

## RESCUE OF A RHINO

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Assam has a number of game sanctuaries where the Indian rhino is protected and allowed to breed and multiply. While the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary in the district of Sibsagar is the most famous of these, where the curious can, any day, hire departmental elephants for a small fee and 'view' rhinos, there are other sanctuaries less famous where the lucky can, after strenuous and persistent effort, come across these ponderous pachyderms. The incident narrated below occurred in one of these lesser-known resorts of the Indian rhino, the Orang Game Reserve in the district of Darrang.

Forest guards on patrol in this reserve, early in the month of January this year, came across a cow rhino hopelessly bogged in one of the numerous swamps occurring in it. While there are about half a dozen rhinos estimated to occur in this reserve and the patrols were accustomed to see the one or two of these wallowing in these swamps, this was the first time they had seen one not enjoying itself thoroughly but obviously in hopeless distress. She was completely immersed in the slimy mud of swamp except for her head and the top of her spine. Her efforts to extricate herself had apparently only resulted in her getting deeper into the 'ponk'. When first seen she had, probably very sensibly, given up all attempts at getting out by her own motive power and had apparently resigned herself to a slow death by starvation.

Word was immediately sent by the patrols to the forest ranger at his headquarters and he at once proceeded to the spot. Food and drink being the first necessities of life buckets of water were thrown down into the semi-solid mud in front of her and while the rhino refreshed herself with what was probably her first drink for a number of days coolies got busy cutting bundles of grass for feeding her. Very sensibly she did not demur at accepting the victuals thus provided.

The resourceful old ranger now set about initiating rescue operations. Jute ropes were hastily made ready and setting a good example the ranger himself descended gingerly into the swamp with

his staff and delving in the mud passed the rope all round her body and tied it securely round her leaving a length of about a hundred feet for towing. A noose was tied at the end of another rope and passed round her neck and secured. A pair of buffaloes and a posse of about fifty men were now detailed to do the dragging from the solid bank of the swamp. About two hours of effort interspersed with breakings and re-fastenings of the ropes and expenditure of much foul language it is to be feared, resulted in the helpless pachyderm being dragged forward a few feet; but appearances had been deceptive and what had seemed more solid ground really turned out to be even more 'ponky' and the rhino was stuck in deeper mud than ever. Daylight was now fast failing and so after pouring more water in front of the rhino for her libations and throwing more bundles of grass in front of her for her dinner it was decided to call it a day. While success had not been achieved, still the prospects were good. If one pair of buffaloes and fifty men could drag the brute a few feet in about two hours, two pairs of buffaloes and about hundred men should be able to do the job the next day easily! The young lady herself was being very helpful two, drinking and eating without demur!

• Work was started soon after dawn next day. One party was detailed off to get stout fresh jute ropes prepared. Another was asked to get busy preparing a solid bed of tightly-bound bundles of jute sticks and grass in front of the rhino in the direction of the pull so that when hoisted on it she should not sink again. A solid causeway having thus been prepared and the rhino having been tied up as on the previous day an hour's hauling saw her safely hoisted on the causeway.

A multitude of about five hundred men, women and children had collected to have their first look at this famous breed of monster and watch proceedings; advice galore was forthcoming how to conduct operations and remarks rife about the attributes of the genus and the medicinal and other values of the different parts of its anatomy; but the crowd was very thin indeed as the brute was hoisted on to solid ground; for who would face an indignant young lady thus roughly handled once she was free to act?

Nothing electric happened for a few minutes while she was regaining her breath; then things began to move fast. She stood up limply and, base ingratitude, groggily attempted a charge at the nearest thing bearing a semblance of humanity, to wit, an earthen pot which had been used for slaking her thirst and which had been covered by its owner's spare rags. This having been smashed up she looked round for more victims but the few men that had been about including the old ranger preferred to watch proceedings from a safe distance.

Thus foiled she quietly ambled off with a piece of the rope still round her neck and watchers from tree tops could see her setting assiduously about her routine business of consumption of large quantities of grass.

Experts say that she was an expectant mother and that was why she could not extricate herself from the swamp.

May her tribe increase!

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