



Rosslyn Safaris

Cawston Ranch - A Bowhunter's Paradise

by Andy Fenwick

The three of us sat anxiously waiting in the make-shift blind. We had an excellent field-of-view across the waterhole. Initially the wind had been in our favour and great care had been taken in choosing our vantage point. But now, with the sun cresting the tree tops, its iridescent rays slowly warming the cool morning, the breeze kept shifting direction.

In the distance behind us and to the right there was some tell-tale movement. Our eyes strained to see through the vegetation. A family of vervet monkeys, oblivious to our presence, picked their way from tree to tree towards us. Gavin shrugged his shoulders and shook his head in frustration. This was all we needed. Being incredibly inquisitive, these comical and clever little primates can be an absolute nightmare to the hunter. At one point they were so close it looked as though one of them might join us in the blind.

Their humorous antics helped while away the time, and it was whilst watching one particularly naughty individual, tugging at his sibling's tail, that I was brought back to reality with a sharp painful jab in the ribs. Anthony motioned ahead. Through the foliage we could see the majestic form of two magnificent sable bulls making their way towards us. Black scimitar horns glinting in the morning sun, their nostrils flared testing the wind, they inched their way closer to the water's edge.

It seemed they had given the "all-clear", for no sooner had they started to quench their thirst than the surrounding bush was alive with game. A family of warthog appeared out of nowhere, closely followed by a large herd of impala, at the lead a ram with an impressive set of horns. A short distance away a mixed herd of adult kudu cows and younger animals cautiously waited their turn. Then the wind veered.



Gary Bogner with a bow-shot impala, one of many trophies Gary hunted with Rosslyn Safaris.



Rosslyn Safari's main draw card - a magnificent trophy sable of 42". Sable average about 39" on the ranch.



With thirteen purpose-built blinds situated at waterholes, Cawston is a bow-hunter's paradise.

In an instant the atmosphere changed dramatically. The impala ram, horns swept back, nose raised, let out a distinctive warning snort. All hell broke loose. Just as quickly as the scene had unfolded, everything disappeared into the surrounding bush in a cloud of choking dust and pounding hooves.

When Peter Johnstone first saw Cawston Ranch, the area was a derelict wasteland, devoid of any game to speak of. It is hard to believe that in just 16 years the area has been transformed into a veritable paradise teeming with wildlife. The animals and their habitat are in excellent condition.

Since Cawston was first farmed it has been utilized for cattle ranching, dairy farming, cropping and various other forms of agriculture which over the years took its toll on the natural game in the area. But the harsh terrain and climate was not suited to farming activities and most of these enterprises failed. In spite of this, Peter – a pioneer of game ranch management in Africa – saw its

potential and in 1987 he and his wife, Carole, purchased the property.

They had to start from scratch. But Peter's years of experience in game management in the Matetsi Safari area now came to the fore. They initiated an intensive restocking program, bringing in animals from Matetsi as well as other areas to form the nucleus of the project. From these humble beginnings, in just a few short years, they had a sizable herd of game to work from. Revenue earned from the sale of animals was ploughed back into the ranch for the purchase of more stock.

Trading under the banner of Rosslyn Safaris, the oldest registered Safari Company in Zimbabwe, emphasis is on quality and sustainable utilization through intensive game management. In this respect hunting plays a major role. Rosslyn Safaris specialises in bow-hunting, and with thirteen waterholes spread throughout the ranch, Cawston is a bow-hunter's paradise.

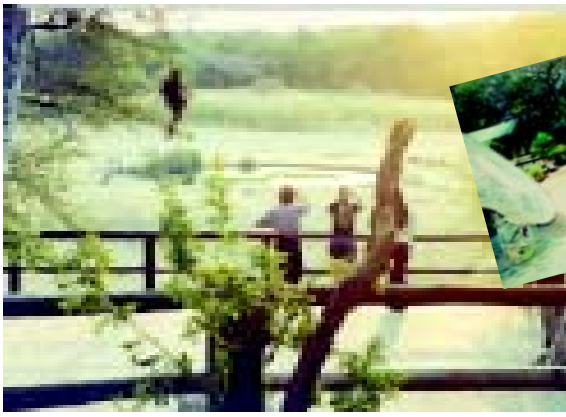
With strict hunting and harvesting quotas, today Cawston Ranch is world-renowned and is the only operator in Zimbabwe offering the bow-hunter gemsbok and red hartebeest along with 22 other species including large, quality herds of sable – the largest privately owned herd in Zimbabwe, as well as kudu, wildebeest, eland, giraffe, zebra, tsessebe and leopard. It is a one stop-hunting venue.

