-400 pound carcass onto the truck. We all breathed a huge sigh of relief and proceeded home.

In retrospect, events were taking place too quickly for me to feel in danger. After I shot the lioness, she ran and we followed; when we found her she was on her last legs. However, it became very nerve-wracking as the male lion roared angrily, and we had a slight kerfuffle convincing the guys to get out and help throw the carcass in the Rover.

Notwithstanding the male’s roaring, I have felt far more nervous about the danger that elephants presented while hunting that species. For something that weighs seven or eight tons, they are quite fast; their tusks and huge limbs can inflict serious damage on the human torso.

Back at camp the skinners took the lioness into the skinning shed. They cut it expertly and took the skin off, asking if I wanted any of it. I really didn’t—all I took was the skull, which is in my basement. I brought no other part of the lion home.

We saw lions several other times on my safaris, but I never saw one take an animal down. That have been fascinating, worthy of the old Marlin Perkins TV show *Wild Kingdom*.

19: Argentina Expeditions



Another good-sized Cape buffalo, taken in Zambesi

Having enjoyed my 1992 trip to Uruguay, I decided to return to South America some years later to try my hand—and eye—at shooting doves in neighboring Argentina. Because I couldn't find any local friends to accompany me, I kept putting the trip off; after a while I became impatient and finally decided to go alone.

Once in Argentina I stayed at a nice farm just outside Buenos Aires and shot there. By this time many Argentinians in the countryside were catering specifically to wingshooters from the U.S., and they had significantly upgraded the food and lodging.

On this occasion I took a pair of shotguns—identical over-under Berettas. That gave me a back-up option in case of a

mechanical problem with one of the guns, plus the ability to point and shoot more quickly.

When shooting doves in Uruguay, reloading my 12-gauge Benelli became a pain. Although the over-under type fires only two shells, I developed a new action plan—to shoot the English way, using two shotguns and assisted by a loader. I taught several boys who usually acted as retrievers how to reload my shotguns and pass them to me in the correct manner. The locals thought that was a pretty neat style and it worked out well. BOOM! BOOM! Take the shotgun from the loader. BOOM! BOOM! Repeat. And repeat. You get the idea.

Although I was in Argentina for five days, I only shot on three of them. There were a few other wingshooters from the States also staying there; we interacted well and had a good time together.

As in Uruguay my compadres and I shot hundreds of eared doves each day. They weren't wasted. All the dead birds were gathered by the bird-boys and donated to institutions and people who needed them, such as the local orphanage. We dined on them at dinner, too.

Upon my return I saw my neighbor Bob Rounsavall and he asked me about the trip. Hearing my report that it was successful, he informed me that he was going to Argentina the following week with two other gentlemen. I thought to myself, "Jeez, I wish I knew you guys were going, I'd have tagged along." But that's okay, it was just a failure to communicate.

When Bob returned from Argentina three weeks later, he too had a report. He announced, "Hey Embry, you're full of crap—we got held up, strip-searched, and robbed of our watches and wallets by a bunch of bandits." Ouch. Bob and his crew must have looked richer than I did. I was instantly thankful

that I hadn't traveled with them.

Bob owned a small jet that he piloted. Sometime later I jokingly suggested that we all fly down to Argentina for more dove shooting, and he replied, "Embry, if you think I'm going to take a million dollar jet back to the same place where we got robbed, you're crazy."

But I did return to Argentina a few years later, accompanied by my son Embry. He was a little more enthusiastic about hunting than daughter Siofra; plus, he's a good shot. He went duck hunting with me a few times locally before agreeing to go dove hunting in Argentina.

After a few days in Buenos Aires we arrived in the Argentinian countryside and joined another group of hunters who were strangers, but we all got along well. Fortunately, there were no robbers or bandits in sight.

One peculiar incident occurred on that hunt. The guide led us to a place near the farm and said, "I've got a great spot for you guys, it's where many guests go to shoot." He positioned us next to a very large pen containing 50-100 pigs of various sizes. That was unusual in itself.

There was no shortage of doves that came within range of our shotguns; perhaps they were attracted to the pigs' feed. However, a dove would sometimes fall into the pen and the pigs would immediately snarf it up. It was quite extraordinary to see a pig gobble up an entire dove. It proved that pigs would eat anything.

Son Embry and I managed to take down several hundred doves each day. We were not as loco as some hunters who shot thousands of birds. By the time they depart, the repetitive firing of their shotguns has tortured their fingers, shoulders, ears, and cheeks. Thankfully, we didn't have that problem.

20: British Columbia Adventures



Big Rack with Embry III

My hunting travels took me twice to the Canadian province of British Columbia (“BC”), once for moose and once for caribou. BC is the westernmost province of our northern neighbor, mainly bordering Washington State to the south, although it also touches Idaho and Montana. To the west it extends to both Alaska and the Pacific Ocean.

Many rarely seen animal species in the U.S. still flourish in BC. Some of the most hunted animals are grizzly bear, moose, caribou, elk, big-horn sheep, mountain goats, stone sheep, deer, black bear, Dall sheep, and mountain lions. Of course all manner of birds and fish flourish in the BC wilderness.

In 1992 during a Wyoming hunting excursion, I met a

pallet manufacturer from Omaha; my new friend made pallets for Budweiser brewery which needs a lot of pallets. He explained that he greatly enjoyed his partnership in a new hunting operation in BC; he was optimistic that Finlay River Outfitters would become quite successful. As kind of a “loss-leader,” he was offering a special rate: If you bought three hunts in advance, he’d give a deep discount. Being something of a nickel-squeezer, I latched onto that deal and made an agreement for three trips.

In short order I took my first trip to BC, billed as “A Moose Hunt.” My specific intention was to only take one moose—there was nothing else on my immediate list. The most popular time to hunt the Western Canada moose is during their rutting (mating) period, late September to late October; they are more susceptible to artificial moose calls during that time.

When I flew into Vancouver, the largest city in the province and the third largest in Canada, an unusual interaction took place. I proceeded to the Air Canada area so I could catch my flight to Smithers, a town in northwest BC near the hunting camp.

When I checked in with my rifle case, the Air Canada agent who waited on me said, “What’s that?” I answered, “My rifle—I’m going hunting.” She responded, “Oh, you just came up here to kill our animals, huh?” Her attitude rankled me a bit. I dutifully explained, “I’m doing everything in a perfectly legal manner, and apparently you have some excess animals.” She remained fussy with me. That was my welcome to BC—one that the BC tourism officials would not appreciate.

Putting that aside I eventually made it to Smithers, a town of about 5,000, within view of majestic, snow-capped mountains. Someone from Finlay River Outfitters met me and we

flew the final leg on a float plane to their permanent camp on a lake. There are many lakes in that area—Williston Lake being one of the largest—but very few airstrips because of the dense woods.

Our plane was a De Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver, a classic Canadian float plane—you can put them on wheels, skis or floats. It is very adaptable and used in a wide variety of utility roles, especially in the bush, where it is unmatched by any other. Last made in 1967, it has a radial engine (R 985) slightly smaller than the DC-3's, and the same as the Twin Beech that I used to fly in the Islands. As you can tell, I am a connoisseur of bush planes.

The entire landscape was quite scenic with its lakes, mountains, and woods. Flying over a river on the way in, we noticed some large moose nearby, raising my hopes for a successful hunt.

The lake camp was nothing special—a semi-permanent, single-room, plywood building, constructed for the outfitting company and serving as the hunting lodge. There was one other guest, but we would not be hunting together.

My guide was Stella (not her real name), a woman younger than me; it was the first time I ever hunted with a female guide. By her words and actions, she let me know that she was as rough and tough as any male guide. Stella was very northwoods.

These outfitters used horses to access the remote areas where moose could be found, which I didn't mind at all. Although it would be manifestly untrue to say I'm a good rider, I am a fair one and I'm experienced. At least I know a horse's front from its rear.

After I became acclimated to the area, Stella and I mounted up and rode to the river where I had seen the moose from the

plane. It was a small tributary of the Finlay River, only about 20 yards wide. Our search came up empty. We ventured out for several days after that to various other areas, finding nothing each time. On the fourth day, we went to still another area, still hoping we'd see that big moose we spotted from the plane. And we did. There was the moose, right in front of us across the river.



My memorable British Columbia moose hunt in 1992

However, it was getting late in the afternoon and we had a Do-we-do-this-now-or-go-back-to-camp decision. We decided to go for it since our search had at last yielded the sought-after moose; plus it looked like snow was coming soon,

according to Stella.

The rifle I used was the same one I used in my recent Zimbabwe trip—a CZ-made, Mauser action .375 H&H; that cartridge is popular for shooting large and dangerous game of all type. I set up and intently placed this huge, old moose in my sights. Carefully I squeezed the trigger. BANG! It went down at once. One shot at about 150 yards—I was thrilled!

Stella was also delighted and definitely impressed with my success. “Good shot, Embry, way to go!” I always endeavor to hit the heart-lung area and I was very satisfied with my aim. It helped that I had a stable resting spot for my rifle; truth be told, it wasn’t that difficult.

The next obstacle was crossing the river to reach the moose. In addition, it had just started snowing heavily. I’m glad the snow started after my shot—I once took a mule deer in Wyoming in the snow, but that was pure luck.

Stella said, “Don’t worry, Embry, I’ll go over and start gutting it so overnight scavengers will be more attracted to the gut pile rather than the meat. We’ll have to come back tomorrow with pack horses to get the meat. We have to get back to the camp soon before the snow gets any worse.” Although the temperature was about 25 and it was snowing, she took off her boots, rolled up her pants, and waded across the fast-flowing river.

I said to myself, “Man, that’s terrible, I should go help the girl.” Then my thinking changed. “No, I shouldn’t. I paid them a worthy fee so she can slosh across and do it herself. After all, she’s about 25 years younger than me.” She crossed the river and field-dressed the moose, returning with a large slice of the tenderloin so we could prepare it for supper.

I asked, “What are we going to do about wolves and bears

finding the carcass?” She answered, “Not much we can do at this point. Just hope.” She had left her jacket on top of the carcass with the expectation that the scent would keep other animals away. She was one tough guide! Even with my jacket on, it was becoming frigid.



Returning to our BC camp with moose ribs in a blizzard

Then we mounted up and started back. By then, conditions were blizzard-like. I didn’t know exactly where we were headed, and I’m not sure she did, but we figured the horses knew where home was. We couldn’t see ANYthing! Everything—including us—was totally covered with snow. Talk about being in a predicament out in the middle of nowhere! Eventually we arrived safely at the lodge, told everyone the moose story and had supper, devouring the moose filet.

The next day we returned to the moose with two other men—one was a guide, the other was a visiting hunter—along with a couple of pack horses. It took some hours to cut it, pack

it, and ride back. The antler rack was impressive—maybe five feet across. Someone took a striking photo of me on horseback with the moose ribs draped across me on the saddle.

The moose looked huge to me, but not when compared to other moose. Although it made the SCI record book, it was maybe the 300th largest moose. Still, I was quite pleased with my accomplishment.

The next day a plane arrived with another paying guest: Dr. Reinald von Meurers, a noted German hunter, author, and corporate in-house physician. Dr. von Meurers and I talked at length about our hunting experiences.

The operations manager of the outfitters company also appeared. He said, “Well, Embry, since you finished off the moose, do you want to look for caribou? You’ve got three more days before the plane returns.” I replied, “Sure, I’d love to do that.” An unexpected offer, and I understood that if I bagged something else, I’d have to pay over and above the original fee.

The manager indicated that we would take horses for the next outing; eventually, he, Stella, and I rode off on huge draft horses that looked like Budweiser Clydesdales. The footprints they left were enormous.

Gloomy weather appeared and it soon began raining; we were miserable and the hunting conditions were poor. Two pack horses carrying our tent and other gear trailed us. Stopping for the day, we set up a tent and fixed some dinner; the tent was small, barely three-person size, for Stella, the manager, and me.

Darkness quickly came into the dense woods, and we all retired to our sleeping bags. Sometime during the night, I was awakened by a strange moaning sound; at first, I thought it might be an animal nearby—I wasn’t really sure. As I collected my senses, I realized it was THEM—Stella and the manager

were going at it, having sex! What an unbelievable and shocking surprise! In the space of a 6x10-foot tent, there were two people copulating, and one person trying not to hear it! Eventually, it pissed me off—they were just so uncouth and inappropriate. At least they could have had the decency not to moan so loudly.

When I awoke the next morning, I concluded there wasn't much I could do about the situation. Being confrontational wasn't an option because I had no idea where we were in the Canadian wilderness and they controlled the horses. So I didn't say anything, just simmered for a while.

Our adventure turned even worse the next day. I assumed the manager knew the territory, but he evidently wasn't aware of the muskeg that we blundered into.

Muskeg grows on top of ponds and swamps. A person can walk out onto what they think is solid ground and drop right through what is only a thick layer of vegetation. All three of us mistakenly rode into this swampy mixture of water and dead vegetation covered by moss. Our huge horses, sinking to their midsections, became quite stuck. Luckily the pack horses stopped short of danger.

What a mess! After looking at the horses up to their bellies in the boggy swamp, I immediately knew there was no way to pull those giants out of the muck and mud. After much discussion and cursing among us three humans, the horses somehow managed to struggle out on their own. When I now reflect on our situation, I realize that if those horses hadn't freed themselves, we would have been in serious trouble and SOL—walking many days in some undetermined direction in the wilderness. In addition, the horses would have starved to death.

After that incident I started making extra sure my guides were well equipped and competent. They needed to know the

terrain, possess a compass, and know how to determine direction. Nowadays with hand-held satellite telephones, one can access satellite service even in a remote area.

In any event, we and the muddy horses kept trudging onward until we stopped and rested at another cabin the outfitters used. As for hunting, there was nothing; I never fired my rifle after shooting the moose.

I was ready to leave Canada after seven days of this fun-filled adventure; the float plane returned and carried me away. Before that however, I had another conversation with Reinald von Meurers. Because I decided not to return to BC for bear after my next already-scheduled caribou hunt, and because he enjoyed the setup there for some reason, we cut a deal. I traded him my bear hunt for an excursion he purchased to New Zealand. We emailed and confirmed everything after we both returned to our homes. It was a win-win situation for both of us—Noreen and I acquired a trip to New Zealand, and Reinhard got his bear hunt.

Before flying back to Louisville without further incident, I took the moose antlers and skull to a taxidermist in Smithers; after processing, he shipped them to me months later. Since we didn't have space for them in Louisville, the moose is now displayed on a wall in Joanie MacLain's cabin in Canada. (More about Joanie later.)

When I later started to inform my Wyoming friend about his operations there and the shenanigans I witnessed, he quickly said, "Oh God, not more. Running this outfitting company is not as easy as I thought." When I told him the rest of the story, he was appalled.

My first trip to BC started off great when I bagged the moose. Then as we tracked animals in the wilderness, it dawned

on me that we were possibly the first humans to view parts of that magnificent, beautiful backcountry. However, I've been trying to put the rest of that journey out of my mind for many years because I got drenched in the rain, awakened by fornicators, and stuck in a muskeg.

21: British Columbia Adventures, Part Two



A mule deer I took in Wyoming

In August 1995 I returned to British Columbia to hunt mountain goat and mountain caribou. Young Embry, then 22, accompanied me on this journey; he was going as an interested observer, not to hunt.

There are five distinct types of caribou, including reindeer. In North America, they are called caribou if they're wild and reindeer if they're domesticated. My target—the mountain or woodland caribou—is considered the largest and is scattered all across northern Canada. Bulls can weigh as much as 600

pounds; their antlers are much desired.

Once again we flew to Vancouver and Smithers, where another Beaver float plane took us to Lake Toadoggone. The name sounds like it originated from someone who thought it was too dog gone far. Actually the name is an English adaptation of the older, aboriginal name Thudegane, which means "two brothers River" or "eagles nest." Go figure.

Because he had been taking flying lessons, son Embry sat in the front seat of the Beaver. As the pilot took off and started to climb, Embry gave a loud yell—a cap had come loose on the dashboard in front of him, and oil was shooting out onto his pants. Our pilot quickly tightened the cap and up we went. Not a good start, especially when the aberrations of the last trip came to mind.

We eventually landed at Lake Toadoggone and started exploring the plywood-shack camp. The shack was the size of a garage, completely built from plywood which was flown in; our "lodge," heated with a wood stove, was one large open space. It had a cooking area and a sleeping area—no bathing or showering would take place—and an outhouse, a frequently-used destination.

We then met our guides, Pierre Baulne and Stuart Egnell. Pierre was French-Canadian, but I'm unsure about Stuart's heritage; I was also uncertain why two guides were needed since there were no other hunters there. We learned that Stella (!) was still working for them and was traveling overland from another camp, bringing horses for us along with necessary provisions.

During our downtime I inspected my Winchester .270 rifle, which has a lighter recoil than the .375 I used to take the moose since caribou and goats are smaller. Some hunters say

they can shoot up to 500 yards with it; my maximum range was 300 yards.

Our guides reported seeing a goat high on a nearby mountain and asked if I wanted to search for it; I readily agreed and off we went. I knew little about walking up a steep mountain—and difficult terrain—with a rifle. Shortly after young Embry and I started climbing, I began to feel exhausted and could not maintain my usual fast pace. After hiking a short distance, I would stop—totally spent.

At the time I thought my lethargy was age-related, that I just lacked energy. I was to later discover the medical basis for my fatigue: atrial fibrillation (“A-fib”), an irregular and rapid heart rhythm that increases the risk of stroke, heart failure, and other heart conditions. Evidently the condition was just beginning to manifest itself.

Despite my mysterious fatigue I enjoyed another first-time experience: ascending on foot through a low-lying cloud or two! We hoped to break through those clouds and discover some goats; as it happened, I became totally exhausted and there were no goats. We sat and scanned the entire area with binoculars, seeing nothing, only rocks. And there were lots of rocks.

Trudging back down we arrived at camp at supper time but no guide was preparing food. When I asked what was for supper, they indicated that Stella was responsible for bringing food and provisions. But there was no Stella, no horses, no food—the latest indication this was not a well-run operation.

However, young Embry volunteered to catch some fish. He found a rod and reel and paddled out in a canoe with the confidence of a 20-something; in short order he returned with five trout, each about 15 inches long. Evidently no one had ever

fished that part of the lake before.

Thus, my son was the hero of the hour—we had plenty of fish for supper. We found a little flour in the pantry, so someone made johnnycakes. But the food situation wasn't good, and to alleviate our growing hunger at breakfast the next morning we only had some stale, half-eaten boxes of cereal.

As we started to make a hunting plan, Embry fortunately spotted some animals across the lake on a different mountain. He reported seeing horse-sized animals smaller than a moose, with large antlers that were more like a deer's. It sounded like he was describing caribou; soon enough he was proven correct.

After we crossed the lake on a boat, I faced another difficult climb; it was positively exhausting to navigate that second mountain. The hillside was quite steep and composed mostly of treacherous shale; if you took a wrong step and lost your footing, a perilous slide would ensue. We had to grab onto some small evergreen bushes to make our ascent easier. Thankfully, young Embry carried my gun for me, as he did the day before.

Finally, we spotted two caribou on the crest at maybe 100 yards. Not being used to humans, they watched us curiously but didn't seem scared or concerned with us whatsoever. It was imperative to act swiftly in case they disappeared over the hill; if that occurred, they'd be gone for good. So I quickly aimed and shot. BAM!

The good news was that the targeted caribou went down immediately; the bad news was that its carcass started careening down the mountain directly toward us—imagine several hundred pounds of dead caribou heading straight for you at a high rate of speed. In addition, we were all on a 45° slope—I could barely hang on without sliding down myself. As this situation developed, the thought occurred to me that there will be three

more carcasses headed below if that thing hits us.

Wonder of wonders, the caribou somehow hung up on small stand of evergreen bushes. We were saved. Later I realized that shooting that caribou was one of the (several) dumbest things I ever did as a hunter. It never occurred to me that the animal wouldn't drop right to the ground, that it would slide down the hill. Had that deadly scenario continued, it would have fallen into the category of a very ignominious death—being killed by the animal you just shot.

As we breathed a huge sigh of relief, young Embry said, “Uh, look down there by the lake—what's that coming this way?” Our guide calmly replied, “Oh that's a bear and he's coming to investigate. He heard a shot and he knows that means meat.”

Wasting no time in dealing with this second threat, we hurried to carve out as much of the caribou meat as we could carry, plus its sizable antlers, because we probably wouldn't be returning. From a distance of about three miles, we monitored the movements of the bear as it steadily moved toward us.

We were on foot because we still had no horses to ride. After we returned that afternoon—on our fourth day—Stella finally appeared with several horses and some food supplies. However, they were rigged up as pack horses and had no saddles; nor did she bring any extra saddlery. It appeared that someone didn't coordinate the details of our visit with her very well.

Since there was only one saddled horse—hers—I advised my son that it was unlikely we would return for a goat, because that would require a great deal more climbing. But at least we had the caribou, so we decided to end our hunt. We used a radio telephone to request the airplane dispatcher to send the Beaver

back for a pickup.

It took that float plane several days to return; because I was so exhausted, we just hung around camp and fished. Since I was only 54, I didn't suspect any lurking medical condition—I just thought it was the normal aging process. After receiving continued treatment for my A-fib, I feel better now at 81 than I did during that trip.

That grueling Canadian trip on the heels of the peculiar first one reinforced with me that my negotiation with Dr. von Meurers for the New Zealand trip was a stroke of genius—or maybe just luck.

For Embry, the entire trip was one new experience after the other and he enjoyed himself immensely. He fished and photographed, taking several picturesque images of the dead caribou and me with the lake in the background. And he came to my aid when I needed help.

After I became more skilled in selecting competent, organized outfitters, I considered going back to Canada to hunt that mountain goat. I had learned the hard way that when you venture into the deep-woods Canadian forest, it's important to be guided by someone you trust. When I consider all the debacles on those two trips, I realize that it was pure luck to return home alive and relatively unscathed, especially with great results—a moose and a caribou.

The caribou antlers are proudly displayed over the fireplace in Joanie's brother Angus's cabin in Quebec, where the local caribou species is the smallest. So, to visitors, it looks like the world's most gigantic caribou. And I always admit to those impressed guests, "Yeah, I shot it!"

