



This is a follow on to "Two American Classics in Africa" published in Volume 11 Number 6 of 2005 by the same author.

My Classics and I Return to Namibia

By Kevin McAdams



My Kudu shot with the 1886 .45-70.

There are few things more enjoyable for me than hunting. Hunting with someone who can appreciate that enjoyment is even better. My son and I went to Namibia in July 2006 and not only had a great hunt using classic rifles, we also took some very unique trophies. I had travelled to Namibia in 2005 with my wife and had a great hunt. Now my son John, was going along with me. We figured this was a good time for him to go because he was between his third and fourth year at the US Military Academy at West Point and, due to the line of business he was going into, we were unsure when the opportunity might arise again for us to do such a hunt together.

I always hunt with old classic rifles, with their original type iron sights, and no scopes! I hunt this way because I enjoy the challenge. I also raised my oldest son to enjoy the extra challenge that the older rifles, and original sights present. On my previous hunt in 2005, I carried a Winchester model 1885 Hi-Wall in 50-110 and a Winchester Model 1886 in .33 Winchester.

This year I would be hunting with the same Hi-Wall in 50-110, and a Winchester Model 1886 in 45-70. This model 1886, manufactured in 1898, was a present to commemorate my high school graduation in 1975. My son would be using a Marlin Model 1895 in 45-70, and the classic of all classics, a Martini Henry single shot in .577-.450. His Martini-Henry is not one of the British military rifles, but is a commercial gun made up by the classic British gunmaker W.J. Jeffery & Co. The Martini-Henry was a present from my parents to my son to celebrate his graduation from West Point. I agree, I had a pretty good set of parents!

I have always enjoyed loading ammunition for my older guns but the .577-.450 turned out to be quite a challenge. The brass is difficult to find, and expensive. The loading dies are also a problem because the shells are so large in diameter that standard 7/8" diameter dies will not really work satisfactorily. But the biggest challenge is in the bullets. There is much confusion about the proper bullet diameter for the .577-.450 and it is difficult to measure the bore diameter because it has an odd number of rifling grooves. Many people assume that because it is a .450, it must use .458 bullets, but the answer is not that simple. The .458 is the correct diameter if you are going to paper patch your bullets. But for regular cast or jacketed bullets the proper diameter for most of the guns is either .463 or .466. The Brit's couldn't even make up their mind on this point. So consequently if you shoot .458 bullets in a .466 bore, your Martini will shoot very predictably - in a word, terrible!

After much reading and studying I finally determined that the proper diameter of bullet to use in this particular rifle was .466. Hawk bullets based in New Jersey made up some 400 grain round nose bullets with a very thin jacket in the proper diameter. They were very accurate bullets from the start. Selecting the proper powder to use in the .577-.450 was also a challenge. The case has a large capacity but it is designed for relatively low pressure. So getting a powder that will ignite reliably but does not produce a high pressure can be a challenge. I'm sure there are others but I personally found Accurate 5744 to work real well. After a little experimentation, I arrived at the proper load that would launch these 400 grain bullets at 1530fps, with no excessive pressures, 100% reliable



John and Dirk Smit with his warthog shot with the Martini Henry.



Mountain zebra shot with the .50-110.



Cheetah shot with the Winchester 1886 .45-70.

ignition, and they shot great. If my 55 year old eyes cooperated I could get it to consistently group into one inch at 50 yards.

My experiences with the .50-110 in 2005 left me with the desire to improve on its performance. On the 2005 hunt I had loaded Woodleigh 440 grain bullets designed for the .500 Black Powder Express. These are really good looking, good shooting bullets that hold together quite well. They were loaded to 1550fps and it turns out they did not expand very reliably. Out of seven shots fired into animals, the only shot that did not exit was one shot that went diagonally through a blue wildebeest. It only expanded to about .55". Apparently these loads were just a little too slow. The .500 Black Powder Express would propel the same weight bullets to 1900fps in the factory loads.

