

THE ROARING VELDT

By
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*Illustrated with 63 Photographs
by the Author*



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LIONVILLE.

Apparently these two great boulders made an ideal retreat for lions on a sweltering day. In all, we counted fourteen in this group, every one of which seemed to be at peace with his neighbor. Here was an impressive scene that spoke well for the amiability of lions among their own kind.

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have I felt nervous in their company, though of course I carried a revolver. I have only heard of one or two instances, and those were near Nairobi and the precepts of civilization, when the native boys annoyed a white woman.

Once away from Africa, with a dulled memory of the petty troubles that arose inevitably from time to time, I can always see the entire adventure more clearly. One of my most cherished impressions is that of our black boys at their work and play. I have never seriously had to revise my original idea of them. I still feel that they are children of the earth.

CHAPTER IX

A PREHISTORIC BACHELOR

A LOT of folk who go to Africa have called the rhino the moron of the veldt. A lot of others have called him the supreme pest. And a lot have called him both. All I have to say is that no matter what they call him, he has only himself to blame.

It is only fair to add, however, he is handicapped by nature. In sight and hearing, at least, he is way below par. Even his sense of smell is not nearly as keen as that of an elephant or buffalo.

To see a rhino suddenly blinking in your direction from the edge of the bush, as your safari line begins to break up and take to the trees, is one of the most bothersome of all bothersome events in the life of an African traveller. As you watch him tossing his great head and scuffing his ponderous feet it is impossible to know what he is going to do next. And the worst of it is, you know he is far more undecided than you are—which may mean a bolt straight towards you.

Probably you have wakened him from a sound sleep, which is the first cause of his irritation. Then he

has caught your wind, and either can't make up his mind where it comes from, or else goes into one of his petty fits of rage and decides to settle the source of it once and for all. His handicaps have made him suspicious and moody, and these characteristics seem to be too much for whatever sense he may possess.

However, I don't think he's really quite as stupid as many people believe. When civilization once begins to threaten him, he can learn how to change his habits in a surprisingly short time. Not so long ago he was much more of a plains animal than he is now. Somehow an idea of caution has been beaten into his little brain. On short notice he can even change his feeding time from day to night.

When undisturbed he is regular in his habits and usually likes to keep by himself. He is the crusty old bachelor of the African animal world. And I suppose that like almost every bachelor, when the least thing goes wrong in his routine, he gets peevish and kicks up a row.

When he comes for you, he is one of the most impressive sights I know. The ancients used to represent him in a regular coat of armor that looked like a steel plate. You can't help feeling they were right, when that massive gray body bears down on you with head lowered so that the terrible horn points straight at you above the beak-like mouth. Of all animals besides the elephant he reminds you most of a monster



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WORKING UP A TEMPER.

You never know where a rhino's next move will be. This old fellow is aware of our presence and is trying to make up his mind whether to charge or go about his business. Like every rhino at such a time he is irritated as well as inquisitive. Time and time again we were deliberately charged by these sullen monsters.



UNDER THE SPELL OF KILIMANJARO.

This beautiful peak, which rises more than nineteen thousand feet out of the plains of Tanganyika, is hard to photograph under even the best of conditions. On its slopes live great herds of elephants which have made it their home for centuries.

that is out of place in the twentieth century, as well as in countless centuries past.

One of the few really serious charges that we ever sustained from a rhino—I mean, one of those blind unprovoked rushes that most sportsmen agree are characteristic of that ungainly animal—happened one morning when we went out after lions.

We had just gotten back to camp, eager for breakfast after an early morning examination of the tracks around a neighboring water hole, when one of our boys reported seeing a rhino in a clearing about a quarter of a mile away. This interested us because we felt we might get a splendid picture. And so we went out to look for him ourselves. Besides Herman and myself, our party included Frank Greswolde-Williams, a friend I shall mention more at length later on.

The boy led us out to the clearing where in the distance, about eighty yards away, we saw our rhino snoozing comfortably under a small tree. At first, against the yellow grass, he looked for all the world like an overgrown mud-pie. Then we noticed that his everlasting friends were with him—the little tick-birds that flutter along a rhino's back and by keeping a lookout for him, save him the trouble and expense of a visit to the oculist.

I was to take the picture, so I held the camera ready for action.

“Sneak up as close to him as you can without alarm-

ing him," whispered Frank. "We're well to leeward, and I think you can get pretty close."

"I'll back you with the gun, if he gets fussy," said Herman, "but I think he looks too lazy to give us much trouble."

Very carefully I made a stalk which brought me to within forty yards of our prehistoric friend. He was a grand bull, and already I was anticipating a perfect portrait of his ugly old poker-face. Herman and Frank followed quietly a little way behind and watched me as I raised the camera to my eyes for a peek through the finder. Although I was using a standard sized Bell and Howell machine I was surprised at how tiny that large bulk looked through my finding piece.

