

Zimbabwe 2014 Elephant Hunt

Why should Americans hunt elephant and buffalo in Zimbabwe? Zimbabwe has several parks that protect the animals within the parks. Elephants do a lot of damage to the trees. Elephants browse not only the leaves but they eat the bark off trees. They will push over or tear off an entire tree and then just eat a few leaves or one or two limbs and walk to the next tree and do the same. What they leave behind, the natives referred to as elephant tooth picks. They will devastate a forest. As the elephant herds get larger than what the parks can hold, the animals venture out onto the adjacent lands. The villagers of these lands see these animals as food. They set up snares and catch their meat. Yes they use huge cables as snares to catch buffalo and yes elephants in snares. This is not hear say, I was there and I have seen it with my own eyes. Anyway to stop the poaching, the government of Zimbabwe will issue a calculated allotment of permits allowing the land owners to sell hunts to hunters. The meat of the animal goes back into the community; the land owner is compensated handsomely for the damage to his trees. The compensation is a huge incentive to stop the poaching instead of promoting it. This program created a market causing investors to build elaborate camps to house these hunters all throughout the areas. I saw 25 to 30 luxurious camps while I was there. This stimulated the Zimbabwe economy and employed thousands of workers not only during construction projects but also long term to run the camps and care for the hunters needs. Trackers, skimmers, professional hunters and lots more. This was probably no doubt the biggest financial industry in Zimbabwe. Well our government, with their infinite wisdom, decided that another country, Zimbabwe, isn't capable of managing their own resources. So we must do it for them. And since 90% of Zimbabwe hunters come from the US, they can do it. They past a law that you can no longer import any part of an elephant from Zimbabwe into the United States. Prior to the passing of this law, a hunt for a huge trophy elephant with 80 or 90 or 100 pounds of ivory on each side could cost upwards of \$100,000. In a poor third world country, what could that do for an economy? But who's going to pay that kind of money if you can't keep your trophy? No body that's who. Over 90% of the American hunters who had booked trophy

elephant hunts in Zimbabwe cancelled their hunts. These outfits have gone out of business. Every camp I visited was empty and run down. Baboons, poachers and people passing through have destroyed millions of dollars worth of hunting camps. It's a crying shame. And now the poaching has gotten way out of hand. The land owners are promoting it to save their trees and for the meat. Everyone is being fed, trees are being saved and there is no other way off getting income for these destructive creatures. They are catching in snares 3 to 4 elephants and Cape buffalo per day, per area, as apposed to 5 or 6 permits a year issued by the government. If this continues, it won't be long and there will be no buffalo or elephant to hunt in Zimbabwe. None to speak of anyway. The good news is, because of all the cancellations, elephants are the cheapest they have been in a long time. And most hunters now days, have a fiberglass replica of their elephant made anyway. So there is no need to bring any part of the elephant back. Now if you were paying the higher rates, obviously you would want the ivory. If you're willing to do this, donate your ivory, meat and hide to the locals, then have I got a deal for you. LOL. No, seriously, you can get an affordable non trophy elephant hunt or trophy hunt and help the Zimbabwe economy.

My Elephant hunt in Zimbabwe

My deal with Izak was that I would join him on a one month safari and film two Americans as they hunt Buffalo and Elephant. For filming their hunt and for airing a TV show, Izak gave me a substantial discount on my hunt. The only catch is, I can't start hunting until the other two guys get done or until October 1st after their safari if over.

Our original plans were to fly into Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe and to hunt about 2 1/2 hours away. Literally 3 hours after I purchased my tickets, I got an email from Izak that our plans had changed and I was to fly into Johannesburg. What he failed to tell me was that because we were driving into Zimbabwe from South Africa, I needed to arrive two days earlier and leave 6 days later. I found an aggressive travel agent. He knew I was going to take a bath on the exchange of my tickets. So he is trying to save me money anyway he can. Delta was running some kind of special from Birmingham AL to Washington DC. Since I live near

Birmingham, that works out great. So I thought? He was able to save me over \$600 by booking the following: Birmingham to Atlanta to Johannesburg to Atlanta to BIRMINGHAM to Atlanta to Washington. Of course with a stay over night in Birmingham on the leg back. That way you have to claim your bags, stay the night then recheck your bags the next morning. Only I have no intentions of finishing the last leg to DC. Shhhh don't tell anyone. For a \$600 savings this sounds great. Only last time I flew to Johannesburg from Birmingham to Atlanta, there was a very slight delay leaving Birmingham. I caught my connection but none of my bags did. Now I can survive without clean clothes, but not without my bow. I didn't get my bow until the last day of my safari. The only trip I ever made to Africa where I didn't shoot my animals. So rather than risk that again, especially on an elephant hunt, I chose to check my bags in Atlanta. The only way I could do this with the class fare I bought with my Delta medallion status was to check in, in Atlanta, before the flight in Birmingham boarded. If you haven't done it by then, your seat is cancelled and a standby passenger gets it. To insure that no Coker moment prevented me from doing this, I drove to Atlanta the night before, stayed in a hotel and made sure I was at the airport two hours before the Birmingham flight boarded. That would be 5 hours before the Atlanta flight departs. While driving to Atlanta, I got a call from my rental house maintenance man, Shawn, to inform me that my house on AVE S had burnt to the ground. I called my insurance agent and let him know what had happened and that I was going to be out of the country for over a month. Here we go again. As most of my hunts do, this one started off with some Coker moments. First Izak informed me that I should have arrived on the 8th not the 9th. Also, my departure date back home was too soon. Unable to change my return date until after I completed the first leg of my flight, I was going to have to do that once I got to Johannesburg. I was allowed to board the plane an hour and 40 minutes before it was supposed to take off, taking advantage of the fact that I am a frequent flyer medallion status so they let me on the plane first. This insures me adequate overhead space for all my camera gear and computer. As we pulled away from the gate and got on the tarmac, the captain announced that there was an electrical problem. Almost three hours later, they got the problem fixed, but then the jet engines had to be warmed back up. Finally we were in the air, but several hours late which meant that the Delta offices in the Johannesburg Airport would be closed when I got there and I

