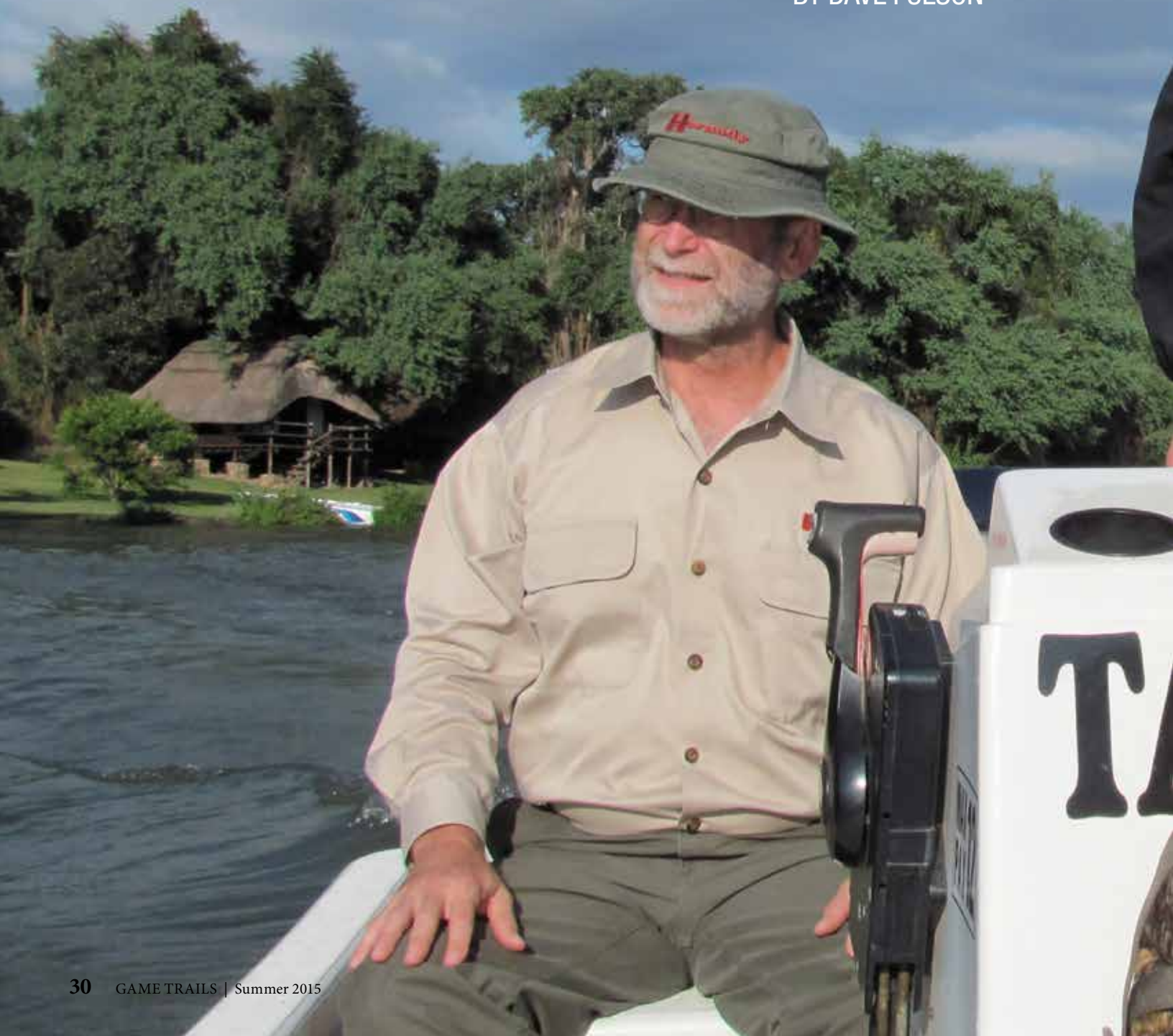


IAN GIBSON

A Life Lived and Remembered

BY DAVE FULSON





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**“DAAAVID, I’LL SEE YOU
ON THE OTHER SIDE.”**

Gibbo (right) in his element on his beloved Zambezi River with Steve Hornady.

IAN GIBSON: A LIFE LIVED AND REMEMBERED



Leading a hunt up the Chewore River – truly Gibbo's house.

