

On the Frontier in Central Africa.

BY BREVET-MAJOR R. G. T. BRIGHT, C.M.G.

An interesting description of the author's experiences during three and a half years' boundary work in Central Africa, during which he traversed remote regions and visited many little-known tribes. Major Bright illustrates his articles with some striking photographs.

II.



AFTER the inhabited country was left behind game became very plentiful. Large herds, consisting of hundreds of hartebeest and zebra in smaller numbers, were seen every day, together with many different kinds of antelopes. Lions were often heard during the night, and paid a couple of very unwelcome visits to our camps.

One night a member of the expedition, bringing down fresh supplies of food from the Uganda Railway, was asleep in his tent. Awaking suddenly he became aware that some large animal (which proved to be a lion) had struck against its side. Immediately afterwards the brute seized a porter and carried him out of the camp, but fortunately did not drag him far, as, scared by the noise and firing of guns, it dropped him and made off. The lion's intended victim, although terribly scared, was not very badly mauled, and after his wounds were dressed he was sent to hospital, where he soon recovered. The curious part of the story is that the man's name was Simba, the Ki-Swahili for "lion," and that this was the second time he had been seized and mauled by one of his namesakes. His black companions, in discussing the affair with the victim, gave him the consoling opinion that sooner or later he was bound to be eaten by a lion.

The second visit took place several months later, in a small camp which was almost surrounded by the tents of the caravan, and was further protected by a zareba, inside which there were some cattle. It was early in the morning, the fires had burnt low, and the sentries were asleep, when suddenly a loud roar was heard in the middle of the camp. Although it was pitch-dark, the rudely-awakened sentries commenced wild and rapid firing in the direction of the noise. As the alarmed men threw wood on to the fires and they burnt up, it appeared at first sight as if no harm had been done. No one, apparently, had been shot by the sentries' fusillade, and the cattle, although they had

broken out of the zareba and were standing about shaking with fear, seemed unhurt. On attempting to drive one of the cows back to the zareba, however, it was found that she had been seized by the lion underneath the shoulder. Although the animal's wounds appeared to be only superficial, she died a few days later, probably from blood-poisoning.

Occasionally a few wandering natives were seen, belonging to the Wa-Ndorobo, a poor tribe, owning but few cattle and flocks and living principally on game. These people are skilful hunters, and kill game with bows and poisoned arrows as well as by trapping and snaring. After having killed an animal the hunters eat a certain amount of the meat raw and then slightly cook the rest over fires, consuming the whole then and there. After this Gargantuan feast they probably eat little or nothing for several days, when hunger once more makes itself manifest; then they go hunting again, apparently spending their whole existence in alternate periods of semi-starvation and utter repletion. Several attempts were made to get some of these queer people to travel with us as guides; they were well fed and small presents were given them to inspire confidence, but after a day or two they invariably disappeared and were not seen again. They were clever at imitating the noises of animals, and could make the peculiar barking cry of the zebra to perfection; in fact, by this means they were seen to stop animals that had been disturbed and induce them to come back, imagining they were about to rejoin their herd. A member of the Wa-Ndorobo is seen in the photograph at the top of the next page.

A couple of months after we had seen the last of the Victoria Nyanza—for which no one was sorry, as none of the Europeans had traversed its unhealthy shores without an attack or two of fever—a steep escarpment of about twelve hundred feet was encountered, and had to be descended. The view from the edge of Isuria, as the escarpment was called, was a fine one

and extended for many miles, as far as a dim line of mountains on the horizon. Looking downwards, where in places the slope was almost a precipice, the country appeared to be a flat plain, with the trees looking from the great height like tiny dots, while the many antelopes grazing below looked almost like flies.

When reached, however, the plain was not so flat as it had appeared from the top of the heights; but was a gently undulating country dotted with small hills, thickly overgrown with trees and undergrowth, alternated by large stretches of land covered with short green grass. It was watered by a large river, the Mara. Rising in the Mau Escarpment, the stream is crossed by the Uganda Railway, and after flowing into German East Africa turns eastwards and pours itself into Lake Victoria. Where we crossed it, owing to the recent heavy rains, it was unfordable, and accordingly we had to build a bridge.

The porters built this bridge in a few hours without any European supervision. As can be seen from the



From a

A WA-NDOROBO HUNTER.

