

# Fort Richmond

EMBRACING SOUTH  
AFRICA'S GRAND ROMANCE  
WHILE ON SAFARI.

BY ERIC R. POOLE

**T**he boyhood dreams of an epic adventure and following the unearthed footsteps of soldiers once headed to war would be fulfilled in a pair of boots. I laced up my Strathconas, slung my rifle and set out on safari.

Just 100 kilometers south of Kimberley in the Northern Cape of South Africa lay 21,415 unspoiled acres that make up Fort Richmond. The place gets its name from the Second Anglo-Boer War where, in 1899, 300 English and Canadian soldiers occupied this property and forced the Wayland family out of their home. The family moved to Grahamstown for the war's duration, but Walther stayed behind to keep a watchful eye over his precious piece of Africa.

On November 23, 1899, many of the British troops living here assaulted a Boer position at nearby Belmont, attempting to move north by rail to overcome the Boer siege of Cecil Rhodes' diamond town, Kimberley. It was a victory for the Brits that could have been seen from the rock-built outpost atop a hill at Fort Richmond. More troops would soon arrive from parts of the British Empire as the Boers lost momentum.

General Sir Charles Warren joined the main body of the 5th Division shortly after the Boer victory at the Battle of Colenso and briefly stayed

at the Wayland home during British occupation. Walther's grandson John Wayland remains in this house living with his lovely wife, Shirley. They keep a photo of this controversial military leader and former London police commissioner wearing Strathcona boots among other keepsake photographs taken of the battle-hardened soldiers staying at Fort Richmond.

Lord Strathcona's Canadian regiment was one of the last in the British Empire to be created and raised by a private individual. He recruited and equipped the cavalry regiment at his own expense for service in the Boer War. Many skilled horsemen enlisted, including some cowboys and officers of the North-West Mounted Police, which allowed for a short training period and a rapid deployment to war. Strathcona's Horse sailed on the S.S. *Monterey* from Halifax on March 18, 1900, and arrived at Cape Town nearly a month later. During their movement to the front lines, members of the North-West Mounted Police began to prefer the lace-up boots the regiment was already wearing and adopted them, as well as the Stetson campaign cover, as their own. The tall, leather-soled boots are now known as Strathcona's boots and are still worn by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

John no longer has the Martini-Henry souvenir handed down by his grandfather because "it kicked like a mule," he says. All that's left for evidence of the soldiers' occupation are a few cigarette burns in some old furniture and markings on the rock-piled ruins of the fort behind his house.



Sir Charles Warren





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Weary soldiers enjoy some downtime at Fort Richmond. Four .577/450 Martini-Henry rifles stacked against a post on their tent are representative of what most British soldiers were issued to fight the Boers.

The Wayland family returned home after the soldiers left and resumed a sheep and cattle farm for the next century. In 1999, Walther's grandson Neil started Fort Richmond Safaris, bringing hunters from all over the world to experience the Dark Continent. As with most of the ethical game farms in South Africa, Fort Richmond does not bring in animals to be shot. Rather, the herds are natural, thriving and surviving as they did in the harsh landscape of centuries ago.

Though I had never experienced Africa before, I had long dreamed of it through the famous writings. I developed a romance for what it was and knew if ever given the chance to hunt Africa, I would do it in a way that honored the past.

On learning the history of Fort Richmond and this region, I purchased a pair of Strathcona boots from the RCMP's Canadian supplier, Alberta Boot Company. These boots were handmade to the exact dimensions of each leg below the knee. They proved a bit slippery on stalks over grasslands, but gripped well on the rock boulders and hard soil. They made steep climbing difficult, but provided unmatched ankle support and protected my legs from the various thorn bushes. Each morning, I spent nearly 10 minutes putting them on and lacing them up. I was determined to persevere and wear them through the entire seven-day hunt.

