

In a chalet covered by an intricately-woven thatched roof hundreds of miles from civilization, I had just exited the shower when my wife Jan exclaimed, “Did you hear that lion roar?” My response was interrupted when the lion’s second roar filled the evening air. Suddenly I realized just where I was—Africa, the Dark Continent—over 9,000 miles from home in South Texas. More importantly, I realized who I was enjoying this wonderful experience with—Jan, my wife of 24 years.

Africa has really never been high on my priority list of things to do. I wanted to hunt North America’s big game before ever considering leaving the continent. Well, I am one fortunate individual.

With a ¾ slam, I have acquired a lifetime of memories in sheep country. I have challenged my own physical abilities to go where few men have the privilege of going. I dug my way out of a snow-covered base camp tent hunting bighorns in Colorado.

I shot a beautiful Dall sheep on a mountain ironically named Texas in the Northwest Territories and a Boone and Crockett-class mountain caribou on the same trip.

In August of 1995, I found myself in British Columbia ensconced on a lush green mountainside not 500 yards above a tremendous stone sheep ram. Watching the regal animal until sundown, my guide and I simply crawled back up into a saddle to get some sleep before the season opener the next morning. I was awarded a silver medal from the Foundation of North American Wild Sheep for that ram, which easily qualified for the Boone and Crockett record book.

As for elk, I have three beautiful 6x6 bulls that were tremendous experiences bar none. I have had the privilege of hunting in the Yukon, shooting a grizzly, moose, and black bear.

With several large mule deer and an exceptional collection of whitetails, including two in the all-time Boone and Crockett record book, I consider myself a fortunate man, especially when I realize where I grew up, hunting rabbits and being content to do so.

My experiences have been awesome, but until I visited Africa, I failed to realize the missing ingredient to all my hunting experiences, and that one thing was sharing it with Jan. What made the trip even more special was the fact that my close friend and longtime hunting companion, David Shashy, and his wife, Angie, from Ocala, Florida, were with us.

Our African safari began on February 18, 2003 when David called from Orlando where he was attending the SHOT show. He told me about a unique hunt in Tanzania for cape buffalo, and I responded with a “just go ahead and book it”. Well, once that statement sunk in, and three or four outfitters later, David, who had hunted cape buffalo in Africa previously, found us a safari in Zimbabwe with Graham Hingeston, owner of HHK Safaris, to begin in September, 2003.

Following 24 hours of flight time, we were all feeling sluggish upon our arrival at Victoria Falls, but once the tires of our twin-engine touched down on the bumpy dirt strip at Chewonde, located in the 400,000-acre Chirisa Safari Area, an adrenalin rush eclipsed fatigue.

Following our landing, we taxied up to our professional hunters awaiting us in their ubiquitous Toyota land cruisers. Scott Bailey was David and Angie’s PH, while Marius Maertens was ours. After becoming acquainted with the youthful, ambitious mates, I knew we were in for a grand time.

Ingwe, meaning leopard in Ndebele, the native language, was our home for ten adventurous days.

Our quarters, composed of two thatched roof chalets, were extremely comfortable. However, little time was spent at camp during daylight as we hunted throughout the day, pausing for a picnic lunch mid day. Following excellent three-course suppers complemented by enjoyable conversation, sleep came easy. We rose at 5 a.m. daily for breakfast and a 5:30 departure for the bush.

The first morning we filled out necessary paperwork at park headquarters and picked up our game scout.

Shortly afterwards, we were glassing zebras. Jan decided to shoot so she walked alongside Marius towards the animals. Having difficulty holding her 7 mag steady on the shooting sticks, she passed on the shot. Moments later, the zebra stalk was eclipsed by a herd of bull elephants.

At sundown as we paused on a bluff overlooking the dry, white sandy Sengwe River, Marius spotted something below us. Observing two native Africans in weathered green garments, I immediately thought “poachers”, but they failed to run and struck up a friendly conversation with Marius. Turns out they worked for the parks and wildlife department and camped there, attempting to locate poachers.

While visiting, they informed us of several buffalo that frequented the spring below their camp. As we parted company, I noticed some 30 2-to-3-inch tilapia pierced on several sticks hanging over their fire. It was amazing how little these people required to survive.

Following supper that first evening, I fell into a deep sleep until 2:20 a.m. when I heard something outside our chalet. With a mini maglite, I peered outside to see four kudu cows not 30 steps from our door. Africa was truly an unbelievable experience as you never knew what you would see next.

Negotiating the deep sandy roads in the dark the second morning, a jacket was required to cut the crisp, cold air. By daylight Jan and I were following Marius and tracker, Francis, as they followed fresh dagga boy tracks from the spring. The tracks led us into riverine habitat shaded by massive trees where Jan and I spotted a huge kudu bull, but on fresh buffalo tracks, I simply passed on him. Unbeknownst to me, we would meet again, but that's another story.

Several hours later we crossed the dry, deep, sandy river bed once again following the herd into steeper terrain. Reaching the top of a ridge looking down into a bowl, the stripped, white-colored bark of the mopani trees relished by elephant, reflected the mid morning sun. Awaiting our tracker, we heard, then saw a herd of stampeding elephant charging from the flat above down into the bowl below us. To avoid the huge animals, we rapidly moved off in the opposite direction until they passed.

One half hour later, we crossed the bowl, tracking on level ground. We were close. Upon spotting the bedded herd of mature bulls, a duiker exploded out of the bush nearby, and the dagga boys dashed off in a noisy dust storm. They ran over one mile and crossed the dry river bed once again as we watched from above.

We tracked these bulls for seven and one-half hours, bumping them three times before giving up on them.

Meantime, David and Angie spotted a huge bull late that second evening, but had to return because of darkness. The following day we picked up another herd, but once again failed to get close enough for a shot.

David and Angie, however, spent their day tracking the huge single bull they saw the day before. Tracking the massive-bosser bull for six hours, they covered 7.2 miles before catching up to him. With three well-placed shots, David's huge dagga boy collapsed onto the dry African soil.

The fourth day of our safari took us on yet another adventure, tracking dagga boys all day long, but with no success.

We returned to the spring on the fifth day, and once again followed a fresh trail. Following the dagga boys was not a problem as they walked up the same hillside they traveled on day two. This time we were interrupted by a huge bull elephant dining on mopani trees in the bowl we wished to cross.

Pausing for ten or so minutes, the ivory-tusked pachyderm parted, and we continued tracking. Upon reaching the flat, tree-covered area above the river, this time we walked with extreme caution. Suddenly Francis stopped, turned towards us, and I knew immediately what he saw. Jan and I, next to Marius, cautiously but rapidly covered the short distance to Francis.

With my .375 placed over my knees, I remained in a sitting position staring at a huge bull. Marius said "Shoot!" and with one shot, the huge animal bucked and ran off as did the rest of the herd, leaving only a contrail of African dust.

After a 20-minute pause, we anxiously walked to where the bull first stood, prepared for a potential charge, but it never occurred as the bovine laid dead not 40 yards from impact.

Following a jubilant celebration with Dave and Angie that afternoon, Angie decided to do some bird shooting. With all the francolin and guinea fowl, getting supper should have been no problem, but Angie with a shotgun was as predictable as facing a wounded buffalo. Several boxes of shells later, Angie connected with a brace of guinea.

Our stay at the Stanley and Livingstone in Victoria Falls was a grand way to complement our safari. With a visit to the local markets, exquisite dining, and not to mention unparalleled hunting, I now know why Africa is so attractive to couples who enjoy our world's most precious resource—its wildlife!!