

I Walked For A Month One Day in Namibia

There was a time when Bushman trackers had names like Silent, Shadow and One Shoe. Even as late as the mid-1990s many top notch outfitters in the RSA used real bushman down in the Cape. Those days are sadly gone but the magic the bushman possess is still there if you look hard enough. Today, if you ask for Bushman trackers for hunts in South Africa, like I have, you will be told they are no longer needed or even available. They have been phased out in favor of spot and stalk treks from the vehicle, except in very rare cases.

However, real bushman trackers are still routinely used throughout African for dangerous game safaris. Following behind and observing the bushmen at work is like watching the best magic act Vegas has ever devised. It is very easy to talk yourself into the energy you are wasting following Bushmen hours after the last blood spoor was found. Yet, far more often than not they re-prove to you that doubting their ability to track is a fool's game. Watching the Bushman track is as alluring to me as the safari itself. Notice the phrase "watch and learning from the Bushman" was not used in the preceding sentence. This was no mistake because westerners have millions of years of filters between us and the animals we pursue. We can watch them track but we can not "learn" how they think like the animals they pursue on our behalf. It has to be watched to be believed. Getting the chance to stalk the biggest plains game behind the Bushman is a very rare opportunity these days and should be taken advantage of whenever possible as the days for this are quickly evaporating across Africa.

While interviewing booking agents and outfitters for our 2011 Safari for plains game to Namibia we centered on Eldoret Farms in NE Namibia. Why? Because during my communications with Nico Badenhorst, owner of Eldoret, we learned they offered both hunting from blinds as well as tracking behind Bushmen. This suited our hunting party perfectly as my safari partner Mike Cunningham of Georgetown prefers hunting from prepared blinds while spot and stalk or tracking is more suitable for my tastes. Hunting from hides or blinds is well understood while tracking is somewhat less understood. Tracking starts by walking or driving the roads in the morning until a "fresh" track of a potential trophy animal is found. Then you stay on the track until you catch up to with the animal leaving the track. This approach requires dedication to the approach because each stalk can last from 20 minutes to all day or even several days. Given the limited time of a modern safari this means you may only have an opportunity to see a handful of animals during your hunt. However, this is classic safari hunting and to get this opportunity on plains game is nearly unheard of today.

In addition to Mike our complete hunting party included Bill Hunter and his son Will. Due to scheduling issues they would arrive almost a week before us. Our schedules overlapped for just a couple of days at Eldoret. Our group was the first American

hunters to visit Eldoret Farms. Mike found Eldoret via the interest website for Alan Kelly Safaris.

The earth doesn't end at the border fence of Eldoret but I'm pretty sure you can see it from there. Eldoret borders Bushmanland in NE Namibia. Driving 5 hours NE from the Windhoek Airport you leave all the semi-desert mountains behind. By the time we reached Grootfontein the land had become flat and densely covered with Acacia thornbush. Camelthorn and Rhodesian teak trees occasionally tower over the thornbush while the broad leafed Apple Leaf tree further obscures your view into the brush. Record rainfall in the summer and fall of 2011 left the typically barren Kalahari sand covered waist deep in brown and dry grass from the fall then winter dry season.

Eldoret is closely linked to a neighboring farm owned by Petrus Vermaak and in total they offer about 50,000 acres. Both farms use high fences to preserve their native animal herds from opportunistic neighbors. Neighbors that would not think twice about drawing their game off their land with a small food plot and shoot them for a onetime cash crop of bush meat. Kudu and eland meat sells for about 90% of beef so cropping several hundred kudu and eland would be a substantial amount of money. So even here high fences are necessary but are still torn down almost daily by transient giraffe and determined eland. Hunting within high fences is typical of very little interest to me in Africa but in this case it was not a serious concern because the dense thornveld limits visibility to much less than 100 yards except in rare cases. So, in this one case neither the fences nor the size of the hunting territory were limiting in the least.

Nico and Petrus offer hunting for most of the native plains game including eland, kudu, giraffe, gemsbok, blue wildebeest, zebra, duiker and warthog. Their strongest herds are in eland and kudu. Their prices are below market because Nico and Petrus want hunters to shoot all they can afford. These guys beg for hunters to come down and help them shoot their animals so they do not have to resort to meat culling which is time consuming and hard work. Aside from the sporadic sport hunters the ranches are working cattle ranches.

