

TRIP REPORT: NAMIBIAN PLAINS GAME HUNT

It was a year in the planning, two weeks in the doing, and a great experience. On June 7th I went to Namibia to hunt plains game with my friend Art, another professor here at Virginia Tech. Art had been present as an observer on my last hunt in 2005, in South Africa; and was bitten by the bug. He's an Old Africa Hand, having made several trips there with study-abroad courses, but he hadn't hunted since his childhood. When I asked him if he wanted to come along—a hunt like this one is much more fun with a partner—he jumped at the chance.

Our safari company was CEC Safaris, a small husband-and-wife outfit located in the Omitara district, about 120 kilometers east of Windhoek, Namibia's capital city. Cornelius (Cornie) and Elaine Coetzee (hence the "CEC") are both Licensed Professional Hunters with hunting concessions in the Omitara region, other parts of Namibia, and in Botswana and Zimbabwe. They're a pair of self-reliant, high-spirited individuals, whose talents complement each other's well. Having lived in the USA for 5 years (where Elaine managed a department in a Dillard's Department Store) while their two daughters were attending high school, they're comfortable with the Americans who make up the bulk of their clientele and understand them well at all levels.

Cornie is, as his wife describes him, a "charming rogue." He's in his early 50's, a rugged and handsome man who, though he has little formal education (he left school at 16 years and 2 months to join the South African Army in 1973) is an amazing autodidact. Not only is he a superb mechanic, a gunsmith, and an inventor, he's extremely well-read with an encyclopedic knowledge of the biology, ecology, and history of Africa. He was born in what was then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). His service in South Africa's army included fighting the insurgent war in "Southwest Africa" against SWAPO¹, as a Special Forces reconnaissance soldier; and also in Angola against the Cubans and other Communist proxies.

Elaine is a beautiful, statuesque lady in her mid-40's, a native Namibian. She says that her father was most emphatically not happy about her marrying a "ruffian" (Cornie's word, not mine!) but they seem to be a perfect fit. She's the organizational and business part of the team, keeping the books and making all the client arrangements and contacts; he's the guy who can fix anything that needs fixing around the farm, and who is a tracker and stalker of great ability. Elaine has a

¹ What is now Namibia was originally settled by Germans in the 1880's as "German Southwest Africa." It was taken from Germany by force in 1914-15 by South Africans in the Imperial British Forces. After the war the territory was administered by the Union of South Africa under League of Nations mandate, later continued under UN mandate. Insurgent movements in the 1960's led the UN to revoke the mandate in 1966, and to recognize the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) as the "government." The land remained under South African control. SWAPO was a typical gang of Cold War Communist stooges with friends in the UN and in the Soviet Union. After a protracted struggle, in 1985 South Africa created an internal Namibian government and a "peace agreement" was concluded under whose terms the country would hold "free and fair elections," with both sides agreeing to accept the results. Needless to say, SWAPO had no intention of playing by the rules, nor did they: the elections were blatantly rigged so that even though SWAPO lost the war—there was never any chance they could achieve a military victory against South Africa—by chicanery they managed to win the peace. South Africa, unlike SWAPO, accepted the election results and bowed out of Namibia affairs. Today SWAPO is the ruling party in Namibia's government. Namibia is thus one of Africa's newest nations. Its history has left it with three commonly-spoken languages (officially English, but also German and Afrikaans) in addition to various tribal tongues.

great deal of marketing savvy, Internet skills, and runs the business aspect of CEC with elegance as well as efficiency.

Their lodge is called “Hunter’s Retriete” (*sic*). It sits on what, for Namibia, is a postage-stamp-sized piece of ground², about 2900 acres. They have agreements with local ranchers with much larger properties, to which they take their clients.

The lodge is a lovely place, with a thatched roof, a shady porch, and a spectacular view of the grassy savannah that comprises the high central plateau of the country.



² Namibian ranches are *enormous*, larger than most US *counties*. The *smallest* ranch I hunted was larger than the District of Columbia; one of them was twice the size of the Bronx, and about equal to Brooklyn and Manhattan *combined*. Nor are these especially large holdings, by Namibian standards. Many are larger than New York City.



Accommodation at the Retriete was pretty luxurious. There are three guest rooms, each named after a famous hunter: Theodore Roosevelt, J.C. Pretorius, and F.C. Selous. I had the Roosevelt Room, decorated with pictures of TR, many of them from his famous 1909-1910 safari. Art had the Selous room. We had private bathrooms. The plumbing was English: that is to say, it provided hot water *or* water pressure, but not both simultaneously.

The food was excellent, and most nights for dinner we ate game meat. Some of it was stuff we'd shot, some of it what Elaine's cook had in the fridge. Gemsbok, impala, warthog, etc., but no kudu that I recall. We returned to the camp for lunch every day after the morning hunt. The dishes were typical Namibian or South African style, casseroles and stews mostly. I was a little disappointed that we didn't cook anything over the open fire, but it was so cold we couldn't sit outside after sundown. On return from the afternoon's hunt we'd have a few drinks and then settle down to dinner, and to bed immediately after, about 8:30 to 9:00.



