

BIG STUFF

African Big Game and its Hunters

By

C. T. STONEHAM

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Photo: Mervyn Conie

A study in dignity and contentment in Nairobi Game Park

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In the night he awoke in a great scare, hearing the strangest noises, as of the chattering of apes. He was surrounded by wild dogs.

"Right and left they stood in two lines, craning their necks to look at me. Two large troops, at least forty, were rushing to and fro across the wind. Others were eating the carcass of the wilde-beest."

He jumped up, shouted, and waved his blanket round his head. As he had hoped, the sound of the human voice frightened the dogs and they drew off, to stand staring at him, barking like collies. He was then able to load his rifle—no mere matter of thrusting cartridges into a breech, but of ramming powder and ball down the barrels: a long and difficult job while ringed by a hundred barking wild dogs. But the dogs evidently came to the conclusion he was dangerous and cleared off before he could fire.

In this place he shot his first lion. It was a female, found one morning eating the carcass of a blesbok on the open veld. Highly elated, Cumming rode after her, followed by two Hottentots on horseback. He soon drew ahead of his boys, who did not display much eagerness.

The lioness trotted away, but as he neared her she lay down with her back to him, for all the world as if she did not desire his acquaintance and wished to signify this by pretending indifference. One deduces that the animal had never been incommoded by man and hoped to be left alone.

But when he came closer she turned and made a short run towards him, growling threateningly. It was in no sense a charge; when he retreated she lay down and watched him.

His boys arrived, and, having all dismounted, the three horses were tied together with a rawhide reim. Both the natives were armed with Cumming's spare weapons.

The white man now advanced and took a shot, hitting the lioness in the chest. With a loud roar she charged; but not the man: the horses were her target.

She leapt on the back of "Colesberg", a horse Cumming had obtained at that town, and got into action with teeth and claws, lacerating him terribly. One wound, says the hunter, was twelve inches long, sunk to the bone of the haunch.

There was a scene of confusion, the horses plunging and struggling, mad with panic, the lioness growling and fighting. The boys ran away out of danger and Cumming hovered in the foreground unable to fire for fear of hitting a horse.

He describes himself as "cool and steady". It must be remembered that he had only one barrel loaded and to load the other at this juncture was impracticable. If the lioness attacked him he must stop her with one shot, otherwise she would treat him as she had Colesberg.

Presently the lioness, presumably satisfied with her vengeance, left the horse and went off. She trotted sulkily right past the hunter, disdaining to notice him. He shot her at close range through the shoulder, killing her outright.

The horse, Colesberg, was badly injured, but he was led back to the waggons and doctored and eventually recovered, to be ridden in many hunts thereafter, until he died of horse-sickness in the Bamangwato country.

Next day Cumming discovered a white rhinoceros with a small calf. The white, or square-lipped, rhinoceros, largest after the elephant of all terrestrial creatures, was then common south of the Zambesi. Unlike the black rhino, it was a timid animal and would seldom attack man. The Dutch hunters shot white rhinos wherever they found them and in a few years they were almost exterminated. A few still survive in a game reserve in Zululand, but in those haunts where they were once so numerous none remain.

Cumming rode hotly after this one. The cow galloped for its life into scattered bush but was hampered by having to guide its young one, which it did by the pressure of its long horn on the little animal's haunches. Cumming shot the mother behind the shoulder, but it went off into thicker growth and escaped. One hopes that it did not die a lingering death and its calf starve, or be torn to pieces by hyenas. Since the hunter was evidently shooting soft-lead "balls" it is probable that the pachyderm was not much hurt.

Shortly afterwards he found a black rhinoceros and, having dismounted for steadiness of aim, fired at it. It charged him promptly. He ran round a bush with the infuriated beast in close pursuit. But he says he was "quicker on the turn" and the rhino could not catch him. Soon it abandoned the chase and went off.

He was lucky in this adventure. Though it is possible to dodge a rhino successfully in that manner there is the chance of tripping on rough ground, or being caught by a creeper, and also of the huge beast getting tired of running round the bush and coming at its enemy through the middle of it.

Cumming continued trekking and hunting, piling up an

statement, which was that he deliberately experimented upon the wounded beast to ascertain the most vulnerable targets.

He was trying to accumulate as much ivory as possible for sale, as well as collecting trophies, and his appetite for slaughter was insatiable.

"In the afternoon I was engaged for three or four hours in combating with a vicious elephant, which I finished with thirty-five bullets in the shoulder, in an impracticable jungle of wait-a-bit thorns. The barrel of my rifle burst with a terrific explosion with the last round, sending the locks and half the stock flying right and left and very nearly sending me to the 'land of the leal'. I, however, received no further damage than a burn on my left arm and the loss for many days of the use of my left ear, a fragment of the barrel having whizzed close past it."

This was his favourite two-grooved Dickson, but he still had the Moore and Purdy rifles, and, of course, the Dutch smooth-bore.

Now in the heart of the Bamangwato country his Hottentots deserted, leaving him with a few local natives and some Bushmen to handle the waggons. Of this work he had no experience and several accidents resulted, waggons being overturned, dissel-booms broken and wheels torn off. But the adventurer in wild places must be adaptable and a man of his hands; Cumming managed to repair the damage, and learnt to drive oxen in the span, a task necessitating exemplary patience and skill. The ox does not take kindly to restraint and hard work, he is always in a state of subdued mutiny, ready to take every advantage to tangle things up and refuse duty.

With a great deal of trials and exasperation the party approached the Notwangi River, where it formed a wide vlei four miles long. There they beheld a huge herd of buffalo, eight hundred strong, grazing on a plain between the waggons and the vlei.

In those days buffalo roamed in the open at midday with complete immunity, where now they hide in the thickest cover, coming out to feed only at night and then never venturing far from their refuge. This alteration in the habits of several species shows their adaptability to new conditions, and also proves communication among them, since assuredly every individual beast has not had the example of being hunted and shot at. The rhinoceros in the last fifty years has become largely a nocturnal

animal; lions will not give voice in populated places, so that their presence in a farming district is often unsuspected; leopards are very seldom seen in daylight.

Cumming viewed the mob of buffaloes with delight; he was as eager to chase them as if they had been American bison. As he approached they stood staring and then thundered off towards the dense patches of reeds in the vlei. Their very numbers impeded their progress; riding a fast horse he easily kept alongside the rear-guard. He was trying to select the finest head but could not make a choice, so he resorted to his usual practice of "browning the herd".

"I let fly right and left into them and the next moment they gained the shelter of the reeds."

On looking back he saw a fine old cow fall dead. Near her stood a wounded calf, whose mother remained beside it. There was no chance of killing any more that day.

On the Limpopo, at that time a veritable paradise of game, he made his first contact with hippopotamuses. These creatures are among the easiest to kill, for they have no refuge other than the pools in which they live and unless the river is very deep they cannot escape. Every few minutes they must rise to take breath, so that the hunter waiting on the bank can get a shot. When mortally hit a hippo sinks to the bottom, but in a few hours the gas generated in the stomach by decomposition gives the carcass buoyancy and the kill can be recovered and towed ashore.

Cumming located a party in the reeds where the stream was broad and the bottom sandy. They swam away from him upstream but he followed and found them.

Three cows and one old bull were sitting in the shallows with water half-way up their sides. They saw him and showed some alarm but did not seek deeper water. He fired at the cow nearest to him and hit her in the head.

"She commenced plunging round and round and then occasionally remained still for a few minutes in the same spot. A second shot entered the roof of her skull and passed out through one eye."

After this she was still alive and active, swimming in a circle, unable to submerge. Cumming was so anxious to secure the beast that he stripped and plunged into the river, armed only with a knife, heedless of the crocodiles and the other hippos, which he feared might attack him. Crocodiles disliking a commotion, and hippos not being pugnacious beasts, he was reasonably safe, but

could see moving about as though feeling for me, and I momentarily expected to be hauled out by one of my legs, which I was unable to draw in farther on account of the close-growing scrub, and made an end of in some unpleasant fashion. As she stood there a second or two, screaming and wondering, as it seemed, what had become of me, I fired my second barrel as well as I could for her ear; but I was in so awkward a position (a bit flustered, too, I confess) that I failed to get at her brain. However, she made off on receiving the shot."

