

# B&C CONSER

**PROFILE:** Frederick Courteney Selous (1851-1917)

By Leonard H. Wurman B&C Regular Member

The Boone and Crockett Club's dedication to the conservation of North American wildlife spans 117 years. Yet not all members have been North Americans, or involved with conservation on that continent.

One of the most recognized of the early B&C members was the Englishman Frederick Courteney Selous, who achieved fame from his African adventures, and it was African wildlife that he eventually decided to conserve.

## A Childhood Dream

Frederick was born on Christmas Day, 1851. His father's ancestors were French Huguenots, and his mother, who was Scottish, intrigued

floor in only a nightshirt, he told his headmaster that he wanted to "harden himself to sleep on the ground as a hunter in Africa." He excelled as an athlete and marksman. As with many early B&C members, he was intrigued by ornithology, and he frequently would steal out of his dorm at night to collect eggs. He presented his egg collection to the school's Natural History Society.

Selous went to Switzerland in 1868 to study medicine, but displayed little interest and quit. He moved to Prussia where he learned both German and butterfly collecting. Caught trespassing, he knocked down the landowner and fled to Austria to continue his studies. While hunting there, he poached a chamois.

Not yet 20 years old, Selous followed his boyhood dream and arrived in South Africa in September 1871 with 400 pounds in his pocket. He purchased an outfit and headed north. The Matabele king, Lobengula, laughed at the youth's request to hunt in Matabeleland, but granted it anyway.

Over the next three years, Selous intermittently teamed up with British and Boer hunters. He used a 4-bore muzzleloader, which he could load on a dead run and which discharged a 4-ounce bullet. On one occasion, he fell off his horse while hunting giraffes and became separated from his party. He emptied his remaining four cartridges to start fires during the cold nights, and spent the next four days lost until some natives led him to the wagons. From 1871 through 1874, he killed 78 elephants, as well as many buffalo and white and black rhinoceros. The ivory trade proved quite profitable, both by killing the animals and trading with the natives for ivory. Selous also learned many of the native languages through his trading activities.

## Dwindling Game and Close Calls

In 1875 Selous visited England for a year. Returning to Africa, he hunted mostly on horseback. His writings describe one trader who had exported 30,000 pounds of ivory in the prior 5 years. Fifty thousand pounds of ivory had been exported from the Zambezi basin alone in one year. Not surprisingly, the elephant population was in rapid decline. Many traders quit, and Selous became depressed. He and several other professional hunters managed to kill only two bulls during months of hunting north of the Zambezi.

He continued to hunt buffalo, giraffe, and the antelope.

Selous had a number of close calls with death. He shot a charging lion that fell dead two yards from his feet. Another time, a buffalo killed his horse from under him and charged as he sat on the ground. Selous rolled over, but the round part of the buffalo's horn nearly separated his shoulder. Amazingly, he stopped another charging buffalo at 20 yards.

When Selous contracted malaria, the natives would not help, hoping to usurp his equipment and trade goods when he died. To their disappointment, he lived.

He traveled north into present-day Zambia in 1878. After he killed a bull elephant and three cows, a wounded cow charged after his exhausted horse. Selous heard two sharp screams above his head before he and his horse were dashed to the ground. The elephant folded its legs and lay on top of him, but he was able to squeeze free and hide. When the cow got up and couldn't find him, it left.

Selous continued hunting giraffes, lions, and antelope, but the next two years were difficult. He lost one close friend to lightning and another to dehydration in the bush. His depression returned, as did his malaria, which nearly killed him. By the time he recovered, the short-lived Zulu War was over. Traveling to England for a year, he wrote about the game he had taken in *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa*, and was criticized for his "wholesale senseless slaughter." The book, however, sold well.

## Collecting, Guiding, and Surviving

Returning to Africa, he tried but failed at raising ostriches and began to supply butterfly specimens to the British Museum, London dealers, and the Capetown Museum. Oddly, he hunted butterflies as vigorously as he did elephants. The Capetown Museum eventually received his extensive butterfly collection.

Selous had further close calls, once being charged by a wounded lion that ran right past him, and another time having to jump off his horse three times in one day to avoid being run over by three different wounded cow elephants.

In 1886, after a visit to England for several months, Selous returned to Africa once again and acted as the guide for four British aristocrats. Later, while hunting for himself, he rode headlong into a tree branch and suffered a serious concussion. Another time, he and his horse fell into a native



PORTRAIT OF B&C MEMBER  
FREDERICK COURTENAY SELOUS

her son with tales of relatives who had been early Abyssinian explorers.

