

## HighBeam Research

**Title:** 'Escape the Elephants': reality TV for the whole family.

**Date:** 2/20/2003; **Publication:** The Dallas Morning News (via Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service);

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Escape the Elephants

Grade: B-PLUS

7 p.m. Tuesday, Animal Planet

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Finally, a reality show that meets some standards of decency for family viewing.

"Escape the Elephants" isn't a reality show in the sense that the contestants, over the course of weeks, must perform gross and inane stunts. In this case, Saba Douglas Hamilton, who was born and reared in Kenya's bush country, joins a former big game poacher, now a conservation officer, in an attempt to elude scent-tracking elephants.

This is where it gets interesting (and educational to boot). Rory Hensman, another Kenyan who runs a private refuge for orphaned elephants, has tapped into the animals' amazing sense of smell. He trains elephants to follow scent on command and believes the huge animals, which can travel up to 8 miles an hour over land (compared to human's typical 3 miles an hour), can be effective in tracking poachers.

The chase takes place over one day, covering 14 kilometers of rugged terrain \_ from open range to river crossings, rocky inclines to thorny thickets.

The two "poachers" get a two-hour start and make every attempt to cover their scent \_ spores as Rory calls it \_ by erasing tracks with branches, wading through not one, but four different water crossings and getting the added benefit of having a herd of buffalo cross between them and the tracking elephants. The elephants never get seriously sidetracked. In fact, the elephants stick their trunks in the air and simply circumvent the dense thicket, trimming time the "poachers" spent trying to confuse the scent in the undergrowth.

Much of the one-hour special is spent on fabulous stock African animal footage \_ rhinos, hippos, crocodiles, lions \_ all cavorting in their (diminishing) natural habitat. Little info-bits get sprinkled in the show \_ that buffalo kill more people each year in Africa than any other animal and that the beast most feared by the ex-poacher is the black mamba snake, of all things.

This program can be enjoyed simply as an interesting chase, where elephants win. Or viewers might take a look at the program's subtext \_ all of these creatures are suffering at the hands of human interference.

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