

# Tally-ho Gentlemen!

Hilton Gary Sanders

The hounds were slowly working their way along the road in between the young knee-high cane and the tall swaying gumtrees. This was a feeding track that the spoor hounds Soot and Banjo were working from the night before. At an educated guess I would say we were a good eight to twelve hours behind the quarry, now long gone.

Hunting to hounds is still alive and well in what used to be the Empire's last outpost. Even as I write this piece, about 250 men and women are running a 21km marathon from Isandlawana to Rorkes Drift in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) to commemorate the epic battles that shocked a nation and spelt the near destruction of another. It would have been fitting to have seen our erstwhile countryman, Mr Robin Barkes, of the Cape Colony up here in full military regalia or in the trappings of a civilian scout!

The yodel and bawl of hounds has reverberated up hills and down dales in almost every corner of the earth where the French or British flag has been planted over a piece of mapped out territory. From India to West Africa and from Canada to New Zealand man has felt the primeval thrill of hunting to hounds. This legacy of the great Norman conquerors has survived in almost all four corners of the world and is an art practised as well as followed by a great many people from a myriad of professions and backgrounds.

An untold number of hunters, even those that never had the privilege of growing up in hound-hunting families or in areas where hound packs were common or even in existence, have had their blood course through their veins at a heightened speed and temperature as the baying hounds

headed their way! At present, even in our new dispensation with increased and often nonsensical legislation and the accompanying lack of transparency, there are still a good number of hunters that enjoy hunting to hounds and this number is growing.

Here in KZN, as with our former sister colony, the Cape Colony, and more specifically the Eastern Cape, hunting bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*) over hounds has been a very popular form of hunting in the deep valleys and heavily bushed kloofs for a great number of years. In many areas the coming of the hunting season heralded a social season of hunts followed by after-hunt dinners or braais that rotated around the district from farm to farm. There was a lot of camaraderie amongst the hunters as well as the beaters that accompanied the hounds on their quest to drive out the wily black Nkonka. However, as with all things times change and these changes are not always for the best.

We have seen a marked decrease in the number of "buck" packs here in KZN as well as in the Eastern Cape. There are basically two main reasons for the demise of these packs. Firstly, there has been a big shift in land ownership in KZN with land claims accounting for a high percentage of our "thorn farms", especially in our traditional bushbuck hunting areas of the Umkomaas Valley and its tributaries as well as in the Greytown, Kranskop, Muden and Weenen areas.

The second most important factor that has contributed to the demise of the "buck" packs is the commercialisation of the game industry in South Africa. It is no longer feasible, unless you are a rich man, to give three to five bushbuck rams away on a social hunt when an outfitter would pay

**Ready to go home after a hard day's hunting.**





The children of the Cole, Roseveare and Sanders families photographed with bushpigs taken on the family shoot, January 2010.

you good money for the privilege of bringing a client to hunt them.

So now, if this is the scenario in the new South Africa, how is it then that hunting to hounds is still alive and well? You are right to ask this question, but I have good news for you! We are still hunting to hounds and this tradition is still going strong in the Eastern Province of South Africa as well as a few other provinces.

Hound hunting has a “new” quarry and purpose – the control of the burgeoning bushpig (*Potamochoerus porcus*) population. As the wily crop-destroying bushpigs are spreading into new areas where they never occurred before so too are the “bushpig” packs and their followers. We are seeing the bushpig population explode in KZN, with pigs now being found in the Normandine and Kokstad/Cedarville areas. The same is happening in Mpumalanga and



**Left to right: Jeremy Cole, Donald Roseveare and Mark Lister with the three maize- and cane-gobbling bushpigs shot in the Ifafa River valley, February 2011.**



**A bygone era. Left to right: Mal Watson, Donald Roseveare and Norman Roseveare with bushbuck rams taken over Donald's hounds on a traditional driven hunt at Jolivet.**

I have even hunted bushpigs in the Freere area of the Free State!

Now one area where we have started hunting bushpigs is in the Jolivet/Highflats area – the stomping grounds of the Cole, Roseveare and Lister families. The Coles first arrived in the district in about 1896. It is fitting that the hounds once more raise their melodious voices in this area

of KZN, as for many years both the Roseveare and Lister families owned and ran bushbuck packs along with Wally Wichmann of Izotsha and the English's of Richmond, on their magnificent farms. It was the hounds' work to drive the pitch-black rams out of their dark, impenetrable fortresses of thorny bush. Donald Roseveare's father, Wallace, also ran a top-notch jackal pack from Highflats in the 1970s as that area was a big sheep area in those days.