Having recovered his hat and cartridge pouch, which he had dropped in the bustle of the moment, he began to follow up the wounded cow, feeling, he remarks, rather vindictively inclined towards her. There was not much blood and it did not appear that the animal was badly wounded.

Before he had gone far he saw another group of elephants, and promptly made his way towards them. "I succeeded in flooring another cow with fine tusks. The rest ran to the edge of the bush and stood on a slight rise among low scrub, just outside the tall forest-patch. I followed, and getting a good view of them knocked over a right and left, and loading again was just about to repeat the performance, when I was suddenly attacked by swarms of bees whose tub was in the tree under which I stood."

The natives of Kenya hang lengths of hollowed tree-trunk in the branches as homes for the bees, and the Kenya bee is a very vicious insect which will attack at the least provocation. So severe can these attacks be, and the victim so filled with formic acid, that I had known men carried to hospital in danger of their lives after being exposed to the full fury of a colony of wild bees.

Neumann says: "They stung me round my eyes and all over my face, ears, neck, etc., compelling me to flee ignominiously and leave the elephants still standing! This was a sad stroke of bad luck and probably cost me a brace of elephants." It is typical of these old-time hunters to talk of elephants by the brace!

At a little distance he managed to get rid of the bees, and again advanced to the hunt, in time to get in another shot as the herd moved off. This knocked down another cow, which on rising was despatched with the second barrel. The hunter says deprecatingly that he was somewhat upset by his experience with the bees or he might have done better.

Later he had a narrow escape from a rhinoceros. There were several of these beasts close to his camp and one morning he

passed one lying in the open with its young calf. He was standing looking at her, noticing that she had a good horn, and debating with himself whether to shoot her for meat, as it was near camp and the porters could easily carry in the portions of the carcass. The .577 was in its cover in the care of the gun-bearer, for he was not expecting to use it that day. His mind was made up by the rhino suddenly getting to its feet and charging straight at him.

"Laying my single .450 down in front of me, while my man hurriedly tore the other rifle out, I had just time to ram in a couple of cartridges and fire a quick shot at her chest before she was upon me. She had her head up still when I fired first; but as she got within a couple of strides she lowered it for a toss."

He had taken his rifle down from his shoulder after the first shot—confident that the beast would turn from the shock of the bullet, as previous experiences of this kind had shown to be the invariable result. But the attacker disregarded the wound and came straight on, giving him no time to take aim again.

"I hastily threw up the butt with my right hand and pulled the left trigger with the muzzle pointing downwards on to her neck, and instantly sprang to the right, just in time to let her pass where I had stood, within arm's reach of me, covering my .450 with dirt. But luckily, though she ran right over it, she did not step on it. She ran right on and I after her. I broke her shoulder with another shot, and then put three Martini bullets into her in quick succession until she dropped." An old Martini rifle was always carried by the gun-bearer for the purpose of finishing off wounded animals and thus saving ammunition for the other rifles.

The calf would not leave its dam for some time. Neumann says that twice it got its fore-quarters on its mother's back while they stood beside the carcass. The gun-bearers threw stones at it and at last it went off, being quite old enough to shift for itself.

"Another (probably the male) stood not far off for a long while after all the fuss was over. I have noticed that in such family trios the male parent generally keeps at a respectful distance from the testy mother and her offspring; and I once witnessed a vigorous assault made by a cow upon her hapless mate, which she prodded unmercifully, apparently because he had unwarily approached too near her calf."

Elephants in the country where Neumann was hunting were of large size and carried bigger ivory than gladdened the hearts of Cumming or Selous. He shot a big bull with a single tusk weighing

have learnt the deadliness of firearms. But fifty years ago they were more bold and might be encountered on the plains a long way from shelter, or in sparse bush where a horseman could operate without much difficulty. It follows that the early hunters formed the opinion that the elephant, buffalo, and rhino, which they generally shot out in the open, were less dangerous to hunt and kill than lion or leopard, which could seldom be caught far from cover.

With the exception of inveterate rogues and man-eaters, no wild animal is likely to attack man unprovoked; and all animals when wounded seek a place to hide—unless they are plains antelope or giraffe, who prefer to remain in the open and trust to fleetness to escape. Once in cover, the thicker the better, the wounded beast has a chance of getting on even terms with its enemy, should he pursue it to inflict further injury.

In recent years the larger beasts seem to comprehend that man can kill at a distance and they strive to keep out of his sight. In my early hunting days I often came on buffalo or lion in the open after the sun was high, and they would linger to give me a haughty challenging stare. In later years my appearance was the signal for them to fly for their lives to the nearest cover. Elephants would walk about in full view within a few hundred yards; now it is a rare event to see elephants crossing an open space in daylight. They realize that they no longer enjoy the immunity which once attached to the giants of the mountains.

All these creatures have decided that secrecy is their surest protection, and naturally when they are hurt they become more secretive than ever. Lions and buffaloes, especially, have become furtive in the extreme and will not show themselves until daylight is almost gone.

Buffaloes live in forest or bush and emerge only in darkness to graze on the fringes of their fastness. When either buffalo or lion is wounded it immediately seeks cover, and, if so badly hurt that it cannot travel, conceals itself in a spot most suited for defence and awaits the outcome. It knows that if it is pursued there must be a fight to a finish, and often it decides that offence is the best protection, therefore it is prepared to attack when opportunity offers. The rhinoceros, even when unwounded, appears to hold these views, for if surprised at close quarters he will charge at once, evidently believing it sensible to get in the first blow.

To follow any fierce wounded beast is highly dangerous. But

it is easier to deal with an elephant, for its bulk and habits are not adapted for close concealment.

Wounded leopards if followed will almost always attack, and there are numerous instances of hunters being severely mauled by them. But the leopard lacks the weight and strength to overpower its human enemy outright, and when wounded, as it invariably is, its chance against a strong man in a rough-and-tumble is greatly impaired. In many cases the man attacked by a wounded leopard has managed to kill the creature with his hands—not, however, without sustaining severe injuries, for a leopard is more difficult to handle than a bundle of razor-blades.

Rhinoceroses have only one method, a head-long charge with horn lowered, which is intended to obliterate the foe on impact, but which if avoided leaves the attacker helpless and bewildered, ignorant of his antagonist's whereabouts—an easy target for the marksman. Elephants, as has been said, are unable to hide effectively; their tracks are quickly detected and their huge forms seen in the cover. However, there is one type of country in which they are exceedingly dangerous: bamboo forest, which imposes a dense screen to the hunter's sight but through which the hunted can burst with as little obstruction as a cow in a cornfield.

Buffalo and lion are most adept and formidable at this game of concealment and attack and this has earned them the reputation among hunters of being the two most dangerous species in Africa. But which is the more deadly is a moot point.

The tactics of a wounded lion are to hide and await the enemy's coming. He can hide himself in cover which one would think could not harbour a small dog. But if there is something thick, shadowy, and thorny within reach he will go into the midst of it and lie still till the right moment to make his explosive charge. His senses are extremely acute, he can see and hear and smell as well as most beasts in the wilds, his speed is phenomenal and his strength prodigious. If the pursuer comes within twenty yards of him and he is not crippled, and the bush and grass is dense enough to conceal him as he comes, there is little hope for the man.

Generally he comes in huge bounds, with jaws gaping, growling or roaring, and there are few more terrifying spectacles. To shoot quickly and straight in the face of this apparition requires almost superhuman self-control; the impulse is to meet violence with violence and use the rifle as a club.

that its presence in the neighbourhood would make hunting impossible. The bull had to be settled with before it caught somebody and killed him.

