



Dullstroom is known for trout fishing. It is one of the most popular trout fishing venues in South Africa.

Hunters are somewhat conservative when it comes to hunting destinations. Many return year after year to their old hunting grounds because they enjoy it there and they know what

these places offer. However, by doing that we starve ourselves of unique places where the hunting opportunities might be equally or even more enjoyable.

The area around Dullstroom in Mpumalanga is one that I

have never visited before. Dullstroom is known for trout fishing – fly fishermen can enjoy excellent fishing on a number of private properties. This high lying part of our country, called the Highveld, fortunately also offers good hunting as I have found out early in 2019.

For those who don't know Dullstroom let me give you bit of back ground info. This tranquil little town lies 35km north of Belfast on one of the routes to the Kruger National Park. Together with Underberg in Kwa-Zulu-Natal it is one of our most popular fly fishing destinations.

Dullstroom was founded in 1883 and named after a Dutch businessman, Wolterus Dull, the then chairman of a committee

that provided help to victims of the First Boer War.

The town was actually founded to resettle Dutch immigrants. The town's official proclamation took place on 9 October 1893 and the word "stroom" (which means stream in Afrikaans) refers to the Crocodile River that passes close to the town.

Another interesting fact is that Dullstroom is the highest town above sea level in South Africa. It lies on the Steenkampsberg Plateau at an altitude of 2076m. The highest point in the area, at an altitude of 2332m, is called De Berg (The Mountain). This area has a typical subtropical highland climate with an average annual rain fall of 820mm.

DULLSTROOM IS NOT DULL

By KOOS BARNARD



INSET: Tranquil Dullstroom. **Main photo:** Elandsbloof, the property where I hunted the black wildebeest.



A Peregrine falcon, one of the birds at the raptor centre just outside of Dullstroom.



The undulating hills comprise mostly of grass veld although wattle trees are also found and it is the only place in South Africa where beech wood and elm trees grow together. These were planted by the Dutch settlers.

Dullstroom is one of Mpumalanga's popular tourist attractions. Visitors like the many curio shops and restaurants and the town is very popular with bikers going on weekend rides and breakfast runs. Because of its high altitude Dullstroom is one of the coldest towns in South Africa. Fog and drizzling rains are common in the area.

It is, however, not only fly fishermen that will feel welcome in Dullstroom. Close to town is one of the most beautiful golf courses in South Africa en the Dullstroom area is the

only one that is home to both the mahem (grey-crowned crane) and the wattled crane. This area is also home to one of my favourite birds, the bokmakierie (a kind of bush shrike).

Just outside of town is a raptor centre which is home a variety of birds of prey. This centre not only educates the public on raptors through bird shows and info but also acts as a rehabilitation centre for raptors. I was again astounded by the size and wingspan of the black eagle (Verreaux's eagle).

My visit to Dullstroom, where professional hunter and field guide Gerhard Delpert was my host, was indeed an interesting one. I really enjoyed the two days that we've spent there. The town and surrounding areas are not only ideal for family »



Gerhard Delpert with a bushpig that he hunted on Elandsbloof. The rifle is a Sauer in .308 Win.



The black wildebeest bull I hunted. Notice the quality of the trophy.



» activities but also offer a lot to hunters.

Although the Highveld can be cold, foggy and wet many antelope species thrive in its high altitude. It is home to blesbuck, black wildebeest, vaal rhebuck, mountain reedbuck, warthog, bushpig and fallow deer. During my visit I was struck by the large numbers of blesbuck we spotted on many properties.

Our base for the two days was Elandskloof Trout Farm, the oldest trout farm in Mpumalanga, started in 1960 by Dolf and Kitty Combrink. The current owner is Kobus (Dolf's son) and his wife Dimpels. Kobus' oldest daughter, Celeste, and her husband (also Kobus) farms with them.

Elandskloof is a beautiful place with a number of dams that house trout. Visitors can book accommodation (overnight, weekend or longer holidays) in one of several chalets located at the edge of a big dam.

