SHIKAR MEMORIES

A RECORD OF SPORT AND OBSERVATION IN INDIA AND BURMA

By

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PREFACE

AFTER nearly thirty-six years of big and small game shooting in India and Burma, I have been induced by friends to record my experiences and observations of the various animals encountered

I always think that in many books on shikar too much is devoted to the killing of the animal, and that its habits of life are not sufficiently described. The shooting of an animal is only actually of interest to the hunter.

How many young men go out to the Colonies ignorant of everything relating to shikar, which most of them intend to indulge in? I hope, therefore, that this book will not only be of interest but a guide to them.

It has been possible to preserve a fairly full diary of these hunting expeditions, and it is from this diary that this book has been mostly compiled.

I have purposely refrained from entering into any lengthy arguments upon the habits of big game, and, beyond some additions to some of the subjects from other shikaris, notably Brander-Carter, a fine hunter and keen naturalist, my thanks are due to Mr. C. H. Ingles, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., Director of the Darjeeling Museum, for having added the descriptions, etc. (given by Mr. Brander-Carter), which are accurate and therefore invaluable to the hunter as well as to the naturalist.

All my leave in India was spent in shikar and fishing, for I am afraid I am not a social animal. I hated the clubs, meets and dinners incidental to a life there. I was

never happier than when in the jungle, far from the haunts of man, surrounded by wild life in all its forms, and amid the beauties of forest, mountain and river.

Here one conversed with nature, and what greater charm than this ? After camping one returned to Headquarters feeling fit and fresh to resume one's duties. I would advise every one proceeding to India to go in for shikar. As long as you have a gun or a fishing-rod in your tramps abroad you are happy—even if you draw blank !

The true hunter must be a naturalist and botanist, as such knowledge then gives additional zest to sport. The shikari must also cultivate his powers of observation. The old hunter sees and notices everything. The training for shikar is that of an athlete. One must be very fit to undertake serious big-game hunting. My advice to attain this is to avoid alcohol and over-eating ; to lead a regular life, and acquire mental occupation and a good conscience. Avoid late nights, big dinners, meets, and stuffy club-rooms.

I am an advocate for tobacco in moderation ; it is good as long as the smoke is not inhaled. A pipe or cigarette at the end of a hard day by the camp fire is very soothing. Some of the fittest men I know have been serious shikaris all their lives, and when they retire they look twenty years younger than their real age, and with the energy and vitality to enjoy life for the remainder of the allotted span.

The love of shikar is born and bred in the bone, and is certainly hereditary. My father was a great hunter and a dead shot. I remember what a privilege it was, at the age of five, to help him reload his cartridges, and later when I was allowed to carry his cartridge bag. At the

age of eleven I was allowed to handle and shoot with a twelve-bore muzzle-loading Joe Manton My brother and I used to wander out and shoot everything we saw in the shape of parrots, hawks, owls and sparrows. As will be seen, our true sporting instinct had not then developed, and my father became alarmed at our expenditure of ammunition, so said that we must eat everything we shot. After this some discretion was used and we confined ourselves strictly to game. The shot we used was a mixture of 1's, 2's, 4's and 8's. Sometimes in our excitement the shot was put in before the powder, and we had to extract the paper with a corkscrew, and with the aid of the ramrod.

During the time spent at school and at the university I had ample opportunity for shooting rabbits, first bolting them with ferrets. This form of shooting is a splendid training by which to become a quick and good shot.

The shikari should have a camera and a good pair of X 8 Zeiss binoculars. I regret now that I could not afford a camera in my earlier days of shikar, for by this I have lost opportunities of unique and interesting subjects. Nowadays the feeling is not so much desire to kill as to take pictures of wild life which would be of interest to others. This is the right spirit, especially as game is decreasing year by year. Let my readers not think me a hypocrite, but the feeling is that, as one gets older, blood-lust gets less; one hates taking life, and feels a sense of remorse for all the animals and birds slain by rifle and gun.

This sentiment comes sooner or later to all men who have done a lot of shooting, and especially to big-game hunters. Life is just as precious and joyous to a splendid

beast as it is to a human being, and now, at my present age, nothing would induce me to kill anything big excepting a tiger or a rogue elephant. I would much rather encounter most animals in their natural surroundings, observe their habits and take photographs, so substituting the camera or cinematograph for the rifle.

