Guns and Hunting
This book is dedicated to all Finn’s fans—past, present, and future.
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The job of “gunwriter” is a rather odd one. For one thing, very few people aspire to the profession when young. I know two men who claim to have majored in journalism in college specifically so they could become gunwriters, and while each succeeded, it took them just about as long to become a full-time gunwriter as for most others in the profession. The problem with gunwriting is that it takes much more than college to even begin to be competent. While this is also true of many other professions, gunwriting requires more experience than most, the reason that many gunwriters essentially fall into the job somewhere in middle age.

Many (if not most) gunwriters in America are really gun-and-hunting writers. While it’s possible to learn to teach algebra in four years, or even to become a Wall Street wizard (legal or illegal), becoming a gun-and-hunting writer requires long post-graduate experience with many different firearms. As a gun magazine editor noted a few years ago, “Somebody who’s only hunted with a .308 Winchester can’t write a really good article about the .308 Winchester because he has little perspective.”

Finn Aagaard may have been born to be a gun-and-hunting writer, even though there’s no indication he aspired to the profession when younger. He was born in Kenya in 1932 to parents who emigrated from Norway and settled on a farm. Finn attended an agricultural college, but always had more interest in rifles and hunting than in farming. He gained some hunting experience on the farm itself, since farming in Kenya in those days meant hunting both for meat and to protect crops and livestock. His father had to be a farmer-hunter, and evidently was a good shot, though he apparently didn’t have the same passion for hunting as his son.

Finn eventually became a professional hunter rather than a farmer, guiding clients after the spectrum of Kenyan big game, so he was able to observe other people using a wide variety of rifles. In many ways this is more educational and useful to a gunwriter than personally owning and shooting a
lot of rifles. Just as someone who only hunts with a .308 Winchester doesn’t have much perspective about where the .308 fits into the hunting-rifle world, a hunter whose only experience is his own is often blind to the individual problems of other shooters.

This isn’t an uncommon failing among gunwriters. How often have we read that the .308 Winchester is a mild-kicking cartridge? Perhaps it is to most he-men gunwriters, but not to some other people. I personally developed a bad flinch from starting my big-game hunting in junior high school with a .308 Winchester that hurt my skinny little shoulder. During Finn’s guiding career, he encountered many people who flinched when shooting big-game rifles, including a lot of he-men who refused to acknowledge the fact.

Of course, it’s still possible to observe a lot of hunting and still not gain any perspective. I can immediately think of two American gunwriters of the past who spent some time guiding, yet often made flat statements about what rifles are “perfect” for different kinds of hunting because that is what they found perfect for themselves. That the same rifles might kick too hard for other shooters, or be too heavy or too long, apparently never occurred to them. Of course, we are all products of our individual experience, but their problem was ego: If their rifles worked perfectly for them, well then they should work perfectly for everybody.

Finn apparently didn’t have this problem. This isn’t to say that he wasn’t a man of firm opinions, but they were fairly earned opinions, gained by not just his own experience but that of other people. Consequently, one of his favorite questions was, “And how do you know that to be true?”

Aside from observing a lot of hunters in the field, another advantage of his African experience was a freedom from some of the commercialism of American gunwriting. Now, there is nothing wrong with commercialism; in fact it’s the basis for being a professional gun-and-hunting writer. However, America is not just the land of hope but of hype.

American gun magazines have always contained a large dose of “New and Better!” This is all well and good because, apparently, one of the basic human needs is some hope of better things coming, whether an afterlife or a new hunting rifle. But we also need things that are tried and true, and in his forty-
five years in Africa, Finn learned to depend on the tried and true. Anything new and improved first had to prove itself to him, and not once but repeatedly.

In the meantime, he tended to ask his question, and from the evidence he often asked it of himself. He learned to believe in proven cartridges like the 7x57 Mauser, .30-06, .375 H&H, and .458 Winchester Magnum, in proven bullets like the Nosler Partition, and in proven rifles like the 98 Mauser and Model 70 Winchester.

One theoretical disadvantage he may have had in Kenya was that handloading was outlawed. However, many of his clients handloaded, especially Americans, and Finn read a lot about handloading. Since he was definitely what I call a “rifle loony,” this was only natural. He also remained distant from some of the hype about handloading that infects many American shooters, especially the striving for every last foot-second of velocity, or tiny groups shot off a benchrest.

Part of the reason for his lack of intense interest in another 100 feet-per-second or half-inch groups was that since Kenya was a British colony until 1963, Finn also grew up with the British perspective on big-game hunting, especially with its strict codes of sportsmanship. Ideally, a hunter never pulled the trigger unless he could place the bullet properly for a quick, clean kill. Consequently, among Finn’s convictions was that a hunter should get as close as possible to the game before shooting.

While this was partly due to the code of British-based sportsmanship, it also came from his own love of the hunt. He got no satisfaction from “hunting” from a vehicle, sitting in a blind, or shooting at long range. He preferred to use his own still-hunting skills to approach game on its own grounds, close enough for that ideal one-shot kill.

I don’t know whether Finn read Jose Ortega y Gasset’s little book Meditations on Hunting, but I suspect he did. One chapter is devoted to technology and the hunt, and its main point is that when humans started hunting for anything beyond the simple need to survive, we ran head-on into the fact that our brains and technology are an enormous advantage over the game we pursue. In order to hunt, we therefore must limit our use of technology in order to engage the natural defenses of wild animals; otherwise, we aren’t hunting but merely killing.
Finn definitely knew and believed this, even if he never articulated it in his writings quite so specifically. In one story he described being at a hunting lodge, where in the evening the other guests bragged about how far away they’d shot their deer. Finn thought this was completely backward, that instead we should take pride in how close we could get before shooting.

That was reflected in his hunting rifles, even after his family relocated to Texas after hunting was abruptly and arbitrarily banned in Kenya in 1977. In Africa his collection of rifles was limited, but when he moved to Texas, he reveled in the freedom of arms that was part of America’s Constitution. Even his new rifles, however, remained fairly simple, with fixed-power scopes and little ornamentation, though he did have some nice custom-built walnut stocks. He also started handloading, and apparently had read and talked about it enough in Africa that some people thought he’d been doing it all his life.

Writing came harder for him, even though he’d been doing it without pay for many years. He’d long kept extensive hunting journals, which became great references for his articles, but he took a long time to write a story for publication, laboring over every sentence until he felt it was just right. His formal education in English was British colonial, so his writing had much of the dry, wry understatement common to many British writers. Like his rifles, it was also unembellished and direct, so sometimes his writing didn’t appeal to those readers who prefer their hunting stories (especially about Africa) full of exaggerated adjectives and desperate encounters with angry beasts. But it did appeal to readers who prefer practical truth.

Among them was me. I read Finn’s articles for a number of years before finally meeting him at the SHOT Show in 1987, a decade after he moved to Texas. I saw him walking on the other side of a big display and almost ran him down, sticking out my hand and saying, “Finn, I’m a big fan of yours.” He smiled and said he was also a fan of mine, having read my articles in Field & Stream for some time.

