

From Smythies, Olive. *Ten thousand miles on elephants*. London : Seeley Service, 1961. pp.149-153:

Before attempting to describe a Maharaja's shoot, it will help the reader to visualize the scene if a description is first given of the method almost invariably used in all big shoots in Nepal, the famous and unique "Ring." This method is used only in Nepal, where it has been brought to an art, the highest pitch of perfection, and a most deadly method of killing all big game. There is in fact no other country in the world where the necessary factors for the "Ring" shoot exists, the enormous stud of *shikar* elephants, the trained experience and skill of their *mahawats* and the *shikaris*, the tremendous stretches of Terai forests, and the wonderful stock of tiger and rhino.

The natural home of tiger is the forest-clad foothills of of the Churia (Siwalik) range of the Himalayas, with the enclosed duns and valleys, and the adjoining forests of the flatter Terai. This great belt of tiger country stretches the whole length of Nepal, a distance of nearly 550 miles on the map, and for more than half the year it is deadly to man owing to the malignant Terai malaria. But from December to March it is a perfect paradise, with a glorious climate, wonderful scenery, and always to the north the incredible panorama of the eternal snows towering into the sky.

In this superb setting occur the big Nepal shoots to which many distinguished guests have been invited including King George V. A wonderful organization is employed to ensure success. For weeks before the shoot commences, rough but serviceable motor roads and temporary bridges are constructed radiating out from the various jungle camps. All the jungle paths and streams and sandy river beds are examined to see where the tigers are, for in such places they leave their footmarks. A day or two before the shoot starts, young buffalo calves are tied up as bait, in scores or even hundreds, on every likely route a tiger may take. (The cow, being venerated, its progeny cannot be used for tiger bait.)

There are seven or eight groups of regularly appointed *shikaris*, each consisting of an officer (*subedar*), 10 or 12 subordinates, and two mounted soldiers for taking messages. Every group of *shikaris* has 10 to 15 buffalo calves (*padahs*) for tying up at suitable places. They live in temporary sheds in the jungle, primitive huts of wooden poles, leaves and jungle grasses fastened with strands of creepers, which they quickly erect with their kukris from the abundant material all around. Between them the various groups cover the whole tract of forest for miles around the central camp.

At dawn the *shikaris* go out and examine the *padahs*, tied out the previous evening. If, or when, one has been killed, they carefully examine pugmarks (footprints) to see if it is a big tiger or small, or one or several. They examine the drag and the direction taken. They then quietly proceed on foot and make a large circle of a quarter to a half mile diameter, demarcating the circumference with chipped stems and grass knots as they go, and are very careful to see that the drag has not gone beyond the circle. If it has, they make another one, as they must have the circle enclosing the end of the drag. This is called "cutting the circle" by the *shikaris*, and the final circle makes the future "Ring."

Meanwhile, as soon as it is seen that a *padah* has been killed and dragged, a special messenger mounts his horse, and gallops off to bring the news. Sometimes motor cars are parked at central spots to accelerate the delivery of the message, and sometimes even a telephone line has been prepared and operators engaged to flash news to the camp.

Within a very short time the news has reached the camp from all directions whether and where there are kills, and the day's plan of campaign is discussed and settled. Immediately a great string of 200 or 300 elephants moves off in single file to the first kill, a few with

howdahs, the majority with pads. The shooting party follows at leisure in cars as far as possible, and then on pad elephants.

The tiger or tigers have been approximately located by the *shikaris* from the direction of the drag, the nature of the cover for lying up, and the process of cutting the circle as already described. When the elephants arrive, they divide into two parties, which proceed very quietly in single file right and left along the line of the cut circle—and it is astonishing how quietly an elephant or line of elephants can move through the jungle. The rear elephants gradually drop out to take their stations at regular intervals, and finally the two leading elephants meet and the word is passed down both sides that the circuit is completed.

The shooting party mount the howdah elephants and the whole circle now moves inwards, crushing the grasses and shrubs, and the men on their backs shouting and whistling to drive the tiger towards the centre. The circumference of the circle of elephants gets smaller, until finally it is less than half a mile round, and the elephants get closer and closer until they are almost touching, and the tiger is surrounded by a solid wall of elephants. Then the order—stop the line—is shouted out and the ring is complete.

The stauncher elephants then move into the ring. Glimpses of one or more slinking forms are seen in the grass and undergrowth, when suddenly a tiger breaks cover and charges with a roar, to be met by shots from the rifle or shouts and missiles if he charges the ring. It is the moment of climax of a culminating excitement. Backwards and forwards he dashes striving to find an escape, to a pandemonium of men shouting and elephants trumpeting, grumbling and gurgling, thumping on the ground and, occasionally, when directly charged turning tail and bolting in terror.

It is necessary to emphasize that a tiger is not normally a dangerous animal and does not attack an elephant or a man, but once he feels cornered, he becomes a fighting mass of diabolical fury utterly fearless of man or elephant, whom he attacks in his mad rage without a moment's hesitation. He has been known to leap a height of 15 or 16 feet into a tall howdah, and more often than not a tiger will try to break through a ring by charging home on an elephant unless he is killed or crippled first by a well-directed shot.

It must also be realized that the Nepal Terai jungles with a fertile soil and rainfall of 100 inches are either gigantic grass growth, frequently the height of a howdah, or are a dense forest of trees, matted together with great climbers and a thick undergrowth of shrubs and shade-bearing plants in which, if an elephant bolts, it is almost inevitable that howdah and rider and mahawat and everything on the elephant's back will be swept with a crash to the ground by a thick branch or the loop of a tough climber. In either case it is extremely difficult to see a tiger at all until the area has been well trampled, by which time, naturally, the tiger or tigers are desperate and in a highly dangerous condition. "It is no sport for bad shots, hasty excitable people, or those with no stomach for danger. Even the most blasé hunter is likely to experience for a second or two a sudden spasm of fear when he first hears the blood-curdling roar of an infuriated tiger, and sees the great striped body launched in its charge, a thunderbolt of death and anger in mid-air. It is one of the most terrific sights in the world."

(Wentworth Day's *King George Vas a Sportsman*.)

Imagine what it must be like when, as frequently happens in the rings in Nepal, not one, but four or five and, once or twice, six tigers have been trapped simultaneously in one ring! The danger and heart-bursting excitement may continue for hours, until a succession of well-placed shots finally brings the thrill and nerve-tension to an end. That describes briefly a typical tiger shoot in the Nepal forests by the famous "Ring" method. Personally I never

thought that this was a very sporting way of shooting tigers as they did not seem to have much chance of escaping with their lives.