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BIG GAME SHOOTING AND TRAVEL IN SOUTH-EAST AFRICA

*An Account of Shooting Trips in the
Cheringome and Gorongoza Divisions of Portuguese
South-East Africa and in Zululand*

BY

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WITH CHAPTERS BY OLIVE SCHREINER AND
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A MAP AND NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

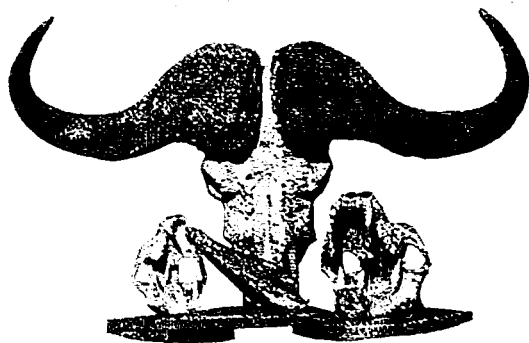


LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1903

kloof (ravine: a wooded valley), and sat down to await his arrival.

Presently Bertie Emmett saw a black rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros bicornis*) descending a steep hill and making for a deep ravine. We watched it until it entered a patch of trees, where it evidently intended to pass the day. It was worth a climb to see buffalo in the valley on one side of our hill and a stately rhino in the ravine on the other side.

When Cameron arrived, we arranged our plan of attack



[Photo by]

[the Author.]

BUFFALO, LEOPARD, BABY CROCODILE, AND LIONESS.

upon the buffaloes, agreeing to leave the rhino in the meantime to enjoy what proved to be his last siesta. Cameron was to conceal himself in the valley below on the chance of the quarry retreating that way, while Bertie and I were to endeavour to stalk the small troop from the opposite direction. Making a long round, we arrived on the crest of a slight rise, and cautiously crept forward towards the spot where we had last seen the buffaloes. Polly, Cameron's gun-bearer, now took the lead, and we closely followed his serpentine movements. Presently he lobbed down behind a mass of wacht-eeen-beetje (wait-a-bit) thorns, and we crept up to his side. He had seen the

CHAPTER XIV

SPORT WITH RHINO IN ZULULAND

Distribution of Black Rhino—White Rhino not quite Extinct—An Exciting Adventure with a Rhino—Character of Rhino—A much-maligned Animal—Many Natives fear it—Its Alleged Antipathy to Fire—Its Paths and “Dumping Grounds”—A Midnight Adventure—An Interesting Spectacle—Rhino Shot—The Deed Regretted—Five Rhinos Seen—An Inquisitive Animal—Rhino Birds—Preservation of Game in Zululand—Warrant for our Arrest—A Mistake.

THE black rhinoceros (*Upejane* of the Zulus; *Rhinoceros bicornis*) is occasionally found in those parts of the Hlabisa, N'dwande, Umvelosi, and Ubombo districts of Zululand which afford it a suitable and sufficiently secluded habitat; even the white rhinoceros¹ (*Umkombe* of the Zulus; *Rhinoceros simus*), which at one time was supposed by many to be absolutely extinct, is represented by a few animals in a small tract of country between the forks of the White and Black Umvelosi rivers.

The white rhino is most strictly protected, and under no circumstances is it permitted to be shot or disturbed. The black rhino being also “royal game,” can be hunted only on obtaining an extra special licence, which, I am pleased to say, is now hardly ever granted.

One bright August morning we had just pitched our tent near a group of trees on an open patch of young

¹ It is constantly being asked why Burchell's rhino (*R. simus*) should have been called the “white rhino.” F. C. Selous suggests it as probable that when the Boer first saw this animal on the yellow, grassy plains of the interior, with the sun shining upon it, they thought it had a whitish tinge, and named it accordingly. An *R. simus* which the Hon. W. H. Drummond once saw in the full glare of the midday sun appeared almost white, while later on in the day, when the long shadows of evening were stealing over it, its colour seemed to be, as it really is, a deep brown.

grass above the junction of the Manzibomvu and Iluhluur streams, and the boys were getting our new camp into order, when Bertie Emmett arrived with the news that he had seen a rhino about a mile from camp. After a hurried luncheon we set out under his guidance.

