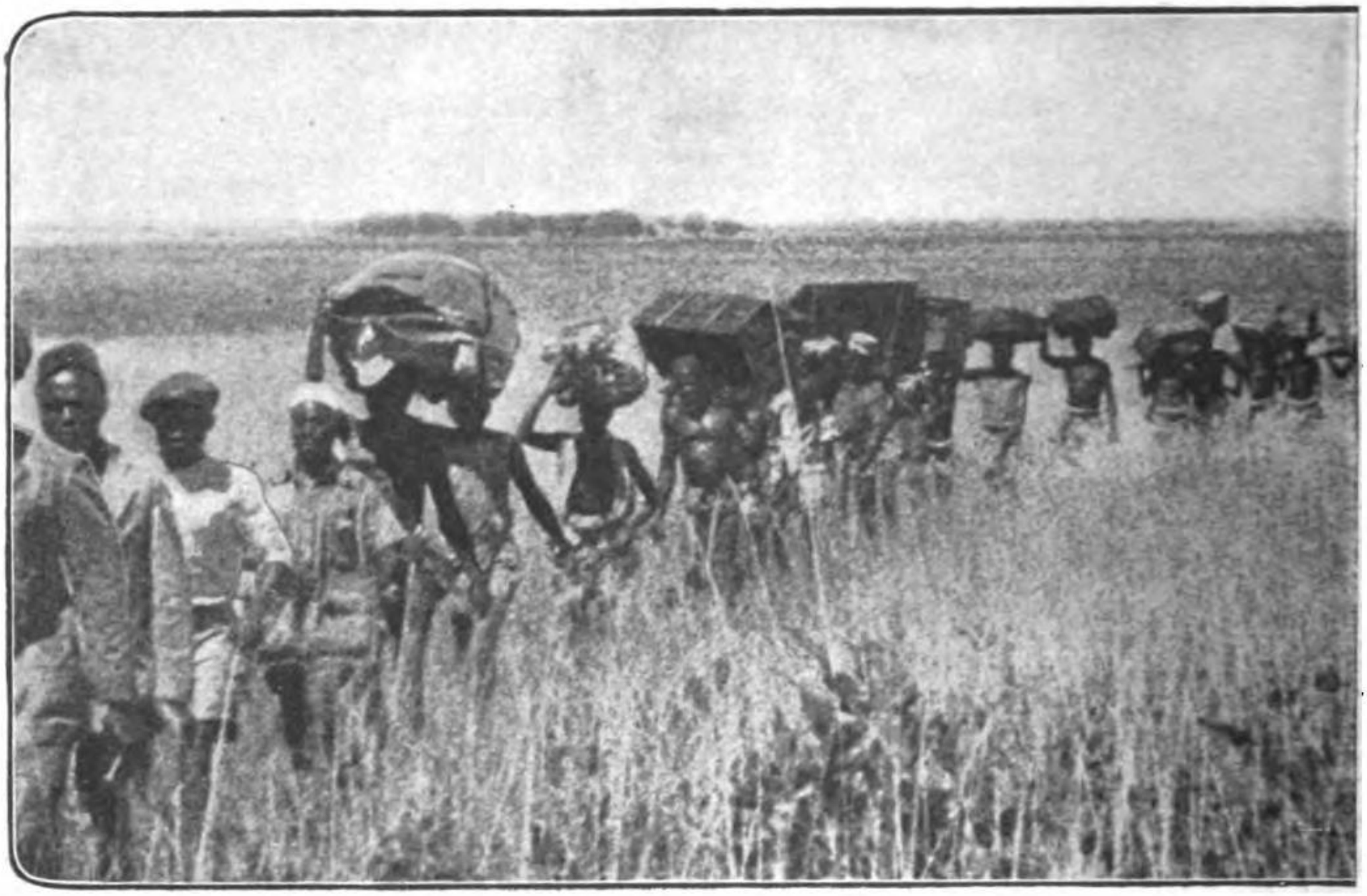


"ON SAFARI"

CIVILIZATION has subjugated a great deal of Africa, but much remains as it was in the beginning. To see the real Africa, where Nature still reigns supreme, unchecked and unharnessed by man, you must needs go "into the blue." This is to be found sometimes within a few yards of a railway, sometimes farther afield, but always cheek by jowl with those tiny settlements which mark the limit of the white man's progress.

