

SELous 1914

Africa's Greatest Hunter

*The Lost Writings
of Frederick C. Selous*

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do so. They must, it appears to me, twist sideways on impact and rotate, thus making a very large wound as they progress.

My bullets usually went through a large antelope standing broadside on, but they invariably tore a hole through the skin on the farther side, which they must, therefore, have struck sideways. My experience with these pointed bullets has, of course, not been very exhaustive, but as far as it has gone it has given me very high opinion of them. This refers, however, only to the absolutely solid nickel-coated bullets. I had others in which the point was formed of copper, which I found very uncertain in their effects. This was especially true at short ranges, for they often broke into a hundred fragments, on striking an animal—even so small an antelope as a gerenuk—without penetrating to the heart or lungs.

Whether the killing of wild animals will yet be made easier than it is today, with the excessively powerful, long-range, low-trajectory rifles now on the market, I do not know. If so, hunting big game will soon be reduced to the level of modern warfare and become mere killing by machinery. My own hunting days are fast drawing to a close, but could I renew my youth and begin again I should never wish for a better armament than a .470- or .500-bore for the heaviest of African game, and I feel a .275 magnum shooting solid-pointed bullets would do nicely for all thinner-skinned and smaller-boned animals.



Chapter Twelve

As was the case with the previous selection, this piece originally appeared in British Sports and Sportsmen: Big Game Hunting and Angling (pages 1-23). It has many features. Selous begins with an overview of sporting history in Africa, a subject in which he was well versed thanks to his extensive reading of virtually every author who had written on hunting in Africa. He then turns to the nature and extent of African game, makes meaningful references to conservation well before such views were widespread, and discusses in considerable detail the factors involved in hunting elephant and buffalo.

These two species were his personal favorites, and they intrigued him at least in part because of the danger inherent in hunting them. He does not say a great deal here about his own narrow escapes, though he certainly had them, nor does he provide a catalog of hunters who had died in the quest for the two species he considered Africa's most dangerous. Still, there is a sufficient personal element to breathe life into the subject, and any time Selous wrote "how to" information on African sport, it was well worth taking note.

BIG-GAME HUNTING IN AFRICA

Since the days when the early Phoenician and Saboean navigators and traders brought ivory and gold to the markets of Egypt, Palestine, and southeastern Europe, Africa has always been known as a land teeming with wild animal life, the home of many strange and terrible, as well as harmless and beautiful, creatures. It was in the course of his voyage down the western coast of Africa that the great Carthaginian navigator, Hanno, first met with great manlike apes. In later times,

and German East Africa, Northern and even Southern Rhodesia, and Portuguese East and West Africa. The white rhinoceros is still to be found in the countries to the west of the Upper Nile, whilst the black species has a range extending from Abyssinia to beyond the Zambezi, and is especially numerous in certain districts of British East Africa. To the south of the Sahara the giraffe still stalks majestically. In many cases giraffe can be found in large herds, through all the semidesert tracts of country that extend from Somaliland to Nigeria and Senegambia, and is by no means scarce in many parts of southwest Africa, from western Matabeleland to Portuguese Angola. Buffalo, eland, and other species of antelope that were nearly exterminated by the rinderpest have, too, increased greatly in numbers of late years, and are now once more quite numerous in various districts.

Indeed, although many parts of the great African continent that once swarmed with game have now become dead and lifeless wildernesses, there are still other districts of that continent where wild animals may be seen even today in truly astonishing numbers. As late as 1910 ex-President Roosevelt wrote of "the teeming multitudes of wild creatures" that he had seen in his journey through East and Central Africa. No one who knows the facts will deny that, lamentable as the destruction of wild animal life has been over many great areas of Africa during the last half-century, game of all kinds, from elephant to tiny gazelle, yet exists in larger numbers in many parts of that vast continent.

How long will these wild creatures still survive upon the earth? That is a question that is often put, and the answer to it is usually an extremely pessimistic one. Personally I think that big game is bound to disappear, or will only be allowed to exist in small numbers in protected areas—especially in those parts of Africa that are really suitable for settlement by Europeans or are capable of supporting large native populations. There is, however, such an enormous extent of country that must remain uninhabited, or at any

rate be only very sparsely populated, that it will be a very long time before any species of wild animal now existent will become extinct. Perhaps I rather ought to say, *need become extinct*. If all the present restrictions upon the killing of game imposed by the legislatures of the various provinces into which Africa has been divided by its present European rulers were for any reason removed, the speedy extermination of any animal that has commercial value would follow.

The total destruction of all big game may be attempted in certain areas of Rhodesia and British Central Africa with the idea of getting rid of the tsetse fly, but such destruction would be restricted to comparatively narrow areas and would only affect a very small proportion of the whole of the present game-haunted districts. There is no reason to think that the laws now in force over most of the continent for the protection and preservation of wild animals in general are likely to be relaxed.

