

The author with his cheetah taken on the last day of his Namibian safari.

**A**s an outfitter myself, I know just how important it is to ask the right questions when you're talking to a prospective client. The last thing you want is a surprise on changeover day, like a 500-pounder plopping out of the float plane, all excited about the backpack sheep hunt they booked with you over the phone. It isn't that special needs hunters can't be taken care of; it's just that it's nice to know ahead of time so the logistics can be worked out.

"So, you'll be hunting and you'll be bringing a second hunter -- who will that be?" Hentie Van Heerden, the well-respected Namibian outfitter knew the rule.

As a client, on the other hand, I know just how important it is to avoid answering the right questions when you're talking to a prospective outfitter.

"That's right, I'll be hunting and . . . WOW! Did one of your clients take that kudu!?" I pointed at one of the many impressive pictures in Hentie's brochure.

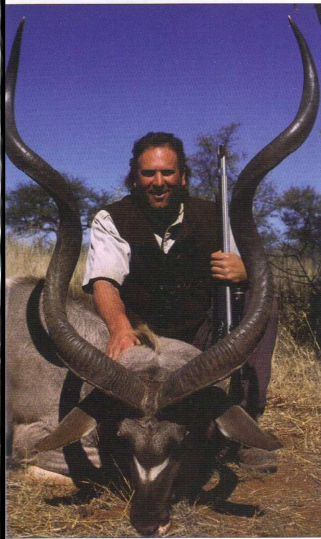
"Yes, we take kudu every year that

Father and son enjoy a safari in Namibia . . . a 76-year wait for dad.

**Three Quarters of a Century**

# Safari

By Jim Shockey



Shockey with his 55-inch kudu taken with his Knight rifle and a Nosler bullet.

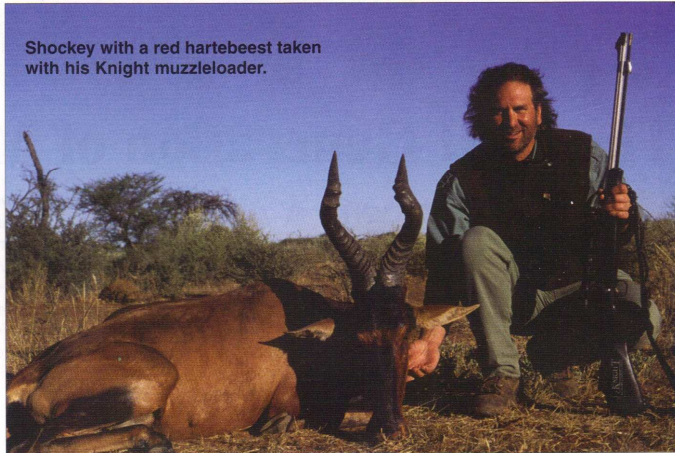
will push 60 inches . . . and who did you say the second hunter will be?"

"The second hunter? Holy smokes! Can I expect to see a gemsbok as big as that if I book with you?"

"Yes, I have some exceptional areas where you can find 40-45 inch gemsbok . . . and the second hunter?"

"Well, I was planning to bring . . . No Way! Springbok and Cape red Hartebeest! You must be hunting high-fence ranches?"

"No, never. I can, however, arrange to take you to high fence ranches if that is your desire, but my areas are free-range, fair chase areas . . . and you were about to tell me who the second hunter



Shockey with a red hartebeest taken with his Knight muzzleloader.

father at one time or other.

"Has he ever been to Africa?"  
"Nope, but it's been his dream for the last three quarters of a century."

"Go ahead and make the check out to Van Heerden Safaris."

"The second hunter?" Hentie didn't swallow the bait.

**Entering the Kalahari Desert**

The months before the safari passed in a continual blur of serious questions from my father.

Ring. Ring. "Hello? Yes, it's me dad. Yes, I can hear you. Yes, it sounds far away, that's because we live 1,000 miles apart -- well, since 1974 when I left for the university. Yes, really. No, I can't tell you what the temperature will be in Africa, but we are headed to the Kalahari Desert -- that's right, it should be pretty warm. Well, that's up to you, but I'd leave your heavy wool long-johns in Saskatchewan. Fine, bring them along anyway. Sure, why not? Bring the red pair too."

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"Your father by any chance?"  
"Yep. Love him to death."

The wonderful thing about outfitters is that every single one of them had a

father at one time or other.