You may not choose *how* you will go. All the motor-cars in the world will avail you nothing, neither may you travel on some other creature's back, for not even an Army mule can live in the tsetse-fly belts through which you must pass. Nature's penalty for infringement of her rules in one part of East Africa alone during the War was sixty thousand dead horses.

Yet, although Nature imposes upon those who would pry into her mysteries laws which may not be broken and restrictions which cannot be lightly set aside, her reward is generous to those who are willing to pay the price.

To go "on *safari*" is to march on your own two feet, with everything that you may need—tents, personal belongings, camp furniture, stores, medical supplies, ammunition, and a hundred odds and ends—carried on the heads or shoulders of native porters. The African porter or *mpagazi* is a curious bird. If he were not on *safari* he would be lying around watching his wife or wives work. He himself is not fond of labour, and his main inducement to carry a fifty or sixty-pound load for six or seven hours a day for weeks on end is not so much the pay as the meat he hopes you will shoot as an addition to his regulation ration of mealie meal. His god is his stomach, so shooting *safaris* never lack porters. No meat, no men, is the rule, unless of course you are a Government official.

A *safari* on the march looks like a rabble, but is really a very highly-organized affair. It may consist, for two white men, of some thirty porters, or, if they happen to be film fanatics carrying a large equipment and a complete developing outfit, as many as a hundred, each one a responsibility, requiring to be fed, medicined, humoured, threatened, cajoled, and studied just like the child he actually is. Well fed and well led, the cheerful *mpagazi* is a wonderful fellow, willing to march through swamps, ford torrents, climb mountains, or hack his way through virgin forests, and although a *safari* may be the most primitive form of

The Author is the well-known explorer and maker of travel films, and here describes in most interesting fashion the joys and sorrows of life on the march in the heart of Africa. "It has its hardships and its dangers," he writes, "but the compensations are innumerable."

The Author.

By F. Ratcliffe Holmes

transport on earth, it is certainly one of the most reliable.

In addition to the porters, each white man will have his own personal servant and his gun-bearer, with one or two spare domestics for odd jobs, and there will be the cook and the cook's mate. These, with the headman of the porters, a regular sergeant-major of a fellow, and as a rule quite capable of running the whole show if you are only wise enough to let him, are the aristocracy of the outfit. Woe betide the white man who for one moment forgets this and requires of his boy some trifling service which is mere "porters' palaver!" There is only one worse crime, and that is to delegate to a mere porter something which is the proud prerogative of his superiors.

The personal boy carries no load, except perhaps his master's raincoat and field glasses. But he is responsible for everything his lord possesses, from his money to his matches, and he is valet, footman, washerman, mender and darner, and very often interpreter as well. Imitative as a monkey, he is generally keen to learn, and becomes therefore just what you make of him.

The gun-bearer is at least the equal of the personal boy in social status. His business is to keep his master's weapons in a condition of perpetual cleanliness; on the march to be never more than arm's length away with a rifle; to know the whys and wherefores of everything pertaining to life in the bush; to be capable of following the spoor of animals on anything from mud to macadam; and to flatter his master when he shoots well and find excuses for him when he shoots badly, after the manner of a well-trained caddie. He is a born hunter, and if in addition he happens to have put in a period of service with the King's African Rifles, as is often the case, then he is a treasure indeed.

The cook occupies the pinnacle of social importance—and possesses most of the attributes of the species. It is just as bad to be at loggerheads with a black cook in the bush as with a white one in Bayswater, and even more difficult to be anything else. There *are* good African cooks, mission-trained, but they have comfortable billets in the settlements and stick to them. Cooks who are willing to go on *safari* may, in my experience, be divided into three classes; bad, very bad, and the worst ever, and my only consolation is to be found in the fact that any cook I may have in the future cannot possibly be inferior to some I

The personal boy. "He is valet, footman, washerman, mender and darner."

have suffered in the past.

A shining example, who will live for ever in my memory, was a one-eyed individual of uncertain origin, whose sole recommendation for the job was the fact that he was the brother, or father—I forget which—of somebody's personal boy. But at that time there was not a real cook to be had for love or money.

