

Bob Serrano: Why I hunt with a bow

Many years ago, when I first discovered the enjoyment of hunting, I decided that the deer and small-game hunting seasons in New York were way too short. So Ed (my brother, best friend, and hunting companion) and I decided that if we were to learn how to hunt with a bow and arrow we could extend the season a couple months. Bow hunting is a totally different experience than hunting with a gun, an experience that I enjoy a great deal. Bow hunting requires the hunter to enter the living space of the animal without it knowing you're there. As a result, I experience sounds, smells, and movements denied to firearms hunters.

Ivan Carter: Why I hunt elephant

A lot of people ask me, "why elephant?" The answer is simple: there is no other animal like it on this planet. When you hunt them, they are often aware of your presence, and that's when reading their body language becomes all important. They are also among the most graceful animals on earth, and after a few interactions at close range hunters are often in awe of the size, beauty and impressive nature of elephants. I know I simply can't get enough!

BS: Why I chose Ivan Carter

I met Ivan at the 2007 SCI convention. We talked about hunting, specifically elephant hunting. I was immensely impressed with his knowledge, but I especially liked his enthusiasm and love of elephants. I spent some time researching Ivan and found that every person who knew him recommended him highly. To a man, they were impressed with his knowledge, energy and professionalism. He seemed to be the right Professional Hunter to use for my hunt.

IC: The challenges of hunting elephant with a bow

First, the hunter needs to be well practiced and have the correct equipment. Bob used an 80-pound bow that produced 100 foot-pounds of energy at 10 yards with a 1,000-grain arrow. Second, the hunter needs to fully understand the importance of correct (by that I mean precise) shot placement. This is of lesser concern to a firearms hunter because, as long as you're in the ballpark, the hydrostatic shock will do the job. Part of my job as a PH is to help the bow hunter understand exactly where the arrow must go. Third, you need to get within 30 yards of the animal completely undetected. That's hard enough, but then you need to get a shot from the side with the leg positioned forward- quite a task actually. Bob arrived very well prepared, both mentally and physically. As a PH, it's always great to hunt with a person who is well prepared and ready to "hit the curve ball."

BS: The Equipment Side

When I learned my bow needed to produce 100 foot-pounds of energy in order to humanely bring down an elephant, I went to my local bow shop, Flying Arrow, run by my good friend Mike Clement. We chronographed all the best makes and models of 70-pound bows he had in the shop. All things being equal, the Hoyt Katera was the fastest bow. So Mike contacted Hoyt and had them build me an 80-pound bow. Mike then put together a 2216 aluminum arrow with a graphite shaft mated to a 180-

grain German Kinetic two-blade broadhead. The arrow setup weighed 900 grains. We shot it through the chronograph and calculated 100.2 foot-pounds of energy. The rest was a matter of practice.

IC: The Physical Side

Since elephants are very active at night, it's important to start as early as possible. You ride on the truck until you find appropriate tracks and then you get out and walk. As I like to say to my clients, "you hunt elephants with your feet." Elephants move pretty fast when feeding, and they can really rack up the miles. You need to be in terrific shape to do all that walking. One of the great things about elephants is that your efforts are rewarded hugely, even if you don't take a shot. Just being able to catch up to them and look them over is a great experience.

BS: The First Experience

I had three tags (one bull, two cows), so Ivan suggested taking the first cow with a rifle and removing the ribs to educate me on the exact location of the vital organs. When we first approached the herd of elephants I was astonished at how hard it was to see them in the bush. When we got within 20 yards, I was further astonished at how close we had gotten without being detected. But then the wind changed, and they bolted. I found myself chasing three to five-ton animals. We caught up in about 250 yards, and Ivan pointed out a cow that had turned to face us. As we walked toward her and closed the distance to 30 yards, she charged. Ivan was talking to me the whole time and had me shoot her, at 6 yards, in the brain. She dropped. Everything happened so fast and Ivan was so cool and in control I never had a chance to get nervous.

IC: The First Experience

There were three reasons we decided to take the first elephant with a rifle. First, doing so allowed Bob to complete his Big Five with a rifle; second, the hunt allowed Bob to deliver a brain shot at a very short range; third, once the animal was down Bob could get a hands-on look at the animal's anatomy- which he needed in order to know the exact location of the heart and lungs.