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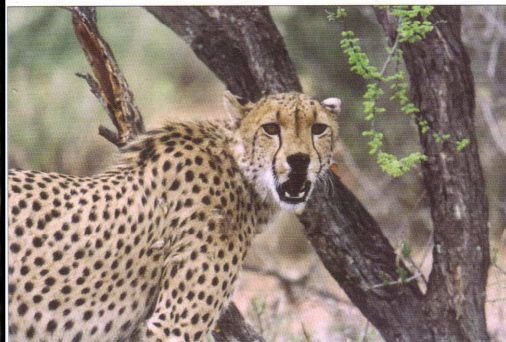
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Debra Bradbury

Cheetah are common in Namibia and are often shot by farmers as predators. The population in Namibia is thriving, however.



Debra Bradbury

Kudu are a magnificent animal with spiral horns. Any horn over 50 inches is good, 60 inches is exceptional.

## African Safari

(Continued from page 41)

The way things worked out, prior to the Namibian safari with Van Heerden, I would already be in Africa, finishing a Cape area safari with renowned professional hunter Larry McGillewie. I therefore had to trust in the airlines to deliver my father from Saskatchewan, Canada to Johannesburg, South Africa, where we would link up.

"We think we found him Mr. Shockey." The helpful security guard at the airport motioned for me to follow. "We just need you to positively ID him for us."

It was my father all right, head down and snoring on the bench in front of the international arrivals gates.

"Yep, that's him. Must have lost the name card my mom pinned to his shirt."

Long story short, I awakened my father, loaded him on the jet for the flight to Windhoek, Namibia, met Hentie at the airport, and before you can say safari of a lifetime, we were cruising through the Kalahari. It was the oddest thing -- it was like my father was somehow 30 years younger! I guess it was because everything was so new to him, and even if it wasn't new to him, it was new because it was in Africa.

"Look! A cow! Well I'll be go-to-heck! A cow! All the way over here in Africa!"



The author's father, Hal, with a gemsbok he took after a long wait at a water hole.

I'm not sure where he figured African milk came from, but it was wonderful to see him shed years, one by one. In fact, it was like he was a child again, oh the wonder of it all! When he spied, through his one good eye, his first real live African kudu bull standing out in the brushy looking desert, I thought he'd gone into a trance -- or that maybe he was sleeping like he sometimes does with his eyes and mouth open.

"Dad? Dad?" He didn't respond for several minutes, he just sat there in awe.

"Kudu. Well I'll be go-to-heck. That was a kudu." When he did speak, it was

quietly and with reverence, except for the "go-to-heck" part that is.

After three quarters of a century, my father was officially on safari in Africa!

### Hunting the Kalahari

The safari was just a journey to that point, but early the first morning it turned into a hunt. Hentie had us hunting smack dab in the middle of some of the best kudu, gemsbok country in Africa. It wasn't by any means a tough hunt, basically we'd leave the fancy ranch house at dawn and drive the ranch trails looking for game. It was fun actually, standing up in the back of the truck, hot desert wind in your face. Dad had a ball seeing all the different wildlife you'd normally miss if you had to stay inside the truck.

"What's that?" He'd point out this or that brightly fashioned bird.

"Swallowtail bee-eater." Hentie never missed a call.

"How about that one?"

"Sand grouse."

"What about that bird way over there?"

"Very good eye Mr. Shockey, but that is not a bird, that is a springbok!" Hentie hissed something at the driver in Afrikaans, bringing the truck to an abrupt stop.

The single pronghorn-sized antelope was standing in the middle of a dried out "pan," a mud-cracked flat nearly a mile long and half that wide. Every one of us studied the distant ram in our binoculars, trying to figure an approach. In the end, there was only one choice, sneak nearly two miles around the pan and come in at the ram from the exact opposite direc-



Debra Bradbury

Gemsbok are a tough animal -- both to locate and to put one down.

tion, using the only thorn bush for miles around as cover.

"You go son." My father didn't hesitate when we offered the stalk to him.

I figured he was going to sit where he was and have a ringside seat for the show, but in fact, when I checked back in my binoculars after we'd only gone a couple hundred yards, he was already sound asleep in the truck in the midmorning sun. The next time I looked, we were across the pan, looking back at the truck and he was still napping, as was the springbok.

"Will you shoot?" Hentie was waiting for the gun to go boom.

"Nope, not until he stands." Call it a personal thing, but I've got an aversion to shooting animals that are bedded.