would have to change my return flight at a later date. When I got through customs with all my luggage, to my surprise Izak was there waiting for me. I was supposed to stay at a bed and breakfast. He informed me that he had cancelled my reservations at the Journey's Inn bed and breakfast and that we were going to travel part of the way to Zimbabwe that night. After we got a bite to eat, it was after midnight when I got in bed and we were leaving at 5:00 am the next morning. I finally fell asleep at 1:30. I calculated incorrectly what time it was there in South Africa and I got up almost two hours too soon. With a little over 2 hours of sleep, I was dressed and ready to go before anyone else had even woke up. At least I didn't oversleep. That is always my biggest fear. Now I'm waiting for everybody else to get up so we can take this journey from South Africa to Zimbabwe. As I'm typing this, I'm looking at the Sun coming up in the background over the back of the mountains and it is a beautiful sight.



After a 5 hour drive thru South Africa, we finally reached the Zimbabwe border. Zimbabwe's currency is the US dollar. It was an English colony, so 90% of all the people speak perfect English. They also speak several of their native languages. But for sure, they understand every thing you say. Crossing the border was an experience all in its self. It took a total of four hours to go through all the processes. I lost count at five different bribes Izak had to pay to speed the process up; and that was all just at the border. We still had several hours to drive to get to the camp. During that drive we were pulled over by 4 different road blocks and Izak had to pay a bribe at every one from \$20 or \$30 dollars. When you get a traffic citation in Zimbabwe it is always \$20 if you pay it right then without court cost you know. Not a lot of money, but a big hassle, unless it's late at night and they come up with a reason to charge you more. This night they claimed that their captain demanded that all offenders after 9 pm be brought to jail for the night and allowed to pay their fine I the morning. To prevent this from happening it cost Izak \$280.

We finally reached camp and 2 hours after that we had dinner and about 1 o'clock in the morning we were in bed. The next morning, I slept late. We had breakfast then drove around in the jeep while dragging the roads to cover all the old tracks. We crossed several groups of buffalo tracks and elephant tracks but most of them were any where from 4 to 7 days old. But we did cut a set of huge elephant tracks that was only a couple days old, so we were hoping tomorrow we can get on that bull. My face took a lot of sun this day. The sweat bees are terrible over here this time of the year.



Day 2. On the second day of the hunt, we took out at 4:30 am in the morning, which is about an hour and a half before daylight. We rode for about 45 minutes and then hiked for about 45 minutes to get to a water hole that was almost dried up. We left for another water hole that was about an hour away. We stopped at a water hole that had some water in it, but not any fresh tracks. So we drove another hour to another part of his property that after about a mile hike, we came to the river bed. Most of the river bed was dry but there were some pockets that had some deep water in it. There were lots of crocodile tracks going in and out of those pockets. We saw some yellowish, green trees that they said was a fever tree. It was called that because when the settlers came to this part of the country and camped near one of those trees on the river, they would get malaria and thought it was coming from the tree. They didn't realize it was coming from mosquito bites from the river. We saw a lot of baobab trees. Most of them were between 1000 and 2000 years old but we saw 1 that was close to 5000 years old. I can't even wrap my mind around a tree that old. We saw lots of scenery and lots of Stein buck and duikers. But we didn't see a whole lot of other game. No plains game, no elephant, no cape buffalo. At about noon, we decided to head back to camp for lunch. Did I tell you how bad the sweat bees at this time of year? :-) :-)





After lunch, we decided to drive around the property where we had dragged the roads to clear it of all the old tracks. We found several places where a group of female elephant and calves crossed over on to our property from the Gonarezhou National Forest. The property we are hunting borders this Forest. The animals live in the forest and occasionally come onto the property we are hunting to feed there. Like I said earlier they have destroyed their food source in the parks. We found a spot where a huge elephant bull crossed over. We also found were 4 large Cape buffalo had also crossed. Only one problem, they would come into our property at night and back into the forest by day light. We decided to go back to camp and have an early dinner and go out at 7 pm to night hunt. It is legal to night hunt in Africa. Now you take a very scary dangers hunt like Elephant or Cape buffalo and you exponentially multiply the danger by hunting them in the middle of the night in the deep dark continent. No thanks, but that is what we are about to do. Since we are hunting right on the edge of the national forest, you must go pick up the forest Scout to ride with you. He is like our Game Warden. They call him a scout but really he is the informant to make sure you don't shoot any animals on the National forest side of the road.



We just got in from night hunting the elephant. We saw six cows with calves. It was awesome. You talk about adrenalin rush. Wow. Luke the guide has a thermo imaging monocular. That was cool. We could see the finest details on those elephants. We got within thirty yards of one pair. Great night, but no bulls.

In the morning before daylight, we got after cape buffalo. I got lots more sun on my face today.

Day 3: Up at four, out at five again this morning. We found several elephant crossings on our dragged road showing where they came from the park into our property and then back all before daylight. We spotted 3 nice kudu bulls. They ranged from a fifty one inch to a fifty seven inch. We stalked them for over two miles. Couldn't get a shot. Lucky for me today, Jim let me borrow his sun block or my face would have really gotten burnt. We re-dug the roads again and made a plan to hunt them again tonight. Did I tell you how bad the sweat bees are over here! :-)) :-)) After a late lunch and a quick nap, We are about to go out again; night hunting the massive elephant bull.

