

# THE LEADERS OF THE HUNT



Photo by Eric S. Eastman

Finding a guide who'll give you the quality hunt you want can be tough. White hunter Gordon Cormack's preference for walking instead of riding made the author's buffalo hunt more rewarding.

## Some Guides And Outfitters Are Good, And Some Are Bad— But All Are Memorable.

By Col. Charles Askins

One of the really dicey gambles in hunting is the payment by the sportsman of the so-called earnest money deposit to the hunting outfitter. Virtually all operators throughout the hunting world require a payment these days which will amount to anywhere from 10% to as much as 50% of the total cost of the hunt. This is taken as an indication of the determination and the good faith on the part of the dude hunter to be on hand when the hunt is staged.

Once upon a time the outfitter would agree that if the client (for some obscure reason sportsmen are always referred to as "the client") had a legitimate excuse, he could back out of the proposed hunting expedition, and again if he advised the operator not less than three months before the hunt, he could get his deposit returned. Here more lately, if you put up, say, 25% on a hunt that is scheduled to cost about \$10,000 and then you whump up some excuse not to go, the outfitter may tell you that he will just hold your \$2,500 and you can come over next year; on the other hand, it is immensely more probable he will just keep your deposit as some slight

recompense for the gap you have left in his season's schedule.

To add a small modicum of zest to the proceedings is the fact that usually the sportsman doesn't know the outfitter and does not have some old buddy who has hunted with this particular outfit, and to ship off a couple of thousand bucks to Outer Mongolia is something like sending the money to the third floozie in the chorus line at Harold's Club and instructing her to gamble it and send you all the winnings.

For the past 30 years I've sent off my money every twelvemonth to a miscellany of outfitters, and I have yet to get scammed. But some of my old amigos haven't been quite so lucky. George Parker, my lifetime hunting partner, paid \$20,000 for a hunt in the Sudan. He was completely flimflammed. There was little game, the vehicles all broke down, the food ran out, and his party was left stranded in the primitive village of Juba with no air flights to the outside. So maybe I've been lucky.

Not, let me hasten to add, that there have not been those moments when I have

wondered just what sort of a predicament I had gotten myself into. I remember one time in the Tsavo of southern Kenya a white hunter, a farmer only recently turned professional, by the name of Ray Palfrey and I were stalking a herd of elephant. We had finally selected a fairly good tusker, and as I walked up to this old bull, a ticklish business fraught with a plentitude of hair-raising moments, this farmer-turned-hunter managed not only to put the safety off on his old .470 double express but also directly thereafter to pull the trigger. The 500-gr. solid plowed up the turf between my feet. Needless to say, the particular bull I wanted, together with 40 others of the herd, departed for Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Another time I was riding around with a Belgian named Edouard who insisted that the only game I could shoot must be of such a size as to make the Rowland Ward record book. Now it should be noted that not every oryx you see, nor yet eland, much less kongoni will measure up to these somewhat lofty standards. This was 25 years ago, and I was not so much interested in placing all my trophies in the



The author's customized 8mm .338 wasn't used to down this fine elk. Just as Col. Askins was about to squeeze the trigger, his "guide" touched off the round that dropped the bull in its tracks.



During a wild boar hunt, Col. Askins learned that guided hunts in India are group affairs. Although there may be only one hunter, some Indian hunting camps consist of nearly 40 workers.



Professional hunters regularly check with natives to learn of game movements. Both in Africa and the U.S., the best guides often are those who've earned the respect and trust of the locals.



Indo-Chinese Moi guides use elephants to carry hunters to the hunting grounds and to pack out game — in this case a one-ton water buffalo taken by late world-renowned hunter Herb Klein.

book anyway. Finally, after three days I flatly refused to leave camp with this jazbo. Tony Dyer, who was the ramrod, shipped him off to Nairobi and out came a little Aussie named Bill Jenvey. Bill and I got along famously.

"All I want, my Aussie friend," I told him, "are just representative specimens. I don't have to shoot any record book critters." Jenvey nodded and after that we waded back and forth through the Guaso Nyro River and forged a bond of friendship which holds to this day.

Scarcely anything is more disconcerting than to travel 10,000 miles and upon arrival find there is no one to meet you. One time I journeyed up to Alaska, which is considerably short of 10,000 miles, but upon putting my wheels down in Anchorage there was no one to meet me. I checked in at the Westward Hotel and waited. And waited. Finally, after three days, a short fat youth turned up and said he was Ben Hancock and that his old man Lee had said to pick me up and that we'd be off to Tok Junction. "Where have you been?" I wanted to know.

