



Candid *camera*



Paul Childerley and the editor embark on a buffalo hunt with a difference. Not only do they have to secure a soft-bosser bull – they also have to capture the whole hunt on film

I had opened my African account in the time-honoured fashion, taking an ostrich, blesbok, impala and blue wildebeest, when the call came in offering me a buffalo bull at a good rate. Our esteemed editor, who was filming my hunt, went to work on me in salesman mode, pointing out the “once in a lifetime opportunity that should not be missed”. It was a done deal by the time his gob had stopped working.

The bull I would be hunting was a soft-bosser one. There were too many of these in the hunting area, and our professional hunter Patrick De Beer had to reduce these beasts with inferior bosses so they wouldn't weaken the gene pool. As far as the trophy is concerned, it didn't matter a jot to me because when boiled they are hardened and varnished to look just like their better-bred brothers, which would cost a packet.

But when the day came to go spooring a suitable bull, the editor was shifting about nervously, mumbling about breaking his own rule of never going on a dangerous game hunt without a suitable rifle in hand to repel borders. I kid you not – he was whining like a butcher's dog locked out of the bone room. I tried to offer him some solace by suggesting he could always hit the damn thing with the camera if

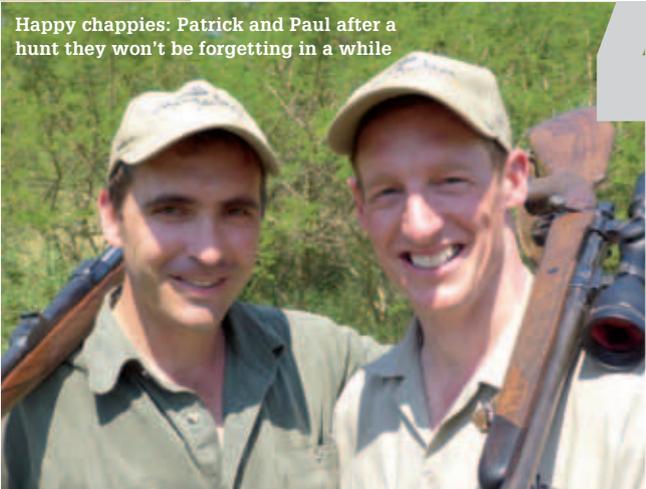
it charged. This went down like a zero fighter over Pearl Harbor. His housewife-like grumblings could not be subdued, so in the end I had to point out his choice. “Make the decision – either it's Stuart Granger with the back-up rifle or Steven Spielberg behind the camera, but you cannot do both.” I threw in the offhand comment that “the producer will expect results.” This did the trick, and gun belt was exchanged for the camera and tripod – but let me tell you Peter had a face like a brewing thunderstorm. A dog wouldn't have licked it.

Duties sorted, we followed Patrick to the Land Cruiser, and we were soon making our way down the sand roads through the bush. Patrick and his local tracker Michael were busily engaged scanning the roadsides for signs of spoor where buffalo had crossed the road. It wasn't long before a gentle tap on the cab told the driver to pull over. Following Patrick, who was already standing with the thumbs up, we grabbed the rifle and camera to take up the spoor of a dozen or so buffalo. Patrick felt there was a good chance a suitable bull would be in the herd, so expectations were high.

After four hours later the sweltering 35-degree heat, all I wanted to do was drink a swimming pool and find some shade. But not Patrick. He went on silently in relentless pursuit of our quarry. Pete said he



Happy chappies: Patrick and Paul after a hunt they won't be forgetting in a while



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and Patrick cracked a few sticks in an attempt to raise the bulls to their hooves. Our PH's ruse worked as planned, and the rear bull stood up to look in our direction. I covered his heart with the crosshairs and touched off the trigger. The .375 bullet drilled its way into the bull's vitals and he hunched before charging left and then right to fall back into the pan, legs flaying as life left him.

By some miracle, our editor of many talents had also managed to catch the whole thing on film – there is hope for him yet. For a greenhorn African hunter out on his first safari it couldn't get any better, and as an experienced UK stalking guide I can confirm with certainty that PHs don't come much better than Patrick de Beer. ■

For cull buffalo hunts contact Patrick De Beer of Mugaba Safaris on 00 27 163 417331 or www.mugabasafaris.com.

was an excellent tracker as he alternately switched point with the local guy. At this point I was just following. My shirt was soaked through and my tongue felt like a sandstone tombstone.

Things then became much more exciting. Michael stuck his fingers into a buffalo pat and seemed to rather enjoy playing with the poop, as his face broke into a smile that would befit a lottery winner. He and Patrick nodded in unison and we followed on much more cautiously as our guides moved into maximum stealth mode. Nobody needed

telling – it was obvious we were close upon the herd. Twenty minutes later we all froze as an oxpecker bird rose close by and Patrick involuntarily put his uptight finger to his lips. A grunt in the bush from in front told us that at least one of the meanest bovines on the planet wasn't best pleased. Patrick slowly raised his binoculars to try to identify our quarry hidden in the bush, but the small movement was enough and the herd moved off as one away from us crashing through the bush like a stampeding team of polo ponies.

Patrick looked to the sky in disappointment and took up the spoor once again. To say I was crestfallen would be undercooking it a little. I could still hear the stampeding buffalo, who were making good distance, and the thought of the time it might take to close on them again in the present heat was quite sobering.

But on we went, and it wasn't too long before Patrick pointed out that two bulls had broken away from the herd and were probably heading towards a small pan or water hole that he knew of close by. This was music to my ears – the bulls' diversion from the herd was easy to follow through the long grass away from the much harder game trail that wound its way through the bush. The wind was perfect but we were soon crawling through some thick bush that would put us at a distinct disadvantage if bulls decided to play nasty.

Finally we came through the thick stuff to a small marshy corridor that ran to the water pan. Here the two bulls came into view, clearly relishing the water as they cooled off after their earlier exertions in flight from us. Patrick deployed the shooting sticks as I shuffled forward to place the rifle in the vee created. I confirmed I was ready

THE SHOOTING SHOW

See the buffalo hunt in full on the 29 April episode of The Shooting Show. Watch it at: www.theshootingshow.tv



Camera shot: The bull was successfully in the bag and on film too