



<b>HUNTING THE CENTRAL AFRICAN GIANT ELAND</b>	<b>July 2006</b>
<b>Story by Bill Stratton (Safari Sur - Argentina SCI Chapter magazine)</b>	



No one said hunting for the Giant Lord Derby Eland in Cameroon would be easy. I just didn't know how difficult it would actually turn out to be until pursuing the eland on his terms.

I had the opportunity to meet the owners of Mayo Oldiri Safaris at the Reno Convention of SCI in January, 2005. They are most hospitable people and very honest and sincere wanting their clients to be successful.

Getting to Cameroon from my home in Montana is not an easy task. I booked reservations for my wife Virginia and myself using Delta/Air France. Air France must be used as it is the only major airline serving Cameroon. The country of Cameroon has its own national airline, Cameroon Air but I soon found that they fly a supposed regular schedule but that schedule is subject to the whim of the pilots on any given day as to whether they want to fly or if there is any interest in even going to any particular destination which they are supposed to serve. I know of several hunters that have been stranded in communities served by Cameroon Air for as much as five days waiting for a plane to show up to take them to Douala, the Capital city of Cameroon.

I booked dates with Mayo Oldiri and choose their opening date for the first hunt which included Christmas and New Years holidays. Virginia and I were very excited over the prospect of spending these two special holidays in a true remote safari camp.

As the time for departure drew near we realized our little 15 year old Australian Silky terrier Essie May who had been gravely ill with diabetes for over a 18 months would not fare well being confined to a veterinary clinic for a period of almost one month. She is hopelessly spoiled and also requires special attention with insulin injections twice daily.

As painful as it was for both Virginia and me we cancelled the hunt. A very short time later Virginia insisted I reinstate the hunt dates if possible and go by myself. She said this was a chance of a lifetime and it should not be postponed. It pained me deeply to think of leaving my wife behind to care for Essie who we both dearly love but I agreed and went ahead with the plans to fly. I cancelled Virginia's reservation and proceeded on my own leaving Billings on December 20, 2005. My flight would take me to Houston Texas where I would catch Air France to Paris and then change aircraft and on down to Douala where I would spend one evening and then take Cameroon Air back up to Garoua to be picked up by camp staff.

My trip started out with more than a few difficulties. First upon arriving in Houston I found the Air France flight was very late arriving in Houston and I would miss my connecting flight the next morning to Douala. I was faced with spending an entire day and night in Paris since there is only one flight daily from Paris to Cameroon.

There were perhaps 15 American oil field specialists waiting in Houston to catch the same flight I was on. All were also taking the flight from Paris to Douala where they would take connecting flights back up to Nigeria, Chad, Benign and other destinations to work the refineries and oil drilling rigs. This may have been what saved me a long delay in Paris. When our flight arrived in Paris there was an Air France agent at the gate holding up a sign with my name on it. I was told we must hurry and follow this agent as they were holding the flight to Douala. We literally ran for a long distance from my arrival gate to my destination gate. There were also agents to assist the oil workers. I often wonder as to what may have become of some of those men on that flight with me. After I returned home I saw on the news that a number of oil rig and refinery workers had been murdered and some were missing. There has been no further word that I am aware of at this time as to the outcome with some of those missing people. Some that may have flown with me to Douala.

I was greatly pleased to know that I was on my way to Douala and would shortly be in safari camp. Wrong! I arrived in Douala where I was promptly met by a representative of Mayo Oldiri. They had made a reservation for me at the Le Meridian hotel which proved to be very nice and comfortable. A good thing as I ended up spending two nights there instead of one due to the fact Cameroon Air had decided not to fly to Garoua the next day. Fortunately for Cameroon there was another domestic airline that had begun a regular schedule December 1st and the Mayo Oldiri people in Douala were able to get me on a flight after two nights in the hotel with nothing to do but wait for a flight.

While waiting for my flight to leave for Garoua I was surprised to meet Guav Johnson, the young PH from Zimbabwe that I would be spending some time with while in safari camp. He had just arrived after three days of air travel getting from Zimbabwe via Kenya to Cameroon. That is Africa.

