

What Would Teddy Say?

PHS Hugo Seia and Rudy Lubin go back in time together when they, along with PHs including Eric Stockenstroom and Alain Lefol, proudly offered authentic fair-chase, tracking-on-foot hunting in the Central African Republic – the very opposite of today's "Toyota Safaris."

So I paid attention to Hugo's recent e-mail about a hunting video celebrating extreme distance shooting of eland, kudu, and impala at 650, 700, and 980 yards.

"My Dear Hunting Colleagues and Friends," he wrote, "I am shocked and saddened by this 'hunting' video, I believe from South Africa. In my opinion, what I saw is a completely different activity from *hunting*. Instead, it is what I call *unfair killing*, and I believe it will stain our profession and even the future of safari hunting in Africa. Hi-tech 'sniper' rifles are war weapons, not hunting rifles!"

After watching the video, I passed the link on to other members of the hunting community whose opinions and thinking I value, if not always share. I am asking them – *and you* – to send me your profoundest thoughts and reflections— whether pro or con – on the subject of hunting Africa's prestigious game without the physical and mental effort of stalking to within a reasonable distance for a traditional hunting rifle.

While writing my sporting art column for *Gray's Sporting Journal* about the chivalrous spirit and techniques of knightly Middle Ages hunting, described in Gaston Phébus's 1397 *Livre de Chasse*, I realized that it's the ethical hunting traditions that have kept the sport alive, above all, sincere respect for the life and death of the animal. Sport – versus "culinary" – hunting is a living heritage entrusted to today's hunters, and only true-grit hunters are entitled to be proud to walk in their predecessors' footsteps.

Phébus judged ignoble and "uncourtly" the techniques designed to take game by surprise, thus precluding them from employing their instinctual abilities and natural cunning. "I should teach only to take animals nobly and graciously and to take pleasure in so doing," he wrote.

Phébus was completely familiar with the behavior, strategies, and ruses of all the animals he hunted in his native Basque County, from badger to bear, from red stag, chamois, and ibex to wolf. His greatest

pleasure lay not in "the slaying of the hart, but in the incidents that led up to it," because these were the truest test of his own nerve, skill, convictions and strength.

When approaching a 500-kg boar on horseback, he advised: "Hold your spear about in the middle, not too far forward lest he strike you with his tusks, and as soon as the point has entered the body, take the haft of the spear under your armpit and press and push as hard as you can and never let go of the haft, and if the beast be stronger than you, then you must turn from side to side as best you can without letting go of the haft, until God comes to your aid or other assistance reaches you."

I also read the oldest hunting treatise in English, *The Master of the Game* (actually a 1406 translation of Phébus's codex to which its author, Edward of Norwich, 2nd Duke of York, of Shakespeare's *Richard II* fame, added five chapters on British sport). In an edition published 110 years ago, the brilliant author of the Foreword described the spirit of "sport for sport's sake" that "animated our common forebears centuries ago."

"Later on, men grew soft and the use of gunpowder removed many of the risks of the chase until sport was degraded to mere slaughter, and men were securely ensconced in danger-proof stands to which they were driven in chariots or carried in litters." Such practices "made scant demands upon the hardier qualities either of mind or body." This was "debased sport" that "was contemptible then and is contemptible now. Luxurious and effeminate artificiality and the absence of all demands for the hardy virtues rob any pastime of all title to regards... [It] makes no demand upon the prowess of the so-called sportsman, is but a dismal parody upon the stern hunting life in which man trusts to his own keen eye and heart of steel for success and safety in the wild warfare waged against wild nature."

He admired Phébus and the Duke of York, "For each of them the chase stood as a hardy and vigorous pastime of the kind which makes a people great." Although he believed that "The chase is the best of all national pastimes... it is a mere source of weakness if carried on in an unhealthy manner, or to an excessive degree, or under over-artificial conditions... and if serious work is sacrificed to its enjoyment, it is of course noxious."

Already in 1904 he considered, "The conditions of modern life are highly artificial and too often tend to softening of fibre, physical and moral. It is a good thing for a man to be forced to show self-reliance, physical and moral." He celebrated the willingness of the hunter to endure fatigue and face risk. "Hunting is praiseworthy very much in proportion as it tends to develop these qualities... which is a good thing for any nation to see brought out in its sons."

But when the object of hunting is "to make huge bags at small cost of effort, and with the maximum of ease... save marksmanship being required," with the goal being the number of animals killed and "the publication of the record of slaughter," these "are sure signs of unhealthy decadence in sportsmanship."

"No form of hunting has ever surpassed in attractiveness... the man who with simple equipment, and trusting to his own qualities of head, heart and hand, has penetrated the uttermost regions of the earth, and single-handed slain alike the wariest and the grimmest of the creatures of the waste."

The author of the Foreword? President Theodore Roosevelt, writing from the White House on February 15, 1904. 🐾

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The objectives of this program are

- To help clients make a better decision when selecting their outfitter
- To offer clients greater peace of mind when actually booking their safari
- To help professional hunters and outfitters save money and get more clients