We got there before dark and didn't hear anything until right before dark. Then we heard a tree branch break. It was a young Bull elephant. It's not hard to hear an elephant break off the top half of tree. We were hunting right on the national forest line and we have a forest ranger, they call him a scout, with us making sure we don't hunt on their side. This bull came from the forest side, crossed the road and was now on our property. However, by now it had gotten pitch black. We put a short stalk on him and it was on. He was about thirty five yards away broad side. The camera's rolling and on came the flashlight. But there was no shot taken. JR says f####, then the light went off and I'm thinking he left the safety on or didn't put a bullet in the chamber. It wasn't until later that night that he told me it was because of a large bush in his line of sight. Anyway, it worked out for the best, so we thought, because right behind this younger bull was two more mature bulls. One of which was huge. Looking through the thermal imaging scope, it looked to be over a seventy pounder. You judge an elephant by the size of their tusks. That would be huge. Seventy pounds per tusk. These two elephants fed their way straight toward us within fifty yards and then turned to our right and went toward a water hole,

staying the entire time on the national forest side. At one time, we had a fifty yard broad side shot but he wasn't on our side of the property line. They faded back into the forest. We decided to wait them out hoping that sooner or later they would work their way across the property line. After not hearing them for over an hour and a half we decided to call it a night.

Day 4: I would really be hurting if Jim hadn't brought sun screen. Started at five this morning. We saw hyena tracks, elephant tracks, buffalo tracks and kudu tracks but we saw no actual animals this morning. We went back to camp early to make a plan. While in camp, JR and Luke cut a set of impala tracks and decided to start tracking them down. They never spotted the impala, so we decided to have lunch. After a quick nap, we went back out for the evening hunt trying to get on those bull elephants. Right after dark, 3 bulls came into that water hole that's on the national forest side. They hung out there for over 2 hours. Then a large herd of cows and calves came in. Some zebra frightened the cows and they ran off in the opposite direction from us. Then the bulls follow the cows. So no luck for the hunters this evening.

Today is day 5: We got up and started at 4:30 am this morning. We drove around a lot before we finally saw our first kudu bull and what a monster bull he was. We started tracking the bull for over an hour before we gave up on it. On the way back to the truck we heard something that sounded like a baby crying. We heard it 3 different times. We headed in that direction to find a caracal cat had taken down a baby duiker. The cat dropped the duiker and took off running when we got too close. The duiker was still alive but was too far gone to save. We found lots of hyena tracks, so we decided to buy a donkey and cut it in half and start two hyena baits. We also found a huge male leopard track. We spotted a huge vulture up in a nest feeding its babies. I got a whole lot more sun on my face today because I didn't have any sun block to use.

This evening, we left at 5 pm for our elephant hunt. After parking the jeep, we walked about a mile and set up on a known crossing where we had seen elephant cross two days in a row but only at night. We didn't hear or see any elephants tonight but we did hear two leopards and I had a bush pig walk within five feet of my right leg. He didn't stop until I turned my flashlight on him. Then he snorted off. We didn't see anything else the rest of the night.

We are in an area that use to have lots of problems with malaria. The thatched roof huts we are staying in have window holes cut out for circulation. No window panes, just the openings. So our beds have nets over them to protect against mosquitoes.



Day 6: We came across a twelve foot Rock python. That is a rare find in the wild in its indigenous country. Highlight of my trip so far. Today we bought that donkey and well you know. We built a tree blind to get elevation for better observation and scent control over one of the baited spots.



I got a premonition from God today. From now until mid next year, fighting in Israel and the surrounding areas will increase. During March of 2015 something is going to happen regarding the tabernacle of the Jews. I don't know exactly what, but it has to do with the tabernacle of the Jewish race. And 14 days after that a significant event will take place regarding the Jews and their Passover feast.

Today, we flushed a large bird while riding in the jeep. The bird soared high in the air straight up from the ground. At the peak of his climb, Jim pointed his finger at the Bird with his thumb straight up in the air as if to make a gun with his hand. He pulled the trigger and made a gun sound with his mouth. With perfect timing, the Bird folded up and made a straight balled up drop to the ground. Jim turned to me with his pretend gun still armed and asked with excitement, did you see that! I said, yes I did now quit pointing that thing toward me! It could

still be loaded.:-) put it back in its holster. We found out from Luke that this particular bird some how escapes danger by doing this.

Tonight's hunt, in the dark, was very exciting. We saw several elephants and three Cape buffalo. While stalking the buffalo, a puff adder snake struck at Izak. It's hard to dodge a striking snake in the dark.

Day 7: We came across another 12 foot python today. While I was filming his head, JR touched his tail hoping to get his head to strike at the camera. But instead, it climbed a tree. We got lots of great footage of this python climbing a tree. At 7 am we had a huge kudu cross the road way in front of us. By the time we got where he had crossed, he was no where to be found. Since it is day seven and we have seen very very very few animals, we decided to stalk him. At 10:44 am we finally stopped for a drink of water. Mind you it is in the high 90s. I was parched. We stayed on this guy's tracks the whole time, but we never saw him. We decided to head back to the truck. We finally got there at 2:00 pm. Did I tell you how bad the sweat bees are over here!



While in camp having a late lunch, a huge Savannah, Monitor lizard crossed the yard in front of my hut. When I started walking toward him, I figure as he noticed how close I was getting, he would run off and not give me a chance to take his picture. Boy was I wrong. He wasn't the least bit afraid of me. On the contrary, he bowed up to me. Then he came at me. Kinda scared me! :-) :-) LOL. He got to within ten feet of me. I got some good pictures.



We checked the hyena baits. We had 70 pictures of hyena at one of them. They were very timid and didn't actually eat any of the bait. They just hung around it. The evening hunt of day seven was slow until about 10pm. Then it got exciting. We started to stalk a herd of elephants when two more herd came out of the forest and into our side. Now there are too many elephants and more are still coming. It was too dangerous to try to stalk elephant in the dark when there is over twenty of them. We decided to come back at 4 am in the morning and try to catch some of them still on our side of the property line.



Day 8: At 4 am on the eighth day, we were looking for these elephant herds. When we got to where they were, they had already crossed back to the park. We checked the game cameras at the hyena baits to find that they had been hit hard. The trackers built a blind in the tree, forty yards from the bait. They used jackal berry trees to build it. Then we found some Africa oranges. They are the size of grape fruit but are green like limes. Did I mention how bad the sweat bees are over here?



