

LARGE
GAME SHOOTING

IN

THIBET, THE HIMALAYAS, NORTHERN AND
CENTRAL INDIA.

BY

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LATE THE KING'S ROYAL RIFLE CORPS.

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Frontispiece.

GROUP OF TROPHIES

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CH. XIII.

THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS
RHINOCEROS UNICORNIS

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS.

RHINOCEROS UNICORNIS.

Generally throughout India—*Gairá*—*Gairá*.

THE Great Indian Rhinoceros appears in former times to have inhabited the Terai throughout its whole length, but it has been gradually driven eastwards, until at the present day the Nípál Terai is its western limit. Even there its numbers have been much thinned, and it has lately been so highly prized that it has been reserved as Royal game, the late Sir Jang Báhdúr permitting no one to shoot it but himself.

Many Rhinoceros have been shot within the last few years in the vicinity of Jalpaigori; but there, partly owing to being constantly hunted, and partly owing to the clearance of large tracts for Tea cultivation, they are rapidly becoming scarce, and the sportsman must travel still farther east before he finds them at all plentiful. In the eastern portion of the Bhútán Dúárs and in Assam, wherever there are heavy reed jungles on the banks of rivers or on the margin of swamps, Rhinoceros may be met with, and occasionally several congregate in one covert. I have myself known six to be roused in a belt of "*nal*" not more than half a mile long and three or four hundred yards wide.

The marvellous growth of the long grasses and reeds, which spring up during the rainy season in the long belt of country lying along the foot of the Eastern Himalayas, and on the "*chars*" in the valley of the Bráhmápútrá and other great rivers, has often been described; and the accounts received with incredulity by those who have never seen how vegetation thrives under the combined influences of a tropical sun and abundance of rain. Let those doubt who may, however, the fact remains that, year after year, in the short space of two or three months, these giant grasses shoot up to a height of from twenty to thirty feet, forming, with the wild cardamum, various other broad-leaved plants and numerous creepers, a tangled cover which shelters the Elephant, the Rhinoceros and the Buffalo, as effectually as a field of standing corn affords concealment to the partridge or the quail.

I have seen a line of about fifteen Elephants beating a strip of reeds not more

than two hundred yards in width, and I could hardly see the grass shake. There was not so much commotion or indication of what was going on as would be caused by a pack of beagles drawing a gorse covert.

Runs or tunnels among the high reeds, like magnified "meuses" of hares and rabbits, show that the same paths through the thick jungle are generally made use of; and the Rhinoceros, like several of the deer and antelope tribe, has the habit of dropping its dung in one place. Vast heaps of these droppings, the accumulation of years, are constantly to be seen, and native Shikáris frequently watch these spots and obtain a shot at easy distance.

The Great Indian Rhinoceros is by no means "a thing of beauty." Huge and unwieldy in form, with an enormous head and general pig-like appearance, it is enveloped in what seems at first sight impenetrable armour, the thick and tuberculated skin hanging in massive folds, which attain their greatest thickness on the neck, shoulders, and quarters.

So thick and tough do these folds or shields appear, as to have given rise to the popular belief that the animal is nearly invulnerable, and that it is only by striking the joints in his harness that a bullet can penetrate.

I recollect an amusing story of a soldier during the Indian Mutiny who was placed in the guard-room for shooting a tame Rhinoceros which had been captured by his regiment. His defence was that he had read in a book that the hide of the animal was bullet-proof; and being of an inquiring turn of mind, had determined to put the theory to the test! As the shot was well-directed, the unfortunate subject of the experiment fell dead, and the prize fund was several thousand rupees the poorer.

As a matter of fact, the skin is quite soft when fresh; a bullet will penetrate anywhere with the greatest ease, and a hunting-knife can be driven through it with the slightest amount of force. When dried, of course it becomes extremely hard, and used to be in great request for the manufacture of shields. The hide, when polished, is very handsome and semi-transparent, and when held up to the light looks exactly like tortoise-shell, the tubercles giving it a beautiful mottled appearance.