I intended this to be merely a preliminary study before crawling nearer for a "close-up." Even at that distance, however, the grinding of the camera seemed unusually loud, and I hoped Herman was close enough behind me. I didn't actually suppose the rhino would hear the rasping noise I was making, but I was frankly nervous just the same.

As a matter of fact the rhino did hear it. I was still watching him in the finder when I saw him raise his head weightily and seem to sniff in my direction. Before I knew it he was up like a flash and was charging straight down towards the camera.

For a few moments I kept reeling off film, delighted

with the thought of the fine picture I was getting. The rhino looked so insignificant through the eye of the camera that I couldn't believe he was very near.

Then I heard the report of a gun behind me and thought to myself: "Good for Herman! He's shooting across the old fellow's bow to turn him and give me a chance for a broadside portrait." But I noticed that the rhino kept on coming, faster—if possible—than before. It wasn't until I heard a second shot that I felt something must be wrong and that Herman was firing in real earnest.

Looking quickly away from the camera I saw in front of me, instead of a miniature beast approaching from a distance, an enormous bulk bearing down on me not twenty-five feet away! It was like passing suddenly from a pleasant doze into the shadow of a nightmare. I don't think I ever ducked aside so quickly in my life!

Then came the third shot. Luckily for me, it sent a bullet straight through the rhino's brain. The great brute plunged forward into the dust like a spent projectile, rolled over, and lay with his four legs kicking at the sky.

Soon he relaxed and lay still. It was all over but the shouting. I confess I felt terribly shaky but I don't think I felt as shaky as Herman, who had had to shoulder the responsibility.

I was chagrined too. By ducking aside, I had lost

a picture we should have valued highly later on. If only I could have stood my ground! Then I would have captured a thrilling moment that would always have made me very proud. But no doubt I did the right thing—at any rate, I like to think I did.

Anyway, the picture I got was fairly exciting. It wasn't as good as some of the rhino pictures Herman took later—one of which consisted of a fine close-up of a cow rhino with her calf—but to see it now is at least a reminder of the greatest "kick" I ever got out of a rhino in British East Africa.

Herman's picture of the cow and calf was also taken under difficult circumstances. These were caused mostly by that paragon of a gun-bearer, Simba, who insisted upon climbing a distant thorn tree when he should have been standing by with the gun.

Herman had been scouting through rhino country one afternoon accompanied by Simba and two or three other boys. Pretty soon he ran across the cow, with her three-quarters grown "toto," and after a painstaking stalk, started to take a picture. Hiding behind a tree he had reeled off about thirty feet of film when the old dowager began to get nervous. She took to trotting up and down like a fidgety speculator waiting for news on the ticker-tape.

This made the boys even more fidgety. Simba in particular began to look longingly around the landscape, mentally making note of the most promising

trees. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer. Relinquishing the gun, he took himself off at a pace that was somewhat between a frenzied sprint and a dignified walk. The other boys caught the hint and also increased the distance between themselves and the rhino. But Simba, for once, didn't fail to carry through the project he had begun. He found a fine tree, some thirty yards off and swarmed up it like a foremast hand in a hurry to repair a topsail.

This left Herman in a rather ticklish predicament. He took the gun and propped it up against the small tree he was crouching behind, then reeled off some more film. By this time even the calf had caught the contagion of its mother's unrest. Both began to sniff and snort, catching Herman's wind at intervals and feeling very puzzled about it.

Like all rhino they were inquisitive and irritable. But Herman didn't give them a chance to gratify their curiosity by moving unduly or attracting their attention. He just kept grinding out his picture which improved every moment. Pretty soon the old cow, deciding suddenly that this was probably no place for children, gave a last disgruntled snort and hurried her offspring away.

Herman, in telling me about it afterwards, couldn't help laughing.

"When it was all over," he said, "Simba came down out of his tree and walked over to me as though nothing

had happened. He picked up the gun again and stood there holding it, the picture of quiet courage and efficiency. We could still see the two rhino in the distance kicking up eddies of dust, and Simba glared at them as though to say he'd get even with them some day for disturbing his master. He also looked sternly at the other boys, who had come drifting back, and shook his head at them reproachfully. Sometimes I actually think it's worth while having a gun-bearer like Simba."

Occasionally, while we were in the northern frontier district after elephant, a stray rhino used to rush into the midst of our boys when they went down to the river for water. When that happened, you can hardly imagine the bedlam of yells and confusion of scurrying feet that followed. The boys simply dropped whatever they were carrying and vanished in all directions as though a magician had made a pass at them and wished them over in the next colony. And when it was all over they came straggling casually back again, laughing and talking as though nothing had happened.