Tonight we heard two different herds of elephants. But remember it's pitch dark. After inspecting the tracks, they all turned out to be cows and calves.

Day 9: At 7:30 am JR shot at a 58 inch kudu at about 250 yards and it ran into the park side of the property. The park ranger went in looking for him but came back and reported that JR had missed. We know better. At 9:30 am, we cut several sets of zebra tracks. We began to track and stalk them. We ran across a half eaten male duiker that had been killed by a caracal cat. It had 4 1/2 inch horns, that's a good one. At 10:45 am we got our first glimpse of them but not before they smelled us. In 1.4 seconds they were gone. We tracked them for another hour and a half until they crossed back over into the park. One hyena bait had been hit again but the other one hadn't been touched. We took it down and are going to move it to another spot. One the way back to camp in the jeep in the dark, I got clobbered in the head by a large limb that we later named widow maker. In an effort to duck at the last minute, I twisted my back. The next day I could hardly get out of bed. I took two celebrex and went hunting anyway.



Day 10: The new hyena bait was demolished. A huge hyena took the bait down from the tree and carried it well over a mile to its den. We took down the other bait and moved it to this new location. But this time we attached it to the tree so that no way a hyena could take it down. It rained all morning and we didn't see anything until about 11. We saw a cheetah. Then we cut a fresh set of elephant tracks crossing from the park to our property. We had just dragged the road so we knew they were fresh. The first fresh elephant tracks in the daylight. I was pumped only to be disappointed. Luke said it was a small adolescent male. Too small to shoot. On the way back to camp, almost in camp, JR shot not one, but two impala rams.





I'm Off loading video now to my computer. I'm Getting ready for tonight's hunt.

It was pitch black dark tonight. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Another Bush pig walk right up to me and I didn't know it until he was two feet away.

Day 11: Got to the hyena bait before daylight but the hyenas were finished feeding. Went for a long stalk and found several places where they had dusted and urinated. We also found some war ants. They were feeding on some dung in the road. They had just finished invading another ant den.



We found several set of elephant tracks. It looked like a good bull and several cows. The good thing is, they went on our side of the property and from what we could tell they were still there. We started tracking them at 7:30 am. We found several demolished trees where they had fed. And after an hour and a half we found several piles of dung. The last pile was still warm in the middle. We could tell he was a trophy bull because one of the trees he demolished was huge. Also, if the dung has lots of un-digested long fibers and leaves, you know the bull is very old. They can get to be 80 years old. The older they are, the more their teeth are worn and therefore the less they chew their food. This causes them to swallow longer fibers of bark and tree meat and the leaves are crushed less. Therefore; their dung has more un-digested parts in it. We tracked the bull until he crossed the road back over into the park. It was 9:50 am. We got back to camp at 2 and had LUNCH and started packing. We decided to move tomorrow to another place 15 hours away. After developing a plan, Izak and I laid down for a nap. As soon as Izak laid down, he spotted a black mamba snake in the roof of our thatch hut. Izak shot him with a .22. The snake fell on the foot of my bed and onto the floor. Now that will keep you from being able to go to sleep. During the night hunt, Jim killed a hyena, but no elephants or buffalo.





Day 12: After breakfast, we loaded the truck and headed to Bulawayo. It's a twelve hour drive. On our way there we stopped at a public restroom that had a chicken nesting in a bucket in the men's rest room. We spent the night in the Bulawayo. We checked into a very nice bed and breakfast. We had WiiFii and was able to catch up on emails and Skype. We went to a nice restaurant for dinner.



Day 13: The next morning I told JR and Jim about a premonition I had the night before. I told them that the next place we were going to was going to have lots of elephant and buffalo. I told JR he would shoot a Kudu and an elephant before we had been there a full week. We got supplies at an open air farmer's market in the Middle of Bulawayo. Once finished with grocery shopping we finished our 3 hour drive to camp.





We finally got to camp. While we were unloading and settling in, an 11 year old girl was playing. She fell and broke her arm. We took her to a clinic to have her arm attended to. On the way back, we could see a huge forest fire across the river about a mile from our camp. The local land owner came to our camp and recruited our camp workers to help fight the fire. It's now 7:30 pm and all the workers have left except for our chief. I just had the best lamb chops I have ever eaten. Sydney is a great cook. The workers finally got the fire out but it was in the wee hours of the morning.

Day 14 We didn't get all our permits this morning so we went out scouting and dragging the roads to clear them of all tracks but we could not hunt yet. We came to the Simba Camp. It was at one time beautiful! There we found the perfect water hole. Izak decided to get some diesel fuel and pump more water into it. We continued scouting and dragging roads on our way back to our camp. We spotted a set of huge elephant tracks on Reuben's property. We drug those roads with the plans to recheck them tomorrow morning. We came upon the Jijeema Camp. It also once was another beautiful camp. It is in ruins now due to

neglect. It had a large water hole in it. Not much water in it at all. Years ago there was a fight over who actually own the camp. When the courts decided the owner, the loser burnt it down. The new owner is in the process of slowly rebuilding it. This place was over run with baboons. I have never in my life seen so many baboons. Hundreds of them living in this camp. Izak decided to come back and pump water into this water hole as well.

On to the next camp. We spotted 3 trophy kudu bulls running together. JR shot a nice 55" trophy kudu bull. We got the truck stuck while loading him up. It took all 10 of us to push it out.



Once back on the road, we spotted a fresh set of lion tracks. I just ate the best sausage I have ever eaten. After lunch, we drove to another area to Scout for elephants and drag roads. When we first got there, we saw tons of baboons. There was hundreds of piles of elephant dung everywhere. I decided to call this road, elephant highway. Most of the trees are broken off about seven to eight feet off the ground.

OMG, I just stalked to within 40 yards of my first wild elephant. There was two of them. One had 35 pound tusks. Jim, the Hunter, is holding out for a 70+

pounder.

We continued to a water hole that Izak knew about. When we got there, there was 26 elephants there watering. It was fanatic. Tuskless females are the most aggressive elephants alive. There was a huge one in the group. She started coming toward us. There was no huge tusker in the group, so we decided to back off. We are back in the truck now headed back to camp. WOW this has been a great day.





