

## SHOOTING IN KENYA

BY CAPTAIN W. J. M. SPAIGHT

The following notes are based on experience gained on a solitary two months leave shoot in Kenya in August and September 1936. The primary objective was elephant, so I had proposed to go to Uganda, where the cost of a licence, £15 for two elephants, was within my rather limited means.

On arrival in Nairobi I discovered that the programme had been drawn up on an obsolete time-table and that there was no boat across Lake Kioga for twelve days. This loss of time, combined with the probable costs of an enforced stay in hotels, necessitated an alteration in plan. On the advice of Captain Ritchie, the Chief Game Warden of Kenya, I decided to shoot in Kenya and gamble on paying for the cost of the licence by the sale of ivory. After all arrangements had been made it was found that twenty-eight days could be spent on the shooting ground. Twenty-one of these were used up in shooting an elephant and getting the tusks back to the railway. The shooting ground was then changed with lion as the primary objective. In this I was not successful, although ten varieties of antelope were obtained.

*The Voyage*

The B. I. run a fortnightly service, each way, between Bombay and Mombasa. The sailings are such that the full sixty days of one's privilege leave can be spent ex-India. All the boats are modern and the standard of comfort compares favourably with first class on the P. & O. A sixty-day return ticket first class costs Rs. 500. The boats also carry second class passengers, but second class accommodation is not normally used by Europeans. Alternate boats call at the Seychelles Islands and stay long enough for passengers to get several hours ashore. Mombasa is the only convenient port in East Africa for short leave. From Mombasa there is a good rail service to most parts of Kenya and Uganda, but connections to Tanganyika are indifferent.

*Arrangements in India*

No passport visa is necessary but passengers to East Africa are required to have a recent vaccination certificate, which must be

counter-signed by the Cantonment Health Officer. Several certificates, signed by one's commanding officer, to the effect that the bearer is a serving officer, should be taken. On production of these certificates at the railway offices at either Mombasa or Nairobi the bearer can purchase railway tickets at half fare—either first or second class—to any station on the Kenya and Uganda Railway. Second class on the K.U.R. is good and comfortable; any berth can be booked and bedding can be hired.

*Kit.*—All equipment can be hired from *safari* firms in Nairobi, but it is cheaper to take everything from India. A double-fly 40-lb. tent, full camp kit, bedding roll, cooking pots and arms were taken; the only cost being extra-luggage charges on the Indian railways. The K.U.R. have a rule whereby any reasonable amount of luggage can be taken into the compartment; this does not count against the free allowance, which is deducted from the weight of packages placed in the guard's van.

*Customs.*—Duty at 33 per cent. of declared value is charged on all arms imported into Kenya. This is refundable on export, when the receipt for duty paid must be produced. Before leaving Bombay it is necessary to get an export certificate from the customs for all arms taken.

Ammunition should be bought in Kenya, where costs are about the same as in India. All types can be obtained in Mombasa or Nairobi. Ammunition taken into the country is charged 33 per cent. duty, which is not refundable if any is exported.

*Clothes.*—Most of the shooting grounds are high and sufficient bedding and clothes for an Indian plains cold weather shoot should be taken. On account of the prevalence of thorn-bush slacks are preferable to shorts. A topee and glare glasses are necessary. A mosquito net was taken but was only used when sleeping on the ground, as protection against crawling insects. In Uganda a net would be essential. Medical stores are cheaper bought in India. A good type of shooting boot, with dubbed uppers and uskide soles, can be bought in Nairobi. Clothes are of little importance in Kenya. Store suits and dinner jackets are optional and tail coats quite unnecessary.

#### *Shooting Grounds*

It is possible to shoot in Kenya, Uganda or Tanganyika on two months leave. All these have, however, separate shooting rules and licences. Uganda is said to be, on the whole, unhealthy, with

very thick bush and a comparatively small variety of game. If a selection of the more common antelope, with the chance of a lion and a buffalo are required, Kenya appears to be the best.

All three territories reduce their fees for a full licence in the case of serving officers. The full Uganda licence is £5, Tanganyika £15 and Kenya £20. These all include lion and buffalo and the Tanganyika licence includes a rhinoceros. Elephant are an extra on all three. An extra can only be purchased by a full-licence-holder. Other extras are rhinoceros, giraffe and ostrich.

