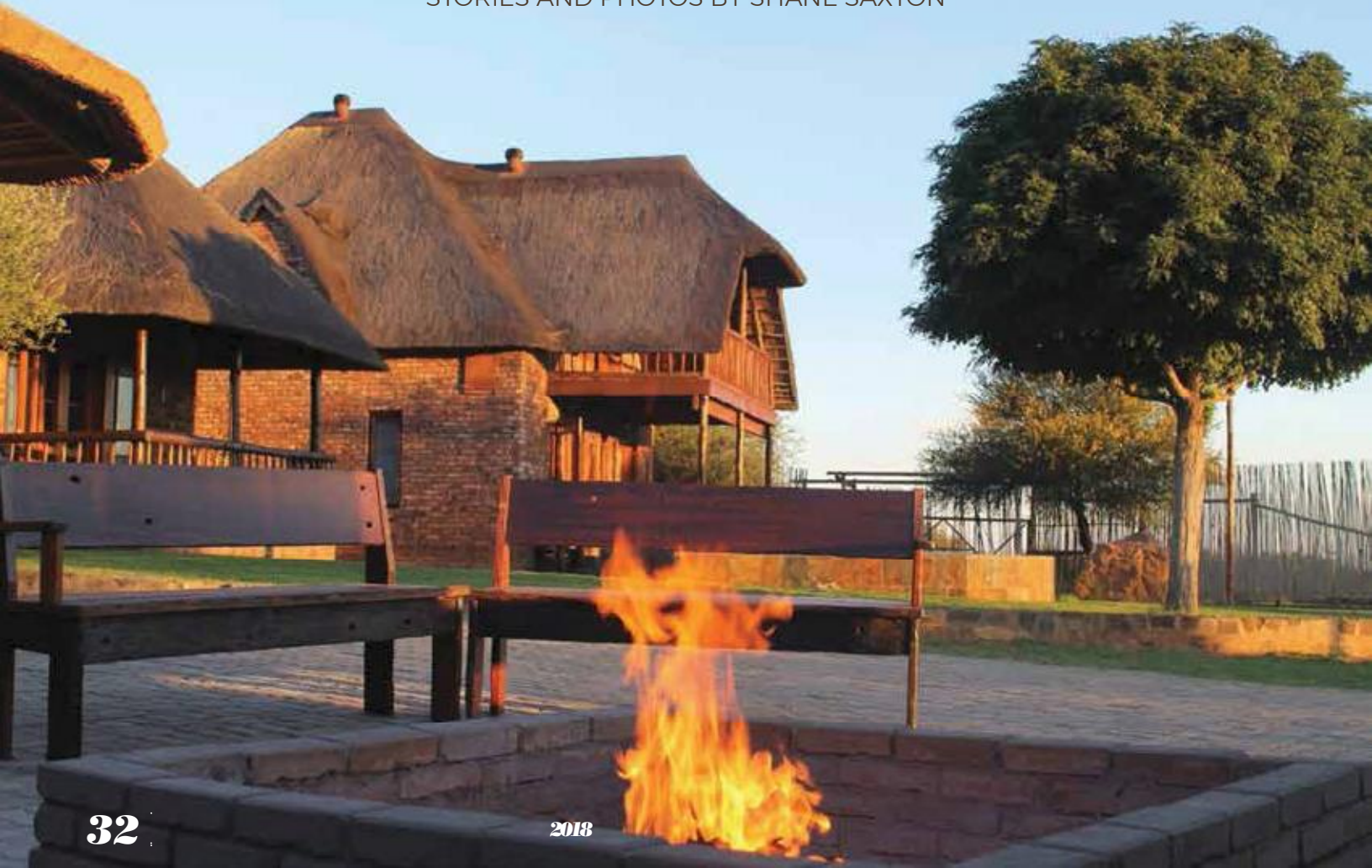


African Safari Dream Hunt Becomes Reality for Mississippi Native

STORIES AND PHOTOS BY SHANE SAXTON



As a child, many Saturday mornings began with me starting the day watching hunting shows on ESPN. There was no Outdoor Channel where outdoor pursuits could be seen at any time you like, as it is today. I would watch countless hunts and, in my mind, put myself there as if I were on the hunt with them. From time to time I would see some African hunts. The intensity of simply watching fueled my passion and desire for the game I dreamed of pursuing. I have always felt somewhat drawn to the mysterious African animals. Maybe it's because over the years I've hunted much of what the states had to offer, or maybe because I'm always looking for the next challenge, and maybe I'm somewhat of a thrill chaser and the thought of hunting animals that could potentially be hunting me added an element of danger and suspense that peaked my curiosity. Whatever the reason, I dreamed of seeing myself there one day, part of my "bucket list" you could say. Sadly though, I often kept the dream just as it was, a dream, because in my mind I felt I could never be able to afford that adventure. Africa seemed to be only for the elite. Fast forward to December of 2016, little did I know, my dream was about to become a reality.

A close childhood friend, Winston White, who had shared the dream of hunting Africa as well, communicated to me that he had been in touch with a friend by the name of Robert Leavines, Host of Archery Quest TV, who was currently booking his third trip to Africa with African Bowhunting Safaris (ABS). Robert

spoke very highly of ABS. Robert inquired of Winston if he knew anyone who may be interested in going hunting in Africa. Immediately Winston gave me a call and our minds went into planning mode on how we could make this happen. This was exactly what we'd been looking for, someone that had a good experience with a outfitter in Africa. We didn't wanna travel across the world with just anyone. Surprisingly, as we began looking into the prices of the hunting packages offered by African Bowhunting Safaris, many were very reasonable, despite my earliest mindset of a certain elite-priced adventure. ABS was very helpful in

in the southern states. Our winter, what little we have of one, is in the December-February range. However, in Africa, their "cool season" begins around the month of June and extends through September. This is also their dry season. So animals are easier to pattern on water holes much like hunting food plots here at home. Our hunt was booked on a dark moon as they call it, much like how our animals (deer for instance) move better in the daylight hours when less moon is visible at night, the same occurs in Africa. To say we were excited was an understatement.

