

LEVER-AFRICA

MARLIN MAN GOES
TO MOZAMBIQUE.
BY RICHARD MANN



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Everyone has a little cowboy in 'em. That's what I told an executive from Marlin Firearms a few years back, while he speculated on the continued popularity of lever-guns when everyone wanted an AR-15. From the time we hatch, it's the cowboy that captures our imagination. They're like super heroes who are real. No, they cannot fly and don't have special powers, but nothing encapsulates the American spirit like the cowboy. It's that gun-slinging, hat-wearing, tougher-than-leather persona that stirs something deep inside us.

If you're a hunter, Africa should stir something inside you, too. Our American West is still wild and rugged, but it's not as hard and wild as places in Africa, such as Mozambique. While taking a dangerous game shooting class at Gunsite Academy, Gunsite instructor Il Ling New told me she and gunwriter Jim Wilson were going to Mozambique to hunt buffalo. Already knowing the answer, Il Ling grinned and asked, "Would you like to go with us?"

I eased back in my chair, pushed my hat up my forehead and I grinned right back at her.

"So, what gun are you going to take?" she asked.

Still grinning I said, "The biggest one I've got; my .45-70 Gov."

The African buffalo is a big critter—with a reputation for being belligerent.

If you don't shoot it right, it gets difficult to convince it to give up. Every year hunters are gored or stomped into blood puddles by Cape buffalo. Imagine a 1,500-pound UFC fighter with horns and you get the picture. However, contrary to popular opinion, a Cape buffalo is no harder to kill than any other animal if you put a good bullet where it's supposed to go. Make a bad shot and, well, you have a cow of a different color. Maybe Craig Boddington said it best in his book, "Buffalo"; "I'm not at all sure you can hurt a buffalo, but I'm very sure you can kill him."

We were hunting with Zambeze Delta Safaris—a topnotch outfitter with a great reputation for putting its clients on trophy animals, particularly buffalo. Our area was slightly northwest of the Marromeu Reserve, which is on the eastern coast of Africa. Here, buffalo can be found in the forest, but are thick as thieves in the swamps nearer the reserve. In these grassy, water-logged plains, they live with elephants and hippos, and crocodiles longer than a limousine.