We saw each other at SHOT almost every year after that, and corresponded occasionally in between, both by letter and telephone. Finn invited me to visit him in Texas, but my career was becoming busier and somehow the visit always got pushed back, and then he was gone. I never met Berit until a few years later,
but we quickly became friends as well, and for many of the same reasons. One of my most prized possessions is a copy of the original edition of *Aagaard’s Africa, A Hunter Remembers*, inscribed in 1993 by Finn: “To John Barsness, Who would have fitted in—Good Hunting, Bwana.” Below that, written in 2007, is a note from Berit, thanking me for my friendship. She and I have gotten together in Texas a couple of times, but it needs to happen more often.

Among Finn’s (and Berit’s) other convictions was that most wild animals are for eating. By the time he came to America he wasn’t much on hunting predators, though I suspect he would have learned to like hunting black bears if he’d eaten one taken at the right time of year. He also wasn’t a super-dedicated trophy hunter himself anymore, having seen perhaps too much of that while guiding, though he was apparently a very good trophy guide. One of the things that always appealed to me about Finn’s writing was his frequent mention of how the meat of a certain animal tasted, even if it had large horns or antlers, for that is still the original essence of the hunt.

Time is the true arbiter of the worth of any writing. There have been a number of gun-and-hunting writers who were very popular in their day, but most have been essentially forgotten. A few, however, remain timeless, even though the rifles they wrote about are now considered passé. Their writing transcends time because instead of being about trends of style and technology, it is about the eternal hunt. I suspect Finn Aagaard will be read and remembered for a very long time, because he was that fine combination of hunter, painstaking writer, and seeker of truth.

John Barsness
April 2010
A Guy You Should Meet

John Wootters said to me, “There’s a guy by the name of Finn Aagaard that you should meet.”

“Why?” said I.

“Because he is Kenyan, a former PH and partner in a safari outfit, and knows guns pat. He has a zillion stories to tell, writes and properly spells the King’s English, wants to be a gunwriter, and has offered to guide us on an axis deer hunt in the Texas hill country.”

“Oh . . . welllll . . . OK.”

We did, he did, and two weeks later Finn signed a contract to write exclusively as field editor for American Rifleman and American Hunter. For the following sixteen years Finn’s love and knowledge of the sports of hunting and shooting and the rectitude he brought to them contributed mightily to the success of both titles.

Now a friend is gone, and though our days in the field together were not as many as I wish, I value each the more.

George W. Martin
Former Executive Director, NRA Publications
Finn Aagaard, whom I’m lucky to have had as my father, was a good man, an avid gunwriter, an ethical hunter, and a patriotic citizen. He slipped away quietly 3 April 2000, after a long battle with cancer. He made this world a better place in which to live and he will be sorely missed by all.

He had a strong sense of ethics and always did the right thing. He took the moral high ground. He accepted responsibility for his actions. He spoke nothing but the truth and was good for his word wherever he went. In a time of slogans, sound bites, and spin doctors, his reputation was beyond reproach and his actions spoke louder than words. He built his house on the solid rock, while many others waffled in the shifting sand. He was a good friend to many and set a fine example for them to follow.

Through his writing, Finn was in a unique position to influence more than just his friends. He started writing seriously in 1983 and gained quite a following ever since. I don’t know how many articles he wrote during that time, but a compilation of his works would probably fill several volumes. He really loved his job. He got to hunt and shoot and reload ammo every day. Finn joked that all he had to do was write about it and get paid.

Writing, however, never came easily for him. He wrote and rewrote and wrestled with every sentence to get it just right. He spent hours and hours doing meticulous research and testing. He kept detailed diaries of all his hunts and painstaking notes of all his tests. Finn wrote what he believed, not what he thought others wanted to hear. He was honest in his reviews of hunting outfits, rifles, cartridges, and equipment. He used his vast experience and interesting stories to support his straightforward writing style. This agreed well with his readers. Modest as he was, fame left him unchanged.

He felt very strongly about gun safety. Through the years, he saw or heard of many negligent firearm discharges and shooting deaths. This prompted him to write one of his favorite articles on the subject, “The Four Commandments.” They can be summed up as follows:
1) Treat every gun as if it is loaded.
2) Don’t point it at anything you do not want to shoot.
3) Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
4) Be sure of your target and what lies beyond.

Finn was also a big proponent of hunting ethics. In a time of deer blinds, feeders, and guaranteed kills on any tiny parcel of land, he believed in fair-chase hunts. The animals he hunted had an even chance of getting away. They roamed free while he stalked them on foot in their natural environment, pitting his hunting skills against their wits. Far more than collecting trophies, he enjoyed pursuing game for the sake of hunting. He loved the time spent outdoors searching for game, and he enjoyed the excitement of a long stalk on his hands and knees. (My last and most memorable hunt with my dad yielded nothing but a good time together.) He respected the animals and would not fire unless he had a clear shot and was assured a clean kill. In his mind, bullet placement was far more important than gun caliber. If an animal was ever wounded, he went to great lengths to track it down so it would not have to suffer.

Finally, my father was a patriotic citizen. He loved this country and all that it stood for. We flew the flag at half-mast for him at his memorial. Finn was a big defender of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights—especially the Second Amendment. Guns were his livelihood. He couldn’t imagine giving them up. He felt it was his duty to be armed in order to protect his family and fellow citizens.

I have been very fortunate to have Finn Aagaard as my father. He taught me about gun safety, hunting ethics, and Second Amendment rights. He passed on to me his .375 magnum and to my brother his .458 Winchester Magnum. He left us with a legacy to pass on to our children. My hope is that through his writing he has also passed on to others his morals and values. I know that he made this world a better place in which to live.

Harald Aagaard, Lt. Col., USMC
Finn Aagaard
1932–2000

Finn Aagaard, former field editor of American Hunter and American Rifleman, died 3 April 2000, after a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife, Berit, sons Harald and Erik, and daughter Marit.

Over the past two decades Aagaard was one of the world’s most popular and highly respected writers on shooting and hunting. His background as a big-game guide in both Africa and Texas, along with a lifelong fascination with firearms, provided an admirably versatile and prolific bibliography ranging from adventure tales and hunting tactics to ballistic performance and shooting techniques with all types of guns.

If ever a man was born to educate and entertain hunters, it was Finn Aagaard. A native of Kenya, where his father was a coffee and sisal planter, he was trained to shoot at an early age, hunting for the family table and protecting crops. After education in Britain and Nairobi, Aagaard went on to serve in the Kenya Regiment and saw action in the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s. In 1967 he helped launch Bateleur Safaris, and over the next decade earned a reputation as one of East Africa’s top professional hunters. After Kenya banned big-game hunting in 1977, Aagaard moved his family to the U.S. and soon was guiding hunters for white-tailed deer and free-ranging exotics on ranches in the Texas Hill Country.

An extremely literate man with a wealth of know-how and insight to share, Aagaard began to submit articles to the firearms press and by the early 1980s was rapidly building an audience. In 1983 he signed on as field editor with NRA Publications and was a regular fixture through 1994. In addition to scores of his articles, NRA published two books, Hunting Rifles and Cartridges (1990), and Aagaard’s Africa (1993). The role he played in helping build this magazine to national prominence was tremendous. Says former American Hunter editor Tom Fulgham:
When Finn Aagaard joined the *American Hunter* staff, we encouraged him to write about the challenge, adventure, and techniques of big-game hunting in Africa and North America. Always he wrote on these subjects with authority, and always he wrote with honesty. But what I respected most about Finn's writing was its pervasive insistence on fairness and integrity in hunting. I'll remember Finn as an expert hunter, a talented writer, and, above all else, an honorable man.”

