

The Three Double-Six DGW in Limpopo Province, South Africa

Gunsmith Judson Bailey Field-Tests a Wildcat Cartridge on Plains Game

AS REPORTED TO BILL BALL, SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR

The first blow hit hard, right in the gut. "Your initial test results are not good," the white-coated cancer specialist reported.

The second blow hit even harder, square in my heart. "I think you should cancel your African safari."

With the help of my friend Dave Walker, I'd transformed the classic .416 Rigby cartridge to a more-modern, high-performance caliber. Beginning with a time-scarred, well-worn British battle rifle, I'd fitted a new barrel, chambered it for the .366 DGW wildcat cartridge, bedded it solidly in a remarkable walnut stock, and used all my skill as a custom gunsmith to finish and fit it out as the consummate plains-game rifle. It was 26 days from my scheduled flight to Johannesburg to tackle two back-to-back hunts totaling 28 days. Now, some nonhunting doctor thought I shouldn't submit to the stress and exertions of Africa!

"Go ahead and cut it out now, Doc," I decided in a steady voice. "I'll have two weeks to recover before the flight. This is my first safari, so the stitches will just have to hold."

Winning Bid

Once called the Northern Province, South Africa's Limpopo Province winks at hunters through a dusty, thorny, arid blend of spindly trees, spiked bushes, confined vistas of amber-tinted grasses and muddy water holes, especially in August and September. This land remains the domain of kudu and Burchell's zebra, blue wildebeest and warthog, nyala and blesbok. Water, in ever-shrinking pans and smaller catchments, defines the daily routine of living and feeding. The big cats hunt here, taking water and food from the steady parade of thirsty animals.

Few folks know this area as well as Stef and Lenette Swanepoel, owners of Numzaan Safaris, and their professional hunter, Walter Enslin. Numzaan Safaris had kindly donated a nyala hunt and trophy fee, and at the annual

SCI Maine Chapter banquet and auction in Portland, the auctioneer declared the winning bid was mine. I later added more animals and days to the hunting schedule.

Sixteen months later, my wife, Barb, and I met Walter on the veranda of a stone-and-thatched-roof cottage on Stef and Lenette's 65,000-acre hunting concession. He was very polite. The well-worn, tattered hat the South African accent replete with British overtones and humor, and the instant smile did not conceal the naturalist, historian, professional hunter and rifleman beneath.

Walter offered me the loan of his rifle, because my .366 DGW remained in transit, with an overdose of airline-inflicted tardiness delaying its field test. My first day's trophies, a 25-plus-inch impala and almost-12-inch warthog, dropped after one shot each from Walter's Ruger .338 magnum.

My anxiety and stress levels plummeted when the .366 DGW chambered rifle arrived. Originally conceived by David G. Walker, the .366 DGW cartridge bears his initials. It reflects a vision of a cartridge that shoots flatter than Remington's excellent 7mm magnums when loaded with heavy, .366-caliber hunting bullets. Solid and chunky in the hand, big .416 Rigby cases were re-formed, necked down and charged with bullets weighing between 250 and 300 grains. The Swift 300-grain A-Frame bullet zips from the muzzle at more than 2,900 feet per second and more than 5,700 foot/pounds of energy.

In Zimbabwe, the .366 DGW would qualify as a dangerous game cartridge. With high expectations, I just hoped it would prove itself on the thin-skinned game populating the Numzaan Safaris' concession.

Game Overflow

In the early August dawn, the man-made waterhole at Sable Pan seemed more mud and tracks than water. A large, open area surrounded the tiny

