

# **NOTES ON A HUNTING SAFARI ON SENTINEL RANCH IN ZIMBABWE**

## **THE COUNTRY**

Zimbabwe is located in the southern part of Africa. Before it became independent in 1980, it was called Rhodesia. It lies north of South Africa, and is bordered to the east by Mozambique, to the west by Botswana, and to the north by Zambia. It is a little larger than the state of Montana in size. The country is struggling to redistribute land, and while it has put severe pressure on the wildlife industry, they still welcome the revenue generated by big game safaris. Despite the negative press, we have never ever experienced problems negatively effecting clients, nor have we ever felt threatened while traveling about the country, nor will you. The white population speaks English, while the black population speaks a duke's mixture, but primarily Venda, Shona, and Ndebele. However, when you are in Safari camp the language of big trophies is all the same! One of the real benefits of the areas we hunt is the absence of the dreaded Tsetse fly found elsewhere in Africa. Like all other hunting countries in Africa, it too, is suffering from a population explosion. Wild Africa continues to shrink in size. One of the primary exports of Zimbabwe was cattle, which was shipped to Europe. In order to protect their cattle from Hoof and Mouth disease, certain areas were set aside for them in Buffalo free zones. All the Cape buffalo were eradicated in these areas by the government. This left the main ranching areas supposedly free of Hoof and Mouth disease, but sporadic outbreaks of the disease is preventing any exports. Our ranch has a huntable herd of certified virus free buffalo.

## **THE SENTINEL RANCH**

The main area we hunt is in the lower part of Zimbabwe, on the Limpopo River. This large river is usually dry during our hunting season. Most of the terrain would remind you of the brush country in south Texas. Areas of heavy Mopani brush, opening into plains, are dotted with Acacias and 2,000 year-old Baobab trees. Some of the area is rolling hills, with rock outcroppings called koppies. Mixed in with these, are even more rugged sandstone hills. The ranch encompasses eighty thousand acres. What fencing exists is to keep neighboring cattle out. Because there are watering points on the property, during the dry season, the ranch becomes a magnet for game. The surrounding area is made up of very large tracts as well, which allows game to move freely. Elephant herds frequent the area, and the occasional Lion will even pass through. This ranch accepts only a limited number of safaris each season. The results are, they are not shot out, and the trophy quality remains exceptionally high.

## **THE STAFF**

A licensed professional hunter accompanies each client, or pair of clients. You will find him knowledgeable about all the birds, plants, trees and wildlife, not just the animals hunted. Zimbabwe's licensing procedure for professional hunters makes knowing this information mandatory. In addition, you will be accompanied by at least one tracker, sometimes two. Most of these chaps have grown up in the bush, or are ex poachers, and could find the needle in the haystack, if it left a track. They seem to have a sixth-sense about what the game is going to do; about the same time the animal makes up its own mind to do it. The camps are staffed with excellent skinners, to ensure your trophies will be properly cared for. Your taxidermist back home will appreciate their expert field preparation. Other camp personnel include, cooks, waiters, house cleaning staff, and someone to do your laundry daily.

## **THE HUNTING**

*Plainsgame* hunting starts with a wake up call just before dawn. After coffee and breakfast, you will load up in your four-wheel drive vehicle, and from that moment on, you are hunting. Depending on the animal being hunted, you may scout from the vehicle, track on foot, or set at a waterhole. Starting from a waterhole in the morning, and following a big bull Eland track is the purist form of hunting I know. It also may be the most challenging, as all their senses seem keener than a whitetail. Traveling the paths along the rivers is always exciting; Kudu, Impala, and Bushbuck compete for the shade and food along the rivers edge. The time that some animal is not visible to you on these ranches can be measured in minutes not hours. Collecting a representative trophy is relatively easy, but record book hunting, is still record book hunting, and will require patience. The good news is you will have plenty of animals from which to choose. Normally you will return to camp for lunch. At mid-day most of the game will be laying in the shade, staying out of the mid-day sun. That's good enough reason to take a siesta your-self. About 3 PM you will head back into the bush. Shooting distances will vary from 30 to 300 yards. Long shots are usually done with the aid of shooting sticks, which make a steady rest. *Leopard* hunting is an evening affair. You will hunt from a blind, situated approximately 90 to a 100 yards from a hung bait. There is a steady rest to shoot from in the blind. Several locations are baited, and each morning you will make the rounds checking for activity. Once a large male cat is working a bait, it becomes a waiting game, and a test of nerves. For a pure adrenaline rush, its hard to beat what you will feel when you hear your first leopard cough, as he makes his way through the tall grass. Cat hunting requires extra effort, and it is the focus of any hunt that includes a Leopard. Sentinel is noted for having exceptionally large Leopards, and we have experienced a high hunter success rate. You will need to obtain a CITES permit, prior to leaving the US, in order to import your trophy. *Buffalo* hunting is done on Sentinel or on Government concessions. If the hunt is not on Sentinel, the best way to reach these concessions is by air charter. While no hunting can be guaranteed, we have been running at 100% success. *Sable* and or *Nyala* hunting require a minimum 10-day Safari and must be booked in advance and are subject quota. The trophy fees are always at prevailing rates.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

Sentinel Camp is very comfortable; each chalet has a shower with hot and cold running water, a flush toilet, and electricity. Each room is equipped with a hair dryer for the ladies. Adjusting the shower temperature, will however, test your dexterity and patience. Daily maid service will keep your room clean, and your laundry will be done for you each day. Each chalet has its own veranda with a great view. There is a common area with a fire pit, where you will gather to ward off the evening chill, and relive the day's excitement. If the moon is dark, you will be treated to the best star gazing in the world. The dining room is nearby, and is covered, but open to facilitate game viewing. From my dining room chair, I have seen everything, from a Cheetah with cubs, to a 60" Kudu. Sentinel is situated in the heart of game country, and even while in camp you will see game!

