

Outdoor Life

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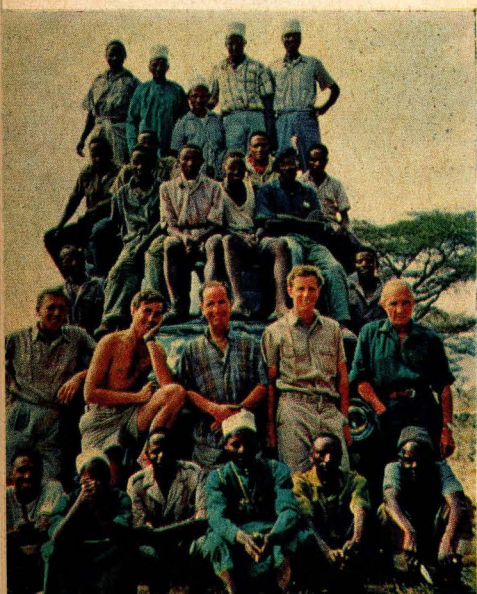


In these two photos, I'm hoping I won't have to fire the .458. Fortunately, after a thunderous charge toward

A RHINO THAT WOULD

Teddy Roosevelt's descendants copy his safari in many ways, but didn't plan this

Surrounded by natives, we are, from left, Terry Matthews, brother Kermit, father, myself, and Krister Aschan



By JONATHAN ROOSEVELT

WHEN THEODORE ROOSEVELT, my great-grandfather, stepped down from the Presidency in 1909, it was clear that drastic measures would be needed to avoid widespread charges that he was simply back-seat driving for his successor, William H. Taft. As a matter of fact, if he stayed in the country, he would surely be tempted to give real substance to these charges. So T.R. seized the occasion to fulfill a long-held dream. He planned a year's hunting safari in East Africa for himself and his second son, Kermit, who was my grandfather.

This was not to be merely a pleasure trip, although T.R. knew he

would thoroughly enjoy it, and that for him it would be next best to being President again. Arrangements were made to get, for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, the most thorough collection of specimens of East African animal and bird life yet produced. Two professional naturalists accompanied the expedition to assist in this, but the principal collecting was done by T.R. and my grandfather. Also, T.R. was to record the trip, and incidentally to pay for it, by writing a book, *African Game Trails*, which was to appear first in serial form in *Scribner's* magazine. Every afternoon after hunting and traveling in Africa, T.R. would spend three or four hours



us, the animal is turned aside 20 yards away by rocks and verbal abuse

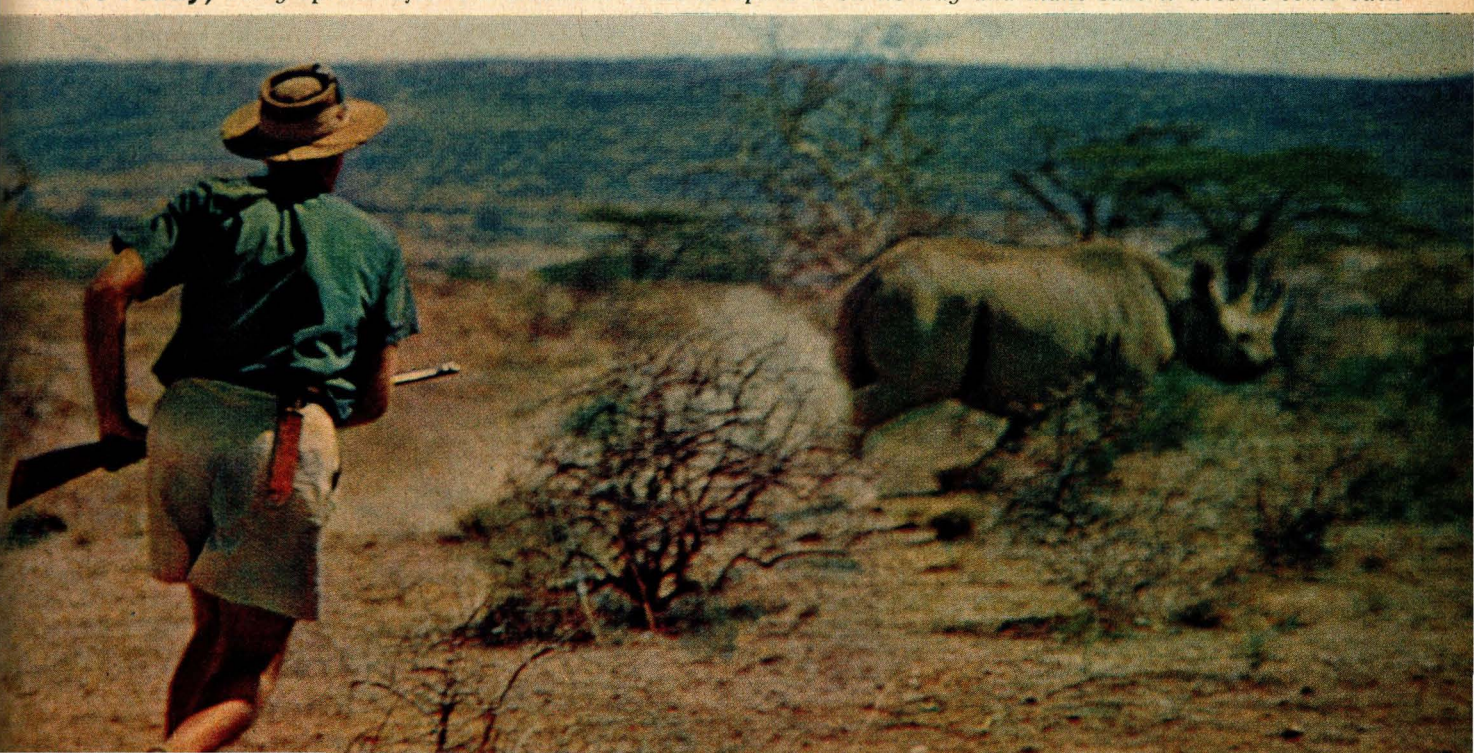
writing of his experiences and impressions. Being a man of unlimited vitality who greatly enjoyed self-expression, he got almost as much pleasure out of this as out of the hunting itself.

