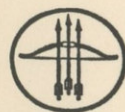


**NICK CARTER**

**The Arm'd Rhinoceros**



**ANDRE DEUTSCH**

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To Neil Sandeman  
late of the Kenya Game Department

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Airborne

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## I

### Why Shoot Darts at Rhino?

THE title of this book has no inner meaning whatsoever. It is a book about rhinoceroses. Any prospective reader who is a rhinocerosphobe should therefore put it down at once. When Macbeth, ghost-haunted, shouted his defiance at 'the arm'd rhinoceros' he was classifying it with other frightening animals such as 'the rugged Russian bear' and the 'Hyrcean tiger'. By doing so he did not prove himself a rhinocerosphobe; he merely committed the common error of failing to understand the great beast.

I have been trying to understand it. Over a recent period of years it has also provided me with my way of earning a living – an exhilarating coincidence. So what I set down here are facts, and I make no apology for the lack of a customary escape hatch: 'No reference to any living person or rhinoceros is intended, etc., etc.' All my rhinoceroses are, or were, living, and all of the people concerned seemed to exist in some sort of way.

Enough of the prologue. . . . Now for the protagonists. First, myself – an Englishman, about six foot tall, with fading brown hair and slightly bloodshot blue eyes, about forty-four years old, and fluctuating between thirteen and fourteen stone, depending on how much I am worrying about current affairs. Species, *homo sapiens*; occupation, a Kenya Game Warden. In the opposite corner, *Diceros bicornis bicornis* Linnaeus, the Black African Rhinoceros; height about five and a half foot; length about ten foot; eyes small and suspicious, but only bloodshot when angry; weight about two thousand pounds, including the muscle to move it; present occupation, trying to stay alive.

The scene is set in Kenya, from whence has come a steady stream of books, many of them propagating illusions. The

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## Poachers and Problems

THE death of the little bull was the beginning of a bad period. Work on the pens went slowly and my efforts to begin catching the South African consignment were continually frustrated, sometimes by my own incompetence, sometimes by the machinations of other people and sometimes by what seemed to be the Kiboko hoodoo.

I usually went hunting at least once a week, with two scouts, while leaving the others to work on the pens. At the back of Nguu Hill where David had his house there was an open plain about a mile across and then a clear cut line of thick bush. Game coming back from the river at dawn had to cross this open space before reaching the shelter of the bush; and among them were, regularly, several rhinoceroses. The rhinos, when the mood took them, would pause in the plain for a dustbath, and would lie down, sometimes for an hour.

There were a number of red ant-hills in the area and a recumbent rhinoceros was very hard to distinguish from a termite mound. Usually the flicker of an ear gave it away, or sometimes a slight movement of the body. Two courses were then open to me. Either I could stalk it and shoot from a distance, or I could wait until it had resumed its journey to the bush, and try to intercept it on the edge where there was usually a convenient tree to climb in case of trouble.

Neil Sandeman had issued me with a double barrelled .470 rifle, but I had made a private vow not to use it unless absolutely necessary. Also it was impossible to carry in the bush together with a crossbow, and only just possible for short distances on the open plains with no obstructions. This meant that the weapon was usually in the hands of my corporal scout, Baringero. He knew how to use it but was an impetuous

individual, and I had a fear in those days that he would let it off prematurely at some charging animal instead of trying the time honoured method of climbing a tree.

A new piece of equipment had now arrived for the darts. This was a small, indeed minute, explosive charge inserted inside the barrel of the dart which pushed the plunger instantly on impact with the target. The idea was to get a rapid injection and also to save the drug if the shot missed: the charge was not supposed to go off if it hit the ground. I tried it for the first time one morning on a bull rhinoceros who had been having a sandbath. I had been on the point of trying a stalk when he got up and started walking towards the bush. There was no discernible wind either way and Baringero and I hurried along the line of the bush to intercept him. We had to run and, burdened with our bits and pieces as we were, the sweat began to run too.

