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KINGDOM OF THE ELEPHANT

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With a Preface by
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With 40 Illustrations



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FIVE

WHITE RHINO

WHEN I first went to Uganda I heard, of course, many stories of the chase, many tales of thrilling encounters with the game animals of Africa, and many discussions of the comparative merits of these animals as objects of the chase. Of all those tales none impressed me so much as that of the quest of the white rhinoceros.

Ceratotherium Simus Cottoni, as the scientists have it, is a bigger animal than the black rhinoceros: its height at the withers is as much as six feet six inches. It is, indeed, the biggest land mammal next to the elephant. Compared with the other large pachyderms it is quite docile and inoffensive when not disturbed. Its colour is not white but about the grey of a bush elephant or warthog, although in some lights it looks much whiter. Its main characteristic is its square mouth, as it is a grass-eater like the hippopotamus, whereas the black rhino has a prehensile upper lip to enable it to browse off bushes. Another distinguishing mark is a hump on the neck just in front of the withers. The species is more gregarious than the black, judging by those I have seen in both Uganda and Zululand.

Early on I met a man who had actually shot a white rhino. I saw photographs of the brute, and my ambition ran high. I resolved to achieve it at the first opportunity, for it was said that the species was fast becoming extinct in Central Africa. Here was a trophy to be gained in the very country in which I lived—a thing unprocurable almost anywhere else, except in Zululand—and I was determined to have it before I might be moved from Uganda.

My chance came at Christmas 1922, when I was able to

combine pleasure with duty in a visit to the West Nile District on the Sudan border. This was the habitat of the white rhino, and I arranged to spend a few days hunting.

I travelled by paddle-steamer and car from Lake Victoria to Lake Albert, and reached Butiaba Port two days before Christmas. There I picked up a coffee planter, Harrison Gibb, who was also keen to secure a rhino, and together we made plans for our safari. H. G. had not been long in the country and was, if anything, less experienced than I, as I had by then had three years' residence and had been lucky enough to get a fairly good collection of the lesser game. In fact I had already bagged one elephant—truly a case of beginner's luck—and two or three buffalo, and had tracked, without success, a black rhino.

We found that we could not leave Butiaba until four days after Christmas, as the paddle-steamer *Samuel Baker* was undergoing repair. She was one of the two paddle-steamers that then constituted the Government ferry service on Lake Albert and the Upper Nile to Nimule, a station on the Uganda-Sudan boundary and the terminus of the navigable Nile south of Rejaf.

We filled in the time by hunting on the lake shore north and south of Butiaba. Some miles up the coast of the lake I was fortunate enough to bag a fairly good elephant. After some rather hair-raising moments in a very dense river-bed I got it, as it came to attack, on the near bank. It was not until some days afterwards that I discovered it was a well-known rogue of ill repute, and that I had shot it only a *few yards* outside a game reserve. I had been misinformed by the Africans and had thought a further river was the boundary, and might easily have offended against the law.

At last we set off, and at 3.30 p.m. on the day following our departure we disembarked at Rhino Camp, on the left bank of the Nile. We watched the paddle-steamer disappear round a bend of the river as it churned its way northward to Nimule, leaving us on a somewhat barren and inhospitable-looking shore. For our camp site we chose a place as high as possible off the water level, hoping that it would be free from mosquitoes; then we set off to the one and only village to obtain some able-bodied followers and all available news of our quarry. When we returned to camp we surveyed the land.

From where we stood we could see that the country got much

higher about two miles further inland, and just north of us was a large bay of the river, choked with papyrus grass and skirted by short-grass country studded with thorn trees and scrub. According to the villagers this was where the white rhino might be found. I had ascertained from other sources that a herd had definitely been seen thereabouts only a few months before, and certainly it was a promising-looking place for game. We thereupon unpacked our rifles, prepared for action, and started off, determined to fill in every moment to the best advantage before darkness set in.

We had not far to go before we realized that the country was packed with game, as in crossing a somewhat dusty track—the caravan route from Rhino Camp to the interior—we found it literally smothered in spoor. It was by far the best assortment of spoor that I had ever seen, but we were disappointed to find no sign whatever of rhino having crossed the track. We completed our reconnaissance and returned to camp, shooting a solitary buffalo for the porters on our way back.

