

A GAME RESERVE IN ZULULAND

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I SUPPOSE that to buy a nine-year-old car in Cape Town, and then proceed to drive it 10,000 miles into tropical Africa and back, is to ask for trouble. My wife and I did exactly this, and thanks to the A.A. and a kindly Providence that showed us plenty of the things that might have happened, but did not, we managed to survive. But there were incidents that could have been serious. The most spectacular ones happened in a Zululand game park. Game park, in Africa, means a vast area of completely natural country where you must not hunt or carry arms of any kind, and the fauna is not harried in any way whatever. There were said to be white as well as black rhinoceros in this particular wild life reserve, and we wanted photographs; both ciné and stills.

We were trying to catch rainbow trout in the Drakensburg mountain streams when we decided to set forth, and our very genial host at the hotel bade us farewell with a few well-chosen remarks: "You watch out for the black rhino," he said. "They don't like people snooping at them with cameras. And don't dilly dally on the way and wander into the sugar cane off the roads; they are full of pythons that feed on the cane rats. You had far better stay here and fish!"

We did the trip to the reserve the easy way, and stopped at Pietermaritzburg and paid a visit to the bird sanctuary; then we spent a few days in Durban, where I watched an angler on the pier play an enormous skate for three quarters of an hour, only to lose it in the surf. From then on we made for the game reserve, some long way up the coast. We soon ran out of first-class roads and moved on to the bush variety, full of corrugations and potholes. We had to be off the roads in the reserve at sundown, because of wandering rhinoceros, and had to turn back and spend the night in Mtubatuba, where a South African at the hotel told us wondrous tales of fishing off the Natal coast.

The next morning, bright and early, almost before the citrus swallowtail butterflies had shed the dew drops from their wings, we were on our way. Mtubatuba is a dusty little town where the natives are a mixture of wild and tame, and wear monkey skin skirts, complete with tail, below shirts of flannel bought at the local shop; all the roads that lead away from it are rough. The road to the reserve just got



1.—A WART-HOG IN THE ZULULAND BUSH. "There are few predators in this area to kill them off, and they were everywhere"

rougher and rougher, until it was nothing but a track over a series of undulating, bushy hills; the entrance to the park was a notice and a cattle gate.

The road to the camp was surprisingly good and the rondavel accommodation quite excellent with everything supplied except food, which we had brought with us. We were allotted a Zulu game scout called Joseph, who promised to be ready to show us round at two o'clock. At two o'clock Joseph appeared. He was a fine-looking Zulu dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts, and socks and shoes; he wore a bush hat at an angle and spoke English without an accent, although his vocabulary was limited to certain stock phrases which appeared to be: "You take photo," "Go back quick," "Come on," "Very

dangerous," "Not dangerous," and "Run like hell!"

We started off with I myself driving and Joseph sitting beside me, and my wife in the back seat holding the ciné camera and the still camera. This part of Zululand is fine rolling bush country, with rough tracks leading round the hillsides and down into the green valleys—an enchanting place of acacia and kafirboom trees, mixed with fig and tamboti, and many others. There are valleys and rolling park country where there are game trails leading off from the tracks, and little secret pools with giant footmarks in the mud, and blue water-lilies growing; and there are black swallowtail butterflies, with emerald-green bands on their wings that sit opening and shutting their wings on the wet margins, and sandpipers and crakes. There are sunbirds busy among the flowers on the forest trees, that stand in the shimmering heat like a picture from the old and forgotten world of prehistoric ages.

The first animal we saw was a wart-hog—a fine old boar that ran round a green hill with the blue sky behind him; then we saw scores of wart-hogs everywhere. There are few predators in this area to kill them off, and they were in family parties everywhere, running across the tracks with their tails stuck up straight in the air.

Across the valley, on the green slopes of the bushy hills, were herds of wildebeest and scattered bands of zebra. A few impala tripped daintily and stopped to stare from the cover of the bush; there was a shaggy antelope, the inyala, that we had not seen before, and his red and white striped does were leaping into the trees. There were little antelopes of the duiker family, watching us descend the mountain paths like dark-eyed sprites from behind the bearded low-hung branches of the forest trees. High in the hot sky a vulture traversed his blue kingdom in long, lazy rolls of effortless motion. But the silence of these wooded hillsides is the silence of a cathedral, and the deep whistle of the hoopoe is like a distant organ note. The low offbeat of the whisper of the insects never seems to intrude, but is for ever there, like a distant murmuring sea.

We came slowly to the bottom of the wooded hill, and entered a low country of high grass and bush. It was very hot, and the butterflies flew slowly with lazy wing flaps, like gilded toys worked with twisted elastic. It was another



2.—WATCHING A HERD OF BUFFALO. "Two hundred yards was as close as we dared go, and even then the bulls were getting on their feet and facing us"

world from the hillside forests we had just left, a world of monsters and primitive silence.

Joseph and I left the car, and with the still camera approached a pool that lay stagnant with muddy margins just off the track. There was a wart-hog rooting among some stamped down rushes, and a black rhinoceros, like a primæval dream, heaved itself out of the mud and stood facing us, waving its dripping muzzle in the air in trying to get our scent. There was just time to get one photograph before Joseph said "Quick back."

