



Weishuhn with the western savannah buffalo he took with Safari Chelet after three days of tracking the herd he was with; taken with his Ruger .375 Ruger Guide Gun, topped with his Zeiss HD5 3-15X Conquest scope and shooting Homady 300 grain DGX ammo.



BENIN BUFFALO BONANZA!

BY LARRY WEISHUHN

The trip had been a long one. We flew from San Antonio, Texas to Atlanta, Georgia; Atlanta to Paris, France; Paris to Cotonou, Benin; and then a 10 hour drive to Safari Chelet's Diona Camp. By the time we (Blake Barnett, cameraman/producer for my television show, Tim Fallon, with the FTW Ranch/SAAM, and I) arrived in camp, we were tired to say the least. It felt really good to stretch my legs and walk around.



After stowing our gear in our individual cabins, several cool drinks refreshed our bodies and spirits. As we relaxed in the open-air camp, three elephants fed through a low thicket across the Alibori River, which wound its way next to camp. If there had been any doubt we were in a remote area of Africa, the elephants confirmed that indeed this wasn't Texas, and certainly not Kansas! Upon our arrival we had been introduced to Ximo (pronounced Cheemo) Chelet, our professional hunter. In visiting with him over a delicious meal that evening, we learned he was quite experienced in hunting African game. Despite his apparent younger age, he had served as a PH not only in Benin, but also in the Cameroon. That night we talked about past hunts, and also about what we could expect in Benin.

"We start at 5 o'clock in the morning with breakfast, then leave immediately thereafter. The area we want to hunt for buffalo is a long way north of camp," said Ximo as we discussed the next day's activities. "We'll stop along the way after first light to check the zero on your rifles. I understand you are both shooting .375 Ruger rifles, topped with Zeiss scopes and shooting Hornady ammo. When hunting buffalo, I'll ask you to load both soft point and solid. Shoot the first shot at the buffalo with one of your 300 grain DGX soft-points and follow up with a 300 grain DGS solid. Continue shooting as long as the buffalo is standing or moving!" Tim and I agreed full heartedly, both believing that far too often, hunters admire their shots when they should be putting a second (and even third) round into an animal.

So started our Benin/Safari Chelet adventure hunting Western Savanna buffalo and Roan antelope.

Early the next morning, we headed into the brush and savanna. As

it got light enough to see, we could tell much of the tall grass (which in spots was easily 8-foot tall) and brush had been burned a couple of months earlier. In some areas the ground was bare of any vegetation. In other areas there was still tall grass and brush. It also appeared that the brush and grass was just now starting to grow once again, providing excellent forage and browse. "We're about two weeks away from the start of the rainy season. You're the last hunters of the season. We'll close camp the day you leave," said Ximo.

After shooting two shots through my Ruger Guide Gun and Tim's Ruger African with muzzle brake it was confirmed both guns were still shooting exactly where they had been before we left Texas.

As we drove to the area where we hoped to hunt buffalo, we encountered three different herds of Roan antelope, including one that held a pretty good bull. We tried stalking them, but they gave us the slip.



Time Fallon (right) with bushbuck



Tim Fallon (right) with Western Roan antelope

"I want to check an area near the river. During the past two hunts we saw a reddish colored buffalo that was huge. Hoof prints are twice as big as other bulls in the area. I'd love for one of you to get a chance at him!"

Later that afternoon Sulamon, a tracker, spotted fresh tracks from the huge buffalo Ximo had described. Tim and I looked at the tracks and immediately agreed that they were larger than the other local buffalo tracks we had seen.

We followed the huge tracks until they came to a river, beyond which lay the park, where we could not follow. Just about the time we determined this was going to happen, Ximo spotted a gorgeous harnessed bushbuck. We motioned Tim forward and Sulamon set up his shooting sticks. Tim, thinking he was looking for a Roan antelope, initially over-looked the bushbuck. About then, the antelope started running to our right and Tim immediately got on the stunning spiral horned antelope. Within in seconds the animal was down. After photos, we headed back to the camp's skinning shed, where the cape was properly removed, salted and destined to the artistry of The Wildlife Gallery for a full body mount.

On the way back to camp we made several more unsuccessful stalks on Roan antelope, as well as starting on what would be a three day

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tracking session for my Western Savanna buffalo. We found fresh track late that afternoon and got on the spoor, but failed to get a really good look at the herd of buffalo we were after. We did hear them run twice when the wind switched to our backs.

