

Carl Knight -

Take Aim Safaris - Hunting at its best



PH Carl Knight.

African Hunting Gazette: When and where were you born?

Carl Knight: I was born in London England in 1973. I am 45 years old as I write this. My family moved to Johannesburg in South Africa during 1980 when I was seven years old.

AHG: Tell us about your family.

CK: My father was a jack of all trades, a good talker and a people's person who got along well with everyone. He loved Africa and remained here until his death in 2016 at age 72. My mother was an Estate Agent in South Africa for most of her life; she now lives with us in the next door. I married a South African girl 13 years ago, and we have two sons: Hunter who is now 10 years old and Luke who is now 9 years old.

My sons have followed in my footsteps so far and share my passion for the African bushveld; they've both hunted a few antelope for the home freezer and been on a few big game hunts with me, for the most part been around camp and waited in the Cruiser.

AHG: What led you to becoming a PH?

CK: I first went hunting at around eight years of age with my father. He bought me a .243 and a .22, and picked up a .30-06 for himself that I now own and have used extensively. I killed my first antelope, an impala ram

when I was 9 or 10 years old. Since then I've remained a proud hunter.

In my early years we lived on a farm of around 20 hectares, our farm was big enough for us to have a shooting range plus a few domestic animals and a dam. The dam attracted seasonal waterfowl and other birds that I hunted with my .22; there were also rabbits and guinea fowl that I hunted as soon as the school bell rang every day. Of course, my passion for hunting exceeded my budget, but my dream of one day hunting a Cape buffalo kept me awake nights. That passion for hunting still exists in me, all too often I can't sleep the night before a big hunt.

In my teens Dad and I hunted what's now Limpopo Province of South Africa the Northern Transvaal, we hunted many species of then free-roaming game on low-fence game and cattle farms. I shot my first leopard at 16 years of age with my .30-06, a cattle killer problem animal. We hunted the Lowveld of Zimbabwe, the Zambezi Valley/Nyakasanga area of Zimbabwe, and the Tete province of Mozambique, it was in Mozambique that I hunted my first buffalo. We outfitted our own hunts, right down to tents, vehicles and food supplies.

I hunted professionally from the age of about 18 until my mid-20s, supplying meat to local butchers in South Africa for re-sale to consumers. I hunted to supply a local biltong/jerky producer that's still in existence today. I would head out to the bush for between 5 and 14 days to harvest as many animals as I could for the thriving meat trade. During that same period I hunted for a Christian drug rehabilitation centre and Church hospice in the Northern Cape. I would hunt for them for months on end, supplying the meat they'd need for the year. It was during this time that I met my loyal tracker and lifelong friend, Paulis, who I still hunt with today. I estimate that by the time I turned 25 I'd killed many hundreds of antelope in southern Africa on my own, and got paid to do it.

It was after that period that I decided to start guiding hunts as a career. I got my PH licence when I was 30 in order that I could guide clients legally, I have been guiding and selling hunts ever since.



This is the biggest elephant hunted in living memory. No one alive has hunted a bigger elephant.

AHG: Which countries have you hunted and where are you hunting these days?

CK: I began hunting in South Africa, where I grew up and still live. There's still great hunting available in South Africa, although the free-range hunting is no longer what it was when I grew up.

I've hunted Mozambique which has gone through its ups and downs. Right now I'd say Mozambique is a great place to hunt especially around the Coutada blocks.

Zimbabwe: that is without doubt the best big-game/dangerous game country I've hunted. Zimbabwe is free-range fair-chase big-game country and is top of my list of big-game hunting destinations.

Namibia: is another great place to hunt, Namibia reminds me of South Africa 30 years ago with its low human population and massive open spaces. The main focus in Namibia is plains game, although there are big-game hunts available in the Caprivi Strip area.

Botswana: I've hunted a few elephants along the Limpopo/Tuli side of Botswana, although there were no big tuskers around where I hunted. I also hunted Saars Post on a 100,000 hectare plains-game block where I shot a golden wildebeest split in the wild. Overall, Botswana is a great place to hunt with plenty of game around.

I hunted in Russia where I killed a brown bear on the Mongolian border with Siberia (Abakan). That was a tough place to hunt. I shot a great bear, made new friends without understanding a single word they said, and came home knowing that African hunters are not the only tough hunters in the world.

AHG: What are your recommendations for guns and ammo for dangerous and plains game?

