

# AFRICA SPEAKS

## A STORY OF ADVENTURE

THE CHRONICLE OF THE FIRST TRANS-AFRICAN  
JOURNEY BY MOTOR TRUCK FROM MOMBASA  
ON THE INDIAN OCEAN TO LAGOS ON THE  
ATLANTIC, THROUGH CENTRAL EQUATORIAL  
AFRICA

BY

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### WHITE RHINOCEROSES

WHERE the River Nile flows as a sluggish stream between wide expanses of papyrus swamp, and the sun pours down a deadly heat, there still exist, in a small area, a few white rhinoceroses, the third largest of living land mammals.

After the shower at Pakwach, we headed inland. The trail we followed resembled a road, but we were the first to ever attempt its passage in motor trucks. Every culvert caved in, while most of the ground was so soft that we found it necessary to pull in low gear for many miles. Naked people ran out from the villages to gaze in wonder as we passed, for they had never seen a motor car before. Laughing and shouting, they would run after us like a lot of children, until the trucks outdistanced them. We stopped at Alui for lunch, finding here a boy who spoke Swahili. He gave us the cheerful news that many deep ravines were ahead — that some were bridged, but most were not. During the day, the second truck went through a culvert, breaking a rear spring, while hours of driving in low gear had burned out the clutch.

We camped the first night at Ngal, and hardly had the equipment been unloaded when a group of naked native girls arrived with water, firewood, eggs, and fowls. The camp was now plentifully supplied with meat, for I had made another fluke shot that afternoon,

killing two oribi with one bullet. I had taken a careful bead on one animal, and the missile had passed through it and struck another which was standing beyond.

The next day proved to be one of the hardest of the expedition, for from sunrise to sunset our total mileage was ten and one-half. There were five bridges to traverse—not regular bridges as we think of them—but logs thrown across rivers, upheld by forked limbs and surfaced with bamboo.

We made an inspection of these primitive crossings as we came to them, finding it necessary to unload everything from the trucks and run them over empty. Luckily for us, as soon as the trucks stopped, a crowd of natives would appear almost at once, and these were put to work carrying the loads to the other side. The Alulu people are good workers, often running with their loads, seeming to enjoy it greatly. As I watched the women carry heavy burdens on their heads, I could not but wonder what they would think of the easy life led by the average civilized housewife, who sometimes complains if she has to get her husband an early breakfast!

Two of these bridges were more than fifty feet high and two hundred feet long, and, to lessen the chances of an accident, we hauled the trucks over with a long rope pulled by a hundred or more natives. Even then, it required plenty of nerve to sit at the wheel and guide the trucks, for the crude spans swayed like long snakes, while bamboo crosspieces snapped underneath.

After this arduous day, we were thankful to reach the village of Nebbi and make camp for the night. Here I sent for the Sultan, as I wanted to learn something about his people. He came at once and proved

to be a fine young man with strong features, a pleasant manner, and broad smile.

Gelasega was the name of this subchief who ruled over the Medaere, a subtribe whose territory extended from Ngal to Nebbi. He was the son of Sultan Amula, the paramount ruler of the Alulu, who holds his court at Okaro. We served him with tea, and then, as he spoke Swahili fluently, I was able to get first-hand information about this strange and little-known people.

The country of the Alulu covers that large area extending from the west bank of the River Nile into the high hills near Okollo, and I was assured that his people were very old, that they had lived in this country since the early time of man. What a history must be theirs! — a history, however, lost in the dust of ages, for try as he would, this young sultan could tell no tale of the past that rang true, so I found it necessary to confine myself to the present.

The marriage customs of different African tribes are always interesting, each tribe having some peculiar practice of its own. Among the Alulu, as among many other tribes, the woman is considered a valuable piece of property, a thing to be bargained over, to be sold and traded, to be used as a beast of burden, having no rights and few privileges.

Girls are married off by their fathers at from twelve to fourteen years of age, the girl having nothing to say in the matter. The father sells where he can get the best price. If he can sell to a rich man he may get as many as six oxen for her, while if he finds it necessary to sell to a poor man, the best he can expect is two oxen for the same girl. Cattle is the money of the country, the standard on which all value is based.

When the girl's father has agreed upon her purchase price, he kills a goat; the boy's father also kills a goat. Then a feast is prepared to which all the friends are invited, and thus the marriage is consummated with meat and a native beer called *mwembi*.

Each man has as many wives as he can afford to buy, for the more women he has, the more children he can raise, the girls to sell and the boys to work for him until their marriage, while the women, of course, in addition to bearing many children, do all the hard labor.