Meals were served in one end of a high-ceilinged Great Room. The room was decorated with numerous taxidermy specimens and had a cozy sitting area around a fireplace, plus a selection of books on guns, African history, hunting, and other topics of general interest to guests. Over the fireplace hung a Lee-Enfield #1 Mark I* rifle that had belonged to Cornie's father; with which, I was told, that gentleman had killed many elephants, and kept his family fed in the years following WW Two. It had South African Police Services markings, and regrettably had been deactivated, since the Namibian authorities refused to give Cornie a license for it! It's a damned shame that it had to be done as the only way to save this relic from a smelter. I wonder if the Namibian police are aware that Cornie could, if he liked, construct a rifle from scratch in his well-equipped shop?

His talents as a gunsmith served me well and saved part of my hunt. I can't imagine how it happened, but the Luggage Gorillas employed by one of the airlines we used (Delta and Air Namibia) managed to damage the rear sight on my muzzle-loading rifle. They must have worked pretty hard at that: the case I shipped it in is made of sheet aluminum with welded and riveted corners and is supposed to protect the guns come what may. But when Cornie picked up



the rifle to inspect it, and tried to look through the peep sight, it had been *bent* to the point where you couldn't see through it! He removed it and took it into his shop, where he re-bent it to the correct angle; we sighted the gun in, and all went well afterwards, as will be related below.

One of the blessed aspects of this place was what it lacked: television. Cornie and Elaine have a satellite antenna, but there are no TV's in the guest rooms or the lounge. This is intentional. "A lot of people say silly things," Elaine remarked; "We should put up a big screen TV on the wall! Can you imagine what that would do to the atmosphere of a hunting camp?" And yes, "camp" is what they call it, though it certainly isn't anything like the summer camp where I spent a month as a prisoner in 1957. There's a saying that "The worst camp in Africa is better than the best camp in America," and in my experience this is quite correct. True, your average African hunting camp lacks the *ambiance* provided by numerous unwashed men drinking stale beer for a week at a time, but Africa manages to make up the deficit with good food prepared by a professional cook, daily laundry service, and comfortable beds rather than folding cots.

Another thing the Retriete lacks is heating. That's not a criticism: most African houses, even very nice ones, don't have it, because most of the time they don't need it. Their version of "winter" is like a balmy summer day in North America. However, we managed to arrive not only as the World Cup was starting, but during the coldest spell in Namibia since 1901. The first day we arrived was fine, but the cold snap hit that evening and it was—no kidding—48 degrees Fahrenheit in my room for several mornings in a row. We'd start the hunting day at 6:00 AM and let me tell you, in an open hunting vehicle (see below) when the air temperature is about 30 degrees, your eyes water. Until the sun comes up you wonder how this can possibly be *Africa*, for God's sake, when dying of exposure seems to be a greater hazard than lions or snakes. Beginning the second night, Agrippini, the maid-of-all-work, slipped a hot water bottle into each bed a half hour before we turned in.

We each had a Professional Hunter and a tracker assigned to us: I went out with Cornie, and Art, the lucky devil, had Elaine as his PH. She prefers to take less experienced hunters and/or women out in the field. Elaine is quite a sight when she's ready to hunt: she carries a Ruger Speed Six revolver in .357 on one hip, and a belt of ammunition for her .416 rifle on the other. Art affirms she knows how to use both, too: she finished off two of his kills, one with the revolver and one with the rifle. Cornie told me, too, that she is "...never out of reach..." of the .357, not excepting the trips when we went into Windhoek to buy souvenirs. God knows where she keeps it when she's wearing a dress in town: I tried to spot it but failed. But I was assured it was there. She carries a couple of rounds of snake shot for it, "just in case." At one point we saw a black mamba in the road, and she exclaimed, "I have my .357!" and started to turn around. Luckily for the snake he left the vicinity, and was nowhere to be seen. Cornie likes snakes, and isn't afraid of even a mamba, a critter that scares me silly. To each his or her own, but...when it comes to 7-foot venomous reptiles known for aggression, I say, "Elaine, go for it!"

Most days we left the house at 6:00 AM, which meant about a 4:30 wake-up for me. We had a simple breakfast of rusks and coffee, and then *ho!* for the veld. I rode with Cornie in an amazing vehicle, his specially modified Unimog.



The Unimog is a German product, a sort of general-purpose vehicle with high ground clearance and four-wheel drive, made by Mercedes-Benz. Cornie's was built in 1964 and he took a welding torch to it, cutting off the cab; that was replaced with a roll cage of his own design and construction, and a bench seat in the rear for riders. The original truck bed has been replaced with one of Cornie's design, too.



