



## Hunting Report.

Robert Keagy

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Safaris Chelet has been a donor to our SCI Chapter, and I had hunted with them previously in Benin, so I was curious about their Cameroon operation. Among other animals, they offered hippo, which I needed, and their trophy fees seemed reasonable. I therefore booked in, but, just prior to the hunt, the Government of Cameroon removed hippo from the list of huntable animals, leaving us casting about a bit as to our main target animal. Since they also offered lion, our hippo hunt magically morphed into a lion hunt.

We also sought the lovely little serval, a beautiful trophy (hunted mainly at night) and the Defassa waterbuck, as well as duikers.

One nice aspect of hunting in West Africa is that the best air-links are through Paris. Pam and I always stop for three to five days to enjoy Paris' wonderful cuisine, performing arts, museums, lovely parks and monuments. We had the good fortune of attending two absolutely breath-taking and wonderful medieval musical concerts, and, for a bit of a change of pace, the Folies Bergere. Paris in the very early Spring (March) was cool, clear and very pleasant, but, after four days, we were pretty well adjusted to the nine hour time zone change, and it was time move on.

After an all-night Air-France flight from Paris, we were met and assisted in Douala, the commercial capital of Cameroon, by Emile, the Safaris Chelet representative. It had been several years since we had visited Douala, and not much seemed to have changed until we pulled into the Hotel Le Meridien. There were U.S. Marine officers and senior N.C.O.'s everywhere, including a Brigadier General, whom we met. (He seemed very young!). We learned that we had arrived at the commencement of a joint Cameroon/U.S. anti-terrorism exercise. This was at first blush disquieting, as Boko Haram terrorists had just seized a French family up-country and shot them, but, upon reflection, the presence of roughly a battalion of U.S. marines in-country was pretty darn comforting.

We had a domestic evening flight late the next day that delivered us into blisteringly hot and dry Garoua, Cameroon, to be met by Ximo Chelet, our good friend and guide from our prior hunt with Safaris Chelet in their Benin concession. Welcoming Pam and I, Ximo conducted us to a reasonable hotel, advising us to get some rest before a seven-hour drive the next day to the camp.

We duly arrived in camp late the next afternoon after a dusty, jouncy ride on the Cameroon road "system". The camp is quite nice, with a colorful, pleasant dining area and lounge overlooking a large swimming hole. The camp has many amenities, but having an electric fan in the room (courtesy of Pepe Chelet) was pretty high on the list, as it was 105 degrees+ in the day, and 85 degrees at night. The client rondouals included en suite shower/baths, and comfortable beds with mosquito netting.

The camp appeared very well run, with good food, cheerful staff, and no drawbacks other than being a tad spread out, and, of course, the oppressive, pervasive heat.

The concession of Safaris Chelet is very large, abutting the fabled Mayo Oldiri river. The area has varied terrain, including some fairly steep hills. In hunting this concession the major problem that we encountered was again related to the heat: the moon was full, and so the animals ate in the relative cool comfort of the night, and slept in deep, cool cover during the hot daylight hours. (The temperature was reaching up to 108 degrees mid-day.) Since only "Mad Dogs and Englishmen (and hunters) go out in the mid-day sun", many hot, dusty miles were covered in the sere, dry, foliage without seeing much. Since West Africa does not have the game density that Southern Africa has to begin with, the feeding during the full moon, combined with the mid-day heat, created a seeming lack of game. (Lesson: never book a hunt during the full moon!)

The first morning, rounding a curve in the jeep, we were surprised to hear a lion killing a bush pig less than 100 yards away, but regrettably across a small river. By the time we backed up to the river ford, crossed, piled out, and snuck up to the kill-site, the human-wise lion was long gone. The bush pig was a monster, with two pairs of evenly-spaced holes on either side of the upper neck and skull-- the great upper and lower canine teeth of the lion had killed the pig almost instantly.

