

ELEPHANT!





Craig Boddington in the Zambezi Valley. The flat-topped mountain in the background is Cherima Kadoma, recognizable landmark in the Lower Zambezi, considered haunted by the Shona.

ELEPHANT!

THE RENAISSANCE OF HUNTING
THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

BY

CRAIG T. BODDINGTON



SAFARI PRESS

DEDICATION

To Donna, my partner and best hunting partner . . .
and a pretty fair hand with a double rifle!

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FOREWORD

It was a big track. . . .

We started early and followed the track for most of the day. We came across breeding herds, elephant bulls with smallish tusks, and huge-bodied bulls that made me appreciate my companions, for we had some close encounters with these great beasts. I knew instinctively that the man by my side, with his left-handed rifle shouldered and ready, has walked in the footsteps of many giants.

The midafternoon heat was beginning to take its toll. Drops of sweat trickled down my face, and my shirt clung to my back. The bull was close! His tracks were fresh, and there was a young bull with him. I saw Maburo tensing up—like a bird dog smelling its quarry a few paces ahead.

Then we saw the bull and his askari in the mopane shrub. After a whole day's anticipation, we finally had him in our sights! Then the bull turned, disturbing the peaceful scene. We could clearly see that one tusk was shorter than the other, but the absolute mass of the tusks made me want to tell the client to take a shot. I hesitated, then looked at my client and said to him: "Craig, it is a big bull; I think we should take him."

The fraction of a second's hesitation on my side, weighing up the chances of getting another bull this size, was enough to spook the old giant. With a changing wind giving away our presence, he hightailed away at a staggering pace that only elephants seem capable of doing.

I turned to Craig and said: "His ivory is going to be heavy. I do not think that the shorter tusk should worry us. It is a formidable elephant!"

Craig nodded in agreement, and we followed the elephant at a steady pace. Knowing we were in pursuit, the elephant quickened his pace and the hunt was on!

Much later that afternoon, Maburo and I noticed that the tracks once again were getting fresh. The old bull had changed his pace from a run into a walk; now he was slowly grazing. We had finally caught up with our elephant! With hearts pounding in our ears, we carefully approached to within seventeen paces of the bull and made our way to a large shepherd's tree. The elephant towered above the mopane, facing in our direction. What an awesome sight!



To my left, a calm and collected Craig was getting ready to take the shot: His .450-3¼ barked, and the elephant turned away with the impact of the shot. The second barrel barked almost immediately next to me, and the elephant dropped in what looked like slow motion. What a fantastic shot!

As we walked closer to the grand old bull, we felt the mixed emotions of adrenaline rush, wonder, and sadness. There, straight ahead of us, his impressive ivory gleamed in the late afternoon sun.

Even more humbling than seeing this great beast coming down, was the sudden realization of who the hunter by my side really was. My friend Craig Boddington was not only the author of many hunting books but also a man who has hunted more dangerous game than most professional hunters in the world. He was also my client!

For fourteen years my professional hunters and I have hunted these magnificent animals. We live, sleep, eat, and dream big tuskers. This is what we do; this is all we want to do! Even though it can be physically and emotionally taxing, there is no greater life-altering experience than hunting the biggest land mammal on earth!

It is hard work finding the right tusker: You work under pressure; you operate within the secret folds of nature and against high expectations from your client and peers. You see many elephants, some with broken tusks, small tusks, and no tusks, but then you see that one elephant both you and

your client know is the one! It is those moments that make for the firewood of your old age—of having lived a life worth remembering!

There are many reasons why Botswana boasts such a healthy population of elephants: the country's vegetation, security, water, and little interference from mankind, but mostly it's because of the authorities' sensible approach to wildlife management. The government, together with the hunting industry, realizes that cooperative and scientific management of the country's wildlife resources will secure the coexistence of man and beast to the benefit of both. Public and private enterprises will continue to join hands to ensure the survival of this magnificent species and the conservation of the habitat it shares with other creatures.

The quality of the hunt and the quality of the trophy makes Botswana the best elephant-hunting destination in Africa today! Interestingly, statistics prove that not only has the quality of trophies stabilized, but in actual fact the quality of the ivory has steadily improved since the reopening of elephant hunting in 1996.

With careful planning, by monitoring the movement of elephants throughout the year, and by assessing the hunt day by day, your professional hunter will narrow down the odds for you, and with a little bit of luck will find you your elephant in the right place at the right time. The combination of his knowledge and skills and your good shooting will turn your dream into a reality.

