

Guidelines and information for self guided hunts in the

Zambezi Valley

Background

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management in Zimbabwe holds an auction every year in the middle of March and offer a number of hunting camps in the Nyakasanga and Sapi safari areas. The hunting areas are true big game concessions with no fences, human inhabitation and are all adjacent to Game Reserves. The hunting camps can be purchased by anyone however non-resident hunters are required to pay in foreign currency. It is not a requirement that participating hunters be accompanied by a Professional Hunter. The dates for the camps are fixed and thus not flexible, however in the event of two camps being purchased the two camps could be combined upon prior arrangement with the warden in Marongora. The auction fee includes all the costs of hunting the animals on the bag with the exception of an additional fee should the hunting party exceed a certain number of people (this number includes trackers, skimmers, camp staff etc.). The animals listed on the hunting license can not be changed, wounded and un-shot animals are counted against the license once the hunt is completed i.e. there are no refunds for un-shot animals. Additional animals can be purchased at the auction to increase the bag if required. A list of the camps, bags and additional animals will be forwarded to interested parties. The list should be considered for reference purposes only as there may be slight changes from one year to the next in respect of dates and bags, new catalogues are issued on an annual basis prior to the auction.



Personal introduction to AR members.

My name is Andrew Cottam and; I grew up in Zimbabwe having completed my schooling in Bulawayo I later moved to Harare where I have a business which has been established for over 15 years. I have been reading the posts on AR for over six years however my active participation on the site has been very limited. Apart from the interest factor, the main reason for reading the posts is to keep up to date on the activities of many of the PH's who I grew up with or know personally - these guys are impossible to get hold off during the season and one tends to loose contact. The hunting reports on AR are always a good read and it is great to see how the various guys are doing.

My own hunting career spans many years and I have spent literally hundreds if not thousands of days in the bush, this is pretty much the same for most of the people who grew up in Zimbabwe and had an interest in hunting. My first few visits to the valley were on Dandawa Impala Camps which were totally enjoyable, however, the lure of bigger game was always a major factor. I have hunted in most of the big game concessions in Zimbabwe.

The non-availability of ammunition and components in the country was a problem that I solved by reloading and designing my own bullets which I had turned on a CNC lathe - a very satisfying pastime, especially when the fruits are one's labour are put to test in a place such as the Zambezi Valley.

Hunting Camps / Accommodation / Food.

The hunting camps are all based on the Zambezi River. D camp (Mangwende Camp) in Nyakasanga and H camp (Kamote Camp) in Sapi are located adjacent to the National Parks Scouts area base and have basic brick shelters with flushing toilets and showers. The rest of the camps have virtually no useable structures other than water tanks and a possibly a thatch lapa. The manner in which the camp will be set up will essentially be on the basis of a traditional fly camp where accommodation is in canvas tents. The camp itself is basic but comfortable, with all the necessary equipment to ensure a pleasant stay. Ablutions take the form of bush shower which is usually erected overlooking the river and "boasts" hot running water. The food is mostly purchased and taken with us; obviously some of the meat which was hunted is utilized as required. The drinks are always cold as we take in the deepfreeze which is filled with blocks of ice. Drinking water is in the form of commercially produced bottled water. Undoubtedly the fly camp concept provides the most authentic bush experience with the tents and the campfire overlooking the river.



Mutoro Camp Nyakasanga area on the Zambezi River, this is a typical camp setting under large trees overlooking the river.

Nyakasanga Safari Area

The Nyakasanga area is bordered by the Harare / Chirundu main road on the west, the Zambezi on the north, the Ruckomechi River on the east and the base of the Zambezi valley escarpment in the south. It is an enormous area whereby it is not impossible to 40 or 50 km from camp in a straight line by GPS and still be comfortably within the concession. The terrain is mostly undulating and the vegetation is varied from thick riverine jesse, open floodplains dotted with palms to open woodlands. The game species most commonly seen are Impala, Waterbuck, Warthog and Zebra. Kudu cows are seen fairly often as are Eland, Kudu bulls can be very challenging if not taken as a target of opportunity. Buffalo and Elephant are common although the former, apart from the odd dagga boy, are not often seen unless specifically pursued. Buffalo hunting is considered easier later in the season as the larger herds tend to break up into a larger number of smaller herds resulting in increased spoor sightings. Lion, leopard and wild dogs will usually be seen during the period of the hunt and Hyena will undoubtedly make their presence known around the camp. The Hippo also frequent the pans in the early part of the season. The concession has a good network of roads and offers a quality hunting experience.



