

Bow Hunter

ISSUE 13

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Young girl's
first bowhunt

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with a longbow

HUNTING GIRAFFE

Traditional archery and hunting



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Hunting giraffe with bow and arrow



By Frank Berbuir

It was the beginning of August when I made it back to beautiful South Africa to hunt again with bow and arrow together with my friend and Professional Hunter, Izak Vos from Vos Safaris. After a long overnight flight from Europe I was happy to be picked up by him. Before we left Gauteng to head up north to Limpopo we quickly visited the Wildebees Outdoor Clothing shop to get me some more Sniper Africa clothes and a pair of these specific kudu leather shoes. Great hunting boots, by the way.

During our drive to the Limpopo province up close to the Botswana border Izak and I enjoyed talking about our ambitious hunting plans for the following eight days. After our extremely successful bowhunt on Cape buffalo, waterbuck, bushbuck and feral boar the year before I decided to take along again for this hunting adventure my fantastic, trusty and reliable Elite GT 500 bow at 90 lbs with the Easton Full Metal Jacket 250 Dangerous Game arrows and the Muzzy Phantom SS 200 grain broadhead, with a total arrow weight of 800 grain.

With this equipment and bow setup I felt comfortable last time and all the shootings and practices went very well dur-

ing the past months. “Never change a winning team,” was my thinking, especially with regard to our intention to harvest hopefully a Cape eland.

At that time I did not really think about a giraffe. Why would one shoot a giraffe – for the trophy, the meat or both?

If you ask this question you can probably query as well shooting elephant, cats, predators or even an antelope. A giraffe is a game animal like all the others. You may hunt it legally in South Africa and other African countries with rifle or bow.

For me it all began after three days in our hunting camp when Anton, the landowner and farmer, visited us again and asked me whether I would like to hunt a giraffe bull with bow

and arrow. "I've never taken a giraffe before, but with that bow and arrow combination it is perhaps possible and I could step up to the plate," I replied.

A giraffe can be twice as heavy and tough as a Cape buffalo and so it would be a great challenge. I know hunting a giraffe can be a touchy and sensitive topic for some and especially for the anti-hunters, but Anton explained to us why he wanted to get this bull shot. "Guys, I have four giraffes here, a female, two young ones and this big mature bull which is about 15 years old. He was borne by the big female giraffe. He is her son. The two kids are from him which, means he got laid with his own mother. Moreover, I had another mature giraffe bull here before and this specific bull did not only dislike him, but he fought hard with him and chased him around so that one day this other giraffe bull went through a 10-foot high fence at full speed and died. So, if I want to refresh the bloodline of my giraffes I need to take him out, that's the main reason." Izak and I looked at each other and after a short talk I said, "OK, let's go for it."

The next morning after breakfast Anton picked us up and we drove close to the area where we saw the giraffes the days before. Anton said he would wait there just in case. We jumped off the vehicle and walked for about half a mile before glassing the four giraffes for the first time and started our walk and stalk. Even though it was winter it became quite warm with about 25 °C [77 °F]. I started to sweat, probably also because of the excitement.

A giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) is the tallest animal on earth and a really big one as well. I had to look for them really thoroughly. We focused on their heads somewhere feeding on leaves in the treetops of acacias, and on not spooking them. With nearly six metres or 20 feet in height they can see a hunter approach from a long way off. A few gentle strides on their part can create a lot of distance between themselves and the hunter. This was the case a couple of times when we spotted them the first time and tried to sneak in with extreme caution. Several times we could reduce the distance between them and us down to 70 or 60 metres, always keeping the wind against us and hiding behind some bushes or trees. This was quite challenging with four pairs of eyes checking their surroundings, but when we wanted to get closer we were busted. For two hours all our stalking attempts were in vain. Then suddenly the big bull separated himself to the right from the other three fellows and went to some higher trees to feed. Now we had a small chance to sneak in closer to him, using some scraggy bushes as cover. Izak crept slowly but surely forward and I followed in his tracks directly behind him. We stopped behind our last ambush between the giraffe bull and us.

Izak grabbed my rangefinder, checked the distance and whispered, "He's standing steady at 40 metres nicely broadside. Now or never, Frank."

It was up to me now. The arrow nocked in quietly and I pulled my Elite GT 500 bow smoothly and calmly to full draw. I took a step to the right for a clear shooting window and aimed with the 40-metre pin of my Spot Hogg sight where Izak told me: a spot above the front shoulder at the height of the "chest bumps" or protruding knobs on the chest, roughly 11 inches back, to get a heart or lung shot. I could feel my heart beat in

my own chest while aiming and finally tapping on the trigger of my Scott release. The Easton Full Metal Jacket Dangerous Game arrow was on its deadly mission. Within a split second it hammered into the giraffe's body where I had aimed. "Yes," Izak said, who had followed the action with his binoculars. "The arrow went in exactly where it should and the penetration is good. You can see the blood splashing out." Indeed, even without binoculars I could see that only the rear part of the arrow with the feathers was sticking out and the blood was running down the shoulder. Unbelievable. The giraffe bull started to run directly after the impact. Because of his flight the three other giraffes followed him. We followed his getaway with the binoculars and at the same time called Anton to come over with the bakkie (jeep). A couple of minutes later he arrived and we drove slowly along the way of the bull's escape. He ran about 700 metres and was now standing behind a tree. We could see him tumbling and his head going down inch by inch until he finally fell over. An absolutely amazing picture I will never forget – when this big, majestic animal dropped dead.

Izak smiled at me, shook my hand, hugged me and said, "Congrats, well done, my friend. He's down but let's just give him a couple of minutes before we approach him." We could see the bull kicking with his hind legs. You definitely do not want to get hit by the hoof of a mature giraffe bull. A minute later it was quiet and all was over. In silence we walked to the bull. The congratulations from Izak and Anton were overwhelming. They asked me if I would like to stay with the giraffe for a few minutes so that they could drive back and pick up some of the farm guys for uploading this roughly 1.5 tons huge giraffe. "Take your time," I replied. It gave me the chance to bid farewell to this magnificent animal and to finally realise my bow and arrow harvest.

When they returned we arranged the bull for some trophy pictures before six South Africans and one German using a winch loaded this giant within 10 minutes on the Land Cruiser. It was very impressive to see how these guys can load. Back at the farm the Castle Lager beer tasted excellent. The skinning and slaughtering of this colossus was another challenge for the farm workers. The next day a refrigerated cargo truck came in to pick up all the venison for sale and the shoulder-mount trophy, back skin and leg bones went to Izak's uncle, Jan Viljoen, my taxidermist of confidence, who did a fantastic job on my previous trophies.

Once more, thank you very much to Izak for the great organisation, his experience and company; to Anton, our host, and to all the nice people I had the opportunity of meeting during this fantastic time.

Equipment:

Bow: Elite GT 500 at 90#

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

Broadhead: Muzzy Phantom SS 2-blade, 200 grain

Optics: Zeiss Victory binoculars and Nikon rangefinder

Release: Scott