As June finally arrived, we boarded our plane ready to tackle the first



Shane Saxton

the booking and the over all planning of the trip.

Shortly thereafter, Winston and I, along with a small group of friends, made our deposit and the trip was booked. We all had a similar hit list of animals which was all plains game. The countdown to the dream hunt was underway, and I couldn't have been more excited. African hunts are much different from hunting here

success of the trip, the long 18 hours of flying and so our journey began. After the long flight our excitement was at an all time high. We were meet by the owners of ABS, Riaan Van Der Merwe and Jakes Van Der Merwe, who personally escorted us from our departure and drove us to the lodge. The lodge and accommodations exceeded our expectations greatly and the hospitality was top notch. After a



Winston White

brief tour of lodge and getting settled we had a short night's sleep. We began to prepare for our first hunt. It was encouraging to know that the property we would be hunting on had been bowhunting only for the past 19 years.

After unpacking we began getting prepared for our first hunt. We were each assigned a Professional Hunter (PH) to help guide us in selecting the animals that needed to be taken based on maturity since we were foreigners to the species we were after. The PHs also did a great job of running the video equipment to help aid in securing our memories for many years to come. I was beyond excited sitting in the blind in Africa with a bow in my hand; a quest I never thought would take place. I was simply enjoying the sights and the smells;

well not the smells. I must mention I was caught a little off guard when I learned that burning Zebra poop in the blind was a great cover scent. Day one ended for me without a successful kill, but I saw a lot of different species of animals just nothing in range. But some of the others had success. For dinner I had my first African Wildebeest steak, which was great. I had always wondered what was done with the meat from the animals harvested on hunts such as this, since bringing it back into the states is virtually impossible, but was pleased to find out that no portion of the harvested animals go to waste. What isn't kept to be consumed at the lodge is donated to locals.

By day two we were much more prepared of what to expect and throughout the next few days, many

animals were taken. The hunting success was exceeding all our expectations. And as exciting as the hunts were, sitting around the camp fire at night listening to the stories and joining in with my own added to the memories that I will certainly forever cherish.

