

SOUTH AFRICA

Cull Hunt 2022



Story and photos by Jim Gordon

A couple of years after our 2017 hunt with Uhlenhorst Hunting Safaris in Namibia, my son, Jeff, and I started thinking about going to Africa again. Uhlenhorst was terrific, but we wanted a different experience this time, so we decided to try South Africa. There are so many excellent outfitters in South Africa, so how do you choose the right one?

The obvious answer: the SCI Convention. So, my mission at the 2019 Convention in Reno was to talk to as many outfitters as I could and find the one who would be the best fit for us. We both had wonderful trophies that used our available wall space, but we wanted to hunt more, so we reasoned that a cull hunt would be the way to go. Also, we wanted an outfitter who owned a lot of territory, so we wouldn't have to spend a lot of time driving between various concessions. With those criteria in mind, I had lots of fun interviewing outfitters and eventually selected Blaauwkrantz Safaris in Eastern Cape.

At the Blaauwkrantz booth, I met Francois Rudman and his sister, Zani, and I liked them both right away. In response to my questions, Francois told me that they do frequent culling, and Zani promptly sent me a



This nice impala ram will look great on Jeff's living room wall.

quote for a cull package with 15 animals. I was delighted with the price. In addition, their property extends over 100,000 contiguous acres of valley bushveld, so we'd be hunting on their land the whole time.

Blaauwkrantz has been a family business since 1936, and the third and fourth generations and their families live on the ranch and are actively engaged in managing it. Arthur Rudman was Southern Africa Game Rancher of the Year in 2016, and his son, Eardley, is the current president of the Professional Hunters Association of South

Africa (PHASA), so I knew we'd be dealing with people of good character.

We were thinking of hunting in 2020 or 2021, but we didn't have specific dates in mind, so we didn't make commitments. At the 2020 Convention, our friend, Frank De Jong, joined us. Frank had never been to Africa, so he was excited about the prospect. We visited with Francois and Zani again, and we started looking forward to hunting with them.

Then COVID hit, everything was put on hold, and the 2021

Continued on next page

Far Left: Jeff taking careful aim from the truck.

Right: Frank and his impala ram.





Frank and his wildebeest.

Continued from page 39

Convention was canceled. At the 2022 Convention, I met Eardley, and we firmed up dates to hunt in September. We wanted to do some sightseeing before the hunt, so Zani arranged for a 4-day tour of the Garden Route and the Karoo. We were happy with Shawn Kennedy and Gracy Travel for our Namibia trip, so we used them again and were very pleased. We had a



Jeff got this very nice blesbuck.

lot of questions, and Shawn responded almost immediately to every one.

Jeff and Frank live in California, so we arranged to meet in Atlanta for the 15-hour Delta flight to Johannesburg. Upon arrival in Johannesburg, Bruce Mdluli met us. Bruce is a Gracy employee, and he helped us through the sometimes confusing and intimidating process of registering our rifles with the South African Police and delivered us to our hotel for the 19-hour layover. The next morning, he collected us and our luggage at the hotel and led us to Airlink for our flight to Cape Town.

When we arrived in Cape Town, we were met by Joe Da Silva, our tour

guide for the next four days. Joe and his wife, Nicole, own Cape Town Hunting Safaris and Tours, and that's what they do. Joe is a licensed hunting guide, and he guides hunters around many areas of South Africa, including Blaauwkrantz on occasion, and other countries in Africa. He is also a fantastic tour guide.

A master of his craft, he entertained and educated us about all the areas we visited and drove through. We saw inviting small towns, museums, rolling hills, seashore, mountains, elephants, baboons crossing the road, and other wild game. We met some interesting people, heard lots of stories (and told a few), and enjoyed some wonderful South African wines and cuisine. We thoroughly enjoyed our time and experience with Joe.

On day five, Joe delivered us to Blaauwkrantz, where we were met by the Rudman family and shown our comfortable accommodations. After a delightful social hour and dinner, we turned in - excited to start our hunting adventure in the morning.

At breakfast on Friday, our first day, we learned that Frank would be hunting with Zani's husband, Philip, and Jeff and I would be hunting with Eardley. Then we headed out to the range to sight in our rifles. Frank was shooting his Kimber .300 WSM, Jeff used his Montana ASR in 7mm Remington Magnum, and I had my Gunwerks Clymer in 7mm Rem Mag. None of us had a

Continued on next page

Continued from page 40

suppressor, although Eardley said that many clients use one.

Since Frank had never been to Africa, he wanted a few trophies: kudu, wildebeest, blesbok, and impala. Jeff wanted an impala, and we both wanted a nice warthog, if we saw one. The impala herd at Blaauwkrantz grows rapidly, so they need to be culled every year. In addition, other "non-trophy" animals are taken, as the occasion arises.

We climbed aboard the truck, with Eardley in the driver's seat, Jeffrey, our tracker, standing on the tailgate, and Jeff and me in the hunters' seats. We were on the Blaauwkrantz property, and we'd gone only a couple of miles when Eardley spotted a small herd of impala ewes and stopped the truck.

I was first up, so he whispered that I should follow him. I had practiced a bit on regular tripod shooting sticks, so I felt reasonably confident. But Eardley had Steady Stix, which support the stock as well as the forend of the rifle, so the support is noticeably more



Left: Jeffrey, our incredible tracker, who could spot the tiniest drop of blood from a wounded animal in the brush.
Above: One very stuck Land Rover.



