

Beastly appetites

Mark Evans of "Eating Giants" shows what's left of a hippopotamus after dinner in Africa.

'Eating Giants'
★★★★★
Sunday at 10 p.m.,
Animal Planet

DINING OUT IN AFRICA'S AN ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT AFFAIR

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THINKING OF something different for your next dinner party?

Perhaps you might want to consider roasting a hippopotamus, suckling-pig style.

Crisp it up, put an apple in its mouth. Very festive. Definitely different.

But there a couple of things you might want to keep in mind, courtesy of a new two-part Animal Planet special whimsically called "Eating Giants."

First, you might want to be sure your dining-room table legs are sturdy. An adult male hippo weighs in at around 3.8 tons.

Second, be sure your guests are not on strict diets. A whole hippo contains about 2 million calories.

You also should sharpen your steak

knives. A hippo's hide is about 2 inches thick, so even if you roast it until it's well done, the skin may not be fork-tender.

The steak knives part isn't an issue for the dining patrons in "Eating Giants." Crocodiles, lions, leopards, hyenas, vultures and insects consume virtually the entire carcass of a dead hippo without a single utensil.

What they lack in table manners they make up for in efficiency, reducing the hippo to a small pile of bones in just a few days.

That's standard practice on the African plains. What's different in this case is that cameras were set up some 20 yards away to record the whole meal, in fascinating and graphic detail.

The scientists monitoring the pictures



will remind viewers of the cops they have seen in a thousand surveillance vans on police procedural dramas, except the scientists get excited about things like tracking a 500-yard walk by a dung beetle.

Animal Planet slotted the show at 10 p.m. for a reason. It's not the kind of thing younger children, or people who mostly enjoy the Puppy Bowl, will want to watch.

But it's part of the animal world, and for those who can't get enough, the second episode will involve an elephant.

Just don't look for the Food Network to pick up rerun rights.