I didn’t know quite what to expect on my first trip to South Africa even though I read as much as I could for the last several years.  I have always been fascinated by the variety of game and have been around many of them on the several game ranches throughout central and South Texas.  I had very high hopes for my trip as I have dreamed about this adventure since I was young.  I called about the hunt from a special I saw on [africahunting.com](http://africahunting.com/) for a sable, Kudu, and Gemsbok package.  The hunt was setup through Kent Shaw with 3S Safaris as the agent and Umzingeli Safaris as the outfitter.
Our flight from the states was as about exciting as a slow burn but the thought and anticipation of landing in Africa kept me squirming in my seat for the almost 20 hours it took to fly from Denver to Johannesburg.  When we landed, Henry with [riflepermits.com](http://riflepermits.com/) had someone waiting at the gate as was planned and he led us to the carousel where, much to my relief, our luggage was all there.  We headed for the firearm office and then to the police station.  He had everything completed prior to our arrival and all I had to do was open the case to verify the serial number.  I would without hesitation, recommend working with Henry to anyone taking a firearm there.  It literally only took a couple of minutes and we were on our way to the City Lodge Hotel in the airport. We had to overnight at the City Lodge because the Delta flight from Atlanta arrived too late to get the rifle and catch the last flight out to Port Elizabeth.  The next morning we got up with only one short flight standing between us and our final destination.  We soon landed in Port Elizabeth and I found my nervous excitement to be almost overwhelming.  I came out of the baggage claim where my PH should be waiting.  We soon found Hennie and Tahlita waiving at us. As soon as we met them we knew they are the kind of people you are instantly comfortable with and in 10 minutes, my wife and I felt like we had already known them for 10 years.  All for the worries I had about our safety in Africa and something going wrong were quickly disappearing.  My wife enjoys the beach so after we left the airport Hennie and Tahlita took us to eat seafood there.  The weather was great as was the lunch after all of the traveling.  After lunch, we took the couple hour drive to True Reflection Taxidermy to look at the different animals and to give me some time to think about the way I would like to have the mounts done.  I really appreciated this because it gave me ideas for them I haven’t yet considered.  We then headed over to Grey’s Gift Lodge, the place we would call home for the next 7 days.
The lodge was very impressive.  It is fairly new and it has a very clean, upscale feel.  My wife loved looking out from the massive deck, and pool area to the hillside and valley that lies beneath.  I was fun to see her looking around the lodge like a kid investigating Christmas presents under a tree.  She is not a hunter and it took some convincing for her to agree to go but when she saw Grey’s she was very happy.  The dinner the first night was as good as any restaurant and better than most.  On the menu was Karoo catfish, chicken and bacon kabob’s, and beef and red wine kabob’s.  I haven’t had food this good in a long time and judging from this meal, dinner was going to be something to look forward to everyday.  After dinner we enjoyed a few drinks on the deck and had a nice fire burning to warm us up from the cool breezy air.  Hennie and I discussed the plans for the next day while my wife and Tahlita sat at the bar and talked about how good looking we are.
