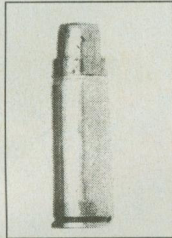


THE ULTIMATE SPORT HANDGUNNING CAPE BUFFALO!



The author's custom-built buffalo blaster, made by Linebaugh, is pictured above with its specially designed .45 cartridge based on the .45 Colt.



Seyfried went to extra pains to equip himself with the optimum handgun and cartridge to do the job, but since he was performing a first, he had no real guarantee that he would be successful until the bullet connected with the big buff. He has declined to reveal the exact load that he devised, but it should be clear that his 2,000-pound seat above isn't just posing for the cameraman. The first shot, though not fatal, definitely got the animal's complete attention.

Can African Cape buffalo be taken with a revolver? This hunter found out the hard way!

By Ross Seyfried

■ I have been told this story shouldn't be written, but I want to share an adventure. Some years ago I set a goal for myself—to take on a Cape buffalo, alone, with a custom revolver.

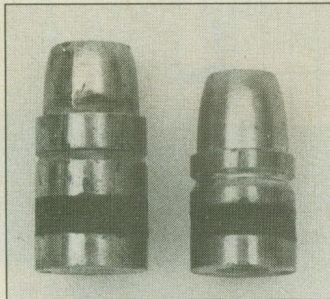
I have been admonished not to write this story for a variety of reasons: That no one cares about hunting in Africa, I'll dismiss without comment. That buffalo hunting

with a handgun isn't something everybody wants to do and that someone might get hurt trying were absurd excuses, but at least they were true. Fortunately, the same reasoning could be used against writing about the Indianapolis 500, downhill ski racing or getting in the ring with Muhammad Ali.

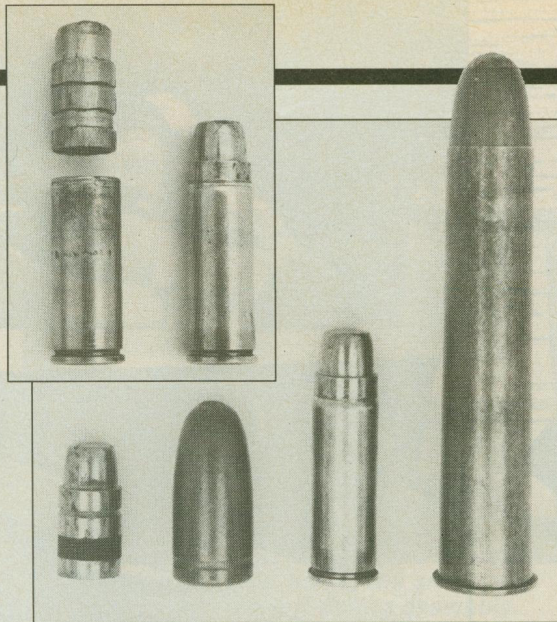
I am offended by the argument that this was a crazy stunt, or that I was obsessed with some death wish. I hadn't the slightest intention of getting scratched. As a cattle rancher, I have had barehanded wars with more cattle than most people have eaten, watched the bovines move, react and try to kill. I had hunted buffalo for several years before, studied their ways and their anatomy.

My handgun shooting was honed to the level of world champion and beyond. With

A complete .45 "buffalo" round (R) is compared to a fired slug and casing.



The big 345-grain buffalo bullet (L) dwarfs a 250-grain Keith .44 mag slug.



A custom .45 round and its 345-grain slug is shown with a standard .577 nitro express buffalo cartridge and its massive 750-grain jacketed slug.



These Cape buffs hightail it through the type of thorn thicket country in which the author conducted his hunt.



The Linebaugh .45 rests on the old bull's horns together with its impressive cartridge. Inset at left is a close-up of the unique barrelband front sight with horizontal Keith long-range gold bars—an accurate setup.



Author's 6-inch hunting knife can be seen against the front hoofprint of one of the large, dangerous Cape buffaloes that he stalked through rough thickets on hands and knees.

the magnificent revolver designed just for the buffalo, I could hit .45 cases in the air, or hit a grapefruit at 10 feet every time, at any angle, in a half second. Finally, I was going to hunt the buffalo where there were tens of thousands of them and where the African people were hungry. If I killed a buffalo, it would be harvested for beef, just like a steer from my ranch and be given to people who probably hadn't had meat for many months.

