

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE

AMAZON HEAD-HUNTERS

ZANZABUKU

[*dangerous safari*]

by

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motor, and entered the Semliki River. Near the delta we saw crowds of white, yellow-billed pelicans and marabou storks. We had a supply of fish along and tossed some to the storks, who were the most voracious creatures I've ever encountered.

The water in the river was very low at this time and innumerable crocodiles slept along the banks. But they were hard to spot, since they look so much like old logs or lumps of mud, until they slithered into the water at our approach. The water was so low that on several occasions the boat got stuck on sand bars, and some of the boys had to jump out and push. It was dangerous, of course, in the croc-infested stream, but they face such dangers daily and think nothing of it.

Men hunt crocodiles, but not for sport. In places where they abound, the animals are sitting ducks for a rifle, as they sleep on the bank with little birds cleaning their teeth and jaws for them. Hunters are interested in the valuable skins, from which pocketbooks, shoes, and other articles are made. Some game wardens have the task of searching out croc nests at the right times of the year, so they can destroy the eggs. A crocodile scoops out a depression in the sand, lays sixty or seventy eggs in it, and covers it up again. There are small lizards which love these eggs, but some crocs usually manage to grow out of one clutch of eggs. In spite of the fact that other animals and all mankind try to wipe out the crocodiles, they keep on reproducing plentifully.

Crocs are well adapted to their environment and are formidable beasts. They eat fish, men, women, children, dik-diks, baby hippos and almost anything they can get their jaws on. A crocodile can kill a rhino ten times its own weight—if the situation is just right and the rhino reacts the way rhinos usually do. The croc lies in shallow water, hidden, at a favorite drinking spot. The rhino comes along, steps into the water a few feet, and begins to drink. The croc grabs him by one leg, the rhino is angry and charges. This is where he makes his big mistake. If he pulled back he could get away, but a rhino's mentality is such that attack is his first thought. He charges, and

the croc merely hauls him in a little deeper until his snout is below water and he drowns. Then the croc has a big feast.

A crocodile can kill a small elephant the same way, but a full-sized elephant can lift a croc from the water with his trunk, smash him to the ground and then trample on him. A hippo can cut a crocodile in two with one bite, but hippo calves are favorite dishes of Charlie Croc. When hippos are about to have babies they usually clear out that whole section of the river so no crocodiles are around. And mother hippos take the precaution of carrying their little ones on their backs when they are traveling around. Most of the time hippos and crocs may be found in the same areas, but the crocodiles keep clear of the "river horses" unless they think they can sneak in a quick kidnaping of a hippo calf. They won't risk a fair battle with an adult hippo.

It is amusing to watch a big group of hippos together, in clusters of fifty to a hundred, provided you can sit in some safe spot, off the regular deeply cut tracks from water back to feeding places. Even if the hippos have noticed you at first, and submerged, they soon get used to you and go about their business. In the Rutshuru River, which I visited on my first two trips, and in the Kazinga Channel between Lakes George and Edward, along which we saw and photographed dozens of different animals in 1954, hippos are protected and thrive in great numbers. You can watch them for hours without getting bored, chiefly because they have such a good time. You find yourself smiling at their antics, trying to figure out how long one can stay under water, and marveling at the ease with which they handle themselves. A cow hippo plays happily with her little calf, making him slide off her back into the water, then helping him climb up again for another go at it.

If all the hippos in sight from your vantage point go to sleep, you can usually walk or move along the water's edge, or move by boat, a few hundred yards and you will find another group of a hundred or so hippos, and they will put on a show for you. Even in such hippo housing centers as the Rutshuru and Kazinga Channel, there are distinct herds that keep a little apart

in front of our cameras, so we got many good scenes over a period of several days.

The natives entered canoes some distance upstream from the spot where a herd of hippos was swimming, sleeping, playing and making love. Men with harpoons sat in the bow of each boat, spearsmen along both sides, and a paddler or two in the rear. But there was not much paddling. The canoes drifted down toward the hippos silently and smoothly, carried by the current. When a hippo near the edge of his group was spotted, the paddler of the first canoe guided the craft toward him. But it is almost impossible to approach a hippo within striking distance without his seeing what is coming. He submerges in the muddy water, leaving scarcely a ripple on the surface.