Like many other people I have spoken to on the subject, I don't believe they had been charged deliberately. More probably the rhino had become suddenly alarmed by their scent and was just dashing off helter-skelter in the first direction he thought of. But you couldn't convince any of the boys of that. Each one of them believed Mr. Rhino had singled him out particularly

and then had taken a nasty sort of pleasure in chasing him all over the African veldt.

One night a rhino actually "charged" our camp. I was the sole white person at home at the time, Herman being hot on an elephant's trail a couple of days' journey away. About eighty of the native porters were with me, but Abdi and I were the only ones armed.

I had given instructions to keep the camp-fires burning brightly all the time. But the boys had become careless after a long period when there had been no scares, and so it was hard now to make them take any instructions very literally. There had been a fire when I went to bed, but when I was suddenly awakened late in the night, the camp was shrouded in darkness. And in the thick of it I heard a series of noises that sounded as though all the hobgoblins in Goblin Land were holding a revel outside my tent. Staccato shouts, long shrieks, piercing screams—it is beyond my power to describe them.

I knew that some animal must have visited camp, but I wasn't sure what kind it was until I heard the sound of a whistling snort a little way out in front of me. Then I realized, of course, that it was pesky Mr. Rhino choosing an inappropriate time to call. I think in this case that we had pitched camp on his favorite trail to a watering place.

Automatically I had taken up my gun and stood with it in my hands. Abdi loomed up beside me, faintly

outlined in the darkness, holding the extra one. It was evident that the rhino had wandered innocently into camp and then, catching our wind, had become confused and didn't know quite which way to turn. For a second or two he had run around in short circles, snorting like a grampus and scaring the natives even worse than he was himself.

Without even the aid of fire-light it had been hard for many of the boys to find a friendly tree. Therefore they had taken to milling around the rhino; and when he finally dashed off, crashing through the bushes, it is hard to say whether he or the boys had been more sobered by the experience! Suffice it to say that a few minutes afterwards the camp-fires began to leap and dance brightly.

Curiously enough, at noontime the next day came a message by runner from Herman, warning me to keep the fires burning every minute after dark. "The country literally swarms with rhino," ran the note. "All told, we saw thirteen yesterday, and eight of them deliberately charged us. Don't worry—but don't let the fires die out."

However he didn't have to caution me then. And as for the boys, some of them bore the physical marks of their lesson next morning when they presented themselves to me to be doctored up. A number of them had gotten painfully scratched by plunging

through the bush or climbing the thorn trees. One boy had driven a large thorn, as sharp as a spike, through the calf of his leg.

Our visitor that night had been undoubtedly on the way to water when he ran into us. He had been minding his own business as all rhinos do when they are left alone. And I have no doubt that by the time he got to the drinking hole he had managed to forget all about the rumpus, and perhaps had joined a couple of comrades in a game of squeals and pushes. For rhino, when they drink at night, often drop their mask of dull sobriety and play all kinds of pranks with each other, until the air resounds with their snorts and squeals.

One of the closest shaves our safari ever had with a rhino happened when I wasn't on the scene. It was during our first trip and my brother Hans was present at the time.

One day just as dawn was about to break, Herman and Hans, together with a white hunter who was with us, started out determined to get a good rhino. Our luck with rhinos so far had been wretchedly poor. We had seen a lot of spoor but it was always old and never worth following. So this time, anticipating an exceptionally hard day of it, they left me behind. Before they started off, Hans—who was to take pictures that day—handed me one of his guns

with a magnificent gesture and ordered me to shoot the lion we had heard prowling around the camp for hours during the night.

I had a lazy day of it, reading a bit and indulging in some target practice with my revolver. It was late in the afternoon when an advance guard of boys came dashing in, grinning triumphantly and waving a little rhino tail in token of victory. However I couldn't get much of the story out of them till Herman and Hans arrived and told it to me.

They had gotten about two miles from camp just as the daylight began to glimmer faintly around them. Herman got a quick shot at an impalla antelope but the light was so poor that he made a complete miss. They found they were nearing a native settlement and decided to go on foot from there.

Just as they left the car they discovered one of their boys hiding behind it in the hope of escaping strenuous duty. So Herman promptly gave him his heavy gun to carry, though he could hardly help laughing at the boy's appearance. The latter had somehow gotten hold of a white shirt which he wore very proudly with the shirt-tails flopping in the breeze like a nightgown. As he walked along beside the others, Herman said, he looked enough like an African ghost to have frightened almost any of our own southern darkies with their advanced ideas about spooks.

The six or eight other boys trudged along stolidly

enough with their loads of cameras, guns, food (including golden bananas), and whatever else had been given to them. And after a march of about two miles, the party suddenly came across rhino spoor—old, but perhaps worth following.

