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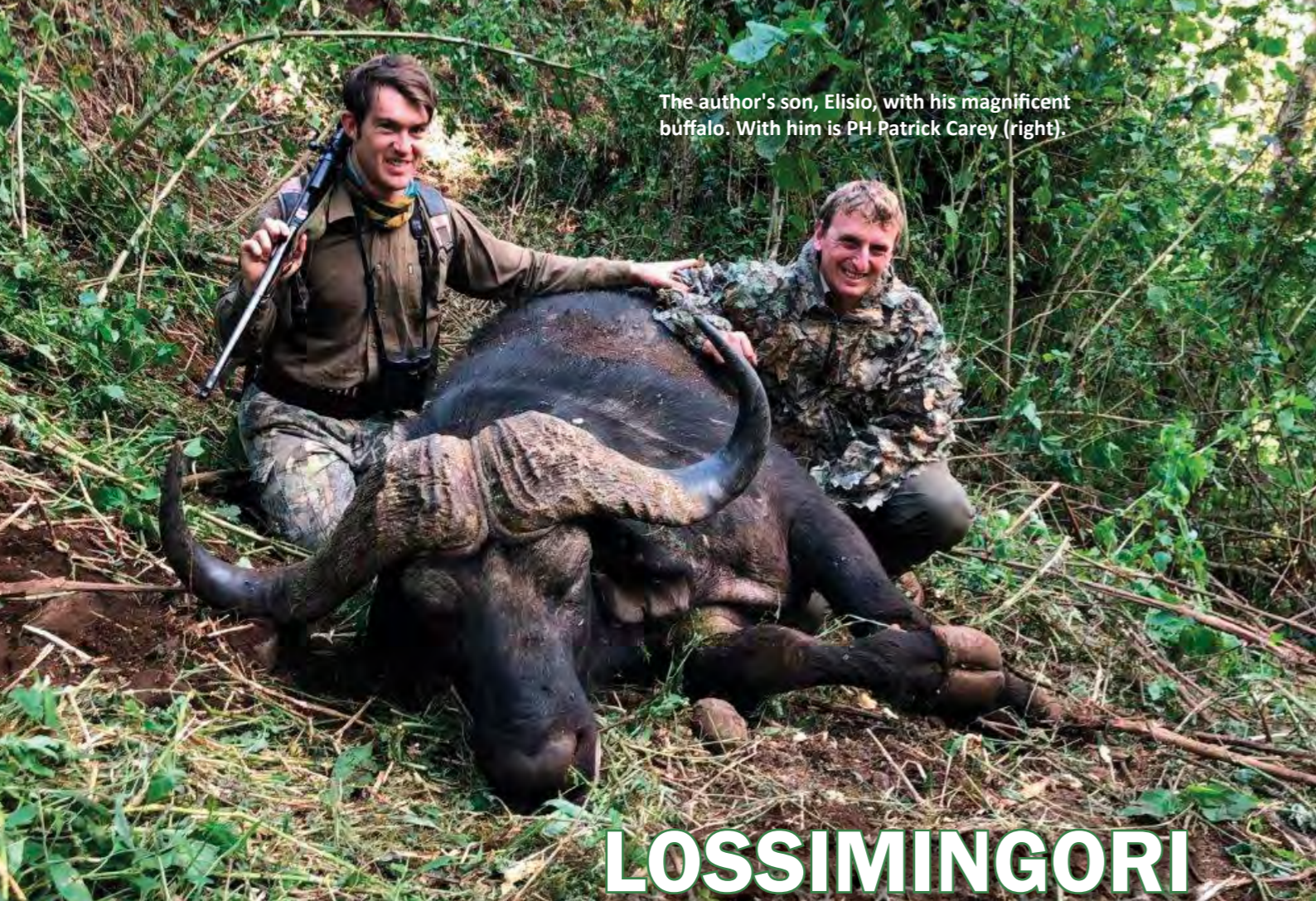
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The author's son, Elisio, with his magnificent buffalo. With him is PH Patrick Carey (right).

