

# The Dinder Park and Shooting Parties in Early Years

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A letter received from an American gentleman and some correspondence relating to a proposal by Lord Kitchener to make it into a private preserve reveal some interesting facts about the history of the Dinder and of shooting parties at the beginning of the country.

The Dinder is now a National Park. There is a road through it from the railway at Dinder station to Roseires. An airstrip is contemplated, rest houses are to be built, and it should soon be possible for anyone who wants to see game to do the round trip in a week from Khartoum. The end of the war found it a happy hunting ground for poachers, with ammunition and rifles plentiful, they were quite prepared to fight the Police who patrolled the Park. Animals were slaughtered in thousands, the game became shy and harried and in another few years would have been wiped out. Now thanks to energetic activity by the Blue Nile Province Police under the leadership of the Park Warden, poaching has practically ceased and the game has recovered extra-ordinarily quickly is again becoming tame, and probably back to prewar numbers.

The Dinder has a long sporting history, and parties have been going there for shoots from the beginning of the century. In those days the expedition was made on camels and the organization necessary to prepare it must have been enormous. Here is a suggested trip for a shooting trip for Lord Kitchener in 1911 :

*Port Sudan.* An ibex drive could be arranged in the neighbourhood, if the length of his stay permitted. If this is wanted he should allow two or three days, and wire beforehand.

- Jan. 14th. (Rail) Leave Khartoum 8 a.m. arrive Sennar 6.35 p.m.
- „ 15th. (Camels) Leave Sennar. Stop night at Abu Naam, on river.
- „ 16th. (Camels) Abu Naam to Singa.
- „ 17th. (Camels) Singa to Abu Hashim, on Dinder.
- „ 18th. (Camels) March up to Dinder, passing Durraba.
- „ 19th. (Camels) March up Dinder.
- „ 20th. Begin shootign.

(Here a fortnight might be allowed for shooting on the Dinder up to the Abyssinian frontier and back. Either going or returning he might turn off the Dinder at the junction of the Khor Galagu to visit the lagoon of Ras Amer, on march. From this point he could, leaving Ras Amer in afternoon or on to the Rahad next morning, and follow that up to the frontier, returning same way to the Dinder. Finish shooting on Dinder, say Feb. 3rd., and allow four days for getting back to Sennar.

*Game* likely to be met with on this line : Elephant, Buffalo, Hippo, Lion, Leopard, Giraffe, Roan Antelope, Kudu (near the Abyssinian frontier), Tora Hartebeest, Tiang, Waterbuck, Reedbuck, Bushbuck, Ariel, Gazelle, Oribi, Warthog, Bustard.

Feb. 8th. (New Railway) Sennar to Kosti.

„ 9th. (Steamer) Leave Kosti.

„ 10th. „ Arrive Renk.

„ 11th. „ Arrive Jebel Ahmed Aga. Two or three days shooting there and at Meshra Rom, two or three hours South. *Game* Buffalo, Roan, Tiang, Giraffe, Waterbuck, White-eared Cob, with possibility of a few other species.

„ 15th. Arrive Taufikia.

„ 16th. to 20th. Five days shoot up the Zeraf.

*Game* on Zeraf. Waterbuck (very good heads), White-eared Cob, Tiang, Reedbuck, Roan Antelope, Giraffe, Rothschild, Gazelle, good chance lion, Hippo, off chance Elephant.

Feb. 21st. and 22nd. Two days for vicinity of Lake No and to go a short distance up the Bahr el Ghazal. This is the best chance of Mrs. Gray's Waterbuck and best heads of White eared Cob. Also possibility of Lion and Elephant.

Feb. 23rd. to about March 10th. or 11th.

Bahr el Gabel to Gondokoro, allowing about ten days for shooting. This could add chance of a good Elephant, a Black Rhino, Jackson's Hartebeest, Uganda Cob, etc. Further suggestions as to best places on the Bahr el Jebel according to local conditions can be offered later."

