



The all-inclusive safari package allowed me to shoot five cull animals, including warthog, blesbok and impala. While the Bushmans Gorge estate was full of animals apparently running wild, all were being reared for breeding including beautiful zebra, blesbok, impala, blue wildebeest, springbok, and many others. The lodge and accommodation is excellent and full of the taxidermist's art. There is a small pool and nearby there is some ancient cave art on the wall of an overhanging rock escarpment, which gives rise to the name of Bushmans Gorge.

Having inspected these the next morning after a substantial breakfast, Craig drove me around the area to introduce me to the proper wildlife on neighbouring farms, and I was delighted to spot my first wild giraffes and zebra before we came across a troop of vervet monkeys scampering across one of the interminable dirt roads which go on for miles and severely test the suspension of any vehicle, which brings me to Craig's car. A white Toyota Hilux with more than 350,000km on the clock it was, as Craig pointed out, 'the car which Top Gear was unable to kill', and my word, that was an appropriate description! The dirt roads would shake the money out of a Scotsman's purse. Craig's vehicle is awarded a brand new steering rack and suspension every year. Tyres are often victim to the ever-present thorns, some several inches long – when stalking through low scrub, a stout pair of gaiters will prevent badly lacerated lower limbs. The load carrying and climbing abilities of this car were truly mind-boggling, even to someone who used to compete in off-road vehicle trials, as I did. The loadbed was equipped with two elevated seats in a specially made heavyweight frame, which accommodated Derek, our tracker and skinner.

After a relaxed lunch, we set out to go to a farm called Coombs Fountain where, after a significant amount of walking, we spotted a number of warthogs around 200 yards away. We quickly stalked to within about 150 yards and, choosing our beast carefully, I placed a 150gn soft-nosed homeload round in the shoulder at what turned out to be 143 yards off sticks. Later, after retrieving the carcass, we continued stalking and saw another 'hog 300 yards distant. We stalked to 83 yards and, once again, I felled it with a similar shot. Derek agreed to extract the teeth of both beasts for me to take home. Dinner at the lodge and another early turn-in followed.

On day two, we drove 40km to another estate and, decamping from the Hilux, started the testing hike to where Craig thought there was a likelihood of finding impala. Eventually we saw two groups, but lost the first due to strong, swirling winds giving us away. However, we found and followed a second herd until we got to within 75 yards where I took the shot, off sticks again. In some ways it is similar to hill stalking in Scotland; the challenge of approaching closely enough to take a shot without one of the herd's many pairs of eyes seeing you, and also avoiding the extraordinary scenting abilities of the animals.

I had decided to upgrade to a young impala ram at a small premium over a cull beast, and good heart shot dropped him on the spot at 75 yards. It was a beautiful animal and one I've decided to have shoulder mounted as a memento of the trip and my first visit to South Africa. The



Between the bars: A straightforward shot at another warthog was deflected by a strand of fence wire

First time safari

James shares his advice for people looking into going on safari in Africa for the first time:

- Check your airline's firearms policy
- Consult the safari outfitter's website for comprehensive guidance
- Allow plenty of time between flights, particularly at entry point (and keep small denomination notes handy)
- Take copies of FAC, passport, invitation letter, SAPS 520 form, flight schedules showing return details, and finally any supporting communications with your police firearms department with you
- Confirm both, separate, flight cases for firearms and ammunition conform to airline requirements
- A hat, stout boots, and dark, practical clothing, usually dark green, are preferable for hunting
- Cash for tips to your PH, the staff and your tracker/skinner is essential

taxidermy cost is reasonable and less expensive than if done in the UK, and I shall wait however long it takes for it to join the trophies of other hunters, consolidated into one container so as to keep shipping costs to a minimum. Settlers Safaris take care of the whole process.

Craig and I then had lunch at another of the lodges Settlers Safaris has set up on various estates, this one called The Hills Lodge estate, which is about 35km from the Bushmans Gorge base. Derek skinned my beast while Craig and I ate a packed lunch on the veranda. The only thing missing was iced gin and tonic! The lodge was once again first class with many examples of taxidermy. Separate chalets were available within a stone's throw of the main lodge. It really is a most beautiful and well-appointed setting and testament to the good tastes of Murray and his wife Petra.

Day three was a wipeout, as the blesbok we were aiming for failed to play fair on yet another huge estate. We couldn't get within safe shooting distance for love nor money. When on the one occasion we did get close, the selected cull beast was either obstructed by others or