



Red Deer filmmaker Rueben Tschetter gets his camera gear ready (contributed photo).

Red Deer filmmaker goes on African safari with Wild TV

Rueben Tschetter's excellent adventure as camera operator

[LANA MICHELIN](#) / May. 30, 2018 5:10 p.m. / [LIFE](#)

Flying in a wind-rocked helicopter above the South African savanna, Red Deer filmmaker Rueben Tschetter strained to capture a white rhino on video — without falling out of the chopper.

When he was hired as a camera operator for two safari episodes for the *Wild TV* show *The Edge*, Tschetter knew he would be in for an adventure.

He just didn't realize how hair-raising and exhausting it would be.

Much of what Tschetter experienced in Africa from May 9-20 fell outside his comfort zone — from flying in a door-less helicopter that took-off before his seat belt was buckled — to walking 25 km in a day with hunters tracking wildebeests in a game farm near the Botswana border.

“It was crazy... it was my first time in South Africa, my first time in a helicopter, my first time shooting a rhino (on film)...”

At times, Tschetter said he had to remind himself “where I was and what I was doing” because the whole thing seemed like a surreal “blur” — especially with the time difference messing up his internal clock.

Generally, Tschetter, producer of *The Cache Project*, makes local short films about Central Alberta. It made for an exotic change when he was asked to be a camera operator for *Wild TV*, which makes hunting shows.

One episode was about two North American hunters who’d paid \$21,000 towards rhinoceros conservation, to be able to track and then shoot — with a tranquilizer dart — a white rhino.

The female had to be studied for health reasons, said Tschetter. She wasn’t getting pregnant so a veterinarian wanted to take blood and hair samples. Operators of the game preserve also needed to install a micro chip in her horn that could be traced if poachers attempted to steal it.

“Rhino horns are literally worth more than their weight in gold,” Tschetter explained. That’s why the endangered animals are being decimated. Illegal poachers sell rhino

horns to Asian countries, where they are in high demand for supposedly curing everything from cancer to impotence — claims disproven by science.

To shoot this episode, Tschetter travelled six hours north of Johannesburg to a wildlife preserve.

He recalled the shocking amount of security rigged to keep poachers out: “There were three electric fences, each 16 feet high and 1,200 volts.” Inside these fences was a pen of free-roaming lions, and beyond this, armed guards patrolled the preserve.

The rhino ‘hunt’ was over in a day. For Tschetter the scariest moment was when the wind rocked his helicopter so wildly, the pilot attempted a landing, but thought better of it and just kept on flying.

Tschetter’s impression of the rhinos was not of ferocious beasts, but fairly docile herd animals. “They kind of reminded me of cows in a pasture.”

The second episode, at a game ranch near the Botswana border, involved five American hunters seeking trophy kills. They stalked antelope, spiral-horned koodoo (like an African elk), and wildebeests.

It was an exhausting week, and Tschetter admitted to feeling some personal qualms about the animal killings. But the meat was donated to local villages.

The laxity of South African laws struck him when the pickup truck he was in sped past a police cruiser at 120 km p/hr. No one inside was wearing seat belts, and a guide and an

antelope carcass were travelling in the truck bed. And the vehicle wasn't pulled over.

"It's real cowboy" over there, he said, with a chuckle.

Although Tschetter remains troubled by the deep rift between blacks and whites in South Africa, he considers the trip an incredible experience.

Would he go back? "Absolutely! I hated the plane trips, but I love the adventure."

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THE CACHE PROJECT