So in 2006, being the ever inquisitive experimenter, I modified these .500 BPE bullets. In the late 1800s Winchester had loaded a bullet in several different calibres that had a unique construction. It had a hollow copper cup, open end down, inserted into the hollow point of the bullet. This was done to protect the hollow point, increase the bullet's ballistic coefficient, and increase its expansion over a conventional soft point. Winchester called these style bullets "copper tube" bullets. The .50-110 was one of the calibres that they were loaded in.

So, I took the Woodleigh 440 grain bullets and carefully, in my Dad's lathe, drilled them out to accept a .17 bullet jacket open end down. These made a neat looking 417 grain Copper Tube bullet. Also, by 2006 I was using a different load that pushed these 417 grain bullets to 1850fps. The bad news is that I think I went too far. Now they seemed to expand too quickly and too much, but more on that later.

My son and I arrived at Hosea Kutako International airport right on time on 5 July 2006. Dirk Smit the owner of Orpa Hunting Farm was there to meet us, as he



My son's kudu shot with the Martini-Henry.

does with all his hunting clients. Dirk, and Thea, his wife, run a family owned one man one woman operation that is a great place to make friends and hunt. After quickly clearing Customs, and the ever-friendly Police cleared our guns, we were off to Dirk's area, about a three-hour drive north of Windhoek. We stopped for lunch on the way, so upon arrival, everyone was ready to go hunting.

Only about thirty minutes after settling into one of Dirk's elevated hides, a very nice old tusker showed up. My son made the first shot count with the .577-.450. The old warthog only went about 20 yards before giving it up. Wow what a way to start the hunt! But it got better.

It was now Dad's turn to try his luck, so we went to a different blind for an evening hunt where the eland and kudu are known to haunt. Just before it was too dark to use the iron sights, the animals came flooding in, many eland cows, followed by a very nice kudu bull. The first shot with my 1886 45-70 broke both of its shoulders and a quick finisher, ended a pretty special first afternoon. To cap it off, upon closer examination we discovered that the kudu had three horns! It had a short (2cm) third horn protruding right between its eyes just forward of the other two horns. Just how do you measure a three horned kudu? Total score for the three horned kudu, was 317cm, using the Namibian scoring

system. Which was good enough for a Silver Medal. Dirk said a check with NPHA could only come up with two other kudu with such a unique set of horns. So it was not only a very nice old bull but a very rare one as well.

The hunt lasted twelve hunting days and almost every day offered something unique. Dirk and I were in an elevated hide when two very nice red hartebeest slipped up behind us. I was unable to fire because of some overhanging limbs so we let them move off a ways. After the hartebeest moved out into a field behind us we climbed down and proceeded to low crawl about 75 yards to a fence line bordering the field.

After 'sneaking' my 300lbs up to the fence, I dropped the biggest one with a nice shot to the right shoulder. Just as I am patting myself on the back, congratulating myself on such a great stalk and shot, the darned thing struggles to its feet. Luckily I dropped it again with another shot before it had a chance to run off. Don't ever let anyone tell you these African animals are anything but tough. A .50 calibre bullet right through the boiler room, after smashing his right shoulder and he gets up and tries to make off! I recovered both bullets under the hide on the far side, both had expanded to over .70". But, I think that had I been shooting something bigger or at a less desirable angle I might have had problems.

Meanwhile John was having a devil of a time taking a kudu. He was seeing plenty, and making stalks but something always seemed to get in the way. That is why they call it hunting and not harvesting! But after several unsuccessful stalks John was finally able to take a very nice kudu bull. He took it with one shot at about 100 yards, while resting the Martini Henry on Dirk's right shoulder. The very nice bull ran about 100 yards but Bruno, Dirk's ever reliable tracker dog found it with no problem. John's kudu scored 308, enough to qualify for a Silver Medal, but it did not have a third horn like Dad's!

On day seven we pulled up and travelled to Kamanjab for a crack at mountain zebra. This is without a doubt the toughest hunt I have made in a long time. The terrain is

very rough and dry even by Namibian standards. I was slap worn out walking from boulder to boulder, up and down those hills. It was very difficult to keep from falling as a result of the uneven footing. Even though the temperature was cool, the climate is very dry and the region is at a relatively high elevation. It would be easy to get into trouble physically in these mountains. Dehydration will definitely sneak up on you and lay you out if you are not careful.