CK: It depends on many factors. I don't think there are any bad calibers; all have a specific application. For plains game, depending on terrain and distance, plus the size of animal I'm hunting, I have used three calibers with great effect: .243, .30-06 and my trusted .300 WM that I was given by a good client from Spain (Thanks Juan).

As far as dangerous game goes, each to their own but for me what's worked well are the .375 H&H and the .458 Lott, both of mine are CZ rifles. I also own a .416 Rigby and a .500 Jeffrey's. I've never hunted with a double rifle, though I know hunters that use them well and make them look very impressive. I grew up with a bolt-action rifle and have stuck to that. Good shot placement always tops cartridge selection as long as legal minimum calibers are being used.



This is a buffalo that my Dad and I hunted together.

I advise hunters to always use premium grade ammunition. In my opinion, the best soft-point on the market is the Swift A-Frame. There's a case to be made for not using premium grade ammunition on leopard, varmint bullets works well on leopard. I use only solid bullets on buffalo, elephant and hippo, from the first shot to the last.

AHG: Which guns and ammo are you using to back-up on dangerous or wounded game?

CK: I use a .458 Lott with solid bullets to back up or follow wounded buffalo, elephant and hippo. I also use my .458 Lott with Swift A-Frame bullets to back up or follow wounded lion. For leopard I use an H&K 7.62 semi-auto rifle with 180-grain Swift A-Frame bullets in my 20-round clip, with a bayonet and a Led Lenser light mounted on a rail.

AHG: What is your favorite animal to hunt and why?

CK: Cape buffalo Dagga Boys! Such an exciting hunt - its kill or be killed when you're hunting buffalo.

Don't spend your time or money on a farmed buffalo hunt expecting the full experience. You won't get it, and may never hunt another buffalo. Hunt them properly, on their terms in their backyard, and you will be back. My problem with hunting fenced-area farmed buffalos is they're not the survivors that wild buffalo are. They're not able to outsmart you, nor are they given the opportunity to do so.

They're simply not the cunning, sly survivors that free-range Dagga Boys are. If you're not giving your target species the chance of flight and escape, a chance to outsmart you, then you're not hunting your harvesting.

Wild Dagga Boys have lived through drought, flood, poachers, hunters and lions, yet still venture into the hunting areas to cause trouble. That's where we wait for them. I recommend you hunt your Dagga Boy buffalo, free-range and fair chase, that's how it should be done.

AHG: Looking back, which was your greatest trophy and why?

CK: My greatest trophy is the buffalo I hunted with my dad in Mozambique. It was, and remains, the fulfillment of a father and son dream hunt in a perfect environment. That hunt was also a catalyst for me to enter the hunting industry in earnest as a career. On that day I believed I could accomplish anything. Since then I've been humbled and grateful to be a part of so many other father and son dream hunts coming true.

I chose that hunt with my dad over the many 70-pound-plus elephants, and very many 40-inch plus buffalo hunts I've booked, attended or guided for. There's so much more to hunting than trophy size. That 38-inch bull in Mozambique put me firmly on a path I'm still on, and will be on until my last campfire goes out.



This is the buffalo in question; note the high shoulder first shot that went right through the bull: Simon Dzingai and me.

AHG: What was your closest brush with death? Looking back, anything you should have done differently?

CK: I've been charged a few times by different big game; when they come, they come fast. Of course, it doesn't matter what species it is when you have to put it down at five meters or less or when it's on top of you. In the handful of times I've been charged by wounded dangerous game, only once has an animal made it past the line of fire to cause damage to a human.

I was hunting with lifelong friend and fellow PH, Mr. Simon Dzingai, from Chiredzi, Zimbabwe. Simon is a second generation PH; his father, Nixon Dzingai (Nixon guided my client/my booking on the 122 pounder in photo on this write up), is a PH of note, Nixon is famous the world over for the number and quality of elephants he's hunted. Simon and I were hunting for buffalo along the banks of the Limpopo River, on the Zimbabwe side in an area called Sengwe 1 when we came across the fresh tracks of three Dagga Boys, we followed the tracks no more than 100 meters through the thick jesse bush when we bumped into the feeding bulls. The closest bull was standing perfectly broadside, a nice old buffalo with worn-down horns and a rock-solid boss, no further than 15 meters from Simon and I.

Just before this hunt I'd been given a rifle by a good client, Raymond Mcluckie (now late), a very nice custom-built .416 Rigby on a Mauser K98 action, topped with a Leupold illuminated-recticle scope. I felt I should use it at least once since it was a wonderful gift and a beauty to look at. I was using 450-grain Woodleigh solids on that day, great bullets. In hindsight, my first

mistake was leaving my .458 Lott at home, since I know the gun backwards and have used it for many years, I could have done with the slower bullet and bigger punch on that day that y 458 Lott delivers.

