

UNDER THE AFRICAN SUN

✓
A DESCRIPTION OF NATIVE RACES IN
UGANDA, SPORTING ADVENTURES
AND OTHER EXPERIENCES

BY

W. J. ANSORGE

M.A., LL.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

LATE SENIOR PROFESSOR AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF MAURITIUS
MEDICAL OFFICER TO HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT
IN UGANDA

*WITH 134 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR
AND TWO COLOURED PLATES*

NEW YORK
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1899

CHAPTER XVI.

RHINOCEROS-SHOOTING.

THE rhinoceros met with in Uganda and British East Africa is the common black "rhinoceros bicornis," *i.e.* "the two-horned rhino." I have heard of "freaks" with three and even five horns, but I have never seen one of them. The Indian rhino has only one horn; it also differs in having huge massive folds of skin, which make it look as if clad in a coat-of-mail, like a battle-horse of the Middle Ages. Notwithstanding the absence of these folds, the skin of the African rhino is more than an inch thick along the back and sides; and over the abdomen, where it is comparatively thin, it is fully half an inch. An extinct two-horned species of rhino, discovered in the ice-fields of Siberia along with the extinct mammoth, had a shaggy coat of long wool; but the present African representatives of these antediluvian rhinos and elephants have practically a naked skin, with the exception of the tip of the tail, which is fringed with long bristles.

The Indian rhino is said to live in marshy jungles and to be fond of wallowing in the mud; but where I have encountered most frequently the African rhino, has been on treeless grassy plains, though sometimes I have met with it in bush-covered tracts.

Whereas hippos and elephants love to congregate together in herds, the rhinos prefer roaming singly or in pairs. Once only did I see three rhinos together; it was quite a model family, consisting of father, mother, and child. But generally the bull goes off by himself on his lonely travels, and leaves the cow to look after her calf. The cow has never more than one calf at a time. She takes care of her calf till it is almost full-grown. The cow has the domestic element largely developed, for I have always met her accompanied either by her young calf or by an adult bull.

The upper lip of the rhino overlaps the lower, and is pointed and prehensile. I watched a rhino browsing on the leaves of shrubs and bushes; it plucked off the single leaves as deftly as any experienced tea-gatherer stripping a tea-shrub of its leaves. It has very small eyes and a short range of vision; it does not seem to be able to distinguish a human being at a quarter of a mile, even when on a perfectly open plain.

Rhinos are greatly troubled by small crab-like ticks; these small red-brown parasites cluster under the tail, along the abdomen and thighs, and around the base of the eye-lashes. Though sight may be somewhat defective, hearing is fairly acute, and scent is extremely keen. I had occasion to notice this at Campi-ya-Simba. Only my gun-bearer, as we call the servant who carries one's gun or rifle, was with me, and I had but a single solid Lee-Metford bullet left, when we noticed a pair of rhinos, evidently a cow with her calf, on the open plain about a mile and a quarter from us. The calf was lying down, and the cow stood by it motionless with drooping head.

We had to pass them, as they were directly in our path; but we were not anxious to risk an encounter, having but one single solid bullet for our protection. We decided to give them a wide birth, and to outflank them at the same respectful distance of over a mile. As long as the wind was in our favour, the rhinos did not stir; but as we were bound to pass to windward of them, we kept a wary eye on their movements. Though there was but the faintest



A RHINO HEAD.

breath of wind, the very instant almost that we got to windward of them, the cow started and turned round and the young one jumped up. Both rhinos appeared greatly alarmed; and we could see that we were the cause, although invisible to them.

The rhinos I have shot, amongst them two fine old bulls, were all smaller than my hippos. The rhino has three toes, the hippo

four, and the elephant five. The foot of the elephant is the largest in size, the rhino foot comes next. The hippo has a comparatively small foot for so huge a body; this difference in size is explained by the fact, that the hippo spends the greater part of its existence in the water swimming. The horns of the rhinoceros are part and parcel of the skin, and merely a modification of it, like a nail. It follows that the horns can be stripped off the skull without injuring any bone. The anterior horn is usually longer than the posterior horn, but sometimes, as seen in the illustration of a rhino-head, the reverse is the case. The posterior horn rests between the eyes on the frontal bone, but the anterior horn is supported on the nose, the nasal bones being raised and strengthened to form a hard bony bump.