Perhaps even more than his field experience and technical expertise, Aagaard’s unflagging truthfulness and decency made him a great writer. He never allowed trophy hype to cloud his vision of the hunt, he never minced words when critiquing guns and ammo, and he never compromised the ideal of firearms freedom. For all of us who valued his work, there remains a place for Finn Aagaard at our campfires.

John Zent, Editor
*American Hunter* magazine, an NRA publication
Acknowledgments

During this entire endeavor I have been stunned and humbled by the enthusiasm and support from everyone I contacted. When I approached Jim Land, secretary, of the National Rifle Association, and requested permission to republish some of my late husband’s stories that appeared in *The American Rifleman* and *The American Hunter*, he contacted Michael Blaz, NRA assistant general counsel. Together they graciously provided me with the necessary permit that enabled me to make a dream come true.

John Barsness, a fellow writer and old friend of Finn’s, replied that he would be honored when I asked him to do the foreword. I felt John would be the right person for the task; his values and ideas correspond closely to what Finn stood for: honesty, common sense, no frills.

I also need to thank Don Polacek of Wolfe Publishing for allowing the reprint of my story “The Tracker,” which was published in *Successful Hunter* magazine, July–August 2005 issue. Kinuno, my late husband’s tracker, featured in so many of Finn’s hunting stories and he was such an important part of Finn’s hunting career I felt he belonged in this volume.

Bill Pace, my second love and a former NRA board member, introduced me to Jim Land and thereby facilitated this enterprise. He has patiently coached and guided me through this whole endeavor and been my constant support in the world of business and publishing.

Finally, a thank you to Ludo Wurfbain of Safari Press who recognized the value of the treasures contained in these stories, and for providing the willingness and means to produce a quality book to preserve them in.

My heartfelt thank you to each and everyone.

Berit Aagaard
Houston, Texas
April 2010
Not until after Finn was gone and the family was flooded with letters of condolence did I begin to grasp the far-reaching impact of his writing. Readers, not only in the States, but from all over the world took time to express their sense of loss. One sentence still grabs me: “I will miss his unwritten stories.”

I went through mounds of old magazines searching for Finn’s articles in order to make a complete collection for each of our three children. What I found was an astounding volume of technical, well-researched information. There was so much always relevant wisdom, common-sense advice, and entertaining hunting stories, all coupled with Finn’s sturdy integrity. Finn had a way to make it all interesting, even to the nongun enthusiast.

More than ten years after his death, people still remember him with admiration. Often I am told: “I grew up reading Finn” or “I always read his stories first when a new magazine arrived.” It is heartwarming to know how much he is still appreciated. His writing contained all his practical experience, disciplined research, endless test shooting as well as his honesty, dry sense of humor, and excellent grasp of the English language.

His writing style flows effortlessly. What most of his readers never knew was how he struggled with each sentence and paragraph. He strived to communicate so others could understand in an intelligent and informative way, seldom writing about things he had not personally experienced or tested. Finn would not praise a product if he did not approve of it. While writing, he was thoroughly absorbed in his work, often forgetting time and place. His office was a jumble of reference materials, books, and his meticulously kept African diaries, notes on bullet performance, rifles, and ammo. I never dared to move anything while he was in the middle of a story; the room looked like a disaster to me, but there was always a method in the mess.

I really want to talk about the photo sessions we had together. The two of us would use the granite hills on the ranch where we lived as dramatic backdrops to
take pictures of the rifles, of Finn holding firearms, of Finn in different shooting positions. It always amused me when the magazine wrote: “Photos by author” when he was clearly in the picture himself and I had taken the pictures!

Going through all the articles, it struck me that here was so much timeless wisdom and information that the newer generation could also benefit from and enjoy. The idea grew in my mind to gather some of the stories in book form. In the end we talked to Jim Land, secretary of the NRA who contacted the NRA Intellectual Property Committee. They kindly gave me the necessary permission to publish a compilation of some of the articles Finn wrote for the NRA. We can thank Safari Press for making it happen.

We will all “miss his unwritten stories,” but now at least some of the best ones will be preserved in a more permanent form than in mounds of old magazines gathering dust in the garage.

Berit Aagaard
Houston, Texas
April 2010
A Tale of Two Sevens

Chapter 1

A pair of venerable 7x57 rifles span a half-century of hunting. (American Hunter magazine, December 1989)

Why is it that the 7x57mm Mauser, one of the very first smokeless-powder cartridges, is still going quite strongly after ninety-six years while many of its contemporaries, such as the .30-40 Krag, have virtually been dead and buried for decades? The answer probably lies in its fortuitous blending of good killing power with relatively mild recoil. Almost anyone can become accustomed to the kick of even a light and portable 7x57mm and learn to shoot it well, while the reliability of the round on everything but the largest dangerous game has been so thoroughly proven in the field all over the world as to be beyond much dispute.

When my father arrived in Kenya from Norway as a young man in 1927 he brought with him a Husqvarna double-barrel 12-gauge hammer gun and a Browning .32 auto pistol, but no rifle. One of his first acquisitions therefore was a 7x57 Mauser-Werke M98 sporter with a 28-inch barrel (or 27.56 inches, to be exact). It remained his only rifle throughout most of his active hunting career. How much game he killed with it I do not know, but it certainly tallied 1,000 heads and likely more, given that he was expected to provide meat to help feed the large labor force on the coffee and sisal plantation he managed.

The local white settlers had built a clubhouse where they would often gather in the evenings to play tennis, hold dances, talk, and in general get together and socialize. My father was probably still embarrassed by his schoolboy English, and in any case he had no money for that sort of thing. Instead he spent many evenings hunting in the sisal. *Agave sisalana*, a relative of the century plant, was grown for
its fiber. It was planted in tight double rows about ten feet apart and provided perfect havens for reedbuck and duikers.

My Old Man would kick the reedbucks out of their beds and more or less wingshoot them as they jumped the rows. At first he used the shotgun and buckshot, but found that too easy and so graduated to the rifle. If there is a better way to learn fast and accurate close-range rifle shooting, I do not know what it might be, and he soon became quite deadly at it. He tried to get them at the top of their leap, and told me that although he might very occasionally miss with the first shot, he would always bag his game if given two shots.

On weekends he and Harry Heppes, the senior manager, would go farther afield. They were up in the Ithanga hills once while my father was still very new in the country. He came across a large, horse-size antelope with curving horns, of a species he did not recognize, and shot it. Harry was utterly horrified when he saw it. It was a roan antelope, which even then was strictly protected in Kenya. They cut it up on the spot and buried the hide and the hoofs. But my father took the chance of keeping the horns, which hung on our veranda over the living room door for many years.

They hunted a lot on the open plains as well, taking elands, zebras, wildebeests, kongonis (one of the hartebeests), and gazelles at ranges that were perforce sometimes quite long, especially for open sights. Harry Heppes was a South African who had been raised in the old Boer tradition in which a boy was sent out with a rifle and two rounds of ammunition. He was expected to bring back meat or both cartridges, else he risked a licking. A harsh schooling, certainly, but it did teach a fellow to make sure of his shot, and to conserve his ammunition.

Harry was an extremely fine shot who later represented Kenya at Bisley. One of his favorite tricks was to wait on an anthill until he had two gazelles lined up so that he could drop both with one round. My father swore he had seen Harry lie down, raise the 600-yard leaf, and nail a little Thomson gazelle that was walking directly away with its nervous tail going like a windshield wiper.

