

An Exciting Trading Trip



IHAD been out on an elephant hunt, and had killed the two elephants allowed by the fifty pounds' licence. Knowing I could not get another permit until the year had expired, nine months hence, I had to think of other ways of making money before I could go elephant-hunting again.

I took my ivory to an Indian merchant who had a store at the Government post, named the Eldama Ravine, situated twenty miles north of the Uganda Railway. The storekeeper offered me a good price for the tusks, but could not find enough ready cash to pay me on the spot. He asked me to wait till the balance came up from one of his shops near the railway line. I told him I could afford to wait, seeing it would be some time before I could go hunting elephants again.

Mohammed, as he was called, then advised me to go trading. He said from information he had received from the natives, the Maraquet tribe had a great many tusks of ivory they wished to sell for cattle, also hides and goat-skins, and that he would pay top prices for all I could get. I had previously done a great deal of trading south of the railway till it had been closed by the Government.

I also knew something of the Maraquet, having shot near their territory, but what I knew about them did not make me very eager to trade with them. They had a terrible reputation with the surrounding tribes, among whom they were always raiding and stealing

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The Author, a well-known African traveller, and who needs no introduction to "Wide World Magazine" readers, herein describes his efforts to trade with a warlike tribe in East Africa. The journey was decidedly exciting, and it was only tact and daring that saved him from being murdered on his arrival. Yet, as the story tells, he managed to obtain the ivory he sought, and the expedition proved profitable.

cattle. Not long before they had surprised and murdered a party of native soldiers and their wives, who had rested near their boundary, on the march from Baringo to the Eldama Ravine. It was also said that the Maraquet women were worse than the men, being very proficient with the bow and arrow, the latter being smeared with a deadly vegetable poison. I mentioned these things to the Indian and he admitted they were true, but remarked there was no need for me to go amongst them. I could camp with the Mutei people, who lived about forty miles from the Maraquet, and get some of them to trade the ivory for me.

This sounded feasible, because I knew the Mutei were quite friendly, and when the storekeeper went on to say that a Persian trader, named Hadji Askar, was engaged in getting a trading safari together to go after the ivory, I at once made up my mind to get in first.

I took the balance of my money in trade goods, and then turned my attention to buying some cattle and donkeys. I managed to get twenty heifers at six pounds per head and ten donkeys at ten pounds apiece.

It took me three days to get ready. I started early on the fourth, because Hadji Askar intended leaving at the same time, so it became a race as to who should get to the Mutei country first, a distance of about seventy miles from the ravine, forty of which were through the Kamasi Hills. My caravan consisted of twenty porters, cook, gun-bearer, and personal boy, in addition to two Arab

traders. Eighteen porters carried the camp equipment and provisions, while the other two assisted the Arabs with the donkeys, which were loaded with trade goods consisting of blankets, iron wire, beads, and calico. The cook and my personal boy drove the cattle.

The first five miles were across fairly level country. Then we came to steep hills like switchbacks. The donkeys refused to climb them and lay down with their loads. The

climax was reached when one of the Arabs seized a donkey by the jaw to pull him along.

The animal, a most vicious brute, promptly caught the man's fingers between his teeth, nearly severing three of them. We rushed to his assistance, but the beast, though loaded, swung round and dealt me a blow with both heels that sent me spinning. The boys laughed, which action seemed to irritate the donkey, for he started for them with open mouth,



"The Elgeyo gave out a terrific war-cry and started running towards the Nandi."

Arabs did their best to make them get up, but no! all the whacking and oral persuasion in the world failed to make them move. When we unloaded them they promptly got on to their feet, but as soon as we lifted the loads on to them again, down they went. There was no option but to let the porters carry the loads to the top of the hill. This took time and tried the patience and temper of everyone; but the

whereupon they promptly scattered. He gripped one, however, by the forearm, and we had to smother the vicious creature to make him let go. I dressed the wound and gave orders that they were to unload the donkeys and let them rest and start again in the afternoon, while I continued till I found a good camping-place.