Day 1
When the alarm went off in the morning I felt like I did when I was a kid that got to stay home to go hunting with Dad.  A feeling I will never forget and haven’t felt in a long time.  I hurried to get dressed then out the door of our chalet and over to the lodge.  Hennie was already up and had the coffee going.  The plan was to go to the range then spend the morning looking for Kudu as taking a big one would probably be the most challenging animal on my list.  We went to the range and took a sufficient amount of shot to show I was good from 100-300 yards.  Time to go look for a Kudu.  We drove around and walked a few ridges glassing with Hennie and the tracker Richard.  We saw several bulls but none were big enough for a first morning shot.  After lunch, we headed to another place to look for a Gemsbok.  We saw several in a herd but Hennie decided none of them were the one.  Tahlita noticed one split from the herd and was hanging out in a thicket a ridge over.  Figuring it was a big bull we headed over to take a look.  Sure enough, Hennie’s voice changed tones as he excitedly whispered “that’s the one, we must take it.”  We got into position as the bull slid back and seemed to vanish into the thick brush.  We sat and looked for a few minutes as my brain tried to decide how such a big animal with a white face could just disappear like that.  Suddenly, Hennie spotted it as it came out far left of where we were.  We made our way over there and got setup about 420 yards away.  I got on the sticks and put the crosshairs on the shoulder.  My breathing probably sounded like something from a horror movie as I struggled to gather myself up for the shot.  The oryx was turned at a bad angle and waiting for it to turn seemed to take as long as my wife takes to do her hair.  Finally the bull took a step as I got my breath slowed down to that of an out of shape guy running sprints at football practice.  I squeezed off the shot and looked up from the scope.  I cycled in another round as the oryx took off running.  In a split second he got into the thick brush and we couldn’t see him anymore.  About this time I thought to myself, “self, you didn’t hear the bullet hit,” Hennie said I missed. I didn’t think it was a bad shot and we went to check for blood.  We searched the area as one of the trackers said snapped his fingers standing over a 6” spot of blood where the oryx stopped.  From there we followed consistent tracks and blood drops for almost 5 miles.  My worst hunting nightmare was coming true.  Not knowing where the animal was hit, blood spots getting smaller and further apart, darkness growing, and worst of all, the feeling of wounding an animal.  I couldn’t believe I missed the shoulder, should I have waited, it was a terrible feeling.  Hennie had his tracking dogs out looking for the bull.  They were amazing animals to watch and suddenly they got the bull back up and he was hauling ass across a flat off in the distance.  He was in the process of making a loop right back to us so I got ready again.  The bull made an abrupt turn and was able to disappear into the thick brush again.  It was basically dark now so Hennie said we will have to find him in the morning.  I’ve had some long rides in the truck in my life before.  Getting in trouble at school, knowing your Dad is waiting for you at home, going to jail and having your Dad bail you out and drive you back.  Those are some long truck rides but this would be among the longest.  The mixed emotions of not being able to do my part after all their work to get me on that bull, my wife’s first hunting trip with me and seeing a wounded animal, the bowling ball in my gut as I thought about that bull laying there wounded.  Hennie reassured me that it’s unfortunately part of hunting but we will find him in morning.  Dinner was undoubtedly good that night but given the previous events, it was hard to fully enjoy the food and the laughs around me.  We had Curry chicken, spiced rice, broccoli and cauliflower.
Day 2
The next morning we get back to where we last saw him and the trackers picked up the trail.  Tahlita and I sat on a high spot as we watched the dogs and trackers do what they do best.  They decided the bull went back to the river side with the heavy brush so we headed back that way.  Hennie and I were going to watch an open area and have the trackers push through the trees.  The trackers we had were joined by two more Hennie called up to try to find the bull.  We sat in silence hoping to hear the excited bark of a dog on an animal or see the bull come out of the trees where we were.  Hennie got a call on the radio from the tracker saying the bull was up and running the other direction.  We jumped on the top rack in the truck and Tahlita raced off in that direction.  I felt like I was on a saddle bronc, holding the rifle in one hand and trying to not get bounced out of the truck with the other.  Hennie yelled for her to “speed up, slow down, speed up” about 40 times in one breath.  We hit the top of the hill at what felt like 50 miles per hour and saw the bull running about the same speed as the truck in an open area on the left.  He turned our direction to cross the road about 75 yards in front of the truck as I raced to get the rifle up and pull the trigger.  Boom!  “Missed,” yelled Hennie as I was able to follow up from behind him this time.  Boom!  End over end the speeding bull tumbled nose first.  Without even a flicker of his tail he was done.  We got him! I instantly lost 100 pounds of weight off shoulders as I raced over to look at him.  