# LOSSIMINGORI

## WITH ROBIN HURT SAFARIS

### Hunting buffalo in the cloud forests of fantasy

#### Aldo Rech

*"Buffalo hunting still fascinates every hunter. It provides an immense potential for adventure as long as the hunter is truly willing to engage himself. It requires courage, endurance and the realisation that living is the sum of experiences. With this awareness a new breed of hunter has evolved. These are individuals for whom the intense nature of a hunting experience is the real trophy. Buffalo hunting provides them with unlimited scope for adventure."*

Rainer Josch – *Buffalo Hunters*

#### The road to the mountain

Masailand had not changed since our last visit. It was just more arid, which of course was better for the contrasts. The crimson flash of the Masai *shuka* (traditional cloth) against the fawn grass, the lime-green surge of the love-birds in the grey, leafless *Terminalia*, the blue-black mantle hiding the rich chestnut breast of the superb starling. There were also contrasts in the landscape – the grey-brown sweep of the Masai steppe and the turquoise sky, and between them the dark green mountains of Meru, Monduli, Burko and Lossimngori.

It was late afternoon when we drove to our camp on the summit of Lossimngori Mountain. The mountain was black-edged with gold from the setting sun and it loomed above the steppe, mysterious and almost menacing in the afternoon glow. The track reached steeply up the side of the slope and we ascended with the tyres grating on the rocks. On our right, the Rift Valley opened up, so we could see as far as the Ngorongoro escarpment and the scrub changed from gray to olive and then green as we ascended. The air became cooler and fresher and the exhilaration of a ten-day buffalo hunt on foot in the forests of Lossimngori was all-consuming.



Camp in the clouds

The track ended at the camp. In front of us stretched ridge upon ridge of forested slopes shimmering in the soft, golden afternoon light. Crowned eagles and mountain buzzards soared on a northerly breeze and the sound of the wind in the ancient cloud forests was like the murmur of a thousand voices. Eager figures crowded around the vehicle with hands thrust out. "*Habari, salamaa, kaributena,*" they exclaimed in soft, welcoming voices. And then I saw him – slight of build, with greying temples, meticulous in his movements and with brown eyes that sparkled when they looked at you. It was Lorinyo, the Masai tracker.

#### Forests of fantasy

There are few frontiers left in the world. When I first saw Lossimngori we were driving back from a hunting safari in Maswa. The mountain thrust up from the Masai steppe and I felt the same as Percy Fawcett<sup>1</sup> must have felt when he first saw the Ricardo Franco Hills in the jungles of the Amazon. He wrote: "Flat topped, mysterious, with forests covering their summits, their flanks cut by deep *quebradas*<sup>2</sup>. It was easy to imagine a lost world on top with creatures not yet known to man." From that moment on the urge in me to hunt Lossimngori was like a magnetic attraction drawing me slowly but inexorably to the hunt that I was about to undertake.

When one considers that Masailand is made up mainly of semi-desert acacia scrub plains, the cloud forests on the summit of Lossimngori are indeed something special. Every morning the mist covers the mountains and the tops of the ridges of Lossimngori are clothed in dense forests with lichens, moss, lianas and huge trees, all of which are dependent on the life-giving mist for moisture. In the clearings there is green kikuyu grass. Due to the ever-increasing pressure from the Masai cattle herders, the mountain has become the last stronghold of buffalo in this particular area. There are also elephant, lion, leopard, eland and bushbuck. Except for a rough track to the camp, there are no roads and all hunting is by foot.

#### Into the shade

Most mornings on Lossimngori were misty, with the mist usually clearing by midday at the latest. The first morning



Enjoying an afternoon cigar

of our hunt was an exception in that it dawned clear with a strong westerly wind blowing and excellent visibility, except for certain portions of the high forests where tendrils of mist were still lifting. We left the camp in single file. The backpack fitted snugly and the heavy feel of the double on one shoulder was comforting. On both sides of the ridge, valleys sloped in all directions. Bushbuck barked from the glades and Schalow's turaco called harshly from the canopy.

Lorinyo led, pausing every so often to listen and scan with his binoculars. As the last tendrils of mist drifted from the slopes of one of the valleys, we saw the black shapes moving slowly between the brush and then the herd disappeared into the forest. The buffalo were like ghosts, appearing and then disappearing.

As the wind was blowing from our right to our left, we scanned the forests on our right. Where the trees were tall and the sunlight could not penetrate, the forest was relatively open, but in the open glades weeds, nettles and grasses grew in lush profusion and even when the buffalo were in an opening, one would only see portions of them for an instant.

