


BIG-GAME SHOOTING
IN
UPPER BURMA

BY
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INDIAN ARMY

WITH A GLOSSARY OF BURMESE WORDS
A MAP AND 11 PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION OF TROPHIES

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CHAPTER IV

THE TWO-HORNED RHINOCEROS (RHINOCEROS LASIOTIS AND R. SUMATRENSIS)

(*Burmese, 'Kyan': pronounced 'Chân'*)

THIS, dear reader, is going to be a very short chapter, not so much because I am afraid of boring you (though that would be all-sufficient cause), as for another reason, which involves such an awful confession that I hardly like to make it. However, the brutal truth will out; so here goes. I have never shot a rhino; nay, more, I have never even *seen* one, outside a zoo. But I have been after them more than once, and I can at least give you a general idea of the animal's habits, of where *not* to go, and the best time of year in which to follow them, and so, perhaps, save you the long, fruitless journeys after them which I have myself experienced.

I do not propose to give a description of a beast I have never seen, so will merely state that in Burma there are no less than three species, viz. the smaller one-horned rhinoceros

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(*R. sondaicus*), so called to distinguish it from the 'great one-horned rhinoceros' (*R. unicornis Indicus*), which is only found in Assam, and two species of the two-horned rhinoceros (*R. lasiotis* and *R. sumatrensis*). It is this last beast which is generally met with in Burma, *R. sondaicus* being very rarely found, probably owing to its inhabiting the dense and almost impenetrable jungles of Lower Burma, Tenasserim and Tavoy. *R. lasiotis* is found, I believe, only in Tenasserim and Arracan. It is satisfactory to know that *R. sumatrensis*, which is the smallest of the lot, and the most hairy, possesses a considerably longer horn (the front one) than that of any other species. Two horns in the British Museum measure respectively 32 in. and 27 in., with a girth of 17 in. The back horn is often merely a knob. In the female both horns are apparently quite short.

The difficulty in bagging a rhino in Burma lies not so much in the rarity of the beast as in his habits, or, to speak more correctly, his habitat. They are extremely local, and unless you can, so to speak, put your finger on a spot known to hold them, you may wander countless miles over the most likely ground without your eyes being gladdened by the sight of even an old track. Hunting rhino in Burma is, in fact, something like hunting serow, except that the latter beast is more widely distributed, and so is easier found.

It is a great deal a matter of luck. *R. sumatrensis* lives in the hills, far from the haunts of man. They are great wanderers, and places which at certain times of the year are a sure find for rhino, will at other seasons be absolutely barren. From all accounts, if one can only strike their immediate locality, one may meet with quite a number, comparatively speaking, of these antediluvian beasts within a radius of a few miles. Mr. Thom, of the Burma Police, whose book is mentioned in my preface, saw three in one day in the Ruby Mines district, and accounted for two, having shot a rhino a few days previously on the same range of hills. With accurate information as to where to go, with good trackers, and with plenty of time at one's disposal, say a couple of months, one ought to make certain of bagging a rhino in Burma. The two most likely localities are the Ruby Mines district and the Shan States; but, certainly in the latter country, one would have to go a very long way, involving a journey of several weeks' duration from the time of leaving Toungyi—the head quarters of the Southern Shan States. Success, supposing one to have been fortunate in securing good trackers (not always a certainty), would then depend almost entirely on the accuracy of the information one had obtained beforehand; not necessarily as to the exact whereabouts of the animals, but of the locality

known to contain them. Given a range of hills which rhinos are known to inhabit, and a general idea of the direction to take when you get there, the chances are that before long you will come on their tracks. But do not be persuaded, as I was, to visit localities *said* to hold rhino on the off-chance of meeting them. You want something better than this to go on. Above all, do not, if you are wise, make a special journey to some particular spot which, you are assured, contains a single beast or a pair of rhinos without first having made practically certain that you will find them there. This you can only do by getting reliable information that they have been seen there comparatively recently, and have not been disturbed.

When shooting in Burma I made three separate expeditions after rhino—twice into independent territory and once in Burma proper. But my time was limited, and being on each occasion disappointed in not finding rhino where I had expected to meet with them, I was obliged to return without making a prolonged search. The first place I tried was on the Upper Chindwin. I started from Tamanthi, a small military-police post, the farthest north of the posts on the Chindwin. I had obtained a rough sketch map of the ground to work over from a man who had shot a rhino there two years previously. He was not after them at the time, but came on

fresh tracks quite unexpectedly. He assured me that tracks were plentiful, and that the place was a sure find. I started up a stream, the NOUNGMO CHOUNG, flowing into the Chindwin two miles above TAMANTHI, and hunted for ten days over every yard of country I had been directed to. I then struck into independent territory, but was obliged to return after a few days, as my Burmans refused to accompany me farther. The country was inhabited by wild Chins, who used occasionally to come down and raid the villages in the Chindwin. Not a sign of a rhino did I see on that trip, not even an old track.

My next attempt was made from MINGIN—also a post on the Chindwin, but considerably farther south. On this occasion also, before starting, I received special information as to where to go, and was positively assured by my trackers that we would find rhino. It was in the hot weather, and I set out full of hope. But I returned a sadder and a wiser man, having seen never a rhino nor the signs of one. I did, however, shoot a bison and a bear.

My third and last trip after rhino was made from TAMMU, on the Manipur border. Here it was not a case of one or two beasts having been located a year or so previously; but I was making for regular rhino country in independent territory. I had excellent trackers with me

who knew the country and were very sanguine of finding rhino. To make a long story short, I travelled for ten days over practically virgin ground; but though I hunted high and low, I only once found tracks of rhino, and those were three weeks old. The beasts had evidently forsaken that line of country for the time being. I did, however, get bison, and once came on a pair of tigers spooning in a nullah; but they were off before I could get a shot.

This, then, is my experience of hunting rhino in Burma, and, as the reader may see, it was not a happy one. But I was undoubtedly unlucky, and was handicapped, moreover, in being unable to make a really long journey to ranges which *R. sumatrensis* has selected as his permanent habitat.

As regards the best time of year during which to hunt rhino, I should say the months of April and May are the most suitable. A rhino lives in very dense jungle, and in the cold weather the hunter would be greatly handicapped by the thick undergrowth. It would be quite impossible to travel about in heavy jungle during the rains. In the hot weather, the rhinoceros, from all accounts, spends most of the day in mud wallows, which, when found, afford a clue to the animal's approximate whereabouts should the wallow itself be deserted for the time being. Tracking, of course, in the hot weather is sure

to be difficult; but with decent trackers the beast will probably be found eventually, and, apparently, it makes little difference how much time is wasted in trying to pick out the trail, since the animal can be shot just as easily when lying up in a wallow as when he is feeding. Mr. Thom remarks on the peculiar humming noise a rhino makes when wallowing, and says that it can be heard for a considerable distance.