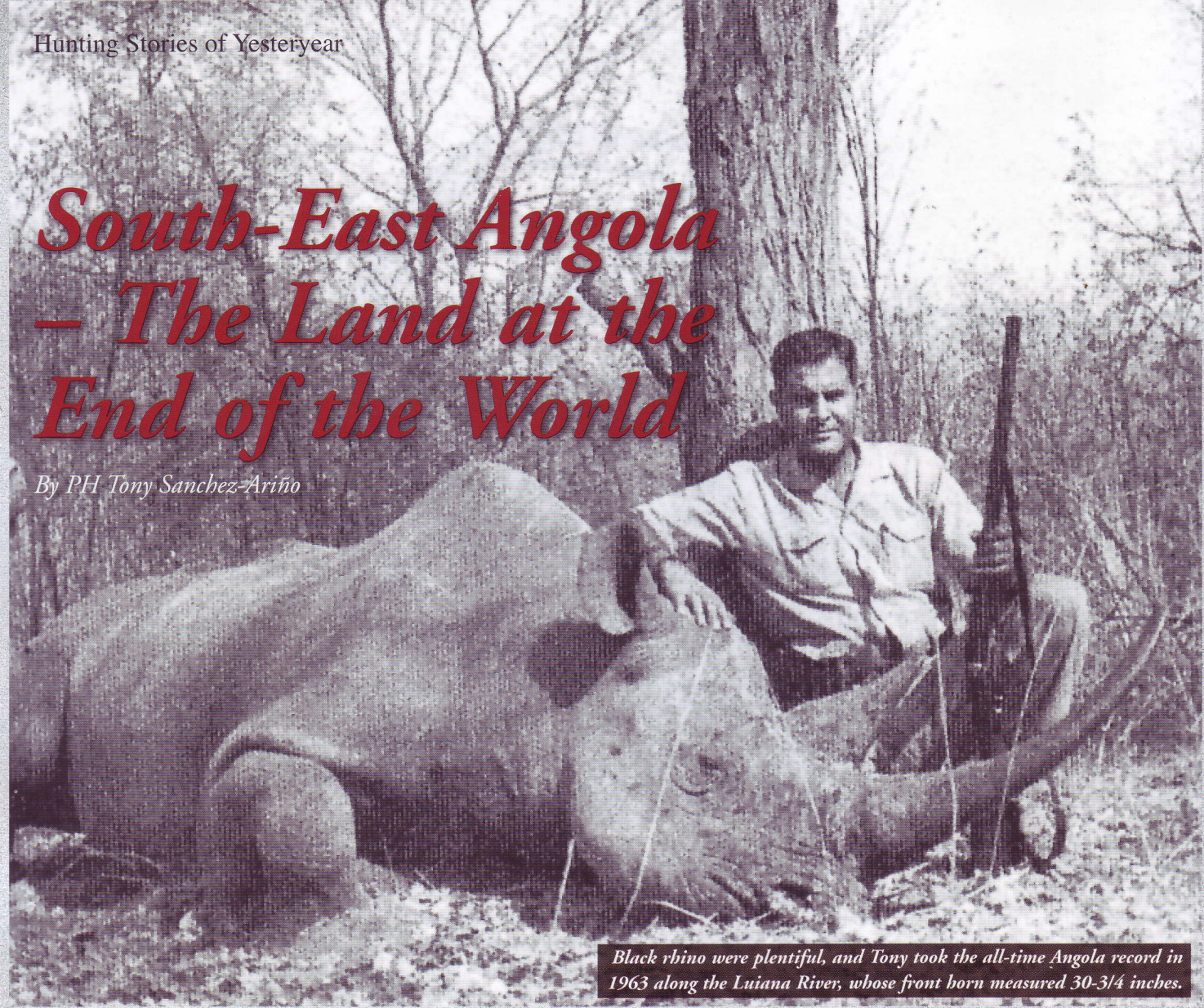


South-East Angola – The Land at the End of the World

By PH Tony Sanchez-Ariño



Black rhino were plentiful, and Tony took the all-time Angola record in 1963 along the Luiana River, whose front horn measured 30-3/4 inches.