The father of a boy helps him to buy his first wife, which amounts to the same thing as a civilized father placing his son in business. He must earn the others for himself, and his success in life is measured by the number of wives he leaves to mourn his passing. When a husband dies, his wives, along with his cattle and other property, go to his eldest brother, who adds them to his list of assets. If the widows do not like their new husband, they can select some other man, who can get them by paying to the new owner their list price in cattle. Middle-aged and old widows bring a very small price, and sometimes the eldest brother who falls heir to an odd lot of old wives feels unkindly toward his late of kin.

When I asked this young chief about the custom of their women going naked, he replied that they had always gone so; that it was best for their bodies. A man was stronger and could take a chance of clothing breaking down his health; besides, there was only one man in a family to buy clothing for, but each man had many wives, and it would ruin him if he had to buy clothes for all of them!

We were traveling through a poor game country, although we encountered a few antelope, some kongoni, and wild pigs. According to our guide, there were large herds of elephants along the river and plenty of leopards and numerous lions in the highlands. The Alulu catch both lions and leopards in wooden traps; they also spear any of these cats that attack their stock. As we pushed farther toward the Congo, the contour of the country changed, small green hills, covered with short trees, taking the place of the flat tropical country adjacent to the river. Large groves of banana plants lined the streams, these proving to be the proper plantains which form one of the principal food supplies of these ancient people.

As we passed through the villages of Paidá, Neapea, Zeio, Warr, Kango, and Logiri, the entire population turned out and cheered as the strange wagons roared by. This is Africa at its darkest — the Africa that the early explorers knew, unspoiled by the semicivilization that has arisen in so many parts, without, so far as my personal observations go, doing anything of real value for the black man.

At Arua I went to see the British official in charge of the district and his first question was as to the route we had come. When I replied "from Pakwach," he was more than surprised, and asked how many bridges we had wrecked! It seems that we were the first ever to land at Pakwach and motor to Arua, the road and bridges being only for foot safaris.

The government of Uganda and those who administer the affairs of the West Nile Province are not very keen to have anyone enter the district where the rare white rhino has its sanctuary. When they do give permission,



Alulu village in the hill country on the west bank of the Nile.



Uganda. The bad boy of Africa, a bull buffalo.



At a rest camp during the journey from Pakwach to Arua.



A small Alulu boy takes his brother for a ride. Note his masterful haircut.



it is only with the understanding that under no circumstances will any of the beasts be harmed. Having assured them on this score, I was allowed to take my party out in search of the animal, in order that photographs might be obtained.

Forty-two miles by road brought us again to the Nile, and there we camped close to its shore. That night it rained like the flood, a real tropical storm, with huge flashes of lightning and deafening peals of thunder, the crashes of which rolled across the heavens with such tremendous roaring that the earth itself trembled.

Next morning pishi held up a glass of drinking water, alive with all sorts of grotesque creatures, for my inspection. I had been warned to insist upon the boiling of all water as a precaution against guinea worm and other parasites, but an interesting fact about the African cook is that he cannot be taught to boil water for drinking purposes. To him there is absolutely no sense in doing such a thing, but if you tell him to make tea, he boils the water thoroughly, because he knows that good tea cannot be made otherwise. For that reason, we never drank water in dangerous localities, consuming, instead, gallons and gallons of tea.

After breakfast, I went down to the river's edge to gaze upon the huge papyrus swamp that stretches from the opposite side to the distant horizon, a swamp that teems with poisonous reptiles and all that order of things that love the dark and the damp. Pythons of enormous size make this their home, but cross the river in search of small game. Hippos dwell on the edge, and many buffalo live not far away.

On our side of the Nile lives the white rhino — that rare and strange beast left over from the long ago, from the age when all the animals of the earth were weird of form and armed for battle. It was with a feeling that I had been transported back into the age of flying reptiles and saber-toothed tigers that I followed the lithe negro who strode in front of me, as the little party wound its way through the tall grass and over a landscape that fitted perfectly into my mental picture of the prehistoric earth.

No matter in what country you hunt rhino, it is always the same story of weary miles under a scorching sun, for all members of this family seem to pick the hardest and most trying country for their haunts. Mile after mile we walked, and soon I was dripping with perspiration; but just as I felt inclined to call a short halt, the boy ahead stopped short and pointed to a clump of small trees. Coming up to him, I made out two light-colored shapes standing in the shade. They moved slightly as I looked, thus proving that they were not ant hills, like the many "rhino" we had already seen. This cow and calf must have gotten a whiff of us, for they were very shy and gave us a hard half-hour's work in attempting to photograph them, the whole effort netting me one graflex negative and no motion pictures at all, or at least none worth bragging about.

