



A Day in the Life of a Hunter

J. R. Shenk

At dusk on Tuesday evening, November 5th 2002 the clouds opened and poured torrents of rain onto the lovely hunting camp situated on the banks of the Munyati River near Battlefields. We woke up on Wednesday morning to a very light rain and very heavy cloud cover. Mr. Chipunza, the hunt director, and I had discussed the plans for the day. We planned to drive to the farm boundary, park the vehicle and make some circles into the area looking for game. Our plans were well laid but we did not consider one of the Peter Principles which says, "Whatever can go wrong will go wrong."

We set out with our tracker, Mr. Sibanda and headed for the boundary. About 30 metres from the boundary the left wheels of the Land Cruiser suddenly sank into the mud. I put the Cruiser into four wheel drive but it only sank deeper. We had left the axe and shovel at camp. Mr. Chipunza suggested that it was necessary for us to walk back to camp, hunting as we went. After about 500 metres a lone wildebeeste bull bolted from the bush. We tracked it until it crossed over into the neighbouring farm. Again we set out toward the camp. After quite some distance Sibanda and Mr. Chipunza said they saw a kudu directly ahead of us. When I looked through my scope it was cloudy from all the rain which continued to fall lightly. I could barely make out the form of a kudu. I took a chance shot but missed. A herd of about seven kudu ran off through the bush. We tracked them for a long distance until they crossed an open field and circled back in the direction of the vehicle. A while later a lone kudu cow leapt from behind an ant heap and headed for the boundary, which was nearby. It appears that the tracker became somewhat confused and stated that we were now inside the neighbouring farm where rhino are kept. When he said this, Mr. Chipunza became very upset and told him that that must never, ever happen again. I realized that we had not crossed a fence and that it was impossible that we were in the rhino area. After some discussion we all agreed that we had not trespassed.

From there we walked about 4 km back to the camp, arriving about 11:00 am I gulped down a couple of cookies and some water. After

getting the axe and shovel we pushed the tractor to start it, since it had no battery. We proceeded toward the stuck vehicle. About 2 km down the road we arrived at the river. Mr Chipunza told the driver to shift down. Instead of shifting down he shifted up into fourth gear and we bounced into the centre of the river where the driver, who was not well experienced, proceeded to stall the tractor. It was obvious that the four of us would never push it out of the river. We took the axe and shovel and headed for the Land Cruiser. After digging out some of the mud and putting branches under the wheels the Cruiser was reversed out of the mud. Wanting to proceed with the hunt we drove to the boundary to make a right turn. Just as we began turning right the left wheels again sank into the mud. We spent several hours digging and cutting branches and poles to put under the wheels. It was soon apparent that we would not extricate the vehicle. We decided that the logical thing to do was to walk back to camp and get Mr. Chipunza's Land Rover. On the way I back to camp we came across some fresh kudu spoor. Being dedicated hunters we could not miss this opportunity. We followed these for some time but gave up when we realized time was running out.

We arrived back at camp at 5:00 pm. We took the Land Rover and drove to the river to the stalled tractor. After several efforts the tractor was removed from the river and the engine started by pulling it. We left the Land Rover at the river and all piled onto the tractor and headed for the Cruiser. It was still raining lightly, which it had been doing nearly all day. As the tractor passed under the trees the exhaust shook the tree leaves and we "enjoyed" a shower under nearly every tree. It was after 6:00 pm when we I arrived at the stuck Cruiser. We hooked the tractor to the vehicle and I started the Cruiser. After a short time I noticed that everyone was huddled around the tractor. I got out of the Cruiser and to my dismay the tractor was completely silent. The driver had stalled it again. After some discussion about the way forward it was decided that three of the younger men would walk to a neighbouring homestead and borrow their tractor. The remaining three,



Mud, glorious Mud.

being wet and cold and not having matches to build a fire, huddled in the cab of the 'Cruiser. For two hours we told hunting stories and other interesting anecdotes. At 9:00 p.m. we heard voices. The three young men had returned with the sad news that the tractor we had hoped to borrow had a puncture.

Another consultation was needed. It was decided that the only thing left to do was to walk back to the Land Rover at the river. It was pitch dark. The sky was completely overcast and we did not even have the benefit of starlight. We walked in single file with the tracker in the lead. It was so dark that you could hardly identify the person walking in front of you. I soon discovered that the one walking in front of me had on a dark jacket but about six inches of a light coloured shirt was protruding below the jacket. I concentrated on that narrow band of lighter material. At times even that seemed to disappear. An occasional branch would swat you in the face or a few thorns would grab at your shins. Twice we got off the track slightly but we soon corrected our course. The tracker did an excellent job of leading us until we arrived at the Land Rover at 10:00 pm. We drove back to camp deciding to continue our efforts to remove the vehicle the following morning. Not feeling especially inclined to make a fire and cook a meal at that hour of the night I ate a piece of cold left over liver, some carrot sticks and peanut butter, some potato crisps and cookies. It was a delicious meal since it was such a long time from breakfast. I had a quick wash and turned into bed at 11:00 pm.

Early the following morning we took the Land Rover and headed for the Cruiser and tractor. After several efforts we were able to pull the tractor from the mud and start it. Both the tractor and the Land Rover were hooked to the Cruiser, which was promptly removed from the mire.

Why doesn't that Peter man die? Maybe his principles would then stop working! Hunting is such fun! We did bag an eland, an impala and a kudu on the hunt. Our freezer is full of meat. By the time the next hunt roils around we will be ready and eager to go. A day with a few problems does not deter the true hunter!



The Shangani River drift 24 hours apart with a drop of rain inbetween.