Frank and his kudu.

solid. We hiked maybe a half mile, and he set up the sticks and told me which animal to shoot. I set up, took a deep breath, let it out halfway, squeezed the trigger, and nailed it at 214 yards. I felt pretty good!

That afternoon, Jeff got one with a great offhand shot from the truck. We both felt pretty good. Then I missed a couple and was reminded that there are very few easy shots.

A while later, we set up on a herd of several ewes and one buck. Eardley whispered, "Don't

shoot the buck". I squeezed off a great shot, nailed it, and Eardley exclaimed, "You shot the buck!" I already had a nice impala trophy on the wall of my den at home, and now I had another one.

Before dinner that evening, we heard that Frank got his kudu, blesbok, and wildebeest - all on his first day! I celebrated a successful first day with a Bain's - my #1 favorite whisky - from Cape Town.

On Saturday, Jeff shot one up

Continued on next page



Jim shot these two cull impala ewes from the same herd in two minutes.

Continued from page 41

a hillside. He thought he hit it, but we lost sight of it in the brush. The four of us searched for it for quite a while, and Jeffrey saw some blood and heard it running away from us. Finally, we found it piled up. It was a small buck, but Jeff said he didn't think he shot at a buck. On the way back to the truck, he found the one he shot at - dead right where he shot it.

The bullet must've gone all the way through one of them and then hit the other right behind it.

Later on, when Jeff was up again, we saw a couple of warthogs; but they wouldn't stand still long enough for him to get off a good shot. Frustrating!

At lunch, Frank told us that he got a beautiful impala ram - his fourth trophy! All four of them in the first two days!

Since he had all his trophies, he joined Jeff and me, and the three of us hunted together with Eardley for the rest of the hunt.

That afternoon, I shot two impalas in the same herd within about two minutes. That was fun. We saw several monkeys and duikers run across

Jim's nice trophy ram.

the road. They're really fast!

Over the next couple of days, we shot at several impalas. Frank nailed every one, but Jeff and I missed a couple. At one point, I was up, Eardley spotted a small herd, and we stalked them. He got the sticks up, and I got on them and flicked open the lens cover on my Leupold scope, and they spooked at the sound. Fortunately, we stalked them again, I left the lens cover open, and I nailed one at 239 yards. Back at the lodge, I borrowed some electrical tape from Frank and stuck it on my scope to silence the opening. I had no more issues after that, but that's a design problem that Leupold needs to fix. Frank shot an old cull blesbok. Jeff shot a beautiful trophy blesbok and a trophy duiker.

A couple of times, as we were driving around, we saw a herd of giraffes. We saw them, and they saw us, at quite a distance. As we got closer, they started to run, and it looked like they were going in slow motion. They're amazing, beautiful animals.

On Wednesday morning, Eardley brought along his 9-year-old daughter, Tina. She was very cute, had a wonderful smile, and was very engaging. We heard all about her pet rabbits, dogs, fish, duikers, etc. She brought us some good luck. We were driving through an area where warthogs had been seen, and Jeffrey spotted a couple off to the right. Eardley stopped the truck and grabbed the sticks, and I followed him. A few hundred yards from the

Continued on next page

Continued from page 42

truck, he put up the sticks and told me to shoot the one on the left. I got a solid rest, breathed, and squeezed the trigger. I thought I saw some legs fly up into the air, but Eardley didn't say anything, so I thought I'd missed. We started searching for blood, and then he said, "There he is, and he's dead". It was an old, ugly warthog with two big sets of tusks. I was very happy!

Every time I got a good shot, Eardley looked at my Gunwerks rifle and said, "That's a really nice rifle". I agreed.

On the way back to the lodge, as dusk was approaching, Eardley stopped the truck and said, "Jim, do you think you can

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Every time I got a good shot, Eardley looked at my Gunwerks rifle and said, "That's a really nice rifle". I agreed.

kill that old kudu cow?" It was facing us, and the light was fading, so the shot wasn't an easy one. I fired, and it went down, but then it got up and disappeared into the brush. Eardley and Jeffrey went after it, but the brush was so thick that I couldn't follow with my rifle. They saw some blood but stopped tracking it because it would keep running, so we decided to go back in the morning. The next morning, Jeffrey and Jeff followed the track for a while and finally



The gang (Eardley was taking the photo) with Jim's awesome, ugly warthog.

found the kudu dead. It was so stiff that they couldn't drag it out of the brush. Eardley called Philip to come help with his work crew and a stretcher - two posts with chicken wire fastened between them. It took seven guys to carry it out!

On Friday morning - the last day - Jeff had a tough shot at a warthog and wounded it. It bled, and we searched for it for quite a while. Another Blaauwkrantz tracker joined us, but we couldn't find it. After lunch, Eardley got his dog, Dorito to help. Dorito is a beagle with a great nose, and he was barking and baying at something, but it wasn't the warthog. Darkness came, and we drove back to the lodge in silence - all very disappointed.

That evening, we had a wonderful dinner of roasted blesbok steaks and South African wine and reminisced about the past eight days. It had

Tina wanted to take this newborn angora goat home for a pet.

been a fantastic experience. We got to shoot a lot, see some spectacular scenery, learn some interesting things, and spend some time with our new friends the Rudman family. We all agreed that we would eagerly go again.

PS. A couple of days after we got home, Eardley emailed us that one of his trappers found Jeff's warthog. It had been dead for a couple of days, so the hide was no good, but they were able to save the head. As it turned out, they had a spare warthog cape that the taxidermist could use, so Jeff will get his warthog trophy after all. ✨