As he's modified it, it is more or less the Mother Of All ATV's. This monster has a diesel engine that honks and blats and farts black smoke when he shifts gears, but it will go absolutely anywhere. Most of the time it runs in two-wheel drive, but if the sand gets soft or the slope is too steep, he can shift it into 4-wheel mode, and I veritably believe the thing would climb a tree. I rode in the passenger seat with a rifle in the rack in front; France, my tracker, rode in the back. We would cruise the roads on the concessions, looking for game: when something was spotted we'd dismount and start walking and stalking. This is essentially the way Roosevelt did things, though of course he used a horse instead of hulking, oversized quasi-Jeep. It sounds like a tank, and even at a walking pace, the local game wouldn't let it get within 400 yards, fleeing before the racket it makes:

but it served us admirably. Naturally there's a winch in the back for hauling in the larger examples of dead ungulates (see below). It has an on-board air compressor, miscellaneous digging and chopping tools, and a jerry can of water, among other odds and ends. Oh, and it has a name: "Obelisk," after a cartoon character in the old *Asterix The Gaul* comic books. Obelisk is the big guy in the picture at left, and really, there is some resemblance between him and Cornie's Unimog—or *vice versa*—I think.

The first day of my hunt was a bust, largely because I didn't have a clue what was going on. Cornie and France had spotted a set of fresh eland tracks, so we descended from the Unimog, and set off following them. It made little sense to me, because there was no way this city kid could see what they were seeing: but they read those scuff marks in the dirt—and of course, there were innumerable ones made by many animals, not just the band of fugitive (alleged) eland—like they were reading highway signs. I scrambled after them as best I could, wondering what in the *hell* was happening, for about an hour. Now, I am not the fleetest of foot: I can manage a respectable waddle when pressed, but they set a hot pace and I had a hard time keeping up, because I had to watch my footing as well as try to avoid the thorns on the vegetation. *Everything* that grows in Namibia has thorns, except the waist-high grass that conceals loose rocks (and, I suppose, snakes: Cornie swore he saw several, but thank God I never did) over which a tubby and out-of-shape university professor would occasionally stumble.

Furthermore, knowing that there thorns in abundance, I'd thoughtfully chosen a pair of briar-proof hunting pants to wear. You'd think this was a good idea, but the facing on the pants was very hard and made a *lot* of noise as I scraped through the bushes. So did I, when I periodically knocked over a rock or tripped on something: these incidents cause Cornie to turn and look at me sternly, and though he didn't actually *say*, "Shut up, you clumsy greenhorn!" I could tell he was thinking of it, and only his professionalism prevented him from doing so. But I *was* a clumsy

greenhorn, and I simply had no idea why we were racing through the brush at (literally) break-neck speed.

Two hours of the chase fair winded me, but I needed to learn. Back at the camp for lunch I asked him what we'd been doing that morning, because obviously I'd missed the point; and also to tell me everything I'd done wrong. He was diplomatic enough to ignore the second question, but explained that, "We were *tracking* a herd of eland, not stalking them. At one point we came within a hundred yards: didn't you hear them?" Well, to be honest, about all I could hear was my panting and the thumping of my elderly heart, but if he says we got that close, we got that close. I certainly never saw them. I don't think he did, either, but he *knew* they were there, from their tracks.

This business of tracking, especially in an area where there are many game animals, is an acquired skill that has to be learned from early childhood. Cornie grew up in the veld and says he's a better tracker than his staff, and watching him subsequently convinced me of this. He can not only tell what *kind* of animal he's tracking, he can tell you *which* animal it is and how many individual animals there are in the group; how long ago they passed; what sex it is; how big its horns are; and probably what the animal had for breakfast on the previous Tuesday. He'd spot the tracks of some animal while driving the Unimog, slam on the brakes, and off we'd go, haring after whatever it was. That afternoon we tried *stalking* impala twice, but never got a shot. Day Two went much better.

On the second morning we tried for impala again, with no luck. But driving around on one of the farms we encountered another group of hunters at the crest of a ridge: the PH with them said he'd seen some eland in the valley below. Cornie took a look with his binoculars, returned to the Unimog, and said, "Let's go!" I dismounted from Obelisk and off the three of us went.

We had to get downwind of the eland, which took some time. The wind was blowing from our right, so we moved quietly down into the valley, making a very long detour to our left. I don't know how far we went, but it had to be half a mile or more before we turned back to the right, heading upwind towards the herd. The stalk began at that point, and we spent the next half hour or so getting into position.

There were three big bulls in the bachelor group. Cornie said, "The one in the middle! He's very large and old, take him!" He set up his shooting sticks and I got ready. The middle bull turned broadside to me, facing to my right; I fired at him, and he began to trot. "Shoot again! He's still on his feet!" Cornie shouted, so I did. I saw the impact of the second bullet, but had missed the first hit. About two seconds after the second shot, the bull fell over and dropped out of sight, in a small depression. "You got him!" I was told, and we walked up to the spot, with France looking sharply about. I spotted the bull first, down on his left side, and apparently stone dead. "Don't get near his horns!" Cornie warned me. "Make sure he's dead!"

He was, in fact he was deader than Disco. It was the first shot that killed him, the second was merely insurance, but he was likely dead on his feet when the second bullet hit. The first took him on the high right side, and coursed through both lungs, coming to rest just under the skin on the left side. It was Norma's 196-grain "Alaska" bullet, fired from my sweet little 1944-vintage

Husqvarna sporter in 8x57. We recovered this bullet at the skinning shed, and it had shed nearly 50% of its weight: not the best performance, but it did the job, and that's what counted. The range was about 170 meters, or 185 yards.