"Whaddya mean, whur have I been?" he

replied belligerently. "I was busy, that's what." With logic like that I subsided. The next day — that made the fourth one — we set off for Tok Junction some 250 miles distant.

In Tok Junction the guide/outfitter, Lee Hancock, was nowhere in evidence. Buck Moore, a sort of supernumerary around the camp, vouchsafed, "Lee is out huntin'; he'll be back maybe in a couple of days." This was slightly irritating, but what really put the icing on the cake was that I had Truman Wood with me. This Chicagoan who scarcely knew me had been coerced by me to make this hunt. To say that I was embarrassed would be the understatement of the morning.

Finally, after a couple of days, Hancock showed up. He had two exceedingly disgruntled clients with him. These dudes had been intent on a couple of Dall rams, but all they got was a week's hard riding. Finally, Hancock decided that it was time Truman Wood and I got into the bush. To make a long story short, I remained for two weeks and never fired a shot. Wood finally killed a runty little Dall ram. There

have to be hunts like this if you persist in the game.

Guy Allison was not a guide/outfitter in the literal sense, but Guy, an attorney, appointed himself as the mentor, the oracle, and the guiding light of our turkey-quail-duck-dove-and-whitetail hunting. This lawyer was a deceptive little individual; he was short, bald, old, soft-spoken and bland. That is, soft-spoken and bland until he got into the game fields, and then he moved, commanded, and marshaled his soldiers with all the iron-fisted determination of a second Bismark. No one kicked a brushpile until Guy ordered it. No one walked up on the pointing dogs until Allison waved him forward. No one gave forth with a single koup on the gobbler call until General McArthur gave his okay. I have lived with some professionals who were pretty bossy, but my legal light outdid all of them.

In the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area of Idaho one year, I was there to put the arm on a likely wapiti. I drew Jeff Arneson as a guide. This bucko came over from California and had acted as a guide

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for the outfitter the year before. He knew the trails pretty well. For 10 days we rode up and down these Forest Service pathways, and while most guides are only given to "Yups" and "Nopes," this child of nature was even less verbose. We'd quit camp before the dawn and return well after the shadows had turned stygian, and during the interlude, he would not even vouchsafe the time of day.

Finally, one late afternoon as we rimmed around a great canyon at its very head, I looked down into the basin formed below and there stood a most handsome wapiti. I did not take the time to count his tines and decide whether he was a keeper or not. After 10 days of constant and persistent horse travel, you ain't too picky. I fell off this old pony dragging the 8mm-.338 Magnum out of the scabbard, and with the reins trailing, I went into a good solid sitting position.

About that time, the guide's rifle gave off with an exceedingly loud pak. The bull fell on his nose. To say that I was thunderstruck would beggar the description.

"What in the hell did you do that for?" I asked.

"I ain't got me ary winter meat yit," the loquacious one said, never batting an eye. "We'uns ul get you the next ones we sees."

During a 14-month stint in Indo-China, the weekend never rolled around but I managed to find myself a long way from the MAAG headquarters. My hunting buddies were two; one was Ngo Van Chi, a Tonkinese who was a thoroughgoing sportsman, and the other was Allen Pope, grandson of the immortal Harry Pope of barrelmaking fame. This Pope made no gun tubes; he specialized in flying for CAT, the Chinese airline with headquarters on Taiwan. At any rate, Pope and I would put ourselves into the hands of Ngo Van Chi, and he would organize a hunt around 20 elephants or so. These pachyderms were manhandled by the Moi — later called the Montagnard, and these mountain people always knew where the game was feeding. Indo-China in those days were second only to Africa as a veritable hunting paradise. There were two breeds of tiger, leopard, five different buffalo (including the world's most imposing, the formidable gaur,) seven different species of deer, wild boar, and what undoubtedly must be the biggest king cobra on the Asian landmass.

The Moi, highly likeable and marvelous jungle hunters, had some special quirks which had to be recognized when you went into the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam triangle with them. Among other things, every mahout — the elephant driver — and his tailgun Charley who rode behind the houdah had to have at eventide a liter

of rice wine, three ounces of the primitive tobacco, and enough opium to fill his pipe. We had a headman who doled out this ration every evening. One time on a sort of longish shikar, we ran out of opium. This came in a huge ball, was really a crude variety as sticky as beeswax, and our entire crew came within the narrowest margin of leaving us stranded in the jungle. Ngo Van Chi, ever the resourceful one, sent a runner all the way back to Ban Me Thout, and he returned in a day and a night with a supply of the narcotic which saved the hunt from utter disaster.

