

# Repayment of a Debt to a Lifetime Companion: A Bowhunting Project In Africa

*By Dr. Ed Ashby*

**I**n many ways I must consider myself a very fortunate person. Here I am, retired, living in a veritable hunter's paradise, and still not yet so long-of-tooth that I can't enjoy it! An independent, full time "bush-bum" of the first order. What more could any hunter ask for out of life?

Being born into a hunting family, it was only natural that I would grow up loving to hunt. Dad was a NRA rifle instructor, and I learned to shoot firearms at such an early age that I don't even remember it. But one day I had a most marvelous experience: I got to meet Howard Hill and to see him in an exhibition shoot with his bow and arrow.

When I got home that day I started making my first bow, a bent willow branch with a fishing line string. My arrows were cane, cut near the lake in our backyard. The heads were cut from tin cans, and the fletching was chicken feathers held on by sewing thread and glue. That first bow broke after a only few shots, but I was hooked.

With money from my after school job, I purchased my first "real" bow, a Pearson Old Hickory selfwood longbow of 65# draw, which proved much too heavy for me to shoot. As soon as I could afford too, I replaced it with a Paul Bunyan fiberglass longbow of 55# draw. Still too heavy a draw weight. I had to replace it too, this time with a Herter's fiberglass semi-recurve of 35#. Just right!

Then came summer, and a job digging ditches (no small feat with pick and shovel in the brick hard clay soils of my native Texas). I got paid 25 cents per linear foot for digging those ditches, real money to me then. With my new found wealth, which was my total wages for three months of toil in that hot Texas sun, I ordered a Bear Kodiak bow. It was a 42# bow, and I ordered two dozen Microflite fiberglass arrows with it, my first ever factory made arrows.

The catalogue at the sporting goods store indicated that these bows came in either right of left hand models. I had no idea what this meant, but reasoned that, since I was right handed, I needed a right hand bow. When that "right hand bow" arrived, I discovered that I had always been shooting my bows left handed! I had to learn to shoot all over again!

For the next two years I hunted small game or shot with my bow almost every day. During that time I never met anyone else who even shot a bow. Needless to say, I had to learn everything on my own, and a lot of what I learned turned out to be wrong (a handy excuse I still get to use sometimes!).

I'm sure the Librarian in my small town got tired of searching the files for archery books of any type. These she

dutifully sent away for, "on loan" from the big libraries. From them I learned some basic shooting skills, how to make good arrows, arrow heads, strings, quivers, etc. I even learned that there were such things as shooting gloves and arm guards—no more fingers with the skin worn off, and eventually the bruise on my forearm even went away!

I finally met another bowhunter. We were, at that time, the only two bowhunters in the entire county. It was truly the blind leading the blind, but together we gradually learned. We shot a lot of rabbits, squirrels, bullfrogs, fish, turtles and other small game. We even collected some foxes, coyotes, and a couple of bobcats. Then we found a lease to deer hunt on near Bryan, Texas—with dozens of other bowhunters! There we learned a lot, and we both began to score regular kills on the small Texas whitetail deer.

Then came trips to Colorado for mule deer. From there my world expanded rapidly. I was to eventually live, and hunt, not only in my native Texas, but in Tennessee, Kansas, Arizona, North Carolina, Minnesota and Alaska, and to hunt in a host of other states. There were trips to Mexico, Central and South America, Europe and Africa. Along the way I had the fortune to meet and hunt with Fred Bear and Ben Pearson.

It was on one of my hunting trips to Africa that fortune truly smiled on me. Natal Parks Board, in South Africa, was considering legalizing bowhunting and wanted to collect some information on the effectiveness of bowhunting. As an experienced bowhunter, obviously interested in African hunting, and who also happened to have some medical expertise, I was asked to participate with Tony Tomkinson, then Senior Game Ranger at Makuzi Park, in the "field work" of collecting and collating the research data.