I found one at the top of the Kamasi Hills, at an altitude of over ten thousand feet. The



view was magnificent, overlooking the Elgeyo valley, through which we had to travel to get to the Mutei. South of us was the Ushanguisio plateau, where dwelt the dreaded Nandi, the greatest fighting tribe in British East Africa, and with whom the Government were always having trouble. No donkeys arrived that night or next morning, so I continued the journey without waiting, trusting they would arrive all right when we made our permanent camp. It took us a long time to follow the winding path down the hills into the valley, and I recognized how difficult it would be for a donkey transport to face such steep places, only fit for mountain goats. At last we reached the bottom and quenched our thirst at a natural soda-water spring. The water was nearly black, but it had a great reputation among the natives of possessing medicinal qualities. I never felt any kind of effect through drinking it.

We camped that night among the Elgeyo people, and next morning had the unpleasant experience of finding ourselves mixed up in a native war. The report passed through the village that the Nandi were on the war-path, and colour was given to the rumour by seeing all the Elgeyo warriors fully armed and smearing themselves with red clay, their war-paint. The head-man had just marshalled his forces when the Nandi came swarming out of the hills. When the latter found the villagers on the alert, instead of being caught napping, they halted and formed themselves into companies, ready

to resist or to attack. The warriors presented a striking spectacle. I could see through the field-glasses the markings on their shields, which denoted the company the men belonged to, such as "Buffalo Company," "Zebra Company," etc. They were in full war-dress; their headgear was composed of white ostrich feathers; their arms consisted of long stabbing spears which flashed in the sun as they wheeled them about. The sword-belt was of leather, in which were worked numerous kinds of coloured beads. The sword was attached to the right side of the belt, and stuck on the other side were heavy clubs.

The women and children of the Elgeyo had hurriedly gathered their live stock together, and were actively engaged in driving them towards the villages of their neighbours, the Mutei, whose huts lay about twenty miles away. Hardly had the Nandi warriors formed themselves into companies when the Elgeyo gave out a terrific war-cry and started running towards them. When they came to within about forty yards they halted and started throwing stones, which the Nandi caught on their shields. Others threw clubs and their two-edged swords. This stone-throwing fighting lasted for about ten minutes. Then the Nandi came on with a rush and very soon the attackers and attacked were mixed up together.

There were distinct crashes as the shields of the rival warriors smote against each other. The Nandi pushed the villagers back and it looked as if they were beaten, but they rallied under the cries of their leaders and gave ground very slowly. The combatants were about evenly matched as regards numbers, there being roughly about fifteen hundred a side.

At last my tent came within range of the stones and the canvas was torn. I had serious thoughts of taking a hand in the fighting myself, but knew it would bring me into trouble with the Government, as well as cause jealousy among the natives with whom I had traded. I therefore ordered the boys to drop the tent to the ground and take shelter behind some trees. We had hardly executed this manœuvre

when the Elgeyo gave more ground, which brought us among the Nandi. Some of the latter warriors rushed at us, and one big fellow raised his spear at me. I was nearly tempted to put a bullet through him, especially when he said white men were old women. I kept my temper under control, however, and gave him a bit of my mind, which so upset him that he would have tried to kill me if his leader had not called him to order, and said they must not war with the white men. The warrior took the advice and joined the rest, who had now driven the Elgeyo back to within a hundred yards of their huts.

Then I noticed a force of about two hundred warriors detach themselves from the rest and make a flanking movement just beyond me. I wondered what their game was till I saw them turn again and knew they were after the live stock which had been driven away by the women and children. The reducing of the Nandi's strength gave the Elgeyo just the weight of numbers which enabled them to drive their opponents back some hundreds of yards. The Nandi were just gathering themselves together for a fresh onslaught when their warriors who had gone to seize the cattle came tearing back to their comrades' assistance. Then, just behind them, I detected the spears and shields of the Mutei, coming to the assistance of their neighbours.

When the Nandi saw they were outmatched they promptly took to their heels, with the Elgeyo and Mutei warriors after them. That was the last I saw of the fighting. The local warriors returned in groups at all hours, shouting and singing of their prowess in defeating the dreaded Nandi. The casualties on both sides were very slight, only twenty-four being killed outright and about two hundred wounded. It took two days for the belligerents to settle down again.