Accordingly, it was decided to attend to the matter before anything else, and next morning at daybreak the three of them started out to find the rogue. They rode ponies and had with them three natives and two dogs.

As they approached the bush a large bull rhino made its appearance, looking warlike. They dismounted in a hurry and fired at the beast, which wheeled and rushed back into cover.

Leaving their ponies with the boys, the hunters followed into the bush along a narrow winding game-trail. Just inside the thick growth was a big pool of blood soaking into the ground, and in the centre of it the print of a great bull buffalo. Evidently the print had been made after the rhino passed, which meant that, as well as the wounded beast, which might be expected to be dangerous, the rogue buffalo was present in that blinding vegetation.

At the moment that they discovered the spoor the dogs gave tongue a hundred yards farther into the bush. The men thought they had found the rhino, and their behaviour indicated that the bush nearby contained no other enemy. They went on along the trail, Albert leading, Daly next, and Danny bringing up the rear. Visibility was reduced to a few yards, the thin trail was the only means of progress.

They had not gone ten paces before there was a sudden crash of branches in front. Albert dived low along the ground under a clump of wait-a-bit thorn, and in the spot he had just vacated appeared the huge body of the buffalo bull, charging down the path.

The animal was right on top of Daly as he fired. The boss of its great horns hit the muzzle of the rifle and knocked it out of his grasp, so that it flew over his head into the trees. The man, struck in the chest by the bull's frontlet, was knocked flat on his back.

However, the shot had taken effect and the beast merely stood over him, evidently dazed. But his plight was desperate in the extreme; at any moment the buffalo might recover sufficiently to trample or gore him, and he could do nothing to help himself. Albert was entangled in the wait-a-bit bush and could not move, Danny had retired precipitately along the path and was beyond sight.

As he lay, Daly was looking up at the great shaggy head, and he saw where his bullet had hit: an inch from the centre of the

boss and slightly high. Blood ran down the animal's muzzle and dripped on him. From the shock of the blow he was unable to move and felt "broken up all over".

The buffalo started to sway from side to side. If it fell on him it would kill him as surely as if it thrust a horn through his chest. Slowly it picked up its right fore-foot, which trembled in the air. He was able to shift his head slightly as the hoof came down, so that it just missed him. Then the left hind hoof rose and moved forward, to be planted on his right knee, from which it slipped to the ground. The beast moved forward a little and then stood trembling, the man's head between its great black legs.

Danny Loeis had stolen back and he viewed this spectacle with his heart in his mouth. He was afraid to shoot, lest the huge animal collapse on top of his comrade and crush him to death. But in a minute the buffalo moved clear of the fallen man and then Danny shot it through the stomach.

It took no notice of the wound but staggered a little farther and then pitched over, bellowing in death.

Daly was not seriously hurt, though bruises and shock kept him out of action for a few weeks. His escape was undoubtedly due to the fact that the buffalo was so badly hurt that the prospect of revenge no longer mattered.

He recounts a story of the buffalo's vindictiveness and its readiness, in certain circumstances, to take the offensive when unprovoked. It was in Rhodesia, just before the outbreak of the Boer War; Daly was out in company with a Boer hunter on the Lower Nyati River. Leaving their horses with their boys, they followed a small herd of buffalo into some bush. Daly climbed a kopje to gain a field of view while his companion continued along the flat. They agreed to meet beyond the kopje. Daly reached the top of the hill and sat on a stone, watching to see where the other would emerge from the sea of bush below. Presently he saw him coming out into the open, going cautiously with rifle ready, as every man does on the trail of a dangerous quarry. The Dutchman had not gone fifty yards from the cover when Daly was astonished to see a bull buffalo emerge, quietly following the man. He promptly fired at it, hitting it in the point of the shoulder, whereupon the Dutchman turned in surprise and, seeing the fallen beast, finished it off. But for Daly's interference, the bull would have charged the Dutchman from behind and probably caught him completely unawares.

Simultaneously the work up-line ceased. We found next morning that the German raiding-party had quietly withdrawn; they were more frightened of us than we of them.

At dawn I went out to find the man I had shot. It was a fine male leopard and by sheer luck my bullet had hit it in the neck and broken its spine.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STUPID RHINOCEROS

THE white, square-lipped rhinoceros is becoming rare. This species flourished in large numbers to the south of the Zambesi a hundred years ago, but the destructive March of Civilization in the shape of hunters and settlers swept them away and now only a few remain under strict preservation in Zululand. They were never found in East and Central Africa, though there was a small number in the Sudan.

Classed as the third largest mammal, after the African and Asian elephants, the white rhino has the reputation of being a placid, timid beast, unwilling to attack man even when wounded. But evidently on occasion it can be as dangerous as its black cousin, as an experience of William Cotton Oswell, one of the most noted of the early South African hunters, shows.

He approached one of these animals, which he had wounded, on a horse. The beast calmly confronted him and walked forward, as though curious to investigate this peculiar phenomenon. Oswell was carrying one of the old-fashioned ten-bore guns which fired a soft lead ball; it appeared that a frontal shot against the armoured giant would be futile so he tried to move aside to get a view of its shoulder. The horse acted as if fascinated by the advancing monster and would not move. Suddenly the rhino made a rush and drove its long horn through Oswell's thigh and clean through the horse into the saddle-flap on the opposite side. Natives came to the white man's assistance and chased the assailant off. This was the worst injury Oswell got in many years of hunting.

Sir Samuel Baker gives a description of Cotton Oswell and of the ten-bore gun, his favourite weapon.

"Oswell was not merely a shooter, but he had been attracted towards Africa by his natural love of exploration and the investigation of untrodden ground. He was absolutely the first white man who had appeared upon the scene in many portions of South Africa which are now well known. Six feet in height, sinewy and muscular, but nevertheless light in weight, he was not only powerful but enduring. A handsome face with an eagle glance, but full of kindness and fearlessness, bespoke the natural manliness of character which attracted him to the wild adventures of his early life. He was a first-rate horseman and all his shooting was from the saddle, or by dismounting for the shot after he had run his game to bay.

"The rifle looked like an ordinary double-barrel weighing exactly ten pounds; in reality it was a smooth-bore of great solidity and carried a spherical ball of the calibre No. 10.

"The hard walnut stock was completely eaten away for an inch of surface; the loss of wood suggested that rats had gnawed it as there were minute traces of apparent teeth. This appearance might have been produced by an exceedingly coarse rasp. The fore portion of the stock into which the ramrod was inserted was so completely worn through by the same destructive action that the brass end of the rod was exposed to view. The whole of this wear and tear was the result of friction with the wait-a-bit thorns! Oswell invariably carried his gun across the pommel of his saddle when following an animal at speed. In this manner at a gallop he was obliged to face the low scrubby wait-a-bits and dash through these unsparing thorns regardless of punishment and consequences if he were to keep his game in view; which was absolutely essential if the animal was to be ridden down by superior pace and endurance. The walnut stock thus brought into hasty contact with the sharp thorns became a gauge, through the continual friction, which afforded a most interesting proof of the untiring perseverance of the owner and of the immense distances that he must have traversed at the highest speed during the five years unremitting pursuit of game upon the virgin hunting-grounds of Southern Africa."

This description gives an informative insight into the methods of the old-time hunters.

The black rhinoceros (*bicornis*) is still numerous in the wilder parts of East Africa and throughout the Belgian Congo. As an indication of the numbers of these animals in untenanted bush

country, when the Government of Kenya decided to throw open the district of Makueni to the Wakamba tribe for settlement, Mr. J. A. Hunter was employed to destroy the rhinoceroses which lived there and might be inimical to the new inhabitants. He shot over a thousand of them.

An average black rhino is 12 feet long, exclusive of the tail, stands 5 ft. 6 in. at the shoulder, and weighs about two tons. It is therefore a formidable creature to contend with, and were it brighter of intellect might command the sportsman's utmost respect.

