

A Hunting Adventure in Northern Nigeria

Hunters are typically bussed in groups from their villages to an assembly point (usually a small town) near the forest where the hunting will take place. Although hunting is done every week during the rainy season (*damuna*), a given village will only participate every two weeks. While Sokoto State is the best known area for hunting, Kafin Madaki (in Bauci State) is also well-known. What follows is a description of my trip to Kafin Madaki with a group of hunters from Fidalami (a small village in Kano State).

We left Fidalami on Thursday in a chartered open truck at 12:00 noon and arrived in Kafin Madaki at nightfall. I was traveling with a group of ten hunters headed by the village strongman, Na Ilu, who bore the title of Sarkin Daji Fidalami (King of the Bush, Fidalami). We carried many weapons of various sorts as well as ten hunting dogs. Each of these canines had formidable names. There was Bauna (Buffalo), Zaki (Lion), Sarka (Chain), Soja (Soldier), Magaji (Heir to the Throne), Balbo (Blacky), Dela (name of any girl born after the birth of two males), Masaa (Bean Cake), Duna (Black Giant), Bule (White Face), and Fifilduwa. Upon arriving in Kafin Madaki we discovered similar busloads of hunters from other villages who arrived from places as far away as Sokoto and Maiduguri.

That night was unforgettable. Each group was assigned a sleeping place in front of the house of a host, but no one went to sleep until about 1:00 A.M. Prior to sleeping, there was drumming, *kirari*, and seven unplanned clashes between men and dogs. There was even a dispute between the traditional King and the hunters concerning the noise of the drums that made it impossible for visitors to hear a play being presented in the open air just outside his palace.

This was the famous *bishi* I had heard so much about. The *bishi* is typically performed the night before the hunting begins and is characterized by armed participants who ritually praise themselves, taunt others, engage in mock combat, and sometimes even perform feats of magic like materializing arrows from thin air.

The dispute with the Sarki proved to be ominous because the following day he declared the forest permanently off limits. The hunters were angered by this declaration, and some even threatened to flood the village with savage animals if he did not relent. ... In the end a compromise was reached and the Sarki agreed to permit the continuation of hunting, but only on the following week-end.

Prior to this compromise the hunters (after first praying in the mosque and preparing themselves with protective medicines) demonstrated in front of his palace. They were trying to impress the king (Sarki) with their numbers; but his decision that they not hunt that weekend could not be altered. He had received inside information that some of the hunters did not come with noble intentions and that they were planning to cause trouble in the bush.

Even though some of the hunting groups went into the bush anyway, it was decided that I should return with one of our hunters to Kano. I never felt more relieved in my life. One of the hunters from another village that looked like the grim reaper himself (he even carried a huge sickle on his shoulder) had been staring at me inquisitively all morning. Moreover, another stranger who appeared to be following me, set off a growing fear when he shouted loudly: “The American has entered the mosque, to pray.”

This, coupled with the presence of numerous other grim looking hunters and the awesome clubs they carried along with the Sarki’s warning about possible foul play had completely overcome any initial enthusiasm I had to participate in the event. I decided then and there that the “junior *farauta*” in which even small children participate was much more to my liking.

As I sped back to Kano in a transport van, thankful for my escape from a possibly grisly and untimely death. I recalled the response made by one of the actors in a movie entitled “The Magnificent Seven” when asked why he took off all his clothes and jumped into a cactus patch. His answer was: “It seemed to be a good thing to do at the time.”