The horns are solid; the anterior curves backward, the posterior is straight and pyramidal. The anterior horn of the female is usually more elegant than the corresponding horn of the male, which is evidently a very terrible weapon for fighting with, being short, stumpy, sharply-pointed and very massive. The longest horn in my possession came from my first rhino, a female; it measures 25 inches along the outer curve from tip to base.

The rhino skull has a curious appearance, owing to the large nasal lump, and to the cranium curving upwards like a Pecksniffian tuft and terminating in a long horizontal ridge. The rhino has no front teeth. In the specimen I sent home for my collection, there are fourteen teeth in the upper jaw and twelve in the lower. I have generally found that the rhino, if left alone, tries to escape from the presence of man; and clumsy as its appearance is, it can gallop off at an astonishing rate, and would out-distance, I should say, even a horse. But if attacked or wounded, it shows fight and may charge; and therefore, according to some men, rhino-shooting is a dangerous sport; but till now I have only met with a single instance where the rhino tossed, gored, and trampled on its aggressor.

If a caravan walking in single file stretches a long threatening line across the path of the rhino, it probably will charge right through the line, under the impression that this is a hostile demonstration meant to encircle it; but once through the line it hurries away, only too eager to escape. It was at Nairobi, the Kikuyu end of the Athi plains, where I shot my first and

my second rhino. I was in charge of a big caravan, as I was taking ex-king Mbogo with his family and followers back to Uganda. We were delayed at Fort Smith, and the food supply was running short. I therefore went to shoot game, and I had shot one hartebeest antelope and two Thomsonii gazelles, when a pair of rhinos appeared in the distance. The wind was blowing from the rhinos towards us, I was therefore able to approach to within 200 yards. I used the Lee-Speed rifle with solid bullet.

At the first shot, at the rhino with the longest horn, it sank into a sitting posture on its hind-legs, and at the second shot it rolled over. The other rhino raced furiously round and round in ever-increasing circles around the fallen one, and then went off at a tangent. On walking up to the fallen rhino, it staggered to its feet and attempted to charge, but it only gored the ground and fell down again. A bullet given as a *coup-de-grâce* in the head extinguished life. It was a huge old female.

Very few of the caravan porters had accompanied me, they could only carry therefore the rhino-head to Fort Smith, in addition to the game already shot. Early next morning a numerous crowd left the fort to supply themselves with meat off the rhino. I followed later on, but not feeling up to doing the six hours' march, required to get there and back, I decided to take with me my light network hammock. It is a very suitable one for travellers. I bought it at Zanzibar to meet any unforeseen emergency; it folds up and slips into a tiny satchel. I little thought how useful I should find it. On reaching Nairobi, I was met by my headman and the others who had gone with him. He told me that not a scrap of the dead rhino could be found. Lions and hyænas had devoured it during the night. In fact, if I had not brought already the rhino's head to Fort Smith, my story of having shot a rhino might have appeared a myth.

Just then a pair of old rhinos appeared in sight; there was a good deal of grass about, and I was able to stalk up to within a hundred yards. They were almost walking side by side, grazing as they went along. I aimed behind the right shoulder, using the same Lee-Speed rifle. On receiving the bullet, the rhino spun round towards me and gave a fierce snort of rage. I dropped flat on the ground to hide myself,

fully expecting it would charge, and trusting it might not see me in the long grass. As it did not charge, I ventured to raise myself to find out what had become of it. Both rhinos had disappeared over the ridge of the hill. We followed with great caution, not knowing if the wounded rhino might not be playing a dangerous game of hide-and-seek with us in the long grass. I could see one rhino racing away in the plain beyond, already a mile or more beyond our reach. At last we discovered the other rhino ; it was dead ; killed by that one shot. It was an old bull with a short but very powerful horn. I was glad that the crowd, having come all this distance to get rhino-meat, would not be disappointed after all, and I left them chopping up the huge carcass.

In the meanwhile I tried to stalk an antelope I had seen about a mile off ; for just beyond this patch of long grass the plain was covered with short grass barely six inches high. I had thus the advantage of seeing the game, but the disadvantage of being seen by it. As I drew nearer, I saw, still farther off, again a pair of rhinos. Trusting to their limited range of vision and to the wind being in my favour, I went straight towards the pair. At 200 yards they appeared to have noticed us, for they stood and looked towards us. Kneeling on the ground, I aimed at the one with the longer horn ; but just as I pulled the trigger, the smaller rhino veered round and intercepted my bullet, receiving it somewhere high up in the back. Unfortunately, the wound was not a mortal one. With a snort of rage both animals came in a sharp trot towards us.

