



With a Handgun for Buffalo...

By Joe da Silva

I have been in the firearms industry for over 30 years and traveled to many of the world's biggest firearm shows like the "Shot Show" in the USA and the IWA show in Germany, and met many outstanding firearms dealers, ammunition manufacturers, knife makers and the accessory guys. One of them was Wayne Baker, founder of Freedom Arms.

Being the keen gun nut that I was those early 80s, I had read many articles about the quality guns Freedom Arms produced. They were not cheap, but boy they were a top-quality handgun. If you ever have the privilege to hold and shoot one, you will know what I am talking about. During my business as a firearms dealer I have dealt with many handguns like Colts, Smith and Wesson, Korth, and I guess I had gone through a few of them, but it is not mere flattery to Wayne Baker and his son Bob, to say that theirs is the finest single action revolver made in the world.

I was one of the first firearms dealers to bring Freedom Firearms into South Africa. In those days it was a great problem to bring any American - or even certain European - firearms into our country, as we had an arms embargo. To get round the problem, most of the firearms coming from the USA were sold to Austria and then sold to South Africa, as at that time Austria did not have any restrictions against South Africa - they were totally neutral - but you had to pay a premium for your firearms. They were really difficult and challenging times - it was like doing things behind closed doors! However, I miss those days as it was a lot easier and hassle-free once they arrived, with less paper work. Today, things have opened up to South Africa, but with difficulties and delays for permits. I am glad I am now out of this industry as I can see the stress and hassle the guys have to go through.

It was in the early 90s when Wayne visited Cape Town. He and Dale Anderson - who had shares in the company - just got onto a plane for a trip to South Africa without letting anyone know. Typical Wayne! I met him and Dale, and brought them to the farm where I live today. They were to shoot pigeons which were a problem on the farm. They did a lot of shooting and had a lot of fun, and afterwards I gave them a great traditional braai.

I had been pushing Bob Baker to come to Africa to do some hunting and to try out the handguns that he designs and manufactures

himself. It had been on his bucket list for many years, and his wife Patrice has been dreaming of Africa for a long time. Other priorities interfered till Bob and Patrice visited my booth a couple years ago and we started working on a trip. The day finally arrived in September 2018. One of Bob's wishes was to test his single-shot pistol model 2008 in .338 Federal on plains game, and his revolver in .454 Casull on buffalo.

I planned to let them see something of Cape Town before hunting - visiting wine estates, seeing the Peninsula, the penguins, Table Mountain - all the usual tourist attractions. Then Bob had an opportunity to hunt a springbok just outside Cape Town. After a short stalk, his first shot was from his .338 Fed, a perfect shot at 150 meters through the heart and lung. Patrice took a zebra with my rifle, at 100 meters. Then she wanted a black wildebeest.

"Why a wildebeest?" I asked.

"Because it looks ugly," she said. I guess that was a good enough reason! Then Bob wanted to try out his .338 Fed on an eland bull. He was lucky when I spotted a nice one in a herd.

"That's the one," I said, and we managed to get in position. But the eland were playing with us and he could not get the shot. But after crawling and stalking we managed to get into position again and wait for the bull to come out of the group. Hunting with a handgun is not easy as you need to be very steady to place that shot, and your view through a scope is so small. You need to know your gun well.

But Bob is no stranger to this type of shooting and after much stalking we finally got to see the bull. We waited for a while to get a window of opportunity. Bang! The bull was hit. Unfortunately I did not have my binos ready when he fired.

"Was that good?" I asked Bob.

"Yes," he said, "but the bull did not drop." These animals can be quite tough if you don't get the vitals. The herd was all crowded around it, making it difficult for Bob to get a

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second shot – that seems to be the usual case when you hunt eland and one gets wounded.

“Let’s wait a few minutes and see what happens,” I suggested. “He might walk a few steps and drop within a few feet. That’s normal with a heart or lung shot.” But this did not happen, as the bull and herd moved off. They moved a long way, and we had to rush back to the vehicle and follow them as we did not want them to disappear into the thick bush area. Finally we managed to stalk within 140 meters, but first I had to make sure which bull he had shot and see if I could see any blood. After a while I spotted the bull, and got Bob to follow me and get closer for nice clear shot. The females were still covering the bull and did not give us that clear shot. After about 15-20 minutes they finally broke loose with the bull at the back of the herd. We ran and crawled following them till suddenly the herd stopped running, and the bull gave Bob a broadside shot. To Bob’s relief, the bull walked five paces and dropped. The first shot had been too high on the shoulders, missing the lungs. Five inches down would have got it on the first round.

A few days later we left for Victoria Falls and were greeted by my friends Tendai and Abigail who run a touring and hunting operation in the Matetsi area outside Victoria Falls, only 45 minutes’ drive from the airport. The Matetsi area is known for great sable, buffalo and elephant, and it is here that I had arranged for Bob to hunt a buffalo with his .454 Casull handgun. Zimbabwe has very strict regulations relating to handguns - we had to apply for his permit five months prior to his arrival, to get permission from the all landowners in the areas to be hunted. It is not cheap for the permit which is an additional US\$ 1500.00 to be paid to the Parks. In South Africa there is no cost for this permit.