However we got in front of him, found a convenient tree, and waited. Fifty yards away, out in the open, his head suddenly went up to the alert position. What had alarmed him I don't know, but he instantly turned back and made off away from us in a curve which would take him to the safety of the cover further down. Cursing, we seized the kit and ran some more. If there is anything more awkward to run with than a loaded crossbow I have yet to find it. It has to be carried in the high port position beloved by charging infantry. We had the shortest distance to cover, but he had the longer legs.

We made it somehow, and leant panting against the tree we had selected as he came running in towards us. Seventy, sixty, fifty, forty yards - he was coming straight at us. I gripped the bow and got ready. Then, to my horror, he put on all his brakes and pulled to a dust-raising halt, glaring in our direction. He could not have seen us, concealed as we were by a bush, and there was no wind. Afterwards I came to the conclusion that Baringero and I were sweating so hard that our bodily smell emanated way out ahead of us. Thought for the deodorant manufacturers.

Off he went again, but our blood was up by then. Gasping and blowing, we rushed down a helpful slope and somehow by a superhuman effort contrived to be at the right point several hundred yards further on when once more he altered course

and came for the bush from the open. Once more, I am glad to say, the gods had planted a convenient tree at the exact spot, one that we could both ascend without crowding. We had left the drug satchel and coil of rope behind at the last spot, but it didn't matter. In he came, trotting hard, tail in the air like a small radio mast.

Again, fifty yards away he got our scent and faltered, but this time he decided to be aggressive. With a rending snort he dropped his head and tail and charged us. Baringero went up the tree and I shrank round its large bole, squinting along the crossbow barrel at the looming animal. Twigs, dust and leaves flew in the air as he crashed through the bush that had been screening us.

He was charging a fraction to my flank before he saw me, which gave me a chance to press the trigger as I aimed at his neck. At a range of ten yards I heard the dart smack home even as I dropped the bow and jumped for an overhanging branch. Baringero reached down and pulled me up as he thundered underneath, and then there was a series of fading crashes in the distant bush and finally silence while we giggled with relief.

Fortunately his great feet had missed the crossbow. When we had pulled ourselves together we collected the kit and followed his trail. For two hours we followed the plate marks, noting that he ran for half a mile, then dropped to a walk, and then to a slow walk with occasional pauses to listen.

Finally he recommenced feeding and shortly afterwards I broke off the pursuit as it seemed clear that the dart had failed. This annoyed me intensely and we plodded dejectedly back to the car. I had also torn my shorts in getting up the tree, which gave me a scarecrow appearance.

When I began catching I wore an outfit of shorts, a shirt outside, a soft jungle-type hat with a small peak and a pair of sandals copied from the Indian *chupli*. I had never worn socks since my ranching days when after a few very painful experiences my feet developed a corny keel. My *chupli*-type sandals are excellent for hunting. One can run or creep stealthily, as they are soled with crêpe rubber and heel-less. The rubber gives a grip that enables one to walk up the side of a smooth rock without slipping and which helps in the inevitable tree

climbing. On crossing a stream one merely shakes them out and they dry off naturally. Mine are made of two pieces of leather, hand sewn with no nails, and are soaked in dubbin. I take care to get the best type of thick soft leather that the Indian boot-maker can supply and they never let me down with breakages or sudden splits.

Three days after my failure with the bull I was out again, wandering along the banks of a sand river which still possessed a few scattered pools. The banks were about twelve feet sheer and in the centre of the river bed were masses of tall reeds in which game sometimes lay up late into the morning. Several of the bigger trees had platforms in them, built by poachers who would lie in wait for drinking animals. The moon was full, which was the industry's favourite period.

These platforms we methodically destroyed as we made our way along, cutting the supports, scattering the logs, or, if they were thatched, tossing a match into them. My leading scouts were about fifty yards ahead when suddenly they halted and beckoned me to come up with caution. In the river bed, about thirty yards away was a half grown rhinoceros standing perfectly still.

From our vantage point it was a perfect shot with no danger or need for a refuge-tree. I selected a dart with a small dose of half a gramme, took rested aim from a log and shot. The dart smacked home on his shoulder like a weird insect but to my amazement he merely flicked his ears and stood.