By that time the donkey transport had arrived after a very trying journey. There was one donkey short and I asked what had become of it, only to be told that it had been killed by a big python. Seeing that the men could not produce the skin of the snake, and knowing the missing donkey was the most vicious of the gang, I drew my own conclusions as to how it had met its end. I traded with the Elgeyo for a few score of goats' skins, and then continued our journey to the Mutei, whose country we reached by the afternoon.

We found the people very anxious to trade, so after dispatching a couple of their warriors to the Maraquet to open up friendly negotiations on my behalf, we began to barter for skins. It was quite forty miles to the Maraquet country, so we did not expect the men back for four or five days. During the first two days the Mutei brought lots of skins and then trade slackened off.

With little to attend to on my hands I went out to look for guinea-fowl, which are found in large flocks in this part of the country, taking a boy with me to carry the birds back. We proceeded in the direction of a large river, and,

hearing the birds clucking away, cautiously approached the place where the sound came from. It was difficult country to walk through, the place being smothered with wild fibre. It grew to a height of about four feet and had a sharp point like a needle, which was always pricking you, no matter how carefully you proceeded. The birds heard us moving and flew away before I could get within shooting distance. We followed them up and I got in two quick shots, bagging three.

Unfortunately the shots disturbed a sleeping rhinoceros, which quickly got to her feet and, catching our wind, promptly charged. We forgot all about the fibre bushes in our frantic efforts to climb the nearest tree, which, as luck would have it, was a mimosa with big white thorns, which stuck in my head and arms as I pushed my way upwards. The boy had easily beaten me, having climbed the tree like a monkey.

I had only got about five feet from the ground when the savage beast drove her horn into the trunk, tearing the bark away in ribbons, while the force of the impact nearly shook me out of my perch. Knowing my life depended on my holding on, I stuck to my post, despite the thorns, like glue. Again the beast charged and tried to knock the tree down. Finding that it resisted her efforts, she circled round it and then selected a spot about ten yards away and calmly lay down to finish her interrupted sleep. This looked as if we should have to stay in our uncomfortable position until the rhinoceros thought of moving, and that would probably mean about four in the afternoon, it now being about 9 a.m.

After a little discussion we tried shouting, hoping it would attract some attention, even if it did not scare the rhino; but finding we were getting husky and the shouting had no effect on the sleeping beast, I told the boy to slip down the tree quietly and try to pick up the fallen gun. It took a promise of five rupees to get him to risk it. But he was quite safe. The animal snored cheerfully away and the boy soon returned with the gun. The rhino had trodden on the butt, but otherwise the weapon was intact.

I had about a dozen number four cartridges, which, of course, were no good against the two-inch-thick hide of a rhino, but I trusted the report would make her get a move on. The first shot brought her to her feet with squeals of rage, when I gave her the contents of the other barrel. This had the opposite effect to what I wanted, for instead of clearing out and leaving us in peace, she renewed her attack on the tree with such vigour that it looked as if she would hack it to pieces. The tree swayed in all directions. I gave her more cartridges in the head, hoping to blind the unreasonable brute, but no! she had made up her mind to have that tree down and make us pay the penalty of unduly disturbing her slumber. The girth of the tree was not very great, and I realized that if I did not stop her she would have us down.

I then remembered a dodge I had used once after zebra; namely, to cut the cartridge nearly through at the second wad, which made this part into a solid lump and at close quarters would penetrate a two-inch plank. I got the boy to tie me to the tree while I manipulated the cartridges. I soon had four ready. Mrs. Rhino was well under the tree when I gave her the contents of both barrels together. These inflicted terrible wounds, which made her reel all over the place. I gave her the other two, but she had moved about thirty yards away, so they had not the same effect. But the brute realized that the neighbourhood of the tree was unhealthy.

She gave out a terrible squeal, and then with tail up plunged away puffing like a locomotive. We waited to see if she came back, but finding it all clear, descended, picked up the birds, and returned to camp.

On the fourth day the messengers arrived saying the Maraquet were only too anxious to trade their ivory, and that I had better go at once, because Hadji Askar had already arrived and was anxious to buy the tusks, but, having heard that my cattle were better, they intended to wait and see for themselves before selling. This sounded all right, so, leaving the majority of my caravan, I started with Mabruk, an Arab, and six boys. We reached the first village on the second day, and, thinking I had gone far enough into the Maraquet territory, built a cattle boma of thorn trees, and pitched a ground-sheet in place of my tent, which I had left behind. Our camp was about a hundred yards from the village on a slight rise.

