



A TWELVE AND A HALF FOOT ELEPHANT SHOT IN TANGANYIKA TERRITORY

(Frontispiece)

IN AFRICAN GAME TRACKS

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*WANDERINGS WITH A RIFLE
THROUGH EASTERN AFRICA*

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And so it proved ; the end was not far off now. When we crossed over the river-bed and approached the further limit of the bush, the tracker's gait became more cautious. Of a sudden he stopped short at the fringe of the trees and stiffened like a pointer when he scents partridges immediately ahead ; drawing back a pace or two he beckoned me to his side, pointing along the limit of the forest. I crept forward and looked in the direction indicated ; the noble beast was standing in the shadow of a tree within a hundred yards of us. He fell to the shot and we went forward.

New to the game, I was less acquainted with the habits of wounded buck, especially sable, than I became later ; no experienced hunter would have gone close up to him so confidently. I jumped back only just in time to avoid the circular sweep of his horns that would have gone through my body as easily as they did through the flap of the khaki coat I was wearing.

But one of the most wonderful bits of huntsman's craft I have ever witnessed came a few days later. It had been a long day and there were no results to show for our work. The buffalo and eland we had been looking for had proved elusive ; so that not a shot had been fired. When near camp in the late afternoon, a herd of between twenty and thirty waterbuck reminded me that we had no meat to barter for the "mealie meal" that formed the staple food of the carriers ; also the chief, who had accompanied us to give us the benefit of his local knowledge, expressed an ardent desire for flesh. Since there appeared to be but little chance now of the nobler game I decided to shoot the lesser.

The buck of which we had caught a glimpse were in the thick bush ahead ; telling the carriers

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and the chief to remain behind, I went forward alone except for my Shangaan hunter, Jim. But in the interval the waterbuck had moved forward and were now deep in the bush. A ten-minutes' stalk brought us to within easy range ; and I fired —with no apparent result. Somewhat chagrined at my failure, for the shot had been easy and we wanted meat badly, I sent Jim back to call up our followers, myself remaining where I was. When they reached me we went forward, the chief at my side talking casually! Presently we came to the tracks of the fleeing buck where they crossed our path ; and the chief stopped dead. "You have killed one," he said without a moment's hesitation ; and when I asked him how he knew, he pointed out one individual spoor, which, he said, showed that the animal faltered in a way that only happened when he was fatally wounded. The ground was soft so that the tracks were clearly marked ; but I could see no great difference between that indicated and the others. However, we followed them up and sure enough, within a quarter of a mile came upon the dead buck. The bush was far too dense for the chief to have seen the shot ; still more to have seen the buck fall.

It is often asked how far the great waste spaces of Africa can be made to serve as a source of food supply for a hungry world. I have tasted the flesh of most kinds of big game and do not like it. But except for "old man" giraffe, which quite frankly is entirely beastly, there is nothing so horrible as waterbuck. Yet, some tribes that turn up their pug noses at the meat of the warthog, revel in it. Again, elephant meat is universally acclaimed throughout Africa as a delicacy ; whereas few will touch the rhinoceros, and fewer still

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the hippopotamus, which is left to the "Shenzis." The two latter I have never attempted on account of their unappetising appearance, and am not qualified to offer an opinion; but I have tried elephant trunk—once. I have no fault to find with the flavour of this, closely resembling ox-tongue as it does; but the two nostril holes that run through its entire length add nothing to its attractiveness; and one cannot shut the eyes in face of the obvious.

Among the buck world the eland undoubtedly affords the best meat, with the roan antelope coming in a bad second. For the rest, they are not good. The hunter generally is too tired at the end of a long day to eat much, and usually confines himself to the tit-bits—liver and kidney; or, if he happens to be really hungry, he keeps the tenderloin, which a native will always purloin if given the chance, for his share of the kill. A well-hung haunch of duiker will melt in the mouth; but this applies to the high veldt rather than the low, the heat of the latter precluding hanging. There is much more to say on this subject in its proper place, but after all the hunting of the beast is the thing; and though the utility of the kill is essential to the flavour of the hunt, as is mustard to beef, there is always the question of the boys' feeding. Usually the conscientious hunter in Africa is unable to eat for his dinner more than enough to keep life in his body and give him strength for his next day's hunt, and his breakfast consists of eggs purchased locally or exchanged for meat, salt or sugar. And it is only when he has an off-day that he busies himself about such subsidiary matters as food.

