



<b>CAMEROON, A BIG SURPRISE</b>	<b>May 2004</b>
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In today's Africa, it's rare to see more game than you anticipated I don't have problem with difficult hunting. The manicured game ranches of southern Africa are wonderful, and there's nothing like seeing great herds roaming the shore-grass savannas of Tanzania or the well-watered floodplains and valleys of Zambia and Botswana. But the tough stuff has its charm, too - areas where you work hard for every animal you encounter, where the price in sweat and miles walked makes success ever more valuable.

In recent years, I've spent most of my African budget in countries like Ethiopia, Central African Republic and Chad.

Actually, I like physically challenging and difficult hunting. I have enjoyed immersely every single trip into the more remote conners of Africa where you find great prizes such as bong, Lord Derby's eland and mountain nyala. All those trips have been successful, either for the primary trophy or for agood selection of "consolation prizes". All have also been tough, with relatively little game scene. All trophies took hard work to obtain.

I have said, both in print and during speaking engagements, that when you head to the most remote parts of Africa, you must be prepared to work hard for every animal you see and even harder for every animal you take. The again, I had not been to Cameroon. In March 2004, Cameron Hopkins of Surefire and I hunted Cameroon with the Spanish-owned Mayo Oldiri outfit.

I did not have high expectations. Since I had never been there, just going to Cameroon was reason enough. Cameron wanted a Derby eland, and I wanted a good western roan - a trophy that had eluded me in C.A.R. and in Chad.

I expected to be successful, but I didn't hold out much hope for Cameroon as I long believed that C.A.R. had more eland and fewer roan, while Cameroon had more roan and fewer eland.

Boy, did I have it wrong. We hunted their Mayo Oldiri concession, and their Mayo N'Duell block to the northwest, both named for the dominant watercourse ("mayo" means river) in each area. these areas are essentially west of the border between northern C.A.R. and southern Chad. I cannot speak to say other areas in Cameroon, out

these areas had obviously been well cared for over many years, and they held a lots of game.

We saw roan every single day, individuals, small herds, a few big herds. Depending entirely on how picky you are, we saw shootable bulls each and every day. But there were also plenty of elands. I saw eland three times, and it was not especially difficult to find tracks fresh enough to follow. But roan and eland were hardly the only animals present.

The single most common was western kob - we saw dozens every day. The second most common was western hartebeest.

Again, we saw plenty each and every day. Buffalo were abundant. Not only were there plenty of fresh tracks, but ever the course of most hunting days, we would eventually run into at least one herd somewhere along the way. Less common and more scattered but still sighted almost every day were sing sing waterbuck, bohor reedbuck and harnessed bushbuck.

There were also plenty of warthog, western bush duiker and red-flanked duiker. Perhaps most surprising of all, we saw elephants almost every day, and there were quite a few lions around.

Cameroon has a most unusual licensing system, requiring some hard choices. the game is divided into three classes.

Class A encompasses the major trophies which, in the northern savanna areas are elephant, lion, buffalo, eland, roan and korrigum. Class B is the other major antelopes, while Class C is the smaller duikers and such. On the big game license, you get two from Class A and four from Class B and C. That's it, so choose wisely. I figured we'd battle hard for every shot we got, and the choices would be automatic based on what game we encountered. that said, for me "perfect", if implausible, Cameroon safari would have included a good roan, a red West African savanna buffalo (which I also didn't have) and a derby eland.

Wrong. Hunting with Zimbabwean Guav Johnson, a young, outstanding PH, we started out hunting all three.

On the sixth day, I took a really marvelous western roan. Now I needed to choose between eland and buffalo - repeat a great trophy, or hunt a breed of buffalo that I had never taken? For several days, I couldn't make the choice. We tracked some buffalo but couldn't find a red bull we liked. we tracked some eland and saw a wonderful bull, but couldn't quite get a shot. Eventually, I decided I really wanted a red buffalo, and we took a great trophy.

The other game really did come along naturally, with no difficult choices. I got a good western hartebeest. I improved on my sing sing waterbuck, western kob, and bush duiker. With a few hunting days loft over, I was out of licenses.

In the most able hands of PH Stefen N'Douga, Cameron did a better job of knowing what he really wanted and he budgeted his time well. He took a great roan early in the

hunt, and on about the tenth day, after extreme effort, he got a nice Lord Derby's eland. Along the way, and quite easily, he took good sing sing waterbuck, western hartebeest and western kob. The final trophy he wanted was a harnessed bushbuck. He remained focused, taking a very nice ram just at sundown on the very last day. He rated it the very best safari he has ever made. Cameroon was a magnificent surprise, with great camps, competent PH's good trackers, and much more game than I expected in my wildest and most optimistic dreams. You don't suppose the forest areas are just as rich, do you? One of these days, I'll have to find out.