The horn of this species seldom exceeds a foot in length; it is composed of agglutinated hairs, and is not firmly attached to the skull, but rests on a slight bony excrescence on the snout, from which it is easily removed a day or two after death. Contrary to general belief, the Rhinoceros does not make use of its horn as a weapon of offence; the wounds which it occasionally inflicts on Elephants are caused by its long sharp incisors, with which it can give a very formidable bite.

The horn is highly valued by natives both of India and China, and fetches a high price in the market; being worth from Rs. 50 to Rs. 300, according to weight. Hindús use it in some of their religious ceremonies, while the Chinese ascribe to it

the virtues of the famous Venetian glass, and believe that drinking-cups manufactured from it possess the property of indicating the presence of poison.

The foot of the Rhinoceros is peculiarly formed, having only three toes; and its trefoil-shaped track cannot be mistaken for that of any other animal.

Ungainly animal as the Rhinoceros is, it is possessed of considerable speed, and, although its usual gait when disturbed is a long swinging trot, it occasionally breaks into a lumbering gallop, the pace of which is surprising.

Owing to their formation, Rhinoceros do not readily roll over on their sides; and when shot they almost always die in a recumbent position, as if they had quietly sunk down to sleep.

The flesh is excellent, and cannot easily be distinguished from beef; indeed it is better than most beef that one sees in India. The tongue, which is very curiously formed, is particularly good.

The following are the measurements of an old male which I shot, but larger specimens are to be met with:—

Height at withers	...	...	...	...	5 feet 9 inches or 17 hands 1 inch.
Length from nose to root of tail	...	10	..	6	..
Length of tail	...	...	...	2	.. 5 ..
Girth	...	...	...	9	.. 8 ..
Girth of forearm	...	...	...	3	.. 2 ..

There are two ways in which Rhinoceros may be hunted; one by quietly tracking up the animal on a single Elephant until he is at last found in his lair, or perhaps standing quite unconscious of danger—the other, by beating him out of jungle with a line of Elephants, the guns being stationed at the points where he is most likely to break cover. In the latter case it is necessary to have reliable men with the beaters, who can exercise authority and keep them in order, for both Mahouts and Elephants have the greatest dread of the huge brute, who appears to be much more formidable than he really is. When disturbed he makes a tremendous noise crashing through the reeds, and grunting and snorting with steam-engine power; but unless driven to extremities by being hemmed into a corner, I believe that it is but seldom that he will really charge home. I have not yet witnessed an instance of his doing so.

In April, 1878, I received an invitation from a friend, who had the command of many Elephants in one of the best heavy-game shooting districts in Bengal, to join him in an expedition against Buffalo and Rhinoceros. Of course I gladly accepted, and on arriving at my friend's house I was pleased to find that our shooting-party consisted of only three, the very best number for such sport. Large shooting-parties are very good fun, and probably (though not always) more game may be bagged than

with a smaller party; but as far as the actual sport is concerned, I infinitely prefer to have not more than two companions.

When there are many guns out there is nearly always a lot of wild firing, and it is frequently impossible to tell who has actually shot an animal.

With three guns, and a manageable number of Elephants, the cream of sport may be enjoyed, and each sportsman is independent and has his fair share of the shooting, without being interfered with by, or interfering with, others.

Our first day was blank as regarded the bag, although one Rhinoceros was wounded; much of our time being lost owing to an Elephant sticking in a quicksand, from which we had the greatest difficulty in extricating her, after laboring hard for several hours.

The second day we only shot Buffaloes, which inhabited the same jungles as the Rhinoceros, so that we could never tell which animal would be likely to break covert in any given beat, and it so happened that we several times found both together.

Our third day's sport afforded an instance of this, and I succeeded in killing my first "Rhino," as we always called them for the sake of brevity, and as I shall henceforth call them in this narrative.

