



A JULES SPRINGBUCK

jewel of the Karoo

Nico Kotzé

The unspoilt beauty of South Africa's undefined Great Karoo, also known as the Land of Great Thirst, is undeniably mesmerising. Characterised by its distinct topography, vast open plains, mountains crowned with dolerite, geological wonders, and a climate that crafts a one-of-a-kind biome, this region has an unmistakable aura of timelessness that captivates anyone who ventures into its landscapes. It posed as an almost impenetrable barrier for early explorers into the interior, who described it as a daunting place, marked by arid desolation and extreme temperature fluctuations.

Geologically, its true nature has frequently been misinterpreted, its vast expanse often underestimated, and its scenic beauty underrated. Nevertheless, it stands as a distinctive biome, unlike any other in the country. Roaming its plains will undoubtedly evoke a profound sense of humility.

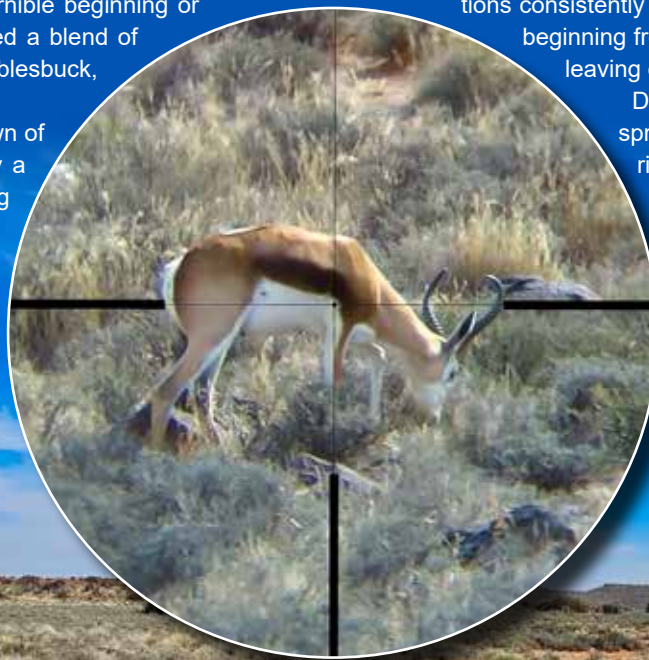
Centuries ago, there were enigmatic occurrences of unpredictable, large springbuck migrations from the north. These migrations were often depicted as a vast sea of bodies moving steadily and relentlessly across the plains, trampling everything in their path, even their own kind. These fascinating phenomena had no discernible beginning or end and, on occasion, featured a blend of springbuck with wildebeest, blesbuck, quagga and eland.

One early morning, the town of Beaufort West was roused by a noise reminiscent of a strong wind. Suddenly, it found itself inundated by a multitude of animals. They voraciously con-

sumed every trace of foliage in the town and surrounding countryside. It took three days for the tail end of this ceaseless migratory herd to leave the town, heading westward. The Karoo bore the appearance of a landscape ravaged by fire. During these remarkable migrations, the plains and hillsides in every direction were densely blanketed by a large assembly of springbuck, tightly packed akin to sheep in a pen. As far as the eye could see, the entire landscape teemed with their presence.

The origins, destinations and potential return paths of these migrations remained shrouded in mystery. The migrations consistently followed a unidirectional course, beginning from the north of the Great Karoo, leaving everyone in the dark.

During these early migrations, the springbuck moved with an unhurried grace, neither running nor trotting. For the most part, they maintained silence, except for their stamping hooves. They remained undistracted, allow-



ing hunters to move among them, taking random shots without triggering alarm. People could walk amidst the herds, dispatching them with sticks or disabling them by seizing a leg and breaking it. They attracted not only hunters seeking easy meat but also a host of predators, including lions, leopards, cheetahs, African wild dogs, hyenas and jackals, all seeking to prey upon them.

Once considered an inhospitably desolate and unappealing geographical barrier, modern game reserves and hunting safaris like the renowned Jules of the Karoo have transformed it into a tourist destination, aiming to provide a glimpse of its splendid wildlife past.

We found ourselves hunting at Jules of the Karoo, owned by the Theron family and operated by *oom* Julian and *tannie* Martisan Theron. We were in pursuit of large springbuck as well as mountain reedbuck.

