

This bull was taken on the Zambezi River with an Encore in 375 JDJ. Cor-Bon's 270 grain DPX bullet saved the day

ADVENTURE ON THE ZAMBEZI

Goals are a good thing. I've always believed that if you didn't have goals, we would tend to float through life aimlessly. Regardless whether it's your personal, professional, financial, or any other segment, goals have a way of keeping us focused on an objective. It's kind of like the carrot before the horse, always something to keep us going. As a goal-oriented person, these personal goals have given me some much needed motivation at certain times in my hunting career. I wouldn't expect my personal goals to mean anything to anyone; just a driving force for me to reckon with. I'm sure most of you have goals and dreams related to hunting.

For whatever reason in this objective fulfilling quest, I wanted to take the dangerous seven. Those African critters include rhino, lion, leopard, Cape buffalo, elephant, crocodile, and hippo. In previous years I had somehow managed to take all of the game mentioned except hippo and all of them had been taken with a handgun no less. Of course that and fifty cents will get you a cup of coffee! Personal goals, you know, it means nothing to anyone else and shouldn't. For whatever reason the hippo had not been on my radar screen until now, so it was time to organize an adventure on the mighty Zambezi River in Mozambique.

Since Americans have to fly into South Africa before traveling on to Mozambique, my wife and I spent a few days hunting for species that had eluded me in the past. Granted, these animals were unique in that you normally don't go to Africa for copper springbuck, Barbary sheep, Southern roan, and genet, but it was a fun-filled week chasing these different species in a variety of environments from the red dust savannah to more mountainous venues. Plus, it gave us an opportunity to recover from that

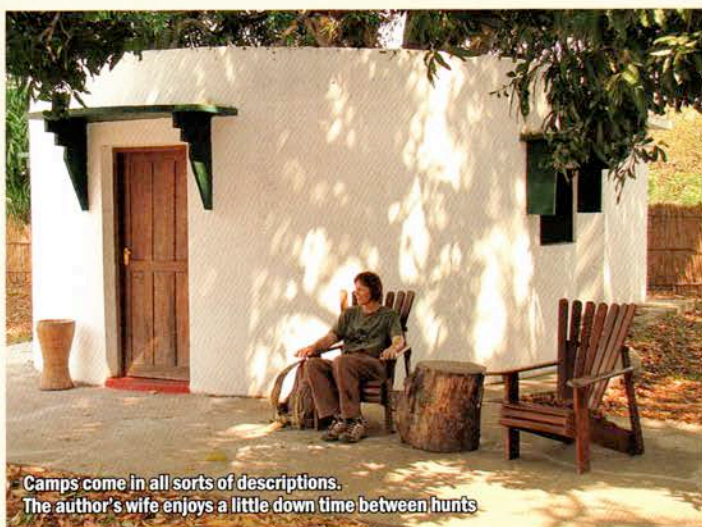
dreaded jet lag and give our bodies time to adjust. This first leg of our journey also gave me time to get confidence in both handguns I was shooting with a little trigger time.

As we returned to Johannesburg to catch our flight on to Mozambique, we bumped into my friend, Craig Boddington. Most of you probably know Craig as a well-respected writer and TV personality. He and Kelly McMillan (McMillan stocks) were hosting four other hunters on a buffalo and plains game hunt. Coincidentally we were all heading for the same camp in Coutada 11, operated by Mark Haldane's Zambezi Delta Safaris. Craig and I knew each other from back in our trapshooting days during the 70's. This was surely going to be a fun trip!

Once we landed in Beira, we endured the customs and firearms formalities without too much drama. A charter flight was waiting to escort us to our remote camp in the bush. Flying over the landscape



Things are not always perfect on any given hunting trip. Tires do go flat even in Africa!



Camps come in all sorts of descriptions. The author's wife enjoys a little down time between hunts



Following spoor on safari is exciting and common. A good tracker is invaluable

you could easily notice fires burning all around. This burning is actually necessary to rejuvenate grass for wildlife. The hour long flight enabled us to get a feel for the terrain and ended uneventful on a dirt runway. Now the fun begins.

