

My first African hunting experience was May of 2005 in Groblersdal, South Africa. I hunted at Ilanga with native guide Benito van Leeuwen. During the first week of the hunt, I had the opportunity to harvest many great animals. These amazing creatures included the Impala, Kudu, Blue Wildebeest, Red Hartebeest, Warthog, and Water Buck. It was common to see as many as one hundred animals a day, and I saw many other big game animals. My entire first week of hunting was from ground blinds on water holes and major trails.

With under a week left in my trip, I spoke with Benito concerning the possibility of taking my hunting to a more difficult level. We discussed the different animals I could spot and stalk. I told Benito I wanted to go after something most people don't hunt with archery, something that would be an extreme challenge to take with a bow. Benito then told me about a three thousand plus pound, fifteen to twenty foot animal. He was referring to the giraffe, a highly difficult animal to take with archery. Few giraffe are hunted; even fewer are shot with a bow. Even those that are shot with a bow are usually backed up with a high-powered rifle. After learning this, it was not difficult at all to decide on the giraffe as my next conquest. I knew it would just be me, my bow, and my arrow. The shot would have to count.

Based on his experience, Benito recommended a much heavier arrow than I was using and more foot-pounds to do the job. He handed me the April/May 2005 issue of *Africa's Bowhunter and Archer* to back up his opinion. The main topic of this magazine issue was hunting the giraffe. After reading many articles about hunting the giraffe, I learned my ability was there and my Mathews Switchback Bow could get the job done. However, my current arrow was not capable of the great feat ahead. Benito agreed with the 700-grain arrow minimum the magazine recommended, so we started the process of getting an arrow ready for the hunt. We took my 560-grain Easton 2315 Arrow and inserted an Easton 2117 Arrow into the shaft. This gave us an 850-grain arrow, which was what I needed to be able to successfully harvest the animal.

After doing this, we had 90 foot-pounds of kinetic energy, which was more than sufficient to take down a giraffe. We decided upon a solid two-blade steel Grizzly Broadhead because of the durability it would offer. Due to the size of the animal, we were still concerned about having enough power. The shot would have to be no longer than 30 yards to be successful. We preferred a head-on shot right above the shoulders in the lower neck area, which is a great opening to the vital organs. A broadside shot is also good, but there is a great risk of hitting the scapula if the shot is too high. This would mean no penetration and missing the vital organs. The other risk with a broadside shot is a direct hit with a rib bone, also preventing penetration with the vital organs. After taking all of this into consideration, we decided a head-on shot would be the best.

I spent the entire day Monday, May 16th sighting in my bow. Due to the weight of the arrow, I had to make adjustments to my setup. I adjusted my Trophy Ridge Drop Zone Rest and spent hours adjusting the pins on my Extreme Sniper XLT Sight, making sure I had exceptional arrow flight with no tail to the arrow. Any tail to the arrow could cause loss of kinetic energy upon impact with the animal. I concentrated on 20 yards and 30

yards, which would be the maximum shot I would be comfortable with. After doing this, Benito and I finally felt I was ready for the journey ahead.

I set out Tuesday, May 17th for the hunt of a lifetime. Benito and I started the day by going to the lookout at the tallest point of the ranch. This gave us the ability to glass the area to find the giraffe herds, providing an easier chance of locating them once we got out in the bush. From the lookout, we located three different herds in different locations on the ranch, each one consisting of five or more giraffes. However, seeing them up on the lookout didn't mean they would still be there once we got out in the bush. Giraffe will travel up to ten miles a day and can move quite fast. Observing from the lookout just gave us a little advantage, so we could go down and move in the direction we thought they might be going. Once we had located the herds from the lookout, we made our plan on which direction to head upon arriving in the bush.

The time had finally come to make our way out to the bush. After a few hours, we made our first encounter with a herd. Due to wind direction and little cover in the area, we had a hard time getting close enough for a shot. The closest we were able to get on this herd was 80 yards before our cover was blown. We decided to back off and try another area where there was more cover and the wind was more in our favor.