In addition to a degree of general incompetence sufficient to ruin the digestion of an ostrich, this man had the knack of asking the most insane and irritating questions, and a rooted objection to work of all kinds which he sustained by guile so exasperating as to almost cost him his life. His period of uselessness terminated one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Day. Although we were in the heart of the Congo and far from civilization, we had looked forward to our Christmas dinner and prepared for it. For more than a month we had carried a live duck with us, feeding it on tit-bits from the table and digging worms for it with our own hands. Also, at a decent interval before death, I shared with it our remaining two inches of whisky, remembering that someone had once told me that spirits would make any bird tender. And tender it might have been if the cook had carried out half his instructions. As it was, when the duck came to table it resembled one of those rubber toys which are put in the children's bath. So we dined on a fillet of freshly-killed buck, divided our remaining inch of whisky between three, drank to the better luck of absent friends, gave the duck to the cat, and went to bed—but not before we had reduced the cook to the rank of porter.

Poor old Sandy! That cat had been with us a long time. A native had dragged him to the camp in a village at the end of a rope, showing signs of having been washed up to the neck. Two tins of condensed milk made Sandy our friend for life, and afterwards he travelled in a basket on the head of his own special porter. Never previously had he left my tent during the dark hours. That night, after demolishing the duck, he got up, and, having told me all about it, went out for a walk, presumably as an aid to digestion. During his wanderings he was devoured either by the leopard whose tracks we found in the morning, or by the hippopotamus which came right up to our doors, though I have always considered the hippo a strict vegetarian.

One of life's little mysteries to me is associated with an African cook. He was one of the type who never by any chance remember what they are told. Having been lectured severely for repeatedly failing to cook onions—of which at that time we had a large and welcome supply—he was adjured in future to put them in *everything*. That night we had them in the soup, and in the stew, which was excellent; they were also present, chopped very finely, in the jam omelette. And it was the very last of our jam! I have never been able to determine whether that was merely meticulous attention to instructions or something worse.

To be honest, the lot of a cook on *safari* is a hard one. His kitchen is out of doors, as often as not without even the shelter of a tree, and he must contrive it as best he may, be it wet or fine, with logs and stones and holes in the ground. The food he serves may leave something to be desired when judged by home standards, but the ingenuity with which he overcomes difficulties compels

admiration; and hungry men marching some twenty miles a day are not very particular what they get to eat so long as there is plenty of it.

A *safari* marches at dawn, if it is wise, camps at midday if it is lucky, and a great deal later if it is not. When the camp is pitched near a village the inhabitants seize upon the travellers like seaside landladies in winter. Everything which may conceivably tickle the white man's fancy is brought for his approval, in the hope that the owners may for once acquire a little real money. Meal for the porters and fowls and fruit for the white men may be purchased with impunity, but discretion is desirable with regard to the eggs. The African native is an obliging fellow and will cheerfully wreck the happiness of sitting hens for the sake of a few cents.

The cook at work in his improvised kitchen.

The midday meal on *safari* is called breakfast, and as often as not is eaten in the open whilst camp is being made. It consists chiefly of flies and other misguided insects in great variety. After two hours' rest the porters will expect you to go out after the "*nyama*" (meat), which the trackers amongst them will be certain to report as quite close, and if you are lucky you may come up with the game after an hour's tramp and get back to camp at dusk, the toil of those extra miles entirely forgotten in the acquisition of a noble trophy.

You will then enjoy your "sundowner," pretending that it is only taken to wash down the daily dose of quinine. With luck you may bathe in two inches of water, but in any case you will consume an enormous dinner, smoke and yarn by the fire whilst the porters gorge themselves with incredible quantities of meat, and at the time when friends at home are setting forth for their night's pleasure turn in to enjoy that sweet and dreamless sleep which comes only to the thoroughly fit.

There is one factor which, above all others, governs a *safari*. It is water. The day's march is from one water-hole to another, or, to be more correct, from a water-hole which you have found to one which you hope to find. At the best it is a brown liquid, covered with green slime, but investigation beneath will probably establish the existence of a bubbling spring, and the trick of getting the purer liquid consists in immersing a bottle, which is only uncorked at arm's length below the surface. Water obtained in this way is surprisingly good if you can forget where it came from.

Water-holes are more reliable than rivers. What is marked on the map as a river very often contains water during the rainy season only, and nothing but sand during the rest of the year. There is water to be found if you know where to look for it, and

Christmas Day in the jungle.

by following the track of some cunning old rhino you will come to the spot where it is nearest the surface. Failing this, you must dig where experience dictates, and when you reach the water it may not look very inviting. A little permanganate of potash and a lot of patience, however, will work wonders, and by this time you will probably not be very particular what you get to drink so long as it is wet.

