When I first began dreaming of a bowhunting adventure in South Africa, I envisioned coming to full draw on a gemsbok or kudu. Little did I know that one of my most memorable hunts would involve placing my sight pin on the ghostly silhouette of a bushpig – *Potamochoerus porcus*.

After much research and planning, I made my first trip to the Dark Continent in September 2006. A 30-hour flight took me from rural North Carolina to the Limpopo Province about 250 km north-west of Pretoria, to hunt with Buchholz Safaris and Anton Le Roux, owner of One On One Safaris. Anton and his wife Sharyn welcomed me with such politeness and hospitality that I felt I was in the presence of a warm Southern family.

My original hunting plan included going afield with several PHs, trying for five plains-game species during a 10-day bowhunting safari, with gemsbok at the top of my list. I had also said that I would enjoy seeing some dangerous game.

After returning from a day of hunting impala, Anton asked if I was familiar with a species of wild boar native to South Africa. My first thought was of the warthog. But no - it was the bushpig. “It’s a strong, stocky pig with powerful forequarters,” said Anton. “It can weigh up to 80 kg and has razor-sharp tusks that can do serious damage if wounded and cornered. They usually travel in groups of four to 10 animals, which include one dominant boar and a dominant sow. There will also be a few younger animals forming the group of hogs. It is difficult to determine exactly how good the population is in a given area as the animal is very nocturnal. I look for signs such as digging for food, rubbing posts, and trails near rivers and wetlands or sometimes at the foot of mountains.” This sounded interesting.

Hunting the nocturnal bushpig with bow and arrow is truly a unique experience. A blind is constructed within 20 yards of a bait station. The blind can be made using sacking, native grasses or camouflage material. Openings large enough for a bowshot should be made at the correct level for the hunter to shoot from a comfortable position. The ground area inside the blind should be clean to eliminate noise made by the bowhunter and guide as they wait long hours in the darkness.

Bait usually consists of fermented cornmeal, which emits an odour that can be detected by the hogs at great distance. It is best to place bait in the late afternoon to avoid other game from stealing it first. Baboons, which share the same habitat with bushpigs, often rob the bait. It can take up to three weeks before the bait is taken, but with luck the hogs will find it within a few days.

Anton had located several of these wild hogs and was interested in taking a bowhunter on a ‘different’ type of hunting. “Being nocturnal, bushpigs are seldom seen and are very difficult to hunt.” The hunt would require waiting motionless and totally quiet, possibly most of the night, behind a makeshift blind. The plan was to let the bushpigs feed to within 15 yards, and then use an infrared light to illuminate them, allowing a bowshot to be taken.

Anyone interested in bowhunting bushpig would be wise to make special preparations for the unusual hunting conditions. Making an accurate bowshot on a dimly lit silhouette from a kneeling position requires not only practice but also special bowhunting accessories. For those using a compound bow, the peep-sight needs to be one with a large opening at least 3/16”, which allows for more light to enter the eye. Since there will be only a soft red illumination outlining the perimeters of the hog, you won’t have a great sight picture. Practise shooting with both eyes and
open, allowing you to see more of the target.

The pigs will be moving as they feed; therefore set your bow on a draw weight that you can hold for several seconds. If the correct shot placement doesn’t afford itself, let down and wait for a broadside or slightly quartering away shot.

Two other pieces of equipment that are vital to success are sight pins and broadheads. I used a TruGlo sight pin that of its carbon-wrapped aluminum shaft supplying the stiffness and weight required to handle African big game.

The blind, constructed on three sides, consisted of sacking and native grasses. Looking upward, the ink-black African sky blanketed us with darkness as the moonless night became quiet. To remain motionless, we lay on our backs, staring at the stars as the hours passed, listening to the sounds of many different animals as they moved across the open plains.

My thoughts returned to the different skulls we’d seen lying in the tall grass during our daytime stalks. Leopards, caracal and hyenas hunt mostly at night, and when I heard sounds approaching in the grass, I became instantly alert. As the sounds grew closer, I wondered if my motionless partner was asleep. Soon, I could hear the grunting and feeding sounds that could only be wild pigs, but still there was no movement from my PH. Although I was anxious to get ready for the bowshot, Anton was waiting.
“The main camp of One on One Safaris is both comfortable and beautiful, which added much pleasure to my first African safari experience,” writes Mabe.

patiently until he was sure the bushpigs were consuming the bait.

After several minutes passed Anton touched me and whispered, “Stand up slowly with your bow in hand.” As the pigs noisily fed, I readied my bow. At the same time Anton turned on the low, glowing red light, and I drank in my first encounter with the African bushpig. At less than 20 yards I could see the unusually long snouts reaching to the ground as they vacuumed up the cornmeal. The long manes were barely visible, but these animals were like no other pig I’d ever seen in North Carolina!

The silhouettes of four animals moving in and out of the light resembled a scene out of an eerie ghost movie. I watched for several minutes, allowing my eyes to focus before bringing my bow to full draw. It was as if I were shooting at a black silhouette target that was being moved in and out of sight. Soon, the largest boar moved into the light, allowing me a quartering away shot. I held both eyes open and strained to conjure up all my nighttime vision.

At the ‘thump’ of the 70-pound (draw weight) Mathews Switchback bow, the A/C/C arrow passed completely through the boar. Instantly the group was gone, filling the air with red dust. The thick, tall grass was no place to walk up on a wounded bushpig, so we decided to wait until daylight to pick up the trail. We napped in the cool darkness, and at first light met with two native trackers and a PH of neighbouring Buchholz Safaris, Whiehan, who brought along his tracking dog. The dog was a mix of Jack Russell terrier and an unknown breed. It was a ball of fire and loved tracking blood trails, leading us through the maze of reeds and brush.

After following the terrier for 75 yards, I began to wonder about the accuracy of...
"Making an accurate bowshot on a dimly lit silhouette from a kneeling position requires not only practice but also special bowhunting accessories," writes Mabe, who gave great thought to his preparation and equipment for his hunt.

my shot. Then one of the trackers pointed across a small stream to a multi-coloured hog lying in the green grass. The arrow had struck the boar a couple of inches back of my intended aim, but still exited close to the opposite shoulder. Not bad for a bowshot taken below a star-lit sky during the twilight hours.

After a photo session with the beautiful wild pig, we loaded the trophy animal onto Anton's Land Cruiser and headed back to camp. There, Sharyn provided us with a great meal as we all shared the excitement and hunting experience together, retelling all the details of a special hunt in a very special place.

Randy R. Mabe is a professional firefighter, freelance outdoors writer/photographer, outdoorsman, and avid bowhunter residing in North Carolina, USA. A bowhunter for 34 of his 50 years, he is North Carolina’s only hunter to ever receive the state’s coveted award of Master Bowhunter.