He never got that good himself, but by becoming thoroughly familiar with his rifle and its trajectory, he was able to do creditable work with it at quite long range despite its roundnose 175-grain bullet and modest 2,300-fps muzzle velocity. The bullet had a lot of lead showing at the nose. It expanded well but
A Tale of Two Sevens

retained enough weight in its shank to penetrate deeply, and was a reliable killer on anything up to and including eland. I cannot remember the Old Man—or anyone else for that matter—complaining of a failure that could honestly be attributed to that load in the 7x57mm.

He did not hunt elephant or buffalo, but did bag a couple of lions with the Mauser. He killed a zebra for bait and tied it to a tree. In those days lions were still considered vermin, and it was a common practice to build an impenetrable thorn boma (enclosure) in which to sit up for the lions and shoot them at night. My Old Man did not do that. He came back at dawn, crawled up over a little rise fifty yards from the bait, found a lion and a lioness on it, and took them both with one shot apiece.

Later he started to use the Kynoch load with a 140-grain bullet at a listed 2,900 fps (which it might nearly have attained in his long barrel). He said that it dropped the small and medium antelopes a little quicker than the 175-grain bullet, and was easier to hit with at long range. But he also thought it caused more wear, and blamed it for the fact that by the beginning of World War II the Mauser's barrel was shot out, though I suspect corrosive priming may have played some part in that.

For a long while there were no 7mms in the family, until my brother-in-law, Peter Davey, bought a used Brno 7x57 in 1958. According to Ludwig Olsen's Mauser Bolt Rifles, it is a Model 21, a slightly modified small-ring M98 Mauser with integral scope-mounting bases, shotgun-style trigger guard, “butter-knife” bolt handle, 23.6-inch barrel, double set triggers, and a slender stock with a neat and unobtrusive Schnabel fore-end tip.

Pete took it along on a rhino hunt that year, near Makueni. This was the district where John Hunter recently had to shoot 1,000 rhinos so that Kamba tribesmen could settle there. The government thought there were still too many rhinos and issued a limited number of rhino licenses to hunters at reduced cost. However, they were still expensive enough that we would have to sell the rhino horns to cover costs, so Pete and I agreed to pool our resources, buy two licenses, hunt together, and split whatever profit or loss there might be in the venture evenly between us.

When we eventually found a suitable rhino, Pete had his .458 and I a .375 H&H, but Joe Cheffings, who did not have a license, was carrying the 7x57 Brno
in case we chanced on an impala or such for camp meat. Pete belted the rhino in
the shoulder area. It went into a spin, as they often do. It received a .375 bullet
in the center of the chest as it turned toward us, then a .458 in the other shoulder,
but still remained on its feet as it swung completely away from us. Joe stuck a 175-
grain softnose into its rear end and it promptly fell down. He claimed that it was
perfectly obvious it was he who had killed that rhino, with the 7x57mm!

(This was 30 years ago, when the situation was quite different from today
and rhinos were numerous. Nevertheless, I concluded that there was little
sport in shooting a poor bloody kifaru and have never had the slightest desire
to do so since.)

A couple of years thereafter a leopard started preying on Pete's cattle, killing
two calves. He recovered one of the carcasses and hung it up in a big fig tree. Ten
days later the cat started feeding on it. Pete drove by in the evening and found two
leopards at the bait, a big male up in the tree and a smaller one, probably a female,
on the ground. There was no cover between Pete and the tree, just a tangle of
brush around the base of it, so he shot from where he was. The leopard tumbled
out of the tree into the brush. Pete approached and circled the thicket but could
see nothing of the leopard, and because it was getting dark he wisely decided to
leave it for the night.

Next morning he eased into the brush with a shotgun and soon found the
leopard dead. But the ground and vegetation were torn up all around it, so it
may not have been entirely defunct the previous evening. Pete got quite a shock
when he paced out the range and found it to be 150 yards—an awful long way
to be shooting at a leopard with iron sights. He had hit it a little too far back,
through the stomach and the very rear of the lungs. The 175-grain softnose of the
7x57mm did about as well as almost any other cartridge could have been expected
to do under the circumstances. The leopard was a very big tom that registered 240
pounds on the scales, with its stomach full of calf meat.

In 1972 Pete brain-shot a large, 13½-foot crocodile in the Tana River. We had
to use the winch on his Toyota to haul it up the bank. Apart from that, Pete used
the Brno mostly as a meat gun, bagging various small and medium-size antelopes
and gazelles for the larder. Not too long after the leopard incident, he had a Weaver
2½X scope mounted on it, using a set of Kesselring low, quick-detachable rings
that are still on the gun, and which are the only ones that I have found will fit the
Brno bases. At some point we replaced the double-set triggers with an excellent Timney adjustable trigger.

Over the years, Pete, always an ardent wingshot, drifted away from big-game hunting. Then in 1977 Kenya banned all hunting and announced that (with a few exceptions) licenses for sporting firearms would not be renewed. Pete gave me the 7x57 Brno, and I immediately shipped it off with my other guns to the United States, where I was eventually able to take possession of it in 1978, almost exactly twenty years after I had first seen it.

I had always wanted a 7x57mm. But when I went into Shaw & Hunter, the Nairobi gun store, looking for one to replace my worn old 8x60mm Mauser, I found they had none in stock, and the closest we could come was a 7x64mm on a Mauser action. The 7x64mm, ballistically a twin to the .280 Remington, served me superbly for fifteen years, but it was not a 7x57! So I was delighted to receive the little Brno. The only thing wrong with it was that its comb was too low for me when using a scope sight, which was easily fixed by having it built up into a moderate Monte Carlo.

I went to work for an outfitter in Texas who guided for white-tailed deer as well as exotic game. Almost immediately I lent the 7x57 to a party of Mexican clients who wanted to avoid the hassle involved in crossing the border with their own guns. They took four deer and an exotic sheep with six shots, using a handload with 140-grain Nosler Partition bullets, so the Czech Brno got off to a good start in its new homeland. Since then I have loaned it to quite a few other hunters, who have used it on deer, mouflon sheep, hogs, axis deer, and aoudad (Barbary sheep). It has also become my personal favorite whitetail gun.

Some years later I needed a .280 Remington in a hurry for an article I was working on. I ordered a .280 finishing reamer, and a buddy and I rechambered the Brno by hand. We were lucky and it turned out well, except that fired cases came out of that chamber with a stepped neck. Then we looked at chamber drawings and found that the 7x57 chamber has a greater neck diameter than does the .280 Remington. The .280 reamer does not clean up all the 7x57 neck, hence the two-diameter neck on fired cases. It did no harm, and the cases survived many firings with no problems. Regardless, when rechambering a 7x57 to .280 Remington, it is proper to set the barrel back enough so that the reamer will clean up the neck completely.
Guns and Hunting

Although I killed a six-point bull elk with one shot with the Brno in its .280 guise (using a 160-grain Nosler Partition bullet), and a lot of other game as well, I came to regret the conversion.

