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SOLDIERING AND SURVEYING
IN
BRITISH EAST AFRICA
1891-1894

by
Major J. R. L. Macdonald, R.E.
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been made, one rush put them in possession of the enemy's headquarters, and the campaign was over.

Next day the hostile chiefs made submission, and paid a fine in cattle, and Mr. Ainsworth returned to Machako's in triumph, having by his bold march and sharp action firmly established the Company's rule in Ukambani. Other districts had been watching the result of this conflict, and no doubt had reverse, instead of victory, been the fate of the Company's flag, there would have been far more serious trouble, for Wakamba, like people nearer home, worship the rising sun.

Since this the Wakamba have remained good friends with the Europeans, and are fast becoming accustomed to work and wages. Mr. Ainsworth can justly pride himself on the results of his two years' rule. In the spring of 1892 we could not obtain a single Wakamba porter, while in 1894, when I required about twenty men to help me by carrying food, the Wakamba fairly tumbled over each other in their eagerness to enlist. Wakamba have also been obtained in considerable numbers to carry loads from Tsavo to Machako's, and even from the coast; and a militia has been formed to guard the passes against Masai raids. Altogether, the future of Ulu is a most promising one.

CHAPTER IV.

MACHAKO'S TO LAKE NAIVASHA.

Our arrangements for the more difficult work ahead commenced in earnest at Machako's. We found that Mr. Foaker had not been idle, and had already collected nearly all the food and some of the donkeys that we required; but we were destined to spend nearly a month in further preparations. Kikuyu was the usual point of departure for caravans towards the lake, but this season the locusts had proved so destructive that only with difficulty could portable food be secured. There was no famine in Kikuyu, as the magnificent fields of sweet-potatoes were untouched, but potatoes do not by any means form a portable food. Even if dried and made into flour, the result is not satisfactory if the weather be wet, and so I had decided to load up with millet flour from Ulu, where the supply was cheap and abundant.

A brief description of our food difficulties may be interesting. From Machako's to Kikuyu is four ordinary marches, from Kikuyu to Kavirondo about twenty-four; so that the usual caravan time from Machako's to the cultivated districts of the lake is twenty-eight marches, while viâ Sotik fifteen days from Kikuyu carries a caravan through the foodless tract.

As it was evident that we could not make a satisfactory survey of the route if we marched at ordinary caravan pace, it was necessary to provide much more food than would have

been required by a trading expedition, and I estimated we should need rations for about forty-five days. Our limited transport could not carry anything like the amount, which worked out to about 36,000 lbs., so we decided to form two depots. The first was at Fort Smith, in Kikuyu, and in this, by three trips from Machako's, we stored 36,000 lbs. of flour. The second was afterwards made at Lake Naivasha, five days' march from Kikuyu, and required two trips to stock it. From Lake Naivasha the Sotik party branched off west, with fifteen days' supplies, while the Guash Ngishu party, with thirty days' rations, marched along the meridional rift. To carry out these arrangements Twining was sent to Kikuyu as receiving officer; another officer remained at Machako's to pack and forward the supplies, and Mr. Foaker, as transport officer, travelled backwards and forwards with the bulk of the caravan. Those of us not engaged on this work made two short trips to explore the country round the Ulu Hills, for up to now we had not succeeded in finding a railway route from the Salt River to Machako's which would not prove very costly.

Pringle and I started off on the more important investigation, and marched to the south with the object of finding a route between the Kapote Steppes and the Salt River Valley, and so avoiding the intricate jumble of hills which constitutes Ulu. In two marches we made the rock pools of Bondani, and during the second day understood at last what the great Masai hunting-grounds were really like. We had hardly left the cultivated tracts when game began to swarm on every side. Gazelle and hartebeest predominated, but on the distant grassy ridges we could see zebra and ostriches. Early in the day we had each bagged a hartebeest, and put our small caravan in good humour at the prospect of abundant meat diet.

Soon, on topping a low spur, we saw a few hundred yards



"BUYING FLOUR."

away our first rhinoceros, lazily cropping the luxuriant grass. The caravan halted, and Pringle and I had a hasty consultation as to the advisability of stalking him. The wind was very uncertain, and came in fitful puffs, now one way and now another, and, neither of us in these unfavourable circumstances appearing particularly keen to push matters to a conclusion, we marched on, determined to wait for a more suitable opportunity. The rhinoceros in the meantime became alarmed and disappeared.

Shortly afterwards, it being my day off duty, I went ahead to look for a camping-ground, and came on two more of these animals. They made off across a small dry nullah-bed, and then stopped to investigate us. The ground was not very favourable, but I tried a stalk, and got a somewhat long shot. Whether the rhinoceros I selected was hit or not is hard to say; anyhow, both made off, and very quickly put several miles between us. Soon after I reached the pools of Bondani. A small reef of rock crossed the nullah-bed, and above this were several fine ponds, the only water for miles round. A few mimosa-trees lined the watercourse, and numerous tracks showed this to be a favourite game resort.