Until the last year before my hunt, my plans had always centered around the .44 Magnum because it was the best tool for

the job that I knew about. It was extremely marginal and I knew it, but any handgun would be a pipsqueak against the buffalo, which often pay little attention to hits from .458s or .470 Nitros.

I worked with John Linebaugh from Cody, Wyoming, designing what I felt was the most efficient, powerful, hunting handgun/ammunition combination on the earth. We used an early Seville action, capable of taking an oversize cylinder to handle my turbocharged loads, and fitted a 5½-inch barrel. The 5½-inch barrel was the perfect compromise between sight radius, overall length, balance, speed and the ability to carry the gun all day, unnoticed, in a belt holster.

Best of all, even with its relatively short barrel, the gun was going to deliver super ballistics with my heavy bullets. My buffa-

lo gun was equipped with a barrelband front sight for both aesthetic appeal and absolute strength. The sight itself was fitted with Keith gold bars and a vertical sandblasted front face for target accuracy. I cut the front blade and the rear notch to the same ⅛-inch width.

Finally, we tuned the lockwork to silky smoothness and set the trigger pull at 2½ pounds. The final result was probably the most shootable handgun I had ever fired. It was just plain easy to hit with it. I trained with it for almost a year, slowly increasing the loads so that I could master the monumental recoil of my buffalo loads. I had to be absolutely in control of all the horsepower so that I could place the bullets with surgical precision and in a hurry from every imaginable shooting position.

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Editor's Note: Ross Seyfried is an expert pistol shot and licensed professional hunter. The feats described in this article should not under any circumstances be undertaken by inexperienced shooters.

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My initial shooting with the Linebaugh .45 was with 310-grain bullets. They were spectacular, but only whet my appetite for heavier bullets. It was apparent that the heavier the bullets were (within reason), the better the gun was going to like them. With bullets weighing up to 350 grains, it was almost easier to get velocities in the 1,300 fps to 1,400 fps range than it was with lighter bullets. The big, heavy slugs were adding resistance that made the large charges of W-296 powder, that I used, burn very efficiently.

My final hunting loads were Keith bullets (NEI #325.454), cast with a mixture

I had four days off to take the "short four-five-eight" and pursue my buffalo. They would prove to be the most challenging, exciting days of hunting in my life.

My good friend Hugo Seia, a professional hunter from Angola, had become intrigued by my buffalo hunt and offered to go along. Hugo went with me as a witness, cameraman and friend who could at least tell the world about the trip if things went wrong. He jokingly offered to climb a tree and shout encouragement if the going got tough. Seriously, the loan of his eyes and lifelong experience as a buffalo hunter were more help than I can define. In fact, his sharp eyes probably saved my hide, and for that I am forever grateful.

Three of my four days went by without success. This handgun buffalo hunt was even more difficult than I had thought it would be. My plans to take a trophy bull had been beaten by the wind, cows in the way, bad light, and pieces of brush. Even though I had been close enough to bulls to almost touch them and had cocked the hammer three times, I hadn't had a shot. I crawled nearly under the belly of an old cow trying to get close enough to get a clear shot at the herd bull when it spooked the bunch.

I could have taken a dozen good bulls with my rifle during those three days, but the challenge of my handgun buffalo hunt was becoming very clear—I was really *hunting* now, and not killing! What I really needed was to find a small group of old bachelor bulls, without the interfering cows and calves or the big herds that had been such a menace for three days.

The morning of the fourth and last day of my hunt seemed like a fitting arena for the challenge. The African sunrise was brilliant red, with doves calling, the distant roar of a lion and the wail of the hyenas. Hugo and I were having coffee, waiting for the light to get good enough for tracking. We didn't have to go far to hunt; my camp was surrounded by buffalo every night. Just then my tracker trotted to our table with his mile-wide grin in full form and almost shouted, "Bwana, Kakulies, they have come." I got an instant shot of butterflies, because what he had said was that he had found the fresh tracks of a group of bachelor bull buffalo.

When I walked out of camp I had the nagging feeling that I was leaving something behind. The "short four-five-eight" was in its holster and my binoculars were around my neck, but both hands were empty. It was a nice, light way to travel, but my sense of well-being longed for my big double-barreled .577 security blanket. Hugo's last words as we walked out of camp were, "Remember, it's the first shot." He was right. If the first round didn't kill a buffalo, there was apt to be a war, and a buffalo war is to the finish. *He* won't quit!

