

PH Spotlight

Mark Haldane

Team Effort in Hunting and Anti-Poaching

IN 1986, MARK HALDANE RECEIVED HIS PH AND OUTFITTER LICENSES AND THEN STARTED GAME AND BIRD HUNTERS AFRICA. FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS WITH JUST A GUIDE, A CAMP MANAGER, A COOK, A TRACKER AND A SKINNER, THE COMPANY HAS NOW GROWN TO EMPLOYING EIGHT GUIDES, TWO CAMP MANAGERS, AN OPERATIONS MANAGER AND 60 CAMP STAFF, TRACKERS, SKINNERS AND COOKS. MARK HAS GUIDED IN ALL OF SOUTHERN AFRICA'S COUNTRIES INCLUDING TANZANIA, CANADA, ROMANIA, ALASKA, UGANDA AND AUSTRALIA.



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Haldane has used DSC grants funds to equip and train rangers active in anti-poaching.

What do you wish a first-time DG client knew before arriving?

I like a client that has practiced on the sticks and knows his or her ability as well as the ability of his/her rifles, which helps, but not a client that has practiced so hard he has developed a flinch. We all have our own styles of guiding. I like to guide a hunt with my client participating. I find we both get more out of the hunt when it's a team effort.

How often do things go about as planned?

Planning is absolutely essential when it comes to a well-run safari, especially the logistics and camps. However, we are hunting wild animals that often outsmart the best hunting teams, so be prepared for Plan B or C to kick in. Be worried when there isn't a Plan B or C.

Who and how many people make up your best DG hunting team?

I like to keep it simple, and as quiet as possible – a single client, along with Gobs, my driver/tracker, and Nhazua, my old Sena tracker.

What makes a good client into a great client?

A client that gets upbeat when the going gets tough. A client that is part of the team and sees his safari as an adventure rather than just a chance to collect records. A client that is interested in all that Mother Nature offers rather than just his quarry.

Do clients do a "starter" safari on plains game, but then "graduate" for a second trip? Or do you have clients who want to DO IT ALL?

Most clients that hunt with me in Mozambique have already graduated through the plains game safaris. However, I've had many first timers to Africa hunt buffalo and they have done just fine.

Hunting experience doesn't just start in Africa, and I've met some darn capable hunters who have never shot anything bigger than a deer.

What was the best thing about your first dangerous game hunt, either as a pro or on your own?

The first dangerous game hunt I guided was with a German client. He was fit, capable and was more concerned with taking a really old Dagga boy rather than the size of the trophy. On the second day of the hunt, we tracked two Dagga boys and got a glimpse of a well-worn bull just before dark. My client was determined that this was the animal he wanted. He didn't come easy and he finally took him on Day eight. We walked many miles each day on his tracks. This same client ended up doing 18 safaris with me.

Besides not finding an appropriate and legal animal, are there any reasons you would back away from a hunt, or a shot?

A dangerous situation is always worth backing out of when you can. Elephant bulls mixed in with cow herds have to be top of the list for me. Ultimately, the safety of my clients and trackers rests squarely on my shoulders. I also like to avoid anything but a solid shot when the light is fading.

What is your favorite dangerous game species and why?

I really enjoy hunting Cape buffalo. I've always found tracking a crafty old Dagga boy in the thickets to be a challenge. This is when it's vitally important that we are all part of the same team. Watching my trackers work out the tracks and listening for any telltale signs. Doing it on foot much the same way it was done 100 years ago makes it special.

What's the best advice you received as you were growing up and doing PH apprenticeship? Who are your mentors and heroes?

In the late 1980s, a leopard I was "educating by my mistakes" gave me a runaround on three safaris. I sat a total of 17 nights for him. I had a client miss him and then the game was on. Tony Tomkinson was my mentor, and I certainly looked up to him. He told me the only way I'd get this cat was to outsmart him. He suggested I build two blinds, one for my trackers and a tree blind for the client

and myself. "Have the trackers leave the blind 20 minutes before dark," he said. The cat was on the bait within minutes of the cruiser leaving with the trackers.

What are your experiences with poaching, anti-poaching, and anti-hunting efforts?

I started out in Mozambique's Zambeze Delta in 1994. The delta had once held one of Africa's highest game concentrations, but the war had taken its toll. Our first game count that year yielded a total of 1,200 buffalo. All that was left were small pockets of game. We started out with a quota of five buffalo and a handful of plains game. I realized if we were going to get this block back to its former glory, an effective anti-poaching unit would be the only way to go. We slowly pushed back the poaching. Today the delta again has one of the highest game concentrations in Africa.

We have had to constantly evolve to stay one ahead of the poachers. We started with just foot patrols and then added a quick reaction motorcycle unit. This year we have included five hours of light helicopter patrol each week, along with the bike squad on the ground.

The comeback of game in the Zambeze Delta has been heralded as the one of the best conservation successes of the last two decades. The remarkable thing is that it

has been funded by hunters and hunting revenue only.

Do you have favorite DG guns, optics, and gear?

I carry a Heym .470, which has never let me down and has got us out of several sticky situations. For optics, I have carried Swarovski for many years and see no reason why I should change now. As far as gear goes, my pack just keeps getting smaller. The simpler, the better.

Let's have some fun. What is your favorite celebratory food and drink after a successful hunt?

A good scotch around the fire with buffalo marrow bones on toast with a dash of horseradish or Tabasco sauce has got to be it.

If you knew you had just 10 days left on the planet, what would you do with that time?

So little time and so much to do. Ideally, I'd like to spend time with those closest to me. Like many folks in my line of work, it seems I've been blessed to have crammed several lives into one, so I couldn't complain on being short-changed. On the 10th day with 15 minutes to go, I'd also really like to see if I could fly a full loop in my helicopter. **GT**



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