One of the very few remaining 'white spots' in the African map, still as late as the 1960s, was the remote south-east corner of Angola, in the old Cuando-Cubango Province.

I came to know a little bit of this 'no-man's-land,' thanks to the first-hand information given to me by my dear friend, the late Jose Fenykoevi, who was the first to visit this part of Angola several times in the 1950s during his private hunting and exploratory expeditions. In one of them, in 1955, he shot a monster elephant – 13 ft 2 in (4 m 1 cm) up to his shoulder, still on display, fully mounted, at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington.

During my continuous search for new elephant country all over Africa, I was very lucky to combine it with my other great passion: the exploration of remote and lost corners. This particular place, still known in Angola as 'The Land at the End of the World' fascinated me - primitive and nearly unknown, with only a tiny administrative post called Luiana, with a district commissioner who had the privilege to enjoy the most lonely, boring and lousy life in the whole country...

Despite the imprecise and inaccurate maps of the territory, for years I dreamt of going there. But its remoteness, the expenses involved, and the total lack of help formed an impossible barrier, and I continued dreaming

my impossible dreams.

In 1962 I was hunting in Uganda, a wonderful country in those days before the Idi Amin disaster, when I got a telegram from my friend Fenykoevi in Madrid, asking me to contact him as soon as I returned to Spain. Of course I was very curious and, on my arrival some weeks later in Valencia, my hometown, I telephoned him.

In a few words he explained the matter: In 1961, some good friends from Lisbon had obtained from the Angola Government the rights to a huge hunting concession in 'The Land of the End of the World' under the name of Luiana Safaris – the Portuguese name for 'concession.' Unfortunately, the person in charge was not ideal, and things went from bad to worse, to the point that the Government warned that, if things did not improve, they would lose the concession rights, together with the large amounts of money invested. Fenykoevi and his friends wanted me to take over and reorganize the company. For me this was a fantastic proposition, to be able to go to the land of my dreams like a paramount chief, explore the country, open tracks for