Still, those glorious days spent in camp and in the jungles are a joy to look back upon, and time will never efface them. For now there is only the retrospect in all its detail and vividness. All the encounters with dangerous beasts to be fought over again!

In a book of this kind the ego must often occur, and for this I must apologise, but from the fact that they are personal reminiscences this cannot be helped.

My thirty-six years' collection of trophies I have presented to the Bristol Museum, as I could never hope to have a house in which all of them could be placed.

And, as a last prefatory word, I must pay a tribute, and offer grateful thanks, to my wife, for she has not only shared with me the vicissitudes and exposure, both in camp and out, of large and small game shooting during the last thirty years—with a constant courage often severely tested—but has been my infallible remembrancer upon the details of many incidents that might otherwise have been lost to memory.

H. S. W.

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"STILL" HUNTING INDIAN RHINO

In Africa, where there are practically no jungles, and it is less dense and fairly free of immense tall reeds and grass, shooting on foot of the African species has been done. My experiences after this beast on foot were undertaken after I had used elephants without success. Every sportsman knows the dread elephants have of rhino, and whilst I was in India, it was said the only two elephants that were staunch to them were in the possession of the late Maharajah of Cooch Behar.

It was disheartening, when on an elephant, to pick up the fresh tracks of rhino, or where he had been feeding during the night, and to go on tracking and tracking through miles of giant null and ekra, or fording bheels; then, at the end of it, to come up to the place where the beast lay in his "seat" or wallow, and after being greeted with the ominous whistling grunt, to find the elephant whizz round and carry one three or four miles before stopping—sometimes into a quagmire.

Anyone who has been on the top of a runaway elephant will agree with me that it is an unpleasant experience, whether on a howdah or pad. The beast stumbles, and falls about, and a rolling ship in a storm is not in it. But worst of all he tries to shake the pad off as well as the occupants. In a howdah it is still worse, for one is then rattled like a pea in a drum. An elephant I was once on

bolted, went absolutely mad, and the only way by which the mahout could stop it was to drive the pointed end of the iron goad into its tongue. All this made me finally decide to try stalking rhino on foot, and in this manner I since went after both the great Indian rhino and the smaller Sumatran species.

Booreegaon, a wild tract situated on the right bank of the Brahmaputra in the Darrang district of Assam, where lay the beds of the old Brahmaputra, was the scene of these operations. In this tract were bheels, null, ekra and a certain amount of simul (bombax) and wild plum. For about fifty square miles neither a villager nor habitation was to be seen. It was an ideal spot for rhino, and it is no exaggeration to say that in this comparatively small area there must have been twelve or thirteen rhino. Kaziranga, the Sanctuary of Assam, was on the opposite bank, and I think rhino were attracted to this spot after the jungle fires and when the young, succulent null-shoots appeared.

I managed to get hold of an Assamese tracker, Laloong by name. A ripping chap, but an inveterate opium-eater, who would not budge in the morning until he had had his dope, and he kept it up with small doses during the day. But poor Laloong met a horrible fate, as I shall relate, though before doing so it may be of interest to give a few details of the habits of the larger and smaller varieties.

The smaller rhino is found at the base of hilly country where the forest is dense and interspersed with streams and cane-brakes. I have seen them in considerable numbers in the foot-hills of Tipperah, Sylhet, and Lushai. In the small ravines of these districts are swamps and streams where cane takes the place of null, and it is there that the smaller rhino lies up and has his wallows. But it is terrible

stuff to get through, and when stalking one cannot do so without considerable noise and damage from the thorns on the cane. The small Indian rhino, on this account, is a difficult animal to approach. He lies up in his wallow, and like the large species, has at least one ear and his nose stuck up above the mud, and his sense of hearing is very acute.