I had intended to hunt half the time with Cabela's exclusive reintroduction of the Sako Finnbear and half the time with my mint 1961-vintage Finnbear, both chambered in .30-'06. But the week of my departure I learned of a law preventing hunters from bringing more than one rifle of the same caliber into South Africa. Therefore, I decided to



Walther Wayland

leave the low-serial-numbered original behind and equip the new one with a modern-but-classy Trijicon 3-9x40 Accupoint since I knew we would be stalking the low light of Africa's late evenings. Coincidentally, Glyn Bindon, founder of Trijicon, is also from South Africa, so using this optic seemed like a good fit.

I had sighted in and practiced taking shots in various positions leading up to the hunt. Of the many types of loads Sako now brings into the U.S., I went with the 180-grain Arrowhead II. This load is built using Sako's case, primer and powders, then topped off with a Swift Sci-

rocco II polymer-tipped bullet. The core is bonded, and the construction provides fast shock, controlled expansion and high weight retention. It proved perfect for hunting Africa's plains game.

The trip took me through Johannesburg and finally to Kimberley, where Professional Hunters Geoffrey Wayland and Otto Hager greeted my hunting party. Eddie Stevenson of Driftwood Media, Richard Mann and Len Waldron joined me on this adventure. The conversation during the 100-kilometer ride was forgettable as the unfamiliar scenery and smell of dusty, arid vegetation overwhelmed my senses. I soon noticed an artillery cannon poised atop a small hill, the first of many battlefield memorials of the Boer War we'd see along the way. Soon after our arrival, Geoffrey and Otto took us to the range to confirm that our rifles were zeroed and we knew how to effectively place a bullet on game at 200 yards.

The Land Cruiser tour of the Wayland Ranch was impressive. It was impossible to see it all, but it wasn't long before we saw what we had come for. A pair of small duiker sprung



*"In a few short hours, you will be chambering a round in your rifle to go on your first stalk in Africa." — J. Guthrie (1976–2013)*

from hiding, blesbok stretched across the horizon, and impala often crossed our path. Certain areas were lush with green vegetation, while other areas were covered with tall anthills or beds of rock.

Otto carried the duties as my assigned PH, recognizable by his burley toughness, hard South African accent and extremely short shorts. We got along instantly. In fact, I discovered he shared my passion for Sako rifles; in his truck was an old Forester chambered in .243.

My first day with Otto produced a sighting of various warthogs, impala, springbok and duiker, but I chose to forgo shooting the smaller game in an attempt to fill my tags with kudu, gemsbok, black wildebeest, red hartebeest and a zebra. My good friend and gunwriter J. Guthrie had warned me to discard any idea of a list and just take what Africa offers. Perhaps I should have listened to that advice.

I remember reading Elmer Keith's description of the kudu's well-earned reputation. Its nickname is still "The Ghost." On the first morning, I observed an average kudu bull stand broadside for about five minutes at 200 yards. The shot would have been easy, and my lust for it grew after hearing our tracker, Solomon, whisper, "Good bull." But Otto followed, "You can take it, but I know there are better bulls in here. This is only your first day."

Moving on, kudu seemed more elusive and I became more obsessed with the idea of taking one. That night, everyone in my hunting party celebrated their own successful stalks while I thought back to that missed opportunity and wondered about the next encounter. Over a fine

*What was once a British outpost is now a premier safari destination. Eleven different types of unspoiled habitat are on this ranch and are still managed by PH Geoffrey Wayland and his mother, Annamarie.*





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*Leroy, a tracker with Imbasa Safaris, used Len Waldron's new Dozier drop-point hunting knife to quickly clean two trophy gemsbok.*

multi-course meal prepared by his mother, Annamarie, Geoffrey indicated that he had an opportunity to hunt an impressive gemsbok at Imbasa Safaris' property the next day. We would not be allowed to shoot anything else.

## GEMSBOK

The gemsbok was on my list, so I volunteered and departed early with Otto the next morning. Once there, we were met by our tracker, Leroy. I rode on the back of Otto's Land Cruiser with Leroy and tried to observe, point and name game faster than he could. He enjoyed my enthusiasm as a bit of entertainment, especially when he could correct me. We stopped and stalked and climbed hill after rocky hill. There, I saw a beautiful herd of kudu with a bull larger than the one I saw the day before. In my quest for that trophy gemsbok, I later saw another kudu bull at less than 40 yards. It was as if the kudu knew I wanted to hunt them but didn't have the right.

