



## GUNSITE

I'm just back from Mozambique, and, I'm happy to say, we successfully took a cape buffalo with the Super Redhawk (.454 Casull). The ammo was spectacular: Barnes Busters, 325 grains, going about 1650 fps. The hunt was Nov. 11-18; it's for the Ruger Hunting Adventures TV show, and will air sometime in 2010.

It was a tough hunt, and even the cameraman said the only one harder than this was a trip he took to one of the central Asian countries (one of the 'stans) for Marco Polo sheep....having said that, we all did our best not to whine too

much! The difficulty of it all, for me anyway, just made the success of the overall hunt that much sweeter! Really! I feel like we really accomplished a lot.

It took four solid days to get the buffalo. We were the last hunt of the season – so these animals were already wary and keen-eyed. It's just before the rainy season (in fact, the first rains came in great thunderstorms on two of our seven days), vegetation is (relatively) low – that means good visibility for us, but also for them. Last but not least, it was warm. Between 100 and 115 degrees, and really humid...even I was \*perspiring.\* :-) (Seriously though, we each got dehydrated during the first few days of the hunt...and a couple of us had some heat exhaustion issues early on...but the entire team pulled through in the end! Read on!)

In the 1.5 million acre concession we were in, buffalo are best hunted in either the thick "Suni" forest (named for the small antelope that thrives there), or the vast, open, swampy floodplain. Because I wanted to be close (I figured 20-30 yards was my optimum range – not too far, but just as importantly, not too close!....) we first tried the forest.

Complete with hanging vines covered in thorns of all shapes and sizes, as well as deadfalls obstructing your every step, the forest offered the best concealment. We did manage to stalk to within 35 yards of a nice (39"-40") youngster, but he was a soft-top, so after a bit of filming and practicing, we left him to grow up some. In our other attempts though, the animals led us deeper into denser and denser foliage, and, combined with the dead leaves carpeting the ground (a little like trying to stalk across a floor of Doritos), hunting became extremely difficult. Although we were after smaller groups, maybe even a lone bull, the conditions allowed even the most oblivious of buffalo to check us before we even saw anything.

On the third day of forest work, bumping yet another herd as we tripped and crackled our way through the forest, we decided to change locations. We headed off to a fly camp 20 miles away, to hunt what they call "The Swamp."

The Swamp is actually a vast flood plain, and really quite picturesque....flat as a pancake, except for large groves of papyrus and sawgrass. I'd never seen papyrus before, and it's impressive. It's a reed-like plant that can be so dense, you literally can't see more than one foot in front of you, in some places - plus, it grows to 16 feet tall. They say that when buffalo get into the papyrus, the odds are REALLY stacked against you (happily, we didn't find out).

The sawgrass was interesting too – it's the real stuff, where if you traverse it in one direction, all is smooth and lovely—but go the other way, and the serrated edges on the long leaves can cut like, well, a saw. It's not really a "grass," and grows to 9 feet tall, in massive clumps....so much so that sawgrass regularly clogs waterways.....

Both of these plants grow in watery, marshy, swampy areas....but at this time of year, the end of the dry season, we had both icky-sticky mud (two of our party sank in to their knees, and the group before us lost an entire boot), as well as dried and cracked mud-dirt, forming crevices large enough to grab a foot (we had three sprained/twisted ankles among us).

To negotiate all this, we used all-terrain vehicles called "Argo's," but I have to tell you that at one point even the PH, Craigh Hamman, said, "Argos are better than walking — but just...." These are eight-wheeled, tracked little tanks, meant to get people and gear places. Comfort is scoffed at. The bouncing was so severe that we all thought about bailing and just walking alongside the Argos at one point or another....I'm just glad that none of my diets have worked and that I have good \*padding\* where it counted. Seriously, the movement in the Argo was so bad that I actually worried about maintaining my zero on my handgun scope, and cradled revolver in my arms the entire time. Still, we actually got one Argo stuck in a hippo ditch once (that's why you always travel with TWO Argos, out in the swamp), and the other ground was so uneven that it pulled one of the tracks off another! I was glad to be able to ride.

And, we had ground to cover. We eventually worked our way to almost ten miles from our fly camp (which was already 20 miles from our main camp). It's not that there weren't any animals ... in fact, spotting buffalo in the vast and open Swamp was easy. We looked for birds, or simply, dust. Great swirls of dust in the distance marked herds of the rascals making their way across to munch or drink....the white cattle egrets did likewise. But it was just as easy for them to see us too. Not only was it open, but these animals congregated in much bigger numbers – which meant more sets of eyes. Add to that the papyrus and/or sawgrass that they favored for concealment, whenever spooked, and you can see we had our stalking cut out for us.

I didn't mean for this to get so long, but suffice it to say that our final stalk, at the very end of Day Four, was half on hands-and-knees,

and the other half bent over 90 degrees at the waist. We spied a large herd just beginning to move and feed, making its way from one open area, through a couple of smallish, linked, sawgrass and papyrus islands to another open area.....the main herd itself was too big (in the hundreds), and too far for me to get into my 30-yard-preferred position, but Craigh thought there might be some stragglers for us to look over.