On *safari* it is usual to have a native guide. There is one characteristic common to them all, and it is that never by any possible chance do they *know* the way, but as guessers they are in the first class. The guide you get is made and not born. No chief would dream of admitting that he cannot find you a perfectly good one. He just goes away and, I imagine, collars the first fellow he sees against whom he has a grudge. "The '*mzungu*' (white men) require a guide to so-and-so. You will take them there," he says, after the manner of a platoon sergeant detailing a man for fatigue duty. It is extremely probable that the "guide" has never been near the place in his life. If he happens to know of a path which leads more or less in the desired direction, well and good. If not, he will cheerfully toddle off on one he does not know, trusting to luck and information picked up from passing wayfarers to get you there sooner or later. His chief hope is that you will very soon discover his ignorance and pack him off home.

Travel "in the blue" can be exciting. There are many things which may happen, some of them the reverse of pleasant. It is not amusing to find yourself marching through a scattered herd of feeding elephant, for they are beasts of uncertain temper, and very likely to resent the intrusion. If they decide to charge, somebody's insurance money is liable to become due.

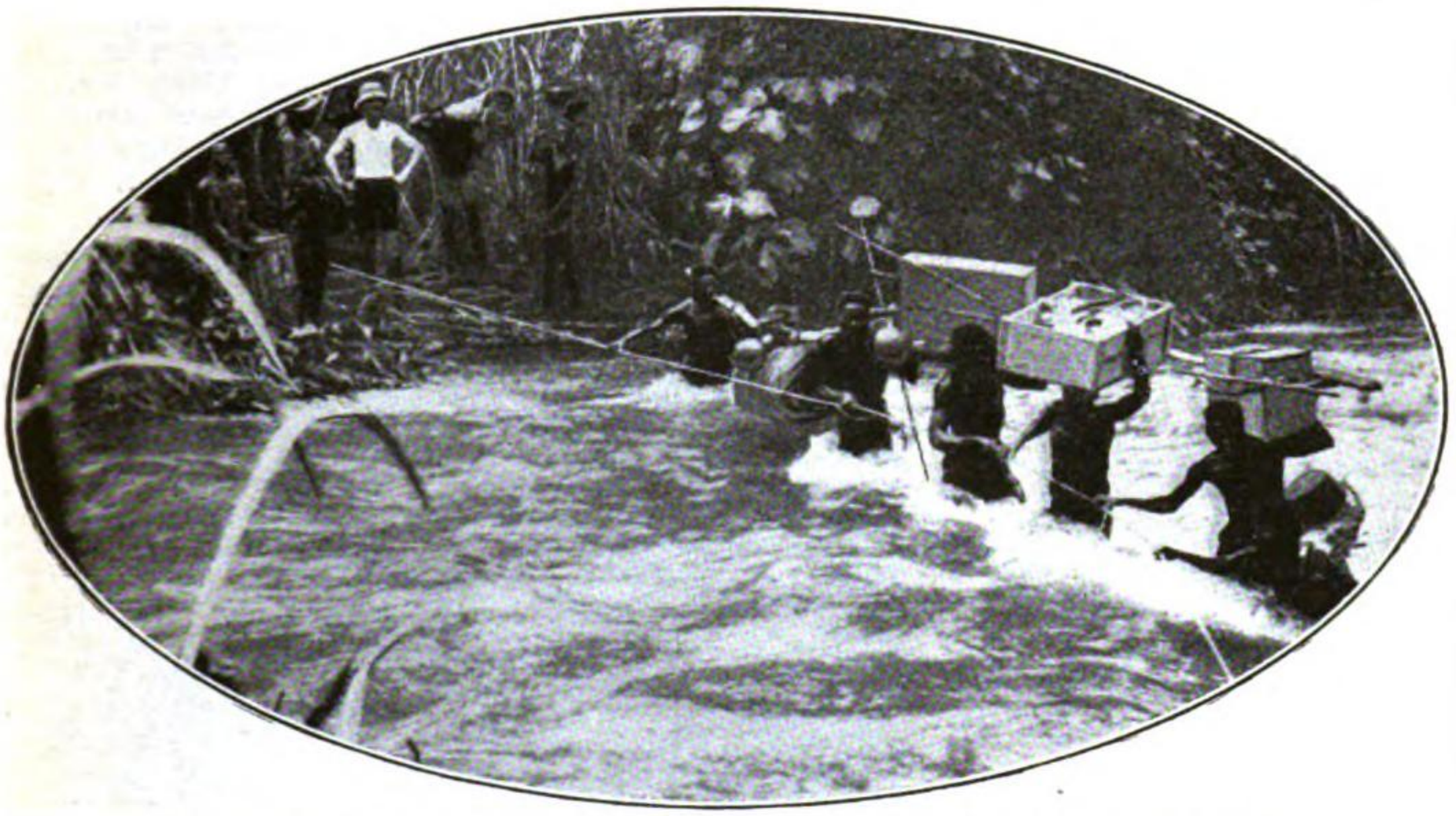
There is no "if" about the rhino. He charges on principle at any smell which annoys him, and of all things the scent of humans annoys him most. It is not so much a considered and calculated attack as a blind rush through the bush, his main idea being to get away from this unpleasant odour. If his eyesight is feeble his nose is wonderful. It leads him unerringly to the target, and two tons of bad temper wrapped in a skin two inches thick can cause an awful lot of trouble in the middle of a big *safari*. If nothing worse happens it will take you half an hour to cajole the porters down from the trees.

