

## *Rhino Traps and Rhino Horns.*

By P. Z. MACKENZIE.

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Recently, when I was walking through some forest in the Aliab country in the Bahr-el-Ghazal province, I saw a curious man-made wooden frame under a tree many miles from the nearest habitation. It consisted of an upright beam in the ground, about 12 feet from the bole of a growing tamarind tree, and a cross beam joining the top of the upright to the tree about 12 feet from the ground. There was some timber lying around, with which the white ants were dealing, but which obviously had been part of the original erection.

I asked my Dinka companion what it was and he volunteered the following information.

“It’s a White Rhino trap that the Dinkas make in the rains. A man sits above the cross-piece on a small platform and spears the rhino as it walks underneath. A very big heavy elephant-spear is used and it is driven down into the backbone of the passing rhino; it is not aimed at the head or neck but behind the shoulders. This type of hunting is done on moonlit nights during the rains. The rhinos are animals of habit who walk along the same tracks every day or night. A track which passes under a suitable shady tree is chosen and a frame is built over the pathway; branches and timber are so placed as to form a camouflaged funnel guiding the innocent rhino beneath the waiting spearman.”

To my question that surely a rhino would see or smell a newly-built trap of this nature, the reply was:

“No, the rhino seems to walk along half asleep and never notices.”

“What happens when a Dinka kills a rhino?” I asked him.

“Oh, we eat the meat—its very good! But of course the important thing is the horn—its very valuable. It’s worth a bull (say £E. 8) and a young man wanting to get married may perhaps only need one more bull to complete the bride price. The horns are made into clubs; they make very good clubs because they don’t break like the usual type of ebony club does in a fierce fight! Small pieces of horn are sometimes made into finger rings and ornaments to hang on bead necklaces.”

I asked if the horn was ever used in medicine.

"No," he said. "But shavings of the horn are sometimes put into stale native beer, if a visitor arrives unexpectedly, as it makes the beer bubble and 'boil' and then it looks freshly brewed and suitable for a guest."!

When we returned to a cattle camp that evening, I made enquiries as to whether anybody had a rhino-horn club which I could see. With great diffidence, a young warrior produced what was obviously a most precious possession. Out of a soft leather case he drew a most beautiful pale grey horn club; it was highly polished and I could see the grain of the conglomerate of hairs running down its length. (Rhino horn is entirely epidermal in origin and differs from a cow's horn in that it has no bony core). The club was about 30 inches in length and was shaped like a policeman's truncheon; the handle end was notched for the last two inches and around it was plaited raw-hide attached to a leather wrist-band.

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## *The Veteran's Prayer.*

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Give me the strength to hold a gun,  
 And shoot these acres till my son  
 Has taught his children, one by one,  
 The sport I've loved since first I walked,  
 And understood since first I talked;  
 But if in them he fails to see  
 Signs of the instinct born in me,  
 Give him the power to leave these lands,  
 Without remorse, in alien hands,  
 Possessed by sportsmen of a line  
 More virile and robust than mine!

Give me the strength to hold a gun  
 Till my last day on earth is done;  
 The wind, the judgment and the sight  
 To fire a last perfect left-and-right,  
 Up to the hour before I die,  
 And hear my children's children cry;  
 "What artistry! What artistry!"  
 "Oh to possess the Old Man's eye!"

J. Osborne Hartley.