Each ranch has a number of waterholes that are very productive if you prefer blind hunting as Mike's excellent trophy bag attests. Plus, blind hunting allows for much better videotaping. Stalk hunting is conducted between the "dunes and straights" behind the careful tracking of Eldoret's Bushman. Our trackers were named Sam, Franz and Spiker though Spiker, was on vacation. The terrain is rolling thornveld. The crests of the roll are ancient sand dunes which provide a base for the taller trees local to the region. We quickly learned the kudu and eland find the tree leaves atop the dunes especially tasty. Though the elephants and lions have long since been pushed back onto the local concessions and parks, these ranches are still quite wild with an abundance of cheetah and yearly visits from roaming leopards, hyena and wild dogs.

Our safari took place under far less than ideal hunting conditions. The moon filled out on our second day in camp, the wind was low and erratic while a pack of wild dogs chased both cattle and wild game. In fact, as we left Eldoret the Himba tribesman responsible for tending Nico's cattle herd reported that they had lost a calf to the wild dogs. In spite of these curses we still collected exceptional trophies which testifies to the natural carrying capacity of this region.

The bag for our safari included eland, kudu, blue wildebeest, zebra, warthog and gemsbok. Aside from trophy collecting, field testing was planned for several bullets in an effort to determine the best bullet for plains game. So, we had a full agenda as we pulled into camp about 40 hours after leaving San Antonio. The two room brick hut was comfortable and clean but at 1 am it was as cold as medieval dungeon. Each step and noise echoed around the earthen walls like an echo chamber as we unpacked but we were much too tired for this to keep us up. However, this hut was a first for me. This was the first hunting hut I had ever stayed in that was not open air. It was very much appreciated that one of the various cold blooded snakes could not find their way into our sleeping quarters for a quick warm up.

After a brief nap in Eldoret's brand new bunkhouse we were up for breakfast at 5:30 am with Bill and his son. Nico laid out the first day's plot which included a stint at the range for us while Bill and Will finished up some business with an eland and blue wildebeest. At breakfast Bill was quick to say they were having a great time but the thornbush made spot and stalk hunting nearly impossible. He was enthusiastically reminded that this was "real" hunting based on stalking and it was very hard to come by anymore except on dangerous game safaris. Any trophies collected here will be well earned. That was the whole reason for selecting Eldoret.

My "journey" within the safari began on the morning of our second day. Mike had already collected a fine eland bull while my first evening hunt added a trophy greater kudu to my wall. The first day had left us in very high spirits. Both shots had been made at well over 250 yards and those shot distances would not be duplicated though after the first day we did not fully understand that. Breakfast on the second morning found Bill eager to get back on the trail of the eland he had shot the previous day. His head hung a bit low as he explained his four mile follow up saga on his wounded eland. The tracking was halted at darkness with no sign of it "settling down" but they were prepared to keep the track as long as the spore held. In my mind's eye I sure hoped that didn't happen to me.

During breakfast Nico shared with us that he had to run into town to have a doctor look at his thumb. He expected to be back within 24 hours. In the meantime, Mike would be hunting with Petrus while the Bushmen would lead my hunting party.

After breakfast Waldo drove Sam and me about 20 minutes northwest in the quad cab truck. Our plan was to drive the sandy ranch roads until Sam found some eland tracks fresh enough to warrant our time and effort. Now here is where the magic of the Bushman begins to unfold. Sam was responsible for finding a trophy quality animal simply from the tracks left in the soft sand. Then he had to age the tracks to ensure we could catch up to the owner before we ran out of day light. By 7:30 am Sam found eland tracks worthy of our effort. We were the first Americans ever in camp so the English language was known but rarely used. Southside High School in Fort Smith, Arkansas did not offer Himba or Bushman so our communication was rendered down to basic hand signals at first.