As I saw the bull he saw me, and tensed up. I aimed, flicked the safety off, and the Rigby boomed. The buffalo staggered, then made off into the thicket with the other two bulls. I was very confident of a perfect high shoulder, double-lung shot, would have been impossible to miss my mark I felt. Simon and I hung back 100 meters or so to discuss the situation and gather ourselves.

We were very close to the dry Limpopo river bed where the bulls had crossed over from Kruger Park earlier that morning and since the bulls were now no more than 50 meters from the river we didn't want to run the risk of them crossing back over as we couldn't follow them into the KNP across an international boundary, if these bulls headed back into the Kruger Park they would be gone/lost. The risk was that the two healthy bulls would pull the wounded one with them back over the dry river bed. What to do?

We decided to follow up within five minutes of taking the first shot. We followed good lung blood for about 20 meters or so in single file along the pathway. In a sudden, massive crash of branches and thickets, the two unwounded bulls ran away towards the Limpopo River. Our tracker and game scout confirmed that the wounded bull was still in the thicket ahead. We stood still for a few minutes, listening. We could hear the bull struggling to breathe.... a loud gurgling sound could be heard as blood filled his lungs so we waited another few minutes until we heard nothing. There was no death

bellow - don't fall for the death bellow fable, it's the dead ones that kill you - we all agreed the bull was dead. That was mistake number two.

We should have headed back to camp for lunch then come back in the afternoon to load the dead buffalo. Needless to say we did not head back to camp, we followed the blood. That was our third mistake.... Young PH's....

We were very sure we knew the exact thicket the bull went into, so continued slowly in single file, with Simon up front and me looking over his shoulder. The next thing I heard was crash boom crash as the thicket in front of us exploded. The buffalo broke cover from five meters, charging straight at us. He'd watched us the entire time, waiting until we were on top of him before charging. The buffalo had had the upper hand all this time, and he got the drop on us.

The buffalo came at us, or rather at Simon who didn't have time to aim his rifle but fired at the charging bull from the hip. Later analysis confirmed that Simon hit the bull in the neck, but missed both the spine and the brain. You must hit one or the other or you're in trouble when being charged. With no time to reload, Simon turned towards me, preparing to run. I, in turn, turned around to see no one behind me. The game scout and his AK-47 were nowhere to be seen....

As I gathered my thoughts and turned to shoot the oncoming bull, in the corner of my left eye I saw Simon's rifle, a CZ in .404 Jeffrey come flying past me. In the next instant out the corner of my right eye I saw Simon go flying over my right shoulder.

Simon hit the ground just behind me; the buffalo had hit him from behind in the lower back/buttocks sending him and his rifle flying. As Simon fell he fell on his back and put his feet up in the air to try and stop the buffalo from stomping his chest, his neck and head into the ground, but the buffalo's bosses pushed Simon's legs into his torso like you or I would break a stem of grass.

All this happened within one meter of where I was standing. It was surreal and ALL happened so quickly, yet in my mind it was taking place in slow motion. It's amazing how your mind adjusts.

Without thinking, I flipped off my safety, stepped forward, stuck my barrel into the buffalo's neck and pulled the trigger at point blank range. There was no need, or time, to aim. My barrel was literally pressed up against the buffalo's high spine.

The buffalo collapsed in his tracks at the sound and impact of my shot, stone dead, falling on top of Simon.

As the buffalo fell Simon screamed out, "He's dead, don't shoot again!" He was clearly worried about getting shot, a real concern in situations like this. I could see the bull was dead, I had considered Simon's position in relation to my bullet before pulling the trigger, it all happened in a split second or less. I managed to pull Simon out from under the dead buffalo at about that time the tracker and game scout reappeared to help me. Luckily Simon wasn't badly hurt. He had a bruised hip and lower back from where he'd been hit, and a scratch or two on his arms from his hard landing.

The situation could have ended very differently on all counts, for better or worse. Looking back I should have not left my rifle at home, not followed up so soon, and left the bull to die once the other two bulls had departed. Solids are good bullets on buffalo, but take longer to take effect than soft points. I knew all of this and still didn't wait long enough.