On our first day out we had no luck. We found tracks that crossed into a prohibited area, and others that were two days old. The following day was the same - I guessed the buffalo were playing with us because they were regularly hunted here and were wise to our plan. We finally abandoned the area and drove to a different one to see if we could pick up fresh tracks. I was getting worried. I had been hunting and bringing clients to Zimbabwe for 29 years, and I had never left without getting a buffalo, and wondered if my good luck was going to run out.

Day Three: We had a 3.30 a.m. start to the area where the buff came to a waterhole, so we could track them after their morning drink. Unfortunately they did not turn up, so as daylight began we drove along the road looking for fresh tracks. About an hour later



*On top: 338 Freedom Arms Federal single shot pistol.
Below: .454 Casull Freedom Arms revolver.*

we came onto some sign of a herd about 20-30, and began to follow. They did not pause, and after 4-5 hours of non-stop tracking they finally stopped, then suddenly everything erupted into a cloud of dust and they spread out. There was no time to set up the stand for Bob to get his handgun on. It was most

frustrating after that long walk.

“Something is very wrong here,” I said to the PH and tracker. “These buffalo are not acting like they should. They are either over hunted or there’s poaching going on.” We decided to sit under a shady tree to just relax for half an hour before we continued. Meanwhile the trackers walked off to see where the buffalo had gone. Some time later we heard some shouting, and the next moment they appeared with a poacher who had just caught and with the game scout who handcuffed him and took him to the vehicle. The poacher had been setting out traps for sable and buffalo in the area - now we knew

*I looked at the scout,
and as I turned
around, Bob woke up*



Bob Baker with his 150-meter-shot springbok.



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why our buffalo were behaving weirdly. We decided to break for lunch, and had to walk back to vehicle after our long trek.

We found a lovely resting place along the Matetsi River, though the PH and trackers decided not to stop, but go to look along the river for other buffalo tracks. While they did this I hopped off the back seat where I was with Bob, and sat in the driver's seat with the game scout lady. (It was first time I had the privilege of having a lady game scout. She was wonderful and very clued up about the bush). I spent some time talking to her and Bob decided to use the bench to catch a quick sleep. The poacher was behind him, handcuffed. It was hot, and we all fell into a deep sleep. Suddenly I felt movement in the vehicle. I looked at the scout, and as I turned around, Bob woke up, and we saw that the poacher had jumped out of the back of vehicle and run away into the bush. We were all in shock to see how quickly he got off and disappeared. We tried to search, but no chance - he was an old and smart poacher, and he got away. It was too late anyway to start searching for him - our day was messed up by poachers. That night we had some good laughs, but still no buffalo. "TIA," I told Bob. "This is Africa,"

The following day we went off early into another area where we were told by the locals that the buffalo were in the area, so off we went and found fresh tracks and started to follow them. About two to three hours onto the track we noticed the buffalo were not settling in and not giving us time to get close. Something was wrong once again. After a quick half-hour rest, the trackers started picking up on the tracks to see where the buffalo were moving to. But the buffalo were getting ahead of us and the trackers were worried, so after two hours of tracking we decided to break for lunch under a tree. While we were settling in we heard the sound of lions. We could not believe it, so after a short lunch break we started on the tracks again, only to see lion spoor and blood! This ended our buffalo hunting for the day as we decided it was going to be the lions' day to hunt and not us humans.

On our last day of hunting we woke again at 3.30 a.m. as we needed to cover all areas and to find that elusive buffalo. Usually we would get our buffalo within the second or third day - this was our fifth and last day. I was very apprehensive about getting a buffalo. After going back to our waterhole I thought this was the one place where we would be able to track them down. We arrived and waited in the darkness, but we could not hear anything. My heart just



Bob Baker with his eland bull.



Patricia with her zebra, and Bob Baker with our skinner Mabuti, and my wife Nicole who did all the taxidermy.

dropped. The buffalo just did not come into the area. Though we walked and drove the whole day hoping some would appear, they were not to be seen at all. I just looked at Bob.

"This was not meant to happen to you on this first trip," I apologised. "It was not that we did not try, and it is the first time in 29 years of hunting in Zimbabwe that we did not get a buffalo, but that is why we called it 'hunting' and not 'shooting'."

"You are a true gentleman and it was great hunting with you," said Bob, "and I enjoyed every moment - you are an experienced hunter, and by the way let me tell you a story. I had been going to Alaska for five years to hunt a moose, which was my dream. I only got it on the fifth year, so I can call myself a pure and true hunter. Patrice and I have had a great time with you on our first trip to Africa and there is a reason why we did not get this buffalo:

"It's because we need to come back to Africa again!"



Bob Baker with Adriaan Schilz at the evening braai on the farm.

Joe was born and based in Cape Town, and is the owner of Cape Town Hunting Safaris and Tours. He has had over 36 years in the hunting industry, and has been an International Firearms instructor for over 25 years, as well as owning his own gun shop for 30 years. Joe is a qualified and registered tour guide and auctioneer, and conducts hunts into Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. He is also a qualified knife maker in his spare time.

Although I have stopped attending the gun shows for over 15 years, I always visited the Dallas and SCI shows where Freedom Arms had their booth, and I made a point to say hello to Wayne and Bob Baker - always great chatting with them. If there is ever a book that everyone should read, that would be Wayne Baker's "Above the Clouds". At age 94 he is still active building bridges, and is present at all the shows that Freedom Arms does in the US and in Germany.