

ZAMBESI

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CAMP FIRES

By

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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A MIXED BAG

The leopard must have come in through the soap-box and walked over me whilst blissfully sleeping.

On another occasion I was taking an afternoon siesta under a mosquito net in the same hut, and woke up to find a leopard licking my hand, which had evidently strayed outside the net and was hanging down. The brute, I suppose, was just getting a flavour preparatory to making a bite, and the sharp hooks on his tongue awakened me.

These animals have the cheek of the devil and are in my opinion every bit as deadly as any lion.

A close-up with a leopard means a terrible mauling; they go at it all four feet at once, with teeth making up for any lost time. Their charge is particularly awkward to stop on account of the lightning speed at which they come, and the queer way they have of twisting from side to side. It looks for all the world as if they are doing their utmost to dodge the bullet. The lion, although a much more powerful beast, does not seem to do so much damage. A few seconds is all a leopard requires to rip one literally to ribbons. In addition to this is the almost certain blood poisoning that sets in, due to the filth left in the wound from tooth and claw. This is where a white man suffers to a much greater extent than a native, whose blood seems to be more resistant to the effects of poison.

THE NYAMANA POOLS: RHINO AT CLOSE QUARTERS

LEAVING the scene of the man-eaters on the Angwas River, I now made all haste to the Nyamana Pools, and on arriving there proceeded to erect a stout palisade of poles, which were sunk into the ground, and set at an angle pointing outwards. In this vicinity protection of some kind is necessary, otherwise there is the risk of—perhaps—a wandering rhino planting his foot on your face while you are blissfully sleeping.

I had with me here a considerable number of carriers and odd natives who had attached themselves to the party with the object of "horning in" when meat was plentiful. These I tolerated so long as they showed themselves willing when work came along—such as gathering firewood and carrying the meat.

With Mondoropuma and a local native a start was made at the first hint of dawn, in the search for anything that might turn up. Meandering along through the bushes, hardly yet awake, I was suddenly startled into action by the leading native

Backing into me, nearly knocking me over. Staggering backwards I caught sight of the cause of his alarm—a rhinoceros was calmly feeding just round the angle of a large ant-heap we had been on the point of passing. His tail was towards us, and, in spite of the scramble, he did not take fright. Cautiously creeping to the edge of the ant-heap, which must have been at least twenty feet in diameter at the base, I peeped over the top and had a real close-up of a rhinoceros—he was so close that I could have prodded him with a fairly long stick. He now showed signs of being aware that intruders were in his vicinity, so quickly aiming for behind the shoulder I fired.

Away he went at a terrific pace and was quickly out of sight. Taking up the easily distinguished tracks we followed up—there was no room for doubt as to whether the bullet had found the correct mark: I could have thrown a stone at that distance and scored a bulls-eye. However, no certainty can be felt as to the result of a shot until the animal is actually down. The rhinoceros is renowned for his bad temper and aggressive nature. They often come charging down with intent to give battle without the slightest provocation.

Mile after mile was covered without any sign of the rhinoceros when, with a crash and scramble, out he came from a thick clump of

bushes, scattering us in all directions. The charge of a rhinoceros is a headlong rush, straight as an arrow; he is quite unable to make the quick pivot turn of a buffalo, consequently, provided sufficient warning is given by his noisy advance, it is often fairly easy to get out of the line of attack. Two shots in quick succession planted again into the shoulder, caused him to stumble, and a third shot into the head brought him crashing to the ground.

Rhinoceros hide can be put to a number of uses. The widest part of this particular one served to cover the top of a mahogany table. When skilfully done, and once a smooth surface is obtained, it makes a really beautiful piece of furniture. In time the hide takes on a high polish, and is not nearly so susceptible to stains and damage as the majority of glossy surfaces. Polished walking sticks are frequently made, and have the appearance of amber. The more common product is what is known as a sjambok—a long strip is worked up into the shape of a tapering stick—and one crack from this on the hide of a native in need of chastisement is remembered by him for many a long day. A valuable oil is manufactured by special process from the horns, and a fair price can be had from dealers if delivered fresh, before the natural oil has had time to dry out. Butt plates and hand grip

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mountings for the more expensive guns and rifles are often formed out of pieces of horn.

The camp of the Nyamana Pools became infested with hyenas, doubtless attracted by the large quantities of drying meat. These beastly animals made the nights hideous with their unearthly howling. The noise they make is the most blood-curdling screech I have ever heard, and sends a chill down one's back when heard in the dead of night. The howl commences on a fairly low note and slowly ascends up several octaves until it feels as if the head were about to go up with it.

Hyenas are possessed of a pair of tremendously powerful jaws—in fact veritable bone-crushers. Many an unfortunate native has lost his foot from one quick scrunch from one of these creatures. The hyena's laugh is so well known by all and sundry that I have no doubt they do sometimes make a noise resembling a laugh, but I have never once recognised anything approaching hilarity. The sound is entirely the reverse, and anything more doleful is hard to imagine.