The spot where he had last seen it was on the eastern slope of some rising ground with small spruits on two sides of it. Cameron and I, accompanied by Polly and Upejane, our respective gun-bearers, entered the low scrubby bush and grass in search of it, while the Emmetts remained on the other side of one of the spruits on the chance of getting a shot should it break cover. After making a couple of turns through the long yellow grass and scrubby undergrowth of young acacias, whose sharp white thorns lacerated our knees and legs at every step, without seeing any signs of the rhino, we were beginning to fear it had made its way to a dense bush farther on, when suddenly the boys shouted out, "*Nantsi upejane!*" ("There's the rhinoceros!"). The next moment there was a rustle, the tops of the long grass swayed to and fro, and a large rhino burst through the scrub about twenty-five paces distant, and, with its head held well up, came straight at us. My boy Upejane (an appropriate name!) threw down the rifle he was carrying, and ran. Cameron and I were standing close to each other, and Polly was a few paces to our right. The brute was coming on at a tremendous pace, but, to my surprise, when scarcely a dozen yards distant, and before we had fired a shot, it suddenly swerved slightly to its left, and would have passed within five or six yards of us; but, when almost opposite, our shots rang out in quick succession, and with a heavy crash it fell in its stride. It made frantic efforts to rise, but all in vain, for its sturdy old back was injured, and its race was run. A moment later a bullet crashed into its brain, and silenced its plaintive squeals. It died on its knees, as these animals frequently do. It was too late to cut up our prize that afternoon, so we returned to camp.

Next morning we stripped off the skin in slabs, cut off the feet with part of the skin attached, and, after

severing the horns from the skull with some considerable trouble, held a *post-mortem* on the carcass. We found Cameron's bullet had passed through the lower part of the heart, while mine and Polly's (who also fired in the excitement of the moment), although fired from different angles, had converged at the spine above the shoulder, where they made an immense hole. I was using my small-bore Mauser, and Polly an ordinary Martini-Henry rifle. The boys did not carry much of the meat to the camp, so the grey vultures of Hluhluur, which sat on the surrounding trees and soared in great circles in the blue skies above, had a noble feast on the huge "earth-shaking beast."

I have specially described the above incident at length, as I think it bears out to some extent what F. C. Selous¹ has said with regard to rhinos charging. I do not think this rhino had any intention of charging us. Polly, whilst admitting that it had swerved away, thought it would have rounded upon us had we not shot it, and Upejane naturally insisted that it had deliberately charged. I think it probably heard us advancing through the grass, and prompted by its well-known inquisitive nature, rushed out to see what we were, and only made us out clearly when within a dozen yards of us, when it swerved in its course in order to pass us by. I am convinced that many occurrences more or less similar to the above have been recorded as "ferocious charges," and that thus the rhino has got the reputation of being a fierce, irascible and vindictive animal. G. P. Sanderson² has well said, "The intentions of wild animals are often misinterpreted by the inexperienced, and a precipitate flight in the direction of the sportsman may be construed into a determined charge." I do not think that the rhino is a sweet-tempered animal by any means, and I admit that some well-authenticated instances of their charging are on record, but I do think that it is painted blacker (metaphorically speaking) than it really is. I think it is inclined to chase

¹ *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (ed. 1881), pp. 195-199.

² *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India* (ed. 1878), p. 215.

anyone who runs away from it and as natives invariably do this, they are often followed.

"To fly the lead before the boar pursues
Were to incense the boar to follow,
And make pursuit where he had made no chase."