There is an iron discipline in lion (or leopard) hunting. You've got to establish baits that look natural, are protected from vultures, are located downwind of a suitable blind location, have the right "feel", and a dozen other attributes. You must check baits both morning and night, spending a goodly deal of time in between finding yet more baits. If however, you serendipitously come on a fresh kill, steer clear of it and leave as little scent in the area as possible.

Well, obviously, therefore, Mr Bush Pig, (deceased), became bait number one, and we set up a screen of unobtrusive brush about 60 yards away, downwind, and settled down to see if Mr. Lion would return.

West Africa is (alas!) rich in tse-tse flies, and they plagued us in droves, biting, landing on our faces, getting caught in our eyebrows, and staggering off, bloated with our blood. You couldn't start swatting them, as any movement might be detected by a watchful and cautious lion. You pretty much just grit your teeth (quietly) and bear it. The lion did not, however, return, so we filed out of our hide at last light.

Checking a (perhaps) active bait in the morning is a slightly different kettle of fish than evening, as you do not wish to disturb any lion that might already be feeding or sleeping near to the kill. We sent in our head tracker, who moved silently through the grass and brush towards the site of the bush pig. The bush pig was, however, gone, devoured, and its scattered remains were located 10-15 yards away.

We needed a new, fresh bait, and we were fortunate to shoot a male kob by about eleven. I shot the kob through the heart with the camp .375, and I was amazed to see the kob (not a big animal!) run

seventy or eighty yards before he fell over, very dead. I don't think I'd run even seven inches hit like that.

We took the kob back to the area around the river, but on "our" side of the stream, which had lots of boulders and green grass, and looked inviting to me, and hopefully, also the lion. Placing the kob in a providential small tree insured that vultures would not foul the bait. We built a hide downwind from where the morning and afternoon breezes blew, and departed with a minimum of noise, but dragging some of the kob guts to spread the scent.

The balance of the day was spent seeking more bait, and if possible, killing two birds with one stone by shooting a trophy waterbuck, the quarters of which could then make yet more baits. We finally located some waterbuck late in the bronze-hot afternoon, but, suffice it to say, I managed to miss over sticks at 150 yards, the .375 slug sailing right over a nice waterbuck's back.

We did not check the bait that night in order to minimize human coming-and-going around the new bait. "They like it a bit stinky" said Ximo, and surely the hot night would start the kob deteriorating.

The next morning, and for each day of the hunt, we hunted hard and hung the resulting baits, but to no avail. The lion had just been around too long to come to a kill that he hadn't made. I had run into this phenomena earlier on lion hunts in Ethiopia-- to successfully survive in modern Africa, a lion must have learned to be very cautious and wise!!!!

We found another set of lion tracks, and set up other, new baits. We were being careful, walking in a half mile or more to avoid motor noise, walking in silence, in file, erasing our tracks, sitting as silently as possible in the blind, and suffering the dual indignities of smelling rotting meat, and surreptitiously smashing tse-tse flies whenever possible. Despite our dedication, the second lion, like the first, did not come to bait.

In the course of seeking the lion baits, though, we had gotten a very nice 29+" Defassa Waterbuck, a good trophy kob, a dynamite red-flanked duiker and a savannah buffalo. I was particularly pleased with the little red-flanked duiker, which was shot nearly perfectly, had very heavy bases and should score very well. The buffalo was a nice buffalo, but again, I was delighted with the near-picture-perfect shot. I revel in good marksmanship.

This hunt was frustrating for poor Ximo, as I had hunted several of the more numerous species on previous hunts, and already had good specimens. We did see a herd of Lord Derby eland, but I already had a 53" from the C.A.R., so I didn't really study them closely. They appeared pretty spooky, though, and I think the Lord Derby are under a variety of severe pressures across West Africa. We also saw roan, but, again, I already had a good specimen from Benin. Ditto the very numerous Western Hartebeeste, which I had also shot previously in Benin. It seemed that as the moon waned, game in general became correspondingly more plentiful during the daylight hours of our hunt.

Over the ten days, my only real complaint I had was that Safari Chelet had not brought/provided spotlights to camp, making it highly improbable that we'd see a serval-- a night hunter-- and I was disappointed by this, as serval was very high on my list.