The taxi ride to the airport in Las Vegas was filled with the usual small talk about the hunting show that had just wrapped up, the upcoming safari season and the other usual talk between friends who never have enough time to really get caught up on life. Ian was headed to a different terminal than me, so I jumped out and grabbed my bags, and as I was paying the cabbie, a firm hand grabbed me by the neck while the other delivered his trademark hammer-blow backslap, a gesture I had come to expect when parting from the man known around the world as “Gibbo.”

In all the years I have known Ian, I think I have never heard him call me Dave; instead, his trademark “Hello, Daaaaavid” is a greeting he bestows on me from arrival into the States to the breakfast table in the bush.

Sagging under the weight of baggage, I cannot remember what I said to him, but I clearly remember his words to me as he got back into the cab “Daaaaavid, I’ll see you on the other side.” Those words have been in my head constantly since my phone rang early on the morning of April 15. My partner, Tim Danklef, considers Ian Gibson a brother, a byproduct of their 25-year relationship. They remind me of an old married couple, more than buddies

with their never-ending, back-and-forth harassment of the other, but – have no doubt – both would kill for the other. Tim is not the emotional open book that I tend to be, but it was a shaken man who quietly told me, “Gibbo was killed by an elephant today.”

Indeed, our friend had lost his life in a confrontation with a bull elephant he was tracking in the thick bush of his beloved Chewore North safari area, country he was connected to like no other hunter of his generation. But this story is not about how Ian Gibson died – it is about how his unforgettable spirit lived.



Gibbo (right) with one of his favorite partners in crime – Steve Hornady



Friend first, client second. Larry Cheek and Gibbo with a hard-earned lion.

Ian Gibson was born in 1960 in what was then southern Rhodesia. His youth was typical of most boys growing up in the Rhodesian countryside, but even at an early age it was obvious young Ian was fascinated by the wild places and game that were so abundant in the land of his birth. School came and went in typical fashion, and then came the Rhodesian Bush War and the start of his military career. Gibbo was in the Rhodesian Light Infantry Third Commando and served with distinction in many actions.

Immediately after his service, Gibbo began his career with National Parks, where he trained under the legendary warden Willie deBeer. These were barnstorming days, where assignments ranged from anti-poaching patrols to dealing with crop-raiding elephants and buffalo to the occasional man-eating lion, sharpening the skills that would

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A great tusker taken with longtime Chifuti client Frank Imperial

be necessary for the next professional segment and true calling of where his life lay, as a professional hunter.

Although countless friends around the globe knew Gibbo only in the context of his hunting life, there was also the man who was seen firstly, and most importantly, as a husband and father, roles that fit the man to a T. Gibbo and his lovely wife, Lizanne, were blessed with three wonderful children: Jason, Lee and Shay, who all gave their father a lifetime of pride as he watched them grow into adulthood. Lizanne was tragically and unexpectedly taken from this world, and Gibbo's role of father took on a new and unfamiliar burden of responsibility. Yet responsibility in the face of change and struggle was a trademark of Ian Gibson, and he rose to each challenge he and his family faced in those grieving years, following the loss of their wife and mother.

To support his family and to take advantage of his natural skills, Ian set his sights on a career as a professional hunter in what had now become the country of Zimbabwe.

In 1987, Gibbo retired from Zim Parks, and his bush skills and experience with dangerous game automatically qualified him for a coveted professional hunting license. In fact, his first safaris were done while he was still in the employ of the Parks Department. Now on his own, Gibbo soon became one of Zimbabwe's most sought after freelance hunters, and he worked in that capacity with several well-known safari firms such as Russ Broom Safaris and Zambezi Safaris.

As his clientele grew, so did his reputation in safari circles. To describe Ian Gibson's personality is beyond this friend and writer's ability. Much like trying to paint one picture of his loved Zambezi River from end to end, the subject matter is too broad to attempt. Yet the words humble, fun, loyal, fierce, loving, brave, thoughtful and devilish are often used by those who speak of and knew him. Certainly, Gibbo did not suffer fools readily, and politics was not his strong suit when his blood was up. You always knew where you stood with this man, one of the things I always loved about him. I never played cards against him, but he would have been a terrible poker player because you could read him so easily. But far from being a flaw, it was a trait I trusted and admired deeply about his personality.

In 2008, Ian became a full-time hunter for what was then a fledgling safari firm run by his close and lifelong friend Andrew Dawson, called Chifuti Safaris. Gibbo brought instant credibility to the firm and quickly became the most requested hunter in the Chifuti stable.