## **FOOD**

*Breakfasts* start off with a cup of coffee, or if you prefer, English tea. This will be followed, at your request, by a traditional American style breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast, and juice.

Some clients just grab toast and cereal before heading to the bush.

Lunch back at camp will consist of various game meats or chicken, salads, and rice or potatoes.

*Dinners* are preceded by snacks and cocktails served fireside, followed by dinner, and dessert.

Most people find Eland filets cooked on the BBQ grill to be better than the beef equivalent. Fine wine accompanies the meal. We will try and accommodate any dietary restrictions or allergies.

*Beverages:* an open bar policy is in effect in the evenings while at the safari camp. We will try and accommodate any particular requests, but not all state side brands are available. You will find the wines to be excellent, and the beer good, and cold.

## **CLIMATE**

The safari season (April-October) is during Zimbabwe's winter; remember their seasons are opposite ours. We hunt during the dry season, when the game is orientated to the available water. Daytime temperatures can reach the upper seventies to low eighties, but falls quickly when the sun goes down. Some mornings you may even wake to find frost on the windscreen of your land rover. When it's 90 degrees, with high humidity back home, you will find the temperatures here ideal to hunt in.

## **GUNS and GUN PERMITS**

We recommend bringing two rifles, one large caliber, and a 222 or 22 Mag. for the smaller animals. Rather than getting into a caliber debate, let us suggest that you bring nothing smaller than a 30-06 or 7mm magnum; with our favorite choice being a 338 Win. Mag. Bullets need to be Nosler partition, or similar, as these are large animals, that do not quit easily. Sixty rounds of ammunition should be adequate for a general mixed bag safari. We have large bore back up rifles for rent in camp should you experience a problem with your primary rifle.

If you are going to hunt Buffalo, the legal minimum is a 375 or larger caliber. A good quality scope, with clear optics is essential. Our preference is a 2 1/2 x 8 or 9-power scope. The camp has 12 Ga. shotguns, but if you want to do some bird hunting for the pot, you should bring a couple boxes of shells in 6 shot size. Please take some time, while still at home, to practice with your rifle. You owe it to yourself, as well as to the animals, to be a reasonably good shot.

South Africa has recently changed their gun laws, and we have been experiencing delays do to the new system. Neither South Africa nor Zimbabwe charges a firearm permit fee. We will supply you with the necessary forms so you can expedite this procedure as much as possible. To facilitate this procedure, keep a copy of your rifle's make, model, and serial numbers with your travel documents. Pack you rifles in a good quality, airline proof, locked case for the journey down. Make sure you have proof of ownership with you; a Customs 4457 form works well, and is usually required upon re-entry to the US. Since 9/11 it has gotten tougher to move about with firearms.

## **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

A valid passport, and onward or returning ticket is required for entry into either Zimbabwe, or South Africa. A Visa is now required for entry into Zimbabwe and can be obtained at the border.

**Make sure you have at least two blank pages in your passport, or you will be denied boarding your plane in the US.** You will be asked to fill out tourist cards prior to entry. Entry into either country is often easier than clearing customs in Miami.

## **HEALTH**

While there are no unusual serious health risks, and vaccinations are not mandatory, certain precautions are advised. We recommend you take a course of anti-malarial medication, and have a current tetanus shot. Even if you are not going to Africa, but travel outside the U.S., you may want to consider the new Hepatitis A & B vaccinations. Bring any personal medications you may require with you. We have yet to experience any problems eating any of the foods or vegetables. Drinking local water is not a problem, but bottled water is available. Since you are hunting during the winter, snakes are present, but not a major threat.

## **ELECTRICITY**

220 volts 50 AC. Bring a converter if you want to re-charge video camera batteries.

## **WHAT TO PACK**

Contrary to what you may have seen in the movies, you don't need a new wardrobe of safari clothes. Plan to bring clothes that can be layered, including a sweater. **Camouflage** clothing is **unlawful** in Zimbabwe. Darker colors, rather than the traditional light tan, work best. Good alternative colors are olive, Army OD, or even dark green. A warm jacket, and gloves may be necessary in the mornings. A warm-up suit feels comfortable in the evenings around camp. Since laundry is done on a daily basis, you need not bring a lot of clothes. Bring boots with soft rubber soles, as vibram soles make too much noise while stalking. You will need a good quality, but not too heavy, pair of binoculars. For binoculars we recommend 8x25 or 30s. Carry a good camera, and plenty of film or a bring memory chip; if you are visiting a game park, bring a long lens. A small camp flashlight will be useful. This is one of the easiest hunting trips you will ever pack for. After your Safari is confirmed we will furnish a detailed packing list.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

The area abounds with archaeological finds, going back to the iron and stone ages. Paleontologists have recently found a complete baby dinosaur dating back two hundred million years. There are rock shelters to explore where Bushman once lived, and their ancient paintings are still very visible on the walls. Zimbabwe has the highest concentration of rock art in the world. Paintings of animals, and people in everyday life, ritual and myth, are scattered about the various sandstone rock formations. It's a bird watchers paradise, with over 350 species of birds in the valley, including the world's largest flying bird, the Kori-bustard. When you aren't hunting, there is a lot to see and do.

## **CURRENCY**

The Zim. dollar is devaluating faster than you can read this information. It is worthless any where out side the country. Use US cash dollars or travelers checks. Don't change money on the streets, as the Government likes to do "sting" operations. You will need to settle your trophy fees in cash or travelers checks. If you order them in advance large denominations are available, and will prevent writers cramp.