During this project I was able to test a huge variety of bowhunting equipment on real animals. I started out with as fine a collection of "home grown" assumptions as one can imagine. These were quickly shattered by reality. Many things that I thought I knew to be true proved to be totally wrong. There are few things in life as brutally cruel to assumptions as cold, hard, facts. This research culminated in the now well known Natal Bowhunting Study.

While I have always loved hunting in all of its varied forms, it is bowhunting that I most enjoy. It is the sport that has given me the most pleasure through the years. Bowhunting has become an old and valued friend. It is only fitting that I try to give something back to the old friend

that has given me so much. That I have always endeavored to do to the best of my ability and means.

Following my retirement in 1994, I packed up and moved to Africa to live. My journey has taken me first to Zimbabwe, a country I was most familiar with from my previous trips to Africa. While I will probably end up living elsewhere on the African continent, where it is even more remote and wild, I have not merely wasted this past year.

During the past year I have done a fair share of hunting. I have also been able to complete some much "put-off" work: collating some of my broadhead research data. This has culminated in developing, and field testing, a theory I have been working on for several years, the "Tissue Penetration Index," or TPI. The TPI is based on the last eleven years worth of data from literally hundreds of arrow shots on game, beginning with the notes from the Natal Study. This respite has also allowed me time to do some further testing and to develop some plans for future projects.

During this past year I have also become actively involved with some of the conservation efforts in Zimbabwe to save the severely endangered Black rhino, a very fine gentleman of the bush, if a bit "cranky" at times.

It was through my association with the efforts to conserve the Black rhino that I inadvertently stumbled upon a chance to expand opportunities for bowhunting in Africa. While working with some of the members of the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy (MBRC), the subject of bowhunting came up (naturally—as my wife would say, "What else does a bowhunter ever talk about?"). While discussing bowhunting, a number of the members of the Conservancy expressed a great interest in exploring bowhunting as a viable option to rifle hunting on the ranches comprising the Conservancy.

The Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy is a consortium of ranchers, located near KweKwe, in Zimbabwe's Midlands Province, who have collectively offered up their lands to the Zimbabwe Government, without any compensation, for use as sanctuary for the Black rhino. The Black rhino has suffered extreme poaching pressure on government lands. The Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy is a Registered Welfare Trust (non-profit), and is the only such rhino trust in Zimbabwe.

The Conservancy comprises a total of approximately 230,000 acres. The entire Conservancy is surrounded by an electric game fence on its perimeter and is patrolled by a number of trained game scouts whose job is to protect the precious rhino they look after. There are less than 300 Black rhino left in all of Zimbabwe. The bulk of these rhino are on private lands, like the MBRC. The MBRC currently protects 37 Black rhino and two White rhino. The Black rhino on the Conservancy remain the property of the Zimbabwe Government. They are not owned by the land owners. The White rhino were privately purchased and translocated to the MBRC.

The Conservancy is also home to a vast array of other indigenous game—impala, zebra, eland, kudu, tsessebe, bush pig, warthog, duiker, reedbuck, steenbok, sable, wildebeest, cheetah and lesser game like caracals, jackals, monkeys and baboons. Although most of the ranches in the

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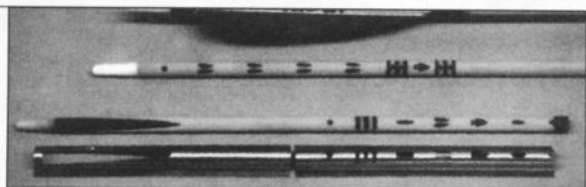
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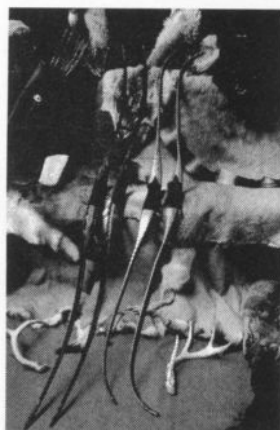
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Conservancy also run some cattle, the rhinos and other game animals wander freely within its boundaries.