We had tracked a wounded bull Buffalo into a large and very thick covert, into which it was useless to follow him with any idea of getting a shot. The three guns therefore went on ahead, and took up their positions at the other end of the covert, while the pad Elephants were ordered to form line and beat steadily through the jungle. After waiting a long time at my post, I heard some large animal crashing through the reeds, and as the line of beaters advanced, the waving of the grass betrayed its movements. It came on very slowly, occasionally stopping for some time to listen, and again making a cautious advance. I remained still as death, but I was in a great state of anxiety lest my Elephant should become uneasy and give the alarm. Fortunately he remained silent, and at length the "Rhino," anticipating no danger ahead, and pressed by the steadily advancing line of Elephants behind him, poked his ugly head out of the reeds within twenty yards of me. I could only see his snout and his horn, and aimed above the latter for his forehead. I either took a bad aim, or my Elephant moved slightly as I fired, for, as I afterwards found, my bullet merely grazed the snout, cutting a deep furrow along the base of the horn. As the "Rhino" wheeled round, I gave him another bullet in the centre of his ribs, and he rushed back into the reeds and through the beaters with an angry grunt.

I was using a 12-bore rifle with hardened spherical bullets, and seven drams of powder, so I felt certain that the "Rhino" was mortally wounded, and accordingly two or three of the beaters were ordered to follow his track. They had not gone far before they shouted that they had found him, and, on hastening to the spot, I had the satisfaction of contemplating my first "Rhino." My second bullet had struck him in

the ribs, and passing forward into his lungs, had caused death by suffocation. The huge animal lay with his legs doubled under him, as if fast asleep, and it required some exertion on the part of one of our largest Elephants to roll him over. The horn was an average-sized one, thick at the base, but not very long.

Although it was a blazing hot day, we celebrated the event with a glass of whisky, and then superintended the cutting off his head and the removal of the shields, while a number of long strips were cut from his hide, to be afterwards made into whips. We selected a few choice pieces of meat for ourselves, and in a very short time scores of villagers from the neighbourhood flocked to the spot, delighted at the chance of obtaining a good supply of flesh.

I took the measurements of this "Rhino" very carefully: they are those given above.

Another "Rhino" was wounded during the afternoon, but we lost it among high reeds, and a savage bull Buffalo created a *diversion*, which prevented us from continuing our search.

Next morning D. was unable to go out shooting, so S. and I went to look for the animals wounded yesterday, at least two Buffaloes having been severely hit in addition to the "Rhino." We were not long in finding a cow Buffalo, which had fallen in a sandy nullah; and some vultures wheeling over the thickest part of the jungle drew our attention to the spot, where we discovered the "Rhino"—a small female—lying dead.

A little separated from the large covert was a belt of high reeds on the bank of a river, and as it was a most likely looking place, we proceeded to beat it. S. went to the end of the covert, while I skirted the edge, keeping just ahead of the line of beaters. It was not long before I heard a "Rhino," which moved slowly along some two hundred yards in front of the Elephants, occasionally approaching the edge of the covert and again plunging deeper into it. At length he made up his mind to at least see whether the coast was clear or not, but hardly had his head appeared, when he drew back, and grunting loudly, charged through the beaters. I immediately called them out of the jungle, and taking them back half a mile, re-formed the line, and recommenced the beat. On coming to the end, however, I found that we had not gone back far enough, and that the "Rhino" was still behind us.

S. therefore went to the other end, and we proceeded to beat in the reverse direction. The "Rhino" was again roused, and after dodging about for some time he at length trotted out close to me. My Elephant was unsteady, and I missed the shot at the head, and as the "Rhino" turned away, my second bullet struck him close to the root of the tail, a pretty deadly place with the heavy charges that I was using. The "Rhino" now went straight to S., who dropped him with a

couple of shots. On examining him, we found that he had a very perfect sharp horn, about a foot long. He was covered with scars from fighting, and had lost one eye!

On subsequent days we shot with varied luck, bagging several more "Rhino," and losing others which we ought to have got. The greatest difficulty was to get the beaters to keep their places when a "Rhino" was on foot. As soon as the great beast began grunting and rushing about, they would scream out that he was attacking their Elephants, and with few exceptions they would do their best to get out of the way, and afford the "Rhino" a clear line of retreat.