Of all animals I think the rhinoceros—of both the so-called white and black species—stands in the greatest need of protection: the white species because its range along the western bank of the upper Nile is comparatively small and the number of its individuals cannot, therefore, be very large; and the black because its aggressive and truculent appearance, whether justified or not, often causes it to be fired into, for fear of accidents, and such wounded animals often die. There can be no doubt that the black rhinoceros has become very scarce or even ceased to exist in many parts of British East Africa, where only ten years ago it was very plentiful, and the returns of those shot on sportsmen's or settlers' licenses do not altogether account for their disappearance.

My own experience of African game extends from 1871 when I first landed in South Africa, to 1912 when I visited the Lorian swamp in the northern part of British East Africa. The now extinct quagga (*Equus quagga*) was, I believe, still in existence, though

Chapter Eight

The ravages of the tsetse fly and its fatal impact on domestic animals were long a source of fascination to Selous. Here is the printed version, first published in the Journal of the African Society (volume 8, January 1909, pages 113-29), of an address he presented to the members of that learned body. In it, he turns from the more commonly discussed issue of livestock to that of the interaction between the tsetse fly and big game. The focus of his remarks is on whether or not the tsetse fly is dependent on big game for its survival.

BIG GAME IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS RELATION TO THE TSETSE FLY

One of the earliest entries in the diary of Van Riebeeck, the first Dutch governor of the Cape, reads as follows: "This night the lions roared as if they would take the fort by storm." This note was made in the middle of the seventeenth century, and I think it more than probable that if on the night in question some six thousand listeners had been placed at intervals of a mile apart, throughout the whole length of Africa, from Cape Agulhas to the very shores of the Mediterranean Sea, every one of them might have recorded the fact that he also had heard lions roaring. For at that time almost the whole of Africa must have teemed with wild animals, and wherever in Africa wild animals are to be found in any number, there lions will be heard roaring at night.

In the present paper I shall make no attempt to deal with the question as to the relationship between big game and one or other or all of the various species of tsetse flies found throughout Africa, but shall confine my remarks entirely to the question

few Dutch farmers, who preserved here and there on their farms a few isolated herds of white-tailed gnu, blesbok, and bontebok, all these three species of African animals would long ere this have shared the same fate as the quagga and the blaubok. As it is, the blesbok is now a rapidly increasing species, and many herds exist on different farms in the Orange and Transvaal Colonies, and also in British Bechuanaland. There are not many white-tailed gnus, but they are increasing in numbers, and the species will in all probability be preserved. Of bontebok, some two or three hundred are being carefully preserved on two enclosed farms in their original habitat near Cape Agulhas, and I understand that they are not decreasing in numbers. The magnificently horned kudu, by many looked upon as the finest antelope in the world, has too of late years become very plentiful in certain districts of the Cape Colony, owing to the protection afforded it by the more enlightened farmers.

Although between the years 1860 and 1870 an enormous destruction had taken place amongst the great herds of game inhabiting the open plains of South Africa, all the greater game, such as elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, giraffe, as well as many of the handsomest species of African antelope, were still plentiful up to the latter date, in the low bushveld of the eastern Transvaal, in the coast belt of Zululand and Amatongaland, and throughout all the forest-clad country extending from the Limpopo to the Zambezi.

In the early seventies of the last century, however, natives commenced to flock from every corner of South Africa to the lately discovered diamond fields. I doubt if any one of them returned to his kraal without a gun or rifle and a supply of ammunition, for at that time in order, I think, to attract labour, natives were allowed to buy arms and ammunition in any quantity they liked on the diamond fields, in spite of the repeated

protests of the governments of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. This general arming of the natives of South Africa in the early seventies of the last century, was not only largely responsible for the native rebellion in the Cape Colony in 1878, and the war with the Basutos two years later, but in my opinion was also the principal cause of the destruction of big game throughout all the native territories beyond the Limpopo. Once the natives possessed guns, they always managed to obtain ammunition either from English or Portuguese traders.

Take the case of Amatongaland: The late Mr. William Charles Baldwin has recorded how in 1854, when hunting near the junction of the Pongolo and Usutu Rivers, he found elephant, rhinoceros of both the black and the white species, buffalo, and many other varieties of game excessively plentiful throughout that district. Since Baldwin's time very few white men have ever visited this part of the country, as the climate is very unhealthy for Europeans. In 1896 when I went to the very spot where Baldwin had met with game of all kinds in very large numbers forty-two years earlier, I found wild animals almost nonexistent. This was with the exception of nyala, which were still numerous in the dense jungles between the Pongolo and Usutu Rivers. The native Amatonga, armed with guns and rifles bought on the diamond fields or at Delagoa Bay, are almost entirely responsible for the destruction of all the game in this part of South Africa.

Although with the exception of the blaubok and the true quagga, no other species of wild game is absolutely extinct in Africa south of the Zambezi. I fear that the white rhinoceros, which still survive in Zululand and Mashonaland, are so few in number that the days of this most interesting animal—the largest terrestrial mammal after the elephant—are numbered as an existing species in South Africa. The black rhinoceros, too, once so