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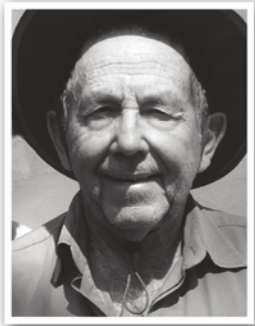
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JOHN COLEMAN

Back in the days A Botswana safari

In late 1962, I conducted a safari in Botswana with a father and son from Salt Lake City in Utah, USA. Before their arrival, they messaged me, requesting that I find a competent photographer to record their safari on film. They were prepared to pay him a good wage and also remunerate me for accommodating him as a non-hunting observer. It so happened that I met Frank De Beer at Victoria Falls shortly before, who was a very competent photographer, so he was my first choice. He was delighted to come along.

Ed and Ted arrived at Victoria Falls at about three in the afternoon a few days later. I met them at the little airport and took them to the Victoria Falls Hotel. It was the only hotel at the Falls at the time. It was posh and old-fashioned, with immaculate service and excellent meals. The clients had a shower, changed clothes and off we went to the "Smoke that Thunders" one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The Zambezi was fairly low, so we could see right down into the gorge, four hundred feet below, as well as all the sections: The Devil's Cataract, Rainbow Falls, Main Falls and the Eastern Cataract. It was, as always, a breathtaking sight and the clients were duly impressed. That evening, I introduced Frank to them, and they discussed the coming safari and made the financial arrangements. Everyone had a sumptuous dinner and went to bed happy.

The next morning, we headed for our camp in Botswana, via Kazungula, Kasane and along the Chobe River, through what was later proclaimed as the Chobe National Park. All along the road, we had to periodically stop to allow herds of elephant to move off the road. We used to hunt in and around the Savuti channel and swamp, as it was considered to be part of the hunting area. After a long, bumpy drive on sandy roads, we arrived with sighs of relief. The camp was situated near the Savuti channel, on the edge of the swamps, under huge, shady fig trees. There were only a couple of hours of daylight left, so we unpacked and then went out to sight in the rifles.

That night, we sat down for a chat and drinks before dinner. Ed and Ted were teetotalers as they were Mormons. To my surprise, Frank also declined, saying that he was a Jehovah's Witness! In fact, it was the start of many fiery, long-drawn-out religious arguments between the blokes. I would finish dinner and retire to bed, leaving them at it.

Ed and Ted were pretty good shots, so the hunting went well. They had booked a thirty-day safari, so we had plenty of time to look for good trophies and enjoy the

hunting. For the first few days, we just scouted the area, looking at the huge variety of game. I took them close to elephant, lion and buffalo to get them familiarised with the animals. If any outstanding trophy happened to show itself, I told them to shoot it. We did come across a very good kudu bull on the third day and after a short stalk, Ed shot it. Ted shot a good waterbuck and a warthog for camp meat. Frank got some pretty good photos and movies of the "Big Boys" and everyone enjoyed themselves.

We needed to get some baits out for leopard, so I got Ed and Ted to shoot some impala and warthog. I set up three baits in some good baiting trees in the denser bush. We continued hunting for other game with daily bait checks. On the morning of the third day, Luka, my Bushman tracker, called me over after checking the bait in a "scratching tree". "Baba, the big leopard has fed last night. We must sit in the blind tonight".

I told Ed and Ted and we decided that Ed would have first go at the leopard. That afternoon, at about four pm., Ed, Luka and I moved quietly into the blind and settled in. My guess was that the leopard would come in just after



A Warthog taken for leopard bait.



Large Tom leopard.

sunset as the area was well wooded and he had not been disturbed.

It was quiet. The odd bird call could be heard. The mopane bees kept bothering Ed and I had to tell him to keep still and not slap at them. About twenty minutes after the sun disappeared in the west, I heard alarm snorts from nearby impala. "Okay Ed, I think the impala have seen the leopard. Get ready and keep still and quiet", I whispered. Ed settled in front of the small aperture, rifle ready and safe off. I peered through the other hole.

