



WHEN YOU'RE THROWN A CURVE



Three essential items for international hunts: Vaccination record, passport, and medical evacuation membership.

**TRAVELING ACROSS
THE COUNTRY OR
ABROAD IS AN EXCITING
ADVENTURE, BUT DON'T
LET HICCUPS IN TRAVEL
RUIN YOUR ENTIRE HUNT.
HERE ARE SOME WAYS
TO KNOCK THOSE CURVE
BALLS OUT OF THE PARK.**

Described as a pathological optimist, I always figure the sun will shine, planes and trains will run on time, and the game I seek is there, waiting for me. It's a nice way to look at life—just not realistic. Stuff happens.

Enough stuff can go wrong hunting whitetails on your back 40. Trucks break down, you can slip going up your ladder stand. If you worry too much, the obvious and sensible option is to stay home. Then you'll probably slip in the shower.

We Americans are among the least-traveled people in the Western world, with one of the lowest percentages of passport holders. That's because, in part, the U.S. is a big country with lots to see. It's also because our marvelous North American Model of Wildlife Conservation opens millions of acres of public land we can hunt with minimal cost. We may be limited to game species found close to home, but we don't have to travel to hunt.

Anything that can go wrong on a long-distance hunt can go wrong close to home, and vice versa. I'm not sure distance magnifies the likelihood of problems. After all, on most long-range hunts we aren't alone. Outside the U.S., the guides and outfitters we engage offer a built-in support team. Hopefully, with the expertise to solve most problems.

We can plunge into our public land wilderness areas on our own—to hike, camp, and even hunt (with licenses and within seasons). This includes Alaska. There, registered guides have long been required for nonresidents to hunt brown/grizzly bears and sheep. Mountain goats were added when search and rescue folks got tired of saving unprepared pilgrims. Unguided nonresidents can hunt black bears, caribou, deer, and moose. I've hunted all four unguided, with success on some, but not all. Moose is easily the most difficult, largely because of the huge recovery challenge. I didn't pull that one off do-it-yourself (DIY), and have huge respect for the many hunters that have.

DIY hunting in unfamiliar wilderness, from the Appalachians to Alaska, is not for everyone. It is essential to



Great game country in northern Cameroon...but this isn't the Serengeti or a South African game ranch. Wildlife is thinly dispersed and you'll work hard for every shot.

have the knowledge, skill, equipment, and physical strength to get yourself in, hunt effectively, and get yourself and your game out. This takes careful planning and preparation.

Elsewhere in the world, we rarely have this option. We use guides and outfitters. This simplifies logistics. It is still essential to research the right area and find an outfitter who operates there with experience, expertise, and logistical support. And, equally important, who offers the kind of experience you have in mind, which means it's essential to know what you're looking for. What kind of camp do you want? Fly-in, permanent camp, wall tent, lodge? Do you want to hunt by foot, horseback, or four-wheel drive?

It's not just about what you want, either. It's about what you can handle. By North American standards, much African hunting isn't all that physical. However, game densities are often low in truly wild country and require lots of walking, sometimes in extreme heat. A gent

contacted me the other day who was unhappy about a safari he took with a PH friend of mine. He hunted in northern Mozambique. That's remote, big country where you work hard for your game. I admire this young outfitter, so I contacted him. There's always two sides to every story, right? The hunter is several years older than I am. That means little. We all age differently. However, he had just had knee surgery and limited mobility. He could have hunted a game ranch in South Africa without a problem, but he probably had no business in an area where long-tracking is normal. Being brutally honest with yourself and the people you'll be hunting with is important.

THE WHAT IF GAME

You're planning a distant hunt. You've got a good outfitter lined up, and you're pretty sure you can handle it. What could possibly go wrong? Well, you can become ill or get hurt. These apply equally close to home, it's just more complicated in the middle of nowhere. I don't worry



ABOVE: Donna Boddington and Jordan Wallace coming in from a backpack sheep hunt in Alaska's Brooks Range. Charter planes add complexity. Despite best intentions, weather rules. Never push a bush pilot to fly; no schedule is worth the risk.



RIGHT: In the arrival hall in Beira, coastal Mozambique. Now you find out if your checked bags made it. Usually they do, but stuff happens. Always pack your carry-on under the assumption that's all you're going to have.

about this stuff too much, but I take some basic precautions to hedge my bets.

For instance, do you have a known or potential problem? Disclose it. The last thing any outfitter needs is a hunter with a secret health problem. At my age, everybody takes medications. Pack plenty for the length of the trip (and some extras), and pack them in your carry-on. Years ago, Joe Bishop and I

were just finishing up in the Central African Republic. The next hunter came in without his luggage and asked if we had any blood pressure medicine. I wasn't taking it yet; Joe never had that problem. We outfitted him with ill-fitting shoes and clothes, and he borrowed the camp .375. I knew him well enough to joke, "You'd better hunt fast!" He did. He left a few days later with bongo, sitatunga, and

yellowback duiker. After three weeks of hard hunting, Joe and I left with one bongo between us.

Almost all outfitters have a medical kit. I don't leave this to chance. In my duffel, I carry a compact kit from the Safari Medic. Be sure to have the knowledge to use it. I had good training in the Marine Corps, with multiple Red Cross first-aid courses, which came in handy in 1993.