[Photo.]

photograph, they selected a place where they could utilize the rocks in the river to the best advantage. On these they laid poles of wood, binding them together with twisted ropes of creepers and fixing a hand-rail on one side. The structure—primitive-looking, but eminently serviceable—is shown in the snap-shot below.

The Mara was literally alive with fish, and the men spent the evenings and nights in fishing with great success. For some time the water we had been drinking—taken usually from water-holes—had not been at all

good, and the clear, cool water of the river was delicious. One fact was very annoying to us European anglers. Although the men, who fished only with hooks made of bent nails tied on the end of pieces of twine or rope, were constantly hauling in fine large fish, the officers, with improvised rods and good tackle, hardly ever caught anything.

One evening a boy, who had been collecting firewood near the camp built by the Commission on the river, returned in a rather alarmed



A PRIMITIVE BUT SERVICEABLE BRIDGE BUILT ACROSS AN UNFORDABLE RIVER BY THE PORTERS.

From a

[Photo.]

condition and told his master, Mr. Outram, that there were a lion and lioness close by. Mr. Outram, who was on a prospecting expedition and was travelling with us, immediately started with his rifle and only two cartridges, all he had in his possession. He wounded the lioness so severely that he was able to kill her early next morning, but the lion escaped.

Lions were very plentiful near the river, and their roaring was often heard during the night and early morning. The men in charge of the donkeys reported that one day on the march they were persistently followed by three big brutes, and only prevented them from attacking the donkeys by firing at them. It was rather an improbable story, and may possibly have been invented to account for the ammunition they were constantly losing through carelessness and were made responsible for when their rounds were checked. The natives are still under the impression that Europeans—through stupidity more than for any other reason—do not tell untruths, and think that they will also be stupid enough to believe any story told to them. The following instance is perfectly true, and is a typical example of the ridiculous excuses that a man will adduce in the full belief of their finding credence, especially when backed up by constant assertion in an injured tone that the author is quite unable to tell a falsehood.

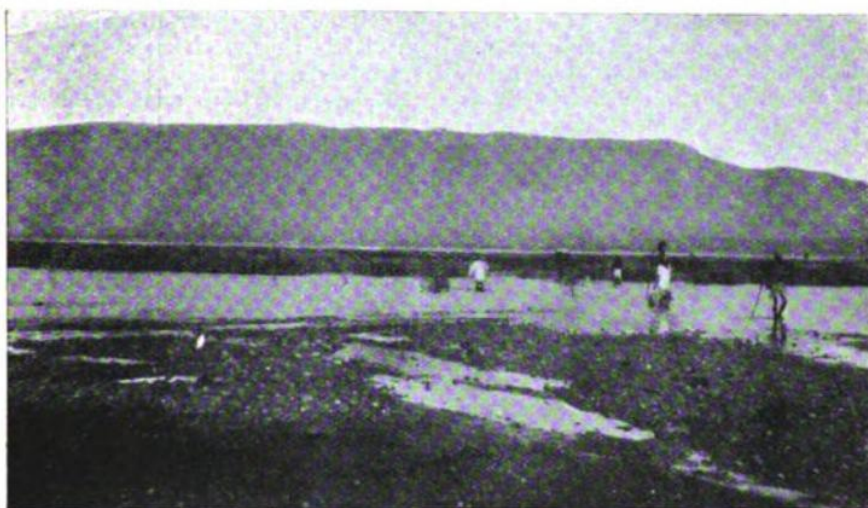
An officer, looking one day at the skull of a lion that he had shot some time before, discovered, to his annoyance, that two of the large teeth had been cut out, thus damaging the head as a trophy. As the skull had been kept, together with other stores, in a large grass house, he sent for the native who had charge of the stores and asked him to explain the loss of the teeth. The explanation was decidedly ingenious. Prefacing his story by the usual remark that he was constitutionally unable to tell anything but the truth, the storekeeper declared that one rainy night a donkey had been put into the house for shelter, and that it was he who had eaten the missing teeth!