He was huge! What a great bull, what a great feeling to know we found him. High fives and hugs all the way around, it would be time for a beer and a deep breath. There was the day old bullet hole, low and back.  We took our photos and loaded up a bull I will be proud to have taken with them for the rest of my life.  We got the bull taken care of and headed back to the lodge for lunch.  Hennie decided that we would go for the sable next so we could spend all day the next day looking for the Kudu.  We went to a place he saw a great bull the previous week.  We glassed for a few hours where he felt like the bulls would be with no success.  They herd suddenly appeared as the day was ending so we made a quick plan and headed their way.  With the wind in our face we got ahead of them and waited for them to come out.  There they were, 5 or 6 bulls grazing together about 100 yards away.  The plan and stalk he made worked out perfectly.  It wasn’t hard to pick out the biggest one as I got on the sticks.  After waiting for him to be clear of the others, BOOM!  He ran about 5 steps and fell into a huge cloud of dust.  I got all my stuff and followed Hennie over to where my dream animal was laying, or so I thought.  Hennie said “where did he go, he must’ve gotten up” as I frantically searched with that feeling growing back in my stomach.  Turns out Hennie likes to entertain himself at the expense of others, as I found the bull on the backside of the bush I was standing next to.  We all had a good laugh, some more than others, and got setup for photos.  We headed back to the take care of the sable as I was enjoying the hot evening air and the feeling sinking in finding the oryx and crossing a sable off my bucket list.  The meal that night consisted of the best butternut soup on the planet with Kudu lasagna, salad and all the fixings.  It was a great meal with plenty of laughs from all.
Day 3
We headed out for Kudu early in the morning.  On the way we stopped to look at a couple of rhinos standing 50 yards away.  I have never seen rhinos outside of the zoo but they seemed to be the size of grey houses standing there checking us out.  They are truly amazing animals to see in the wild.  We pulled up to a few ridges and got out to glass the areas.  We saw one that Hennie thought to be a shooter bull so we made the stalk.  It worked great and got about 400 yards for him.  After getting a better look, Hennie decided we could do better.  We headed out to refuel and eat some Kentucky Fried Chicken. Tip, feed the PH some Kentucky when you can.  It was pretty warm to look for Kudu after lunch so we went to chase a hartebeest.  We got to the property and saw quite a few animals but no hartebeest yet.  He jumped a group of impalas and saw a herd of hartebeest running behind them into the thick cover.  Hennie developed a plan to sit under was I recall being the only tree in a huge open landscape of short grass and thousands of termite mounds.  The trackers would go to the backside of the brush the hartebeest ran in and drive them back out towards us and our tree.  About 20 minutes went by as they started to run.  The herd got to the edge of the thick cover and stopped.  The leader of the herd stood to the left as I quickly tried to judge him.  Hennie yelled “shoot him, the one on the left, now!”  I look at him and thought out loud, “neh, he’s not that heavy.”  The look on Hennies face is something I will never forget as he quietly screamed, “what the f\*ck do you know, f\*cking shoot him!!”  Now for those that haven’t met Hennie this may sound a like a bit extreme, but it’s just his fun way of saying “what the f\*ck do you know, fucking shoot now,” and I will tell you that it’s pretty damn tough to shoot a hartebeest when you’re laughing as hard as I was.  Well, here we go, BOOM!  I reloaded as I saw him turn with blood in a perfect spot.  My adrenaline got the best of me as I must’ve remembered the oryx and thought I’m not letting him get away.  He had only taken about 10 steps but slowed to a stop when BOOM! I sent another one his way.  He fell over and decided I better use another for good measure. BOOM!  I shot to make sure he was dead when I heard “quit f\*cking shooting him!” Apparently Hennie didn’t want Swiss Hartebeest.  When I got finished laughing we headed over to him.  Remember the part about him not being that heavy?  Well, apparently in my lack of growing up judging hartebeest for a living I just shot one that would make gold.  Given that information I understand the outcry from a few minutes ago.  It was really one of the funnest and funniest hunts I’ve ever had.  We took some photos and headed back to take care of him.  When we finished we set out for the Kudu again.  We went to a spot Hennie and I had seen a good bull at earlier but couldn’t get on him.  We sat on a high ridge glassing over a few bulls without seeing the one we were looking for.  It was growing dark now with just 10 or 15 minutes of good shooting light left.  In the silence, Hennie screamed out “bush pig, bush pig, bush pig, f\*cking shoot it, don’t f\*cking miss!”  I looked down and saw a gorgeous snow white bush pig making her way through the bushes.  Got right one her and BOOM!  She fell right over!  I couldn’t believe I just got lucky enough to get a bush pig the way we did.  We went down to get her and she was just as pretty as I thought.  A beautiful white bush pig with perfect border of black on her back legs.  What an unexpected trophy!  Pics taken, time to get her back to skin for a full body mount.  Dinner at the lodge that night was as good as the rest.  We had beef rolls, rice, potatoes, and vegetables with a peppermint tart dessert.
