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My blesbok (230 yards)
left to right PH's
Lennox and Dirk



AFRICA PART V

Pete Moore's been talking the talk for the last few months about his trip to South Africa, now let's see if he can walk the walk...

After finally making it to the top of the hill in the searing late morning heat, we spotted the springbok ram and two ewes. Dirk Triegaardt, professional hunter and one of the partners in Jericho Game Farms, indicated we needed to get forward about 30 yards to be in position for the shot. This was not good news, as the ground was not

only red-hot but also covered with tiny stones that dug into knees and burned palms as we crawled. Slithering slowly and painfully forward, we got to the appointed spot and I cautiously opened the bipod legs.

Pinging the ram with my Leica range finder gave me a dead-on 200 yards easy shot with just 3" of drop. The male turned towards us, presenting a near front-on target. The aim was on the neck but angling through for the heart. Looking at Dirk I asked in a whisper, "OK to shoot?" He nodded. Settling back I positioned the cross, flipped off the safety, checked the sight picture and squeezed the trigger. The 270WSM banged loudly, I saw the bullet hit and the springbok fall like a puppet whose strings had been cut. This was what I

had come for - my first ever kill on a plains game species.

Setting the safety I stood up and Dirk hugged me, grinning with delight and then wincing...perhaps I should have told him about the muzzle brake! Suffice to say he stayed back from the muzzle after that. Springbok down, blesbok and hartebeest to go; but first...

Long shot

That single shot was the culmination of months of preparation for a trip to Africa courtesy of Jericho Game Farms. Brothers Dirk and Francois Triegaardt (PH and owners) had contacted me last year about the possibility of coming over and seeing what they had to offer. These days Africa seems to be the top destination for British hunters looking for the ultimate shooting experience, with plains game being the preferred species. Personally, I would not want to shoot the big five, so stuff like antelope and warthog is enough for me...

There was not a lot of change out of £3500 (including flights), but then you can pay £3,000 to shoot one Scottish red deer. But if you enjoy the chase, you owe it to yourself to go to a land where

"Aiming up from the elbow joint I placed the cross high in the vital triangle and went for a spine shot"

the game is exotic and the hunting exciting at least once in your lifetime...

Regular readers will know that I have been building up to this trip for four months now, writing articles on rifle build, ammunition and equipment selection, so this time around it's the real deal, to see if Africa is all it's cracked up to be.

The UK side of things was easy - with a maximum of five kilos of ammo and my Winchester safely in its Pele Travel Vault, along with my knives and optics, I rolled up to the BA desk at Heathrow on Saturday afternoon. I had confirmed my intention to take a firearm when I booked and did so again two days prior to the flight, as is recommended. I put the ammo in a Case Guard box, which the airline was happy with, though I would advise you to check if you fly with another company. This is tagged and then put in your main baggage. The rifle is inspected, as is your FAC, then labelled and given to a security person who is responsible for it and also delivers it to the plane.

At the other end it was even easier. I picked up my bag and went along to the firearms office at Cape Town Airport. My rifle was already there. Showing my FAC, passport and South African import form, the Sergeant gave me a temporary permit for the duration of my stay. This is handed in on the way back. The whole process took 10 minutes.

800 Kilometres

Dirk met us at the airport and we stayed the night with him, as we were to drive up with him and Francois to Jericho on Monday morning. Normally clients would be put up in a hotel overnight. Conversely, you could fly to Port Elizabeth and be picked up from there. PE is only 300km from the farm; Cape Town is 800km...

Africa is a stunningly beautiful, stark place. Huge mountain ranges rear up from the flat and dry plains. Leaving at 0930 we got to Jericho at 1900, with a stop off to see the local taxidermist on the way. Though tired we went out for a quick game drive in a 4 x 4 (the Saffs call them bakkies) and saw a number of species - hartebeest, wildebeest and springbok. I have to say that it whetted my appetite for the next few days' hunting. Then it was back for drinks, darts and that South African staple, barbecue.

The accommodation is a traditional white-washed, Cape Dutch farmhouse with en-suite rooms for couples, singles and families. If you've ever read any Wilbur Smith novels about South Africa then this is the living embodiment of it. The house is staffed by a cook/housekeeper and maids who keep you fed and watered and do all your washing.

Range Time

Dirk's plan was to hunt the three species in order of size over the next two days in a variety of ways - from mountain stalking to driven game through plains stalking. But first it was down to the range for a check zero. This is mandatory for both client and PH, as quite often your rifle can drift off zero due to the flight, elevation and temperature of the country you are in. Also, it allows them to assess your shooting ability and in doing so the ranges they will let you fire at. The Winchester was a little out, but a few



The culmination of the week - a red hartebeest, this bad boy was taken after a morning's stalking out on the Karoo and worth every minute of it

clicks on the turrets had it shooting bang on at 100 yards again. Dirk, Francois and another PH named Lennox were all quite impressed with my rifle and kit. The Leica rangefinder was new to them, but they all appreciated the quality of the Swarovski EL 8X42 bins, which in the end they borrowed from me more than I used them myself!