A road through the jesse bush

The Sapi hunting concession is bordered on the west by Mana pools, on the north by the Zambezi, the east by the Chewore controlled hunting area and on the south by the main road between Chewore and Mana pools. Sapi is definitely more rugged than Nyakasanga and the vegetation is mostly thick jesse which gives way to open woodlands towards the south of the concession. On the Chewore side of the concession the land becomes very rocky with a number of small hills, other than that the land is fairly flat. The game species most often seen are Impala (mainly on the floodplains and open woodlands) Kudu cows and Elephant. Buffalo are plentiful; however they are not often seen whilst traveling around. Lion, Leopard and Wild Dogs may be encountered and Hyena will also make their presence known. The hunting conditions in Sapi are more challenging than Nyakasanga as a result of the road network which is limited and the extent of jesse bush. The fishing in Sapi however deserves special mention as, later in the season; one can expect to catch a number of reasonably sized tiger fish with relative ease.

Sapi Safari Area

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A nice Sapi Tigerfish

Modus Operandi

The hunting licenses are collected in good time and the equipment, provisions etc. for the duration of the hunt packed on the vehicles. The hunters will be picked up from the airport in Harare and on the day before the hunt commences we will head off in a northerly direction for the Zambezi Valley. The trip is about 400km / 250 miles, so an early start (3.00am) is advisable. We normally arrive in Marongora (National Parks Office) at about 9.00am, here we will present the hunting licenses and pick up the National Parks scout who is designated to our camp.

The trip to the camp from Marongora will take approximately 1-1.5 hours (Nyakasanga) and 4-5 hours (Sapi). Upon arrival at the designated camp site we set up camp, the staff usually set up their own camp a fair distance from the main camp. The setting up of camp and launching of the boat is usually completed by mid afternoon after which we locate a suitable place to check the zero on the rifles. Assuming that everyone is happy with the rifles we take a drive and collect some firewood, returning to camp for a couple of beers, maybe a trip on the river, dinner and a good nights rest.



Pulling the 3 toner out of a riverbed on the way to camp in Sapi Safari Area

The following day (1st day of hunting) we will be up early (4.00am) have a cup of coffee some breakfast cereal and then be on our way before first light. The basic concept is to drive around on the bush roads until we find suitably fresh tracks to follow. Upon finding suitable tracks we will follow them until such time as we locate the animals or decide to call off the hunt for whatever reason. In most cases it is unlikely that we will return to camp before dark. The hunters usually rotate so that everybody gets a fair turn (unless a specific target of opportunity presents itself) Obviously if we are not successful we will review our strategy and make the necessary modifications for the following days hunt. Within reason the hunting party will primarily focus on the major species i.e. buffalo, once these are in the salt the camp will relax somewhat and other activities such as fishing can be integrated into the days activities. The hunting methods will also change as the plains game will be hunted in known areas on a more relaxed basis i.e. we may come back to the camp for lunch and go to another area in the afternoon.



Looking for spoor at a waterhole

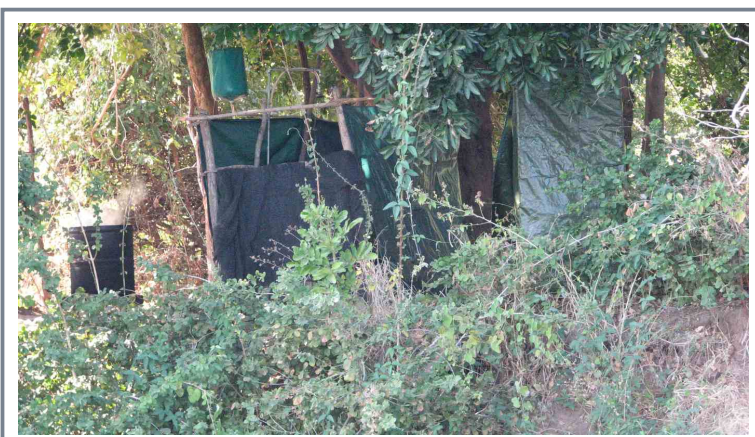
The "skinning shed"



We normally have a tracker, a cook and a couple of general hands in camp. The National Parks Scout (although not his duty to do so) usually assists in the whole process and becomes an important part of the team. Accordingly we integrate him into the whole process and cater for him during our planning for the trip. The tracker usually does most of the skinning if the bag is small however should the bag be fairly large we normally employ additional staff to undertake this task. If a specific cape is required for a mount we will usually oversee the skinning process ourselves.