Several times a year for the last three or four years I have been taking my hounds down to the farms of the aforementioned gentlemen to hunt bushpigs that are causing large-scale damage in their maize and potato lands as well as in the sugar cane fields. A hunt of necessity has now become the enjoyable and camaraderie-filled hunts of yesteryear. Friends, neighbours and family members of the landowners are invited and they all join together for a bit of damage control, a spot of sport and a well-earned lunch. Even top-notch custom rifle builder Alan Henry of The Natal Gun Co' has been seen on these hunts now and again.

Back to the hunt: We had already been on the track of the wandering, feeding sounder for a good four hours and were tired. It was also starting to get hot as the summer sun burnt the valley mist off in long, wispy tendrils. This was going to be another cooker of a day.

Soot and Banjo were stepping it up now and their long drawn-out bawls were getting deeper as they along with Baron now dropped over the edge of the krans and into a

long tongue of bush that headed down into the Ifafa Valley. This was not somewhere that even the most seasoned of us enjoy going as the ground is steep and the bush very thick and laced together with plenty of thorny vines. It is these vines that make you look a tad different by the end of the day than when you started out in the morning!

We jumped into the trucks and headed down into the valley as it was definitely quicker to drive down than brave the rock-strewn slope covered in chest-high grass, with a bunch of places just waiting to help your butt wiz past your ears with a dash of speed. Plus it is a far better plan having a truck nearby, should the pigs decide to head uphill at a later stage. I find that it prevents that deep burning sensation one gets in one's legs and chest should one decide to cover the same distance on foot! At least we were not headed into the Mtwalume River valley!

Barry Cole eased the Cruiser down the rough track, stopping every so often so that I could listen for the melodious voices of the hounds as well as get a fix on them using the receiver that picks up the signal transmitted by each hound's individual tracking collar. The hounds were further to our left and upstream from us. From their long, wavering, drawn-out howls and bawls I knew they were bayed up at the nest. It was time for some hot action!

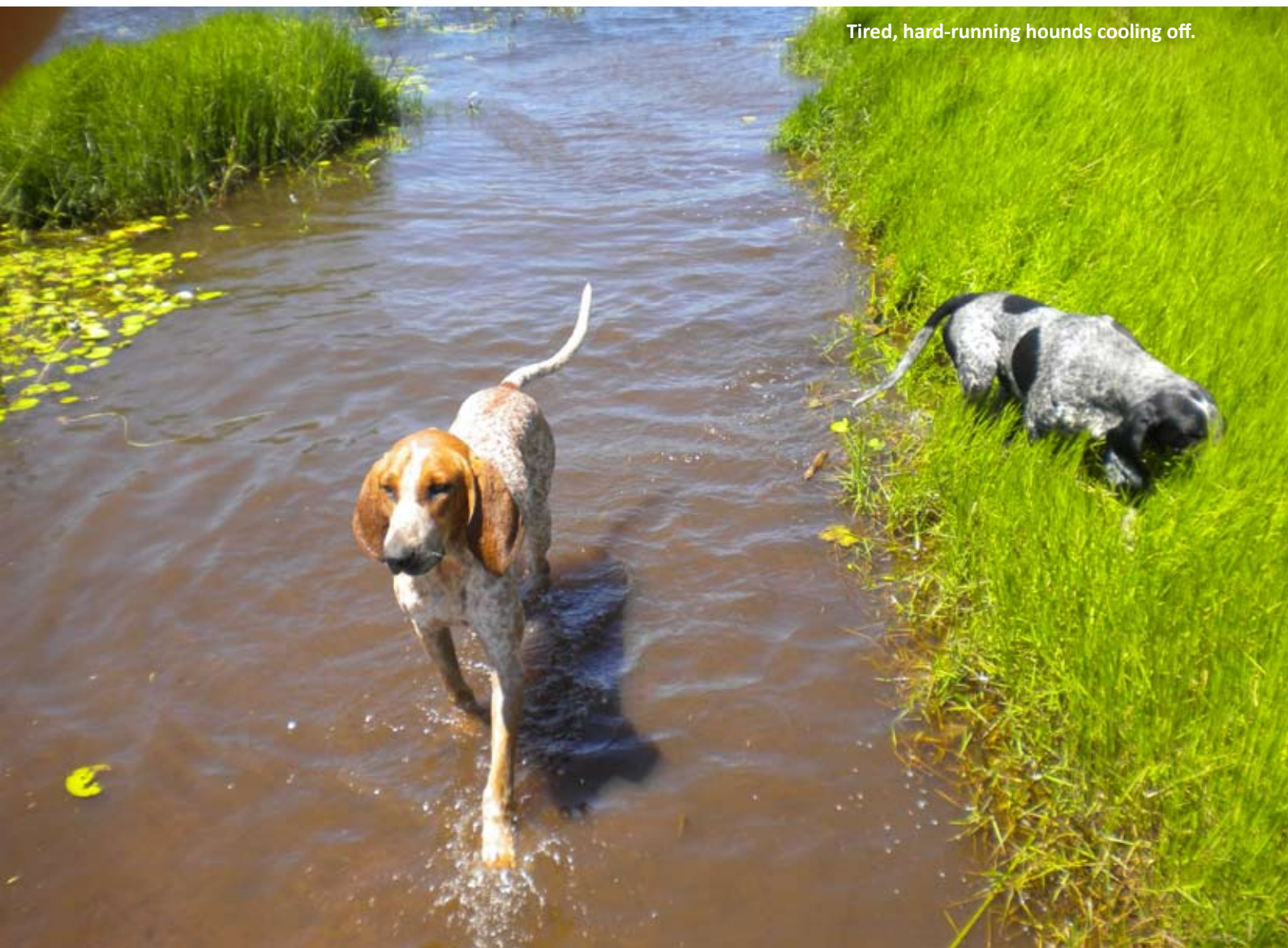
As we rounded the bend Jeremy Cole's truck was parked in front of us on the track. His labourer, who was on the back, told us that Jeremy had gone up the small valley that was choked with both bush and reeds that smothered the stream, and that Neil Cole was just ahead

