

It is December 2016 and news has just come in that a photographer has been injured by a charging buffalo in Kakadu National Park. Apparently he was in the company of Dave Lindner, a well known Territory identity and ex parks officer, who has extensive experience in studying and hunting buffalo over a period of 40 years or more. It was reported that Dave had put a number of shots into the buffalo before it charged the photographer, ripping his arm open, and was finally dispatched by Dave. One afternoon, three weeks ago, a hunter was very badly gored by a scrub bull not far from here. However it was not until 6am the next morning, some 12 hours later, that a helicopter was able to extract him to Darwin Hospital. These incidents remind me that every time you venture out on foot to hunt buffalo or scrub bulls there is a very real element of significant danger for the unprepared.

He's coming! - Charges

The last charge I experienced was as recently as 3 months ago when I was out with a hunter from Wisconsin. We had been scouting a series of large, mainly dry, swamps and were returning to the vehicle when we were charged by a scrub bull.

We saw it, about 400 yards away, and I took little notice of it and kept heading back to the vehicle. The animal started heading toward us, which did get my attention. Not normal behavior for a wild animal, even one that has had little or no contact with humans.

When it was about 200 yards away it began to accelerate. This got my undivided attention! I chambered a round and ensured the safety was off.

When it had closed the distance to about 80 yards I took a rest on a tree and placed the crosshairs on its head. I squeezed the trigger when it reached 15 yards.

In this instance the drama and danger was minimized due to four factors. Firstly, the area was open and the bull was observed from a significant distance away. Secondly, the animal made its intentions quite clear. Thirdly, the bull made the mistake of charging a very experienced PH who was confident in his ability to make a killing shot at a distance where he would not miss. Finally the PH was accompanied by an experienced hunter who was also aware of what was happening and suitably armed.

The first charge by a dangerous animal that I experienced was a cow elephant in Africa over 30 years ago. I was carrying my William Douglass double in 470 NE. The PH that I was with had a Remington 700 Bolt Action. The Remington was chambered in 416 Rem Mag and loaded with very long, for calibre, monolithic solids.

The PH took a shot at 15 meters when it was obvious that the cow was not bluffing.

His shot had little effect and I put the cow down at around 8 meters with a 500gr Woodleigh steel jacketed solid. On examination his monolithic solid had hit the cow towards the side of her skull and key holed, ricocheting off to the side. Whether a shorter, steel jacketed solid placed in the same spot would have gyroscopically stabilized and not key holed we will never know.

However I made a decision then to never use, over long, non-lead bullets for close range backup. That experience was quite terrifying when the first shot failed to stop the beast. However it showed me that a suitably armed hunter holds all of the aces if he does not panic.

Since that time I have faced perhaps 20 charging buffalo and a few scrub bulls.

I am going to share some of those experiences with you.

However, before I do, let me make this observation: Any other animal generally needs a good reason for attacking the most dangerous animal on earth – humans.

The reason may not be obvious on some occasions.

Generally, but not exclusively, the charge is the result of being hurt by a human at some time.

The scrub bull that I described charging me recently had no reason to hate me. However he did have a very obvious reason for hating humans. Although we encountered him, deep in the wilderness, 20 miles from the nearest road, he had been in contact with humans sometime before that event. His horns had been tipped, to prevent damage to other animals when yarded or trucked, and he had a readable ear tag. His capture would not have been

painless, driven out of cover by a helicopter only to be run over and pinned under a cut down and armoured Toyota 'Bull Catcher'. He would then have been roped and tied to a tree for later retrieval, his horns tipped and tagged. This one obviously escaped his ropes. Perhaps when he saw two puny humans on foot he decided on revenge – who could blame him? On a more curious note some people seem to attract a belligerent response from animals, whether by chance or some supernatural '*Fatal Attraction*'. Here are a couple of instances hunts where a charge was almost pre ordained, one with a very lucky ending!

Joachim

I have met few people as relaxed and jovial as Joachim and his wife Edeltroud, 'Eddie'. Just as well as we had two rather interesting encounters with buffalo whilst hunting. The first occasion was not a charge in the strict sense of the word. However a mature bull buffalo tearing out of thick cover, 15 meters in front of you, demands your instant attention whether he initially means you harm or not!

Joachim's First 'Accidental' Charge

We were pushing slowly along an overgrown track alongside the Wilton River when we came upon a very fresh, very large, buffalo 'High Stack' that merited closer attention. I surmised it was less than 10 minutes old given the fresh aromas emulating from it. Water buffalo are very clean bovines, they bathe at least once each day and when camped will not defecate where they rest. A buffalo camp is readily identifiable by the spotless camping area, devoid of vegetation and the 'toilets' around the perimeter, the choice of which toilet area to use corresponds to the opposite direction the wind is blowing. When out and about, should nature call, they will stand still whilst venting themselves resulting in a neat stack. Big buffalo can make little stacks on occasions. However, small buffalo cannot make BIG stacks. With this knowledge an experienced hunter knows – BIG stack means a BIG bull.

I decided a short walk was in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the owner of the steaming stack and appraise his horns.

We preceded, very quietly, along the track following his spoor for about 300 meters, upon rounding a sharp bend we came upon the rear end of the architect of the stack not 20 paces in front of us. He sported very straight horns, the style Joachim had indicated he wanted. Joachim was carrying one of our rifles, a very well made, Mauser 98 action, FN chambered in 10.75 x 68 mm.

