



The blind resembles a giant Hershey's Kiss dropped in the dirt near a mud-puddle.

# Stickbow Hunting on the Zingela

Story and Photos by  
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**I**t's early morning in late May and I'm sharing a hunting blind in northern South Africa with two recently acquired friends. Waiting for the sun to wash the chill from my neck and shoulders, I can't believe my good fortune to have this day, this place, this moment. Our blind



(L to R) Tracker, Dennis Kamstra, Tracker, author, Gerry MacDonald

in the dirt near a mud-puddle. It hasn't rained since February, but there is a small stand of red clay tainted water, and the clear sky promises heat that will bring the drinkers.

I'm sharing the hide with traditional bow hunting icon Dennis Kamstra. Traditional bow (or stick bow) hunters use the kind of simple bows and arrows that have been around for centuries, not the



Zingela Camp is in northern South Africa near the Limpopo River. A two hour drive from Polokwane (Pietersburg) International Airport.

modern compound bows with pullies and cables. Kamstra has traveled the world in search of game to maneuver to the sharp side of his wooden arrow and has succeeded more times than not. He is a deep well of stickbow-hunting knowledge, and when he offered me the chance to hunt with him at his new South African hunting concession, Zingela, I couldn't decline.

Kamstra is director of marketing for MacDonald Pro Hunting International and spends half of the year in the states and the other half in South Africa. MacPro is a family business in its sixth decade of professional hunting, now run by brothers Sandy and Gerry MacDonald. Kamstra chose Gerry to be my professional hunter

on this trip. He's just what you'd want in a P.H., 34 years old with 60 years of experience. I knew I was in good hands as we sat in the blind watching the darkness fade.

Our first visitor is a jackal. We watch him as he steals a quick drink and leaves. We have a common predatory kinship with the jackal and intend him no harm. Like him, all we need is a little water, warm sunlight on a cold morning, and a fair chance at finding game. I silently wish him luck as his hunt, ultimately, is more important than mine.

#### **At First Light**

Waking up early in the morning, I slip into a fleece jacket, unzip the tent flap,

walk outside and watch the sunrise. The feeling of being alone in the middle of 46,000 acres in this ancient land, waiting for the day to begin is that of belonging and also of insignificance.

I met Kamstra in the Johannesburg Airport. He's a rugged, solid-framed man with the built of a 1970 International Scout. He may not go fast but I get the impression he can go over, under, or right through anything in his way. He's wise by way of travel, age and experience, and by doing things his own way. He's not self righteous about traditional archery as some can be, but he's always willing to tell people about it's rewards, and he shares his mistakes openly to save others from the same.

#### **Second Visitor**

A lone gemsbok walks to the edge of the water at the left side of the blind, quartering toward us. It is a large African antelope with spectacular long and straight horns. The gemsbok continues slowly to the middle of the waterhole and stops broadside with my shooting window. Without a word from my hide mates, I take a stand in the rear shadows and pull my bow to full draw.

I let the string slip from my fingers, keep my head down, my eyes on the gemsbok's ribcage, and watch as the white feathers spin through and land red in the water behind. The gemsbok bolts out of the waterhole and out of sight. We all know it won't get far. MacDonald smiles and softly says, "Brilliant."

That arrow, with its slowly turning white feathers disappearing into the gemsbok and reappearing red on the other side, is something I'll never forget. After a wait, we leave the blind and find the red-stained arrow still floating in the water. I take several pictures of it because it seems to make its own statement. After tracking the gemsbok through the dusty bushveld for only a hundred yards, we find him lying motionless. We only need for the trackers to bring the truck, load the gemsbok, and cart it off to the salt shed.



**Equipment:** On this trip I used a sixty-four inch, sixty-five pound longbow that I'd made myself for about one hundred dollars. My arrows were Grizzly Stick Alaskans from Alaska Bowhunting Supply, and my broadheads were Silver Flames from German Kinetics.

### **Third Visitor**

An impala walks in from the same side as the gemsbok. It is a medium-sized antelope with exquisite lyre-shaped horns. I look at MacDonald. He gives me a slow and deliberate thumbs up. I slide slowly up the back wall of the blind. The impala stands at the far edge of the water, alone and broadside. I loose an arrow and immediately utter a profanity as I see the arrow bury itself to the feathers farther back than I intended. Kamstra is unphased, barely looking over his reading glasses as the impala disappears into the bushveld. His calmness is reassuring. As we wait before tracking, I review the shot in my mind and begin to believe the shot may have been lethal.

In a short time we find the impala piled up in the bush. MacDonald and I were almost on top of the impala before we saw him. Kamstra, lagging 30 yards behind us, asked with good humor, "I wondered when you guys were going to see him." Standing over the impala I began a short speech on how a longbow hunter needs nerves of steel and a steady hand to attempt a femoral artery shot and - - we all laugh because we know I'm full of dung.

Finding the impala in such short order relieves me over a less-than-perfect shot, and once again there are smiles all around. After taking photos and loading the impala in the truck, we still have a few more hours in the blind before dark. The rest of the day is spent watching animals, but no more were taken except by camera.

When we get back to camp, there is a fire blazing to ward off the evening chill. We share sundowners at the fire pit and enjoy the quiet kind of contentment that is hard to match outside a hunting camp. I'd taken two fine animals in one day with a longbow that I'd made with my own hands; both shots were effective with no dogs or expert trackers required. A day like this is why we hunt for years on end, a single day that will last forever.

In front of the fire we celebrate – not the killing but the hunt itself. We celebrate the day and companionship, and we celebrate the little pieces of the old Africa that still exist. We celebrate our luck at being able to see for ourselves the images of safaris past created by our old favorite writers. And we celebrate the mystical flight of a feathered shaft off of a bare bow made of wood.

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