An eland is an enormous animal, the largest of the antelopes. There aren't many animals in Africa much bigger. This bull was about 12 years old, well past his prime, and Cornie (whose philosophy is to shoot only mature males) was delighted with the kill. As the saying goes, once the trigger is pulled the fun is over and the work begins: but fortunately in Africa there's always someone around to do the grunt work for The Client. Africa is spoiling me in that respect: here I have to drag my own kills out.



This bruiser weighed about 1900 pounds, and the stripes on his side mark him as a "Livingstone eland," a subspecies of the Common Eland. A ton of pot roast on the hoof, more or less. The Unimog and its winch was up to the task, and it only took an hour or so to get him into the back and head off for the skinning shed.



In the picture at left, France the tracker is preparing to bring the eland up the ramp (which is the size of the average farm gate!) and Snip, Cornie's tracking dog—more about Snip below—is making sure The eland doesn't spring to life.

I'm getting a "skull mount" for this animal. His horns were very big, but his head was the size of my Labrador Retriever, and there's no place to hang a full mount on the wall of my office.

After leaving the late Mr Eland in the capable hands of the skinners we went back for another go at impala. That time I had a shot, but missed him.

Day Three saw five more fruitless impala stalking attempts, without a shot fired. It was beginning to look like I wasn't going to get an impala at all, but as a consolation prize, that night we ate some tenderloins from the eland for dinner.

I did, however, get my impala, and a damned nice one. On Day Four we were again out early, and stalked up a couple—I was getting better at the technique and making less noise—but we passed up a shot because the one we were watching turned out to have one horn shorter than the other, and Cornie declared this animal to be unworthy of death. Who knew symmetry can be fatal to your health?

About 8:00 we spotted another herd, and one ram with very nice horns. We stalked him and I got into position, pulled the trigger, and *CLICK!* My rifle misfired! This was partial bad luck and partial stupidity. The gun was loaded all right, but the all-pervasive fine dust of Namibia had interfered with the magazine follower. It's normal practice to leave the chamber empty but cartridges in the magazine, and when I worked the bolt the sticky follower had hung up and the bolt hadn't picked up a round. "Always *look* with a bolt action," Cornie warned me, "and make *sure* you have a round in the chamber!"

The ram was dumb enough to give me a second try, after we'd chased him a few hundred yards. He stopped, I fired, the gun went off, and I missed! But this ram was *really* dumb. He ran again, and we pounded after him, and he stopped again! I'm not sure why he did that: perhaps he was having a laugh at our expense, and/or he figured that the clown in the funny hat was so incompetent that he had nothing to fear. But it was a fatal mistake, because shot number 3 didn't miss, and down he went at 170 meters, another double lung hit. This bullet (another Alaska) went all the way through and left a biggish exit wound. The ram went 100 meters and dropped.

He was again a mature animal, maybe 7 to 8 years old, and with a beautiful set of horns. He was so pretty, this one's getting the full shoulder mount treatment. I want to put his head in the central stairwell of the house: Susan says it should go in the backyard shed.



With the two main animals checked off on my score card, we spent the next day trying to get a baboon. I work in an anatomy department. Among the advantages of my job are that I have no problem finding a home for miscellaneous animal parts, and bones are always welcome. I wanted to get a complete baboon skeleton and have a student assemble it for our lab displays. But there was no baboon for me that day: those guys are very smart and they know a Unimog is big trouble, so they never let you get closer than about 200 yards. I missed five of them that first try, as we chased them from one side of a rocky hill to the other until sundown. I did eventually get one, a tale to be told later.

One of my goals for the hunt was to hunt with a muzzle-loading rifle. I do a lot of this for whitetails, and originally I'd planned to bring a .72 caliber Pedersoli double rifle with me. Unfortunately, numerous practice sessions with it before departure had shown me that I simply couldn't hit anything with it much over 25 yards away, and there was no way I was going to shoot it at an expensive animal and wound it (you pay for wounded game that isn't recovered). In the end I opted to bring my tried-and-true Thompson/Center New Englander .54, that has been the terror of the local white-tailed deer population for years.

You can't bring gunpowder or percussion caps on airplanes, so I brought the rifle and had Elaine buy the caps and powder in Windhoek. The price there was only four times what it cost in the USA...\$85 for a pound of powder! I had sent her some .72 bullets but of course couldn't use them, so I had to bring bullets for the .54 with me.



Cornie was worried that I might start a grass fire, and from the image above you can perhaps understand why. But I assured him that our Autumn woods were every bit as dry as their veldt and I had yet to start a fire there; besides, I use lubricated wool wads that don't ignite.

The quarry was a warthog this time. Warthogs are every bit as ugly as...well, warthogs; and although they're very nearsighted, they have sharp ears and a terrific sense of smell. They also have a reputation for ferocity. Under normal circumstances, warthogs are shot from a blind at a waterhole. Ambushing game at waterholes isn't well thought of in Namibia but for some animals it's *de rigueur* and the warthog is one. They're very difficult to stalk because they're so alert and have such keen ears and noses.