BUFF BALLISTICS

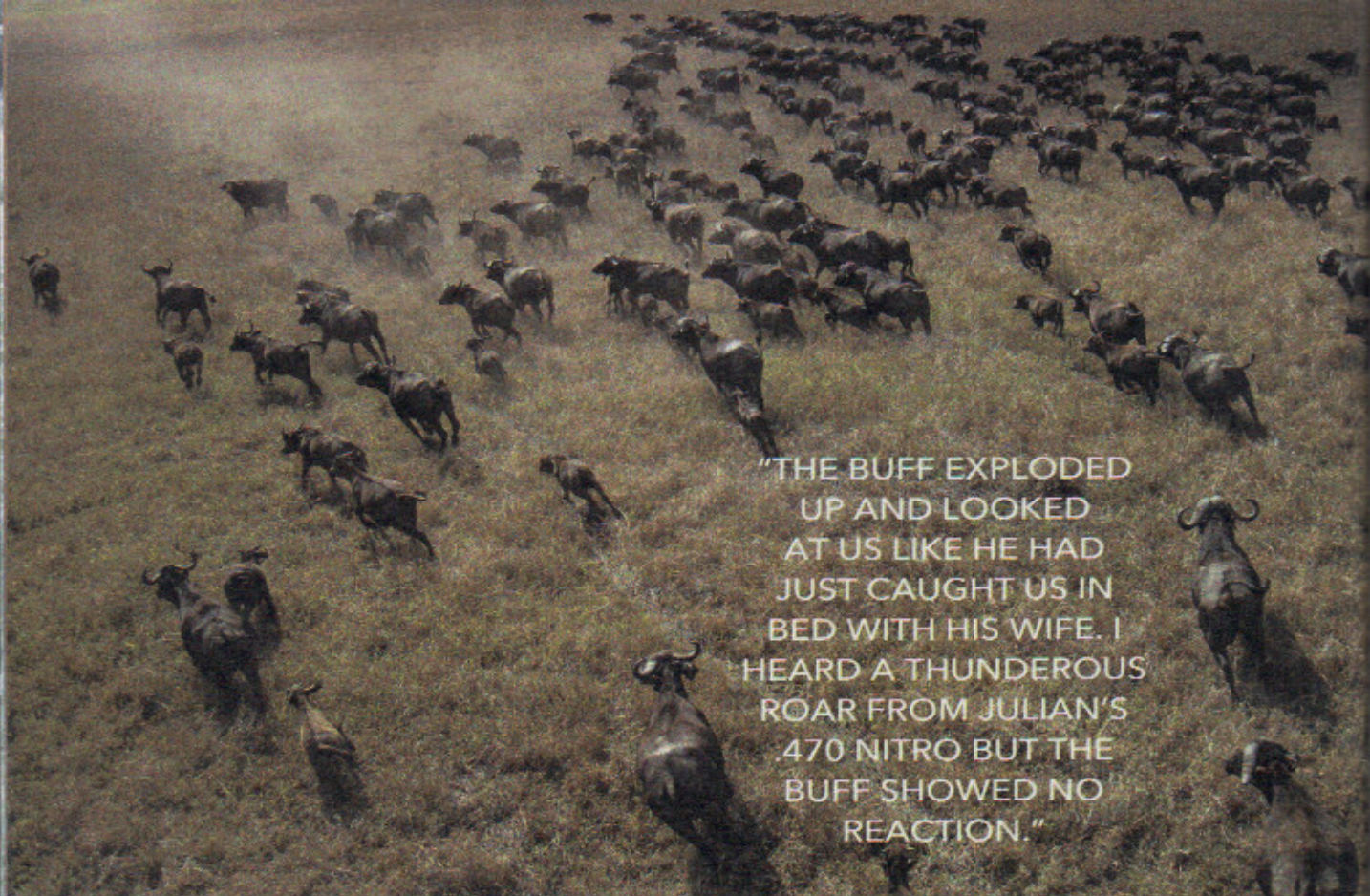
Before daylight, Jim and I loaded up in an old, tank-tracked Swedish military vehicle and headed out. These surplus contraptions allow Zambeze Delta hunters to cover a lot of ground and water. Yes, they swim! Three hours

later we'd spotted a herd of about 200 buffalo, and Jim was up first because he'd won the coin toss. It couldn't have gone better. After a 20-minute stalk we were within spitting distance of the herd. Secluded by tall saw grass, we motionlessly waited for 5 minutes before Jim smacked a superb bull in the heart with a Barnes Triple Shock bullet from his .375 H&H Mag. The brute stumbled off about 15 yards and promptly fell over dead.

Simple enough I thought. By noon we had Jim's bull loaded and were looking for another herd. It didn't take long before we were off on another stalk. Once again we used the saw grass as cover, but that's also where the water was. I'm talking waist-deep water that's as black as day-old coffee and smells about the same. We pushed through to within 50 yards of the herd. They saw us and stared us down. I felt like I'd just stepped onto a street in the bad part of town, facing an army of armed and dangerous gang members!

You might wonder if the 140 year-old .45-70 Gov. cartridge is "enough gun" for buffalo. The answer is yes—and no. Originally loaded with a 405 grain lead bullet that left the barrel at about 1,300 fps, the .45-70 Gov., though powerful at the time, was not an African buffalo buster. However, modern rifles, such as the Marlin 1895, can handle very powerful —

PHOTOS: RICHARD MANN



"THE BUFF EXPLODED UP AND LOOKED AT US LIKE HE HAD JUST CAUGHT US IN BED WITH HIS WIFE. I HEARD A THUNDEROUS ROAR FROM JULIAN'S .470 NITRO BUT THE BUFF SHOWED NO REACTION."

magnum like—.45-70 Gov. loads. Mine was stuffed with Buffalo Bore 430-grain hard-cast lead bullets, which left the 18½-inch barrel at almost 1,900 fps. That's nearly .458 Win. Mag. performance.

Generally, buffalo are first shot with a soft-point bullet—preferably broadside—with the hopes of inflicting as much internal damage as possible. Then, if necessary, follow-up shots are made with solids to guarantee as much penetration as possible. I didn't have that luxury. Hard-cast lead bullets are, in effect, solids. This meant I could take only a facing shot because my PH and I were concerned my bullets would shoot completely through a buffalo and injure another animal.

