

# AFRICAN SPORTING GAZETTE

## Bertrand de Courcy's Buffalo of All Dangers – Mozambique: 2007

*Did you know that after some 15 years of civil war it is now again possible to hunt in Mozambique? The hunting season starts in June and ends in October.*

The Republic of Mozambique in south-eastern Africa is bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east, Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the north-west, Zimbabwe to the west, and Swaziland and South Africa to the south-west.

My hunt started in Harare, Zimbabwe from whence I took a charter plane for the one-hour flight to the bush. From the landing strip, it's about another hour by car to get to the camp in the west of the country. Simon Rodger's Rifa Wildlife Safaris hunting area covers some 650,000 hectares and borders Zimbabwe and Zambia. The Zambezi and numerous other rivers cross the area. This allows a large diversity of animals - elephant, lion, leopard, hippopotamus, Cape buffalo, sable, roan, Cape eland, kudu, bushbuck, crocodile and more.



Hunting lodge by the lake

The luxurious camp, situated on Lake Cobara Bassa, has been constructed with all the amenities, and can compete with South African safari lodges in terms of comfort. It is managed by extremely competent Zimbabweans who are fully accustomed to a demanding clientele. Being on the lake, it offers beautiful sightseeing, a bit different from classical bush camps. As a change from hunting, you can take an afternoon off for fishing; or you can cruise the lake and look for animals on the banks. If you spot one a good trophy, you just stop the boat and continue the hunt on foot.

At night, hippos graze near my 'bedroom.' I never realized until then just how much noise these animals could make while eating. Fortunately, the thousands of crocodiles in the area come out of the water only at sunrise and sunset, and spend the rest of the day lying on the banks in the sun.

The first morning, we wake at 6.00 a.m. which is quite late for a safari day, but we need sunlight to check my rifle. At the target range, I find my Weatherby .460 hasn't suffered from travel, so we go back to the car and start driving on the hunting trails.

My PH, Yann Le Bouvier, drives with me next to him and our trackers in the back. We search the track for evidence of a herd of buffalo. When we see spoor, we stop to examine it. It's exciting, everyone trying to 'read' the footprints to determine which species they belong to and how old they are.



Crocodile from Lake Cobara Bassa

This is definitely a buffalo – and a big one. I start dreaming of the size of the trophy although everyone knows that trophy size is not linked to the size of the animal and its footprint. All we know is that it is a solitary male buffalo with big hoofs. It has crossed the track less than an hour ago, so we decide to go for it. To be sure that it has not circled and re-crossed the track, we drive forward another 10 minutes to check – nothing.

We return to the original tracks, get equipped, take our guns, and load them for immediate action. At the beginning of the tracking we had noticed that the print of the front left hoof was unusual. It indicated that the buffalo was not walking evenly. It looks like he's been wounded! Well, we are in a serious situation. Buffalo hunting is already a serious matter, but to track a wounded buff is highly dangerous. It is likely to hide behind a bush and charge anything that passes by!

Tension builds... We walk more slowly, looking everywhere, and cautiously avoid stepping on any dead branches. Regularly we check how the wind blows to be sure the Dagg Boy does not get our scent. We absolutely need to see him before he spots us!



Musengezi river

As the spoor is heading toward the lake the vegetation is becoming denser. Something new on the ground – a big lion is following in the footprints of our buffalo! A lion is

tracking our wounded buff! Lions have an incredible capability to determine whether an animal is wounded, and buffalo is their preferred prey. We were already in a serious situation, but to track a wounded buffalo that is being tracked by a lion - not good!

We look at each other and wonder whether or not we should continue. We are not too concerned about the lion. But if the buffalo senses that a lion is hunting him, he will be under great stress and in an aggressive mood. It would probably be safer to stop and wait, but we cannot leave a wounded buffalo in the bush. We decide to pursue the tracking.

The vegetation gets even thicker. The air closer to the lake is cooler now, and it seems that the lion has decided to stop its hunt, as we cannot see any more footprints. The bush is now very thick and we cannot see beyond 100 feet. Suddenly to our left the head and neck of a huge buffalo appears with a fine set of horns. While Yann keeps close watch with his binoculars, I place the neck of that buff in the crosshairs dead centre of my scope. When I hear Yann say, "Shoot!" I immediately pull the trigger, and the buffalo falls just as fast. My .500-grain bullet in the neck has exploded the spine. We get closer and I place a safety shot.



44 inches Cape Buffalo

Finally we can admire the trophy...Wow! A set of horns that measures 44 inches! We inspect the original wound – it was a frontal shot. The bullet went through the shoulder without breaking any bones, and ended in the stomach. Other than the difficulty it already had with one leg, it could have walked and run normally until it died after much suffering.

During the field preparation of the animal, we discover a .416 Rigby bullet in the old bull's stomach. Some unlucky hunter didn't catch up to his fine trophy and finish the job. We had decided to take a huge risk, but we have been rewarded.

*French hunter Bertrand de Courcy is the president of management consulting group and also advises hunters on the best destinations in Europe and Africa. He has hunted Africa intensively since 1975, in particular West Africa and Rwanda where, unfortunately, hunting is now closed.*