It was a cold winter morning with clear skies and a slight breeze. Record rainfall over the summer had left the thornbush deep in what looked like waist high Johnson grass between the taller vegetation. The tracks that caught Sam's attention that morning were mixed with others from giraffe, kudu and Nico's cattle. Sam looks up from the earth and his stare told me he was visualizing the animals that had passed across the road and in what sequence. From bended knee he looked into the thornbush and said, "Bwana your eland is in there, we must find it, it is a good one". It was a cold winter morning and the African sun had yet to extract its toll from our flesh. A plume of warm air billowed from my gapped mouth as my mind estimated how far those tracks might lead. Sam adjusted his blue and white Puma baseball cap and kicked some sand to test the wind. The reddish tan dust gently drifted away from his olive drab green uniform. My next thought was water or the lack thereof. Neither of us had any but then only one of us would need any. As Sam turned to the tracks in the sand I thanked God for the opportunity to hunt plains game behind an authentic Bushman tracker.

We first cut the track in the soft sand of a straight. Green leafy trees marked dunes to our left and right. The tracks quickly became obscured under the long grass growing between the acacia thorn. Looking into the bush my mind's eye would not relieve me of my civilized chains. My view could only see the lifelessness of the thornveld while Sam's saw animals walking and grazing in various directions and groupings. Sam's unfiltered connection to mother earth left him optimistic and eager to find the eland he knew was just ahead of us while my clouded and dulled senses obediently followed his lead. Sam needed to stop every 5-10 yards to decipher the myriad of crisscrossing spore left by multiple giraffe, eland, gemsbok and kudu. At times he would use his hand to bend the grass over to look under the long grass at the tracks left in the sand. Though the morning light was good enough to see well into the distance it was still impossible for me to see even the slightest depression in the sand. The soft sand made it seem like we were always walking up hill. My stride was twice that of Sam's but my pace was still lacking. He stayed on the track which led us onto a dune top that was originally on our left.

Minutes passed, then an hour. The tracks began to meander amongst the leafy trees atop the dune. The smooth noiseless glide of the sand and grass straight was behind us. The dune floor was littered with thousands of crunchy leaves. Now the deadfall meant that each step had to be chosen carefully. Trying to keep my size 11 footprints "in" Sam's size 8 shoes was a full time challenge that kept my eyes glued to the forest floor. Never the less each new step produced a new set of crunches designed by God almighty to warn his children of our approach. Africa warms up quickly and just a couple hours after sunrise the first sweat of the day rolled from my neck. Sam stops to whisper to me what he "sees". As he whispers a hornbill was snapping his oversized bill in a nearby tree, another one of God's trip wires had been kicked as we passed. This is not to say Sam was less than extraordinary and careful because he was. That is noted just because that is the way things happen in Africa. You never get a direct unimpeded line to your quarry. Little things like this are always planted along your way to test your resolve. Sam, with a combination of English, hand signals and animations let me know the eland was now feeding just ahead of us. Minutes later we crossed freshly deposited eland dung denoted by the oily sheen glistening in the morning light. This "development" peels back several layers of civilization stained filters telling even me that we were real close to the heavy hoofed antelope that crossed the road several hours before we arrived.

Before we continued Sam tells me with three upright fingers then two downward fingers quickly scissoring that there were three eland bulls moving quickly through the trees in front of us. He points to where they were before they took off. We walked past that point as we continued the stalk. It was about twenty five yards. We ghost walked a couple hundred yards until we were back to the transition between the dune and the straight. Within seconds Sam's movements changed, his ears were now tracking the eland along with his eyes. He frequently knelt down to see inside and behind the tree and thornbush line just 25 yards out. As he kneels he tosses another handful of sand into the air to check the wind to ensure it did not betray our efforts. Inching further through the low branch tangle my field was limited to the back of Sam's green military type light hunting jacket as I tried to minimize my existence. Seconds later he took a couple of quick steps to my left. The view of the back of his jacket was quickly replaced with a fleeting view of Africa. My eyes lifted from the dune sand and locked directly into the eyes of a trophy greater kudu caught in his morning browse. At twenty yards he didn't wait long before he jumped his front feet over his back and wheeled deeper into the thorn. Sam did not seem deterred in the least while I felt the crashing Kudu might startle the eland. We pressed on further through the deepening grass as the leaf clutter was thinned. A couple of minutes more and Sam's tedious work paid off.