The next morning at 5.30 we set off again. We followed the dusty track until we reached higher ground, where we stopped to scan the country with our binoculars as the sunrise behind us shed its light over the landscape. Nothing but small game was in sight, so we decided to go north-west round the bay and then strike inland towards some low hills that we could see in the distance. My previous experience after one rhino told me that the habit of the brutes was to water before dawn and graze their way to bush country very leisurely until the morning became hotter. I had, of course, read up the subject pretty thoroughly beforehand.

After walking at a good pace for an hour and a half we reached a small knoll about one-third of the way round the bay, and there we stopped again to survey the country with our glasses. We had seen no trace at all of rhino spoor, and the men from the village were unhelpful. They were obviously impatient and resented the white man's 'idiocy' in going after one particular kind of game when so much else was available. In answer to my enquiries they said tersely that "all the rhino must have gone, as they had always been in this place before and now there was no sign of them". I then asked how it was that there was no spoor to be seen if they had been there before.

Their reply was inevitable: the spoor had been obliterated by other game.

I was not at all convinced that the spoor of such a heavy beast as the rhinoceros could be so easily and rapidly obliterated, in view of my information about the herd that had been seen a few months before. It was therefore obvious that if we walked far enough round the bay, and beyond it along the Nile shore, we must eventually come on their watering place, unless they had migrated to other water inland. At all events we had plenty of time and could, if necessary, move our camp and follow them for several days once we picked up their old spoor.

A little further ahead I noticed that the edge of the papyrus bay had recently been burned, also the shorter grass adjacent to it. This was rather serious, as it might have had the effect of driving the game a great distance inland and then covering up all traces of their retreat. But there was nothing to be gained from pondering the matter, so on we went.

Then came the great thrill.

About ten minutes later, as I rounded some bushes on the edge of the burnt area, I was amazed to see, at about a hundred and fifty yards half-right, an enormous light-grey animal quietly grazing in the midst of the charred and fallen papyrus grass. A few seconds' glance was enough: it was a huge white rhino.

Like a flash I turned round to see that all followers got behind some cover, and, doing the same myself, I whispered to H. G., "Whose shot?" He replied, "You take it, you know more about it than I do." I then gave signalled orders to the boys to keep well down out of sight until they heard my shot, and at the same time asked H. G. to make sure they did. Many a quarry has been lost by the careless curiosity and exposure of one's followers at the critical moment.

I handed my binoculars to H. G., and very carefully and silently opened my rifle—a D.B. .470 Rigby—to make perfectly sure it was loaded. Satisfied that all was in order, I cautiously rose to my feet at the edge of a bush until I could see the great grey form clearly again. He had moved only a few yards, and was very slowly shifting along a step or two at a time with his head right down, all his attention on his grazing. What he was

finding to eat I could neither see nor imagine, as where I stood there was thick, charred grass lying knee high and practically nothing else but an occasional scorched thorn bush. As he moved his massive head a moment later I caught sight of the anterior horn, and I marvelled to myself as I thought of such a trophy almost within my grasp. It was a colossal head.

Between myself and the brute were only two clumps of thorn bush, and with my rifle grasped in readiness I made my way to the first. When safely up to that, and sure that the animal had still not seen or scented me, I paused awhile to study his movements. I judged that if I could get up to the second bush I should then be not more than fifty yards from him, and that would be an ideal range for the .470 on such a precious target. It was by that time just after seven o'clock, and the sun was inclined to be unfavourable.

One more advance, and I had reached my second objective. From where I stood I saw the great brute move his position slightly, head still down, and present a broadside target. Now was my time. I stepped to the right of the bush and raised my rifle.

The rhino raised his head, pivoted round a little, and had a good look at me. In a second or two he turned, and as he did so I took careful aim for the heart and fired the right barrel. The brute at once swerved round to face the opposite way, stumbled, trotted off a few yards, and then crashed to the ground. I quickly reloaded the right barrel and stood my ground for a few seconds to see if he would rise, but there was not a sound or movement. He was dead.