Day 15: I got up at 3 am. Fixed 2 cups of coffee and ate some cereal. Left camp way before dark. We went to the Jijeema camp to start pumping water to the water hole. We finally cut a nice bull track and started tracking him. After 2 & 1/2 hours, the elephant crossed over into the national park, only it's no longer Gonarezhou but now we are bordering Forestry commission. OMG The sweat bees are worse here than the first place we were hunting! We checked another water hole and found a fresh lone bull track. We hung a game camera there hoping to get some pictures of him. Then we fueled the truck and headed to another place to hunt the afternoon hunt, near the Cwayi River.

We started following a set of huge tracks when the ground started to rumble. Our tracker put his ear to the ground to see how close we were. This was a fatal mistake. The train ran right over his head because we were too close. Just kidding :-) :-) :-).

Anyway, at noon we started walking and scouting along the Cwayi River. We see lots of termite mounds everyday, but today we saw one that was over 12 feet tall. We saw lots of game. A huge wart hog and crocodile just to name 2. Izak told us about a huge crock he once shot. He said when they opened its belly there were two un-digested right arms.





Later Izak started a fire and cooked kudu back straps for lunch picnic style.



On the way out from the river, the truck I was in got stuck several times. Thank GOD we had a winch. At 3, we spotted a herd of cape buffalo. We started stalking them. We saw them several times but no shot. At 7 pm it got too dark to see. So after 4 hours of stalking we had to head back to the truck. In the DARK! Did I mention we had seen several different huge lion tracks while stalking the buffalo?

Day 16 We started extra early today because we are driving to a new place that is a little farther away from camp. Once we got there, we went to a water hole. But before we got there, our tracker spotted a nice bull elephant. We all got ready and it was on. First thing off the bat, we had to run up a steep hill. Then left and circle right to get the wind right. A few hundred more yards and then we spotted him again. Once he was determined to be a thirty pounder, weight of the largest ivory tusk, it meant that JR was up. He got into position. The sun was right in our eyes. JR had to move again to get a set of trees just right to help block the sun. In position again, JR is ready. Izak reminds him to place the bullet between the eye and the ear hole. JR follows instructions perfectly. Boom! Down drops elephant number one! :-) :-) :-) Took pictures and video interviews for TV and then more pictures. This elephant's penis was three feet long and 10" in diameter. What a whopper. I learned where to shoot an elephant after JR shot his. As close to a road as possible! :-)





We went back to camp and after I loaded all the footage into my computer, we had lunch. Then I got my bow out and begin practicing. Not going to be long now. Headed back to Simba Camp to check the filling of the water hole and sd card of camera over leopard bait. Vultures found the leopard bait and totally destroyed it. Both water holes were almost full but no elephant tracks at either of them, yet. We were told of another place that is supposed to have a really nice huge elephant that has been drinking there the last three evenings. It was called the Antoinette place. We drove about 40 miles to get there. We arrived at the perfect time for checking water holes. We drove around the property and

checked all the property lines and around all the water holes. We saw lots of tracks but, We didn't see any tracks that we thought were big enough. We went to one last water hole to check it out. We decided to hang out at the last water hole until about one hour after dark. We herd some elephants breaking off trees but none came into the water. I was so tired, I went to bed without eating dinner.

Day 17 We got a late start this morning although I was ready to leave at 4:30 am. Apparently there was some celebrating going on last night and I missed it. Everybody else got up late. We finally left at 6:15, but by the time we got to where we were hunting and found our scout for that area, it was 7:30. We went to retrieve the game camera we had hung at that water hole to see what kind of lone bull elephant had been watering there. When we got there, the camera had been stolen. We left there and started looking for tracks on the roads. We got a flat tire and our driver, Doome, had to fix it.



We found some buffalo tracks and started our stalk. We caught glimpses of them every now and then but they were few and far between. After about five hours we decided to take a break and drink some warm water. Warm only because we had no ice. Izak was certain that the buffs were bedded down in the heat of the day not much further. He was right. One more hour of stalking and we spotted them bedded down. The whole herd. Not sure how many there were but there was a bunch. Probably 30 or more. That's not good. Too many noses, eyes and ears. We had the wind in our favor the whole seven hour stalk. But another Coker moment is always around the corner. When we were about forty yards from the closest cow, you guessed it, the wind shifted and they busted out of there. In the blink of an eye, 30+ buffalo disappeared. Everybody was pooped. I mean we were all some tired puppies. Everybody crashed in the dirt road that we finally crossed.



JR and I went back for the truck. On the way back to the truck, I realized that the blisters on both my feet, also had blisters. Blisters on top of blisters. While JR was trying to drive Izak's truck down a 4 wheeler trail to pick everybody else up, He tried to fit Izak's ford ranger between 2 trees in a curve on a road that was cut for a four wheeler. Needless to say, it didn't fit. Neither side fit. In other words the ranger isn't as wide as it use to be. And none of the 4 doors close properly any more. Izak couldn't have been too happy. No time for the picnic lunch Izak had planned. We drove to a small village and bought some Cooked sausage and carried on.



We traveled to another area that we hunted the evening before, where we had gotten a report of a trophy elephant frequenting. The Antoinette place. While we were driving and glassing, OMG, we saw a cheetah and her 3 cubs. She caught a small duiker and started feeding it to the cubs. Not too many folks have ever witnessed that.



Later we saw a male and two female Bush bucks. We also saw lots of elephants but no trophies. The ride back to camp was two hours long. But I must say, it was one of many highlights of the trip. There's nothing more exuberating than to ride at night in an open aired jeep through the brush of wild Africa! For dinner I had my first taste of elephant. Boy was it delicious.