My tracker showed me the tracks of five old bulls near a pool where they had watered just before sunrise. The meandering tracks were easy to follow through the

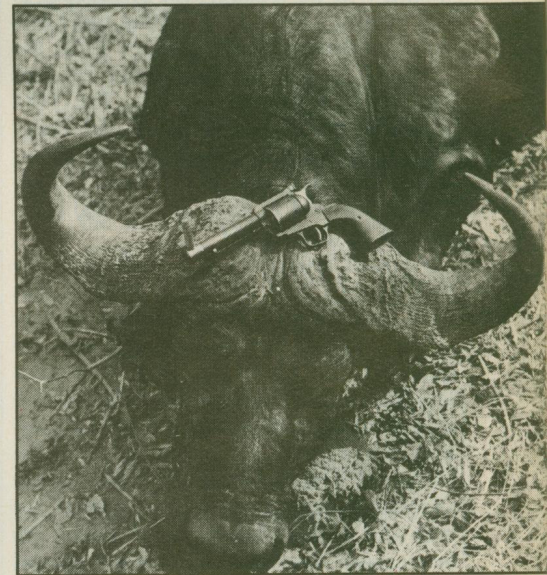
open mopane scrub, since the bulls fed away from water, toward a place for their midday nap. After about 200 yards of tracking we found the spoor of three big lions that were following the same buffalo. It sort of added to the game, because a few weeks earlier we had taken a savage charge from an old tomcat, under similar circumstances. It seems he objected to us hunting his buffalo.

We both grinned at the tracks, ignored the lion trouble until it happened, and kept going. The bulls were feeding and playing in the mopane scrub, and we were gaining on them with every step. One old fellow stopped to polish his horns on a small mopane tree and left it in a shapeless mass of splinters. This scrub mopane looks like American scrub oak, but it's a lot tougher, and the sight of what his play did to this spring-steel mopane made it very clear what a buffalo could do to a mushy hunter—if he got serious.

Even though I knew the bulls were headed for a dense thorn belt to shade up for the day, I had begun to hope we could catch them in the open country. The conditions were perfect, with hoof-plowed ground to quiet our steps and enough cover for good stalking, but not enough to really hide the bulls. We were slipping along on the easy spoor, straining our eyes for a



PHOTO BY L.L. RUE III



Though awed by the monster bull, the author had the kind of confidence in his .45 that brought about success.

glimpse of the bulls. It seemed like everything was on my side. Even the wind was perfect for the hunt.

Two hundred yards later the party was over. The tracks took a sharp turn to the right and ended against what looked like a solid wall. The bulls had gone into a thorn thicket, miles across. It was like a giant thorny hedge, gone riot and totally to seed. Even the lions gave up here: Inside, they couldn't maneuver against the black tanks with the lethal horns. The bulls weren't here by accident, just as they hadn't grown old enough to carry huge horns by chance. This was their sanctuary. They could run

of type metal, wheel weights and pure lead, that weighed 345 grains. I heat treated the bullets to a Brinnell hardness of 22 and loaded them to a chronographed velocity of 1,490 fps. I won't quote the specific load. It was a special load, precisely tailored to my custom barrel and cylinder. In my revolver they were totally safe and reliable, with the empty cases falling out of the chambers.

Remember, I was going buffalo hunting and wanted no part of a "fool's load" that might break something or tie up the gun in any way. But because it was a custom load for a special gun, it might be dangerous in any other gun. So it will forever remain my secret. *Don't even think of trying to duplicate the ballistics in any ordinary revolver. That would be dangerous!*

I spent the next three months in Africa, living and working with the revolver. I shot nearly 30 head of big game (almost all of them previously wounded by other hunters). From the start I was amazed by the killing power of the .45 Magnum. On rear-raking and $\frac{3}{4}$ away shots, elk-sized hartebeest and kudu simply folded. I shot clear through both sides of eland bulls weighing a ton. My buffalo gun was proving to be two or three times the game killer as the best .44 Magnum loads I had used.

My time in Africa was about over, but

through this mess like a thoroughbred through bluegrass, but everything else except the elephants and leopards suffered here. I almost quit, like the wise lions, but there was still a small chance that I might get a shot.