The droppings are always in heaps, and similar to those of the large rhino. He is very fond of the fruit of the ootunga (*Dellenia indica*) or elephant-apple, the consequences being that the urine is just like blood. He also eats the bark of certain trees and creepers, and I have seen the bases of some trees almost entirely stripped of bark by him. He travels very quickly, and is quite at home when moving either up or down hill. He is not so dangerous as the large rhino, and trusts generally to swift flight. The spoor is a trefoil, similar to that of the large one but, of course, smaller. When he comes across a fallen tree he always goes round it, being unable to raise his feet to any height. Laloong told me that the rhino sometimes lifts a fallen tree with its horn, and in this way often kills the young one following behind.

The smaller rhino is a great wanderer; in fact it is on record that one was shot in a tank that supplied the engine of a tea-house with water. When disturbed he snorts like the larger rhino, but I have never heard him make the whistling noise of the latter, nor have I ever come across him in pairs as I have the larger. Both have favourite trees upon which the horns are sharpened and cleaned.

The large rhino is fond of the dhoob grass which crops up in the drying bheels during the cold weather, and here, too, the wild dog-rose grows and is also devoured.

The best way to get on to the fresh tracks of the large rhino is to visit a bheel, and if after the smaller one the streams. The rhino feeds at night, and at the streak of dawn will go eight ro ten miles to have his siesta in the tall null and ekra. These seats can be seen in numbers when stalking, and in his progress through the reeds regular tunnels are made. Many wallows, both old and new, may be found, and into these he plunges when troubled by the heat, usually spending the hottest hours of the day in them. On leaving them he is covered with mud, which cakes and is impervious to the bites of mosquitoes and other biting flies. When wounded and pursued he will often plunge into them, *en route*, to cool himself before he goes on. This condition makes tracking an easy matter because the wet mud adheres to the reeds and grass during his passage.

Many believe that the horn of a rhino is used as an offensive weapon. This is not correct for its only use is for digging its wallows. His weapons of offence are the huge, sharp, tusk-like teeth, sharp as razors, at the side of the lower jaw. When using these the upper lip is turned up and the lower one down, so exposing them to the full. These can inflict terrible gashes, and were it not for the shields every fight with one another would mean disembowelment for one of the combatants.

The flesh of the rhino is in great demand; even Brahmins can eat it, and a fistful is sold for four annas. The horn may fetch anything from 400 to 500 rupees. To bag a rhino, therefore, is to a native both a godsend and a gold mine, and, for this reason, the Assam Government had to take measures in time to protect it from extermination. The Marwaris treasure the horn, and cups are made of it, which are supposed to possess the property of making

poisoned drink harmless when placed in them. Scrapings of the horn are also used as medicine to prevent an abortion. In the opinion of some natives the urine is supposed to possess anti-malarial properties, and, I believe, at zoological gardens quite a lot of money is realised by the sale of this secretion.

A native will build a hut in a tree, above a heap of droppings, and wait there a week or more to get the rhino, an iron arrow being fixed into the bullet to make it more effective.

The smaller rhino, though nothing like so aggressive as the large one, will, when wounded, and followed up, charge, and takes some stopping. A female deprived of its young, like most animals, is most dangerous, and will charge at anything coming near her. The young of the large rhino become very tame up to a certain age. A friend of mine in Assam had one and it used to go out every day with its keeper and fetch back its fodder on its back, like an elephant; but I have never heard of the young of the smaller species being kept in captivity.

When feeding, or undisturbed, the rhino walks very slowly, but when chased it is astonishing with what speed the animal can travel. I estimate that its speed at full gallop is about fifteen miles per hour. It will go through unbroken null or ekra like a rabbit through bracken, ploughing a clear path in its progress. Even half-burnt null and ekra, which sometimes baffles an elephant, is nothing to a rhino. When chased he spins round every now and then to face the pursuer, and then dashes off again. For easy passage through swampy ground the rhino has no rival, and it is wonderful to note how slightly the feet sink in this. His weight and wedge-shaped head help him

to get through heavy jungle, and the thick hide protects him from thorns and ekra stumps.

When charging the rhino utters a loud nasal snort, lowers the head and comes thundering along. Sometimes he will not charge home, but will stop a few paces off shaking his head from side to side, and striking the feet on the ground like a cow. The tail is also rapidly whisked.

The sense of sight is bad, but smell, and hearing especially, are very acute.