These were mistakes I've not made again. Nor has Simon for that matter. Simon and I were hauled over the hot coals by Nixon that night in camp. We were lucky there were no clients around and that no one was seriously hurt. Since then I've never left my Lott at home on dangerous-game hunts, just makes me feel more confident.

AHG: How has the hunting industry changed over the years? And the hunting clients themselves?

CK: Hunting in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Namibia has not changed much in the 35 years I've been hunting. In some cases it's gotten better, the free-range concessions have gotten stronger, as these Governments have invested in sustainable utilization models and issued sustainable quotas. Mozambique and Zimbabwe are getting better every day. If the USA were to lift the elephant and lion ban imposed on Zimbabwe, those animals would receive a lot more support and tolerance from Africans.

Clients have become camera shy and have diminished interest in hunting due to attacks from anti-hunters and armchair conservationists that know nothing about conservation yet are, thanks to social media, prepared and able to ruin a hunter's life and business just for being hunters. Hunting expos are less well attended than they once were; online hunt shopping is becoming more common. I would say the industry is shrinking, with fewer clients and more

outfitters than ever before. I'm glad I did what I did, when I did it. I can't help but think that if I were starting out now I would never be able to do the same all over again. Time will tell, and at 45 I still have 15 years or so of guiding left let's see how it goes.

AHG: What qualities go into making a successful PH?

CK: First of all this is not a job, it's a career. Throw the free and fair employment book out the window since you'll be working 24/7. When you're not actually guiding you're handling trophy exports, marketing and fixing camps etc. PHs must embrace minimum wage! If your plan is to get rich, then you're barking up the wrong tree guiding and selling hunts. Good PH's are patient, honest and loyal. They need to be physically fit, strong and tough, shoot well and know a lot about guns and ammo. For the most part clients expect non-drinkers and non-smokers; no client wants drunken PH's in camp, it's not fair to the client if the trophy animal he booked to hunt runs away as a result of smelling your cigarette smoke.

AHG: What qualities go into making a good safari client?

CK: Africa's big game should be an end destination in your hunting career, not a first stop. Don't begin your hunting career by booking guided big-game hunts. Know your equipment well including your rifles and ammunition. Be flexible in your mindset as Africa is rural and Third World; shit happens here and always will. Price is only one factor you should consider when booking a hunt. Budget hunts give you budget results and marginal areas. Quality hunts in top areas with top PHs are worth every nickel.

AHG: If you could suggest one thing to your hunting clients to improve their safari experience, what would it be?

CK: Spend as much time as possible practicing shot placement before your hunt. Many clients struggle with big-bore recoil and end up flinching with the result that your animals are killed by your PH or lost completely. Most big-game clients are experienced hunters and nice guys. I've not had client problems in my career, nor problem clients. For the most part clients and PH's get along since hunting is the thread that binds us.

AHG: What can the hunting industry do to contribute to the long-term conservation of Africa's wildlife?

CK: First we must educate anti-hunters and armchair conservationists. Consultation with both anti- and non-hunters is our best way forward.

The hunting industry already operates under strict guidelines and on a sustainable utilization basis. Organizations like the True Green Alliance should get more support from hunters.

AHG: If you have a wife or partner, if she could do it all over again, would she? What's her advice to future wives of PHs? Are any of your children following in your footsteps?

CK: Yes I have a wife. Am I allowed to say that she's the main reason I hunt as much as I do?? Jokes aside, we have a great relationship. We work hard to support and educate our children in the ways of school and the ways of nature. I'm pretty sure she would do it all over again as would I.

My sons Hunter and Luke hope to follow in my footsteps although I would prefer them to be professional people. I don't think many fathers want their sons facing wounded buffalos, elephants, lions, etc. I hope my sons do hunt, but as clients. Hunting for a living and running a hunting business is a tough game.

AHG: Any last Words of Wisdom?

CK: Respect your clients and the animals you hunt at all times.

- Be honest and have integrity.
- Kill cleanly and fast.
- Don't experiment with calibres or shooting distances on live animals.
- Be mindful of the sacrifice that the animal you kill is making that sacrifice must be for the good of its species and the sustainability of its environment.
- Never hunt any animal that is under threat in its natural habitat; conserve and preserve before killing.
- Export clients' trophies quickly.
- Always stick to your pricelist; you cannot charge clients or agents differently.
- Use enough gun
- Stick with it as getting clients and making a success of this industry takes time like any other business.
- For my family and I there is no life without God. Give praise and be grateful for every day. And never complain about getting old; I knew too many people that never got the privilege.
- Every day above ground is a good one. 🦋