

SPORT AND TRAVEL

ABYSSINIA AND BRITISH
EAST AFRICA

BY

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WITH 72 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
TAKEN BY LADY HINDLIP AND THE
AUTHOR, AND TWO MAPS

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T. FISHER UNWIN

ADELPHI TERRACE

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day I stayed at Baringo in order to rest my men, and in the course of a tramp round the country shot a Chanleri. On the following day my Njemps guides took me to the edge of the koodoo ground in that district (about four hours' march).

That afternoon I was taken violently ill, the result, I fancy, of eating some meat which had been kept too long, or of the Baringo milk. Although feeling as weak as the proverbial kitten, I started off early next morning with a mule, and during a seven hours' ride and tramp caught sight of one male and three female koodoo, too far off to get a shot, and I never saw the male again. In the evening I shot a Grant's gazelle, and saw quantities of game. During the course of the day I saw Greater Koodoo, Burchell's Zebra, Eland, Ostrich, Grant's Gazelle, Chanler's Reedbuck, Klipspringer, Steinbuck, and Dik-dik. Next day camp was shifted an hour's march farther into the hills, and pitched by a small water-hole, which I feared at first would not last. A long tramp from the camp showed nothing, however, except one or two

female koodoo. Early the following morning I climbed over the first ridge, and after hunting a large tract of country without any success, as a last resource we descended into a deep ravine in order to search a "nullah," which looked a likely place, as it had thick scrub on both sides. I had almost given up hope of finding my quarry, when out of a patch of thick bush there crashed a greater koodoo, which started off at its best pace in the direction from which we had come. I snatched my rifle (a .340 Winchester) and ran back, catching sight of him as he galloped through the thin scrub. The first shot missed him clean, but the second, by a stroke of luck, caught him in the neck just as he was going over a small ridge, and in a few minutes the coveted trophy was ready for skinning. He proved to be a fair shootable beast with a nice wide spread.

Another day was unsuccessfully spent at the same camp looking for koodoo, and on February 24th I left the hills and marched north towards a plain that was spoken of as Campi Kifaru.

During the first day's march I had my first experience of the disturbing results upon my porters of the presence of rhino. After we had been going about a couple of hours and had got into thickish bush, we were suddenly startled by a snort and a crash. I grabbed a rifle and waited; the porters didn't. Crash, bang, clatter, down went the loads and up the thorn-trees they clambered like a troop of monkeys, while two rhino, a female and a "toto," careered wildly across the track, luckily without taking any notice of any one. We had not gone much more than a mile when precisely the same pantomime occurred, except that instead of charging through the caravan the disturbed beast galloped parallel to the porters, with the result that rather more loads were thrown about than on the previous occasion. I began to wonder whether my chop boxes, cooking pots, &c., would survive these ordeals, but strange to say hardly anything was damaged, and camp was reached without further incident. During the afternoon's stroll I got a Grantii and a steinbuck, and saw some old buffalo tracks.

A little more than an hour's march next day brought me to a spot where I intended to stop for a day or two in the hopes of finding rhino. I was not to be disappointed, for that very day I had not gone far from camp before I "spotted" one across a fair-sized open plain. Leaving half a dozen of the porters, who had come with me to carry anything killed back to camp, in some bushes, I started off with my Somalis to try and stalk the kifarū.¹ We soon gained the cover of some scrub on the opposite side of the open plain, and found the animal's tracks, but he was not to be seen. Climbing a small hill we espied the brute slowly feeding back across the plain we had just left, in almost a direct line for the porters; so keeping carefully behind him we gained rapidly, and by the time he entered the bush were almost within easy range. From where he went into the bush to the place where we left the porters was only about a hundred yards, and he must have either "got their wind," or "picked up their tracks," for all at once he came charging

¹ Kifarū = Rhino.

full tilt out of the bush straight for where they were standing. As he passed me at about 40 yards, I caught him behind the shoulder with a '450, turning him at once. While Osman was reloading the '450, I put three Mannlicher into him at about 80 yards, and then broke his off fore shoulder with the big rifle; after that he was helpless, and finished off easily. This was my first rhino, and for Baringo I think an average one, with a horn just under 19 inches. Though these animals are, or were, very numerous in this district, their horns do not run very long. While the scalp was being taken off I had a look round with my glasses, and saw two more rhino and four giraffe in the distance.