I still wanted a 7x57mm. So finally I ordered a 22-inch Light Sporter 7x57 barrel from E. R. Shaw and had gunsmith Joe Sherrod fit it to the Brno. The Shaw “light” barrel is actually quite substantial and gives the rifle a slightly muzzle-heavy hang. It has a barrel-band sling swivel and a bead-blasted, satin bluing, and with its 4X Leupold compact scope it weighs right at eight pounds unloaded. I could have saved some weight by having Sherrod turn the barrel down, but I like its balance, and have learned my lesson. I am going to quit messing it about. The gun is as close to perfection for my purposes as I am likely to get, so I am just going to use it the way it is, and enjoy it.

And I do thoroughly enjoy hunting with it. In various hands it has now accounted for precisely fifty game heads in North America, of which twenty-seven were white-tailed deer. Only one of the deer required more than one shot, which is a very satisfying record, especially as I do not shoot deer from blinds as is common here in Texas, but still-hunt them on foot.

Because it is not used on anything bigger than 250-pound aoudad, or at ranges of much over 200 yards, I generally use fairly mild handloads with 140- to 154-grain bullets at around 2,600 fps. They do all that is required under these conditions, as does any of the factory-loaded ammo I have tried. Winchester and Federal loads with 175-grain bullets in my rifle generally give about 2,350 fps, while the Remington ammo with 140-grain bullets averaged 2,638 fps for 25 shots the last time I chronographed it.

Two new factory loads have recently been announced for the ancient cartridge. Winchester has a 145-grain PowerPoint bullet at a listed 2,690 fps, while Federal is offering a Premium load with the 140-grain Nosler Partition bullet at 2,660 fps, both velocities being from 24-inch barrels. I have not been able to try either one as yet, but both ought to be excellent choices for game up to the size of caribou, at least.

Because many old, weak, or worn-out rifles chambered to the 7x57 may still be in use, American ammo manufacturers conscientiously tend to hold pressures down to not much over 45,000 cup. However, the reloading manuals suggest that in strong, modern rifles in good condition that will safely tolerate chamber
pressures of up to 50,000 CUP, such as the Ruger M77, velocities of over 2,800 FPS can be achieved with 140-grain bullets in a 22-inch barrel, and up to nearly 2,700 FPS with 160-grain bullets.

If I were going to hunt moose or elk with the 7x57, which I would not hesitate to do, I would most likely use the 160-grain Nosler Partition bullet at as close to 2,700 FPS as I could comfortably get. Otherwise I really do not see much sense in pushing the 7mm Mauser to the limit, and think that when high velocities are needed it is better to step up to the 7mm magnum, or at least to the .280 Remington. But because I believe in stalking to within as dead-certain a range as possible, and have consequently not fired a shot at game at over 250 yards in years (and darned seldom even back when), I find the 7x57 amply sufficient for almost all my hunting. Of course, I like and use many other cartridges as well, but the fact remains that the little seven will do a thorough job on about any of our non-dangerous game in the hands of a responsible hunter.

Many European makers still regularly chamber to the 7x57mm Mauser. Rifles in that caliber can be had from our custom gunmakers, and from some semi-custom makers like Ultra Light Arms. But among our large-scale manufacturers, only Ruger presently lists rifles in 7x57mm. It offers the chambering both in its M77 bolt gun and in the No. 1 single-shot rifle. While I am very happy about that, it does not concern me personally. I already have my 7mm.
Rifles for Dangerous Game

Chapter 2

Whether you’re off to Alaska for grizzly or Africa for buffalo, the author offers advice on firepower and rifle designs. (American Hunter magazine, October 1988)

The hunting of dangerous game holds a fascination for many of us above and beyond that engendered by more innocuous beasts, no matter how elusive and challenging they may be. A large part of it probably derives from a natural urge to prove to oneself that he can handle danger, that he can perform when his life may be at stake if he screws up. Whatever the psychology, most hunters dream of one day going to hunt brown or grizzly bears in Canada or Alaska, or buffaloes, lions, and elephants in Africa. A surprising number of them make it, even those of quite modest means if they are determined enough to save up for it, so a discussion of the proper arms for the purpose may not be entirely irrelevant.

There is no one cut-and-dried answer to the question of what is the best rifle for dangerous game. It all depends on what one will be hunting; on where, how, and under what conditions; and on his own abilities and limitations. The ideal tool for warding off a brown bear at two paces in a dripping-wet Alaskan alder tangle might not be the prime choice for precisely dropping a dimly seen leopard stone-dead out of the tree at fifty yards in the dusk, for instance. A few chaps could apparently handle a double-barrel .577 Nitro Express as easily and as casually as a 20-gauge shotgun, while others have trouble with anything that kicks more than a .30-06. And so on.

I am a firm believer in employing “enough gun.” But I am even more firmly convinced of the necessity for putting the bullet into the right spot no matter how mighty a cannon one is using. The most powerful sporting rifles presently available cannot be counted on to make up for poor bullet placement to any
significant degree. Even on an elephant, a 6.5mm solid in the heart or lungs is vastly preferable to a gut shot with a .600 Nitro Express. On the other hand, with equally well-placed body shots that do not affect the central nervous system, the big gun is indeed likely to stop the animal a little quicker on average than the small one.

A chap once wrote to me asking advice. He was going to Africa to hunt a lion, but had found that he could not tolerate the recoil of a .375 H&H. Should he take his familiar .30-06 loaded with 200-grain Nosler Partition bullets, which he shot very competently, or the bigger gun that was too much for him? Of course I replied that a 200-grain Nosler in the right place would kill any lion in Africa quite promptly, and that he would be far less likely to land himself and his professional hunter in a lot of grief with an '06 he could handle than with a .375 that caused him to flinch. A better answer, though, would have been to suggest that he learn to handle the .375.

We make too much of the recoil bugaboo. None of my hunting companions and acquaintances in Kenya had much trouble accustoming themselves to the recoil of the .375, and we were by no means a bunch of supermen. We were just motivated: If we wanted to hunt buffalo and other dangerous game, we had by law to use at least a .375. Likewise, I notice that a good proportion of resident Alaskan big-game hunters tend to use the .300 magnums, the .338 Winchester Magnum, and even the .375 H&H.

I believe that any adult who does not suffer from some physical disability, such as bursitis in the shoulder or a whiplash neck injury, can learn to handle a .375 H&H and, in most cases, a .458 quite adequately for shooting at game. One mistake most hunters make when graduating to rifles of heavy recoil is to fail to hold them firmly. The butt should be pulled back firmly into the shoulder, and the fore-end gripped tightly enough to absorb some of the recoil and to control and moderate muzzle rise. One has to overcome the natural inclination to hold a rifle of which he is frightened away from himself else it gets a running start, and that really hurts. The butt pad should be held against the muscles of the shoulder joint with the toe over the armpit, not farther in toward the chest where it can hurt the collarbone, and not out on the upper arm.

Given a reasonably well-fitting stock and an effective recoil pad like the Pachmayr Decelerator, a properly held big-bore rifle may startle and shock a
neophyte, but it cannot physically hurt him unless he is shooting from an awkward position, from the bench, or with his back against something solid so that his body cannot roll with the punch. A muzzle brake or Mag-Na-Porting may help, though the latter serves mostly to suppress muzzle rise, in my experience.

The ideal way to accustom oneself to a heavy rifle might be to start out with very mild reloads and then to gradually increase the charge over a number of shooting sessions until he can eventually handle full-power ammo. Until he has become quite comfortable with its recoil, the rifle should be fired only from the standing position, not from the bench. When one does have to sight-in a big gun from the bench, a “sissy-bag” of sand or small shot placed between the butt and his shoulder is a useful aid.

