

# African Encore

After no less than 27 journeys to the Dark Continent, Col. Askins finds his latest safari as thrilling as the first.

By Col. Charles Askins



Photos by Leonard Lee Roy III

Because of their unpredictable nature, Cape buffalo are considered by many hunters to be Africa's most dangerous game. Col. Askins has shot them in numbers while on safari.

Africa is the earthly embodiment, the realization of the American Indian's happy hunting ground. It is within the grasp of all sportsmen. It calls to the huntsman; whether or not he heeds the call is a matter of fancy. If his enthusiasm is little fettered by mundane bounds, if his infusion of the hunter's red corpuscles responds, if his adventuring soul is prepared to surmount the hobbling considerations of time and finances, then he will stand astride the African veldt.

There was once a time when a big game safari in Africa was only for the idle rich. Aside from the sizable quantities of folding money a safari involved, it was possibly even more prohibitive from the standpoint of time consumed. Now, all that is changed. The aspiring hunter may fly to Africa in less than 24 hours, experience the thrills and satisfaction of a big game hunt, and do it in something less than a month's time.

Africa, extending from the upper reaches of the Sudan southward to the Cape of Good Hope, and from the game-rich hinterlands of Namibia eastward thousands of miles to Mount Kilimanjaro's eternal snows, is game country beyond imagination.

This limitless expanse encompasses every known hunting terrain. There are dense, steamy jungles; open savannas; mountains (some of the loftiest on this sphere); semi-desert areas; and gloriously rolling open plains. There is

heat and there is cold. There are seasons of rain and months of beckoning sunshine. It is the most bountiful game land on earth.

Neither firearms, cartridges, food and drink, hot baths, hard work, walking, physical condition, nor age need deter the willing. The sportsman may cart along his own shooting irons, fire his favorite loads, and thoroughly test his personal gear. But if he so desires, the outfitter can provide an ample selection of guns, camp gear, food, and drink. As far as transportation, hunters can traverse the backcountry on foot or by Land Cruiser. Once the hunting begins, a variety of techniques may be chosen depending on the quarry. Tuskers must be spooed, buffalo stalked, and the great cats, both lion and leopard, are usually hunted from blinds. In short, the whole affair can be as easy or as challenging as you make it.

It is all very well to encourage the neophyte to take the African plunge. But what's to be done with the old roo who has glimpsed the bright lights one too many times? What is left for the old safari hunter who has been there 27 times? That depends, I believe, on his enthusiasm for the chase—the ardor, the strength of the passion.

The 28th sojourn to the African bush might well be quite as stimulating, thrilling, and eagerly savored as the first safari. I'd spoor new animals, I assured myself, shoot them with new cartridges chambered in strange rifles, and thrill to never-before-seen vistas.

After Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Botswana, and South-West Africa, the choice of new hunting grounds narrowed perceptibly. I might look to Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, Zaire, or Zambia.

Accounts of little game in the Sudan, scandalous poaching (a crime literally gone amok), and abysmal treatment by various outfitters caused me to reject the area. Chad was caught in the throes of an invasion by Libya, and the Central African Republic and Zaire were closed to elephant hunting. It would be Zambia, I elected.

Being a very old dog at this game, it has been my observation that new outfitters try harder. The safari Bill Askins, my partner, and I chose with a firm that is new to Zambia—Hunters Africa, Box 2078, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa 3200. Actually, they are new and old, I should explain.

A quarter-century ago, I was hunting in Kenya with White Hunters Africa. The new organization has retained this old designation, but the ownership is pristine, the management experienced, and the enthusiasm bubbly.

An almost unbelievable arrangement came about in the choice of Hunters Africa. "You will have Mike Hissey as your professional hunter," Gordon Cundill, managing director, assured me. Hissey and I had teamed up one year in Kenya and the next in Uganda way back in the 1950s. A steady-going Briton transplanted to Kenya, Hissey was utterly dependable, even tempered, courageous, and resolute.