Shortly after crossing the Mara River the expedition entered the range of the Ndasegwa Mountains, the most difficult country that had hitherto been encountered. A mountain towering up ten thousand feet in altitude was passed to the northwards, and much difficulty was experienced in crossing the deep ravines, with their roaring torrents. Nearly every day heavy showers of rain shrouded the country in mist, and the weather became cold, damp, and cheerless. From the top of the mountains, when clear weather prevailed, the huge dome of Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, over nineteen thousand feet above sea-level, with its giant

snow-cap glistening in the sun's rays, could be discerned to the south-east; and Mount Meru, a sharp-peaked, solitary height, of considerably lower altitude than Kilimanjaro, was also visible in a more southerly direction. After a few days' journey the mountains came to an abrupt end, and the country descended by precipices and steep slopes into the Great Rift Valley, which runs for hundreds of miles through the African continent, carrying in its trough many large lakes. At one place on the edge of the escarpment we saw a mountain which looked as if it had been cut in half with an enormous knife. On one side its outline and slopes were regular, but on the other it descended almost precipitously for five thousand feet into the valley below.

The range of temperature in the highlands and valleys was tremendous, and very trying. Delightful days of cool breezes, with evenings that were actually cold, gave place to blazing sun in a sky of brass and oppressively close nights. Mosquitoes made life irksome, and large scorpions hid themselves in unlikely places, causing more than once unpleasant and painful surprises to those members of our party who came in contact with them. We crossed two rivers in the valley, and a large camp was made on the banks of the more important of the two, the Guaso Enyero. Here wooden storehouses, thatched with grass, were built, and for several months the wretched place was the headquarters of the British Commissioners and our guard of native soldiers. The latter built small sleeping platforms for themselves, about ten or twelve feet above the ground, as they found that even at such a slight elevation they were free from mosquitoes and could sleep in peace. Some months after our arrival, but luckily not before we had been able to remove the stores, heavy rains caused the Guaso Enyero to overflow its banks, and the camp was surrounded by a shallow lake. The garrison were now compelled to spend all their time on their sleeping perches and relieved the tedium by fishing from them in the waters below. The storehouses were flooded with water, and for miles around the country was one huge swamp. There were several herds of buffalo in the neighbourhood, and on one occasion, looking through a telescope from the top of a hill, over a hundred of them were counted congregated in a large marsh. In places wildfowl—geese, teal, and snipe—afforded good sport and a welcome change from the usual diet of antelope or overdriven and half-starved goats and sheep.

Close to where the Guaso Enyero runs into the Natron Sea is the River Pagazi, and the following photograph shows some of our men searching its waters for dead fish, of which



NATIVES SEARCHING THE PAGAZI RIVER FOR DEAD FISH—“THEY WERE ALIVE WITH INSECTS, BUT, TO THE NOT OVER-FASTIDIOUS TASTE OF THE AFRICAN, THAT MATTERED NOTHING.” [Photo.]

there were hundreds on its banks or floating in the stream. What killed the fish was not known, but, as we camped near by, the Swahilis were not slow to avail themselves of this novel source of supply, and easily found enough fish to last them for several days. True, they were alive with insects, but, to the not over-fastidious taste of the African, that mattered nothing; fish and worms were alike devoured with pleasure, and no inconvenience followed. Natives, by the way, will readily eat meat even when quite decomposed, and not even a bad tin of meat, enough to poison a white man, causes their digestive organs to revolt. After dining not wisely but too well, the porters were sometimes seized by what they called “tumbo,” a painful form of colic, which was easily cured by a curious treatment to which they submitted themselves, after suffering for a few minutes. The patient having been laid on the ground with one foot across the other, a cloth is tied round his ankles, sufficiently loosely to allow a small stick to be inserted in the loop. The stick is then held and vigorously twisted round and round, causing the joints to

press tightly together. It can be readily imagined that the resulting pain must be considerable, yet I can testify that it cures “tumbo” almost immediately. It can thus be recommended as a certain, although rather painful, cure for colic.

When we first reached the Natron Sea, one of the lakes in the Rift Valley, it was in many places quite dry. The accompanying photograph shows a number of Swahilis employed in scattering the stones of a boundary cairn which had been built in the bed of the lake, but was found not to be suitably situated, and was accordingly ordered to be removed. The mud-flats of the lake were covered by a slight chemical deposit of whitish colour, which on



[From a]

THE SWAHILIS DEMOLISHING A BOUNDARY CAIRN.

[Photo.]

moonlight nights made the landscape look as if it were covered with snow. The heat was intense, for absolutely no shade was obtainable, and the lake was at a low altitude. The water in the lake was replenished from numerous salt springs, and a large river, reported to be salt, was found to be impregnated with natron and quite undrinkable. Walking out on the mud towards the centre of the Natron Sea, the mud at each step became softer and warmer until it became so hot that a man could not keep his hand in it, and it was impossible to proceed farther.

