

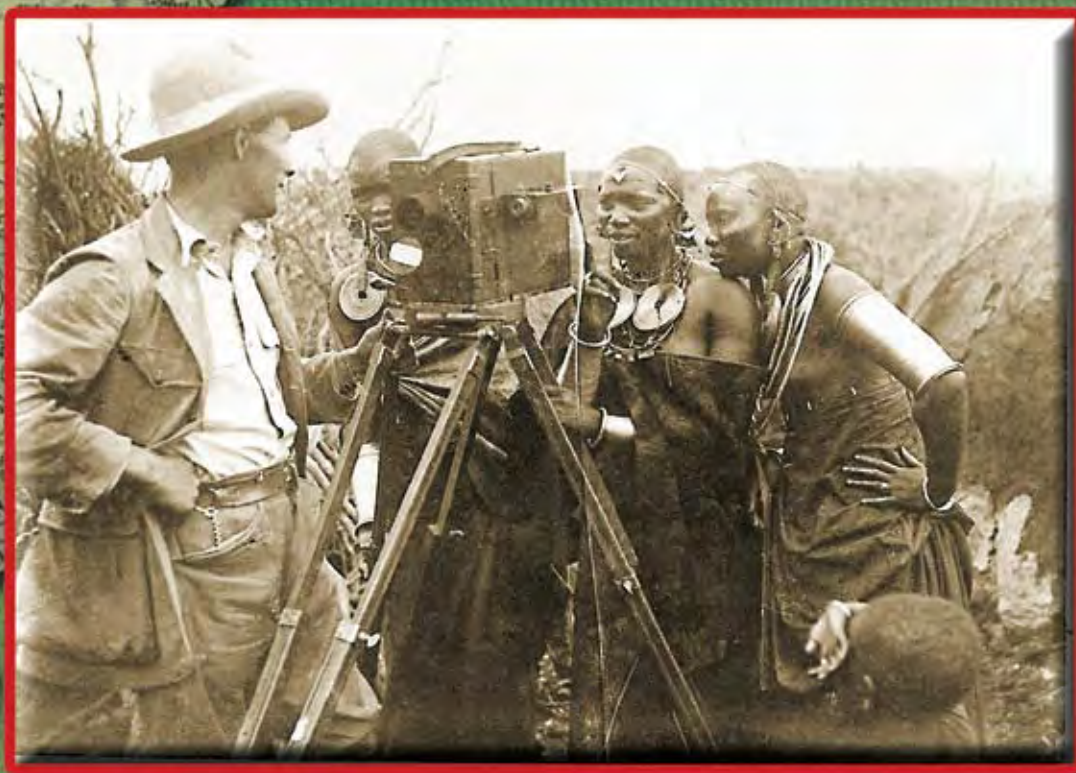
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An African Hunter Remembers Part 8

A Surprise for the Wandorobo

by Mulga (George Henry Outram)

While working for the Anglo-German border commission in about 1902, George Outram fishes on the Mara River while his camp is mistakenly raided by the King's African Rifles (KAR). The story continues...

1902 On my return to the escarpment camp I pitched the tent with one of my sheets run up as a flag of truce for fear the KAR were still in the vicinity. I wrote a report for the Colonel on my trip to the plains. Then we started to clear away the timber to unmask the beacon due west and also to the south. The western line was for our party, while the line to the south was for the German survey party on the plains in German East Africa. While my crew cut away the timber, I hunted north for game. One day I met three Wandorobo digging a beehive out of the earth. African wild bees are not particular where they make their hives, sometimes in fallen timber at the roots, in hollow trees and in holes in the earth. When they saw me, they made a move to run, but as I stood still they stopped. Salim spoke to them, so they came back and shook hands. I told Salim that if they wanted meat to come along and I would try and get them some. I got them two zebra and one topi and next morning they presented themselves in camp with a request for more meat and said they were very hungry in their village in the forest. Taking my rifle I went out and got three zebra, and then set out with one of them to see how the Wandorobo camped. Through the forest about four miles away I found about twenty huts dotted about near a beautiful little stream. On going around the camp I was astonished at the number of rhino horns at the hut doors – at least one hundred – giving an example of the deadliness of the poisoned arrow, for this is the weapon they rely upon for killing game. The native spear actually is a useless weapon except at close quarters as it is too heavy to throw for any distance. The Wandorobo huts are very small compared with the huts one sees in other villages. The word 'Wandorobo' means a hunter or wanderer.