My father, whose name is also Kermit, has always been fascinated by T.R.'s many-faceted character and especially by the ex-President's adventures in Africa and Brazil. T.R.'s account of his safari only increased my father's desire to learn at first hand what T.R. had experienced. I can only say how glad I am that father waited until my older brother (yet another Kermit!) and I were old enough to accompany him before he followed his father and T.R. to East Africa for a hunting safari.

In June of 1960—I was 20 at the time—the three of us met in Nairobi, Kenya, for a four-week safari which, even considering the brevity of our trip as compared with T.R.'s, was designed to follow T.R.'s footsteps as closely as possible. We also had a list of species desired by the Smithsonian, though we were able to meet only a small part of their requests, and an additional list from Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. The Kenya Game Department had kindly arranged for us to hunt in as many as possible of the same areas that T.R. had hunted. We

HAVE AMUSED T. R.

Rifle ready, Terry sprints after the truculent brute to speed it on its way and make sure it doesn't come back





A RHINO THAT WOULD HAVE AMUSED T. R. *continued*

were able to meet a surprising number of people whom he had met in Africa 50 years earlier and even several who had hunted with him.

We took T.R.'s favorite rifle along with us, a Winchester .405, which needed only a new recoil pad to be in perfect shooting condition. However, we all found new Winchesters infinitely more satisfactory. We had with us two .458's, two .375's, and two .264's. The .264, which Winchester had just completed work on and which was not then on the market and had never been seen in Africa, proved a particular pleasure to us. Winchester fitted ours with Lyman 4X scopes, and they combined supreme accuracy with knockdown power which never ceased to amaze us or our two experienced white hunters, Terry Matthews and Krister Aschan of the outfitting firm of Ker and Downey. All of us had several one-shot kills with the .264's, and some of them were on large antelope such as the oryx at distances up to 300 yards. We used only the 140-grain load but found it as versatile as any cartridge I know. This is due, I believe, to the bullet's sectional density and profile, and to the rapid but controlled expansion of the Power-Point which provides maximum energy release.

The fact that the velocity of this cartridge is somewhat slower than some other Magnum loads only pleased our hunters. Their feeling was that the ultrahigh-speed loads all too often would deflect if they hit a piece of grass or splatter on the first impact with the target resulting in frequent, long, and many times fruitless, chases after wounded animals. Both of our hunters swore they would be the first two owners of the .264 when it came to Africa.

My father also had to pay for his pleasure by writing, and he did it two hours every evening. The resultant book, which compares the Africa of T.R.'s time with the Africa of today and which describes in amusing detail T.R.'s safari as well as our own, will be published by Alfred Knopf under the title, *A Sentimental Safari*. Before our safari was over, we found that we had copied T.R.'s hunting experiences in some very unexpected and unsought ways, as well as in ways we had planned on.