We had hardly settled down before the natives came flocking round to inspect us. I noticed the men were in full war-paint. They crowded round the cattle kraal, and asked how many cattle I would give for a tusk of ivory. I told them that when I saw the tusk I could say, but not before, as it depended entirely upon the size of the tusk. This seemed to annoy them, but, finding I would not barter without seeing the goods, they went away and shortly reappeared with a small tusk weighing about twenty pounds. I told them that was no use to me, as I only wanted to buy big ivory. They then declared that if I would give them two head of cattle for it they would bring another.



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I saw at once they were trying to fool me, so decided I would have no dealings with them over ivory, but informed them I would buy goat-skins instead.

One warrior armed with spear and shield brought a skin about the size of a rabbit's, which so annoyed me that I told him not to play the fool. No one, I explained, would think of taking a skin like that even for nothing, and to save unpleasantness told him to take it away. He then turned to his companions and said that he meant me to buy it, and with that threw the skin at me and reached down to snatch up a blanket in payment for same.

I had no intention of passing this insult, no matter what the consequences might be, so when he straightened up with the blanket in his hand, I caught him a blow under the jaw as hard as I could hit him. The surprise and force of the impact sent him to the ground, and before he could raise himself up again I had seized his shield, which had dropped out of his hand, and beat him over the head with it. He never waited to regain his feet, but scrambled and rolled away in a very undignified manner, which drew shrieks of mirth from his companions.

I now told the boys to pack up, as we would return. Just as they started to do so an old, villainous-looking chief arrived on the scene, and asked me what the trouble was about. I told him in very forcible language, and he rebuked the people for their foolishness. He then asked me to postpone my departure because his people wished to trade, and to give colour to this statement a few old women brought some goat-skins to barter. He then said he wished to examine the cattle, and I agreeing, he called to some warriors to come and assist him. They got two of the heifers which they said looked doubtful and examined them thoroughly, and then left, saying they would bring some ivory first thing in the morning. It was then about four o'clock, so I had tea and sat talking to my Arab. About nine o'clock the two heifers the warriors had examined were dead. Mabrukie examined them and said a poisonous thorn had been driven into the poll, a common trick amongst the Masai. Things

looked black and I lay in my bed with my revolver beside me.

Shortly after the moon had risen Mabrukie came and warned me that he had seen armed warriors go into a patch of forest about fifty yards away, and that he thought we were being surrounded. I waited for no more, but gave orders to pack and clear. We stole cautiously away and managed to put some distance between us and the village before our departure was discovered. I had left the ground-sheet erected and also some skins on the ground to make them think we were sleeping.

We soon heard the alarm given, drums beating and horns blowing, which made us hurry forward. The cattle travelled well, and the boys having light loads, we made good speed. We kept leaving the track to mislead them, and by morning had reached our permanent camp, having done the forty miles in one stretch and without a drink of water. Finding no water in the camp, I picked up a kettle that was on the fire and took a drink out of that, which nearly scalded my throat. I found the Arab whom I had left in charge had traded a good many skins, so it looked as though, even counting the loss of the two cattle, I should make a profit on the trip.

The Mutei were very cross over the way we had been treated, and the two messengers said if I gave them four head of cattle they would go and trade the tusks of ivory owned by a friend of theirs amongst the Maraquet. They said I could hold them responsible for the safety of the cattle, and, knowing these men had cattle of their own, I agreed. They returned in a few days, bringing two tusks weighing nearly forty pounds each, also the report that the Maraquet had stolen Hadji Askar's cattle and driven him towards the Suke tribe, and that their intention had been to kill me and take all my goods. I did not doubt this latter statement in the least, knowing the reputation of this tribe. In fact, some years later the Government had to declare war on them. I gave the messengers a heifer for their services, and returned to the ravine and sold my goods, which gave me a profit of eighty pounds. I had made a fair profit, but certainly could have done with a little less exciting trip.



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