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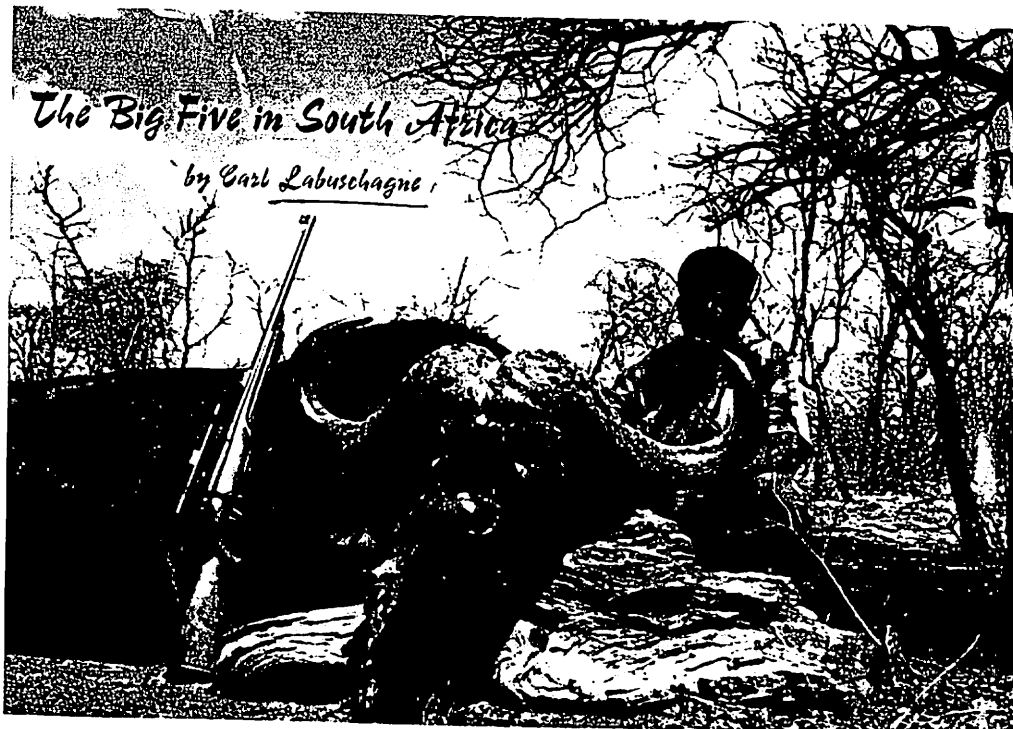
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There was a time, more than a hundred years ago, when South Africa used to be one of the greatest hunting paradises in the world. A time about which one old Boer hunter wrote, saying that he had ridden a day's hard journey through a succession of flats that were covered with great herds of springbuck which never ended from horizon to horizon.

A time when the enormous herds of plains game would trek right through small country towns in such mind-benumbing numbers that any sheep caught up in their midst, were swept away, never to be seen again. We can scarcely imagine the years when the red soils of southern Africa still reverberated to the thunder of annual animal migrations that left the sky dark with tons of dust for days. Those were the days when South Africa hunters like the Portuguese João Albasini had a virtual army of 100 men and 200 porters hunting ivory for him. When waggons slowly came rolling in to the Ivory capitals of Grahamstown, Lydenburg and Schoemansdal, from the surrounding wilderness, groaning with great loads of hides, horns, pelts and of course, many tons of enormous elephant tusks.

Of course, as the great herds receded, man had to follow the great bests of Africa ever further into the wilderness regions of the Dark Continent. But strangely, enough, South Africa has always proven to have been a haven of stability for hunters and later also for wildlife. It is also strange to think that



despite the fact that South Africa is the most developed country in Africa, its quality of hunting still ranks in many ways, as among the best. As the rest of Africa erupts into turmoil, more and more people are beginning to ask once more: "Just what does South Africa have to offer in the way of the Big Five today?"

The answer is rather simple. Today South Africa alone remains as the only country where you can still hunt all five members

of the big five – elephant, lion, leopard, rhino and buffalo – in one country. This can typically be done on either a single safari of 21 – 30 days, or on different safaris at different times. There does not seem any likelihood that this should change in the near future. Hunting in South Africa is also still about 90% on privately owned game areas, which cuts out a lot of unpleasant bureaucracy. And these areas are still growing at a phenomenal rate as the safari industry continues to

expand. One of the things that most visitors rate very highly compared to other African states, is the relative political stability in the country. But even then, most people realize that South Africa is still just another African country that can change overnight – as we have seen in most other African states so far. For example, who would have predicted the Zimbabwe debacle, only a few months ago? Today, no African country has long term stability anymore as South Africa.