*Continued on pg. 61*



Although oryx are most often found in the northern Sahara, the author shot this one with an 8mm-08 while on safari in South Africa. The bull sported horns that measured 40 inches.



Leopards, one of Africa's big five, rest during the day and usually hunt at night. Since these spotted cats often prey on antelope and gazelle, hunters use these same animals as bait when hunting the big cats from blinds.



Professional hunter Mike Hissey (r.) guided the author to a trophy sable. The antelope's horns measured 46 inches, good enough to qualify the bull for the Rowland Ward record book.

## African Encore

Continued from pg. 25

Our bivouac was 200 bush miles west of Lusaka, the capital of this Third-World, communist-dominated country. The dozen grass tufts spectacularly overhung the sparkling-clear waters of the Lunga River.

The Kafue National Park, all 6 million acres of it, provides an immense incubator and refuge for game animals. The Hunters Africa concession borders this monstrous preserve, and there are no fences, rivers, mountains, or forests to impede the ready inflow of the great animals.

"Of course," Mike Hissey grinned, "it isn't all a one-way road. When shooting pressure gets too lively, the herds simply migrate back into the park. They know full well where the border lies."

I nodded. That was just as well.

Times have changed. When Teddy Roosevelt went on safari, he rode a horse and his safari walked. When the modern safari huntsman takes to the veldt, he rolls along in a safari hunting car. Only when hunting the great animals like elephant, buffalo, and occasionally lion does he step down and go it afoot. It is an easy touch, quite frankly.

"Hissey," I told my hunter, "I want to shoot 23 buffalo. I've now bagged 77 of the surly old bovines. I want another 23 so that when someone asks, 'Have you ever shot a buffalo?' I can simply say, 'Well, yes, 100.'"

Hissey looked a little bewildered. Ordinarily, the hunter shoots only one or two buff. To take 23 might be quite a chore.

The buffalo rifle was the new .360 Askins Mag. This cartridge, an original one, is made up on the 404 Jeffery case. It fires the 300-grain Barnes full-metal-jacket bullet, which delivers 4,300 foot-pounds of muzzle swoosh in the old Winchester Model 70 barreled by Shilen. The second rifle was a Griffin & Howe chambered for the 8mm Rem. Mag. Improved. This is a beautifully done ordnance piece, stocked as only this grand old company can do. It features Bastogne walnut with a full-figure display checked 22 lines to the inch, a steel buttplate, and a skeletonized pistol grip cap. The action is the Remington Model 721 with a left-hand bolt. The scope is the Leupold 3X-9X in a one-piece mount. The handlock kicks the 175-grain Sierra bullet along at 3,140 fps.

Unloosed on nyala, greater kudu, impala, and a scimitar-horned oryx in Natal and the Transvaal before descending on Zambia, I'd found the rifle and its souped-up 8mm loading quite adequate for the game.

"I think we'd best go find a puku for you," said Hissey. I'd never gathered in one of these little antelope. They are related to the kob, of which I've shot quite a number. At any rate, we hammered along

through a most glorious wonderland of an open forest that broke out into a limitless savanna called the "Dambo" by the natives. There were an almost endless number of puku.

"We'll get down and stalk 'em," Hissey offered. We did that and after a mile-and-a-half stalk, bent double most of the time, the white hunter motioned me to shoot. The range was 350 yards; the game a 140-pound target standing 40 inches at the shoulder.

"Hey, look, you bloody limey," I said. "I want my game close enough to take with a couple of good pistol shots. What do you mean, shoot?"

Hissey hissed in my ear, "You can't get any closer. Take him from here."

There was no other choice. I moved up to an anthill a dozen feet higher than the surrounding Dambo, got into an uncomfortable prone position, and put the Leupold crosswires on the little buck's shoulder. At the shot, the game dropped stone dead. A very lucky shot, and a thing I don't like to do.

"Don't make me shoot so far again," I admonished my old comrade.