Each gemsbok seemed to keep eyes on our arrival. The truck didn't seem threatening, but any sight of us stalking them on foot sent them running. Leroy had developed a trick he called the "007." With the truck maintaining a constant low speed, Leroy and I stood on the back of the bumper, waiting for the moment to step off and hide among the trees. If we did it right, the gemsbok would stay fixated on the truck driving away.

We attempted the 007 trick twice without success, but I could see how it could work. There were just far too many of them watching all directions. It appeared that the gemsbok survived by using their large numbers to alert the rest of danger. That afternoon, a long stalk on foot produced the intended result. Moving slowly tree to tree allowed us

to close the distance on a fine group of about 40 gemsbok. We stopped at about 110 yards and confirmed the distance with the rangefinder. Though male and female gemsbok look similar, it was obvious which one we were after. I chambered a round and assumed a supported-standing position on Otto's sticks as the gemsbok started to uncomfortably scuffle. The monarch bull stood in defiance to my presence as his harem ran for safety. Once I pulled the trigger and saw his leg buckle, I quickly reloaded and decided to keep shooting until he was firmly planted. Three shots were perfectly placed in rapid succession. His laser-straight horns measured 39 inches apiece and gave me pride. Leroy honored my effort by painting my boots with its blood.

## BLACK WILDEBEEST

The next morning started on a mountain behind the lodge. The stone-covered plateau could have been one of the places soldiers sourced the rocks to build the fort. From this location, Otto and Solomon could see for miles in all directions, and they glassed for hours looking for kudu. In that time, an eerie falcon took flight and hovered in place just a few feet above, looking down on our hunt. Nothing was spotted but an immature kudu bull and a few cows 900 yards out. With the sun high and the wildlife taking cover in the shade, Otto called it a morning and turned to lunch.

Back at Annamarie's house, I opened a message with news that my close friend, J. Guthrie, had died that night in his sleep. It was suggested that we should consider cancelling the remainder of the trip and fly home for the funeral. That's not how Guthrie would have wanted it.

I passed on lunch and tried to collect myself in private before heading out again that afternoon. Richard and Len both had a kudu to their credit as well as an assortment of springbok, blesbok, impala and zebra. Immediately after shooting the springbok, Len had a zebra run straight by his covered position. A shot to the chest and the zebra flipped





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ass over head. It was an incredible display of fast-action marksmanship.

Otto and I trekked the land and looked for kudu. I spent that time riding atop the Toyota thinking to myself about the 10 years Guthrie and I shared in friendship. As the sun started to set, we spotted a large herd of black wildebeest mingling 800 yards out. Thinking back to Guthrie's advice, I told Solomon I'd be interested in taking one.

The black wildebeest is special in that it's rare. Blue wildebeest are the more common of the two wildebeest species. Besides the darker color, the black wildebeest have hooks for horns that curl in front of the head instead of to the side like the blue.

Otto and I slowly crept in line to their position while moving tree to tree. Once we had moved to within 200 yards of the herd, a scout cow alerted the rest to our presence and thunderously stampeded more than 2,000 yards across the plain. As we watched them disappear over a ridge, a number of them turned back. We couldn't believe our eyes as they came right back like a slingshot toward our position. There must have been something special about that land we were standing on, but I didn't question it. I took a supported kneeling position in a tree using the low-hung branches and shade it provided for cover. With a round in the chamber, I scanned for a target. Otto initially identified two bulls of similar size, but as the herd stopped 100 yards away an old bull emerged and gave curiosity to our position. *That's the one*, I thought. Otto confirmed. The bull turned toward us, put his head down and feigned a charge at our position. One shot placed just under the shoulder blew up the heart and brought him down at 60 yards.

"Very good bull, very big bosses," Solomon concluded.