Some of the birds are quite good eating. I have already spoken of the paauw: his brother

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the korhaan, which is found all over Africa, whether veldt or bush, is also a table delicacy. Pheasants and partridges, as the francolins large and small are called, are delicious though they are somewhat lacking in the gamey flavour of their European congeners; the same applies to the quail. The plovers, of which there are many varieties, are not worth eating; as also the goose, especially the great goose which far exceeds the swan in size. Ducks are ducks the world over; but there is one variety which I cannot help acclaiming, the big black river duck. I have never tasted a wild duck—or a tame one either, for the matter of that—to compare in flavour with him. There are also snipe that are much like their English relatives; and this except for guinea fowl exhausts the list of common eatable fowls more or less; for the storks and cranes and herons are beyond the pale.

Though game preservation is dying now in England, both because of the impossibility of keeping up shooting estates, and also because the spirit of the times is against the rich man's sport, there are still many left to whom the subject is of interest. It is often asked if shoots could be made more interesting by the introduction of new game birds. Some half-hearted efforts have been made in this direction by nature lovers, such as the attempted rearing of the tinamoo; but this was not very successful. I often think that the francolins might easily be acclimatized. The greater francolin, or "pheasant," as he is called locally, has none of the British-Georgian bird's brilliant colouring—indeed, he is a dull grey, homely fowl—but he flies well, and inhabiting the same kind of cover, would make a pleasant addition to the bag if he could be reared. In my opinion, far more could

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licence permitted had been secured only this day, to my very great relief ; lastly, that I never wanted to see an elephant again during the course of this life, and hoped devoutly that the bull would keep away as long as the safari remained at Kidatu. Ali was only slightly consoled by our purchase of stores ; for, he said, though money always came in useful, life was better.

The region north of the Ruaha must have teemed with game at one time. Never have I seen more "likely" country, but its accessibility to civilization has driven the game away. We spent one night only in the camp one mile beyond the river. The tent was pitched on the side of the road opposite the banda, while the boys had made their camps in the huts appointed for that purpose. While Hamishi, the house boy, was bringing the second dinner course across the road to where we were seated before the tent, an exclamation from him caused me to look round. Just behind my chair a pair of hyenas were sniffing the air in hopes of a chance to steal.

There is very little danger to be apprehended from these foul brutes as long as one is awake. Their jaws are at least as powerful as those of any living animal ; it is said that they can crack the bones of a pachyderm's leg between their teeth. I have heard of but one man who lost his life through them. He was a "transport rider" back in the old days of pioneer Rhodesia, and a hyena snapped at his face as he lay asleep beside his wagon, a common practice among the transport riders of these times. Years later, when we were camped on the banks of the Ora River, a hyena darted out from the shadows and grabbed the meal of a wapagazi mess that was being cooked on pointed sticks above the fire. The boys who thus lost their supper were sitting round

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the blaze at the time, watching with eager eyes the meat being cooked, so that the beast in his rush must have brushed between two of them. Like all scavengers, they are extremely cowardly in attack, but at times they are very daring when hunger driven. Of all African mammals they are the most detested ; the appearance of the brute would secure his conviction at a trial, unheard.

One evening walk through this bush was enough to prove that the game had vanished from the district, either through death or flight. The only living animals we saw were a family of hippos who were playing together in the wide lake a mile above the Ruaha ferry ; and these were too happy in their cool retreat to be wantonly disturbed. The father was not yet old enough to have acquired the savagery that would come later ; and doubtless, when he became obnoxious, some other white man would destroy him in after years. Farther along the road were the spoors of many buffaloes ; and unable further to pursue the lordly elephant, I had leisure to devote attention to the lesser animals.