Equipment

I have accumulated all the equipment required to set up a very efficient hunting camp. The hunting vehicle is a Landrover 300Tdi which is in perfect running order and is fully kitted out with winches (front and rear) water tanks, long range fuel tanks spare wheels, recovery equipment fridge etc, we also take in a second vehicle which has full 4x4 capabilities. The equipment is transported in a 3 tone truck onto which we pack a deepfreeze a small generator (only used during the day when we are out of camp). We also have a smaller 12 volt freezer which is powered by solar panels. Each person will have a tent with a stretcher, foam mattresses, table, groundsheet and lights. There is a central kitchen tent in which we store all the food, drinks and cooking equipment. Depending on the location of the camp we take in either a 17ft boat with a 115hp Mariner engine (Nyakasanga Camps) or a 13ft boat with a 20hp Mercury (Sapi Camps). Lights in the camp are provided by LED lanterns (in the tents) and low wattage 220v bulbs powered through an inverter and a 12v / 105 amp/hr battery. The batteries are charged from time to time by the generator.



The shower and toilet, rustic but effective, the water is warmed in the drum on the left and poured into the green bucket which is raised on pulleys to provide the necessary pressure. The toilet is in the tent on the right. This photograph was taken from the river, as can be imagined the view whilst showering is very pleasant.

I have a number of rifles some of which can be borrowed if the hunters don't wish to bring their own, these are briefly described below:

- I use a .450 Ackley based on a Brno ZKK 602 action with a ghost ring sight. I have designed and manufactured my own 450gr copper monolithic bullets which have a large flat meplat; these rounds operate at about 2350 fps and have proved to be deadly on buffalo. I prefer solids because without the backup of a PH, my rifle is the one which is most likely going to be brought into action if something nasty pops out of the bush.
- Brno .375 H&H with a Leopold 1-4 x 20 scope. The bullets currently loaded are 300 gr Rhino softs and produce a velocity of 2400 fps. This rifle is nearly brand new and acts as another option when the shot opportunity does not favor the .450 Ackley – it is also available for loan if required.
- Brno ZG47 (I think) in 7mm Mauser x 2 - these rifles are our Impala rifles and are loaded with 170 gr Rhino bullets to a velocity of 2350 fps, they are very accurate working rifles, one has a Leopold 2.5 x 20 fixed power scope and the other is in the process of being converted to operate with a ghost ring sight.
- Browning Citori O/U shotgun for birds.
- Brno .22 with Leopold 2-7 x 33 Rimfire scope.



Dandawa Impala Camp (note solar panel on thatch "kitchen")



Typical fly camp setup with the tents forming a semi circle around the camp fire. One of the tents would become the kitchen where all the cooking equipment, foodstuff, drinks etc are stored.

What do I get out of this and why am I doing it ?

Financially I will get nothing; I earn my income distributing automotive paint. The concept is to spread the cost of the hunt over a few contributors thus making it more affordable for everyone. In addition it will give me the opportunity to continue visiting a place that I thoroughly enjoy. In the event that I want to hunt a few of my own animals I will purchase these as additional animals which will be added onto the basic bag, alternatively if a suitable understanding is agreed upon the cost of the original bag can be shared as will the bag. The hunting experience will also be maximized as for example if two buffalo are on license the time taken hunting the buffalo will obviously be greater than that taken to hunt a single animal.

What can a visiting hunter expect ?

I can't say how the experience would compare to that offered by a professional outfit and don't really think it is fair to make a direct comparison. The hunter in this case is essentially on a self guided hunt and will be responsible for his own decisions. I believe that this component of the hunt yields a far greater sense of satisfaction. I also believe that ones shooting improves significantly when professional backup is not guaranteed. Ultimately the person squeezing the trigger on a self guided hunt calls the shots and takes all the responsibility, accolades or blame for the results. Obviously the hunting team will offer as much support as possible in every aspect of the hunt.

I believe that the visiting hunter will have the time of their life and ultimately leave with nothing but fantastic memories of a classic hunt, conducted under ethical standards in a beautiful and wild part of the world with good friends. In the event that other attractions want to be visited e.g. Victoria Falls or a houseboat trip on Kariba we can put something together to facilitate such wishes..... Ultimately the very nature of the arrangement will result in a personal touch from beginning to end that no professional outfit will be able to match.