T. V. Kirby once had to do a sixty yards' sprint with a rhino cow at his heels, and only avoided her by tumbling over the edge of a gaping sand-crack; but it must be noted carefully that he admits if he had remained stationary, she might not have charged. He says, "Immediately she got the bullet she came straight out and possibly had I stood still might have passed me."¹ He had fired his last cartridge and holding an empty rifle in his hand, did what we all would have done under similar circumstances, cut a caper for the nearest tree. When a rhino is disturbed, it takes a certain course, usually proceeding down wind at first, and, should it encounter anyone, it will most probably rush over or toss that person aside with a pass of its massive head, but will not show signs of a vindictive character. It is only natural I think, that such a huge and powerful animal unaccustomed to be interfered with and fearing none of the mighty denizens of the forest, should unceremoniously thrust aside the obstructor of his pathway. It is curious that Peter Kolbe, writing as far back as between 1705 and 1713, should amid many strange and incorrect statements, have come comparatively near the truth with regard to the disposition of this animal. He says the rhinoceros has a very keen sense of smell, and always comes running up to the intruder, but can easily be avoided by jumping to one side when it does not renew the attack, and that it charges only when wounded.

Since the earliest times the rhinoceros has been a much-maligned animal, both with regard to its appearance and character. Many natives of Zululand have a wholesome dread of the rhino, maintaining that it often makes unprovoked attacks upon them. Yet I met only one who could show me scars which he alleged had been inflicted by the

¹ *Sport in East Central Africa* (ed. 1899), p. 13.

² *Beschreibung v. d. Kaar d. G. d. H. p.* (ed. 1727).

horn of one of those animals, whereas scars received from buffaloes are frequently seen. Cecil Emmett's gun-bearer, Gobotoo, told me how a rhino had one day chased two of his children. They had been down at the stream at the foot of the hill to get water, and were returning to their kraal, when a black rhino gave chase, and continued to pursue them all the way home. My informant said that he was eventually compelled to shoot it, as it refused to leave the vicinity of the kraal and was a source of danger. The magistrate made poor Gobotoo pay a heavy fine, and confiscated his trusted *isi-bamu* (gun) for this breach of the game law, despite his plea of justification. Now, from his whole account, and the answers he gave to my questions, I am convinced that the rhino did not follow the children with the slightest malicious intention, but merely from curiosity.

Some natives in Zululand say the rhino has a great antipathy to fire, and will often endeavour to extinguish a veld fire which has just started. If there be any truth in the statement, I presume the reason is that a bush-fire often compels a rhino to flee from its usual haunts and beaten tracks: hence the inclination to extinguish it. I may here mention a circumstance which perhaps supports the contention of the natives to some extent.

The rhino has its regular paths along which it goes when passing to and fro between its retreat in the dense bush and its feeding-grounds and water-holes. Its large flat feet make these paths very smooth and broad, and in dry weather a cyclist could enjoy a spin on one of them were it not for the long grass which rises on either side and overhangs it during the greater part of the year in flat, open country. At intervals along these paths dung-heaps may be seen, frequently on a slightly raised spot or at the foot of a tree. These spots are usually half a dozen yards on one or other side of the main track, and branch paths run out to them and rejoin the track farther on. At these "dumping grounds" the rhino regularly leaves its droppings.

We had pitched our tent near one of these spots, about six yards from one of their paths, and our boys had built