As we were driving to a waterhole to set up, France (riding in the back of the vehicle) spotted a warthog sleeping in the knee-high grass. Cornie asked if I wanted to try stalking it, and so we dismounted, I capped my gun, and off we went upwind. I was definitely getting better at this spot-and-stalk business, though I have to admit I didn't actually *see* the pig until he started to move from left to right, about 35 yards away from me. Once I had him in view, I fired and hit him on the right side, angling down, and the bullet came out his left shoulder. This was a classic

example of how you don't need high velocity for effectiveness. That 435 grain cylindrical bullet was moving at a very leisurely pace, maybe 1000-1100 feet per second: but it more or less punched a core out of that warthog.



Again, to Cornie's delight, this was a very old boar, who, he said, would not have made it through another year of life. He was perhaps 11 years old, and even though his tusks were worn and one was broken off from fighting, they were very big.

I asked Cornie why, if these pigs are so wary, we were able to get so close. "Well," he replied, "this guy was very old, and he probably had lost some or all of his hearing; and he was likely almost blind." I wasn't sure what to think, but it would appear that the only warthog *I* could stalk was decrepit senior citizen who was both blind and deaf. But in any event, that Old Piggie went to market on the back of the Unimog.



I subsequently killed two more warthogs with my Husqvarna as “meat” pigs. Cornie is required by law to provide his staff of four with some “basics” of life (including free housing and lifetime employment..Namibia is after all run by ex-Communists...) and among these is...meat. Meat is a luxury for most people in Africa. He asked me to stake out his waterhole and shoot a couple of smallish males, as “staff meat.”

One of these meat pigs presented me with a graphic illustration of the value of a dog. I had shot the pig late in the day and he ran off from the waterhole into the grass. Cornie heard the shot and came down with Snip, his fox terrier. Snip soon picked up the pig’s scent and within five minutes we heard him barking hysterically a couple of hundred yards off. Snip is trained to bark only if an animal is still moving, so we knew the pig wasn’t yet dead. We came up to where Snip was worrying the pig—who hadn’t much longer to live and didn’t really appreciate the attention he was getting—and finished the business. At that point Snip, being a terrier, began to bite the pig and try



to shake it. The absurdity of a 20-pound dog trying to shake an already-dead 60-pound pig to death has to be seen to be appreciated, but Snip is all heart and courage, and completely unaware that he's small. He'd tackle a lion if the opportunity presented itself, and I'd give him an even chance. Besides being courageous and faithful, Snip is remarkably photogenic.



While I'm on the subject of dogs, I should mention that Cornie and Elaine have five of them. Snip is one of two Fox Terriers (the other is Foxy, who hunted with Art) and there are two Bull Terriers, Sumo (above) and Zia, who serve as Elaine's bodyguards (giving her time to draw her .357). In addition, there is Trixie, a Jack Russell Terrorist. As you would expect, Trixie is the Boss Dog. She pushes Sumo and Zia around with impunity, because—like Snip—she is unaware of how small she really is, and that Sumo could snap her in half if he chose. JRT's are contemptuous of all other breeds as weaklings and cowards, and there isn't a JRT in the entire world who would hesitate to tackle a rhinoceros that had offered offense.

The JRT is the Official Dog of Namibia, I believe. *Everyone* has at *least* one, and usually more. The Basic Set of Dogs in Namibia seems to be one or two JRT's as Early Warning Dogs and ankle immobilizers, with a couple of bigger dogs to rip an intruder to shreds. Sumo and Zia are more or less 60 pounds of muscle with fangs, and woe betide anyone who tries to mess with Elaine when they're on guard.

The afternoon of the Warthog Day was another fruitless chase of baboons in the mountains, and another miss for me. On the way home, France, who has phenomenal eyesight, spotted a very, very rare animal on the roadside, just as dusk was falling. How he saw it I'll never know, but he got very excited, and Cornie did, too, both of them yelling in Afrikaans at something in the bush. Cornie shouted for me to come, and to bring my camera. It turned out to be a pangolin, a very shy and rare anteater that looks like an armadillo covered with artichoke leaves.



I had never heard of such an animal. It's completely toothless and harmless, and Cornie said in his whole life he'd seen fewer than ten of them. When he picked it up, it did exactly what an armadillo does: rolled itself into a compact armored ball that rendered it invulnerable to nearly any predator.

Cornie said this one was a very large one, and at least 70 years old! It's hard to imagine, but this creature was born about the time the British Army was being ferried off the beaches at Dunkirk, and he could well have been older than that!



The Big Day was about six days into the hunt. We went to a huge game lodge closer to Windhoek, to try for a zebra.

Burchell's Zebra are pretty common in Namibia, but Cornie had a CITES³ permit for me to take a Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, a species native only to a limited area, including the mountainous regions of Namibia. The Hartmann's is a bit smaller than the common Burchell's zebra, and lives in some very rugged terrain. We chased zebra in the morning and I missed two, again at very long range, and when we broke for lunch, as we drove along, we passed a herd of springbok. Springbok are beautiful animals, slightly smaller than a whitetail, and present in vast numbers all over the country. Cornie was ogling the herd, and stopped the car (we weren't in the Unimog that day). "That's a *beautiful* springbok! Do you want to take him?" I was a bit hesitant, but I could hear the note of frustration in his voice. "I certainly won't shoot him from the car," I replied, but if he'll let me get to that tree over there"—about fifty yards away from the car and perhaps 100 from the herd—"I'll take a shot."