There was a nice camping-ground on short turf near the pool, surrounded by shady trees; but, unfortunately, in these a few objectionable beehives were visible. A man was despatched to see if they were tenanted, as, if so, previous experience indicated the advisability of pitching our tents a little farther off. The man approached one of the trees, and beat a hasty retreat, to the great delight of his comrades, who had watched his movements with interest from a safe distance. But on his arrival he reported, not bees, as everyone expected, but a leopard, reposing under the shade of a tree.

This was a great piece of luck, and, hastily taking my rifle, I began a cautious stalk. We got close to the tree, and, sure enough, there was the leopard; but I could not get a clear

view. So, retracing our steps, we made a little *détour*, and gained, unobserved, a small mound, within fifty yards of the tree. From this I got a good shot, and disabled the animal, which, however, required two more bullets to despatch it. Then we found that my luck was greater than I had anticipated, for the animal proved to be a cheetah, and not a true leopard. This, according to the authority of Mr. Jackson, who had for years devoted himself to sport in these regions, was only the second cheetah which had been bagged in East Africa.

The remainder of our caravan soon came up, and camp was pitched. Pringle then went out, burning to beat my day's record, and he very nearly did so, for at no great distance he stumbled across two lions, which were lying in the grass on the look-out for game. Unfortunately, they vanished over a small rise before he could use his rifle. That evening we saw abundance of game all round the camp, and had some sport, putting up another rhinoceros and a leopard, but failing to bag either.

Next day we marched over undulating ground towards the bluff shoulder of the Maka Mountains, which on the Kapote side form the sentinels of Ulu, and from whose summits the Wakamba warriors are ever on the outlook for Masai. During this march Pringle bagged a rhinoceros. The grass was so long that stalking was easy; but its length was a positive disadvantage at close quarters, as it prevented his firing kneeling, and to make accurate shooting from the shoulder, with a heavy double eight-bore rifle, is a matter of some difficulty. The huge animal did not succumb to the first shot, and the subsequent proceedings were interesting and exciting for both parties. Finally the eight-bore won, and Pringle was justly proud of his first rhinoceros, which proved to have very fair horns.

The rhinoceros is a stupid beast, and somewhat blind;

but, on the other hand, it has a keen sense of smell. Thus, it is essential to stalk from down-wind; otherwise, if at a distance, it may make off, or if near it may charge. But with the wind in one's favour it is astonishing how close one can get without alarming him. We had a good deal of experience with these animals later on, as the caravan was frequently stopped by them, and was charged on no less than five occasions. A caravan passing a solitary rhinoceros to windward affords a very amusing spectacle. The great beast scents the caravan at once, but cannot quite make it out, so he stands facing it, and wagging his enormous head from side to side in ludicrous uncertainty. Then up goes his tail, and he comes tearing down, only to pull up again after twenty or thirty yards to repeat his investigations. To give time for reflection and vary the monotony, he then trots along parallel to the caravan, till, on an extra strong whiff of scent, he wheels round, and again makes a headlong charge for a few yards. This somewhat stupid, though distinctly entertaining, performance is repeated until, in most cases, the caravan has passed safely, and the rhinoceros is left in his uncertainty. Sometimes, however, the caravan is of such length, or so slow, that a charge home comes off; then the porters drop their loads and scatter, and the rhinoceros gallops through the line and away up-wind, with his tail in the air, and no damage done.

Our little party, having passed Maka, got on to the headwaters of certain tributaries of the Salt River, and found, as we had hoped to do, that the difficulties to a railway on this line were, comparatively speaking, slight. As we had rations for only ten days with us, we had now to retrace our steps. On the homeward journey it was my turn to bag a rhinoceros, which had not, however, such good horns as the one that fell to Pringle's rifle. At Bondani we found the same abundance of game, and between that and Machako's I had

my first experience of a charging rhinoceros. I was following the banks of a dry nullah, keeping parallel to the caravan at a distance of about a mile, in hopes that it might drive some antelope my way. Our range of vision was not extensive, owing to the lie of the ground; but this was an advantage, as it meant that game must come pretty close before sighting us. Happening to glance uphill, we were suddenly aware of a rhinoceros about 100 yards away, and making straight for us like an express engine. I had only a double .500 Express with hollow bullets, which would have produced no effect, so judged discretion the better part of valour. My few followers hastily retired at a pace I could not hope to equal, so I plunged into the nullah-bed, and ran, as I thought, about thirty yards out of the line. On climbing up the steep bank, I came almost face to face with the rhinoceros, who had evidently changed his direction a little, so I had somewhat hurriedly to scurry out of his way. He passed quite close, offering me a splendid shot, had I possessed a suitable rifle. On reaching the far bank of the nullah, he wheeled round, and investigated me for a few minutes, before he resumed his way to windward. Pringle, who was trying to circumvent the wily ostrich on a hill a little way off, enjoyed the performance immensely, as he could see the unceremonious way in which we had to make room for his excellency the rhinoceros.

On our return to Machako's, a similar small expedition went out to the north-east, and reached the Athi River. They, too, found the country traversed a sportsman's paradise. They came across lots of hippopotami in the Athi, and bagged two of them, and so the porters came back laden with meat. On returning to Machako's, the caravan had the wind behind, and our olfactory nerves gave us notice of their approach before they came in sight, as the meat, after a few days in the sun, was, to say the least of it, rather high.