That we didn't get a shot at a lion was a bit disappointing, but I felt everyone had tried their best.

The last day though, I began to feel somewhat run-down, headachy and rather flu-ish. That evening I went to bed early, anticipating packing up our gear at first light.

The next day, I dragged myself through the effort of packing, settling accounts, saying goob-bye to staff, and schlepped down the Toyota Landcruiser. I took several Tylenol, but I was feeling lousy, and the rapidly escalating temperature - even at nine a.m.- didn't help.

We rattled, bounced, weaved and dodged potholes most of the day, arriving into Garoua, about five p.m. We checked into a local hotel. It was hard for me to walk to the room, and I collapsed upon the bed upon reaching the room. The wheezing rattling air conditioner kept the waves of heat at bay, but the room temperature still hovered at 80 degrees and felt oppressive.

I told Ximo and Pepe that something was very wrong, and could they please see if they could scare up a thermometer, some ice, chilled juices, whatever.

They returned in about an hour, with a thermometer, two small bags of ice, chilled orange juice and soup. The thermometer read my temperature at 39 degrees celsius, which is close on 103 degrees Fahrenheit.

We discovered that my left leg, which had had a blood clot/Deep Vein Thrombosis some years previously, and therefore suffered from very poor circulation, was swollen and angry red. Clearly, I had an infection developing. Ximo and Pepe tried to get more ice, to pack the leg, but to no avail. I bolted down cold orange juice and tylenol, elevated the leg to improve circulation, and spent a very restless and fevered night, getting up to shower several times, but even the "cold" water was luke warm.

The mid-day flight to Doualla the next day was a travail. I had to walk a long distance to a sweltering departure gate, where even the slightest breeze from the broken windows was welcome. I was fighting infection and fever. Ximo tried valiantly to find some ice, but no avail.

The plane itself was, thank God, air-conditioned, and I had some respite while on board.

Arriving at the airport in Douala, I couldn't wait to get to the hotel and lay down and rest. Upon arrival at Le Meridien, Ximo got busy and summoned the hotel doctor, who finally showed up about 8 p.m. He took one look at my swollen, angry red leg and said "We've got to get this under control or you'll die". This was, I felt, an example of a pretty self-explanatory and clear statement.

The doctor prescribed 2625 mg of Amoxicillin and 2250 mg of Ciprozed daily until I could get home to San Francisco.

The obvious problem was: where do you get these antibiotics at 9:30 at night in Doualla, Cameroon? Ximo and Emile took off, and I guess that they had a quite a time of it--pounding on doors, searching for open pharmacies, etc. I was so "out of it" that I am not sure how long Ximo was gone, but he returned triumphantly, and I greedily downed the medicines.

By mid-day the next day I was feeling substantially better, and when Ximo had to fly-out to meet a new client arriving in Benin, I could assure him with a clear conscience that I was o.k.

We returned via Paris, and I spent one day flat on my back in the the Paris Airport NB Hotel, but I was now feeling near normal, although the level of anti-biotics was making my stomach feel queasy.

When we got back to the San Francisco Bay Area, my doctor at Kaiser took one look and admitted me to two days in intensive care, with a constant regimen of intravenous antibiotics and saline. Under this further massive assault, the infection disappeared as quickly as it had appeared.

What had caused the infection? We don't know. I had been hammered pretty badly by tsetse flies while in the lion blinds--they love to crawl up the inside of your pant leg and get a really big drink. Alternatively, perhaps there had been some small, latent infection in that leg, and when the blood pooled due to poor circulation, coupled with the 105 degree heat, a here-to-fore latent infection found ideal breeding conditions, incubated and exploded.

Throughout the trying days in Garoua and Douala, Ximo had shown great concern, care and selfless dedication. Without his efforts, I am not sure what could have happened to me, but it could have been extremely serious. Clearly, Ximo and Safaris Chelet had extended themselves far beyond the call of duty to protect and safeguard their client, and I am exceedingly grateful for their dedicated care, concern and efforts.

I hope that this is of interest,

Kind regards, Bob