



Challenging Africa's BLACK DEATH on its own turf

Tamlyn van Wyk

As a female hunter, you do stand out from the crowd, whether you like it or not. And, at times, you are challenged to do many weird and wonderful things! I recently accepted such a challenge. Looking back, though, I am astounded yet grateful that I did this. The challenge? Hunting a Cape buffalo with a .500 NE, using my own reloaded bullets. The reloading was a major challenge in itself and not something I had tried my hand at before. The other challenge? I had less than two weeks to prepare!

As an avid hunting enthusiast with many African plains game and speciality animals under my belt, along with a successful lion hunt, I looked forward to the opportunity to meet my nemesis. As the co-founder of a hunting brokerage (Game Hunting Safaris), I am well versed in hunting and the role conservation plays in hunting, and I have a healthy respect for the animals hunted.

Few hunters can honestly say they did not experience an increased heart rate the first time they spotted their Cape buffalo quarry. I must admit that the thought of hunting one did make my heart beat a bit faster. (Okay, a lot faster!)

The Cape buffalo is nicknamed "Black Death" or "The Widowmaker". Irritable, always annoyed and violent at times, it is one of the most feared animals among hunters due to its unpredictable nature. Hunting a Cape buffalo is almost a rite of passage for experienced hunters and requires guts, determination and expertise. As a member of both the Big Five and Dangerous Seven, this species is regarded as one of the most dangerous animals to encounter when wounded.

Reloading is both a skill and a learning experience. It demands meticulous attention to detail, as small variations in components can affect the performance. It was fun and I learned a lot. I also have to admit that I will be reloading my own bullets for my .300 Win Mag in future. I spent a great deal of time at the range, practising with the .500 NE – a popular rifle choice for both dangerous- and big-game hunting experiences. I learned not to be afraid of the recoil; if you don't fight it, it is more manageable than you think.

Destination: Limpopo

The destination for our Cape buffalo hunt was a camp in Limpopo Province on the outskirts of Roedtan. Offering full board as well as self-catering choices, the lodge proved to be a

great family option. The camp layout included four chalets, each sleeping four, with a queen bed and two single beds per chalet. The accommodation was spacious and well equipped, and with Limpopo's temperatures reaching the upper thirties on a moderate summer day, the air conditioning was a welcome addition.

The rest of the camp included a kitchen area to prepare meals if you were to choose the self-catering option, as well as braai facilities. Comfortable accommodation, scenic views, hot showers, friendly hosts and great company ensured a game hunting adventure of note.

I travelled with four family members. For them, the rest camp provided a calm and comfortable environment to recharge the batteries and unwind. The weather was perfect for swimming in the large pool and our younger members made full use of it. We relaxed around the campfire with drinks, braaiing and retelling hunting tales of old.

Facing Africa's Black Death on my big-game hunting safari

It is always good practice to spend the first morning at the shooting range, especially if you have been travelling with your firearm (usually on bumpy roads), to ensure it is still accurate. I was using a .500 NE with open sights, so there was no need to check whether the scope had been bumped. I briefly discussed my strategy with my PH. We agreed that the most important thing was to make the first shot count because, after that, we would have a very angry buffalo that would possibly charge. We also agreed that only in the event of the buffalo actually charging would the PH also fire. So, we had a plan and were ready to start!

But things don't always go as planned, right?



Day two saw us having a very early start. We were up and headed out at 4.30 am. Walking along, searching for buffalo tracks, we eventually found some. Sweat started trickling down my back. We came across a large herd at least twice, but the wind did not play along. The buffalo smelt us and ran long before we had a chance to do anything. But this is all part of the hunt, and you need to have patience to follow through and not get frustrated.

The third and final day began with another early start, and we were finally on the track of a lone buffalo bull. These animals are particularly nasty when challenged, and other herd members will often return and fight to protect the targeted buffalo. Theoretically, it is thus safer to hunt a solitary buffalo. However, this may not always be the case, as a lone bull that left the herd because of his age can be as grumpy as they come (like a lot of old men!).

