

KAFUE FOR ANTELOPE

by Ken Lange

The bull sable was old. He had reached his great age and obtained his harem by wits and strength. He was clever—the mere fact of his existence was proof of that, for in the African bush the weak and the stupid die young.

He had chosen his resting spot with care. From the side of the anthill he could see clearly for 200 yards in any direction. Sharp-eyed cows feeding around him added to his security. It was impossible for any predator to approach without being seen.

He had been lying in the sun for about an hour now. It was time to move again. Slowly he stood up, black and magnificent in the morning sun, his gleaming scimitar horns arching over his back.

One anthill away, I had been lying catching my breath after the stalk to this spot. Two years of planning, a lot of rifle practice and a fair number of headaches had been required to get me here. My professional hunter, Eric Stockenstroom, had found this was

the closest we could get to the herd, and since we couldn't find a clear shot at the bull we had decided to wait him out. Now he frantically motioned me to get up.

The position is wrong. My legs are cramped, and as I kneel I can't find a solid branch to rest on. I grab a small tree that the wind is shaking and watch the crosshairs quiver around his shoulder. This is not good! But almost as in a dream the rifle steadies. Something clicks in my brain and my finger moves under its own command.

The blast of the 7MM magnum tears across the plain. The echoes seem to go on forever and I see the sable dive for the cover of another anthill and from there into the bush. I find I have reloaded and don't remember doing it. Eric is looking at me.

"Did I hit him?"

"I don't know."

It was the fourth morning of a 21-day safari in Zambia. A lot of research had convinced me that Kafue was the place to go for impressive antelope and I had made my booking through Jack Jonas with Zambia Safaris. My companion Glenn Dalrymple was along to take movies and slides.

The first day of our safari had been devoted to the seven hour drive from Lusaka to Namata Camp in the Billilli Hot Springs management area, just south of Kafue National Park.

The second morning resulted in a one-shot kill on a Lichtenstein hartebeest with 22-inch horns, and the afternoon brought a strange little grysbok—a tiny antelope about the size of a small dog. The third day rewarded us with nothing after eight hours of hunting.

Hunters are superstitious. Eric's fiancée and camp manager, Suzie Dalton, had been with us on the second day when we had got two good trophies. She stayed in camp on the first afternoon and again on the third day. I realized that we had to have Suzie along if our luck was to be good, and on the fourth morning I talked her into coming again.

The morning had started off with a herd of eland spotted at a distance, and Eric and I going after them on foot. Everything was wrong. They had the wind on us and kept moving at a steady walk away while we raced from anthill to anthill, trying to catch



Profusion chiefly characterized Kafue—right down to the foot-long seeds of the “sausage tree” (left). The author took 20 good trophies, including eland, kudu, oribi, a 45½-inch sable (below), and a bushpig (below left).

Photos by Glenn Dalrymple





It took hard hunting to bag this 50½-inch kudu.

up. Finally the bull stood separate from the cows and I tried two long shots with my .375. They missed.

In the confusion of not knowing where the sound came from, the herd ran directly towards us, then realized their mistake and turned broadside at about 50 yards. The bull brought up the rear and as they crossed an opening, I collected my eland. The 300 grain Nosler passed directly through his heart but he didn't fall! Eric added three chest shots from my 7MM.

Big! I couldn't get over how big he was. It was all the five of us could do to roll him over. I admired his 27-inch horns and felt happy with this first of the large antelope that I had wanted. I was still admiring him, after we had loaded him and started for camp, when Eric spotted the sable.

Disappointment sets in. I've blown it. Strange that the cows didn't run very far. I can see them standing just a little way into the bush, looking back at us.

"I think he must be hit. The cows are waiting for him to come," says Eric.

Hope! After him, quick. There he is, walking through the trees. Now he stands. Rest across Eric's shoulder. Try for a neck shot—only clear spot. Now!

He's down! Slap on the back from Eric. There's no hurry now. Time to just stand and look at him. This is why you are here. Remember this spot. You came a long way to get here. Remember this moment and the way you feel right now. Just stand quiet and look at him.

The tape read 45½ inches.

Next morning we were off at sunrise again. Suzie was along for luck. Eric was taking some birds for the pot; I was relaxed and enjoying myself immensely; Glenn was taking movies.

All was calm when Eric said, "Is that a lion up ahead there?"

Of course I didn't know. It didn't look like a lion. In fact, it looked a bit like a small straw stack.

The straw stack crouched down.

I had the .375 in my hands, loaded and pointed in the general direction of the lion. We moved closer. At about 50 yards we stopped to look through the scope.

No doubt about it now. That's a lion, alright. Little shivers are going up and down my spine. Glenn's camera is running right in my ear.