Trophies

The license which is issued enables the hunter to export any trophies taken on the hunt. The hunter would however be responsible for the processing of the relevant export documentation unless this was handed over to a taxidermist and the necessary arrangements for payment etc. made accordingly. Wherever possible we will follow up and assist in the process

Safety issues related to hunting in Zimbabwe

During their stay the visiting hunter will at all times be under the wing of the "host". We will pick you up from the airport, drive you around, drop you off and assist wherever possible. We have lived here all our lives and know how everything works. Consequently the level of personal security will be very high. Issues related to medical assistance if required can be addressed however there is always a risk that something could happen and as the areas are very remote the hunter needs to be aware of this situation. Limited cell phone coverage is available in certain areas along the river in Nyakasanga (mostly from the Zambian side) however no coverage is available in Sapi. We travel at all times with a comprehensive first aid kit and when tracking into the bush an emergency kit is taken.

The question of tips.

The auction price is the total price of the hunt i.e. no tips are applicable. The standard practice is however to reward the "employees" who have gone out of their way to make the trip more pleasurable and successful. In this regard the tracker, cook and general workers are considered. A fair quantity of meat is usually accumulated during the hunt and a reasonable portion of this goes towards the people who have worked in the camp – the value of this benefit should not be underestimated.

Payment for auction fees / bags.

As with any auction the payment is due immediately after conclusion of the sale, whilst the hunt will only take place a few months later. The hunter is more than welcome to attend the auction; however, this is probably not practical. The amount of the winning bid is displayed on the license and in this respect can be easily confirmed. The hunter must accept that an element of trust is applicable – I am however sure that a suitable arrangement will be made in good time prior to the auction which serves to protect the interests of all the parties concerned. The normal situation is that fee is payable to register as a representative on behalf of a foreign hunter, a deposit is also payable in order to bid, 20% of the bid price is payable immediately after the sale, thereafter the balance is payable within 7 days. There are 42 hunts available in Nyakasanga and 31 in Sapi. The bags differ from camp to camp over the duration of the season, however, an example of the typical bag would be the one detailed below which is at "D" Camp in Nyakasanga and is as follows:

Buffalo Male x 1
Buffalo Female x 1
Hippopotamus Male x 1
Warthog Male x 1
Hyena Spotted x 1
Impala Male x 4
Impala Female x 4
Duiker Male x 1
Grysbok x 1
Baboon x 4
Serval x 1
Guinea Fowl x 3
Francolin x 4
Doves / Pigeons x 3

In addition to the abovementioned bag additional animals are auctioned individually. The number of each species available may differ from time to time however the list of additional animals would be similar to that below:

Trophy Elephant Bull x 7	Impala Male x 6 lots of 5
Elephant Tuskless x 5	Impala Female x 5 lots of 5
Lion Male x 1	Bushbuck Male x 3
Leopard Male x 8	Warthog Male x 5
Crocodile Male x 4	Hyena x 6
Buffalo Male x 8	Serval x 5
Buffalo Female x 2	Jackal x 2 lots of 2
Eland Male x 2	Baboon x 1 lot of 2
Hippopotamus Male x 3	Guinea Fowl x 2 lots of 10
Kudu Female x 3	Francolin x 3 lots of 10
Zebra Male x 6	Doves / Pigeons x 2 lots of 10
Waterbuck Male x 4	Sandgrouse x 2 lots of 10

Running costs

The cost of food, wages, fuel etc. is covered by the contribution as detailed in the costing comparison as well as our own local contributions. The most expensive component of the hunt is fuel ± 600 ltrs (± 150 gallons) followed by drinks and food. The nature of the roads and the requirement for reliable vehicles also means that expenditure on the maintenance of the vehicles and equipment from one year to the next is relatively high for example a mopani stump through a tyre immediately terminates the useful life of the tyre even if it is brand new.

Cost Comparison

The schedule below provides a comparison from a cost point of view between an auction hunt and undertaking the same through hunt with a professional outfit. The obvious difference is that the daily rate is not applicable, this saving however is offset to a certain extent by the higher cost per animal. In the event that two hunters are sharing the bag the cost becomes fairly reasonable as illustrated. However should a hunter wish to shoot a large bag i.e. by purchasing a number of additional animals the pendulum could swing back in favor of hunting with a professional outfit. There is a limit to the number of hunters per camp, therefore additional camps would have to be purchased to accommodate a greater number of hunters.