Through the somewhat less tense trees Sam fixed his stare on the three heavy footed ghosts that had left their tracks in the road hours earlier. We stopped as Sam allowed

the eland bulls to settle down as the kudu bull's quick departure left them agitated. Within a few minutes more they were feeding again. While we waited Sam reconfirmed that he could visually see that our bull was still with the other two. He rechecked the wind and made sure I was ready because our next move was into their camp. By this time we had been on the track for 2 hours.

Sam broke into a trot, the soft sand under foot made the brief jog seem like each of my Russell PH boots had a load of concrete in them. The chill of the morning was long gone, though only 10:30 am, sweat from the stress of the stalk and sand left my shirt wet with perspiration. Thirst was a real need at this point but thinking that this all would come to a quick end once we caught up to the eland kept my thirst in check. Our 200 yard jog in the sand came on the heels of a 2 mile stalk. It was a crouching jog that sucked the air from my lungs and left me huffing and puffing. Sam jogged ahead keeping his eyes on the eland as they moved ahead of us. We broke from the thornbush onto a ranch road and Sam quickly stabbed the shooting sticks into position. Breaking the cover on Sam's heels the eland first came into view as my .375 H & H dropped into the crutches....ummh, shooting sticks. Before they came to rest the eland broke into a trot. Their trot started at about 125 yards and slightly downhill as we were on the dune top and they were at the base. My shot path was open and unobstructed. There was no time to use the sticks. Twelve pounds of Ruger RSM found my shoulder while their gait was funneled through my Burris Signature scope tuned to 1.5x power.

My huffing and puffing prevented a quick shot while the crosshairs bounced chaotically around the largest bull which trailed the pack. All in the same split second the other bulls were keyed into my brain. The lead bull was so old his horns were almost worn back to his ears. The second bull was young with short pointy horns. The third and final eland was not a herd bull yet but he was otherwise at his peak. The shot opportunity was very poor and should not have been attempted. Only an over eager part time hunter would take that shot. My chest was still heaving from the 200 yard run through the sand when the first round, a 380 gr Rhino Bonded Soft Core loaded to 2250 fps was sent down range timed to the cycle of bounces in my crosshairs from my breathing.

Further supporting the senselessness of this shot sequence he was running away with the only shot being a quartering shot angling through the ribs. First, the bullet had to miss the back hips but not hit the front foreleg. For some crazy reason the shot made sense. Naturally the shot missed low as the shot passed between his front legs. The two follow up shots were with 300 gr Swift A-Frames bullets loaded to 2550 feet per second. Three quick shots and they were gone. It felt as if the second shot might have had some effect. Sam quickly reaffirmed that my first and third shots missed.

We collected ourselves then walked to where the eland were when the shots were fired. We immediately found a blood trail, the track was now on. Fresh stories from miles of

tracking from Bill quickly circled my mind. Sam pointed his index finger at the tracks in an effort to help his mind's eye follow their meanderings. The tracks indicated the wounded bull was having no problem keeping up with the other two bulls in the herd. The one hit must have hit near the guslophogus which is never immediately fatal. My throat was so dry it was scratchy to even swallow. Each step behind Sam found me alternating between dreaming of water and anger for taking such an ill-advised free hand shot while huffing and puffing from the sand impeded run. Everything said stop, don't shoot, be patient but these screams of caution were drowned out by those destructive forces that sometimes you are powerless to stop. These are the internal forces that trick your ears into hearing "yes you can, go for it!" but later you find out they really said "I'm getting ready to teach you a big lesson". Poor interpretation of these internal messages leads one to the following little memories from Eldoret.

Before we left the relative freedom of the open air on the sand road I asked Sam if he thought there was enough spore for him to track my wounded eland. He smiled and said, "Yes I will find your eland". At 10:45 am we started the follow up stalk. We had tracked them for three hours leading up to the shot. How many hours will it be before the next?