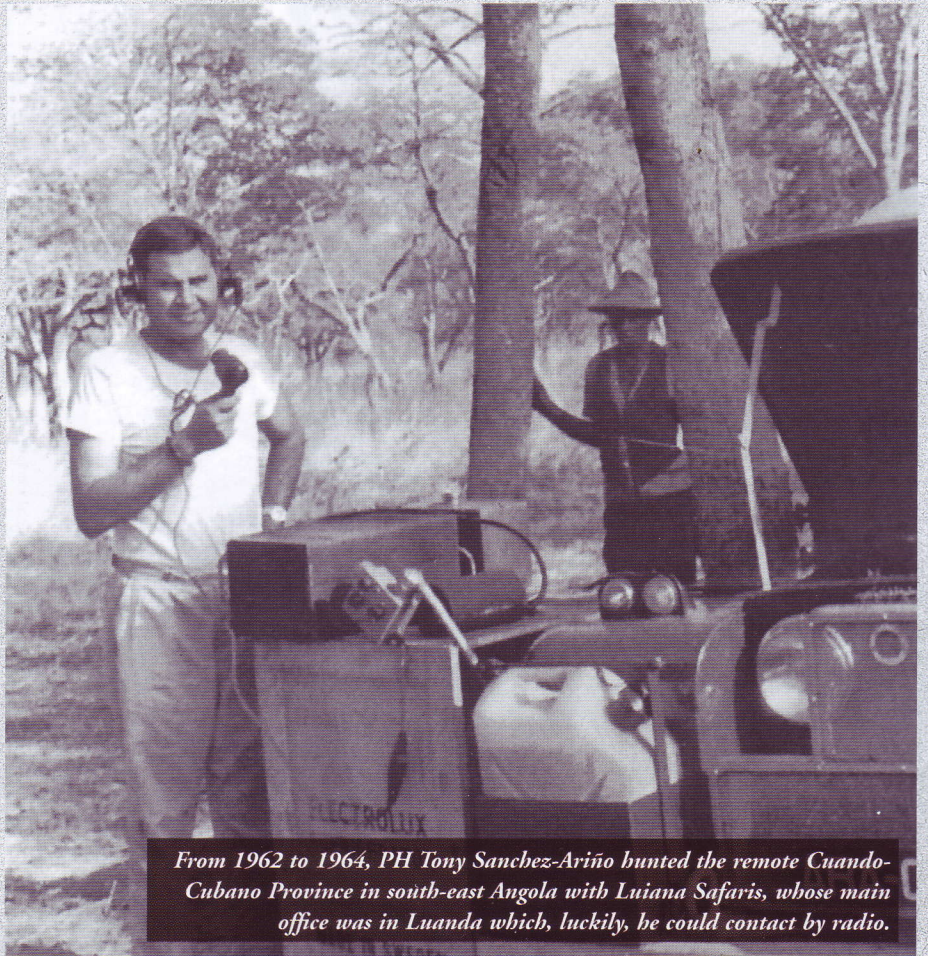
the hunting vehicles, build up camps, etc. In a second all my 'impossible dreams' became a reality. Of course, I accepted and two weeks later I was on my way. In those days it was extremely difficult to reach Luiana from Luanda, the capital of Angola, the shortest way being from Victoria Falls, in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). From there, I had to go by car to the Angolan border via Sesheke in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), cross the Zambezi River here and arrive to Katima Mulilo in the Caprivi Strip, part of South West Africa (now Namibia). In 1962, the road from Vic Falls to Katima Mulilo was a lousy one – just a sandy track; but from there to the border with Angola we had to find our way through the bush - no roads, no tracks, nothing. It was imperative to open a way that could be used conveniently, because all the supplies, including the petrol, had to be obtained in Katima Mulilo, the nearest post with a trade company. The owner of the