It is said that the days of hundred-pound tuskers are basically gone. Ninety-pounders, eighty-pounders, yes, it happens . . . sometimes! Seventy-pounders, yes that happens more. Sixty-pounders happen a lot. The men who pursue big elephants spend their days, year after year, looking for that "big one." You get despondent, you think of giving up, and then, after many days of hard work, it happens! Around the corner, your bull is suddenly there—the one you have always dreamt of! The year 2010 was such a year for us, for one of our clients was blessed with a magnificent tusker, fully 104 pounds.

Botswana is an artist's palette and every hunter's lifelong dream. I have been fortunate to hunt there, and in a time when our elephants can be hunted. But the diversity of its fauna and flora, the sunsets, the people, the sheer abundance of animals and trophy quality are not necessarily what makes for a successful elephant hunt.

It is the time spent living close to your Creator and creation: Feeling the bite of the desert chill and the battering ram of the African sun on your

skin; waking up to a cacophony of bird sounds and the promise of a new day; appreciating the coolness from your water bottle down your parched throat after the chase; making friends around the crackling embers of a campfire; and finding out more about your innermost self. A successful elephant safari is to say: “I have walked in the footsteps of giants!”

It is a privilege for me to write this foreword to Craig Boddington’s book on elephants. No other author in this day and age has traveled the globe and hunted in Africa as extensively as has Craig. His passion for writing, his skillful use of the English language, and his love for dangerous-game hunting is world renowned. The analytical planning, passion, and accuracy portrayed in this book makes him one of the best hunting authors of his time.

Elephant hunting is my love and my life, so to be able to read a book that covers so many intriguing and accurate facts is a pleasure. This book covers the philosophy of the hunt, the hunt itself, choice of calibers, penetration, bullet performance, and shot placement. Everything a reader wants to know about an African elephant safari is captured in a very informative and readable fashion.

For the elephant hunter who would like to go to Africa and experience one of the most wonderful hunts a person can do, this is a must-read book!

Johan Calitz
Maun, Botswana
November 2010



INTRODUCTION

It's amazing how time flies. Fully twenty-five years have passed since I took my first elephant . . . and, totally coincidentally, it was also twenty-five years ago that I wrote my first book. The former event was a hunt for a non-trophy bull, taken with Peter Johnstone. Peter was a pioneer professional hunter in Rhodesia, along with Ian Henderson and Brian Marsh; and my old friend Geoff Broom. The latter three are now retired; Peter is still hunting, and thus is now the senior safari operator in Zimbabwe. That first elephant hunt, though short, was a total success, a mind-altering learning experience—as anyone's first elephant is sure to be. The book, well, like most first books, I wouldn't exactly call it a success. But it was also an educational experience, and one of the things I learned was that I enjoyed writing it.

Unlike the magazine articles that have occupied most of my working life, a book belongs to the writer. There are few editorial guidelines to follow, no word counts, no advertisers that need to be mentioned. Perhaps best of all, there are no firm deadlines and no editor standing over your shoulder. A book is soup when it's soup. Of course, you have to be a bit careful about that. There are a lot of great books out there that never quite get finished! So far, at least, that has not been my problem. I've never claimed to be a great writer, but I enjoy the writing process, and I've never been visited by the dreaded 'writer's block' that has plagued some of my colleagues.

So, enjoying the process, I've written quite a few books over the last quarter century. Some have been my idea. Some have been suggested by my publisher and longtime friend, Ludo Wurfbain. As I've written before, he's a great guy for ideas and, as a publisher should, he knows what he can sell. His ideas have generally been better than mine! A couple of my books have been suggested by friends and, more recently, my two partners in our filming business, Tim Danklef and Dave Fulson, have steered me into book projects—and assisted tremendously in the process.

No book, at least with me, has been a spur of the moment thing. The first sentence alone is a daunting task, and the rest of the tens of thousands of words must be pounded out over the course of days, weeks, and months. So the conceiving of a book cannot be done lightly. But within that context, some of my book projects have taken shape very quickly. Others have developed as

milestones were reached that seemed meaningful to me. My first “ten-year African book,” *Mount Kenya to the Cape* is a good example . . . but better ones are the two “ten-year African books” that have followed. And, yes, now five years into my fourth decade of African hunting, I hope there might be yet another. Those books were fun to write!

Some of my books have thus been years in the planning . . . and I have a couple of projects in my head right now that will take a few more years before I feel I have enough experience to write them properly. For instance, I would like to have a book on mountain hunting in my body of work . . . but there are a lot of mountains I must still climb, so I hope I remain able for a few more years. But twenty-five years ago, when I was writing my first book and hunting my first elephant, it never crossed my mind that I might someday even consider a book on our present subject, the African elephant.