On day two of chasing "my" buffalo, we got on the herd's tracks a couple of times, but each time the wind switched and we backed out. Then late in the afternoon, we picked up their tracks and followed them for about three miles before catching up with them. The herd

consisted of about 15 or so animals, including one good mature bull and a few younger bulls. At one point we closed the distance to less than 75 yards, but the buffalo were hidden behind brush. We saw the mature bull, but he was on the back side of the herd. As we were trying to come up with a plan to get a shot at the mature male, the herd suddenly took off running away from us. We couldn't figure out what was going on because the wind was still blowing in our faces. When we started walking back to the vehicle, we could hear brush breaking and hoofs pounding on the hard ground. The buffalo were running toward us! I set up my RLD sticks and waited with my .375 Ruger pointed in the direction of the noise. The buffalo ran to about 50 to 70 yards away from us, stopped and went back to grazing. The younger of the two bulls fed toward us, to within about 30 yards; I wished it would have been the mature bull. Unfortunately it was on the backside of the herd again. After about five minutes, the younger bull fed his way toward the herd and joined it, feeding on our extreme left. Moments later we lost sight of them. We waited for another five or so minutes, and had planned on following the herd when the wind switched back. We decided to simply walk away rather than taking a chance on spooking them, in hopes of catching up with them again the following day.

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On our three mile walk back to the vehicle, Ximo mentioned he had gotten a good look at the bull. It had great bosses and very decent horn length. Ximo also said that it covered in mud; how he had found mud was a mystery because it was horribly dry.

That night we again enjoyed a fabulous meal and a couple of hours of cool and restful sleep before the generator was turned off, which killed the air conditioner in our cabins. Hours of non-sleeping followed because we were anxiously waiting for the knock on our door that meant it was time for breakfast.

Early the next morning we stalked a couple of nice Roan. If we did not have rules regarding shooting running game on television, I could easily have taken a fabulous Roan! That said, I spent nearly a lifetime shooting running game quite proficiently, but today's television shows rules prohibit such hunting.

Right after lunch we took up the tracks from the buffalo herd we had been following. Those tracks led us through the site of an ancient village, obviously abandoned long before metal was introduced into that part of Africa.

The tracks took us quite a distance before we were able to catch up with the herd. The wind

was in our favor and we went unnoticed. The buffalo were feeding at a walk, along the edge of some unburned trees and brush. Ximo and his tracker suggested we try to get ahead of the herd.

We took off at a fast walk and were able to get ahead of them, where we set up and waited for them to come our way. The wind was still in our favor when the first buffalo came through the low spot where we waited. They were cows, including an absolutely gorgeous blonde. Ximo glassed anxiously with his Zeiss binoculars, hoping to find the mature bull, but he could not find him. Just as he turned to tell me he thought the bull must have left the herd, Sulamon whispered that the bull was coming our way and pointed in the direction where the buffalo should appear. Quickly I pointed my rifle in that direction and saw the big bull come out. "Shoot the one with mud between his horns and on his body," whispered Ximo. The bull stopped, but the blonde cow continued toward us. I waited until she cleared the bull which was quartered toward me. My .375 Ruger rested solidly on the Wide Body Shooting Rest on my BOG Gear RLD sticks. The crosshairs of my Zeiss settled on the exact spot I hoped to put my 300 grain Hornady DGX so it would take out the top part of the heart and lungs. Taking a deep breath and letting it out, I gently tugged the trigger. At the shot, the bull bucked and ran

toward our right. I bolted in a 300 grain DGS (solid) and again shot the departing buffalo. I quickly bolted in another round and shot the buffalo again as it turned to the left. After reloading again I moved in the direction where I had seen the bull run. Through my Zeiss scope (cranked down to 3X), I tracked the buffalo and was about to shoot again when I watched him stumble and fall. Keeping an eye on the fallen bull, I reloaded my magazine, the bolted in a fresh round.

Admittedly, my bull was dead with the first shot. But I'm one of those who believes in continuing to shoot as long as the animal is up or moving. Far too often some hunters admire their first shot and watch the animal run away without shooting again, thinking their shots to be fatal. This can result in it taking a long time to recover their animal, if at all. Keep shooting as long as the animal is still standing or moving.

Once we were certain my buffalo was down, the congratulations started, followed by many photos and taking care of the cape and meat. Later, my buffalo's horns and cape were shipped to The Wildlife Gallery where their artistic taxidermists will work their magic in making my Western Savanna buffalo look alive.

I could not have been more thrilled with my buffalo or the hunt! ★