I got out of the car and loaded the rifle, and cautiously moved towards a tree, which afforded me a place to brace the gun. The herd started to move, with the big ram at the tail end of the string. He began to get suspicious and began to move with the rest of the group, but Cornie went

³ Council on International Trade in Endangered Species

BAAAAHHHH! At him, and he stopped just long enough for me to get the shot off. I hit him hard and he dropped like a stone.



That was the morning...after lunch we went back to the mountains and found some more zebra. That hunt nearly killed me. These are, after all, *mountain* zebra, and though it wasn't the Rockies, they were real, sure-enough mountains that went up and down and back up again. Nor were the zebra cooperative: they were very, very wary and we had to run to get anywhere within 200 yards. As I said, I don't do mountains or running...but after 5 or 6 days of matching Cornie's pace, I was more or less able to keep up with him as we chased one herd. After it was over I asked him if he'd ever lost a client to a heart attack, and he said no; I replied, "There's a first time for everything!" but I am here to tell the tale.

Finally the herd we were chasing stopped on a hillside 156 yards away, and gave me a shot. I took this one from a sitting position, with my back braced against Cornie's. I have—ahem—a low center of gravity and have always shot best from a sitting position; so it proved this time.

The Hartmann's zebra has a set of "chevrons" on its shoulder, and the peak of these chevrons is the aiming point. I put that bullet—a Norma "Oryx"—spang into the top of the chevron on the left foreleg of the biggest beast in the herd, and felt good about that shot as soon as it was on its way. The zebra went a few yards and keeled over from a double lung hit.



It was an elderly mare, about 800 pounds. Again, Cornie was delighted, as he felt she was well past her reproductive prime and an ideal candidate for removal from the breeding pool. She was a job to load up, and will eventually become a rug. Note the brown markings on the face: this is a characteristic of the Hartmann's zebra, as is the lack of the "shadow stripes" seen on the Burchell's. Really a handsome animal.

The next day was another fruitless baboon hunt, since I'd pretty much shot up my list except for that. As we were driving around I noticed some odd movement in my rifle stock...it turned out it has a crack! This may have been a very old crack I never noticed, that became apparent only in the extraordinarily dry environment of Namibia, but a crack is a crack. As the Afrikaans saying has it, *A Boer mak a plan*; that is, there's always a work-around. Mine was...electrical tape. I had also lost a scope turret cap in the headlong rush to the dead zebra, so I wrapped some of it around the elevation adjustment to keep the dust out. I like this rifle far too much to leave it this way; it goes to the gunsmith for repair or a new stock as soon as I can get it to him.



My list was as yet incomplete, since I hadn't got a baboon in seven tries over several days. So we gave it one last hurrah, and finally I connected, though I hardly covered myself in glory in the process.



We went back to a place I'll always think of as "Baboon Mountain," and after an hour or so of blatting around in the Unimog, we spotted some of them high on the crest of a hill. I fired, and damned if the baboon didn't fall! A 252-yard shot! We sent France and a kid named Matt (an intern from Texas, that's him with the ape at left) up to retrieve it—another prerogative of The Client—but lo, the baboon wasn't where he was supposed to be. Apparently he'd been wounded and snuck off.

Now, a wounded baboon is a dangerous animal: they're tremendously strong and agile, and have a take-one-with-you point of view. I'd have gone up after him, but the slope was about 45 degrees and well beyond my comfort level in climbing: it would have taken me hours to get up to the crest, and Cornie told me to wait in the Unimog. He took my rifle

up with him, scampering like a squirrel, and finished the baboon off; France and Matt hauled the body down.

My hope of a baboon skeleton was—literally—smashed. The bullet had hit him on the right elbow, shattering it completely beyond any restoration; and then ripped across his belly. He was at best a few minutes from death when Cornie fired. But his skeleton was unusable for my original purpose. I had France remove the head, and his skull will sit on my desk.

That more or less ended my hunt, though I spent a few of the remaining mornings at the waterhole, during which time I saw a jackal. I didn't know it at the time but jackals are vermin, and I should have shot it. Nary a warthog nor a baboon showed his face during these days.



One day we got a call from the neighboring ranch that a giraffe had been shot, would we like to come and watch the dismantling? You betcha! We had seen many giraffe in the course of the week, and this one in particular was one we'd "met" in the field. He was huge old bull with innumerable fighting scars on his face and neck.

Giraffe are placid looking creatures and from the ground they look big, but you can't imagine how big they really are until you see one on the ground dead. They're huge, bigger than anything else than an elephant; and bigger than a fair number of elephant, come to that. This bull



had to have weighed well over 5000 pounds on the hoof. It took four shots from a .416 Remington to get him down. A wounded giraffe is big trouble, as he can run nearly 40 miles an hour and will cover a lot of ground before he dies.

We watched the process for a couple of hours. The beast was skinned on the ground and quartered, the bits being hoisted into a truck by a front-end loader on a tractor. The picture above right shows one skinned and shortened hind leg being hoisted in the truck. The rib cage is separated from the body with an *axe*. One normal sized pickup can't hold all the meat from a big giraffe like this one: the rancher had to send for reinforcements.