The blood spore was small but consistent for the first 400 yards. After that, a spec would be found here and there, by 11:00 am the blood had played out except for the occasional swipe about three feet off the ground on the long grass as it passed the front leg. Based on the height of the blood on the tall grass it looked as if the shot must have hit somewhere near the right height for a heart shot. The sun was at full boil by this time. A slight breeze drifted across our face under a cloudless sky. We had been on the trail for four hours with constant movement through the sand and thorns. Although the Bushman does not require much water that was not my case. It was hot as the sun bore down on us. This is the same sun that bleaches bones and sucks the life from human pursuits. If I was ever going to be delirious from dehydration this was it. We were the first Americans Sam had ever met so revealing that big white people needed water every hour was not on my list. If Sam could walk all day without water then surely an American could as well.

Well, that little nugget of vanity didn't last much past noon. As the sun reached its mid-point in the sky my need for water could not be ignored any longer. When it was clear Sam had no intention of calling in for food or water I finally stopped him and asked him to call HQ for some of each via a few hand gestures.

We found the limited shade of an acacia tree and waited for Waldo, the young PH apprenticeship to appear. It took Waldo about thirty minutes to arrive while both of us said little. We were sitting on the east facing slope of a dune. Jet lag caught me pretty good at that moment in the shade. A quick cat nap was only interrupted by the drone of

the quad cab motor struggling to keep all four tires turning through the soft sand. Waldo arrived with water, Franz and news. The news was that Bill was still on the trail of his eland with no luck. Now the eland had opened a second front in their battle against the pale white Americans. Waldo was perfectly polite but left the impression he felt his hands were full with Nico at the doctor four hours away and now two out of three sets of hunters had lost animals. Waldo stayed just long enough to encourage us and explain he would return with lunch at 2:00 pm.

Franz and Sam often worked as a team and everyone felt this would speed up the tracking. They quickly picked up the trail that ONLY they could see. Blood hadn't been seen for hours and miles. They were reading the eland's direction from how the grass leaned and then an occasional track. We kept up the pace until approximately 1:45 pm. After that we pulled off the track and made our way to the top of the closest dune where we found some shade for our lunchtime break. Now, seven hours into the follow up my spirit was becoming weak. My once proud American spirit was now dreaming up plausible excuses to hitch a ride back to the HQ with Waldo when he delivered lunch in the quad cab. My weaker demons were proposing excuses like back problems or dehydration. The limited water supply coupled with several sleepless days weakened my resolve. However, that little gremlin that told me to shoot at a running eland a couple of hours ago was not finished with the "little lesson" he talked me into just yet.

First, Waldo delivered the lunch on an ATV, not the quad cab so my chance to expose just how weak I had become was taken off the board. Thankfully, the ATV instantly forced me to be the hunter I came here to be. Now my thoughts were sent forward to what remained for the afternoon.

We had a quick rest then were walking back into the bush by 2:30 pm. It had been hours since we had seen our last blood spoor. The eland's apparent path was thankfully keeping us in the straights as tracking was somewhat easier than the leaf covered floor of the dune tops. However, low and behold Sam found fresh blood spore at 3:15 pm. He called me over to a spot where the eland had lain on the tall grass then showed me the blood stained sand under the grass. Two separate blood stains. Hummm, the bullet must have passed through the front leg. Previous tracks did not reveal the leg was being drug so the wound seemed minor at this point. I looked at Sam again and asked, "Will we find this animal again? Again, Sam smiled back at me said, "Yes", with absolute confidence.

We stayed on the meandering track that took us far away from the dunes. The eland joined some females then broke away from them. He briefly rejoined the two bulls from the morning then broke away from them. The wounded eland jumped several fences. Miles passed under foot. Between 3 and 4:30 pm we jumped numerous kudu and warthogs but no eland. Several times they lost the trail as my eland tried its best to

divorce from us. As the sun neared the western horizon Sam indicated he had rejoined the males again from this morning. Sam was divining all this information while walking through wind swept knee high grass with numerous other tracks crisscrossing our eland's. This is something that must be experienced to be believed. As the sun began casting long shadows my mind's eye kept replaying the video it captured in about two long seconds as the day was just warming up. All three eland were still clear in my mind. Mine was the largest with horns at their peak while one eland was so old he had rubbed his horns to nubs while the third was a lesser and younger bull.