22: Ducks in Mexico

Noreen wished me good luck as we boarded the plane and flew to Brownsville, located in far south Texas, across the border from Matamoros, Mexico. My compadres for my four-day hunting trip to Mexico were good friends Richard Buddeke, Orn Gudmundsson, and Royden Peabody, three experienced hunter-travelers. The American who was running the duck-hunting operation picked us up and guided us through the Mexican border security checkpoints.

We stopped in San Fernando, a city of about 30,000 people, located about 85 miles from Brownsville. Unfortunately, our accommodations were substandard; we stayed in a dilapidated house with a few run-down bedrooms and bathrooms. The food prepared by the house cook wasn't anything special, so we all dined several times at nearby restaurants.

We would be shooting on Laguna Madre, a lengthy coastal lagoon in northeastern Mexico. It is separated from the Gulf of Mexico on the east by a number of barrier islands and is bounded on the west by the mainland.

Our residence was located near a poverty-stricken neighborhood, and beggars besieged us each day as we departed and returned. The solitary, 6x8-foot general store displayed only two packs of cigarettes which they sold by the stick, bringing back memories of Noreen's Haitian experience. Giving up smoking, she was frequently tempted by sidewalk sellers of single cigarettes shouting, "Eh, blanc!" to get her attention as she

drove by. The depth of Mexican and Haitian poverty is deplorable and unforgettable.

In the field our targets were ducks. In general, they were the same as North American ducks—mostly mallard and teal; many may have migrated there and remained. Of course, there were Mexican ducks, too. Some of the native species found in Mexico included: the Mexican duck; blue-winged teal; fulvous whistling duck; cinnamon teal; green-winged teal; mottled duck; ringed-neck duck; Harlequin duck; long-tailed duck; masked duck; and the ruddy duck.

Royden brought his Nova Scotia duck tolling retriever that was great fun to watch and very useful. A small dog the size of a springer spaniel, it is often mistaken for a Golden retriever. They have been bred over the years to attract ducks by running up and down the beach; not being excessively intelligent, ducks wonder what is running down there and fly in to get a closer look. BOOM! BOOM! They don't see us hunters hidden in a blind or in the reeds.

Orn, Richard, and I had always heard Royden bragging about his dog, but we didn't expect much until we saw his amazing work at the beach. At night the faithful pooch stayed in his shipping crate as we slept.

Each morning we would venture out with our guide to Laguna Madre in a speedy, flat-bottom airboat. It was definitely the world's loudest machine—a small boat with a huge V-8 engine turning an equally large, airplane-type propellor with two foot-long exhaust pipes. It was earsplitting! For some reason, people who operate airboats don't believe in mufflers.

We would literally fly over shallow areas in the nearby bay. The propellor did have a wire guard around it, although its metal was way too sketchy and I didn't want to go anywhere

near it. I figured that death was lurking in that blade for someone, and it wasn't going to be me.

Every day we went to a small sand island in the bay where we put out decoys and waited for the ducks. Many were redhead ducks migrating from north to south. I was again using my Benelli semi-automatic shotgun, holding five shells.

Although the ducks were interesting and shooting was fun, our guide was definitely subpar. One morning he dropped a friend and me off on a sand bar; then he took the other two to a different location. On his way to the second site, he ran out of gas. With the complicated logistics and locations involved, it was a monumental screwup. We were left standing on a sandbar in the middle of nowhere, thinking, "Where is our guide? Where is anyone? What do we do now? What if a storm arises?" Our guide was one of the most incompetent hosts I ever met. Although every day presented a hassle of some sort, we certainly did take a lot of ducks.

I certainly saw some unique sights in Mexico. Each day near the village where the airboat docked, wild pigs would devour fish as the latter swam in to eat the scraps discharged from the sewers. The pigs would wander the entire village gobbling everything edible.

Disturbingly, some years after our visit, I read that the Los Zetas drug cartel had taken over San Fernando in 2011 and massacred almost two hundred people in horrible fashion. It evidently involved a dispute between rival cartels. Over 10,000 citizens departed for safer cities.

I don't believe that I will be returning.

23: Groundhogs Galore

A secular private school founded in 1965, St. Francis School in Goshen had been started by congregants from St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church. During the years that Siofra and Embry attended school there, I came to know Bob McCall, the headmaster. The Goshen campus educates children up to and including the eighth grade. My granddaughters Bella and Tinsley also went there and then attended the St. Francis High School campus in downtown Louisville.

Headmaster McCall had asked me to serve on the school's Board of Directors, which I agreed to do, so I saw him quite often. During one conversation about hunting, he inquired, "Oh, do you have a gun?" I replied, "Yes, a few." He continued, "I've got a great big groundhog out in my backyard tearing up things. Could you come out and shoot it?" What the culprit was tearing up I didn't know, but I agreed to assist.

Groundhogs, also known as woodchucks, are burrowing animals that typically weigh from five to fourteen pounds. Their popularity increases every year on February 2—Groundhog Day. They defend themselves with their large front claws and sharp incisor teeth; they also give off a high-pitched whistle to warn the rest of their colony of predatory danger. They primarily eat grass and vegetation, consuming as much as a pound a day. Maybe Bob's groundhog was making itself a nuisance in his vegetable garden.

I told Bob about a guy in Maine who survived the winter by eating groundhogs, and I informed Bob he could do so if I

was successful. He definitely declined my offer; I think he was also positive that I was lying! But I wasn't.

My Louisville friend Pat Carroll, with whom I hunted in Maine twice, had a childhood friend whose family fell on hard times during one harsh winter. There wasn't much food because their income dwindled; but they survived on groundhogs, killing and cooking them most any way one could imagine.

In any event, Bob was very excited when I came to his house one day with my .22 rifle. It was the closest he had ever been to big game hunting. But of course it was very small game.

We sat at a picnic table in the backyard of his large property and waited, talked, and waited some more. This volunteer mission of mine took a long time.

Finally, the miscreant groundhog poked his head out of a hole. That was all I needed and I popped him with one shot. Mr. Groundhog fell back down in his deep hole, with nary a chance to whistle. Since no one was interested in recovering the body, we gave it a decent burial by filling in the hole. Bob had no memorial words to say at the gravesite.

24: Sweet Home Ireland

Ireland has a special place in my heart for reasons unrelated to my Irish wife Noreen. My genealogy contains several Irish ancestors, including: William Speer (1747-1830) of County Tyrone, who fought during the American Revolution in the famous Battle of Cowpens; and Agnes Heron, from a line of well-known stage players and singers originating in Ennis, Noreen's hometown.

For the pre-wedding flight I took to Ireland, the crew on our Aer Lingus plane had been alerted that "Noreen's fellow" was on board and they proceeded to get me drunk as a hoot owl. Upon arrival, I made a poor impression on Noreen's family. Her dad never had a drink in his life. For him to see his prospective son-in-law getting off the plane half-loaded early in the morning was one of my least memorable moments. Luckily my mother was with me; her respectability won the day.

Noreen's parents were Maura and Timothy Flannan Smythe of Ennis, County Clare, Ireland; she had three brothers—Conor, Michael and Barry—and four sisters—Ann, Olive, Maura and Maeve. Despite our rocky start, Noreen's parents, family, and I interacted very well and had a mutually enjoyable relationship.

My father-in-law Tim Smythe was quite an accomplished individual. An outstanding athlete who ran barefoot, he was a European cross country champion in the 1920s. As he aged, he always maintained his champion's physique and conditioning. He and Maura made sure that their children were oriented

toward the outdoors life; they were quite involved in sports, dogs, and horses. Enjoying horseback riding since she was a youngster, Noreen was the “horsey-kid” in her family. Her love of horses remained as she grew older.

Tim’s name opened many doors for me in Ireland. No matter where I was without Noreen at my side, I only had to casually mention, “I am married to Tim Smythe’s daughter,” for strangers to become more friendly and helpful. Not that they weren’t already, but they always gave me extra assistance when they discovered our kinship.

It was my good fortune to accompany Noreen and her father several times on their hunting jaunts in Ireland. When out running with his foot beagles—one of the two varieties of beagles—he could go all day long, never stopping for rest. He always dressed the same: A black wool suit with a black wool overcoat and a tie. He would let the 10 or so hounds loose after their prey, and off we ran. Sometimes the dogs would actually catch the fox or rabbit and dispatch them. It made for an exhausting day.

Noreen’s Irish ethnicity also played a part in another amusing story about my friend Max Karant, Vice-President of the Aircraft Owner and Pilots Association and founder of the *AOPA Pilot* magazine, which he edited for 18 years.

During Max’s visits to the Turks and Caicos, he became fascinated with Noreen, and he especially loved her Irish brogue. Just prior to a scheduled trip to Ireland, he asked her for a traditional Irish saying with which he could greet people. “Póg mo thóin,” she replied, and she worked with him constantly until he pronounced that phrase correctly. Needless to say, upon his return a year later, Max chided her for teaching him to say, “Kiss my ass” to the Irish customs inspectors at the airport. But it was

all good-natured fun and the Irish were used to it, I'm sure.

After Noreen's cancer diagnosis, we decided to buy a house closer to her birthplace, so we could spend more time near her family. In 2005 we luckily found a cottage overlooking scenic hills and valleys at Corofin, only eight miles from her hometown of Ennis and her family in County Clare. The proximity allowed me to connect with her relatives and to know them better.

The mostly-stone cottage that we bought was an old wreck—quite dilapidated and in very poor condition—so we had to do a virtual rebuild. Since it was in a scenic preservation area, our improvement plans were limited because the Irish are very strict on the remodeling of older structures. Although we couldn't add on to the existing residence, we transformed the permanent garage into extra living space and ended up with an almost perfect two-bedroom residence with marvelous views of the lakes and hills.

The entirety of Ireland is only about two-thirds the size of Kentucky—not very large; that statistic was quite a shock for Noreen. A peaceful woman, never anti-English, she enjoyed her home isle immensely. We only indirectly experienced The Troubles—the conflict and violence between the nationalists and unionists of Northern Ireland—during our trips to County Clare. Noreen and I always supported the Peace Process—talks and negotiations that would lead to an end to the widespread violence.

Firearms were a big deal in Ireland; to possess one, a person had to qualify for a permit and be approved. Because I didn't want to travel back and forth with my shotgun, I applied for and was granted a permit. As a result, I installed a secure gun safe during the renovation of our cottage in Ennis; it was a large,

lockable, steel cabinet bolted to the wall.

Returning once from a lengthy trip abroad, we discovered that the house had been burglarized; from all appearances, the wrongdoers had stayed there several days. They had broken into the safe in the furnace room, where we kept our tools, and they stole my shotgun. That was unexpected because the gun safe was bolted to the wall in the strongest way. It appeared that they used our tools to pry it open and gain entry; it took some effort, for sure. That theft really made me angry!

Dutifully I went to the local constable and reported the theft. He became quite upset, saying he didn't like this happening in his jurisdiction because it reflected poorly on his service. When I asked if there was any chance of recovery, he dismissed that idea and said I must be joking. He said, "It's gone up there"—meaning Northern Ireland—"with the barrels shortened and the stock cut back. It's been made into a cannon-like, sawed-off weapon."

When I inquired if I'd receive another permit, he responded, "Embry, the idea of you leaving the country with your gun in a locked cabinet, you might not want to do that again." So I didn't reapply; instead, I ferried my shotgun back and forth from the states for a while.

Later in more pleasant times, I researched the possibility of traveling to a castle in Northern Ireland to shoot pheasant, woodcock, and snipe. While back in the States, I rounded up some friends who were shooters and we agreed to make a holiday of it. There were 10 of us altogether, five "guns" (shooters) and spouses; the group included Noreen, me, and Joanie MacLean's brother, Angus McIntosh MacLean and his wife. (As I said earlier, much more about Joanie later.) We weren't seeking deer or game, only birds.

Arriving at historic Shannon Airport—the only airport in Ireland that is open 24-7-365—we all drove to Ennis, about 23 miles away, for several days of sightseeing.

Then we motored 160 miles to Belle Isle Castle in County Fermanagh. Located near Lough (“Lake”) Erne and River Erne, the castle was built in the early 18th century and was later expanded to serve as the home for many generations of nobles. In 1991, the castle was fully refurbished; Belle Isle Estate stretches over 470 acres and serves as a popular tourist attraction with a wide range of activities.

Although small for a castle with only five bedrooms, it was a tasteful, comfortable residence, filled with beautiful furnishings and magnificent paintings that reflected its history. It belonged to James Hamilton, 5th Duke of Abercorn, who purchased the estate for his son, Lord Nicholas Hamilton; their dedicated work has vividly transformed the castle into the attraction it is today.

We had a wonderful time there. One of the women in our group, originally from Ashland, Kentucky, said, “I met the nicest guy when I was out walking, and we chatted for quite a while. When I asked the guide in charge of the hunt who I was talking to, he said it was Lord Hamilton.” She was shocked and replied, “What! I’ve been chatting with some Lord?!” I told her that since she was quite good looking, he was probably trying to pick her up!

The castle was fully staffed and they prepared all our meals. We were fortunate to have luxury accommodations in the midst of much natural beauty. Noreen especially enjoyed it; being from the south of Ireland, she really didn’t know much about Northern Ireland, except that they had English heritage and tradition. A woman whom Noreen came to know at the castle

was equally unsure about those in the south of Ireland; however, they chatted, exchanged information, and became friends. In her distinct Irish manner, Noreen said, "She's just like the rest of us but a bit different, you know?"

Lakes and rivers surrounded Belle Isle Castle, and we ventured out daily on 12-14 foot aluminum boats, looking for snipe; the shooting was excellent. The guide took us out two at a time on three different boats; he knew that the snipe would be flying over at a certain time each day, so we were ready for them. I was using a shotgun that I had brought with me from the U.S.

That was a bracing experience. My friends and I stood there in our boats, waving our shotguns around in the air, rocking back and forth, hoping that the calm and the snipe would coincide, which they did several times. But not too many.

We also shot pheasant and woodcock. The English woodcock are almost twice as large as those in the States; they are also great tasting. The terrain wasn't nearly as difficult to navigate as the thick brush in Maine where I've shot woodcock. Plus we weren't just doing walk-up shooting by ourselves. The guide provided some beaters who went through the woods pushing up the birds; so part of it was semi-driven, part walk-up shooting. We took the woodcock back to the castle and, as an added bonus, the cooks prepared them for dinner. They were especially tasty since we didn't have to cook them ourselves.

An excellent time was had by all of us on our adventure to Belle Isle Castle in Northern Ireland.

As for our County Clare cottage, Noreen and I unfortunately experienced another couple of break-ins and severe damage to the property for several years, so we decided to sell. That was heartbreaking—for both of us.

25: **Stalking and Shooting in the U.K.**

In June 1967 a family event took place in Geneva, Switzerland when my 21-year-old brother Rudy married Sylvia Bogsch whose family lived there. Two amusing incidents occurred during my layover in London on my way there as I took a break from my Island duties.

Upon arrival at Heathrow Airport, I needed a taxicab and noticed several young guys nearby who were also looking for one. They kindly asked me if I wanted to rideshare with them and I readily agreed. When they identified themselves as The Who, I said “What? Who what?” During my time in the Islands, I had lost touch with the popular music scene and hadn’t heard of the famous English rock band.

Just on a lark I also visited the Colonial Office which was responsible for the administration of all territories outside the British Isles. I politely asked the clerk if he had any information about “the Turks and Caicos.” He looked at me in a very quiz-zical manner, whereupon I stated, “It’s one of your colonies.” Quickly he shot back, “Atlantic or Pacific?” So much for the stature and renown of the Islands.

Over time Scotland has become a meaningful and important part of my hunting life. Recently I heard that Season Four of the popular Netflix series *The Crown* contains an episode about the search for a wounded 14-point stag at Balmoral Castle, the Scottish holiday home to the Royal Family. Although the estate in Scotland where we stalked, Auchnafree, was near the Balmoral area, the stag I got there wasn’t that large—

but almost.

That Scottish stag-hunting adventure unfolded in an unusual manner. But let me first explain the origin of my hunting exploits in the United Kingdom (the other “UK”).

In early 1993 I first made the acquaintance of Kevin Downer at a Safari Club International Convention in Reno. Operating “Kevin Downer Sporting Consultants” in England, he was an outfitter, taxidermist, and guide; he also worked as a professional hunter in several African countries.

I engaged Kevin, who lives in Sussex, about 36 miles south-east of London, to arrange hunts in England for me; as our companionship increased, we became good friends. He has quite a backstory and has led a most interesting life, including serving as the gamekeeper for one of my favorite estates on which to shoot.

After we had success stalking deer several times, he introduced me to local bird-shooting in Sussex. When I talked to him about other possible hunts in the U.K., especially the stags in Scotland that I had heard about, the information he provided intrigued me even more.

In short order that seed of an idea germinated, and Noreen and I were off to Scotland. Joined by two guests from Louisville—Bobby and Elizabeth Martin—we rented a comfortable, four-bedroom house near Dunkeld, a scenic town north of Edinburgh in the south of Scotland, with the idea that Bobby and I would do some bird-shooting. Our quarry was not to be “driven pheasants”—more about that in a later chapter—but wild pheasants that had been left from driven shoots.

The pheasants there are raised from baby chicks and placed in a pen with a four-foot high fence and no top on the cage. The cage keeps the foxes at bay but allows the pheasants to fly

out; although free to go, they voluntarily return because they are fed there. Kevin, who accompanied the four of us, is an excellent cook, and he prepared several meals with the pheasants and rabbits that we took.

About 18 miles away from Dunkeld is Auchnafree Estate, comprised of 12,000 acres of “stunning hill and crag” almost 3,000 feet above sea level. It boasts that first-time visitors to this “magical place” never fail to be captivated and enchanted by the overwhelming sense of wilderness and tranquility. That description is quite accurate. Red deer, grouse, pheasant, blackcock, partridge, snipe, duck, rabbit, and Blue Mountain hare are all available during the appropriate season.

Stags are the male red deer—Scotland’s largest surviving native wild mammal. A cousin to the North American elk, they have a body size slightly smaller than a domestic donkey. There are about 350,000 in existence, the majority of which are found in the Scottish highlands and islands and over much of mainland Scotland. “Fair chase” ethics require that the shooting of red deer be undertaken on the open hill and in woodland; it is important to comply with ethical hunting standards.

Some explanation of terminology is necessary. In the U.S., “hunting” refers to virtually any outdoor activity requiring a gun and some sort of quarry. However, in the United Kingdom, three different terms are used: “Hunting” means fox-hunting on horseback; “shooting” is when the quarry is birds; and following deer on foot is termed “stalking.”

Kevin and I decided to go deer-stalking at Auchnafree; Bobby wasn’t interested in deer. Stalking can be hard, dirty work. I wore my tweed breeks—the Scottish term for trousers—alternately walking for miles, then staying low and wallowing in the mud. In addition to my Barbour jacket, I wore

Wellington boots, more commonly called “Wellies.” On my first trip to Ireland, it struck me that everyone carried Wellies in the trunk of their car because it was frequently rainy, wet, and muddy there.

As Kevin and I trekked through the heather up one mountainside, I thought I was going to die. The heather is about knee high and I couldn’t simply brush it aside like grass. It’s similar to a tough bush, so I had to constantly pick up my feet and trudge over it like western sage. Perfectly suited for the rugged hills of Scotland, it is fast-growing and loves wet soil. It was tough going up that mountain.

Stalking red deer presents a variety of challenges: getting close while it’s raining; creeping stealthily on the muddy ground; and looking for an unhindered shot.

Properly licensed, Kevin and I were accompanied by the ghillie from the estate. “Ghillie” is an ancient Gaelic term for someone acting as a guide or attendant on a fishing, hunting, or deer stalking excursion. Our ghillie used a classic collapsible telescope, while Kevin and I each had standard hunting binoculars. We finally spotted a few stags roaming together, including a sizable one which our ghillie said we could take.

The selection process is significant and aids the conservation of the species. The ghillie from the estate is responsible for identifying and selecting a stag that is suitable to be culled. It’s not possible to simply pick the biggest one or the one with the largest antlers. The goal is to avoid shooting ones that are still of breeding age. If a deer starts declining due to age or becomes too old to breed, then it can be shot. Sizable stags in their prime must be avoided. But if one has antlers that are skewed or uneven, it then may be an appropriate target. If it’s a spectacular one, it might be saved for the owner of the estate to hunt.

This protocol is unlike hunting in the U.S., where wildlife is considered public property—unless it's on land that is fenced in—and each hunter has complete discretion to select the animal he or she wants to shoot. In Scotland and other European countries, the animal is considered the property of the landowner whose wishes must prevail.

Directing my attention to the one the ghillie indicated, I took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. BANG! The stag went down and we were elated. But suddenly the stag jumped up, running over the mountainside like a freight train. Mumbling silently to ourselves, we followed its trail to a nearby estate—one which we didn't have permission to enter—and we had to return to Auchnafree.

Our ghillie phoned the other estate and they gave permission to enter and recover it. However, the timing was bad—our stay in Scotland was ending and we had to leave. We later learned that the stag was found dead two days later; It had been shot well but still had enough life to briefly recover and bound away. I criticized myself for not creeping closer to get an even better shot.

The stalking of that red deer stag in the Scottish highlands was challenging, unforgettable, and a truly remarkable experience. My utmost respect goes to Kevin Downer based on my many experiences stalking game and shooting birds with him. He also accompanied me when I secured two trophies now mounted at home: a sizable muntjac and a large roe deer.

Another key person in my U.K. hunting has been Chris Batha, an instructor and gunfitter for several London gunmakers. In the early 2000s, I met Chris at another Safari Club convention. Because I realized that my wingshooting technique was imperfect, I needed a skilled trainer to analyze my form and

help me shoot more accurately. Based on a friend's recommendation, I connected with Chris; we forged an excellent relationship, and I engaged him for private lessons.

With over thirty years of wing and competition clay shooting in 14 countries on three continents, Chris is considered one of the most highly qualified and experienced shooting instructors worldwide. I've shot with him on several trips to England, Scotland, and Wales. It's quite an experience seeing him at work. He's indeed a master.

In 2004 he acquired an old English gun-making company, Charles Boswell Gunmaker, and he started making "Best London" shotguns again under that name. A genuinely good person with unique experiences as a former member of the Merchant Navy, London firefighter, and taxi driver, Chris also deals in used guns and is experienced in gun design and smithing. In addition, his charming American wife Sara is an involved, competent, and friendly partner in the business. They also maintain a second home near Savannah, Georgia.