There is no other game animal on Earth that has spawned such a rich body of literature—and it all remains good reading. It is important that I make clear right now, up front, that I lay no claim to being a latter-day Bell, or Sutherland, or Hunter. I claim no fraction of their experience, nor that of the great professional hunters of the last fifty years, many of whom are still in the field, still following the great game. The only claim I make is that I am an American journalist, specializing in a pursuit for which I share a passion with those of you who choose to read these lines.

As both vocation and avocation I have been fortunate to indulge myself in that passion through a fairly active career. I am not an elephant expert. I cannot bring the experience of a Tony Sanchez or the knowledge of a Richard Harland to a book on this subject. On the other hand, as a hunter with a long and eclectic African experience, I have been mentored by great hunters . . . and as an American writer, I have had the flexibility to hunt over a wide swath of the continent.

Perhaps more importantly, in the context of this book, I have seen incredible changes in the thirty-odd years since I first hunted Africa. I missed the great days of elephant hunting. There’s no point in lamenting, because they will never come again . . . but when I began my African career we didn’t realize those days weren’t just passing, but were already past. In the 1980s, when I did my first elephant hunting, I was disappointed because I’d read too much of the great old stuff. Then came the 1990s, and I was grateful for the (little) elephant hunting I’d done. The handwriting seemed clear on the wall: The time for hunting elephant had passed.

Fortunately it had not. It had changed, but it had not passed, and as we moved into the new millennium it became ever more clear that we were entering a new age of elephant hunting. The free-for-all ivory hunting was gone, as was the time when a visiting sportsman had a fair chance to take a really huge tusker. Instead we were reaching a time when regulated sport hunting was essential to elephant management . . . and we will be in that time for the foreseeable future.

So this book isn't about the history of elephant hunting, or about the search for giant tuskers, nor about the specifics of elephant management. All these subjects have been covered well by more experienced hunters than I. Instead it's about elephant hunting in modern Africa, in our Twenty-First Century. We will, of course, take trips down memory lane, because it's important to understand the context in which modern elephant hunting takes place. But we will not dwell on the past, and although we might speculate on the future, we will concentrate on the present. And right now the present is very good for the African elephant, and for hunting the African elephant.

Since I have confessed that I am simply an American journalist who has done a bit of hunting, it's important that I recognize that I could not have written this book without a great deal of help. I have been fortunate to have hunted wild Africa, and the African elephant, with a number of great hunters and good friends: Willem Van Dyk (and Willem Van Dyk Junior), Barrie Duckworth, Roger Whittall, Geoff and Russ Broom, Peter Johnstone, Michel Mantheakis, Luke and Jasper Samaras, Rudy Lubin, Jacques Lemaux, Negussie and Danny Eshete, Sissai Shewemene, Alain Lefol, Peter Swanepoel, Cliff Walker, Rory Muil, Andrew Dawson, Paul Smith, Willy MacDonald, Johan Calitz, Jamy Traut, Dirk de Bod, Ian Gibson, Corne Kruger, J. P. Kleinhans, Brent Leesmay, Mark Valaro, Ivan Carter, Mark Haldane, Jaco Oosthuizen, Debbie Visser . . . and more. Thanks for all you taught me!

As I said, I have never claimed to be a great writer. I try to write honestly and simply, and thanks to the wonderful English department at the University of Kansas, I can write a straight sentence. I leave it up to you to judge the quality. However, my work should make it obvious that I am not a great photographer! The elephant is not just a big subject (pun intended), but also a very visual subject. So I needed help, and I got it. Thanks and acknowledgments go to my partners, Tim Danklef and Dave Fulson, for tireless assistance with photography and research. Then there's John Dugmore. When I was a kid I watched a young John Dugmore take

actor John Saxon on a leopard hunt in Kenya on *The American Sportsman*. Now retired in Maun, John provided invaluable assistance when Tim, Dave, and I did our Leopard book. It is a great honor for John to allow me to use some of his photos from the last days of the big tuskers.

And a most special thanks goes to some really talented photographers—Clyde Elgar, Mark Valaro, and Dirk de Bod—for making some of their fantastic images of elephant available for this book. Clyde is a Zimbabwean who loves his country's wildlife and spends every spare moment with his camera. Mark is also from Zimbabwe; Dirk is from Namibia. Both are extremely good professional hunters who I've been fortunate to share some great times with. How they find time to use their cameras is beyond me, but both use them very well. And, of course, a special thanks to Johan Calitz for his much-too-kind foreword.