The country to the east of the road at Kikumi is rough with bush, intermingled with buffalo-grassy, low-lying plains that in the wet season are under water : at this time of year they are dry on the surface, though there is always water a foot or two down. While crossing the plain on which the forest encroached, I came upon several holes about twelve inches across at the top, which tapered down to a depth of over five feet. Their inner surface was perfectly smooth and they looked exactly as if goal posts had been drawn out of them by sheer force. At the extreme bottom there was a glimmer of liquid ooze. Many years earlier some wandering elephant had sucked up water from an accidental

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depression in the ground when the liquid had vanished elsewhere, thereby deepening the cavity ; consequent suction had increased the depth till the precious fluid could be reached only by the largest animals. The smooth surface of the water holes was caused by the constant insertion and withdrawal of the trunks.

Farther on we came upon other holes in the flat ground. These were perfectly circular, with a diameter of about three feet to a depth of eighteen inches. The soil is very hard here, a breccia of quartz crystals with a sand cement. It must contain some salty constituent, for John explained the holes' causation. Rhinos, of which there are many hereabouts, are very fond of salt, he said. In order to obtain this luxury, they root the ground with their lips till they have dug a little way down. Then, inserting their heads into the depression, they move round in a circular direction, scraping the sides with their horns till a few grains of saline earth fall to the bottom. These they suck up with their prehensile lips. In the course of time the hole becomes a perfectly circular pit till it is too deep for their awkward necks ; then another site is selected and the process renewed. This explanation would account for the extremely worn condition of all the rhinoceros' horns in the neighbourhood. None I saw exceeded fifteen inches in length, and some were so far worn down that they formed small horny protuberances on the animals' noses. As trophies they were quite inconsiderable.

The commercial value of rhino horns has soared of late years. They are purchased in bulk at sales for Eastern markets, where they are ground into powder by the Chinese for medicinal purposes. The old professional hunter of a bygone day, who lived

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for and by his rifle, looked to these for a substantial portion of his livelihood. He was glad to sell them at the rate of five shillings per pound. His needs were few, for he had often sunk below negro level and was known under the contemptuous name of "White Kaffir." Five or six pounds was all he required for a year's sustenance. This would purchase enough cartridges for the coming season, enough tobacco of the Boer variety, and a couple of shirts. For the rest of his living he looked to his native wives, who hoed his mealie patch and planted his bambiella—sweet potatoes. His home was the negro hut, and his ways of living and thought, theirs. The produce of a single elephant or a couple of rhinos would more than fill his wants for the year.

The present price obtained for the commodity is enough to make him turn in his native grave. Eight times five shillings is probably an under-estimate to-day. Very shortly the price will be purely fictitious, for either more strict preservation or extermination will render rhino horns un procurable. Perhaps a diminishing population in the Chinese Republic, of which there are no signs at present, or some substitute for the powder, will kill the need. Otherwise the celestial magnates will be forced to do without their favourite tonic.

The rhino falls an easy victim to the modern high-velocity rifle. In the old days it is to be imagined that he was somewhat of a formidable antagonist when the muzzle-loading gun had scarcely enough penetrative power to pierce his hide. One rhino I shot with a soft-nosed bullet, that had been inserted in the breach inadvertently in place of a solid, presented a somewhat curious commentary on the ancient weapon. In its passage through the animal

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the lead core had been ripped out of the nickel cover, which continued its course till stopped by the tough skin of the farther shoulder. When the hide was removed, an iron bullet, which had been hammered into a round shape, was found embedded in the flesh in close proximity to my missile, immediately under the skin. This work of art, which I still retain as a memento, had been hammered into a sphere till it fitted the bore. It must have been projected out of an old "gaspipe" gun with a three-quarter inch aperture that was innocent of rifling ; for though the marks of the hammer blows still remained, there were none of the curved lines of the grooving. It had been fired so long ago that there were no signs of penetration on the shoulder ; the skin having healed over so completely as to leave no mark. The enterprising engineer who had constructed it must have owned a touching confidence in his star or a pathetic estimate of his gun's power. He was probably a black warrior who had purchased a Belgian fowling-piece with the results of months of hard labour in the mines ; and had spent weeks in the fashioning of this, his one projectile, which was to be propelled by a handful of black gunpowder. The effect the wound had upon the rhino would be hardly more severe than the prick of a thorn would be to a human being ; the only thing he could have felt was the shock of impact, which doubtless startled the beast.

