

PH Spotlight

Peter Thormählen

Owner/operator of Thormählen & Cochran Safaris, Peter Thormählen is a veteran DSC exhibitor and staunch supporter of the auctions. They operate in Namibia and South Africa, as well as Cameroon in the Mayo Oldiri concessions. In Namibia, they operate in 10 concession blocks (community and government) with five tented safari camps in the northeast and northwest of the country. Not only does Thormählen and Cochran provide quality hunting in Africa, but Peter and his wife Anso have created a warm family atmosphere in their booth at the DSC show. Be sure to visit them in booth 3412 at Adventure 2017.

What do you wish a first-time dangerous game client knew before arriving?

The most important thing I want a client on a DG hunt to know how to shoot his gun, how to reload it fast, and how to handle it. Most clients buy beautiful expensive guns that they don't know by the time they come on safari. Practice dry firing at home, as well as live-firing in different positions on a shooting range or in the field. The ones that do spend the time to know their gun enjoys great hunting satisfaction and success. Also important is knowledge of the anatomy of the quarry from different shot angles. This gives a client a lot of confidence where to place his shot during the stalk.

How often do things go about as planned?

With all of the territory we cover, there is a lot of room for things to go wrong with so many different groups of hunters in different camps, vehicles, generators, and personnel, etc. But we have excellent professional staff managing all of our camps and our professional hunters are the best out there.

A lot of pre-season planning is done so things rarely goes wrong out of control. Decisions are made daily on the ground to keep the operation running smoothly and clients happy. That is what we are there for, so our clients can enjoy their safari in Africa and go home happy.



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Who and how many people make up your best DG hunting team?

My best DG Hunting team is my tracker Paulus and my skinner. My tracker has saved my life on at least five occasions while following up wounded black rhinos, lions, leopards, and buffalos with his excellent tracking skills and eyesight. They are true masters of the bush – their skills are unbelievable. I would not be able to hunt without them!

What turns a good client into a great client?

Great clients are the good clients that gained hunting experience over time on safaris. They are the people who know their gun, PH, and knows to sit back and enjoy their DG safari team working to get their desired trophy animal(s). I absolutely like clients who come on safari to enjoy hunting and the outdoors. Those are the true hunters, who enjoy being out in the bush with a gun on their shoulder. Most of the time, the hunters that gets big trophies do so because they are relaxed and do not make demands on or create issues with the PH.

I have no respect and little tolerance for any client who flies all the way to Africa to be a bitter, unhappy, or rude in camp. Also any hunter who judges his safari success with a tape measure should book with someone else as I will not guide them.

Great clients are the ones who never stop enjoying a sunrise with a hot cup of coffee or tea by the fire, a sunset in Africa, a spider's web in the early morning with glittering dew drops on it, evenings around a camp fire after a long days hunt, or just being in Africa enjoying our culture, country, food, friendship and animals. The great clients are the ones that realize that we have only one chance at life. Great clients becomes friends who enrich our lives when they are visiting for their safari.

Do clients do a “starter” safari on plains game, but then “graduate” for a second trip? Or do you have clients who want to do it all?

Times have changed. Successful people who can afford DG safaris or plains game safaris have the financial means, but more and more, we have hunters who does not have the time to do plains game safaris until they are “experienced” enough to hunt DG. I don't see this as a problem, though, as a good PH can guide any client successfully on a buffalo or elephant or any DG animal in the same way he would guide him/her on an eland or other antelope hunt. In my opinion, a good PH in is not the one that can walk 100 km per day, or shoot an animal at 1,000 meters. It's the PH that can get any client of any physical condition or age on a DG animal for a good shot!



What was the best thing about your first dangerous game hunt, either as a pro or on your own?

The best hunt ever in my career as professional hunter was when our client took the first legal black rhino in over 70 years. By that time, I had guided numerous DG hunts, mostly buffalo, white rhino, and lion. All the years and years of dedicated work by our game department finally came together when the first black rhino CITES tags were issued in 2005. The first black rhino bull hunt was outfitted and guided by me, and the bull was taken on July 23, 2005 in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. The privilege to stand there and look at the black rhino bull after it was taken was the highest achievement in my hunting career. Thirty two days later, we took a second black rhino with the first Rifle Dart Hunt ever on a black rhino in the history of sport hunting.

We wrote our names in history regarding black rhino hunting with the first-ever blackpowder dart hunt on a black rhino, and the first ever crossbow dart hunt on a black rhino.

To have the privilege to take the first black rhino and know what it meant for the conservation of the species was the ultimate satisfaction for me as professional hunter.

Besides not finding an appropriate and legal animal, are there any reasons you would back away from a hunt, or a shot?

A client's safety always comes first. When the situation does not allow for a safe hunt, I do back away from an animal. It's not worth pushing the boundaries when guiding a client as their safety is first priority. There is no negotiation about this.

What is your favorite dangerous game species and why?