The importance of finding a shotgun that "fits" refers to more than the length of the stock. Chris painstakingly examined not only my gun but my stance, balance, body posture, and technique. He used a complicated, adjustable, fake gun in which all the parts moved; he called it a "try gun," actually invented in the 19th century. As in "Try it this way, try it that way."

He quickly concluded that I had an ill-fitting gun, saying, "You've got a long neck, Embry, so you need a Monte Carlo stock"—one that has a raised cheekpiece while keeping the heel of the stock low. He said it would raise my chin and put my head in the correct position. When shooting, I had been unconsciously lowering my head down towards the stock and resting it there. From Chris I learned that my shoulder and eye should

be looking straight down the barrel without bending my head for the necessary alignment.

That was an extremely valuable modification and greatly improved my accuracy. The difference in comfort and balance was amazing. From then on, I only had my stocks made in the Monte Carlo style. He also advised me to practice my gun-mount—moving the gun to the proper position on my shoulder—10,000 times. I did so—50 in the morning and 50 in the evening for 100 days. His instruction really helped me shoot at my optimum capability.

A trip to Scotland in 2014 provided a unique shooting challenge. A “leftover hurricane”—remnants of what was Hurricane Bertha—crossed the Atlantic Ocean from the eastern coast of the U.S., bringing 60 mph wind gusts squalling over the hills. In addition to the high winds, Scotland recorded almost a month's rainfall in only 12 hours.

On one crazy occasion, the high winds were blustering straight toward us along with the wind-borne pheasants. Birds flying 80 mph required me to swing the gun lightning fast just to lead the creature sufficiently. It was tough shooting to say the least. But I remembered what Chris Batha said in one of my early lessons—“They don't fly backwards!”

As I raised and brought my shotgun to touch my shoulder and cheek, I needed to accelerate the swing of my gun even more quickly so that it moved well ahead of the pheasant. My goal was to pull the trigger and continue the swing through the shot, just as one would with a golf club or a tennis racket, firing into empty space ahead of my target. Although I had some limited success, I'd rather not shoot in such abnormal weather conditions again.

During an earlier trip to England in 1994, by pure

coincidence I ended up hunting on the grounds of the first Sir Robert McAlpine, 1st Baronet, who was nicknamed “Concrete Bob,” a pioneer in the use of concrete and labor-saving machinery. Memories of my days in the Islands came flooding back.

The McAlpine Construction Company, founded in 1869, was chosen to pave the South Caicos island airstrip runway in 1969, a major event. Among the multitude of exceptional, unconventional, or just plain weird pals and characters in our lives during our Turks and Caicos years, Noreen and I had a friend named David Scott, the engineer in charge.

Our friend’s entire name was David Hamilton Scott, AOFB. We asked about the title that followed his name, and David explained that his father recommended adding AOFB to distinguish his resume from a crowded field of applicants. It stood for “Ancient Order of Froth Blowers.” And yes, it secured him the job at McAlpine that led him to the Islands.

26: New Zealand Sojourn



A Texas whitetail deer, lured close by ‘rattling’ in 1994

My transaction with Dr. Reinald von Meurers of Germany in which I traded him one of my extra hunts in British Columbia for a hunt in New Zealand resulted in a wonderful journey to that island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. Noreen and I spent three superb weeks there exploring and sightseeing—with only five days reserved for hunting.

After the long flight and adjustment to the new time zone, I met with my guide, an interesting guy, who suggested that we sight my rifle, a necessary step to determine if the scope had been jiggled around during the plane trip. It is essential for the scope to be dead-on perfect; if it's only a couple of inches off at 50 yards, it will no doubt miss the target at a greater range.

I inquired if we would go to a shooting range. He replied, “I’ve got that worked out—we’ll go to the basement in my house.” I wondered what he meant, and off we went.

In his sizable backyard he had buried a 50-yard-long, three-foot-diameter concrete pipe and connected it to an opening in the wall of his basement. In effect he had a homemade shooting range, allowing him to shoot indoors safely and comfortably. We shot through the pipe at a target on the other end that was clipped onto a wire pulley which he could run back and forth. It was a clever concept that I had never seen before—shooting inside a pipe. It reminded me of Open Range—a gun range in Crestwood, Kentucky—that provides a 100-yard-long underground shooting range.

New Zealand is home to some very wily sambar, large deer that can be taken year-round. Not native to New Zealand, they were originally imported from India or Ceylon by the British. We hunted them on the North Island; although we came physically close and it was fun stalking them, none were old enough to take, and I left empty-handed.

But that was alright because the scenery was breathtaking 24 hours a day. In fact, Noreen and I agreed that if we were 20 years younger, we may have stayed there.

One day we took an exciting helicopter ride with several others to the Fox River Glacier on the west coast of the South Island; it’s very accessible and a major tourist attraction. Our pilot gave an extensive lecture on the history and geography of the glacier and he stressed essential safety requirements when walking on the glacier.

He certainly clarified the limits of our personal explorations. Barriers and warning signs had been erected to prevent sightseers from entering danger zones close to the active glacier

face. Our pilot explained that it was extremely dangerous to walk near the crevasses on the glacier. He noted that a mere slip or slide meant the likelihood of falling in and never being seen again; there was simply no way to rescue someone. As he talked, we all nodded our heads, including the lone Japanese tourist. Evidently, the pilot assumed we all understood.

The Japanese passenger had at least two cameras strapped around his neck and one in his hand. After we landed and jumped down from the whirlybird, Noreen and I carefully got our bearings so we wouldn't accidentally walk into danger and fall into a crevasse. Not the Japanese fellow. A photo opportunity must have caught his attention because he hurried away from the group and stepped right next to a large crevasse. Noreen, the others, and I cringed. The pilot yelled at him but he just smiled, waved back at the pilot, took some photos, and looked down—for a long time. That's when I realized that maybe his English skills were lacking.

The pilot wrung his hands, saying to me, "There's nothing I can do—if the guy wants to kill himself, he will!" In retrospect, I don't think the Japanese gentleman understood a word of the pilot's warnings. Fortunately he somehow escaped a tragic end and eventually returned safely with our group.

That helicopter trip provided a stunning, spectacular view. It reminded me of the ski-plane flight that we took to Mt. McKinley, Alaska, where we landed in perfectly clear weather; now known as Denali, the highest peak in North America is most often obscured by clouds. Both in Alaska and New Zealand, we were fortunate to see nature's beauty revealed in all its glory.

27: Texas Hunts, Including King Ranch



**The feral hog that I shot from a windmill at
King Ranch in Texas**

Over the years, I've had some unique experiences hunting nilgai, quail, deer, aoudad sheep, and wild hogs on numerous excursions to Texas, especially at the historic King Ranch.

There is scant land set aside for public hunting in Texas; most hunting venues are private, and many of the private places are high fenced. The use of a formidable fence generally keeps animals within a certain area. However, many hunters—including me—don't enjoy pursuing animals that can't escape naturally. These fenced-in places also house exotic animals and inevitably some will escape. Since the climate is favorable to them, they flourish on their own—like the nilgai and Barbary sheep.

My first Texas trip took place in 1994; although I was interested only in open range hunting, somehow I goofed and made reservations at a large, fenced ranch in Kerr County.

That jurisdiction is located on the Edwards Plateau in Texas and its county seat is Kerrville, a city of about 52,000. It was actually named after a native Kentuckian—James Kerr—who helped establish the Republic of Texas. The hunting ranch I visited is in Texas hill country and the Guadalupe River runs through it.

It was my intent to book an open range hunt for Texas white-tailed deer, a local variety. But when the driver delivered me to the ranch, I quickly noticed an eight-foot-high fence around the property; it was hard to miss the large, protective gate. Max Watts, my guide, confirmed that it was indeed a high-fenced operation. Upon hearing of my error and reluctance, he explained that the ranch encompassed 20,000 acres (30 square miles), which gives hunters a free-range-type atmosphere since the animals have room to roam and escape. Max kindly offered to return me to the airport but I considered it and talked myself into staying, saying, “Hell, as long as I’m here, I’ll do it.”

As it turned out, my capable guide’s observation was accurate. Once I entered the field and started stalking, I couldn’t tell it was fenced. Although many of the high-fence domains are only a few hundred acres—which any hunter can cover in a fairly quick manner—this one was indeed huge.

Max Watts is a graduate of Texas A&M University in Deer Biology. He is a “rattler,” taking two old antlers and rattling them to make the sound of two buck deer fighting which attracted other deer. His rattling once resulted in an unusual occurrence for me: We were hidden behind a bush when a young buck ran toward the rattling and stopped a mere 10 yards away.

Since it was not large enough to shoot, we let it go.

In one respect, my high fence hunting experience wasn't distasteful because the ranch was so immense. However, after mulling it over, I returned to my original conclusion that taking something that's fenced in just doesn't seem sporting.

On the other hand, King Ranch, larger than the state of Rhode Island and Europe's Luxembourg, is simply amazing. Located in South Texas between Corpus Christi and Brownsville, it is the largest ranch in Texas, comprising 825,000 acres and stretching over six counties. Founded in 1853 by steamboat captain Richard King, it flourished due to the efforts of Robert Kleberg, his lawyer, who also married one of King's daughters. Coincidentally, my father told me that one of his VMI classmates was Richard Kleberg from that same family. The Klebergs are still involved in the ranch and Texas politics.

Decades ago King Ranch began offering a limited number of low-fence, fair-chase hunts as part of their ongoing wildlife management program. In addition to being home to many non-game species, threatened and endangered species, and migratory waterfowl and other birds, King is home to white-tail deer, turkeys, nilgai, and javelina (peccaries that look like wild boar). With that in mind, I decided to go hunting "deep in the heart of Texas."

In the Lone Star State there is no fixed hunting season for exotic game. Nilgai hunting commonly takes place during summer when the Texas weather is so hot and uncomfortable that hunters venture out early in the morning when it's cool, return in mid-morning, take a nap, have lunch or rest, then go out again for more hunting. It's a long day but it also makes the heat more tolerable. It reminds me of the ditty, "Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun."



The record Nilgai that I took at King Ranch in 1995

My first hunt at King Ranch was in 1995. Upon my arrival, I met Amos DeWitt who was in charge of the hunting operation. With his brother Michael, they founded the Rancho Tio Moya lodge and hunting concession on the Ranch in 1988. First, Amos helped me recheck zero on my rifle's scope in case rough luggage handling impaired the rifle and scope. He set up a target, gave me a resting place, and I confirmed that it was accurately zeroed in at 100 yards.

While Amos was showing me around the ranch, by chance we stumbled on a herd of nilgai, or "blue cow." Nilgai is a large Asian antelope that was first introduced in Texas, probably by traveling circuses, during the 1920s. The male nilgai has horns rather than antlers and doesn't lose his appendages like a deer. It has been reported that the feral population of nilgai in Texas approaches 40,000.

Amos was low-key, matter-of-fact, and funny. Inspecting the herd of nilgai, the following conversation took place:

Amos: "That's a pretty good sized bull in there."

Me: "I've never seen a nilgai in my life—I've seen pictures of them, but I don't have any idea of their typical size."

Amos: "Yup."

Me: "How big is it?"

Amos: "Pretty big bull!"

Me: "Well, how big? should I shoot it?"

Amos: "If it was me, I'd shoot it—biggest one I've seen in several years."

Me, thinking to myself: "If that's the case why didn't you tell me to shoot it right away?"

Taking aim with my .270 Winchester, I shot and hit the nilgai, which went down but bounced back up and ran, so we followed. Soon I had the opportunity for a second shot and killed it. It was an unexpected achievement for a "practice round" to sight my scope. Although it placed high in the record books, the main principle it reinforced in me was that it's sometimes better to be lucky than skilled.

The ranch staff took the skull and horns to a professional taxidermist and measurer who determined it was the 4th largest nilgai bull ever taken. It's still in the top ten today. By the way, nilgai is also quite tasty, as many have attested.

At the next annual Safari Club hunter's convention, I received a "Major Award" for that nilgai, presented on the "Night of the Hunter." The top ten entries taken within the past 18 months that are certified by a master measurer are eligible for Major Awards. It's quite a thorough selection process and I was pleased to be recognized on stage for it.

Since I had some extra time the day after the nilgai exploit, I asked Amos if there were any wild, feral hogs around. He replied, "Sure, the best way to get them is to find a windmill near

a pond or water source, stick around there. When the hog comes to get water, you'll have a good shot."

He dropped me off near a large windmill that fit that description. To avoid being detected, I initially stayed low on the ground; but I gradually concluded that some elevation would provide a better opportunity to see my prey. There were some 2x6s laying on the ground, so I arranged them so I could climb up the windmill trusses; about 15 feet off the ground, I rested on the cross members of the windmill. Sitting there with my .270, I waited. And waited. Just as Amos predicted, a wild hog finally emerged and I dropped it with one shot. Its size wouldn't make the record books but I was glad it appeared because I was getting bored sitting there.

In later years I hunted near Llano, Texas with the internationally renowned professional hunter and arms expert Finn Aagaard, a fascinating person.

Finn was born in Kenya to Norwegian parents who had emigrated there; raised in Kenya, he became a professional hunter. In 1977, that country banned big game hunting and he moved to Texas with his wife, Berit, a registered nurse. He and Berit had met in Kenya where her father served as the Norwegian ambassador. Her parents were not enthused about her marrying a PH but it certainly was a good match, at least from what I observed.

Finn worked as a hunting guide in the Llano area, wrote several books, and was a regular columnist for a monthly magazine, in which he wrote about the technical aspects of guns, calibers, and African hunting. Having read his books, I knew he only operated free range hunts, so I phoned him to arrange one. An extraordinary hunting guide, he was quiet and likable; we really connected on my first visit. With much in common, we

became genuine friends. He, Berit and I got along famously together.

Finn operated around Llano, a small town located in central Texas hill country, about 72 miles northwest of Austin. Exposed rock and granite permeate the area; Enchanted Rock, a pink granite mountain and one of the largest batholiths in the United States, is nearby. A batholith is a large igneous intrusion extending deep into the earth's crust—geology has always interested me.

Llano is known for its Texas-style barbeque. With several restaurants to choose from along the main highway, I ate plenty of the best barbecue I ever had. In fact, my friend Jon Gudmundsson, who owns and operates River Road BBQ in Louisville, obtained his large smoker in Texas. Jon, who knew many Texans, drove there and bought back that wonderful old smoker to make his barbecue more irresistible.

Llano is known as the deer capital of Texas for good reason: There's an overabundance of white tailed deer in the area during the fall and winter. In November and December, thousands of deer hunters pour into the town seeking a trophy buck as the town's population triples.

Finn, with a limited formal education, knew more about the mechanics of shooting and the science of ballistics than anyone I'd ever met; he also spoke several languages. Since I had been to Africa several times, I thought I knew a lot; but after I met Finn, I realized I didn't know jack. The first time I hunted with him, I was thrilled to take a Barbary sheep. I enjoyed that hunt so much that I immediately made plans to return.

Summer 1996—one year after I took the nilgai at King Ranch—was a scorching hot time in Texas as my friend Irvin Abell and I joined Finn in Llano for a five-day, free-range hunt

for axis deer, Aoudad sheep, mouflon sheep, and blackbuck deer. Noreen accompanied us as far as Atlanta where she stayed to attend the Olympic equestrian trials.

Although axis deer are native to the Indian subcontinent, they were introduced to Texas in the 1930s and over time became abundant in certain parts of the state, especially grassland areas. Males can weigh 250 pounds. The appearance and behavior of axis deer is similar to whitetail deer, and they are most active at dusk and dawn. Originally kept on farms or controlled hunting sites, many escaped captivity; it is estimated that there are over 6,000 free ranging axis deer, plus 40,000 on private hunting ranches.



The aoudad I took in 1994 on a hunt with Finn Aagaard

Aoudad sheep is another species introduced to Texas from foreign climes—the rocky mountains of northern Africa, where they are known as Barbary sheep. Sandy-brown in color, they can weigh up to 320 pounds; their horns have a triangular cross-

section and curve outward, backward, then inward, and may exceed two-and-a-half feet in length. Active in early morning and late afternoon, they prefer dry and barren mountainous areas. In Texas, they were released into the wild in the 1950s. By 1963, their population had increased to the extent that hunting permits for them were issued for the first time.

Some hunters tend to confuse aoudad and mouflon as the same animal but they definitely have different origins. Mouflon are wild sheep native to Turkey, Armenia, and Iran. Thought to be the ancestor of all modern domestic sheep breeds, they too were not native to Texas, having been introduced around the 1930s, flourishing in the mountainous terrain and meadows. Mouflon have two different horn configurations, including one that curves much like bighorn sheep.

The blackbuck, introduced in Texas in 1932, is a moderately sized antelope, with males in Texas weighing about 125 pounds and standing about three feet tall with long, ringed horns that resemble corkscrews. By 1988 this antelope was the most populous exotic animal in Texas after the axis deer. However, in all my Texas travels, I have never shot or eaten a blackbuck.

After zeroing in our scopes, we started our daily hunting routine: mostly walking from 6:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.; followed by lunch and a rest or nap; then another hunt from 4:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. It's much too hot during the early afternoon to hunt; anyway, that's usually when most of the animals are inactive, resting in the shade.

We saw many sheep and deer the first day; a large blackbuck bounded off too fast for me to get a decent shot. However, Irvin got an aoudad sheep with a 27.5-inch measurement with one shot. Finn didn't sleep much that night because he was up

until midnight cutting up and processing the day's animals. Most places have several helpers who assist in that duty, but Finn was a one-man crew.

The following day we were all up at 5:00 A.M. and followed the usual routine. About dusk, Irvin took down a 27-inch axis deer with two shots; we were accompanied by ranch foreman Gary Larimer. Once again Finn was up late processing deer meat.

The next day we ventured out in a pickup truck that developed two flat tires, so not much hunting took place and we came in early. After a much-needed nap, the four of us again went out in the vehicle with Gary. Five minutes from the ranch, we saw a large axis lying in the same field where Irvin took his deer. Since shooting it from a moving vehicle would not be sporting or ethical and is just not done, I decided to take a different course of action.

Jumping quickly from the truck, I crept closely to a fence, rested my .300 Winchester Magnum rifle with a 180 grain all-copper bullet and took a shot from 150 yards. It was right on target. The deer got up and ran about 50 yards before collapsing—shot through both lungs. That one made the SCI record book.

Later I had dinner at the Badu House, a popular Llano restaurant, with Finn, Berit, and Irvin. That restaurant, a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, had an unusual bar; its top was made from Llanite, a granite found only in Llano County. It was the largest assembly of polished Llanite in the world. Unfortunately, Badu House restaurant permanently closed in September 2021.

The following day I hunted all morning for mouflon, and I was fortunate to find two bands of them. Since one was running

quickly, I followed the other but bungled my stalk. They are extremely wary animals that spook easily. Although I later encountered the same two fast-moving bands, those cautious creatures were too smart for me again.

That evening, Finn, Berit and I had dinner at their house as I prepared to leave the following day. All things considered, it was a good hunt and trip.

Finn died in 2000 at age 68. It is said that he valued simplicity and didn't use new equipment simply because it was new. He favored cartridges such as the 7×57, .30/06, and .375 H&H because he had experience with them during his decades as a PH in Africa. After his passing, Berit expanded his hunting stories and updated them with never-before-published material found in his meticulously kept journals dating back to 1956. I greatly enjoyed reading them; they were among 200 books that I donated to the Boone & Crockett Club for resale in 2022.

In later years I went to King Ranch twice with Marc Reynerson, the scout executive of the Lincoln Heritage Council (Louisville) of the Boy Scouts of America from 1991 to 2007. Marc spent more than 38 years working professionally with the Boy Scouts. He controlled a partial lease on a quail-hunting section of King Ranch and he owned several bird dogs. If you donated a certain amount to the Boy Scouts during their capital campaign, he provided a quail hunting trip accompanied by him. Marc was always quite successful in his appeals for funds.

There are six native species of quail in North America; in Texas, we hunted for the same bob white quail that lives in Kentucky. Both hunts consisted of just Marc and me and my 20 gauge shotgun. Although he had three dogs, we used only one at a time because of the excessive heat; we would run one for a couple hours, then rested him while another one worked.

Texas quail hunting varies wildly with the weather. Sometimes the ground is covered with them; other times, you can't find one. The weather affects the grassland growth in which they live and feed. My two trips there were not great years for quail; however, our own hunting was pretty darn good on both occasions. We must have been in the right place at the right time.

A brief word about snakes. Rattlesnakes are a part of everyday life in Texas, but I never had any incidents with them. While hunting, I always wore fairly thick pants, canvas from the knee down mostly for thorn protection but they would probably stop a rattler's fangs too. Some hunters wore tall, protective boots to block them.

Other than the puff adder that I stepped over in Africa, I had no narrow escapes from snakes. I never had to shoot one other than the pair of copperheads we found in the house we bought in Prospect. BOOM! All gone.

Noreen was from Ireland where no snakes exist, so she was convinced that any snake she saw was dangerous and out to bite her. Once, I was walking a quarter mile away from our Prospect house and heard a piercing scream; when I ran back, she was standing in the garden next to a quite harmless foot-long garter snake.

Another trip to Texas bears mentioning. Gray Lang, Jr., a longtime friend of mine who shared my love of flying, had a hunting lease on a large ranch in South Texas near the small town of Hebbronville. Gray was splitting the cost of it with several other guys; each was able to hunt a portion of acreage several times a year. On two separate occasions he invited Louisville friends Hewett Brown, Bobby Martin, Barry Morrow, and me to accompany him to hunt quail. Although Gray's trailer was

somewhat dilapidated, he owned some outstanding dogs.

Something occurred one day that illustrated the dumb things one can do in life. Hewett and I were following the dogs which had found some quail; there were some cows nearby. I can imitate a cow pretty well, so I was going “Mooooooo, Mooooooo,” and Hewett said, “Embry, you better cut out that shit, that cow is giving birth.” Indeed she birthed that calf, then suddenly turned around and angrily charged straight at us! As it went by, I quickly shuffled backwards and fell right into a large cactus, getting stuck all over my body. I thought Hewett would die laughing. I was just grateful it didn’t turn around and chase us again.

A ranch hand told us that another lessee had hunted solo there just before we arrived. He said it was some guy from Arkansas in a shitty old pickup with some dogs. We learned it was Sam Walton, the Walmart founder. The hand said that to look at him you wouldn’t have thought he had a nickel.

