

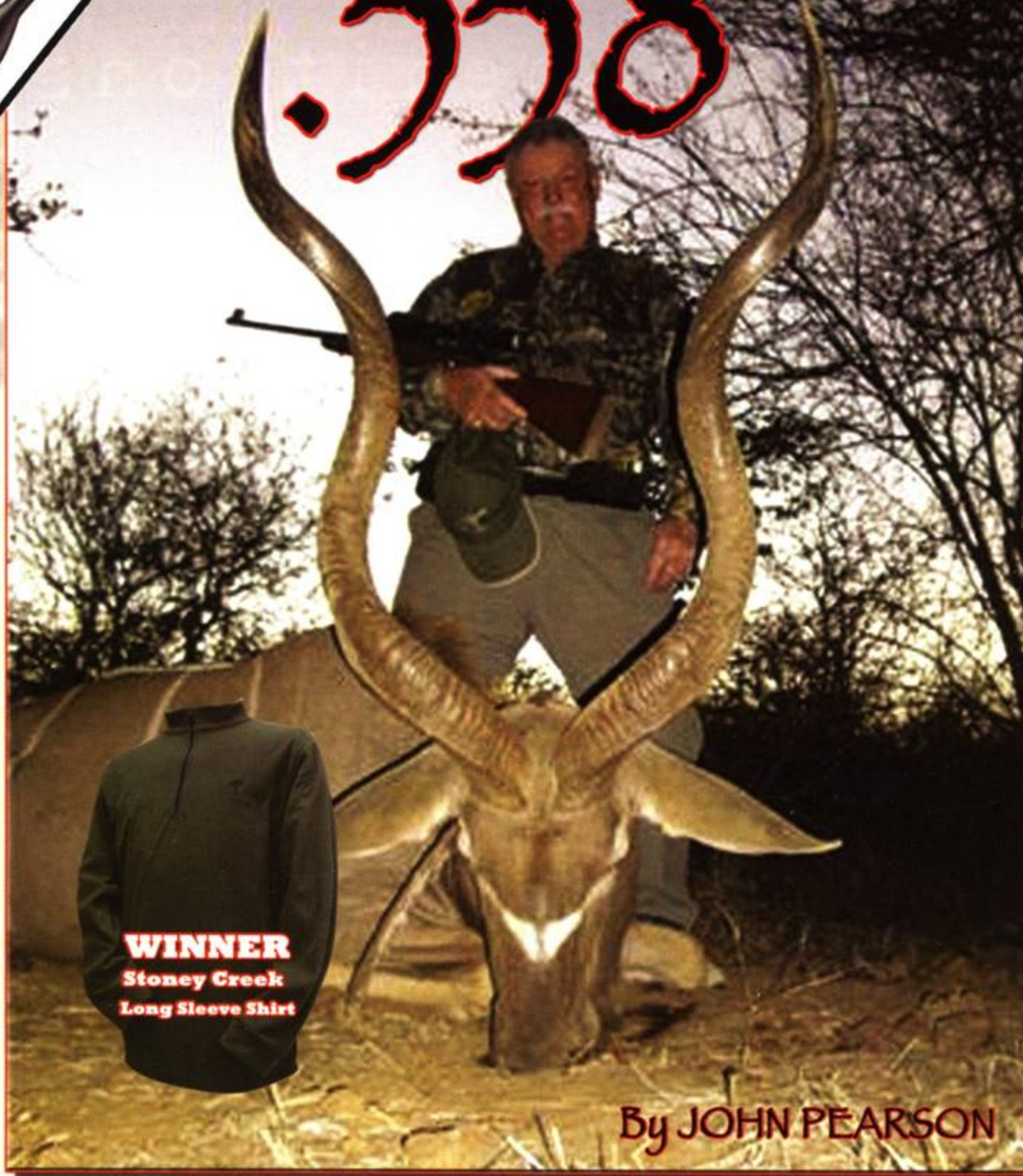
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# Death by .338



By JOHN PEARSON

My African Safari of 2008 evolved after two years of planning, sourcing and upgrading the various pieces of equipment and clothing that I would need. Watching all the available African hunting videos and taking note of what the hunters were wearing and what equipment they were carrying, then evaluating the essential items like cameras and binoculars. It was almost as much fun as the real thing.