It was mid-morning when Lorinyo raised his right hand, indicating that we should stop. He listened intently and motioned that the rest of the party should remain in this position and that our PH Patrick Carey, my son Elisio, and I



PH Patrick Carey – "the man with the fair hair"





Doubles become friends

should accompany him. We nudged into the forest proper and immediately my nostrils picked up the pungent scent of buffalo. We were extremely lucky to have the wind as it deadened the noise made by our approach. The slope below us was almost perpendicular. Very gradually Lorinyo raised his stick, pointing. In a small clearing directly below us I could see the black shapes of a small herd of buffalo. Some were feeding and others were prostrate in the morning sun. We moved closer. Patrick and Elisio climbed a tree to get a better view, and when they descended they indicated that there was a good bull. However, the bull was lying in an unshootable position. There was nothing else to do but wait. Time never passes as slowly as when you are waiting for it to pass and it was mid-afternoon when the bull got up and moved into the clearing. As luck would have it, his head was facing away from us and Elisio had to wait for what seemed like an eternity until the bull turned. At the shot the buffalo hunched and I had a glimpse of the herd tearing away down the hill and the bull stumbling and becoming entangled in clumps of creepers. There was the noise of a heavy body falling and then the long drawn-out death bellow. Elisio had done it.

It was very late in the afternoon when we had finished. As much of the meat as could be carried by the trackers and ourselves had been removed from the buffalo. The skull minus the bottom jaw had been cleaned and was attached to a backpack carried by Elisio. We started the ascent of the ravine into which the buffalo had fallen and the words of Roger Hurt, co-owner of Robin Hurt Safaris,

resounded in my brain: "Get as fit as you possibly can – then get fitter." My load was relatively light compared to Elisio's, but every step up the ravine was an effort.

At last we emerged into a clearing on top of the ridge. There are certain moments in one's life that will always be remembered and this was one of them ... The sun was sinking behind Elephant Hill and the forests were bathed in a golden orange light. The buffalo horns carried by Elisio seemed to glow with an inner fire.

### The man with the fair hair

It is very easy to immortalise professional hunters. Hemingway did it with Philip Percival and Ruark did it with Harry Selby. It is so that the relationship with your professional hunter sometimes transcends friendship. When you add the qualities of respect and admiration to this relationship, there is always the danger of the pedestal. I know for a fact that Patrick would never want to be placed on a pedestal. His character had never been moulded by the formless grey pulp of political correctness. He had never claimed instant fame by virtue of his posing next to the carcasses of dead animals. There was a steeliness and a "Chindit"<sup>3</sup> quality about him and he was a living disciple of the philosophy of phenomenology<sup>4</sup>. Enconced in his house he had built on the Usa River in Arusha, managing logistical and other operations in dangerous frontiers of the Congo and the CAR (Central African Republic), guiding bowhunts for buffalo in Grumeti, extremely well read and



My rifle, my shotgun barrels and me..."

Thomas Wolkman - owner of Heym







**The ascent**

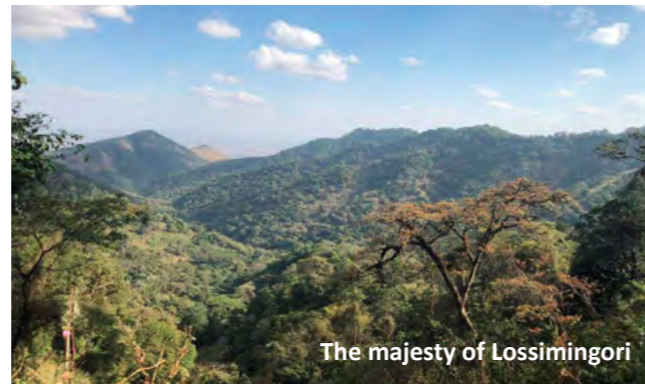
an avid historian, Patrick was a real character from the pages of Rudyard Kipling or Richard Burton. Trousers were not important to him, except for, he would argue, if you only had one pair. What was important, however, was the "between-the-wars" .470 Rigby double he carried, his remarkable sense of humour, and the fact that only 32 years of his life had passed.