He visits salt licks like most animals. I have never seen rhino swim, but presume he is a good swimmer, as I know rhino have crossed rivers like the Brahmaputra and Borelli when in flood.

The ashes of burnt jungle are eaten by him, no doubt for the saline matter contained.

But now to some experiences after rhino on foot. They were thrilling times, and, although the last experience ended in a tragedy, I look back to those days with pleasure and my heart beats fast when recalling them.

This sort of shikar can only be done after the jungle fires, April and May if in Assam, when the sun's heat is terrific. It also means a long tramp, wading through and swimming bheels and forcing one's way through unburnt jungle and wild cardamoms ten or eleven feet high ; a very weary and tough job.

My longest day, according to my diary, was from 3 a.m. to 11.30 p.m., allowing one hour out of this for a halt for rest and lunch. I was so tired at the end of it that the slightest movement caused cramp in the legs. Every sportsman who has had a long day after markhor and ibex over difficult country knows the feeling.

My wife and the tracker Laloong were with me on my

first adventure. We procured an elephant to take us to the bheel where we hoped to pick up fresh tracks. We found these, evidently of a bull rhino that had been feeding there during the night. My wife then returned to camp and Laloong and I proceeded to follow them up.

We had left camp at 3 a.m. and had reached the bheel at daylight. From here we tracked through the tunnels and burnt jungle till 1 p.m., when, after crossing a large piece of burnt jungle we came to a patch still unburnt, with some simul trees and wild plums, and Laloong declared the bull must be lying up in this. He was right.

On entering it the tracks became very plain. Laloong led the way armed with a 12-bore rifle, and I followed with a ·450 H.V. In one of the tunnels our way was blocked by a huge mass of dead reeds several feet high, the accumulation of years. I thought it impossible for the rhino to have got through this, but Laloong held on and crawled under this heap, then suddenly drew back and held up his finger. I then knew that we had found our quarry.

I, in turn, crawled under the heap, not an easy job, and was astonished to see a huge rhino about eight yards away, standing broadside on and not moving a muscle. From this awkward position I fired at his shoulder; he gave a snort and made a rush, but fortunately not in our direction, otherwise both of us would have been trampled flat.

We went after him, the tracking being easy as there was plenty of blood. He went on and on, only stopping at a few wallows *en route*, till blood marks became less distinct, when we had to trust to other signs. He ultimately got into an old bed of the Brahmaputra, impenetrable to anything but a rhino, and here we had to give up. Night was

now falling, and there were many miles to go before reaching camp, which we did not do till 11.30. There was no moon and how we managed to find our way through those swamps and jungles I do not know, excepting that I was wet to the skin and my clothes almost in tatters.

Next day we went out on an elephant in search for the wounded beast, but when we reached the spot the mahout declared that the elephant would sink in the quagmire in which the rhino had taken refuge, the result being that I not only lost him, but felt keenly his possible sufferings before the end came.

I rested in camp the whole of the next day as there was some official work to be done, but on the following one Laloong and I started out again.

We left camp at 3 a.m. for another bheel where we came on the fresh track of a bull, but it was not till 2 p.m. that we came up with him. I managed to get within ten yards but unfortunately he was in heavy stuff and I could not choose a vital spot. I fired, there was a snort, and suddenly I found myself caught by the coat and dragged into the null at the side of the tunnel. Laloong was the tractor, and had he not done so the rhino would have got us. We followed him up, and he, like the first one, took to impenetrable jungle, so again we had to turn towards camp without definite results.

After bath and dinner, Laloong came for orders for the next day, but I told him I was going to take a rest in camp. He then begged me to lend him my 12-bore and six cartridges to shoot pig. He returned on the following evening with five cartridges and said " he had missed a pig." We then had a dispute as to which bheel we should visit next day. Whilst after another rhino I had noticed the track of a big

bull in another bheel and said, " Laloong, we will go there." He tried to dissuade me, and said he knew of still another bheel where there were three rhino. But I stuck to my proposal, much against his wish.

