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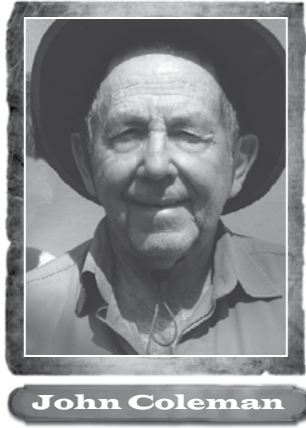
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Hunting with Ed Habeck

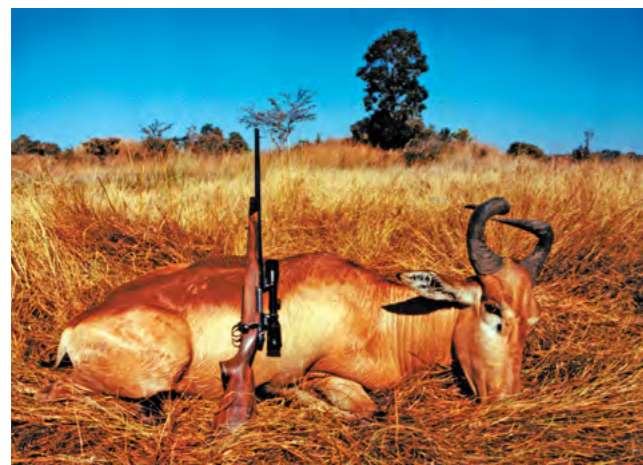
I first met Ed Habeck in the late 1970s. He was keen to bag whatever species of plains-game he could get on a fair-chase hunt in South Africa. I arranged for him and his friend and bank manager, Bob Thomas, to do a hunt in the Hoedspruit area. They later took a safari with me in Zambia.

I soon found out that Ed had a very dry sense of humour and was always playing practical jokes on his friends. He also did it to me and I had to keep my wits about me. Before they first came out to hunt, Ed got a copy of my letterhead and wrote a letter to Bob as if it came from me. He said that Bob, as a non-hunting observer, had to carry a spear in case a lion happened to attack, so that he could protect himself and the others in the group. Bob actually believed this until I told him that Ed was joking!

Ed and Bob duly arrived at Jan Smuts Airport (now known as OR Tambo International Airport) in Johannesburg, where I picked them up. We drove down to Hoedspruit and out to the farm, Hermansberg. Jan and Annemarie, the owners, met us at the house and we unpacked our stuff into a couple of rondavels (round huts).

Ed was a shortish, strongly-built bloke while Bob was tall and older and looked like a typical bank manager. Both of them turned out to be very pleasant guys. Of course Ed kept kidding me and I got caught out a couple of times, believing him, until I learned to take what he said with a pinch of salt.

We hunted for about three weeks in South Africa on Hermansberg and down in the Eastern Cape on Robin Halse's farm high up in the mountains near Queenstown. Ed took some good trophies, including kudu, waterbuck, wildebeest, impala, bushbuck and warthog at Hermansberg. On Robin's farm he hunted grey rhebuck, mountain



Ed was a fine shot, dropping this Lichtenstein's hartebeest in its tracks.



The author with Ed Habeck's big roan antelope bull

reedbuck, black wildebeest and fallow deer. We had a fun time and became good friends. My wife and I later visited Ed and his wife, Sissy, at Kinderhook near Albany in New York State in the USA. Ed had the Toyota franchise for Kinderhook and Albany, so he was doing quite all right.

A couple of years later, Ed wanted to hunt lion, leopard and other game in Zambia, so we arranged a date and Ed and Bob duly arrived at Lusaka Airport. I met them there and went through the usual procedure of showing lots of teeth and greasing the odd official's palm, then took them to the Pamodzi Hotel. Ed complained about having to pay excess on his overweight baggage and said he was sure he had not packed such heavy stuff. We looked in his suitcase and found a bag full of old nuts and bolts. Ed's grandson had put them in as a practical joke, getting his own back on Ed for playing so many jokes on him!