Black Rhino for sure. There were six black rhino subspecies in Africa according to Furstenberg:

Bicornis minor – Woodland black rhino (South Africa)

Bicornis bicornis – Desert Black rhino (Namibia)

Bicornis chobiensis – Angolan black rhino (Angola and Caprivi Region of Namibia)

Bicornis brucii – North Eastern black rhino (smallest population, Ethiopia /Sudan)

Bicornis longipes – West African black rhino (biggest population, across the whole of west Africa)

Bicornis michaeli – East African black rhino (Kenya and Tanzania)

Only three subspecies remain – *B. minor*, *B. bicornis*, *B. michaeli*.

A highly successful breeding project of *B. michaeli* exists in South Africa. These animals were captured in Kenya in the 1960s and introduced in South Africa. Their numbers are currently so many that a number has been exported back to Tanzania to replenish poached populations. This is a remarkable conservation success story. Only a limited CITES tags of this rare subspecies of black rhino became available and we

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had the opportunity to hunt two *B. michaeli* with our clients. The other three subspecies are extinct because of no trophy hunting means no conservation.

The black rhino is the most aggressive and intelligent of the Big Five, in my experience. I have guided 14 black rhino hunts in my career. But most important is the fact that they are so vulnerable to poaching. If black rhino trophy hunting is stopped, the species has no chance for survival.

Who are the most important people in your life and career?

Definitely, my beautiful wife Anso and our three beautiful children, daughters Liane (25) and Heike (17), and son Hermann (21). Without Anso's dedication and commitment as mother and wife, I would never have had the opportunity to do what I love most – hunt. I cannot thank her enough for that.

What's the best advice you received as you were growing up and doing PH apprenticeship? Who are your mentors and heroes?

Always do the right thing with clients, and always respect woman and families on a safari. Always do the right thing even during the times when things went wrong after a wrong call on an animal and it is going to cost the PH money to rectify the situation. Just always do the right thing in any situation. It's hard to do sometimes with a PH salary, but it is the only long term sustainable thing to do. Cutting corners is short term.

I attended the Johan Calitz PH school where the lecturers were Johan Calitz and Kobus Schoeman. Kobus Schoeman has shot over 500 elephants as a Kruger Ranger in PAC. Johan Calitz outfitted over 1,250 trophy elephant hunts in Botswana during his career. Training under Calitz was not easy as he did not tolerate any failure and mistakes, and today, our PHs and staff knows that the smallest detail is important to us. Johan is for sure my mentor and will always be my hero. I will never be able to thank him enough for what he taught me.

Do you have favorite DG guns, optics and gear?

Guns are a passion – an addiction that has brought me trouble lots of time with my wife. Big Bore calibers are the ultimate and in bolt action, I have a 450 Watts, 450 Rigby, and a .375 H&H. I love classic romantic calibers and have two double guns in .475 #2 as well as a .500 Nitro in 3 inches which I sold to our one PH. I am currently waiting for my new .500 nitro in 3-1/4 inches as it is a classic Kynoch caliber that was



designed during the old ivory hunter era.

My 500 Nitro 3 inch is a Heym that I am addicted to. The gun is perfectly balanced and shoots unbelievably accurate. That specific gun saved my life on a black rhino hunt when the bull charged from eight paces after the client made a perfect heart shot. I shot it from above, in the brain at three feet as the head was already lowered to hook me with its horn.

When I went to Heym USA's owner Chris Sells and told him I want a 500 Nitro in 3 1/4, he was speechless as he knows how much I love my 500 Nitro Heym. After several questions from Chris about why I wanted a new double, my only reply was that I don't really know, but that I like the tall old classic shell. Chris just shook his head and laughed. So a new beautiful double was born as I bought the 500 Nitro 3-1/4 Safari model in box lock, and two side plates with engraving of black rhino, elephant, and Cape buffalo.

What do you do on holiday?

Holiday time is holy time in our family as it is nearly the only time we have to spend together. I am in Namibia full time while Anso runs the South Africa side of the office. We have a beach home close to Mosselbay where most Decembers are spent swimming, cycling, and enjoying our time together. All three of our kids are passionate hunters. Liane has taken three of the Big Five, while Hermann has taken two of the Dangerous Seven so any time I am at home, we hunt together. Most of the fights at home are between the kids on who is hunting what.

If she was willing, would you take your mother on a dangerous game hunt, and would you be her PH?

Definitely yes. Hunting runs in our family. My great grandfather was one of Kaiser Wilhelm II's bodyguards and an avid hunter, as was my grandfather and father. My mom's family were also avid hunters. My mom shoots very well and has told me she would have liked to hunt Cape buffalo.

If you knew you had just 10 days left on the planet, what would you do with that time?

We definitely want to be together as a family those last days, and the primary thing we want to do is hunt the Big Five. Liane only needs a lion and elephant, while Hermann needs lion, leopard, Cape buffalo and an elephant to complete the Big Five. Heike the youngest still needs the complete Big Five so we don't have a lot of time to finish all those in 10 days. So please give us 30 days? GT

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