I told Salim to pass on the word that if they wanted beads or wire to come over to our camp.

A procession turned up one morning just in time to witness a novel piece of tree shifting. With so many large trees to cut down, it would be weeks before the beacon could be seen, so I decided to try other means besides the axe. We had plenty of dynamite, so I got an auger and bored a number of holes in some of the large trees, some to the depth of two full sticks of dynamite. I plugged the holes full then put the caps into the dynamite with pieces of white paper to make a target. The Colonel and I would amuse ourselves with some target practice as we attempted to set off the dynamite and blow up the trees.

The Wandorobo men, women and children stood watching us. We used old rifles captured in the Boer War and bearing the EAR Brand, so our shooting was a bit erratic. When we registered our first bull's eye there was a huge roar and the ripping of trees. The Wandorobo flew back to their home in the forest and I am positive not one bow and arrow was taken back to the village, as they threw everything away in their wild flight, even their skin cloaks. Some of them had seen the effect of a rifle on buck when out hunting with me, but this must have looked in their eyes like I had handed out a dose of lightning. We collected all the Wandorobo goods and awaited their return to retrieve them. Next afternoon they actually plucked up the courage and came near us and were overjoyed to get their bows and arrows and other belongings back. They stole up to the shattered trees, shaking their heads as if to say, "We cannot understand it."

A week later I headed out again at 3 pm with three Wandorobo. We camped at the bottom of the escarpment for the night at a little water hole the Wandorobo had told me about. Around that waterhole we saw enough lion spoor to satisfy anyone wanting lion, but none were fresh. Daylight found me on the move again in the same direction I had taken ten days previously. From the top of the escarpment the country looked absolutely flat, but one soon found there was a huge fall in the country towards the river timber and the little flat-topped hills densely covered with a growth of jungle. Game was plentiful and

can only be described as a very overcrowded unfenced zoo.

Herds of topi, kongoni, wildebeest, graceful impala and beautiful gazelle all stood staring as we passed along. We heard the shrill whistle of the waterbuck. The Bohor reedbuck, like the zebra, stood gazing at us. Next came the beat of hooves like a squadron of mournful men and there, on the plain, was a sight I will ever remember. Galloping at top speed, then wheeling and opening out to let us through, we saw game numbering in the thousands. They stood snorting and stamping and now and again one more venturesome than the rest would walk to within 25 yards of us, then with a wild snort galloped away like mad.

About four miles from the river two rhino trotted along quietly. I took the double barrel 500 and moved quickly after them. Although they appeared to be going at the rate of a dogtrot, they were actually moving much quicker than I was. One of the Wandorobo ran to the front. I kept him in sight as best I could and after about a mile of fast going, I found him waiting for me in some open thorn bush country. The two rhino walked slowly across my front about one hundred yards away when both stopped dead and with heads up and ears pricked, stood listening. Thinking they had heard us, I stopped and heard the faint sound of song as our porters marched along. I thought the rhino would bolt so I fired for the shoulder. At the sound of the report the other rhino galloped away whilst the wounded one ran round in a small circle. I put another cartridge in and shot at the wounded rhino as he started off in the direction of his mate, hitting him in his hindquarters. The three Wandorobo ran after him and waved frantically for me to hurry. As I reached them, the rhino fell on his knees and I pumped two more shots into him to finish him off. I thought he was quite the ugliest animal I had seen. His front horn was quite a good one – twenty-eight-and-a-quarter inches long. We called a halt and sent for the safari to come over and get what meat they wanted. We cut off his horns and two front feet as trophies and marched on to the river, which I reached at about 4 pm feeling tired after the eighteen-to-twenty mile march, but very pleased I had gotten such a good rhino. The three Wandorobo couldn't resist the temptation of about two tons of meat on the veldt – so they stayed behind.

I selected a spot to camp just outside the river timber and pitched camp for the night. That night I listened to the howl of the hyena, the bark of the leopard and the grunt of the lions together with

the splashing of hippo as they floundered ashore on the other side of the river. The chattering of the monkeys and the shrill call of the tree hyrax put sleep out of the question. The loud report of an *askari's* rifle brought me rushing to the campfire. He said he had fired at a lion. The lions grunted till almost daylight and with the advent of dawn all noises ceased and the birds, like ourselves, welcomed the daylight.