Kenya has a twelve-day licence, which can be post-dated to the day from which shooting will actually commence, this includes one lion and a buffalo. There is also a cheap Private Lands licence, but it is improbable that lion would be got on private land, though buffalo is possible. Lions certainly visit private land but the residents do not wait for visitors to come and shoot them.

#### *Arrangements in Kenya*

Nairobi is the best place to get one's outfit in and is also central for all shooting grounds. The head Kenya Game office is located there and its officers are only too willing to assist in the selection of a locality to suit individual requirements. Anyone going to shoot in Kenya, without ready-made plans or introductions to residents, is strongly advised to consult the Game Warden before pushing out into the blue.

*Servants.*—English-speaking cooks and bearers can be engaged at 50s. a month, or less. The head waiter of a Nairobi hotel found me a Zanzibar boy who successfully combined the duties of cook and bearer at this wage.

A good gun bearer can be found at about 80s. a month. Great care must be used in the selection of a gun bearer. It is best to ask the advice of the Game Warden. In any case local advice should be obtained before a man is taken on; members of certain tribes are considered unsuitable. Most of the good gun-bearers are permanently retained on the pay list of the big *safari* firms or by white hunters. It is improbable that a gun-bearer will be able to speak English. For elephant a tracker is necessary, the gun-bearer cannot track and perform his duties efficiently. The tracker should be found locally after the shooting ground is reached; wages are about 90s. a month.

Porters can be found anywhere, the normal wage is 15s. a month. All servants expect to receive food (*Posho*—a coarse

maize flour) and a small ration of cigarettes should also be supplied. The superior servants expect to be given a blanket or a pair of shoes each, the cost working out at about 5s. to 10s. a head.

*Provisions.*—*Posho* can be bought for the boys at any village shop, but all European foods must be taken from one of the big towns. Tinned foods are expensive. Drink and cigarettes cost about the same as in India. African servants cannot make *chappattis*; so unless one is prepared to eat bearer-made scones or take an oven to make bread, biscuits must be bought. Ryvita is expensive but a hard ration-type biscuit, as used by the King's African Rifles, can be obtained cheaply from a confectioner's shop in Nairobi.

#### *Transport*

A reasonable lorry can be hired from about £15 a month. To obtain a driving licence a local driving test must be passed, neither Indian nor English licence-holders are exempted; the fee for the test is 20s. and the licence costs 10s. Petrol is about sh. 2/50 a gallon but the price increases with distance from the railway.

Porter *safaris* are cheapest for short trips but it must be remembered that food must be carried for all the men, so several porters will be employed in carrying their own food. After buying the Kenya licence (£45) I found that I was unable to afford either of these methods; so, on the advice of the Game Department, I worked from the railway, employing porters by the day to move the camp away from the railway when necessary. I found that by moving on a light scale—inner fly of tent and sleeping on the ground—a five-day trip could be done on four porters.

#### *Hotels*

There are several excellent hotels in Nairobi, the charges being in the vicinity of 20s. a day. The Queen's Hotel was found to be good and considerably cheaper, as it is used more by residents than by visitors.

#### *Shooting*

In the open country the bright light and absence of features make one tend to underestimate distances. The common antelope of the plains are easy to approach, up to a distance of about two hundred yards, but a close shot is difficult to get. The oblique approach march is the best method. It is similar to black buck shooting and not very exciting.

The bush animals are hard to get. Two days were spent in shooting a gerenuk and all attempts to get a lesser kudu failed, though several were seen within easy range when tracking elephant.

Lion eat carcasses and the normal method is to shoot an antelope or a zebra and to stalk the kill at dawn. Owing to the open nature of the country and the presence of carrion eaters lions normally lie up on the kill. As, however, lions rarely hunt alone, unless several animals are placed for them, they may eat up all the kill and leave the vicinity before dawn. This was discovered by bitter experience. A Coke's harte beeste was killed within half a mile of camp, four lions came on to it about one o'clock, cleaned it, then roamed round the camp until about four o'clock making nasty noises. A 40-lb. tent does not seem very secure when it is too dark to shoot and several lions are grunting within fifty yards. Kills should be placed near water. The lion, to a certain extent, hunts by scent and if a lorry is available it is a good idea to tow the kill around in a large circle before tying it down.