My wish list on this hunt was rather small. On previous hunts I had taken most of the game found in this area so I was looking only for specific game including Red duiker, suni, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, and a big bull hippo. Boddington had told me earlier that suni and Red duiker were crawling around all over the place. He wasn't joking! These little guys are found in few locales but I would go out on a limb and say their sheer numbers in this concession would be difficult to top anywhere.

Kobus, our professional hunter, had drawn the short straw and ended up with me. The first morning while hunting in the sand forest, we continued bumping in to suni and Red duiker. Kobus kept me off the trigger most of the morning but before noon I couldn't take it any longer. At the moment I was shooting a 375 JDJ, more than enough gun for the diminutive suni. There were, however, Cape buffalo in the forest so it was comforting to carry the big gun. When an old male suni stood broadside, I sent the 270 grain Cor-Bon DPX bullet through his shoulders. Our first Mozambique animal was heading to the salt. These little pygmy antelopes are quite unique tipping the scales a whooping ten pounds or so. Nevertheless, they are challenging to hunt being shy and wary.

While hunting the forest was a neat experience, the open savannah area of the floodplain was intriguing. Here in this vast open landscape where palm trees dot the flat as a pancake terrain, we were hoping to find Lichtenstein hartebeest. This homely-looking creature has a face only a mother could love. The floodplain yielded an unbelievable amount of reed buck including some whooper rams. Sable was spotted frequently not only here but just about everywhere we hunted. When you got tired of looking at reed buck, oribi were plentiful and seemed to be running behind every palm tree. It is amazing what an aggressive anti-poaching campaign will do for an area like Coutada 11. The wildlife flourishes. Our first attempt at hartebeest was so unsuccessful it left us scratching our heads. One big bull in a herd of twenty or so animals was so busy chasing a potential girlfriend, he

ignored the fact we were trying to get within range. After lying in the burnt grass for thirty minutes or so I was covered with black from head to toe.

As the days drifted by too quickly, we continued seeing a multitude of game including several herds of Cape buffalo. Craig and his group had put eight good bulls in the skinning shed. Not to mention two nyala over thirty inches! This area has some monster nyala. One of the hunters took a giant of a warthog. We observed a ton of these porkers. Sable are not particularly huge here but 36-38 inches are commonplace with the odd 40 inch taken on occasion. On a couple of occasions we bumped into large herds of eland. The big bulls were most impressive. Bushpig, blue duiker, a few impala, bushbuck, and zebra, with a mix of the other animals already mentioned kept us observing game all the time.

We headed back to the floodplain to look for the hartebeest who had given us the slip. Bulls are territorial so we concentrated our efforts in the same vicinity where he eluded us. On the way we spotted an old male Red duiker. There are approximately eighteen different species of forest duikers with most of them being reclusive. As I looked through the Leupold scope, you could see this Natal Red duiker was well-past his prime; the exact type of animal we were hoping to find. One shot from the XP-100 and we were quickly taking pictures. When we finished with our photo session, immediately we continued to the wide open space of the savannah looking for our hartebeest. Just before calling it quits at lunch time the herd was spotted. Partially hidden behind a pocket of palm trees, I found the herd bull and sent a .308 Winchester through an opening in the trees. The Nosler 165 grain AB performed well and we were headed back to the skinning shed.

With nothing left except the hippo, I became a bit apprehensive about the whole matter; game jitters I reckon. We drove to the Zambezi River the following morning towing a 16 foot aluminum boat. Upon arriving at the river we were greeted by several women washing their laundry. With a river full of crocs and hippos it didn't seem like a good idea but I'm sure these folks have been doing this for decades. As we motored upstream, Shorty, our tracker, was on the lookout for a pod of hippo. Once in a while we would come across some local fisherman in their dugout canoe. Shorty we would ask them if they knew where the hippo were hanging out. It seemed



Suni are shy animals that thrive in the thick forest. This dandy male was taken with a 375 JDJ from 25 yards



This Lichtenstein hartebeest fell to the author's XP-100 chambered in .308 Winchester. The shot was a tad over 200 yards