I like to think of that black man stalking up to his quarry, his heart filled to overflowing with hopes of abundant dinners ; the training of his piece upon the rhino's shoulder at a range of three feet ; and with the pressing of the trigger, the vast volumes of mephitic gases that issued from the nozzle. When this was somewhat dissipated or blown away by the

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light breeze, there would be an eager anticipation in those virile eyes as he searched the surrounding forest for his fallen victim ; this would be followed by a desperate search through the bush for the spoor which may have shown a spot or two of blood. But never again did that nigger see the rhinoceros.

Rhinos have a very bad reputation for ferocity which I think is quite undeserved. They are naturally surly, cross-grained, ill-conditioned brutes, but they have no more venom in their nature than their opposite numbers in a farming countryside. Where much worried by unskilful hunters, they undoubtedly develop temper, and in such places may attack at scent, sound, or sight. When the charge has been pressed home, it is never renewed if unsuccessful. The animal then continues on his headlong course, driving with his horns at anything that obstructs his passage, whether tree, bush, or anthill. I have never known personally of a case where the rhino returned to the charge when he had once passed his objective. They differ in this from both elephants and buffaloes, either of which turn on their tracks again and again to carry out their warfare to its bitter end, until the issue is settled one way or the other. In the old days, when a huge cloud of smoke followed the bullet out of the cannon's mouth, it afforded a mark for attack that could hardly be missed even by the half-blind rhinoceros ; now that this facility is denied him, he can charge only by scent or sound. A few years ago such an attack did take place, the object of the charge being, I regret to say, a lady with whom I was acquainted, who up to that moment had passed through many miles of Africa unharmed. She was entirely alone, and had overcome all the difficulties and dangers of her lonely march unaided. And the very gallant

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gentleman who rushed to her aid, unarmed, likewise fell a victim.

Rhinos are extremely clumsy brutes, far more awkward in their gait than elephants, and, in the water, hippos. Though, like all the pachyderms, their pace is very deceptive, they are easily avoided by leaping aside, so only presence of mind is required. But this avoidance is not always possible. The slopes of the hills round Kidete are covered with a growth of wild sisal, a most pernicious vegetable, the points of whose stiff leaves are armed with dry spikes that are as sharp as needles, and have all the piercing qualities of a stiletto. They point in every direction. The only means of climbing these mountains is through the rhino tracks which criss-cross them. Should a rhino be met with on the way, it is impossible to leap aside, for the sisal leaves would transfix a man as a red-hot gimlet would go through melted butter. In this event the only chance is to stand one's ground and trust that a well-placed shot will kill or turn the brute. I fancy that these spikes at times penetrate even the inch-thick armoured hide of a rhino in spite of its toughness. No other animal, not even the elephant, will face it willingly.

The rhinoceros strikes the observer as the greatest anachronism in all Nature, an unfit survivor out of primeval times. Before the coming of the modern high-velocity cordite rifle, his bulk and hide guarded him fully from dangers by flood and field. Now, unless he be artificially protected, it is to be feared that he is not long for this world. Already vast regions where he was once abundant are void of him. In Uganda, where with the exception of a few specimens in Zululand and on the west of the Nile in the far south of the Sudan, the "white" rhinoceros is still to be met with, his official census is one

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hundred and fifty individuals ; and though this may be an under-estimate, there is no doubt that his numbers are very limited. Only the very strictest preservation will prevent his extinction. It is good to know that henceforward no licence whatever will be granted for his slaughter. His black brother occurs far more frequently throughout the low-lying parts of tropical Africa than he, but the numbers have been sadly reduced in recent years. A joint effort on the part of the authorities, and a rigid observance of the game laws, alone will permit his survival. God grant that these will take place ! The white game wardens throughout the British colonies are one and all lovers of wild life ; otherwise they would be unfitted for the service. Each one of them may safely be trusted to do all that lies in his power to protect his wards.