This cartridge was disparaged by John Taylor because of the light weight bullets used in the factory ammunition, 350gr, and their poor construction.

However with Woodleigh 400gr projectiles and sufficient case capacity for modern propellants to propel them at a muzzle velocity of 2,200ft/sec it is the ballistic equal to the traditional 404 Jeffery loadings.

As the buffalo turned Joachim placed a shot upon its shoulder. The animal promptly speared off through some heavy cover. We took a few paces towards his exit point only to be confronted by a buffalo bull bursting through towards us. A quick shot from Joachim and it spun on the spot and was swallowed up in the scrub. With his rifle checked and reloaded I led the way on the follow up.

Twenty meters on was a very dead buffalo. However a further fifteen meters away was another, equally dead, buffalo. *Joachim had pulled off a double!*

I can only surmise that when the original bull took off on his death run he surprised the second animal which reacted by charging back past him into our faces. Joachim could not get the smile off his face for the rest of the day. However I had a lot of work to do processing two trophies.



Joachim's buffalo double where they fell.

Joachim's 'Real' Charge

With two buffalo in the bag we had concentrated on pigs and Joachim duly secured a very fine boar sporting 20cm tusks. Now we were fishing a small stream looking for some Black Brim for dinner.



Joachim with a very fine boar taken with my Marlin 1894 chambered in 44 Rem Mag.

Neither of the two buffalo Joachim had secured were large trophies and he had indicated that should we come across something extraordinary, Gold Medal Class, he would be up for another.

I was on my way back to the vehicle to get some cold drinks for my guests, who had one black brim on the bank and were actively seeking another, when I spotted him.

A massive buffalo bull with horns that were well in excess of 100 SCI was below, in the creek bed, about 40 meters ahead of me and oblivious to my presence.

The wind was in my favour so I detoured to the vehicle, secured the rifles and made my way back to Joachim and Eddie.

A short time later we are at a vantage point and Joachim places a shot on the buffalo which disappears into a thicket of Hiptus, about 2 acres in area.

We wait a few minutes, there is no sound.

I lead the way down the bank and across the stream to the spot where the bull was standing.

His running tracks head down a narrow game trail through the thicket and there is ample blood splattered around. I have one up the spout and the safety catch off and proceed slowly and carefully. About 20 meters into the thicket there is another game trail intersecting perpendicularly. The blood spoor goes straight ahead but something in my unconscious mind tells me to stop and look down the path to my right. I peek around the corner. *Whoa!* About 15 meters up the path he stands waiting. We beat a hasty retreat and I decide we will navigate around the thicket until we are downwind then make a plan.

Ten minutes later we are on a rise of about 3 meters high and 40 meters from the edge of the thicket discussing our next move. Suddenly the head and shoulders of a massive buffalo

push through the cover directly in front of us. He hesitates for a second then launches toward us.

By the time he gets to the rise where we are standing there are 4 more bullets in him and he is still on his feet and moving fast. However the shots have had the effect of dissuading him from a direct assault on us and he veers to the left and away. Three more shots later and he is down leaving two very relieved hunters to administer the coup de grace.



Joachim with his massive charging buffalo that scored over 104 SCI.

Neels' Charge

Perhaps I should not have been surprised that Neels and I were charged. When we were discussing hunting on his arrival he gave me the information that he had been on two Cape Buffalo hunts and both had resulted in a charge. In one instance his PH had been very badly injured before the buffalo was killed.

Neels, from South Africa, had already secured a good buffalo and we were out and about looking for 'something bigger'. We spied a very good buffalo bull paying close attention to a cow on heat. They were accompanied by what I presume were a couple of the cow's offspring. It took us nearly a kilometer to close the gap on the group unobserved and we were about 30 meters behind the bull. At this point he turned and saw us. Neels was carrying a Kreighoff double chambered in 470 NE and I motioned to him to take the shot. The bull bucked at the shot and promptly disappeared behind a small grove of cover. Neels careered off to the right to get a view of the departing bull, whilst I was yelling at him to break the rifle and recharge the right barrel. My pleas fell on deaf ears. The bull appeared, he took a second shot.

At the sound of the second shot the bull instantly turned and headed back the way he left. In the event that he was intent on an appointment at closer quarters to us I hurriedly took a rest on a nearby melaluca – rifle shouldered and ready. 'Have you reloaded?' 'No!' 'Reloaded?' 'No!' The bull is now 20 meters from impact with us and coming at speed. My shot enters

just under the nose and takes him a little too low to hit the brain but his spine is hit and he drops instantly. He is alive but paralyzed. 'Reload and give him a finisher.' is my request. Neels steps up and squeezes the front trigger. Poof.... No powder, just the primer, behind the bullet! He squeezes the rear trigger and the job is done. I am feeling a little weak after this exhibition. Had he responded 'Yes' to my second plea regarding his progress reloading the first shot would have been the dud. With perhaps half a second lost we would have had a very exciting time with the outcome anyone's guess!

Surprisingly this is not the first instance I have encountered where a hunter has arrived in camp with hand loaded ammunition and we have discovered a round with no powder charge under the bullet.

The other instance was discovered when checking the rifle sights in camp – so no harm done.



Neels and his charging buff.