themselves a half-moon shaped zariba or scherm (enclosure) of branches under a small tree a dozen paces farther up on the side of the path. One night we were awakened abruptly by a loud, piercing shriek of terror, followed by cries of "*Moi mano!*" (an exclamation of surprise and fear: "O mother, my mother!") from our boys. Hastily seizing our rifles, we were about to rush out to ascertain what the noise was about, when something dashed against the half-open tent-door. The next moment Gobotoo's woolly head was thrust in with cries of "*Upejane, upejane!*" ("Rhinoceros, rhinoceros!"), which at once enlightened us as to the cause of the midnight panic. Learning that it was only an old rhino, we did not trouble to go out, especially as we had already secured the number we had permission to shoot, but gave the boy an old blunderbuss or roer (gun), which we usually set as a trap-gun for hyenas, instructing him not to fire at the rhino, but only to scare it away with the report. As soon as the gun was fired off the rhino beat a hasty retreat, crashing through the brushwood in grand style amid the cries and shrieks of the boys. One old Zulu gave me a very vivid account of the night's escapade. He was sleeping, he said, near the open doorway of the scherm, where a smouldering fire was occasionally fanned by a breath of wind into a bright flame, and the other boys were curled up in their blankets farther back. He was awakened by a slight noise amongst the trees close by, and for a few moments lay listening intently. Presently a twig cracked, and he heard the long grass on either side of the rhino's path rustle, and knew that a large animal was approaching. Drawing a handful of faggots from a pile of wood near him, he threw them upon the flickering fire, which soon burst into flame. The glare and blaze prevented his eyes from piercing the intense darkness beyond, but suddenly there was a rushing, shuffling noise, and the next moment the huge dark form of a rhino stood in front of the fire, with its wicked little eyes twinkling in the fire-light, and the point of its long shining horn looking uncomfortably sharp. Upon seeing this apparition, he gave the blood-curdling yell which had made us grasp our rifles in our little tent hard by. That same yell

brought the inmates of that scherm to their feet, and the next instant they made a wild rush for the only tree which was within the enclosure. The rhino seemed to stand spell-bound on beholding this strange spectacle, and it was only the loud report of Gobotoc's gun that effectually roused it and sent it dashing away like a locomotive down its track, marvelling, I should say, at its strange midnight experience.

I am inclined to think that the rhino merely visited the zariba from inquisitiveness. I do not go so far as to say with the natives that it had intended to extinguish the fire. It is, however, perhaps noteworthy that F. C. Selous mentions an instance of a white rhino coming to within twenty yards of his camp fire and only running away when a firebrand had been hurled at it.¹ The Hon. W. H. Drummond records an instance of a black rhino stamping upon his camp fire with its feet, whilst he was encamped on the banks of the Black Umvelosi River in Zululand. The rhino had not been disturbed, and evidently made an unprovoked attack. "Hardly ten seconds had elapsed," he writes, "since I had heard the first warning puff, and now our fire was scattered in every direction, and the vicious animal was stamping upon it and everything else it saw, and squealing with rage the whole time."²

One day towards the end of July I had a splendid opportunity of observing the "singularly nervous excitability," as a well-known sportsman has aptly put it, of a black rhino. We had climbed a rather high hill in order to obtain a good view of a small troop of buffaloes which one of our boys had espied in a valley below, when Bertie Emmett, who was looking down into the opposite ravine, gave a low whistle. As I crept up to his side he pointed to a large rhino walking slowly down the steep slope of a neighbouring hill. We watched it into a patch of bush. It was rather late in returning from its drinking-pool and feeding-grounds to its shady retreat in the ravine, for the sun was already an hour up.

¹ *The Great and Small Game of Africa*, edited by H. A. Bryden (ed. 1899), pp. 52-67 (article on "White Rhinoceros").

² *The Large Game and Natural History of South and South-East Africa* (ed. 1875), pp. 75, 76.

As Bertie Emmett and I had already had excellent sport that day, we remained on the crest of the hill, while his brother, accompanied by Polly, descended and made for the bush which the rhino had entered. From our lofty position we watched, and eagerly awaited, developments. The hill was precipitous; at its foot there was a wooded spruit, beyond which, scattered trees and undergrowth, intermingled with long grass, covered the bed of the ravine, until the mountain rose on the other side; farther down the ravine the bush was thicker, until, far below, it presented one dense mass of tree-tops. Presently Cecil Emmett and the boy disappeared in the long grass and low scrub between the straggling trees, their course being indicated to us occasionally by a protruding hat or glittering gun-barrel. Then we caught a glimpse of the rhino. It advanced into a patch of yellow grass with outstretched nose, and swung round, testing the wind in all directions, moving its head up and down. It was clearly unable to locate its enemy. At one time I almost feared for Cecil's safety, as the rhino faced a scrubby patch where some aloes grew, near which I had last seen him. For hardly a second did it stand stationary; now its body would sway about as if it were shifting its feet, then, advancing suddenly a few paces, it would wheel round about again, while the twitchings of its tail and ears accentuated its whole bearing of restless eagerness. I was so interested that I slid down the steep side of the hill, hoping to get a better view from closer quarters, but before I reached the spruit a shot rang out, then a moment later a second, followed by a rush and a heavy crash. I scrambled across the dry watercourse, and found Cecil Emmett standing beside his struggling prize. A few seconds later the light died out of the curious, wicked little eyes, and the great beast was dead.