The boys all came rushing up, and H. G. was soon at my side offering his hand in congratulation. We all stood in awe as we saw the enormous brute lying before us dead. My head gun-bearer remarked: "How did you kill him with one shot? His body is as big as a hill."

There was much excitement for the next half-hour, and cameras and tape-measures were quickly produced. To my intense satisfaction I found that I had bagged a trophy of much more than average worth. The front horn measured thirty-seven inches in length and twenty-eight in circumference at the base, and the posterior horn fourteen inches and twenty-two inches respectively. But what pleased me most were the mag-

nificent proportions and symmetry of the horns as a pair. The body measured approximately six feet three inches at the withers and thirteen feet in length: it was a gigantic beast in all respects.

Next came the photographing. As the sun's position precluded a photograph of the head as it lay, I decided to have it cut off and placed in a favourable position on top of the carcase. This was a formidable undertaking, and it took six men to lift the head when severed. We used two cameras and took a great number of photographs at different ranges and stops, to make quite certain we got a good one; then, having carefully cut off the horns and mask and a piece of hide from the flank, we once more discussed further movements.

It was evident from the spoor that the brute I had shot was a solitary bull, and we had yet to find the herd for H. G. to get his trophy. The country was like an oven, and we were all the time walking on the stubby ashes of recently burnt grass; our feet were red-hot, and our throats were parched by the dust from the ashes as we walked. We fairly soon resolved to make for such shade as there was, which was nothing better than the shelter of a trunk and one limb of a tree about eighteen inches in diameter, and we had to keep shifting our position in obedience to the sun.

At 4 p.m. we were quite pleased to be on the march again, and half an hour later we found the outpost of the herd. Three white rhino were standing together, apparently asleep, near the foot of a rather leafy thorn tree. H. G. at once prepared for action, and I put my glasses on the trio. I whispered to him, "The one in the middle is the bull; get a bit closer, and I'll stand here and cover you."

H. G. got safely up to a piece of bush, and then from where I knelt I could see him stand upright and take aim. He fired, and the three rhino trotted away. I immediately rushed forward to join him and ask what had happened, and he turned round with a look of utter despondency and blurted out, "I missed the — thing!" I replied, "Don't worry about that, I expect there are plenty more." I felt mighty glad at that moment that I had taken the shot at the magnificent specimen of the morning but I felt sorry for old H. G. However, we had not far to go. About a mile or two farther on we came on three more rhino,

and this time there were two buffalo standing just behind them on rising ground. They had seen us and were glaring down at us in their customary unpleasant manner, but the rhino seemed, like the last, to be asleep.

I whispered to H. G.: "Those buffalo won't stand long. You go for some cover, and I'll try to get round a bit to the left to keep an eye on them while you get your rhino. Don't mind them. And the bull is on the right this time."

From where I stood watching the two buffalo I could see H. G., and I waited with some anxiety for his shot. At last I heard the bullet strike. I could just see the three rhino going off, but one was wounded this time. My two buffalo crashed off up the slope, out of sight.

At that moment I caught a glimpse of a very fine warthog standing with his family about a hundred and fifty yards to my right. While H. G. was following up his rhino I rushed after the pig. Just as I was about to fire I was alarmed to hear a heavy stampede behind me, and turned to see the two buffalo coming full tilt towards me. As they saw me they swerved off, and I had a shot at the front one and, to my amazement, killed him. He took a great lurching dive forward and almost turned a somersault as he fell, going full speed downhill. The other one made off, and the pigs, of course, as well. Then I went up to see what H. G. was doing. I found him standing by the side of a dead rhino all right, but it was a female! He explained that he had forgotten what I had said and fired at the middle one again. It was a rather poor specimen with a front horn of only twenty-three inches, which is not good as the cows very often have longer horns than the bulls.

By the time we had photographed and measured the rhino the sun was getting pretty low. We moved off to find our camp, leaving two boys behind to cut off the horns and some hide and follow us at their leisure.

