



The red stag I travelled all those miles to get.
(Mark Rackay/ Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

ARGENTINA ADVENTURE

I have returned from my safari adventure in Argentina, and report to you that the trip was a smashing success. My wife will tell you that anytime I return home from a trip in the people section of the airplane, and not in the cargo section with a blue tag on my toe, that my trip was successful.

We have been planning a safari trip to hunt in Argentina for almost two years. Argentina stands alone as the world's most popular hunting destination. This does not include elk hunts in Colorado or opening day for Wisconsin whitetails.

In terms of hosting visiting hunters, Argentina welcomes over 20,000 annually. Second place would go to South Africa that sees 10,000 hunters a year. The fact is, Argentina equals the number of hunting safaris conducted on the entire African continent.

Hunting in Argentina is a serious multi-million dollar industry. There are many outfitters operating fine lodges and camps. The country has a good road infrastructure and many domestic and international airports, so getting around is fairly easy.

The currency of Argentina, the peso, is relatively unstable. This makes it a great value for the American dollar. In fact, most places would rather have U.S. greenbacks over their own currency. The Automobile Club of America has rated Argentina as one of the places where the U.S. dollar goes the farthest.

The language is Spanish, although Argentina has a large European influence. English-speaking peoples initially settled many areas of the country. Just about everyone has a certain amount of English as a second language, so communication is no problem.

My guide spoke several hundred words of English, which is about equal to my Spanish vocabulary, so communication was rarely a problem. After a few days with these fine people, your Spanish vocabulary drastically improves, and you begin to have fun with it.

Most hunters who visit Argentina go for the bird hunting, especially doves and pigeons. These birds are considered a nuisance and exist in untold millions in the farming areas. The locals are thrilled with the outside help controlling these pests.

Big game hunting is what brought me to the country. Argentina has some of the world's best free-range red stag hunting in the world. There

are other opportunities for game such as axis deer, fallow deer, blackbuck and buffalo, several of which I was interested in.

I chose the La Pampa region where the red stag was originally released in the early 1900s. This area looks similar to the hill country of Texas with very thick brush and long grasses and fairly level terrain.

The place we chose to go with was TGB outfitters, which has a lodge located a two hour drive from the La Pampa domestic airport in Santa Rosa. We chose this time of year because the red stag was in the middle of rut, known as the roar season. During the roar season, the woods are full of "roaring sounds" and fighting stags, as they all seek to impress their lady friends. It provides many exciting moments for traveling hunters and game watchers.

Like any great adventure, there is always the problem of travel. In this case, the airline travel was it's usual dumpster fire of problems for me. I started from Montrose, to Dallas, then an overnight flight to Buenos Aires. From there it was a couple hours ride to another airport for a domestic charter to Santa Rosa, where a waiting truck drove us to camp. All in, somewhere around 36 hours was spent in travel.

Without sleep and very little food, my mood was a bit on the cranky side. After a good meal, a couple glasses of local wine and seven hours of sleep, the world was a brighter place.

The first morning out, an hour before sunrise, I noticed the constellation Crux, or more commonly known as the Southern Cross. This constellation consists of five very bright stars and has been the theme to several songs, including one of my favorite Jimmy Buffet tunes "Southern Cross."

I have been fortunate to see the Northern lights above the Arctic Circle, near the Chantry Inlet, and now can say I have seen the Southern Cross in South America. The Crux can be used to locate south; similar to the way we use Polaris to find north in this hemisphere.

It was interesting to note my guide Roberto used no navigation equipment whatsoever. All hunting was done on foot in very thick brush. The country is relatively flat, at an altitude



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

of around, 1000 feet above sea level, and fairly devoid of landmarks. We covered anywhere from six to 15 miles a day on foot, and the navigational skills of Roberto never faltered, finding our way out each time. I never figured out how he found his way around so well.

We managed to call in several smaller stags before

actually calling in a very mature one on the third morning. This beast was near in size to our Colorado elk and had very heavy antlers. After I harvested him, I paid for the processing and donated the meat to the families of our guides who really appreciated that. I generally do that anytime I hunt in a foreign land.

After also collecting a blackbuck, I got the silly notion to pursue a buffalo. The Asiatic water buffalo were introduced to the country years ago. There are untold numbers of them and they know no boundaries or fences.

The bulls average 2,100 pounds and can stand 6 feet tall and 10 feet long. They are every bit as dangerous as the African Cape buffalo, and have the angry disposition to match. Come across one of these in his usual bad mood and you will get gored and stomped enough that your sundry remains will be returned home in a large manila envelope.

My wife was not along to talk me out of going after one so I readily agreed when the offer was made. We spent two days walking in brush so thick that visibility was measured in feet and inches. You could see glimpses of buffalo when chasing several herds of them around. It was amazing how such a large animal can move so quickly and quietly.

Late in the second day we managed to get around 40 feet from a very old herd-bull. I happily report that, although he tried to stomp me, he was unsuccessful and he is now feeding many families. He was estimated to be 35 years old and weighed in at 2,640 pounds.

I might point out that everything in the Argentina woods can be out to get you. The country is home to six species of poisonous snakes, and I encountered three while there. Roberto stepped over one without seeing him, but I saw him just in time. He was a pit viper known as a Yarara and has a

non-aggressive personality but a deadly bite. I held him with some shooting sticks for a picture, and he was less than enthralled with the idea, scampering away immediately after the "Kodak moment."

The country is also home to tarantula spiders and we saw several. They are not aggressive and I actually held one in my hand for a while. Be advised to shake out your shoes and boots every morning before showing your feet in them. Uninvited tenants like spiders and scorpions like to roost in there at night and could leave you a very unpleasant wake up call.

Argentina is a big beef cattle raising country and has many other agriculture opportunities. We ate delicious grass fed steaks for several dinners along with game meat. Fresh vegetables were abundant as were local fruits.

We had just entered their autumn season, as the southern hemisphere is opposite from us up north. The temperatures dropped into the '50s at night and made the mid-80s during the day. It was basically dry, except for one gully washer of a thunderstorm one afternoon. The storm was associated with a cold front and brought impressive lightning, 50-mph winds and a couple inches of rain.

Overall, the trip was fantastic, from the great foods, fine wines and terrific hunting. It was a new experience for this adventure-seeking hunter. I found all the people of Argentina to be very friendly and welcoming, most with a great sense of humor. They have to be able to laugh to put up with someone like me for a couple weeks. Without a doubt, I will return, and in future columns I will share some of the great experiences and lessons I learned over there.

After chasing buffalo, holding tarantulas and messing with deadly pit vipers, I realize that perhaps my wife is correct. Maybe I am just a little boy at heart, playing with nature every chance I get, and very lucky not be sent home in the cargo section of the aircraft. Then again, maybe she just worries too much. I can't wait to tell her that I am off to Africa next.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspsi.org

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