When a hippo submerges he may then do one of many things. He may just go down and lie quietly on the bottom, waiting for the intruders to pass on or go away. He may swim *away* from the menace, retreating to the middle of the herd just below him. He may advance toward the approaching craft with the intention of attacking it. Or he may turn to one side and hide temporarily in a muddy nook below the surface.

The natives assumed, first of all, that he might be just below the surface where he submerged. So they drifted over that spot and the harpooners thrust their sharp weapons blindly down into the water, hoping to draw blood. When their weapons struck only water, the paddler came to life and sent the canoe zigzagging back and forth across the river, hoping to catch the hippo as he surfaced again. But the first hunters had no luck with any of the hippos on their downward drift. When they were below the herd, they headed for the shallow waters along shore and poled their way upstream again, to repeat the whole maneuver.

Meanwhile four other canoes followed the first, but not a single hippo was harpooned that day—or the next two days. Finally, however, the infinite patience of the natives—and our cameraman—was rewarded. A harpoon struck home and blood boiled up through the muddy waters. There was a violent

thrashing in the water as the wounded hippo turned to attack, and the canoe rocked until we thought it would turn over. But in that brief encounter two more harpoons and several long spears were plunged into the big hippo, reaching vital spots that knocked the fight and life out of him in a hurry.

The job was not over, by any means, for the men then had to haul the animal to shore. But they had enough ropes attached to make it, and he was finally rolled up on the bank, to the joyous shouts of the Wadamba, who had not only rid the river of one more enemy but had found much needed food aplenty.

While hippos were often interesting and sometimes dangerous, they could not hold a candle to rhinos in either department. A rhino will eagerly attack a two-ton truck—and sometimes he'll win even that battle. The theory that all wild animals will let man alone if not annoyed or hunted is put to a severe test by the rhino, who seems to go around permanently angry. On the other hand, there are Carr Hartley's two tame white rhinos, who allow people to ride them piggy-back. They prove that *faru* is susceptible to kindness. And when I recall the number of times I *wanted* a rhino to charge for the sake of good movies, and the beast retreated or just paid no attention, I know that some rhinos occasionally remove the chips from their shoulders.

There's no way of knowing what a rhino will do, and that is what makes him so dangerous. You can only be sure that half the time he will charge a man anywhere near him, whether there has been provocation or not. And when a rhino charges he means business. He's fast and agile and determined.

To prove that stories of the ferocity and unpredictable behavior of the rhino are not exaggerated, I want to quote briefly from two news items in the *East African Standard* which I read during my 1954 trip. They served to increase my caution in dealing with these animals.

Col. Charles Haynes of Nyeri was killed by a rhinoceros which charged him and his wife as they were walking near their home at Nyeri airstrip. Col. Haynes saved his wife by thrusting her into bushes when he saw the rhino was going to charge. He was badly gored in the groin and died later in Mt. Kenya Hospital. The first indication of the animal's presence came when Col. Haynes's dog ran out from the bushes, frightened. The rhino followed . . . Nyeri residents have been increasingly worried by the animals which now appear regularly near houses and the airstrip.

Obviously the rhino, in this instance, considered the dog a sufficient provocation, became angry and charged, when most other wild animals would have stayed hidden in the bush or retreated, with or without dignity. The second item was more dramatic.

A bull rhino, disturbed by an operation in the forest around Treetops, charged into the Ol'Gatai Sisal Estate, killed two cows and then attacked cars on the Mweiga-Nyeri Road. The animal went for a car driven by Mrs. Ruby Beyts, wife of Brig. G. H. Beyts, District Officer, Mweiga. She swerved past it and on arrival home told her husband who phoned the police.

Meanwhile the rhino charged a truck owned by Col. G. Jarman, a Treetops White Hunter, who stopped the vehicle to let an Asian passenger alight. The Asian's shirt was ripped up the back—but he was unhurt. The animal charged the truck five times and later went up the drive to Brig. Beyts' house. A truck with four African policemen, including a sergeant with a Bren gun, came to the scene. The rhino made for the truck, threw everyone out, dug his horn into the floorboards of the vehicle and lifted it bodily. The sergeant opened fire and killed the animal.