At length, after a very enjoyable week, we came to our last beat, a long narrow belt of reeds with a small marshy stream trickling through it. D. went to the extreme end; I was about a hundred and fifty yards from him, and S. came along with the beaters. As they approached I heard a "Rhino" coming on ahead of them, and he passed me within a few yards, but without showing himself. Directly afterwards, two shots from D., both of which hit him hard, sent him back in my direction, and as he passed me at a swinging trot within thirty yards, I got a clear shot at him. My bullet struck him fair in the very centre of the shield, and the enormous brute rolled heels over head like a rabbit—stone dead. This was the only instance we witnessed of a "Rhino" dying otherwise than in a recumbent position; but none of the others were thus shot dead in full career. This was the largest "Rhino" that we killed during the trip, and had the most massive horn. I regret that I did not keep his measurements.

On a subsequent visit to the same jungles I shot two more "Rhino," one with a single bullet.

In 1886 I once more found myself on the same ground; this time alone, and with the intention of, if possible, shooting on foot. As I had only two Elephants, neither of them staunch, driving was, of course, out of the question, and I only used them as means of conveyance. After a few days' shooting at other animals, I reached the place where I expected to find "Rhino," on the forenoon of February 15th. My camp was pitched on the bank of a large river, and heavy reed jungles extended in every direction, the portion close to my tent having been recently burnt. In the soft sand were the fresh footprints of several "Rhino" and Buffaloes, one of the former being a remarkably large one; and the "pugs" of a large Tiger showed where he had drunk on the previous evening.

The Elephants having bathed and collected their "*chára*," I started pretty early in the afternoon; we soon reached dense cover, and the numerous paths made by the "Rhino," their fresh droppings, and other signs, showed that there were several about. We followed up some of the most recent tracks, which, however, were so intersected by others, that it was impossible to keep to one long; and at length we

gave up the idea of tracking, and merely moved quietly through the jungle, keeping a sharp look out. The cover consisted chiefly of "nal," but here and there were comparatively clear spaces, where the grass had been burnt some time before. We were turning towards home, when, on reaching one of these clearings, I observed a "Rhino" standing near the opposite side of it, and gazing in our direction. He was about a hundred yards off, and I knew that if my Elephant approached any nearer she would see him and immediately bolt, so I lost no time in slipping to the ground and making the best of my way towards the "Rhino," which was standing nearly facing me. Although the green grass was short, the dry stems which had escaped being totally consumed by the fire were seven or eight feet high, and not only formed a sort of screen through which it was difficult to see clearly, but considerably impeded my progress. Moving as cautiously and quietly as possible, I could not avoid making a certain amount of noise, the dry stems crackling at every step. When within about sixty or seventy yards, I thought that it would be unadvisable to attempt to get to closer quarters; as if the "Rhino" became alarmed, he would at once be lost to view. I therefore aimed at his shoulder, and gave him a shot from a heavy 8-bore. He stumbled forward on receiving the bullet, and I at first thought that he would subside on the spot, but after one or two desperate struggles he recovered himself, and disappeared before I had a chance of giving him the second barrel. Running up to the spot, I was surprised to find no blood, and on following the tracks for about a hundred yards, not a drop was to be seen. The Shikári at once said that I had missed, but I knew that this was quite impossible; and besides I had clearly seen that the "Rhino" had nearly fallen to my shot. I therefore insisted on following up the track, and had the satisfaction of finding that it led us out to a burnt part of the jungle, instead of into the nearly impenetrable "nal." We had not gone two hundred yards when we reached a small tree, and as it was impossible to see farther than a few yards on foot, the Shikári climbed up to reconnoitre. He immediately began to gesticulate violently, and I tried to ascertain what he saw. As I do not know two words of Bengálí, and the Shikári was nearly equally ignorant of Úrdú, I could not gain any information, except that the "Rhino" was in sight. There was not a branch on the tree within fifteen feet of the ground, so I went back to the Elephant, from whose back I hoped to have a view of the game. I had hardly mounted, however, before the brute bolted, and it was some time before she could be stopped. As soon as she was brought to a standstill, I again dismounted, and rejoining the Shikári, took up the trail on foot. I was still in ignorance as to whether the "Rhino" had shown signs of being mortally wounded, and I had heard none of the puffing and grunting which generally proclaim the fact that one of these animals is *in extremis*.

