

# DAKOTA

THE NEWS FROM STURGIS/WINTER 2007

## The Engraver's Art

Spud Buff:  
A Novel Approach to  
Cape Buffalo



A Dream Realized,  
A Lesson Learned in  
Africa



The Flying B  
Wingshooting in  
Idaho



## Traveling with Medications

How to avoid trouble at Customs

# Spud Buff:

## Big-Bore Adventure for the Vegetarian Hunter

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*[Editor's Note: Dr. Frank's contribution to this issue left us with a smile on our faces, and we trust it will do the same to you. At the risk of stating the patently obvious, we feel obliged to add a disclaimer to this story along the lines of "Please don't try this at home...or in Africa."]*

We left at dawn, after first locking up our moronic ridgebacks Penga and Tyson and the two cats who usually accompany us in the bush.

We had barely left the house when we encountered spoor in the driveway. Professional sculptor Murray Grant quickly identified it as coming from a 50-inch bull, as clearly evidenced by the immense meadow muffin still steaming in the chill morning air.

Three of us were conventionally armed: Murray with his father's pre-'64 Winchester .458 and I with my Searcy .470, both loaded with Federal ammo topped by 500-grain Woodleigh solids.

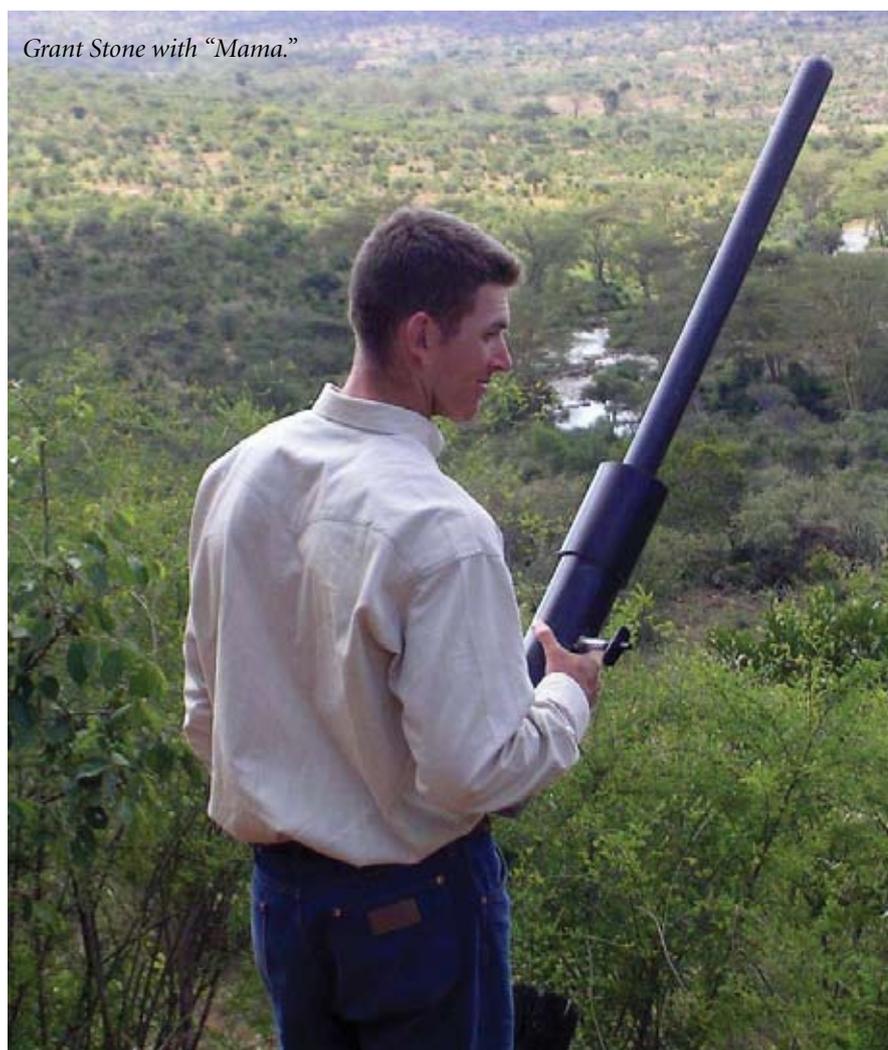
Biologist Stephanie Dolrenry carried her SONY HDV 1080i video camera.

But West Point cadet Grant Stone was the man of the hour, armed with his exotic experimental 1.670-caliber potato gun we call Mama Kichwa Kiazzi (Swahili for Mrs. Potato Head). Grant had hand-crafted Mama from the finest Nairobi PVC sewer pipe, tastefully engraved in a semblance of rose and scroll by the teeth of Tyson, who eats everything, even exotic plastic weaponry.