We went back to the car and turned along the track. A few hundred yards further on a mother and child rhinoceros crossed the track and entered the bush. We could see the mother's head poking through the foliage, like a horned cockatrice. I asked Joseph what I should do if they charged the car, but all he would say was: "You take photo!"

It was quite useless taking a photograph from where we were, so he and I got out of the car and began a stalk which must have been funny to watch, because it consisted of Joseph treading gently forward towards the rhinoceros, while I followed some way behind with the camera. Mother rhinoceros could not see us, but she was trying desperately to get our scent, and Joseph kept signalling forward and back, until we were too close for my liking. Then the wind must have shifted, because the rhinoceros snorted like a steam engine and came out of the bush after us. "Run like hell, sir!" said Joseph in a deep voice, and we both ran back to the car. The rhinoceros shook her head in disgust and backed into the bush out of sight.

We motored slowly away, while I argued with Joseph about what we should do if a rhinoceros really did charge the car head on in this narrow track, but, apart from grinning and saying, repeatedly: "You take photo," he had no practical suggestions.

The whole place was literally stinking with rhinoceros and it seemed to us only a matter



3.—A BLACK RHINOCEROS AT A POOL. The author's car was charged and chased by a black rhinoceros

of time before we ran into real trouble in this way. The grass was tall, and one was on to them before one knew they were there. We suddenly saw two more cross the track and enter the grass about 50 yards ahead. I stopped the car, but left the engine running and stood by the bonnet with the ciné camera. One of the rhinoceros turned round slowly and moved like

an animated toy back on to the track. Slowly she turned and faced us, and then came down the track like a train straight at us. I threw the camera into my wife's lap in the back seat and struggled to get the gear into reverse. It would not go, and I had to move it into the forward position before I could engage reverse. By this time the beast was almost on the bonnet, and



4.—WHITE RHINOCEROS MOTHER AND CALF. "The calf kept running forward and then back to his mother"



5.—“A TERRIBLE SIGHT FOR A FLY TO SEE, SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE RED SKY OF DAWN”

Joseph started shouting at it. It was like a nightmare in slow motion. I only had to forget to take the brake off and stall the engine for complete annihilation. But I got the brake off, and we started to move backwards until the engine was roaring almost as loud as Joseph. At the very last moment the rhinoceros turned into the grass beside the track, and we went away in reverse for a couple of hundred yards before we stopped and collected ourselves.

We all had a good shaky laugh while we waited 20 minutes for the rhinoceros to move off. It was late afternoon now, and the sun shone red gold on the bush, and bee-eaters were flying in little flocks high overhead, and there were francolin and guinea fowl calling.

We went forward again, as it was the only way to get back to the camp, and Joseph thought that by this time the rhinoceros should have moved away. But the one that had charged was waiting in the grass; he came at us again like a steam engine, and was so close that we could see the saliva dribbling out of his pointed rubbery mouth. My wife worked the ciné camera from the back seat, while Joseph shouted and I tried in vain to make the car go faster. She was a good old car, but she would not accelerate; but Joseph's shouting sent the rhinoceros into the grass again and we got back to the hill and the trees.

Joseph wanted to go and look for more, but I refused to be drawn into any further situations that could only result sooner or later in real trouble, and kept on up the hill. We did a successful stalk on a lone buffalo bull and got a good photograph of him. Joseph was not too happy about the buffalo, and said: “They very bad animals—you can dodge rhino—but buffalo get you.” We saw a large herd of buffalo (Fig. 2) but 200 yards was as close as we dared go, and even then the bulls were getting on their feet and facing us.

Back at the camp Joseph said he would be along to-morrow at six a.m. and we would go after more black rhinoceros. I said “Nothing doing”; we wanted to see

some white rhinoceros. Joseph said we would be lucky if we saw any, as they were very rare. He seemed depressed at my lack of enterprise, but I refused to be argued out of it, and he said: “Very well, sir—white rhino in the morning if very lucky.” He departed after a salute and crashing of heels.

