

It's October 2011, suicide month both in Limpopo and Zimbabwe, where my client Barry Seabrook and I will spend the next two weeks chasing our quarry. The legendary Nyati, the notorious Tuskless Elephant and various plains game.

We will start our hunt just outside of Ellisras in the Limpopo province of South Africa. While driving to our hunting concession it seems as if the roads were fenced in or out, I am not sure which one is correct. It gives you the impression that not one piece of property was spared when the fencing companies pulled in.

Many an Outfitter has been asked whether his premises/concession is fenced. We as South Africans are proud to say... "Yes"! To a potential client this is where his attention span is cut short and his eyes start to wander to the next exhibition booth.

Why are we proud to say that? A game farm or ranch is a huge investment. Not just in Property value but financial expenditures, infrastructure, labour, management planning, execution and huge quantities of time. And time is money!

If an area in South Africa is not fenced according to the Nature Conservation regulations you fall under their rules, ethos and regulation standards. And that is not good!

Yes there are some Outfitters that expect a client to hunt on a concession no bigger than a large plot just for the sake of collecting and ticking trophies of the wishing list. But we as South Africans should be grateful that our Land Laws is still the way it is otherwise we would also have been run by a system that is not based on sustainable utilizations. In SA the farmers with their high fenced properties IS that self created system.

Fair chase hunting is just as challenging on a 1000ha (2300 acres) as on one of our neighboring countries. Sometimes the ph must just get his arse of the hunting rail and start hunting

Barry and I were heading for LeadwoodSA's hunting Concession where we will do a short 2 day recce of the area before we depart to our Zimbabwe part of the hunt. Our quarry for Limpopo were Impala, Bushbuck and Waterbuck.





We missed a golden opportunity on an immensely big impala and after the sight of that impala all the others looked small in comparison. Big mistake as that caused Barry not to shoot an Impala. I think I messed that one up a bit. Sorry Barry!!! For the bushbuck and the waterbuck we kept ourselves to the rivers edge. We had about 8 miles of River to work with, both sides. Some very good bushbuck was seen but unfortunately we were unable to make a shot. It was as if the young males and the females new they were not the quarry, yet and just stood there or silently slipped away into the thick riverside ravine.

Early on the last morning we spotted some fresh waterbuck tracks and decided to follow. The waterbuck smell kept luring us on until we spotted them feeding in an open patch next to the riverside. There was almost no approach with the tell tale wind blowing as it was. We made a slow and painful stalk. Barry's beautiful Sako .375 H&H barked and the Waterbuck dropped where it stood. Spine shot! We ran closer to put a coup de grace but it jumped up and took off. Through the river up on the other side and heading for the mountain! Damn! Blood was not plentiful but as long as it was still running it was fairly easy to follow the spoor. We left the tracers on the spoor and we went in front to try and ambush the still very lively Waterbuck. With constant radio contact with the trackers we new where it was heading and we waited. It joined up with another male. We came close to finishing his suffering on two occasions but every time his companion saw or smell us and took of again. It was hot and we were thirsty. We lost the spoor on several occasions but thanks to the trackers ability we were on them again.

To make a long follow-up short we finally ended the hunt when we out-guessed him for the third time and this time Barry made no mistake. It was a very tiring hunt but an awesome trophy. Our time was running out, though we still had a road to cut open just to get close to our fallen trophy. It was hot as hell and I wanted to get him to the coolness of the skinning shed as soon as possible.



After a very nice shower and lunch we took off with the truck nose pointing in the direction of Zimbabwe. We entered Zimbabwe at Bietbrige Border post, got our Temporary Rifle Import permits and were off. The roads heading to Bulawayo is in a good state with no speed signs and lots of stray animals. (no fences of course). Their toll road system consisted of a number of 50 gallon drums painted blue and a uniformed officer collecting your \$1 payment. Everyone we met was very friendly. Great people!

