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Hunting Cape buffalo with bow and arrow - my dream came true

By Frank Berbuir



All my travels to the different countries of Southern Africa for bowhunting and vacation have so far been a fascinating and enjoyable part of my life and I have to admit that I became addicted to it. I made it back to beautiful South Africa in August last year and arrived on the OR Tambo International Airport on a sunny morning where Izak Vos picked me up.

This bowhunting trip was very special to me, since it was the third time I travelled to Africa to fulfil my long sought-after dream to hunt a Cape buffalo with bow and arrow. The two former trips were unfortunately disastrous due to unreliable, incompetent and badly prepared outfitters. This time, however, I was hunting with outfitter and PH, Izak Vos, from Vos Safaris.

I know Izak, an excellent and highly experienced professional hunter of dangerous game, (especially buffalo, elephant and other big and plains game) from former hunts in Mozambique and South Africa where we became close friends. His family gave me a great and hearty welcome.

Our plan for the following days was to do a walk-and-stalk hunt on a Cape buffalo in the Limpopo Province in the northern part of South Africa. For this endeavour I had

exercised, trained, learned and practised a lot and specifically. With my equipment and bow set-up I felt extremely comfortable and able to do the job.

The Elite GT 500 bow set at 90 pounds, along with the Easton Full Metal Jacket 250 Dangerous Game arrow and the Muzzy Phantom SS 200-grain broadhead with a total arrow weight of 800 grains should perform well.

We were just three guys early that chilly Saturday morning when we stepped out of the Ford Ranger pick-up, Izak, Johan, an accompanying PH with my camera, and me. We left the *bakkie* behind some thick brush and walked and stalked roughly two kilometres until we came closer to the scouted area where we spotted a bachelor herd of buffalo days before and found their favourite grazing area. I felt a surge of excitement with every step. The broadhead practice shoots on the butt, days before the hunt and early that morning went all well, but now it was time to rock and roll – “Africa is not for sissies!”

Through the binoculars we spotted the dust cloud the bachelor group produced on their wandering, which indicated their direction. Fortunately we had the wind blowing in our faces. We sneaked slowly behind some bushes to lie in ambush. It did not take very long before the first buffalo

came into visible range.

“Holy smoke, what a huge animal”, I thought when I first looked at it from about 50 metres. “Stay calm”, Izak whispered. “This is just a young bull, the bigger and older ones will be at the back of the herd.” Wow, my blood pressure was rising to the level of a racing car engine when the herd of wild buffalo gathered and roamed in front of us. Our sparse cover was just bushes. They could run us over easily. Sometimes a buffalo was facing in our direction, but the wind was luckily in our favour. The wind did swirl a little bit from time to time, but the buffalo did not get it directly.

It became highly risky when a soft-bossed young bull became very interested and walked closer, directly in our direction, snorting and sniffing to find out what might be behind the bushes.

I got a bit concerned when I saw Izak releasing the safety of his .458 Lott rifle and slowly started to lift his gun. Fortunately the young daredevil lost interest and turned around when he was about ten metres from us. “Holy cow” that was gruelling and exciting.

Then “the Boss” appeared, one of the last buffalo to join the squad that grazed calmly on a spot of grass. “Son of



Frank's Cape buffalo with PH Izak Vos.

a gun, this is an awesome bruiser of a buffalo", was my thought when I saw him. He was big, really big with a tremendous body size, hard boss and set of horns and he looked mean and awkward. Robert Ruark's dramatic explanation of a Cape buffalo's stare became a reality to me: "A buffalo looks at you like you owe him money". That is a moment in your life you can hardly describe unless the moment is right in front of you. He made his position as the "big shot" clear to the others. Each buddy that came up close and personal got hit by his horns or boss, which sounded very impressive – like smashing a heavy sledgehammer on an anvil. What a magnificent spectacle!

About 20 buffalo were in front of us and I was in a kneeling position when "my buffalo" stood free and nicely broadside. I used my Nikon rangefinder to locate him at 25 metres. Izak looked at me and just nodded his head, which meant: "Frank, do it – now!" Luckily I calmed down during the whole exciting scenario and was ready for the moment of truth. I had practised a lot with my bow set-up and had studied buffalo anatomy as well. At a snail's pace I lifted my bow with the nocked arrow, grabbed the Gripwerks-quilted maple grip and drew slowly up to a full draw.

It might have been because of my high adrenaline level that it felt easy to pull the 90 pounds of the bow in that situation. The pin of the Spot-Hogg sight was facing exactly on his vital area. A soft touch with my index finger on the trigger of my Scott release and the Easton Full Metal Jacket Dangerous Game arrow went off and silently flew to its mark. The impact was evident by a cracking noise.

My first impression was that I made a good shot. I felt relieved when Izak smiled at me and put his thumbs up and whispered: "It was a brilliant shot directly behind the shoulder."

Mortally wounded by the Muzzy Phantom SS two-blade broadhead the buff jumped up. When he turned around we could see the arrow sticking out on the other side – so it penetrated completely through the massive chest cavity of the brute. It was so amazing to see that.

He stumped about twenty metres, stopped, turned back to see what had happened and then lay down.

Izak told us to be quiet, calm and not to move, because we wanted to give him time due to the fact that all the other buffalo were still there.

After a short while, which felt like eternity, we could hear his death bellow and see all the other buffalo rushing to their companion, trying to protect him. That was a picture I will never forget!

He was dead. No additional bullet from the rifle was necessary.

We radioed the landowner and when he came with the *bakkie* and shot three times in the air. The remaining buffalo backed off and we could take some great trophy photos and load him on the *bakkie*. It was interesting to see how quickly this big 800-kg animal was loaded within a few minutes.

The slaughtering gave 375 kg of meat and a beautiful trophy. The spread of my buffalo officially measured 41½ inches! Wow, that was impressive, it was an outstanding trophy. It

had everything a buffalo should have – a big hard boss, nice dropped curls and a wide spread.

You can never really appreciate the enormous size of these magnificent animals until you get up close to them. He was a mature bull with exceptional horns that would easily qualify him for the record books.

A couple of days later on a different location and farm in the Limpopo Province, I also shot a nice big waterbuck and a Limpopo bushbuck. I also bagged a huge feral boar before the buffalo – making it a great trip and hunt with a great PH and good friend, who is well organised. The intense and well-planned training, preparation and great equipment, which performed excellent on all animals, paid off perfectly.

All in all it was an amazing and memorable experience of a lifetime.

One more time thank you very much to Izak and his wonderful and hospitable family, as well as to all the nice people I had the opportunity to meet during this fantastic time. **ABH**

Equipment:

Bow: Elite GT 500 set at 90 pounds

Arrow: Easton Full Metal Jacket 250 Dangerous Game with heavier inserts

Broadhead: Muzzy Phantom SS two-blade of 200 grains

Optics: Zeiss Victory binocular and Nikon rangefinder

Release: Scott

Camo: Sniper Africa

Not always...

We always look for our arrows to see what kind of blood is on it to determine where the animal has been hit. This blesbuck (photo right) was shot through the heart at 22 yards. The blood



sprayed three metres from where the animal was standing, it died within 20 yards and yet the arrow was dry. The vane had a slight tinge of pink on it. That's all. So, most concepts and theories work well most of the time, but as you can see NOT all the time.

Adrian de Villiers