When they shifted and got into the open, so that a good view was had of them, we appreciated for the first time the tremendous bulk of these animals. The cow loomed over the calf like an ocean liner over a tugboat, and the latter was large enough to attract attention in any company, even though it was only half

grown. As Jones and I stalked them with cameras, rushing here and there to get into a position where a good picture could be taken, our two gun boys tried their best to keep close at hand, but twice when the cow lost her temper and snorted in our direction the boys made short work of getting into a high perch, leaving us sans guns and too tired to run.

The cow kept circling until she got our wind, then with a loud snort, kicked up her heels and made tracks too fast for us to follow. The calf also made tracks, sometimes getting in its mother's way, only to be pushed almost off its feet. Upon regaining its equilibrium it would then make a frantic start, soon overtaking its mother, and so they disappeared from sight.

Things had happened so fast, and I was so keen to get pictures, that I had little time to make notes of the animal itself, so we started in search of more white rhino, taking a long circle toward camp, which would carry us near the Nile. We came upon many water buck and some Uganda kob, but no rhino.

There was still about two hours of daylight left, so Jones, taking my heavy rifle and some boys with him, trekked along the Nile bank in the opposite direction from which we had just come. He found a place only a short distance away that was teeming with buck, while buffalo were plentiful. Wounding a buffalo bull, he started in pursuit, then had an experience which is interesting as proving how little is known about the distribution of some African animals. We had been assured by several men, who undoubtedly thought they knew the facts, that there were no common, or black, rhino in the district inhabited by the white members of the family.

The wounded buffalo ran over the brow of a small hill, with Jones following behind. As he neared the crest of the hummock, an ugly black snout appeared, and he raised his rifle to fire, thinking it to be the buffalo. He discovered his mistake just in time to save shooting a big black rhino bull who had heard him coming and was anxious to greet whatever came over the hill. Back tracking to windward of this beast, he gained a point of vantage and found that Mr. Rhino was guarding a female and a small calf. Here was a whole family of black rhinoceroses in a country supposed to be inhabited solely by the white representative of the species!

This is a wild and out-of-the-way country very seldom visited by white men, a district where primitive man still lives as he has for untold centuries, for the little contact he has had with the white race has changed him but slightly, and his ways of living not at all.

There is a young Scotchman who gets about this district in the interests of a large trading company, and as he happened along during our stay we had him for dinner one evening. He told us of an experience he had been through during the construction of his bungalow. The doors had not yet been hung, although otherwise the place was finished. He was sleeping in the bedroom and at his feet slept his only companion, a small dog. During the night he heard a slight noise and wakened just in time to catch a glimpse of a leopard as it bolted through the doorway with his dog in its mouth.

Leopards are bloodthirsty brutes anywhere, but seem to be very bad about here. I was shown a leopard

skin, not yet dry, that had come off a large male killed by an officer at Arua, and was told that this spotted cat had attacked several native children. While the leopard is bad enough, he cannot compare with a lion that has turned man eater. Where game is plentiful there are very few cases of man-eating lions, but in a country like this where some districts are almost empty of game, they occasionally appear.

In a native village less than five miles from our camp, a lion had recently been killed after terrorizing the villagers for many months. This old lion started its career by killing a woman near the spring when she went for water. Having once tasted human flesh, it demanded more and laid in wait near the spring until another woman had been added to the list. The natives now avoided this place, but the man-eater was cunning and stalked the women as they worked in the sweet potato patches or in the maize fields, until it had killed and eaten eleven women. The men at last went to the white man for help. A trader came out from the post and managed to shoot the brute, but it will be a long time before the people of that village forget this terror of both daylight and dark.

Early in the morning we again went in search of the white rhinoceros, and this time were successful beyond all expectations. An hour's walk brought us to a place where some of the animals had wallowed that night; so, taking their spoor, we tracked them over hill and dale until I had just about reached the melting point. It was impossible to make out how many rhinoceroses were ahead of us, for the tracks would branch off and then join again, then all would walk almost in the same footprints. In far less mileage than we had cov-

ered on the previous occasion we came upon them. Gathering the party together into a compact group, the cameras were made ready for action, then with two boys to carry the big movie outfit, one gun bearer for any emergency that might arise, and Jones and I each with a small camera, we crept slowly toward them.

Now both of us had stalked the black rhinoceros and I had filmed more than one of these truculent creatures, but this was a different animal, and the surprise and thrill that awaited us around the corner of a small bush is impossible to describe. There stood not two but five huge beasts, one of which would tower over a black rhinoceros like the Woolworth Building over Trinity Church! How many tons of flesh were represented there I cannot state, but this mammoth pachyderm gave me a good reason to look around to see if the gun bearer were close at hand. He was not!