These ranches are not to be confused with game farms. These are large blocks of land, and are rather like a large block of wild Africa fenced in. Hunting here is much like hunting any wild game area elsewhere in Africa. The accommodations are, however, a little nicer (ranch style accommodations). The food is superb and is served in a friendly atmosphere. There are even cooling "sundowners" at the end of a long day's hunt.

Most of the ranches in the Conservancy also offer a host of activities for nonhunters to enjoy. Such activities as horseback riding, tennis, swimming, game viewing, nature walks and rides, and some "tame" animals to visit, including ostriches, buffalo, elephants, sable, warthogs, baboon and lions—even rides on trained African elephants are available! It is also one of the few places left on earth where one can approach, on foot, free ranging Black rhinos. For those who have never experienced it, approaching a Black rhino on foot is a side trip worth missing a few hours hunting time.

Because of the need to control their animal populations within the carrying capacity of the land, most of the ranches in the Conservancy have always offered rifle hunting for the other indigenous species. There has always been concern, however, about the pressure and stress to the animals from this activity. After talking to them about bowhunting, many of the members began to realize that bowhunting could possibly offer a way to help control the game populations within the conservancy without resorting to rifle hunting.

Currently, I am in the process of trying to develop a "Bowhunting Project" to demonstrate to this group exactly how bowhunting can benefit the Conservancy. Several members of the Conservancy have expressed a desire to move from rifle hunting to bowhunting exclusively, if the project can be shown to be both effective and economically viable for them.

This Project is not a money making operation for me. I receive no compensation for the Project. It is because of my interest in seeing bowhunting become better established in Africa that I have undertaken the Project.

Of course, I also have my own reasons for wanting to see an influx of bowhunters into this area. As some of my readers may recognize, I have a long interest in the study of bowhunting effectiveness under real hunting conditions, and have published numerous technical articles on this subject. Having a bowhunting project in the Conservancy would afford me the opportunity to collect a wealth of new field data. Data on a wide range of new, untested, equipment and on game of varying size, up to eland—but I wanted even more.

I also wanted to collect as many field notes as possible on hunting the larger animals: Cape buffalo, hippo and elephant with bow and arrow. Through my long time friend and Professional Hunter, Gordon Cormack, I was put in touch with Piet Houggard. Piet has a hunting concession in Mozambique. Mozambique allows "the big stuff" to be hunted with a bow. Perfect!

Upon visiting it, I found that Piet's hunting concession has large Cape buffalo, hippo and elephant populations. It also offers superb leopard hunting and the largest



crocodiles that I have seen in Africa! There is also a mixture of plains game: kudu, zebra, waterbuck, impala, warthog, etc., but the plains game is not found in the numbers that are resident on the Midlands Conservancy. What possibilities it offered for the advanced bowhunter with a thrust for real adventure in a truly wild and undeveloped part of Africa. What possibilities it offered me to collect some very hard to get data!

Piet's hunting camp is located on the Zambezi River, near where it empties into Lake Cahorra Bassa. It is a beautiful, comfortable—almost luxurious—hunting camp. There are thatched cottages, a large lounge, dining and cook areas, and even flush toilets. There is also excellent fishing on the Zambezi River.

Piet does have some experience with bowhunting, and has had one bowhunter take a Cape buffalo bull, and two others miss chances at leopard—both at ten feet! For those interested, the one buffalo was taken with a 100# longbow, the broadhead used was a Black Diamond and the shaft was from a fiberglass fish arrow. It was a quartering away shot and the shaft penetrated past the fletching for a one shot kill. The two missed leopards were both shots taken with compound bows, and both hunters had the same story—when the leopard came to the bait, it was too dark to see their sights!

What types of information do I hope to collect from the bowhunters participating in the hunts? Basically, I hope to expand my data base with information similar to that collected during and since the Natal Study. Of interest will be the equipment used by each hunter and the effectiveness of that equipment. Naturally the bow type, draw weight, chronographed velocity, shaft size and material, arrow mass, broadhead type and TPI, where possible, must be recorded.