biggest store was Finaughty, the grandson of the famous elephant hunter William Finaughty, who hunted between 1867 and 1877 in Matabeleland, thanks to his friendship with

the great chief Mzilikazi; he shot around 400 elephants, all with his 4-bore gun.

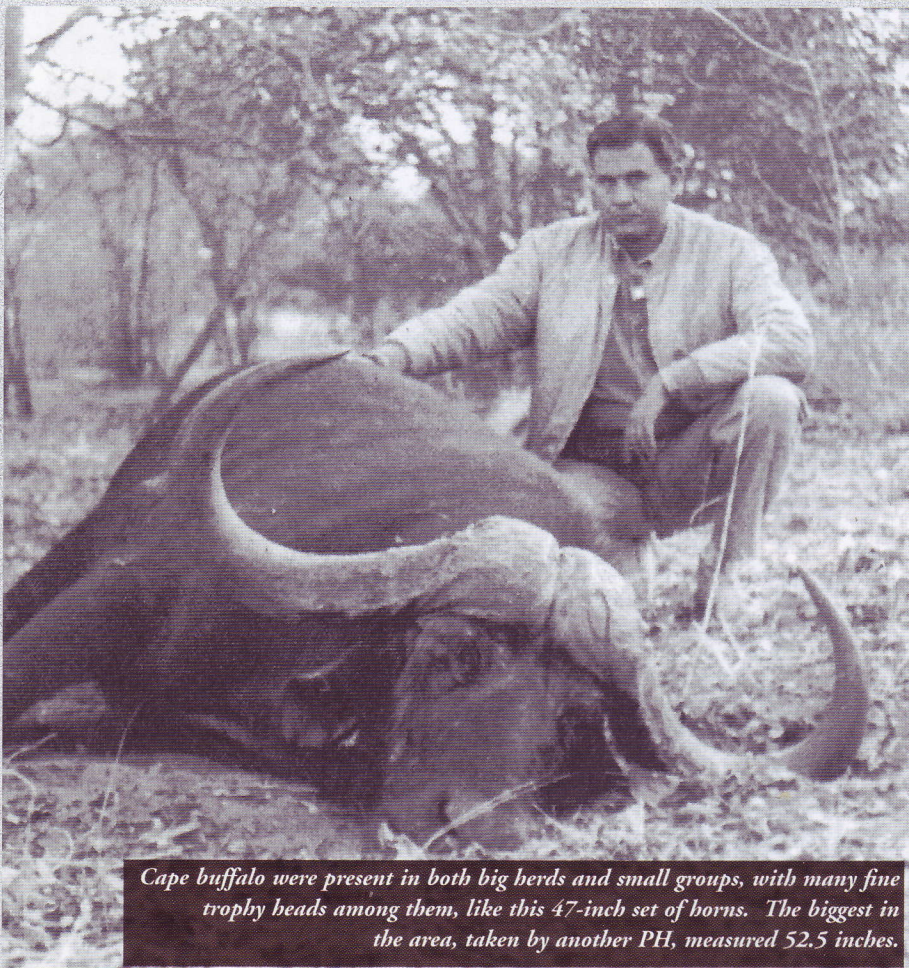
In the extreme tip of the south-east corner of Angola, along the Cuando River, we established a mini camp on the left bank, in Northern Rhodesia, where one Land-Rover was kept to go to Katima Mulilo and bring all the necessary supplies back to the border. From here everything was sent to Angola, loaded on a pontoon made with empty petrol drums and strong planks. The crossing from one side of the river to the other took an hour, following an open channel through the high grass and aquatic vegetation. Another Land-Rover waited on the Angolan side to take everything to the main camp, about 50 km away on a very poor track. The administrative post of Luiana was about nine km up the river in a beautiful place with big trees, home to hundreds of doves.

