

Ross Parker has endured a civil war that transformed his homeland and turmoil that changed an entire continent – all while nurturing incredible artistic talents and fighting for wildlife conservation.

By Ladd Wilkinson

I can't tell you, exactly, when I discovered that Ross Parker isn't your average dealer of fine wildlife and sporting art. But I know this: My epiphany didn't happen at a Safari Club International show or in one of Parker's two south Florida galleries, where I've observed him suavely interacting with clients ranging from avid hunters to refined social bluebloods. Perhaps the realization came on our morning together in remote Mana Pools National Park near the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe, where we were hiking, unarmed, with artist Craig Bone.

Back in the early 1990s Mana Pools was a protected area where you were not required to hire a safari guide to ferry you around in the safety of a Land Rover.

Park guards made it clear that hikers like us were courting danger at our own peril. Over the years many visitors have died at Mana Pools: gored by mean-tempered buffalo, fatally mauled by lions, crushed by elephants and hippos, bitten by snakes and whacked by crocs while boating and fishing the Zambezi.

"I want to show you what true wild Africa is . . . the way I knew it as a boy," Parker said. "It's what I want my artists to communicate in their work."

Bone had invited us to tag along as he gathered reference material for a series of paintings featuring leopards and charging elephants. In the months to follow Parker planned to exhibit those scenes at the SCI and Dallas Safari Club expositions, in addition to his Call of Africa Native Visions galleries in Ft. Lauderdale and Naples.

Our walkabout led us up a mostly dry wash that held a seeping pool, called Chitake Springs. The waterhole was a magnet for megafauna. Proceeding through the twisting labyrinth as it cut deeper into the Earth, the banks around us rose higher, which meant we had only two ways out – where we'd entered the wash and a spot around the next bend. Soon, a complication ensued when a bull elephant appeared behind us, hell-bent on reaching the spring.

To stay ahead of the massive tusk, we lightailed it, and then another formidable



The SURVIVOR

Ross Parker and his wife, Kitten, in their Call of Africa Native Visions Gallery in Ft. Lauderdale.

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