

PHOTOGRAPHING WILD LIFE ACROSS THE WORLD

BY
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WITH EIGHTY-FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS



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A REPORT OF RHINO

We had been out rather over a fortnight when the rains, already late in appearing, began to set in. Most of us were more or less downcast at the lack of success, and I think that wet day seemed to take pretty well the last of our spirits out of us, especially as Ulyate declared we might now expect more wet weather, far more than would probably be pleasant.

To our relief the morning broke fine and clear, whilst, as is always the case after the first rain, the veldt seemed to have taken on a new freshness. The dust of months had been washed off leaves and grass, old spoor had been obliterated, everything seemed ready to burst into new life.

The cowboys rode on ahead scouting round, whilst the rest of us kept with the safari, halting every now and then when the wagons fell too far behind. Despite the rain of the night before, the heat was again intense, and the slow rate at which we were compelled to travel did not tend to make matters more pleasant.

It was during one of those short halts that Means, the cowboy, came galloping back along the track. We had now got so used to ill-luck, that really I believe none of us expected him to have any news; consequently, we were more than elated when he informed us that there was a rhino in a valley a short distance off, and that Jones and the other cowboy were holding him up for me.

It did not take us very long to get into the saddle

again, to overtake the wagon, which we had allowed to trek on ahead, to hustle the camera porters into new life, and start for the scene of action. After half an hour's riding we came on Loveless, who informed us that Jones was down in the valley keeping watch on the animal, which did not yet know of his presence.

We at once took the cameras from the carriers, and began to creep cautiously up-wind towards a clump of bush in which Jones was hidden.

Fortunately, the light was excellent—it was just about noon—and other conditions generally were in our favour. The cowboys got their ropes ready and started to work round slowly, whilst I went forward on foot quite close to the sleeping rhino, focused my camera on him and gave the signal for the others to close in.

Instantly Jones gave vent to a war-whoop which would have done credit to a Red Indian and, followed by his assistants, dashed up. A moment later the rhino was on his feet trying to get the scent, his great nose in the air, his little purblind eyes peering round. He just gave me time to get some film, then he was away at full speed down the valley, the cowboys in close pursuit. He galloped considerably over a couple of miles before he decided to halt and face his enemies. The place he chose was a good one from his point of view—a dip in the ground where the rains of the night before had formed a small pool. He went right into it and turned round to face us,

THE RHINO AT BAY

then, finding we were not coming on immediately, indulged in the luxury of a good roll, probably to refresh himself after his run.

The question now was how to get him out of the water and within reach of the lassos. There was one simple and very dangerous way of doing it—to induce him to charge. Without the slightest hesitation Jones tried this plan, riding right up to the water's edge. The rhino let him come on until he thought he was sure of getting him, then charged with lightning-like suddenness. It took the horseman all his time to keep ahead, but a few seconds later a lasso was over the great brute's neck, checking him momentarily, though immediately afterwards the rope snapped like a piece of thread.

Obviously there was no sense in trying to catch him that way when he was in full career. The only chance seemed to be to tire him out first and then endeavour to get several lassos on him at the same time. For over half an hour the three cowboys kept up the game, taking it in turns to be chased, the rhino always returning to the pool after each unsuccessful dash. At last another rope was thrown, and this time he was caught round one of his hind legs. The lasso held, but the man and the horse at the other end had to follow the animal when he decided to leave his pool and take up his stand in what was happily a most convenient place for me—the middle of an open space.

His first act then was to knock down an ant-hill which seemed to annoy him, and after venting his wrath on that he was ready to face us once more.

I sent my assistant to a small thorn tree on the south side, taking up my own position opposite. Hardly had I done so when the rhino caught sight of my assistant's camera and charged. His carrier-boy gave a fearsome yell and was up the tree long before the white man, but, luckily for the latter, the rhino paused to smash up the apparatus, otherwise I should have got a moving picture of my assistant being tossed, a picture which in all probability he himself would never have lived to see on the screen.