I can safely say that we all experienced a pang of regret as we beheld this patriarchal bull, which, but a moment before, had been so noble a sight, now an inanimate mass of hide, flesh, and bone. These regrets usually come too late to save the animal's life, yet I would not be without them. It may be that the scarcity of game in Africa's southern latitudes causes the regret, and that no such

feeling would be present were rhinos and other big game "in dense masses" within view of the sportsman's waggon, as in the days when Cornwallis Harris and Gordon Cumming and even Ballwin and Drummond, drew trigger.



Plot 2A

Mr. Allen C. ...

MR. EMMETT AND GOBOTO WITH RHINOCEROS SKULL.

But I think not. When the hunter's blood is up, he is merely a killing animal; all his energies, mental and physical, are concentrated on one idea, to slay, to the exclusion of all else; but, when the deed is done, there comes to the hunter, unless he be of a very brutal and

undeveloped type, a feeling of regret and pity. The higher faculties of his intellect assert themselves; and then comes the regret that he has "cast into the void what was so wonderfully made."

As the long shadows were rapidly stealing across the ravine, we dragged our weary limbs to our little camp on the Manzibomvu River, and left the work of skinning for the morrow. Near camp we saw another rhino in the twilight. Near the junction of the Manzibomvu and Hlubluur streams, and especially near the dense bush on the slopes of a certain hill below the junction, we encountered rhinos somewhat frequently. One day our party (four of us) saw five; but that was exceptional, and each of us had been out in a different direction, thus covering a large tract of country eminently suited to rhinos. Polly, who had lived in the country all his life, and had seen much hunting, declared that the one which Cameron saw was of the white species, but I cannot vouch for the correctness of the statement. The one which Cecil Emmett encountered was a very bold and inquisitive old fellow; it would not budge an inch as he stood looking at it at close quarters, and it was only when a clod of mud struck it that it turned tail and dashed off among the scattered trees. If he had had a camera with him he could easily have secured a couple of valuable pictures. None of the rhinos seen that day were accompanied by rhino birds.

In these days, when many of South Africa's beautiful antelopes and large mammals are all but creatures of the past, it is most refreshing to see as many as five rhinos in a single day so far south as the 28th degree; doubly so when one hopes that in the future such animals as the white and black rhino, hippo, buffalo, koodoo, Burchell's zebra, waterbuck, blue wildebeest, reedbuck, inyala, bushbuck, and smaller antelopes, will be protected as much as possible in that territory, and given every opportunity to increase.

An incident which took place whilst we were cutting up the rhino shot the previous afternoon gives some idea of the praiseworthy exertions of the authorities to preserve game in Zululand. Four native policemen appeared on

the scene and presented us with a warrant, issued by the Magistrate of the Hlabisa district, for our arrest on a charge of having shot a white rhino. The diligent police smiled pleasantly as they glanced casually at the rhino before them, and, not observing that it was one of the prehensile lip or black species, thought they had caught us *in flagrante delicto*. However, we soon drew their attention to the fact that the animal before them was an *upezane* and not an *unkombe*, and, on arriving at the camp, showed them the horns and hide of the other rhino, and satisfied them that a mistake had been made. It appears that a native had given information to the magistrate, living many miles away on the mountains, that the first rhino we had shot was a white one, whereupon a warrant had been issued. Strangely enough, the police arrived just as we were cutting up the second.