One night as the stories around the campfire were going strong, I began to ask Riaan to share some lion stories. I was dying to hear since we got in camp some of the PHs were saying how Riaan had been on over 400 successful lion hunts. Riaan told us many stories of his experiences guiding hunters in the pursuit of the King of the Jungle. Riaan told of many hunts that ended with the lion charging and him having to shoot the lion within 5 yards. One was the lion actually rolled into the client's

feet after Riaan had to shoot the lion because the client freaked out when the lion began to charge and he just laid down in distress. As the stories were told my heart would beat in excitement as I could only imagine the thrill of hunting such a creature that could at any moment during the hunt, be hunting me. After some time, I had made up my mind. I was in Africa, a place I had dreamed of going my whole life, and I wasn't going to leave without fulfilling the ultimate quest of hunting a lion! There was one small issue however; the look on Riaan's face when I told him I wanted to do it with a bow made me well aware that this was not a feat to be taken lightly. Riaan explained once a male lion realizes you are within 100 yards or so of him you become a threat, and the mighty lion isn't one to back down. He explained that he had guided on several bow hunts but

at best it's a 50/50 chance the lion will charge before you get into bow range. One wrong move could go from hunting the mighty lion to a fight for your own life as they are known to charge without hesitation. After much convincing, I was able to convince Riaan to take me. Riaan agreed but we would have to travel 8 hours to an area where lions were present because there weren't any lions in the area we were hunting.

After a long day of traveling and a sleepless night due to excitement and getting ready for the hunt, we got up and had a real nice breakfast, packed our snacks and food for the day, and headed to the blind. We arrived at our blind about thirty minutes to an hour before daylight. Riaan and I took turns walking around the blind, which was ground level, shining a light making sure the lion wasn't near. About an hour after daylight we heard

the lion waking up with a roar and sounded to be maybe a few hundred yards away. It was an eerie feeling. As the morning progressed we saw numerous animals, but the lion never showed. At dinner that night, since the next day was the last day of the hunt, we made a plan to hunt the lion in the blind that morning and if that didn't work to try a spot and stalk. By lunch, still no lion had shown. As luck would have it, another group of hunters mentioned they had seen lion tracks not far from our area. We devised a plan to start our stalk and the four of us set out. Myself, Riaan, another PH, and a tracker who led the way with Riaan and the other PH behind him with guns, and me in the back carrying the bow. We got right on the track and within 20 minutes we could tell the tracks were getting fresher. They felt confident the lion was going to be laid up due



Left to right, professional hunter Christiaan Du Plooy and Shane Sexton.



Winston White

to the encroaching heat of mid-day. The terrain was very thick, and we couldn't see far at all, maybe 100 yards in the best of spots. However, as we continued on, the tracker stopped and called us up to him as we were at the edge of a large opening, indicating to us that he felt the lion would be visible there. Sure enough, Riaan spotted the lion immediately laying in the shade under a tree about one hundred yards away. It was obvious the lion had seen us and bolted. Riaan told me that the lion wasn't very spooked, and he didn't know what we were. However, it was then that Riaan told me to be on high alert because he felt the lion would not run twice and if threatened, could very likely charge. My heart was thumping out of my

chest. After another thirty minutes of stalking, the tracker's eyes got huge and it was obvious he had spotted the lion in the thick cover just ahead of us. He was only twenty-six yards away staring directly at us. I took aim and hit the lion perfectly as he let out the loudest roar I had ever heard. At that moment all my emotions surfaced, and I couldn't control the shaking. We ran after the lion and put another arrow in him just to be sure there was no chance at being attacked by a wounded animal of this caliber. The excitement was like nothing I could have ever dreamed of, special to say the least. I took a knee and thanked God for the opportunity to accomplish something I had dreamed about as a child.

I cannot thank Riaan, Jakes, and their amazing staff enough for providing us with an adventure of a lifetime. I made many new lifetime friends across the world and I will certainly be making another trip to Africa in the near future! With 6 hunters in camp we harvested 27 animals, many were book animals, all with a bow. If anyone would like to have the experience of a lifetime and go on bow hunting trip to Africa I can assure you that you will not be disappointed if you go with African Bowhunting Safaris. If you would like any info please contact me, Shane Saxton, at saxton21@yahoo.com or 601-540-5040.

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