We five friends always had an excellent time together in South Texas. Once, we decided to go to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, only sixty miles away, for a night out. We had rented a large Lincoln Continental sedan when we flew into Austin, and off we went.

In Mexico we had a great dinner at an excellent restaurant, and my buddies ended up buying a case of red wine, plus a case of delicious Mexican beer. As the designated driver, I drove back and we all survived!

28: The Bison



A huge bison, taken with my Sharps in Wyoming, 1996

In the fall of 1996, I learned that free range wild bison were being raised and hunted on a ranch near the border of southern Wyoming and northern Colorado; a friend highly recommended going there. Since the fees and costs were reasonable and the idea of another new hunting experience appealed to me, I booked it.

Like many in my generation I was quite familiar with stories and images that portrayed vast herds of “buffalo” roaming throughout the western states, being chased by American Indians, and slaughtered by buffalo hunters. However, I later discovered that those animals were, in fact, bison.

Although related in the animal kingdom, buffalo and bison are *not* the same—they are distinct animals. I hunted the genuine buffalo—the Cape buffalo—in Africa; there is also the Asian

water buffalo. The bison of the Great Plains are in the same zoological family as those buffalo, but very distant cousins.

Tough, resilient bison are the largest land animals in North America. Broad, muscular, and featuring shaggy coats, the adults typically grow to almost seven feet tall and can easily weigh up to 2,000 pounds. Up close they are huge. Formerly several million across the plains, they were nearly hunted to extinction in the late 1800s.

I planned to take a bison in the same way that old-time buffalo hunters did; to do so, I needed the proper rifle. My hunter friend Irvin Abell owned a modern reproduction of an 1874-pattern Sharps .50 caliber rifle, and he graciously lent it to me. This large-bore, lever-action, single-shot rifle became an icon of the American Old West, featured in many motion pictures. I would have preferred the specially modified Sharps Model .45-110 caliber version showcased in the Tom Selleck movie *Quigley Down Under*. That was a very cool rifle.

My destination was The Terry Bison Ranch, bought in 1885 by the first territorial governor of Wyoming who became rich by raising cattle and sheep. A herd of bison was carefully managed on its 27,500 acres. Buff Terrill from Terrill's Outfitters was the guide in charge. The arrangement was straightforward: After shooting a bison, hunters could take the skull and pelt if desired, plus they could buy whatever meat they wanted. Buff probably made more money selling meat to hunters and third parties than from the hunting excursion itself.

With Buff tagging along, my friend Pat Stanosheck and I stalked a small herd of 10 bison; approaching them was easy. The bison I targeted was a very old one—and as big as they get. Carefully aiming the Sharps, I made a good heart-lung shot on the large bull but the bison ran away. Trailing on foot, I was able

to hit him with another good shot; it surprisingly scrambled away again. What the heck!

We followed it in Buff's pickup; when we caught up with the animal, we beheld a very unusual scene which has stuck in my mind: The twice-wounded bull was surrounded by other bison that were fiercely attacking it!

They were violently and repeatedly hooking him with their horns. I didn't come too close because I didn't fancy a two thousand-pound buffalo becoming agitated and trampling me. However, I was able to take a third shot that put my target down; then we scattered the other bison with the truck. I truly believed that my first shot hit that bison in the right place, although it didn't die immediately. Perhaps the 1880s buffalo hunters just kept repeatedly shooting into the herd until several dropped.

Until you've seen a bison in person, or until you kneel next to one you've just dropped, it's hard to comprehend their huge size. To memorialize this hunt, someone took an excellent photo of me behind the bison that shows its impressive dimensions; indeed, I appear to be diminutive.

There was no way we three could hoist the bison on the pickup, so Buff returned to the ranch to fetch a front end loader, which was sufficient to hoist the heavy bull onto the truck. Before we loaded it, Buff gutted it in the field. At the ranch, he hung the entire carcass in their meat locker, skinned it, and cut out the usable cuts of meat. I kept a small portion of meat and Buff kept the pelt and most of the meat.

I only wanted to keep the skull; I declined to mount the entire head, as some do. At first I thought it would be neat to have a bison robe, but I decided that wasn't a necessity in my life or Noreen's; indeed, she later confirmed that. Such robes

were desirable when traveling over the plains in a covered wagon, but not so much in modern America.

After I returned, Noreen and I ate bison steaks for a while. Bison is alleged to be a healthier alternative, but truth be told, I can't much tell the difference between bison and beef.

Although not particularly challenging, there were two amazing things I will always remember about that hunt. First was the monstrous size of the bison that I put down. Then, the other bison attacking him was something I'd never seen nor heard about in my research.

Many years after that hunt I conducted research and realized that I had been aiming at the wrong place—that's why my first bullet didn't kill the bison. Its heart is typically located very low in the chest just above the front leg. That's different than what I thought at the time. The bottom line is I shot too high. It's recommended that you shoot a few inches behind the base of the ear. Precise marksmanship is a necessity—at least one bison guide says you should be able to hit a 4" target at 100 yards prior to signing up. That's an extremely small area, although if you hit close by, the shock would probably incapacitate the animal.

Later I also learned that it's problematic to only wound a bison because other young bulls will attack it. What I experienced was evidently the norm.

Some years later the Terry Bison Ranch became a "resort" destination and doesn't even list bison-hunting among the activities it offers. It appears to be much more genteel—and a lot more expensive—than it was in 1996.

29: Hunting With a Handgun

Several challenging adventures I've undertaken involved only a handgun. This is a short-range hunting activity, the success of which depends upon one's stalking skills, marksmanship, and nerves. Some hunters use a pistol with a scope which gives them a much better sighting platform. My trusty .44 magnum revolver only had fixed iron sights.

While in the Army I trained on a classic handgun—the M1911 .45 caliber semi-automatic. My gun safe currently contains several handguns, including a .22 revolver, a .22 pistol (a pistol by definition is semi-automatic, although most people don't use that term correctly), a .38 revolver, and the old military .45. That .45 will fly out of one's hands upon discharge if they're not expecting that huge kick.

However, my favorite hunting-handgun was a .44 Magnum Smith & Wesson Model 29, with a 5-inch barrel, iron sights, and no scope. Model 29 is what Clint Eastwood used in his first *Dirty Harry* movie in 1971, although his had a longer 6.5-inch barrel. For years S&W got a lot of advertising mileage out of Harry Callahan's movie monologue in which he proclaimed his Model 29 as "the most powerful handgun in the world."

Evidently Smith & Wesson made only a small number of Model 29s with a five-inch barrel. I bought mine—which kicked like a mule when I fired it—around 1992; they have become scarce and very pricey. Nowadays the standard Model 29 come with just a four-inch barrel.

Only on my black powder hunts did I routinely take a

handgun—I believed it was necessary because I only had one rifle shot before I began the slow process of reloading. So, I carried a .38 in my bag in case I shot a deer but didn't kill it—I didn't want it struggling around, wounded and suffering, while I took a lengthy time to reload.

When I first heard about handgun-hunting, the inherent challenges appealed greatly to me, so I decided to hunt with my .44 Magnum a few times, all of which were successful. I began with wild hogs. Pigs that escape from a farm become wild hogs, basically changing their body shape; they develop a much thicker skin, start growing hair, and their backs get lean.

Hogs are amazing in the wild; they are omnivorous and will eat anything. They pose a variety of environmental difficulties when they are allowed to breed and live unchecked; unfortunately they are plaguing many parts of Kentucky. Found close to Louisville in Henry and Bullitt Counties, they pose enormous future problems for golf courses and parks. Not long ago, wild hogs caused significant headaches in Bernheim Forest, 25 miles south of Louisville. Some were captured, but some also had to be shot.

My encounter with these creatures occurred on a hunt in Tennessee. My companion knew someone near Crossville who owned several hundred acres that contained wild pigs. We drove down specifically to shoot them; I took only my .44 magnum pistol—no rifle.

On the first day, the owner put me in a tree stand so I could watch pigs emerge from the bush. After that experience, I told him it was really boring—I sat up there all day, ate my sandwich, and never saw anything worth shooting. “Is there any way I can get involved in a little more action and proactively go after the hogs?” I inquired.

He replied, “You wanna go after ‘em, huh?” And he kinda smiled. I momentarily thought, ”Oops. What am I getting myself into?” He said, “We’ll do that tomorrow morning.”

Next day we took his dogs and hunted pigs in uncut fields and terrain that was overgrown with wild bushes and felled trees; our vision was limited. Suddenly the dogs ran into the woods, did some ferocious barking, and several pigs charged out; they were angry and in attack mode.

One of them came straight at me from 15 feet away. I quickly took my .44 and BAM! I dropped a huge, tusked hog, 300-400 pounds, with a head shot. One shot—that’s all there was time for. It was scary!

If it had hit me, it would have started chomping on me and cutting up my legs, from what other hunters have described. The property owner asked, “Well, had enough excitement yet?” In response, I tried to keep from shooting HIM, as I calmly replied, “I think that’ll do.”

After the hog was field-dressed, we took it back and strung it up to gather the meat, much of which we brought back with us. The pork tasted good, quite different than regular ham; that’s a function of what they’ve eaten. I wanted to take the skull, but that was too damaged by my .44 magnum.

On another occasion in Wyoming’s wide-open-spaces-with-little-cover, I thought it would be a real test of hunting skill to sneak up on a pronghorn and take it with a revolver. So off I went.

Though pronghorns are not true antelope, they are often referred to as the “American antelope.” That’s what we call them out in Wyoming where they are plentiful. At least four that I brought down with my rifle (1992, 1995, 2012, and 2014) are in the SCI record book. Two more are in the Boone &

Crockett record book, which has a more exacting standard.

At a distance I spotted a small group of pronghorn in a grassy area with scattered trees and small bushes. It looked like a perfect opportunity for my plan, so I started stalking them. When they'd look away, I'd quietly crawl to the next little bush, sit there for a while, then quickly move again when they looked away. I avoided an "erect" position; antelope generally know that a "standing" figure is an enemy—most likely a human being. In any event, they never noticed me; it was fun stalking them by stealthily hurrying from bush to bush while the animals looked elsewhere.



**A Wyoming pronghorn in 2012,
my first entry in the Boone & Crockett record book**

My goal was to come within 30-40 yards without being detected so I could get one good shot. With only a five-inch barrel, a revolver's sighting platform doesn't provide much accuracy. My furtiveness was aided by the always windy-noisy Wyoming grassland; in addition, the grass itself was fairly high.

The animals never heard my approach. Finally I was close enough to aim confidently, so I fired a round and brought down a large pronghorn. It was thrilling for me to achieve success on my first try.

On another occasion in the middle of the day, I was just out “messaging around” with my friend Dave Barry. Neither of us had a rifle, but I had my trusty .44 S&W. While standing on a small ridge, we looked across a draw with our binoculars. (A draw denotes terrain that is formed by two parallel ridges with low ground between them.) We spied a mule deer with large antlers on the other side, just below the rim of the draw. Lying on a small ledge, it was about 30 feet below the top of the cliff.

Given the size of its antlers, we wanted to get a better look. Jumping in the pickup, we circled around several miles to the end of the draw to get relatively close; then we walked up the rear of the slope. Looking down from above, we couldn’t figure out where it was for a few minutes; we walked around reconnoitering before locating it.

Peering over the edge of the cliff, we discovered the mule deer was about 25 feet directly below us. Dave asked, “Wanna try it?” I replied, “Sure, why not?” On my stomach I shinnied up to the edge and leaned over as Dave held my legs. While the pronghorn was stationary, just looking around, I took careful aim from above and fired a round straight down. BANG! My shot went into its spine and through the heart and lungs—it died instantly. A perfect shot with my .44.

That incident was similar to the two times in Zimbabwe when Russell Tarr held my feet as I hung over the edge of a cliff to shoot elephants, although I had used my double rifle then.

As Dave and I congratulated each other for being so brilliant, it occurred to us that it would be quite difficult to retrieve

the deer from our position above. We returned to the pickup to check out the available equipment; everyone in Wyoming carries stuff in their truck, from sleeping bags to water, from guns to shovels. Pickups are ubiquitous in Wyoming for moving cattle, opening gates, and a hundred other chores; the state has the highest percentage of registered pickup trucks to vehicles in the country.



A Cape buffalo in the Omay region of Zimbabwe

Dave luckily had rope in his truck, and I used it to carefully scramble down to the ledge where the deer was lying. I quickly secured the rope around its head and we pulled it up. After field dressing it on the cliff, we took it back to the ranch, hung it up, and skinned it. The gut pile—the heart, lungs and all the intestines—would soon be discovered by coyotes or vultures. They both have an incredible sense of smell which is beneficial because otherwise Wyoming would be littered with animal

carcasses.

Another of my handgun-shoots also involved the novel use of a pickup truck. Dave and I were riding around when I spied a herd of pronghorn and an idea came to mind. “You see that herd of antelope up there?” I asked Dave. “If you drive along very slowly keeping the antelope on your side, I’ll open the passenger door when we’re close—you slow down, and I’ll drop out of the truck and roll into the ditch. Then you keep rolling away.”

Being familiar with pickups, the antelope herd watched it warily, not noticing me tumbling into the ditch as Dave kept driving. Under cover, I got a line with my .44 revolver on an antelope buck about 30 yards away and BAM! Dropped it on the first shot. That adventurous plan was fun and worked well. Plus, the antelope meat was quite tasty.

Oftentimes when people become interested in handgun hunting, they buy one with a longer barrel, add a scope, put a shoulder stock on it, thereby turning it into a mini-rifle. I preferred the original firearm—my unaltered .44 Magnum revolver, just as I purchased it.

In retrospect I should have kept that handgun; I miss it now and would like to use it again. It did find an excellent new owner—Dennis Magnusson, my friend and the best guide in North America. After a great hunt together, I impulsively gave it to him as a gratuity when he admired it.

Smith & Wesson is now producing an eight-shot revolver with a four-inch barrel that shoots a .357 Magnum cartridge. Taurus also makes an eight-shot revolver that shoots a .38 special in addition to the .357 magnum; there’s less kick when shooting a .38. Although the cylinder is slightly larger, it’s not huge, since .38s are smaller than .44s. I’m still researching these

handguns, and one may find its way into my hunting arsenal.

30: Bear and Sheep in Alaska



**No grizzlies around on my last day in Alaska,
so I took this black bear**

In August 1996 Noreen accompanied me to Alaska where I hunted Dall's sheep which are found in the subarctic mountain ranges there. Traversing the mountains on foot was quite exhausting; we also spent much time on horseback.

After flying to Seattle, we traveled to Fairbanks, Alaska where we paid \$110 to stay in a \$40-variety Super 8 motel. That was better than the alternative—freezing to death. The following day we took a train to Denali National Park and Preserve; it was a cloudless day and we had an outstanding view of Mt. McKinley (now Denali), the highest mountain in North America at 20,310 feet, covered in snow. It was rare to see the

mountain so clearly; for that we were grateful.

Taking a bus tour, we saw both caribou and grizzly bear; in the park, we stayed at a privately-owned lodge because there is no National Park Service lodging facility. The next day we returned to Fairbanks on the train and had an excellent supper.

We later flew to Tok, a 1200-person village about 200 miles southeast of Fairbanks, where we hung out with some sheep-hunting brothers, Robert and Chris Geib. From there we took a DHC-3 single-engine deHavilland Otter to Bill Burwell's camp in the Mentasta Mountains. Burwell operated Ram Creek Outfitters within the boundaries of the Tetlin Indian Reservation, adjacent to the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. We definitely left civilization behind us.



**A heckuva climb up the mountain
to get this Dall sheep in 1996**

I went specifically to hunt Dall's sheep; however, I also bought a license for a grizzly bear because there was a

possibility of getting one. Grizzlies are huge; standing on their feet, they can be 10-12 feet high. And very dangerous. Watching the famous bear attack scene in the movie *The Revenant* reminded me of that. I wondered how they made that scene look so realistic.

While in Alaska we became friendly with Charles J. “Charlie” Fritz, a renowned Western landscape artist who was hunting grizzly bear and moose. Charlie is an artist with a particular interest in illustrating the journals of Lewis and Clark. He explained how his 100 paintings of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-1806 were purchased by someone and then exhibited by Bass Pro Shops, giving his work significant exposure. He later published a book titled *Charles Fritz: 100 Paintings Illustrating the Journals of Lewis and Clark*.

Charlie was kind enough to agree to paint Noreen and me on horseback with Noyes Mountain—the highest point in the Mentasta range, a little over 8,000 feet—in the background. We received the outstanding finished painting after our return to Louisville.

Occasionally I talk to Charlie on the phone, and I have bought some other paintings from him, including one titled, “Pronghorns on the New Mexico Borderlands,” showing the second antelope that I took which made the Boone & Crockett record book.

We were pelted by snow and rain on the first day in camp, and the guides worked hard to control the horses. After a three-hour ride, the clouds lifted and we glimpsed six rams, all of which appeared too small to hunt. Back at camp, the group was more humdrum since the feisty Geib brothers had moved on to a spike camp, a somewhat primitive, tented camping arrangement.

The next day there was the usual confusion as the staff sought to control the horses, but we finally got underway. Bypassing the same group of rams, we went up the other side of the mountain valley and found caribou and a band of ewes and lambs.

My guide was Jimmy (not his real name) and it was the first—and last—time I ever worked with him—one of the few inferior guides that I've known. Noreen once had to tell him to quit abusing his horse, and some tension resulted. My wife humorously opined that Susan the cook, Jimmy's wife, might try to poison us! But Noreen had done the right thing.

The next day Noreen rode out with Bill Burwell himself to a spike camp; just scouting around, they sighted a huge moose that was the largest he had ever seen anywhere. Noreen commented, "I guess it was big, I'd never seen a moose before."

Meanwhile, Jimmy and I rode out to the mountain at 7:00 A.M. after someone reported some sheep on the edge of the glacier. It was a lengthy trip but I was slowly becoming used to riding; after several hours of hard traveling, Jimmy and I left the horses on a little island in the middle of the river so they could graze and feed. Our hope was that they would still be there—renewed and ready to go—upon our return.

We started walking up the 2,500-foot mountain, maintaining a view of the sheep high on a ledge as they fed. However, at some point they moved onto the moraine below the glacier.

Jimmy was monitoring the trek, using a pair of powerful binoculars; meanwhile, I was becoming exhausted carrying my rifle and a 20-pound pack. We were proceeding through some tall brush when Jimmy suddenly sped up and left me behind. I flat couldn't keep up. That's one reason he was a subpar guide—he failed to realize that I was 30 years older than he was and

couldn't keep up with his younger legs.

I said to myself, "Screw this," and just sat down on a stump and waited, hoping he would eventually notice he was alone and return. Sure enough, after 20 minutes he came hurrying up the path and asked me what happened. I replied, "I'm 30 years older than you and can't keep up. Your job as a guide is to make sure that I *can* keep up, so you need to walk according to my pace and to occasionally check to make sure I'm still with you."

His actions had really pissed me off. There I am sitting on a tree stump in the middle of I-don't-know-where, without my guide. Our relationship improved somewhat after that incident—at least for a short time.

We moved on and eventually scrambled up a shale-like hill that was extremely difficult to climb because the surface kept slipping under my feet. Coming within a few hundred yards of the herd of sheep we were monitoring, we hid behind some rocks and brush to determine which sheep to target.

We had decided that our target was a large ram, but the herd started to get restless. Jimmy got on my nerves again when he said, "We better hurry up or they'll take off." In no uncertain terms, I told him, "When I'm ready to shoot, I will. If I'm not ready, I won't. I'm not shooting just for the hell of it." He was truly a pain in the ass.

After we stopped, it was over an hour before I took a shot. I had rested my rifle on a pack; when the sheep started moving out, I fired. My first shot wounded one in the hip. Although I didn't knock him down, my second shot went through the lungs and killed him. This was at a distance of about 200 yards; my resting place was not as sturdy as I might use on a rifle range but steady enough to achieve a successful outcome. The sheep that I took was sizable—a full-curl, eight-year-old ram; in spite

of my guide, I was pleased with my shooting.

Then Jimmy got to work; for two hours, he was quite competent in skinning the sheep and cutting up the meat. Our plan was to pack all of it back down the mountainside. As we headed off, he carried most of the meat, while I took his pack and rifle plus the animal's head, which was heavy.

Our relationship improved somewhat as we carefully hiked down the treacherous slope together. He said, "If you're brave, we can jump-slide down this stuff and go faster." I agreed and we did that for a while—it was fun but a little scary too, sliding down shale at a 45-degree angle. We finally reached the bottom safely with no injuries.

Jimmy then pointed out that the horses were still quite a distance away, but that if he continued alone it would be faster to bring them back. That seemed reasonable and I agreed; he left all his gear and meat with me and departed.

As I sat there by myself on a small sand bank on the river with a large load of fresh sheep meat, the thought came to me that I was bear bait—that I may have to use that license tag for a grizzly sooner than expected.

In addition, the sun was quickly setting. As the situation became more concerning to me, I began constantly moving, spinning around, looking for bears and wolves. There were noises everywhere—in the bush and the creek, from branches and the wind, everywhere. The darker it became, the more everything sounded like a grizzly bear sneaking up on me. Grizzlies aren't afraid of humans—they regard them more as lunch. By then I also was hoping that I hadn't irritated Jimmy too much, although I still had his rifle. Finally I said to myself that if I kept gyrating, I would screw myself into the ground and not be able to move. Not funny at the time.

My excitement ended when Jimmy appeared with the horses. I breathed a sigh of relief strong enough to knock him over, no doubt. Our trip back to camp lasted several hours in the dark, with all the meat, rifles, gear, and sheep's head strapped on the two horses. Although still an inviting opportunity for predators, we finally arrived safely at camp at about 1:00 A.M. I later heard that another guide did see two grizzlies in the area that day.

At camp I had nothing in particular to do except hang out and entertain Noreen with tales of the sheep hunt and how I survived a possible attack by a grizzly bear—emphasis on the word “possible.” We eventually packed a picnic lunch and trekked one hour to half-mile long Bean Lake, where I relaxed and fished, and Noreen picked blueberries nearby. Bears enjoy blueberries too, so I brought my rifle, just in case.