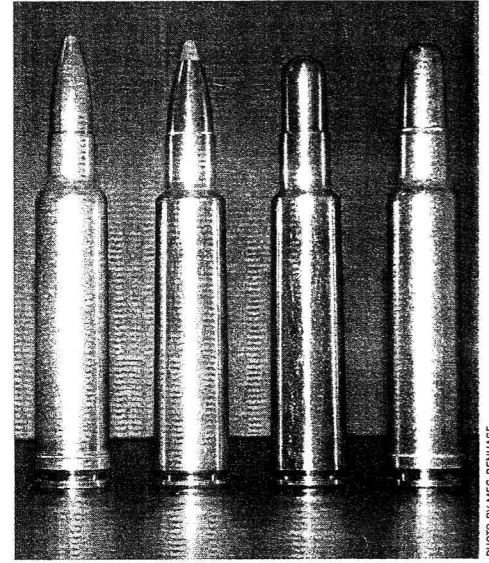


PHOTO BY MEG BENHASE

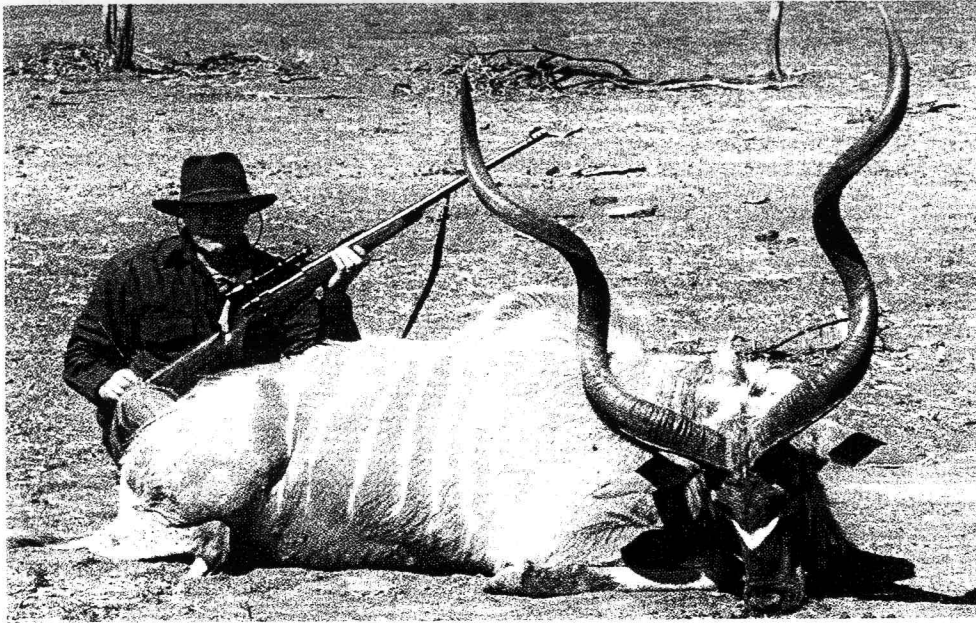
In Zimbabwe, the .366 DGW qualifies as a dangerous game rifle. Easily handling bullets ranging from 250 grains (Nosler Ballistic Tip) and 286 grains (Nosler Partition) to the 270-grain Speer and the 300-grain Swift A-Frame, the .366 DGW cartridge achieved nine one-shot kills in its first African field tests.

puddle and was so vast, it seemed no animal interested in survival more than water could possibly traverse it. It took 20 minutes before files of warthogs, bodies buoyed on short legs and tails jutting skyward, trekked past the elevated blind in small groups. The kudu held off until hundreds of impala and some bachelor wildebeest bulls drank. They then walked to the water as elegantly as a princess on parade. Lagging behind, an older bull limped badly.

The crosshair in the Leupold scope settled on his shoulder 178 yards distant, and the A-Frame bullet smashed through shoulder and lungs, exiting from the opposite shoulder. Spread wide, his horns taped 52 inches, and he'd dropped after traveling only a few feet. Walter refused to debate whether I was more pleased with the trophy kudu or the one-shot performance of the .366 DGW.

As the afternoon light softened, rhinos plodded forward, drank and then ghost-stepped through dry, crunchy soil, leaving the Sable Pan waters in absolute silence. For a dry and dusty locale, the Numzaan Safaris concession virtually overflowed with game.

Male zebras, aggressive and belligerent, often bear mouth-sized scars of teeth-gouged skin or sport a missing



Never suspecting danger, this old kudu bull limped across the open area surrounding the Sable Pan waterhole. He fell after one hit from Judson Bailey's .366 DGW rifle, which fired a 300-grain Swift A-Frame bullet.

ear or tail. These hard-bitten lessons are generally delivered by competitive stallions in the quest for females or dominance. The largest stallion distanced himself from the herd, shaded by trees surrounding the Waterbuk Pan. Alert but not alarmed, the zebra focused his attention on three eland nearby and didn't detect our approach.