About 90% of the animals are taken with bow, and the balance with rifle. Because of this there is less disturbance to the wildlife. This type of low-impact hunting fits in well with the Ranch's overall management policy. As a result there are more hunting days available through the season for the number of animals taken. An average season consists of about 20 hunts, which equates to roughly 200 hunting days.

Most of the bow-hunting is done from the convenience of purpose-built blinds sited near



14" tsessebe are not uncommon.



The perfect way to unwind after a long day in the field.



Traditional 'East African' style tented accommodation - rustic but luxurious.

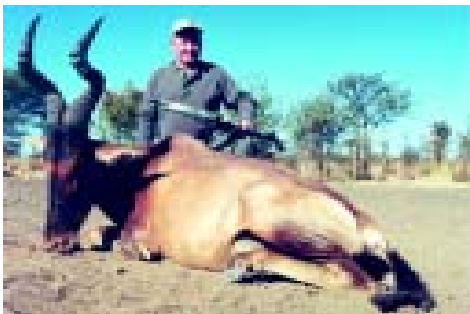


After a welcome meal relax by the warmth of a mopane fire.

With the day nearly at an end, we returned to camp for a chance to rest our tired legs. Built on the edge of a ridge, the hunting lodge is luxuriously appointed with a commanding view of the surrounding bush. A central living area, with lounge and dining room, forms the focal point of the lodge and leads out onto a pool deck. There is a viewing platform overlooking a waterhole and, with the setting sun as a backdrop, and a cool refreshing drink at hand, there is no better way for the weary hunter to end the day. Accommodation, in the form of traditional 'East African' style safari tents, each with en-suite facilities, hot and cold running water, shower and flush toilets ensures total comfort and gives a new meaning to the term 'camping'.

Meals at the lodge are a culinary delight. A wide range of mouth-watering dishes, varying from delicious kudu steaks to sumptuous guineafowl casserole, are created by the kitchen staff. If you like, the chef can prepare a special meal from something you've shot whilst on safari, adding a unique and personal touch to the whole Cawston experience. To round off the evening adjourn to the lounge for an after-dinner aperitif by the warmth of a roaring mopane fire before retiring to bed.

In essence, then, although the emphasis at Cawston Ranch is on bow-hunting, the activities on offer cover a wide spectrum of the African experience. Families are well catered for, and the Johnstone's and their staff are well versed in providing a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. 🏠



A 24" red hartebeest - one of the more unusual species available at Cawston.

After our stint in the blind we were given a tour of the rest of the operation by ranch manager Gavin Robinson. Gavin has been with Cawston for the past eight years and has been instrumental in initiating many of the ranch's conservation practices. Meticulous records are kept of all the game harvested: trophy sizes, weights, meat production, income and costs, and all this is correlated back to the annual road strip game count in terms of productivity per ha. The game count is conducted each year by an international ecological consultant, Vernon Booth, to give the exercise scientific credibility.

One of the biggest challenges faced in the early days was a tick problem. Ticks are probably the number one cause of deaths in both cattle and wild game. Cattle can be dipped, but wild animals are a different proposition. The solution came in the form of the "Tick-Off" machine, an ingenious contraption. These low maintenance units are placed in strategic areas along game paths. The animals activate a pump when they step on a pressure plate and are sprayed top and bottom with a fine jet of insecticide - simple but highly effective. The results have been phenomenal.

Although the ranch is run as a private concern, the surrounding communities benefit from hunting. This close relationship has resulted in a decline in poaching as well as a greater understanding amongst the population about conservation and sustainable utilization. Everyone wins at the end of the day.

It is this attention to detail that can be seen in the rest of the running of the ranch. The abattoir, for example, is immaculate, well organised, and most important of all, clean. The staff and skinners take great pride and enthusiasm in their work, and it shows through in the quality of the end product.



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salt licks and waterholes. Rifle hunts, on the other hand, are undertaken strictly on a "walk and stalk" basis. Hunting takes place through the dryer, winter months of the year between April and October, but because of the abundance of game, early and late season hunts are available.

Cawston is very family orientated, and besides hunting, there are many other activities available, including walking, night drives, a tour of the ranch's ostrich farm as well as visits to local communities and places of interest. Because of its close proximity to Bulawayo, just 37 miles north of the city, the ranch is also the ideal springboard to visit other land marks such as the Matopos, Hwange National Park and Victoria Falls.



Ed Joseph with an impressive wildebeest trophy.