### Glimpses of the primeval

We had walked very far that morning along the main ridge, then down and up over the saddle and right at the next ridge, which extended in a westerly direction, eventually dropping into the hunting concession known as Mto wa Mbu. The air was as clear as a diamond. There were signs of buffalo everywhere and Patrick and the trackers went in different directions to scout. The track ran on top



**The author with his fine buffalo bull**



**The majesty of Lossimngori**

of the ridge and widened at intervals into glades of kikuyu grass. I sat in the shade at the edge of the track, scanning the ridges and surrounding forests with my binoculars for signs of movement. I became aware of a strange caterwauling emanating from one of the glades and a closer look with my binoculars revealed a huge maned lion and lioness in the act of mating. Elisio, the game scout and I sat watching the scene when we became aware of a herd of eland walking in single file on the ridge towards the clearing in question. The lions also became aware of the elands' presence and the upshot of all this was the herd doubling back towards us, running along the ridge and eventually disappearing into the forest on the other side with the lions in hot pursuit. We looked on in awe as Lake Manyara sparkled in the distance.

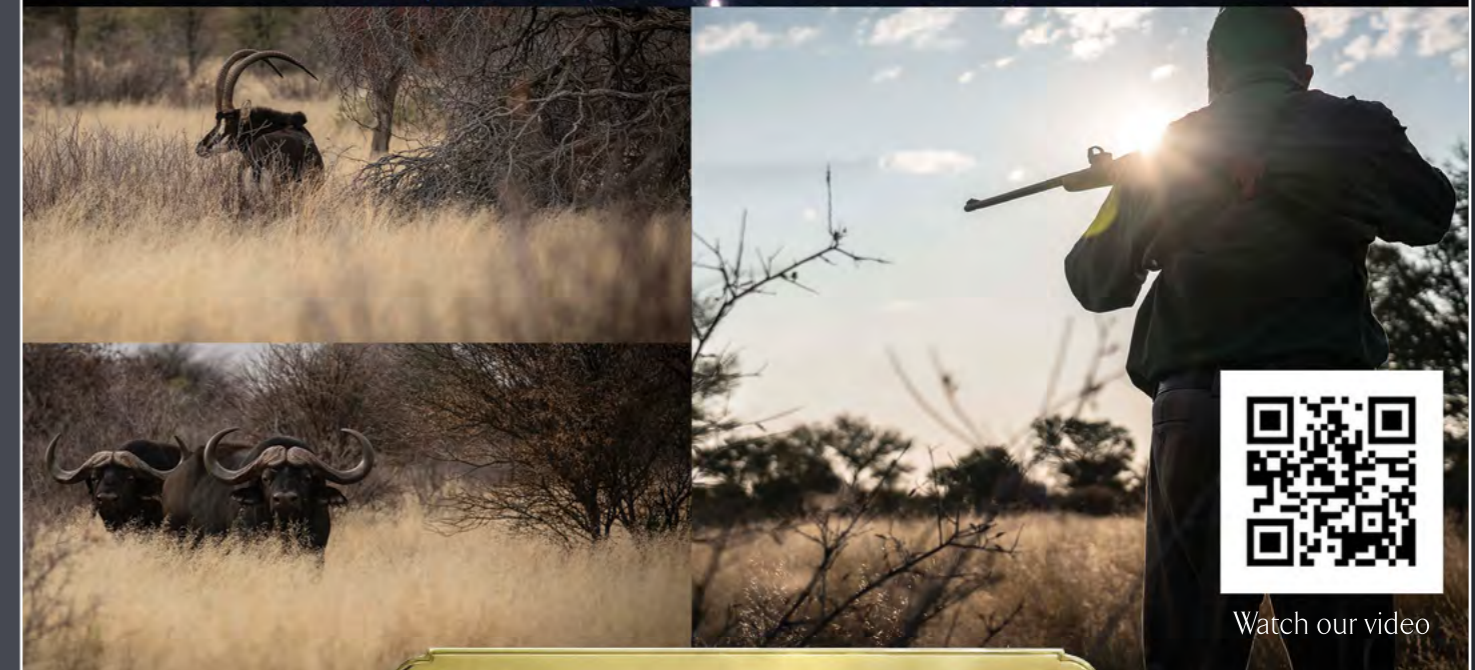
That afternoon, after a long trek down the valley at one of the waterholes, Lorinyo suddenly crouched down and pointed. At the waterhole stood a young elephant bull, drinking. The wind was in our favour as we approached. Without warning a much larger bull emerged from our left and began to shove the younger bull with his tusks, trying to move him away from the waterhole. The spring emerged from a small gap in the rocks and it was obvious that the large bull wanted the source of fresh water for himself. In the meantime, the younger bull started moving towards us and Lorinyo motioned that we should slowly retrace our steps, which we did. We passed within a short distance of the elephants, and I was left wondering over how many centuries the elephants had actually drunk from the same waterhole.



