

# GREAT BRITAIN RIFLE TEAM TO KENYA AND NAMIBIA 2004

by Alex Henderson

## Captain

David Hossack GB, Scotland and Sussex

## Vice Captain

James Dallas GB, England and London

## Adjutant

Alex Henderson GB, Scotland and Berkshire

## Main Coach

Martin Townsend GB, Ireland and Hertfordshire

## Shooters

Gary Alexander GB, Ireland and Tyrone

Iain Brechin Scotland, East of Scotland

Lou Lou Brister GB, Wales and Sussex

Matthew Button GB and Lincolnshire

Julie Cane GB, England and Essex

Simon Cane England and Wiltshire

Peter Chapman England and Sussex

Colin Cheshire GB, England and Hampshire

Derek Lowe GB, England and Surrey

Richard Mott England and Middlesex

Trina Noyes GB, Scotland and Berkshire

Iain Robertson GB, Scotland and Aberdeenshire

Ian Shaw GB, Scotland and Wiltshire

Martin Woolger Sussex

Mark Wrigley Scotland and Middlesex

Richard Vary GB, England and Berkshire

After nearly two years of planning, and having chosen a team which we felt would work well both on and off the ranges, we found ourselves at the North London Rifle Club on Sunday 16 May for our final packing and preparations for the start of the tour the next day.

We had a nice easy check-in at Heathrow thanks to the firm and knowledgeable handling of the check-in process by Trina, who had probably trained the staff in an earlier life, thereby bypassing any of the usual problems. We have never had as easy an arrival at any airport as we had in Nairobi; having been met and escorted through Customs and Immigration by senior members of the Kenyan Military Police, our rifles were simply taken straight from the plane to the range by nice men in uniform. We were even waved through passport control, neatly sidestepping the \$50 per head fee for visas.

The colonial affluence of Muthaiga Country Club was amazing. Polished parquet floors, comfortable armchairs everywhere, today's edition of every newspaper, more waiters than guests and delicious food. Sadly, much as we loved the place, it is too far from the range to make that journey every day, so during the shooting we stayed at a lodge near the range. Wana Funzi, as the ranch is called, can only be described as pure Africa: a dozen little thatched huts,

some with running water, most with electricity - some of the time - set round a clearing in the bush. It is as remote a place as many of us had ever been, the only company, apart from the staff, being the monkeys, giraffes and ostrich that are all around. We passed the day with a visit to Stony Athi: a hot and dusty but well-kept range with about 20 targets at all distances, again, in the middle of nowhere. We had time to check kit and zero before a much-needed shower and a home-cooked and delicious dinner, before we lit the fire, opened the whisky and awarded the Prat Hat for the first time, to the person who acted in the most unnecessarily stupid manner during the day. I won't mention who won it, nor will I tell you what I did!

The meeting opened with the team match, the result of which, we're glad to say, was substantially in our favour. Our hosts were, as we knew they would be, the friendliest team we had ever met, eagerly congratulating us and pulling us all into a group photo at the end before a hugely hurried return to the lodge for a shower and change. Well, there was almost time for a shower, but there was one vital ingredient missing: water. Half the huts at Wana Funzi are VIP huts with running water, (so long as only one person in the camp is running it); the other half have a bucket on the roof with a rope attached. A whistle to the staff ensures the bucket is filled at a suitable temperature and a quick yank on the rope releases it onto your head.

There was sadly not enough water for twenty showers, so most of us set off dirty and smelly to the party held by our hosts at their small-bore club in Nairobi. They had built it themselves, by the way: having failed to obtain government grants, they raised the cash from the members and built themselves the smartest best-equipped range complex any of us had ever seen anywhere in the world.

*It's time to play the music;  
It's time to light the lights;  
It's time to put on make-up  
For the Muppet Show tonight.*

*"Well, what did you make of the show?"  
"Terrible!" "Awful!"*

We'll introduce the rest of the cast as the tour progresses, but we'll start with Colin "Statler" Cheshire and Martin "Waldorf" Townsend, those two grumpy old men sitting in their box, hurling abuse and criticism. You might already know Mark "Oscar" Wrigley, that filthy stinking beast who lives in a dustbin, and Lou-Lou "Miss Piggy" Brister (and that's her idea, not mine). Mind you, the similarity between Martin Brister and Kermit is suddenly striking, so maybe it's more appropriate than we'd thought.