With the wind finally in our favour, we managed to sneak up on the bull and set up the sticks. But... there is always a but... there was a thick tree right where I needed to place my bullet! He noticed us and I considered taking a shot as he was running away but thought better of it. When you absolutely must make the first shot count, taking a shot on a running buffalo seemed a little gung-ho to me, so I let him go.

But after all my bad luck with the wind, the bush was finally kinder to me, and we found the tracks of another solitary bull. By the time I had him in my sights, the sweat was no longer trickling but running down my back from both the heat and nerves as he was standing roughly 50 m away. There was no time for sticks, so I took aim off the shoulder. I gently

Cape buffalo measurements.

SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL
Method 4
Entry Form
 For horns of African buffalo

Antelope ☒ No ☐ No. From Club ☐ Name ☐

Date Taken: _____

Sex: ☒ Male ☐ Female ☐ Age: _____

Place Taken: _____

Locality: _____

Guide: _____

1. Tip-to-tip Measurement of Horns: 57 3/4

2. Width of Bees: 12 1/4 x 11 1/4

3. Total Score: 110 1/2

Supplemental Information
 Outside spread of horns: 41 1/2

Signature: K. Hecker

Measure No: 600

Date Measured: 12-4-2023

Signature of Measurer: _____

Approved: ☐ No ☐

By: _____

Date: _____

squeezed the trigger and... *click*... a sound no hunter ever wants to hear. As the mother of a family of four, I am always super aware of gun safety. In this case, it was to my detriment because while we were walking, there were no bullets in my rifle. (You can imagine the jokes afterwards – my husband is never going to let me live this one down!) Luckily, I managed to pop two rounds into the .500 and squeezed the trigger, hitting the bull on the shoulder with the first shot while the second went high. With the adrenaline pumping, we took off after him.

By now, it was midday. The heat was almost unbearable and we headed off, now tracking a wounded buffalo. While following his spoor, I did consider the fact that I was a mother,

ROWLAND WARD
 FOUNDED 1870

Buffalo measurements.

Method 12-a
 Cape, Central African, and Nile Buffaloes

Left Right

W 12 1/4 11 1/4

G 12 1/4 11 1/4

Score (W & G) 23 1/2

Tip-to-tip 41 1/2

☒ Cape buffalo
☐ Central African buffalo
☐ Nile buffalo

Score: Add the sums of the 2 bosses (W) and the greatest spread (G); this is the score.