Weight in a rifle reduces felt recoil, but it also reduces portability, and if taken too far it can hinder quick handling. A client of mine in Kenya brought a Remington M700 .375 with a heavy 26-inch barrel that weighed over 12 pounds with scope and ammo. It was a dream to shoot, but it about wore him out when we spent a morning tracking up buffalo on foot. At the other extreme, there has been a minor fad recently for ultralight big-bore rifles that has resulted in .375 magnums weighing a scant six pounds and the like. Those who like them may keep them; personally I want a .375 to weigh around 9½ pounds field-ready, and think that 8½ to 8¾ pounds is about right for a .338. Conversely, my .458 “stopping” rifle weighs 9¾ pounds with a full magazine, and I would not have it any heavier for the work I put it to.

A “stopping” rifle is the rather specialized tool that a professional hunter (guide) uses to get his clients out of trouble, and to clean up messes. It is designed for quick handling and fast shooting at close range, while delivering as big a bullet and as heavy a blow as is practical. But it is not always the best choice for the hunter on a guided hunt.

The way to stay out of trouble with an animal that can fight back is to hit it so well with the first shot that no charges can develop. To this end I always told clients who were coming to hunt dangerous game in Kenya that I preferred them to bring a scope-sighted .375 H&H rather than an iron-sighted .458 because they would be more likely to place their shots vitally with it.

African stopping rifles are usually fitted with the traditional Express-type shallow “V” open rear sights. They are a third-rate choice, with low-power scopes and “ghost-ring” aperture sights being preferable on all counts. But
stopping rifles are normally used at such close range that it does not matter. Jack O’Connor described how on one of his African safaris he and his companion (probably Herb Klein) tested their professional hunter’s heavy double rifle and found that it was shooting half a foot off at 100 yards. He remarked that because the professional never used it at ranges over 25 yards, that was good enough. Actually, most of the time he probably did not use the sights at all, but just pointed the piece like a shotgun.

A more precise sighting arrangement is definitely to be preferred, as even professional guides may have occasion to try to stop a wounded beast at quite long range. Many years ago Soren Lindstrom (who did not yet have a professional’s license) and I took his father out for buffalo. Finally we got him a shot at a very good bull that was standing broadside at well over 100 yards. It was farther than we liked, but we were running out of time—the buffalo were alerted and about to go, and besides, Erik Lindstrom was a capable shot. He hit it a touch far back in the lungs with my .375, and it ran into an isolated motte of thornbrush. Now we had trouble.

Then I noticed that the buffalo was peering out at us through a gap in the thorn. Only its head was visible. The range looked to be 200 yards or a little more, but we had nothing to lose. I sat down with the .375, held the cross hair in the Weaver K2.5 scope on top of the boss of the bull’s horns, and gently pressed the trigger. The buffalo disappeared, and when Soren and I worked our way into the thicket we found it dead with my bullet through its brain. There was a good portion of luck in that shot; nevertheless, I could never have pulled it off with the iron-sighted .458.

On the other hand, I have used the same .375 to follow up and finish off a couple of wounded buffalo in thick cover when my .458 was out of action, and found the scope no hindrance. On another occasion, when we had a wounded bull standing in dense shade in heavy brush, I could not make it out through the iron sights of the .458, so I took the scope-sighted .375 from the tracker and solved that problem. Clients have used the rifle with its 2½X scope to flatten a buffalo at 10 feet, to stop a charging elephant at 14 paces, and to kill a lot of the big stuff quite neatly both near and far. I am absolutely convinced that a low-power scope sight of from 1½X to 3X, or a variable-power scope with a 4X maximum, is by far the best sight for a guided hunter’s dangerous-game rifle.
The only exceptions I can think of might be leopard hunting, when a little more magnification could be an advantage, or when one has to hunt in extremely wet and thick cover. From what little I have seen of Alaska, scopes would seem to be entirely appropriate for much of the bear hunting there also. All the clients we had in one Alaska camp used scopes successfully and with no problems. Phil Shoemaker, the registered guide, had a little Leupold 2½X scope on his .458 stopping rifle and liked it very well. It had survived some pretty rough treatment and was still moisture-proof. Good lens covers were an essential, though. Wide bands cut from automobile inner tubes are as good as anything—if you can find an inner tube! I do think it is good insurance to have standby iron sights on the rifle and to use a mounting system that allows the scope to be readily removed in the field if necessary.

Phil had a fiberglass stock on his rifle, which I think is wise in that wet climate. He had also painted most of the external metal with a black, matte, rust-proofing paint, and had reinforced the stock with a bolt through the recoil shoulder. Fiberglass stocks are said to be stronger than wood. That may be so, but only if they are properly designed and well made. Heavy recoil has been known to tear the recoil shoulders out of some synthetic stocks. In the drier climate of East Africa, wood stocks served me perfectly well, though I insisted on a crossbolt behind the recoil lug on rifles of .375 power and up, and bedded the actions in fiberglass. A second recoil lug under the barrel is usually fitted to .458 rifles, and sometimes even to a .375.

The old double rifle versus bolt-gun controversy is pretty much passé—not that many doubles are around anymore, and few of us can afford them. Obtaining ammo may be difficult as well, though B.E.L.L. of Bensenville, Illinois, can supply cases for many of the obsolete British double-rifle cartridges, and loaded ammo for some of the calibers, as can A-Square Company of Madison, Indiana, and perhaps others. Doubles are available chambered to cartridges like the .458 and .375 belted magnums, but extraction can be unreliable with rimless cases. Personally, I would want a flanged (rimmed) cartridge like the .470 Nitro Express if I were to hunt dangerous game with a double rifle.

A good double rifle does handle rather like a double-barrel shotgun, and I believe that provided it fits the shooter, it probably is faster than a bolt-action (or autoloader) for two shots at close range. But when more shots are needed in a
hurry, or the range extends to any distance, then the advantage tends to be with the magazine rifle. I doubt there is anything to the contention that doubles are more reliable than bolt guns—many of their parts are quite delicate.

A rifle for dangerous game must function with absolute reliability. Provided the shooter has remembered to load it, it must go bang every time the action is cycled and the trigger is pressed, without fail. Because of their superior extraction system and their “controlled feed,” whereby the extractor engages the case before it enters the chamber, I prefer the old Mauser M98 and the pre-’64 Winchester M70 actions to the more modern ones. But my present .458 is a post-’64 M70, and I would not hesitate to depend on a Remington M700 or a Ruger M77 either. Three of the four bear hunters in Shoemaker’s camp were using Browning A-Bolt rifles and liked them well.

A smooth-working action that allows the rifle to be reloaded easily with the butt in the shoulder is another requisite. To get it, I would be prepared to pay a good gunsmith to work on the gun. I would also consider it money well spent to have him alter the stock (if necessary) so that the rifle came up to my shoulder with the sights quite closely aligned to the target. A decent trigger facilitates getting the bullet into that vital spot, but because one is often tense when dealing with dangerous game, it ought perhaps to have a slightly heavier pull than normal.