Apart from shooting various specimens of the antelope family, nothing further of particular note occurred at the pools, and striking camp I pushed north to the Zambesi. On sighting the river I continued along its banks whenever possible in a westerly direction. During the dry

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season the Zambesi, as often as not, presents the appearance of a series of sandbanks interspersed with streams. The main stream is difficult to locate, and in some years may be in quite a different part of the river bed to that of the preceding year.

CHAPTER XXIV

BUFFALO, RHINO, CROCODILE

BUFFALO offers every bit as much excitement and danger as any of the animals previously touched on. The palm for being the most dangerous will never be handed to any one of them, for the simple reason that each can hand out instant death, provided the circumstances present him with the opportunity. Each hunter, naturally, will sum up the possibilities of the different dangerous animals according to the amount of danger he has experienced from them, and the age-long argument in this respect can never be settled satisfactorily. One feature connected with the buffalo is the determination with which he will turn hunter if badly wounded. He makes it then his one object in life to get even. Elephant, lion and leopard if wounded and then left will rest content. Not so the buffalo. At once he lays his plans for attack, and will drive them home with fierce determination.

One of his favourite tricks is to fall to the ground when shot and then stretch himself out feigning death.

This statement may seem to many a trifle far-fetched, but has been experienced by far too many hunters to allow of any doubt being felt regarding its truth.

BUFFALO, RHINO, CROCODILE

The inexperienced hunter, on coming within convenient distance, will sustain a nasty shock when the animal quickly regains his feet and charges down at full speed.

I saw this actually happen to a friend I had taken out for a hunt. A herd were located feeding in a large, open water course. Selecting a big bull, a shot was planted behind the near shoulder and down went the bull, the remainder of the herd stampeding for the shelter of the thick bush not far distant.

Before I could stop him in order to put in another bullet to make certain the old bull was not foxing, away went my companion full speed to examine the prize. My yells of warning had not the slightest effect. When within a dozen yards, like a flash the buffalo regained his feet, and the impetus of the runner carried him almost on to the brute's forehead. Down he went from the force of the impact, and the bull at once manœuvred for an opening to drive home the point of one of his massive horns.

His feet kicking madly at the threatening head, my friend—with more than his share of good luck—managed to save himself from serious damage long enough to enable me to send home two quick shots, which diverted the buffalo's attention to the new danger. Leaving the man on the ground, he came pounding in my direction, but was easily finished off with a third shot.

I now feared the worst, as my impetuous partner did not, as I expected, regain his feet and join me.

On reaching him I found that he had fainted as the result of his hectic experience, but fortunately an examination showed no broken limbs or other serious damage. He came to quickly, and was able to gain his feet and hobble back to camp, little worse beyond a bad scare and a few minor bruises and cuts. This is the one and only instance that has come to me first hand where a close-up attack from a buffalo has resulted in such slight damage.

I have written enough in a previous passage to convey what methods can be successfully employed in the buffalo hunt, and cannot stress too much the necessity for treating this animal at all times with the greatest respect.

Now, the rhino is the queerest creature of them all, and presents little or no difficulty in the matter of finding him in the localities where he abounds. In fact, it is as often as not a question of losing him, for he seems to have the unhappy trick of barging in at the very moment his presence is least wanted. The rhino has gained the reputation for being fierce, aggressive and dangerous, but I think sheer pig-headedness sums him up more accurately.

He relies chiefly on his ugly nose to warn him of any unwelcome presence, and follows that same nose along any scent he resents. Once this guide is lost, he is quite content as a rule to



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THE COOL OF THE EVENING

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BUFFALO, RHINO, CROCODILE

lumber off into his beloved solitude and there remain in peace. In spite of his tremendous bulk, the rhino can work up a good turn of speed, and gets over the ground at a bounding gallop, travelling with most astonishing smoothness for an animal weighing anything up to three tons.

The anterior horn averages about twenty-five inches and the posterior half this, but horns are on record of forty inches and over.

The tracking of rhino offers more difficulty than might be expected, for, in spite of his great weight, the feet do not leave very clear marks on the ground, especially if it be of a hard nature.

It is their usual practice to drink at some favoured water-hole in the early morning, and then feed along until the sun commences to get hot, when they will search out a shady retreat wherein to take their ease during the hot hours.

It has been my own experience, almost without exception, that rhino at once make off down wind when disturbed; but perhaps where I came in contact with them they had not been shot at sufficiently to instil any strong resentment of man's presence. No doubt where they are constantly potted at by all and sundry they become bad tempered and aggressive, learning as they do in common with other animals that the first scent of man means trouble in store.

The crocodile can hardly be classed as a dan-