Day 4
Back to looking for a Kudu.  We went back to the ridge we were the evening before and saw the bull that had previously got away.  Hennie found him 350 yards away.  Got on the sticks, crosshairs on the shoulder, squeeze the trigger, and BOOM!  I got a huge Kudu!!  I looked up for him and Hennie yelled, “you missed!”  The bull was gone.  I was actually shocked I missed.  I felt like I made a great shot, didn’t pull it, ranged him at 350.  Still don’t know what could’ve happened.  Hennie watched my shot go high and after searching for any blood we decided that I did shoot over him.  Well we kept searching as it was still early.  Went a few miles and found two bulls.  One was really nice so we put a stalk on them.  The bulls ended up busting us and took off never to be seen by us again.  After that we got on another ridge and glasses the hillside below.  We saw several bulls and another that was a definite shooter.  I got on the sticks after ranging him at 450 yards.  BOOM!  Whop!  Heard the hit and the bull ran to the right BOOM!  “Over!” Hennie yelled BOOM!  “Under!” Hennie yelled again. BOOM! Knocked him over.  He still had his head up and I rapidly searched for another bullet. Am I the only one that brought bullets to this party I wondered?  Hennie laughed as he was as good as dead anyways.  After some funnier to others jokes about being nicknamed 4 shot we got to the bull.  I got another round out of the truck just in case and we walked up to him.  He was dead.  Celebration ensued as they backed the truck up to him.  Hennie reached down to grab the horns and the bull whipped his head around knocking him over!  BOOM!  I put one in at point blank as he was trying to stand back up.  It was over now but not without a tennis ball sized bruise on my PH’s shin.  Couldn’t have happened to a better person if you ask me.  We got our pics and somehow managed to get the bull loaded up in the truck.  I finally got my Kudu and couldn’t be happier with him.  We headed back to the lodge for lunch.  We were going to go after a wart hog that evening when Hennie got a call to help with a wounded buffalo.  The wife and I wanted to go check it out so we headed that way.  We looked out from the truck as Hennie and the dogs helped track him through the bush.  We saw the big bull cross the road in front of them and disappear into the thick brush.  The dogs managed to round up a baby jackal that they scooped up to keep the dogs from getting him.  One of the property owners wanted to take it in to keep it alive we held on to it while the looked for the buffalo.  The sun set and they had to give it up for the night and use the chopper to help look for it the next day.  We headed back to the lodge and had pea, ham, and bacon soup with slow roasted blesbok leg, rice, green bean casserole, and sweet carrots.  It was great!