## ZEBRA

Over the next morning's breakfast, Otto said to me, "Today, maybe we climb the mountain again to look for kudu, then we go find you a pajama donkey."



*This fearless black wildebeest faced down the author at 60 yards and was willing to fight with its heavy hooks to protect the rest of the herd. It was a good death.*

That's the name the locals have given what we more reverently refer to as zebra. We had been keeping our eyes out since the hunt began, but even finding a kudu in the increasing heat proved difficult. They just weren't moving.

"OK," I replied. "Let's go get one of those ponies in striped pajamas."

Each morning and afternoon started out with a steep climb on top of a hill to glass for animals. And once again, nothing revealed itself.

"Sometimes zebra like to wander with eland," said Otto. "One of the trackers told me where he saw some yesterday."

That afternoon, Richard Mann joined me on a death march across the grassland. He was after an eland and I a zebra. We couldn't drive to this place because it was often so flat that game would disappear if they sensed any danger. The arduous hike across bulbous grasslands put four miles on the leather soles of my boots. And it produced nothing. Tired, we drove nearly 20 miles to the other corner of the property to examine a dry lakebed. Sometimes, animals like the eland and zebra will hang out near the lakebed because they can see for a long distance. Sure enough, more than a mile away Otto spotted four zebra stallions hiding among a herd of giant eland.



*This elegant .30-'06 Finnbear features Sako's famed bear-head silhouette grip cap and a rose-wood-topped forend. It's a tribute to the classic Sako rifles introduced in 1961. These are exclusively available from Cabela's.*





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Giant eland, the largest species of antelope, are quite wary and can run up to 40 mph. Otto figured our best chance at taking a zebra would be to wait for the mixed herd of eland and zebra to move in our direction and conceal ourselves behind the ant hills. Staying low to the ground, we squatted and crawled until it was obvious to some cows that something was awry. As I observed the group of 30 through the Triji, I fell in love with the idea of taking a large bull. A half-hour later, the group started to move toward us and to our left. The zebra moved among the back half of the eland and stayed with them. It was going to be difficult to shoot a zebra stallion and not risk wounding an eland cow behind it. The largest bull eland trotted in front and offered a clear shot. I asked Otto if I could take both a zebra and an eland once the opportunity presented itself. "I've never seen it done, but OK," he replied. I would attempt to shoot the zebra first, then swing to the front and drop the giant eland bull.

As the lengthy formation of animals drew near, their speed picked up. Only one zebra in the rear offered a shot, so I waited until it was 250 yards before pulling the trigger. I heard the impact and immediately pumped another round into the chamber and swung to my left to take the eland. "Hit him again," Otto said. Fighting the urge to put a .30-caliber Scirocco into the bull, I quickly pivoted back to the zebra I had just wounded. I miscalculated my holdoff for their speed and shot too far rearward. The red blood contrasted perfectly against his black and white stripes. The shot I had planned for the massive eland ended up getting placed into the zebra's shoulder. Invigorated with adrenaline, the stallion ran another 600 yards before finally losing enough blood.

Stoked with bittersweet satisfaction, Otto and I went out for kudu just as the sun started to fall that evening. Solomon only caught a glimpse of The Ghost, but he signaled Otto to stop. He dropped his binos and used his hands to describe



*"Was it white with black stripes, or black with white stripes?" the trackers would like to joke. Found in the plains, Burchell's zebra wear fewer and broader body stripes than that of the Cape Mountain zebra.*

a large kudu standing among the rocks in the shadow of the mountain. Otto killed the truck, and we stepped far away out of sight.

"Eric, you're going to have to climb this mountain over here to take a shot over there. Think you're up to it? If so, I can get you to within 300 yards of him. He's a real nice bull."

We quickly climbed the mountain without being detected. The kudu were still watching our truck 500 yards away. The window of opportunity only offered me a shot off rocks. There was no way for me to shoot off sticks. I grabbed the Galco sling with my support hand and pulled back as I made sure the barrel didn't touch any part of the rock cliff I was shooting from.

"He's 280 yards, Eric," Otto said. "Take him when you've got a shot."