We had not been going long when H. G. sprained his ankle, and soon after this the two men we had left behind appeared suddenly with a runner. The head boy had sent him to tell us that the country we had chosen for our camp was all burning, and the whole party had gone back to the river. This was unpleasant news. We were getting rather tired, H. G. could hardly walk, and the river was a long way off. I sent two of the

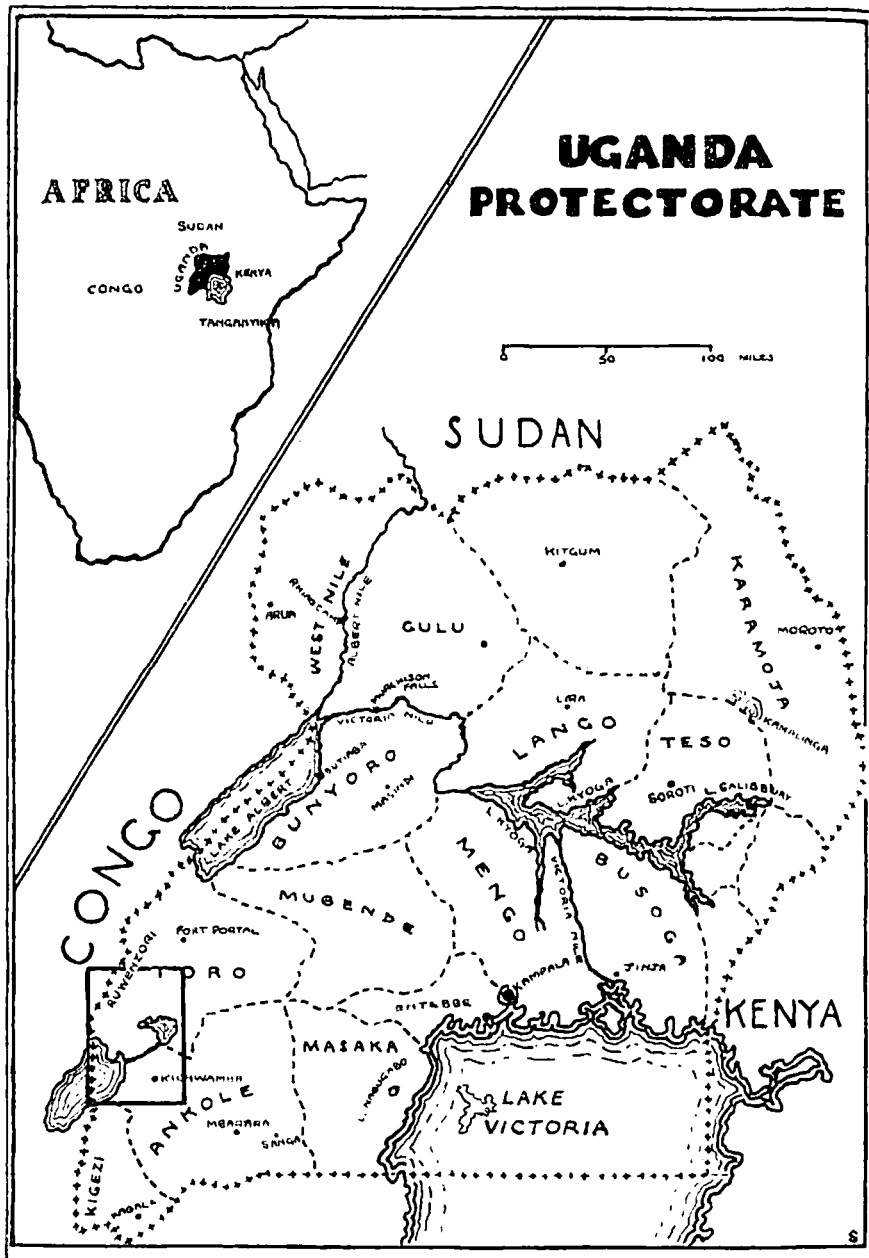
boys on ahead to the river to bring out a chair and some poles so that we could improvise a stretcher if necessary. Then, with H. G. leaning on my shoulder, and our one and only remaining boy carrying the rifles, we started to stagger on towards the river.