Day 5
In the morning we went to Grahamstown for errands and to see the sights.  It’s a really pretty place with good universities and big historical buildings.  Definitely worth seeing.  After we got done with some sightseeing and shopping we headed out for the black wildebeest.  It didn’t take long to find a herd so we got out and got setup.  I’ve never watched black wildebeest before but it is very fascinating how they run in circle after circle to protect themselves but fortunately want to stay out in the open.  The grass was short enough for a prone shot so I laid down while Hennie picked out the best one from the herd.  This is where the hour long circus began.  We would have him picked out and then they would start the circle thing again like someone hiding a ball under the cups and trying to watch which one it’s under.  After feeling like a casserole baking in in the sun we finally got the one we wanted clear from the others about 350 yards away.  BOOM!  The herd ran, the one I shot included. He dropped out about 20 yards later due not having a heart anymore.  It was great!  More high fives and hugs as we walked over to him.  We took our photos and headed back.  After an afternoon break, we went out in search of a warthog.  We were glassing the side of a hill when one of the prettiest animals on Earth was spotted eating leaves on a tree.  It was a Nyala, and it was big.  We decided it would be a great opportunity if I ever wanted one so I got setup for a shot.  He was standing about 500 yards so we eased about 100 closer.  He stepped out of the trees and BOOM! He fell right over.  “That’s how I want you to shoot from now on!” Hennie yelled.  As we laughed, I couldn’t believe I taken a Nyala, it was awesome and I couldn’t have been happier with him.  We got our photos and got him tied to a pole to carry him out to skin for a half mount.  Back at the lodge we shared more stories and laughs over a cold beer and a warm fire.  T-bone steaks were on the menu with roasted potato wedges, salad, garlic bread, and ice cream.  It was delicious.
Day 6
Warthog day today.  We headed to a place the week before they spotted 50 or 60 from a ridge.  Unfortunately, It was very hot and wart hogs were nowhere to be found.  We sat watching a watering hole but never saw any.  We took a long walk and ended up kicking out a few but never could get a shot on them.  About lunch time we headed back to the lodge for a break from the heat.  That evening we went back out, this time closer to the lodge where we saw some earlier in the week.  We stopped at a spot and were glassing from the truck when Tahlita spotted a pair of them.  We got out and got setup as one went over the top.  I was one the other one as Hennie said “shoot!”  BOOM! He fell right over.  It was a great shot on a wart hog I was happy to get.  We headed back to take care of it and made a plan to look for another one after dark.  After, fittingly I might add, having pork chops for dinner with baked potatoes, salad, butternut, and custard, we got back in the truck.  Hennie and I sat on the high rack with the spot light and Tahlita drove with the wife in the passenger seat.  That place is completely different in the dark and we saw a ton of animals. Everything from duiker to springbok, to impala, to springhare.  Then right next to the truck a wart hog ran out, there wasn’t anytime for a discussion when I heard Hennie say “shoot!”  BOOM!  Another warthog down.
Day 7
With all the animals on my list in the cooler, we decided to go see Addo Elephant Park by Port Elizabeth.  We had an early flight out of Port Elizabeth the next day so decided just to get a B&B there after the park since the lodge would be a couple of hours away.  We got the animals to the taxidermy then headed south.  The wife and I really enjoyed Addo and had some elephants right next to the truck.  We saw a lot of plains game, warthogs, and cape buffalo.  We had a nice lunch at the park then headed into town.  We explored Port Elizabeth and had a dinner by the beach while watching some penguins on a small island.  It was a great day as bittersweet feeling of knowing our dream trip was about to end.  After losing some money at the casino in hopes of hitting it big and moving to South Africa, we walked back to our B&B to get some sleep before our early flight in the morning.
I couldn’t have imagined a better trip and I’m glad we didn’t wait any longer before we decided to go.  All the worries we had about safety in South Africa are just a distant memory.  I felt safer there than I have in our hometown and we never had any issues.  It was easier than I thought to bring the rifle there but I would still recommend using rifle permits to help out.  Hennie and Tahlita are true professionals in what they do and we have definitely made lifelong friends with them.  Hennie is one the the most personable and entertaining guys I’ve ever met and it’s been a pleasure hunting with them.  He is very knowledgeable in putting a proper stalk together, taking care of business with a wounded animal, and he worked hard to make sure we had the trip of a lifetime.  Having Tahlita there really helped my wife feel more at ease as she is a non-hunter.  I was worried about her having fun in a hunting camp but after our trip she can’t wait to go back.  Grey’s Gift Lodge was phenomenal and it is as safe as anywhere.  There are plenty of activities in the area for all ages and I wouldn’t think twice about bringing the family on our next trip. I just wish we could’ve stayed longer to enjoy all that South Africa has to offer besides the great hunting.  Thank you Umzingeli Safaries for the great memories and the excitement of planning our next trip with you guys.