The kudu was as dark as the rocks behind him, so I adjusted the intensity level of the Accupoint's green-dot crosshair until the perfect amount of illumination came through the reticle. As the sun glared over the skyline of the mountain, I drew back the trigger, holding the dot high on the shoulder.

After the crack of the gunshot, the next sound impacted the kudu and drew blood. We saw the bull go over the ridge-line and disappear with his cows. He left us a blood trail in





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## SOURCES

*Special thanks to Trijicon for sending me on my first South African safari. —EP*

## OUTFITTER:

Fort Richmond Safaris  
[fortrichmond.co.za](http://fortrichmond.co.za)

## RIFLE & AMMUNITION:

Sako 85 Finnbear, .30-06  
[sako.fi](http://sako.fi)

## Optics:

Trijicon Accupoint 3-9x40  
[trijicon.com](http://trijicon.com)

## CLOTHING:

Alberta Boot Co.  
[albertaboot.com](http://albertaboot.com)

## Beretta

[berettausa.com](http://berettausa.com)

## Mountain Khakis

[mountainkhakis.com](http://mountainkhakis.com)

## CASES AND LEATHER:

Galco  
[usgalco.com](http://usgalco.com)

## ILLUSTRATIONS:

Doug Schermer

the mountain's rocks that continued toward the thick vegetation. As the blood trail became harder to detect, I watched in awe at the forensic investigating abilities of our tracker to spot a small, wet blood speck on a blade of grass or in the sand. Eventually, the blood trail stopped, and he followed my wounded kudu by tracks alone.

"He has a bad leg," Solomon pointed out. "See, the right track is flatter than the left. He is favoring one of his front legs."

We jumped him twice that evening and heard a lungy wheez as he stood up in the thick thorn trees and disappeared again. I hated that I wounded him, and even more so now than ever The Ghost was living up to his reputation. That night, Otto called off the search and instructed us to give him a couple days so we wouldn't push him too far.

We never did find him.

## RED HARTEBEEST

My last day of hunting at Fort Richmond began with another mountain climb to search a final time for the wounded kudu. After glassing a good spell, we took a long ride with an open mind for impala, warthog, blesbok or red hartebeest. We found ourselves tracking a large group of red hartebeest that we had seen walking toward water. They don't have great vision, so we were able to observe them upwind a lot closer than some of the other animals. There were nearly 40 of them more than 300 yards away, and only a few dark-colored males. That afternoon, the hartebeest gave up their watering hole and began to move in a zig-zag pattern toward the vegetation at the base of a mountain. Otto and I tried to stay a few hundred yards in front of them, moving in a low position from anthill to anthill in 50-yard bursts. We finally fell below the horizon in a valley, staying hidden in hopes they would cross our flank. As expected, the hartebeest crested the ridgeline one by one and moved steadily down toward our position. I scanned from the anthill and compared the body size of each male.

"That back one looks pretty good," I told Otto. "No, that one in the front is the best." I obediently set up, leaning on the anthill for stability, and maxed out the scope's power. With the rifle on Safe, I picked a spot on his shoulder and held off his neck for a 10-mph lead. I applied pressure to the trigger until Otto said, "Take him." The gun fired, and he dropped in his tracks. The Sako reloaded effortlessly, with the scope never coming off the animal. As the hartebeest started to push his body up on his front legs, I hit him again.

## LOOKING BACK

I will never forget this trip, for many reasons. Though I lost a close friend, I came in part because of him and took away some of my dearest memories. The first kudu I saw might have been dead if I hadn't decided to hold out for a larger one. Perhaps I should have listened to Guthrie's advice and taken what Africa offered.

This African safari lived up to the romance I had hoped for, and I've got a deeper appreciation for the meaning of life. Though I drew jest in camp, I don't regret wearing Strathcona's boots or enduring the difficulty of hunting in them. To their credit, these historic boots probably saved me from breaking my ankles on a few of Otto's mountain climbs. What I thought was going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience probably won't be. More than anything I want to go back, relive history and hunt that elusive kudu. ○