Some open-water beaver lodges were in the nearby stream. I had heard that fish like to gather around beaver dens, so I made myself home on top of one, casting and trying my luck. As it turned out I caught lots of grayling trout for dinner, no doubt because no one had ever recently fished in that area; arctic graylings are some of the best-eating freshwater fish in the world. As I finished, there was a sudden, loud, smacking noise that surprised us. SLAP! SLAP! SLAP! A huge beaver about 20 yards away, was slapping his flat tail down, undoubtedly pissed off that I was standing on top of his house. Knowing that beavers will sometimes attack humans when they feel threatened, we moved on peacefully.

When Bill asked if I wanted to use my bear tag to look for a grizzly, I readily agreed. Our plan was to travel on horseback and conduct “reconnaissance” with Bill's powerful binoculars from the highest point we could easily access. When we finally

sighted a grizzly, it disappeared into a small, forested area below. Bill was certain that it would re-emerge, so we stayed there for a couple of hours, patiently waiting in the rain for the bear to come out. It didn't. Out of luck that day, we rode back to camp.

The following day we traveled back to the same area and spotted a bear on the other side of our little canyon. At first it appeared to be a grizzly; but the outfitter eventually concluded that it was a black bear. He advised that my tag was good for any bear if I wanted to take this one; at a distance he thought it was a large one. Because I only had one day left and my chances of getting a grizzly were slim, I agreed to go for it. As the old saying goes, a bear in the hand...

We quietly worked our way down the hill, creeping closer to it until we came to a drop-off. Taking my time, I lined up a shot from 300 yards across the canyon—farther than I would have preferred. However, I got it through the lungs on the first shot and quickly fired again, hitting it in that same area. The bear immediately keeled over.

It was a strikingly colored black bear, with golden streaks in its fur. However, it only measured a disappointing six feet in length—nose to tail—so Bill declared there would be no trophy fee since it wasn't seven feet. In addition to a daily fee, we were charged a trophy fee for each animal that I took--to cover the extra labor involved in skinning and processing.

Once again the skittish horses weren't initially interested in carting a bear down the mountain, but they eventually did so. When we returned to camp, I discovered that the Geib brothers had also come back; both had gotten sheep. We had an excellent dinner and a fun time that evening.

The outfitters gutted the bear and skinned it; they

eventually took the hide to a tanner for processing into a rug, which I gave to Siofra for her new baby. The bear was too small to consider measuring its skull, so it doesn't appear in the SCI record book.

The following day the Otter landed with two new hunters, so Noreen and I decided to leave early since I had already gotten both sheep and bear. Surprisingly, the new pilot revealed himself to be an undercover agent from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game! Thankfully we were all in the clear; he found no problems at the camp or with any of the animals that were taken.

Years later I learned that Bill Burwell had been convicted in federal court in 1998 for allowing clients to illegally take a grizzly bear and Dall sheep and in 2011 for illegally transporting or selling wildlife taken in violation of state law. In addition to probation and a hefty fine, he was not allowed to hunt or guide anyone who was hunting. A stiff sentence for a big-game hunting guide.

Although it was a good hunt, I was slightly disappointed because I had hoped to get a grizzly. Several years later I considered a grizzly hunt on Afognak Island in the Kodiak Archipelago near the Aleutian Islands. At a Safari Club convention I met an outfitter whose family had operated there for many decades with excellent results for their clients because of the many bears and few hunters.

I told the outfitter that I'd like to take my .470 Nitro Express, that it would mean a lot to me. The guy smirked and said, "Nah, you don't need that, you can use one of our rifles." When I told him that I'd rather bring mine, he said it didn't have a scope on it and he didn't think a double rifle was suitable—although I don't think he knew anything about them.

I had shot many animals within 50-100 yards with a double, but he was pretty fixed about using a regular rifle with a telescopic scope; however, we would be close enough to bears that 300-yard shots were not necessary. After our conversation, I believed we were getting off to a bad start, so that was the end of that.

That was my last hunting trip to Alaska. Although I considered returning for grizzlies several times, I never did so. I also contemplated hunting brown bear on the Alaskan Coast, but never pulled the trigger, so to speak. The only other North American bear is the polar bear, which always sounded to me to be more trouble than it was worth. Perhaps I had learned how tough and exhausting it was to hunt in the northern wilderness.

Bear hunting is not something I would consider now; at age 81, I'm not comfortable stalking anything dangerous. On the other hand, maybe I could do so with the right guide or outfitter. The expression "Never say never" sometimes appeals to me.

31: A Maine Man

Since 1960 I have greatly enjoyed visiting the Pine Tree State; for you *Jeopardy* fans, Maine is the only state with just one syllable.

In my late teens and early 20s, I vacationed just outside Boothbay Harbor where my parents had purchased a log cabin at Sprucewold Lodge colony, an historic group of rustic log cabins built in the 1920s. Mom and Dad would spend the entire summer there.

Boothbay Harbor is a beautiful little town about 60 miles north of Portland, the state's most populous city. With about 2,000 residents, Boothbay was mostly a lobster-fishing town with a decent tourist trade when we were younger; now it's also become popular for whale watching and yachting. Sometimes we would drive around the area to sightsee. The first time we traveled 41 miles to the iconic L.L. Bean store in Freeport, we found a plain-looking small town store—just a two-story-tall wooden building.

Noreen delighted in our Maine interludes. Early on, she, the kids and I would travel from Grand Turk to visit my parents in Maine for a week or more in summertime. My brother would also be there with his wife and young children and we'd all have a wonderful time reuniting. The weather was always perfect in July and August, and the landscape, coastline, and scenery was gorgeous; plus there were lots of fresh lobster right off the boat at dockside restaurants.

My parents owned that property for a long time. When

they divorced, my father signed his ownership rights over to mother. Around 1990—when I was back in Louisville and Rudy in California—she had a stroke, so we decided to sell it.

Twice in the 1990s I had some adventures hunting grouse and woodcock in Maine. I was accompanied by my friend Pat Carroll, a business broker and convenience store owner in Louisville. I met Pat at local bird and quail hunts; although not in our regular hunting group, he was quite experienced concerning dogs and birds. A longtime outdoorsman, he had graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a forestry degree.

During October, Pat would rent a cabin in an area familiar to him in northern Maine near the Canadian border. Although he would usually stay three or four weeks, my trip would only last five days. We stayed in the same cabin he always rented, and we hunted the same territory both years. The weather was decent when we hunted there; we experienced no really heavy snowfalls nor fierce cold.

With my trusty 20-gauge shotgun in hand, I mainly hunted grouse and woodcock in Maine, not bigger game. It's difficult to obtain a license to shoot a moose there; state officials determine by lottery who has the privilege of buying a very expensive license, and it seemed unlikely that I would win.

Although we didn't bag many birds, it was a unique experience. The terrain was thick with brush and foliage, making it extremely difficult to see any target. As in many northern forests, the hunter's view is often obscured by evergreens. It was also tough walking through that stuff, constantly having to push brush and vegetation out of the way. It wasn't "a stroll in the woods" by any means. Another significant challenge is that the woodcock migrates only during a certain phase of the moon, so the timing was crucial.

I had to work hard to overcome the natural habitat of my prey. Woodcock live in dark, deep woods; when roused from their hiding places, they always fly straight up. Although that's wonderful to watch, it was challenging for me to shoot because there were so many trees shielding the woodcock in every direction. Not only are woodcock hard to locate but they are exceptionally fast. It's hard work to find and take one, but it's extremely rewarding to taste the bird when properly prepared.

There is a painting in my home office of two English woodcock; they are typically almost twice as big as American woodcock. Otherwise their appearance is similar. Very hardy birds, woodcock are also called timberdoodles, worm-diggers, bogsuckers, and similar silly nicknames.

Grouse, unusual looking birds, were also challenging targets. Not only do they have feathered nostrils, but their legs are covered in feathers down to the toes, and those toes have feathers or small scales that make it easier to walk on snow or burrow for shelter in winter. There are many varieties of grouse, which typically weigh from two to seven pounds.

Sometimes the locals driving on a logging road would just stick a shotgun out the window and shoot grouse walking along the road. That is NOT sporting, in addition to being unlawful. Pat and I did not hunt that way.

In England and Scotland, driven red grouse shooting is popular with hunters. In Maine, grouse were somewhat easier to locate than woodcock; although they didn't ascend straight up like woodcock, they would fly all around the trees to escape, causing many hunter-vision problems.

In most hunting locales you might overhear hunters say, "We got four ducks or five geese or 17 doves today." In Maine, people would say, "Well, we flew four woodcock," or "We flew

five grouse.” That means they SAW that many, not shot or killed that number. Merely sighting that many would amount to a successful and meaningful day for them. That was interesting hunting terminology which I never heard anywhere else. As for me, I would rather shoot grouse, woodcock, pheasants, and other birds than just sight them.

In the field, my dog would accompany me. Noreen and I had bought Cote, a French Brittany—a smaller version of a regular Brittany—in North Dakota. Named after the French perfume, we usually pronounced it “Cody.” Pat also loved dogs and he would take Cote on his drive to Maine while I flew into Bangor.

Cote was a good dog that hunted pretty close; it wouldn’t take off and run 50 yards away like some hunting dogs I’ve seen. He’d stay nearby, hunting within 10-20 yards, suddenly going into a point when it caught a bird’s scent. But not just any bird—it wouldn’t lock onto a robin or chickadee or other ordinary songbird; it focused solely on game birds.

Although Pat and I shot very few woodcock and even fewer grouse during our trips, the challenges of the hunt and the companionship afforded appealed greatly to me. When I was mulling possible retirement in 1998, Pat gave me some needed advice on selling my company, Champion Wood Products. Although I was going to list it for sale through him, he told me to save money by doing it myself—with his assistance—since I already knew some possible interested buyers.

Sometimes it’s hard to believe that I’ve been retired for so long. For a long while I didn’t know how to spend my time, thinking maybe I should buy another business. Pat told me that was a bad idea. Based on his honest appraisal of my situation, I realized that I had no desire to take on another set of problems.

That was good advice from my friend; plus, I didn't like working that much anyway.

My parents passed away within several years of each other; Mother died in 1991, at the age of seventy-four, and Father died three years later. At the time of her passing, she been residing in the Episcopal Church Home, a senior living facility in Louisville.

Noreen and I were diligent in looking after her and caring for her. My brother and I survived her, along with her brother Conrad of Hanover, Germany, and five grandchildren. Her funeral took place at St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church in Harrods Creek, where she was buried.

Father's health started declining about the same time and he ended up in a nursing home in Reston, Virginia where he lived. He died there at the age of 79 and is buried at the Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Herndon, Virginia.

With fondness I still recall the intense drilling that my father gave me about firearm use when he bought that single barrel 16-gauge shotgun for me when I was a teenager.

I still dearly miss my parents.

In 2019 Rudy's and my children agreed that they wanted to return to Maine for a family reunion. We told them, "We're old geezers—you all make the arrangements, and we'll finance it and attend."

Thus, we held a family reunion in July in Boothbay Harbor with 19 people in five cabins at Sprucewold. In a nod to yesteryear, we rented cabins on the same dead-end street that our family's cabin had been on—Crooked Pine Road. We were right down the street from my parents' old place and even got

to know the couple who had bought it from my mother.

The locals in Maine were mostly friendly and very accepting of us in the tiny nearby town where we went for groceries. We also drove to the flagship L.L.Bean store in Freeport for my first trip there in almost 50 years. We discovered that the Bean store, which hadn't locked its doors since 1951, is now the centerpiece of a huge shopping plaza with many other retail clothing stores nearby. By the way, it finally did have to install locks during the pandemic, but is now back in business 24/7/365.

There is no hunting season open during summertime in Maine, so I took no shotgun; however, we all enjoyed several days of fishing. We also chartered a 50-foot sailboat and went all around the harbor and out to sea—a three- or four-hour cruise. It was fun—there were skilled sailors in charge of the sails and rigging who were not about to turn their boat over to the Rucker clan.

Maine provided the perfect locale for an outstanding reunion that not only brought the family together but flooded us with memories of our past. Maine seemed as we remembered it, except for many more tourists.

Joanie and I drove there because we planned to drive to her cabin in Quebec after the reunion; her kayak was strapped securely on top of my 2019 Subaru. We thought it would be too much trouble to take it off before we reached Canada, so wherever we went—shopping or fishing or whatever—there was the kayak on top of the car.

32: A Note About Dogs



With a tracker and an impala—food for the camp

As I mentioned earlier, Pat Carroll and I loved to walk the fields and forests in Maine with our hunting dogs. Although Cote was the only dog I ever took there, my history with canines goes back much further.

In my youth we had an English springer spaniel named Muffin; my brother was given the privilege of naming the dog, and Rudy really liked English muffins. So that was that.

Springer spaniels are “gun dogs,” raised to assist hunters in flushing out game from cover and later retrieving it. We used Muffin for none of those purposes—he was just the lovable family pet.

In her childhood, Noreen also had developed a fondness

for dogs. Her father always maintained a small pack of assorted canines for hunting in his particular Irish manner. Timothy—on foot with no shotgun—would take his dogs out to hunt foxes and rabbits. I always described it as “fox hunting without the horses.”

Shortly after I started hunting as an avocation, I acquired a black Labrador retriever named Marley. All Labs are active “gun dogs”—friendly, loyal, and good in the field.

In the 1980s I took Marley up to Walpole Island in Ontario for duck hunting several times and he always performed well. On one occasion when the marsh was frozen, we used steel boats to loop around in the lake and break the ice so that we could place our floating decoys. You’d think that a dog wouldn’t want to go swimming in that water, but Marley was champing to get loose and jump in.

After we finished “de-icing” some open water so the ducks could land, they just poured in; we had lots of targets and there was much shooting. Marley retrieved without resting—Labs have that behavior in their DNA; he was an outstanding hunter’s dog.

Noreen had grown curious about the place that I traveled to several times a year, so I invited her to accompany me to Walpole on a duck hunting trip. Marley the black Lab accompanied us; my mother watched the kids at home.

We encountered typical Canadian weather—freezing cold. The first morning before sunrise, the two of us and the guide ventured out in a boat, broke the ice in front of the blind area, then entered the blind. Soon the ducks started pouring in and I was firing away. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! In short order I had my limit of ducks. Noreen calmly observed, “It looks like there’s not much to this at all—I don’t know why it takes you so long.”

She was one smart wife.

After 12 good years, Marley passed away. Next, Ziggy, a mostly white English setter, came into our home and our hearts.

Friendly and good-natured, Ziggy was an outstanding pointer for quail hunting. I took him to many local hunting farms and fields around Louisville and Western Kentucky. He had an excellent nose and loved to go, go, go. Ziggy would sleep in the car until we came to within five miles of a previous hunting destination. Then he woke up sniffing—immediately detecting recognizable scents from the old territory. I'll repeat—what a nose he had!

However, he had a major weakness. After he pointed and I shot and the bird came down, he'd pick it up and casually chew on it briefly, then drop it and carry on! After lengthy, painstaking efforts, I finally gave up training him to bring the bird to me. At least I knew where the bird was located so I could retrieve it myself. I guess mischievous Ziggy had trained me well. He was with us for almost 15 years.

Shortly after Ziggy's death, we primarily looked for another house dog; I contacted some friends from Montana who owned several French Brittans. Noreen and I liked their features so I did some research on the breed. Originating in France, it's a purebred dog raised primarily for bird hunting. It typically weighs from 30 to 40 pounds—somewhat larger than an English and American cocker spaniel—and lives up to 15 years.

These excellent hunting dogs are one of the smallest breeds of pointers, and they didn't point like Ziggy did. The setter locked into pointing position like a statue, once he caught a bird's scent. Cote, our little French Brittany, was slightly

different—he'd slowly walk up, sniff, and nonchalantly raise one paw. That was it; in the field, you had to pay attention or his gesture would be missed. In spite of that, his nose was great and his ability to find birds was awesome.

His end with us came far too early. A hunting friend's daughter and husband lived on a farm near Georgetown, Kentucky. They really liked Cote, so I left him with them once when I went on a trip. Days later the husband phoned me and sadly began, "Mr. Rucker, I got some bad news." Those are words you never want to hear when answering the phone. The husband was driving a farm truck through the gate to the road and somehow the dog ran under the wheels and was killed. The couple was extremely upset at the unfortunate accident.

I was so disappointed to lose such a pleasant, agreeable friend. Cote the French Brittany had been in our lives for about six years. He was the last dog in my household.

33: Two Hippos and Me



A spotted hyena in nighttime Zimbabwe, 1994

On a 2008 solo safari with professional hunter Martin Pieters, my prey was the always-dangerous hippopotamus. I knew Martin from other safaris; he once worked for Butch Walker who had decided to bow out of the active safari business. However, Butch still had a lease from a tribe in Omay that he negotiated to Martin, and that's where we went to hunt hippo.

My friend Millard Cox, a Louisville lawyer, had used Martin as a PH and recommended him to me. Millard, one of my regular Kentucky hunting buddies, had hunted his entire life but had never been to Africa. He heard me talk about it so many times that we finally went to Zimbabwe together in the mid-1990s and hunted with Butch. Millard enjoyed it so much that we went together a second time.

On both our joint trips, our wives accompanied us. He was married to Mina Jones Cox, one of the Jones twins, daughters of Warner Jones (1916-1994), legendary thoroughbred race horse breeder. Mina and Noreen knew each other from social events and had become friends. The four of us always enjoyed each other's company.

After the elephant and rhinoceros, the semi-aquatic hippopotamus—Greek for “river horse”—is the third largest land mammal in existence. Hippopotami are extremely dangerous. They typically live in a “bloat,” (an unusual word, no doubt coined by an Englishman) or herd, consisting of 10 to 20 females with their young plus several “bachelor” males, all dominated by one very aggressive male.

In Africa over the years, I learned about their aggressivity towards humans and their attacks on villagers in boats and on land, sometimes with no apparent provocation. I was told that if you come between them and the water or their young, they will attack without hesitation. I have always firmly believed that they kill more people than any other animal in Africa.

On one safari with PH Russell Tarr, I was fortunate to return each day after hunting to a wonderful camp. Built on a grassy knoll, it consisted of several huts overlooking the river. From the lake's edge we walked up a 35-foot trail to the camp which was on a slight rise. There was abundant, desirable grass growing near the camp.

I had noticed that a fully grown hippo frequently emerged from the water after dark and grazed in our grassy “yard.” Becoming used to its presence, I wasn't bothered by it and just avoided the 5,000-pound creature, walking well around it and giving it plenty of room to feed.

After Russell and I returned with some fresh meat one day,

I entered the shower tent to wash away the day's dirt and grime. Coming out I was greeted by a scary surprise: There was the familiar, huge hippo only 15 feet away and staring straight at me! I'm naked, holding my towel around my waist with one hand and my Dopp kit in the other, with only a stupid smile on my face. Knowing that hippos can run up to 30 miles per hour, I was hesitant to bolt or do anything to annoy it. You must respect an animal that is quite fearless and weighs more than a ton. So I just shouted, "Russell!"—no doubt in a squeaky, high-pitched voice. Russell quickly emerged from his tent, made some loud noises, and chased the hippo away. Quite an introduction to the world of the common hippo.

On the 2008 safari I had informed Martin that I wanted to take a hippo—on land, not in the water. But after several days of hunting, I received a message to call Noreen on the satellite telephone. Sadly, she informed me that her cancer had spread. Terrible news! Always a trooper, she declared that I should stay on safari; I replied that I loved her and would return immediately. Carol Medley, my superb travel agent, went all out to hastily arrange my return trip.

Meanwhile someone reported sighting an injured hippo in a small bay near Lake Kariba, the huge lake and reservoir. Because we had a few hours before my charter would arrive and we knew the area where this hippo was allegedly located, Martin urged me to check it out. We hurriedly proceeded to Kariba Bay.

Sure enough we found it—out of the water, standing on the shore, looking miserable with a hole in his side. It was an older male—not ancient, but not too young either, severely wounded in a fight with a dominant hippo, perhaps over territory or a female.

As I was preparing to put it out of its misery, it suddenly lumbered back into the knee-deep water. Thinking it may be on a sand bar and easy to recover, I quickly took a shot and dropped it. Unfortunately it keeled over and fell into an underwater drop-off; it just kept going down, completely out of sight.

Martin then engaged Dalton Tink, the 20-year-old apprentice hunter shadowing him, saying, "Dalton, here's where you earn your pay. You gotta go down and get that hippo. Jump in and attach a rope to it." Dalton replied, "Me? What about the crocodiles?" I responded, "Don't worry, Dalton, we'll take care of the crocs."

Obediently, young Tink, full of energy and ignoring the many crocodiles in that area of the bay, took off his clothes, literally placed a knife between his teeth, and dove into the water, à la Tarzan.

Without a mask he couldn't see much, but he did manage to swim down and find the hippo. Reappearing after being underwater for a while, Tink reported that the animal was in a depression on the bay's floor; Martin gave him a rope and told him to get it done. Taking a large gulp of air, Tink dove in, cut a hole in the hippo's hide, put the rope through the opening, tied and secured the rope, and resurfaced. An amazing accomplishment!

Martin attached the rope to our Land Rover and pulled the hippo's carcass out of the water. A stunning sight, it must have weighed 3,500 pounds. After taking what we wanted from the animal, the locals removed its hide and recycled virtually everything else.

Following some photo-taking, Martin hurriedly took me to a little dirt airstrip to my chartered airplane, a single-engine Cessna 182, with room for a pilot and three passengers. We left

immediately.

A young white Zimbabwean with extremely blonde, curly hair was piloting the Cessna. As we neared our destination, I heard him call, "Bulawayo Tower, this is 1460 landing." The tower's response was "B-a-a-a-a-ah." When I heard that bleating sound, I said, "What the f--- does that mean?" Pointing to his hair, he told me his nickname was "Sheep" because it looked like he had one on his head. Everyone has a story!

After a night in Bulawayo I caught a flight to Joburg, then to Paris. My connecting flight in France developed engine trouble, so I had to spend an extra night there before finally returning to New York City and Louisville. All my last-minute travel arrangements took three days to complete. Noreen was surprised to see me, but very grateful. I knew that was the right thing to do.

When I attended a Safari Club convention in Las Vegas in 2017, I happened to run into Dalton Tink, and we laughed about that hippo incident. He had become one of the newest licensed professional hunters working for Martin Pieters Safaris and obviously still had a pit bull mindset. I thanked him for the memories that hippo incident gave me—always funny to recall. Tink replied, "Believe me, I haven't done it again." Still a young man, Tink has become an outstanding PH in his own right who now operates his own safari business with a partner and is doing quite well.