Buffalo are the bugbear of all *safaris*. They are, without exception, the fiercest, bravest, and most cunning of all African animals, and responsible for the death of more hunters than all the elephant, lion and rhino put together. Buffalo, like rhino, are liable to charge on scent, but their attack is inspired by sheer hate instead of the mere dislike of humans which prompts the rhino to get past them and away, and they are capable, especially when wounded, not only of hunting a man as a terrier hunts rats, but of patrolling for hours beneath a tree into which their unhappy quarry has climbed.

Mr. Ratcliffe Holmes with a big bull rhino which charged the camera.

The king of beasts is not wont to give trouble—in the daytime. Very seldom indeed are lions seen, and I have in fact walked through country where lion spoor was much more frequent than that of game without seeing a single one. If by chance the *safari* blunders on a lion he will slink away or hide in the grass, looking anything but kingly, and as one great hunter has truly said, travellers in the wilds would see many more lions than they do if they would only look behind them.

Life in the bush is only surpassed for sheer interest by life on an African river.



African rivers are often tiny trickles one day and raging torrents the next.

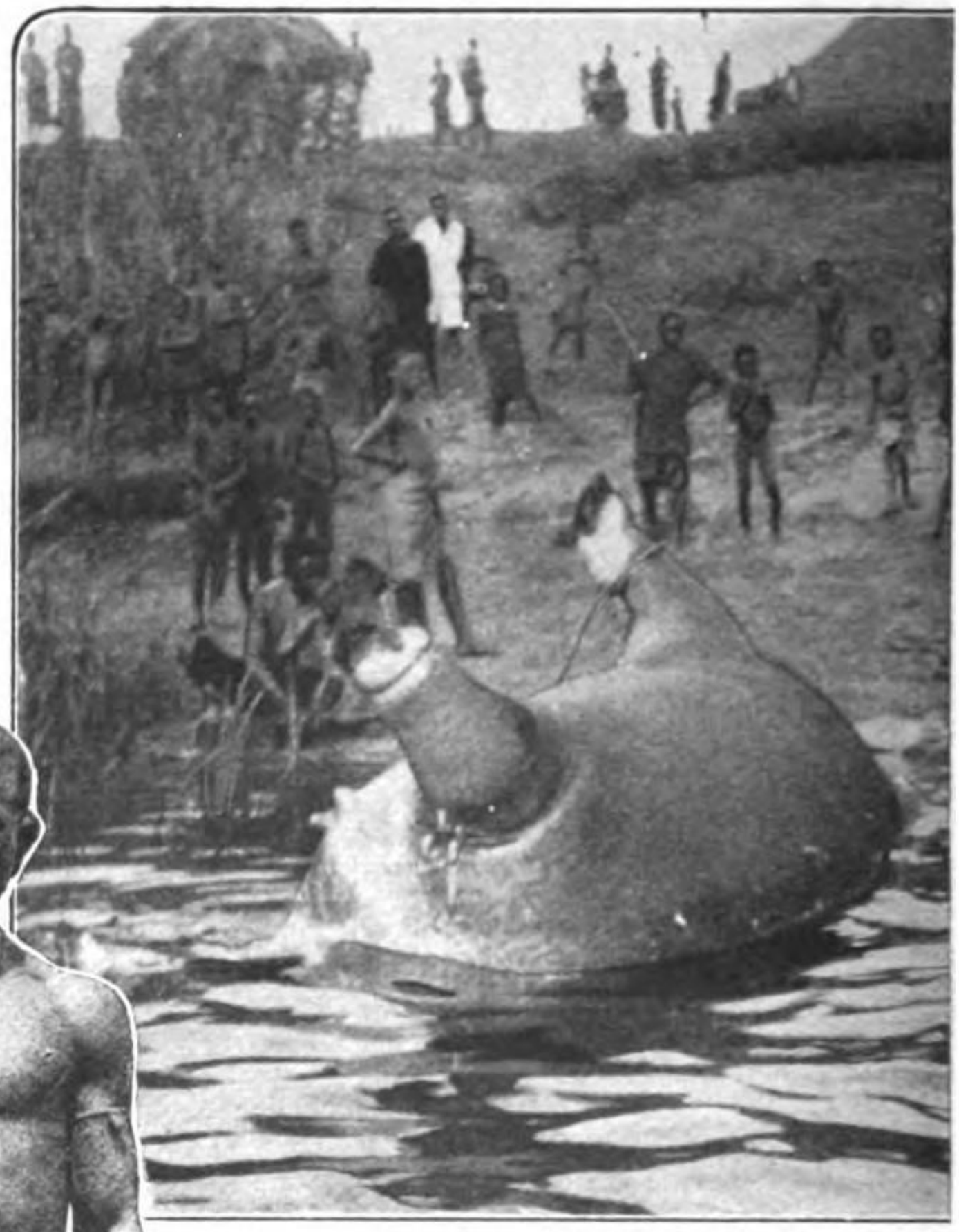
The one journey which will for ever live in my memory in all its details was down that almost unknown river the Luapula, one of the main tributaries of the Congo, which rises somewhere in the Bangwelo swamps and forms the boundary between Northern Rhodesia and the Katanga Province of the Congo Belge.