We were camped in Awash National Park in Ethiopia when Joe Bishop knocked on my tent after dinner. "Boddington, I just got a mouthful of shower water. Better watch me." By midmorning, he was sick, with his belly swollen like he'd swallowed a watermelon. We headed back to camp where he lay down. I checked on him an hour later and took his temperature. It was 106 and climbing. We carried him into the shade and divided the staff into two groups. One group fanned him using blankets, and the other formed a bucket brigade down to the river and doused him. It worked, the fever broke, and we drove like mad to Addis. There, it took a doctor 10 minutes to

diagnose the bug and get antibiotics going. Back home, it took weeks of testing to reach exactly the diagnosis that the young doctor achieved in minutes.

I also carry a medical evacuation membership with Global Rescue, which is essential for distant travel. Coverage starts 50 miles from home, so it's equally useful while deer hunting down the road. I always carry the card. The dumbest thing I ever did was have a heart attack in Uganda and not call Global Rescue. My symptoms weren't obvious, and I had no risk factors, so it couldn't have been a heart attack, right? We went to the International Hospital in Kampala, where they missed it, diagnosed a pulmonary infection, and sent me home with a bag of antibiotics. It should have killed me, but obviously it did not. I had the card and a satellite phone. If I had called Global Rescue, they'd have gotten me in consultation with a doctor, who would have likely figured it out and gotten me on the way home sooner. I couldn't undo the event, but it may have sped up my recovery.

Now let's turn to what

will most likely go wrong, and that's travel. Flights will arrive late or be delayed, which seems worse in the post-Covid world. Flights are randomly canceled and affected by weather, crew shortages, and mechanical issues. To circumvent some of these problems, refuse close connections by allowing a minimum of two hours for domestic connections and four hours for international.

To survive flying, be flexible, roll with the punches, and know how to use your phone. I don't know how we got through this before cell phones! I remember trying to work through foreign pay phones, language barriers, and foreign currency. Wherever you're going, have good phone numbers for whoever is meeting you. Make sure your cellular plan allows communications from whatever countries you're going to. I also have satellite phones, as do most outfitters in remote areas. However, cellular communications are so good today that I only carry sat phones in remote areas. More often today, I ask if my cell phone will work, and I store numbers I might need. The

smartphone application WhatsApp offers free texting and voice and is almost universal in the outfitting world.

Just this past July, I was headed to Johannesburg when my flight to Atlanta was canceled. In minutes, Delta had me rebooked—a day later. It wasn't the end of the world; it was just a matter of texting the folks at Frontier Safaris. Charter flights can be more difficult, but they have phones, too. Make sure you have all the numbers you might need when things go haywire.

TRAVELING WITH FIREARMS

If you're traveling outside the U.S. with firearms, things get more complicated. Knowing the rules of the airlines you're traveling on is essential. Some require advance approval, and many charge separate handling fees. If connecting to a different airline, ensure they have mutual baggage agreements. Otherwise, you will need to collect your bags and recheck them.

Satisfy all the requirements to travel with firearms. Amsterdam, a key hub for Africa, requires police

LEFT: Joe Bishop and Boddington with Bishop's excellent mountain nyala, taken in the Ethiopian highlands. It was in Ethiopia that Bishop became seriously ill from bad water. One of the few times Boddington has been happy he had a good medical kit. RIGHT: If Boddington looks a little pale it's because he had a heart attack just after shooting this old Nile buffalo in Uganda. Lacking classic symptoms, he passed it off as heat exhaustion and the local hospital misdiagnosed. He should have called Global Rescue before this photo was taken.



clearance to travel with firearms and ammunition. Generally, so do the Gulf nations. I've twice had my ammunition confiscated in Doha (Qatar). The ticket agent had filled out the paperwork correctly for the firearms but not the ammunition. I could abandon it or go to jail. I abandoned it. A buddy of mine just got stuck in Istanbul customs on the way to hunt ibex. His ammunition exceeded the limit. He got through it only after hours in a closed room with police. I did the same in Katmandu 10 years ago. Never again. I learned the rules and follow them.

Avoid cut-rate internet sites for any travel where time matters, which means all travel for hunting. You must be able to talk to someone if things unravel. It's fine to book directly with airlines. However, for international travel with firearms, I recommend

using a hunting and gun-savvy travel agent—a real person you can talk to when stuff happens. Travel with firearms can and will be complicated. Good trip insurance is an option. Just be sure to read the fine print. Some travel insurance isn't worth the paper it's printed on. Discuss the travel insurance option with your travel agent, booking agent, and/or outfitter. If you're traveling with valuable firearms, consider insuring them. My first commercial flight with a firearm was to a Montana elk hunt in 1972, and I have never lost a firearm—knock on wood. I have few guns worth insuring, but when I travel with one of them, I use Sportsman's Insurance Agency, offered as a member benefit by Safari Club International (and others). That's not a policy I ever want to cash in on (and don't expect to), but it's good peace of mind. ■

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In Mexico's Yucatan, outfitter Mario Canales' equipment list included snake boots. Maybe not essential, but Boddington always packs a compact medical kit and, on remote hunts, a satellite phone.

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Hunters and hikers can't get over how tough and featherlight these boots are and how they practically float over trails. You'll wear them from your hunting adventure straight to a town run because you won't want to change into anything else. Our breathable, waterproof 7-inch model gives you a "rooted to the shoe" foundation, thanks to our ankle-securing Kenetrek K-Straps and a super-padded ankle collar that wraps you in complete support and comfort.

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