

ANOTHER DAGGA BOY IN THE CAPRIVI...

Stefan Fouché



One of my most special hunting memories to date.

An exceptional hunt in a very special place. What a stunning buffalo hunted in the Caprivi.

Drenched with sweat and feeling the 30-odd kilometres walked in the Caprivi sand in my calves while hunching down behind a very small bush, I realised the time was now. The buffalo bull was a mere 25 paces away. He was unaware of my presence, and if I kept dead quiet and the wind held, he would walk into the firing line. At this moment, I knew I needed to keep my composure and shoot straight – not with a double rifle, however! My hunting companion had the iron sights lined up and was ready to take his shot. I was armed with a 4K Sony camera and two half-depleted batteries... The .500 NE roared and I tried my very best not to flinch. The buffalo broke away and a few follow-up shots ensured that Ronald Nel hunted one of the most beautiful lone buffalo bulls I ever had the privilege to see. To experience and capture the moment with him and our great friend and owner of Ndumo Hunting Safaris, Karl Stumpfe, was just priceless. And to think that the next day we would do it all over again – this time, it would be my turn with the double rifle in my hands and Ronald behind the camera.

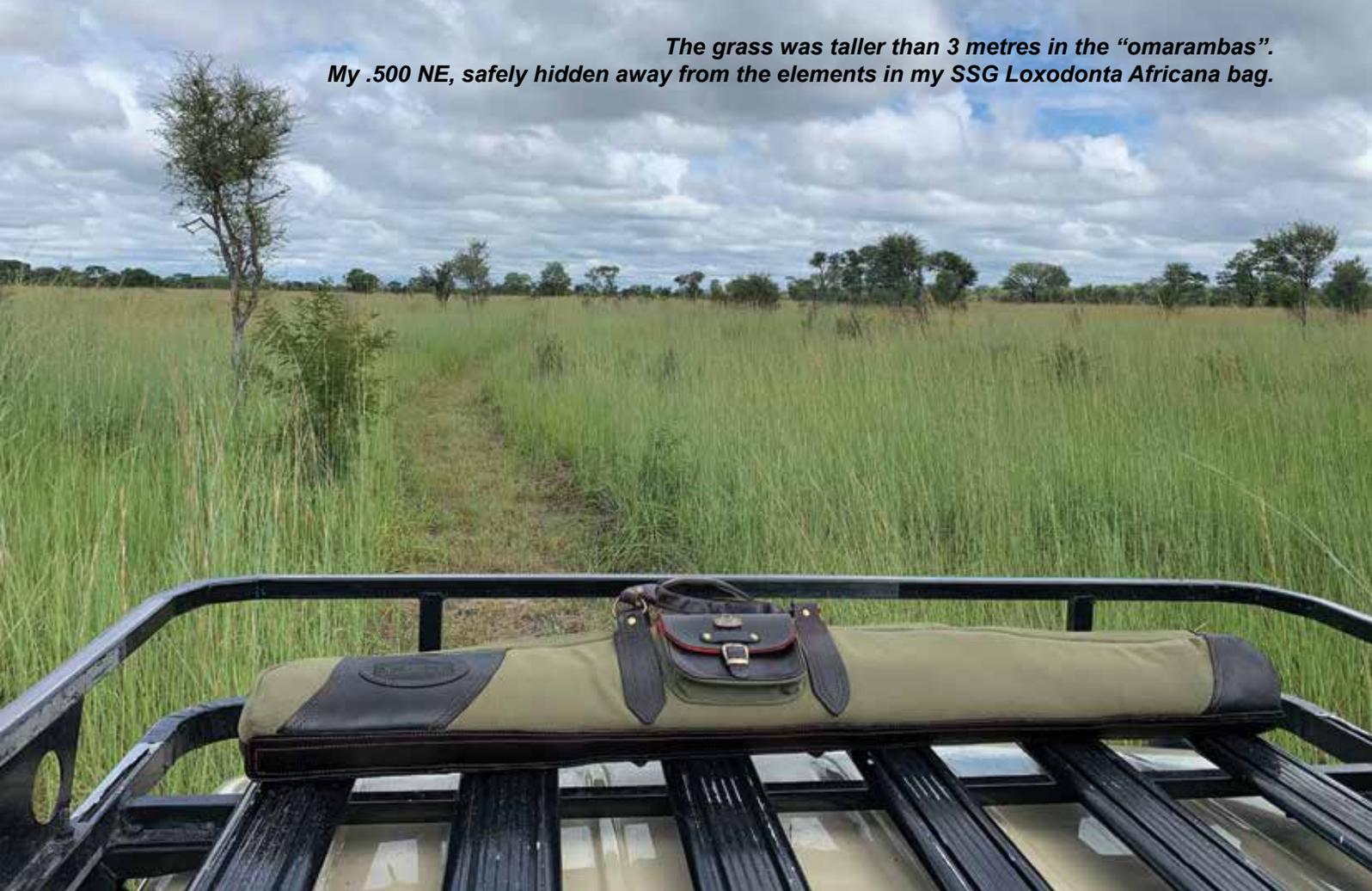
It was 4 am in the Ndumo camp and the kettle had done its part to ensure some much-needed coffee. It was not every day you hunted something special like we did the previous day and not celebrate it with a few (or more than a few) of Ireland's finest. Or, as in Karl's case, Scotland's finest. After coffee, bacon and eggs to help our bodies get going again, we climbed on the back of the Land Cruiser and started driving. We were in Namibia just before the season really got underway, and it was still very hot and extremely humid, with rain every afternoon. Sunrise was at 5 am and we needed to be at the first water to start searching for buffalo tracks. We were looking for a lone bull track or a handful of solitary bulls. As Ronald explained in his article in the November 2022 issue of **GAME & HUNT**, we were trying to find old, lone bulls kicked out of the herd.