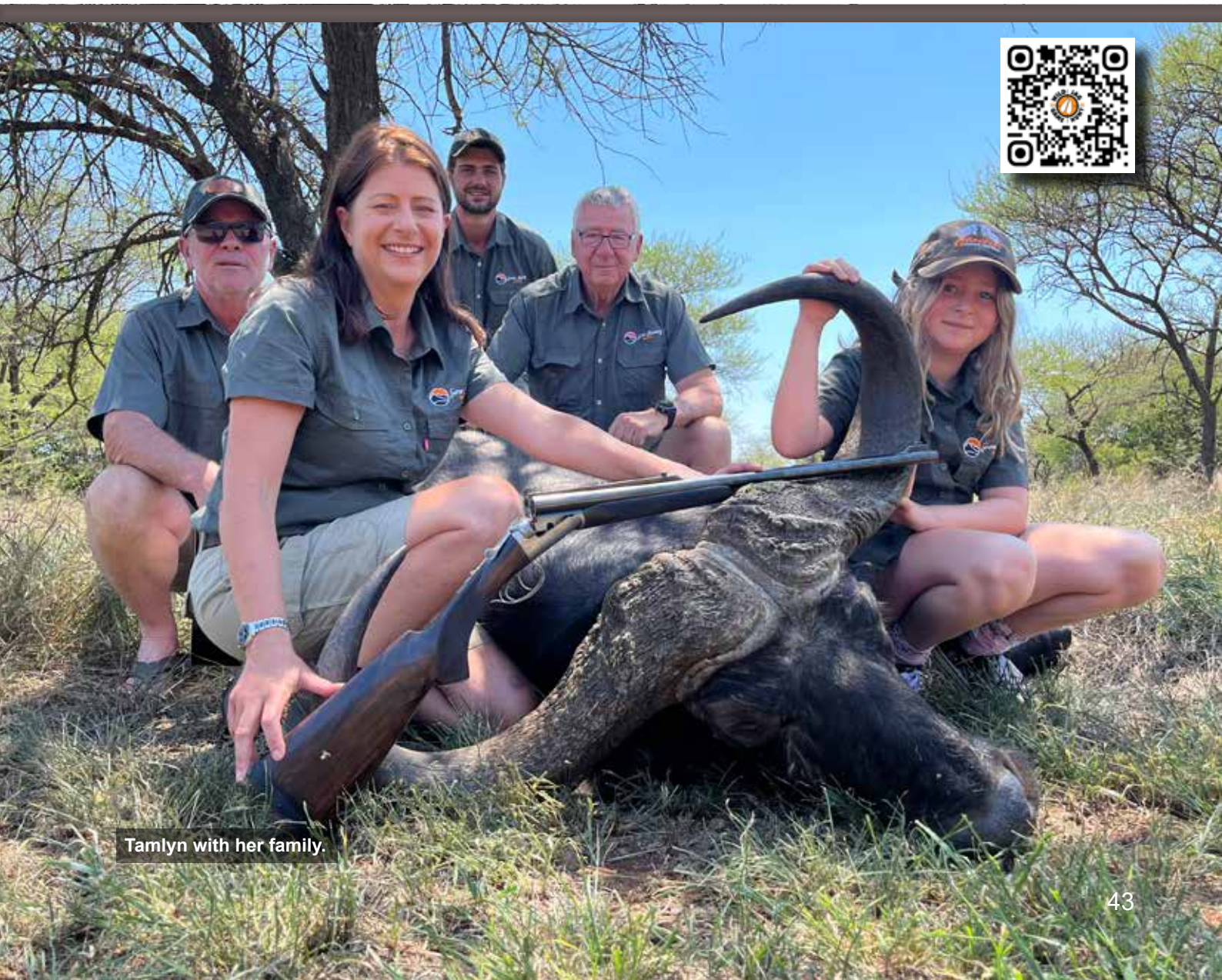
and besides trying to be a role model to my daughter (because girls can do anything!), I had to make sure things did not go pear-shaped. I simply had to survive this! Later, we ended up tracking the bull through areas so thick with bush that visibility was extremely limited. In these moments, you must be hyper-alert, focusing on nothing else but survival. It may sound melodramatic, but trust me, it is completely true. If he had to charge, we would only have milliseconds for a head shot to take him down, or we would be dead. I got eyes on him only once during this time and managed to get another two shots off, hitting him once. Buffalo are extremely tough animals, and he was still not down. Instead, he disappeared again.

Just before the light faded, we saw him again, this time coming towards us. Thankfully, he was unaware of us and did not charge. I took another shot, and to my dismay, he vanished again.

Continuing our search, we eventually found the old bull, standing broadside as we approached. Two shots rang out and he went down quickly. This was followed by a "safety" shot to the spine from the PH.

This was one of my most memorable and certainly most dangerous hunts. I was also exceptionally privileged to be accompanied by my son, Keenan (a qualified PH), who had my back. My buffalo was a monster of a bull, scoring 65 points on the Rowland Ward measuring system (which has been updated to include the boss) and 110⁷/₈ on the Safari Club International scoring system (the minimum being 101). One always knows the risks of hunting a buffalo on foot, and everyone always repeats the mantra that you must anticipate, after the first shot, that you are chasing down a wounded buffalo. Only a while later did I realise I was chasing down a wounded buffalo, not just anticipating it, but **actually living** it! In that moment, you focus only on the present. Only afterwards do you realise what you have accomplished and how much could have gone wrong!

I am extremely proud of myself, not only as a hunter but also as a woman. I not only ticked the box and won the challenge, but I exceeded my expectations by downing a trophy Cape buffalo. As a lady hunter, I challenged myself and can now say with the utmost pride, "I hunt like a girl... a successful one with a trophy buffalo to her name!" 🦌



Tamlyn with her family.