Hunting costs comparison (Amounts in US\$)

Hunting with a professional outfit - Duration of hunt 14 days

	1 Hunter	2 Hunters (splitting bag as per auction hunt below)		Total
Daily rate 10 days @ US\$ 950 / day (2 on1 rate)	13300	13300	13300	26600
Tips at 10% of daily rate	1330	1330	1330	2660
Transfers and pre hunt accomodation costs	500	250	250	500
Government levy 2% of trophy fees and daily rate	456	349	373	722
Trophy fees	9475	4125	5350	9475
Buffalo Male x 1	2750	2750		2750
Buffalo Female x 1	1000		1000	1000
Hippopotomus Male x 1	3000		3000	3000
Warthog Male x 1	400	400		400
Hyena Spotted x 1	350		350	350
Impala Male x 4	1000	500	500	1000
Impala Female x 4	400	200	200	400
Duiker Male x 1	175	175		175
Grysbok x 1	200		200	200
Baboon x 4	200	100	100	200
Serval x 1 (not likely to be hunted)				
Guinea Fowl x 3				
Francolin x 4				
Doves/Pigeons x 3				
Total cost of hunt	25061	19354	20603	39957

Hunting on an auction self guided hunt - Duration of hunt 14 days

	1 Hunter	2 Hunters (splitting bag)		Total
Daily rate	0	0	0	0
Tips (to staff if desired)	300	150	150	300
Contribution to costs	1500	1000	1000	2000
Buyers Premium on auction fee 1%	140	61	79	140
Estimated auction fee	14000	6095	7905	14000
Buffalo Male x 1		Buffalo male		
Buffalo Female x 1		Buffalo female		
Hippopotomus Male x 1		Hippoptamus		
Warthog Male x 1		Warthog		
Hyena Spotted x 1		Hyena		
Impala Male x 4		2 x Impala (m)	2 x Impala (m)	
Impala Female x 4		2 x Impala (f)	2 x Impala (f)	
Duiker Male x 1		Duiker		
Grysbok x 1		Grysbok		
Baboon x 4		2 x Baboon	2 x Baboon	
Serval x 1 (not likely to be hunted)				
Guinea Fowl x 3				
Francolin x 4				
Doves/Pigeons x 3				
Total cost of hunt	15940	7306	9134	16440
Value of savings				
Total value of savings	9121	12048	11469	23517
% value of savings	36%	62%	56%	59%

Notes:

The information that I have provided has been sourced from personal experience, websites and the AR forums. The auction price may differ significantly from that given on account of the fact that it is an auction. Prices at the auction also vary depending on the date of the hunt eg. early season hunts are usually cheaper than those in the middle and towards the end of the season. It is up to the hunter to decide on the maximum bid that he or she is willing to pay for a given hunt. The bottom line is that significant savings can be made if two hunters share a bag, However as with everything in life compromises must be made - In the event that the hunter feels more comfortable hunting with an established operator, having the services of a dedicated PH and paying accordingly then the self guided hunt is not an option. The hunter must also be aware that the dates are not flexible and in the event that for any reason he / she is unable to attend the hunt that no refunds will be available from National Parks, The hunt may however be re-sold but this may not prove to be a practical option.

How many hunts are we looking at doing on this basis ?

We would look at doing one hunt per year. Obviously we have other work commitments and do not want to turn the whole concept into a chore. Ideally we will meet some people who would want to come back again thus making things a lot easier.

Photo Gallery

Here are a few photos of some of the Buffalo that I have hunted.



41" Dagga boy taken in Nyakasanga - note the massive body size. The shot was well placed on the shoulder and the bull ran about 15m before going down. The flat nosed solids from the .450 Ackley hit very hard.