At the site of the giraffe kill, we met Simba, an 8-week-old JRT puppy who belongs to the land owner. Simba means "Lion," an entirely appropriate name for a Jack. Elaine is holding him at left.

True to JRT tradition, Simba decided that the giraffe was *his* kill, and began to gnaw on its dis-articulated leg, which was probably 40 times his size. The picture below is of Matt with the leg. This shows how big it is: Matt's a football player from Austin, Texas and is 6 feet tall, at least. That's one of the forelegs he's holding. Simba decided to teach the giraffe a lesson in manners by eating it.





My last kill was an entirely fortuitous one, a black-backed jackal. The day before we left, Elaine and Cornie took us to visit the Lindenhoff farm⁴ where the taxidermist Jacomien lived, along with her husband Jaco, the farm manager and a PH. Jaco took Art and me and Cornie for a game ride around the ranch, because there are rhino on the property, which we hoped to see. As we mounted into the back of his Toyota Land Cruiser, Jaco placed a rifle in the rack in front of me, and said, “If you see a jackal or a cheetah, shoot it!” I thought he was kidding: I assumed the rifle was there in case one of the rhino took offense at our presence, but no, he was serious.

Well, we didn’t see a cheetah (more on this below) but a very careless jackal showed himself on one of the paths about 4:40, 50-60 yards out. It took me about 2 seconds to get the rifle up and a round in the chamber, and the jackal is now residing in Jackal Heaven. Jaco described his rifle as “a cheapie,” which meant a CZ 550 with a synthetic stock in .300 Winchester Magnum...here that rifle would cost about \$1000, and probably twice that much in Namibia. If that’s a “cheapie,” what does a “good” rifle cost? (Actually we’d been to a gun shop in Windhoek, and “good” rifles run anywhere from \$2K to...well, I never did get an upper end figure, but probably more than I paid for the entire trip. Import and sales taxes are pretty scary in Namibia.)

⁴ A tiny place: only 38 square miles. About 50% larger than Manhattan Island.



Take my word on this point: a .300 Win Mag is WAY more gun than is needed for a 35 or 40 pound jackal. In the picture I am holding it so that you *can't* see the exit wound: most of that jackal's right side was exit wound, actually.

Now, about the cheetah. Americans are told that cheetah are an endangered species, but according to everyone I met there, and also to the CITES web site, they aren't. They're classified as "vulnerable," which means that if they're pressured too hard they may eventually become "endangered," a word that has special meaning in the system of classification. Nevertheless, the propaganda here is that cheetah are on the brink of extinction, and it was a shock to me when, one evening coming home from the eternal hunt for a baboon, we spotted a cheetah, and Cornie asked me if I wanted to shoot it. "I can't afford that!" was my answer, to which he replied, "No charge! Cheetah are vermin here, we shoot them on sight!" I was so startled that the cheetah, who had perhaps encountered the Unimog before, skedaddled, but I kept it in mind. It was reconfirmed not only by Jaco, but by Chris, a land owner who has a *pet* cheetah, but who nevertheless shoots every one he finds on the farm.



This animal, whose name I forget, is a prime candidate for the Fattest Cheetah On The Planet Award. He was hand-raised from cub hood and eats 4 kilograms of meat every day: far, far more than any wild cheetah could ever hope for. In the picture above he's enjoying his lunch—a goat kid from the farm flock. He was very fastidious: he stripped off the meat, left the bones clean, and ignored the skin!

The picture of him below shows how big he is. I doubt this cat could run down an antelope, but what the hell, he's got a good deal, so he doesn't have to. Elaine once had a pet cheetah, I was told, and they're apparently very much like house cats in behavior. I gathered that tame cheetahs aren't unusual pets in that part of the world, but it seems to me that having a 200-300 pound carnivore *in the house* isn't the smartest thing I ever heard of. Still, Chris' Jack Russell Terrorists didn't seem to worry about the big kitty, and I suppose the Senior JRT would occasionally beat it up, just for practice.



This view of cheetah-as-vermin was confirmed by the presence of several cheetah traps on the Lindhenhoff property, one of which is shown below. You can't bait cheetah: they don't even return to their own kills and they won't touch carrion.

The trap is a gigantic version of a Hav-A-Hart, set in one of their runways, and surrounded by brush so that the cat has to go through it. It's open at both ends, and the cheetah can see through it, so in he strolls, and BANG! he's caught. No doubt no cheetah ever gets fooled twice.

I asked Jaco what happens to a trapped cheetah. "Well," he said, "it depends on their attitude. If the cheetah is cooperative, he goes to Cheetah Recovery. If he isn't, we shoot him in the trap." No word on the ratio of cooperative to obstreperous cheetah was forthcoming.