All day we worked hard on our new *boma*, our camp for the next month or six weeks until those behind us reached our camp on the Mara River. This wonderful river carries a very large volume of water draining the plains for a considerable distance and the big range of mountains north of Sotik country. Judging by the high water mark some ten feet up on the trees around my camp, I knew in rainy season our present camp would be a good place to be out of. I sent back to the base camp to ask the Colonel to send a collapsible boat. We would make our main camp on the other side of the river where the bank was 20 feet higher than on our side.

Knock off time saw the riverbank lined with porters busily fishing. They made fishing lines from the wild fibre that grew on the riverbanks brought a plentiful supply of fish to camp at night. Selecting several of the largest fish, I had them packed in clean, wet grass in a box ready to go at daylight with the boys who were going to Sarungu Camp for the boat.

All this fishing reminded me of another fishing story. Before starting out on this expedition, I fitted myself out with a few lines and hooks. I tied my line onto a long thin stick, which acted as a fishing rod. After fishing, I left it standing against my tent to dry. Some hours when I went for my rod and line to fish again, they had disappeared. I called my tent boy Sabori and asked him where my rod and line were. He did not know, nor did anyone in camp. I sent Sabori to get another stick similar to the one that had been stolen. I unpacked my box and dug out another line and hook and awaited Sabori's return. Twenty minutes passed and Sabori had not returned. I called his name loudly, but got no reply. I told my gun-bearer, Salim, to cut me a stick, which he did, returning within ten minutes with the stick stripped of bark. Salim and I went fishing and forgot about the boy who had not returned.

Half an hour passed and I sent Salim to my tent to get my pipe and matches and to tell Sabori to get some tobacco from my box. Salim came with the pipe and told me that Sabori was not in camp.

Salem thought Sabori had fallen in the river. We lost no time in turning out 20 men to search the riverbank. I went with them and with the name "Sabori, Sabori" ringing through the trees, we searched everywhere, but still got no answer.

My old cook, Marbruken, said, "Let's see if the *mamba* (crocodile) has caught him." A careful search showed no sign of a struggle on the riverbank. We went back to camp but found no sign of him. Suddenly a blood-curdling scream broke out behind our camp. We all ran in that direction and saw Sabori rushing back to camp. I grabbed my rifle and ran out to meet him. Sabori dropped at my feet in a dead faint. The boy's face, legs and arms were covered in blood and his *kanzu* was torn to shreds. I threw some water on him and watched his drawn face, almost as white as my own, twitching. As he recovered, I asked him what had happened and he gasped one word: "Nyoka!" meaning snake.

I ripped off what little clothes he had left on his body and washed him all over, but the deep bleeding thorn scratches left little chance of seeing any puncture in the skin, if he had been bitten. Sabori fainted again and I called for brandy, which I forced between his clenched teeth. Soon he sat up and we learned what had happened. He had gone to get the stick for me down by the riverbank. He found one and as he returned through the long grass, he heard a loud hissing noise. He turned to see a huge snake with its head at least three feet above his own. He ran away into thick thorn bush country with the snake hissing at his heels. On and on he ran through the thorn and scrub, his skin ripped from head to toe. Seeing the camp, he screamed for help and fell exhausted at my feet. It is difficult to say whether he snake did hunt him as he described.

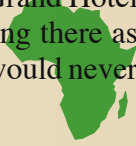
We never saw the snake Sabori said chased him. But the Sergeant Major had a nasty experi-

ence when he arrived at our Mara River camp four or five days later with 300 porters and the boat. He and I went out to shoot meat for the boys and the Sergeant took his shotgun in case we found guinea fowl. While watching the men cutting up a buck, he walked about 40 yards away to some inviting shade.

He saw what he thought was a huge cartwheel lying in the grass; he had a second look and realised it was a big snake. He threw a stick at it, thinking it was dead. To his surprise, a huge snake rose, swaying and hissing. His gun bearer ran up and the Sergeant grabbed his shotgun and emptied both barrels into the snake's head.

He dead snake measured over 24 feet in length and three feet in girth. Sabori was delighted at the death of the python, but he told me if he lived to get home, he would never go on safari again. So far he has kept his word. Nine years later I went to have dinner with the manager of the Grand Hotel in Mombasa and found Sabori working there as Head Table Steward. He repeated he would never again go on safari!

To be continued...



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