Day 18 The motor to the well pump died in camp, so we have had no water for two days now. The mechanic had been working on it for two days but couldn't fix it. Parts are hard to come by out in this Bush. He did his best to rig it, but he just couldn't do it. This is where that term comes from if you know what I mean. LOL. Izak sent CJ to Bulawayo to buy a new motor. It's a Sunday, so he will have to make special arrangements once he gets there. All of this caused us to get a late start. I was going to start hunting my elephant today but without CJ to film it, I elected not to hunt today. So now we are hunting buffalo for Jim and JR and a trophy elephant for Jim. We checked 7 or 8 different water holes and drove lots of miles of dirt roads looking for trophy elephant and buffalo tracks. At noon we decided to head back to camp for lunch. I had elephant kabob. My second time for having elephant. It was delicious, again. We went back hunting for trophy elephant to the Dete Valley area. We saw lots of sign. When we drove past where JR killed his elephant, there were loads of hyena tracks. Izak had Jacob build a blind for a night hunt later on in the week. We then drove over to the water hole where we had seen a large herd of elephants several days earlier. I saw my second crocodile. We ended up not seeing any elephants so at dark we called it a night. Once back at camp we noticed that CJ was back with the new pump for the well. He was having trouble keeping the belt on the pulley that turns the well pump. He didn't have enough correct bolts to bolt down the motor. Then the motor wouldn't stay cranked. We determined it was a crimped fuel line. We had to take the fuel tank off and reposition the tank and the fuel line. This motor is a diesel and it got air in the line. We didn't know how to prime the air out of this foreign motor. It's in the middle of the night now and we had to go get a mechanic out of bed to show us how to prime it. In five minutes, after he finally got there, he was able to show us how to prime out the air and in another 15 minutes, we had the motor running. But the belt was still jumping off. Some more rigging and we had a temporary fix for the belt. Now this pump was 3 times the horse power of the one we replaced. By the time we got from the

well to the camp house, the pressure of the pump was too great and had busted the under ground lines. Then to top that off, at the same time this happened, the coil in the diesel generator powering camp, also went out. Now we not only don't have water, we don't have power either. Next morning, CJ went back to Bulawayo to get the diesel generator fixed. So no hunting for me again today.

Day 19 Today we traveled on the old Victoria highway. In the early 1900s queen Victoria of England commissioned to have a road constructed from Victoria Falls to Bulawayo. They used asphalt but not a full sheet like we do today. They paved two 18" strips with a gap in between. Parts of the asphalt still exist.

First we went to the Dete area again but on a different side than last night. We were looking for cape buffalo. We saw no fresh signs. Izak got word of a monster buffalo at the Kana 6 area. We packed everybody up and drove there. After about an hour of stalking, Izak spotted one of the biggest tracks he had seen in a long time. We followed the tracks through a valley and to a water hole. There were fresh and old tracks. Fresh and old dung. Izak said based on the dung, he could tell that the buff had traveled the same path three days in a row. Probably around 6 pm. We made a plan to come back here this afternoon and set up, with the wind, for an ambush hunt for Jim. We then traveled to the Cwayi River to try to find JR A BUFFALO. WE DROVE AROUND for about two hours without seeing any fresh sign of buffalo. We did see a huge baboon bent over another one, if you know what I mean. LOL. WHEN we got into the dried up river bottom, we jumped several Bush buck. That happens to be on JR's list. We got out of the truck and started a stalk down the river bottom. Now I'm gonna tell you, after hearing Izak story about the last croc he killed, every time we walked past a large pocket of water, I am cognizant of the possibility of crocodiles. No Bush buck, so back to camp for lunch at 1.



Back out at 4pm to go back over to Kana 6 area, After that huge footed cape buffalo. Our Scout for Kana 6 never showed up. Izak had to drive to get cell coverage so he could call Pedro to get permission to hunt without the scout. He got permission and the hunt was on. We stalked to the back of the dam of the water hole where the buff had been watering. We got there and settled in at 5:30pm. By 6:30, it was good and dark with no animals in sight. We stayed until 9, hunting in the dark, hoping the Dagga Boy would come in. That's the Nick-name of all old bull cape buffalo. We headed back to the truck in the lion and elephant infested Bush, in the pitch black dark of the night. Jim pulled back and let go of a nasty caisha thorn Bush. It unexpectedly catapulted me in the forehead. Blood dripping down my face. Dayshavoo of my Kentucky hunt where the buckle of my safety harness catapulted back into my nose while I was climbing down a tree in the dark.

Anyway we got back to the truck without getting eaten or trampled. On the way back to camp, we went through road block number 25 BTW. The police here are relentless. And this time we got a legitimate citation. Our right back brake light was out. Ticket, \$20. Back at camp, CJ got the pipes fixed, the generator fixed and the well pump motor belt adjusted. So it was a welcome pleasure to finally take a shower after three days with no water.

Day 20 Today I got up at 4 to leave at 5:30 going after that huge footed Dagga Boy. We found tracks and started stalking. Found dung that was 4 hours old.

One hundred more yards and we spotted him laying down. He must have been there bedded down for the 4 hours. Unfortunately he spotted us before we spotted him. You guessed it, he jumped up and boogered off. We continued stalking. After several hours, he had calmed back down and we caught up with him again. We saw him two more times. No shooting opportunity. The wind changed. It was wrong for continued stalking. We decided to back off. We went back and built a blind at the water hole in hopes of catching him while he waters in two days or so. Give him a chance to settle back down. Next, we drove back to the Dete 1 valley area looking for elephant and buff tracks. We didn't see any fresh ones that were big enough. We then drove to the Dete 2 hunting concession. No fresh tracks there either. Back to camp for lunch. The sweat bees sure were bad this morning. My tan must really be getting dark. At least on my face and fore arms. I was in a general store buying supplies today when another white man came into the store. I over herd the store owner tell him that he was the only white man to ever come into his store. And this was the fourth time I had been in there. LOL Every time we drive into a small village we see the same Rag man. I don't know how else to describe him. It is 100 degrees and he is wearing all these rags. But anyway, it doesn't matter where we go or how far we travel to get there. Boom he shows up. He really gets around and I would like to know, HOW?