We arrived in Garoua and were met by Luis another Mayo professional hunter who along with our driver would take us the five hour drive over terrible roads to my first hunting camp Mayo Vaimba. We arrived at camp Vaimba late in the afternoon and met the camp manager Joaquin. The camp was absolutely beautiful nestled on the banks of a beautiful river. The dining and meals were gourmet and my rondavel was clean and well cared for.

I was supposed to hunt with Luis for the first week in pursuit of eland and other plains game. Unfortunately Luis had contracted a serious eye infection and was having serious problems with his eye. He had to wear an eye patch and was using several antibiotics which had been prescribed by a physician in Garoua.

Due to Luis's eye problem I was to be guided by Joaquin who proved to be most competent and a true professional hunter. On several occasions Luis came with us but struggled walking long distances over rough terrain with a patch over one eye. I

admired his determination but continued to worry over what appeared to be a deteriorating condition with his infection.

We hunted very hard for an eland. Hunting eland is much like elephant hunting, you simply walk and walk and walk until you find fresh tracks or the animals themselves and then try to make a plan for a stalk. Sometimes you will follow fresh tracks for miles and never catch up with the animals that are feeding and moving constantly through the forests. Add to the constant walking in temperatures of 100 degrees and more and it becomes a true challenge to harvest one of these animals.

In addition to the many miles walked each day in the intense heat there was another problem that made hunting very difficult. As I mentioned I was the first hunter into the Mayo Oldiri camps and that being the case a lot of the forest and savannah had not been burned and in some areas the grass was too green to burn. In the areas we could burn and then come back and hunt a day or two later we would find ourselves walking through all the fresh ash from the freshly burned grass. This ash was loaded with sulphur and other irritating properties that would fill your eyes and sinus and drain down your throat causing everyone to have coughing spells. As we hunted along with our column creating these clouds of ash and soot we sounded as if we all had pneumonia or consumption. My throat and nose were very sore from the time I began the hunt until days after the hunt had ended, all from the heat, soot, dust and ash.

Joaquin had been anxious for me to harvest something and on the fourth morning of our hunt we saw a group of Sing Sing water buck males several hundred yards away through a clearing in the forest. Joaquin suggested I try for the largest which was a fine ram. I was using a camp rifle, an 8 X 68 Mauser equipped with a very nice German scope. The rifle also had a muzzle break to reduce recoil. I had not fired the rifle thus my first shot with the rifle was to harvest this large waterbuck. I was able to get on the beast and set the first trigger, (this rifle had double set triggers) and as I moved on target I squeezed the second hair trigger.

My first round fired through this Mauser was most effective and I had collected a marvelous trophy. The only problem was my ears were ringing so bad I was almost deafened by the muzzle blast. This would continue through out the hunt. I wish I would have had ear plugs and had I known about what I would be using for a rifle. I would certainly have taken my fitted ear protection with me. Always ask questions of your safari operator. I know better and should have asked more about the gun.

I had finally drawn blood and everyone was feeling much better. I had been refusing to shoot game we were seeing such as water buck, bohor reedbuck, hartebeest or duiker as I did not want to disturb the hunting areas by firing a shot when my primary trophy was the giant eland.

After walking for some four or five miles on the morning of the fifth day we came across fresh tracks. Our tracker went to work and we followed the zig zag tracks of cows, calves and several bulls in this herd of perhaps 15 or 20 animals. It was probably another 2 miles when our tracker and PH stopped suddenly. All was very still and quiet. We listened and in the distance heard a eland calf calling to its mother for milk. We knew we were close so took precaution to keep the wind in our face.

This required a large circle away from the tracks we had been following. After perhaps another two miles of walking as quietly as possible on the dried and burned leaves and brush we had completely lost track of the eland. We decided on a bold move and cut back across our circle path hoping to find the tracks of the herd again. While walking rapidly up a narrow gully our head tracker, who with age was very hard of hearing and partially blind which is quite common among the blacks who spend their lifetime in the intense African sun, came up out of the gully and to our surprise there was a very nice eland bull running away from us some 150 yards away. Joaquin was very upset with the tracker for not having used more caution when coming up out of the gully. All we could do was to continue on but we knew now that the herd had spooked. When eland become alarmed they can move at a full run for miles. We decided to again gamble and continue straight across country to try to intercept the herd.