Again, to an American, this seems to be a pretty cavalier treatment for a Majestic Animal, especially one with pretty much cult status here, but Namibia has plenty of cheetah, and in fact CITES issues 150 license for *export* of cheetah every year as trophies. If a problem cheetah is killed, it can't be exported, and it can't be sold, so the animal is worth nothing to the land owner. In fact, a cheetah is a major-caliber financial liability, because it will kill calves of both domestic and wild animals and goats. Since the land owner sells those animals as his living, a cheetah on the grounds costs him a bundle. While we were there, a different farm owner called Cornie and said she had *seven* cheetah on her property, they were killing two or three of her goats every day, and would he *please* come and kill the damned things? Cornie is a member of the Namibian Professional Hunters Association, and is trying to get NAPHA to lobby the government to change its rule on problem cheetah as trophies. "If you have a problem animal," he explains, "you can't sell it: it can't be taken as a trophy and it's essentially of no value. We have clients who would pay a substantial sum for a cheetah, but we're limited in how many we can sell as trophies by the CITES rules. If we could sell a problem cheetah to a client, and if the client could export it, then everyone wins: the land owner gets rid of a nuisance, the client gets a trophy, and the PH and ranch make money." This is of course entirely too logical for the Save The Cheetah Lobby, but some day it may come to pass.

My general impressions of Namibia were uniformly positive. We did go into Windhoek twice, and it's a modern city with clear German influence in architecture. There are modern shopping

malls and orderly traffic, a fair amount of new construction going up (built entirely by Chinese firms) and well-dressed people, black and white, on the streets. I think it's perhaps the size of Roanoke, and is the biggest city in the country.

Namibia is a vast place: the size of Texas and Oklahoma combined, over 400,000 square miles. The rural areas are almost uninhabited, even fairly close to the cities, because most of the 2,000,000 people in the country live in Windhoek and one or two other large cities. We were in the Omitara District 120 kilometers east of Windhoek. I asked how many people lived there and was told about 700, which figure included blacks *and* whites. Given that only 10-12% of the population is white, that means fewer than 100 in a huge expanse of countryside. God knows how anyone meets a potential wife or husband! Large areas of the country are simply uninhabited, and some of it is uninhabitable.

Before the Germans came in the 1880's, there was in fact no permanent population, even of native tribes. There is very little surface water, and what there is consists mostly of shallow pools that collect rainwater in the brief rainy season, but dry up in the heat of Spring and Summer. With no water, animals migrated to the north (into what is now Angola) and the natives followed the game. In Summer, nothing could live there except drought-tolerant plants.

But there is a good deal of underground water and the Germans brought well-drilling technology with them. Borehole wells with wind- or solar-powered pumps now bring water up out of the ground in sufficient quantities for livestock and game to remain year round and for people to live. Nevertheless, Namibia is the driest country south of the Sahara Desert. With typical German thoroughness, the colonizers calculated the size of ground needed to raise a single cow, given the water; and that's the reason Namibian ranches are so colossal in size: it takes a great deal of savannah to maintain a cow. Less so for game animals, and nowadays, though Namibia is still famous for its beef, game ranching is more profitable, especially in places accessible by road from Windhoek.

The roads are good, though few of them are paved. The blacktop ends just before Cornie's ranch, and except for the road directly into the capital, we drove on well-graded dirt roads at hair-raising speeds. The most amazing aspect of the place is how *clean* it all is. In nearly three weeks, I think I may have seen one piece of litter on the roads; even downtown Windhoek is clean, much, much cleaner than any of the South African cities I've visited. The discarded plastic bag is sort of the emblem of the Third World, in my experience; but there aren't any floating around in the parts of Namibia I saw.

There is an Omitara *District*, but there isn't any "Omitara" in any real sense. Before the building of the roads the narrow-gauge railway that runs past the Retriete carried a great many cattle to market, and Omitara was a thriving little village serving as a shipping station for them: cattle from the district were taken to the railway depot there. The better roads, improved and faster motor transport, plus the shift from an emphasis on beef cattle to game ranching killed the village. Today there remains only a police station and the Omitara Trading Company, a small general store that supplies the needs of the locals when they run short of something needed on the farm or need a liter of milk. With Windhoek and its supermarkets only an hour away by car, the Trading Company's days are probably numbered as well. An "informal settlement" (read:

squatter camp) that looks very much like the shanty-towns surrounding most South African cities is about two kilometers away. The Trading Company sells liquor and wine to the inhabitants and also *single* cigarettes...most of them can't come up with the cash to buy a whole pack at a time. Cornie is very contemptuous of the squatter camp: he says it was foisted on the district by the government as a way to make sure their supporters would be the majority in the periodic elections. (SWAPO must be pretty good at rigging elections: they haven't lost one in the past 25 years, in any part of the country.) The squatter camp inhabitants, he says, are the majority of poachers he catches. The police he dismisses as incompetent and corrupt (so what else is new in a Third World country?) and says, "We don't rely on the government, we rely on our neighbors," when someone needs assistance. This is of course a feature of rural life everywhere, but the Omitara District goes beyond any concept of "rural" in the USA outside of interior Alaska.

I'll be back...there is an elephant in the Caprivi Strip with my name on it, and before I get too old and creaky, I need to meet that elephant. Also there's a hippo up there who is mine. The trouble with hunting in Africa is that it simply flat-out spoils you for anywhere else. Whitetails in the Virginia woods are going to seem mighty tame after this trip.