As the company grew, our company, Safari Classics, partnered with Chifuti as their stateside agents, and soon, our video cameras became a part of most safaris that Chifuti booked as DVD and TV projects sprung to life. And, of course, one Ian Gibson was soon a "leading man," whose image and wit were a regular part of our productions. It also introduced his unique hunting skills and personality to a large audience. Lord, how he grumbled and complained about that "bloody camera following me everywhere," but anyone who knew him saw through that little act because he was a natural for TV and obviously enjoyed it far more than he would ever let on.

I remember in the early days of the TV game, fans would come up to him at trade shows such as the Dallas Safari Club Convention ("... the very bloody best," he would say) and say, "Hey, Gibbo, how you doing?" You could see his mind working as he shook hands and asked himself, *Do I know you?* Then they would tell him that they love seeing him on TV, and the light would come on. We used to tease him unmercifully, and when he signed his first autograph in front of us — oh, the hell we gave him!

But, as in life, Gibbo came across on camera exactly as he was without the camera. If he had an ego, it rarely showed. Another rarity in the very competitive world of professional hunting is that Gibbo was deeply respected by the peers of his age and openly admired by up-and-coming hunters, many who he mentored closely over the years. The footprint he left on the professional hunting fraternity in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, is the stuff of legend. The Zambezi Valley, the home of his heart, and place he breathed his last, will never be the same for me, or for those of us who will now walk its wild spaces without him. But, I, we, will always feel him there.

Over 500 people, black and white, came to honor him at his funeral. Tears were flowing from many, including grown men who knew him, loved him, and must now miss him. Many past clients, friends, industry relations and even folks who only knew him from TV appearances blessed his memory and family with financial support in the days since his passing. The

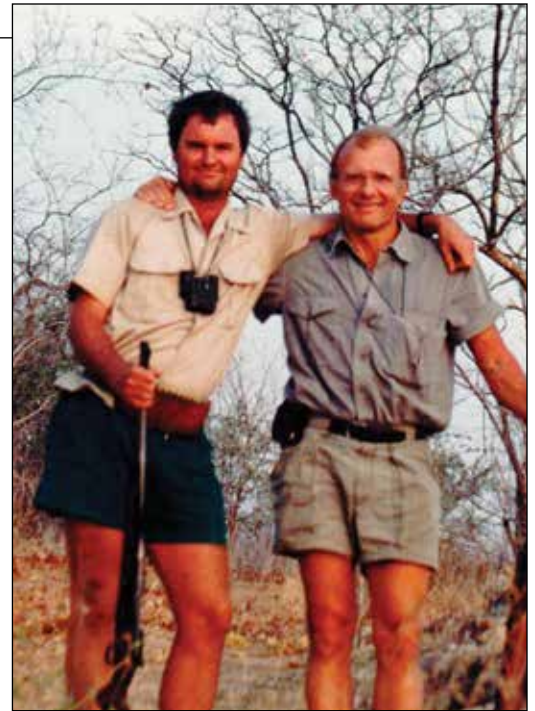
DSC Frontline Foundation, of which Gibbo was a passionate supporter, also helped with recovery and funeral expenses. His entire family has asked me to share their gratitude for this and for the overwhelming outpouring of prayers and support they have received during what have been dark days.

I am having a very hard time reconciling the fact that I will not see Gibbo in the Valley this year, or in any earthbound years that will follow. I have both cried and cursed the loss, as have many of you reading these words. In the days following the news of his passing, tears fell, dried up, and freely fell again as we fielded calls from so many friends calling to share not only their grief and shock but their warm memories of the man we call Gibbo.

I don't believe, on reflection, that I have any interest in saying "goodbye" to Ian Gibson. Ian is a part of all who knew him, and he left an impression on my heart that is his alone. I will never feel his trademark backslap, the bear hug inflicted when he had the drop on you, or that "Hello, Daaaaavid" greeting that was uniquely Gibbo. Not in this life. But there is life after this, and I know he is there with loved ones who will greet him. Colleagues like Owain Lewis and Willy were also on hand to welcome him to campfires that, one day, I hope to share with them.

No, I have no intentions to saying goodbye, Gibbo, because you are a part of who I am and so many others are, and that piece of you will walk with us wherever we go in life.

I have indeed thought about your last words to me, my friend, and yes, you have my word, I will see you on the other side. Until then.... GT



Gibbo (left) in his early days as a professional hunter with client and friend Bruce Switzer

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