Why is a rhino so belligerent? The most likely theory is that he is not very bright and his eyesight is poor. He cannot actually see anything clearly until it is about ten yards in front of him. But the beast makes up in courage what it lacks in

brains, and a keen sense of smell compensates for its poor eyesight. If you approach a rhino downwind, as any sensible person does, the animal is not aware of you until you are very close. He dimly makes out the menace in front of him; if there's danger where he's looking, he figures there is probably also danger behind him and to right and left. At least, he's assuming the worst and taking no chances. So he charges to break out of the supposed encirclement—and he goes in a straight line. The thickest brush growth is no barrier to him, as he can crash right through it. Don't think that because he looks so bulky and clumsy that you can dodge out of his way and his speed will carry him past you. He can wheel and turn in his own length, no matter how fast he is going, and would put to shame a polo pony in this department.

All other animals make way for a rhino. If *faru* and *tembo* meet on a narrow forest path, the elephant is the one that will detour. I doubt that a rhino could do much damage to an elephant, but the elephant will still decline an engagement. All natives feel the same way about the rhino. The Masai, bravest of the brave who kill charging lions with their thin spears, fear only one animal—the rhino. Incidentally, rhino horn—which is not genuine horn but compacted hair tissue—is more valuable than ivory. Throughout the Orient, many people consider powdered rhino horn a powerful aphrodisiac.

Perhaps it was foolish of me to set out to provoke a rhino to charge me. But a moving picture of a rhino is nothing unless he is charging. He's an ugly brute, and nobody enjoys looking at him in repose, as you can enjoy a reclining lion, an elephant quietly drinking water, a giraffe nibbling at leaves on a tall tree. With their thick hides that fit so badly that they seem to be made for some other creature, and their long, forward-sloping horns placed in the most unlikely position near the end of the nose, rhinos would look like amusing caricatures if they were not obviously so cantankerous.

My first intimate knowledge of rhinos came from the late

Lionel Hartley, who helped me in 1946 in the country around Mrito Andei. It was a rugged area, dry and covered thickly with thorny bush, including many of the aptly named "Wait-a-bits" whose thorns snatch at one's clothes and hold on. It was good rhino country.

After all the talk about the bull-headed belligerence of the rhino, you would think that it might have been simple to get one to charge me. But there were so many essential elements in my planned scene that we never managed to get them all together at once. There had to be, first of all, the rhino. Then there had to be a good tree for me to climb when *faru* charged me, plus a safe spot for my cameraman, preferably another tree, from which he could photograph rhino, me and the tree I escaped to. And the light had to be right. Hartley, of course, planned to cover the whole thing with his big .475 gun—it took a mighty jolt to stop a charging rhino, and there wouldn't be any time for second shots. Another essential was Hartley's ability to save me in an emergency, and he always inspired so much confidence that I was never really worried on this score.

We went out in a truck and saw our first rhino right away, but he heard the motor and didn't like it so ambled away out of sight. A few hours later, during which time we saw a fine pride of lions, we sighted a big bull rhino about two hundred yards away. When we stopped the truck, he retreated.

As we jolted our way over the countryside for several more hours I began to express doubts about the ferocity and even the presence of rhinos. The words were hardly out of my mouth when a big rhino suddenly lunged at the truck from behind a bush about seven feet away. But the truck was going fairly fast, and Hartley stepped on the accelerator, so the rhino missed. He took up the chase, however, and came so close to the rear of the truck that one of the Africans sitting there was petrified with fright and rolled over to get as near the truck cab as possible. Hartley speeded up and we finally pulled away from the angry beast, who might have toppled us with a charge against the side but couldn't do too much damage with a collision on the rear

of the vehicle. While this was all very exciting, I didn't get a picture. The rhino had not given me any time to get set.

During the next few days, this same sort of thing happened many times—a rhino suddenly charging from the bush—but these meetings were totally unproductive photographically. Hartley explained that we had to find a rhino quietly feeding, approach him downwind, find the necessary trees, then let the rhino know we were there, whereupon he would charge. After several days, we came upon a feeding rhino who did not hear or see us. We watched the little tick birds that walked up and down his back, picking lice from the folds of his skin, and hoped we would not disturb them. They are very alert, and often serve as the rhino's eyes. If they became alarmed at our presence, they would fly up with little cries and head in our direction to tell the rhino where to look for trouble.

