

# Walk and Stalk

**Simon K Barr** bags an unusual quarry species in the form of the Hartman's mountain zebra in Namibia

**Z**ebbras and their fingerprint of swirling stripes have long fascinated me. Their elegant form and striking colouration make them one of the most iconic and beguiling of African game species. Three separate species inhabit sub-Saharan Africa; all are part of the equids family. The common plains zebra is the most geographically widespread and numerous of the species. The highly endangered Grevys is found only in Ethiopia and Kenya, where it is believed there are less than 2,500 animals left living wild. The species that was of most interest to me before my trip to Namibia was the mountain zebra. This is split into two subspecies, the Cape found only in South Africa and the Hartmann's that lives in small numbers in Namibia and south-western Angola.

## IMMENSE APPEAL

When planning my hunting expedition, knowing the Hartman is almost unique to that area of Africa had immense appeal. To experience something truly wild and not replicable on a stocked game farm

in South Africa made me feel I was going to engage honestly with Namibia and make my experience far more special.

I am not a trophy hunter per se, but at home, if I stumble across a handsome mature roebuck past his prime, I feel privileged to have the chance to take an animal that has done his bit for his species. I felt the same about the zebra and hoped to take an old stallion that had passed on his genetics to many future generations. Zebra have been anthropomorphised countless times in children's fiction and are a reasonably emotive species to the British public as a nation of horse lovers. Knowing my hunt would be fair chase, part of a selective management plan and the spoils would enter the food chain was enough for me to feel comfortable about my chosen quarry species.

## RECOMMENDED

As for an outfitter, I had been highly recommended the von Seydlitz family and their lodge Schönfeld, near Omaruru in western central Namibia. They hunt over



Simon with Leica BRF binos, a good tool for plains hunting

200,000 hectares of premier ground that plays host to an abundance of carefully managed wild game. Schönfeld is one of the few family estates in Namibia still run by the family that emigrated there 100 years ago from Germany.

Namibia is four times the size of Britain and bursting with geographic diversity. There are mountains, wetlands, deserts, forests and everything in between. Second to Mongolia, it is the least densely populated country on earth meaning enormous amounts of space for animals and tremendous hunting opportunities. Namibia



Stephan Eurasia and SKB with the zebra, a challenging hunt on an unusual species



**A tiny window of opportunity - lining up on the Zebra through some thick brush, the 7mm Rem Mag Hornady ammo and Merkel Helix was up to the task**

has a stable democracy and is a safe, friendly country. To that end, I have heard from many seasoned African hunters that it's the ideal introduction to the continent, being such a straightforward and easy place to visit. I now wholeheartedly agree!

**CHARMING AND HISTORIC**

The castle-like hunting lodge nestles into a hillside and has a charming, historic feel. On arrival, I enjoyed some warm family hospitality while the young, fifth generation von Seydlitz line ran around carefree. Not a bad place to grow up! Under the pitter-patter of their feet in the large sitting room, I spotted a felt-backed skin from a Hartmann's mountain zebra and far bigger than I had imagined!



**Hard work but then again it should be - stalking the zebra through some thick stuff**

Namibia shares the same geographic longitude as Europe, so mercifully no jet lag, so the following morning could not come quick enough! After a light breakfast, before the intense African sun got up, we headed to the range to check zero.

I took a Merkel Helix, straight-pull/switch-barrel in 7mm Remington Magnum. On top a Leica Magnus 1.5-10x42 scope on a quick mount system and it all went together easily and quickly. Ammo – 139-grain Hornady GMX Superformance lead-free. The minimal meat damage and terminal performance of the GMX in .308 had previously impressed me. But how well would this polymer-tipped, copper alloy projectile fare on a Hartmann's zebra?

Two shots touching on the black at 100 yards was all the rifle needed to do. Proof enough for my Professional Hunter (PH) Stephan that we were ready and able. Stephan is a fourth generation von Seydlitz and the son of the current owner Hartwig. He has hunted all of his life and grew up on the estate.