With this kind of help, I hope my words are up to the task!

Craig Boddington
Rungwa Game Reserve, Tanzania
October 2010





(Photo courtesy of Clyde Elgar)



WHEN GIANTS WALKED

CHAPTER 1

There was a time, not so long ago, when Africa was a limitless expanse of wild country, teeming with wildlife. It is not known when Africa's elephant population might have been at its peak, or exactly what that high number might have been—or when the peak might have occurred. It is certain that elephants once roamed Africa in the millions, and remained in the millions until after World War II. They still occur from east to west, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. Requiring much water and forage, they never ranged into the depths of the Sahara. But in antiquity they were present across much of North Africa.

Though there was much trade in ivory from the wilderness to the south, elephants were extinct in Egypt by the time of pharaohs. Farther west, along the well-watered Mediterranean coast, they persisted for centuries—as they did to the east as well, along the Red Sea. Some taxonomists describe the North African elephant as a unique subspecies, *Loxodonta africana pharaoensis*. Whether distinct or not, these were smaller in body than southern elephants. It was this breed of elephants that the Carthaginians learned to tame—the same breed that Hannibal took across the Alps during the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.). During the same period, the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt also trained and used African elephants as war elephants, some from North Africa and some from Ethiopia.

The North African elephant seems to have become extinct sometime after the fall of Carthage, maybe in the second century, probably from overhunting by the Roman legions for use in the Coliseum. Isolated populations may have persisted along the coasts of Eritrea and Sudan until the mid-nineteenth century, but the North African elephant has, regrettably, passed into history.

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This is Ahmed, the famed tusker of Marsabit in northern Kenya. Elephants of this size were never common, but there was a time not so long ago when there were millions of elephants in Africa. Out of those millions, quite a few lived to grow large ivory. (Photo courtesy of John Dugmore)

This was not the first extinction of a race of elephants caused by man. The large-bodied Syrian elephant (*Elephas maximus asurus*), westernmost representative of the Asian elephant, was hunted to extinction by about 100 B.C. Regrettably, this would be just the beginning of man's ravages against the great pachyderms. The value of elephant ivory predates recorded history, with some of the oldest ivory carvings dating to 10,000 B.C.

Man has seemingly always coveted its soft luster, smooth texture, and incredible weight. The Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and, later, the western world craved ivory, and Africa supplied it in unknown countless tons. From a purely historical perspective, against this insatiable demand it's amazing that Africa's elephants persisted in such great numbers for as long as they did. Unlike many other species, in the elephants' favor

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was their ability to move deeper into the uncharted vastness of Africa's wilderness, behind the barriers of distance and disease. This as well as the simple fact that, until the nineteenth century puny man's ability to slay an elephant was limited, and in numbers, impossible. But slay them we did, with spears, poisoned arrows, and traps.

Even so, when Cornwallis Harris penetrated north from Cape Colony in 1836, an entire continent lay before him, and on this continent roamed elephants in the millions. Even then it was not as if there was an elephant behind every bush. Africa is huge. It was not then, nor is it now, all preferred habitat. The earliest European hunters trekked days and weeks by ox wagon, horse, and on foot to reach elephant country. In fact, those coming up from the south—Harris, Gordon Cumming, Selous—just touched the tip of the iceberg. It's a turn of fate for a later chapter, but in



Elephants in the Moonlight, painted by Walter Dalrymple "Karamojo" Bell. Bell was among the few who made significant money hunting ivory—and lived to enjoy it. After retiring to Scotland, he wrote, painted, and stalked Scottish stags.

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what is now Zimbabwe and Botswana they found far fewer elephants than exist in these areas today.

In the nineteenth century the big numbers of elephants lay far to the north, across the wide bulge of equatorial Africa, east to west, to be plundered by the next generation of adventurers. Trade in ivory to Europe continued to escalate from the sixteenth century onward while elephant populations on the fringes, nearest the accessible coasts, almost certainly diminished in the same ratio. But in the manner of these intelligent giants, and with limitless Africa before them, it's likely that far more elephants moved deeper into the hinterlands than were killed. If you read some of the oldest accounts, and you should, you will quickly realize that elephant hunting in the days of muzzleloaders was a whole lot different from today!