The rhino is one animal that particularly fascinated T.R. and his son.

While reading *African Game Trails* as homework for our own trip, I was much struck by a remark of grandfather Kermit's quoted in the book: "Look at the rhinoceros standing upon the plains of Africa, lost in prehistoric thought." Perhaps the fact that the beast really is a relic of the far-distant past explains why we find him so unfathomable and strange today.

T.R. wanted to shoot quite a number of rhinos for the Smithsonian, but he shot at least one which he had no intention of shooting. Once, when hunting for hippopotamuses not far outside of Nairobi, he was deflected from his stalk by a truculent female rhino. She appeared to be charging, and T.R.'s companions urged him to shoot, which he did very reluctantly, for he did not need this rhino for the collection. As he wrote in *African Game Trails*: "Now I did not want to kill this rhinoceros, and I am not certain it really intended to charge us. It may well be that if we had stood firm it would, after much threatening and snorting, have turned and made off; veteran hunters like Selous* could, I doubt not, have afforded to wait and see what happened. But I let it get within forty yards, and it still showed every symptom of meaning mischief, and at shorter range I could not have been sure of stopping it in time. Often under such circumstances, the rhino does not mean to charge at all, and is acting in a spirit of truculent and dull curiosity; but often, when its motions and actions are indistinguishable from those of an animal which does not mean mischief, it turns out that a given rhino does mean mischief."

Any hunter who has seen a rhino coming toward him at full tilt and getting within 40 yards of his destination would, I feel, sympathize with T.R.'s self-defense, even though it may seem to have been a bit premature. I know I did. The ground under you shakes—I'm not sure whether the rhino pounding toward you or your own heartbeats cause the most (*continued on page 69*)

*Frederick Courtney Selous (1851-1917), guide, explorer, animal collector, settler, soldier, and famed big-game hunter.

Theodore Roosevelt was reluctant to kill the monster bearing down on him, but he couldn't let it get any closer





RHINO AMUSED T. R.

(continued from page 22)

vibration—you hear the snorting and grunting of the beast as if you had earphones on, and at about 20 yards off the charging animal seems as large as a man must seem to a cowering rabbit. Particularly on the first occasion, I would have welcomed the speed of a rabbit or, better yet, the wings of a quail, for any reasonable means of escape seemed more reliable than dependence on the .458 in my shaking hands, even though the .458 does deliver more than 2½ tons of knockdown power.

Kris, the elder of our two hunters, a methodical but sure-moving Dane who had hunted in Kenya for more than 30 years, told us upon our arrival at our second camp (in the Narok district near the Serengeti Plains) to beware of rhinos around the camp itself and even in our tents at night. He told us of one occasion in the same camp when a rhino's snorting had awakened him in the middle of the night. Getting up from bed, Kris turned his flashlight on a confused rhino cow poking her horns into his sleeping quarters, which were only big enough for one. He began to bang his tin wash basin and shout in the animal's face. The rhino wheeled around and trotted off. Kris threw his basin after the beast just before the tent, which had got in the way of the animal's departure, collapsed around him.

Terry, our second hunter, was a vigorous and brawny 27-year-old who relished danger and excitement. He is interested in what he calls "the psycho-analysis of the game," which he feels is a study proper to this modern world, though he admits that by the time he gets a leopard on a couch it is in no condition to talk to him about its dreams or its deep-seated worries. As far as the psychology of the charge is concerned, Terry is convinced that when lions, leopards, or buffaloes charge, they know very well what they are doing and will almost always carry through their attack unless they are forcefully deflected. He feels that the rhinos' and the elephants' charges are, more often than not, results of confusion, curiosity, or fear, and that they can often be turned without a rifle by creating some sort of scene. I must say that when Terry had a chance to test his theory in my presence, I devoutly wished he were more cautious and less experimental.

Even though T.R. could not anticipate that oriental superstition would endow the rhinoceros horn with aphrodisiac powers and thus encourage poaching of the species, he nonetheless feared that the rhino was in danger of early extinction. He believed that the beast's stupidity, curiosity, and truculence would lead many a hunter to shoot rhinos unnecessarily. Whatever the reason, T.R.'s prediction is all too close to being realized in East Africa. As of mid-1961, one authoritative estimate was that there were only 2,000



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rhinos left in Kenya and that they were dying at the rate of 500 a year while reproducing themselves at a rate of only 125 per year. For this reason, none of our party felt inclined to take out a special rhino license.