That left us with a dilemma. There we sat on the edge of the tall grass with about 500 eyes looking at us while we scanned the herd for a mature bull—one willing to face us head-on or step into the clear. It was hot. I was sweating profusely and the skeeters and tsetse flies were biting. About every 5 minutes a bull would start to move into a position for a shot. I'd put down my Swarovski binocular and ease into a

seated shooting position. Then, a cow or calf would get in the way or the bull would simply turn broadside or move back into the herd. Frustration! I felt like Tebow looking for a team.

This went on for 3 hours. Three hours! It was brutal. We couldn't move because there was always at least one buffalo watching us. My back hurt, my legs hurt, and I got a cramp and had to rub it out. I was thirsty, hungry and losing patience. And, to complicate matters, about 100 of the buffalo—some of the gang members—were working into the saw grass behind us. It was, to be honest, a bit scary and completely nerve wracking.

TIME TO ACT

Finally, with only an hour of daylight left, we knew we had to act. So, we stood up, hoping one of the bigger bulls would give us that notorious stare—allowing me to shoot him right in the throat. It didn't work that way. We stood up and there was no shot. After a few seconds the herd thundered off. My PH, Julian Moller, said, "Stand fast. I think they'll come back to check us out." He was right. All of a sudden

several hundred buffalo charged us. They stopped at about 60 yards and stood there like a bunch of cows looking at a new gate.

Julian picked out a mature bull and just as I got the crosshairs lined up, a calf stepped in front of him. Then, off they ran again, pulling the buffalo from the long grass behind us out as they ran by close enough to spit on. This happened two more times. The last time, I got a shot at a bull.

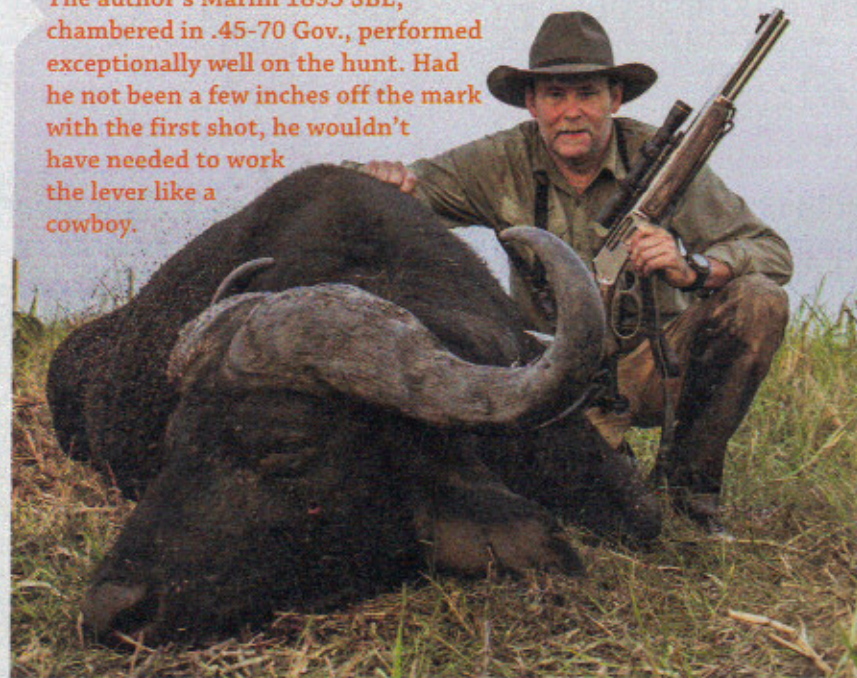
The shot was there. My aim was true. I was certain.

I was wrong.

It was a mistake I'll never forget. Immediately after the big Marlin roared, I heard the bullet smack. The buff stumbled, wheeled to his right and ran off with the rest of the herd. We ran after them, but our bull was lost in the dust and the stampede of blackness. After 200 yards I knew we had a problem, and my mouth was so dry I couldn't have licked a postage stamp.