Fresher spoor was found a little further along, which began to lead into heavier bush. But soon it was evident that this new spoor had been made by a cow rhino and her "toto." The youngster, by the looks of the tracks, must have been about three-quarters grown; but as there was a law against going after any cow with young, that, so to speak, ended *that!*

By this time it was hotter than blazes. Herman and Hans and their companion found themselves perspiring profusely in the middle of a white hot furnace that seemed to be burning the scrub for fuel. As there seemed to be no other spoor for miles around they began to think of calling it a day. They stopped under a tree for a rest and a swig out of their water-bottles.

"I say!" said the hunter who was with them. "Have one of these banawnas. They're jolly good!"

But suddenly the spot where they were resting became too hot—even for "banawnas." Just as they were sitting down and relaxing, with the boys standing a little way off to one side, there was a snorting nearby in the bushes that sounded almost as loud as a noon-whistle. Whether or not the boys took it for that, they proceeded to quit work with a promptness that would

have taught even a gang of union laborers a trick or two. Like a flash they dropped their loads and darted in every direction of the compass. Four of them tried to climb a little tree that would ordinarily have groaned under the weight of a single boy. One or two of them still held on to the guns they had been carrying, and Herman's African "spook"—the last in line up the unhappy little tree—was one of them.

Then it was that the incongruous white shirt proved its worth. Herman looked for it instinctively. When he saw it, he grabbed it by the tails and snatched his gun out of the boy's hand just as the crashing sound in the bushes gave way to the appearance of the great black bulk of the rhino himself. The ornery old monster had charged from a distance of about forty yards, and was closing in fast when Herman turned him with a quick shot. Then, as the rhino swerved off through the bush, he fired again.

By this time Hans and the hunter came up. The former had the camera; and the latter, who had managed to retrieve his own gun with a bit of difficulty, followed Herman on the trail of the wounded rhino.

They hadn't gone many yards before the rhino was sighted going slowly up a dry river-bed. Herman watched him from a distance of about fifty yards, until suddenly he got a good chance for a broadside shot and dropped the old bull with a hit in the shoulder.

Just then Hans came dashing up, all out of breath,



THIS RHINO CHARGED IN HEAVY BUSH.

We always refer to him now as the "banana" rhino, because he charged just after the white hunter had solemnly offered Herman and Hans some bananas to refresh them after they had given up hope of seeing rhino that day. Herman managed to turn him just in time.

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RHINO MEAT À LA CARRE.

Our native boys carried loads of heavy rhino meat more willingly than they would have carried their usual loads at half the weight. They knew it spelled a feast for them later on.

with the heavy camera. He began his picture-taking even before Herman had an opportunity of giving the rhino a finishing shot. After he had gotten what he wanted and paused to wipe his dripping brow, his brother-in-law looked at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"Where were *you*?" Herman asked. "Why didn't you shoot when you saw him coming at us that way?"

"Shoot be damned!" he said indignantly, before he caught the other grinning. "All I had was this confounded camera—and I didn't even have that!"

When an understanding had been reached at last, the hardest labor of the day began. The rhino's head had to be cut off and covered with branches to protect it from the vultures. The native boys cut away great strips of their precious meat and threw them into the branches of trees, for the same purpose. And finally after a job rendered almost unendurable by the blinding sun, the party was ready to go back to camp.

Now, of course, the boys carried unbelievably heavy loads of tough rhino flesh and would have gladly taken on even more if they had been able. It is wonderful how much an African native can carry and how far he can walk when he really wants to.

When they had almost reached the car, Herman and Hans looked back in the direction of the fallen rhino. High in the sky, mere specks in the blue, a feathered army of scavengers was already gathering its bat-

talions. Soon it came tumbling down. And as they walked on, glad of the precautions they had taken with the great horned head, they could picture the scene that was taking place back there—the confusion of flapping wings, the hopping up and down of squat bird bodies, the whipping to and fro of naked skinny necks.

Somehow they felt that even this was part of the Africa that fascinated them. In its own strange way, it belonged.

CHAPTER X

LION WORLD

THE first lion I ever saw in Africa behaved in a way that made me rub my eyes and blink with wonder.

Unconsciously I was expecting a charge. In my mind's eye I could picture him bearing down on me with flaming eyes and open jaws. Ever since my childhood, when I had shuddered at stories about how he loved to eat people up, I had clung without realizing it to this idea of him. Even watching him in a cage as he paced restlessly behind thick iron bars, I had often wished those bars could be thicker.

A little later I was to learn that this childish appraisal of him had not been entirely wrong. But just now, when I saw him for the first time in his own wilds—he simply ran away.

It happened one day when we were tracking buffalo. Their spoor had led us straight to a water hole, and there, in the soft mud at its margin, we saw the imprint of a great circular pad that meant only one thing—lion!

Then we heard the one sound that above all others