

Justin's Safari - 2007

If there's one thing that I have learned in my nearly 30 years of living, it's that you can't accomplish much sitting around talking about what you might like to do one day. I can safely say that when it came to hunting Africa I was either going to dream about it or do it. So when the SCI banquet came around I was quietly planning to bid on one of the Africa hunts.

I now look back and think about the surprised look on my friends' faces as I hoisted my hand into the air to bid on the hunt. They thought I had lost my mind. The look on their faces was one that said, "Only millionaires and movie stars can afford to hunt Africa!" They were wrong.

After a short volley of bids between me and another gentleman the hunt was mine. I immediately started looking at what I would have to budget to get there. I was truly surprised at the figures I had in my head. I could harvest five exotic beasts on another continent and live the life of a Hemingway character for less than I could take a trophy bull elk in New Mexico. Oh yeah, and my wife could come along too!

It should be noted that I bought this hunt in February of this year and shook hands with Gerrit Breedt of Eland Pro Safaris at the baggage claim in Namibia on April 13, 2007. I put the whole hunt together including passports, required shots and required paperwork for various customs agencies together in just over two months. The information that Gracy Travel International and Gerrit put together made this a snap.

For this hunt I decided to keep a daily journal like so many African Safari goers have in the past. I found it to be a very good way to remember precise details of each day's hunts and events. I'll include quotes from my journal seeing as they are a candid look at my thoughts during the time I was there.

I won't lie; international travel resembles what I imagine, a 30 hour stay in a third-world dentist's chair would be like. If you are ever in Frankfurt International Airport make sure and stop by a pleasant restaurant name "Kuffler and Brucher." It was a bright spot in a long trip across the world.

Once in Namibia we had an easy time through customs and we were off to Grootfontain to get permits and supplies. Shortly there after we embarked on the 350 mile trip to Mooilaagte (translates into "low lying area") where Gerrit Breedt made his home and where we'd be hunting. I fought back heavy eyelids on that drive not wanting to miss a thing in this exotic land. Well, I say "exotic," but I fear the landscape was oddly similar to the desert southwest I've always lived in and merely differed in the size of the fauna. No matter what, it was nice to be at our destination.

We met Gerrit's wife Makki who treated us like royalty. The trip happened to fall on the first anniversary of mine and my wife Hilary's wedding. On that day I wrote in my journal, "Upon returning we were greeted with an anniversary cake and homemade

dounuts with our choice of coffee or iced tea. Which one do you think we had at 4:00 in the afternoon? Gerrit and Makki went above and beyond to help us celebrate our first wedding anniversary in Africa.” I really can’t say enough about the quality of service and the hospitality of Gerrit and his crew.

We didn’t spend much time hanging around after the drive. A quick stop at the range to check that my rifle was still on and we were off. I remember feeling like a kid at Christmas and I noted, “Right out of the gate we saw several trophy Kudu, and then a few Wildebeest. We traveled down the road a little and spotted more game. This time we saw several hundred animals in an open field. There were Zebra, Hartebeest, Warthog, and a couple of Blesbok and Eland.” It was at that point that I knew the trip was a bargain!

I wasn’t even in Namibia an entire day before a little patience and some coaching on how to spot and stalk nabbed me a nice Kudu at just before dark. The bull gave us a quick frontal shot which it took and it dropped him in his tracks. A second shot was needed from my .300 WSM to finish him off, but I was confident I had the right gun. He ended up measuring 45 and 45 ½” with 11” (26cm) bases Total 112 ½” - not bad for a guy right off the boat, right?

That night I realized two things. One, Jagermeister is consumed the same way in Namibia as it is in a college bar – often and in shot glasses. Two, Tafel Lager will do when the nearest Coors Light is few thousand miles away. The celebration was as much fun as the hunt!

Mornings started early and occasionally with a blast from a Kudu horn to wake us from our room. Gemsbok proved to be quite elusive the day before so we intended to hit the trail hard looking for a group today. I was impressed with Gerrit’s knowledge of the land and the general abundance of game everywhere you set your eyes. We spotted Giraffe, Blue Wildebeest, Warthogs and Springbok within minutes of leaving the ranch house. The trip was worth it. I felt great about my investment.

The great thing about Africa is the opportunity to check off any one of the animals on your list when you are out stalking something different like the ever elusive Gemsbok. On day two I described one such event in my journal. “Gerrit and I walked approximately two miles in heavy thick brush looking for a Gemsbok. We got to within 20 or 30 yards and before we could react he was off in a flash. We continued to hunt the area hopping to spot a Gemsbok on the move, when we spotted three Zebra about 80 yards out. We hustled to get a good shooting lane on them. We were able to get a clear shot on a nice mare followed by another shot for good measure.”

It is important to realize that although you have your heart set on a list of game you’d like to harvest that they sometimes don’t cooperate. I searched for an Impala throughout the trip and even though we caught site of a few they never presented me with an opportunity. I did, however, find a nice Springbok in the afternoon on the last day in its place and was very happy with it.

When I finally did catch up with a good Gemsbok he measured 31" and 32" horns, and 7" bases that totaled a score of 77". He aged at 7 yrs old. It was on that hunt that I renamed the "spot and stalk" method the "walk and walk" method, which is just like the former but with more walking and less spotting. Be prepared to keep yourself hydrated because you will be walking quite a distance each day. The thorns are vicious so proper attire is needed as well. The wife spent most of her time participating in the less exhausting "windshield safari."

By the last day I was halfway ready to stay there for ever or just get home before I couldn't leave. On the morning of the last day I took a Blesbok that's an easy Gold Medal ram and had bases bigger than Gerrit has ever seen coming in at 7". The Blesbok's measured 14" and 15" respectively.

My wife and I had a blast. I only regret not having more friends and family to be there to experience it all with us. We found the whole operation to be inviting to hunters of all skills and financial means. Gerrit and his wife were top rate professionals as was Gerrit's nephew and professional hunter in training Jacobus.

As we traveled back to the US I couldn't help but think back to the looks on the faces of my friends when I bid on this hunt. I couldn't wait to tell them that if a guy of modest means like my self could get over there, they could too!

When it was all said and done I had the memories of an experience that many people may never get. I also had an extreme distaste for coach seating on international flights and a hankering for a cheeseburger and a Coors Light.

I urge anyone that took the time to read this article to consider raising their hand up high in the air when they start auctioning off Africa trips at the next banquet. Putting your money where your mouth is quite a motivator and I found it to be a lot easier than ever imagined.

My wife even came out of the whole thing pretty well, she's getting a new house out of it. It seems we need higher ceilings to accommodate my trophies!