The new area brought many potential opportunities but no success because of our pursuit for a head-on shot. I was presented with broadside shots most of the day, and many of these shots were at a distance greater than 30 yards. I did not feel comfortable with any of the shooting opportunities. At one point, we thought I had a good chance. Then, upon ranging, we found we were 33 yards out and didn't feel I should take a shot. Because we wanted to stay within a 30-yard range, I passed up the animal, hoping the day would bring a better opportunity.

After many unsuccessful encounters, we headed back to camp to discuss our plans. We talked about the day's opportunities and the many broadside shots I was presented with throughout the day. We questioned whether I should take a broadside shot if the timing and positioning was right. After much discussion, we decided I would consider taking a broadside shot if everything was in my favor and I felt comfortable. Before leaving camp, I took several more shots with my bow, making sure everything was still working properly. In the back of my mind, I knew there was a possibility that a broadside shot would be my only chance.

We headed back out to the bush at 1:30 in the afternoon. We knew we only had a few hours of daylight left, so we had to get moving. For the next few hours, we had no encounters and were starting to get frustrated. At 3 o'clock, we finally spotted a herd of eight giraffe. We didn't know how we would get close enough for a shot, but the bush played to our advantage because it was very heavily covered. It was late in the day, and there were many shadows we were able to move in and out of. We slowly proceeded, carefully taking each step as quietly as possible. Everything seemed to be working in sync. The wind was in our favor, and we had moved within 50 yards of the herd. The next 20 yards would be the most difficult. The desired bull in the herd was the farthest

from us. Not only did we have to move in close enough to get to him but we had seven other sets of eyes that could possibly see us as well. We moved forward and were finally able to get within our range.

Finally, my time had come. I had a huge decision to make. It was almost 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and I was presented a broadside shot with the biggest bull we had seen yet. We were able to work within 28 yards of the giraffe. In a quiet whisper, I told Benito I felt 100% positive in my ability to make this broadside shot. He never pressured me to take a shot I was uncomfortable with or did not feel I could do. He never instructed me to take a shot. He left it completely in my hands.

Finally, the time had come to see if our work had paid off. Standing behind a big bush pile with heavy shadow, I waited for my opportunity. The giraffe was looking in our direction, but he never saw us. I waited for the right time and then silently drew back my bow. Before I hit the trigger, I prayed and asked God to guide my arrow. I placed my 30-yard pin on the spot. Once I was in complete control of the situation and felt 100% comfortable, I knew the time was right. I hit the trigger on my release, and it was as if time stood still. It seemed like the arrow would never get there. This was the first time I have ever seen an arrow fly so true in my life. Finally, I saw the arrow impact. I could see everything. I could see the arrow penetrate all the way to the 4-inch vane. It was almost a complete penetration. Seeing this, we knew I had missed the ribs and the shot was true. I watched the giraffe run, not one hundred yards out of visual sight and could hear it go down. As I turned back to Benito, he said it was perfect. He couldn't believe how precise my shot was. He asked if I wanted to go retrieve my trophy. I looked at him in disbelief and said, "What do you mean? I just shot it. We need to wait."

"No, my friend. That was a perfect shot. In 15 seconds, it was over," he said. We started our way to my trophy. After walking less than 80 yards, we found the giraffe. I was completely amazed. I could not believe what I had done in making this incredible shot. Our specially made arrow did exactly what it was supposed to do. Upon retrieving the arrow, we found that it had flawlessly entered between the ribs and offered a double-lung shot, instantly sending the animal to its fate. I had found my trophy, and my journey was complete.

After thinking back on all the time I spent preparing myself mentally and my equipment physically, any less would not have done the job. I learned a lot in my two weeks at Ilanga with Benito. There is much more to hunting than just shooting the animal. When you don't know what your equipment is capable of, you are missing out on more than you can imagine. By changing just a few things on your setup, you can increase your opportunities by 100%. If we hadn't spent all the time we had in making sure my equipment was 100% accurate, the opportunity I had would most likely have been lost. My first trip is complete and in the bag, but all it has done is sparked a fire that will send me back to Ilanga.

--Jim Barbarossa