

The author's mentor, Bill Woodley, with elephant tusks weighing 83 and 86 lbs. Makindu, 1946.



Sunset Tales of Safariland by Stan Bleazard

Reviewed by Brooke ChilversLubin

Let's just admit it. We're jealous of anyone blessed with an innate lust for the bush, who was born in Kenya between the two World Wars, and had a game-rich wilderness as a backyard.

Added a hunting father whose job put them in sight of Mount Kenya, and a grandfather who managed a sawmill in a remote tropical forest on the western side of the Rift Valley. And what do you get? Stan Bleazard, Deputy Chief Game Warden in Kenya's Game Department during its heyday in the 1960s, pilot, professional hunter, co-author of *The Impossible Dream* with world-famous conservationist Ian Parker, and now author of his 275-page autobiography, *Sunset Tales of Safariland*, lushly published with 113 black and white photos by Trophy Room Books in Agoura, California.

Bleazard started his hunting life with his father's Mauser bolt-action .22 and 9.3mm rifles (Jim Bleazard used the latter to collect a buffalo, good enough for Rowland Ward, in Marsabit

in 1927), and brought home his first 'trophy': a well-earned bustard, just in time for Christmas dinner.

Bleazard was able to live the bush life for 50 years, hunting mostly for himself or killing 'rogues and marauders' for the game department. He also guided hunting clients, albeit those still endowed with the mentality of yesteryear, that is, without the time pressures and record-book burdens that characterize the safari industry today. Yet he calls each outing a safari, because 'safari means a journey of extended duration that requires considerable preparation and is always a very serious undertaking.'

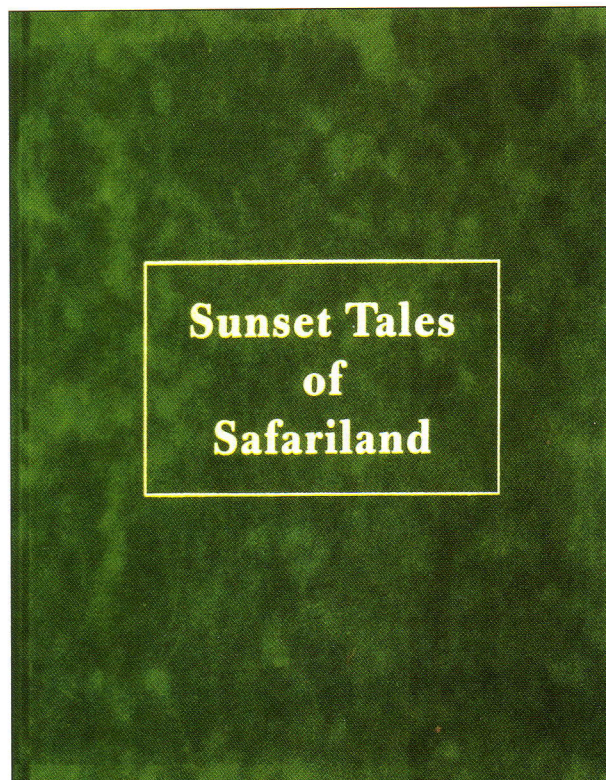
The adventures and insights of men like Bleazard earn them no rewards in hunting clubs, for this amount of experience cannot be bought. That's probably what makes this book

such a compelling read. His straightforward, yet detailed and descriptive style adds to the pleasure; for example, he captures the rhythm and purity in the routines of preparing to leave camp for hunting, in the smoky mugs of tea downed 'before the dawning.'

In the chapter 'The Pursuit of Skill,' Bleazard calmly takes us down the track of his evolution as a hunter as he studies and pursues gerenuk, oryx, kudu and bushbuck, never missing an opportunity to examine an elephant skull – especially the critical positions for brain shots of the ear orifices and cranial joint. He learns that bush duikers are most likely to be encountered in pairs in the open while feeding, and about their tactic of sharply changing direction as soon as they enter cover. And that bushbuck, although not herd animals, can be gregarious



The author's father, Jim Bleazard (right), in camp with J.A. Hunter. Garba Tula, Kenya, 1927.



around waterholes, and that they tend to stick to the same trails between their daytime hideouts and nighttime feeding places.