Our host and birthday boy, Mr Stumpfe, eagerly put himself up as driver of the Cruiser early morning, closing the side windows completely. The rest of us at the back got a nice, two-hour-long shower from the previous night's rain that soaked the branches and grasses next to the road. It was unbelievably green and thick here this time of year. We were hunting in Babwata East in what every hunter knows as the Caprivi Strip of Namibia. Some folks call it the "panhandle", but the correct terminology is the Kwando Core Area of Namibia. I like calling it the Caprivi Strip. The camel-thorn trees were dark green, almost blueish, and the grass was so tall that it slapped you in the face whilst standing upright on the back of the truck. Seeing any buffalo activity was virtually impossible, so the plan was to visit each known watering hole where the buffalo might have drunk during the night or early morning.

After an hour, we got to the second dam or pan and saw some very good eland tracks. I could not help dreaming about what the bull at the end of this massive eland track looked like. The reality was that there were no buffalo tracks to be seen, so we needed to head off in the direction of "Leeuwater", a famous water source on the concession that got its name from the amount of lion (*leeu* in Afrikaans) activity near the water. The next water source lay about another half an hour from where we were. With the good rain, the veld was full of water, meaning that the buffalo did not need to visit a regular water source, which made our chances of finding tracks really slim.

At the next point, we did find a good track, and the hunt was on! Armed with a Verney-Carron double rifle in .500 NE and some 570-grain Hornady DGX Bonded bullets (softs), we set off. The humidity must have been close to 100% as the sweat started dripping from us within minutes. The earth was wet and the normal, soft Caprivi sand was hard below my feet from all the rain. The trees, bushes, scrub and grass were still completely soaked, and although it was still early, you could feel that you were hunting in the summertime. Within an hour, the sun was beating down on the hunting party. The Barakwena Bushman trackers were in front with Karl on their heels, followed by me and then Ronald, my good friend, who held the camera to try and film an episode of **AFRICA'S SPORTSMAN SHOW** for our YouTube channel. The hunt was arranged at such short notice that there was no time to arrange for a cameraman. Nevertheless, with Ronald being a great still image photographer, what could go wrong?

*The grass was taller than 3 metres in the "omarambas".
My .500 NE, safely hidden away from the elements in my SSG Loxodonta Africana bag.*



Karl was carrying his trusty Mauser rifle in .450 Rigby, one of my all-time favourite big-game calibres. It is a single square bridge, so of course there is no telescopic sight, just the shallow V-iron sights. It was actually an article by Karl himself about the .450 Rigby cartridge published nearly 20 years ago that caused me to fall in love with it; 500 grains at 2 400 feet per second – devastating! Back on the buffalo track. We were some distance behind the bull, with the inside and outside colours of the dung heaps still looking completely different. When tracking a buffalo, you can estimate the time you are behind the animal by opening up the dung with your boot and comparing the colour on the outside (that has been in contact with the elements) to the colour on the inside, which has been protected by the outer crust. The more similar the two colours are, the closer you are to the buffalo. Years of tracking skills entitled the Bushmen to an opinion, and the estimation was about 45 minutes.

Some kilometres later, the bull teamed up with two other bulls and they just did not stop. The going was tough in the thick bush. In some places it was so thick that you wouldn't even notice an orange motor vehicle parked only five paces in front of you. The beautiful scenery most definitely made up for the struggle through the dense grass and brush in some places, though. And then, of course, the birdlife is on another level in Babwata – I could write a whole article just on that. The sheer vastness is also something to get your mind around. In three days, we crossed one vehicle track and had covered more than 40 kilometres on foot by then.

Back to the hunt. Fourteen kilometres from the vehicle, the wind turned, and that was it – the buffalo we had been following from just after sunrise had smelled us and took off as if they were well rested. The chances of catching them again were not good, so we decided to head back in the direction of the vehicle for a well-deserved lunch break.

As we set off after lunch, we drove behind a heavy thunderstorm. By our estimation, we were minutes behind it, the water still dripping from the branches and leaves. One advantage was that all the tracks in this area were washed away and only fresh tracks would now be visible. I was standing upright on the back of the Land Cruiser, looking for any sign of fresh tracks. This was our last afternoon, and the chances of getting a buffalo were getting slimmer by the hour. As we found a single track crossing the road, the driver immediately stopped the Cruiser.