The next morning, we set off to Lunga Camp near the Kafue National Park on the Lunga River. As usual, the tsetse fly got worse as we got nearer camp and we started applying an evil-smelling ointment called Flypel. This seemed to keep them off for a while. Just before entering camp, I sprayed the vehicle all over and underneath to get rid of any tsetse fly hanging on. Lunga Camp consisted of some thatched sleeping huts, a large thatched dining room/lounge, kitchen and storeroom on the banks of the Lunga River. We unpacked and settled in, then had an early lunch and set off to recce the area.

The two trackers had collected some dry elephant



Ed with his leopard, killed with one shot

dung in a bucket and placed it in the back of the Land Rover. They then set it smouldering. The foul-smelling smoke helped to keep most of the tsetse fly at a distance. Some got through, however, and every now and again one of us would let out a yelp from the horsefly-like bite and slap the offending insect, rolling it to break its wings. If you don't do this and just lift your hand, they fly away and come back and bite again – tough buggers! Some of them you don't feel biting and those are the ones that get your blood. They get a bellyful and buzz off slowly, looking like a swollen blimp; if you swat them, it leaves a big patch of blood. I was a little paranoid about tsetse fly bites because, apart from the slight chance of getting sleeping sickness (Trypanosomiasis or "Trips"), there was a lot of AIDS around – although the doctors said there is very little chance of contracting AIDS through a bite from one of these critters, I hated to take the chance! We therefore mostly wore long-sleeved shirts and long pants and applied copious amounts of Flypel to our exposed parts.

We drove around part of the area, seeing plenty of game such as Lichtenstein's hartebeest, puku, sable and a small herd of cow elephant, but didn't shoot anything. When we arrived back at camp, we encountered another "pest" in the form of the local Game Department official. His name was Tonic Kapungwe and he was fairly approach-

able because, as long as you produced some goodies for him, his bribery threshold wasn't too high. I showed him lots of teeth, got out a couple of digital watches and two inner tubes for his broken-down Land Rover, and he went off happy. Ed remarked that he wished the officials back in USA were that easy to keep happy! The problem with most of the local officials was that if you didn't part with various goodies, they were liable to find some fictitious breach of a non-existent law and impose a "fine" – no receipt, of course!

Early the next morning we set out to find any sign of lion and leopard. We headed off in a southerly direction and Ed shot an impala and a warthog for leopard bait, which we loaded onto the vehicle. As we were driving along, the tracker tapped me on the shoulder and pointed. I stopped and looked in the direction he was pointing. There, standing at about 150 paces, were about six Lichtenstein's hartebeest, a very nice bull among them. "OK, Ed, let's get out and stalk over to that tree. You can use a branch as a rest and shoot that bull," I suggested. Ed nodded and we set off, keeping low and using some bushes as camouflage. We got to the tree and the animals were not yet agitated, so Ed took his time and dropped the bull in its tracks, as I had expected he would. He was a good shot and didn't get excited when he hunted with me in South Africa. We drove over, took a couple of photos, gutted and loaded the animal and carried on.

The country consisted of fairly open grassy plains with some bushy patches and a couple of depressions with bigger trees. I stopped at every likely spot and sent the trackers to try and pick up leopard and lion sign, but no luck so far. As we were driving along an open plain, I saw a small herd of buffalo in the distance. After glassing carefully, however, I saw that there were no big bulls. After a couple of kilometres, we came to a patch of forest and I decided to put out both the baits in likely spots some distance apart. After hanging the impala in a good, leaning tree in some thick bush out of reach of hyena and lion, and strewing the guts around, we went on and found another spot. The tree was also well into the bush and a leopard would not be afraid to come in early because it would be well concealed. Then we hung the warthog on a good, strong branch, again strewing the guts around, and headed back to camp.