Dalton also had an unfortunate medical situation brewing. He needed a really strong skin medication and asked if I could help him and I agreed; A doctor friend gave me a prescription, and I sent it to Zimbabwe via another hunter who promised to deliver it when he went on safari there.

One year later I saw Dalton at another annual convention,

and his condition was totally cured. He couldn't thank me enough, saying that sort of medicine was just not available in Africa. I was grateful to be able to help him. It was the least I could do for a man who dove into croc-infested waters with a knife in his teeth to recover my errant hippo.

34: Noreen's Passing

In 1998 Noreen and I returned to the Turks and Caicos and purchased 2½ acres of land on Salt Cay, about eight miles south of Grand Turk. Only about 50 people lived there with no retail or grocery stores whatsoever. We also rehabbed a run-down, dilapidated cottage on Grand Turk which became our primary residence; we spent several months a year there just enjoying life. Because of my long association with the Islands and my trailblazing work developing local air service, I was later accorded “Belonger” status, a legal classification associated with British Overseas Territories.

Our kids and grandchildren would often visit; Embry and Siofra always retained good feelings about the Islands. In fact, my son became greatly irritated once when the local customs official stamped his passport as a “visitor.” He quickly proclaimed to them, “I bearn here!” Much surprised, they redid his paperwork.

Luckily we sold the Grand Turk house in 2008, just months before the Islands were struck by Category 5 Hurricane Ike. Moving back to Prospect, Kentucky, we lived in the historic 1840 Clore House until 1995 when we bought a townhouse condo in Prospect. Then we planned and built a timber-frame house in Skylight, also in Oldham County; it was an excellent place on 20 acres.

As for business, long story short, after taking over the company, putting my savings into it, taking out loans, and avoiding bankruptcy, I was able to turn Champion Wood Products

around and make it profitable. It was still going well when I eventually sold it in 1998.

In 2000 disaster struck when we learned that Noreen had cancer. After her first breast cancer diagnosis, we made many trips to hospitals and doctors in Louisville and focused on her treatment and recovery. She underwent surgery followed by chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and the cancer went into remission. Then it reappeared. More treatments, more doctors, and another remission followed.

Noreen and I had some excellent years in the cottage that we bought in Ireland; then her cancer returned in 2008. As related in the previous chapter, I was in Zimbabwe on a hunt when she called to tell me that the disease had spread.

Noreen Smythe Rucker was 67 years old and had been married to me for 42 years when she finally succumbed to cancer on Sunday, June 6, 2010, in Skylight, Kentucky. She was an accomplished horsewoman, farrier, gardener, word traveler, and a much-loved wife, mother and grandmother. Survivors besides me included her children, Embry and Siofra; four grandchildren, Tinsley, Isabel, Embry and Ennis; three brothers, Conor, Michael and Barry; four sisters, Ann, Olive, Maura and Maeve; many nieces, nephews and cousins; and countless friends. Services were held at St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church in Harrods Creek.

Our adventures continued even after Noreen's earthly passing. She desired that her ashes be spread in various places around the world that were meaningful to her. Arriving in Ireland to carry out her wishes, I discovered that the suitcase carrying her ashes had been lost. Protesting to the airline clerks, I moaned in my best Irish accent, "You've lost me wife's ashes, how can I now bury her?" The clerks were aghast and acted

quickly to reunite me with her ashes so that I could accomplish my mission.

Amazingly the exact same scenario occurred in Grand Turk upon my arrival to spread her ashes near the home that we had shared in our later years. “Hey mon, no ashes,” I yelled. Again the locals acted quickly to remedy the situation. No doubt Noreen watched all this activity on her behalf with great amusement and eye-rolling.

35: Back to Argentina



I took this chobe bushbuck on the flood plain of Lake Kariba in 1994

After Noreen's funeral service, my good friend Richard Buddeke and I were walking from St. Francis church to the Memorial Garden to bury some of her ashes when he politely inquired, "What are you going to do now, Embry?" When I indicated I was unsure, he insightfully suggested that we go duck hunting. When I observed that ducks were not in season, he noted, "The duck-hunting season is now open in Argentina. The season there is totally the opposite from here." Pushing my grief aside, I agreed to his plan.

Eventually we asked Arlie Tucker, the retired North American chairman of Komatsu, the Japanese heavy equipment business, to join us. He is good company, and I still hunt with him

frequently. I always wondered how Arlie functioned when he went overseas for meetings because he didn't speak Japanese. His explanation amazed me—they installed a simultaneous translating machine in the boardroom. Obviously, they wanted to hear what he had to offer.

Richard, Arlie, and I flew into Buenos Aires, traveled to the middle of nowhere, stayed in a really nice farmhouse for a few days, shot a lot of ducks, and shared a lot of laughs.

The farm was located in the central region of Argentina and was fairly close to the Paraná River, second in length in South America only to the Amazon. The owners had cleared out the farm's compound to make way for shooters during the duck season. There were numerous ponds and lakes on the farm and several other nearby places where they had permission to hunt.

They provided guides to accompany us each day. In the planning stages when I inquired if we needed to bring our own waders, they replied that they had plenty of waders. They were right—they did, and they all leaked! Every day we put them on but returned with wet socks. However, the weather wasn't that bad, which was in our favor.

The three of us targeted various species there; some were ducks found in Kentucky, others were indigenous to South America. We saw fulvous tree ducks, teal, pintail, and lots of unfamiliar ones. We also encountered numerous birds that we had never seen before; the guides made it clear that we were not to shoot them. Once, a common flamingo flew directly overhead, and Richard pretended to aim at it when the guides excitedly yelled, "No, Señor! No, Señor!" Richard is quite a jokester.

There was no government-established limit on ducks, and

we each shot 40-50 ducks each day—not an excessive amount after the 400 doves on the previous trip. Some of the ducks we ate, the rest went to feed the staff on the farm. Nothing was wasted.

Speaking of eating, Richard is also quite a gourmet. We accompanied him to a restaurant in Buenos Aires that he had heard about, and we devoured a fantastic meal—mostly beef. A welcome change after all the ducks we took.

I learned much from my trips to Argentina, Uruguay, and Mexico; I have hunted in no other Latin American countries.

36: Introducing Joanie



**Resting with Russell Tarr
after a good hunt for this Cape buffalo**

Coincidentally, Noreen and I had purchased our place in Skylight from Elizabeth “Lizzie” MacLean, who was the sister of Joanie MacLean, the woman who would later become my second wife. Their father was Angus MacLean, owner of the Wood-Mosaic Corporation in Louisville’s Highland Park neighborhood and son of the founder of that company which at one time was the largest producer of fine face veneer in the United States.

Joanie and I first met when I was twelve and we occasionally dated as adolescents. We even exchanged letters for a while after she went away to boarding school. Then as young adults often do, we went our separate ways. Eventually we renewed

our friendship when Joanie taught our children at St. Francis School in Goshen. Noreen came to know Joanie as a friend and liked her very much.

Sometime after Noreen's death, Joanie and I began dating. She accompanied me on my 10th trip to Africa in 2011. That trip to Zambia went so well that we eventually married on December 22, 2012. Aren't the twists and turns in life fascinating?

Joanie had three children from her prior marriage: One son, Stuart Ulferts, is an attorney who lives with his wife Kelli and family in Prospect; her daughter Elizabeth is married to Bill Reisert, President of Reisert Insurance Company; and her son Erick Ulferts and his wife Julie and their family live in Portland, Oregon.

When we married, Joanie lived on Spring Drive and I still lived in the house in Skylight. We decided that Oldham County was too far out; so, we sold both of those houses, bought our current one on Glenmary Avenue and had a wonderful addition constructed. Both of us love the house and its pool—and each other.

Joanie owns a cabin in a compound with other MacLean family members in a woodland preserve in Quebec about one hundred miles north of Ottawa. It's about 1,100 miles due north of Louisville which is usually a two-day trip for us. The local town—Maniwaki, Algonquin for “Mary's Land”—is about 30 miles away; it's so isolated that the trip to town takes about 90 minutes.

Joanie's grandfather's family was from Canada, and Scotland before that. Her grandfather loved recreational fishing and shooting so much that he contacted the local Algonquin tribal elders and sought the best place for those activities. Eventually, through a complex arrangement between the Algonquins and

the Quebec government, the MacLeans received a lengthy lease of a large, isolated area for recreational use only.

The MacLean family cabins, including the one that Joanie inherited, were built by Algonquins and French Canadians about 100 years ago at her grandfather's direction. Of the eight cabins that were originally built, five are still owned by family.

On maps there are lakes named Lake Angus and Lake Kathleen after MacLean family members. Joanie relates very well with the local Algonquins; she knows many of them personally since she's been vacationing there since age four. In the distant past, her father would come and go from his business in Louisville while everyone else spent two summer months in Canada.

Joanie and I are fortunate to embrace the adventure that travel provides. Our travel agent jokingly refers to us as "MacRucker." We have visited France several times, including a very moving trip to Normandy; I have always been interested in World War II, especially D-Day. We drove there from Paris and toured the area with an excellent guide.

During a pleasurable, month-long trip to Europe in 2016, we were escorted around London by my friend Jim Clark who drives a Black Cab. My guide-friend Kevin Downer first introduced us to Jim, a real cockney. These drivers are licensed after passing a years-long, extensive training course, memorizing over 20,000 locations and sights for visitors. When Joanie and I first went to London together, she wanted to see some famous designer's place, and Jim said, "I've never been there but I know where it is." Indeed he did, taking us straight there.

We spent six days in the Edinburgh area, where I shot partridge and pheasant before driving to Wales for more shooting. Then we journeyed back to London before flying to Berlin for

three nights—I hadn't been to the German capital for 50+ years.

My Uncle Conrad's granddaughter Louisa showed us around Berlin; remarkably, we even found the house where my mother lived. We also viewed my great-great-grandfather Hegel's grave; yes, the noted German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel.

We traveled to Prague and the Czech Republic for several nights before returning to England. There, we ate lunch at Rules, the oldest restaurant in London, established in 1798. Rules serves the traditional food of England, specializing in classic game cookery, oysters, pies, and puddings. Rules owns an estate in the High Pennines—England's last wilderness—which supplies training in game management for the staff, exercises its own quality controls, and determines how the game is treated. I ordered and dined on the woodcock—twice as large as the American variety. It was served complete with its long bill. Quite a meal!

37: With Joanie in Africa



**Wife-to-be Joanie MacLean and Atlas
holding a puku I took in Zambia in 2011**

In 2011 my trusted friend and professional hunter Russell Tarr advised me that he had access to an excellent hunting camp in Zambia—in the Kafue region that I had never visited. He described spectacular sable antelope in that area, plus Cape buffalo. It certainly appealed to me since I had never taken a sable. With compact, robust builds and large, soaring horns that arch backwards, they are truly spectacular.

Although we would not marry for about a year, I asked Joanie if she would be interested in accompanying me on a hunting safari to Africa. I believed she could get to know me better by understanding my dedicated avocation.

Joanie replied, “Yes, I guess so, I always liked camping out.” Her answer indicated to me that she might not really “get it,”—at least about safari life. Whatever her preconceived notions, I wanted her to learn some particulars about safaris from someone other than me before we left. So I suggested that we first attend the upcoming Safari Club convention in Reno to meet Russell and others to discover what really happens on safari. She was agreeable.

In Nevada, Joanie was obviously surprised that more than 25,000 guests would attend that type of gathering. Professional hunters, guides, outfitters, and vendors from China to Chile and Alaska to Azerbaijan and everywhere in between were present to display their hunting-related wares and promote their activities. It was quite an intense week-long event.

When we finally connected with Russell, Joanie initially had some difficulty understanding his Zimbabwean English, slightly different than “English” English, sounding more like the English that New Zealanders speak. He introduced us to an experienced safari manager whom he knew, Werner van Noordwyk, an Afrikaner from South Africa who had obtained a lease in Zambia on the new hunting area Russell mentioned.

At one point, van Noordwyk’s dialogue with Joanie went like this:

Werner: Will you be doing any hunting?

Joanie: No, no, but I’ve been camping before, I can help out with cooking and other chores like that.

Werner (with a surprised look): Madam, we will have 17 people looking after you, you will not be doing any of those things.

Joanie (delighted): This safari idea is sounding better all the time.

Joanie suddenly had an entirely new attitude toward safaris, once she understood the typical daily protocol as explained by Werner. She was now greatly looking forward to the trip.

Leaving in September, we drove to the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport in Hebron, near Covington. It still surprises many visitors to Cincinnati when they discover the airport is actually located across the river in Kentucky. As I checked my rifle and our baggage all the way through to Zambia, the clerk in Cincy was agog; she had never waited on someone checking baggage that far—more than 8,000 miles. My hope was that every item Joanie and I took would make it to Zambia without delay.

We flew from CVG directly to Paris where we had a pleasant time seeing the sights on our one-night layover. Well, pleasant except for one glitch.

Joanie and I had tickets to ride the Metro—the subway—to our next destination. After it stopped, I quickly boarded and suddenly the doors closed. As the train left, I realized that Joanie was still standing on the platform. Good grief! She tells the story from here: “That was the first time I had ever been to Europe. As I stood there, seemingly abandoned, I thought, ‘There goes my maybe-husband. Holy shit! What am I going to do?’ Then I realized I still had my ticket. I boarded the next train and caught up with him soon enough. It all worked out.”

After reuniting with my beloved, we flew to Johannesburg and finally to Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia with over two million residents. Amazingly, all of our luggage and hunting items arrived undamaged.

In Lusaka we connected with Bilion, a Zambian friend of our outfitter. I had been exchanging emails with Bilion who had asked me to buy and bring a new Apple cellphone for him since

the American price was much cheaper than in Zambia. He was delighted to see us—and the phone—when he met us at the airport; after reimbursing me, he drove us to the Protea Hotel.

The next morning Russell drove 500 miles from Bulawayo and met us at the hotel; we packed everything in his vehicle and started a seven-hour drive to the Nkala Camp on the Kafue River, not far from the Kafue National Park. Kafue is the country's oldest and largest park, approximately the size of Massachusetts.

Our departure from Lusaka, a huge metropolis, was problematic. Russell had warned us that vehicular traffic was extremely heavy around noon because everyone in the city drove home for their midday meal. We discovered the hard way that what he said was true: We left the hotel slightly late and got stuck in the most horrendous traffic jam I have ever experienced—it was just total confusion.

As we sat in this mess, people were running up on both sides of our car, hawking a wide array of items—dresses, machetes, tires and whatever. Joanie's eyes were bugging out at this spectacle, and we were becoming fatigued with the constant turmoil.

An extraordinary incident then occurred. Gazing out the window, we saw a middle-aged couple in a conventional sedan on the other side of the street. He was wearing a sport coat and tie and she was also nicely dressed; they looked like schoolteachers, librarians, or officials of some type. Their unmoving car was just sitting on the roadside; it appeared that they wanted to go in the opposite direction. Suddenly, about six guys—all of whom were laughing their heads off—picked up the car, turned it around and put it down, now pointed in the direction the couple wanted to go. Everyone in the area clapped and cheered

and was in great humor, shouting and laughing. Then the couple went on their way.

That was Joanie's unique introduction to Lusaka. She thought it was a strange, funny place that must be taken with a grain of salt because everything was wildly different from American culture. We both agreed that the locals were quite friendly, engaging, and happy to be able to sell their native wares to foreign visitors.

When we finally reached the highway, we were able to speed up for a few hours. Arriving at our camp, we found everything set up and ready for us: tents, showers, and even an actual plumbed bathroom (!) in one tent. Our sleeping area consisted of a larger tent with a straw roof to deflect the sun. Joanie was indeed impressed. Heck, I was a veteran of many safaris, and I was impressed, too. The camp was the most elaborate and guest-friendly that I had ever experienced.

There was even a hot water tank for the first-class shower. To keep the fire going beneath the tank, a burning log had to be constantly maintained; when the fire became low, someone would push another log over to keep it going. Joanie was also amazed at the quality of the meals that came out of the kitchen, which was basically just a grill over an open fire, in addition to a few large pots.

The only other hunter in camp was a woman from Germany. Countess Irminhild didn't think much of Americans and was at first somewhat snotty to us. Then I happened to mention that my mother was German, from Hirschberg in Silesia. Lo and behold, it was the same home town as the countess. When I told her my mother's maiden name, her attitude toward me did an abrupt about-face—as von Bitters, we were acceptable. Maybe we should have given *her* the snotty treatment at that

point, but pettiness has no place when you're 8,000 miles from home. We realized that the countess was actually quite boring; she discussed German poets and philosophers, assuming that I knew all of them, which I did not, despite my family connection to Hegel.

A widow, she had brought her own personal professional hunter from Namibia, formerly German West Africa, located southwest of Zambia. I never hunted with her while there; she went out accompanied only by her PH.

A word about my armament. Some years before I went to Zambia, I had sold my trusted Manton .470 Nitro Express at a Safari Club convention. I had questioned the dealer from whom I originally purchased it about possibly selling the gun which he certainly remembered. He indicated that it would probably bring \$17,000; that would have been a nice profit for me since I bought it for \$10,000. In addition, it would have been a vindication of sorts for me. Noreen believed I was stark raving mad for buying a rifle at that price. Stinging from her observation that it was the dumbest thing I ever did, I justified it by telling her that it was a really good investment. Much to my surprise, it was!

For prospective buyers I wrote a meticulous history of the animals I had taken with that classic rifle—listing the number of buffalo, elephant, lion, and others that I took in Africa. The dealer was delighted with that list and said it stimulated its sale at the \$17,000 asking price. I bought a shotgun I really wanted and took the rest in cash.

But that meant that I needed another rifle to take to Zambia. Buying a new rifle would be a significant expense I didn't want to take on. I knew it would be possible to borrow one in Africa, but I wouldn't know what I was getting and I wouldn't

have practiced with it.

A solution to this quandary eventually materialized. My hunting friend Neville Blakemore owned a Winchester Model 70 .375 H&H. It wasn't a double rifle like the Manton but that was okay, it would still be a useful weapon for large and dangerous game. No guesswork there—I had shot my first elephant with a similar .375.

Neville is an extremely decent person and very bright. He attended Princeton, Harvard Business School, Cambridge (England), and finally the University of Minnesota to become a chemical engineer. When I was active in the Boy Scouts, he was the senior patrol leader, so we go way back. He has a world of experience shooting ducks and hunting deer.

Telling him about my Zambia trip, I asked if he'd consider letting me use his Winchester. He graciously agreed to rent his valuable gun to me, and, as part of our agreement, I immediately started to practice and become accustomed to it. In addition, I had a gunsmith put it in top condition. That rifle, and our agreement, served me well—I used it the entire time I was on safari in Zambia.

My first day out I hunted buffalo, sighting a huge herd of 700-800; but we never came close enough to take a good shot, and I wasn't going to take a chancy one. Evidently, these buffalo were quite skittish from being chased constantly by guys from the city in revving pickup trucks. Indeed, Zambian citizens with a license could hunt anywhere in the country; this licensing arrangement was not nearly as restrictive as the one in Zimbabwean tribal areas. We also spotted a herd of 60-70 elephants; again, I was never in a position to shoot.

Joanie would typically stay in camp when I left after dawn—she's not a morning person. After she arose and had

breakfast, she'd wander around nearby, always in sight of the camp. She was well aware that lions and hippos were dangerous, so she never roamed anywhere—especially swimming—by herself.

There were a few occasions when she went out on hunts with us. Once she got quite a thrill when we came close to a large herd of elephants. Joanie said, "They were huge creatures. I knew enough about elephant behavior to know that the female leader was the 'guard' and the others stayed behind her. If she started flapping her ears, that meant she was angry and concerned, and we needed to back off. It was a very exciting experience to be so close."

On another occasion with Joanie, we were tracking a large herd of buffalo and worked our way quite close to them. It was mostly grassland but there were some small trees in the area, and she was trying to hide behind them which was difficult because they were so slender.

Joanie recalled, "It was very dusty, to say the least. I was concerned about what I would do if they came after us or charged—just lie down? I mean there were about 500 buffalo. But I felt really safe, and they didn't detect us because the wind was blowing toward us. I did have a colorful hat on and one of the trackers once put his huge hand on top of my head and just pushed down, saying, 'Get down, so the buffalo can't see you.'"

During our daily hunts Russell drove a Toyota Land Cruiser. Most professional hunters at that time were switching from the English Land Rover to Toyota because the latter were considered more reliable and advanced and had a better suspension system. These vehicles take an incredible beating and much abuse because hunters make their own new roads much of the time. A PH must be a competent, knowledgeable

mechanic, and Russell was amazing. He carried an extra spring, a radiator, and a variety of other essential auto parts, plus at least two spare tires; he was always prepared to take some broken item apart and weld it back together.

Once in Zimbabwe we were traveling in one of his Land Rovers when the fuel pump stopped working. To remedy that perilous situation, Russell had one of the trackers sit on the front fender and hold a five-gallon jug of gasoline with a little tube running to the carburetor. For many miles we drove on the road back to camp like that. Russell had to be a jack of all trades—it was not possible to call AAA for a tow.

Russell's "whatever works" mentality meshed very well with my Turks and Caicos state of mind. Although I wasn't a certified automobile mechanic, I had often worked on airplanes using whatever materials I could to keep them flying.

The guides and PHs all carried portable radios but they seldom worked because it seemed that you were always in the wrong place for proper reception. If you were lucky, there was one radio in camp that could reach the outside world in case of an emergency. Over the years, satellite phones have become more common, and most of the PHs have one of those available. Nowadays all of the visiting hunters probably carry their own satellite-connected phones.

Another day we found a buffalo herd about 300 yards from the park boundary and started stalking them. We got within 110 yards when I took a straight-on shot at a bull. No luck. A rare miss for me—it happens.

Russell and several trackers knew where some sable typically gathered, so we decided to scout that location. One evening we walked for many miles until we spotted a herd of antelope and crept up on them. We discovered a huge sable with

42-inch horns, along with a small herd of puku—sandy brown, medium-sized antelope that prefer wet grasslands. But it was getting too dark to shoot, so we returned to camp.

