

THIRD TIME JUST AS LUCKY! THE HUNTER WHO SPECIALISES IN 59½" KUDU BULLS



Photo: Annette Oelofse

By Steve Tors

My latest client, Mike Connely, had just arrived in the hunting camp. Mike was a building contractor from San Diego in California, in his mid-forties, tall, broad-shouldered and quite athletic, and I could see he was a very keen hunter. After the introductions, my first question was: "What do you want to hunt, Mike?" He replied: "I'd really like to have a kudu and a gemsbuck."

For some reason I thought that this was his first hunt in Africa but as we chatted it transpired that he had hunted on the continent once before, in Zimbabwe. This set off warning bells because almost anytime somebody hunted in Zimbabwe, they hunted kudu – there are lots of kudus in Zimbabwe. So I asked him: "Didn't you get a kudu in Zimbabwe?" "Yes," Mike answered. I asked how big it was so that we would know what kind of a benchmark to look for. "It was 59½," he replied.

I said to Mike: "I don't want to be negative but I'm telling right now, with 12 days to hunt, the chances of

getting a 59½" kudu are not going to be that easy."

This was 35 years ago in Namibia, before a rabies epidemic took a devastating toll on the kudus, and there were kudus everywhere. Namibia was probably one of the best countries in Africa to hunt for greater kudu.

Mike said: "No Steve, don't get me wrong, I just love hunting kudu. I don't expect to get anything close to that – I know it is not realistic. Back home we hunt mule deer up in the ridges in Southern California, and I like to hunt elk. Hunting kudu is very similar to those type of hunts, and that is what I like to hunt."

Well, that was a bit of a relief and at least I knew he would be happy with the hunt. We started the hunt on one of our concessions – the largest privately-owned cattle ranch in Namibia. In those days it was just open cattle country with open-range gemsbuck and kudu – and there were plenty of kudu there. The terrain consisted of rocky koppies and mountain ranges with thick bush and open plains. It was a pleasure to hunt there.

So Mike and I started off driving along the roads, glassing the hills and checking out many kudu. On the

second or third day we saw quite a nice kudu browsing half way up a hill. In those days in Namibia two kudu were usually on a licence and there was no problem achieving that. We decided to try and stalk the kudu. We got out of the vehicle, did the stalk, put up the sticks, made a good shot – and the kudu went down. It was very nice 54½" bull.

Mike was really happy but we still had one to go, so we just kept on looking. There were quite a few places to glass from, including one koppie on top of a high plateau. We climbed to the top of the koppie and glassed down on the plateau below. Mike named this place 'Kudu Central' because from up on the koppie you could sometimes see five or six kudu bulls feeding below you at distances of 100 to 600 yards. And that was just one of our everyday stalk and glassing areas.

One day, on the way up to the top, Mike had a .375 over his shoulder. It was quite a steep hike. Mike slipped and went down, and as he started to tumble, he hugged the .375 to his chest and rolled with it so that the telescope wouldn't get damaged. I was quite impressed with that – sacrificing your arms and elbows so that your rifle wouldn't get knocked about! After he stopped rolling, I checked him out. He was fine apart from some bad scratches on his elbows and arms.

However, Mike was quite a tough guy. We continued hunting like this for quite a while, day after day. The average tally of kudu per day was running at about 20 mature, shootable kudu bulls every day!

The end of Mike's hunt was coming up but we still hadn't seen anything exceptionally big. On the third last day we were back at 'Kudu Central', glassing from the top of the koppie. There was very nice kudu, probably one of the biggest we had seen during the whole hunt, standing at about 400 yards from us. The wind was in our favour. We made our plans: Mike and my Bushman tracker, Levy, would go down, walk along the ridge and try to come up downwind of the kudu to get a shot. I'd stay on top of the koppie and give them hand signals if they lost track of the kudu.

Mike and Levy went down and I stayed up top, watching. However, as they say, animals don't get big by being dumb. This kudu was bedded down but he was looking straight downwind so he could see what he couldn't smell. After a half hour Mike and Levy reached the edge of the plateau but as they came over the kudu bull was looking straight at them. He jumped up but Mike was very quick and got in a shot as the kudu turned to run off. The bull ran a 100 yards and dropped. It was a very nice kudu and we admired the thick horns with their deep spirals – it was a fantastic trophy!

According to Namibian licence rules, all trophies must be measured and the details filled in on the same day the hunt took place. After taking photographs, the measuring tape came out. We were stunned to discover it was an unbelievable 59½" kudu! Now Mike had two 59 ½" kudus – however, Mike's Zimbabwe kudu had 10½" base, which is sort of average, while this one had 12½" base. This means it was even bigger than his first one, which is pretty unbelievable considering it was the third kudu he had ever taken. Of course, we had a big celebration!

There was still days of his hunt left, more than enough time to pick his second trophy, a gemsbuck. Mike got in a good shot from

the top of one of the koppies, and having bagged a nice big gemsbuck bull, the hunt was completed.

Hunting the hills back in those days was one of my most enjoyable hunts, and with a client like Mike Connely, who loved hunting in the hills as much as I did, it was probably the most memorable kudu hunt I had ever conducted. Mike returned about four years later to hunt with us again, and sure enough he shot another 59½" kudu! Mike was now the owner of three 59½" kudu trophies from three or four different hunts. The personalized licence plate of his Toyota Land Cruiser at home reads 'KUDU 60' – which I think is very appropriate! **ASM**

