

My last Newsletter and Blog Post

I celebrated my 69th birthday recently and have been touched by how many people remembered and called and emailed to wish me. Wonderful to be remembered, especially at an age when many people think you are increasingly irrelevant. It has been the end of a busy and eventful few days, weeks, months, year actually when I think about it. The completion of the five book spiral horn series and, a few days ago, the completion of the biggest book project I have ever attempted – Hunting the African Buffalo – Nature's Debt Collector – The Six Subspecies – a 480 page, 735 photo monster; a fantastic last hunt in February in Cameroon for my favourite plains game animal, Lord Derby's eland; and the end of my hunting career such as it has been.

So, family, friends and fellow hunters, this is my last Newsletter and Blog Post. I am busy selling my firearms and hunting books, clearing out my hunting cupboard, resigning from many of the hunting associations of which I have been a member and tidying up the rest of my hunting bits and bobs. The Buffalo Book, which will be out in or about September, will be my last hunting book and I will no longer write hunting articles other than for the odd friend who specially requests it and then only after I have given the request some serious thought.

I have reduced the print run of the Buffalo Book quite drastically to 1 000 standard editions, 300 limited editions and 30 Deluxe editions because I do not want to be tied to selling hunting books. I will maintain my website and the two Peter Flack Productions online shopping sites for a period of two years but will almost certainly then close them unless something, which is not currently on my radar screen, appears from over the horizon. Obviously, once the websites are

closed, I will stop selling books and pulp the remaining ones.

The question I have been asked repeatedly by those who know me well and know that hunting has defined my life for 60 years, is why and why now? Well, let me start by copying here the note I sent this week to all those people who applied through me to join the Fair Chase Guild:

THE FAIR CHASE GUILD – SAHGCA DECISION

Good morning to those of you who have applied for membership of the Fair Chase Guild. Bad news I am afraid. I was informed on Friday 7 April by the president of SA Hunters and Game Conservation Association (SAHGCA) that, at the recent meeting of the 62 branch chairmen of SAHGCA, these chairmen, led by Mr Jan de Man, voted to cancel the association of the Fair Chase Guild with SAHGCA. I was told that the reason put forward for the cancellation was that all 40 000 plus members of SAHGCA were fair chase hunters and they did not need an association to prescribe to them how they should go about it.

Just to recapitulate for a moment. I proposed the formation of the Fair Chase Guild under the auspices of SAHGCA some 18 months ago at a meeting at the head office of SAHGCA attended by the president, CEO, Conservation Manager, a board member of SAHGCA and assorted other members and employees of SAHGCA. Thereafter, a number of further meetings took place, also at the head office of SAHGCA, to give effect to this proposal and which culminated in the formal announcement of the formation of the Fair Chase Guild under the auspices of SAHGCA at the official dinner immediately preceding their Annual General Meeting in November 2016.

Clearly, therefore, the decision taken by the branch chairmen is questionable from a legal standpoint – how can they summarily undo such a decision of SAHGCA's? But that, I guess, is for SAHGCA to sort out.

No-one is compelled to join the Fair Chase Guild and the

Guild has neither the authority nor wishes to prescribe anything to anyone, as has been stressed by the Guild in writing more than once. It is an entirely voluntary body for like-minded individuals and organisations who wish to conduct a public relations strategy designed to promote fair chase hunting. As such, there must be other reasons behind the decision of the branch chairmen. When I pushed for the real answer, I was told that this was "Boere (Afrikaner) politics" at work, whatever that may mean. Still later, I was told that a number of those most vociferously opposed to the Guild were those who shot game from vehicles (bakkie 'hunters') and they objected to an association which frowned on this behaviour.

The decision has taken me completely by surprise as I received no warning that the Fair Chase Guild was even on the agenda of this meeting and, I confess, has left me feeling perplexed, confused and not a little upset. It is worrying that I was ignorant of what a large number of SAHGCA branch chairmen think is the right and proper way to hunt, on the one hand, and that they did not want hunting promoted, on the other hand, or certainly not by the Guild.

Whatever the real reasons for and whatever the legality of the decision may be – and there were a number of chairmen who, after the meeting, apparently expressed opposition to the decision although not saying so in the meeting – the decision of the branch chairmen is clearly a vote of no confidence in the Fair Chase Guild and its aims and, as the original proponent, in me personally.

Looking back over the brief six months that the Guild has been an association of SAHGCA, I can honestly say that they have been neither a hindrance nor a help and the Guild does not need the association with SAHGCA to move forward, other than that it will no longer have access to the membership of SAHGCA, many of whom (it was thought) would be keen to join the Guild. How wrong this latter view was.

The question clearly is this, however, if the original proponents were so wrong about the appeal of the Guild to SAHGCA members, is there any point in going forward alone? Gerhard Verdoorn, the current president of SAHGCA and one of the original founder members of the Fair Chase Guild, has decided to remain on as president of SAHGCA for the remainder of his 18 month term and is still keen to continue to develop and grow the Guild as an independent body.