It was a journey perforce undertaken alone, so far as white society was concerned,

The *safari* crossing a swamp.

the other members of the party having departed previously in the hope of reaching the famous mission station on Lake Meru, a hundred and fifty miles away, before one of them was dead.

It remained for me to follow, with some three score heavy packages, all matters of vital importance, and there were but two sizeable dug-outs available. One belonged to Kasenga, the little settlement from which the voyage started; the other had providentially come from a village downstream, and was promptly chartered for the return journey. These proving totally inadequate, a desperate search was made up and down stream and another craft brought to light. This was no mere dug-out, but a *boat;* large, with heavy timbers armoured in zinc, a veritable tub, roomy, and the very thing for my purpose. Its sinister history was concealed from me at the time. Had I known then what I learned afterwards not a single package of mine would have been entrusted to it.



Two hippos shot by the Author

A typical native guide. "They never by any chance know the way, but they are champion guessers."

As it was, the greater part of our equipment, especially those things damageable by water, was put aboard, and very early one morning the fleet set out on a voyage which at least promised to be amusing and eventful. It meant some two weeks on a river of which terrible tales were told, with a dozen native paddlers and about as many words in common. The "Dreadnought" wobbled badly as soon as she was in midstream, and pursuing an eccentric course, quickly landed on a sandbank. Investigation proved this to be due mainly to the steersman's utter ignorance of the functions of a rudder, a thing he had never seen before, but a demonstration of the true relation between the position of this article and the course of the boat improved matters, so that presently I felt justified in going ahead with

the canoes. There were frequent halts to await the appearance of the heavy squadron. One such was made on a friendly sandbank, but in this case the minutes passed and there was no sign of the tub. Then faintly on the breeze came cries of distress. I turned my

on the Luapula River.

canoe and raced back. A black figure appeared on the high bank, gesticulating wildly. Knowledge of the native language was unnecessary—our Nemesis, which had already got in at least one shrewd blow at the enterprise, was at work again. At top speed we rounded the next bend, and there, twenty yards from the bank, in just sufficient water to cover her, the "Dreadnought" sat securely on the bed of the river with the water flowing placidly over her cargo!