The team with their trophies (and a chair) at Windhoek.



"The view's better from here . . .



. . . than from here" Matt Button demonstrates his skills.



Life's a beach - this one's Malindi.

(All photos: GBRT to Kenya and Namibia)



"It may be the middle of nowhere but four-star accommodation is just not good enough. I demand an upgrade!"

The individual shooting started with a pool-bull competition at 200 metres (where you get five rounds and have to try to hit a disk the size of a 10p piece in the centre - one point for a hit, zero for anything else). So quite why Townsend challenged an inner for a bull we'll never know. He lost the challenge, by the way.

After a good day's competition, we made our way back to the lodge, where we wished James a happy birthday, with the hotel staff dancing round the dining room singing *Happy Birthday* in Swahili and presenting him with a delicious home-made birthday cake. A few celebratory drinks followed, as you'd imagine.

Day two of the individual shooting saw the start of the Championships. A rather cooler start was most welcome, but the temperature still climbed to its normal scorching level by lunchtime. The wind was a lot more taxing today, so the 10% reduction in target size, through using yard targets at metre ranges, meant that anything but the tightest group was too big. So far Gary Alexander, James Dallas, Martin Woolger and Trina Noyes had won competitions, with Ian Shaw taking the Short Range Aggregate.

A small selection of cross-shots and a wide selection of cross shooters, due to very variable conditions, opened the field up somewhat in the morning of the final. Twelve of us made the cut, with Ian Shaw leading the field by the narrowest of margins. However Matt Button managed to knock Shaw into second place with a very creditable performance at 1000 metres, which caused a large sigh of relief from the National Guard when they saw a rather lighter person climb into the chair for the procession back to the mess!

They did it brilliantly - a 40-strong band, all in uniform and led by a Drum Major, escorted him and us down the half-mile stretch of dust from the firing point. Then followed the Prizegiving at which a large table was completely covered with trophies to present, and we were honoured by the presence of many important dignitaries, including the Kenyan Sports Minister, IOC representative and at least one Olympic gold medallist.

The next day was the start of our holiday period, and began with a lie-in - what bliss! Well, it would have been had Statler and Waldorf not risen at dawn to give themselves that precious extra hour of uninterrupted bickering before the rest of us got up for breakfast and wrecked it all.

We sent all our cases and shooting kit back to Muthaiga without us, while we spent half an hour on a fifty-seater twin-prop to Kichwa Tembo in the Masai Mara for our safari. We were met by the hotel staff and driven to Bateleur Camp, where we were staying. Kichwa Tembo is a four-star establishment. This, of

course, is not adequate for a GB team, so we wangled an upgrade to a \$400 a night hotel half a mile up the road.

Wow - what a place! We thought Muthaiga was the pinnacle of opulence but boy, were we wrong - Bateleur knocks it into a cocked hat. Our rooms here have a floor and a roof but no walls. In the space between they have pitched permanent tents, so the effect is of sleeping under canvas, without actually doing so. We were allowed a few minutes to unpack before being whisked out on our first game drive.

David and Martin T took the precautions of throwing hats and sunglasses respectively to the elephants as a sort of peace offering. A full-scale military operation involving three jeeps was launched in order to manoeuvre ourselves into a suitable position from which to retrieve the gifts, and then to get ourselves to a safe distance before the elephants changed their minds and decided they would, after all, look good in Armani shades and a cricket hat.

We spent a truly wonderful couple of days in the middle of the Masai Mara game reserve, which included six game drives, on which we saw most game imaginable, and a hot air balloon flight followed by a huge cooked breakfast; there is something wonderfully unique about sipping champagne and eating bacon and eggs at a fully laid table, under a cloudless sky hundreds of miles from the nearest town.

From there we boarded the same little plane as before and headed south to Malindi on the coast of the Indian Ocean. With white sand beneath our feet and a warm, warm sea lapping at the shore, we all agreed it was a tough life.

For fear of making you all too jealous, I will keep the report of our stay in Malindi nice and brief. Suffice to say that it was paradise itself, and we all spent a very happy few days fishing, playing golf, swimming, relaxing and investigating the excellent local seafood restaurants.