We crawled, belly down and heads up, along a berm for the last 50 yards. An abundance of thorn-studded low vegetation attacked with painful disregard for my skin. My cancer operation stitches held together and even welcomed new punctures from the inch-long spikes protecting spindly bushes from grazing animals and crawling hunters.

"He's 95 yards distant, the hide is good and he has both ears and his tail," Walter whispered.

Lying prone, I pushed the barrel through a hole in the scrub. The crosshairs settled on the small triangle formed by the stripes at the point of the zebra's shoulder, and the rifle recoiled. As Walter and tracker Kiewiet watched, the zebra dropped instantly, jumped erect and piled up in a confusing whirl of black and white stripes 15 feet away.

Wait-a-Bit

We hunted warthog in dense *bushveld* in the Eland Skloof region, slipping through the tall grass, ducking low trees and dodging thorny bushes. Sporadic, shifting winds kept the animals wary all day and spoiled several earlier stalks, possibly because of the sound of footsteps or wisps of human scent riding the breeze.

Returning to the Land Rover, tired and frustrated, I was surprised when a warthog left the low brush some 50 yards away and ran across the vehicle trail toward thicker brush on the other side. I made a mental note to forget about shots on running game, but only after I rested the .366 rifle on the bonnet and put a bullet into the moving animal, hitting him about six inches behind the shoulder.

The 300-grain Swift A-Frame bullet struck me as a superb hunting bullet, and it had the same effect on the warthog. A profuse blood trail marked the final 75 yards of his escape attempt. Walter and I decided the performance of the .366 DGW won't always make up for a poorly placed shot, but both of us believe it saved the day on that warthog.

As a first-time African hunter, I had no experience with "wait-a-bit" thorns, and neither had Barb. Walter took us to the Biyala Game Ranch in the foothills adjoining the Drakensberg Mountains of Natal Province. I took an unexpected, offhand shot at a nearly 27-inch nyala standing broadside in thorn brush so dense, I had to ask Walter which way the animal was facing. Nevertheless, the excellent glass in the Leupold scope helped me find a tiny path through the brush to the nyala. After I shot, the nyala spun around, jumped twice and collapsed.

A wait-a-bit thornbush latched onto Barb and held on. She wrestled the bush, ripping her clothes and skin with the serious thorns. It took almost five minutes for the bush to relax its tight

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How the .366 DGW Fares Against the Competition

Between its .338-378 and .378 magnums, Weatherby has the field of high velocity, dangerous game calibers pretty well covered. So, what's a guy to do if he wants a wildcat cartridge that does more than just duplicate the ballistics of existing calibers?

The answer, of course, is to slide in between, and that's just what wildcatter Dave Walker did with the help of custom gunmaker Judson Bailey. The resulting wildcat .366 DGW is based on the .416 Rigby cartridge case necked down to the smaller caliber. The .366 diameter is the same as the European 9.3mm caliber. In Africa, various 9.3mm chamberings have chalked up an enviable record as reliable medicine for a wide variety of truculent beasts, so this caliber has excellent potential in a wildcat cartridge designed for African game.

Rigby's rimless .416 case also inspired Weatherby's .378 Magnum case. As a result, the dimensions of the .366 DGW and the .378 Weatherby are nearly identical, except for the belt just forward of the extractor groove on the Weatherby case and the distinctive Weatherby "Venturi" shoulder.

Weatherby's .378 launches a 300-grain bullet at 2,900-2,925 fps at up to 5,699 ft-lb. According to Judson Bailey's data, so does the .366 DGW. With comparable case capacities, this means the .366 DGW must necessarily operate at somewhat higher pressures because of its slightly smaller case neck diameter. In earlier years, this probably made a greater difference than it does today if you stick to modern propellants that generate consistent pressure levels despite wide fluctuations in ambient temperature. Nevertheless, be careful.

On the positive side of the ledger, a 300-grain, .366 bullet should have a slightly higher ballistic coefficient than a 300-grain .375 bullet. If you compare the 300-grain Swift A-Frame .366 bullet to its .375 counterpart, this turns out to be true. The .375 has a bc of .325 compared to a .342 bc for the 9.3mm.