The salvage and cartage of our goods back to Kasenga occupied a whole day, whilst another was devoted to attempts, with the aid of the sun, to reclaim the groceries. Everything which was not hermetically sealed, however, and a good deal which was, was entirely spoiled. I set off again later in the two canoes, leaving most of the gear for a Government barge which was somewhere in the offing, and hoped by long days on the river to make up for lost time. But the early or "light" rains broke, and made progress impossible. It was a case of camping where one could, either in a morass ashore, or on some sandspit of an island where inquisitive hippo nosed around at night, and on one occasion brought the tent down about my ears. Long before dusk there were dense clouds of mosquitoes, so that it was necessary to go to bed by daylight and fill the tent with the acrid smoke of damp logs.

Petty annoyances of this kind, however, were amply compensated. There is no more perfect way in which to see an African river than from a dug-out which the boatmen, fearful of hippo, paddle as near as possible to the bank. Sitting in the bows, rifle across one's knees and ready for anything, it is possible to study a hundred forms of life which would not otherwise be visible. There are diving birds of many kinds, herons galore, crested cranes, flocks of snow-white tick-birds, fish eagles, gorgeous kingfishers, and many other feathered creatures scarcely less resplendent. Crocodile may be seen in scores, swimming lazily across the river, or lying, eyes and snout alone in view, just below the surface; and almost every ledge is occupied by what at a distance looks like a great log, but which, as you come abreast, wakes from its doze and slides into the water. At frequent intervals a school of hippo poke their heads above the surface just ahead, and it is no long odds against some old bull charging the boat. One had been shot a few days previously with its tusks actually through the canoe of a Rhodesian Commissioner. Approaching Kashobwe, from whence one of the canoes had originally come, I was forced to shoot two hippo, but it was thirty-six hours later that the bloated carcasses were towed into the little beach, having been dragged into the reeds by crocodiles. By that time every native within walking distance of Kashobwe was on the spot, for such an orgy of meat had not come their way for years. Decomposition in these latitudes is swift, and the carcasses were in a horrible state, yet those natives swarmed over them like flies, hacking off great portions which they carried away with huge glee.

Next morning I discovered half my belongings on the beach, the owner of the Kashobwe canoe having decamped, taking his canoe with him, and no bribe was

sufficient to tempt another to take his place. So here, perforce, I remained for five days, with nothing to do but shoot "crocs" and listen to tales of the great herds of game which had once haunted the plains behind the village. My informant was the local *fundi*, or hunter, an extraordinary old fellow, armed with a muzzle-loader of great antiquity, with a range of twenty yards and the kick of twenty mules. I can vouch for this, for I tried it—once. Of late years he had taken to the river for his hunting, and with that fearsome weapon had actually slain no fewer than eleven hippo, stalking them to point-blank range in a tiny canoe which he could carry under his arm. It was an operation demanding a brand of cool courage of which any white man might be proud, and the old boy was perfectly justified in keeping the skulls of those hippo in a row outside his hut—signs of his calling and undeniable proofs of his prowess.

At last the barge arrived, bringing a French engineer who was bound for the one little cockle-shell of a steamer which forms the Lake Meru fleet. He was almost dead with malaria, and possessed neither medical stores nor "comforts." Fortunately I had both, and our entire ignorance of each other's language did not prevent the proper discussion and use of either.

All opportunity for observing the ways of the wild was now gone. The chief propelling power of that barge was noise—the voices of Awemba boatmen who dug into the stream with long-bladed paddles. As they paddled they sang chanties, day and night, calculated to fit the various strokes employed and so conserve their energies. The most popular ditty was one which sounded horribly like "you never can win; you never can win"—a sentiment most unwelcome under the circumstances. However, after fourteen of the most interesting days I have ever spent, I stepped on to the beach at the foot of the great cliff at the head of Lake Meru on which stands Luanza, and was relieved to hear that our invalid had arrived safely and was now out of danger.

Life "in the blue," whether on *safari* or a river, has its little hardships and its risks. But after a while hardships become commonplace, and the danger adds a zest to life which the fleshpots can never give. The compensations, too, are innumerable. Here Nature may be seen rioting in a thousand forms of vegetation, here it is possible to observe an infinity of animals, and bird and insect life hitherto undreamed of, and the manners and customs of peoples as yet untouched by civilization.

Who having had the smell of the camp fire in his nostrils can ever forget it, or the exhilarating sense of physical well-being which can make light of a twenty-mile tramp? Who having once shed the shackles of civilization and for a space lived next to Nature, would not willingly repeat the experience?

The old hippo-hunter with his fearsome weapon and his eleven hippo-skull trophies.