After a busy morning with the scalp and feet of my rhino, I tried to find one of the two I had seen on the previous evening, but discovered no trace of either. Two very large herds of eland, which were grazing quietly, let me approach quite close, and as I wanted fresh meat I shot a Grantii.

Next day I marched north for two or three hours, and entered the Sugota Reserve. This

reserve, together with the Baringo district, was formerly included in the Uganda Protectorate, and when the eastern province of Uganda was transferred to East Africa, owing to some legal formality being by some chance omitted, ceased to be a game reserve, until again made one by an East African ordinance. After a futile attempt to approach an ostrich, I endeavoured to get a shot at a herd of oryx (Beisa); in this I was more successful, and shot a female with long horns at about 250 yards. Not far off there were three more herds of oryx, but as there were no good heads to be seen I left them alone and returned to camp, shooting a fair impala on the way.

After breakfast the following morning I took my glasses and went up a small hill quite close to camp, from the top of which a capital view of the surrounding country could be obtained. I had not been spying long before I picked up a rhino feeding about a mile away, so going quickly back to camp we started after him. The wind was shifting round in a most uncertain manner, and when

we got within about 60 yards he must have winded us, for he suddenly stopped feeding, threw up his head, and began sniffing. The point of his shoulder was towards me, and I fired, hitting him evidently too far back, for he staggered, twisted round, and before I could get in another barrel was off *en route* for the west, first stop Baringo! We followed and tracked him for a considerable distance, but as he led us into very thick bush, his tracks became more and more difficult to distinguish from those of other rhino, and there being no "blood spoor," I was eventually forced, much to my disgust, to give him up. Retracing our steps, we suddenly stumbled on the fresh "spoor" of a lion, which we followed slowly for a long way. After nearly three hours' patient tracking, the spoor led into a dry nullah with overhanging bush on both banks. Suddenly there was a crash, and a big animal bolted out from under a bush not five yards off. I sprang instantly across the nullah, and ran up on to some rising ground, but saw nothing, and until I went back and satisfied

myself that the tracks were those of Leo I could hardly believe that it could have been the lion.

I was rewarded for an early start next morning by seeing a rhino in the distance, but as he was a long way off I sent back to camp for my mule and started to stalk. Eventually we crept as near as possible and waited some twenty minutes for him to feed up to us. When he was within 50 yards a .450, well forward made him perform what Mr. Neumann calls the "death waltz." Another barrel only had the effect of causing him to retire as fast—and not a bad pace—as his short legs could carry him. However, as he received two or three bullets from the small bore he did not go much more than a quarter of a mile, and was easily finished. During the process of skinning I climbed a small hill, and in the distance saw a herd of twenty giraffe, two more rhino, and eland and zebra galore. When my mule turned up from camp I started back, missing at very long range on the way an animal which I took to be a "cheetah." On my return I

found the camp, with the exception of my Somali boy and skinman, in a great state of excitement. On inquiring the reason I was informed that three Suk people—a very bad tribe¹—had come into camp and had caused much alarm. I found it impossible to calm my Swahili and Wakamba people, who at once set to work, much to the amusement of myself and the Somalis, to erect a large zariba. At ten o'clock that night I was awakened from peaceful slumber by my personal boy, Abdi, who told me with a broad grin that the sentry had reported that there were some men crawling near the camp. I got up but found nothing, but my headman would not be satisfied till I served out some extra rounds of Snider ammunition. Then I was allowed to sleep till daybreak.

¹ Bad in the estimation of the porters only.

CHAPTER III

BACK TO RAVINE

In the track of buffalo—Rhino near camp—Encamped on the lake shore—My first buffalo—Adventure with a rhino—Suk—Visit to Mr. Pearson—I dismiss my Njemps guides—Return to the Molo—Building a bridge under water—Arrival at Ravine—A serious explosion—A wonderful East African garden—Departure from Ravine—Off to Mount Sirgoit—Through virgin forest—A fine grazing and agricultural country—Arrival at Sirgoit—Adventure with rhino—A narrow escape—A troop of seven lions—More lions—My first lion—A “shauri” with Wandrobo—Lost in the night—Arrival at camp.