Now, I'd like you all please to picture a small, homely, intimate restaurant, specialising in its beautifully presented, minimalist vegetarian low-calorie masterpieces. Got it? Good, because Carnivore's is **nothing** like that. For a start it seats 360. They have every sort of meat you can imagine, from chicken wings and pork sausages to zebra, crocodile and kudu. Not a place for the faint-hearted or anorexic, but we didn't have any of them. And so, after our final night of holiday ended, we flew the next day to Windhoek in Namibia for the second bout of shooting.

3:45am? You're kidding, right? Oh, you're not. We were at Nairobi Airport, just a shade earlier than we would be going to bed on some other tours we could mention, while Trina negotiated manfully with the

check-in clerk who wanted to charge us over US\$6,000 excess baggage because Air Kenya weren't honouring the 50kg limit we had agreed with BA. Well done Trina in getting him down to a lot less than that, but we can still feel a letter coming on when we return.

On arrival at Johannesburg we found we only had about 53 microseconds in which to change planes; unfortunately, as it takes 57 microseconds to move rifles and luggage from one plane to another, while we made the transfer by the skin of our teeth, our suitcases (having neither skin nor teeth) missed it and were currently sitting forlorn, lonely, abandoned and frankly rather cheesed off, in South African Customs. We, on the other hand, were now sitting forlorn, lonely, abandoned and frankly rather cheesed off in Windhoek Airport. Still, at least the South Africans who came by air had also lost their luggage, so at least it was fair, even if it was a pain.

While we wait for our luggage, allow us to divert your attention for a few moments towards the Namibian landscape and away from the stench of forty unwashed socks.

Namibia is now a republic, with its own government, currency and problems - if you think fitting eight million people into an area the size of London is an infrastructural nightmare, there is an equal and opposite nightmare in populating an area the size of France with the population of Woking. Happily, the Germans left in something of a hurry and didn't have time to take their excellent roads with them, although sadly they also left behind four original 1920s VW people carriers, which we were able to verify were still operational. The country is a strange mix of desert and high-rise. It all seems either very affluent or very barren, but quite unslummish. It is also at 5000 feet, so the air is clean and pure, the sun is warm but not too hot, there is no humidity and it is basically the most comfortable climate you can imagine.

Arrebusch Travel Lodge, as its name suggests, may not be five-star accommodation, but is extremely comfortable and very convenient for the range. It also has an excellent bar and restaurant attached, both of which we sampled, and both of which we would recommend.

Fantastic! Some of our luggage has arrived. One of the vans has returned to the airport and has just pulled up at the hotel with . . . four coaching chairs and a flagpole.

Windhoek has a pretty range, in a bowl formed by the sizeable hills all round, with the result that there is circular wind (left at the firing point, right at the 300 metres point or vice-versa). It is also full of concrete blocks the size of garden sheds. Apparently the Army had been practising there the previous week and had been using various obstacles, some of which

needed a ten-ton crane to shift. C4 had a fit at the suggestion that we would just shoot round, over and through them, but it seems the Namibians felt that even we are good enough shots to miss twenty foot slabs of stone ten yards in front of us.

Despite the obstacles, the range was immaculate, our hosts clearly having been working long and hard to make it so for our arrival, even re-painting the ablution blocks after the graffiti of the previous week.

Finally, at about lunchtime, our rifles and kit arrived, so we hastily assembled everything and hurried up to the range for a practice before the sun went down. None of us shot exceptionally well, but it served the purpose of establishing zeros and locating our base on the range so we were all set for the competition.

The Meeting started with the opening ceremony, led manfully by C4 who raised the flag while a troupe of Namibian dancers, dressed in lion hides, ostrich feathers and what looked like rather unlikely strips of chipolata sausages strapped to their ankles arrived and performed some traditional pieces for us. They sang and danced beautifully, and, though none of us can claim to have understood it, we all thoroughly enjoyed it.

Scores on the first day were OK, but not really much more than that. We picked up the odd third and fourth place, but the field was clearly dominated by the South Africans. We thought up various reasons along the lines of "they've been here before and know the range", "they have handloads", "they eat more red meat", etc, but unsaid we all knew we were definitely up against it here.