The next morning we returned for the sable but could not find it. I did take a fair-sized puku with 17” horns, and I saw a bushpig but I didn’t realize what it was. Stupid me! After looking for one for 20 years, I didn’t recognize it and missed my chance. That evening we glimpsed another large sable; again, darkness fell and we returned to camp.



**In Zambia, I finally got a sable
in 2011 after looking for years**

On the following day we finally were able to locate the sable herd with the big bulls that we had seen before; we stalked them to a position fairly close. When ready, I took an 80-yard shot with the .375 and hit a 46” buck in both lungs, dropping it immediately. Its size was impressive. I got the sable I had been seeking.

Before we left camp I was able to take down a large

Lichtenstein's hartebeest from about 150 yards. Living on grasslands, they are a unique antelope species that have good eyesight but a poor sense of smell. In addition to the sable, puku, and hartebeest, I was able to take an oribi; it turned out to be #11 in the SCI record book. Oribi are tiny, slender antelope with yellowish brown coats; they live in very small herds.



**Dennis, David, me, and another tracker with oribi,
#11 in the record book**

That was a neat shot, taken on our last day of the hunt. As we stalked the area, Russell indicated the oribi to me, saying, “That’s a good one. Go ahead and take it from here.” Easy for him to say—it was a long shot, a couple hundred yards, and I could barely see it. Fortunately, I was able to lie down, put my rifle on a firm resting place, and sight it. The oribi slowly walked up onto a small mound and looked around; taking careful aim, I shot from about 200 yards. When it immediately dropped, all the trackers and skimmers started clapping—they appreciated the first-rate shot. Upon examining the body, I saw

that it truly was a small target—only two feet tall, with 10-11 inch horns. Our cook prepared it for supper that night.

Each evening Joanie and I watched the safari helpers skillfully skin, clean, and prepare the animals for supper. Every part of the animal was used and nothing was wasted; the cook was excellent at his job. In no time Joanie became buddies with him and assisted him on the grill. Although he only had fire, charcoal, stones, and a grill to work with, he once prepared a sable wellington with the interior filet; it was amazingly tasty.

Joanie said, “I have some photos of that feast. In general, I was blown away totally by the open-air opulence of the camping area; and I was extremely surprised at the cook’s efficiency with so little modern technology at hand. He used an old grate resting across the top of several concrete blocks—that’s how he did all his cooking, including bread and pudding! The cook was fabulous, making bread, cakes, and all manner of wild game—grilled, boiled, or baked.”

She continued, “The areas around the villages we visited were always clean, as were the huts, with tops made of brush—bamboo-like—and mud brick. The locals had so little in terms of material possessions but they were full of life and extremely kind.”

“I still fondly remember some of their names,” Joanie commented, “especially Atlas, Dennis, and David. Dennis carried an AK-47 at all places and times. He said he would shoot poachers and that he would shoot Embry if he took something he wasn’t licensed to shoot. Hoping that Dennis was joking, I merely told him to carry on.”

Dennis was a game officer or scout from the Game Management Commission, which assigned a representative to tag along on each hunt. He was also associated with the anti-

poaching foot patrols that scout wildlife areas for evidence of illegal hunting activity. Dennis was so taken with Joanie that he wanted her to meet his family. She asked me about it and I said okay, and off they marched. It helps so much to have a good attitude in life.

Joanie explained, “His last daughter’s name was Loveness and she was lovely. I felt very privileged for him to ask me to meet his family. They also took me to the local reptile park and museum, which housed many displays with live snakes.”

David was Russell’s chief tracker for many years; a super guy, he was from Botswana, south of Zambia. Joanie recalled that David eccentrically wore a “mad bomber” type of insulated hat—more appropriate for the Arctic rather than equatorial Africa—over his ears and tied underneath his chin. Dark glasses were an essential part of his look, too.

When you part from Botswanans, not only do they shake your hand as they say good-bye but they simultaneously tap your forearm with their other hand as a sign of respect. David did that *twice* for Joanie, which was lovely and especially meaningful, and she was quite touched. It was a major sign of respect for her. Joanie observed, “They were warm and wonderful people.”

Unfortunately David later died from what is commonly referred to by locals as “the Slim Disease”—AIDS. That terrible affliction has ravaged and affected much of the continent’s population and killed so many wonderful people. And it continues to do so.

Joanie was also fascinated by two locals who had dug a hole in the ground to make bricks. “They used simple tools,” she said, “water in a plastic jug, a shovel, and wooden molds. They would fill the molds with the sand and mud, bake it, and let it

dry. It was a brick factory on a small scale. But it's all they had, and it showcased their industriousness."

"I hit it off with the locals really well," she commented. "No doubt because I chose to ride in the back of the truck with them, rather than sit up front with Embry and Russell. If I sat upfront, I would have had to sit on the gear shift anyway. I'd much rather be with the trackers in the back. We all got along really well."

Joanie has a distinctive laugh and sometimes Russell and I would be driving along and hear peals of laughter coming from the back—she and the trackers were just having a big time back there. At first, Russell said, "I wonder if Joanie's okay?" I quickly replied that Joanie was fine, it was the trackers who we needed to worry about.

She had many fond interactions with the safari helpers. "There was some type of monkey up in a tree," Joanie said, "and one of the trackers said, 'Look, a branch manager!' We all cracked up. It was just so funny. They showed me the proper way to kill the dreaded tsetse fly—you can't just slap it, you have to pound it, crush it, then roll it off your arm. Periodically out in the bush I would feel a hand push the top of my head down when I got too close to a tree limb. They were very protective of me."

Joanie continued: "Once I asked what they were eating, and they said it was sadza, similar to a thick polenta with dried meat. 'You want some?' they asked. So I traded Altoids for sadza, a carbohydrate staple eaten in many homes across the country."

After the safari, we worked in some side trips to see the sights around the country. It was a fun-filled adventure going to world-famous Victoria Falls, one of the world's largest waterfalls. The Falls is located on the Zambezi River separating Zambia and Zimbabwe; we saw it from the Zambian side

because we didn't feel like crossing the Zimbabwe border. Livingstone was the town we stayed in. It no doubt received its name from journalist Henry Stanley's 1871 meeting with the famous explorer Stanley Livingstone and his legendary greeting: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

We hired a spirited guide named Brilliance who showed us all around Livingstone. She was quite proud of the town and took us to a museum and the local hospital, among other places. We also had an interesting cab driver who was Joanie's size—very diminutive—and we eventually determined that, although he drove fairly well, he was drunk most of the time. Drunk as a skunk, creeping along at about three mph—not good for the drivers behind him, but great for sightseeing.

He'd say, "Oh, we cannot go here because of the elephants." That's how we determined there was an elephant crossing in town—they literally crossed the road in the middle of the city. He got lost a few times but we always steered him back on track since the town of 130,000 wasn't huge.

Our hotel in Livingstone was comfortable but a little strange. Russell, away on another hunt, had recommended it because he knew the owner, so Joanie and I stayed there for three days. It was a fairly large resort-type hotel with 40 rooms and a nice swimming pool. However, we soon realized that we were the only guests in the hotel. No one else was there. That felt weird.

The food was sometimes a little sketchy, too. And when Joanie had her fingernails done, the manicurist looked closely at her face and said, "I like your gold tooth!" Joanie replied, "Thank you so much," as she wondered where that conversation was heading.

The swimming pool was unique in that it had an alcohol

bar in the middle, so we could swim around while drinking. Once, Joanie was outside walking by the pool where some local Zambian friends of the manager were hanging out. They were having a good old time when one of the guys suddenly grabbed her, picked her up and was ready to throw her into the pool. She calmly told him, “If I go, you’re going with me.” All the others there must have been thinking, “Oh my God, what is he doing—grabbing this white woman, a stranger?” The nature of what he was doing must have dawned on him, too. That’s when he politely put Joanie down. It was quite surreal but all done in good nature.

The worst thing about our stay was the fact that we couldn’t get any soap. We kept asking for it each day and they always replied that they’d bring it right away, but it never appeared. Oh well, no one’s perfect.

A distinctly more unsettling moment occurred at the airport in Joburg after we arrived for departure. For some reason, the authorities—whomever they were—separated Joanie and me and took us into separate, gender-based rooms.

Joanie was quite distressed at being placed in a closed room with several other women for whatever bizarre reason the authorities wouldn’t share. I was taken to a room with male travelers and sat next to a gentleman from Pakistan. I asked him if he had any idea why we were there. He answered, “No, but it happens frequently, so it’s probably nothing to worry about.” I didn’t know if I should consider that good news or bad.

After about an hour, Joanie and I and all the others were “released,” and we reunited, befuddled but none the worse for wear. No explanation whatsoever was forthcoming from anyone in charge. It was disconcerting and we didn’t like that experience. Other than that nothing unusual occurred on our

flights back to Louisville. In fact, we were able to stay a bit longer in Paris and enjoy more of that metropolis. Joanie said, “I felt like a jet-setter!”

In retrospect, the most amusing moment of the safari occurred one day in camp when someone asked me how many cows I had to give to get “that one,” referring to Joanie. I quickly and proudly replied, “Hundreds!”

38: England and Scotland Again



**Headquarters for elephant and buffalo hunt in
Gokwe, Zimbabwe, 1990**

In 2021 Joanie and I were off to Great Britain again for shooting and sightseeing. In London we stayed in the comfortable Queensway Hotel on an elegant, tree-lined road in South Kensington. In the heart of London, it's close to the Victoria and Albert Museum, Hyde Park, many restaurants, and other interesting places.

During our time in London, we enjoyed visiting my daughter Siofra, Director of Advancement for the American School in London, a K-12 day school with an international complement of students. It's larger than St. Francis, site of her previous development position.

Siofra lives in the St. John's Wood neighborhood area in

downtown London; she's right down the street from Paul McCartney. Granddaughter Bella, then 18, was staying there temporarily and was employed as a server at a local deli. She was excited that one of her regular customers was Emma Watson, who played Hermione in the Harry Potter movies.

After saying our goodbyes we left for Scotland, taking a train to Berwick-on-Tweed, the northernmost town in England, about two miles south of the Anglo-Scottish border. It's quicker to take a taxi from there to Melrose, Scotland than traveling to Edinburgh and backtracking about 40 miles to Melrose.

We had an adventure getting there. As we neared our Berwick stop, we hefted our two huge suitcases and duffle bag—that's going to change on our next trip, I hope—and stood by the door, waiting for the train to stop at the station. But the door didn't open! We didn't realize that you have to push a button on the wall for the door to open. The train started moving again while we stood there like bumps on a log. Being from another country, we didn't know the drill. Since we were the only people getting off, and no one yelled "Push the Button!" we were out of luck.

We had to ride the train for another hour all the way to Edinburgh, then waited half an hour for it to turn around, then rode another hour back to the stop. Luckily on the way back to our missed stop, someone on the train showed this dumb American how to use his phone to call the wife of Wilson Young—the outfitter—who manages her husband's office. I didn't know whether she was going to laugh or cry; I'm sure she didn't think highly of my Intelligence Quotient.

In any event, she phoned the taxi that they had reserved in Berwick and persuaded him to hang on a bit longer for us. The

driver didn't seem to mind. Thank goodness for cellphones!

As I mentioned earlier, I've really enjoyed traveling to the United Kingdom to shoot since about 1994. Almost annually since 2012 I've been shooting in the Scottish Borders area; since 2015 Joanie and I have stayed in the small towns of Melrose and Kelso, both south of Edinburgh in the Borders area.

King Arthur is said to be buried in the hills that overlook Melrose, and Sir Walter Scott lived a few miles west of that town. Kelso, 15 miles to the east, is noted for Floors Castle and Kelso Abbey, both notable historic sites many centuries old. While I am out in the field, Joanie has fun going to museums, gardens, and what the Scots call "charity shops," which are second-hand stores. In Scotland's distinctly gray wintertime, the sun rises about 9:00 A.M. and sets about 3:30 P.M., so it's a short day.

Occasionally the non-hunting spouse comes out to the field to join the "guns" (shooters) for a tasty sit-down lunch, planned by the hunt organizers. Sometimes the organizers provide someone to show spouses a variety of local places—castles, gardens, or shops—while the guns are away. There's a distinct social aspect to these hunting journeys. It helps that Joanie is very sociable and interacts well with almost everyone she meets.

Although we are obviously foreigners, both of us feel accepted and welcomed by the local populace. One of the significant cultural differences Joanie noticed is that passersby seldom make eye contact or return your smile. If you do smile at them, they no doubt think, "Oh, that one's an American."

Going to Melrose two years earlier in 2019, Joanie and I stayed in Burt's, an excellent small hotel in a perfect location in the center of town; a very charming couple has owned it for 30 years. Since we planned to return the following year, I asked the

owners if they had anything larger, perhaps with a kitchen and other amenities. They told us about Thistledo cottage, their former residence with its own gardens in a quiet spot behind the hotel, close to picturesque Market Square. Perfect! Upon leaving, we made a down payment and reserved the cottage for 2020. Then Covid-19 intervened and we didn't travel that year. When the owners asked if we wanted our deposit money refunded, I declined, saying, "We'll be back."

And we were. Traveling to England in 2021, we did have to present proof of our Covid-19 vaccinations and later undergo Covid testing. We stayed in a comfortable, three-bedroom, two-bathroom house with kitchen, housekeeping service, internet access, and free parking—right in the middle of this little town. We were able to tour the huge, spectacular Melrose Abbey, established in 1136, plus many other interesting places. We could easily walk to the grocery store and to the Anglican church for services. It's somewhat peculiar that no bank is located there but there's simply not enough banking business. However, we could access numerous essential banking services on our cell phones. The post office is located in a van that sets up in a parking lot a few times each week.

In turn, I shot for four days with the same friends I've been meeting since 2015 except for the pandemic. Chris Batha, who I've mentioned before, puts the trips together; he and his wife Sara arrange our accommodations, transportation, shooting sites, and all other details.

Our on-site outfitters are Wilson Young and his son, Wilson Young, Jr., who have been running their family business, Eskdale Shooting Services, since 1980. They lease the shooting rights on 60-70,000 acres of beautiful countryside in the Scottish Borders from the Duke of Northumberland and the Duke

of Roxburghe; the latter also owns Floors Castle in Kelso.

I enjoy shooting with the Youngs because they are easy to work with when tailoring a game shooting package, and they provide an outstanding driven-shooting experience. It's an unusual style of shooting, done only in a few countries, plus maybe three places in the United States. Wilson Young has been recognized as one of the premier driven-shooting specialists in Scotland for several decades. Eskdale is said to provide their clients with one of the highest quality driven-partridge and pheasant shooting experiences in the world. I agree wholeheartedly.

Theirs is quite a large, ongoing business operation, employing maybe 100-150 people, making it the largest employer in the area. It also involves growing crops and raising birds. The managers fence in the birds' roosting areas, but those sites aren't roofed or topped, so the birds can come and go as they please. They can accurately be described as wild except they have a comfortable area to receive food. The four-foot high fences protect the birds from foxes and similar predators.

In British driven-shooting, the guides begin by placing us at the base of a hill; shooters are 30 yards apart. Again, the shooters are called "guns," and they're in a line of eight. One's position in line is called a peg, usually marked with a wooden stake. Typically I draw a peg number randomly from a container in the morning; then I'm moved up or down for the next drive. Partridge and pheasants are at the top of the ridge either feeding on crops planted there to attract them or in the woods where they've been fed.

The second part of the process begins as the birds are driven by the beaters into the area above us. The beaters—maybe 10-15 altogether on each drive—strike a stick against

the bushes. The beaters are ordinary local people, mostly young. They act as beaters during the shooting season and earn a decent wage; it appears that many draw unemployment for as long as possible.

The guns comprise the third and final aspect of the process. Beaters roust the birds to fly over us and we start firing away. Shooting birds as they fly 30-45 yards overhead going 40 mph is often quite challenging, especially if one has never done it before.

There is no particular order of shooting. Since the guns are 30 yards apart, the birds will fly directly over someone who can take a shot. Sometimes a bird will swoop in between shooters who just react automatically. No one calls a shot, it's pure instinct; in fact, two guns may shoot at the same time. Although the person next to you may comment, "I hope you enjoyed shooting my bird," there are no real arguments among the shooters. Everyone understands the protocol and the problems.

The downed birds all belong to the landowner but guns are entitled to take a brace of them—two—every day. The landowners will sell theirs to a game dealer for either export or resale to local shops and grocery stores.

The actual course of shooting and loading is quite regimented; Wilson provides a "loader" for each shooter, and that makes for a two-gun tango when the shooter uses two shotguns—also called "doublegunning." Here's the sequence: There is a loader standing to my right; I shoot—BOOM! BOOM! I hand the empty shotgun to the loader, stick out my hand into which he slaps a loaded shotgun; I shoot again, and the cycle starts over. During the exchange of guns, I don't need to look down because the fresh loaded one is pushed into my hand; the switch must be done flawlessly ensuring that the

safety is on. Exchanging two shotguns presents a dangerous situation, since one is loaded and the other may still contain a shell. No one wants to screw up and drop either weapon; even just clanging them together could dent the barrel. Everyone strives to be careful to avoid accidents. I've not seen any blunders firsthand, but I've heard about them.

Sometimes the shooters don't want a loader, so they just load themselves. Some of the Californians we shot with (more about them later) were using only one shotgun, so they'd open it when empty and their helper would quickly put in two shells; those helpers are called "stuffers." Some believe that you can shoot as fast with a stuffer as by doublegunning. Personally, I don't think so.

In mid-morning, it's customary to stop for "elevenses"—a tea and snack break where a variety of light refreshments and drinks are served.

As the day progresses from drive to drive and the shooting locations change, the loader is also responsible for transporting the shotguns in a soft canvas container or zipped bag; they are not carried in the open. The carrying device is simple—there are two slots into which the guns are slid, then it's carried over the shoulder. The total weight is probably 20 pounds, which I'm delighted not to carry. Of course, I'm paying out the wazoo too.

It's important to look sharp out in the field; that's what the guides and beaters expect from their guns. For my most recent trip I had purchased a new, German-made, waterproof jacket; it fit me well. Of course, I left it on the train back to London, so it's gone forever.

On the 2021 trip, three of the guns and I were friends who've been shooting together since 2015. We discovered that

the other four guns were from California and had never been to Scotland before. Not only that but they knew nothing about driven shooting. But we all interacted well together and I quickly came to know the new fellows.

We “veterans” figured they’d start the new guys—and us—with easy birds about 25-30 yards high—much easier to hit—but they didn’t. Instead, they sent us to shoot in the 40-50-yard-high range. I felt sorry for these hapless Californians because it’s quite challenging to shoot birds that high. A shooter must account for winds that may push the birds in different directions or increase their speed. There are many instant mental calculations that must occur before that trigger is squeezed. I have to significantly lead the bird by pointing my gun in front of where the bird is flying while my eyes are on the bird itself, taking into account the drift caused by the wind.

In a typical day of shooting, we move around a lot since there are usually four or five drives. After the second drive of the day, one Californian said, “This is pretty tough shooting, man!” I replied, “Oh yeah, just don’t expect to get every bird. You’re new and just starting out. Expect one out of every six shots, that’s a good ratio. If you make one out of every three shots, it’s great.”

He asked, “Are there any easier places to shoot?” I said, “Yes, but not with this kind of beautiful countryside. Tell Wilson that you’re just starting out and you want easy birds. He’s got enough territory for that.” Actually, I was thinking he should have stayed home if he wanted it easier.

One woman there shot so fast it was like a machine gun. She used two guns: BOOM-BOOM! BOOM-BOOM! BOOM-BOOM! She was knocking them down.

In addition to the beaters, the Youngs hire numerous

pickers-up—each has a dog or two—for all the dead birds. In a single day there might be 300 dead birds—that’s called a 300-bird day. For a 400-bird day the pre-set fee would increase significantly because more dead birds increases logistical issues for the owner-operators. Wilson has to decide whether to tell his beaters, “More, more, more!” or “Stop, that’s enough!” However, with their expertise and years in the business, they usually get it exactly correct.

I was using a pair of 20-gauge Italian shotguns made to my specifications by Rizzini, a family-run Italian business that started in 1966; their guns combine the best modern technology with traditional craftsmanship. Fortunately, Wilson usually keeps them for me in Scotland when I return to the States, so I don’t have to continually schlep them back and forth. He can also ship them to Kevin in Sussex if I need them there.

Although there was loud muttering from the Californians, I never heard any outright cussing. When they finally got the hang of it and fell into a shooting routine, they actually started to enjoy themselves. All things considered, Wilson was in a bad spot teaming us with the Californians. *We* wouldn’t have been happy and satisfied if the birds were too easy because we appreciate being challenged in the field.

Pheasants and partridge were the targets of our shooting drives; I find that partridge are typically harder to shoot because they’re smaller birds that look like they’re flying much faster but in reality are not. If a duck or a pigeon wanders over, it’s permissible to shoot them; in fact, pigeons are very good eating. Occasionally someone will shoot a stray woodcock. Very seldom is any other species seen nearby.

Overall we had an excellent trip, although one of our shooting days was cancelled because of the heavy rains. That

was most unusual because the Scots seldom cancel for weather. However, the wind-driven rain was so forceful that we couldn't see the birds.

After ten days in Melrose our original taxi driver took us back to Berwick where we caught the train to London—this time without incident. Our friend and loader Nigel Anderson and his girlfriend Debs picked us up; it took three hours of driving through horrible traffic to cross London to Sussex in the south. There are approximately nine million people residing in London, and I think they were all driving cars that day.

During one of my first trips to Sussex in 2016, I went to Legsheath Farm where Kevin Downer is the gamekeeper; I was his guest. The rest were family—this is not a commercial operation. Like many British venues, Legsheath reflects much tradition since 1545; in addition to a fabulous, 11-acre garden, there is much good shooting available. My game card for that trip shows that our team of eight shooters took 203 pheasants, three partridge, and 10 mallards.

We finished our 2021 trip by spending a week in Sussex, then we returned to London for our flight home, which required Covid-testing; it was a hassle finding a testing site. It was also extreme bad luck that our departure was on the exact day when the U.S. ended its pandemic travel restrictions and opened its borders to European countries. The airport was jam-packed with travelers in a hurry, and the security at Heathrow was a pain in the ass.

One rude officer at a security checkpoint removed everything from my toilet kit. She classified all my items as liquid whether they were or not—such as toothpaste, deodorant, and lip balm—and required me to transfer them into plastic bags. Then she insisted I fit them back in my suitcase—a difficult

chore, especially in those circumstances.