The safari proper came to an end with a very long march into Kilossa. We had intended to make a break at the first village out, and come in by a final easy stage ; but the intervention of two obstacles turned the two marches into one. The African climate has a very disruptive effect upon the mechanism of watches ; the mainspring of our third and last going timepiece snapped at the moment of our reaching camp about twenty-five miles from the railway ; and thenceforward we had no means of telling the time during the hours of darkness. During the day the sun was sufficient guide. In our optimism we relied upon the boys' instincts.

For that last morning's trek we had given instructions that we were to be called at five o'clock, so as to give us time for a cup of tea before setting forth with the earliest light of dawn—our usual procedure. When we were summoned from our

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toto at play in the spot where later the buffalo had been gathered. The three species of buck to be met with for the most part are the Jackson hartebeeste, the common waterbuck, and the Uganda cob, all of which carry very fine horns. In addition there are, of course, many of the ordinary smaller buck, such as bushbuck, the harnessed variety of which is very handsome in his striped coat, oribi, duiker, and other little woodland creatures. To the west of Lake George, the "record" pair of waterbuck horns were secured not long ago.

There are two outstanding features of life here that make up for the lack of variety ; the Uganda cob is to be found nowhere outside the confines of the country ; and the white rhinoceros, which still survives to the west of the Nile, and which is extinct elsewhere save for a few specimens in far-away Zululand. The latter is the second largest among land mammals, giving place to the elephant only. He is very timid, and shows none of the ill-conditioned surliness of his black fellow. His native inquisitiveness has been his undoing in the past and renders him an easy prey to the rifle ; for there is no danger to be apprehended in his pursuit. The white rhino is as harmless as the giraffe. His average length of horn far exceeds that of the common rhinoceros ; though the latter has a small advantage in thickness. Later I came in contact with several specimens of white rhinoceros in their last retreat on the banks of the West Nile, and was able to observe something of their ways. The extermination of the race, which has long been going on, has now been arrested by the game laws and their rigid enforcement by the authorities. It is greatly to be hoped that the absolute prohibition of his slaughter will be prolonged indefinitely ; or at least until the

UGANDA—THE SEMILIKI VALLEY

country is restocked. The world can ill afford the extermination of so interesting a creature.

We made the acquaintance of the Uganda cob on the morning of our first march out from the Wasa camp. A pair stood gazing at the safari as it serpentine through the thin bush ; and when they had satisfied their curiosity they departed—unassaulted. Later in that march the country changed its character, the bush giving way to rounded hills that resemble in a manner the English Southdowns. The region shows signs of geologically recent volcanic activity. The summits of the hills are waterworn and bare of scrub, but their folds contain clumps of huge timber trees. Thus, if a side of a hill that is bare of all vegetation except short grass be climbed, the hollows on the further side may be found filled with a dense forest. And but for the colobus and other monkeys that make their homes amongst the trees, there is little other wild animal life here, though the country seems eminently well suited for it. It was not till two days later when we reached 'Nsindukwe that we came upon the Uganda cob in his thousands. The recent drought had collected them in the neighbourhood of the Wasa River.

The past season had been peculiarly dry. Everywhere there had been a shortage in the water supply through Uganda. The waterholes which can usually be depended on to yield enough for a safari, were now nearly empty through evaporation. At Kakara all that remained was a thick mud that was almost unfilterable. I walked over to the waterhole whence the wapagazi drew their supplies to investigate the conditions. The boys had already taken enough of the fluid slime to satisfy their immediate needs, but instead of allowing the sediment to settle