Bleazard also talks about his guns – his .22 LRs, .256 Mannlicher, the military .303 and .30-06 Springfield, Brno 8x60mm, Mauser 9.3x62mm, Winchester .375 H&H Magnum, and Jeffery .450 No. 2. Cartridges were widely available then, and he only ever experienced a single misfire. “With practice I learned the character and limits of each calibre and which type would best suit the particular occasion. Each one had merit for specific situations,” he writes, as he encounters black rhino, lion, leopard, buffalo and elephant, noticing the local vegetation and geology along the way and how they affect the hunt and its outcome.

Tied to his own tales are those of friends or acquaintances that might otherwise be lost, like PH John Dumore, who killed buffaloes, unlawfully, by putting them at bay with dogs, then spearing them. George Dove, Geoff Bennett, Peter Jenkins, Nicky Blunt and Brian Nicholson also appear.

Bleazard's mentor was Bill Woodley, “hunter, conservationist, soldier of rank and distinction, bush pilot and raconteur extraordinaire,” with whom he shot his first elephant. In the course of their friendship, Bleazard learned about Woodley's time under ‘Tiger’ Mariott and his years hunting in Mozambique. Woodley also imparted to him his esteem and respect for the altruistic elephant, as well as the importance when hunting them of “the careful steady approach to ascertain the situation, the plan for

the confrontation, the final closure for the shot, while always being ready for the unexpected.”

Bleazard tells of his hunting elephant on foot with Reggie Destro in 1951 in Kenya's Darajani Thicket – the 600-sq.-mi. block between the railway at Kibwezi and the Athi River - that netted him 79 and 83 lbs of ivory. At the end of the hunt, their tracker concluded: “All elephant hunting is really a matter of luck and fate.”

He put that combination to test in Uganda's Karamoja plateau on lion, and on leopard in the Mountains of the Moon, and the Chambura River in the south-west. (The resident full-game licence itself makes a terrific read for today's hunters.)

Bleazard's writing about the Kenya Game Department is particularly rewarding. Inspired by German thinking as early as 1896, the game laws of the East Africa Protectorate ‘commenced being enforced in the field by commissioned officers’ in 1899. In 1901, A. Blayney Percival was the department's first game ranger - “a gifted field naturalist who left valuable records of his observations.”

Personally, I enjoyed most the descriptions of Bleazard's years in the 33,000 square miles of Marsabit (home to the elephant Ahmed, and his nine-foot-plus, 147-pound tusks, who died of natural causes in 1974) and Moyale districts of the Northern Frontier Province, with its bands of *shifita*, the equestrian brigands of the Ethiopian Boran highlands, carrying spears, lances and Mannlicher Steyrs. There, he also came to know (*Born Free*) George Adamson, who'd done 23 years of service with the Kenya

Game Department himself, and taught him how to ‘call up’ crocodile to within two feet. Adamson also taught him more practical bushcraft, like the importance of applying a coating of nail varnish to seal the percussion caps on his cartridges and storing them in plastic bags, even under the driest conditions, to prevent dampness from causing misfires.

In NFP, C.J.P. Ionides taught him how to catch snakes in a region where death by snakebite exceeded all other causes of death together, including tribal skirmishes. Bleazard travelled Marsabit by camel, skirting the southern edge of the Chalbi depression, at the rate of 18 miles a day, learning from the Arab caravans to make the first march a short one, so one can still send back for a forgotten item. He tracked down poachers who used stone cairns to trap leopard, and crossed paths with PH Harry Selby guiding Robert Ruark.

Looking back, Bleazard, who now lives in western Australia, concludes that wildlife management then “had to do more with containment and the application of the law, rather than preservation.” And we are jealous of those times when that, alone, seemed enough to assure the future of Africa's game. 🦁

Sunset Tales of Safariland by Stan Bleazard is published by Trophy Room Books as a limited edition of 1,000 numbered and signed copies, bound in dark green swede binding with gilt letters. The cost is \$125 plus shipping. Contact: www.trophyroombooks.com or jim@trophyroombooks.com