I started the count-down on my watch and after fifteen minutes saw his head droop. Still he had not stirred from the spot where we had found him. Then I noticed on his back the scar of a fresh wound. It glistened as he began to sway on his feet, and the blood was black instead of red. As the drug took him he turned round slowly a couple of times and I saw two more gashes on his other flank.

'Poisoned arrows,' said Baringero decisively and stood up. The animal took no notice as we talked in normal voices, and after a few more minutes collapsed on to his side. He was dead before we had crossed the river to get to him.

I examined the wounds with curiosity and rage. The arrows

had fallen out, presumably in his first panic-stricken rush from the poachers. The blood was black and liquid in the gashes. I was so angry that I could hardly think straight, but after I had calmed down I gave orders for the small horn to be cut off and went to report to David McCabe. He was also furious that it should happen so close to his house, and we took the only counter-measures we could think of at the time.

We humped a barrel of diesel oil down to the carcass with some difficulty and having opened the belly up poured the stuff all over and set fire to it. What did not burn would be inedible.

We searched for the killers but it was an impossible task. To convict a person of a poaching offence of this nature it is essential to catch him red-handed in the act or with portions of the beast in his possession. On this occasion the poachers had probably seen our arrival from a distance and had departed to resume their normal occupations, either as employees on the nearby railway or A.D.C. ranch, or as loafers in the local village. Should they be so slow as to be caught carrying their poisoned arrows with them they could only be charged under the Poisons Ordinance and a maximum sentence of three months given if the magistrate was feeling liverish. Prison, of course, was looked upon as a well-fed rest, but before sentence could be passed the actual substance had to be taken to Nairobi and proved to be poison by an analyst.

These were the days when poaching was at its worst. David had a staff of a dozen scouts and his transport consisted of one elderly lorry with two-wheel drive. With this he had to patrol an area of twenty-two thousand square miles of bush country where every river and mountain range ran in parallel barriers against the lines of communications. Not only were there the local poachers to contend with, but some of the European hunters with licences were just as bad when it came to breaking the law in order to assist a wealthy client to get the prestige portion of some unlucky animal.

The concrete proof of guilt required by the law, the indifference of magistrates when assessing penalties and the price paid by Indian traders for rhinoceros horn all made the task of the game warden so disheartening that the only logical thing was to concentrate on certain accessible areas and let the rest

go. This, then, was the situation when I started pitching my pens at Kiboko in the autumn of 1960 and I was just as depressed as David.

The constant demand for rhinoceros horn results from its alleged aphrodisiac properties. There are many stories surrounding this subject, some extremely funny, but it is generally considered on balanced medical evidence that a glass of gin has the same effect. The general demand comes from the Far East, where the Chinese are supposed to pay fabulous sums for the genuine substance. It is this that keeps the market going and encourages the Indian receivers to take the slight risk of being caught and successfully prosecuted. As the Chinese are an eminently sensible race one wonders why from time immemorial they have been swindled into buying an aphrodisiac that doesn't work. Perhaps, as many savants believe, it owes its reputation to being mixed with cantharides before it reaches the purchaser. Whatever its properties, the horn sometimes fetches as much as eighty shillings a pound, and this spells death for its original owner. So by cutting off the horn of the poisoned bull and by spoiling the meat with oil, David and I had done the only thing possible to avenge it.

The British Colonial Administration in Kenya was always two-faced in its approach to game. Balanced laws were made but the penalties for breaking them were inadequate. Game wardens were given special powers but lacked the means or men to enforce them. Most of the upper strata of the Administration expressed the keenest interest in wild life but did nothing about it except to express regret at the legal position. The average District Commissioner in the field, on the other hand, cursed game on behalf of the tribe whose interests he represented, but usually interpreted the law in the most draconian fashion possible when it came to assessing penalties and deterrents. The Northern Frontier District D.C.s were especially good when it came to dealing with European safaris led by white hunters of dubious reputation.