Suddenly, ghost-like, the beautiful cat appeared at the bottom of the tree. He was huge and heavily muscled, with a shiny dark coat. I gripped Ed's shoulder, indicating for him to keep still. The big cat stood looking around, then leapt up into the tree and stood over the bait. As he lowered his head to feed, I gave Ed the thumbs up and he took aim and fired. As the shot went off, the leopard leapt high into the air, landed on the ground and took off, grunting angrily. Ed had wounded it! Not good in that thick stuff! "Hold it; give it a few minutes, then we will check out the tracks and blood", I cautioned Ed. I handed my .458 to Luka and took the twelve-gauge shotgun from him. It was loaded with AAA buckshot – good medicine for wounded leopards at close range!

It was starting to get a little gloomy, so after a short wait, we carefully approached the spot where the animal had jumped from the tree. There were some small spots of blood and running tracks of the leopard. We carefully followed the spoor, me in front with the shotgun ready. I could see that the blood was quite dark and getting more plentiful, indicating that the shot had probably hit it far

back, nicking the liver. The animal would most certainly die, but not soon enough and would not be in a good mood!

After following nervously for a couple of hundred paces, it got too dark to see so I called the chase off and we went back to camp, planning to follow up early the next morning. Back at camp, Ed was very despondent. "Don't worry Ed, we will find it in the morning", I encouraged him. I was hoping that it hadn't died but had climbed up in a tree because there were plenty of hyaenas around and they would ruin the skin if they got hold of it.

Bright and early the next morning, we set off to the spot where we abandoned the spoor. Luka picked up the tracks and we slowly and cautiously started tracking. Every crackle of bushes or other sudden sounds made us stop, listening for the tell-tale grunts of an enraged leopard - nothing. As we came to a particularly thick patch of big trees, Luka suddenly stopped and raised his hand, squatting down in front of me. "Listen, I can hear it growling", he whispered. I stood dead still, hardly daring to breathe and listened. Faintly I heard a sort of deep, bubbling rumble. I peered into the undergrowth, hoping to see the animal, but realised it was up above us in a big tree. As I looked up there was a deep grunt and I saw the leopard,

about to jump down at us. I swung the shotgun up, pulled the trigger and shot it in the face, luckily killing it as it dropped to the ground, much to my relief!

After we all settled down, I told Ed to stay put and I carefully approached the animal to make sure it was dead. Ed's shot had, indeed, hit it a bit too far back and, after opening it up I found that the bullet had nicked a lung as



Lion track in the mud.



Well maned lion.

well as the liver, as I had thought. The animal was doubtless pretty sick by the time we came up to it and that is why it didn't attack us sooner.

We carried it out of the bush. I fetched the vehicle and we returned to camp with Ed's trophy amidst much rejoicing.

We heard lions roaring almost every night. Some near, some far. This increased both Ed's and Ted's desire to bag one of these magnificent predators. We followed tracks most days and came across lions, but none with good manes. One-time Ted and I were tracking a big lion with a couple of lionesses when we were suddenly confronted by a furious lioness with three small cubs. With short, thunderous grunts she kept rushing at us, stopping a couple of yards short each time, tail thrashing, amber eyes fastened into mine. "Keep still, then slowly back off without taking your eyes off her", I whispered. She made another rush. I had my .458 pointed right between her eyes and was ready to pull the trigger, but she again stopped in time. I slowly backed off after Ted and Luka. Fortunately, the lioness took this as a capitulation and after giving some more thunderous growls, she went off with her cubs. I breathed a sigh of relief!

Ed and Ted were anxious to get elephant, buffalo and lion, so we concentrated on those animals. While we were searching for the big ones, we came across other good trophy animals and they both shot good sable, water-buck, eland and kudu over the next few days.

Ted shot a very nice lion without incident. The day after that, we found the tracks of a big lion near the edge of the swamps, heading towards a small island. Lions actually swim quite a lot in that area and are often found on the islands. "Ed, the lion is almost sure to be on that island; are you prepared to wade across?" I asked him. He was keen to do that,

so we set off wading slowly through the waist-deep water.

The Chobe swamps are not actually muddy, but there are a lot of reeds and papyrus patches, so the going was slow. I was looking out for crocodiles and hippo, but none were around, thankfully. When we got to the bank of the island, we scrambled up and stood, quietly watching and listening. After a few minutes I heard a strange scratching sound, then a deep sigh about 50 paces away under some trees. It was the lion! He was marking his territory and scratching near the urine with his back claws.