One of the best of the standard 9.3mm chamberings has been the 9.3x64mm. As loaded by A-Square, it launches a 286-grain bullet at 2,700 fps with 4,629 ft-lbs of energy at the muzzle, although the Nosler reloading manual shows maximum velocities about 100 fps less.

The .366 DGW beats that old standby by a substantial margin, firing a heavier bullet 200-300 fps faster. There is a price to pay in recoil for the higher performance of the .366 DGW, compared to the 9.3x64mm, but if you want wildcat performance that closely mirrors the .378 Weatherby Magnum without the belted case that seems to offend some people, the .366 DGW is an excellent choice. — SS

grip and let Barb loose. Leading her toward the nyala, I blundered into another thornbush for a while. Of course, Walter, a skilled professional, knew just how to avoid the thorns as he measured the nyala's horns.

At the end of 28 days of hunting, my trophies included two zebra, two warthog, two gemsbok, kudu, blue wildebeest, nyala, blesbok and an impala. I took the impala and a warthog with Walter's Ruger M77 rifle. For all other game, my custom rifle, handcrafted on a World War I-vintage P14 rifle, performed flawlessly, as did the Leupold Vari X-III 1.5 - 5 X scope.

South African field-testing of the .366 DGW cartridge (handloaded with the 300-grain Swift A-Frame bullet and a hefty charge of H4831 powder) generated nine shots fired at nine animals at distances ranging from 50 to 200 yards. All were one-shot kills, and none required tracking or a finishing shot.

Keenly attentive to my medical needs, our outfitters and PHs put in extra effort for our comfort. I didn't have to carry or lift anything or strain myself at any time. Although, due to my rheumatoid arthritis, I hunted mostly from ground blinds, this is clearly not the only style of hunting in Africa. 🐾

If you want more information about the .366 DGW cartridge and fine custom rifles for all hunters, including those with physical disabilities, Judson Bailey is your man. Contact him via The Workshop, 368 Todd's Corner Road, Saint Albans, ME 04971; (207) 938-3595; e-mail: theworkshop@TDS.net,

Stef and Lenette Swanepoel, owners of Numzaan Safaris, run a gracious, efficient and tremendously successful hunting operation. Contact them at Box 180, Koedoeskop, 0361, North West Province, South Africa; +27-14-7850621; e-mail: numzaan@iafrica.com.

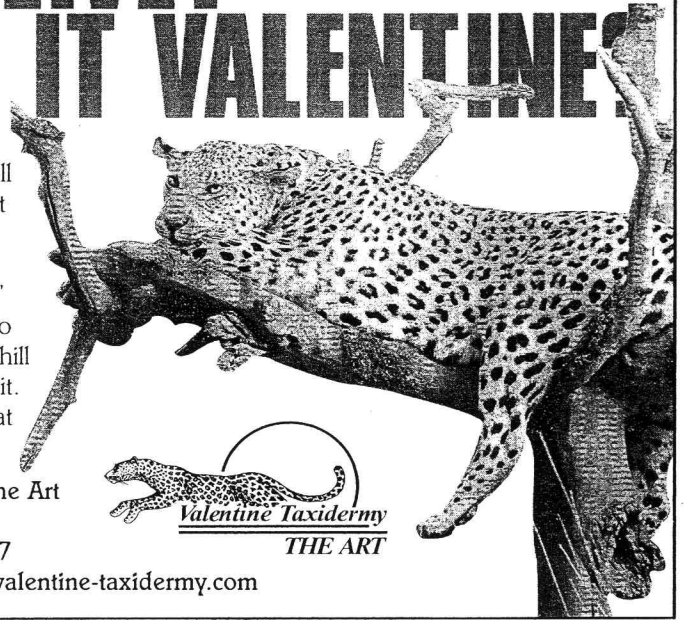
Walter Enslin has obtained South African and Congo concessions, previously un hunted for the past 20 years. His new firm, Kwan Safaris, specializes in plains game and the Big Five in South Africa, along with bongo, sitatunga and buffalo in the Congo. E-mail him at kwansafaris@mweb.co.za.

Editor's Note: We're pleased to mention that Judson Bailey has been cancer-free for two years and continues to build fine rifles in excellent health.

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