The bull stood broadside on, a mountain of flesh and bone, the profile of head and horns outlined against the sky in such a way as to be more impressive than if seen against a background of trees. They had no suspicion of our being there and went on feeding and nosing about. Placing the camera in position, I began to grind away, and as I did, had the time to make a few mental notes. These rhino are not white, but might appear so in certain light. The actual color is a light reddish brown. The horns are very long and quite slim, the front horn being the longer in all cases — how long I would not care to say, for it would only be a guess, but the record horn for a white rhinoceros cow is over sixty-two inches. Its muzzle was truncated and had no prehensile tip, this being why it is sometimes referred to as the square-lipped rhinoceros. The

skull has great length, and when the beast turned and faced me I could not but remark on the enormous width of its face, caused by the square mouth and flat front surface of the horn. When it walked, its head was carried low, and it seemed that the earth jarred just a bit.

The huge bull walked slowly to within thirty yards of me and then must have heard the clicking of the camera, for he moved away, to be followed by seven more! I filmed them all as they crossed the screen, one behind the other.

After this scene, we photographed the mammals for some three hours, from many different positions. In so doing, we took quite a few chances, for although their vision is poor and their hearing not very good, they have a marvelously keen scent, and as the wind was somewhat gusty and often veered about, it kept us busy keeping to their windward. Once the breeze suddenly changed and placed us in a rather uncomfortable position. We were almost surrounded by the eight rhinoceroses, when a whiff of air carried knowledge of our presence to a cow with calf. She turned on us and snorted, then made a short dash forward and things looked nasty for a while. Behind us, within forty yards, stood three of the group, two more were close at hand on our right, while the big bull was eyeing us from a distance of not more than fifty paces to our left. Had the cow charged, it would have been hard to decide which way to run!

We kept after a young bull, trying to get some real close-ups, until he got peeved at our persistence and charged. It came as a complete surprise, for we had by now got quite used to the rhinoceros and had lost all fear, so there was a mad scramble for a while. The

beast had all the advantage, for in a hand-to-hand battle he would have won hands down, while we could not shoot, no matter if he did charge. As he rushed toward my four-thousand-dollar camera, I forgot all else and tried to attract his attention to myself, at the same time looking about for a suitable tree. He came about half way, then showed some hesitation, and, just at this point, Jones got hold of his gun and fired a shot into the air. The report frightened him and away he went, this time in the proper direction for a charging rhinoceros!

Well satisfied with the day and thankful that nobody had been hurt, we trekked back to our camp on the Nile. Going down to its bank for a swim and to watch the hippos disporting across the way, we discussed the white rhinoceros and its probable fate under any government other than that which now protects it. We agreed that it should continue to be protected; for although a formidable beast and well able to hold its own against any opponent in the animal kingdom, it would soon vanish under the gunfire of the modern hunter.

The white rhinoceros is a left-over from prehistoric times, a weird animal as well as a rare one, a ponderous beast still tramping through the torrid heat, amid the silent jungles that skirt the western shores of the ancient Nile.





Alulu mother. Her costume consists of a bunch of grass suspended by a string. The baby's head is covered with a bowl.



An exceptional photograph of white rhinoceroses. In the center is a bull; the others are cows.

whitish coloring make it a very distinct species. The oryx is supposed to be the unicorn of antiquity. Height, four feet or more at the shoulder; weight, about four hundred fifty pounds.

## Q

**quagga zebra** (see zebra)

## R

**reedbuck, mountain** (*Redunca fulvorufula*).....Swahili: *tohe*  
**reedbuck, Ward's** (*Redunca wardi*).....Swahili: *tohe*

The mountain reedbuck is considerably smaller than the Ward's. There are several species widely distributed.

**rhinoceros, black** (*R. bicornis*).....Swahili: *faru*

The black rhinoceros is distinguishable from the white species more because of the prehensile tip to the upper lip than because of any difference in color. It also differs in the form of horns and ears and in the position of the eyes. It is smaller than the white rhino, but even at that a fair-sized beast.

**rhinoceros, white** (*R. simus cottoni*).....Swahili: *faru*

At one time this huge beast, the third largest of land mammals, was abundant, especially in the district between the Zambezi and Orange rivers, but has now been exterminated except where rigidly protected. It is the northern species which inhabits the west bank of the Nile River.

**roan antelope** (see antelope)

## T

**Thompson's gazelle** (see gazelle)

**tommie** (see gazelle, Thompson's)

**topi** (*Damaliscus korrigum jimela*)

Resembles the hartebeest, but is much richer in color, with lyre-shaped horns. Weight, about three hundred pounds

## W

**Waller's gazelle** (see gerenuk)

**Ward's reedbuck** (see reedbuck)