From the back, I could identify the track of either a lone buffalo bull or a massive eland bull. As I got down on the ground, Karl told me to quickly get my ammo belt and binoculars as this track did indeed belong to a lone buffalo bull. The spoor was minutes old and we had a good chance of catching up with him as the wind was in our favour at that moment.



Now that is a proper buffalo track imprinted in the Caprivi sand that has become hard after the rain. The Hornady .500 NE 3" cartridge looks small next to the track.



Lunch with good friends under a very big knob-thorn tree. #onsafariwithndumo

As we hit the one-hour mark, old Willem, our head tracker, froze in his tracks. He saw the bull through some open patches as we reached the next "omaramba" – a stretch of wetland lowered in the bush between two very long sand dunes. This Kwando Core Area just north of Botswana is still part of the Kalahari Desert, and although you cannot see the dunes as we know them, they are still here, just a lot flatter and further apart. After all the rains, the "omaramba" was full of puddles and small dams where the animals drank, bathed and played. This old fella obviously had a nice bath and was now wandering off slowly as we watched him through the trees and bushes.

We were about 70 metres from the bull, and as we got to the 50-metre mark, the sticks were up and I had a pretty good view of him. The wind was still in our favour but was starting to swirl a bit, which was most definitely not ideal. I could sense the urgency from my newly appointed cameraman. He obviously felt the same swirl of the wind in his neck and on the back of his sweat-soaked shirt and was, exactly like me, feeling the burning sensation in his legs from the nearly 50 kilometres walked over the last three days. I asked Karl whether he thought we could approach a little closer as I wanted to make sure of my shot and obviously try and get as close as possible to the tank of a bull without being noticed. He nodded, knowing that if the wind turned, I would probably go home without a buffalo. We slowly proceeded in the direction of the next available bush to use as cover.

At the 30-metre mark, Karl asked me whether the shooting sticks were still necessary. With the utmost confidence in my set-up, I respectfully asked that they be left behind. The last cover was a few steps away, and with Karl on my left shoulder and Ronald on my right, I raised the two barrels of the Verney and slipped off the safety.

It was a beautiful old bull with the perfect horn shape and an absolutely massive body. He stood broadside, with his vitals (heart/lung area) directly behind a bush, testing my nerves. He was about 20 paces away from us, and now, with his head lifted and nostrils flaring, I knew he had caught a whiff of us. I took a step or two to the right to try and see more of his shoulder. By then, he had started moving and his right shoulder became visible just enough for the first 570-grain DGX Bonded to leave the barrel and shatter the silence of the majestic Caprivi. I knew the shot had hit well, and as the bull sped off to the right, I got the brass bead to lie dead still in the shallow V-back sight and pulled the back trigger. The bull was anchored immediately and stopped in his tracks, only his back legs working. Within

seconds he was down with blood streaming from his nose.

Karl and I advanced carefully – me with two new cartridges in the .510" pipes, ready to go, and Karl with his loaded .450 Rigby. The bull was still very much alive and on high alert as we waited for his next move. It was clear that he could not get up. Both front legs weren't working and he shoved himself towards us with his back legs. I could see in his eyes that he was furious and wanted to fight, not flee. Not even 10 paces away, I knew he would die from the lung shot as the blood was oozing from his nostrils, but it might still take a while. As I felt very sorry for the old beast, I decided to put him out of his misery. What an incredible hunt. What an incredible bull. Great friends and great trackers in an unbelievably special place that I fell in love with the first time I set foot there. A ton of emotions came down on me at once, and I was completely and utterly humbled for the umpteenth time in my life.



Karl and the author with the buffalo where it fell. Note the thunderstorm building up in the background.



We came to learn that the first shot broke the right shoulder and hit the lungs. The second shot went through the already broken shoulder (a mere 4 inches above the first shot) and broke the opposite shoulder after passing through both lungs. The immense power of the .500 NE and good bullet construction ensured an incredible outcome to an extraordinary hunt. As we waited for the Land Cruiser, we were greeted with a proper Caprivi thundershower. We endured 45 minutes of hard rain and even did the trophy photo shoot in the pouring rain. Thank goodness for a waterproof iPhone and the fact that Karl

and I used a proper cameraman, which counted in our favour as his photos were out of this world. Thanks, Ronald – you are a great cameraman and an even better friend. I wouldn't change these adventures of ours for anything in the world! Karl Stumpf, there are no words and not enough pages in this magazine to even start thanking you and your wonderful team for putting us in the position to create such unforgettable memories. Thank you, old friend, until we meet again in the paradise some call the Kwando Core Area of Namibia. I simply call it the Caprivi. ✎



On the tracks of lone buffalo bulls together with good friends in the middle of nowhere. It doesn't get better than this!



Broken radiator. Karl does not only hunt well but also sweats well. Hunting Namibia's Caprivi Strip in summer is always fun.

Karl Stumpf, professional hunter and owner of Ndumo Safaris (left), the author (middle) and fellow hunter Ronald Nel (right).



Scan the QR code to watch the video.