They do not eat grass but browse on a variety of leaves and twigs. Vaughan Kirby says they are very fond of the bark of the red mimosa, known in Kenya as the "red-thorn", and I have found them partial to the euphorbia cactus, which has an astringent juice that will temporarily blind a man. Perhaps the rhino uses this plant for medicinal purposes. He has a mouth like leather and, like the giraffe, will chew up thorns as if they were grass.

They like to drink twice daily, as a rule in the evening just before dark and again at dawn, so that it is unusual to find one more than ten miles from water. On entering new country the rhino shows extraordinary prescience in finding water, and many a lost man has been led to pool or river by following the tracks of the animals.

Not many years ago rhinos showed themselves boldly on the plains in daylight, where they fed on sundry plants among the grass, but now they live in dense cover and are active only under the cloak of night. During the day they retire into the thickets, find a shady spot, and there lie down to sleep. They are often attended by green tick-birds, the size of starlings, which busy themselves in the search for parasites and sometimes make sore places in the rhino's skin by their constant pecking. He does not seem to mind them at all; when one runs into his ear he will hold his head on one side and wait patiently until it comes out again. These birds act as sentinels for their host, rousing him to danger with their raucous twittering. The alarm note of the ox-peckers is often the first indication the traveller has that a rhino is near—a dangerous neighbour in bush or forest.

Opinions about the black rhino's ferocity are contradictory. Some hunters maintain they are comparatively harmless and that their so-called charges are in reality stampedes to get out of trouble; others consider them to be among the most dangerous

beasts in Africa. I think their dispositions must vary greatly in different districts, and that they are timid only in those parts I have never visited. Selous, hunting in Rhodesia and the Transvaal, had no more respect for them than a farmer's cattle; Cumming regarded them as being no more harmful than pigs.

Of the black rhinoceros, Sir Samuel Baker writes: "It will attack either man or beast, frequently without the slightest provocation. It is especially likely to attack should it obtain the scent of any person or strange animal before it appears in sight. This makes it extremely dangerous when riding through thick jungle or high grass."

Vaughan Kirby says: "That the rhinoceros is a singularly obtuse, unwary beast, and therefore easily approached, is undeniable, as also that he often charges blindly, without the slightest malicious intent, in the hunter's direction; yet he is extremely obstinate and quick-tempered, and if wounded at close quarters and able to make out the whereabouts of his aggressor, will prove a most formidable and dangerous opponent. He is not vindictive like the buffalo, yet I met a native in Portuguese East Africa who bore terrible proofs of savage treatment received from a wounded rhino, which, he assured me, had hunted him round and round in some long grass until it caught him, gored him in the ribs and severely trampled on him."

Blaney Percival, giving what he calls a "dispassionate opinion", maintains that the rhinos in North Kenya are much more savage than those farther south, and that the forest rhino is the fiercest of all.

In my experience a rhino when disturbed in thick cover is just as likely to charge the intruder as to run away. But generally, I think, his attack is caused more by fear than anger. The rhino is very short-sighted; even at twenty yards he has difficulty in distinguishing a motionless object. But his hearing and scent are very efficient and once he gets down wind of a man he knows pretty well where he is. A startled rhino, suddenly awakened in his daytime retreat, will often make the mistake of running in the wrong direction, and then, finding himself confronted by the danger he sought to avoid, he is likely to charge madly at the trespasser, apparently believing his best chance to lie in overthrowing the enemy at once. In this he is usually correct, and many a rhino's life has been saved by his pugnacity; the

hunter is intimidated by his foe and does his best to get out of the way.

For the spectacle of a furious rhino charging out of the bush a few yards in front is enough to daunt the bravest. He comes at a great pace, head down, snorting fiercely, and his energy and violence are frightening in the extreme. But in this attitude, being unable to see where he is going, he is easy to evade; he will blunder through bushes and into trees and frequently miss his target altogether.

The great danger lies in being caught on a narrow trail, hedged in by thickets. African bush, with branches interlaced, sprouting a million thorns, is as impenetrable as wire netting, and if a rhino charges down a path which he has made by repeated travel through this type of growth it may be impossible to avoid him. As a rule, hit or miss, the beast goes straight on and will run for a mile or more.

Once I shot an oryx beside an ant-hill, and on going up to find the animal was suddenly charged by a rhino. I avoided it by running up on to the ant-hill, and from that elevation I watched the aggressor's behaviour. It went straight as an arrow over the bush-clad flat, down into a donga, where it disappeared. But a few minutes later I was astonished to see a minute black figure rushing up the opposite hill more than a mile away. It was the rhino, still going strong and as straight as ever.

There are occasions when the rhino turns back and charges repeatedly through the cover, trying to find his enemy. I have lain weaponless in a patch of grass while a rhino rushed to and fro looking for me, and I had no doubt of what would be my fate if I was discovered. It was a windless evening, he could not locate me by scent, and after several tries he went away.

I never found the rhino a particularly difficult beast to hunt, for it can be approached against the wind very easily. The surest method is to follow the big three-toed spoor to the thick cover where the beast is likely to be lying up, then to make a circle and stalk with the wind in favour. In this way it is possible to come on the sleeping giant at ten yards' distance, and then, if desired, withdraw undetected. I have lain within the width of a tennis court for a long time watching a rhino's doings without his ever being aware of me.

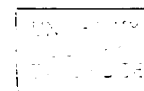
Riding along the Northern Guasso Nyiro one morning, I saw the back of a very big rhino protruding above the bush. He was



Photos : Mervyn Cowie

(Top) Rhinos are common round Mt. Kilimanjaro

(Bottom) Cow rhino charging the photographer



completely red from having wallowed in the mud and let it dry on him, a trick to discourage flies. I tethered my horse to a branch, called my two dogs to heel, and proceeded to stalk the beast up-wind through the dense wait-a-bit bush.

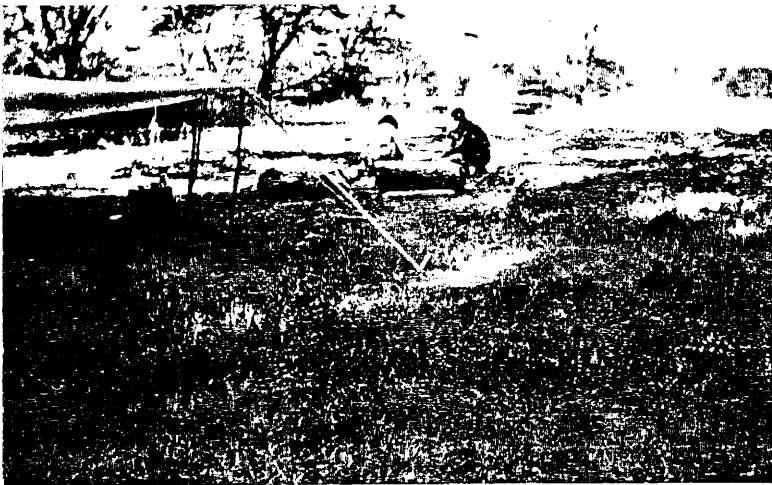
Eventually I arrived at the edge of a small clearing and there was the rhino, twenty yards away, walking slowly towards me. I lay quite still, my dogs flattened themselves down behind me in the way they had been taught. The rhino was a huge bull with a fine horn; he was mooching along, obviously without a thought of danger. But he was coming straight towards me and I had no weapon other than a heavy revolver, as useless as a pea-shooter to stop that giant. I would have given much to withdraw but was sure that my least movement would catch his attention and provoke a charge.

When he had closed half the distance between us, I clicked my fingers to the dogs and made the motion of throwing a ball, which was the signal for them to chase a quarry. They dashed forward, barking and yelping, and leapt at the rhino's shoulders, one on either side. He was the most surprised and startled rhino in Africa; he began to turn round and round, butting at his tormentors, squealing like an immense pig. I got up and ran quickly away into the thick of the bush. Then I whistled the dogs and they soon rejoined me, very pleased with the game of baiting a blundering giant. From first to last I do not suppose that rhino was aware of my presence.