The camp staff posing with Ed's lion

That night we heard lion roaring in the distance and decided to try and find them. We set off in the morning, heading towards the road near the Kafue National Park where the lions had been roaring. As we got near the cut-line boundary, the tracker suddenly grabbed me by the shoulder. "Big roan," he hissed, pointing towards the boundary about 200 m away. I looked and saw the biggest roan antelope bull I had ever seen, standing about halfway between us and the boundary of the Park. "Ed, quick, jump out of the car and use that tree to hide behind and shoot it. I will drive on as if we haven't seen it. Make sure you kill it, otherwise it will run into the Park," I whispered urgently. Ed jumped out and we slowly drove on. The shot rang out and I heard the thump of a strike, but then saw the animal running towards the boundary. He crossed over about 30 paces, stopped, staggered and collapsed – inside the Park!

There was not likely to be anyone travelling around that area, so I reversed back to Ed, stopped the vehicle on the road and got out with the trackers. "Ed, the bull ran over into the Park. We must walk in and carry it out so that there are no tyre marks. It's no use telling the officials that it ran in from outside – they won't believe us," I explained. We walked in to the animal, gutted it and cut it in half and carried everything out, including the guts in a sack. Then we loaded it on the Land Rover and took off back to camp. I warned the trackers not to tell anyone where we had got it and they roared with laughter at the very thought of it. It was a fantastic trophy, measuring number 3 in the record books. We weren't even looking for roan! That is the way it often goes.

Over the next few days, Ed got a very nice puku and a mediocre sable, but we saw no fresh sign of leopard or lion. We thus decided to head off to Mutinondo Camp in the Luangwa Valley, where we would concentrate on leopard, lion and a good buffalo.

We drove back to Lusaka, collected the necessary food and other kit, and took off along the long road towards the Luangwa Valley and Tanzania beyond. Along the road we encountered the usual "road blocks" manned by motley crews of civilian-garbed individuals carrying AK47s and rocket launchers, claiming to be police. We stopped and humoured them, of course, and parted with handfuls of dried meat. This made them "happy" and we went on our way. Ed, as usual, made some humorous remarks and said that he wished that the police in the USA were so accommodating!



Lunga Camp near the Kafue National Park



This fine puku was among the animals on Ed's hunting list.

After about six hours of driving, we turned right onto a rutted, potholed dirt road, bumped along for a couple of hours and then descended over the escarpment, down into the Luangwa Valley. The camp on the Mutinondo River wasn't too far from there and we thankfully climbed off the vehicle and settled down to a couple of beers. The camp, set up with the usual grass huts, was under huge riverine trees and overlooked the wide, sandy river. There were channels of shallow, running water and we could see puku drinking nearby. After a good dinner, we went off to bed and were woken by the "tea boy" at about 6 in the morning.

The main job was to locate fresh lion and leopard sign, so we headed along a track meandering upriver. Just after we left camp we saw a pride of about six lionesses and a young lion paddling across the river. Ed actually got a bit excited, but I calmed him down and told him that we were looking for trophies, not babies!

As we were driving slowly along, the tracker pointed out a herd of buffalo, grazing a little distance away. "OK, Ed, let's go over and you can shoot a lion bait. This is quite a likely spot for lion and they will be attracted by the herd," I said. I checked the wind – it was breezing slightly across our line of approach, so I started walking more to the left so as to get the wind more in our faces. Using available cover, we got within about 50 paces, right behind a big tree. There were two young bulls and an old dagga boy with small horns, but no trophy animal. "Shoot the young bull on the right, he will make good bait and we can get the tripe and some good steaks off him," I whispered. (I just love buffalo tripe – it is the best tasting from all animals I have eaten!) Ed took aim with his .375 Magnum and dropped it in its tracks with a shot that broke both its shoulders. We gutted it, cut out some steaks from the backstrap and I cleaned out the tripe and put it in a plastic bag. Then I tied a rope to its back legs and dragged it to a likely spot in an open patch near some dense bushes where I tied it to an old tree stump. The tracker covered it with leaves, upon which we moved downwind, about 40 paces away, and erected a grass wall with two holes to see through at rifle height. It was a good spot because we could approach along a line of bushes without being seen by lion that may be feeding, and the prevailing wind would be blowing almost in our faces from the bait. I then got my animal call and squealed for a while to get any lion's attention. Thereafter we pushed off back to camp.