Means saved the situation by dashing in just as the great brute had finished with the tripod and inducing him to chase the horse. In an instant my unfortunate assistant seemed to be forgotten, and the animal was in pursuit of Means.

The beginning of that fight was typical of the whole. If the men and horses were good, the rhino was splendid. He was game right through, and despite their wonderful skill, the cowboys had their work cut out. They lassoed him time after time, throwing their nooses over him with uncanny accuracy; yet he would either tow man and horse away across the veldt or the rope would break. I do not know how many broken lines were dangling from him when at the end of some four and a half hours he began to



Lassoing a Rhinoceros.

Between pages 160 and 161.



Lassoing a Rhinoceros.

Between pages 160 and 161.

HORSE VERSUS RHINO

show signs of exhaustion. Several times one or other of the Americans managed to seize the end of a broken rope and tie it on to another, but it seldom held for long.

It was exhausting work for all concerned, but especially for the horses. They had, of course, by far the worst of it. Their riders had the excitement to keep them going, still I think the horses enjoyed it. My assistant, who was on his first visit to Africa, I placed within a couple of yards of a tree, up which he could shin, which he luckily did when things became dangerous. I was on foot, and had the rhino concentrated his attention upon me, he would inevitably have succeeded in ridding himself of an enemy. Yet during the whole of that long afternoon's excitement I do not recall having thought of this. I was out then to get photographs; I had gone to an immense amount of trouble to secure pictures of that rhino being lassoed, and I was not going to be done out of my reward if I could help it.

The sun was getting perilously near the horizon, when Jones decided to try and make the animal fast to a tree. Loveless got him on the run again, leading him straight down on to my camera, though fortunately he pulled up in time. Obviously he was getting played out by now. One of the broken ropes was caught, another was thrown catching his hind leg, then gradually and with infinite exertion he was tied to a

thorn tree, round the trunk of which the lasso was passed. Just before he was finally tied up he drove Loveless up a tree, but that was his last effort. He stood there a gallant, sullen captive, the real hero of the act, whilst I used the last of my film on him.

When we visited the place next morning he had gone. I met a man who saw the same rhino with a bit of rope on his head, and directly he got the smell of a white man he was off like lightning.

After the lassoing of the rhino there came another blank. We wanted a lion now. One day I sighted two against a hot spring over a mile away. There were a few rocks in the background. When we got to the place the lions had vanished completely, but one had left the biggest pug-mark I had ever seen. Everything else had to give way to the search for lions, yet none was sighted. Day after day it was the same, and with each hour our chances of success grew less. Stores were shrinking rapidly, a sense of discouragement was spreading through the whole party, and the real rains which would make the country almost impassable for the wagons became more and more of a danger to the expedition.

At last, after a camp-fire council, we decided to accept the inevitable and head back for Nairobi. There was a chance, of course, of a lion on the homeward journey, but I believe none of us really counted on it. We hurried over the road—if you can use that term

in connection with bullock-wagons. We wanted to get away from the dreary, waterless country we had been scouring in vain. There was one long stretch, a twenty-four-hour trek, between two water-holes, and we gave the cattle a day's rest before tackling it; then we inspanned in the cool of the evening and started out on what we knew must be a wearisome ordeal. At sunrise we were in the Rift Valley again; at noon we halted for a couple of hours and served out water sparingly to the horses and carriers. The heat was abominable; everyone was horribly thirsty, yet it was out of the question to make a real stop. The cattle must be got on to the next water-hole.

It was a dreary-looking procession that wound along the road that afternoon. The carriers were too thirsty to chatter to one another, much less to sing; the white men were too parched to smoke. Horses and cattle alike plodded along with drooping heads. Everyone was longing for the trek to be over, longing for the moment when he should be able to throw himself down beside that water-hole ahead and forget—or try to forget—that abominable dry stretch.

And when at last we did reach the supposed pool there was not a drop of water in it!

There was now only one thing to do. Scores of lions might have been but a few miles off the track, yet we should not have dared to turn aside in pursuit of them. When you are short of water on the veldt every