An old, bad-tempered rhino will attack other animals which intrude on his privacy. In one district in Kenya rhinos started attacking elephant calves, with the result that the elephants turned against the rhinos and killed them wherever found. A rhino has no chance against a full-grown elephant, whose superior size and weight and long tusks give it an insuperable advantage.

If alarmed while lying down they sometimes sit up on their haunches like a dog, gazing round for danger, and in this position they look comical. But when rushing at you with head down, huge and powerful, they appear anything but funny.

A wounded rhino often seeks revenge and will charge recklessly at the man who follows it. Soft-nosed bullets have little penetrating effect on their inch-thick hides but they succumb easily to a solid fired from a high-powered rifle. The best place to hit a rhino charging at close quarters is in the neck, over the top of the lowered horn; otherwise a broadside shot through the



(Top) Cooking a meal on the Guasso Njiro

(Bottom) Camp by the river; a tarpaulin stretched from the car

shoulder will finish him at once. The old-time hunters, shooting these beasts repeatedly in neck and shoulders with big elephant-guns and finding them still active and dangerous, were using soft-lead bullets.

Many natives are killed every year by rhinos. While traversing bush-paths they are suddenly charged and overwhelmed—in fact it is probable that more human beings are killed and injured in wild Africa by the rhinoceros than by any other beast. This is sufficient answer to those authorities who maintain that the animals are harmless and never attack with serious intent to kill.

Examples of the dangers of rhinoceros-hunting are provided by the experiences of Mr. Vaughan Kirby on his expeditions in Portuguese East Africa. While hunting kudu, accompanied by some natives, he heard a beast crash away into the thickets, and guessing it was a rhino, immediately followed it.

"It turned up-wind for about a mile and then went with the wind again, zigzagging through the bush from side to side as is the custom of these beasts, especially when wounded. He halted once or twice after turning down-wind but winded or heard us and broke away again before we sighted him."

The spoor was lost among low stony hills and Kirby struck back for camp. His way lay across a vlel and there he came upon a rhino bull and cow walking towards the river, evidently to take their evening drink. The sun was less than an hour from setting and the hunter had to act speedily.

"Telling the boy to remain behind, I ran in a stooping position as fast as I could towards the rhinos, now nearly abreast of me. There was a considerable hollow in the ground in front of them, full of long thick grass, and they had not reached the edge of it when I entered at the upper end and gained the fringe of grass-patch."

There he waited, finger on trigger, and found it exciting work. In the middle of the patch the grass waved where the beasts approached, but then they stopped to feed and he could hear the champing of their jaws on some wait-a-bit bushes. Then slowly the form of the bull came into view as it ascended the side of the hollow to the hunter's right.

"He was less than thirty paces and aiming for his neck, about a foot behind the junction with the skull, I fired, and without kick or struggle he fell on his knees dead.

"The cow, which must have been on the farther edge of the

grass-patch, instantly came rushing towards me with loud snorts, but before reaching the open pulled up, irritated but irresolute. By kneeling down I could indistinctly make her out, standing apparently at an angle towards me; and though my foresight glimmered badly in the half-light, I aimed where I judged her shoulder to be and fired quickly.

"Immediately she got the bullet she came straight out, though I was down-wind of her and she could not have made me out, and possibly, had I stood still, she might have passed me; but, although I have fairly good nerve, it was an experiment I did not care to try, seeing that I held an empty rifle and was standing right in the way. So by the time her ugly horned snout appeared at the edge of the grass I was already moving; but she instantly caught sight of me and probably smelt the smoke of the rifle at the same time, for, when hoping to dodge her, I turned short to the left up the hollow and made for the nearest tree, about a hundred yards distant, she wheeled with marvellous celerity and snorting loudly gave chase."

He had twenty yards' start but he says she ran two feet to his one, and the sounds of her vicious snorts behind him were extremely unpleasant. At any moment he expected to feel her crash into his back. He must have been a good runner on that rough ground not to be overtaken at once—I have been chased on horseback by a rhino and for a short distance it was going as fast as the horse.

"Three strides in front I saw one of those gaping sand-cracks so common in this dry country. What might be its depth I neither knew nor cared; I had seen them three feet deep only, and others twenty feet, some a foot, other twelve feet across. This one was about seven feet deep and three wide, and when I say that the rhino was now barely two lengths behind, the agility I displayed in tumbling over the edge of that haven of refuge may be imagined.

"Next moment I was half-smothered in sand and gravel as a dark form passed over; but I was safe, for on poking my head up over the edge I saw my late pursuer disappearing in the gloom amongst the trees. She had chased me quite sixty yards."

Mike Cottar, a famous Kenya hunter, used to tell me that it was simple to dodge a charging rhino. One waited till it was within a couple of paces and then jumped aside and slightly towards it, like a boxer side-stepping an opponent rushing him in the ring. He said it was impossible for such a big unwieldy brute to turn

quickly enough to catch the man who did this, and I can well believe he was right. But I never had sufficient faith in my judgment and agility to try the expedient; though I have escaped from a rhino by catching the bole of a tree and swinging round it, a trick which seemed to baffle and unsight the beast completely, for it went galloping on through the bush as though I were still a yard in front of its horn.

Vaughan Kirby had a second risky experience with a rhino he was hunting. He and his gun-boy, Dolambi, spoored a bull into a thick bamboo jungle in a hollow between some hills. It had descended the slope, turned into the hollow, and there stood for a time among some burnt bamboos before entering a thick unburnt patch and lying down at its edge. As they stepped from the burnt scrub into the open the gun-bearer saw the bull lying down sixty yards away and pointed it out to his master.

"At first I only saw a black patch which might have been anything, but at that instant the bull stood up, staring in our direction. Even then among the dark bamboo stems it was difficult to make out exactly how he stood, but there was no time for delay and I fired with my Metford. For a few minutes nothing could be heard but the snorting of the wounded beast and the crashing of the bamboos as he tumbled about among them, with clouds of ash enveloping everything. Then I caught a glimpse of the huge form as it dashed through the jungle and gave it a parting salute in the ribs with my second barrel, at once running forward along the spoor."

This constant running about after wounded game fills me with admiring astonishment. Nowadays we are careful not to hurry over uneven ground under the fierce sun, for with a racing pulse and a bumping heart it is impossible to shoot straight, and straight shooting is the thing that counts most in the pursuit of a dangerous wounded quarry. But the old-timers, clad in shirt and boots, chased elephants and buffaloes and lions through the bewildering bush like native spearmen, and seemed to place the enormous bullets from the four-bores and ten-bores with considerable accuracy. A big-game hunter of the 'nineties and before was something of an athlete.

This trail led up a long steep hill, where the rhino moved slowly, evidently hard hit. At the top they saw it in a kneeling position forty yards away, close to a boulder which cropped out from the ground.

"He lay stern on, apparently dead, and of this I felt convinced when I saw some rhinoceros-birds which flew up from his neck failed to rouse him. It is a golden rule, however, never to approach an apparently dead animal—especially if dangerous—without being armed; so I gave Dolambi my Metford and took the double 12, relying on knocking him over with one or both barrels if he should rise.

"When about twenty-five yards from him I shouted, 'Hey! Hey!' In an instant the dark and apparently inert mass sprang to its feet and wheeled round, standing with raised head and little twinkling eyes fixed savagely on us. But I was ready for him and gave him a two-ounce bullet on the point of the shoulder. He fell instantly with a loud squeal, but in a moment was on his legs again, and catching sight of Dolambi as he turned to run, made straight for him, snorting furiously.