Two years ago the terrorist situation in Rhodesia was pretty much touch-and-go. The sportsman who wanted to stalk his game in the bountiful mopane forests ran a pretty good chance of being stalked in turn by the guerrillas who poured over from Zambia and Mozambique. With a new rifle and cartridge to be field-tested, I did not feel that I should let the presence of a platoon or two of revolutionaries hold me up. I found a white hunter, a Scot by the name of Gordon Cormack, and he told me he had buffalo that I could shoot.

We were hunting by permission of the National Parks & Wildlife Service on the Morongoro Park, a two-million acre tract hard against the Zambia border. Only the Zambesi River separated the park and the enemy country.

To insure that the odds wouldn't be too strongly stacked in favor of the terrorists, the park people gave us three or four game scouts who trailed along behind. These stalwarts were in army uniform, the regulation camouflage, and each was armed with the FN rifle. Too, I noted, every man jack had a plentitude of spare 20-round clips.

Now, when hunting in Africa it is the long-standing practice of the professional hunter to toot around through the bush in his sturdy Land Rover. The game, usually, is not as disturbed by the sight of the vehicle as it is by the view of the human when the latter elects to go it afoot. Cormack, every inch the practicing Scot, drove his nice shiny Toyota Land Cruiser up the bush, stopped it, got out, and said to me, "Let's go." And go we did. For the rest of the day. The temperatures were hovering near the 95-degree mark, and the blacks soon drank up all the water.

For all that, I knocked off my buffalo, the new rifle-cartridge combination performed handsomely, and our trailing retinue never fired a shot.

Percy Dinshaw, a shikari/outfitter of Madhya Pradesh, set up a tiger hunt for me. Percy, a most intriguing Indian, had been a major in the Indian army during WWII, had fought across north Africa with Montgomery, and now long returned to his native heath was very probably the leading shikari in the central Indian provinces. I winged my way over to New

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Delhi via Air India and in London was told the .340 Weatherby Magnum could not be transported across Saudi Arabia because India and the Saudis had an agreement that no firearms would be transported. This was something of a blow, but when I explained my predicament to Dinshaw in New Delhi he said, "Don't worry. I've got a Winchester Model 70 in .375 H&H, and you can use it." This was encouraging. The only fly in the soup, however, was that I am left-handed and the bolt, like all Winchester bolts, was on the wrong side of the horse pasture.

Percy, all 250 pounds of him, liked his ease and comfort. We made camp in the forest bungalows left by the British when they had departed India some years before, and these brick villas were pleasant indeed. Dinshaw, with all the finesse of a two-fisted trencherman, saw to it that we had the best pair of cooks in all the M.P. State.

I was not in India for any purpose but to shoot a tiger, and after a couple of weeks, we had a tiger feeding on a nilgai. That afternoon the boys (there were 37 in camp) built a machan about 25 yards from the big antelope. This machan was placed in a palm and was probably 12 feet off the ground.

Aziz, an old shikari, went in the machan just at sundown. These blinds are built so tightly that no light can penetrate the walls. And indeed, if even the faintest glimmer of movement is discernible through the machan, the tiger sees it and will not visit the bait. Aziz had a jacklight powered by a jeep battery. He positioned himself at one of the two ports. I sat beside the other.

At about 9:15 the tiger was on the bait. This must be tied with cables between two trees or the great feline will simply pick it up and carry it off. The old shikari and I permitted the game to feed for 15 minutes, and then I nudged the old Indian. He snapped on the light.

The animal had somehow sensed that we were there on the platform. He blinked at the light only once and then bounced off toward the jungle, which was about 20 yards distant.

I placed the crosswires in the old Lyman Alaskan scope on his shoulder, swung the rifle along smoothly, and gently mashed the trigger.

On the shot, the tiger ran behind a tree, not a big tree, just a sapling possibly four inches in diameter. He put his shoulder behind that tree just as I pulled the trigger. The 300-gr. bullet hit the tree and not the tiger. Dinshaw was properly sympathetic the next morning. "I'll cut out that section of the tree if you want. You can take it home with you." I'd journeyed 10,000 miles to shoot a tree. ■