On arrival at Luiana Camp I met the people working there: one camp manager, two PHs, and two drivers for the hunting cars, all of them Portuguese, plus all the native workers. The camp, with its small chalets and central dining room, was in better condition than I expected.

Finally I was at the gate of my wonderland. After a few days in camp sorting out problems, I started to prepare to explore the country between the Cuando River in the east, forming



From 1962 to 1964, PH Tony Sanchez-Ariño hunted the remote Cuando-Cubano Province in south-east Angola with Luiana Safaris, whose main office was in Luanda which, luckily, he could contact by radio.



Cape buffalo were present in both big herds and small groups, with many fine trophy heads among them, like this 47-inch set of horns. The biggest in the area, taken by another PH, measured 52.5 inches.

the boundary between Angola and Northern Rhodesia, and the remote and unknown territory to the west, along the Luiana and Utembo Rivers.

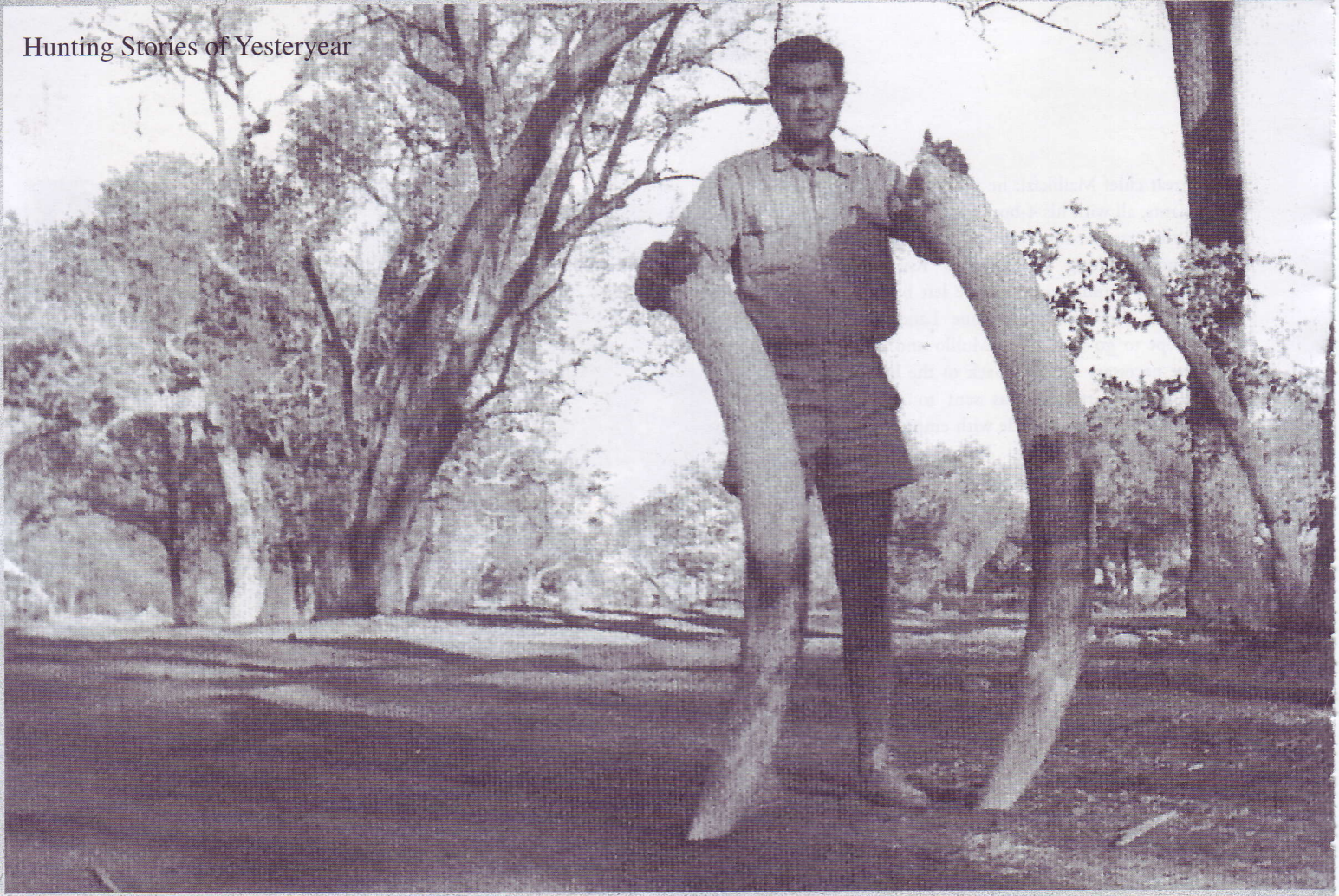
The country was a succession of open places, locally known as 'chanas' that alternated with forests with big trees and horrible thorn bush, very difficult to cross. The sandy terrain made the walking tiring.

With some small and nearly useless tents, food, rifles and the porters, we started towards the areas nobody had entered before; during 1961, hunting had mostly been along the road to the Nerquinha Mission and Mavinga.

Not too far from the camp we started to see the first game - reedbeek, tiang, roan, zebra and, near the water, many red lechwe. About 10 km farther, in a place with several waterholes, we saw the first elephant, buffalo and black rhino tracks, which was fantastic news. Here and there we also found lion tracks, very well marked in the sand. The expectation could not be better.

Along the way, trying to find the easiest way for a future track, the natives marked the trees with their axes. Later, the Land-Rovers could cross the bush without much problem. In Angola, these bush tracks are named 'picadas,' and one of our objectives was to make as many as possible in order to reach the most remote parts of the concession with the future safaris.

Hunting Stories of Yesteryear





The elephants in south-east Angola had short and very thick tusks, that averaged between 50 to 70 lbs per side, although Tony took several in the 80- to 90-lb class. His biggest was a 103-lb single tusker.

Even in those far away days in a remote territory never hunted before, tuskers over 80 lbs. were difficult to find and were the exception.