**Lunch in Masailand**



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**AFRI-SUN SAFARIS**



## Fate decrees

It was the eighth day after Elisio had shot his buffalo. We had hunted the length of the mountain. Opportunities had presented themselves but it was either a case of the bull being too soft or the wind changing at the last minute, or simply not being able to get within shooting distance of a suitable bull. On the morning of the eighth day, we were walking on a ridge that ran at right angles to the main ridge. There was thick mist and we walked slowly, listening carefully. Lorinyo picked up the sound of a feeding herd on our right. There was nothing to do but wait, so we sat on top of the ridge, waiting for the mist to move, which eventually it did. The slope below us was covered in a shrub that the Masai refer to as "Ol-Masakwa", growing to a height of 4 to 5 ft, with bright pink flowers.

The slope extended approximately 300 m down to where a shallow valley started, covered with tall trees and patches of thick scrub. A herd of buffalo was feeding in the Ol-Masakwa. We retraced our steps back to the main ridge, glassing. While we were moving, two groups of buffalo broke down the valley and disappeared into the thick brush at the bottom. There was still movement in the shrubs on the slopes and Patrick and Lorinyo did a short reconnaissance. When they returned they reported having seen a large bull that was obviously not part of the group that had broken away. This buffalo had not gone very far in the thick shrub and we moved back up to the top of the ridge to glass.

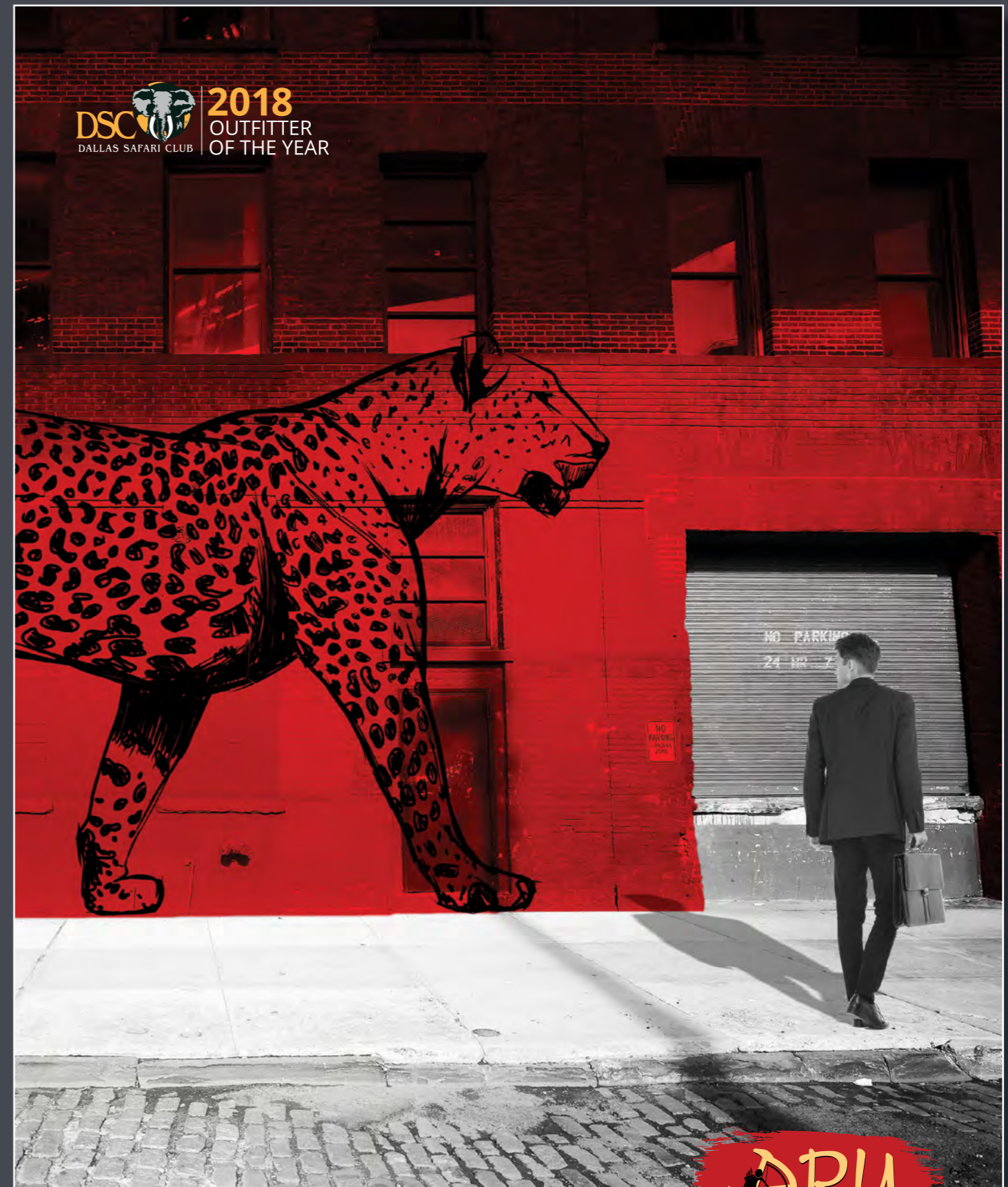
It wasn't long before Lorinyo picked up the shape of two buffalo bulls lying in the shade of a large tree where the valley started. At this time the sun was almost directly above us and it was a case of having to wait until the bulls got up to feed. Once again we waited. In the late afternoon, when both buffalo started to feed up the slope towards the ridge, Lorinyo led the way, followed by Patrick, Elisio and I. We had to move extremely slowly as the brush was very thick. We were halfway down the slope when Lorinyo stopped and slowly raised his stick, pointing to our right. The black mass of a buffalo appeared, head down and feeding towards us. The distance was only 20 m and I had the great fortune of being able to break the buffalo's neck with a shot from the left barrel of my double. We waited a while before approaching the downed animal.