After three hours, we came across fresh tracks, and two hours later we saw the first tail swinging. No matter how many times I see that, it always gets the adrenaline flowing. On the first encounter, I like to spend some time showing the hunter all the shot angles; in this case we were focused on the heart-lung area (in anticipation of the bow hunt), as well as the brain shot. When the wind swirled I knew our window had arrived, so we walked boldly into a clearing in sight of the elephants that were now about 12 yards away. They simply shuffled out of the clearing and into the thick bush. We hustled behind them and soon came across them resting in a thicket. As we approached a cow without calf (always important) faced us, and at 6 yards Bob took her. We finished her with a second shot, and when I looked at Bob I could tell by the expression on his face that he was hooked on elephant adrenaline.

BS: The Bull

My major concern was that I didn't hit a rib and then have to have Ivan complete the kill with a rifle, thereby losing my bow kill. When we approached the herd we had two good bulls to pick from. The one who was a little farther away presented a perfect broadside shot at 30 yards, so we decided on him. As luck would have it, I hit a rib dead center, and we watched most of the arrow break off and fall to the ground. Upon inspection of the arrow, we felt (and hoped) that enough of the arrow had penetrated into the chest cavity to cause enough hemorrhaging to bring the beast down.

I had a great many anxious moments and doubts while we tracked the elephant for hours before finding him. I thought that it would be easy tracking an elephant, but they don't bleed much and the ground was quite hard. The trackers did an amazing job. I couldn't have been more relieved and delighted when we found him at the base of a tree.

IC: Tracking Pressure

As soon as the arrow hit the bull, I knew for sure we had hit a rib, and I wasn't at all sure that we had actually gotten enough penetration for a clean kill. But when we found the shaft, and saw that the arrow had penetrated 10 inches, I felt better. But I knew we'd have a tough time tracking him.

There were close to 30 elephants in the herd, and while the bull was bleeding well, it was mainly aerial sign (on the leaves and trees that he passed). Not much was dripping onto the ground. I've guided clients to more than 200 elephants and had yet to lose one, mainly due to my great trackers, but as soon as the blood stopped we had to just follow the group and see what developed. This is a time of huge emotional pressure; a guy's dream hangs in the balance. The temperature was well over 100 degrees, and we had been on foot for eight hours, the last three with no blood trail.

At last we caught up to the group. I figured he had to be there, but as we approached the "devil wind" turned, and off they went again. When this happens, it's hard to rally the trackers and stay positive. We got close again and got a really good look at the herd, and our bull wasn't there. Where had he peeled off? How were we going to find the spot? Was he dead? This is a form of mental torture.

Then we noticed three vultures circling overhead. My heart quickened and as we stepped into the clearing, there he was. After all the months of preparation, all that mental strain and now there he is. I looked at Bob and saw his eyes mist over as he said, "This is the best moment in my hunting career." It's moments like this that make it crystal clear to me why we hunt!

BS: The Other Cow

After having taken the bull with the bow I was excited to try taking a cow with the bow as well. We once again followed the same technique of glassing or finding tracks and following them for hours until we came upon the herd. As we approached to within 20 yards Ivan picked out an older cow with no calf who presented a good shot. I placed the shot within inches of where we had discussed and it happened again, I hit a rib right in the middle. The arrow broke off, but this time the elephant didn't run off; it ran back to the group at 30 yards. I lost track of her and Ivan helped me to pick the right animal. Initially she was partially blocked by another cow, so I waited until that cow moved and I had a clear

opening. I shot again and this time did not hit a rib, the arrow passed into the elephant and I got complete penetration. A double lung shot. She ran off with the group. Again we had an anxious time while tracking her, but the trackers were up to the task and we found her about 500 yards away.

Epilog: Why I Could Do This Again

Hunting elephants with a bow is something that I don't believe I could ever get tired of. It has all the elements I love; getting close to the animals and sneaking into their living space, hearing and seeing them close up, watching them behave naturally. It delivers plenty of heart-pounding danger and excitement, but at the same time Ivan leaves nothing to guess work. He makes sure you know what to expect, and he is with you every second, just in case he's needed for a backup shot. His professionalism just gives me another reason to go back to wild Africa, like I really needed one!