In our discomfort the night became hideous. A lion or two in the distance, and hyaenas everywhere, gave voice with great gusto as they advanced towards the sumptuous dinners we had left for them; and to make matters worse, we found that even on the high ground the mosquitoes were as plentiful as down by the river. H. G. collapsed once or twice, and I tried to find enough wood to make some fires to keep the fiends off us while he rested, but it was a hopeless business. We endured hours of torment.

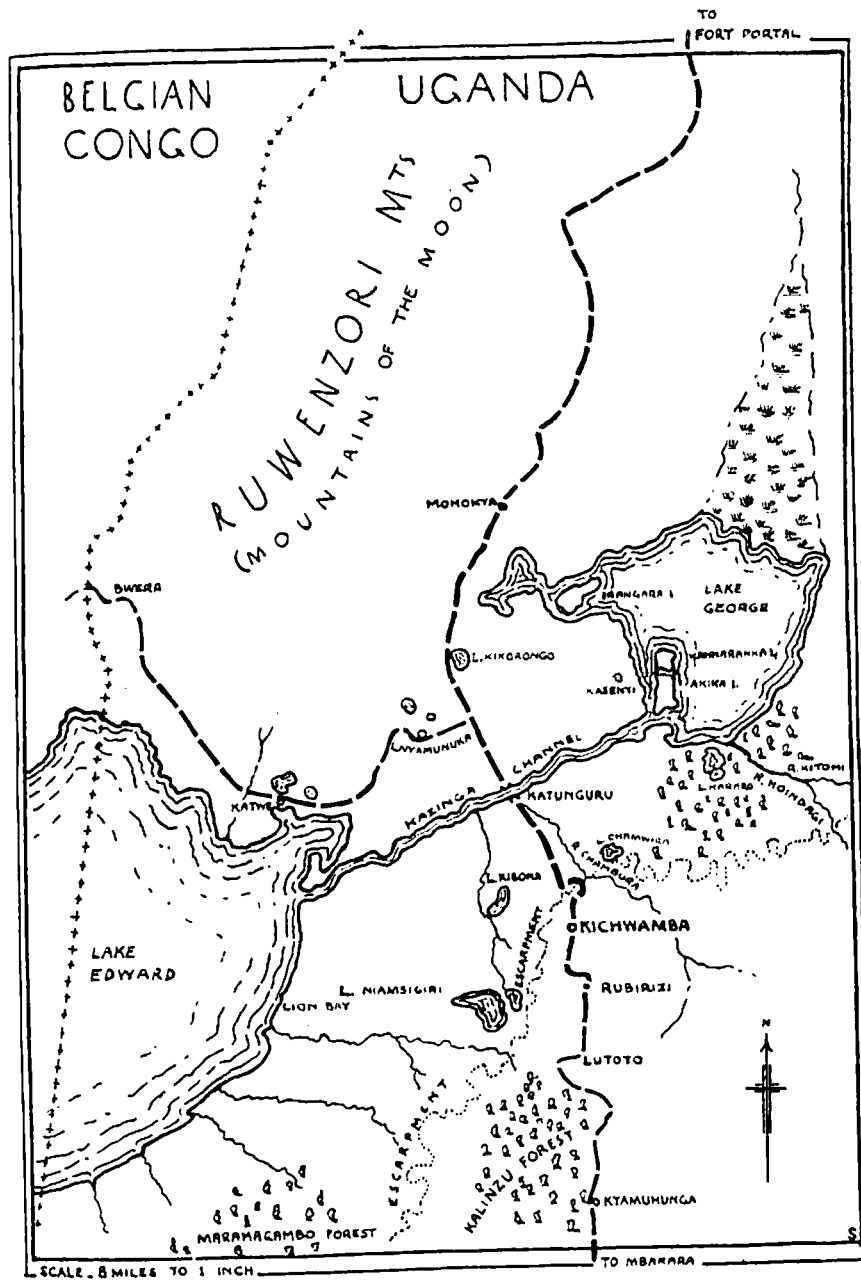
Furthermore, having made a somewhat erratic course while we were looking for the camping site, we were now fairly ignorant of the direction we should take to find our river camp. I made a rough calculation by the stars, and we tried to follow my reckoning; but it was still rather vague. H. G. collapsed again, and I had to send on our unfortunate boy by himself to try to find the track and hurry on the 'ambulance'; and there we were at a standstill, at the mercy of millions of mosquitoes and not too happily situated as regards any prowling carnivorous beasts.