Disaster struck! My fuel filter was clogged up and there were just enough fuel delivered to keep the truck going slowly. After replacing the filter the problem persisted. It was the fuel pump that was pumping himself to scrap metal. Luckily we altered the air/fuel mixture so that we could reach our destination. We arrived at the camp 11 30pm. Driving at night on Zim roads is not advisable! Car trouble is the worst thing that can happen to an Outfitter when a client is present while traveling between concessions. At camp we switched vehicles and continued our hunt with our Zim Ph Mitch Riley.



We stayed and hunted out of Chete Safari Camp on the shores of Lake Kariba. An awesome sight greeted us when we awoke the next morning as the sun was shining on the Lake in that sunrise soft color prism. After a hearty breakfast it was off to the shooting range just to check that the trip did not alter the point of impact of Barry's guns. Mitch gave Barry a short "where to hit a potential dangerous animal that might hit back" talk and we were off to seek our quarry. The Cape Buffalo! We went past the Nature Conservation camp to pick up our, soon to be ever present, game scout. Just to keep a watchful eye on us and to be witness if something goes wrong or right for us if you know what I mean!





Our very capable game scout. We came across some poachers on the shoreline and he used a very persuasive method to convince them in returning, quickly, to Zambia in their small dugout.

A branch was tied to the hunting truck and we drove the main roads around the springs. Our plan was to drive the roads to clear them of old tracks and call an early lunch. No sense in staying out after 10 30 am. It is the hottest and driest part of the year and in the week to follow the temperatures reached a scorching 50 degrees Celsius. This was the hottest temperature since 1966. By that time it was so hot that to touch the metal of the gun or the hunting rig will make you use a language that is not fit for a family magazine. Although we were all droopy eyed after lunch, sleeping was out of the question, the swimming pool was the only answer.



Buffalo and Elephant tracks were every where as they were traveling to and from the springs and the lake to drink and cool themselves off. While checking out a spring for tracks we bumped into a family group of elephants. The tracker spotted a minute movement amongst the thick jesse alongside the creek. We quickly got the wind in our faces and made a slow approach to see if there were any tuskless amongst them. No such luck but an exciting experience. The following couple of days we tracked and looked over about 200 head of elephants up close and personal in our attempt to take a tuskless. We had one close call when a young bull that was following a herd made it quite clear to us that he didn't like our presence nor our smell. He was still young enough to be stupid so we made a very undignified retreat when he came for us with high speed, trunk up and ears outstretched. It was pretty intimidating and Mitch had to use some fowl language to try and dissuade him not to go trough with it.

He stared us down and then confidently turned around and walked away with a spring in his step. It was fun none the less. Hunting the tuskless cows were scarier than the lone bulls. The family group would be spread out while feeding so you really have to get amongst them to look for the one you want. The jesse and the mssasa trees was so thick that sometimes you were only a few feet away from feeding elephants. But back to Buffalo Hunting! Early morning on the second day we picked up fresh tracks. The tracks told us that we were about an hour and a half behind them as they crossed there just before sunrise. With our backpacks on, filled with clear gold (water), guns loaded and safety on we took off tracking. According to the GPS they were heading straight for a natural spring about 3 miles. We missed them at the spring but we found their outgoing tracks heading away from the spring at a leisurely pace. Not long after, their tracks started meandering, they were feeding.



Dung, fresh and warm to the touch proved that we were close, real close. We followed slowly. Tracking, searching, sweating and swatting the irritating cloud of mopane flies swirling and buzzing around our ears and eyes. The noise they make is so loud that trying to listen for bush sounds is almost impossible. I am sure that mopane flies can really be used as a form of torture. It's that bad. On we went.



Everyone made his own plan to deal with the mopane flies.