The country surrounding the sea was dreary in the extreme. As far as the eye could see the rocky ground was covered with coarse, wiry

The country lying to the east of the Rift Valley being almost waterless, we built a large camp near a spring in some rocky mountains. Except during the rains there was no water between us and the Guaso Enyero, a distance of a couple of marches, so the drinking supply for the men had all to be carried for a considerable distance. For this purpose we used empty kerosene tins carried by porters on their heads. This method was by no means satisfactory, as the tins do not stand much wear and soon rust and leak.

Trees and thorn bush were so dense near the spring that a clearing had to be made before the camp could be built. As the country was uninhabited, no food was obtainable, and we



From a]

ERECTING A BEACON ON MOUNT SHOMBOLE.

[Photo.

grass, with here and there stunted thorn bushes which served only to accentuate the dismal character of the scenery. Above these thorn bushes the long necks of giraffe were often observed, as they roamed the country in large herds.

Shombole, a solitary mountain near the north end of the Natron Sea, was next visited; and the picture reproduced above depicts a party of our men erecting a beacon on one of its slopes for the use of the surveyors. This lonely mountain was infested with baboons, who barked vigorously as they climbed about its sun-dried rocks.

had to dispatch caravans to the nearest point on the railway for supplies. The next photograph shows stores being issued to the men after the return of a caravan. There were large numbers of antelope in the region, but to kill them wholesale to supply the caravan with meat was not considered sportsmanlike. In order to partly supply our needs a herd of cattle accompanied us, the animals being slaughtered when meat was considered necessary for the men. As regards flour and rice, which formed the staple food of the porters, special arrangements had to be made, and it can be easily understood how difficult it was to feed four hundred



ISSUING STORES TO THE EXPEDITION AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF A CARAVAN.
From a Photo.

men out in the wilderness, seeing that all food loads had to be carried—often as many as eight marches, and never fewer than four—from the Uganda Railway to the portion of the country where the expedition happened to be passing through. Despite occasional mishaps, however, it is satisfactory to be able to relate that the escort and men were seldom without their proper rations.

On one occasion our food supply had to be brought from Kiu, a station on the Uganda Railway, by a convoy of donkeys. The route they were to travel by had been carefully gone over. It was about five days' march, and the only difficulty there seemed to be was the scarcity of water. Everything was settled, and we congratulated ourselves on the ease with which we expected to obtain a good and certain supply of food. Then the rains burst, and it poured day and night. Meanwhile our store of food became less and less, and no donkey caravan arrived with the supplies. We heard to our dismay that the country had become impossible for donkeys; large stretches of land, a few days before dry and sunburnt plains, were now soft and swampy and quite impassable for laden transport animals. Dry river-beds that appeared as if no water had flowed along them since Noah's flood were now unfordable, rushing torrents. The rains showed no signs of abating, and we were soon on the brink of starvation owing to the further demands on our shrinking

supplies made by the caravan men, who reached camp hungry and exhausted instead of bringing the long-expected donkeys laden with food. As matters were fast becoming critical, we supplied these men with just sufficient rations for the journey and sent them off to obtain stores at the railway, with instructions to return with all speed with as much as they could carry. On one occasion, while a large number of natives were fetching supplies from Nairobi over a waterless country, they became disaffected and disheartened and precipitately bolted. They were told that a number of kerosene tins of water had been deposited at a place which they were expected to reach at the end of their day's march. It was an extremely hot day, and no doubt the carriers did not believe that they would reach the water store, or, perhaps, even doubted its existence. At any rate, they suddenly threw down their loads, and in a very few minutes the caravan was in full flight, their precious loads littering the ground for a distance of several miles. The escort of native police behaved well, and after doing their best, without avail, to prevent the panic-stricken natives from bolting, they mounted guard over the deserted loads. Thanks to them, very few were lost or looted, although, as will appear later on, many were hopelessly destroyed through circumstances over which the police had no control. The district in question was usually one of extreme drought, but that very night, as luck

would have it, the rain came down in torrents, and those in charge of the caravan spent a dismal night in the downpour. When after several days the scattered loads were collected it was found that many of the bags of flour had to be thrown away, the heavy night's rain, followed by a broiling hot day, having rendered them no longer fit for food. The deserters, worn out with long and thirsty marches, made for their homes, where they eventually arrived, but only after several had succumbed on the road.