**WALK AND STALK**

Hunting at first light was a familiar walk and stalk but in a completely alien environment for me. We were dropped off from the truck with our tracker Erassi and worked through some open areas that animals like to feed on. The ground looked beautiful but was hostile. Barbed wire like spines



**The von Seydlitz family lodge Schönfeld, near Omaruru in western central Namibia, in celebration of the successful hunt my hosts hoisted a union flag**

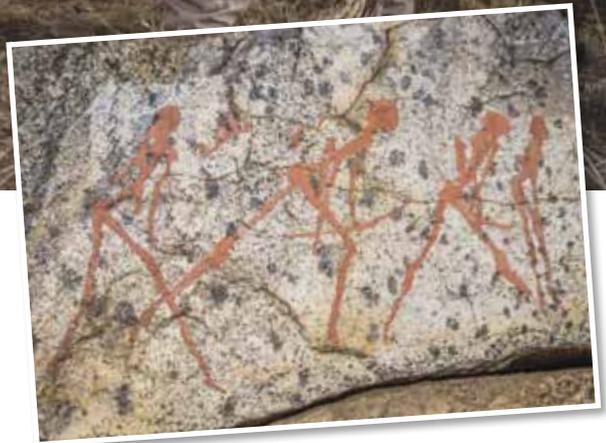
and spikes protruded from every plant and bush. The animals were plentiful but in an environment where the rules really are 'survival of the fittest', they do not stand for long if they think something is awry.

Oryx, impala, kudu, hartebeest, wildebeest. Every animal I saw that morning was in top physical condition. Everything looked as powerful and defined as a thoroughbred racehorse! Another clear reminder that this ecosystem operates with active predation. If you lag behind, you are a meal for something else. The area we stalked apparently accommodated no less than 27 huntable species.

Having not seen a mountain zebra by mid-morning, it was time to spot and stalk using the vehicle to move us from location to location



More hard work loading the 350 kg zebra onto the truck was not an easy task



Hunting has been practiced forever in Africa - 2,000 year old bushman paintings depicting hunting scenes

► location to cover more ground. We headed towards some higher more rocky mountainous areas favoured by the Hartmann's. On the way, we stopped at every high point and valley to use the lay of the land to try and look under the low tree canopies to catch sight of animals taking respite in the shade from the midday sun.

**GAME ON**

Finally, after a few hours and as the shadows started getting longer, Erassi our eagle-eyed tracker glassed a small group of mountain zebra under some thorn bushes. They were roughly a mile away. From that distance he identified the stallion standing slightly away from the group. He and Stephan then plotted in Afrikaans. Stephan quickly explained that Erassi thought they might have seen us come over the crest of the hill but were much lower than they usually are in this region so this was a golden opportunity. The hunt was on.

The plan was to leave the vehicle and circle the group in a huge loop. If they had seen us they would think we had gone in a different direction. The brush was far thicker and more brutal than we had experienced in the morning. After an hour, my internal compass, a much more rudimentary version than Stephan and Erassi's, told me that we must be closing in. Moving quietly was hard, the stones and rocks under foot crunched and every branch clawed at our clothes. This was going to be a delicate and slow chess move.

**ALARM!**

Half an hour passed and our slow progress had taken us to the lip of a small bowl. Erassi pointed into the brush, we were where we needed to be then heard the zebra's hoof banging and scraping on the ground signaling it had sensed us. We had little time left before this creature took flight. I could just see a long black coarse tail flicking in the thorn canopy without a clear shot. I came up onto the sticks and waited, heart pounding.

The stallion started to move, it had enough of feeling uneasy and I knew it was about to take flight. A broadside shot exposed itself for a split second, which was all I needed! The shot rang out and I could see through the scope I had connected hard!

We quietly walked to the strike area to find a reassuring amount of evidence. Lying less than 100 yards away was the old Hartmann's stallion, an overwhelming sight. The shot had entered perfectly behind the front shoulder, passed through both lungs and exited the slightly quartered animal at the back of the rib cage on the offside, conclusive proof that the ammunition was a good choice.

**STRIPES**

As we looked over this incredible creature Stephan explained the most obvious way to tell the difference between a plains and mountain species are by their stripes. The mountain zebra has solid stripes while plains, seen more on the grasslands, has

additional faint stripes superimposed on the white referred to as shadow stripes. On closer observation, I could see that the Hartmann's stripes don't join on its stomach giving it a characteristic white belly and also continue down to its hooves. The plains zebra stripes extend all the way to its underside and often fade towards its hooves. There are two more obvious differences; the Hartmann's has a grid-iron pattern across the top of its rump and a prominent dewlap or Adam's apple unique to the species.

The next task was the mother and father of all extractions. A team of workers from the lodge was called to assist in some heavy-duty forestry clearance to open a path to where this substantial 350 kg zebra was lying. Finally after a few sweaty hours the beast was loaded and we headed the half hour back to the lodge.

The satisfaction of a job well done was indescribable. A few nights later we had the pleasure of eating the zebra's fillets and what excellent meat it was too. However, I still have one nagging question running around in my head – are zebra white with black stripes or black with white?