The one item of essential equipment I needed was a suitable heavy calibre rifle. I had already considered using my old .300 Weatherby and when loaded with 180 or 200 grain premium projectiles there was no doubt that it would do the job, but I wanted something with a bit more grunt. The big problem was that I am extremely left handed, and finding a left handed rifle in the calibre I required was proving to be difficult. My first choice was a .375 H&H but enquiries proved fruitless,

then a chance phone call to Frank O'Reilly's in Melbourne located a Tikka model 695 which had languished on the wall for many years, the only trouble was that it was a .338 Win Mag. It would have to do, so I bought it and began to use it.

I read all the loading data and reports I could find on the .338 Win Mag and the more I read, the more I began to appreciate the potential of this excellent calibre. It shoots flatter than the .375 H&H with less recoil, so I worked up a load using 225 Grain Barnes Triple Shocks, which I favoured because of the success I had with them in my other rifles. One thing was apparent from the start, the rifle was accurate, but it didn't fit me so I had Ken Davis do his magic stock work then I had myself a handsome, accurate and powerful rifle.

I was confident with the rifle and my loads and ready for the big trip when Murphy struck! Just before my departure date I was informed that I could only take factory loads as South African Customs forbade reloaded ammunition because drug smugglers had been apprehended with quantities of ammunition in which the normal powder had been replaced with some kind of white stuff! It only takes a few to spoil it for all the rest. A frantic search for suitable factory loads located some Federal's, which were loaded with 225 grain Barnes projectiles, and I was finally on my way.

My wife and I were met at Oliver Tambo Airport by Peet Bezeudenhaut the owner and operator of 'THIPISE SAFARIS' and quickly whisked through Customs and out of Johannesburg to our first hunting destination, Harry Claasen's Mata-Mata Camp in the Kalahari. The word *Camp* in this case is misleading to say the least, the accommodation and service is absolute luxury, all meals and drinks are provided and the feature evening meal usually has several types of game meat as well as the normal food we are used to eating.

Next morning we had Rusk and coffee which is the South African equivalent to Billy tea and damper, then set off in our Toyota Bakkie or hunting car for our first look at the Kalahari. There is no Public Land in South Africa, all hunting is done on private farms or hunting ranches. These huge properties have a perimeter game fence to keep the animals inside and the poachers out, but all the animals are totally wild, living and breeding exactly as in the wild. They are the property of the landholder and must be paid for when taken as trophies. This is what Game Ranching is all about and it is an extremely well run business.

My first trophy from Mata-Mata was a Blue Wildebeest, we spotted them in the camel thorn and followed them on foot until I could get a clear shot, and this was not easy because the thorn is almost impenetrable although the animals seem to be able to move more easily. We had the sticks up several times but I couldn't get a shot at the bull, the cows were milling around, then finally he stuck his head out of the thorn, "between the eyes", whispered Peet and between the eyes it was, I had my first African trophy and my first kill with the .338 Win Mag.

The next couple of mornings found me shooting Sand Grouse over waterholes and I could write a complete account of bird shooting in South Africa but in the afternoons we once more patrolled in the Bakkie. We saw a herd of Gemsbok led by a good bull and managed to work out the direction in which they were travelling, so with a bit of back tracking we managed to set up an



ambush. We positioned the shooting sticks where we thought the Gemsbok would appear from the thorn. Shooting sticks are three sticks or bamboo held at one end by bicycle rubber and normally carried by the tracker, when game is sighted the tracker sets up the sticks and the client rests his rifle in the vee at the top and takes the shot, this gives a much steadier hold than an offhand shot above the tall grass as that Gemsbok bull found out. Number two kill for the .338 Win Mag. It was a "Texas Heart" shot as the Gemsbok bull ambled along a track away from me but the bullet was later found under the brisket, full penetration on a very large animal.

Next day we drove to a nearby cattle farm that had some open country and herds of Springbok as well as a few Blesbok. The owner who told us that his boys had just trapped a leopard that had been killing his cattle welcomed us, and as we drove to the Springbok area we passed a Unimog towing a trailer with the leopard trap complete with the leopard inside. What an awesome animal, we took some photos and proceeded to the Springbok paddock, which was about 1000 hectares. After glassing from the roof of the Toyota we spotted some Springbok. When springbok shooting it is De-Rigour to shoot from the vehicle as the grass is too tall to shoot over and the Springbok's comfort zone is about 250 metres and you can't get any closer unless you get completely gillyed up in full camo and belly crawl in the prickles for about 100 metres, then slime up beside a tree to rest on. Not for me.