The next morning, we went in early and stalked up to the grass wall. There were no lion, only a couple of jackal, so we continued looking for leopard sign or lion tracks. We came to a small hill with a dry stream bed below it – a good spot for leopard – and got out to inspect the area. Right away the tracker called me over to the sandy stream bed and pointed out the fresh tracks of a big leopard. After marking the spot with some toilet paper, we went on to look for some suitable bait, and soon found a warthog. Ed shot it and we took it back and hung it on the leaning branch of a tree, not too high but out of reach of lion or hyena.

Early the following morning, we returned to the lion bait, parked a short distance away and stalked in to the grass wall. As I looked through the hole, I saw a lone lion chomping on the buffalo. "Ed, it is a good, adult male, but it has an average mane. Have a look and say if you want to shoot it." Ed looked through the hole and whispered, "John, do you think we will get a better one?" "It's possible, but we may not see another," I replied. Ed decided to shoot it, so I told him to take his time and give it a good shot in the middle of the shoulder. He pushed his .375 slowly through the hole, took aim and fired. The lion leapt straight up in the air, let out a roar and took off running through the knee-high grass.

"It looks like you gave it a good shot. Let's wait a few minutes and then follow the blood spoor," I suggested. After some minutes, we moved over to where the lion had taken off. Soon we picked up plenty of bright red lung blood and carefully followed the clear trail. The grass was high enough to hide a lion lying down, so we would not see it until coming close. I was thus very careful. Suddenly we heard a slight groan and saw the shape through the grass. "Stop, it is dying. Just wait until it is dead," I whispered. The sounds soon stopped and we cautiously approached. The lion was stone dead. I congratulated Ed and we took some photos, loaded the lion and took it back to camp.

After having brunch, we set off to check the leopard bait. When we were about 200 m from the spot, we got out and approached the bait cautiously in case the leopard was there. It was! But it heard us and took off with a low growl. "Right, Ed, it will probably come back late this afternoon if we walk away and it thinks we have left." We walked back to the Land Rover and drove about



This warthog served as leopard bait.

2 km further. Then we sat down in the shade of a big tree and ate our sandwiches. We waited there until about four o'clock in the afternoon and quietly drove back to within about 500 m of the bait. There we stalked into the blind and settled down.

Just before the sun went down, I heard the sawing grunts of the leopard approaching the bait. I motioned to Ed to keep still and quiet, and we waited with bated breath. It was quiet for some minutes and then I heard the leopard much closer. The sun was down and I hoped the cat would come in while it was still light, because we had no light with us. We sat quietly, hardly daring to breathe ... Suddenly it was there in the tree, standing broadside to us, looking at the meat. "Shoot it right in the middle of the shoulder," I hissed. Ed fired and I heard the thump of a good strike. The big cat leaped out of the tree and took off into the bushes, but did not let out any grunts, so I was pretty confident that it would die soon.

It was starting to get gloomy and I was anxious to find it before dark, as the hyena would make a meal of it if they found it. The blood trail was good and clear – bright red, frothy blood that was getting more. "It's almost certainly dead, but we must still be careful. If it is still alive, it will surely come for us," I cautioned. However, after a few paces, I saw the big cat lying on its side. After watching for a few seconds, I picked up a stick and threw it onto the leopard. It didn't move – it was dead. It was a beautiful big tom. Ed had shot his lion and leopard on the same day!