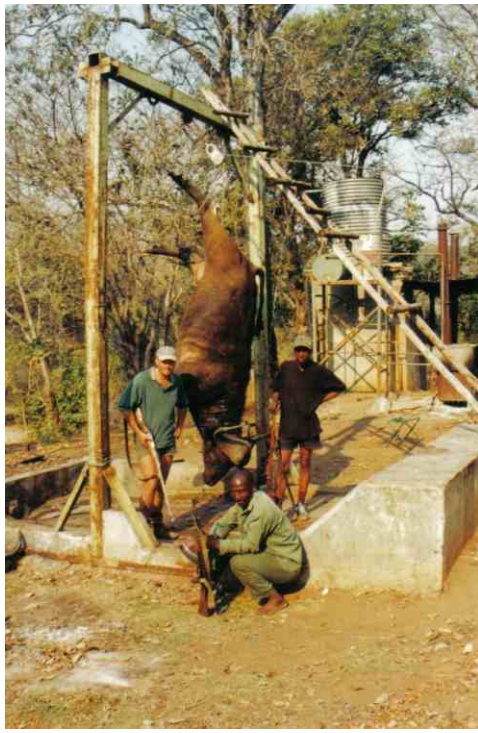
43" Charara bull – an incredible hunt which is a story by itself. The bullet was a 500gr Woodleigh Soft Nose which impacted in the centre of the chest - the bull dropped in its tracks. It is said that different animals exhibit different character traits – this one definitely had attitude and would have been a major problem had it been wounded. Unfortunately the photo was taken with a first generation digital camera hence the lack of clarity.



34" Sapi Dagga boy - not necessarily the best trophy but it did have a solid boss and a lot rear curl however the whole experience resulted in a really tough and memorable hunt. The shot was in the chest offhand at about 30m; the bullet penetrated the entire body and exited near the tail. The animal probably went no more than 10m before going down.



My first buffalo - 40" out of Nyakasanga Camp in Makuti. The shot was well placed and the bull only went about 20m before going down, this is the only buffalo that I have taken which let out a death bellow. The bullet was a 480gr copper monolithic loaded to a velocity of 2150 fps



Doma Safari Area – we had a good bag which included a buffalo bull, buffalo cow, zebra, sable and kudu. The area is very picturesque but incredibly tough and one needs to be very fit. I was amazed at the manner in which the buffalo were able to operate up and down the mountains.



In my opinion this buffalo would be the Ultimate trophy. It is always nice to get a wide spread but the "character" of this old boy special.

My advice regarding hunting in the valley.

1. Try to be as fit as possible, sometimes things can become quite physical and being in good shape will add to the overall enjoyment of the whole experience.
2. Make 100% sure that your shoes are comfortable, well worn in and that you are able to walk long distances over uneven terrain without discomfort or blisters. The shoes should also be free of external fabric in which spear grass can get embedded and have a sole which is impervious to thorns. Gaiters (I think that's what they are called) to prevent seeds and sand getting too intimate with your socks and into your shoes are also essential.
3. Learn to shoot quickly. Hunters who fiddle around invariably end up empty handed. I will stick my neck out and say that almost every animal from an adult male warthog up has a vital area which will be covered by an A5 size of paper (half the size of an A4), a hunter who can consistently and quickly hit a target of this size at any distance up to 75 yards will be more successful than the one who takes too much time wanting to put his bullets into a target the size of a small matchbox. (Hunting of cats over bait is an obvious exception.)
4. Be aware of the position of the vitals at any angle of all the game species which are on the license.
5. Drink plenty of water in the morning and have a bit of breakfast before you go out. This will give you energy and slow down dehydration.
6. Travel light – take the absolute minimum of equipment / clothing when following tracks or walking in the bush. There is nothing worse than feeling cluttered with "stuff" when trying to leopard crawl through the bush to get into a good shooting position.
7. Be aware of your position in the bush. Watch the sun, remember the direction that you have walked and use a reference point as a guideline e.g. the road, in this way your chances of losing your way will be minimized.
8. Most importantly – enjoy the whole experience, on a recent hunt in Sapi I had determined that I only wanted to hunt and track a Dagga boy and not a herd bull. On the first day I saw what was possibly the biggest buffalo that I have ever seen whilst hunting – I was sorely tempted as the shot was easily available however; I stuck to my decision and let it go. I ended up shooting a 34" hard bossed dagga boy on the second last day but enjoyed a further 10 days of hard hunting which would have not been the case had I taken that shot on the first day.

Summary

If there is anyone out there who is interested in joining us on a hunt in the valley, send me an e-mail and let's get the ball rolling. If you are interested and want know a bit more please let me know. I don't know what the response to this "offer" will be like but as previously mentioned our capacity is very limited so I apologise in advance if there are interested hunters out there who we won't be able to accommodate.

Andrew Cottam

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