"Follow me quietly; we will have a look at him; be ready to shoot when I say", I whispered. We cautiously crawled forward and when we were about twenty paces away from the trees, there was a sudden thunderous grunt. The huge lion broke cover, ran a few paces and stopped broadside on, next to a big termite mound. "Shoot him". Ed fired, the lion let out a roar, took off and circled back right at us. "Shoot it in the chest!" Ed fired again and the animal dropped, struggled up, looking me



Luka, the tracker and the author with a zebra.



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straight in the eye. I shot it between the neck and shoulder, finally putting it down. After Ed settled down, I called the trackers and they waded over and helped drag the lion through the swamp to the main bank. It was a beautiful dark maned specimen and measured ten feet one inch from nose to tail tip.

One morning early we came across the fresh tracks of five big elephant bulls. Two of them had rather worn "treads" on the back of the feet, indicating that they were old and likely to have good ivory. I felt the usual thrill of finding big elephant and told the clients: "These are worth following; let's get going. Load your rifles with solids and keep as quiet as you can". Luka started off eagerly on the spoor and soon we found fresh piles of dung, as yet undisturbed by dung beetles. I broke one of the dung balls open and felt the middle. It was still warm! "They are close now, Baba", Luka whispered.

Soon we heard the deep rumble of one of the pachyderms, about a hundred metres ahead in a patch of big teak trees. "Keep quiet and follow me. Remember exactly where I told you to aim to get the brain", I said whilst testing the breeze. It was blowing steadily, almost in our faces, so that was perfect. Ed was going to take first shot, so Ted walked behind all of us. We cautiously approached until I could see the backs of a couple of the elephant, about thirty paces away. The animals were standing broadside to us in the shade, flapping their ears and unaware of our presence. "Both of you come with me; there may be two good ones. Ed, walk just behind me and you, Ted, walk behind him, but both be ready to shoot if I say so", I whispered.

Frank, the cameraman, kept at the rear. Luka led us slowly towards the dozing bulls until we were about twenty paces away. Suddenly he stopped, crouched down and pointed. I saw the gleam of big ivory on one of the animals. I wanted to see if there was another shootable bull, so I motioned both blokes and Luka to squat down and keep quiet. I moved slowly to my right, watching the

wind direction. I saw a couple more bulls about fifteen paces over to the right of the first ones and saw good tusks on one of them. I beckoned to Luka and signed to him to keep Ed with him and send Ted over to me. Ted slowly stalked over. I showed him the elephant. "I'm going to sign to Luka to let Ed shoot and you get ready so that you can fire immediately when Ed does".

I pointed to my eyes and looked at Luka, then pointed at the elephant, tapping the side of my head. He nodded, indicating that the head of the elephant was clearly visible. "Ok, Ted, you take a heart shot because the animal will probably start moving as soon as Ed shoots", I whispered. I had repeatedly shown both blokes where the heart and brain were located when we saw elephants, so I was confident that they would aim at the right spot.

Both men were only about fifteen paces from their respective targets. I held up my hand, then signalled to Luka for Ed to shoot and simultaneously whispered "Shoot" to Ted.

The two shots were almost simultaneous. Ed's elephant threw up its trunk and collapsed, hind legs first, then rolled onto its side. Of course, Ted's elephant took off like a juggernaut, crashing through bushes and over fallen tree trunks for about fifty yards, then slowed down, staggered and collapsed on its side. I knew it would not get up so I ran over to Ed's elephant to make sure it was dead and got him to put a shot into the brain through the back of the head. I turned to Frank. "Did you get all that on camera?" I asked. He nodded. There was much celebration that night and they didn't even argue about religion!

Ed and Ted shot their lion and buffalo without incident and overall, it was a very satisfactory safari. Frank got some good photos and movie footage and had a good time himself. Back then, I only had a cheap 35 mm camera and did not bother to take many photos. I recently found a photo of Ed and Ted with their elephant tusks and that brought this story back to memory. I never got copies of Frank's photos...



Ted and Ed's tusks.



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