While we were hunting this morning, without asking, Rueben came to our camp and swapped an old belt he had for our new well pump belt that CJ HAD FINALLY adjusted and got running right. He said he needed the new one for his well pump where he lives. Anyway he did it and didn't tell anyone. Jim started a shower right before lunch and after he got all soaped up, that old belt broke and we were without water again. This afternoon we went to the Antoinette area again for a trophy elephant. The moment we got there our jeep had a flat tire, again. After changing it we started hunting. We saw several cow and calves and a couple medium size bull Elephants just before dark. We then watched a water hole for two hours after dark. We gave up here and went to the Simba area to hunt that water hole all night. We only have five more days to hunt so we are utilizing all day and night. We ate dinner, elephant steaks and they were fantastic, then hunted the water hole all night. Only cows and calves came in. As I'm lying on the ground at this water hole all night. I was gazing at the stars of the African constellation. As I'm watching falling stars and the milky way, I think of how blessed I am to have a job that allows me to have such an adventure.

Day 21 Left this morning to try and find buffalo. At 10:44 had to stop and fix stuck brake shoes on the back right wheel. Wheel and tire was smoking. Finally

got it fixed.



Went back to camp for lunch and shower and nap. Izak and Jim are hunting for that big footed Dagga Boy in a blind just the two of them tonight. So the rest of us have the evening off. We only thought we had the night off. Izak's plan worked. Just after dark, the Dagga Boy inched his way in to their right. He circled and started to come on from behind them. They had set up so the wind was directly in their face. So once he got directly behind them, it would be all over. He got within 7 yards of Izak's chair just to his right. Then he wondered back farther to their right and slowly made his way to the water. Had he gone five more yards in the direction he was headed, he would have wined them. He walked 20 yards straight in front of Jim. The moon was half masked. Jim could see him clearly in his scope. He touch the trigger and put a slug right in his neck. Dropped him like a ton of bricks. A literal ton. They came and got JR, CJ and me so we could join the celebration.



This Dagga Boy had been caught by, not one but two different snares. One he broke off from his foot. This one had eat into his hoof very deep and his skin and meat and grown back around most of the cable. Some of the cable was sticking out of his leg. It had blood all around the cable that was imbedded into his leg.



The other snare had been around one of his horns. He had apparently broke that cable also, but the marks on his horn were very deep showing that it was a long struggle to get loose.



Day 22 Finally my turn to hunt. I loaded up all my gear and was ready to leave at 5:00am. I soon found out that Izak had gotten a call right before he went to bed. They told him of a group of Dagga Boys that have been in the same area for four days. And the good thing is this area hadn't been hunted all year. CHANGE OF PLANS. We are now hunting the Kana 8 area for a buffalo for JR. We found all kinds of fresh tracks. You could tell from all the tracks and dung that they had indeed been there for four days and there are a lot of them. We stalked them for about two hours until the wind shifted. We decided to call it a morning. We drug the roads and made a plan. We are coming back here first thing in the morning. It is a long drive so we are leaving at 4am from our camp. We did a little more scouting along the river and then went back to camp for a nap before the evening hunt where I will be finally elephant hunting.

Not 30 minutes into our nap, Izak got a call from the scout from the Kana 8 area. He told him that he had spotted the buffalos and they were bedded down. So we hurried back to the area and started stalking to where they were bedded. They were not there any more but they left some fresh dung there. We got on their tracks and kept going. It wasn't long and we spotted them but not before they spotted us. The race was on. We stalked them for 3 more hours. They went through some cane breaks like what I had seen many times before. It's similar to our cane breaks except the leaves are sharp as razors. I have Nick named them Satan's tongues. The difference between this batch and all the others is this one was 8 feet tall and 100 yards long. Cutting me all over the face and arms. Anyway, we stayed on their tracks till dark. We spotted them 2 more times before we had to call it a night. Back to camp to make a plan for tomorrow morning. At dinner it was decided to go back to Deter 2 so I could finally hunt elephant. YAY!

Day 23 After dinner, while sitting around the camp fire, Reuben called Izak to tell him that a herd of over 2,000 buffalo just migrated onto his property. Izak said they do this every year but they're just passing through. They'll be gone in one day. We must take advantage of tomorrow and go after this group. No elephant hunting this morning for me. When we got to the road where this herd of buffalo were suppose to be, there was a sign warning not to go down the road on foot because of lion, elephant AND Buffalo. LOL.



When we finally got to the property that had the 2000 cape buffalo, they were all bedded down in the road. Right on the property line. The road and the brush was covered in black. Black Cape Buffalo. As we approached, they all got up and run off. The wrong way. Back across into the national forest. Next we went to Kana 6 to get back on that group of buffs. Found tracks but nothing fresh. Had lunch and went back to Dete 2 where we saw lots of elephant but no trophy. We don't have a non trophy tag for that area for me. Back to Antoinette to try to locate that trophy elephant. On our way there we saw a group of 10 or 11 huge bull sables. Tonight was the first time in the Antoinette area that we didn't see any elephant. We even stayed two hours after dark at the biggest water hole but no luck. We did see another big cheetah and 11 giraffes.



We drug the roads around Jijeema and Simba in the dark on our way back to our camp. The current plan is to check the roads for tracks at first light. We do have non trophy permits for these two areas, so if we see tacks there, I will finally begin hunting.