In a portion of the country traversed rhinoceroses were very common and were seen nearly every day. In the dry season they were generally to be found on the tops of mountains, displaying wonderful agility, considering their short, stumpy feet, in climbing among the rocks and running up and down the hills. On one occasion a non-commissioned officer attached to the expedition, while sketching with a plane table, left it for a few minutes, but had only gone a few yards away when the instrument was

charged by one of these savage brutes, who tossed it angrily into the bush. The plane table was not the least damaged, but if the non-commissioned officer had been working at it when the rhinoceros charged there might have been a different tale to tell. Some of the natives with the expedition had narrow escapes when charged by these animals. They are particularly numerous in the Kiu district, and one evening, while one of the sergeant-majors was shooting partridges for the pot, he was suddenly charged by a rhinoceros. Armed as he was with only a shot-gun, he might as well have attempted to stop the monster with his fist. Fortunately for him, however, a soldier who was near fired with his rifle, severely wounding the beast, and thus probably averted a dangerous accident.

Large parties of natives from Ukamba, a populous district in the Protectorate, hunt these

animals, and from the remains of them that were seen as we crossed the country they must be successful in the chase. These Wakamba hunting parties, consisting of sixty or seventy warriors, pepper their quarry with poisoned arrows and follow it till it is killed or dies from sheer loss of blood. Although it is a distinctly dangerous form of sport, yet not many natives appear to be killed while engaged in it. I have been told that the Wakamba hunters do not eat rhinoceros flesh, contenting themselves with merely removing the horns and leaving the remainder to be devoured by beasts of prey.

Within a very few days the carcass—like that shown in the annexed photograph—is almost entirely devoured by beasts of prey and vultures.

On one occasion one of the German officers shot a rhinoceros—unaware, owing to the length of the grass, that it was accompanied by a young one. After he had walked up to where the beast was lying dead he was surprised to hear a shrill squeaking in the grass, and to see a little rhino run out pathetically from the bush. It



A DEAD RHINOCEROS PRACTICALLY DEVoured BY VULTURES.
From a Photo.

was captured by the men without much difficulty and taken alive to the camp. For the first few days the little animal was savage and would lower its head, snort, and attempt to charge when approached. Finally it became very tame and would walk about camp in an aimless manner, not taking the least trouble to steer clear of anything smaller than itself, which it would knock down rather than avoid. It was fed with a spoon and drank milk from a bottle with a leather teat. When moving camp the little fellow was put in a blanket and slept quietly, while the blanket was attached to a long pole. Thus slung, in the form of a hammock, it was carried by four porters. It lived for several weeks, and then began to suffer from diarrhoea, a disease so often fatal to young animals, and from which to our great regret it died later on. I believe that only one young rhinoceros has ever been brought to Europe alive from East



THE YOUNG RHINO WHICH BECAME THE PET OF THE CAMP—IT IS HERE SHOWN FEEDING OUT OF A SPOON. [Photo.]

Africa. This queer little pet is seen in the above photograph feeding out of a spoon.

That the porters had hard work can be seen from the next illustration, which shows a caravan crossing Lake Amboseli. In the dry season there is probably little or no water in the lake, but we had to cross it during the rains, which made it in places well-nigh impassable. Carrying their loads the men sank at every step over their ankles in mud.

After marching for about a mile and a half in this uncomfortable fashion, we reached a river which was running in the centre of the lake. Here the water was not deep, but the men sank up to their middles in its muddy bottom as they struggled across. To sink at every step up to the waist and not to feel at all certain that one may not disappear altogether is certainly not as pleasant walking as could be desired.

Crossing Lake Amboseli was one of the most trying experiences the porters had. It is perhaps only two and a half miles across, and yet it took over six hours' wading through mud and water to reach the opposite shore. All this labour proved to be unnecessary, as we found later that

the lake only extended a short distance to the south, and we could have marched round in comfort on dry land in about one-third of the time that it took to cross. Lake Amboseli is brackish and undrinkable, although when we crossed the amount of rain which had fallen had filled it with fresh water. There are several lakes and swamps to the north-west of Kilimanjaro: some of them, like Lake Amboseli, are brackish, while others contain fresh water.



From a]

THE PORTERS CROSSING LAKE AMBOSELI.

[Photo.]

(To be continued.)

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