The laws governing the north were different from those in the rest of Kenya and were designed to assist the Administration in dealing with tribes in desert areas whose chief amusement is the

efficient perpetuating of blood feuds – something they have developed to a fine art. (In certain areas near the Ethiopian border if one saw a man not in obvious uniform but carrying a rifle one shot first and asked questions afterwards – otherwise one might not get the chance to ask the question.) As a consequence of this, District Commissioners in the north were absolute masters in their own areas, and could and did extend their protective hands over what little game there was. A hunting safari under a suspect hunter could be hindered in all manner of ways and as a last resort could be told abruptly to leave the District. But down in the south among the Bantu things were different and although perhaps admirable from the political point of view, made life hard for anyone trying to keep animals from becoming extinct.

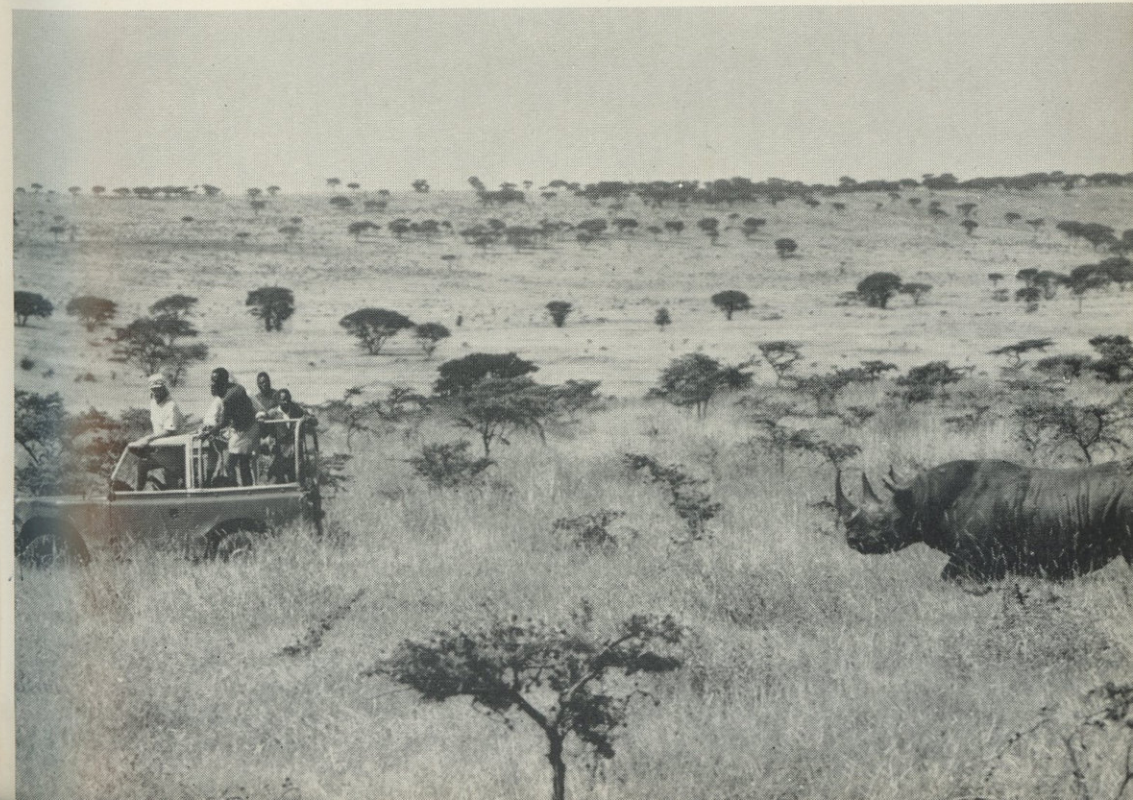
So we struggled on, David and I, he chasing poachers and I pursuing rhinoceroses, neither of us with any great degree of success and once a week we would meet at the hotel and moan over our wrongs and a pint of beer.