Hunting Individual Species

Elephant – Elephant are still almost exclusively hunted in the Eastern Transvaal lowveld, next to the famous Kruger National Park. Kruger Park has undoubtedly the most and best trophy elephant bulls on the African continent today. Although most of the magnificent bulls are collared and monitored, the hunter can usually expect a bull in the 50 – 70 lb class, which in today's terms is very satisfying. The problem is just that elephant hunting in South Africa is very limited as compared to Zimbabwe. Very few elephant hunting permits are available each year, and since these permits are in very high demand, they are usually auctioned off and booked up to a year in advance. So South Africa offers good elephant hunting, but not in great numbers.

Buffalo – In the past buffalo was

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almost exclusively available in the Eastern Transvaal lowveld but due to rapid breeding of disease free buffalo by the game ranching industry, there are now sizeable populations in many game ranches and reserves. Trophy quality compares with anywhere in Africa, although numbers are still not comparable to that which may be found in countries such as Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Zambia. Trophy fees

for South African buffalo are steep, but then the daily rates are very low compared to the rest of Africa. One good point is that the quality of safari accommodation is generally much better than in many other government concession areas in the rest of Africa. This is something which adds value to any hunt, and the more so when a hunter is bringing a family along. On the whole, though South Africa

K.H. Ritterbusch

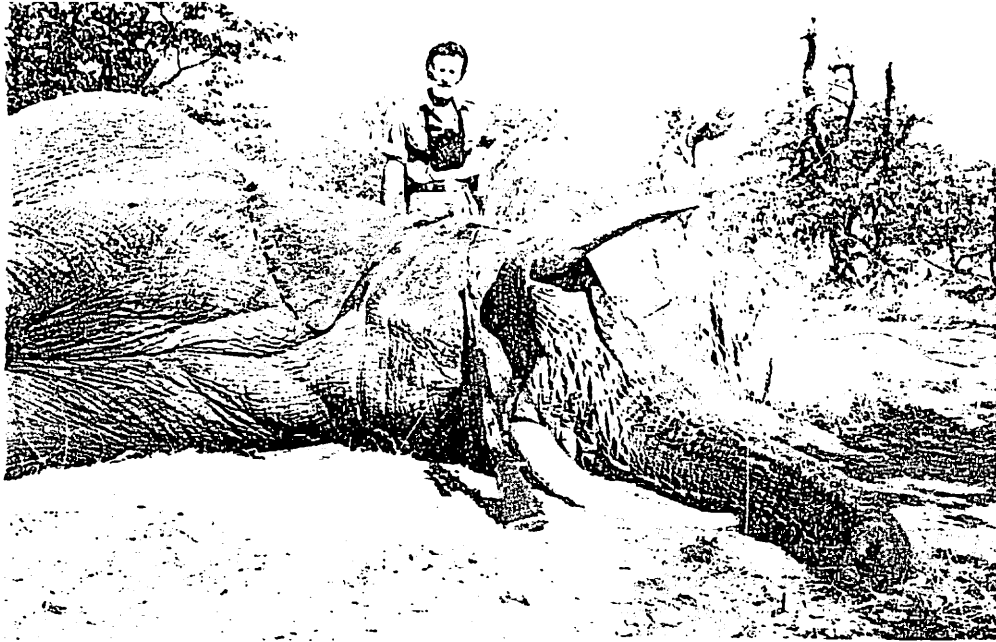
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is price-wise about on a par with the rest of Africa when you total the trophy fees and daily rates.

Lion – Much has been made by the liberal media of the world on the so-called "canned lion hunts," and it does seem to have sent ripples of uncertainty throughout the sporting world. Yet, the "canned lion" issue seems to be yet another one of those scares which has been blown completely out of proportion. Mostly so by sentimentalists that don't mind damaging a generally very sound industry in their own pursuit of sensation and for the creation of highly profitable media controversy. It stands to reason that in the few instances where any kind of abuse or unethical hunting ever does happen, it should be stamped out immediately, in South Africa the game departments have long since clamped down on any alleged canned hunting, and what little actually did take place is unlikely to ever happen again. There is one other problem though. It is of great concern to us that an organization like Safari Club International has elected to drop all lion entries from South Africa from the Safari Club record book, due to the media reports on the so-called "canned hunts." This has further added to the unfair damage which has been caused to lion hunting in South Africa. It is a great pity that such public hysteria should be allowed to influence the minds of some of the world's most notable sportsmen – to such an extent that they should throw out the baby with the dishwater as it were.