Two days later I struck camp and marched towards the lake in the hope of finding buffalo. During the afternoon I saw several giraffe and shot a *Grantii*, and on returning in the evening I found that my porters had again been thrown into a state of consternation by a couple of inquisitive rhino feeding

close to camp. By eleven the following morning I had reached the shores of the lake, and after pitching camp a couple of hundred yards or so away from the water, I took Elmi and a Swahili (Osman being lame from a bad foot), and started out in search of some traces of buffalo. We had only gone a little way when I shot a good impala, which proved to be the best head I had obtained; and after sending it back to camp, I resumed our search for tracks, and presently came upon some quite fresh ones which led into a dry "nullah" near a small conical hill, up which I sent the remaining porters. Accompanied by my two gun-bearers and the Njemps guide, I followed the tracks, which after a while turned back towards the hill up which I had sent the porters. The latter were now signalling us to come on, as three buffalo had just gone by. After tracking the beasts through thick bush for about an hour, we came into fairly open country with plenty of cover; and saw that our quarry were on their way to water, and that they had stopped to drink at a small

water-hole and had gone on again. The light was getting very bad when, about fifty or sixty yards away, I could discern the shoulder and half the head of one buffalo and the hind-quarters of another. I fired, whereupon they turned and rushed off, but the '450 had done its work, and we soon heard the wounded beast groaning under a patch of bush, and saw there was no need for a second bullet. Much to my sorrow and disgust it turned out to be a female. My porters afterwards told me that one of them had larger horns than the other, so probably the three were a male, a female, and a nearly full-grown calf. I had let fly a second barrel as the buffalo turned and galloped off, and the bullet had unfortunately torn a nasty piece out of one horn, but on its arrival home Messrs. Rowland Ward rectified this with their usual skill. I got back to camp about 8 p.m., and next morning, having often been told by those who have hunted in South Africa that lions have a partiality for buffalo meat, I went early to the carcass in the hopes of finding Leo.

There was, however, no sign of lion, so I went after some waterbuck that I had seen on the way.

I left Elmi with my heavy rifle to follow at a respectful distance, while Osman and myself tried to approach the herd with only a small rifle, a .340 Winchester. We managed to get within easy range, and were only waiting for the male to show himself when something glistening on my left caught my eye. At first I thought it must be an ostrich, but a moment's reflection told me that no ostrich with any self-respect or thought for his or her plumes would venture into such thick bush. In my horror I now saw, not more than a dozen yards off, the ugly snout, horns, and forepart of a rhino, who, sniffing uneasily, was coming suspiciously (as I thought), and noiselessly through the bush. To nudge Osman and draw his attention to our danger was the work of a moment, and no two human beings tore faster through the thick patch of bush, or did a short hundred under difficulties, in better time than he and I. A small-bore rifle with soft-

nose bullets is no weapon with which to face a rhino at close quarters, and although it would most likely have turned him, I preferred not to try. Luckily the rhino neither saw nor winded us, but unfortunately the waterbuck did, and after unsuccessfully following them for a time I returned to camp.

Late that afternoon some of the Suk people appeared on the scene, and caused consternation among my men. The Askaris immediately grabbed their rifles, and appeared hurt when I made them put them down, for if the Suk had been bent on trouble, the sight of these arms would only have aggravated matters.

Two days' march took me back again to the old boma by the lake, and the following day, leaving the camp in charge of my Somalis, I took my caravan to the new boma, a couple of hours' march into the hills, in order to call on the collector, Mr. Pearson, who kindly invited me to lunch, after which, in the cool of the evening, I returned to my camp. Next morning I paid off my two Njemps guides, who had been with me all the time and had proved most useful, and

started off on the return journey to Ravine. On reaching the Molo, at the point where I had crossed it on my way to Baringo, I found it to be in flood and quite impassable, so I proceeded to another ford which, although unfordable, appeared capable of bridging. Building a bridge under water sounds rather a curious performance, but that was literally what I had to do, for although the actual stream was not broad, the water had overflowed the banks for quite a considerable distance. I was impossible to bridge the whole. A couple of straight thorn-trees were soon felled, and after a certain amount of trouble and a great deal of noise, these were laid side by side across the actual river. Fortunately, there was little or no current to disturb the trees, which were too heavy to float, and a pile at each end with a rope stretched across as a guide line, completed this feat of submarine engineering.

On the following morning we successfully crossed the Molo, and a couple of days' march brought me back to Ravine, where I found Mr. Isaac recovering from a serious accident.



