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BRITISH BORDERLAND

SERVICE AND SPORT IN EQUATORIA

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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*Original
copy*

WITH 18 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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simple antelope is neither so simple nor so fearless as he once thought him. It probably will not soothe his ruffled temper to cross the line into the reserve and find that the herds will come within twenty yards or so of him and pursue a parallel course, observing him minutely the while, with almost indecent curiosity. They know just as well as he does that he may not shoot there.

The train clatters over a girder bridge spanning a small nullah, and amongst the feathery tops of a mimosa grove in the bed of the streamlet we catch a glimpse of black and white blotches, long swaying necks, and small pointed heads nibbling the young shoots. A herd of giraffe feeding. Then amidst the grazing herds we see a bevy of ostriches scuttling madly over the ground, which they cover at a tremendous pace. The wariest, cunningest, and hardest beast to stalk in Africa.

Presently we stop at a tiny station ; a couple of tin houses, some mud huts, and a few ragged tents, with the usual motley crowd of heterogeneous loafers that a railway station seems to attract in all lands. While the engine takes in water the Indian station-master shows us the pug-marks of a lion who carried off a goat from here last night. We follow up the tracks until we lose them on hard, dry ground, and

then go back to find the train waiting for us in order to start.

It has gone a short way when a black, bulky, and ungainly mass is descried in the scanty shade of a stunted acacia. Our first sight of rhino—outside the Zoo—and very sleepy and plethoric he looks as he takes his ease. Subsequent experience will teach us that, ungainly as he seems, he possesses extraordinary mobility. "Like a motor-car running amuck," I have heard him described.

Presently a fellow-passenger, an old and tried shikāri, points out to us a celebrated swamp which is said always to harbour at least one lion and where many have been shot, and suddenly we actually see one—not nearly as royal as we imagine he should look, as he slinks out, and then, turning, slinks back again into the dense mass of reeds. Possibly the raider of last night.

Then gradually the game begins to thin down, and at last disappears entirely; mud huts, tents, and tin houses rise from the plain, and we are steaming into Nairobi, the headquarters of the Uganda Railway, having done the 250 odd miles from Mombasa in just over twenty-three hours.

We spent two days at Nairobi, staying at the mess of the 3rd King's African Rifles, whose headquarters are here. The Nairobi

of 1902 was a very different place from the Nairobi of to-day. Roads were conspicuous by their absence, and, save for the railway employees' houses on the plain and a few officials' bungalows on the hill, there were not many signs of human habitation. We drove across the plain, innocent of roads, to the hill on which stood the military lines, since shifted to another location. Nairobi, when I last saw it at the end of 1906, was hard to recognize as the same place as it was on my first introduction to it. Then a few houses scattered broadcast on the open veldt, it was without form and void. Thanks in a great measure to the unceasing labours of the Sub-Commissioner—Mr. John Ainsworth, C.M.G.—out of chaos has sprung a handsome, picturesque, flourishing town, whose well-kept roads, bordered with avenues of blue gums, are the pride of the Town Council. Imagine a Town Council in 1902.

Its advantages over Mombasa as the seat of Government are manifold. The climate, resembling that of the Riviera, is extremely healthy, and the large civil population, for the surrounding country is thickly settled, is in much closer touch with the Government—to mention but two.

To me one of the chief attractions of the place is that horses do well here. Though

visited by that terrible scourge horse-sickness, on the whole horses thrive, and the East African country-breds show great promise. Now that the railway crosses the "fly-belt" near the coast, imported horses can be brought up in comparative security in their closed boxes, and at the Nairobi races, in consequence, some very good animals are pulled out.

Here we caught our first glimpse of the renowned Masai, whose name was at one time the terror of Eastern Africa.

Much of their ancient glory has departed, but they are still a fine fighting race.

Our stay at Nairobi was, much to our regret, limited to two days, and we had to catch the weekly train which ran between Nairobi and Port Florence on Lake Victoria, and so, after an all-too-brief stay, we once more embarked on the Uganda Railway for our destination, Fort Ternan.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANGLO-GERMAN BOUNDARY COMMISSION (continued)

THE journey from the Mara River to Ndasegara, via the camp of Kibaibai, where I saw the unaccustomed sight of a European, Dr. Chevallier of the Commission, was noteworthy to me only for my first sight of eland, and for my cook giving me a very elaborate dinner with tinned plum pudding on December 26, under the impression that it was Christmas Day; and, indeed, it's hard to keep one's dates right out in the wilds.