We started from camp at 4 a.m. and on reaching the bheel were not long in picking up fresh tracks of the bull. Then began the long track and push with bended back through unburnt ekra and null. Making one's way through the maze of tunnels was weary and hot work, but we were hot on his tracks by 1 p.m., as evidenced by warm droppings and freshly-trodden grass. We cautiously advanced, side by side, with rifles at the ready. I could see that Laloong was not his usual self, and in fact appeared nervous. We then came to a tunnel which branched into two, and after proceeding a few yards along the right-hand one, Laloong held up two fingers denoting there were two, and drew back a few yards.

I now decided to take the left branch in order to get a side shot. No sooner had we done this than there was a loud snort and I saw a rhino thundering down on us. The next instant the rhino was within a few feet of Laloong, who was on my right, almost touching him, tossing its head from side to side and stamping its feet. Laloong threw up his arms with a look of terror, and when the rhino was almost between his legs I let drive. The beast retreated eight or ten paces, bleeding profusely, and undecided whether to charge again or not. I was just going to let him have my left barrel when down the left branch of the tunnel came another rhino snorting terrifically, and this time full tilt at me. I jumped to the side and, as the brute nearly touched me, fired, and he went on. I then looked to my right but could see nothing of Laloong ; he had vanished.

I called his name several times and got no reply, but at last heard a choking sound and knew that something serious had happened.

I made my way through unbroken ekra in the direction of the sound, and after going about twenty yards found my poor tracker covered with blood, and his clothes torn to shreds. His body was practically a pulp, there were teeth-marks in his side and his skull had been apparently fractured. The poor fellow was still alive, and getting his head on my knee I pulled the clotted blood and bits of broken ekra from his mouth. Five minutes later he was dead.

The jungle was trodden down all round showing that the rhino had made sure of his kill. My rifle was not there, and after the tragedy I searched to find it about ten yards away smashed to bits. A curious circumstance was that the stock showed the imprint and depression of one of the nails of the rhino's foot.

Apparently what happened was this. Whilst engaged with the second beast the wounded bull must have charged down on the tracker, got a hold of him and had carried him through the unbroken ekra, stamping on him and worrying him as a dog does a rat.

I was now in a dilemma because I could not leave the body. I therefore stood near, with rifle cocked, in case the wounded rhino should return. I had mounted guard like this for $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours when I heard a swishing in the jungle, and my joy was great to see an elephant, which my wife, who was in camp, had procured from the Mauzidar, and had sent in search of us.

I wrapped the body of poor Laloong in grass, placed it behind me on the pad and told the mahout to take us to his village, some $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles away. On the way I noticed

a lot of vultures collected in one spot, and on going there found to my astonishment the remains of a young rhino, apparently quite fresh. It was then that the whole drama dawned on me. Laloong on the day on which I had lent him my rifle, had shot the calf belonging to the pair which behaved so viciously ; and it was on that account he had showed his reluctance to go to my bheel.

When I got to the village I had a bad time, for the villagers, including his family, became truculent and menacing. They at first said that I had shot him, but after seeing the body were satisfied that he had been killed by a rhino, and I was then able to tell all I knew about the shoot-of the calf. I sent a wire to my D.C. when I reached camp, and he asked for a report. The eventual verdict was that I was blameless, and that the death had been accidental.

After this occurrence the vernacular press tried to make out that I was responsible, but I think I did all that could have been done in the circumstances, and had I known the calf had been killed I certainly should never have gone after rhino on foot in that area.

After this tragic and thrilling adventure I promised my wife never again to go after rhino on foot.

One of the wounded animals was seen crossing the Brahmaputra by some Gurkhali herdsmen. He was sickly and probably died in Kaziranga Reserve. But my regret then was that I had not bagged the murderer.

The rhino is not an aggressive animal, like the African, excepting in special circumstances, and owing to its extreme shyness it does not raid crops like the elephant.

Let us hope that the race will multiply and flourish and, after the lapse of years, will afford sport to the coming sportsman. As a result of the formation of the Kaziranga

Reserve, a forest officer who visited it before I left India computed the number there at 32 or 33 head.

May I also offer this small suggestion to fellow-sportsmen who wish to hunt the rhino on foot. Use a ·461 H.V. rifle and use soft-nosed bullets, not solid, as the range is usually very close. I lost a number by using the latter.