He evidently enjoyed his trip as in the following letter to Sir Reginald Wingate dated 31st January from Gondokoro he suggests that the Upper Dinder be turned into a private preserve :

" I am so taken with shooting in the Sudan. I want to ask you whether it would be possible to hire a tract of country on the Upper Dinder. It would have to be a big piece to look after the game properly—some 50 miles by 30 near the Abyssinian frontier. Of course one would keep all regulations forest and game and I would take on a certain number of people to look after it and be able to get out to my own shooting in the winters. Would this be possible? Mc Murdo tells me the country on the Upper Dinder is quite deserted. Could you let me know what the Government would require for such a concession? I would then mark on the map the piece I would take in hand and put up a shooting box and employ men to look after the Game, etc."

The Game Warden's reply follows:—" I am of opinion that it would be almost impossible for the Government to make this particular concession to Lord Kitchener.

" Not more than fifty or sixty miles of the upper Dinder are good game country, and such a concession as is proposed would practically mean the whole of this if both banks of the river were included in the breadth of thirty miles, or half of it if the concession lay all on one side of the river.

"The Dinder is quite our most popular shooting ground, and there is no other district so accessible and so well stocked with game which could be opened to visitors instead of it. At the present moment there are 20 or 21 holders of £E. 50 licences on this river. To make it into a private reserve would very greatly reduce the attractiveness of the Sudan to sportsmen in general.

"While I consider that it would be very inadvisable to make the particular concession which Lord Kitchener suggests, I think it might be possible to entertain an alternative proposal. But I think the tract of country applied for should be one not at present open to shooting parties, nor a conveniently accessible district which would probably be opened shortly. A large private reserve should, if possible, be so remote that the closing of it would not be an appreciable loss to other sportsmen."

It shows that at that time there were 21 sportsmen shooting on the Dinder. It must have been quite a dangerous place. I wonder, who outfitted all these parties and how they arranged, who was to shoot where. Evidently it was not the Game Warden as in another letter to H.E. The Governor-General on Lord Kitchener's proposal he says it is 8 years since he visited that part.

Earlier in the century 1905 there were still Black rhinoceros in the Dinder. Today as far as I know there are none North of Bor though rumours of a strange beast with a clover shaped spoor still occur in Nasr district.

A letter from Mr. George Harrison of Philadelphia to the Editor Sudan Notes and Records which has been passed to me follows:—

"On February 17th 1906, when shooting on the Dinder River, I saw two Black Rhinos. These were the only ones I saw on a shooting trip to the Abyssinian border and back. Nor did I see any other spoor of Rhinos. I saw them near a place my men called El Abiat. At that time there were no villages above Abu Hashim. But a more interesting fact about this animal was the so called "discovery" of the White Rhino on the Upper Nile by Major St. Hill Gibsons in 1900. I have often wondered why no notice was taken of its discovery by Speke and Grant in 1862. On page 328 of the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society for 1872 there is an account by Lt. Colonel J.A. Grant of the White Rhino on the Upper Nile. Among the animals listed by him is:

"Rhinoceros Simus (Burchell)—the white two-horned Rhinoceros is found in Karagweb where several specimens were shot. It is larger than the bicorios. J. H. S. (John Hanning Speke) the enormous length of the first horn, the flat and non-prehensile upper lip and the difference in the skin distinguish this animal at once, but it is rare in comparison to the other."

“Although Speke and Grant were only a short time with Sir Samuel Baker at Gondokoro, one would think that for a few minutes at least the talk would turn to Big Game, for Speke was a famous shikari. But stranger still is that no one going to the Upper Nile took the trouble to “read up” on its resources.

“Perhaps this may be of interest.”

Apart from his Dinder information Mr. Harrison's remarks on the discovery of the White Rhino are also of interest.

In view of the recent discovery of the Black Rhino on the West bank one wonders if there were black as well as White there in Speke and Bakers' days. There must be a wealth of big game history hidden away in old files and the memories of sportsmen who visited this country in the early years of the century.