"As the beast rushed past a few yards off I fired my left barrel into his shoulder. Once more he came down with a crash in a cloud of dust, but instead of lying there he again scrambled to his feet, while I yelled to Dolambi to bring another cartridge. I saw that it was a case of 'run', for I was but a few yards from him and knew that he saw and smelt the smoke from the rifle, so I lost no time in making for the friendly boulder on top of the ridge, the furious beast snorting and blowing behind me. He would surely have caught me had he not been wounded so badly. As it was he came near enough, for as I swung myself round the boulder by the aid of the long trailing roots of a stunted tree growing in a crevice in the rock, he charged blindly in with a crash. The boulder, being immovable, upset my enemy, who lay on his back kicking all four legs in the air, and before he could recover I got hold of my Metford and settled him with a bullet in the head."

The measurements, taken on the spot, were: Length from nose to tip of tail, 13 ft. 4 in.; shoulder height, 5 ft. 8½ in.; anterior horn, 20¾ in. This was certainly a big rhinoceros, and evidently possessed of unusual stamina and tenacity. Its behaviour shows decidedly that those hunters who maintain that the black rhinoceros is a fairly harmless beast who will always retreat if able must have been fortunate in the specimens they encountered.

It always seemed to me that no rhino was to be trusted if one got close to him. He will keep clear of man if he can, but there is nothing he is afraid of when his blood is up. A bull rhinoceros once charged a locomotive on the old Uganda Railway, with

fatal results to himself; and there are several instances of automobiles being turned over by these animals.

I remember a transport driver in the Northern Frontier District telling me how a rhinoceros damaged his lorry. He left the machine purring at the roadside for a few minutes while he walked back along the track a short way to recover something that had fallen off the load. When he returned a bull rhino had the whole of the front part of its body in the driving compartment. Having no weapon, he stood and shouted at it, whereupon it backed out of the cab in a hurry and chased him up on to a pile of rocks. It then went off and left him to examine the damage.

The control panel was half-ripped out, the windscreen smashed and the steering-wheel badly bent. I told him that if he had not scared the beast by shouting, but had let it get out as it got in, no harm would have resulted, to which he replied: "What was I supposed to do—wait there till it had satisfied its curiosity?"

On one occasion my wife and I sat in the middle of a thick evergreen bush waiting to shoot a leopard, and in the moonlight a rhino came along and started to browse off the bush which sheltered us. I coughed and lit a cigarette, and after one astonished snort that rhino went away, so quietly that we imagined it treading on tip-toe.

CHAPTER XVII

A BLOODLESS SAFARI

NOWADAYS particularly, visitors to Africa are interested in seeing wild life, without necessarily destroying it. The numerous game parks provide the opportunity for this amusement, but it is also possible to undertake a genuine safari into the wilderness and see big game at close quarters while refraining from firing a shot. Thrilling and interesting though the hunting of wild beasts may be, it is by no means essential to engage in actual encounters with the "big stuff" to enjoy the wandering, foot-loose life of the hunter. One may adventure freely, using nothing more deadly than sketch-book and camera. Of course it is advisable to be armed and ready to defend oneself against those infrequent rogues whose hatred of man impels them to take the war-path, but apart

from shooting a few antelopes and game birds to supply the larder the holiday-maker need not kill—in fact, if he is willing to live on canned goods he need never dirty a rifle.

The ardours and excitements of the chase when photography is the object may not be quite so strenuous, nor the outcome so replete with triumph over danger and the weakness of the flesh, but the life is the same, and the purpose requisite for enduring fatigue and discomfort provided. For unless a man has occupation on safari he will succumb to boredom and find hanging about his camp preferable to exerting himself in exploring rough uncharted country in heat and thirst. Where there are no roads or buses travel is hard work, and distances in the wilds always greater than imagination pictures.

On my return to Kenya in 1947 the first thing I wanted to do was to get out in the Blue and see how much conditions had changed. There was no wish to shoot anything, but a strong urge to recapture the old delights of safari life, to enjoy the sensation of complete freedom in wild untenanted places, observe the beasts in their untrammelled haunts, and learn if I could still rejoice in the toil and hardship of camp life.

My wife had a like pleasure in safari; in the old days she and I had made several adventurous journeys, quite by ourselves, without servants, or even a tent. My son, Michael, now set foot in Africa for the first time at the age of sixteen. He had been reared on tales of trek and camp and was eager to experience these delights. There was not much time at our disposal but we resolved to have a week-end in the wilderness among the game.

I planned to visit the Euasso Nyiro, a river in Masailand which rises in the Mau and takes its unhurried way down through the Rift Valley to Lake Natron. In the past it had been a favourite hunting-ground of mine. Kay and I had camped on its banks many times; we remembered it as a place of peace and beauty, thickly populated with a variety of animals and birds. We had been used to dash out from Nairobi whenever time allowed, spend a few days on the delectable river, and return, weary but refreshed in spirit. We took no boys, but travelled in a light car with the minimum of equipment, sleeping on the ground under a slung tarpaulin and cooking our food over a camp fire. Now we proposed to repeat this experience in the same manner as of old. The Euasso Nyiro might have changed but we were convinced we had not.

In the old days there had been a track along this river where a lorry could get through, but now we could find no trace of it. Darkness was falling, it was imperative to reach a camping-place speedily.

We left the road and started across-country, slowly converging on the river, threading our way among the thorns on a series of pans of sun-dried clay. In the rains all this valley would be a swamp, but now it was dry and firm, and the undergrowth not too thick for the car to penetrate. We worked a mile up-stream and came to rest in a dry vlei among clumps of bush and groves of the ubiquitous fever-thorns.

All hands set to work to unload the car. The tarpaulin was rigged as a lean-to shelter, chop-boxes and blanket-rolls set in a circle. As is usual along a river there was much driftwood; Michael and I started to drag big dry branches and heavy logs to the wood-pile and cut them into manageable lengths. We wanted a good camp fire to provide cheer and discourage inquisitive beasts.

Kay found her way to the river along a choked game-trail and returned with a full kettle, which she placed to boil on three stones. In a few minutes we were drinking mugs of sweetened tea—badly needed after the long journey.

By the time we had finished our preliminary labours the full moon was up and the river-glades softly illuminated. We took soap and towels and went off to wash.

In Masai, Euasso Nyiro means Brown River. At the point where we camped it is a slow stream twenty yards wide, broadening in places to form miniature lakes. Its water is slightly muddy but where the current is swift not unpleasant to the taste. It was warm enough to wash in without a shiver.

After consuming more mugs of tea we felt able to cope with a meal. We ate rump steak and fried potatoes, followed by Californian canned fruit, seated on our blanket-rolls in a companionable circle. The fire burned merrily, lighting up the little glade, the moon was large and golden and serene, there was that hush upon the land which falls in wild places at the beginning of night. Far vistas between the bush-clumps in the misty moonlight contained nothing moving; apart from the difference in vegetation and climate we might have been camping in Kensington Gardens. I wondered if all the game had been driven away; not even a hyena raised his hungry call.

Supper over, we sat talking and resting, preparatory to cleaning the plates and making our beds. Suddenly there was a crash and a loud snort from the thicket behind us. It was a long time since I had heard a rhino, and as I snatched up my rifle I said: "That, I think, is an impala." Those animals, when alarmed, are good imitators of a rhino, though their snorts are less resounding.

Michael and I went out of the firelight, rifles ready, just to make sure all was well. We neither saw nor heard the intruder, which must have slunk quietly away.

We were all tired and lost no time in making our beds and getting into them. Michael slept in the back of the car, Kay and I on the ground under the tarpaulin. We made up the fire with big logs, and I hoped I should awaken periodically, as of old, to put on more wood when it was required.

The fire burnt with a steady hiss and flutter, the glade lay plain in the shining moonlight, beneath bush and tree were pools of inky shadow. For a period of perhaps ten years I had slept in the open more often than under a roof; then I had no more fear of lying down on the African veld than in an English meadow. I seemed to have grown away from those days, for now I was decidedly uneasy.

I had never been attacked in camp by a lion; but conditions might have changed, lions might now be bolder, more used to the ways of humanity and correspondingly contemptuous. For all I knew there might be a man-eater in this district. Looked at from this angle, to bring my wife and son out on a jaunt like this was the next thing to lunacy.