*This was the first time in my hunting career when, having arrived at the buffalo, no one spoke a word for the first couple of minutes. It was not the widest nor the oldest nor the biggest buffalo I had ever shot, but I think everyone realised that this was in many senses the apex of my hunting career.*

We were ravenous when we arrived home at camp that night. Skewers of pepper chicken were presented



Lost for words ...



### Aru's American Expo Tour 2019

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9 - 12 January 2019, booth #3039

**Dallas Safari Club**, Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Centre,  
17 - 20 January 2019, booth #2926



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**Glassing for buffalo**

while we were sitting around the fire, sipping glasses of red wine. We were then summonsed to the mess where a steaming tureen of buffalo-tail soup awaited us. After we were finished, the chef appeared, bearing a huge platter of buffalo steaks, served with golden brown potatoes.

After the meal we sat outside the mess, smoking port cigars and listening to the sound of the wind in the forests. It had been a remarkable day.

## Into the Rift

The next morning we dropped down into the Rift with the trackers – across the concession to Monduli Juu and then down into the valley. Memories of our safari during 2011 came rushing back. Lesser kudu in the hills, gerenuk, Grant’s and Thomson’s gazelle in the valley. Elisio bowled over the first sizeable Tommy we saw, and in the shade of a spreading thorn tree he slaughtered the animal. Lengai



**Lorinyo, our skilled Masai tracker**

had a fire going and our nostrils filled with the delicious aroma of roasting meat. We had the liver cooked in a pan, sirloins barbequed over open flames and bits of rib on wooden stakes roasted by Lengai. We drank red wine and listened to the sound of the bells worn by the Masai cattle. We spoke of former safaris together, of the enjoyment of life and the wonder of simply prepared food.

We drove back in the afternoon through a rainstorm and then up the escarpment while Masailand stretched out in front of us. Although Elisio and I never said it expressly, Lossimingori had changed us forever.



### FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Exploration Fawcett – Percy Harrison Fawcett
- 2 *Quebradas* – ravines
- 3 The Chindits were a special-force unit operating in the forests of Burma from 1943 to 1945, known for their stamina and bravery.
- 4 Phenomenology is the philosophical movement that concentrates on the detailed description of conscious experience as opposed to the science of being.

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