We rose well before sunrise on our first day to a bitterly cold morning with temperatures below freezing. An icy breeze further intensified the chill. Stepping out of the lodge, we spotted springbuck grazing in the distance, their coats illuminated by the first rays of the sun, casting a golden-white hue upon them. They leisurely fed as they made their way northward across the open plains, evoking thoughts of an-

cient migrations. We savoured a hearty Karoo breakfast prepared by *tannie* Martisan before heading to the shooting range to check the 6.5 Creedmoor.

As we ventured deeper into the rocky outcrops where our hunt would start, *oom* Julian's son, Izak, told us that with their property expanding over 26 000 ha, their safari had hunting rights on an additional 100 000 ha. The

Theron family has called this land home since the late 1850s. Accompanying us on this hunt was Izak, along with Nico, one of their experienced guides. Michelle was also there to capture footage of the hunt, and Snoezy eagerly seized the chance to join us.

Our walk started atop one of the prominent koppies deep within the farm. Our plan was to traverse each koppie and then seek out an advantageous viewpoint from which to survey the sprawling plains below. Early on, we were alerted by the shrill alarm whistle of a mountain reedbuck who had spotted us, though he remained elusive in our sight. Given the vast expanse of the hunting area, one could spend a considerable amount of time looking for springbuck. I was determined to secure a large ram for my trophy room, so we decided to divide our efforts. Nico ventured in one direction while we took another path so that if he spotted a potential ram, he could radio us.





As we cautiously advanced over the next hill, Izak caught sight of a bachelor herd of rams. He discreetly signalled to me, pointing out a particularly large ram and suggesting I should consider taking him. The stalk was on, and we silently and deliberately manoeuvred ourselves into a strategic position behind a big boulder, concealing us from their view. Despite their backs being turned to us, unaware of our presence, the instant my crosshair settled on the larger ram, they suddenly bolted. They got spooked by something else as they could not have sensed or smelled us, given the favourable wind. We pursued them briefly but soon realised they had vanished, crossing over the hills in the far distance. Tracking them further would be akin to searching for an entirely new herd or ram. Nevertheless, we continued in the direction they had disappeared.

After some time, as we ascended one of the kloofs, Izak abruptly halted and crouched. He had clearly spotted something. Indeed, another herd of springbuck came into view,

walking away from us, but then noticed our presence and trotted further up the hill. Proceeding cautiously, we followed their trail until we discovered them where they had settled yet again in a spot they felt safe; some were bedded down, while others grazed. Taking cover behind a small bush nestled amidst the distinct Karoo shrubs, we observed them closely. Among the herd, we spotted a beautiful, sizeable ram, but he was bedding down, making it impossible to take a shot. We tried to wait them out, but after approximately half an hour, we decided to retrace our steps and approach from a different direction, ascending another hill to secure a better vantage point for a shot.

Traversing just beneath the crest of the koppie, we silently closed the gap, and the springbuck remained unaware of our presence. Even Snoezy showed exceptional stealth, cautiously peering over each boulder to keep our position undetected. The ram we looked for came into view once more, yet he was still lying down. So, we hunkered down between



two sizeable boulders and took cover behind a little bush, granting us sufficient cover to patiently wait out the ram. I readied myself for the shot, but he was partially obscured by some shrub. Meanwhile, the other springbuck proceeded to graze away from him, passing us one by one, no further than 130 m from our cover.

While the other springbuck continued grazing further away, the ram got up and started moving in their direction. I remained poised and waited for him to enter a clear spot. The moment he halted, my crosshair zeroed in on the vital area just behind his shoulders. At the sound of the shot, he dropped right where he stood. It was a textbook walk-and-stalk Karoo springbuck hunt at arguably the world's most renowned springbuck safari, Jules of the Karoo. He was the epitome of a perfect ram, adorned with all the characteristics one would want in the ultimate springbuck trophy, securing a special place in my trophy room.

That evening, Mandi, Izak's wife, expertly marinated the ram's backstrap with a homemade barbeque mix and balsamic salad dressing. Izak barbecued it over open coals, accompanied by succulent lamb ribs. Surrounded by friends they had invited for the evening, we relished the renowned warm hospitality that the Karoo is celebrated for in South Afri-



ca. Amid the merriment and contentment, I could not help but reflect on what a perfect way it was to conclude a splendid hunt, with such a special trophy ram.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Theron family for this unforgettable hunting experience and the privilege of sharing moments with them on their historic land, as well as for their warm hospitality, the very impressive springbuck ram, and Michelle's beautiful mountain reedbuck. 🦌



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