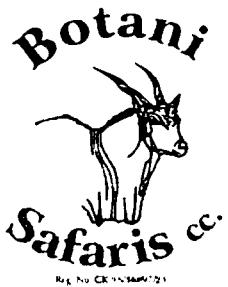


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The Rhino

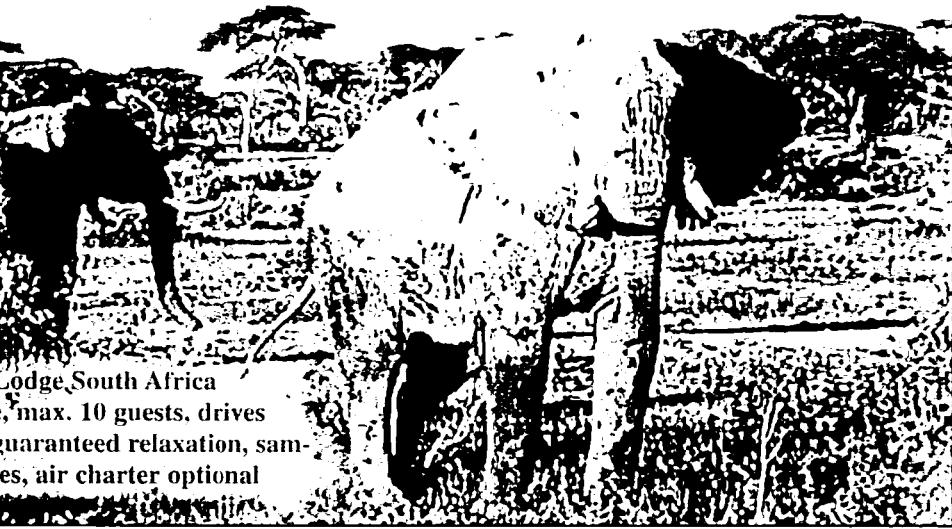
that did not like Elephants

by John Kingsley-Heath

Arthur Santomo, who hailed from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was a short and stocky man of Sicilian-Italian extraction. We had met in the U.S.A. at a soiree given by some friends of mine in Pittsburgh, and he had booked a 30-day safari with me in the hope of collecting as many trophies as possible. He was an excellent companion and enthusiastic hunter. Arthur wanted some good ivory, and, as luck would have it, it had rained on the eastern border of the Tsavo National Park and a migration of elephants in search of new pastures was imminent.

We were booked into block 21A in Kenya, which was a 250-mile drive from Nairobi down the main Mombasa Road. At MacKinnon Road, the scene of the old British Army supply dump of the 1939-45 War, we turned north-east and followed the park boundary to the Galana River, where we camped.

A few miles before reaching the Galana, we passed two hills on the east side of the national park boundary. These hills



were small and easily climbed within a few minutes. The surrounding country was flat, and from our observation post a fine view of the area was possible.

The soil was red, the reflected light from the small water holes easily spotted. Big, red mud-encrusted elephants stuck out like sore thumbs. Our little group of spotters saw little this day, so, returning to the car, we headed back up the border cut, heading south-

west on the road by which we had entered the previous day. We crossed over the Garibete flood plain and decided to stop for a cup of tea. Sitting on the roof of the car, we immediately spotted a large bull elephant on his own heading out of the park into the hunting area.

The wind was blowing strongly from east to west, so turning the car round to face north towards camp we sat and watched. The

bull was carrying good ivory that I estimated to be in the region of 80 pounds a side. He crossed out of the national park and kept on heading east within the hunting area. After giving him a mile within the hunting area, we collected our rifles and water bottles and set out after him.

About an hour and a half later we came up to him browsing on some newly grown vegetation. An ear shot with Arthur's .458 Winchester Model 70 killed the bull immediately and left him sitting bolt upright. After taking a few pictures and leaving Arthur and Edward, my gunbearer, by the elephant, I set out to return to the car, carrying my trusty .470 Westley Richards double-barrelled rifle.

The country was open and easy to traverse on foot. I hit the road and turned left towards the car, which I could now see clearly on the brow of the rising ground. As I got nearer, a large animal, that at some distance appeared to be a rhino, moved across in front of the car. Rhino were totally protected in the area, and I had no wish, therefore, to provoke it, which is easily done. From the lie of the ground I decided to make a long detour within the hunting area and come up to the back of the car with the wind securely in my favour. The rhino seemed unconcerned and continued to stand by the car as if it was guarding it. The detour completed, I approached to within 20 yards of the car, keeping it between me and the rhino's head. I made it to the car, climbing onto the roof from the back and diving down through the observation hatch on the roof.