We stayed for a couple of hours after the shooting and joined them at their range-side braai (barbecue) which was delicious, provided by the catering arm of the local bowling club, called "the Terminators" in a rather worrying way.

Namibia does not believe in issued ammunition - it is all "bring your own" so we had approached the South African manufacturer, PMP, who had supplied us in Kenya. They were, however, unable to provide enough for the whole of the Namibian Meeting, but some of the South Africans had kindly agreed to make some handloads for us so we could compete on a level playing field in the team match.

It was agreed that we would use these handloads in the second leg of the individual shooting so we could all get zeros with the good stuff. Wow - what a difference! Suddenly the prize lists had GB shots in the medals in every match. We didn't win them all, but we won some and were either second or third in the rest, so we all breathed a collective sigh of relief that tomorrow's match might now not be the walk-over we feared.



Leopard Valley Range.



The Opening Ceremony at the clubhouse.



Iain Robertson enjoys the ride.



Taking the 0600 to breakfast.



Very civilised - breakfast in the bush.



"Right we'll wait till they drop something then I'll stamp on them - which one do you fancy for lunch?"



"Hmmm Robertson and Townsend could be a bit on the stringy side but that Lou Lou looks tasty!"

We spent the evening in town at Joe's Beer House and Rib Shack, an establishment that, as you will imagine, specialises in red wine and steak. The service was dreadful and we were there for hours, but the food was superb and cheap, so we got over the slowness, but really had no time for anything afterwards except sleep, especially as we had the International Match the next day.

The match started a little below par at 300 metres: none of us really had any particular ideas why . . . it was just one of those days where we didn't get everything right at once. At 600 metres we improved, but the old enemy still increased their lead by one or two, before 900 metres where they were simply in a class of their own. We reckon if we'd performed a little more like we feel we ought to have done we would have dropped about 35 points, instead of the 48 we actually lost. The South African B team dropped 32; their A team dropped 18. We're not really used to feeling totally outclassed, but we're afraid that's what we were.

The conditions for the Final the next day were difficult, to say the least, with some people coping better than others with the very fast changes. Top of the day was Iain Robertson, who was chaired back to the clubhouse, with Johann du Toit of South Africa taking the Grand.

Now, we've heard of people flying from London to Paris for lunch, but we are not aware of anyone flying to Cape Town for lunch before. But we did. The fact

that we had to change aeroplanes there and had a seven-hour stop-over is nothing to do with it, of course. We had the most delicious seafood lunch imaginable on the Waterfront while some very nice people in uniform looked after our rifles and luggage at the airport.

We returned to the airport for the long slog home, except for David and Alex who stayed on, with Hilary (David's wife) and Cairen (Alex's fiancée) joining them for an extra week in South Africa. The rest had an easy and uneventful flight back to Heathrow and on to Bisley, thus concluding a most enjoyable and memorable tour. Now all we have to do is sift through the 4,000 photographs we have taken between us.

#### **Final words from the Captain**

On behalf of the team, I cannot thank our hosts enough for the care, attention and good humour shown to all of us during this, the most enjoyable tour I have yet been on. Everything was laid on, and the whole tour proceeded without a hitch. We were welcomed wherever we went and I feel sure that both countries we visited will not have seen the last of us. I do hope they see that as a promise rather than a threat!

Lastly, on a personal note, I should like to thank all members of the team for their tremendous spirit of enjoyment and fun throughout the tour, and particularly to James Dallas and Alex Henderson, both of whom were unflagging in their support and help to the team both before and during this amazing tour.

## **Barbados Rifle Association Centenary**

As part of its 100th anniversary celebrations, the Barbados Rifle Association is planning a Fullbore International Invitational Individual and Team Shoot on the Paragon Ranges from 20th - 26th March 2005, over 300 to 1000 yards ranges.

The provisional plan is as follows:

Sunday 20th	Practice
Monday 21st to Wednesday 23rd	Individuals
Thursday 24th	Day off
Friday 25th	Team shoot at 900 and 1000 yards
Saturday 26th	Team shoot at 300, 500, 600 yards

*(Team events will be held between combined international and Barbados teams)*

An indication of availability to take part would be much appreciated at this point after which a detailed programme will be made available. We look forward to hearing from you.

Bill King

Barbados Rifle Association

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