CROSSING THE MOLO RIVER IN FLOOD.

It seems that the day after I left for Baringo he had been blasting stone in a quarry, when a large charge of gunpowder exploded within four feet of his face. His escape was marvellous. Fortunately he saved his eyes by protecting them with his arm, but his hand and one side of his head were seriously damaged by stones and powder. For a fortnight he was blind in one eye, but happily both he and a native, who was also hurt, escaped without any permanent injury.

Owing to the fact that I was unable to buy sufficient flour to ration my men for any length of time, I spent a most pleasant three weeks at Eldoma Ravine, as the guest of Mr. Isaac—in this respect, perhaps, following the example of the “parasites,” spoke of by a late Government official in one of his reports. During this period I managed to secure a couple of very fair Ward’s reedbuck, two bushbuck and a duiker (Grimm’s).

The garden at Ravine is an example of what can be done in the highlands of East Africa, even by a man who, owing to his official duties, has but very little time to give

to such an occupation. Potatoes were given away, and any white man, whether sportsman or official, could rely on replenishing his stock of vegetables at Ravine. There was an abundance of peaches and passion fruit ; the vegetables included potatoes, artichokes, onions, cauliflowers, vegetable-marrow, beetroot, &c., while flowers were also grown to a certain extent. Mr. Isaac's example might be well followed by every official in East Africa, for every station ought to possess a kitchen-garden, if only for the benefit of the health of the occupant for the time being. If asked why a certain station has such a poor garden, the reply invariably is : "What's the use? If I get my garden well started I shall be moved to another station, and find that the man I relieve has never begun one, and the man who relieves me will neglect mine." That is quite true, for there is no encouragement for a junior official to have a good supply of vegetables even for his own use.

On April 5th my porters, whom I had sent the previous day to bring flour from Londiani, returned, and the next morning I left Ravine

and my kind and energetic host, whom I did not expect to see for some six weeks or more.

My objective was now Mount Sirgoit, some six days' journey, an entirely unhunted and unknown region, where I was told lions were numerous. An old Uasin Gishu Masai came as guide, and for two days our path, which here and there required a considerable amount of clearing, led through virgin forest, interspersed occasionally with clumps of bamboos. Camp was pitched the first night in a small clearing in the forest, the night being very damp and cold, with the thermometer at 46 in my tent at 6 a.m.

Next day the country became more open, and at the end of the march we were practically through the forest. During the march I saw a small herd of fourteen roan, with inferior heads, and I shot a Ward's reedbuck in the evening for meat. Tracks of different animals, including pig, buffalo, and probably "bongo," were visible everywhere. The timber in the forest ought to be of considerable value, and a concession has, I believe, been granted to a syndicate to work it.

Sirgoit was sighted on the following morning, and three more marches brought us to a small lake near the mountain, where I intended to shoot.

The country we had traversed consisted of grassy, undulating plains, eminently suitable for grazing-grounds for large herds of stock and for agriculture, which could also be carried on with advantage to a large extent. The grass appeared to be excellent, and water plentiful in most places for grazing, though too far apart, perhaps, for small holdings. Homesteads would have to be built at the edge of the forest, and the runs or ranches extend out into the open plains.

The morning of our arrival at Sirgoit was a red-letter day, though it nearly had a disastrous ending for one of my men.

Somewhere about 9 a.m. I was with my two Somali shikaris, Masai guide, syce, and a mule a mile or so ahead of the caravan, examining the surrounding country, wholly engrossed with speculations as to the future of this beautiful district, and certainly not thinking of rhino or any of those disturbing

elements which are met with so often when least expected. I was called from the clouds by a yell from the guide, and, turning round, saw at a distance of only fifteen to twenty yards two rhino—a mother and a young one—charging full tilt at us. I turned for my heavy rifle, which I saw to my horror was in its sling-case and unloaded. Osman, who was carrying my '256, was too far off to be of any service, as the animal was coming in a line between us, so there was nothing to do but bolt, yelling at the same time to Osman to shoot, while Elmai, who had the '450, could not get the gun out of its cover. My syce, who was nearest the rhino, tripped, and fell heavily on his face, while I expected another minute would see him up in the air with at least a considerable hole in his anatomy and a broken bone. That day, for some reason, I had put on a topee instead of a double terai hat, and, as the boy fell, this blew off and fell between the prostrate syce and the rhino, which stopped short, tried to horn the hat, and got a Mannlicher bullet from Osman in the shoulder. By this

time I had my '450 ready, but as the rhino backed, and I did not wish to kill a female, I changed it for the '256 and contented myself by driving her off by a couple of shots in the ribs. I do not think the syce will have a narrower shave for some time. During the excitement my mule, of course, had bolted, and was not recaptured till next day. I do not think the rhino was much the worse, as the bullets were soft-nose, and I saw what I took to be the same two animals on another day.