Chasing

*Photos: R. W. Sutherst*

Being chased





Darting black rhino from the helicopter

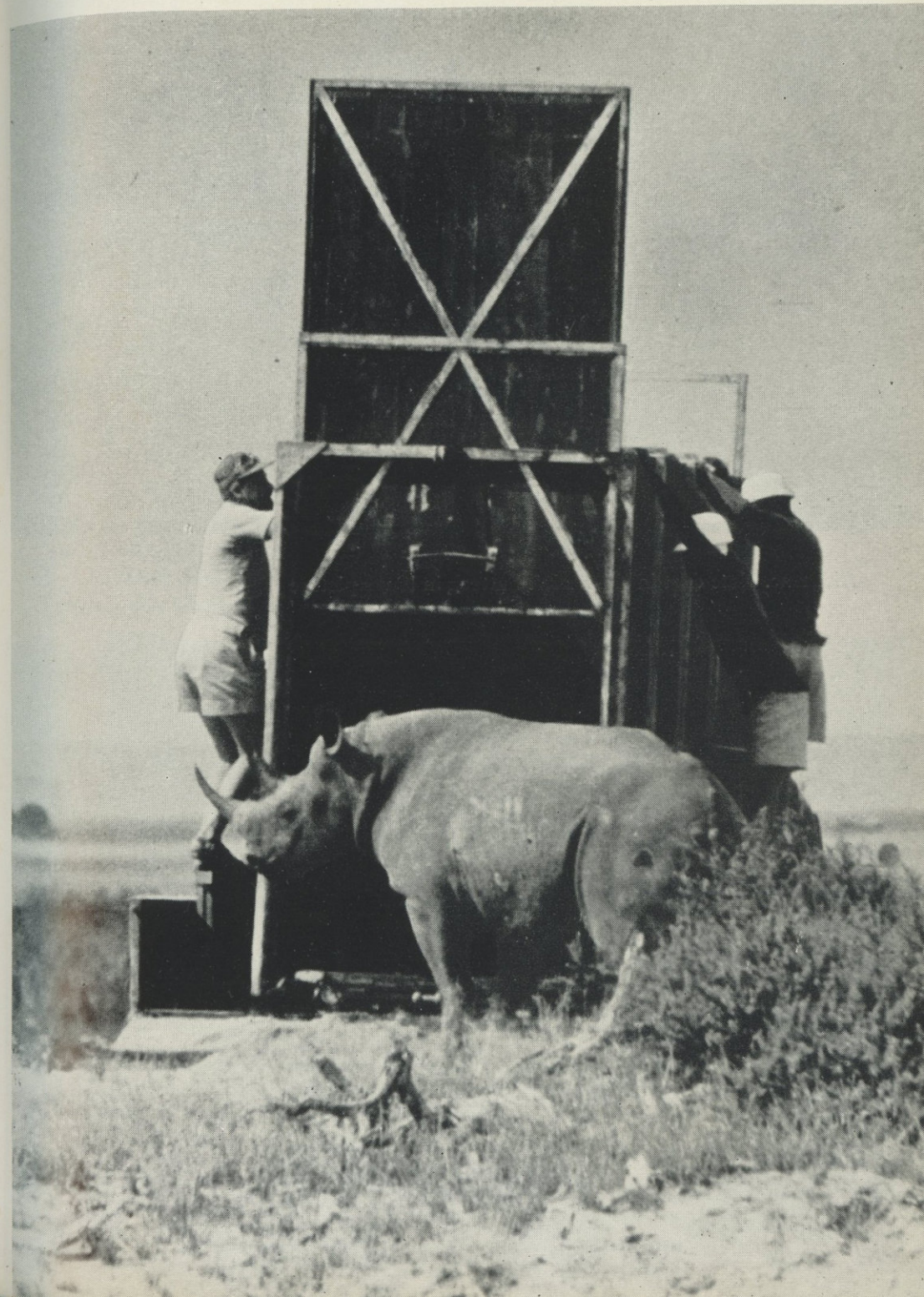
*Photo : Alan Root*

The helicopter spotting while I work from the Landrover

*Photo : Terry Spence*



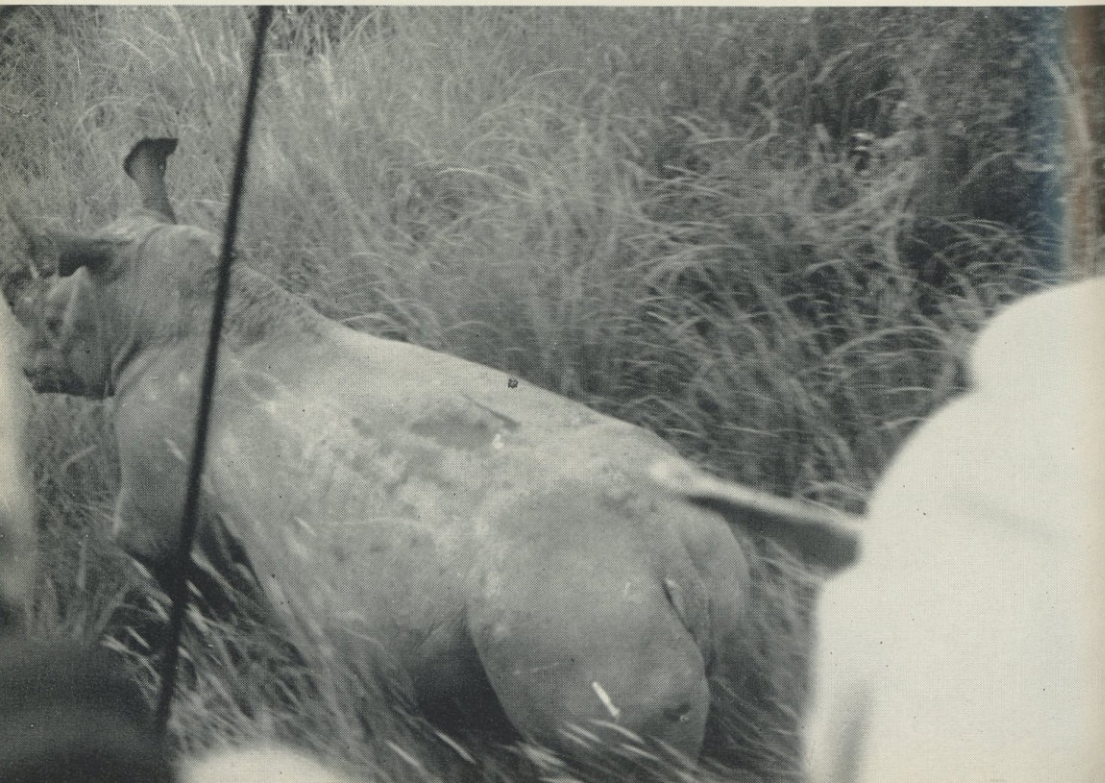
Releasing at Amboseli





*Photos : Anglia Television*

Airborne. Note dart in rhino's left buttock in lower picture



## We Pen J. A.

THEN, on the 18th of that September, the luck turned and we caught and penned our first rhinoceros. J.A. we called him afterwards, as a sort of compliment to the old hunter who owned the hotel at Kiboko. I first spotted him from the main road in the heat of the middle day when returning from a visit to Simba Hill. He was standing under a small thorn tree and I could hardly believe my eyes.

I had no equipment with me but there were two darts made up in my box at camp. The area in which he was standing seemed wide open and flat. I was only two miles from camp and I pressed the D.K.W. hard, bouncing in over the rough track with the horn blowing to summon my scouts. I explained the situation and they scattered in all directions to collect the kit. I checked the darts and loaded them up. As he was a big bull I put in a large dose. After a short period of feverish activity we were off again, all in the big diesel and fairly hurtling down the road.

He was in the same spot. I decided to rush up to him in the lorry and hope to take him by surprise in his sleepy state. The ground was absolutely flat all round and this plan worked. The diesel was making a lot of noise but we were travelling very fast, and were on him before he had made up his mind whether to run or to stand and fight it out.

As he turned to run, I shot the dart into his buttock and then his superior speed and cross-country performance took him away from us over the shimmering red plain, in and out of the small thorn trees and anthills. It took the drug forty minutes to put him down and towards the end I was beginning to wonder if it would ever happen. He reeled and swayed and sometimes fell but always got to his feet again. At last he went down long