Mama fires a 2000-grain projectile, on top of three brief squirts of Charm Room Deodorizer. We had found that the scent identified as "Mountain Berries" produced the most reliable ignition and highest velocity, reaching nearly 100 fps, for a Taylor Knockout Factor of 47.7 or a muzzle energy of 44.4 foot-pounds. Extensive ballistic testing had shown that Kenya-grown new potatoes were not only rounder and more accurate than russets or Yukon Golds, but harder as well – just the medicine for our great Laikipia bulls.

The plan had been hatched earlier in the week at a drunken brai on the banks of the rain-swollen Ewaso Nyiro river in celebration of Grant's 21st birthday. Too inebriated to hit each other with the potato gun, we had decided that a buffalo would be a more worthy, and larger, target. More important, we would be sober.

We met at my house the night before to plan the morning hunt. Murray looked like hell, his face covered in bruises, the result of a recent 3:00 a.m. encounter with a tentful of young women and a bottle of Kenya Cane. Although sport hunting was banned in



Grant Stone with "Mama."



*The author stands to the left next to Grant Stone with “Mama” and Murray Grant.*

His young nerves honed by military conditioning, Grant squeezed the trigger of the Big Match lighter that fires Mama. Misfire! Without skipping a beat, he squeezed again, Mama roared, and the potato flew true, striking the bull mid-boss. However, our ballistic calculations were for naught – the potato was not up to the challenge and mashed itself uselessly against the rock-hard horn.

The buff bellowed in rage and charged, but we could do nothing – hunting is illegal in Kenya. Luckily, he was blinded by potato juice and watery pulp drooling into his eyes. He brushed past us in black fury, his charge carrying him down slope into the safety of a thicket, whence he never re-emerged.

Flushed with success, we congratulated each other for yet again surviving gross juvenile stupidity in the bush, and headed home for breakfast and fresh underwear. The experiment had been a resounding success: we had scared ourselves silly and no one had been hurt.

More importantly, we had proven that Mama is the answer to every Politically Correct hunter’s dream – even in Kenya one can still hunt the most dangerous game, without fear of breaking the law, or offending the sensibilities of the animal protectionists whose mindlessly destructive policies have brought this country’s wildlife to the brink of disappearance. Tomorrow: Lion! 🦁

*Dr. Laurence G. Frank has lived in Kenya and studied predators for 36 years. He has been a research associate at the University of California, Berkeley since 1984, first as part of the Berkeley Hyena Project and currently in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. He spent 20 years studying the behavioral ecology and endocrinology of the spotted hyena before turning to conservation research. Laurence directs the “Living with Lions” initiative, comprising the Laikipia Predator Project and the Kilimanjaro Lion*

Kenya when he was an infant, Murray has hunted problem buffalo since his early teens on his family’s Laikipia ranch.

My experience was limited: I had killed one enraged bull with a single brain shot at five yards (the story is better if I don’t confess that he was terminally mired neck deep in a riverbank mud hole).

Grant is a lifelong hunter, but bull elk in his native eastern Oregon hardly compare to bull buffalo. A keen ornithologist turned hyena biologist, Stephanie is deadly with her SONY, but also relatively new to mbogo. However, she had proved her mettle last week while trapping hyenas at night in the dense Aberdares forest, seething with elephant and buff.

We made toward the river, where our local dugga boys bed down for the day in thick, thorny bush below the escarpment. We could not go south, for fear of further disturbing the wild dog den Steph and I had stumbled upon the day before, much to the dismay of our accompanying cats. Buff tracks were everywhere, but the freshest headed uphill. Our bulls were still grazing on the plateau. Murray followed the tracks, guiding us with hand signals while Grant followed close behind with Mama, spray can of room freshener at the ready for instant charging.

Twice we stalked the alarm calls of tickbirds, constant companions to parasite-ridden buffalo. Both times we were disappointed when they led us first to warthogs, then to giraffe. Our hopes sank

as the sun rose higher, but buff tracks still lay ahead and the bush grew thicker.

Without warning, a commotion to the left brought rifles to shoulders while Grant frantically sprayed Charm into Mama’s chamber. The new potato had been carefully rammed home hours earlier. A family group of warthogs and half a dozen waterbuck exploded from the bush, breaking cover not 20 yards away. Just as we began to relax, Murray signaled urgently: Buff! Grant mounted



*The arsenal the trio carried into the bush with “Mama” in the middle.*

Mama, shouldering her like an RPG launcher. The great bull was less than 15 yards away, alerted by the warthogs and ready to rock. He stared at us, but whether in murderous malice or besotted rapture at blonde Stephanie we would never know.