As a youngster, Selous was mischievous and constantly in trouble, yet he did well academically and read incessantly about Africa. At age nine, when found sleeping on the dorm



# VATIONISTS

trapping pit. The horse was killed, and Selous sustained severe leg injuries. He repeatedly attempted to hunt north of the Zambezi, but was turned back by native hostilities and by malaria that infected his native "boys."

On one such attempt, hostile natives crept into camp at night and fired their rifles. Selous escaped amid a shower of javelins, but became separated from his "boys." He had only his rifle and four cartridges, one of which he used to kill a wildebeest for food. Over the next 10 days and using the Southern Cross as a guide, he traveled 300 miles, making his way back through unfriendly villages, once swimming a crocodile infested river. When he arrived at a friendly village, he found that 12 of his original 24 "boys" had been killed and 6 wounded in the night attack.

After becoming a liaison in 1889 between Cecil Rhodes' British South African Company and King Lobengula, Selous obtained mineral rights for the Company and arranged peace treaties with a number of other tribes. He also led an expedition north from Bulawayo to build the 460-mile "Selous Road," as it became known, which terminated at Fort Salisbury.

By this time, income from his book royalties, land investments, ivory sales, prospecting, and sale of specimens had made Selous financially comfortable. But the adventures continued. During the first Matabele War, Selous was the head scout for a troop column that came north from Capetown. He was wounded when a bullet struck his chest, yet stayed outside his ribs and exited eight inches from the entrance wound.

When the war ended after several months, Selous returned to England, married, and honeymooned in Europe. But British life was too sedate, and he returned to Bulawayo as manager of a gold mining and land company. He scouted during the second Matabele war in 1896. When it ended, he returned to England and wrote two more books. He joined the British Ornithologists' Union and made egg-gathering trips to the continent and present-day Turkey.

## Ranging Farther Afield

Theodore Roosevelt, who longed to make an African safari, had read Selous' first book and started a vigorous correspondence that last-

ed until Frederick's death. Selous was elected a Professional Member of the Boone and Crockett Club before 1897, the year he first came to America to hunt in the Big Horn Mountains. He returned the following year to hunt near Yellowstone Park.

When the Boer War broke out, Selous did not return to Africa; he was sympathetic to the Boers and critical of the British annexation of the two Boer republics. He hunted eastern Canada and Newfoundland in 1900 for moose and caribou, and the following year returned to take two fine woodland caribou in Ontario. Selous spent most of 1902 bird hunting and collecting bird eggs, and the following year he hunted British East Africa for the first time.

Selous joined three Canadians and three Americans in 1904 for a hunt on the

Yukon's MacMillan and Pelly Rivers. Two of the Americans, the artist Carl Rungius and the conservationist Charles Sheldon, would later be admitted to the Boone and Crockett Club. Selous partnered with Sheldon, who was studying sheep and taking specimens for American museums. Selous was primarily after moose and caribou for the British Museum. He took four moose, but only sent the cape and antlers of one, with a spread of 67 inches, to the British Museum.

In 1905, he collected two fine caribou heads in Newfoundland. The following year, he returned to the Yukon and took three moose, six caribou, and two wolves. Mount

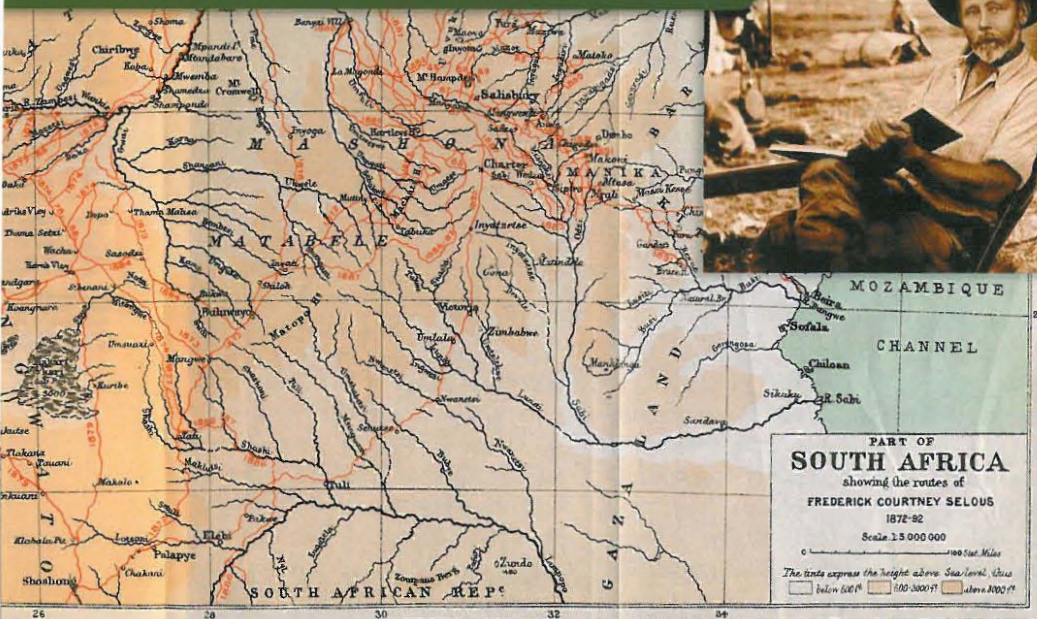
**IMAGE OF SELOUS TAKEN IN AFRICA IN THE 1870S WHEN HE WAS IN HIS TWENTIES HOLDING HIS EARLY 4-BORE "DUTCH" ROERS SMOOTHBORE.**  
**INSET: BARTERING WITH NATIVES ON THE TRIP TO BULAWAYO.**