These big-bore, hand-held cannons were inestimably more efficient than spears and arrows, but their soft, lead projectiles, first round balls and later conical bullets, provided little penetration; consequently, there was no opportunity for the great slaughter that would follow. If possible, the hunter would be mounted, and would ride in close and discharge his single shot, dash away to reload, and then ride in to shoot again—as



John Alexander Hunter at the ivory market in Kenya, probably in the 1940s. The number of elephants taken by the ivory hunters is unknown, but almost certainly pales in comparison to those removed to make way for livestock and crops.

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A safari camp in Kenya receives a visitor. By 1940 elephants had long since vanished from North Africa, but it is estimated that between three and five million still roamed the continent. East Africa had an especially dense elephant population until the 1970s. (Photo courtesy of John Dugmore)

many times as it took. It was not the clean, humane form of the sport that we revere today.

It was incredibly dangerous to both horses and man, and the old accounts are wonderfully exciting. Note, however, that this is yet another example of how, in response to man's pressure, animals have changed their habitat. I have seen many elephants in clearings and openings, but I have never seen an elephant in country so open that one could course them on horseback!

It is my opinion, not shared by all who try to assemble the patchwork of history, that relatively little serious damage was done to Africa's overall elephant population until two totally unrelated events coincided. The first event was the race of the European powers to acquire African colonies. Prior to the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were loose footholds around the periphery of the continent, but the interior was uncharted as well as

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J. A. Hunter and a female client with a fine Kenya tusker, circa 1935. Elephants of this size were never common and never a sure thing—but they were out there, and with just a bit of luck they could be found.

untamed. Then came the African Land Rush, and by the end of the century Belgium, England, France, Germany, Portugal, and Spain had claimed most of Africa. Suddenly, instead of a small handful of explorers and adventurers, there was a flood of soldiers, settlers, and seekers of fortune.

This would be a two-edged sword, with access for the ivory trade just one blade. Wildlife was forcibly removed from vast areas to make room for livestock and agriculture. This was neither hunting nor poaching, but simple eradication, and this effort continued until well within living memory. Even today, Africa's burgeoning human population has led to the inescapable escalation in the conflict between humans and elephants, necessitating a system for problem animal control, known as "PAC." This control work is responsible for the deaths of many more elephants than all the sport-hunted permits issued continent-wide. Since the ivory ban, it is even probable that more elephants are lost to PAC than to poaching!

In years gone by, however, untold tens of thousands of elephants, buffaloes, and rhinos were killed to make room for cattle, crops, and settlement schemes and to create sterile buffer zones against the tsetse fly. This effort continued until quite recently. In 1979 I was one of the first hunters on Roger Whittall's

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Humani Ranch, now part of the Save Valley Conservancy. Only a couple of years earlier, which was before the bush war had started to wind down and commercial hunting seemed a viable project, the government had completed its effort to eradicate the buffalo and elephant to make room for cattle. It took another twenty years to return them to the area!

Colonization did bring some semblance of law and, in many cases, for the first time. Wildlife that wasn't "in the way" was given some form of protection, though often primarily so the governments could charge license fees. Later, when it became clear that Africa's wildlife heritage was vanishing, parks and game reserves were established. Colonization did slow down the free-for-all for ivory, though the most enterprising and adventurous of the ivory hunters would find ways around the rules.

The second and parallel event that heralded the demise of the African elephant was the development of the self-contained metallic cartridge. In the 1870s, the metallic cartridge gave hunters arms that could be reloaded rapidly, and large-caliber cartridges with hardened conical bullets gave them tools that made it practical to actually kill outright, more or less, the largest animals on earth. Just twenty years later, the higher velocity of smokeless powder, coupled with its own parallel development, the jacketed bullet, took



Crossing Kenya's Tana River with big ivory. Kenya's Tana River was one of the great places for big tuskers, and remained so until elephant closed in 1973. (Photo courtesy of John Dugmore)

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the “more or less” out of the equation. With Africa opening up and the tools refined, the killing escalated. Frederick Selous, who led Cecil Rhodes’s Pioneer Column into Rhodesia in 1890, was more famous as an explorer and naturalist than as an elephant hunter, but as a young man he had hunted ivory and was among the few who made the transitions from muzzleloader to breechloader and then to the high-velocity bolt action. Shortly before World War I, he said of Holland & Holland’s new .375: “Had I had one of these in my youth, I should have killed thrice as many.” The new rifles, cartridges, and bullets changed the game.