Then it was out in the bakkie for the hunt. We took two attempts to get into the springbok, the second of which resulted in my first kill.

I asked if they minded if I gutted the game, as I was keen to see what the bullets had done inside - though if you don't fancy it they will do it for you. My Spyderco Spydorsaw made short work of the sternum and pelvis. As this was my first African species Dirk blooded me on the face to celebrate...another strictly optional extra!

Charge of the Blesbok

Springbok down, we decided to see if we could bag the blesbok, as Dirk reckoned the hartebeest would need a whole day's stalking. This time round we adopted ambush tactics. Spotting a herd of 17 animals at about 700 yards, we set up under a big old thorn tree and waited. Lennox drove off to one side and walked up on them to drive them our way. They came like a cavalry charge - hooves flying, dust boiling up around them. Dirk spotted the one we wanted with the Swarovskis. He picked an individual in a group of five males at the front of the herd.

I pinged the group at 300 yards; the lead male then separated from the other

"They came like a cavalry charge - hooves flying dust, boiling up around them"

Jericho farm house, this traditional Cape Dutch style; has en-suite rooms, cooks, maids and a laundry service and is a great setting to kick back after the hunting



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four and stopped at 230 yards three-quarters on to me. Taking a bead a little up on his front left elbow I let fly. Thomp! You could here the meat smack as the bullet hit and he stopped dead and staggered backwards – a good kill. Dirk told me to shoot him again, so I did, but it was not really nessecary. With his white face, chocolate body and ridged, lyer-shaped horns he was a good-looking beast. Two down, one to go, with the afternoon free for a nap and some cold beers.

Jericho Game Farm is situated on the Karoo and covers a big area. In basic terms it's a giant field surrounded by a 2.5 metre high game fence. However, this is an over simplification, as the 'field' includes mountains, valleys river beds, thorn bushes, woods and thickets, so you can get some idea of the size and diverse terrain on offer.

In Balance

The choice of game species is good; 700+ springbok, wildebeest, red hartebeest, mountain reedbuck, impala, blesbok, kudu and of course the favourite, gemsbok, with its distinctive long and straight horns. Apart from the impala I saw all of these. The kudu tend to be solitary and stay in the mountains, but the others herd. Often as not small breeding herds are bought in to establish a species on the farm. Francois told me that for 2006 they would be introducing zebra.

The beauty of this set-up is that the game is there in known numbers and can be sourced to the client's wishes. You still have to hunt it, but it's there and can only wander to the limit of the fence. Limits

First blood, for first SA antelope – don't worry it's not compulsory...



First kill – a nice springbok ram (200 yard neck shot) PH – Dirk Triegaardt on the left; note at this stage I still have the Swarovskis...



are set to ensure a continuing supply; for example, this year they will shoot 10 gemsbok (all older males). This will mean that the younger ones can step up to replace them for 2006 and allow juveniles to grow to maturity. Surprisingly enough they still have to cull; the more prolific species like the springbok will, if unchecked, eat too much and upset the balance. Dirk told me that 200 would be on the list for this year.

I was told that there are some leopard up in the mountains and I also saw baboons, an aardvark (an enormous thing about the size of a pig), rabbits and some truly monster hares. There are snakes there but thankfully I didn't see any. Oddest of all are the springhares – imagine a rabbit with a long hairy tail and the legs of a kangaroo. They leap up to eight feet at a time and are just plain weird...

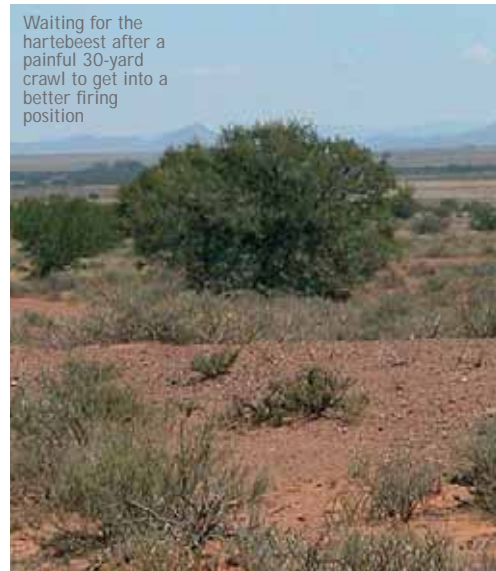
As the farm is all about trophies, the game meat is usually used to make biltong. We fed well on Tuesday night, with springbok and blesbok liver and kidneys as a starter followed by Karoo lamb. I commented on the fact that it seemed a waste using the saddle (fillet) for biltong and told them that in the UK this is viewed as the best bit...on Wednesday evening we had the saddle of all three beasts.