We inched the truck to within a hundred yards of the animal without disturbing anyone. From here the cameraman could photograph the scene with relative safety, since the rhino would presumably be charging me rather than the truck. We found a tree off to the left that I might climb, but Lionel decided it was too fragile; the rhino might knock it over. Farther away we found a tree that was good, but it was out of position for the cameraman. So we switched around, put the cameraman in the good tree, and decided that I would run for the truck. All set at last, I walked slowly toward the feeding rhino, taking pictures with my own camera. I wanted to catch that moment when he looked up, saw me, and started his charge directly for me. Then I'd fly and hope to make the truck in time.

He finally looked up, all right, but instead of charging he just turned and trotted away into the bush. And we had lost a couple of hours!

Patience, patience—how much of it is needed! And how thin it was running by that time. That is when camera hunting becomes dangerous. After days of frustration—from uncooperative animals, rain, poor light or any of a dozen causes—the

photographing explorer is too eager. When he finally encounters an animal in favorable circumstances, he is likely to take foolish risks.

I know that I finally took chances I shouldn't have when we finally came upon a big bull feeding. Although he looked peaceful to me, Hartley said this particular animal was *kali* and ought to be "full of fun." I have no idea how Hartley could tell. Perhaps it was the rutting season, when rhino bulls are all nervous and irritable. They have a right to be, for among rhinos, the female is the aggressor in love-making and will chase an attractive bull for miles, then butt him furiously until he agrees to give her what she wants.

We found a tree for the cameraman, a sound tree for me about forty-five feet from the rhino. The light was right, and Hartley stationed himself with his gun to cover me. I approached the rhino, but the wind was wrong and he had no idea I was there. I picked up a branch and threw it at him. It fell short, but *faru* heard the noise and looked up, eyeing me suspiciously; but he did not charge. I threw a rock, which came a little closer and angered him. As he lowered his head, I was sure he was going to charge, so took off for my tree at full speed. I grabbed the lowest branch, swung my right leg up over it, managing to strain a muscle badly as I did so. Breathless but safe on the branch, I turned and looked back. The rhino was in the same spot, looking at me wonderingly. He had not charged!

Hartley said later that he felt sure the rhino would charge when I took off. But I ran about a second too soon. If the charge had once begun, the rhino would not have stopped, but just before he moved I ran, and this confused him.

But we didn't give up. I approached the rhino again, though he didn't seem very interested. Hartley sent a boy to circle around in back of the rhino, hoping the animal would get the boy's scent, feel surrounded, and charge me. The boy climbed a tree to reconnoiter, and then saw a sleeping cow rhino, the mate of my friend, near the foot of it. Hartley and I did not know this at the time, of course, and Lionel could not make out the boy's

signals from the tree. The boy was afraid to descend for fear he would waken the sleeping rhino, which would charge him. And if that cow rhino had awakened, she might have charged me suddenly from the side and cut off my retreat toward the tree.

But I could not get a rise out of the feeding rhino. *He* knew that he was not surrounded, for he had left his mate asleep back in the bush a little way. The light was growing dim and finally the big rhino, his belly full, turned and went back into the bush where he awakened his mate. They went off together.

Conclusion—I obtained no good rhino pictures in 1946, but I learned a good deal and had some exciting times trying. During my 1954-55 trip, I more than made up for the deficiencies of 1946, although my first encounters with rhinos almost got me into a peck of trouble.

I planned to go into the same general region, which by this time had become a protected area, the Amboseli National Park. Just before leaving for Amboseli, however, I heard from two good friends of mine from San Francisco, Marsden Blois and Earl Douglass, two fine sportsmen who were on a trip around the world. They asked if they could join my expedition for a short time, and I was very happy to have them come along. My one hope was that we would not strike one of those deadly stretches when nothing happens, when skies cloud over and no wild animals can be found.

I met them in Nairobi, and we set out almost immediately for Amboseli in the Volkswagen bus and one truck, along with cameramen Johnny Coquillon and Dave Mason and an excellent African guide. Shortly after entering the sanctuary, we saw another truck and, of course, stopped for a chat. It contained two Americans, a missionary named F. G. Reid, and Dr. George W. Allen, who had been a medical missionary in Nigeria for years and was now practicing in Nairobi. Allen was a fine animal photographer and such a lover of wild animals that the authorities had made him an honorary game warden. Allen and Reid were looking for rhinos, and so were we, so we decided to join forces and look together. I felt that this was a lucky break,