Meanwhile, Eric and Suzie are calmly discussing his mane! I can't believe this.

"Shoot him between the eyes," says Eric.

Why did he have to call for a head shot? This gun will never get steady! The light clicks in my brain again and the .375 bucks.

Funny, no recoil. I didn't even lose my sight picture. Somehow, I've worked the bolt and see the lion flip back and then he's turning and getting up! The .375 bucks again as the crosshairs touch his forehead, and he drops.

This little episode seemed to take forever, but the films showed me that from first spotting the lion till my second shot went off took at most 45 seconds.

The lion was down. We approached him gingerly. My first shot had entered just under his right eye. The second one was directly between them. This bullet is lying in front of me now. The feeling I dreamed it all never left. It still hasn't.

He measured 9 ft. 3 in. from nose to end of tail. We loaded him up and returned to camp. About half a mile from our destination the trackers started beating on the coffee kettle and singing. Arrival at camp was a big event. Everyone was singing, shaking my hand, looking at the lion and raising clouds of dust. People seemed to be coming from all over. I don't know where they all came from.



Roan taken with an easy 100-yard broadside shot.

I didn't know what to make of the whole procedure, so I just stood there feeling a little sheepish until the lion left for the skinning hut and I left for the bar.

All alone now, I drink a silent toast to the magnificent animal who has given me the greatest 45 seconds of my life. The vision of him as he turned into my second shot is planted indelibly in my brain. I don't even have to close my eyes to see it. I probably never will.

The next day Suzie stayed in camp.

The day after that she came along again. We surprised a pair of bushpigs.

"Shoot! Shoot!" yelled Eric.

"Which one?"

"The one on the left!" The .375 roared.

Eric told me had never been on a safari that had obtained a bushpig, and Suzie had never seen one before. He had 6-inch long tusks that reminded me of white chisels.

An hour later a short stalk put Eric and me on a small herd of reedbuck. Another 300 grain Nosler crossed the plain and I had a bull with 13-inch long horns.

I still wanted a roan and a kudu to round out my collection of big antelopes, and I was missing the oribi to finish the small antelope. Roan had been giving us problems. There were a lot of them about, but they seemed very wary and were continuously on the move. Eric and I had walked

for miles after roan.

But suddenly there was a bull feeding in a clearing, Eric was yelling, "Shoot! Shoot!"

It was an easy 100-yard broadside standing shot and the .375 did its work again. He had 24-inch horns, and huge ears which seemed longer than his horns. A fine companion for the sable.

A wild elation gripped us all, and with a feeling that we could not fail now, we loaded the roan and continued. The concentration of the men as they watched for game could almost be felt.

Then we saw a group of small antelope bounding through the bush. Even I could see the horns on the lead male. One of Eric's little quirks, that I had come to know, is his method of describing game.

If he said, "That's a good oribi, you better take him," he meant that the head was a nice representative head and was shootable.

If he said, "That's a bloody good oribi," you could be fairly sure it would make the record books.

However, this time he drove the

brake through the floor and yelled, "J----- C-----! Look at that oribi! That's the new world's record. We've got to get that S.O.B.!"

We ran up. Eric lifted the buck's head and grinned like a cat that had swallowed several canaries in rapid succession. The tape revealed that he didn't quite measure up to our expectations, but he wasn't far off with his 6-7/8-inch horns and nice heavy bases.

We hunted hard for kudu. I was still hoping for a bull with 50-inch or better horns, but there was only one day left. As we started off the next morning, again with Suzie along for luck, I didn't know whether I would turn down a smaller one or not.

The .375 was loaded with my last 300 grain Nosler on top of two solids. I was shaken out of my daydream by Eric yelling, "Kudu. Shoot!"

He was standing in the bush and I could only make out the outline of a large grey animal. I couldn't see the horns. Eric was looking at him through binoculars so he evidently could.

Put your trust in him again, Ken, and find an opening. The crosshairs


probe the branches and find a clear space that lines up with his chest, low down. I can make out that he's standing quartering towards us as the .375 bucks off its own accord and my last soft point drives through the opening.

He staggers and then jumps from behind the brush and I see him clearly for the first time as he runs across an opening and disappears.

"Don't worry, he's hard hit," said Eric.

He didn't go far. We found him lying in a small clearing about 100 yards further back. He taped 50-1/2 inches along the curl.

There would be a celebration in camp that night and a long drive back to Lusaka the next day. We had photographic tours of Kenya and Egypt to look forward to.

But the trip ended here, in this clearing. I had come all the way from a small town in the Saskatchewan parklands to stand in this spot looking down at my last trophy. The sun slanted through the trees and cast stripes on the grey coat of the kudu. 

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