We crawled into the thorns on our hands and knees. The thickets aren't real friendly places; they are hot, without a breath of air and parched by months of the dry season. My only chance in this thicket was to move at a snail's pace, in absolute silence, and somehow see the buffalo before they sensed our presence and ran. There was the endless maze of thorn, complicated by dark

IN MAY:

BLACK POWDER SILHOUETTE SHOOTING

shadows that all looked like buffalo. But we inched ahead, each foot carefully placed, and strained our eyes on each branch and shadow.

We hadn't gone very far when I tested a pat of buffalo dung with the back of my hand. It wasn't just warm, but hot. The bulls were only feet or possibly yards away, but we hadn't a clue of exactly where. The game of invisible cat and mouse went on for over an hour. The bulls were moving slowly, but still going faster than we could follow. We tested the air with puffs of dust lifted with our toes, and it continually cut from side to side.

Sometimes my pessimism could feel the wind on the back of my neck—the breeze that would give the bulls our scent and send them crashing away. I was about to think that this damn strained crawling in the thorns would never end when suddenly, straight ahead I got a glimpse of movement: the flick of a buffalo tail. I riveted my eyes on the spot, trying to make out a buffalo when, with the movement of a ghost, he was gone. Gone so silently that I doubted if I had seen him at all. But when I looked at Hugo's eyes, they told me he had seen him too.

We searched every twig, branch and shadow, looking for the other bulls. Twenty yards to our left, an ear flopped. After looking through our binoculars for several minutes, the form of a ton of buffalo started to take shape. He was lying down. None of the other bulls seemed to be where they could see or smell us. We slowly settled to the ground. I collected my thoughts and lowered my pulse. I was close to the bull, but not close enough. Even though I knew where the vital parts of the bull were, there wasn't a hint of a target through the brush. The bull was broadside, facing to my right and roughly looking at us.

If we made the slightest mistake, or if the air movement shifted even a little, he would vanish in a crashing cloud of dust. I looked the situation over and found a 6-inch tree 10 yards to my half-right, with a

reasonably clear path through the thorns leading to it. If I could reach that tree, I could cut the range in half and greatly increase the chance of a shot. I crawled like a snake, looking back over my shoulder at Hugo, who could see the bull when I couldn't. He would signal me with his eyes when the buffalo was looking at me. When the bull looked, I froze, and moved again only after he looked away.

It seemed like it took an hour, but finally I reached that tree, with the bull still happy. I inched my right eye around the bole, hoping to see a clear shot into the buffalo, but there was nothing. I was a lot closer, but the change in angle had put even more thorns in the way. I was determined to wait here. Sooner or later the bull would move, and when he did, maybe there would be some small opening for a well-placed bullet.

I caught myself daydreaming while I waited, chuckling at what my life insurance agent would say if he caught me lying down within spitting distance of a bull buffalo. A snapping branch and a deep purr brought reality back. There was a damn elephant within a few yards of us; he was probably part of a herd with cows and calves. If they got wind of us, they would come screaming down on us with a lesson in why not to violate the privacy of an elephant's house.

The next cracks and rumbles revealed the jumbo's position, fortunately upwind. The elephant noise made the buffalo uneasy about his napping place. As he got up to move away I rose to one knee, ready to fire. The bull walked slowly, but there wasn't anything behind the sights except a black shadow and thorn branches. He was gone again.

I walked back to where Hugo and my

FOR MAY:

ROSS SEYFRIED ON COYOTE RIFLES

tracker waited. We all shrugged our shoulders and took up the tracks again. The bulls were split up, wandering. Fifty yards of tracking led us to where three sets of tracks crossed in front of us, left to right, and disappeared into the thorns around the base of an old ant hill. The bulls had begun to take a single file trail and travel—but only three of the five had gone by. To my left I could hear buffalo hooves coming. Between us and the sound there was a small clearing shielded by a termite hill.

I moved two steps to my left to break my outline behind a log and waited. I could hear the great buffalo hooves thumping closer with every step. It was actually going to happen. I was in a clearing on the trail the buffalo were walking on. I was going to get a shot! I held the trigger back on the single action and slowly cocked the

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hammer. Then I eased the sear into the hammer notch silently, avoiding the tell-tale clicks of the single action that right then would have sounded like a miniature atom bomb.