In the midst of these cogitations I fell into a deep dreamless sleep. It was not the hair-trigger sleep of the old days, when the slightest hostile sound would wake me; I slept heavily, as if in a bedroom. A hyena could have crept up and stolen my boots and I should not have been aware of him.

II

The morning was like all Kenya mornings, a joy to experience. At this season there was no dew, one could move about in comfort, the air was fresh but without chill. We soon had the fire burning well and the kettle beginning to rumble.

I prowled around the camp. Behind a thicket against which the car stood I discovered the fresh spoor of a rhino. It looked like

that of a small cow; she had come down a steep bank on her way to water and had suddenly seen our fire through the bush within twenty yards of her. After uttering that surprised snort she had turned at right-angles and gone off, evidently not greatly alarmed.

After drinking a mug of tea Michael and I left Kay to wash the cups and climbed the bank to explore the bush beyond. There we found the old trail I had been used to follow. It was badly overgrown but looked passable for a car.

Breakfast over, we prospected a way for the car, and managed to get it up on to the trail. From there we sped along merrily, dodging obstructions, negotiating beds of tall reeds, keeping close to the river and always finding the old track again.

The place was alive with impala, as it always had been. These rufous antelope are among the most handsome in Africa and their movements a delight to watch. I know nothing except the cheetah so graceful in action. They must be the world's finest jumpers; I once saw half a dozen young rams go over the top of a Government Service tent without the least difficulty, taking off in front of one set of guy-ropes and landing beyond the other. The rams have long lyre-shaped horns, and the big flock master lurks always in the background, guarded by his wives, who have a proper respect and care for him. These beautiful animals dashed across our path, stopping to stare when the danger was past. They seemed little perturbed at the intrusion of man.

At the end of five miles we came to wide glades and deep washaways, a part I remembered, where I thought a good camping-spot could be found. Thomson's gazelles were grazing in the glades; Michael stalked them among the gullies and got within thirty yards, where he examined them at his leisure.

In a glade just beyond the river a small herd of eland fed. The young bull, catching our wind, ran down to the water's edge to inspect us, while his wives bunched in readiness for flight. Presently they went off among the thorns, but without haste. It was plain that no shot had been fired in this place for a long while; in the past the game had not been used to stand staring at a man.

We found a good place for our camp within a stone's throw of the river, where there was a wide drift, the drinking place of Masai cattle. The car was parked under a big acacia tree, unloaded, and the tarpaulin rigged. We began to gather a store of fuel; there was plenty of dead wood lying about.

By this time the sun had gained power, it was very hot in the

river-valley and myriads of flies attacked us. I thought longingly of shady verandahs and iced drinks. I was tired after the journey and the labour of cutting wood; I remembered how hard one had always worked on safari and the enormous fatigue that descended on the hunter as he sat cleaning his weapons, before rolling into his blankets and stretching his aching limbs.

We sought a secluded pool in the babbling river to bathe, shaded by groves of fever-trees that lined its banks. Black-faced monkeys were active in those trees. Brilliant lorries croaked dismally as they flitted from branch to branch, raising a great screaming commotion when they met a friend. Golden weaver-birds were busy about their plaited nests, hung from twigs low over the water so that robbers should be baffled. The river chuckled and rattled over stone and sunken log. We were tucked away in the wilderness beyond all men's ken.

The Euasso Nyiro lies in a broad valley, whose sides rise slowly some 300 feet. Along the riparian flats stretch a succession of grassy glades, among belts of lush green fever-trees and tangled thickets. The hillsides are dense with brachystegia bush, grey gnarled stems rising 20 feet high, and sign-posted with stunted candelabra-cactus trees. It is ideal cover for rhinos and there one could be sure of finding them, though in that dense bush it was a risky undertaking.

Up on the ridge one is suddenly confronted by immense plains, where in the distance rise lumpish mountains to encircle the view. These are the Loita Plains, home of the Masai and innumerable herds of game. In 1930 it was estimated there were 3,000,000 wildebeest on the Loita Plains, and, of course, numbers of zebras and gazelles, together with the lions, cheetahs, and hordes of scavengers that preyed on them. My wife and I had often crossed the Loita and camped in its vast expanse; we were anxious to view it again.

But first we decided to explore the river-valley, which had always held great attraction for us. We followed a game-trail near the water, going cautiously, for this was no place to take chances.

Everywhere were tracks and droppings of rhino. We saw their resting places under bushes and their spoor at the drinking-holes. Twenty years before there had been rhino on the Euasso Nyiro but now there must be many more; from the signs I deduced that there were scores of them in a small area. In this place they had never been good-tempered beasts and I was a trifle worried for

fear we might come suddenly upon one and be attacked. With nothing but soft-nosed ammunition for a deterrent the outcome would be doubtful.

A hundred yards from camp we found evidence of a lion-kill. The traces showed that during the night impala had been grazing close to some thick bush. One lion had gone round and stalked up through the cover, the other had waited to cut off the quarry's retreat. I thought it was the lioness that had killed, charging suddenly out of the bush. The lions had disembowelled the carcass, leaving the entrails lying—I noticed that among the contents of the stomach were the remains of sodom-apples, the little yellow fruit which grows on a spiky veld plant, rather like a tobacco plant in appearance. The killers had dragged the buck a short distance away into a thicket, where they might be in hiding, fully aware of our presence. The kill must have been made in the early hours, for no hyenas had arrived and no vultures located the offal.

I wanted to show Michael his first wild lion. He and I went into the bush along narrow winding trails on the track of the dragged kill. It was still and hot, the grass had been flattened by big bodies. I knew the lions must be lying-up somewhere close and I thought it likely they would resent interference with their property.

It was hardly the place to take a novice; no responsible white hunter would approve this situation. We were not lion-hunting anyway, we had come there to look and admire. So we soon abandoned that quest and rejoined Kay, who had been waiting in the open, exhibiting a certain confidence in my doings which I could not help feeling was misplaced.

Here the tracks of rhino were much in evidence. We grew increasingly wary as we traversed the glades. Impala leapt out into our path, pausing to stare before cantering away, snorting with alarm. Stopping to watch a beautiful stag, who stood motionless within thirty yards, I told my son: "You couldn't miss that."

He replied: "I wouldn't shoot that beast for anything. It would be criminal."

I divined that his inclinations were more those of the naturalist than the hunter, and was not displeased.

Flocks of guineafowl showed themselves, almost as tame as chickens. The notice had said shooting was prohibited within two miles of the bridge. We were a long way outside the prohibited area, yet the game was trusting as in a national park. I concluded

that there were more wild animals here now than in the days when I had hunted them.

Returning to camp, we found it in possession of a troop of Sykes monkeys. They were investigating everything and I hurried to intervene, for these mischievous imps can cause a lot of damage in a short time. Dozens of them scampered away along the river bank and climbed into the trees, from the branches of which they watched us with intense curiosity and little fear. Fortunately they had not stolen or destroyed anything.

While we ate luncheon, seated on our blanket-rolls in the shade, they gambolled stealthily around, greatly interested in all we did. Kipling was right in calling monkeys the "foolish folk", they cannot keep their attention on anything for more than a few minutes and in consequence fall an easy prey to a clever hunter like the leopard, but they are intrigued by the behaviour of human beings and will hang about a camp for hours, peeping at its occupants from behind the branches. They hate leopards and are frightened to death of them—nevertheless they will follow after one, keeping in the trees, and scold and threaten, making a great to-do. Baboons will even mob a leopard, throwing sticks and stones at it, but never venturing to close quarters.

A big herd of humped cattle came down to drink at the drift, bringing, it seemed, all the flies in Africa. They were from a Masai manyatta two miles away up on the plains. The herdsman, a Masai of middle age, came to make himself acquainted. He was an amiable fellow, in blanket and hide sandals, and he carried a well-made bow and quiver with a dozen arrows. In this place he would have to protect his cows from wild beasts, and like all his tribe would show fight to any marauder.