The lead tracker suddenly went down on his knees and indicated that we should follow his example. The two dagga boys were feeding about 30yards in front of us. The wind was perfect and Mitch motioned Barry forward. Softly I crept closer to get the shot on film. I heard Mitch describing the two buffalo to Barry. "Shoot the one on the right when he steps clear of the ...BANG! At the shot the bull ran the way he was facing and his companion turned and followed suit. We kept quiet, listening to their departure and to determine the way they went. The death bellow followed shortly afterwards. It was a hair rising moan and an awesome sound to hear! Creeping closer through the dry Mopane and into the Mssasa trees with guns at the ready we located the bull. Mitch moved Barry into position to make a quick coup de grace and so a lifelong dream of Barry comes true. The bull was enormous! All scar-faced and battered. A dagga boy to be proud off!!



Barry Seabrook, Left, (Owner of Gunsmoke Adventures) and Gunter Bierbaumer (Owner of LeadwoodSA Hunting Outfitters) with 44" Buffalo.

The GPS told us that we were 1 mile from the nearest road. We thus had to cut out a winding road through patches of Mopane, thick Jesse bush and Mssasa trees.

A remarkable experience. Good footage, a wonderful hunt in a truly hard, rough, hot but scenic surrounding. The Zambezi escarpment, hugging the shores of Lake Kariba where the soil is patchy with thick sand on some places and rocky outcrops everywhere. Between the constant shrill deafening noise of the Cicada beetle and the irritating buzz of the mopane flies you can hear the call of the fish eagle or the grunt of the hippos nearby. I fell in love with this country before the political mess but the same feeling still persists as the down graded systems haven't touched the bush in any way. Hunting is still as good as it was years before.

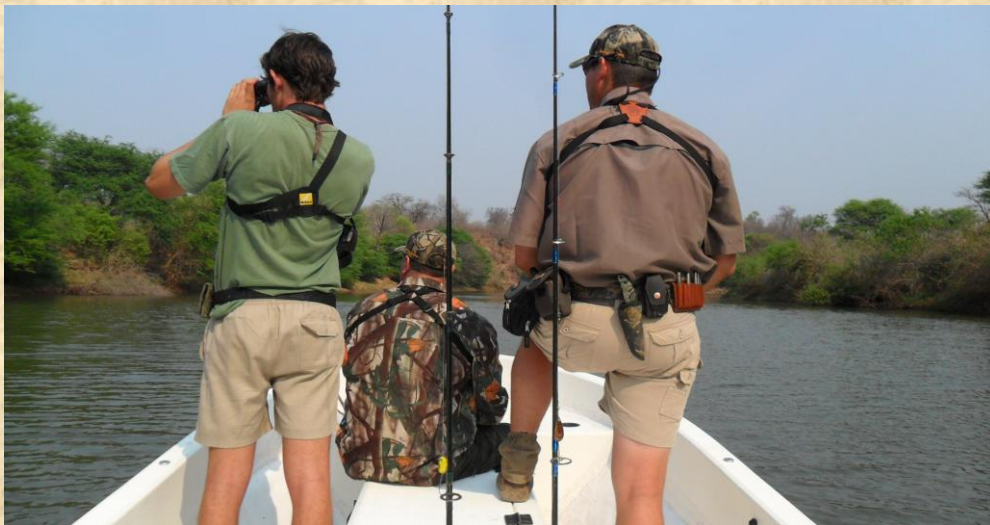


Baobab Tree in the Zambezi Escarpment.



Nothing beats our African sunsets.

The following days were spent boating on the Lake searching for Elephant, Kudu, Bushbuck and Impala. We also tried our hand at tiger fishing.



We hunted the fenced in farms of South Africa and the open areas of Zimbabwe and we enjoyed both experiences. Remember that the hunter sets the standard. Not the ph or the outfitter. They are merely pions in the game that the hunter wishes to play.

Please do not let the fenced in concessions keep you away from South African hunting. Do not frown upon the only self created system that keeps us in the business. Rather choose your ph and outfitter well and let them show you why we are proud to call South Africa our home. We have so much to offer. Come “walk and see more”....”listen and learn” and you will be surprised at the outcome of your trip.