Ndasegara was about as unlike the Mara River as any two places well could be. It was a high point on a stretch of rolling, open downs, about ten thousand feet above sea-level, at times most abominably cold and covered with "Scotch mist." Mara River, on the other hand, was low-lying and thickly wooded. The shooting around the actual camp was nil, and one had to go back along the Kibaibai track for some miles before one came to shooting-ground. However, when one got there the shooting was pretty good, there being

a lot of lion, rhinoceros, and eland about, as well as Roberts' gazelle, which I unfortunately took for ordinary Grant's gazelle, which they very much resemble, and did not shoot. My regret may be imagined when I afterwards heard what I had missed, especially as I never had another chance at this extremely local animal. It was while shooting from Ndasegara that I had my experiences with lion recounted in the chapter entitled, "Leaves from an African Game-Book." I was not altogether sorry when I got my orders to push on to the main camp on the Guaso Nyiro River, as I had about exhausted the shooting potentialities of the surrounding district, and I had heard stories of the extraordinarily good shooting in the Rift Valley.

The march between Ndasegara and the Guaso Nyiro was only noteworthy for a missed lion, lots of fresh buffalo-spoor, the steep climb down the escarpment, and the complete scattering of the safari by two rhinoceros. This happened on the open plain near the Guaso Nyiro River at daybreak—an early start having been made. I was justly punished for my laziness in not carrying a rifle on account of darkness, by not getting a shot at one of the best rhinos. I've ever seen. It was really a rather peculiar experience. The first charge took place while it was dark, on

the tail of the caravan, and when daylight arrived I saw the whole of my safari dotted over the plain, discarded loads everywhere, one of them containing my rifle-cases, every small thorn tree bearing a strange fruit of porters, and amid the debris two rhinoceros fussily marching about. Before I could work my way round to my jettisoned rifles the rhinoceros had taken their departure.

The months which I spent at the Guaso Nyiro Camp were, I think, the most fascinating from a shooting point of view that I have ever spent. The plains on either side of the stream fairly swarmed with game—amongst which were some enormous “heads” of the common species as well as some varieties—such as Waller’s gazelle and *Oryx callotis*—that I had never before encountered. The river itself was bordered on both banks by dense bush which fairly swarmed with buffalo. I made a number of expeditions into this thick stuff, but without success—it was so thick and tangled that the buffalo could always hear one forcing one’s way through, and although I have been on several occasions within ten yards or less of a buffalo, the impenetrability of the branches prevented me ever seeing him—the first intimation I had of his presence being the noise of his flight. In addition to the risk of getting involved with a stampeding

herd, the absolute futility of this procedure made me give it up. My next effort was to march a considerable distance up stream outside the bush, carrying with me a Berthon boat--then cut through the bush to the river, launch the Berthon, and float down stream to camp. Not a sign of buffalo, though both banks were cut up with their tracks. It was most annoying, with all these quantities of buffalo about, that one could never get a sight of one. Captain Dickinson of the K.A.R., who, like myself, had put in many vain efforts to get at the buffalo, and I then joined forces, and after several unsuccessful efforts eventually marked down a very big herd and discovered their daily, or rather nightly, routine.

A couple of miles or so down stream from our camp was an enormous swamp several miles in extent, bordered by the customary belt of scrub. Our herd used to pass the day in the swamp--whose thick ten or twelve foot reeds made pursuit a matter of considerable difficulty and danger, but at night came out to feed on the open plain beyond the scrub, into which they retired before dawn; then they used to spend an hour or so in this scrub before returning to the swamp. A few efforts to walk them up in the scrub not only convinced us of the uselessness and danger of this method of proceeding, but

showed us that the herd when alarmed always stampeded back to the swamp. This fact determined our next move in the campaign, which was to build a couple of perches, otherwise platforms, on poles about twelve or fourteen feet high, a couple of hundred yards apart, at the junction of swamp and scrub, where the growth was a little less dense than usual, and in the track of the herd's usual route to the swamp. A little clearing somewhat enlarged the field of fire from each perch. Having allowed two or three days to elapse to remove the scent of man, we took up our positions on these perches one morning before dawn.

Of all the various species of big game that abound in Central Africa, the buffalo is perhaps the greatest prize that rewards the efforts of the sportsman of dangerous game: elephant, lion, and rhinoceros, are all, it is true, greatly to be desired, but they are all, in a greater or less degree, widely distributed and fairly accessible. The buffalo, however, although his numbers are increasing fairly rapidly after the scourge of rinderpest which swept like a wave through Africa some few years since, is still comparatively rare, and even when he is to be found, has usually taken up his quarters in swamp or forest so impenetrable, or ground so difficult, as to make his pursuit a matter of extreme difficulty