Scarcely a pair of hours later, we came upon a little band of roan antelope. Now the roan is a great game animal. Bigger than all the antelope save the eland, it is a prized trophy. Alarmed at the appearance of the hunting car, the little band moved off at a swinging trot.

"Those roan know the whole story," I said to Mike. "They've had experience with autos before this." He nodded glumly.

We got down and with Padding, our tracker, commenced a circuitous approach. The Dambo grows four-foot grass; to remain hidden, you must keep your head and back below the waving tops of the cover. The roan herd would have no part of us. They broke into a gallop, and we turned back in disgust.

Departing camp at 6 a.m. every morn, we turned back each day after 12 hours of steady travel. An hour from the Lunga bivouac, we halted abruptly. There at 800 yards was a band of roan. The boss of the pack was a fairly decent head.

"Get down," ordered Hissey. "There's still enough light to shoot."

The stalk was easier this time for we had an interminable number of anthills to provide cover. At 400 yards, the anthills evaporated.

"It's from here or we'll give up and try tomorrow," said Hissey.

Now a full-grown bull roan antelope weighs 750 pounds and is as tough as an M-60 tank. Well, almost. The light was going fast, but through the glass, the crosshairs showed fine and clear. The game was partly facing me, giving a quartering shot at the neck and shoulder. The big 8mm bullet struck precisely six inches low. I had held just below the withers, tracing a course down the juncture of the neck and shoulder. It could not have been placed

more properly had the bull stood at 60 yards. It fell on the shot and never moved.

"What are we going to do?" Hissey asked a bit plaintively. "If we don't try these lengthy shots, we just don't get the chance." I nodded glumly.

Each day, we sallied forth, and by keeping the boyish enthusiasm of my guide in check—he has only been at the business 26 years—I carefully paced our killing to a critter each day. There were a pair of hartbeest; a dinky waterbuck (shot at an unbelievable 125 yards); and a reedbuck shot at 300 yards. Then we got into a sizable band of sable, and the herd boss looked like a shootable trophy.

At 400 yards, the 175-grain Sierra laid him low, but he got up and followed the cows into the miombo. We spooled along behind; scant blood droppings encouraged us. Padding was better than any bloodhound, keeping his nose within bare inches of the sun-baked sod. We had scarcely penetrated the belt of timber when we spotted the sable, very sick and barely moving. When he stopped and turned to look back over his trail, the second 8mm bullet struck him in the heart. The range was close, not more than 180 yards. The horns measured 46 inches.

I saw little of Bill Askins. He departed from camp at 3 a.m. each day for the lion blind. Late in the afternoon, he sat until after dark over a leopard bait. In the interim—you can't sit in a blind all day—he and Don Grobler, his hunter, gathered in puku, zebra, roan, waterbuck, eland, hartbeest, and impala.

Most of his kill went to feed the insatiable felines. His blind was within 30 yards of a lone tree where 16 lions had been shot by previous clients that season. Bill was shooting the 300 Weatherby Mag., probably the best cartridge for the African scene. Time ran out on Bill, and he had to pull up stakes before he took either a lion or a spotted cat.

"Where are the buffalo, Michael?" I'd ask at least once daily. "I came here to shoot 23, remember?" Hissey squirmed at that.

One day, we saw 60 buff, but these wise old bovines were in the Kafue Park. "Can't you just sorta ease over there and say boo, at 'em?" I inquired.

Hissey didn't even smile. "We never invade the park," he said a bit ponderously. "Not even in pursuit of wounded game." Mike has a good sense of humor, but you couldn't kid him about breaking the game law.

One day, we took up the spoor of two lone bulls. Padding clung to the track like a leech on a hound dog, and finally we got a look at the pair.

"Both about 36-inches," Hissey opined. "I wasn't trying for a new record head—I just wanted to wallop the pair with the .360 Askins Mag. The duo gave us the slip. I am still short the 23 buff I need to round out the full 100. ■