Musioka, the other gunbearer whom I had left to look after the car, was squatted down in the back trying to make himself invisible and scent less. As I climbed into the car the springs squeaked, and the rhino was alerted and snorted. Leaning over I switched on the ignition and blew the horn. The rhino—duly startled out of his wits—took off. Thankfully, we had seen the last angry rhino for the day—or so we thought.

Setting off in the car in the direction of the elephant, we had hardly gone three-quarters of a mile when we heard a fusillade of shots. We stopped and glassed the country, but saw nothing. More shots—they were coming from the direction of the elephant, Edward, and Art. Quickly I decided on the direction in which they were firing. Incredibly, I saw them sitting on top of the upright elephant through my binoculars. Driving to my left, I approached the elephant from the opposite direction to which they were regarding an enemy unseen by me. On my arriving



a few yards from the elephant, Edward pointed out a rhino not 30 yards from them, apparently dead and sitting upright.

My .470 in my hands, I got out of the car. Immediately I was treated to a tirade of complaints from Arthur. 'You abandoned me in the bush to my fate!' he shouted. 'And I am lucky to be alive!' He was the epitome of an excited Italian. It did not take me long to obtain the story of what had happened.

Both Arthur and Edward had sat on the ground with their backs resting against the elephant, watching me walk away into the

distance. Shortly after I had disappeared they felt the elephant move behind them. Edward stood up and climbed onto the elephant's foot to look over its back.

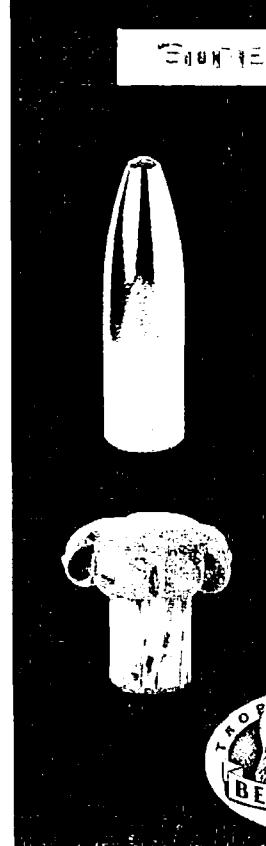
There, not five feet from him, was a rhino. There was no tree in sight, the only refuge being on top of the elephant's back. Grabbing Arthur's arm and putting his fingers to his lips, Edward coaxed Arthur onto the elephant's back.

Arthur was speechless and petrified. The rhino backed off, snorting.

'No shoot! No shoot!' said Edward.

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(He knew rhino were strictly protected in the area.) The rhino, hearing Edward's entreaties, charged the elephant and repeatedly horned its carcase, causing the elephant to rock uncontrollably. This was understandably unnerving to the two elephant jockeys perched on its back. The dialogue continued: 'No shoot! No shoot!' said Edward. The rhino continued its altercations, and the carcase of the elephant rocked dangerously, threatening to spill Arthur and Edward onto the ground in front of the rhino.

Finally my Italian-American friend could stand it no longer. By now there were more than 30 holes in the elephant's carcase made by the irate rhino. His .458 Winchester deterred it somewhat, but not until it had charged twice more was Arthur able to get a fatal shot into the rhino, so unsteady had become his perch on the elephant's back. Heart-shot, the bull rhino lumbered off a few yards, where it collapsed and died, sitting upright, just like the elephant. The rhino's horn measured 14 inches.

After everyone had cooled off, we had a predicament on our hands. We had shot a rhino in a protected area without a licence in the most bizarre and unbelievable circumstances. There was only one thing to be done: the matter had to be reported to the game department. I carried in the car at all times a radio telephone with its 50-foot wire aerial. Operated by the car's 12-volt battery, this had a range of more than 500 miles. I set up the radio and made the call.

As luck would have it, David Brown, the newly appointed chief game warden, was

in and prepared to take the call. As I described what had happened with some embarrassment, I could well imagine the look of incredulity creeping over his face.

'Strange things happen, stranger than fiction', he said. 'All right, John. Carry on with the safari; bring in the horn, headskin, and feet, and if the facts that you have reported can be substantiated we will see about Mr. Santomo keeping the trophies on payment of the licence fee.'

I was very relieved to hear this outcome of what could have blown up into a

difficult matter. At the end of the safari, we duly presented our selves with the trophy to David Brown at game department headquarters in Nairobi and, after talking to the gun-bearers and Arthur and me, he duly settled the matter. The elephant's tusks were a nicely matched pair, each weighing 85 pounds.

Excerpt from the book „Hunting the dangerous Game of Africa“ by John Kingsley-Heath.



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