Information from each killing shot must also be collected: the shot angle, amount of penetration, tissues hit, description of the wound channel, condition of the broadhead and arrow after the hit, animal reaction and collapse time, etc. For the hunting on the Conservancy, because it is constantly paroled by game scouts, I also hope to collect some information on any animals hit and not recovered. How many survive and how many are truly lost?

All such information is of great value to the bowhunting community if we are to be able to answer questions about, and challenges to, the effectiveness of bowhunting. But, in the final analysis, the main purpose is to help all bowhunters have access to information, based on hard data, of what equipment is truly required to be adequate on game of various sizes under real hunting conditions.

Equipment used must meet all legal requirements to hunt. Other than that, no restrictions will be placed on the equipment that the hunter uses. The general idea is to have as wide a sampling of equipment as possible in the testing. It is also important to note that the use of camouflage clothing is generally forbidden, although there are some exception for certain camouflage patterns.

Cost of the hunts on the Conservancy are U.S. \$300.00 per day for a 1x1 hunt (one hunter, one guide), \$250.00 per day (each) for a 2x1 hunt, \$200.00 per day (each) for 3x1, and \$150.00 per day (each) for four hunters with one guide.



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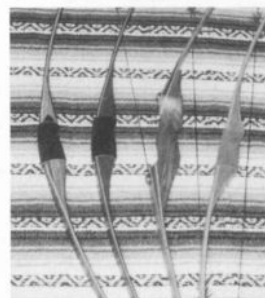
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The Conservancy hunts are conducted by a fully licensed, and Bowhunter Certified, Professional Hunter. Hunt cost includes use of a fully equipped hunting vehicle, trackers, skimmers, field preparation of the trophies and all lodgings and meals during the hunt. The beer and wine are even included! Bird hunting is also offered free to those hunters who wish to try their hand at it.

The "Big Game" hunts in Mozambique are at U.S. \$750.00 per day 1x1 and \$650.00 per day 2x1. There is a seven day minimum on the Mozambique buffalo hunts, but I would very strongly recommend at least ten days be allowed for this hunt. Hunts for the other "big animals" have to be arranged on a case-by-case basis. The plains game hunts can be of any length from seven days on up, but ten to fourteen days offers the better chances of success. On both hunts, the head taxes are payable for each animal killed or wounded and not recovered. Expensive? Yes and no. Considering the number of species which can be taken, the cost per animal is very reasonable.

The hunting in both the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy and in

Mozambique can be either by stalking or from an established blind or tree-stand. Stand hunting is generally more effective for most plains game, and the only productive method of leopard hunting. Still, there is no more challenging way of hunting the plains game than the stalk. Buffalo and hippo are generally stalked. Crocodiles can be baited in.

So there you have the story of my "Bowhunter Project." If I can interest enough bowhunters in coming to Zimbabwe to hunt plains game, it is very likely that a large portion of the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy can be secured as a "bowhunting only area".

As for Mozambique, if bowhunting for the truly big game can become a firmly entrenched, economically important, source of tourism income now, it is likely that the newly elected Mozambique government will refrain from placing prohibitive restrictions on bowhunting the elephant, lion, leopard, hippo and Cape buffalo.

The Mozambique hunts could also provide valuable information, in statistically significant quantity, about the efficacy of bows and arrows for taking

the larger animals—data that will, most assuredly, be useful to bowhunting's future. This type of information could well help remove the restrictions against hunting these behemoths of the bush in other areas and countries.

If you, like I, feel a need to give something back to our sport, here is a chance. If you are a bowhunter with a thrust for adventure, if you would like to be doing something to help advance bowhunting in Africa, and elsewhere, here is a chance. I need help from other bowhunters to demonstrate the appropriateness and economic feasibility of bowhunting here.

Lest one think that it is through the publication of the data which I collect from this research that I make some financial gain, I have never sold any of my many archery articles to any magazine. They have all been supplied free of any cost. It is just one more way I have of trying to repay my old friend and lifetime companion, the King of Sports!



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