Suddenly, Sam's demeanor changed and his steady stare meant he was looking just ahead to see into the bush. Sure enough, a minute later he had all three eland bulls back in his sights. We had been pushing them all day, now the setting sun settled them down long enough for us to catch up. Once again, like this morning when we caught them they were on a dirt road just inside a three strand cattle fence about 125 yards away quartering single file away from us. Sam quickly set the sticks and urged me to shoot..shoot. The similarity of the replay from this morning was just too much. No way was I going to try to thread that needle twice in a day. First, we needed to confirm that my eland was truly in front of us. No way was I going to open a new chapter till the first one was closed. With my rifle in the crutch Sam was telling me to shoot, "Bwana shoot...Bwana quickly shoot". Pulling off the sticks I tried to tell Sam that he must confirm from blood that this was MY eland. My brief look through my scope yielded neither blood nor damage from previous shots. Sam stared again through his binoculars and repeated, "Shoot Bwana...shoot".

Now, it was the exact same scenario as the morning. Would I walk into the fire again? No, it was a trap to be passed on. The scenario was a loser. Through the course of the day our interaction revealed Sam understood English quite well when he was spoken too, he just wasn't as sure of his skills when speaking. As the eland continued their walk away from us I asked Sam to reposition us for a better shot. He understood and we quickly scrambled out into the thornveld in a semi-circle which resulted in us gaining an angle and closing the distance to about 100 yards. The sun was just above the horizon and I was wiped out from three days of travel and my second day death march. My gun seemed to weigh fifty pounds by this time. The five minute semi-circle yielded an excellent broadside shot on an eland Sam said was mine though we saw no blood on the hide. Sam quickly knelt and motioned for me to use his shoulder as a rest.

As a result of Sam's reset, the eland we thought was mine was perfectly squared up for a broadside shoulder shot. Our profile remained low from our kneeling position. My crosshairs were perfectly steady on the front shoulder as my .375 H & H unloaded a 300 gr Swift A-Frame into it from 100 yards. At the shot the eland showed no reaction! He jumped forward and ran back into the acacia thorn with his head passing above the bushline like a shark's fin breaking the water. We waited a few minutes to let him settle

down as Sam thought it was good hit. His alert lifted head as he trotted off left me with a new level of concern, he simply didn't look any worse for the wear.

We made it to the fresh blood trail around 5:30 pm. It had been a long thirsty day. Each step was made with the vision of a desperately needed drink of cold water in the back of my mind. My most recent shot became known as the 5 o'clock shot. Fresh new blood pointed us into the thornveld as the sun sank past the horizon. We tracked it until the light played out. My spirit sank to new lows as now a second shot from a steady rest failed to bring this dance to a close. As we called a close to the days tracking Franz grabbed several handfuls of grass to stuff high into the acacia scrub like a big bird's nest so we could quickly get back to the track in the morning. As we walked out to the nearest road Sam radioed for the truck. As we marched towards the nearest road in the near darkness the 5 o'clock shot replayed in my mind. It should have been a show stopper, but it apparently wasn't.

Waldo picked us up in the darkness. Waldo asked for a clear explanation from both of us. Both Waldo and Sam were confident we would quickly find the dead eland in the morning light. The ride back to the headquarters was long and cold. Once at the Boma we rejoined the party. Mike and Bill had both shot Kudu. Will finally got his Blue Wildebeest. After hearing of my saga Bill said they had called off his eland trek after about 12 miles. His wounded eland would not be found and would probably live. He said he expected us to stay on the track until we found it. I agreed and thought to myself that we had the luxury of seven more days, if needed. Nico had been placed in the hospital, in an effort to save his thumb from gangrene.

The next morning we were back on the track around 7 am. This time Peter Luttig joined us to help track. He was a PH from a nearby farm and he was extremely good at tracking as well. We quickly found the hay left in the top of a leafless acacia tree at dark the evening before. They picked up and followed the trail over several fences and through several straights and dunes, just as we did in reverse the day before. Through the course of the first day we had tracked the eland several miles to the north, taken a few shots then trailed it back to about where we had originally found its tracks early in the morning of the second day. The 5 o'clock shot was taken from approximately where we had first encountered its tracks the previous morning. Now, after several more miles and hours we were within 200 yards of where the first shots had been taken. If you can follow this that means our course measuring about 8 miles went from point A to B then back to A then back to B thus the eland's course had now folded back on itself twice.