on the road. I went to the right of the stream, passing an all-ready Neil while Barry went straight up the left-hand side of the stream to get above Jeremy.

All of a sudden there was a shot in the bush from Jeremy's position and I heard him say that he thought that he had clipped a pig. With that I heard a pig heading down the valley on my side with the hounds in tow. It came with a rustle and stopped under a small overhanging bunch of reeds. It looked back right about at the same time as I sent a round through both lungs and the heart, anchoring it for good. In the meantime a second pig broke above me and was to be accounted for by Donald Roseveare when bayed a couple of hundred metres further up the Ifafa Valley by the hounds.

Barry then shouted that he had seen two pigs go up and over the hill above him into the next heavily bushed ravine, downstream from our current position in the main valley. Mark Lister who had now joined us from across the other side of the Ifafa as well as Trevor Roseveare from his position further up the Ifafa Valley, both said that a third pig had also gone out over the ridge back towards the sugar cane lands. We did a quick regroup and caught the hounds that were loose. We then repositioned so as to be able to hunt one of the pigs that had gone past Barry and over the ridge.

Unlike hounds that are used to hunt bushbuck and that tend to operate as individuals, each chasing their own animal, hounds hunting bushpigs are trained to hunt as a pack, working a single quarry animal at a time. The hounds



Tired, hard-running hounds cooling off.



were led up to where Barry had last seen the pig disappear from sight. Here Soot, Jackson, Tombi and Banjo were released. They took off “talking” immediately. We then laid Baron, Joss, Maquinty and Wednesday onto the smoking hot trail. Away they went, with us the hunters following as best we could. It was not long and we could hear from the voices of the hounds that they had the pig up ahead of them and were working it in ever-diminishing circles in a basin-like spot in the valley bottom. I saw Jeremy headed that way and so was Barry and I. This pig was going to bay soon and we needed to be there and do our part.

Barry and I headed down into a tangled mat of bushes interlaced with vines and creepers from the northern side of the bush whilst Neil made his way in from the bottom along the tributary to the Ifafa. Jeremy was coming in from the opposite side of the bush to us but about 50 metres upstream from us. We could all hear the deep, guttural grunting of the pig as it stood at bay and defied the hounds.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Three shots in fast succession reverberated up and down the valley. Jeremy had been charged by the very stropky bushpig, a sow, and had dropped her with her nose between his spread-out feet! So ended another day’s eventful hunting over hounds in the Jolivet area. All that remained was to extract our quarry and take some photos to capture yet another memorable hunt on film.



- ▲ Donald Roseveare and a boar that was raiding the macadamia orchards, February 2011.
- ▼ This is how you recover a bushpig from the Mtwalume River valley!



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