Day 24 We drove all the roads that we drug last night around Jijeema and Simba and didn't see a buff or elephant track. Next we went back to Kana 6 where the other buff herd lives. Found some tracks and started following them. Found some 4 hour old dung. Continued following the tracks. In about 200 yards, we found some 10 minute old dung. They must had bedded down for a while and were up feeding again. Then Izak spotted them feeding in the thick brush about 100 yards in front. After about an hour of very slow stalking, JR was 20 yards from the buffs but it was so thick everybody was on hands and knees and could only see hoofs and bellies. They heard a twig snap under somebody's knee and off they went. 2 hours later, Izak and Jacob, the tracker, had us within 100 yards again. 30 minutes later we were at 45 yards and again crawling on hands and knees. They were now in the somewhat open but in tall grass with their heads down. Very difficult to tell bulls from cows. Finally a bull lifted his head for about 3 seconds and Izak saw him. JR didn't see him. Izak was trying to describe which one he was, but they were all moving about and grazing and before you knew it, which cup was the peanut under trick had

everyone fooled again. Before the bull lifted his head again to disclose the correct cup, they had all grazed off out of site. With the wind shift, no chance of getting close again today. Back to camp for a very late lunch and out again for elephant. A plan had to be made but Izak was out of ideas. Believe it or not a thunder storm was brewing and they hadn't had rain in 6 months. This was definitely going to have to play into Izak plans. We decided to go to the water hole at Jonathan's area and stay the night hunting for a trophy elephant for Jim. On the way there we drove through Dete 1 where we spotted the herd of 2000 buffalo again. They were feeding in the valley. We needed to back out and get the wind right. We backed up and Izak planned the stalk. It was getting dark fast and we had about 20 minutes of daylight left. Once we got the wind in our face, the herd was feeding directly away from us but at a slow pace. We cut through the brush at an angle keeping the wind in our face. It took about 30 minutes but we finally were in the correct position. Only problem was it was too dark to film. Izak scoped out the herd with his binoculars and found a tremendous bull. He was over 200 yards away and JR didn't feel comfortable making that shot in the dark. It was unanimously decided to leave the herd, and pick up their tracks at 5:30 am tomorrow morning and get a shot in the daylight hours. If they continue in the direction they are headed, they will still be in a territory that we have permits to hunt.



The water hole we were going to hunt all night for Jim's elephant wasn't far from where this herd was headed, so we decided to scratch that idea. We are going to get a good night sleep and spend our last morning stalking this herd of buffalo. Izak told us that since it was so late at night, they would be bedding down soon and nothing else but lions would bother them. So pray that lions don't locate them and harass them all night and run them out of the country. Izak said that when Buffalo group up in herds this big, it is very probable that lions pick up their scent and the entire pride stalks them and gets an easy kill on the ones in the back of the herd. I was praying hard this night. When we got back to camp, we discovered the new motor Izak bought for the well pump was too strong for the old rusted shaft that turned the pumped. You guessed it, it broke the pump shaft. So since we're without water again, and we are getting back to camp at a decent hour, Izak took us to a hotel so we could all take showers. My shower was scalding hot. After I got in the shower, the hot water changed and it literally scalded my head. When I reached to quickly turn the hot water volume down, the shower head fell off and hit me in the head. Now this scalding water is coming out in a straight stream instead of a spray. I have to jump out of the shower to keep from peeling all my skin off. Anyway, after a not so nice scalding hot shower, we were all ready for buffalo stew, compliments of Jim. It was delicious. Bed time. Two things I've learned about eating Wild African animals for a month. First, your poop doesn't smell the same AND SECOND, IT ISN'T THE SAME COLOR! Lol Talk to you tomorrow.

Day 25: We got up super early today. I was up at 3am. We did not want to miss this huge herd and a golden opportunity. Once the sun rose enough to see, it was very foggy. The fog was so bad that we drove right past the buffalo herd without seeing them. We didn't know we had drove right past them. We doubled back worried that lions had run them off. We got out of the jeep and began to look for them on foot. Now you can't imagine what a herd of 2000 buffalo looks like. And I know you can't imagine enough fog low to the ground to cause a group of hunters to walk right past 2000 buffalo at 40 yards to your right. But that is exactly what we did. Well not all 2000 of them. Only a couple of hundred. Now the wind was in our face and slightly blowing from our left to our right. So when we got just Past the back 200 buffs, and they were on our right, they winded us and jumped up from their bedded positions. These 200 ran

toward the other 2000. They were about to cause a stampede. But here is where the fog helped us. The other Buffs were confused and a little reluctant to run for no reason in the fog. So the 200 ran off into the brush, but the rest just stood up and watched. We cut hard to our left and went into the brush, anticipating that the rest of the herd would eventually follow these 200. we got into position. But the rest of the heard JUST STOOD THERE WATCHING THE 200. We finally decided that the herd had settled back down, so we started CUTTING TO OUR RIGHT AGAIN. We got back to the road and started walking down it toward the rest of the 1800 buffs. Izak looked down at the road at our tracks from just about 30 minutes ago when we had made this same hike in the thick fog. In our tracks were Lion tracks. Yes, in our tracks from less than 30 minutes ago, was a huge male and several other lion trackssss. So now, not only are we stalking these cape buffalo, but we are keenly aware of what might be stalking us. As a minimum they are definitely competing with us over the buffalo and maybe they actually have something else on their mind? So, we quickly finished our approach. Izak spotted the Huge Buffalo that was either the one we had been stalking for 6 days or he was at least just a big. He turned broad side. Izak ranged him to be just over 200 yards. JR took aim and squeezed off a round. The muzzle break almost blew out my brains! Let's just say, it was louder than normal. The Buff took 2, maybe 3 steps and then he collapsed. What a shot! JR dropped him, almost in his tracks. The last morning of the last day of the hunt and JR finished his list of animals with a tremendous trophy Cape Buffalo. After taking thousands of pictures and the closing of the video, the skimmers went to work. They cut him up so we could manage to get him in the back of the jeep, along with all the trackers, skimmers and hunters. And of coarse, the cameraman. (That would be me!)

That afternoon we packed all our gear and had a wonderful dinner to celebrate a very successful hunt. The next day, on our way to Victoria falls, we stopped at our 28th Road Block and paid our \$20. When we got to Vic Falls, I met Obama's long lost son. I mean his is the spitting image. Looks to be about 25 or 30 and looks just like him. I had president's son carry my bags to my room LOL.



The next day, on the way to the Vic Falls airport, we were stopped by our 29th Road Block. However, CJ talked himself out of that \$20 ticket. Had a great time but, Glad to be HOME!