After tracking for about three hundred yards I could just make out a black

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mass through the withered stems, a few paces in front of me; and a closer scrutiny showed me the "Rhino" lying on his side. The Shikári implored me to fire, but I knew that the "Rhino," if not actually dead, must at any rate be very sick; so I walked right up to him, and found that he had already breathed his last. He was a huge old male; his great age being shown by the fact that he had lost two or three of his teeth, while what must once have been a fine massive horn was much splintered and worn away.

The portrait here given is that of the above mentioned "Rhino." I had a very handsome table made of one of his shields, and his feet were converted into pedestals for lamps, which have been much admired.

Next morning, having sent to summon the inhabitants of the neighbouring village to assist in the congenial task of cutting up the "Rhino," I hunted in a different direction, but did not meet with any game. After breakfast, we proceeded to skin and dismember the "Rhino" which had fallen less than a mile from my tent. The villagers had knives and bill-hooks of miserable quality, and as my two best skinning knives had been lost, it was with infinite labor that we severed the enormous head from the carcass, and amputated the four limbs, as I wanted the feet as trophies. I also removed the shields from the shoulders and quarters, and gave the men leave to do as they liked with the remainder. They carried out the butchering operations *con amore*, and it was not long before flesh, bones, intestines, and even skin, were cut up into small fragments, and ready for distribution. The great ribs, which looked like the timbers of a ship, were wrenched off, and at last nothing remained but the vertebræ, the pelvis, and three or four ribs which had been scraped perfectly bare. About two hundred vultures had collected during the day, and were sitting in groups all round us; but they must have been sadly disappointed, for the human vultures had left them absolutely nothing but a pool of blood! When the work was complete, two or three of the leading men made the remainder squat in a circle, and proceeded to allot the numerous shares of flesh, which appeared to be divided with the greatest fairness. I had the curiosity to count the men and found that there were eighty-seven, each of whom had a good load of meat to carry home to his family.

It is a great satisfaction to a sportsman when he knows that the flesh of the animals that he kills is not wasted. The keenest hunter must have sometimes felt that the life of a noble animal has been sacrificed solely to gratify his love of sport; and I have often regretted the waste of tons of excellent meat, which the prejudices, religious or unreasonable, of the natives, have prevented from being utilised. If removing the head of the "Rhino" was hard work, skinning it was infinitely harder, and it was late in the day before the task was completed.

I had just undressed at night, when the Shikári came to say that a "Rhino"

had come down to the opposite bank of the river. Our fires, however, must have alarmed him, for when I went out, he had vanished. Crossing the river on the morning of the 17th, I again found many fresh traces of "Rhino," but saw none of the animals. The greater part of the day was occupied in supervising the preservation of the head, feet, and shields; and I was prevented from going out in the evening by the non-return of the Elephants which had been sent for fodder.

I sent men in various directions to search for them, but no tidings could be obtained.

Early in the night a "Rhino" was heard not far from my tent; but by the time that I went out he had moved into some thick reeds.

The Elephants did not return till 8 o'clock next morning, their coolies having a long story about one of them having escaped, and their spending the night in chasing her. I have strong suspicions that they paid a visit to a village three or four miles off, and thought that they might as well take a holiday. In the afternoon I crossed the river to where I had seen so many tracks on the 17th, and waited till after sundown, in hopes that a "Rhino" might venture into the open. We heard one in a very dense jungle, but he would not show himself. At night I was awoken by the growling of my dog, and could distinctly hear the tread of some heavy animal. Hurrying out in my sleeping suit, I could hear a "Rhino" moving not far off, and I approached near enough to hear him chewing the reeds, though it was impossible to see him. After a time he moved off in the direction of my tent, and I lost no time in following him. I was met by my servants, who showed me the spot up to which he had come before he detected the fires; it was *within* forty yards of my tent door! As the "Rhino" had made off down the river, I ran along the sandy bank, in hopes of cutting him off, but I was only in time to see him walk across the stream about a hundred and fifty yards below me, and though there was a bright moon it was, of course, useless to fire at such a range.

My leave of absence was now drawing to a close, and I set out on my return journey next morning.

