

DOUBLE DUGGA DAY

By Jeff Wemmer President and CEO of Texas Huntco

I was in Zimbabwe at the invitation of Crag Boddington, host of Dallas Safari Club's *Tracks Across Africa* television show, hunting in the Chewore South Concession with Chifuti Safaris.

Filming TV shows in the African bush is a challenging task in its own right, but adding in the fatigue factor and the aspect that we were looking to get up-close and exciting footage of near point-blank shots on dangerous game animals made this a memorable experience for sure. Men and equipment had been pushed to the limit. That said, PH Ivan Carter and his expert team- Bashop, (head tracker), Powaman, (Bashop's brother #2 tracker), Benji (Zimbabwe Parks Game Scout), Wenji (second scout and PH hopeful), "Renz," Safari Classics cameraman and I -were all in good spirits and were ready for more!

On this particular morning, we decided to head back into the hills of the Zambezi Escarpment looking for more elephant and hopefully some solitary old buffalo bulls- "Dugga Boys." It was the dry season and temperatures at midday would routinely push the red over 100° F. The going was tough up in the hills and we had already logged in over 250 Kilometers walking according to Ivan's records. I had heat-stroked once early in the trip and was now constantly preoccupied with gulping copious amounts of H2O to prevent another kidney-wrenching, fever-chills episode! Humping around a 15.5-pound .600 Nitro and it's ammo will test your endurance...but it's well worth the trouble when you get to cut loose with the monster and witness first hand its devastating power!

As we were traversing the base of a huge mesa-like mountain one of the trackers, Powaman, banged on the Landcruiser's cab-he had spotted something across the valley from the mesa. There, approximately a mile and a half away, standing on a rocky hillside stood a lone buffalo bull. How Powaman saw the thing is beyond me. Ivan and I strained to see him using binos. He was far enough off that we were in fact unable to judge his horn size and quality. However, experience has taught us that one should never pass up an opportunity to put in a stalk on a Dugga Boy. These old bush warriors are a breed unto their own. Living a mostly solitary life and having to fend for themselves without the added safety that the herd provides they become very keen and aggressive, animals. These are the oldest of the bulls. Most Duggas grow to a very large body size as their primary focus on life is eating and defending themselves from lion attacks - they are the Gladiators of the buffalo kind.

We made a plan. Using a gray rock outcrop as our bearing we began the stalk. It was mid morning and already the heat was getting up there. What looked like a straightforward one-to two-mile stalk became a bit more than we had anticipated. The terrain was challenging as we crossed over and through several hills and deep gorges to get into where we had last seen him. As we moved up what we thought would be the final hillside we spotted him a few hundred yards away resting under a large Acacia tree. After a quick glassing, we decided that he looked good and we initiated the final approach. Thus far he had not spotted us. Wind was a major concern. Earlier in the safari the fickle spring winds had confounded us on several occasions, but today the wind gods were a bit more cooperative. As we moved in, we found yet another steep drop before we could actually get into position for a shot. We dropped into the steep arroyo losing sight of the old boy. Coming up the other side I was full of adrenalin, as I knew we would be within a hundred yards of him and anything could happen. He could have winded us and moved off maybe straight downhill to us, maybe to the left or right. Although buffalo don't generally charge unprovoked, these old boys are capable of anything. In the back of my mind I was thinking about the PH in the concession next to ours that a couple of days earlier was inexplicably charged, run over and was saved a severe horning by his binos - a few broken/ bruised ribs were the only damage.

Even when carrying a .600, blindly walking uphill on to a potentially very dangerous animal tends to make one get a bit imaginative! It was just a few seconds more and we

had him in sight - there 50 yards away he was right where we last saw him – still facing down hill to the right. The terrain had leveled off and Ivan signaled for me to take the lead. The plan was simple...swiftly move on to him, he would stand up and for a microsecond and I would have a perfect broadside shoulder shot. I rushed in. At about 25 yards he stood up, looked at me and was about to bolt. I cut loose one of the 900-grain Woodleigh softs and smacked him square on the lower shoulder.

Having the downhill advantage, he made for cover with Ivan and me in hot pursuit. He was hit pretty solid so we were able to overtake him in seconds. I reloaded on the run and cut loose another shot into his hindquarters in hopes of breaking a hip, or, getting to his vitals a-la- Texas heart shot! He went another 20 yards or so- stopped, turned and initiated a counter attack to which I answered with a frontal brain shot at about five paces! With that, he was down and finished. This .600 Westley Richards is truly a stopper! Once we determined he was on his way to buffalo heaven, we moved in for a closed inspection. We were taken aback by his horn size and quality. This scarred old boy had nearly 40" if worn-smooth, tattered old horns. Add to that multiple scars about his face and body from a lifetime of fighting to procreate and survive in the bush – we had a true Dugga Boy...an old crusty bush warrior! What a great trophy!

We backtracked the path he had taken and saw huge amounts of heart-lung blood splattered all over the place – he was done for sure. So, one might ask the question as to why, when a near perfect broadside shot was made would one rush the animal so quickly. Ivan's philosophy is simple: "A shot may look good and might actually be so, but it is far more humane and offsets any potential risk of severe mauling if in fact you go in after the animal, keep him in sight and finish him as quickly as possible."