My mind raced like it had when I was in competition, or like race car drivers tell me theirs do at high speed, where fractions of a second are expanded into slow motion and appear to be long periods of time. The bull came over the termite hill moving at a brisk walk. His great horns swept the air, searching for an enemy he sensed but hadn't defined yet. I will never forget the impression he left, a tremendous picture of graceful power with the eyes of a warrior. I am sure the grandest fighting bull in Madrid would have felt like a white mouse in front of this fellow.

His shoulder was covered, so I decided on a brain shot and settled the sights just under his left eye. That looked like the perfect impact point, with his head elevated much higher than I was. As the front sight recoiled in the heavy muzzle blast, I could see the bull's hind quarters collapse and then recover. A cloud of dust instantly obscured everything in the congested thicket and the bull was gone.

Something had gone wrong. If the shot was right the bull would have collapsed on the spot, but instead he had run. Now everything changed. I wasn't hunting buffalo any more, I was locked in a moral and legal commitment to follow up a wounded buffalo, an animal that was apt to fight instead of just run. The huge revolver felt tiny in my hands. I felt disappointment and fear at what must have been my error and the task that followed.

I took up the tracks immediately, instead of allowing time for the bull to stiffen as is usually the best plan with wounded buffalo. I hoped he would still be dazed from the hit near his brain, and that I could catch up with him before he fully recovered his senses. He had run hard, leaving a moderate blood trail. The plowed hoof marks in the sand were easy to see, but the tracking had to be slow and deliberate. The thorn was heavy, and we had to see every inch of it.

Before, it had been necessary to try to see the bull before he saw us and ran. Now, if he lay in ambush, seeing him first could be a matter of life and death. With the tracker's eyes on the spoor, Hugo and I followed yard by yard, looking for the buffalo. The bull ran about 75 yards and then slowed to a walk. He was either dying or planning an ambush. We followed for another 300 yards with the tracks zig-zagging through the brush. The strain was heavy and the work tiring; here he could wait until we were within one bound to jump on us.

We stopped for a minute to think things over, wondering if this was going to turn into one of those "follow-forever" buffalo.

We started again and had taken about 10 steps when Hugo hissed, "There he is." Hugo's eyes directed mine to an almost invisible sliver of buffalo hide. The bull was standing in a deep shadow, almost inside a thorn bush, waiting. I took a step forward as I cocked the revolver. From there the bull's head and shoulders were buried in the brush, but a small tunnel in the thorns left the fold of skin behind his shoulder exposed. It was plainly visible.

I shot instantly. His knees buckled when the big bullet hit home, but he recovered and pivoted on his hind legs, looking for me. As he spun I stroked the hammer, drove the muzzle down out of recoil and landed another shot in his lungs. When the second shot hit him, he saw me, and made his intentions clear. There were only 20 yards between us, but a lot of thorns to turn bullets filled the space. My calm mentor behind me seems funny now in hindsight, but then Hugo's quiet voice saying, "Shoot well, he is coming," was more than a little spooky! The situation wasn't really too bad.

Before he could get me, the bull had to come into the small clearing in front of me. It was only a few feet long, but I would get one good clear shot. As he came, the bull's front feet began to fumble; the almost 2 ounces of lead in his vitals were taking effect. The sweep of his right horn hooked a 4-inch tree. Seconds before, he would have snapped it like a matchstick, but now it checked his stride at the edge of the clearing. I hit him behind the ear as his body spun; he collapsed while the big gun recoiled, and he gave the deep bellow of a dying buffalo.

I felt Hugo's hand clap on my shoulder and heard my tracker shout. Hugo was glad we had succeeded, and my tracker was glad the buffalo hadn't. I took a few minutes to be sure the buffalo was absolutely dead and then several more to lean against a tree and shake. My nerves had had just about all the fun they could stand. We weren't supposed to see the bull when we did; his plan was to wait and hammer us in the thick brush at the end of the clearing.

My first shot had landed exactly where I wanted it, but I had misjudged the angle a little and the bullet passed just under his brain. I had almost gotten more than I had bargained for or wanted out of this dream hunt. But in the process I had pushed myself, my hunting and a handgun further than I would have ever hoped was possible. I also hope I have added a little proof to the fact that a handgun isn't just something to be used by criminals, but instead a sporting tool of the highest order. They should be revered just like a good race car—yes, dangerous if misused, but magnificent when pushed to their potential.

While I was skinning the Cape, my tracker was heading for his village. By dark a line of natives looking like army ants would descend on the buffalo, taking every scrap of meat, bone and hide. It was a rich treat for families left hungry by drought. ❧