Unfortunately he could speak very little Kiswahili and conversation was difficult. He naturally assumed we had come there to hunt, though the absence of servants and the usual safari equipment of tents and lorries must have puzzled him a good deal. He knew about the pair of lions that had killed close by. Evidently they had lived there some time. He offered to lead us to them.

I said I had already found their whereabouts but did not want to molest them. This astonished him. Why not kill a lion when you had the chance?

I told him the District Commissioner at Nerok did not wish me to kill lions, and he must have thought that official had taken leave of his senses. The Masai live by cattle, lions are the enemies

of cattle, therefore lions are a nuisance and a menace and should be exterminated. No one would be the worse off for the absence of lions.

His tribe do not suffer the ravages of their foes tamely; when a lion becomes a really bad cattle-thief they go out after him. The method is for the warriors to advance in a long line till the lion is located, then they surround him and close in. The lion hides until the danger is pressing, then he charges at some point in the cordon. It is highly dishonourable to flinch from the attack; a man who lets the enemy get away might as well hang himself, for his people will disown him henceforth; so he takes cover beneath his shield and endures the mauling while his comrades rush in and kill the assailant with their spears. In these hunts one or more men may be killed and others injured, but almost invariably the lion is disposed of.

There are no man-eaters in Masailand. The people would not tolerate them; if a lion kills a man he is sought for and soon exterminated.

We gave the herdsman a present of jam and sugar and he departed happily, mustering his cattle for the return journey to the grazing-ground on the plains. He would not keep them long on the bushy flats where lions might steal upon them unobserved.

When we went up to the Loita we found the fringes of it devoid of life—not even a secretary bird was present. The dry weather was long established, grazing had suffered, I supposed the game driven far out on the plains to more fertile spots. I had known this happen in the past, and hoped there had been no diminution in the game-herds in recent years.

I lay in my blankets that night listening to the crackle of the fire, watching the soft glow of moonlight in the glades and the lacy branches of the fever-trees traced against a sky of turquoise. In the evening Michael, while wandering along the river, had heard lions grunting on the farther bank. The Masai had spoken as though the pair that lived here were a scourge to the cattle and a threat to men; it was conceivable they might steal up to the camp in the shadows. But with recollections of past immunity I dismissed my qualms and went to sleep. So many times I had lain out quite alone, listening to the grunts and roars of lions all about me, finding that the creatures, apart from a natural curiosity which sometimes brought them within sniffing distance of my fire, had no wish to interfere with man and would go off about

their own affairs sooner or later. In Kenya and Tanganyika this seemed fairly safe procedure, but farther south, apparently, the risk would be great.

At dawn I heard Kay stirring. She was about to make tea and would go down to the drift for water. I felt lazy and I stayed where I was.

She returned and said quietly: "There is a huge rhino coming down to drink. If you don't make a noise you can come and see him."

In the past she had always been scared of rhino; now she seemed disposed to treat this one like a privileged visitor. She was so happy at being out in the wilds again that nothing could be classed as inimical.

I saw no reason for being careful not to frighten the beast; I should have preferred him to vacate the district at speed. Rifle in hand, I walked round the back of the car and saw, a short way off, a really big bull rhinoceros leisurely approaching. He was not going to water, he was walking straight into our camp!

Kay stood beside me. Michael thrust head and shoulders out of the car, holding his rifle. He said nothing. The appearance of this giant out of the prehistoric past was doubtless something of a shock to him.

In such circumstances the behaviour of a rhinoceros is unpredictable. If suddenly scared, this one might run off in panic, or charge like a whirlwind at the cause of his alarm. In an instant he could change from an amiable, inquisitive interloper to a snorting, thundering fury, eager to smash everything in front of him. I was well acquainted with the characteristics of rhinos and would never trust one an inch, however peaceable his demeanour.

But rhinos are really respectful of man and would prefer to give him a wide berth. The way to warn a wild beast without giving it a sudden fright is to make some seemingly careless noise which informs it of danger but allows it to think itself still undiscovered, so I coughed loudly at the rhino.

He stopped instantly, threw up his head, and listened. It was obvious he could not see us. Standing there beside a thorn-tree in the growing light he looked like a monstrous pig, wide as a barn door, with a long ungainly head and long thick horns. I was convinced we were indistinguishable to him; and the air was so still that no scent could reach him. The danger was that he might decide on impulse to charge and sweep the enemy from his path.

Soft-nosed bullets might not turn him. Directly he saw it, he would go for the car, and after the impact it would need the services of a well-equipped garage to make that car travel again. We should be marooned in this desolate spot two hundred miles from home.

I coughed again. He heard me. But it was his nature not to be easily thwarted; he wanted to reach that part of the stream where he had planned to spend the day and no intrusive black herdsman was going to deter him. Let everyone get out of his way; he was Kifaru, the big bull of the bush, and in his career he had never met anything that could stand up to him. He put up his little tail, stiff as a ramrod, and I thought that next moment he would be rushing towards us—two tons of lunatic energy.

I shouted threateningly, as I would to a disobedient dog: "Get out of that, you brute!"

It shocked Kifaru. He wheeled aside and set off at a lumbering gallop across our front, passing about thirty yards from us. On the edge of the bush he spun round and stared, snorting fiercely. I supposed he had at last got our wind and realized a deliberate invasion of his territory. He was wondering what to do about it. Fortunately he settled on retreat; he went off through the bushes with a prodigious crashing, and I expect he kept going for a long time. I measured off the distance to the tree beside which he had stood: it was fifty-two paces.

Next day we packed up and started for home. Our provisions were running short.

On the way we encountered a small herd of giraffe standing in the trail. So tame were they that I ran the car up to within three paces of a large cow and then had to stop because she showed no sign of moving. She stood there, looking down on the roof of the car with her mild inquiring eyes, but from the driving-seat I could not see her head so far above me and had to get out to inspect her. When I was afoot she got suspicious and slowly walked off to join her companions, who were waiting for her on the edge of the bush ten yards away. It was evident that no sportsman had visited that part of the Euasso Nyiro for a long time; I was very glad we had not fired a shot in that sanctuary.

CHAPTER XVIII

NAIROBI GAME PARK

I SAT in the office of the Director of National Parks, discussing with him new developments in the preservation of wild life. A few years before there had been no parks, only reserves, inadequately policed against the operations of poachers, black and white. Now huge stretches of country in various parts of the Colony had been set aside for game sanctuaries and would be ably administered by resident wardens with staffs of native rangers under them. What these black rangers would think of preserving wild beasts, especially lions, leopards, hyenas, and wild dogs, I could not imagine, but I learnt that they quickly understood the purpose of the work and showed themselves enthusiastic in their duties.

In the main the country thus utilized was dry and barren, empty of human inhabitants, and useless to all but the animals that had retired there from constant persecution. Roads were being cut through the parks, dams constructed to catch the infrequent rain, rest-houses would be built to accommodate visitors. There would be no interference whatever with natural conditions; the animals would pursue their normal way of life as it was before the first white man set foot in the country. But, it had been shown, the beasts would become sufficiently accustomed to the spying of man to disregard him and expose themselves for his study and amusement. The experiment of the Kruger National Park in South Africa had proved so successful that Kenya expected a large increase in revenue from the tourist trade, as well as helping to preserve the indigenous fauna. This was probably the only way in which the wild beasts could survive, since settlement of natives and Europeans, and systematic big-game hunting, were quickly reducing their feeding grounds and destroying them.

The wardens, of whom Colonel Mervyn Cowie was the chief, were quietly enthusiastic in their task, and already the people of other countries were taking an interest in the advantages of the project. One park was already working, open to the public, who were not slow to avail themselves of the entertainment. This Nairobi Park, just outside the city, was a favourite resort in the evenings and week-ends and I had heard much about its attractions.