I agree...having shot numerous buffalo and having been charged by a supposedly anchored bull. The more time they have to rest, find thick cover and regroup only adds to their ability to gain composure and mount a successful attack! The recovery effort took a couple of hours. Soon enough we were loaded up and back on the move again.

Hunting dangerous game (in particular, Dugga Boys) is Ivan Carter's specialty.

"Hunting Dugga Boys is different to almost any other hunting, says Carter, "these wily old battleships are extremely smart, difficult to track and often live in the thickest cover. Add to that their cranky and unpredictable nature and you have a real hunt on your hands. Anyone lucky enough to get themselves a worn out, old broomed down Dugga Boy whose bosses are worn smooth and whose face and ragged ears bear a hundred scars, has truly got one of the finest trophies available in Africa today."

We had yet to make the escarpment. We were determined to spend the afternoon hunting along the base of the mountains – an area that had been so good to us thus far. The main reason we were heading to the hills, so to speak, was that due to the severe terrain, few hunters or people ever make it back there. Thus the chance of seeing a trophy elephant bull or that reclusive old buffalo increases exponentially. The other fact is that one of the elephant's favorite foods, the Prince of Wales Feather, was just starting to re-foliate after winter. Those tender lime-green compound leaves are a favorite of elephants, thus the chances of spotting hungry pachyderms gorging themselves on the abundant flora were pretty good.

It wasn't an hour after we loaded-up our bug boy that, while crossing a small wet riverbed, (unusual for this time of year), Ivan spotted two Dugga boys beating it up the and into the bush.

He exclaimed..."Two Dugga Boys to the right." I caught their rumps as they disappeared into the thick cover a couple of hundred yards away. Off we went again. But this time the circumstances were quite different. We knew we had two bulls on the move and they were in some really thick ravine cover – some sort of Combretum. I call the stuff "velvet thorny bush." It looks harmless enough but those of you who have been around the stuff know of its pesky nature. The trees grow to 20 feet and bush out like a bouquet of flowers, making a large overhang which animals, (read: buffalo), love to get into and hide. The terrain was flat going, but completely covered in dried grass and leaf litter. That

combined with the thick cover made for some difficult and very interesting tracking. Having just busted these bulls we knew they were near, but how near? How close? We couldn't tell in this stuff. We had to just get busy looking for any sign of recent activity and keep our ears tuned for any sounds of animals moving through the bush.

What had appeared was going to be an easy stalk suddenly became a tenuous ordeal. We were separated from the trackers several times only to rejoin with everybody shrugging their shoulders in a "I don't see any sign of them – do you?" As we moved along looking to cut some sort of trail, Ivan froze and motioned to me, pointing just ahead in a tiny opening in the jess. There they were, at just about 20 yards away. They were on alert and I sensed the urgency of getting a shot off and now! Problem was that I was smack dab in the middle of crawling under some brush and had to painstakingly creep around Ivan for a shot. Once in position, which took just a few seconds, I was faced with another challenge. All I could see of the shoot-able buff was the tip of his right hindquarter to his horn boss, dropped back and down to where I figured his mid-shoulder was and let it fly-BOOM! The result of an 8,000-foot pound muzzle blast kicked up a cloud of leaves, dust and debris inside this little world of opportunity among the tangle.

The buffs bolted off back towards the river. We were again in hot pursuit. We hadn't gone 20 yards and around the corner of the thick bush he stood. As before, I ran in and dispatched him with a single shot to the frontal neck. I was again inside five yards. He was nearly down, unable to come forward. As much as he wanted to, the initial wound was just too substantial and robbed his ability to fight. But I'll tell you this; he had a look to him like that of a fallen fighter when told that the fight is over, even after he had regained his composure. This animal wanted a piece of whatever had gotten hold of him...boy was he ticked!

I wanted to give him a textbook frontal brain shot just under the bosses, but his head was bobbing wildly in his attempt to come for me. Just as I put the bead on his forehead, he ducked and the shot struck his neck just behind the head...Whoomph! Down he went! No frontal brain shot for him, but an equally effective spine dislocating shot to the neck! Man that .600 really hits with authority when correctly placed.

"It's not about the inches, it's about the hint...the failed stalks, the hours of tracking and when all said and done, do it enough times and suddenly it will all come together," said Carter, "but to have that happen twice in a day is incredible and while luck is a major component...Jeff was extremely well prepared for his hunt. He is a tough individual, superbly fit and well practiced with his rifle so it's no coincidence that he had such a great hunt. Hunting Dugga Boys with a .600 double rifle means getting within 40 yards...and being able to quickly and efficiently make a snap decision and a good shot," Carter added.

Wow! Yet another Dugga Boy! Who could ask for more from a day's hunting? I have shot two bulls from a heard in a morning's time before, but never had I gotten on to two completely different solitary bulls in a week, muck less the same day. Have a top-notch team, the determination to succeed and a good bunch of luck made this one of the most memorable hunts of my 45 years here on earth, and definitely the best ever buffalo hunt I had been a witness to!

Africa had a way of doing this to us men of the blood spoor- we take chances in far away places all in the hopes of creating a memory - stories that can be told over and over again...hopefully inspiring your and old alike to go for it and make their own little bit of history!