After riding and walking for many hours we finally came upon a group of zebra. I took a shot at the leading stallion, at approximately a hundred yards, while

using Dirk's left shoulder for a rest. He kicked at the shot and we finally found him about 100 yards from the point where I shot him. Contrary to what many uninitiated Americans may think, hunting the mountain zebra is NOT anything like shooting horses. Mountain zebra are smart and tough. They are a very worthy challenge, and the rugs are beautiful.

After returning from Kamanjab, John experienced a very memorable time while taking his red hartebeest. Having spotted a very nice bull out in a very large field, he and Dirk proceeded to make like some of the warthogs that frequent this same field, and crawled on their hands and

knees at least a hundred yards out into this completely open field. After pushing their luck as much as they dared, John took the shot. Dirk called the shot at 6 o'clock, low. So John took another shot, this one was also low, but not as much as the first. On the third shot John's hartebeest went down like someone had jerked his feet right out from under him. John had to aim with the front sight bead on top of the hartebeest's back to get the hit. Later I used the rangefinder and determined the shot to be close to 225 yards. That is quite a long shot for a 45-70 and iron sights.

Dirk had told us from the beginning that if we saw a cheetah we were to shoot it. He has a lot of them on his property and they can devastate his smaller game animal populations. They are therefore very costly to have around. He certainly does not want to exterminate them, but he needs to keep the numbers in check to prevent them from wiping out his small antelope. This is a shame for the cheetah, because, due to the short sighted US policy of not allowing sport hunted cheetah to be imported into the US, cheetah have lost a lot of their monetary value. There is a saying when it comes to farming, in any country, "if it pays it stays".

If the Cheetah were importable into the US, Dirk and other PHs could charge a lot more of a trophy fee and hence, offset the monetary loss that they cause

to the springbok, duiker, and steenbok populations.

Late in the hunt we were all three in a hide near the eland post. The eland were acting very strange. They would hang out at the very edge of our sight about three hundred yards out. They were very reluctant to come in to the water. Well, we found out why. A big Tom cheetah was obviously out hunting also. He made the mistake of cruising by our hide at only about 20 yards. Dirk said to shoot it. One shot from my 45-70 through the right shoulder and he rolled over, literally with all four feet skyward. After trembling for a few seconds he went limp. Dirk was amazed that he died so quickly, without running off. He did not move an inch. The old Model 1886 had done a good job. It may not be the first, but I wonder if it will be the last cheetah to ever be shot with a Winchester 1886 45-70?

The last few days of our hunt, my son spent looking for a big eland bull. Dirk got him close more than once. They had been able to see it moving through the brush staying just out of touch. This scenario was repeated several times, and ultimately the eland won. John was never able to get a shot. But now he has something to look forward to coming back for.

The last evening we were at a hide waiting for eland when a large eland cow

came into the clearing. She had a deformed right horn. It curled down and around, rubbing against her neck. She could not move her head freely to the right because of the horn. Interesting that she had survived predators, not being able to watch to her right as a normal one would be able to.

Well, I waited out the light as long as possible, hoping for a big bull to show. But none came so I decided to take the cow with the deformed horn. A shot behind the right shoulder set her in motion. She ran several hundred yards and, thanks to Bruno we were able to find her. She took a 45-70 from my son, and a 30-06 from Dirk before I was able to fight my way through the brush to finish her off with a shot to the centre of the chest. She did not give up easily! It took us several hours for Dirk to fight his way back in the dark to her location with the hunting truck, and then it was quite a ride back out crashing through the thorn bushes with our heavy cargo.

What a fantastic hunt, Namibia is truly a unique place. My son took a big, memorable warthog, a springbok and a beautiful kudu with the all-time African Classic, the .577-.450. I took a cheetah and two different animals with very unique horns. I will definitely be coming back. I'll be back for Cape buffalo and, hopefully, a crack at a lioness in the Caprivi, I can't wait! 