Meanwhile Foaker had done his work well, and about two-

thirds of the necessary rations were already stored at Fort Smith. The standing camp at Machako's was accordingly broken up about the middle of March, and the whole caravan, laden with as much flour as it could carry, made for Kikuyu, across the grass plains of the Athi. Game swarmed on every side, but was difficult to stalk, as there was so little cover. Still, we were not altogether unsuccessful. On reaching the Athi, I decided to camp for a day on the banks of the stream, more especially as Pringle and I had each killed a hippopotamus, and the meat would be a welcome addition to the porters' fare. Pringle had also come across four lions at the Stony Athi, which is a few miles south of the real Athi, and had a shot, but without result. Next morning parties of men with ropes and knives went out to retrieve the two dead hippopotami, and the white men separated into two shooting-parties. Pringle and Austin stuck to the Athi River, and though they had no luck with large game, made a phenomenal bag of guinea-fowl. Foaker and I struck off towards the Stony Athi, and bagged two gazelles and a hartebeest, as well as a few guinea-fowl. We also sighted a few water-buck, but, as they also saw us, we could not get a shot. On return to camp we found that one of our sentries had shot a hartebeest, as it strolled along the river bank, within a hundred yards of the encampment.

Another long march amidst countless herds of game brought us to the edge of the Kikuyu Forest. A strong homa was at once built with branches and bushes, not against the warlike Masai or treacherous Wakikuyu, but to protect our donkeys from the hyenas, which simply swarmed there. The hyæna, which is generally considered a timid, and even cowardly, animal, is comparatively bold and aggressive in Masailand, where the inhabitants are accustomed to laying their dead outside the camp to be devoured by these foul scavengers. The trait in these hyenas that troubled us most

We discovered a great fall on the Athi, and soon after passed the broad mouth of the Keite River, and a little later attained the most advanced point reached by Twining on his expedition from Tsavo. There was no water visible in the broad bed of the Kiboko as we marched up it, but by digging we got a plentiful supply near our camp. Next day we continued to follow the course of the river, and came upon gradually increasing pools of water, which were, however, much fouled by game, and distinctly brackish to the taste. Along the edges of the pools was a deposit of salt, which our porters collected, but which, to judge from subsequent results, must have possessed powerful medicinal properties. As our provisions were now running short, Austin and I decided to follow an old native track east of the mountain of Bwinzau, and that appeared to run to Kibwezi. In several places we had to cut our way, as the path was little used, and, after one night without water, we reached Kibwezi on September 7th, to find that Pringle's party had arrived an hour before us, from the exploration of the Salt River. He had found it necessary to alter our plans after my departure with Austin, for on reaching Machako's he got a letter from Kibwezi to say that food was very scarce, owing to the failure of the second rains, and that no arrangements had been made for us at Tsavo. Foaker had accordingly been despatched to buy food at Ndi, Twining told off to transport food from Ulu to Kibwezi, and Pringle himself carried out the more important of the river surveys—viz., that along the Salt River.

He had met no Masai, but numbers of rhinoceros had afforded the caravan plenty of excitement. On one occasion, as Pringle was working at the rear of the column, with an askari about 100 yards behind him, a rhinoceros appeared, and, after its usual undecided tactics, charged the askari. The latter took no thought of the wind, but rushed along the path past Pringle, dropping his mat on the way. The

rhinoceros stopped to investigate the mat, and, not finding much in that, charged Pringle, who had meanwhile exchanged his notebook for his eight-bore. There is a theory that you can always turn a charging rhinoceros if you reserve your fire. Pringle gave him one barrel at about fifty yards without apparent result, and fired his second at ten yards. But that rhinoceros was not one of the sort to turn, and, but for the fact that Pringle was a very active man, they would have changed rôles, and he would have constituted the bag. As it was, the wounded animal made off, and got clear away. On another occasion a rhinoceros charged the caravan, and began to play cup-and-ball with a bale, to the great amusement of Pringle and his followers. Judge of the former's disgust when he found it was his own bedding which had formed the bale, and had, moreover, acquired during the operations a variety of holes.

Pringle had to make some long marches, but had succeeded in making a certainty of the opinion we had already come to—that a practicable railway route could be got on to the Kapote Steppes, along the valley of the Salt River.

At Kibwezi we found a large caravan, bound for Uganda, under Martin. He had a duplicate of the despatches that had missed me at Naivasha, and these proved to be orders for me to return to Uganda, and report fully on the true causes of the recent troubles. This was rather a blow to me, as I was within twelve days' march of the coast, and had now to turn back, and retrace my steps for 600 miles. However, orders must be obeyed, and I prepared to hand over charge of the survey to Pringle. Fortunately, I had for some time past been drafting my report, and now, in five days' hard work, I ran through, with Pringle and Twining, the more technical chapters; I had already worked out the whole basis of the estimates, and the fieldwork plans were almost all up to date, so I could hand over to Pringle more than enough to enable