Regardless of the unpleasantry we encountered on our departure, it was an agreeable trip overall with no major issues, although we were sad that we couldn't connect with Noreen's family. In both Scotland and Sussex we enjoyed reconnecting with friends and acquaintances from past trips. However, as we age, travel becomes more problematic, especially dealing with the Covid regulations. Such is life.

My friends and I didn't shoot in Scotland in fall 2022 because of a bird shortage. Most pheasant and partridge chicks are raised in France, but an avian flu epidemic caused many bird deaths in Europe, resulting in uncertainty about the bird supply in Scotland; thus, Chris Batha cancelled our shoot.

However, we did rendezvous with Noreen's family in Dublin where twelve of us had dinner together. Later, Fiona Kelly, a graduate of Trinity College, arranged a special tour of the Old Library there featuring the Book of Kells, Ireland's greatest cultural treasure. We were also pleased to visit and tour Newgrange, a 5,200-year-old passage tomb 45 minutes north of Dublin. It's an amazing stone age monument older than Stonehenge.

We ended up in East Grinstead, West Sussex at The Ashford Park Hotel, a commendable, stately, neo-Gothic hotel, built in 1820. Providing great service and excellent food, this beautiful building is located in the heart of Ashdown Forest, the inspiration for A. A. Milne's Hundred Acre Wood in his Winnie the Pooh stories.

My destination was another family shoot at Legsheath with Kevin. Since the family that owns the estate typically invites only relatives and close friends, I was again honored to be included. Shooters there ordinarily use only one gun with no

loaders; however, as my loader I used my friend Nigel Anderson whom I know very well from past shoots since 2015; he grew up on Legsheath because his father had worked there as estate manager. Plus, I was older than everyone there and played the age card. It was great fun.

Another one-day shoot in Sussex in which I participated in 2022 offered pheasants and ducks; partridge were in short supply. Although I used only a single gun, I again employed Nigel's help; his girlfriend Debs works some shoots as a volunteer picker-upper, bringing her four dogs. Charming and cheerful, she became good friends with Joanie. Debs, whose father managed another sizable estate in the area, works for a law enforcement agency, so her efforts in the field are strictly recreational.

In her own jaunty manner Debs mentioned that she just received an MBE—the “Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire” medal. Debs joked that she should have received one recognizing “My Bloody Efforts.” According to Debs, the OBE awarded to an “Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire,” should actually recognize the “Other Bugger’s Efforts.” That’s British humor for you.

It was hard shooting there because the warm weather let the trees retain leaves longer, allowing the birds to fly through the trees so fast I couldn’t see them until they were suddenly right on top of me.

We shared much fun and laughter with Nigel and Debs and invited them, along with Kevin and his wife Karen, to our hotel for what they call Sunday Lunch—our dinner—which is typically roast beef or another traditional British culinary dish. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the food and each other’s company.

My shotguns are still over there with Kevin who will take them to a gunsmith for the usual cleaning, maintenance, and

problem-checking. Upon completion he will keep them at his place for safekeeping, or, if I decide to return to Scotland in the fall, he can send them to Wilson for safe-keeping. Kevin has several driven shoots lined up for my next visit, plus a duck hunt and a day of pigeon shooting. Wild pigeons are both very challenging targets and quite delicious.

Joanie and I are considering a possible new travel plan in the future. We may fly over but return on the transatlantic ocean liner *Queen Mary 2*. That would be an exciting change of pace since neither of us has ever traveled on the Cunard Line flagship. Just another example of the pleasant ripple effects that my hunting avocation has provided over many years.

39: Hunting in the Future



**PH Russell Tarr points out shot placement
on this Cape buffalo**

In my humble opinion, the future of hunting is unsettled for a wide variety of reasons:

- There are fewer young people hunting; in addition to sports and hobbies, many youth are increasingly mired in computer games and other technology pursuits.
- Guns, shooting, and hunting have developed an unfashionable reputation in modern culture. Mass shootings

have increased and become a focus of the media, fueling the anti-gun lobby.

- Animal rights advocates oppose any type of hunting. Seldom is it taught or emphasized that game animals are a renewable resource and that hunting is necessary for animal conservation. Death is a part of life!
- The concepts of fair chase and ethical hunting have not been consistently passed down to the next generation of hunters.
- Many people don't understand the connection between an animal dying and then being served up as food on a platter—they ignore the fact that the steak they bought at the grocery was once part of a living animal.
- Urbanization and the reduction of farmland results in less land devoted to hunting and shooting.
- Rural lifestyles are decreasing; fewer people are involved with a farm ecosystem where the births and deaths of animals are an important aspect of daily life.
- Human encroachment into wildlife areas follows urban sprawl.
- Our national demographics are trending away from the hunter type.

I don't like to talk about statistics; any mention of them calls to mind an old saying I once heard: If my first shot goes six feet in front of a duck, and my second shot goes six feet behind that duck, statistically I've shot a duck—but it doesn't put any food on the table.

However, government statistics—supported by my personal observations—say that sport hunting is definitely declining each year. In 1975, based on stats collected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there were at 17.1 million hunters 16

years of age and older participating in the sport, representing about eight percent of the population overall. By 2016 that total was reduced to 11.5 million or roughly four percent of the population. In addition, hunters in each state face their own distinct challenges, including various animal diseases.

As opposed to the European model, wildlife in the United States is allocated to the public by state and federal laws and is available to everyone. Commercial game markets and the sale of wildlife is prohibited to ensure that wildlife populations can be sustained. It is a major precept in our country that wildlife is held in the public trust. This means that fish and wildlife are managed by the public through federal and state governments; although citizens can own property, they cannot own the wildlife on it. Wildlife is owned by all citizens.

In recent times though, the reality of this principle has been affected by land usage which is changing; the amount of public land available for hunting has been continually reduced. Private land is not as accessible as it used to be. In the past, deer hunters could knock on a farmer's door and ask, "Is it OK if I hunt here?"—and receive a "Yes" in return. Today, one is less likely to obtain that permission. Many people now oppose hunting; some embrace the offensive—and grossly inaccurate—image of hunters as rednecks riding around in their pickups and blasting mailboxes with their shotguns.

Landowners who do give their approval may charge an access fee; I'm unsure what Kentuckians would ask. Thus, for people who don't own their own land or can't afford access fees, it's difficult to hunt. Some have said that If sport hunting is to survive in this country, we may have to adopt the European model and limit hunting to those who can pay the landowner—the one who would own the game and make their own hunting

rules.

The general public doesn't realize that all tax paid on firearms, ammunition and other hunting equipment goes to the fish and wildlife (or game) commission of the state where the sale was made. Every time I buy a box of bullets or a new shotgun, the charged tax goes to the feds, to be split among the states by an exact formula based on how many hunting licenses are sold in each state. By purchasing a license, the hunter thus promotes animal conservation and supports evidence-based scientific management of wildlife.

How is hunting affected by our country's changing demographics?

As tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau, by the year 2030 all baby boomers will be older than 65 and one in every five Americans is projected to be of retirement age. Although dove season has always resulted in social gatherings with hunters accompanied by their children and grandchildren, connections to youth will decline as my cohort ages since hunting is a pastime customarily endorsed and handed down through families by elders. My friends and I are retired and have much time to pursue our hunting interests; my comrades on a recent hunt were 82 and 84 years old. We are aging out of the sport and rarely do I see anyone significantly younger.

I sincerely hope that the anti-gun lobby doesn't start focusing its political efforts on those of us who own guns for hunting purposes. That would be a misdirected campaign.

Although I'm pessimistic about the future of hunting, I do understand that interest in many sports and activities waxes and wanes over time and is subject to high and low swings. Hunting may make a resurgence for a variety of reasons.

Some foodie-types, especially women, are becoming

interested in hunting because it generates healthy, natural food not raised on factory farms. Hunting traditionally has been male-dominated, but I believe that more women are taking up the activity. Plus, only five percent of the U.S. population identify as vegetarians, according to a 2018 Gallup poll.

For some progressive young people, obtaining locally sourced meat is the biggest motivator for hunting. Students often support ethical hunting as a conservation tool. Perhaps their posts on social media about the role that hunting plays in conservation would lead more youth to investigate hunting as an avocation.

Although I rarely watch television, I know there are several hunting channels. I'm not sure about the viewership demographics of such programs, but it could possibly increase interest in the sport.

As for Africa, I believe the atmosphere there is becoming less welcoming for hunters because of opposition to sport hunting by groups such as PETA. Johannesburg has drastically changed for the worse in recent years, becoming immensely crowded with an unsettled, disorganized infrastructure, high poverty rate, unemployment, and violent crime. All of which bodes ill for hunter travel to that locale. And photo safaris just don't generate the income necessary to advance animal conservation efforts.

Politics certainly plays a role in the African hunting industry. While I hunted in Zambia in 2011, a presidential election took place. Russell Tarr, our PH with a reputation as The Prophet of Doom, said, "Well, it's generally not great to be here during an election." He further remarked, "If we have a peaceful transfer of power, it will be the first time on the continent!" But they did that year, and the outgoing president offered his

congratulations to the winner with his pledge for a smooth transition. That was a hopeful sign amidst the continent's political chaos.

Another example of African political disorder occurred when Zimbabwe began to expel white farmers who lived there. Zambia gratefully accepted some of those experienced farmers and gave them land to improve Zambian agricultural exports. That was strange but typical of African politics—one country chasing whites out, another one inviting them in.

It is my fervent hope that politics won't continue to negatively affect the future of hunting in Africa because so many wildlife conservation efforts there depend on the income generated by that industry. The fact that animal rights groups are pressuring African countries, threatening their wildlife management programs, and saying that they won't support their photo safari businesses is distressing to me.

As for the United States, we can do a better job of recruiting a more diverse population of hunters, including women, minorities, and urban folks; we can do better in encouraging and reinforcing the ethics of our colleagues in the field. Local efforts are crucial to the growth of hunting.

I firmly believe that many benefits to society result from hunting, and I hope that this sport can rebound from its steady decline over the last 60 years.

40: In Conclusion

Hunting has furthered my travel over the world and facilitated my overseas adventures that began in 1950 when mother took Rudy and me to Germany.

Including both hunting and sightseeing trips, I have been fortunate to visit at least 39 foreign countries. They are: Turks and Caicos, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Jamaica, Bahamas, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Bermuda, England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Andorra, Spain, Switzerland, Monaco, Holland, France, The Gambia, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Austria, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Canada, Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina, Micronesia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Egypt, South Africa and a stopover in Botswana. In the U.S., the only states in which I have *not* set foot are Louisiana and Vermont.

Altogether I took ten trips to Africa from 1988 to 2011. I experienced many adventures on these safaris and hunts, shooting 52 species of animals; 41 are still listed in the Safari Club International record book although some may not be very high in the rankings. The most notable in the books are: the free-range nilgai that I shot in Texas, still in the top 10; and the oribi which I took in Zambia, still in the top 15.

Of the Big Five, I have bagged 10 elephants, a lion, 22 Cape buffalo, and a leopard—all except the black rhino, a critically endangered species that is rarely hunted legally. With my faithful .470 Nitro Express, I killed six of those elephants, 10 buffalo, the lion, plus one hippo. I loved that rifle.



**Russell Tarr held my legs as
I leaned over a cliff and shot straight down at this one**

With Russell Tarr my trusted PH, I hunted five times in Omay; once in Chete, the hilly country on Lake Kariba; once in Dollar Block, the scrubland where the Kalahari desert region meets the Zimbabwe woodland; and once in the Kafue region of Zambia. During those trips, I took eight of those elephants, 17 buffalo and the lion.

Some of the trophies from these trips are displayed in my home to remind me of the challenges to and successful results of my marksmanship, plus the countless wonderful people whom I encountered in foreign lands. I was fortunate that my son Embry accompanied me to British Columbia, Wyoming, Argentina, and once to Zimbabwe.

I donated many trophies to the Lions Club, a service organization that sponsors the Kentucky Lions Eye Institute which assists people who are blind or have vision impairments. The Lions once organized an event so that children who are blind could perceive the sizes and shapes of various animals.

They fitted a trailer with a deer's head, skulls, antlers, horns, and similar items. I donated several of these

In addition, I contributed an elephant's foot that had been made into an umbrella stand in the old Victorian-style. I must confess that Noreen didn't think much of my elephant-foot-umbrella stand to begin with, so it was a good opportunity to dispose of that. In any event, it served a good purpose—the kids could grasp how big an elephant is. Other hunters also donated to the display, which was a very cool learning experience.

Hunting has afforded me a multitude of social opportunities both locally and internationally. I enjoy attending the annual Safari Club conventions—along with 20,000 others—not just to learn what new gadgets, gear, or guns are available, but to renew friendships with outfitters, guides, and friends with whom I've hunted in Africa and England. Also, it's fun to connect with many faithful friends as we hunt doves locally.

I have a wide variety of reading interests, many related to hunting. The books I enjoy most—some dating back to the 1800s—are memoirs and personal stories because I learn from their authors' intimate experiences. The set of books that I bought in Bulawayo and had bound in elephant hide are unique and evocative. My magazine subscriptions include *The Field*, *Safari Magazine*, *AOPA Pilot*, *Fair Chase*, and *Modern Huntsman*.

As so often happens in families, it appears that my children have little interest in my book collection, so I plan to donate them to the Boone & Crockett Club. B&C uses a dealer who appraises them for tax purposes and lets the club keep any particular books that it wants to retain. The remainder he sells for an appropriate price; thus, the club benefits.

Hunting has been my catalyst to meet a variety of engaging, unique characters, many of whom I've already introduced.

One that I haven't mentioned is local jockey and trainer Earlie Fires, a member of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame. Originally from Arkansas, Earlie enjoys hunting deer and bird hunting, so he and I get along quite well. Although he always talked about going to Africa with me, he never put that plan in motion.

Although I faced dangerous situations several times in the field, I was never involved in a firearm incident where someone was shot or injured. Some of my friends have experienced or witnessed such accidents. When several people—all armed—gather to hunt, it is vital to follow established protocols and safety standards; but not all hunters do so. In Africa it was my good fortune to avoid injury-causing attacks by wildlife. I never saw any of Russell's crew attacked by an animal, but I heard stories about a tracker being killed several years earlier.

I sold all the large-caliber rifles that I used in Africa, but I continue to maintain many firearms, plus ammunition, in my house—for hunting and self-protection—including: two 20-gauge shotguns; one 28-gauge shotgun; one 12-gauge shotgun; my handguns and various rifles—maybe 10 or 12 firearms altogether. Most are stored in my secure gun safe. Other than the incident in Ireland, no weapons have ever been stolen.

Government firearms oversight is a topic of interest to me. Joanie and I agree that gun sale regulations and registry requirements need to be improved. We also favor allocating more resources to mental health treatment, although that appears to generate many knotty complications.

A few years ago, Kentucky lawmakers dropped the licensure and permit requirements to carry a concealed weapon. That was really stupid for the legislature to do—that licensing process provided a sense of responsibility for gun owners. Also,

the NRA could brag about the successes of people with CCDW permits. But now—with no regulation—anyone can carry either concealed or openly.

To earn a vehicle operator's license, applicants must pass a standard test. In many ways firearms are inherently more dangerous than motor vehicles; it would be beneficial to reinstate training and licensing requirements to own or carry a firearm. Of course, such action may be a political disaster—the Second Amendment flag wavers and NRA lobby would come out with guns blazing, so to speak. Politics aside, it shouldn't be a hardship for any reasonable person to prove they know how to handle and shoot a firearm—things my father taught me. Everyone certainly has their own opinion—I'm just arguing for a safer way to be a responsible firearms owner. This opinion is from someone who's been an NRA member for almost 30 years.

Joanie and I went crazy with travel during 2022. At 81 years old, I'm going to stay as active as I can until *really* old age sets in. We started in February with a week-long trip to Puerto Rico, splitting our time between old San Juan and Ponce. Then I went on a few quail-shooting trips to East Tennessee and West Kentucky.

In May Joanie and I went on a fascinating Alaskan cruise, similar to one we took three years ago. Flying to Seattle, we traveled to Sitka, Alaska, and spent a few days sightseeing and acclimating to the region. Then we boarded the *Mist Cove*, operated by The Boat Company, a non-profit organization that supports efforts to conserve the Tongass National Forest. Located in Southeast Alaska, it is the largest U.S. National Forest, roughly the size of West Virginia.

Comprising the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world, the Tongass is remote enough to shelter many species of

endangered and rare flora and fauna. From our boat I saw several large grizzly bears that I would have pursued if I was on a hunt, but hunting dangerous game no longer appeals to me.

Our journey took us through the southeast islands, then on to the Tongass and to Juneau, Alaska's capital. The *Mist Cove* is a copy of a French minesweeper, successfully-converted into a small expedition boat with two levels for 24 passengers. Our accommodations were quite cheerful and spacious, with a queen-size bed, full bath, and a regular shower.

Although not shooting or hunting on the trip, I did stream-fish for trout. On a past excursion I fished for halibut from the boat and that was really boring. Halibut live on the bottom and if you catch one, you just crank, crank, crank. There's no action to it—a lot of cranking and very little catching makes *me* cranky! One time in Alaska when I fished for halibut, I did catch something unusual—a 15-legged starfish, extremely rare for a species that typically has only five appendages.

On our recent Alaskan trip, we saw whales and sea lions in massive numbers in addition to huge icebergs that had tumbled from the nearby glacier. Sea lions are mostly large, loud, and have an odor; Joanie says they remind her of little old men, "present company excluded." The dominant sea lion was twice as big as the others. They were constantly working to reach the summit of a tall crag on their island; they would climb up with their little fins, slide back down, then repeat the process. It was a riot to watch.

Poaching is a major threat to sea lions. It's illegal to hunt them in the United States although Eskimos and American Indians are allowed to kill them for food in some remote areas. California has the strictest state laws because so many live on its coast.

After a wonderful cruise on the *Mist Cove*, we went to Portland, Oregon to visit Joanie's son and family. I learned that bird hunting is first-rate in Eastern Oregon; maybe I will return some day to participate. But after two weeks on the road it felt wonderful to arrive home in Louisville.

At the end of July—after we both recovered from a Covid subvariant infection, although we were both fully vaccinated and boosted—Joanie and I drove up to her Canadian cabin for a month. That's always a relaxing, pleasant time. Then came our trip to England and Ireland for three weeks in the fall. After that, I had several brief quail-hunting hunts in rural Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia.



Son Embry wearing my hat after I took a Cape buffalo during our Zimbabwe safari

It's been twelve years since my last safari, but I vacillate about returning to Africa—although I'm sure that I don't want to hunt dangerous game anymore. I'm not as fast reaction-wise or physically, and sometimes on safari you *must* be to safely participate. A risky venture wouldn't be good for me, the animal, or the PH. Right now I'm mostly shooting birds.

The cost of another trip would be mitigated by the agreement I made with a PH when I lent him some funds years ago. He said that I could take repayment from his fee if I returned or that he would be glad to guide my daughter or son on a photo safari. Siofra would love to participate in one, especially since she's in England now where it's easier to access Africa. She's been asking me to accompany her, not necessarily to shoot.

Although it might be fun to see the marvelous African sights again and to renew old friendships, I worry about the health risks. My age and heart issues would make such a safari chancy. Zimbabwean hospitals are certainly low on the healthcare continuum, far less than optimum in an emergency. We'll see what happens.

For more than 30 years, one of the hunting-writers that I have most admired is Spanish philosopher and essayist José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), especially his classic *Meditations on Hunting*. I could devote an entire chapter to a discussion of his writing, and I encourage the reader to research him. Three of my favorite quotes from Gasset:

- “In our rather stupid time, hunting is belittled and misunderstood, many refusing to see it for the vital vacation from the human condition that it is, or to acknowledge that the hunter does not hunt in order to kill; on the contrary, he kills in order to have hunted.”
- “The hunter who accepts the sporting code of ethics keeps his commandments in the greatest solitude, with no witness or audience other than the sharp peaks of the mountain, the

roaming cloud, the stern oak, the trembling juniper, and the passing animal.”

- “When you are fed up with the troublesome present, take your gun, whistle for your dog, and go out to the mountain.”

Over the years I hope that I have followed those offerings from Gasset, although it wasn't always easy. Once I began hunting, I immersed myself in the tradition and culture of the sport, to my great benefit.

As an avocation, hunting has given me much satisfaction and provided me with a multitude of unique experiences: the professional hunters, guides, and trackers I've come to know; the unique places I've visited around the world; the art of tracking prey over difficult ground; the thrill of stalking dangerous game; the finesse of instinctive shooting; the challenge of difficult shots; the feeling of pleasure on a shot well made; the implementation of ethical tactics and fair chase methods; the support of healthy animal populations; opposition to poaching; dining on unprocessed wild game; communing with nature in the wilderness; quiet moments with friends and family in the field; and the ability to demonstrate courage while facing danger.

All these singular elements of hunting have combined to provide a welcome balance to my life and make me a better person. In addition, I am fortunate to have been influenced by the two beautiful, loving, caring women whom I married, both of whom brought out the best in me, no matter the place or time. For all those experiences and persons I am profoundly grateful.

Afterword by Harry Rothgerber

Have you ever heard the expression, “to deliver a message via a cleft stick?” I certainly hadn’t until I started working with Embry Rucker on this project.

He explained to me that in the olden days prior to the advent of telegraph communication, officials and hunters in colonial Africa would send messages via a native runner carrying a stick, split at the end, in which an envelope would be stuck in the cleft. The message-carrier would then run through the bush—and all its many dangers—to deliver the note. Years later, when the *official* mail was delayed for any reason, someone would joke that it was faster to deliver a message with a cleft stick. When I first heard that expression I had no clue of its meaning until Embry explained its origin.

A few years ago I worked with Embry on his first memoir, *Coming in for a Landing: My Ten Years Flying in the Islands*, which told of his adventures in the Turks and Caicos Islands. In that personal story, Embry mentioned briefly his interesting—and entertaining—safari trips to Africa. So I was pleased when he asked me if I thought he had enough hunting tales for another volume. I knew he did.

Many times during this project Embry would reveal some

Afterword by Harry Rothgerber

bit of information about hunting or Africa or life in general that would rivet my attention. He's an engaging person who has led a life filled with adventure around the world. I hope you've enjoyed his tales as much as I did.

Harry Rothgerber
July 2023