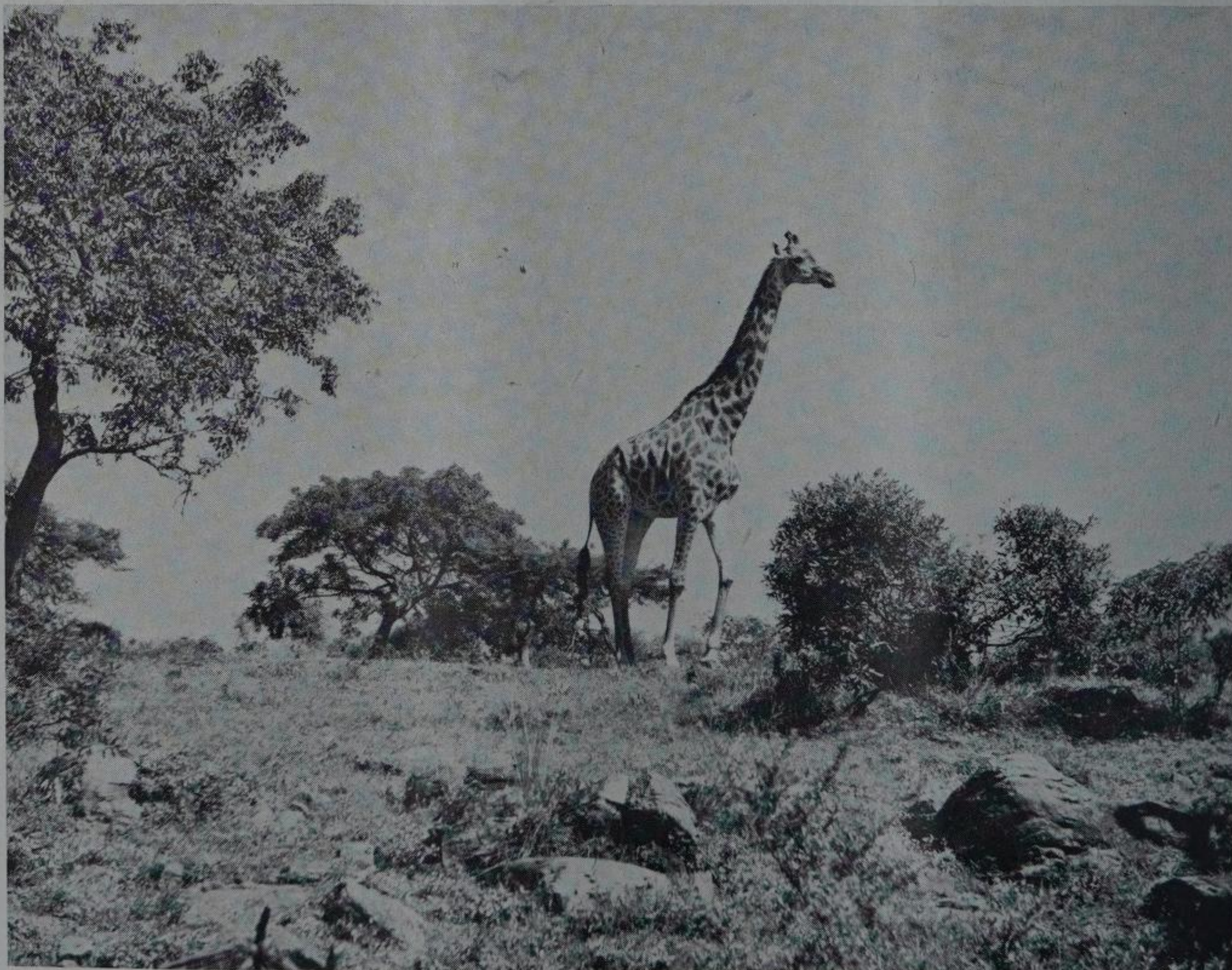
Morning dawned fine and clear, with only a thin mist over the trees in the valleys. There was a tawny eagle sitting on a tall tree by the camp entrance as we drove out. We took a different track from the one we had taken the day before, and entered a rolling bush country of low scrub and scattered trees. There were

many antelope feeding on the hillside, and a kudu bull with huge twisted antlers moved majestically away from the bonnet of the car. There were two waterbucks that faded like white ringed shadows into the bush, and families of wart-hogs in the open spaces among the trees.

As the grey light of late dawn gave way to the first flush of sun, golden clouds floated like giant feathers in a sky shot with rose, and hornbills flew with looping flight across the valley. Then, round a corner of the hillside, we came upon a mother and calf white rhinoceros. It was the most monstrous piece of good fortune, and as the light grew we photographed her with the still and the ciné camera (Fig. 4). The calf kept running forward and then back to his mother; she knew we were there, but could not see us.

We stalked within thirty yards of them and ran off 100 feet of film and a reel of stills. As I was kneeling down to change the film I glanced up at the sky, and there was a huge spider's web like a fishing net hung on a bush, with a great blue and yellow spider sitting like an ogre in the middle of it with her puny little husband straddling the outside ropes (Fig. 5); a terrible sight for a fly to see, silhouetted against the red sky of dawn. I seemed as small as a fly as I watched the great animals, which were surely the remnants of the beasts that walked the earth when man had a stone club, and survived only because he could think a little better than the beasts that hunted him.

We must have watched the white rhinoceros for a quarter of an hour before they eventually moved away into the deep bush. Further on we saw seven of them chasing one another about and squealing like giant pigs. Joseph was quite beside himself with excitement, and on the way back to the camp, when the sun was high in the sky, we found four giraffe on the road. He said that he had seldom seen so many different species of animals in so short a time. The giraffe were most confiding; they showed no fear of the car or of us, and let us walk up to them so that we had to back away to get them in the view finder of the camera (Fig. 6). Eventually, we ran out of film and went back to camp. We were in the bush quite a lot during the trip, but never before had we been so lucky and the Zululand Reserve made up for a great many disappointments. But it was only afterwards that we realised how lucky we really had been.



6.—“THE GIRAFFE WERE MOST CONFIDING AND LET US WALK UP TO THEM”