This property, on which Gerhard has a hunting concession, is also home to good numbers of blesbuck, black wildebeest, fallow deer, bushpigs and other game. Something that stock farmers won't like, but what I rather enjoyed, was that we could hear the melancholic calls of black-backed jackals every night. Unfortunately these predators and stock farming do not go well together, but there is something so Africa, so primeval in their calls that I always feel welcome wherever I hear these little hunters call.

There is no shooting range on Elandskloof so we had to go to a nearby quarry to see if my Blaser Professional R8 in .270 Win was still sighted in correctly. I used Norma factory ammo for this hunt – loaded with the excellent 150gr Oryx bullet. Muzzle velocity of this bullet out of my rifle is about 2700fps.

I didn't sleep well and wasn't very steady, so my grouping over the shooting sticks was not up to my normal standards but I had confidence in my rifle and being an old hand at hunting, it did not bother me too much.

As it often happens in the Dullstroom area, the morning of the hunt dawned cool and overcast. Immediately after our shooting session at the quarry it started to drizzle. That did not bother me because we were dressed for wet weather and the Blaser doesn't mind wet weather either. On my first hunt with this particular rifle (a year earlier) I got drenched and during a gong shooting competition near Verkykerskop in 2018 we had to shoot in pouring rain. The Blaser never missed a beat.

Following a winding road, Gerhard drove us up a number of hills to a point where we would leave his Land Cruiser and continue on foot. It was still drizzling when we left the vehicle but a few minutes later the rain stopped.

According to Gerhard we were on our way to a spot where some of the black wildebeest bulls like to hang out. The undulating terrain with its many

rocky outcrops, gulleys and ridges provide excellent cover and is ideal for walk and stalk hunting.

The first game we spotted were a number of blesbuck. We quickly checked them out, then continued. The next moment a black wildebeest bull came into view. He was bedded down and unaware of us. Fortunately the terrain was in our favour, so we slipped downhill and out of view, then circled towards the spot where we had spotted the bull.

On our way towards the black wildebeest we spotted a fallow deer stag on the crest of a nearby rise. Our presence did not seem to bother him though and he casually moved off. Using the lie of the land to avoid detection we continued towards a rocky outcrop... one that would bring us within easy shooting range of the black wildebeest bull.

Arriving at the jumble of rocks we moved slightly to the left and then spotted a second wildebeest. Gerhard looked them over and told me to shoot the bull on the left, the one we spotted first. I crawled forward slowly to get into shooting position. Gerhard whispered that the bull was exactly 100m away.

The bull spotted us, jumped to his feet, but being unawares of what exactly we were, he stood dead still, facing us at an angle. I settled the crosshair at the junction of his neck and shoulder and squeezed the trigger. A fraction of a second later the 150gr Oryx bullet hit with a loud "dup". The bull bucked,

then set off at a run but he ran out of steam after covering about 50m or so.

When I knelt beside him, I noticed that he was an old warrior with a beautiful set of horns that would qualify for the Rowland Ward record book.

Those of us who live in cities often travel unnecessarily far to get to hunting venues while there are good places to hunt right on our door steps. Dullstroom is less than 300km from the Johannesburg/Pretoria metropolis and offers plenty of hunting opportunities. Gerhard Delpert, who grew up in this Highveld region, has hunting and fishing concessions on a number of private properties and he is a very good guide. During the Anglo Boer War a number of skirmishes took place around Dullstroom and with Gerhard's excellent knowledge of the history of this area he is able to entertain his clients on war and other interesting stories.

I visited the Dullstroom region in autumn when the veld was still green. During winter the undulating, grassy hills are covered in different hues of brown with evergreen trees dotting the landscape, standing out like markers. It is indeed a pleasant and interesting area to visit. This is a place that I am happy to recommend as a hunting or tourist destination.

For more details on hunting and other activities contact Gerhard Delpert on 083-622-4961 or e-mail him at gerhard@fffsafaris.co.za 📞



The area in which I hunted the black wildebeest.