We were losing light. Julian ran to fetch the swamp buggy, and we immediately took up the track. After about 800 yards we spotted the herd, with

The author's Marlin 1895 SBL, chambered in .45-70 Gov., performed exceptionally well on the hunt. Had he not been a few inches off the mark with the first shot, he wouldn't have needed to work the lever like a cowboy.



the wounded bull bringing up the rear, running like he'd broken the heel of his boot. Julian said, "Get another bullet in him! When I stop, shoot him!" He slammed on the brakes and I stood up and whacked the running bull in the rear quarter at about 120 yards. I levered the gun like John Wayne and hit him again. The buff swung to his right and headed into the tall grass. That's when I knew it was going to get worse.

We bailed out of the buggy, I turned the scope magnification down to 1X and shoved three rounds in the rifle, all with trembling hands. We could just see the bull's back behind a wall of grass 60 yards away. As we started to move in, rifles at the ready, he laid down. He was going to try to ambush us. It wouldn't be accurate to say I was scared of the wounded buff because I was sure we could stop him; Julian had his .470 Nitro double-gun and I had a full load in my .45-70 Gov. The fear was from the unknown: I didn't know what the buff was going to do; I didn't know what my PH was going to do; and I wasn't all that sure what I was going to do.

We closed to 20 feet and Julian—rather calmly, I might add—said, "Shoot him in the shoulder." When I did, things got Western. The buff exploded up and looked at us like he had just caught us

in bed with his wife. I heard a thunderous roar from Julian's .470 Nitro but the buff showed no reaction. I'd already cowboied the lever gun so I swung to the big black head, found the reticle and pressed the trigger. I quickly ran the lever but when the rifle leveled out the bull was down. I shot him two more times in the chest just because I thought it was the right thing to do.

We found my first shot had hit about 3 inches to the left of my point of aim. The bullet penetrated 4 feet along the right side of the spine, destroying the backstrap. Only 3 inches! Three inches to the right and it would've torn out the spine and dropped the bull where he stood. We also found Julian's bullet had struck the horn and glanced low through the buff's neck without hitting anything vital. It was the head shot from the lever gun that ended it.

I guess you could say I screwed up and then had to cowboy up to correct my mistake. Looking at the damage the .45-70 Gov. did to the buff, Julian said he wouldn't hesitate to trust the rifle or ammo again. I would do it again, too. But instead of being certain of my first shot, I'd be *absolutely* certain. That was Craig Boddington's advice. I'd heard it plainly, just failed to follow it. Cowboys can be stubborn like that. ■

BUFFALO GEAR FOR THE COWBOY

BY RICHARD MANN

The rifle I used in Mozambique was the same rifle I used for black bears in Alberta: a Marlin 1895 SBL, which is an all-stainless lever action with an 18½-inch barrel. It comes out of the box with big loop lever and an XS Lever Rail installed. The Lever Rail allows for the quick removal of a scout scope such the custom Leupold 1-4X Scout Scope I used. The Lever Rail is also fitted with an XS aperture rear sight in case you decide it's time to get serious. If I had it to do over again, when the battle got close I would've removed the Scout Scope and fought it out with the XS sights.

As surprising as it might seem, binoculars are important, even when hunting big black beasts at close range. I watched those buffalo for 3 hours through my Swarovski 8X32 EL. I looked at their horns and into their souls with that binocular. If you've never looked through a Swarovski EL, it's hard for me to explain the clarity and absence of eye strain. Here's another interesting fact: My eyes are really close together. My interpupillary distance is only 55mm, which means 95 percent of all men have eyes farther apart than mine. Most binoculars cannot be squeezed close enough together for me to look through properly. With the EL this isn't an issue.

Buffalo Bore ammo is known for hard-hitting, big-bore loads such as those I used for the .45-70 Gov., but they also offer an extensive line of more traditional handgun and rifle ammunition. The Buffalo Bore loads worked to perfection on the buff—I just put the first one in the wrong place. Those same loads were used to cleanly take a warhog for camp meat and a trophy reedbuck.

What else does a cowboy need for hunting in Africa? Well, you gotta have a hat, but you need to leave your cowboy boots at home. I wore my time-tested and comfortable Russell Zephyr boots for everything but the stalk in the swamp. For that, I wore a \$12 pair of sneakers I picked up at Wal-Mart. One day in the swamp trashed those sneakers; I left them in Mozambique.