We endured this plight for another hour or so, and then I insisted on our moving slowly on again, as I feared we should be benighted, which would be the worst thing possible for H. G. in his painful state. It was a lucky decision for us, as after about another half-hour's agonizing tramp we unexpectedly came upon the track and I knew we could not have more than about four miles to do.

On we staggered until the stretcher-bearers arrived. Then I made H. G. as comfortable as possible and hurried on to the camp with one gun-bearer to see that everything was in readiness for the patient. It was just midnight when I had a tankard of beer ready for him as the bearers put him down, and we drank to the day we had had and to the New Year. It was actually the eve of 1923 as we drank, and we felt we had seen out the old year in rather more than average style. Five-thirty to midnight might be counted a long day even under less strenuous conditions.



Uganda Protectorate showing the Western game reserve



Western Uganda, including the game reserve area

I finished off the safari in an amusing way by bagging a well-known crocodile. As the *S. W. Lugard* steamed slowly into Butiaba we passed close to a long sandy spit on which we could see a huge crocodile fast asleep near the water. One of the officers said: "Ah, there's old George. Nobody has ever been able to shoot that devil." To this I replied, "Well, do you mind if I have a crack, or does he belong to somebody?" Being assured that the saurian was nobody's pet, I let drive. Allowing for the movement of the ship, I shot for the heart—and the shot came off.

The brute did not move an inch. For a moment or two we thought I must have missed; but George was dead. We went and examined him later and found he was just over fourteen feet in length. I was at the top of my form in those days, and I got every trophy of that safari in one shot each.

Of course I was proudest of my white rhino head, and I have a vivid recollection of boasting about it later to our Governor, Sir Geoffrey Archer, who succeeded Sir Robert Coryndon. He was at first polite and complimentary but in a few minutes I saw his expression take a sudden change for the worse.

"What right had you to shoot a white rhino?" he asked.

"There is no law against it as far as I know, sir," I parried. "The third schedule merely says one rhino; no mention of species."

"That's all wrong," said His Excellency. "It was never intended to include the white rhino."

Nothing more was said on the subject then, but an amendment to the Game Ordinance was effected with all despatch. I was the last man to bag a white rhino before this amazing creature was put on the wholly protected list.

SIX

DANGEROUS GAME

THE most dangerous animals to the hunter in Africa are the buffalo, elephant, lion, and rhinoceros. I have put them in alphabetical order for the moment; for while there is general agreement that these are the most dangerous, and that all four are very dangerous, the order of precedence is the subject of the widest divergence of views. Enough to fill several books has been written on the relative dangerousness of the 'big four', and there is as much disagreement among the experts as among hunters of lesser experience. Only a very ignorant person would care to be dogmatic on the subject.

But first, my apologies to the leopard. He has been described as the most deadly fighting machine in the world, and I certainly do not exclude him from the ranks of dangerous animals. He is wonderfully cunning and agile, and unsurpassed for courage and ferocity. He is utterly fearless at bay, and when wounded he is sure to charge if he is able to do so. However, because of his relatively small size he is less dangerous to life, if not to limb, than the other four beasts, as he will often maul when a bigger brute would kill. For this reason, and because we know so little about him, I shall leave him out of the discussion in this chapter, although I shall come back to him later.

I am writing only of African beasts, for I have had no experience of American or Asian game. Apart from the tiger, however, I have never heard of an animal that was held to beat our foremost adversaries in Africa in this respect. It is true that a Canadian acquaintance of mine claimed that the moose was more dangerous than any African animal, but his main reason was that it required 'six shots rapid more often than not' from