The optimum barrel length is another consideration. In heavy cover, short is better—at some cost in power and in range limitations. Actually, I used that old M70 .375 quite happily in plenty of thick African brush and forest and never found its 25-inch barrel to be any real handicap. I learned something, though, when I followed Shoemaker into Alaskan alder patches. The leaves were mostly gone and visibility was not too bad. But the closely packed, upright stems really could catch the rifle barrel if one had to swing it urgently to deal with an upset bruin coming in from the side. For that particular application, an 18-inch barrel would be dandy, but otherwise I think 22- to 24-inch barrels are generally the best choice.

There exists some disagreement, to put it mildly, as to what cartridges are suitable for dangerous game. The first, most essential attribute is penetration. The bullet must have sufficient penetration to reach the vital areas of any animal on which it will be used, at any angle and distance from which the shot may have to be attempted. Without that ability, none of its other qualities is of any avail. Too much penetration is infinitely preferable to too little, which is why solid full-
metal-jacket (FMJ) nonexpanding bullets are appropriate for elephants and, in my opinion, for buffalo as well. For bears and the big cats, premium “controlled expansion” bullets such as the Nosler Partition or the bonded-core bullets offered by some of the small, specialized bullet makers are good choices.

Every species of terrestrial dangerous game has been bagged quite handily with such mild cartridges as the 6.5mm Mannlicher and the 7mm Mauser. If I had nothing else, I would be willing to tackle any of it with which I have had any experience with suitable loads in a .30-06. But given the choice, I would nearly always opt for more power.

For elephants, for backing up clients, or for following any wounded dangerous animal into the “puckerbrush,” I want my .458. For hunting unwounded lions or buffaloes, I like a scope-sighted .375 H&H, but I acknowledge that a .416, which combines the virtues of both the .458 and the .375, might be better yet. I think the .338 Winchester Magnum with 250-grain Nosler Partition bullets is excellent bear medicine, as is the .340 Weatherby Magnum and even a .300 Winchester Magnum with the right loads. But I expect they are less effective than the .375 when it comes to using solid bullets on the larger African beasts.

The essentials, then, are that the rifle must be absolutely faultless and smooth-functioning; have rapid availability of follow-up shots and the ruggedness to withstand rough conditions; deliver loads with sufficient penetration to reach the vital areas under almost any circumstances; have good fit and balance to promote fast handling and quick pointing; weigh enough to moderate recoil and to aid steady holding without impairing portability; have a sighting system that permits both very fast shooting at close range and precise aiming at longer distances; and deliver as much power as the shooter can comfortably handle while remaining confident of placing his shots where they need to go. Above all, shot placement remains the key.
Kudu Days

Chapter 3


South-West Africa, otherwise known as Namibia, is the place for greater kudus. There they are among the commonest of the large antelopes, and are as much a nuisance and a danger to motorists as white-tailed deer are here in central Texas, or so they say. In fact, though, kudus inhabit a far-flung range that extends from a little below the Congo River in Angola through Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, on up the eastern half of the continent through Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia to the fringes of the Red Sea hills, whence it hooks back through southern Sudan to parts of Chad and the Central African Republic—a grand, sweeping arc that traverses some seven thousand to eight thousand miles of Africa.

Although their numbers are sadly reduced in much of this range, and the guerrilla wars that ravage back and forth across Angola, Mozambique, Chad, and Ethiopia have no doubt taken their toll, greater kudus have been brought back in South Africa and are still plentiful in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, and relatively so in Tanzania.

They may be common in some areas, but no one has ever accused the kudu of being commonplace. A mature greater kudu bull weighs six hundred to seven hundred pounds and stands a good five feet at the shoulder, which is to say that it is not significantly smaller than your average Rocky Mountain bull elk. Kudu bulls are a blue-gray color with a white chevron between the eyes and six to ten vertical white stripes on their flanks. Their ears are large, while their hoofs are surprisingly small for the size of the beast, a not uncommon family characteristic among the tragelaphine or spiral-horned antelopes. (One notable exception is the swamp-dwelling, almost amphibious sitatunga with its greatly elongated hoofs.)
Kudus appear almost slender compared to the burly roan and sable antelopes, a fact that, combined with their aristocratic bearing and the incredible magnificence of their horns, puts them among the most handsome and elegant animals on earth.

The heavy, ridged horns typically make 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ complete spirals and may tower 4 feet above the head. According to Rowland Ward, they are properly measured along the outside surface, not around the spiral.

The longest set on record, to my knowledge, is listed in the 1922 edition of Rowland Ward’s *Records of Big Game* as measuring 71½ inches on the outside curve and 51¾ inches in a straight line from tip to base. A photo of this head, which was taken by J. Cole Rous (or Rouse) in the Lyndenburg district of the Transvaal, is included in that edition. It looks quite stupendous!

The East African greater kudus have smaller heads, on average, than the southern race and are listed separately in the record book. The minimum length for inclusion in “the book” used to be 49 inches for East African kudus when it was about 56 inches for southern kudus.

Kudus are animals of the dry brush country and in general seem to prefer hilly terrain. They are principally browsers. The big bulls run in little bachelor bands or are very often solitary, while the cows and younger animals are normally found in groups of around four to six, though famed African hunter Frederick Courteney Selous reported once seeing a herd of almost thirty kudus.

In addition to their large ears and love of cover, kudus share other traits with our white-tailed deer. They are skulkers and hiders that depend more on concealment than on fleetness of foot, and the way a kudu can remain invisible in a patch of skimpy, leafless bush is uncanny.

They seem to have extraordinarily keen hearing, a good sense of smell, and excellent eyesight. Like whitetails, they have quick and nervously alert dispositions, and at the first hint of trouble an old bull is likely to lay his horns down along his back and sneak away into a thicket before the hunter has any inkling of his presence.

Greater kudus were quite rare in Kenya, found only in scattered pockets. For many years there was no open season on them, but eventually it was realized that the population was stable and could tolerate a carefully limited harvest.

Mostly we hunted them on steep, hot, rocky hills in the arid Northern Frontier District of Kenya. We climbed and glassed for them in country that looked like
parts of Arizona, and in many ways the hunting resembled accounts of hunting the desert bighorn sheep.

A lot of African trophies, particularly many of the antelopes, are collected by chance; one happens on them while hunting something else. This was not the case with the kudu in Kenya; they entailed a serious quest that concentrated on them exclusively, and even seeing one was an event. Therefore I liked to hunt kudu.

I first hunted them on Pyramid Ranch (named for a hill) in the Loldiagas to the northwest of Mount Kenya, when Ray Mayers ran that spread. Born in Australia, Ray was one of those glorious characters who made Kenya such a marvelous place to live. He had served as a district commissioner in the military administration of Somalia during World War II. There he kept the peace with the aid of the Somalia Gendarmerie, a unit whose British officers were, by all accounts, as rare a mob of far-gone eccentrics as one could wish to meet. Ray had an inexhaustible store of humorous tales, and had seen far too much of life to be able to take any of it very seriously. He and his wife, Helen, were probably the most hospitable couple I have ever known. A ranch house they built later, near Voi, had no doors whatsoever. Anyone could walk in and be welcome.

There was a drought that year in the Loldiagas—in fact, not a drop of rain had fallen in eleven months and the country was burned up. I climbed the hills behind Ray’s house in the black predawn every day for a week and glassed and searched both high and low till near dark. I saw several cows and a young bull with but one curl, but never a sign of the half-dozen mature bulls that normally ranged the property. It turned out that there had been an isolated, heavy thunderstorm up to the north near Dol Dol ten days previously, and it is likely that the big boys had migrated over there for the new browse.