Still and all, it wasn’t that easy. Aside from the inherent danger of hunting elephants, there were colonial patrols and occasionally hostile natives to deal with—and the ever-present threat of tropical disease. Those who actually pursued the ivory trail were few in number. Many of those who survived left written records of their exploits. In my view some of the best African reading to this day was left by Walter Dalrymple Maitland “Karamojo”



A very young Harry Selby and a happy Robert Ruark at the Mount Kenya Safari Club with Ruark’s first hundred-pounder, taken on his second safari in 1953.

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Eric Rundgren with a fine Kenya elephant. Rundgren was one of relatively few professional hunters who truly specialized in big ivory. A tough guy, he was considered one of the best. (Photo courtesy of John Dugmore)

Bell. He is, perhaps, best known as an outspoken advocate of the small bore, and we will discuss this in greater detail much later. Bell later became a talented artist and very fine writer during his retirement in Scotland. Bell was among very few who actually made real money from ivory hunting and lived to enjoy it!

Another great hero of mine is Capt. Jimmy Sutherland, who also left behind a wonderful book in his *Adventures of an Elephant Hunter*, published in 1912, before the midpoint of his long career. Sutherland was unique in that he hunted elephants almost continuously from 1899 to 1932, from southern Africa to Sudan, only taking a break to serve as an intelligence officer in World War I. Bell is credited with killing over 1,000 elephants and Sutherland 1,200. Regrettably, unlike Bell, Sutherland apparently didn't know to quit while he was ahead. He was poisoned by members of the Azande tribe in Sudan in 1932, and died just before his sixtieth birthday.

Then there was John Alexander Hunter. "J. A." Hunter, as he was known, served variously as an ivory hunter, professional hunter, and game control officer. Credited with shooting about 1,400 elephants, Hunter continues to serve us by being one of the very best storytellers to ever write about Africa. I was perhaps in the fifth grade when I discovered his bestselling autobiography,

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On this remarkable Kenya safari with John Dugmore, Joe Iverson and his wife took two elephants, 134 pounds and 123 pounds. This was in the late 1960s—but there was never a time when success like this was common.

Hunter, in our school library. I have never been the same. Hunter lived well and died peacefully in retirement in Makindu, Kenya, in 1963.

We are fortunate today that, in the absence of Internet and television, it was fashionable (though not always profitable) in those days to write about one's exploits. There are literally dozens of books by early elephant hunters. Some had more experience than others, and some were better writers than others, but all the old books are fascinating reads that kindle excitement about Africa and hunting its greatest game.

Shot placement hasn't changed. Nor, provided you follow the J. A. Hunter school rather than the Karamojo Bell school, has choice of rifles and cartridges changed much. Elephant hunting, however, has changed very much, and while the superior knowledge of the old-timers should be taken to heart, it must also be taken with a healthy dose of salt. The elephant hunting they experienced will never happen again.

It is not my purpose here to chronicle the history of ivory hunting and elephant hunters. This has been done well by better hands with more experience, older hunters who had the chance to actually know some of the

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greats. Among the rich body of Africana, one will find several volumes that truly chronicle the ivory trail. Tony Sanchez, with more varied experience with elephants than most hunters still alive, has done several great books on the old elephant hunters. Brian Herne's *White Hunters* is a classic, though it's more about professional hunters than ivory hunters. J. A. Hunter wrote as much about his contemporaries and the hunters who preceded him as about himself, and his writing is always wonderful.

But in researching old material, it's important to be aware that our available records are incomplete. There is a gap, and while there is nothing easily done about it, it is a problem. As English-speaking people, we follow our own language. So we know about Bell and Sutherland and Hunter and so many more. And remember, too, that in the glory days of the British Empire, and the time of British colonies, those writing in English were very likely to be Anglophiliac. What we don't know unless we speak other languages is the history of elephant hunting outside those English-speaking colonies.



*In the good old days a safari was a major expedition—but usually not on a scale quite like this. This caravan is the mobile safari created for the filming of *Hatari* starring John Wayne. (Photo courtesy of John Dugmore)*

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Walter Bell, the most famous of all the early elephant hunters. This photo was taken after WW II on Bell's beloved estate, Corriemoillie, in Scotland.

We know there was great elephant hunting in the French and Belgian colonies of Central and West Africa—and for that matter, in Portuguese Africa and in Spain's West African colonies, where Tony Sanchez started his career. As we shall discuss later, the great elephant hunting in the French sphere of influence lasted until very late in the game, but I as an American, English-speaking hunter can tell you very little about the great elephant hunters from France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal. I can quote you song and verse on Bell and his colleagues, but I know little about hunting in so many other nations. All these great nations had their colonies and their great hunters, and the truth is we in the English-speaking world know very little about them.

