

SOFTS or SOLIDS

– LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #208 –

When you overhear a discussion or argument, between hunters or professional hunters, that includes the words “Softs” and “Solids,” chances are they’re talking about safari hunting on the dark continent. That’s because a discussion of ammunition loaded with soft point or full metal jacketed bullets applies only to a few of the dangerous game animals of Africa, and that’s where the first discussion likely started, about the time of the introduction of smokeless powder and jacketed bullets just before 1900.

Dangerous game animals are the Big-5 (elephant, cape buffalo, lion, leopard and rhinoceros); also, hippopotamus and crocodile can be dangerous – but mostly to the native peoples, in their daily lives. In all of the African countries we’ve hunted, 375 H&H was the minimum caliber requirement for dangerous game. As far as I know, all

calibers of rifle ammunition (375 and larger) have always been offered in solid as well as soft point loadings. And of course there are no offerings of solids in smaller calibers – unless you count the military calibers of 223 (5.56 x 45) and 308 (7.62 x 51).

A leopard isn’t any larger than a whitetail deer and if well-shot, a 243 soft point would do the job just fine; however it’s typically illegal to use such a small caliber. Lions are much bigger and require a larger caliber; but they are soft skinned, and easily put down with a good shot, using soft point bullets. It’s hard to imagine that any professional hunter would ever advocate that a leopard or lion be shot with a solid bullet.



On the left is a Hornady 375 Solid, new and recovered from a bull elephant; right side is Nosler 375 Partition, new and recovered from a cape buffalo.

There’s not much rhinoceros hunting today, but they and elephant are always candidates for solids, whether it’s a side brain or heart shot, or a follow-up shot from behind the animal. On cape buffalo, most PHs I’ve hunted with have recommended a soft for the first shot, when the animal was straight on or broadside, and a solid for a second shot when the animal was running away.

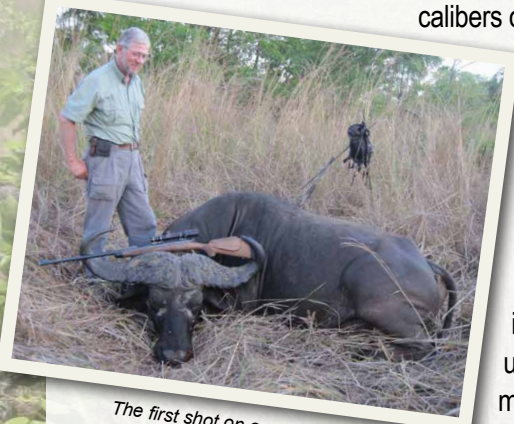
"Dangerous game animals are the Big-5..."

As a side note, Brenda and I only take one gun each to Africa; if we’re hunting dangerous game, it’s always our 375 H&H rifles. Brenda also likes to shoot duikers and other small game animals. When doing so with her 375 H&H, she simply switches from soft points to solids and leaves a .375 hole on both sides; which the taxidermists appreciate – especially for full-body mounts.



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The first shot on a cape buffalo is always a soft, hopefully through the heart. That’s my Nearly Perfect Safari Rifle. (Tanzania 2011)



Solids are everyone’s recommendation for elephant. That’s PH Nicholi Dubish on my right. (Tanzania 2011)