My two men would have started up and bolted, but I just managed to prevent it. All three of us now crawled off on our stomachs, endeavouring to get out of the way of the advancing rhinos. The two others got ahead of me, when suddenly my Martini rifle, which I was dragging along with my left hand, blazed off. The muzzle was pointing behind me and at the moment nearly touched my left foot. The bullet went clean through my foot. The trigger, I suppose, had got caught in some stubble. What made it worse, was that the loud report was accompanied by a cloud of smoke, though I am not sure now whether it was not this very smoke which hid us from the two approaching rhinos. My men jumped up and ran away, whereupon I too jumped up and ran ; but within fifty

yards or less I sank on to the ground overpowered by the pain in my wounded foot.

The rhinos fortunately galloped off without having seen us. I wore long, heavy leather shooting-boots reaching up to my knees. With some difficulty I got the boot and the blood-soaked sock off. The bullet had not smashed up the parts, but drilled a clean hole where the great toe joins the foot. The toe itself was cold, blue, and apparently dead. I tore off a long strip of cloth to serve as a tourniquet and bandage, and twisted it tightly over the injured part to staunch the flow of blood. My two men returned to me, with sincere regrets at not having noticed, in their panic, my accident. The sorrow and universal sympathy of my black servants and caravan porters was touching and gratifying, as I am in favour of upholding strict discipline in a caravan. I am certain, natives appreciate a white man's rule the more, if he is firm but at same time scrupulously just in his dealings with them.

My hammock now proved very welcome ; and in it I was carried back to Fort Smith. What worried me on the way, was not so much the pain as the thought that, if the great toe was really done for, I should have to amputate my own toe, not a very pleasing prospect, or, as an alternative, something even more disagreeable to contemplate, I should have to ask one of the officials at the fort to cut the toe off, and not one of them had the necessary surgical knowledge. This brought vividly to my mind a scene once witnessed by my father in an Indian village. A blacksmith happened to be the accredited village surgeon. A man appeared at the forge with an injured great toe. The blacksmith requested him to put his foot on the anvil, and before either patient or onlookers had time to realise what was about to happen, with a stroke of his chisel and hammer the blacksmith had clean chopped off the toe.

The three-hours' return journey to the fort allowed time for the collateral circulation to establish itself in my injured foot, and when I dressed the wound at the fort, I was delighted to find that amputation was not necessary. Within a month, applying ordinary antiseptic treatment, the wound had thoroughly healed, leaving a linear scar on the dorsal surface and a round scar on the sole of the foot where the bullet had made its exit. Also the long tendon, upon which depends so much of the movement of the great toe, became reunited,

though clean severed by the accident. In the course of months a good deal of the original movement was restored to the injured part.

My third rhino was again an old bull. I shot it near the Kiboko river, to the west side of the caravan route. There was a good deal of bush about, which made it easy to stalk to within twenty yards of the rhino. I used the Martini rifle. I preferred, owing to the position of the rhino, to try the shoulder-shot. At once it turned to charge, but it was evidently mortally wounded, for it staggered, as it gored at the nearest bush. A second bullet, fired at the head, entered the brain and rolled it over. One man went off to carry the welcome news to the caravan and to act as guide to those who were willing to fetch the meat-supply to the camp. In the meanwhile another of my men began to cut up the rhino.

The hide of rhinos and hippos is greatly valued in Africa because of the durable, one might say imperishable, whips and thongs which it provides. The hide is cut up into long narrow strips of suitable length. These are dried in the open air by being suspended vertically from the branch of a tree. The lower end of each strip is weighted with a very heavy stone. I sent some flaps of rhino-hide to London and had a tea-table made out of them, preserving the natural black and rough appearance of the skin. But there is a process by which the skin can be made more or less transparent, and shaped into bowls and similar fancy articles, which have the appearance of polished amber. Rhino feet and hippo feet, when set and mounted with the toe-nails polished, yield other interesting curios in the shape of door-stops, flower-pots, and boxes.