As regards lion hunting in South Africa I have found that most lions I have hunted with clients have been extremely wary and difficult to hunt. Especially the ones that have lived and survived on- or near cattle ranching areas. These are definitely much more difficult to hunt than in Tanzania or large government areas where they are not persecuted. In some cases, lions are sometimes released on large enclosed areas, where they are then hunted after an appropriate period of time – with the full knowledge of the hunter. The following is an interesting example: Some months ago, a husband and his wife

decided to book a lion for both of them. The husband booked a hunt in Tanzania where the hunt went according to the usual manner. Bait was put out, a blind constructed, and after all that, he calmly shot his lion at a short 45 yards distance from the blind. In other words, a nice enough hunt, but really nothing to it. His wife, on the other hand, wanted an "easy" lion, so they decided to book her lion hunt in South Africa instead. Her lion was on a 5,000 hectare game ranch. They would never come to any bait, so her trophy had to be tracked very hard on foot for three full days. When she finally got her shot, the lion immediately charged the wife. She managed to shoot the lion and killed it at a knee-rattling distance of only ten yards. The irony of the tale lies in what her husband afterwards thought of the adventure. Husband could not help remarking that his hunt in Tanzania could in no way compare with his wife's hunt – not for excitement, and not in terms of experience!

Furthermore, the price in South Africa was just a fraction of his hunt in Tanzania. The bottom line is: Lions decidedly do not like to be tracked for days on end. They will usually charge as the lions and leopards did in the Kalahari of Botswana in the days when it was still possible to hunt those animals there. That ought to be enough to let people understand that lion-hunting in South Africa is not "soft" in any way, and can be just as exciting, and probably more so, than in other states today.

Leopard – Although leopard occur so widespread in South Africa that they can even be found on the outskirts of some of the cities, leopards are also rather difficult to hunt, mainly due to their massive territorial range and thus endless persecution from livestock farmers. In the Northern Transvaal where most leopard hunting takes place, the permit system and allocation of permits have caused problems in the past. The system as it is now is still not ideal, so the important thing is just to make sure your outfitter has a permit and a quota for the trophy to be legally exported with the blessing of CITES. Some incredibly big leopards are still taken regularly in South Africa, but it is best to know that the hunt can be demanding at times.

Rhino – As for many years now, both white and black rhino are doing very well in South Africa. For the foreseeable future, however, only white rhino will be available for hunting. With white rhino, the numbers and quotas are still increasing yearly with some excellent trophies available. Over the last few years I have taken three that have had horns over 30 inches long, and one can probably say that not since the pioneering days, have such good quality trophies been so readily available to the sportsman. Unfortunately it is not likely that



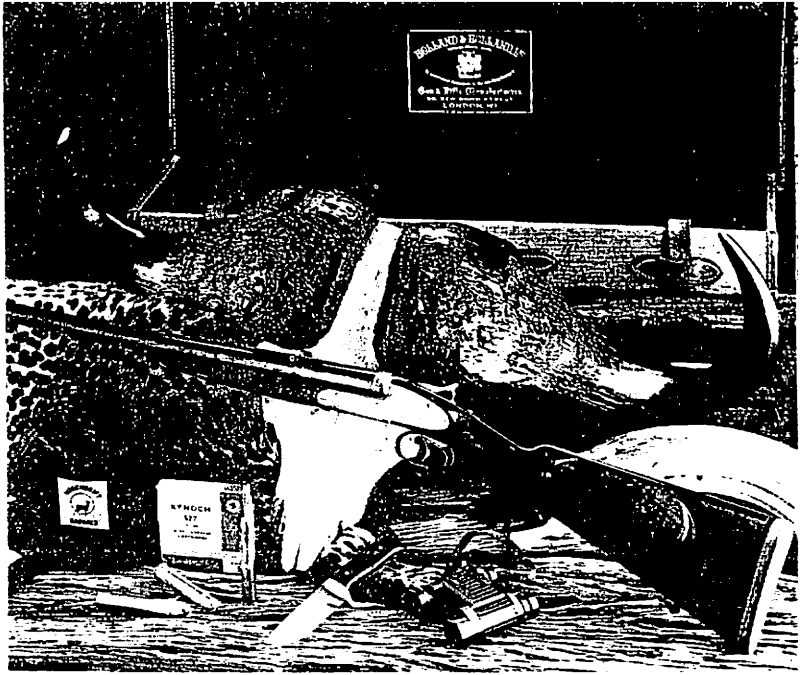
This huge leopard was taken virtually within sight of Jo'burg's skyscrapers.



