

ELEPHANT-HUNTING IN THE DINKA COUNTRY

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1.—IN THE FOREST WHERE THEY BROWSE AND REST DURING THE DAY

AS you fly southwards over the Sudan after leaving Malakal, your plane may, if the weather is favourable, drop down low and fly the last hundred miles to Juba at a few hundred feet above the White Nile swamps. You are then likely to be repaid for a bumpy half-hour by the sight of herds of elephant, buffalo and antelope, and glimpses of crocodile and hippo in the Nile. If you are bent on hunting big game, stop at Juba and you have not far to go. Elephant are often seen within a few hundred yards of Juba landing-ground, and on occasion invade it and have to be chased away. But the big tuskers are likely to be farther afield. In the first few months of the year, when this country is best for hunting, it is possible to motor north from Juba into the heart of the elephant country.

A hundred and fifty miles north of Juba on the west bank of the White Nile lies the country of the Aliab Dinka, those pastoral and picturesque Nilotics who, at this time of year, are grazing their vast herds of long-horned cattle on the flat lands near the river, where the succulent green grass is sprouting after the annual burning. The young Dinka warriors carry no firearms; but they are fond of working off their high spirits on big game hunting, and a number of elephant and buffalo, besides smaller game, are accounted for by their spears. They can tell you where the elephants are to be found.

The bush here reaches to within a few miles of the Nile, and the elephants in their hundreds make a nightly trek to the river to drink, returning before dawn to the forest,

where they browse and rest during the day (Fig. 1). There is no lack of fresh spoor, and if this is followed into the bush, you are likely to come up to a herd within a few hours' walk. Walking in the heat of the day (it can be grilling in the forest in February) is not to everyone's taste, and it is a good plan to take a few followers with light camping kit, and spend the night in the bush near an elephant track a couple of hours from the river.

You will probably hear the elephant moving down to the river during the night, and, if you have camped too close to a track, the

Dinka will damp down the camp fire, and there may be an anxious quarter of an hour wondering whether the elephant will want to investigate this intrusion into their haunts.

In the morning with luck the herd may be encountered on its return journey from the river, and you may get a chance to have a good look at them before they settle down for their midday rest in long grass or thick bush. They will probably be feeding for the first three or four hours of daylight, and, as elephant in this area are not usually unduly shy, it should be possible to get a sight of every likely tusker in



2.—IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO GET A SIGHT OF EVERY LIKELY TUSKER IN THE HERD

the herd (Fig. 2). Fairly heavy ivory is obtainable in the locality, and it is not worth shooting anything thought to be under 60 lb. a tusk. With luck an elephant carrying 80- or 90-lb. tusks may be found, and there are certainly hundred-pounders about. The biggest bulls are often separate from the herds (Fig. 3), and it may be necessary to spend some days searching for them in the forest, or to follow them into the papyrus swamps, which they sometimes frequent at this time of year.

The swamps, however, do not provide such pleasant conditions for hunting as the forest where, apart from the chance of finding a big tusker, there is plenty of other big game. Buffalo, roan antelope, tiang and waterbuck are common, as well as warthog and several of the smaller buck, and there is every likelihood of coming across white rhinoceros, which are numerous in this locality.

The white rhinoceros is completely protected in the Sudan, so that shooting is out of the question. But they are easy to approach and the nature of the country affords excellent opportunities for photography in the dry season.

Rhino horn is much coveted by the Dinka warriors, who use it, on the rare occasions when they can get it, as a substitute for ebony to make the heavy clubs that they invariably carry. A horn club is handed down from generation to generation, and is a mark of great distinction to its owner; in addition, it has the practical advantage of being virtually unbreakable when used in the club-fights in which the Dinka not infrequently indulge. In spite of this inducement, however, the rhino in this part of the country do not seem to be much molested by the Dinka, or at any rate in my experience do not show it by their behaviour. Others have found them on occasion pugnacious, and as they are very much swifter and more agile than they look, it is as well not to become too familiar before ascertaining their frame of mind. There are no black rhinoceros in the Aliab country, though they are found on the east bank of the river only a score of miles away. The Nile here, and for many miles to north and south, is a sluggish stream bordered by papyrus swamps and lagoons, where both hippo and crocodiles are found in great numbers. It seems to form an effective barrier for the black rhino, as well as for the zebra, for both animals are found only on the east bank. There are plenty of elephants on the east bank also, and if you have not been lucky enough to find a bull with good ivory on the Aliab side, it would be well worth crossing to the other side to have a look at the famous Bor herd, which will not be difficult to find.

There are no public ferries in this part of the world, and crossing the river will be quite a business involving the collection and hire of a small fleet of dug-out canoes. Every Dinka turns fisherman when the occasion arises; but along this stretch of the White Nile there lives a group of Dinka who are fishermen by trade,

and who spend most of their lives in dug-out canoes. They are looked down on by the cattle-owning Dinka, and it is even considered no crime to rob them of their fish, but they are useful to the community in time of food shortage in providing a good supply of fish, and at all times in providing a transport service across the Nile. They are, however, an uncertain folk, and it may take at least a day or two to persuade them to produce enough seaworthy canoes at the starting point. It is well to accept only the largest and least capsizable of the dug-outs, as even the best are none too steady, and it is no fun to see your kitchen, or even your bed, turning turtle before your eyes.

The voyage may take upwards of three hours, partly across open lagoons, where the water can get quite choppy, and partly through

narrow twisting streams flanked on both sides by tall papyrus. It is an odd experience and, in spite of the occasional aeroplane passing overhead, produces a feeling of remoteness, with the stillness broken only by the sound of the paddles and the plop of a crocodile sliding into the water as the canoe rounds a bend.

It is strange how quickly environment can change your sense of values. After a fortnight's hunting among the Aliab, even Bor, with its one-man post office and its landing-stage for paddle steamers, will seem quite a metropolis, though it was only a primitive African village when seen from the 'plane window a few weeks earlier. It is at least a link with the outside world, and a trip down the Nile by stern-wheeler will provide a leisurely and interesting way of getting back to Khartoum and civilisation.



3.—THE BIGGEST BULLS ARE OFTEN SEPARATE FROM THE HERDS



4.—A FEW OF THE FAMOUS BOR HERD