

## Subscriber Field Notes

### Wing Shooting and Sightseeing in South Africa

This bird hunting and sightseeing trip to South Africa with professional hunters **Mark and Glen Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa** included four couples, and two solo guys. We left Atlanta on Delta through Dakkar and on to Johannesburg. It was a brutal trip even in business class.

We arrived in Johannesburg and cleared customs. Air 2000 helped clear our guns (\$150 USD), and it was worth every penny. We were driven to Bloemfontein, which took about four hours and arrived about midnight at De Oudkraal Bed & Breakfast. We had decided to drive to Bloemfontein because the reports regarding staying the night in Johannesburg were not very favorable. (It is our understanding that there is now a flight from Johannesburg to Bloemfontein with only a two-hour layover.)

**This was our third trip with the Haldanes, and it was just as good if not better than the two previous trips.**

At De Oudkraal, outside Bloemfontein, we hunted dove, pigeons, and geese for two days. **The birds were great and the food gourmet.** The gals toured the local area in a van with Glen their driver. The area around Bloemfontein is steeped in history with a wonderful museum of the Boer War and a memorial to the women who died there. They also visited a lion and cheetah breeding farm where they saw lion cubs from six weeks to a year old, and a special breed of white lions.

On leaving De Oudkraal, we caught an early morning flight to Durban on the third day. We were driven by van from Durban to Baynesfield estate to have lunch. We toured the estate and museum, then settled in tented chalets overlooking a lake. The gals were off on an adventure to Seaforth Country Lodge. Leaving early the next morning from Seaforth Lodge in a four-wheel drive vehicle, they made it over Sani Pass into Lesotho to visit a small village of the Basotho tribe, and have lunch at the highest pub in all of Africa.

The men enjoyed an afternoon red-eyed dove shoot followed by a late evening goose hunt that was really hot-barreled. We quit while the geese were still fogging in. The next morning, we had a walk-up with dogs for francolin and spurfowl. **The hunt was very good with lots of birds although not a stroll in the park.** Mark said that not all his groups liked this kind of hunt. After lunch and a quick rest, we hunted dove. It was somewhat slow because of a cold front that was coming in and a brisk wind. We did shoot several Rameron pigeons as well as Cape turtledove. A great meal of African Pot Stew and some drinks were



waiting for us on our return to camp.

The next day, we were off to Zulu Wings by van. Met the gals along the way, and caught up on their adventure over Sani Pass plus the spa night at Seaforth Country Lodge. We settled in our rooms at Zulu Wings. Three of us stayed to hunt and the rest of the group were off to Mkuze Falls Game Preserve and Lodge to do some game viewing. That evening we shot about 40 ducks, mostly yellowbills. The next morning we did a goose hunt from pit blinds with dogs, and we shot approximately 20 Egyptian geese and four or five spurwings. **The dove were challenging, high flying, and abundant the next morning.** This hunt was followed by a duck shoot in the evening.

Meanwhile, the group members who went to Mkuze Falls Game Lodge were taken to their chalets overlooking the Mkuze River and falls. After high tea,

they were off on their first game drive. Sibbo, the ranger, provided the group with magnificent photo ops of four of the Big Five, getting so close that the zoom lenses on cameras weren't needed.

We completed the final two days of shooting starting with **the best driven guinea fowl hunt I have ever had.** Although cold and wet, the five of us shot about 30 guineas. That evening we had another typically good duck hunt.

One member of our group took advantage of plains game hunting and shot a very good wildebeest, black springbok, and a common springbok.

**The last day of hunting was filled with a morning of walk-up francolin and spurfowl, and finished with an evening of unusual decoyed crows and pigeons. This was lots of fun!**

The group who returned from Mkuze did several trips including a visit to the battlefields of Rork's Drift that ended with a narration of the battle. The gals did a lot of shopping on the Midlands Meander, and ended with a drive through the Drakensburg Mountains for a performance by the Drakensburg Boys Choir.

Although we were not ready for our hunting to come to an end, our time with the Haldanes was over. Awaiting us after a short flight from Durban to Cape Town was the Victoria and Alfred Hotel, which is located on the wharf very close to good restaurants and shopping. The hotel is great, breakfasts very hardy and good, the service impeccable, but there is no onsite gun storage now. It was a hassle to store the guns in town as it took us over an hour each time to store them, and then retrieve them the day we flew back to the States. It will cause me to rethink staying there again. We stayed in Cape Town three days, visited the wine country with wine tastings, Cape of Good Hope, botanical gardens, and did some shopping. The restaurants were good to excellent.

**In summary, this is a great trip for couples as the gals have as much fun as the guys.** The variety of birds in different locations was unmatched. **The hunts with the Haldanes are as well planned as any**

**you will encounter.** We designed the trip so that we could do the most that we could in the 16 days total trip time.

Cost was \$550/day per hunter and \$400/day per nonhunter. Not included in the price are the international and in-country flights, tips, shells, Cape Town with tour guides and vans. I shot 40 boxes of shells and the price was appropriate. **I can offer no real negatives to this trip.**