

The Nimule Corridor

By T. R. H OWEN.

The Nimule corridor is not much known, and yet no lover of good country and of natural history has really completed his education in the Sudan until he has seen it.

From Yei, 100 miles S. W. of Juba, one can motor a further 100 miles to Kajo Kaji, only a short distance from the Uganda border. Kajo Kaji lies on the edge of the hill country, but looking west and southwest over a populated and fairly fertile land-scape, and its feature, the rest house built by Stigand in 1911, is itself among the wonders of the Sudan, a huge labyrinthine building surrounding three sides of a courtyard, compacted of great slabs of warm-coloured granite and with something in it of a Norman fortress, an Oxford College and a Cotswold farm-house all mingled together with a strong individual character about the whole.

From Kajo Kaji one must take porters and descend, seven miles by ruler on the map, to Shukoli on the Nile. The route will take 3½ hours, winding down a great gorge of granite boulders very similar to some of the defiles in the Nuba Mountains, up a steep ascent and down an equally precipitous drop to the plain; and at Shukoli, where there is a ferry and a small ginney, habitations are left behind and the traveller turns South to enter the "corridor" proper.

This corridor lies between the Nile and the Mountains. To the east the former runs like a great Norwegian Salmon river, not the placid White Nile which most of us know but strong and deep with rapids, rocks and islands and the hills rising straight from the banks. The whole stretch of 32 miles is fine, but reaches its best at the Fola rapids 5 or 6 miles North of Nimule. Next to the Victoria Falls I think this is the most impressive sight of water I have seen. Starting with a definite and beautiful waterfall, the whole bulk and volume of the Nile is then compressed into a channel some yards across between rocky walls, and for nearly a mile is forced through this channel at 20 or 25 m.p.h. with a power and vehemence which must be seen to be understood.

Two miles to the west the great escarpments rise into Uganda, running parallel with the river, with peaks and bastions standing out here and there and from the base of these mountains the ground falls riverwards in a series of gullies, stony slopes, rocky hillocks and glades. In parts of these hillocks a few Madi have scratched a living in times past, but it is now uninhabited, eroded, undevelopable soil, covered with a growth of scraggy combetum except among some of the deep glades and along the river where gemmeiz, ardeib, hemmeid and other good timber grows.

By the river the track is easy, but if the traveller wishes to see the game of this narrow corridor, mostly a bare 2 miles broad and widening at the Southern end to a maximum of 4 miles, he must go up over the

rough country to the base of the escarpment, hard walking but with full reward in scenery and in wild life.

Small game is not abundant, but with early burning to provide young green grass it could be increased. Waterbuck are fairly well distributed and can always be found; I have seen up to 23 in a herd, and also a male-herd of 6 or 7 horned beasts. Hartebeeste are hereby and there in small groups. Duiker and oribi are frequently met with. There are a few bushbuck on the lower slopes; and at some seasons wart-hog are not uncommon. A party or two of cob may be seen near the Northern and Southern ends. Baboons are present, and the little rock hyrax. And in at least one deep ravine near Shukoli, and probably elsewhere, the beautiful colobus monkey exists, which floats from tree-top to tree-top with its long, silky, black-and-white fur flowing out and giving it almost the appearance of flying.

But it is for the big species that the corridor is remarkable,—elephant, buffalo, rhino and hippo. The latter is found along the quieter reaches of the river, and may keep one awake at night with his deep grunts, but he is not so common as he should be owing to pitfall traps and other Madi hunting methods. Buffalo are distributed from end to end. They have, I think, lately suffered from some disease which has reduced their numbers; but they breed quickly; you cannot go any great distance without stumbling on them, and a herd of sixty buffalo walking up the hillside towards one, with the background of the mountains behind them, is a fine sight. Their vision is not quick, but wind is an all-important factor in approaching them and one has to be careful, for what is a constant and steady wind on the open tops may blow from all kinds of queer and irregular angles when you get into the twisting gullies.

The same warning about wind applies to elephant. To the ivory hunter the corridor is not recommended. For some reason which is not clear bulls, at any rate big bulls, do not seem to frequent it. But up and down the great majority of it cows, calves and young bulls are to be found in little knots and groups and family parties. For the photographer the conditions are good, partly because of the fine setting and background which are usually lacking with elephant and partly because the rocks and trees more often than not give good cover and line of retreat for those of us who are not of the boldest. The elephant however can travel with surprising agility over stones and among boulders. Their favourite beat is the base of the escarpment, where the combretum for their browsing is thickest, and their shapes may sometimes be seen high up the mountain-side.

The rhino needs a special note. The black rhino has recently been seen in the corridor near Nimule, by Colonel Stanton, and the occurrence is of great interest for they have been supposed confined to the East bank and must in all probability have crossed by the elephants bridge, the barrage of vegetation which forms from time to time across the face of the river and rocks. But the real rhino of the corridor is the rare "white" one. As is commonly known the name is a corrupt-



MY LORD THE ELEPHANT



WHITE RHINO, NOTE SQUARE LIP AND FRINGED EARS

ion of the Boer word describing the broad, square lip which, along with his bulk, large fringed ears and high and heavy shoulders distinguishes him. But if it does not refer to the colour of his hide it is more applicable to the colour of his soul, which is most distinct from that of his nasty cousin. There can be few more placid or inoffensive beasts than the white rhino. A mother with a child may become umbrageous and should not be taken liberties with, but that does not apply only to Rhino. Otherwise he is an idle and quiet pachyderm and one could almost go up and shake horns with him. He tends to sink down and snooze incontinently in the shade at any time of day, even early in the morning. The vision of his little pig-eyes, tiny for his bulk, is weaker even than the elephant's. And even when an intruder is physically within their range, he often seems unwilling to believe it. I have been to within 20 paces, and when I ambled back the only effect upon the quarry was to make him mildly stare. During the following minutes, though well beyond his vision, one could see his poor old brain painfully working as it began to dawn upon him that he had seen something unusual and that perhaps the neighbourhood was not wholly healthy, and after much swithering and cogitation he slowly trundled off. The only factor I have found which makes them difficult of close approach is the tick bird. If they are present they tend to become noisy and disturbed when the intruder is as much as 50 yards away, and their host always takes warning and becomes uneasy.

Birds life along the river is not in abundance but is never absent. The various ibis, the hammerheaded and openbill storks, Egyptian geese, spurwing plover, the grey-headed and pied king fishers, cormorants and many birds of prey are generally to be found. Above all, on every reach, the traveller is never out of hearing of the high, wild, yelping of the fishing-eagle, to the bass accompaniment of the river's roar—that best and most satisfying of sounds to all who love water and fine country.