For that to happen, we had to crawl INTO the little islands so we could hide enough – get close enough – to assess the animals. At one point, we crawled (belly crawl, for me!) to inside 10 yards of a cow...and continued to slither by her to get around and look at the group following. I was tempted to peek and look her in the eye...but her smell was enough to tell me to keep my head down!

We snaked our way (and did I mention that cobras like to hang out in the papyrus?) to a spot where the vegetation was low enough for me (5'4" – me, not the vegetables), just about where the animals were crossing through the sawgrass and papyrus patches. Thankfully, there was a nice mature bull at the edge of the group (later, we paced it out at 32 yards).

I \*presented\* the Super Redhawk from the chest/crossdraw rig (thank goodness I practiced that, so there was a minimum of flailing), and hoisted it onto sticks (practiced that too), cocking the hammer as I came up (to hang onto this .454 Casull, I need to have a really good grip, and the single-action trigger position is the best for that).

It took just a moment for Craigh and me to confirm we both had the same bull in mind – and also to get a clear shot! These animals were snacking, and were all over each other getting to the choicest green shoots....and this "little" bunch numbered over 50 animals, we realized later (the bigger herd they were lagging behind had several hundred buffalo in it).

He was angled away from us, not the ideal broadside shot we'd hoped for, but a very doable quartering position. My first shot was into "the crease" – as Craigh instructed – behind the front right leg. It ended up being a good, high heart, hit. HOWEVER, (Lesson relearned for us buffalo-heads:) heart-shot animals sometimes don't know it, this is especially true of buffalo. This ruffian merely bucked his right leg out, hesitated for a nanosecond, and trotted off with his pals. Interestingly, the herd didn't bolt and stampede off – Craigh had warned me of this. He told me they often move off, then turn and face you again, as if wondering, "Who did that?" Here, they moved only another 20 yards away, but then hung together, a little more alert, but largely unimpressed. Harrumph, I thought, as I tracked him and shot again.

Unfortunately, I was now shooting through sawgrass. Do I know better? \*sigh\* Lesson relearned: avoid trying to bust through stuff, no matter how robust you think your ammo is, or how dainty you think the foliage is. Shot #2 was deflected, and though it also hit, it didn't put him down.

Now the herd wasn't quite sure what was going on – so they milled around more as they continued to put distance between us. I moved a few feet to the side, to get out of that darned sawgrass/papyrus stuff, and get a clear shot. Now I was having serious issues identifying my buffalo, and thank goodness for sharp PH's! Craigh was on him, even as the entire rest of the herd seemed to swallow him up. He was seriously ill, and not moving well, but he was constantly obscured by other bodies.

All of sudden, there he was, in the open. Broadside. The other buffalo seemed to melt away; no one behind, no one in front....The reticle steadied, and I focused on it, and on applying smooth, consistent pressure to my trigger – just like I say to do in class!

On this shot, center of vitals, the buffalo bucked, stumbled, and keeled over on its side, legs out. Unbelievably to ME, we later paced it at over 100 yards. Clearly, he was mortally wounded from the previous shots (and I don't want to suggest that ANYone take a shot at that distance with a handgun, on such an animal). Clearly, I was thankful that I decided to go with a scope for this hunt, instead of "manning up" and using ironsights, as I had originally planned. The front sight blade would have occluded the whole animal!

Now we all advanced on the buffalo's butt, me, Craigh, and Ken Jorgensen, my pal from Ruger and my appointed rifle "back-up" (yes, Craigh had rifle in hand too). I big-step-little-stepped my way in, delivering the insurance shots at Craigh's direction. (I'll never forget this: as we moved in, he actually said, "If he charges, he'll have to get up, turn around, and then come for us – and you'll have to beat me to the draw!" I'm still not sure if he was kidding or not.)

For a long moment, all three of us stood there, shoulder to shoulder...I'm not sure what the other two were thinking, but for me, I wasn't quite sure that it was done, and wasn't quite ready to let myself heave that sigh of relief and triumph. Finally, Craigh looked at me and smiled for the first time in four days....hands were shaken, back slapped, hugs all around...

Let me just add that through ALL of this, cameraman John Magillivray slogged 50 pounds of stuff (literally) along AND managed to get this all on film! It won't air until next year, but I saw a bit of the shooting-and-buffalo part....he did an unbelievable job. Actually, it's amazing that all of us (Team Ruger, as I dubbed us) were able to get this done! PH, tracker, me, Ken, cameraman.....it's not easy to get within 32 yards of a buffalo under any conditions, much less with a small army.

But again, that just makes it THAT MUCH MORE of an achievement for us all. As Jim Wilson says (I know he'll want to credit Finn Aagaard with this but Jim said it to me), it's a \*Team Effort\*!!