# B&C CONSERVATIONISTS

**PROFILE: Frederick Courtney Selous (1851-1917)**



**ONE OF THE GREATEST MEMORIALS TO THIS FINE NATURALIST IS THE SELOUS GAME RESERVE IN TANZANIA, WHICH COVERS OVER 19,000 SQUARE MILES. THEODORE ROOSEVELT NOTED IN 1907, "MR. SELOUS IS THE LAST OF THE BIG GAME HUNTERS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA; THE LAST OF THE MIGHTY HUNTERS WHOSE EXPERIENCE LAY IN THE GREATEST HUNTING GROUND WHICH THIS WORLD HAS SEEN SINCE CIVILIZED MAN HAS APPEARED HEREIN."**



**RIGHT: THE GREAT BIG GAME HUNTER, SELOUS (FAR LEFT) IS TAUGHT AT THE AGE OF 62 BY A SERGEANT HOW TO LOAD, AIM, AND FIRE A RIFLE JUST BEFORE HEADING TO EAST AFRICA TO JOIN THE LEGION OF FRONTIERSMEN IN 1915.**

Selous, a peak at the junction of the North and South Forks of the MacMillan River, was named in his honor. Selous described his North American hunts in *Sport and Travel East and West* (1901) and *Hunting Trips in British North America* (1907).

Although Selous visited Roosevelt in the White House during this time, he does not mention this in his hunting books. In appreciation for his contribution of the many African and North American specimens, the British Museum erected an imposing monument of Selous at the exit of its great hall.

Selous was very active in arranging and advising Theodore Roosevelt's 1909 east African Safari and the two shared the same boat ride from Naples to Mombasa. They hunted Africa at the same time, and the two safaris actually met once. Selous also hunted Africa in 1911 and 1912, as well as collected eggs in Europe and Iceland.

## A Soldier's Devotion

When the First World War started in 1914, Selous tried to enlist, but was repeatedly rejected because of his age. Finally, the following spring, he was commissioned a lieutenant of the 25th Royal Fusiliers and deployed to British East Africa. The battalion traveled by rail from Mombasa to Lake Victoria, crossed it by boat, and captured the town of Bukoba from the Germans. Selous led a 20-man scout-



ing party before the general advance.

The British initially did not have enough soldiers to invade south into German East Africa. Selous' troops successfully fought German patrols to prevent them from blowing up British railroads. Dysentery and malaria were taking their toll on the British forces, yet the 64-year-old Selous remained healthy, was promoted to Captain, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.).

Finally, in 1917, the British marched south. During the battle of Beho-Beho, Selous crept ahead of his troops to glass enemy positions and was killed by a shot to the head. He was buried under a Tamarind tree in a simple grave, where a monument marks the site.

## His Conservation Legacy Endures

The early wildlife conservation movement in Africa had some similarities to that in America. In the early 1880s, Lobengula tried to limit white hunting, and even fined Selous for shooting a hippopotamus against his wishes. By 1890, the British became alarmed at the declining game populations, decided to limit native hunting, to require whites to have licenses and to limit their take.

With Selous as a leader, many former African hunters met in the British Foreign Office in 1900 and formed the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire. The Society promoted the formation of reserves and sanctuaries, the enforcement of game laws and regulations, and a minimum elephant tusk weight. Given that many members were responsible for the slaughter, the society was dubbed the "penitent butchers."

The Society was a semi-scientific body, gathering data to support its efforts. It published a journal that in 1950 became the journal *Oryx*, and today is the respected *Oryx*, *The International Journal of Conservation*. Initially consisting of aristocrats, hunter-naturalists, and government officials, the society was very effective.

Today, Selous' gravesite is within Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve, Africa's largest. The 19,000-square-mile reserve has over 50,000 elephants and 100,000 buffalo within its borders. In some ways Selous' life is a metaphor for the world hunter. His excessive taking of game eventually morphed into a personal commitment to protect these resources for future generations. ■