Little by little we went ahead, reaching places never visited before by a white man. GPS had not yet been invented, and we found our way with a compass, the sun and our instinct while I made maps of sorts, marking the rivers and permanent waterholes, so necessary for game animals. The territory was sparsely inhabited, and we found only some primitive groups of Bushmen from time to time, known as 'Mukankalas' in Angola. These poor people, who had never met a European before, were horrified to see me. The Bushmen were still completely pure, without any mixed blood from other tribes. As I am 6 feet 4 inches tall, they looked like miniatures by comparison, and were very nervous in front of me. Thanks to my interpreter, a half-caste Portuguese and African, I was able to communicate with them, and, after they lost their fear, they turned out to be quite friendly, so different from their relatives in Botswana and Namibia – always with a serious expression, distant and distrustful. The information I used to get from the Mukankalas was always quite accurate and very helpful, just like the Pygmies in the Cameroon, Gabon and the Congo, which it is a great thing for hunters and explorers.

Months later, when I was on safari after elephants, I came across a group of Mukankalas I had known for some time. The chief, an old person full of wrinkles, was a well-known hunter and, when I asked him if he knew where to find the elephants, he quickly answered: "Yes, I know." My next question was: "Where?" And his fantastic reply, pointing ahead with his arm, was: "In the bush..."

The farther west we went, we found more and more elephants, mostly old bulls, very seldom females, and never a single calf. It looked to me like an asylum for old age elephants. Black rhinos were always present in high numbers, like in northern Kenya in the golden days.

One day, walking along the small Kandonge River, we counted 23 of them, going and coming from the water, something that today would look like a fantasy, but it was very true only 45 years ago.

The bull elephants in the Cuando-Cubango area had the biggest bodies I have seen in my life, real monsters. I have hunted elephants all over Africa and never saw such huge specimens as those. Lions were always present, and at night we heard their roar from many different directions. When we started the safaris we used to shoot them without bait; in daylight, they were quite tranquil, looking to us with curiosity as though trying to find out what

kind of 'animals' they had in front. For sure, they were not at all used to seeing humans.

It was the same with the leopards, also found all over the place. We never hunted them with bait either, because they would have a daylight siesta on a branch or any other clear place - easy to spot them. It was like hunting in a zoo... Buffalo was always present, in big herds and in small groups of old bulls, with very fine heads among them. I shot several between 46 and 50 inches, but the biggest one, obtained by one of our PHs, measured 52-¹/₂ inches, a super trophy.

The old elephants had short and very thick tusks. Their bodies were so big that many times the hunters underestimated the weight of the tusks because they looked smaller by comparison. The biggest I shot was a 103-lb single tusker, but I got several in the 80 and 90-lb class. Even in those far away days in a remote territory never hunted before, tuskers over 80 lbs. were difficult to find and were the exception. The average was from 50 to 70 lbs. per tusk. If I am not wrong, the record for the Cuando-Cubango was 120 and 125 lbs., shot some few years after I left the country.

As I said before, black rhino was plentiful, and I was very lucky to get the all-time Angola record with 30-³/₄ inches, on safari with a client in 1963 along the Luiana River.

Greater kudu and sable with magnificent heads were found all over the place. Very seldom we shot sable with less than 44", and my biggest one was 50-¹/₂", both horns exactly the same length. Kudu with heads up to 58" were not rare, and during the three years I was there, we got three bulls over 60", the biggest 63-¹/₂", a super beauty.

In the marshes along the Cuando River lived thousands of red lechwes. Looking from a high point it was possible to see a moving red mass, and they were tame like cattle. The problem was to choose the right one to shoot because, when you were aiming at one, then there was another bigger one next to it, and it was like this all the time.

I stayed for three years (1962 to 1964) in 'The Land at the End of the World' exploring and hunting, hunting and exploring... We managed to build up a small landing strip for charter planes for clients, etc. In 1963 the government stopped us bringing clients from Vic Falls, and we were forced to bring them from Luanda. An office was opened in Luanda and connected by radio with our camp in Luiana. We were also forbidden to bring supplies from Katima Mulilo and everything had to be from Angola. The nearest place from camp where it was possible to get food, petrol, etc., was the town of Serpa Pinto, around 700 km north-west. The road was terrible, just deep sand. We bought a powerful



lorry, a Unimog with a trailer that journeyed back and forth from Serpa Pinto. Half the trailer was full with diesel drums for the Unimog, always in double gear on the sandy track.