Hentie understood, and so we sat and sat. Finally, late in the afternoon, the ram rose from its bed. At 165 yards, the shot is right at the maximum distance I'll take a muzzleloader shot, but the cross hairs were steady just over the line of the ram's back. BOOM! The springbok dashed away as though the hounds of hell were on its tail. Even with the big Nosler bullet through the lungs, the tenacious animal still made the 200 yard dash to its death in seconds. We knew it was a good ram, but it wasn't until we walked up to it that we realized it would easily score high enough to be the world's muzzleloader record Kalahari springbok.

Dad didn't see that first hunt of the safari for that springbok, but he was all over the second hunt the next day, mostly because he was the designated shooter.

Our options were limited in the walking-miles-and-miles-across-the-desert department, so Hentie checked a nearby water hole for tracks after we caped out my springbok. There was plenty of sign so we set up an ambush site for the next morning and returned to the ranch house to wait the sunrise.

I was already up and enjoying the stars when the ranch helpers, mostly caramel skinned members of the Bushmen tribe, started to wake up and light their cooking fires. The roosters were crowing and the last of the stars were just starting to fade out of sight. The sky turned the most beautiful orange-pink in the horizon toward where the sun was rising and all around me the silhouettes of the trees stood pitch black against the lightening sky. I said goodnight to the Southern Cross and headed back to the ranch house where I could just make out my father's shape against the glow of the kitchen window. It was time for coffee

and the day's hunt.

Patience is something my father has in abundance, especially since he sleeps through the waiting part! And that's exactly what he did for several hours as we waited quietly at the water hole for something to happen. There were other sounds around us, rustling and buzzing, and of course the sound of deep breathing, but it wasn't until nearly noon that Hentie reached over and touched my shoulder.

"Gemsbok!" He twisted me so I could see where he was looking. "Coming in!"

I shook my dad awake and pointed out the by now obvious lance-horned beast.

"Get ready!" My heart was pounding. "Make a good shot dad! Don't panic, just squeeze the trigger, make sure you

hold right . . ." BAM! I nearly jumped out of my seat.

It was over as quickly as that. One second the stunning creature was walking toward the water hole, and the next it was dead of a broken heart.

"Holy smokers! Great shot!" When I recovered my wits, I turned to my father and held out my hand. "That was a long wait!"

He didn't answer me right then but he did take my hand. He was still looking at the gemsbok when he said to me, almost under his breath. "Yes, I waited 76 years."

#### **The Rest of the Story**

We hunted hard for the next week, dad took a super 53 inch kudu and I took two, one 54 incher with a rifle and one 55 incher with my muzzleloader. Dad eventually took a nice springbok at 350 yards and I touched the trigger on a klip-


springer. Both of us took great Cape Red hartebeest; mine the new world's record for muzzleloader. Dad also tagged a good warthog. But without doubt the pinnacle of the trip came on the last day as we headed back toward camp for lunch.

"Cheetah!" Hentie nearly turned inside out pointing out the distant silhouette under the thorn tree. "Bring your gun and come quickly. NOW!"

It was an incredibly rare sight and for all of us as hunters, a huge deal. Namibia is about the only place in the world where cheetahs can still be hunted legally and I had a tag! The Namibian farmers often shoot the big spotted cats on sight. To them they are nothing but livestock killing vermin. There is a large and stable population of cheetahs in Namibia, but the various world conservation societies know the predation killings must stop and the best way to stop the wanton killing of cheetahs is to use legitimate hunting to put a value on the cheetahs. Hunter harvest can be controlled, and if the farmer gets far more for a cheetah hunt on his land than they get for the lost livestock, the farmers will tolerate cheetahs.

The fleet of foot cats cannot be imported to the United States, but they can be imported into most other countries and the unusual "sacrifice the individual for the greater good of all" model works and works well to ensure cheetahs will always be there, racing across the African desert.

Unfortunately for that particular cheetah on that particular day, the system sucked. The ancient starving male, very likely on its last legs, never knew what happened. One second it was grieving getting old and listening to its stomach protest and the next it was a spirit, free and unencumbered by an aged body.

My father didn't say much when we walked up to the fallen beast, but his eyes were sad. It was a moment of clarity and definition for all of us, a moment to reflect and ponder life, but I suspect my father understood most clearly the significance of the event -- the journey was almost over. 

*To book a fantastic and very affordable Namibian Safari (prices for an all inclusive seven day safari for five animals start at \$4,500 USD) with Professional Hunter, Hentie Van Heerden, contact him at: vhsaf@mweb.com.na or visit his website at vhsaf@mweb.com.na*