Elephant, whatever they may have done in the past, live in thick country and are found by tracking. An elephant walks at five miles an hour and once disturbed may go as far as twenty miles before stopping. An elephant feeding makes such a noise that it is doubtful if he could hear any sounds made by a man approaching. Great care must be taken not to allow the elephant to get the wind. The shot is taken at very close range, but the thick bush makes shooting difficult. The heart is located lower in the body than one might expect. The brain shot is best but requires steady nerves and good shooting. The spoor of a warrantable bull is about two feet across.

In thick thorn country rhinoceros were found to be a curse. They are stupid animals with bad eyesight and bad hearing but with a good sense of smell. When disturbed they rise with loud grunts and charge into wind. All natives appear to be very frightened of rhinoceros and on hearing one grunting or crashing about in the bush will normally throw their loads and run. It was found that if an unseen disturbance of this nature was piqueted, with rifle at the ready, the porters were reassured and could be moved out of wind complete with their loads.

When, however, a rhinoceros was seen nothing could prevent them climbing into the nearest tree or bush—with a glorious disregard for thorns and fragile articles in the loads. The need to

shoot in self-defence never actually arose but the day a rhinoceros charged and hit the tracker's fez, he had dropped it as he got into the bush, it was a near thing.

### *Weapons*

The Game Department say that nothing under a .400 bore should be used on elephant. A .450/400 double barrel, a .350 Magnum and a shot-gun were taken. Owing to the long ranges at which one is tempted to shoot at antelope a small bore rifle is undesirable; with the .350 Magnum it was found that no antelope once hit got away. The shot-gun was most useful for the pot. Only fifty 12-bore cartridges were taken and these were sufficient to keep the camp supplied with either francolin or guinea-fowl for the whole four weeks. African birds prefer running to flying and many were shot on the ground; all were shot near camp.

### *Localities*

The areas visited lay between Mtito Andie, Kenani, Tsavo and Voi. Porter trips were done up the Tsavo River and down the Voi River. After securing the elephant the Taveta line, towards the Tanganyika border south of Kilimanjaro, was visited. This was the theatre of operations in East Africa in 1915 during the early stages of the advance on Tanga. There is an Indian Army war memorial at Maktu and a live service .303 round was picked up near Mbuyuni, on the scene of an engagement. It must have been nice country for the German withdrawal, but most unpleasant to advance through.

### *General*

The currency of the country is shillings and cents. 20s. are £1; there are 100 cents to the shilling. The general language is Swahili, but it was found that for actual shooting a few words out of a Swahili phrase book, bought in Nairobi, sufficed.

Many of the railway employees, guards and station masters, are Indians, with Sikhs in the majority, and a knowledge of Urdu was helpful. The K. U. R. allow holders of first or second class tickets to travel in the guard's van of goods trains and holders of third class tickets can travel in empty goods vans. Thus, while passenger trains were few and far between, it was found possible to move up and down the line, frequently, in goods, engineering

and water trains.

There is a scarcity of villages in the shooting districts, so labour and supplies must be obtained near the railway. All settlers were found to be most hospitable and helpful. Information regarding shooting was hard to come by, except from the Game Department. This was due to the fact that the fitting out of *safaris* is a local industry and anyone running his own show is looked upon, in the towns, with suspicion.

While it is probably best to employ a white hunter, if after dangerous game, it is certainly expensive. The cheapest white hunter expects a minimum of £50 a month, with all found for the duration of the *safari*. Moreover, maintenance costs would be increased and it would probably be necessary to take two lorries instead of one:

#### *Conclusion*

A trip to East Africa is an enjoyable way of spending two months privilege leave. The climate is pleasant, the inhabitants helpful and pleased to meet people from India.

If one wants to shoot, and is prepared to run a *safari* in the same style as an Indian shoot, there is no reason why an African shoot should be much more expensive than one in Kashmir. The following is a brief summary of my own expenses:

Railway fares on the K. U. R. at half-fare concession 2nd class £5; servants £10; provisions £15; hotels £5; *bakhsheesh* £5 (for elephant); licence £45 (full licence £20, one elephant £25); incidentals £10 (taxis, tips and drinks); return fare B. I. steamer Rs. 500; Indian Railways Rs. 150.

Credit for sale of tusks (148 lbs. of ivory at just over 7s. to the lb.) after paying selling commission £55.

Therefore the total cost of the trip came to approximately Rs. 1,800.