THE CHÍTÁ OR HUNTING LEOPARD—*Cynælurus jubatus*.

This animal is found in Central India and the Central Provinces, but it is nowhere common, and in most districts very rare. I have never met with it in the wild state, but I have described it, and related all I know about it in the chapter on the Indian Antelope.

THE JAVAN OR SUNDERBUN RHINOCEROS—*Rhinoceros sondaicus*.

This comparatively little known Rhinoceros is still tolerably abundant in the Sunderbuns or Gangetic Delta, where it inhabits the swampy islands near the sea face. It is also found, but rarely, in the Sikkim Terai, where, I believe, its existence was not known for certain until I recognized it in 1878.

It is sometimes known as the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros, but when full-grown it is little, if at all, inferior in size to the other species.

It may be recognized by the different arrangement of the heavy folds of the skin, by the somewhat slenderer head, and above all, by the curious tessellated appearance of the hide, which is very different from the tuberculated armour of *Rhinoceros unicornis*.

The female has no vestige of a horn.

In May 1878, I was hunting not far from the left bank of the Tístá river, with two friends, S. and L. One day we had pitched our camp at a place where we were told that Rhinoceros were to be found, and had spent the whole morning in a fruitless search for them. That there were "Rhino" in the neighbourhood was evident from the fresh tracks, so we went out again in the afternoon.

After beating through a considerable extent of forest, we came to a wide grassy plain, and while crossing it, we roused a "Rhino" out of a muddy watercourse. We did not catch sight of it, but the disturbed state of the water showed that it had just left, and we presently heard it moving through the high grass. We had not much difficulty in tracking, and in about a mile we overtook the "Rhino," which turned to gaze at us. S. fired and crippled it, and knocked it over with a second shot.

Our Elephants, which were all nervous untrained animals, refused to go near the fallen "Rhino," and as we endeavored to force them in the proper direction, a calf, which we had not previously observed, rushed through the grass. L., who could not see how small it was, fired at once, and struck the poor little beast, which uttered a loud scream.

This was too much for the nerves of S.'s Elephant, which at once bolted at full speed in the direction of the "sál" forest, which he was only prevented from entering

(to the imminent risk of his rider) by the Mahout throwing a blanket over his eyes.

In the meantime L. and I were endeavoring to find the calf, but though we dismounted from our demoralized Elephants, and hunted for it on foot, we could find no trace of it in the heavy grass.

On going to examine our prize, I at once recognised it as *R. sondaicus*; and on telling the natives who were with us that this was not the ordinary Rhinoceros, they informed me that they were aware that there were two kinds.

A Gúrkhá who was with me filled a soda water bottle with the milk of the dead Rhinoceros: I had the curiosity to taste it, and found it excellent.

S. had some very handsome shields and trays made from the hide; which, when dried and polished, looks like tortoise-shell.

THE PIGMY HOG—*Sus salvanius*.

This tiny animal hardly comes under the heading of "Large Game," but being so nearly allied to the Wild Boar, I have mentioned it in its proper place.

It is an inhabitant of the Sikkim Terai and Bhútán Dúárs, but very little is known about its habits. As it lives in perfect forests of grass, there are not many facilities for observing it.

I can give no detailed description of the animal, never having inspected one. I believe that it is exactly like a miniature hog, only rounder in shape, and nearly tail-less. I have frequently seen its footmarks in the Sikkim Terai, and on one occasion I followed a small animal (whose course I could trace by the moving stems), for some distance, but did not fire, because I could not see what it was. I was much annoyed when my Shikárí afterwards informed me that it was one of the small Pigs.

I believe that the Pigmy Hog does not stand more than twelve inches at the shoulder!

THE SHÁ OR ÚREN—*Ovis Vignei*.

The question whether this sheep is identical with the Úriál, or not, has not yet been satisfactorily settled. After careful examination of many skulls, Mr. Blanford is unable to find sufficient reasons for recognising more than one species. I believe, however, that there are marked differences in size of body and shape of horn; while the conspicuous ruff of the Úriál is said to be entirely wanting in the Shá, if not in the Úren.

The Shá inhabits the utterly barren and forestless hills of the Ládák, where it is