To do this will mean that, at the very least, the Guild will have to develop its own constitution, its own membership certificates and open its own bank account. Gerhard has agreed to complete the design of the membership certificate which he has started, his wife, who is a lawyer, has offered to investigate what will be required to open a bank account in the name of the Guild and I originally offered to redraft the membership forms and attempt a first draft of a new constitution.

In the sober light of day, however, I have asked myself three questions, firstly, can I stay on as an honorary life member of SAHGCA given my close ties to the formation of the Guild; secondly, is it worth pursuing the development of the Guild at all; and, thirdly, how does this affect me personally? In moments like these, I often think of the character in Dante's Inferno who was condemned to push a boulder up a hill only to find that, when he reached the crest, the boulder slipped from his grasp, rolled all the way down and he had to start all over again. I do not want to be a boulder roller!

I have made my decision. I have resigned from SAHGCA. I will not pursue the goals of the Fair Chase Guild. I will not play an active role in any hunting association. I will stop hunting and become a non-hunter.

I have often felt that, in life, it was important to recognize when doors were opening and closing for you. To walk through the ones that were opening and not into the ones

that were closing. For some time I have known that the hunting door was closing in my life but, because it was such an important one to me, I persisted in pushing at the closing door to keep it open. No more. I must accept that, for whatever reason, my time as a hunter has come to an end and move on with the rest of my life, however long that may be.

I am very sorry if this will disappoint anyone or, worse still, make them angry at me but I cannot see any alternative. Fortunately or unfortunately, I have never learnt how to run with the foxes and hunt with the hounds.

For those of you who still want to pursue membership in the Guild and its goals, please feel free to contact Gerhard Verdoorn – nesher@tiscali.co.za.

I have since had the matter explained to me by a lawyer active in SAHGCA circles. He said that those at the forefront of the move to cancel the Fair Chase Guild's association with SAHGCA, despite professing to be ethical hunters, do not comply with the Fair Chase Guild's Code of Conduct. They are worried that, if they join the Guild, they will be found out or exposed by their "friends" who know what they do. If they do not join the Guild, on the other hand, they are worried people will say that the reason for their refusal is because they are unethical and do not comply with the Guild's Code of Conduct. In other words, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. The Guild represented a threat to them and they had to find a way to put a stop to its activities. All the rest is window dressing.

The Code of Conduct, for example, which apparently became such a bone of contention for these opponents to the Guild is based, almost word for word, on that of Rowland Ward's Guild of Field Sportsmen, which has been in existence for decades and was drafted by the Chairman of Rowland Ward at the time, Robin Halse and his friend Chappy Scott.

The voting mechanism suggested for the Fair Chase Guild, which also caused such hysteria in the ranks of these opponents, is the same as for the Special Rates Areas in the country, i.e. one vote for every rand contributed, although in the Guild's case, non monetary contributions were also taken into account and the voting system was both open to debate and amendment by members.

Clearly, these opponents were determined to find fault with the Guild regardless and, in the end, after extensive lobbying, managed to do just that.

But let me return to the closing door. What gave my push back added impetus was the Cecil debacle when I realized there was not one hunting association worldwide that had a public relations strategy worthy of the name. As a hunter I was embarrassed, no, humiliated by the pathetic responses of the bodies to which I belonged and which I thought should be at the forefront of proactively representing us and promoting the critical role that hunting played in conservation.

In my arrogance, I resolved to try and change things and I have failed. I have learnt, yet again, the truth of the old maxim: You can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink.

Secondly, those who have read my recent books and, particularly, the Conclusions, will also have noted my growing despondency at the failure of almost every African government to recognize that, if they only used their wildlife and wildlife habitats sustainably, they could provide opportunities for all their people in perpetuity and thereby conserve both the wildlife and its habitats. But no, the politicians, army and police personnel who should be at the forefront of these efforts are the very ones leading this short sighted destruction and for the basest reasons.

My recent hunting trips to Mocambique, The Republic of Congo

and Cameroon have only confirmed and strengthened this view and I have been taken aback at the increasing pace of destruction, the depths to which it has sunk and the hold that bribery and corruption has gained over the very fabric of society in Africa. It is now the accepted way of doing things at all levels. When I expressed my dismay to a local Congolese recently, his reply was a surprised, "But don't you know, we Congolese lie all the time?"

To this must be added my disappointment that people in South Africa, who call themselves hunters, can be equally short sighted and also for base reasons. Both groups would rather jeopardise the future ability of their children and grandchildren to enjoy these wonderful, renewable natural resources than change their ways, which they know in their heart of hearts to be wrong. And here I am obviously not just talking about the opponents of the Fair Chase Guild but also those who offer canned killings, domesticate and/or genetically modify wildlife to produce unnatural colour variants and the like.

I do not want to inhabit this kind of hunting world any longer and so, instead of tilting at windmills and continuing to push in where I am not wanted; instead of seeing my energies gradually dribble away and, ultimately, founder to a futile halt, I want to redirect my energies, such as they are, into other and different channels. I hope you will not be angry with me or take me to task for abandoning the good fight but I think it is now time for younger, braver, better men and women to either step up or continue the good fight. Totsiens!