

Leon's Mountain Nyala Hunt

This hunt was conducted in the Din Din Mountains, Ethiopia, Africa.

I had a 30 day safari there in April, 2009, with Swanepoel and Scandrol Safaris. The first 14 days were spent travelling to various parts of the country to take other species. We planned the last 16 days to hunt the Mountain Nyala, one of the most difficult and prized trophies in Africa.

The Nyala have been driven from the lower reaches of the mountains by the native herders. There are extremely few Nyala still available, and they hide in the cliffs and heavy rain forest below the top of the mountains.

The first day in the area is spent climbing, on foot, to the top of the mountain, where a tent camp is set up. Before the hunt, this seemed like a good idea, since the Nyala are easier to reach from the top of the mountain. However, there were several difficulties:

1. There is only one way to actually harvest an Nyala, and that is to climb down the cliffs every day through the thick brush, so that you can actually see onto the mountain side! Then, you fight your way back to the top at days end.....
2. The shot opportunities are usually extremely long - shots average over 400 yards. Since I only hunt with Handguns, that presented a challenge. There had never been a Mountain Nyala harvested with a Handgun, and I could definitely see why! Fortunately, I realized this factor before I went to Ethiopia. So I spent a year developing and handloading the best rounds for this situation. I also practiced on dozens of days at the 400 yard range.
3. I live at an elevation of 1,000 feet above sea level, so the 12,000+ elevation really sapped my strength for the first week.
4. There were no cooking facilities at the tent camp, so our meals were carried up the mountain every day by the local camp helpers. Even considering the great shape they were in, that process took over 2 hours. So, we had to eat all of our meals cold.
5. The top of the mountain is very cold and windy at night, and it rained every day.

6. There were no shower facilities at the tent camp. Two weeks without a shower was a record for me!

After a week, I was very discouraged; we had not seen a single Nyala male. There were native herders everywhere, and the animals would not come out of hiding. Finally, on day 10 we spotted a great male. He was actually in a small clearing 412 meters across a canyon from us. I lay down and made a steady rest in the only opening on our side of the canyon. However, there was a tree right in the middle of the field of view. The PH asked one of the "trackers" to just pull the tree to the side quietly. The "tracker" had not actually hunted before, so he climbed down and proceeded to break the tree in half, which made a crashing snap! By the time I looked up, the Nyala were in the heavy brush running.....

This was my 24th day on safari, and 10th day hunting Nyala. The bad food, high elevation, cold and wet, along with the inexperienced hunting helpers really had me beat down. To say I was discouraged is an understatement. I actually sat there, unable to make myself move for several hours after the Nyala had departed. Somehow I managed to climb back to camp by dark.

As with all difficult hunting, there was nothing to do about the situation, except keep going out every day and working to make something happen. We spent four more days without sighting any Nyala - male or female. I had accepted that all the money spent and all the hard work would not benefit me. I would have to return in the future to find an Nyala.

Then, as is often the case, on the 14th day of hunting the Nyala, we caught a glimpse of a male Nyala across from our vantage point. As I set up for the shot, the PH confirmed that it was a nice trophy and to shoot if the Nyala ever came out of the brush enough for an ethical shot. He did move through a spot with just enough opening that I could see the heart/lung area of his chest. I shot without even realizing I had pulled the trigger!

The Nyala disappeared instantly. No one could tell if he ran off, or he was wounded. I reloaded and stayed set up on the spot we had seen him. We sent two trackers with machetes down through the steep canyon and up the heavy brush on the other side. After 45 minutes, they made it to the spot where he had been standing. He had expired on the spot and dropped so fast that we could not see him!

I was extremely fortunate to take such a beautiful specimen, especially since we had only seen two males in 14 days of hunting. He is one of the main

highlights in our trophy room, and is envied by all African hunters that take a tour.

Not only is the Mountain Nyala beautiful, he is the only one to ever be harvested with a Handgun. So, he ranks #1 in the SCI record book. He is also winning the #1 major Award for Handgunned species at the SCI Awards Banquet on January 27th, 2011.