Local fisherman showing where hippo had been spotted



Shorty scanning the river for hippo

like every lead we received turned out to be a dead-end with nothing to show. A few females were spotted during our two hour ride upstream but no bulls were to be found. The occasional croc sunning himself on a sandy bar reminded me we were no longer in Missouri! After lunch we worked our way back toward the launching site still looking for a bull. It was late in the afternoon when we arrived back to our landing but Kobus wanted to take a run downstream and look around before calling it a day. Fifteen minutes later we spotted a small group of hippo with one good bull in the mix. Since it was late in the afternoon, Kobus did not want to shoot at this hour and risk running out of daylight before possible recovery. Sure sounded like a good idea to me so we made a plan for the following morning.

As we unloaded the boat bright and early I noticed a croc sunning himself on the opposite sandbar. Meanwhile, two women were splashing their laundry on a large rock in the water. Something about this picture just didn't seem right but who am I to say anything? We motored downstream and sure enough the hippos were out on a shallow bar in the middle of the river in the same proximity from the previous afternoon. We shut the motor off and drifted quietly down to a patch of reeds in the water. Unfortunately the hippos were situated in the middle of the wide river too far to shoot from either bank. I checked the rangefinder and didn't like what I saw; 170 yards. Before leaving for this trip I had the gun sighted-in dead-on at 100 yards. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would attempt a brain shot on a hippo any further. I told Kobus that shooting this far made me uncomfortable. The only alternative was to push the boat directly downstream to another patch of weeds which did not gain us much ground. The hippos were uncomfortable with this also and slid into deeper water. We placed a Pelican box containing a satellite phone on top of the weeds then a sandbag on top of the box. I stayed in the boat and tried to rest the handgun. Boy was this a chore! Eventually the hippos slowly came back to their sunning area. Kobus insisted that I get ready to take the shot even though he knew I was out of my comfort zone. The big bull was facing toward us slightly. Kobus studied the position of the animal and told me to put the bullet in his eye socket. From the angle the bull was laying, this shot would

Getting a hippo in position for photos is not as easy as one may think. Oh yeah, there are crocs in the river too



place the 270 grain DPX bullet through the brain. Holding the crosshairs just above the eye, I nervously tugged the trigger. You could hear the bullet "thump" clearly and that's the moment things got interesting!

Immediately all hippo scattered for deeper water including the bull. We knew instantly I had missed the brain. The bull disappeared in the water momentarily then like a submarine, came bursting out with gallons of blood gushing from his nostrils. He dove back in the water not offering another shot. Fifteen seconds later he arose again, blood still gushing from his nostrils. Kobus pushed the boat toward the bull hoping we could get another bullet in him. The big bull was heading toward land, exploding out of the water every

few seconds. I tried a couple of shots to no avail. The boat was simply moving too much for a steady shot. We were over 100 yards from the hippo as he continued to bust out of the water, blood spewing from his nose, in an attempt to make land. It was as if he was drowning. This episode lasted four or five minutes tops. The last time he came out of the water you could see he was about finished. When he disappeared that last time everything got quiet, eerie quiet, as we drifted downstream. Kobus got his gun ready. My wife made the comment she hoped the bull didn't try to get in our boat. I could detect a ripple in the water and asked Kobus to get us closer. Sure enough, our bull was finished. We all breathed a sigh

of relief! It was an experience I'll never forget.

Kobus and I both were interested in where the bullet hit and how far it penetrated. When we finally managed to get the hippo to a shallow bar, several local fishermen were on the scene to help us. My shot hit a little low of the eye socket and luckily the bull was almost facing towards us. This position allowed the bullet to penetrate a great deal. Unfortunately we never could find the Cor-Bon DPX bullet. Kobus and Shorty determined the 270 grain slug made it to the hippo's lungs. Thanks to the construction of this premium bullet, we were able to recover this bull. We were all very thankful. I was lucky. Sometimes it just works out. Excitement such as this doesn't happen every day.....and that's a good thing!

Several reedbeek were taken for community quota where all the meat is given to the local people who appreciate the protein



After the hunt a few birds were taken to feed Shorty and his family