There are exceptions. We know of some of the great Portuguese hunters because some of their books have been translated, and many Americans have hunted in Mozambique and Angola, thus passing on stories about these men. *Winds of Havoc*, ably written by Fiona Capstick in English, is the biography of Adelino Pires. Tony Sanchez, a Spaniard who started hunting in Spanish Guinea in 1952 (the year of my birth), is an exception in that, though he often writes in Spanish, he has focused many of his books on the large American market. We know about Baron Bror von Blixen, a Swede, from many English-language writers. Blixen is famous as one of the great early professional hunters (and a specialist on big elephants) but perhaps even more famous as the husband of writer Karen Blixen. He, too, wrote a book, *African Hunter*, which was translated from Swedish in 1938. Eric Rundgren, also of Swedish extraction, left no book of his own (for which we are the poorer), but he left a legend as a hard case as well as hard hunter, and we shall hear more about him as we progress. But all these hunters plied their trade in the British sphere, or among English-speaking hunters. It is simply a statement of fact that much great hunting was being conducted throughout the rest of the continent, yet we know very little about it. I wish I knew more.

In the fifties and sixties, with large-scale culling operations ongoing, there were some number of hunters who took elephants into the thousands, and a handful into the tens of thousands. This was eradication, of necessity targeting entire herds—bulls, cows, and calves. It was not sport hunting, nor was it ivory hunting. I have a few friends who were involved in this, and some were very good at it, but in time most grew sick of it, and couldn't do it anymore. The ivory hunters who actually took a thousand bull elephants for their teeth were very few in number. Again, mine is not a view held by all. It is my firm opinion that given the vastness of the African continent,

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even in the era of smokeless powder and repeating rifles, professional ivory hunters had little impact on the overall numbers of elephants or their genetic propensity to grow ivory.

There were undoubtedly exceptions, and one of them certainly could be found in the Lado Enclave, circa 1909. The Lado Enclave, in what is now Uganda, lay north of Lake Albert and west of the Nile, continuing on to the Sudan border. The Lado Enclave included about 10,000 square miles of fantastic elephant country, which King Leopold II of Belgium held as a private lease. This was apparently well known, for the area had long been a favorite among serious ivory hunters willing to risk being shot by Belgian patrols.

When Leopold died in December 1909, the Belgians pulled out very quickly, leaving a lawless area full of elephants. It quickly became populated by elephant hunters. It was possibly the only “ivory rush” seen in Africa, with experienced hands, neophytes, and “wannabes” converging. Professionals like Bell were already in the area and cashed in. Others died of fever, the diligent Belgians shot a few, and one, according to J. A. Hunter, was eaten by the natives. But in this once-rich area, the elephants were well and truly hammered.

During this period, Theodore Roosevelt passed through this area while on his epic 1909–1910 safari. Roosevelt insisted on a dinner with an available group of the Lado ivory hunters and offered a toast to “the ivory poachers of the Lado Enclave.” Several of the hunters protested, for they were breaking no British law, and with Leopold II deceased, Belgian control was shakier by the day. With good nature, President Roosevelt reworded the toast, offering it “To the company of gentlemen adventurers—for such you would be called in Elizabethan times.”

Even in those days, and we will talk about this more, an elephant bull with 100-pound tusks was a rare animal (though much more common than today). Obviously, there is no history that details the size of ivory on individual African elephants for the last 10,000 years, but the largest elephant we know about was taken on the slopes of Kilimanjaro by the slave of an Arab trader in 1886. These tusks weighed 226 and 214 pounds and are still in the British Museum. For the longest time they were not on display, and you used to have to beg a curator to see them, and if he took pity on you, you were allowed to view them in the dusty basement. Recently, the tusks have been brought out of storage and are now, once again, available to the regular visitor. This is the only elephant we know about to grow tusks exceeding 200 pounds.

WHEN GIANTS WALKED

Somewhere along the line someone established an elephant of 100 pounds per side as the Holy Grail of elephant hunting. In today's world this, too, will require further discussion. But there is no question that an elephant carrying a hundred pounds of ivory in one tusk, whether on two sides or one, is a magnificent and rare trophy. And a rare animal. Rowland Ward, the first record-keeping organization, ranks elephants by the weight of the heaviest tusk. More sensibly, at least to me, Safari Club International uses the combined weight of both tusks. But for historical records, Rowland Ward is the reference, having published their *Records of Big Game* since 1892.

