



The only way is *Africa*



Steve Sweeting confirms that on safari it is possible to take both the boy out of Essex and Essex out of the boy when Africa enters the equation

Essex lad David Buisson is known to some as the owner of The Airgun Store in Loughton but to many more as a well coiffured, neatly manicured helicopter pilot and successful entrepreneur. Last year David decided it was time to hang up his Luccchese boots, put aside his hair gel and self tan, forgo his moisturiser and prepare to get down and dirty on a hunting trip to Africa.

Putting aside his stylish city slicker adornments, David quickly transformed into a much more typical hunter, ready for all that Africa had to offer. It wasn't only his physical appearance that changed – his mental acuity tuned into the impending hunt. As the safari approached, Essex seemed a lifetime away. Clearly the psyche of the hunter lay just beneath the surface, and it was probably this predatory

instinct that was partly responsible for his success in the concrete jungle of the city.

Our destination was a vast area of bushveld in the Kavango region of north-east Namibia. Wildacker hunting lodge is a truly wild destination, next to bushman land. Here it was not at all unusual to see elephant, signs of leopard and occasional lion.

I personally have hunted at Wildacker on a number of occasions, and have never once been disappointed. Our host on this occasion was the new manager and professional hunter (PH) called Thorsten Meier. I had never met Thorsten before, but both he and his wife were extremely congenial and made sure from the off that we were all made to feel very welcome. Nothing was too much trouble for them.

Impala: Namibia



After our late arrival and a lavish supper, we retired to our rooms reasonably early. The long drive from Windhoek had left us slightly the worse for wear – on top of that, our hosts' generosity with the wine ensured that all would sleep well. Next day started with an early breakfast, after which we set off in two groups to start hunting.

I was pleased to learn that David and I had been chosen to hunt with Thorsten. He would be our guide and mentor for the next few days. Surprisingly, for the next few hours game seemed scarce, which was completely contrary to my previous experience. Apparently there had been an unprecedented amount of rain during the rainy season just passed, and the game was acting abnormally owing to the unusual conditions. On more than one occasion we alighted from the vehicle and tried following the fresh spoor of various species, but for one reason or another failed to find our quarry or close in sufficiently for a shot.

It was early afternoon when once again we left the truck to stalk into a waterhole in the hope of finding suitable game. This was to some extent wishful thinking, because the heavy rainfall ensured that no animal in the region suffered from thirst. However, being creatures of habit there was a passing chance some animals would find themselves at a familiar water hole as a matter of routine.

After 10 minutes walking as quietly as possible – albeit at a brisk pace – Thorsten stopped abruptly and examined the spoor that crossed our path. The impala tracks were fresh, indicating that a small group had passed this way just a few minutes before.

We followed the spoor at a much slower pace, stopping every few yards to carefully glass the way ahead, looking for a giveaway flick of an ear or a swish of a tail. As we edged forward just a few yards at a time, I prayed we would not spook our quarry by getting wrong-winded by the contrary breeze. Then Thorsten stopped abruptly and crouched down on one knee; David and I did likewise. I strained to see what our guide was looking at, but then suddenly, there it was.

On the far side of the secluded water pan was a beautiful impala ram standing perfectly still in the shade of a mopane tree. As my eyes

became accustomed, I saw several more impala taking advantage of the shade.

When hunting in Africa, calibre choice is of course going to be of paramount importance. On this occasion we would not be hunting dangerous game, but smaller to medium-sized game in light bush. However, if only one rifle is to be used, the larger game such as oryx, wildebeest or kudu will require a heavier bullet that can punch its way through flesh, bone and foliage to reach the vital organs. That being so, David had opted to use my .308 rifle and Norma cartridges loaded with 180-grain Nosler Partition bullets. It was with this rifle slung from his shoulder that David carefully crawled up alongside Thorsten to discuss the possibility of a shot.

The PH and his client went through the options in hushed tones. From time to time, one or the other would point in the direction of the small herd, obviously debating the merits of one ram over another.

Finally, they made a decision. The two hunters inched further forward to get themselves better placed for taking a beautiful beast that stood furthest from our present position at a distance of about 120 yards.

I watched with heart thundering in my chest, hoping that the ram would not move away as David pushed the stock of my Remington 700 hard into his shoulder. From his prone position the rifleman felt his finger tighten on the trigger. At that very moment all thoughts of his Essex-based alter ego had long since been forgotten. David Buisson had become the complete African hunter.

The sharp report and resultant bullet strike told of a satisfactory result. A perfectly placed shot into the impala's shoulder made a clean kill and secured David a superb trophy. This really was hunting at its best, and David was as happy as a bus load of Essex girls on their way to a Dagenham nightclub. ■



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