Red Hartebeest

Food is good at Jericho, being both plentiful and traditional. Breakfast is UK-style fry ups, or their own sausage cooked in a spicy sauce with melipop - a

sort of porridge made from maize. Lunch was often out on the veld and consisted of a barby or cold cuts; the cold box is always loaded with beers and juices, with the former only being allowed after hunting has finished. However, the client's requirements will be catered for and a preference form is sent out prior to the booking, on which you can put down your likes and dislikes. There's no mobile phone reception at the farm, though a TV and video/DVD player will soon be available, as well as a computer with Internet link. Basically, you're there to hunt and at the end of a long hard day the chances are you will want to eat, have a drink, kick back and shoot the breeze.

Waiting for the hartebeest after a painful 30-yard crawl to get into a better firing position





With luck still riding high we set out on Wednesday to bag the red hartebeest. My Africa hunting book didn't do it justice, as the picture looks like a big yellow donkey with horns. With its red/brown coat it's an impressive looking animal with odd angled back horns and a proud gait.

This was to be the hardest and most exciting of the hunts; twice we tracked the herd through acacia thorn-filled dry water courses to no avail, Dirk and Lennox working hard to get me into them. The sun had really got up too and it must have been 34 out in the open. At about midday we came out onto the plain for our third attempt.

Lennox had seen a lone male and was moving round to drive him my way. I took up a firing position, realised I was too low down and asked if I could move forward to a higher point. Dirk nodded and I stated crawling, all the time conscious that the hartebeest was out there and getting nearer. With knees and hands burning I made it and waited.

Righteous Shots

Dirk could see more than me and said it was coming in from the right, and though further forward I was lower down so didn't have the field of view he did. He also told me that I must shoot it, as it appeared to have something wrong with its front leg. Oh, and to watch out for Lennox as he was somewhere to the front...no pressure then. No time for fancy range finding

either; this was going to be close. I spotted Lennox way off to the right about 400 yards out, so that was one less worry.

Then it came into view, trotting in from the right at about 100 yards - all red fur and swept back horns. I noticed it was favouring its front left leg and there was blood on the shoulder. Aiming up from the elbow joint I placed the cross high in the vital triangle and went for a spine shot. The Winchester boomed and I had the satisfaction of seeing him fall through the scope, stone dead. It was the biggest rush of the trip and I don't think I have felt that excited for many a year. Inspection showed he had a compound fracture of the fibula that looked no more than a day old. He would have hung on for a week or two before dying an unpleasant death.

So, three animals, four rounds and all righteous shots, so I was very pleased indeed. More back slapping, photos and congratulations and that was that. On Thursday we went out with my 35mm Nikon to try and get some pics. We managed to stalk up to the big gemsbok herd and Lennox got behind them and moved them right past my position (where's me Winchester?). To see these impressive antelope charge past was a real treat. Then it was an 0500 start on Friday back to Cape Town and doing the tourist thing up Table Mountain, then a party in the evening, with me having to tell my hartebeest tale more than once. Nearly everyone hunts out there - it's a shooting anorak's paradise!



End Game

It was a truly excellent week. Everything went well, the company was good, as was the general package, and the hunting brilliant. Next month I'm going to do an 'after action' report on the various items of kit I took with me, but here are a few of my initial thoughts...

I think I agonised over calibre choice a bit too much; the 270WSM Fail Safe load was brilliant, and would be more than capable of taking on both kudu and gemsbok. Usually I heart shoot, unless at close ranges, but both my hunting book and local advice showed that moving up into the 'vital triangle' really did make for some effective knock down shots. You don't need to be mega fit for this sort of hunting, but I would advise that you get some regular exercise in well prior to the trip. **SS**

Braai – that's barby to us Brits – Francois Triegaardt frying up the springbok and blesbok liver and kidneys for the boma starter in the boma

“ Pinging the ram with my Leica range finder gave me a dead-on 200 yards, an easy shot with just 3" of drop ”



Green Fees

Though the price will change depending on how long you stay and what you shoot, here's a rough breakdown:

- Daily rate (five days) includes accomadation, food, drink, PH fee, vehicle and skinning: £1000
- Game: £1450 (four species)
- 2-nights accomadation in Cape Town: £100
- This does not include flights, taxidermy and VAT
- A 50% deposit of the daily rate must be paid to confirm the hunt, which is not refundable if the client cancels
- Taxidermy can be arranged
- Jericho now has a UK booking agent that can book flights and also arrange South African rifle documentation etc

Contacts

- sandrat@iafrica.com
- www.jerichogamefarm.com

UK:

- Jericho Enterprises UK, 07985109502
- gunfitter@blueyonder.co.uk.