Some of my men made a fire and cooked pieces of the rhino-meat, whilst others were engaged in cutting up the body. My boy roasted on a green spit some of the liver for me; it was beautifully tender and very good indeed. When the heart was removed, it was found that the bullet had gone right through it, tearing a hole an inch in diameter. It is astonishing how, with such a mortal wound, the animal could have had the strength to gore at the bush. The right ear of this rhino was slit and torn in two places, but these were old wounds, probably got in some fight.

The last time I passed by the Kiboko river, I came, to the

east side of the caravan route, upon a fine old rhino bull ; but I could not get sufficiently near, as a deep and wooded hollow intervened. I had three of my men with me, but the moment we sighted the rhino, they left me and swarmed up the nearest trees. Only some considerable time after the rhino had disappeared, crashing in headlong flight through the bushes, did my brave boys descend from their perch of safety.

My fourth rhino was a young solitary bull ; I called it "the baby," though it was considerably larger than a donkey, and evidently old enough to have started on its solitary journey on its own responsibility. Owing to the drought, we had camped



TWO RHINOS.

where we could find water ; and the porters called this camp "Campi-ya-daktari," — "the doctor's camp." It lies between Campi-ya-simba and Muani. The ground here was literally covered with large beetles and biggish scorpions.

My last two rhinos, an old female and a young male, I shot at Lanjora. I had to make a very wide circuit to get round them, so as to have the wind in my favour. The plain was perfectly open, and only quite short grass was on it, not a tree or shrub could be seen for miles around. When 100 yards off, the rhinos saw me and at once trotted towards us. I knelt down and fired, using the Lee-Speed rifle. The very first shot took effect, and caused the old cow to stagger, and rooted her to the spot. But the young bull was bent on doing mischief, and

I had to shoot him. I gave him two shots in rapid succession ; he gave a scream and snort, staggered, and retreated to where the old one stood. As he got near to her, he rolled over with his feet in the air ; but somehow he managed to scramble up once more, staggered a few yards farther, and rolled over finally on to his side. In the meanwhile I gave several shots to the old one, to put her out of pain, as blood was streaming from her nose and mouth. Then she too fell down and rolled over. Curiously enough, their backs were turned towards each other and their tails almost touching. The female had a remarkable pair of horns, the posterior being larger and longer than the anterior. I returned to our camp, and left the men to cut up the meat ; but from what I heard afterwards, I was sorry that I had not remained.

The double supply of meat caused the cutting up to take the men longer than usual ; and as it grew dark, a vast number of hyænas came, from no one knows where, and formed a sort of circle round the score or more of men who were busy with the meat. Some of the men told me that the old hyænas were patiently waiting till their turn of the feast should come ; but in the meantime, the younger hyænas were frisking and gambolling about. The hyænas must have been rather disappointed at the short commons they found, as very little was left for them except tough hide.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIPPOPOTAMUS-SHOOTING.



SOUDANESE SOLDIER
WITH THE FAJAO
PADDLE.

THE hippo is a gregarious animal. In its native home, the rivers and lakes of Africa, the name of hippopotamus, *i.e.* "river-horse," given to it by ancient naturalists, is eminently suitable, as it usually shows only a narrow bit of its huge head. A line, drawn from the ears to the nostrils, would indicate the portion the hippo exposes above the surface of the water. In uninhabited regions the hippo is not only a perfectly harmless, but, according to science, a useful animal, designed by Nature to keep down the over-abundant river-vegetation. Where, however, the hippo crosses the path of civilisation, it becomes a nuisance and a menace, and it is sure to be exterminated.

My first acquaintance with hippos was on the Zambesi and Shiré rivers. As long as we travelled on the stern-wheel steamer, a sort of large-sized raft, the hippos caused us no trouble, but wisely allowed us to pass unmolested. On the Upper Shiré river we had to travel, two and two, in a boat with a sort of dog-kennel at the stern. In this kennel, the two adventurous travellers were expected to find during the day shelter from the broiling sun, and at night the solace of sweet refreshing sleep, in spite of the miasmatic emanations of the river and the countless swarms of mosquitoes. When to these attractions the hippo adds unexpectedly his appearance on the scene, and, as very nearly happened to one of our boats, threatens to capsize the boat and to throw the occupants into