As far as big game was concerned, we intended to concentrate on buffaloes and leopards, neither of which are in any danger of extinction at the moment. I did not learn until later that if a white hunter or his client shoots a species for which the party does not have a license, the white hunter must be able to prove that he or his client shot only because one or the other's life was in immediate danger. Otherwise, the white hunter faces loss of his license. Terry's adventurous nature leads him to a definition of immediate

danger which is about 20 yards closer than mine.

On one occasion, which amused T.R. greatly, T.R. was asked to turn the tables and chase a rhino away from a stalk. A member of the party was after a buffalo when this rhino appeared and threatened to charge or in some other way alarm the buffalo. So T.R. was called into action to shoo the animal off. This he did, observing: "That settles the question as to what you can do with our ex-Presidents. They are most useful in scaring rhino away."

The story stops there, and I don't know whether the buffalo hunt was successful. But I do know that I could have used an ex-President in the summer of 1960.

This particular morning started out

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with a bit of extra excitement for me. I had been warned to shake out my hunting boots before putting them on, and this time the warning paid off. A two-inch scorpion fell out of my right boot and scuttled off to the side of my tent. Armed with the left boot and a flashlight, for it was barely 5 a.m. and still dark, I engaged in a successful hunt and carried the reddish-yellow victim to the breakfast tent with me. Terry gave us all a lecture on the painfulness of a scorpion's bite and showed us how to pick one up without getting bitten. I have filed this information away in my mind but suspect that next time I encounter a scorpion I will continue to favor the approach of the boot.

Then Terence Spencer, a Life magazine photographer who was with us for two weeks, Terry, and I drove off to pick up a Samburu guide who, reportedly, knew where a herd of buffaloes was. It is amazing, and often good grounds for suspicion, how nearly every African you meet while on safari can tell you the exact whereabouts of lions, leopards, or buffaloes, depending upon your whim for the day. His feeling seems to be that a ride in your Land Rover will provide a welcome change and, after all, there really might be some animal in the general vicinity he has indicated. In this happy event, the African knows he will get a small financial reward and that his name will be given to other hunters as one who can be trusted. This possibility opens up an endless vista of car rides, shillings, cigarettes, and candy.

This particular Samburu, a young and handsome hunter of 19 who wore only a skin wound around his waist like a towel, was either honest or lucky. He led us directly to a set of fresh buffalo tracks not yet covered over by those of the cattle belonging to the local Somali herdsmen. Terry estimated, on the basis of the tracks, that there were between 50 and 75 buffs in the herd—a figure that was later substantiated. Hopefully, we took off after the animals. They seemed to follow a daily pattern of crossing the river in the morning to go up into the hills from which they returned at night, recrossing the river and lying up in the underbrush. This was home to them, and why they didn't eat there I don't know for the grass certainly seemed more lush than anything to be found in the stony hills above.

At 10 o'clock, after three hours of following tracks, we caught our first sight of the buffaloes. They were standing under a few trees on the top of a small hill about half a mile beyond us. Buffaloes, like most other game, move from sunrise until the sun gets hot, and then they find as cool a place as possible. They only start to move again about 4 p.m., going on until dark. These poor buffaloes did not know they were in for a full day of moving.

We were hunting in what is known as the Northern Frontier district of Kenya, an arid and hot area but by no means a desert. The territory in which we had located the buffalo herd was

particularly interesting, because it seemed to be an endless series of small hills in every direction. Each one was 20 or 30 feet high and had a circumference of maybe 200 yards. I have not yet had the opportunity to do much hunting, having just graduated from Harvard last June. However, even I could feel that this was perfect ground for a careful stalk.

Our group consisted of six—Terry and two gun boys, the Samburu guide, Spencer, who was laden down with cameras, and myself. We agreed to head as straight for the herd as the hillocks allowed and for as long as the wind continued as it was. So we proceeded, slowly and painfully, on our hands and knees. We must have made a funny sight. Spencer, aware that the clanking together occasionally of his cameras made him unpopular on the stalk, attempted to carry one of them in his teeth. I found that a .458 could weigh closer to 50 pounds than to the nine or so I was assured it did weigh, and I was constantly switching the rifle from the left to the right hand. Of course, the hand that didn't have the rifle shared the thorns and pointed rocks with my knees.

Every 100 yards or so, we would creep to the top of a hill to make sure the buffaloes were still resting. We soon got close enough to see there were only three bulls in the herd of 50. One of them, however, had particularly heavy horns which Terry estimated had a very respectable 50-inch spread.