Some years later I did hunt kudu near Dol Dol, with Laird Mooney, while Ken Clark guided his uncle, Chip Loomis. After three days of hard hunting, during which we got only a fleeting glimpse of one small party of cows, we spotted a solitary bull high up on a hill. We went around behind the hill, dodging a bunch of agitated elephants on the way, climbed it, and crawled expectantly over the crest. The kudu was gone.

A brushy draw ran partway down the otherwise open slope. I left Laird where he had a commanding view, and walked noisily down one side of the draw, allowing my scent to drift into it. It was a good guess. Presently the kudu burst
out of the brush into the open, and Laird nailed it at 200 yards with the third shot from his .375 H&H.

There was a total eclipse of the sun that afternoon, but it seemed a minor event to us. Laird and I will always remember that day as “The Day We Shot the Kudu.”

It proved to be a candidate for the record book, with horns measuring 51 inches along the outside curves. The next day Chip and Ken collected another beauty with 47-inch horns but a much wider spread. Getting two kudus in two days in Kenya is fantastic, and if memory serves, we bagged a record-book Grant gazelle and gerenuk here also.

The other main kudu ground in Kenya lay just to the south of Lake Turkana (formerly Lake Rudolph) in hunting Block 52, which included Ol Donyo Nyiro (roughly, “The Dark Mountain”) and some isolated, rough-hewn hills with names like Kowop, Koitokoi, and Sartin.

It was home to the “Butterfly People,” the Samburu, who are close kin to the Masai and to the wild Turkana. There we found the big, narrow-striped Grevy zebras, the hardy and courageous beisa oryxes with their lancelike horns and flowing tails, the long-necked gerenuks that stand up on their hind legs to delicately nibble acacia leaves, a few rhinos, some big-tusked elephants, and a surprising number of leopards in the ravines and wooded valleys that tumbled down the sides of Mount Nyiro.

Don Siebern and I (accompanied by my wife and six-month-old baby) camped under the flat-topped thorn trees by the Uaso Rongai stream at the south end of Nyiro, and hung leopard baits all around. While awaiting a nibble, we hunted kudu on the nearer reaches of the mountain and on the nearby hills.

It was again an unusually dry year, even for that semidesert country, and we went several days without seeing much sign. Eventually we found a good bull taking his midday siesta in the shade near the top of Kowop hill. The wind was such that the only possible approach was up a little gully. We ended up crawling on hands and knees, but ran out of cover more than four hundred yards below it. The kudu had noticed something and was staring in our direction, but was still too far off to shoot. So Kinuno, the tracker, and I sat there, talking casually and never looking at the kudu, while Don got down on his belly and, by slithering along like a snake, successfully worked his way to a rocky ledge perhaps sixty yards closer.
He put his hat in a notch in the rock, rested the rifle on it, wriggled around till he was comfortable, took unhurried aim, and fired. But the shot kicked up a puff of dust just under the kudu’s brisket, and that was that. We had simply underestimated the actual hold-over required.

A while later Lowell Douglas and I came back, strictly for kudu. This time we camped at Tuum, a one-store trading post on the western side of Nyiro, intending to concentrate our hunting on the mountain. We sought information among the locals, and finally one of the Samburu said that he could show us an area to the north of Tuum where a big bull (he raised both arms high over his head to illustrate) used to live. That country was now uninhabited, he explained, because the previous year a band of renegade Shifta from the north had swept down on it, killed the people, and made off with all their livestock.

At first light next morning Lowell, Kinuno, and I, together with the Samburu guide and a pal of his whom he insisted on having along, left the Toyota at the end of the track and started climbing. We went slowly, because Lowell had two crippled knees that he had injured playing college basketball, and stopped at every suitable point to search the ground with binoculars. Our hearts leaped when we startled a big, gray antelope out of a thicket soon after leaving the truck, but it was only an eland that went away in a smooth, ground-eating trot with its dewlap swinging from side to side.

Toward midday it became obvious that Lowell’s knees were giving him considerable pain and that he was about done. I decided we would make one last spy from the next little rise and then turn back. As soon as Kinuno peeked over it, he ducked down and signaled me to come up beside him. A thousand yards away across the valley, on a main ridge of the mountain, a kudu bull lay under a scraggly little thorn tree. How big it was I could not tell, but it had the full two turns of a mature bull, and that was plenty good enough for us.

Unfortunately there was no way to approach it from where we were without being seen. The proper thing to do would have been to go back down the mountain the way we had come, make our way around behind the main ridge, climb it, and come at the kudu from above. But that would have necessitated a hard march of several hours over rough terrain, and Lowell’s knees would have given out before we were halfway.
Groups of people walking from hither to yon across country are a common sight in East Africa. So in the end I decided that we would just stroll openly up our ridge, talking and showing no interest in the kudu, until we reached a spot opposite it from which Lowell would have a long but barely feasible shot at it. There he was to drop down behind a tree while the rest of us walked on, and do the best he could.

Of course it did not work, which is just as well. As soon as we came in sight, the kudu rose to its feet. Then it turned and went slowly up the hill, stopping to stare back at us from time to time—a beautiful sight with the sun glinting off those great horns. It disappeared over the top, into what appeared to be a little basin on the crest of the ridge that was overlooked by a rocky knoll.

Our ploy had succeeded to the extent that the kudu had not seemed unduly alarmed, and I thought there was a fair chance that it might stop and bed down again in the basin. I suggested that we continue up our ridge for another half-mile, then cross the valley to the main ridge and come down it until we could look into the basin from the knoll. Lowell was tired and hurting, but gamely assented to give it a whirl.

It took us an hour, but finally we reached the rocky knoll and climbed it. After a break to catch our breath, I put Kinuno in the lead, closely followed by Lowell, who had instructions to be ready to shoot quickly if the kudu broke into view. I followed a little way behind with the Samburu.

Suddenly Kinuno stopped, touched Lowell’s arm, and pointed. The two Samburu immediately sprang forward to get a better look, but I was able to grab them in time and force them to sit down. Lowell stared where Kinuno pointed, nodded, moved a step to his right as if to get a clearer view, snugged the .270 into his shoulder, and fired.

“Got him!”

I rushed up, saw the kudu thrashing around on the ground, realized it had dropped out of Lowell’s sight, and slapped a .375 bullet into it.

Lowell said the kudu had been standing in the thornbrush about sixty yards away, looking at him. Its chest had been completely obscured, leaving him no option but to shoot it in the neck, which he had done as nicely as you please.

Then came the hard work. We had to cut it up, carry it down off the mountain and about three miles out to the Toyota. But who cared? I was glad to be staggering along with the heavy horns gouging my shoulders, the blood trickling down my back, and the sweat bees swarming around my face!
That kudu was a real trophy, no matter what it measured. (I never did put a tape to it; horn length seemed entirely beside the point.) We had done it right, and Lowell had given it everything he had and then some. He thoroughly deserved his success.

I do not hunt to get my name in a book, or even to acquire a beautiful trophy for my wall. Not really. I hunt for the joy of it, for the sake of testing my paltry skills, and for the satisfaction of playing man’s original role in nature. I hunt for the sake of the hunting, and that is why I would as soon hunt the East African greater kudu as any game on earth, except buffalo and, nowadays, perhaps the white-tailed deer.