

The B.H.A.S. Hunting & Safari Journal

TRACKS IN THE SAND

Stanley and I had an extra day rest in Maun-Botswana as the next group, a family of 4, were delayed in London due to flight difficulties. We picked up their bags at the airport and drove to them camp (about 5 hours) whilst they flew in with a chopper to the hunting area – NG4 - over 1Mil acres in the Kalahari of predominantly vegetated sand-dunes, calcrete rock in the northern part with natural water seepages and a few dolomite hills against the Namibian border, opposite the famous Nyae Nyae elephant concession. On the menu for this hunt was primarily 2 leopard and 2 elephant.

Botswana allows the hunting of leopard with hounds like is done in the USA with mountain lion. The hunt involves baiting as per usual, then once a sizable fresh male track is identified, a team of about 6-8 bushman trackers RUN on the track whilst the hunters follow in a vehicle.



Once it is determined that the track is very recent, they release 2-3 of the leader hounds that pick up the scent and take off. Once that distinct hound “bugle” is heard – signaling that they are right behind the cat, they release more fresh groups of dogs intermittently till the cat is surrounded. It’s very intense, knowing the potential of a stressed leopard, and extremely fast paced.

The first cat we hunted was exceptionally quick, even to those that do this regularly. The second though, 2 days later, took a good 5 hours of chasing and returning dogs to the car numerous times to water, as the cat evaded the hounds and backtracked on itself numerous times.

Both cats were shot cleanly, and we had no incidences of the vehicle being charged or of injured hounds except 1 scratch on the nose. I’ve heard this is not always the case and things can go “south” quite quick. Different from the conventional way we hunt leopard over bait from blinds, this has a much higher success rate – but the method is something I must still get used to.



A great “his & hers” – 2 days apart

The remaining 11 days were spent on the ivory trail, using 2 vehicles to cover the vast area we had to pick up tracks for the (minimum) 2 elephant tags booked. Communication being the key factor, thankfully we had InReach service with the GPSs, as cell network was patchy at best. We’d communicate who (thought) had the best track and both teams would try converge at that point. Going was tough, and the first elephant down was on day 7 of the safari. I was not with; the other team having had picked up a great track at a water pan late morning and the trackers catching up within a short 6 km resting under a tree. The hunters caught up to them quickly too, using rino-GPS and with a great shot, put the huge-bodied bull down, ivory in the mid-40’s.



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The jumbo hunting continued to give us the curve-ball, and although one or both vehicles found good tracks daily, we could just never catch up with them or the wind gave us a nasty at the last minute, or they simply crossed the border into Namibia or neighboring concession on their march. In between, we hunted an oryx for camp meat, saw numerous duiker and steenbok, of which we hunted 2 trophy rams in between, also a "his&hers".



It wasn't till the second last day that we picked up a fresh track at a pan, also relatively late in the morning and although there was not much character within, it was an exceptionally large track and decided to put in the miles to walk it down to have a look. I contacted the other group which had till then, seen nothing spectacular, they already started to head our way.



About 3 hours in, we bumped into a bull in some thick stuff, and I communicated my estimates on weight and dimensions through, which were also sort of mid-40's. They decided to come have a look, being about 30 minutes out, myself and my trackers staying downwind. By the time they arrived the bull had moved on and we soon realized it wasn't the same bull, so continuing

on the big track for about another 3km till we found him feeding just off the path a few hundred yards off. It took another 20-odd minutes to get into a position to have a good look at the ivory, the decision synonymous. The first shot (about 42 yards) from a .375 H&H was perfect on the shoulder, with a very quick follow-up shot through the brush that hit just behind the leg at about 50 yards. He ran a little ways and went down, burying his right tusk in the ground, the left tusk growing visually as we walked up - what a beaut of a bull ! Close to sunset and far from the vehicles, we took a few quick pics and came back the following morning to dig out the right tusk to get proper photos. Left tusk ended up just shy of 60lbs, the right tusk at 57lbs, both over 17" on the lip.



All in all, it was a great 15-day hunt, with some good critters. We closed the last day exploring the nearby Gcwihaba caves, a national heritage site in Botswana.



Off to the us for school holidays, a bit of R&R with family. Back in the saddle end of July. Hunt safe.

BH