After another 4 or 5 miles of hard walking in the now noon day sun and temperatures of over 100 degrees we spotted eland in the trees about 300 yards distant. We approached as close as we dare and still were a long 200 yards away from perhaps 6 or 7 eland that we could make out in the shade of the forest. Joaquin had me take up a position with my rifle resting in the crotch of a small tree, the only tree between the eland and ourselves. He told me to watch for a bull to present itself for a possible shot. I maintained this position for perhaps one hour in the blistering sun before it was decided the eland were sleeping and would not move for maybe another two hours or more. We thought it best to leave this location and walk a large circle to come into the herd from a different angle with more cover. I felt like a lobster fresh out of the pot after standing at the small tree for so long.

We did another 2-3 miles and came into where we thought the eland should be. One of our trackers climbed a small tree and spotted eland about 450 yards away. We made our way slowly towards them but as so often happens in hunting, we spooked a small herd of hartebeest that broke into there clumsy gait and ran in the direction of the eland.

We quickly had to change plans which took us right back past where we had waited for so long hoping for a shot. From there we cautiously made our way parallel to the forest where the herd had been sleeping earlier in the afternoon. The sun was cruel and intense at this point. We had been on this stalk since early morning and it was now perhaps 3 PM. We continued walking not knowing exactly where the eland might have gone when suddenly our tracker and Joaquin following behind him froze. At this point you must understand that Joaquin is 6 ft. 3" tall and towers over my five ft. 7 inches so he had a commanding view of the terrain ahead of us.

Joaquin called for the shooting sticks and motioned me forward. I moved cautiously with the man with the sticks. He set up and I looked directly over the sticks with my rifle in place and saw movement. There were eland moving through the trees maybe 200 yards ahead. They disappeared and the two of us, the black tracker with the sticks and myself moved slowly forward, eyes peering into the trees. The tracker stopped and placed the sticks into position again. I moved in one fluid motion onto the sticks searching for what he had spotted. Suddenly about 125 yards ahead I could just make out the spiral horns of a giant eland coming up from a low spot in the ground. I was on him instantly, setting my trigger I waited for him to come into full view. As the cross hairs found their mark I touched the hair trigger and heard the roar of the rifle and the thud of a good hit. The bull lurched and moved maybe 25 yards through some short

trees and stopped. Joaquin who had caught up with us by this time urged me to shoot again which I quickly did and the eland was down. The 200 grain Nosler partition bullets had done their work very well.

We all ran through the stifling late afternoon African sun to my trophy. What a thrill to see this huge beautiful animal and to know that we had met him on his terms and had overcome adversity such as the heat, dust, soot and so many miles of both walking and running to harvest what is considered as Africa's premier spiral horn trophy.

Weighing upwards of 2000 pounds and heavy spiral horns that can measure over 56 inches around the spirals the Giant or Lord Derby eland is highly sought after. There are only three areas in Central Africa where these animals are hunted, CAR, Cameroon and a small area of the Sudan. The sportsman seeing one of these trophies must plan carefully for the hunt. The hunt itself is very physically demanding and this part of Africa can be very unforgiving. Be prepared for miles of difficult walking in high temperatures. Strong stable footwear is a must. The hunt can also vary from savannah to small mountain ranges and rocky terrain which all add to the difficulty of harvesting one of Africa's finest antelope.

My bull measured just on 50 inches on the longer horn and carries massive bases. He was an old bull and of the type that make for a very fine trophy. Once the trophy is received I plan to mount the bull on a pedestal where he will occupy a prominent place in our atrium trophy room.

At the end of my fifth day of hunting and having successfully taken my Eland and Sing Sing waterbuck I changed camps to hunt with Guav Johnson at Camp Mayo Nduell. A 5-1/2 hour drive over terrible roads.

There with the able help of Guav and his 7 ft. tall tracker I harvested six very fine trophies in the remaining 8 days of hunting. They included a Nigerian Bohor reedbuck, Kob de Buffon, Western hartebeest, Western bush duiker, Western Savannah buffalo and a very nice harnessed bush buck. My only regrets were missing a shot at a red flanked duiker which I would dearly have loved to have added to my pygmy antelope collection and not having a chance at a lion although we saw lion on two occasions.

**For information on hunting in Cameroon I highly recommend [Mayo Oldiri Safaris](#).**