rhino will be available in the rest of Africa for a number of years to come due to widespread poaching problems – and especially as a result of governments who don't have the will or the ability to cope with the problem.

At the end of it all, it should be apparent that for the hunter who is in search of a good, solid safari in a stable environment where little can possibly go wrong, South Africa is probably still your best bet by a long margin. If anti-firearm laws do not ruin it for everybody, then Big Five hunting in South Africa will probably continue strongly for a long time to come, and like good wine, will only continue to improve in quality and character. The only question left to ask, would probably be the one which is most frequently discussed and for which there are always an infinite number of answers, depending on whom you ask: – "Which one of the five would be the most dangerous to hunt?" There really is no cut-and-dry answer. In the end it all depends on a person's experience with them and which one had scared that particular hunter the most at some time. For me, I'll place the elephant at the top of the list, and the reason is simple enough: If one of the big five members decides to kill you, the elephant is just the best equipped to do it. It can track you, follow you, stomp and stick you. Or even stretch you and tear limbs off to be scattered to the winds. And when it has had enough fun, the elephant is the one who can mix any careless hunter into the ground so well that his extracted remains will probably be accompanied to the undertakers by a significant volume of African soil!

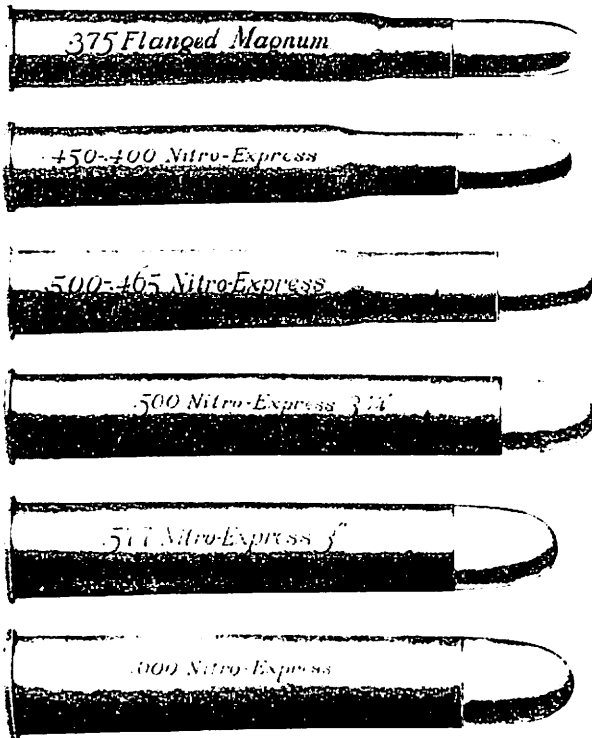
It has always been my belief that big, dangerous animals should be hunted with sufficiently powerful weapons. In the case of elephant, my choice of life insurance certainly lies in the use of big calibre rifles. It is a simple fact, proven during a lifetime of hunting, that large game such as elephant, and even buffalo, respond much better the higher you go up the ladder of rifle calibres. Of course, calibre size has to be balanced against practicality issues, such as size, weight and



the cost of your weapons. In my work as a professional hunter, I have found this balance in my two life-long favourites – the .577 nitro express, and .505 Gibbs.

Yes, these weapons are heavy to carry. Nevertheless, in my experience, the person who has to suddenly confront up to 7,000 kilograms of charging bad attitude often finds out that matters such as weight and price are very relative indeed. It is then that most of us would very willingly have preferred to have been armed with a more powerful rifle, no matter if it had to be twice the weight, and expense! Especially if this would mean the difference between stopping that angry charging buffalo bull ten paces in front of you, as opposed to two paces behind you!

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