I lined up on the biggest ram and squeezed off the shot. Number three kill for the .338 Win Mag. As we were loading the Springbok, our eagle eyed tracker pointed out a nice Blesbok about 250 metres away, he had probably been lying down sleeping when the sound of the shot disturbed him and he was trying to locate where it had come from. Peet got very excited and after some quaint South African expletives I got the message that I should shoot the "jolly thing" so with a rest on the shooting sticks, I did. Kill number four for the .338 Win Mag.

For the next day's hunting it was decided to go to Freddy's Farm to get another Springbok, and after another long shot from the bakkie I broke the front leg of the biggest ram. The rifle was spot on at 200 metres so I knew that he must be further than we had originally estimated. After a quick reload I held on the back line and squeezed off another shot, I saw a puff of dust beyond him and he dropped. We walked up to him and counted 300 paces. Kill number five for the .338 Win Mag.

This was the end of my Kalahari shoot, so we packed up and drove to Sun City so my wife could do some hunting in the jewellery shops

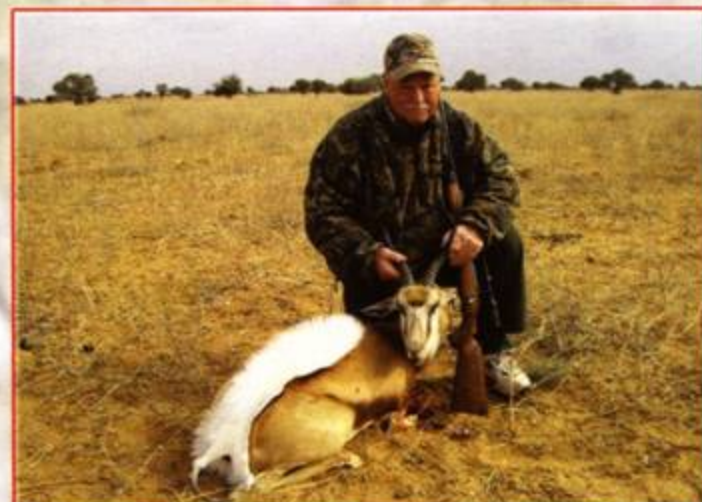
and boutiques. After we had secured her trophies we then drove to Peet's own hunting ranch. Popallin Ranch is situated in Limpopo Province on the banks of the Limpopo River and the Zimbabwe border. It has animal species which are not available in Kalahari. Popallin has mountains and kopjes which overlook river flats and valleys. Mopane scrub replaces the thorn and the vegetation is green. Peet has built many permanent blinds overlooking waterholes and river pools, so it is possible to sit silently in these blinds and watch a variety of animals as they come to drink. This is how I shot a 25 inch Impala and later a magnificent old Warthog.

We still cruised in the bakkie but could spot the game through the Mopane, then walk in and shoot off the sticks, this was good hunting and I shot a ripper Kudu bull. About this time my wife thought it would be nice to have a Zebra rug on the floor of the gun-room, the only problem was that our rug was mingling with a herd of Giraffe which can see for miles from way up there and are almost impossible to approach. The only solution was another very long shot, one with which I was not confident, Peet persuaded me to take the shot and I did, but just as I fired, the Zebra moved it's head in front of it's chest and I hit it through the muzzle and into the chest. The Zebra went down but was up again immediately and staggered into the Mopane. Our Venda trackers Trust and Laurence found the spoor and tracked that Zebra for over a kilometre before I put in the finisher. Bullet performance was not lacking, just bad shot placement. We later found that the bullet had passed through the muzzle then entered the chest, gone through one lung and finished up inside the opposite flank.

My final African trophy was one which I wanted to shoot ever since I had laid eyes on this most cunning and despised creature in Africa. I waited at Koppie Blind overlooking a river pool for many hours and when I got the shot, it was a long downhill attempt off the sticks. My first shot dropped the male and after a lightning reload I also dusted it's mate.

Up close a Dog Baboon is a fearsome creature, it has teeth like you wouldn't believe, they cause havoc wherever they go and are relentlessly hunted but so cunning that it is quite an achievement to shoot one, once again the .338 Win Mag did the job emphatically. This was my final trophy from Africa, and as my mate Wisey said, "once is not enough", so we are now planning our next trip. I saw some beautiful Black Wildebeest on Freddy's farm, a monster Eland and a Nyala I would like at Popallin and there are shops and restaurants at Sun City we haven't been inside yet! But one thing is certain;

*I will have the .338 Win Mag with me.*



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