During those unforgettable years exploring the very last corner of the territory, my great reward was to be the first white person to put his feet in virgin territory, to meet people who had never before seen a white face, and to know a pure Africa as it was before the arrival of the European... a real Paradise.

By the end of 1964 I had done all that was required by Fenykoevi and his friends who also hunted with me there. By that time the company had grown and there were too many people around. So I convinced myself that it was time to say good-bye to Angola where I had enjoyed myself up to the very last drop, and go back to my old hunting grounds in the Sudan, Kenya, Ubangui-Chari, Somalia.

After I left, the company continued for years; later, people from Mozambique went there to hunt and, little by little, my

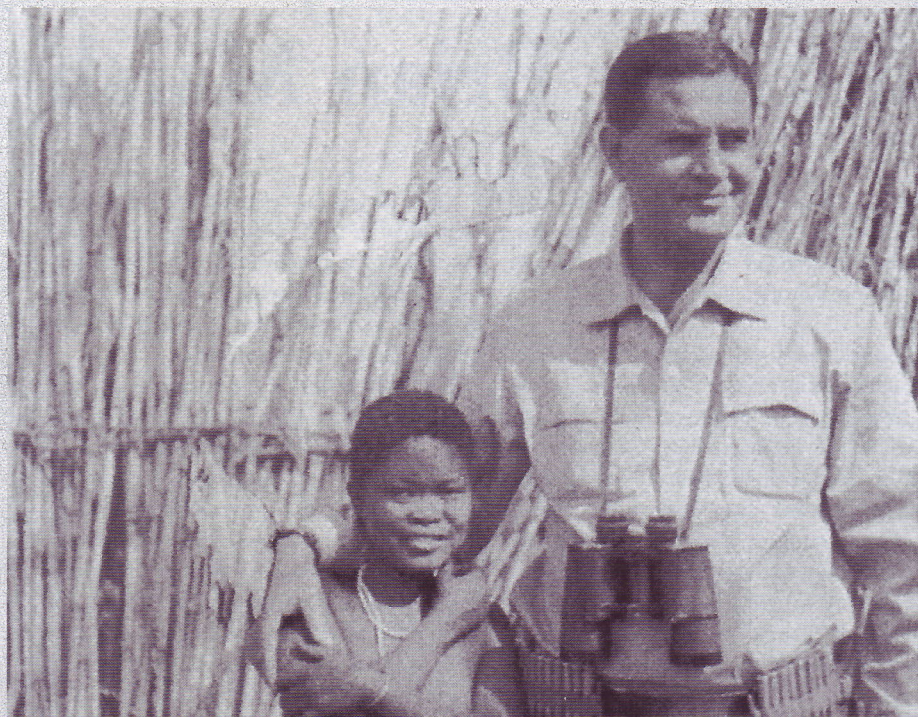
virgin Africa became a prostituted Africa, the hunting grounds ruined by shooting from the cars, and worse - a real disaster. Then in the 1970s the civil war started, and my beloved Cuando-Cubango province became the headquarters of the rebels, with landmines by hundreds of thousands, and killing everything on four legs for food. The incalculable numbers of red lechwe in the marshes along the Cuando River were reduced to zero...

Now 43 years have elapsed from the day I left 'The Land at the End of the World,' but the memories are as fresh as though it was only two days ago that I walked endless miles with my .416 Rigby rifle on the shoulder. If I could turn back the clock, I would want nothing more than to re-live those happy days of dawns along the Luiana River and nights with the Southern Cross shining in the sky like diamonds...

PH Tony Sanchez-Ariño is the author of *'Elephant, Ivory & Hunters'*, *'The Last of the Few'*, and *'On the Trail of the African Elephant, and Ivory'*. 🌍



The elephants in 'The Land at the End of the World' had the biggest bodies Tony has ever seen in his lifetime, like this one, pictured next to Tony, who is 6 feet 4 inches tall.



The hunting area was sparsely inhabited by small groups of primitive, pure-blooded Bushmen, known in Angola as 'Mukankalas,' like the young girl pictured here with Tony.