As we followed the bull back to the original point B the wind changed while he rejoined a cow eland herd he had briefly run with over the last two days. These factors kept the bull winding us frequently enough to keep him safely in front of us. Peter decided it was

time for a new strategy. Peter radioed back for Waldo and Anton, Petrus's son, to come out and help us with the new plan as lunch approached.

The new plan included for me to be staged ahead of the fleeing eland. A crossroad several miles ahead of the eland's current location would provide enough open space for up to a 500 yard view in either direction. Furthermore, as the eland continued in its northeastern pattern a boundary fence would force it back in my direction. The last piece of the plan called for Franz and Sam to push the eland up to me with their scent. Basically we were going to hunt this eland like a Kansas pheasant. My job was to be the blocker and shooter while Sam, Franz, Waldo and Peter funneled the unkillable eland towards me.

Peter drove Anton, Waldo and me up ahead of the dune the eland was hiding out in. When we were in position on the cross road, Peter radioed to the trackers to start their push. After an hour nothing had happened but we knew from the radio Sam and Franz were pushing the eland in our direction. Peter decided he would stake out another parallel road while Waldo was left at the boundary road to my left. At this point we had a trap set with scouts on all three directions in a "U" shape. While Waldo and Peter came and went over the course of the hour my inner demons began to question who was best to close this deal as it skirted across the road. This would be my third chance at a trotting eland with only a couple of seconds to shoot freehand. Furthermore, someone must be available to confirm that the eland in front of my barrel was MY eland and not a separate eland that had been pushed through our trap. It was too much for me to figure out by myself. Peter offered to stay with me so he could confirm the eland had blood on it from the previous shots which released some of the pressure forming over this dune. Peter, while admiring the .375 H & H RSM was offered the opportunity to take the shot if he felt it was the best way to get this safari back on track. He kindly said he had the utmost confidence in my abilities and he was not needed in this case. I wasn't so sure at this point but appreciated his vote of confidence. He agreed to identify the animal prior to my shot. At that we went back to staring into the forest on top of the dune with views up to seventy five yards in several directions.

By noon everyone was in place and just an hour later Waldo caught a glimpse of him as he stepped out onto the road to get a better look ahead of his escape route. Waldo, located at the junction of my cross road and the side road, gestured wildly for us to run to his position. My first thought as we jogged was yet another freehand shot after a jog in the sand. Storm clouds were building in the back recesses of my mind. After a short two hundred yard run we were beside Waldo. He was pointing and asking us to look down the road about 300 yards in the distance. The three of us clustered behind a sole unused corner fencepost about 8" square. Peter quickly became both the videographer and chief authenticator. The flat top of the fencepost made a perfect video platform while the side of it stabilized my rifle. From a kneeling position on the left side corner

post the two day trek that seemed like a month was about to come to an end. At least that is what we all hoped.

Peter reminded me that he clearly confirm the blood before he gave the go ahead to shoot. Waldo was on the right side of the fence post while Peter stood above us with both binoculars and video camera. Seconds later the eland luckily returned to the road even closer than the last time he stepped out into the clear. Above me Peter was whispering....wait...wait...wait...then... ok.... I see blood, yes he has blood on his front shoulder. By this time the eland had closed to within 150 yards and was trotting straight for my muzzle. Peter directs me to take the shot when he clears from behind the lone tree on the fence line.

Trotting directly at us the first 300 gr A- Frame hit his chest at about 125 yards. My second shot penetrated through about 15" of the lone Camelthorn tree on the left side of the road before hitting squarely in the chest. It kept coming, no sign of a hit yet. The third shot again to the chest met with similar effect or the lack thereof is more like it. After three shots, this story, supported by video from my camera, will confirm the eland showed almost no sign of a hit, let alone the two from yesterday! Now at seventy yards with all three of us were getting a bit nervous I decided to aim my fourth and last chambered round off the chest and into the right front shoulder. The fourth and last 300 gr A-Frame hit the intended shoulder and dumped him straight into the ground nose first. This was the first significant indication he had been hit. The eland however quickly recovered and broke back into the bush at sixty yards.

