

Rhinoceros are relatively rare in Uganda these days and very few people are ever allowed to hunt them. P. A. G. FIELD, who was District Commissioner of Karamoja at the time, obtained special permission to deal with a truculent brute in his area and describes here how he tracked and shot . . .

The Rogue Rhino of Loyoro

KARAMOJA is one of the few districts in Uganda where the black rhinoceros is still common in certain localities. Even so, his present range represents but a fraction of the area he formerly covered as common place-names in the southern counties and Suk, where rhino no longer occur, bear witness. Many a locality has been christened "Nakouamosing" (rhino's head) or "Kaikamosing" (place of the rhino), together with other variations of the same theme and this still perpetuates the memory of notable hunts or encounters of long ago. To-day, however, the rhinoceros in Karamoja is mainly confined to the Narus and Kidepo river systems in the north of Dodoth County and to the country just to the north of Kaabong, although there are one or two pockets of the animal elsewhere and in particular in the vicinity of Loyoro in Southern Dodoth.

The country around Loyoro consists of a number of low rocky hills piled into varied and rather grotesque shapes. The soil is badly eroded and as a result has been invaded by dense thickets of acacia thorn interspersed with *sansevieria* and other succulents. The human population is concentrated so that villages and shambas lie near to comparatively-isolated valleys where the thick and thorny vegetation makes grazing difficult for the ubiquitous flocks and herds of the Dodoth.

I had for some time heard tales of a rogue rhinoceros molesting the villagers in this area and the chiefs would speak in particular of the

misdeeds of a certain bull rhino who was said to be particularly savage. The story went that he had killed and injured several people and was given to descending in the early morning upon pedestrians on the road between Loyoro and Koputh, thus making it unsafe to walk on this highway except in broad daylight. Women gathering firewood or



A Dodoth tribesman examines the horns of the rhino which was said to have killed and injured several people
(photo by P. A. G. Field)

unsuspecting herdsmen were particularly liable to incur his rage, and short-cuts through the bush in the area where he lived were not to be lightly undertaken. This point was endorsed in vivid language by a Game Ranger who had a near escape while taking an evening stroll for guinea-fowl and felt it desirable to make a detour over an inhospitable hilltop in order to regain his car.

Having obtained permission from the Game Warden to deal with this truculent animal, I arrived one Saturday at Loyoro, and enquired as to the results of the exhortations sent in advance to the local trackers to mark down the bull and note his present haunts. The Karamojong are not good hunters and such instructions usually bear little fruit: but this occasion turned out to be the exception, and on arrival I was assured that the enemy had been located in thick bush only a few miles from the camp. No difficulty was expected in coming up with him next day.

In the morning, my guides made me stop the car near Losolot hill just to the north of the Loyoro—Koputh road and we entered thorn bush that closed behind our backs and cut out the road as though it had never existed. From the start the going was tense on account of the extremely limited visibility which at times fell to a few feet and I felt distinctly unhappy. Under such conditions, very little warning could be expected of the presence of a rhinoceros who would have the advantages of surprise at close quarters. The wind consisted of slight and fickle air currents and in any case it was not possible to move according to its vagaries owing to the density of the bush.

Very slowly we worked forward stopping to listen at intervals. The rhino, who might be accompanied by several of his companions, could not—I was assured in whispers—be very far distant and at any moment a snort or the crack of breaking vegetation might indicate his whereabouts. One or two places through which we wound our way were indeed so thick that I thought discretion and the retention of some shred of initiative the better part of valour and insisted on the party backing out. While in the process of executing just such a manoeuvre a muffled snort from behind made the party freeze. A second later we all moved rapidly back in the direction of the sound in order to regain a slightly more open patch where there was at least a limited field of fire. At that moment a dimly visible grey mass started to drift towards us from the other side of the clearing. I ran to my right in order to get out of the creature's path and halted a little way back.

From where we then stood, the rest of the party bunched behind me, we saw the form of an enormous bull rhinoceros, as yet unsuspecting, move slowly forward towards the spot from which we had just come. At first the head was invisible but a few seconds later there emerged quite the best pair of rhino horns that I had yet seen in Uganda. The excited trackers whispered that this was the bull we were after and urged me to shoot at once. Nothing loth, for the creature could scarcely fail to wind us in a few seconds and the situation was rapidly becoming embarrassing, I brought up my rifle and fired at the neck. He just subsided where he stood and came to rest on his belly with his forefeet extended in front and his rear legs folded up alongside him. I went in and gave him a second shot just to make sure but thereupon thought it expedient to beat a rapid retreat as the angry snort of another rhinoceros—probably one of the bull's wives—sounded just beyond the edge

of the clearing some 60 yards away. The job was, however, completed and there could be no reason to linger and create trouble that might end in a second with, by the standards of the species, comparatively inoffensive rhinoceros having to be shot.

Soon afterwards we returned to the carcass accompanied by a noisy herd of meat-hungry Dodoth tribesmen. The animal was large, even for a rhino, and had fallen in a position where the proportions of his frame and his unusually impressive horns would have made a splendid photograph. But that was not to be. By a maddening coincidence the last film in the camera had been exposed and the new roll, packed with such care the day before, could not be found and must have fallen out of the car on the drive from Moroto.



The author of the article measures the length of the horns. Taken over the outside curve, the front horn measured $31\frac{1}{2}$ inches and the rear horn 19 inches. They make a fine pair and recall an occasion that, thanks to good luck, fulfilled the dual function of ridding the Loyoro bush of a tyrant and providing a short but memorable August Bank Holiday hunt for the author (photo by B. G. Kintoch)