ELEPHANTS WITH 120-PLUS-POUND TUSKS, ROWLAND WARD

(As recorded in *Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game* 27th edition, the table includes any elephant with one tusk of 120 pounds or more. The following data list the largest recorded tusk.)

Country	Number	earliest date	last date	largest tusk	smallest tusk
Cameroon	1	1961	1961	132	132
C.A.R.	11	1959	1982	154	120
East-Central Africa	2	1902	1902	138	128
East Africa	2	1898	1958	133	129
Ethiopia	1	1986	1986	145	145
Ivory Coast	1	1906	1906	128	128
Kenya	46	1898	1973	172	120
Mozambique	2	1936	1953	185	122
R.S.A.	9	1982	1988	157	122
Sierra Leone	2	1909	1927	138	125
Somalia	1	1965	1965	146	146
Sudan	10	1902	1979	161	126
Tanzania	19	1898	1976	226	120
Togo	2	1902	1921	138	138
Uganda	6	1902	1969	179	121
Unknown	12	1891	1961	184	140
Zaire	3	1944	1978	198	149
Zimbabwe	2	1967	1984	143	132

Let's take a step up, and look at super elephants. Rowland Ward lists just 24 elephants with the heaviest tusk weighing over 150 pounds, just two dozen in the known history of African hunting. Take a step down, and there are just

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ELEPHANTS WITH 120-PLUS-POUND TUSKS, SCI

(As recorded in *Safari Club International Record Book of Trophy Animals*, 12th edition, the table includes any elephant with one tusk of 120 pounds or more. The following data list the combined weight of both tusks.)

Country	Number	earliest date	last date	largest weight 2 tusks	smallest weight 2 tusks
C.A.R.	6	1970	1978	302	237
Ethiopia	4	1986	1989	288	244
Kenya	4	1957	1969	241	122
Tanzania	4	1955	1972	245	143
Uganda	1	1966	1966	240	240

132 with the heaviest tusk of 120 pounds or more. This is also a small number. It is important to note that Rowland Ward was an English taxidermist, so most entries are from the English-speaking world. Again there is that gap. But we only know what we know. What we know is that, of these 132 great elephants, fully 46 were taken in Kenya, where elephants will never again be hunted. Another 19 came from Tanzania, 11 from the C.A.R., 6 from Uganda, and 10 from Sudan. Twelve were from unidentified or unknown locations, and then just a handful: 2 from Zimbabwe, 3 from Zaire, 2 from Mozambique, 9 from South Africa, 2 from Sierra Leone, 2 from Togo, and one each from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, and Somalia. Two each came from several locations in East-Central Africa and East Africa.

The record books are always the best resource for where the largest trophies may be taken—but the true validity depends on the data base, and applicability to modern conditions depends on how things have or haven't changed. Rowland Ward is not just slanted toward English speakers, but is also not nearly as well known as it once was. On the other hand, the Safari Club International record book, though much more current, is primarily American—though gaining rapidly in international acceptance.

SCI started record keeping in the late 1970s and is for members only, although trophies may be entered no matter when shot. I will talk about SCI hundred-pounders in the next chapter, but for comparison's sake, we will stick with 120-pounders here, as we did with Rowland Ward. SCI lists just

nineteen elephants that have one tusk weighing 120 pounds. Although the sampling is smaller, notice how the locations change, somewhat reflecting the fact that Kenya was closed before SCI started keeping records: Of those nineteen, six were from the C.A.R., four each from Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya, and one from Uganda. These seventeen giant elephants were taken between 1955 and 1989, the latter date perhaps significant as the year the last known giant was taken.

It isn't always clear whether it's genetics, nutrition, minerals, growing conditions or, more probably, a happy combination of all, but we hunters know that areas that have traditionally produced the best trophies are the most likely to continue to do so, provided the conditions that produced such trophies are maintained. Now take a look at the modern hunting map of Africa, the countries that are open to hunting, and the countries that are open to elephant hunting, or likely to reopen.

Realistically, the only country that historically produced large elephants in significant numbers and remains open to elephant hunting is Tanzania, and perhaps there is potential there. Tanzania's herds were ravaged in the 1970s and 1980s, but the country now has a large elephant population that is young and growing. With this one exception, it seems clear that the time when giants walked, both great elephants and the great hunters who pursued them, have come to an end. It does us little good to lament times gone by. Modern elephant hunting is not the same as it was in the days of Bell and Sutherland, and never will be the same. My contention, and the premise of this book, is that it is still wonderful and getting better . . . and we can only deal with the reality we have.