As my last shot dumped the eland, the otherwise steely nerved Peter can be heard screaming in the background as he fleetingly saw himself being the first PH to die from an eland charge. Once the eland recovered and broke into the trees Peter grabbed my empty gun and ran after the eland. We followed quickly behind Peter while I yelled to him to stop as the gun was empty! Now gunless, it occurred to me that it might be time to quickly sharpen a wooden stake to drive into this eland's black heart as it is clearly impervious to copper and lead. As we reached Peter at the treeline we heard the crash of a heavy dying animal. We all looked at each other with hopeful looks that this saga had come to a fruitful close. We found the eland about 100 yards into the bush from where the last shot had hit.



After the jubilation was over we assessed the damage. All my shots over the past two days were there for the reading. My first raking shot produced a meaningless crease in his right front leg. Two blood points just as the early spoor indicated. Then there was my 5 o'clock shot. It missed the shoulder by the slimmest of margins behind the front leg but slightly below the heart. So far neither shot slowed this eland down in the least. My four final shots all hit within an 8" circle squarely in its chest. My second shot travelled through the Camelthorn tree before hitting the eland's chest with zero deflection. The fourth shot shattered its front right shoulder at the intersection of the foreleg to the chest. Any one of the final four shots was lethal, just nobody bothered to tell the eland. This was my second eland and both are very high scoring trophies but this one just needed a lot more effort to get into the salt. This one required the longest follow up trek of my life, about 10 miles over two days. Wow.

Eldoret Ranch offers about 20,000 acres and specializes in classic Bushman led tracking safaris for several species of large plains game. This is a perfect tune up hunt for buffalo or elephant as they are hunted the same way. I'm not aware of any other farms offering plains game hunts in the classic manor so if you are up to a no frills safari based on tracking behind Bushmen then this opportunity is not to be missed.

This safari also reminds me of just how optimized we have become. The human operates best with a certain design envelope. Operations outside that envelope subjects one to consequences. As a healthy (top 2% percent as measured by Mayo Clinic) middle aged American male I require a “normal” amount of food and water. Water became a real issue on this safari. While Nico was in the hospital our daily water supply was over looked. It didn't matter to Sam but my ten mile slog through the sand came on the heels of a three day air journey then immediately followed by a stomach virus that emptied all remaining fluids from my body on the fourth day of the safari. I was back on my feet on the fifth day for another long day of walking in the Kalahari sand. That night, my sixth night there, the consequences of operating outside my envelope caught up with me. The seventh morning found me unable to sit. I could stand and lie down but the back muscles controlling the sitting position were painfully locked up. No amount of pain killers were able to reduce the pain so after a few more days we stopped by the hospital for additional pain killers as we traveled by mini-van to Etosha National Park. Nico and Mike were very accommodating. Nico prepared the back bench seat for me and we kept our schedule with me basically laying down or walking. A couple days longer and even laying down became quite a problem.

At the time we were not sure what was causing the muscle issues but once back in San Antonio the doctors determined it was the result of extreme dehydration. Just a little side note to file away with the hypothermia I thankfully survived while bear hunting in Northern Alberta. These two little inconveniences were reminders for me to stay within my own personal design envelope for optimal performance.

Post Log

This story was fulfilling a dream to track with the Bushman. Had I digressed, I would have elaborated on the Himba cow herder team, husband and wife, dressed in traditional clothing and the village of Bushman encamped not far from Nico's compound. Nico looks after all of his helpers that work his ranch. Every night, in pitch darkness you could hear and see through the tress that his Bushman families were dancing and singing around their campfires. I was told there was no use in trying to sneak up for video as they were impossible to approach. I was told that their chanting, dancing and singing would come to an abrupt halt as soon as they detected my presence in the woods. Naturally I did not believe them so on several nights I tried to catch their wonderful dancing and singing around the fire on video. In the darkness of the forest that separated Nico's compound from theirs I never got within 300 yards of their fires. Somehow they always saw me and simply stopped until I gave up and walked back to Nico's firepit. Amazing.