When we had crawled for half an hour and had reached a point about 300 yards from the peaceful herd, we had our first piece of bad luck. My father and brother had gone after an impala that morning, and the beast had led them to the hills about a mile above our buffalo herd. Only one shot was fired, but it was enough to spook our targets. They ran off toward the river and safety, and we were sure we would never see them again that day. However, they were not so frightened as we thought, and they stopped on top of another hill half a mile from their starting point.

We knew they were spooky, so we rested for 45 minutes before starting after them again. This time we headed in a direction that would cut off their path if they went farther toward the river. The ordeal of the hands and knees started again.

After much quiet swearing, we again got close to the herd, and the nearer we got, the more our confidence grew that we would soon return to camp with horns blowing—the sign of a kill of one of the big five of Africa. Our goal was to get within 100 yards, so that I could make a very sure shot with the .458. It would have been easy, for our bull had wandered 20 yards from the herd to do some serious branching.

There was no reason why, five minutes later, we should not have all been laughing, backslapping, taking pictures, making measurements, and congratulating each other for a good stalk

and me for a good shot. Instead, all of a sudden we found ourselves very much in need of an energetic and bold ex-President of the United States.

We were within 150 yards of the old bull when the Samburu guide began talking excitedly and pointing urgently toward our left. My sense of direction is just good enough so that I was sure that the herd we had been after for two hours was to our right and ahead of us. So I felt little restraint in indicating to the Samburu just what I felt about his making such a ruckus. I was glad later that he didn't know any English. Terry showed more restraint than I. He just looked at the Samburu as if he intended to shoot him in the britches. Then Terry and I got excited and started shouting too. On a hill about 60 yards behind us, a large bull rhino was moving toward us, occasionally lowering his head menacingly and pawing the ground. We ran to the top of the hill we had been crawling behind and prepared to play king of the mountain with the nervous rhino. Spencer, with his usual calm efficiency, maneuvered off to one side so he could photograph whatever might develop. The Samburu, on the other hand, apparently felt he had done enough by calling the danger to our attention. He and one of the gunbearers made a remarkably agile and speedy retreat.

The rhino started down the hill he was on at full speed in our direction. He must have nearly stepped on two hares which seemed to spring up from under his nose. He turned his charge to those fleeing hares for a few paces but then altered his course back toward us.

By this time the Samburu and his friend, who were moving considerably faster than the hares, were nearly where the buffaloes had been. The buffaloes, of course, were making a mad gallop for the river.

Nzala, the braver of Terry's gunbearers, picked up stones and began to throw them at the rhino, who was now 30 yards from us and still coming at a dead run. I had a slightly wavering .458 on my shoulder waiting for the word from Terry (see cover). Terry was conducting a most instructive three-way conversation. Part of it, in Swahili, was addressed to the Samburu and the fast-moving gunbearer. I could not understand it, but I am sure it was expressive. Part was addressed to me, begging me not to shoot. Quite understandably Terry felt that I might be a bit nervous about the turn of events and begin shooting prematurely.

Had I been alone, I am sure I would have done so, but I did have faith in Terry's judgment. The last part of Terry's conversation was directed at the rhino. It was in English, and in my diary I very conservatively described the language as earthy. In substance, and with considerable color, Terry was advising the rhino to take his big body somewhere else.

From Terry's actions, I got the idea we were trying to scare the rhino away.

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I did my best to contribute, but I am afraid that the shouting I attempted could not have been heard very clearly by the rhino for it came out in what seemed like terrified little chokes.

It sounds as if it took the rhino hours to traverse the 60 yards, but the whole incident lasted not more than half a minute. The brute slowed to a confused trot when he was about 20 yards from us. I believe if he had again started for us, Terry would have agreed to shoot, but just at that moment one of Nzala's rocks hit the rhino directly on the snout, and this, combined with all the pungent language being thrown at him, seemed to convince the rhino that we were beneath his dignity. He changed direction and began to trot off to our right, snorting loudly. Terry

ran a few steps after him to keep him going, and I finally lowered my .458 and sat down.

Now we indulged in the same sort of nervous laughter and backslapping that I thought would have come from the buffalo kill. Terry received many compliments for his animal psychology as did Spencer for his calm picture taking. We were never to see the buffaloes again, even though we looked for them for two days. My wife and I are now teaching school in Tanganyika, so I might be able to go after a buffalo again before long. If I don't, however, I'll still feel that the rhino experience is a better memory than any 50-inch horns could be. This was indeed a rhino that would have puzzled and amused T.R.

THE END