Continuing our march, we came on the remains of a zebra, which had been plainly killed and eaten by lions during the night. While looking about I caught sight of the finest live lion I ever saw in or out of a Zoo or menagerie; he had the most magnificent black mane imaginable, trailing down almost to his toes. He was slinking off round some rocks, so with my two Somalis I gave chase, and after going about half a mile suddenly saw two heads appear through the long grass and immediately disappear. Then to my utter astonishment, as I looked over a ridge overhanging a small swamp, I saw seven

lions careering off without offering me a chance. From what I could see I should say there were three big males, two good-sized females, and two smaller ones. We followed them for a long time and eventually got round the right way of the wind and found them on the far slope of a small valley. Here we waited some time for the big one to rise, and when he did I missed him clean. I fired again, when he galloped off; but I had underestimated the distance, a common fault, and shot low. My feelings are better imagined than described.

We trudged wearily on in hopes of getting up to them again, but we could make nothing of it, and had almost given up in despair, when we saw another troop in the distance, and we started off after them. I am almost certain they were not the same as those we had seen earlier. Although they either saw or winded us and began to move off, I was lucky enough to place a Mannlicher bullet at about two hundred and fifty yards in the off quarter of the last lion, who sat down and then came back to look for me. He continued for about

the incident was over, and that we were all unhurt. Aidid and Bodley, who had galloped up to the animal as she charged, were now examining the skin. It was a narrow shave, for the lioness had come between Owad and myself, knocking us both down, though I think that, as my bullet smashed her off shoulder and penetrated the heart, she must have been powerless from the moment I pulled the trigger. She was a very fair specimen, and in capital condition. Lady Hindlip had been watching the incident from the top of a hill, and had seen all except the lioness. I sent ponies back for her and for our cameras, and photographed the body before skinning. One of the horses, an Arab stallion which the Somalis called Ainop Hüt,¹ proved himself to be an excellent pony, for although he came suddenly within a few yards of the lioness before she was shot, he never showed a sign of fear. As I had the whole of the afternoon to dress the skin, I was able to get out early the next day, and spent a long and fruitless morning looking for lions. About midday I

¹ Somali for "Black Flyer."

spied a rhino with a very fair horn, and managed to secure it without much trouble, a .400 on the shoulder and a couple of shots from the .370 as it ran off proving sufficient. The horn measured 26 inches, but it had looked longer from a distance. The carcase was left out for bait, but had not been touched next morning when we turned up to photograph it. We then climbed Karuna, a bare hill, from the far side of which Aidid galloped after a cheetah without any success. In the hopes of finding lions at the remains of the rhino, I was again on the spot soon after daylight next morning, and heard roaring not far away. The ponies made a circle round, but discovered nothing. Eventually we found a fair-sized swamp where fresh tracks of lion were abundant, and searched all the bushes and likely places round, but it was too late, as the lions had all retreated into the swamp for the day. I sat for some time considering whether I should come and camp close to or whether I should leave Sirgoit and try the bush beyond. As I could not drive the swamp I decided not to camp there but

to move on into the giraffe ground. Soon after I got into camp the food party from Mutei returned, but with very little grain. They told me that it was very fortunate I had sent the Masai with them, as when the Mutei people saw them they turned out in full force and the Masai had to go forward and explain what they had come for. In the afternoon I climbed Sirgoit and obtained a wonderful view of the whole plateau. On the way I shot a hartebeeste, whereupon two Wandrobo promptly appeared, and on returning to camp said they would show me giraffe and elephant.

There were a number of flowers round our camp at Sirgoit, among them what appeared to be a white geranium, smilax, asparagus fern, a red and yellow lily, jessamine with red-backed petals and red buds, a kind of red-hot poker plant, while not far away were to be found yellow gladioli, red and yellow broom, lupins, and a mauve stonecrop, having a most delicious smell.