

BIG GAME SHOOTING ON THE EQUATOR

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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EAST AFRICA 77 ILLUSTRATIONS
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RHINOCEROS

RHINOCEROS BICORNIS

SWAHILI: KIFARU. MASAI: E-MUNY

THE common two-horned rhinoceros "looks very fierce, but is an awful ass!"

That is what a small boy might say as a start for an essay at school, but it sums the animal up "in one," as they say.

He is like a large pig, black and hairless, has small pig eyes, and his upper lip has a prehensile tip to it. The curve of the lower jaw makes him look as if he were perpetually smiling. His horns are of a peculiar nature; the tips and two-thirds of the length look like horn till they are cut through sectionally, when they seem to be a mass of thickly coagulated hairs. And the fact that they are really composed of hair is borne out by their lower third part, from which the coarse ends of hair stick out till the base seems to be covered with cocoa-nut matting. Also when a beast is killed it will be found that his horns just move when pulled hard. They have to be cut off with a hatchet, bone and all, but after a day

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or two the bone rots off, and in another week the skin goes too, leaving the base of the horn cup-shaped. The rhino has three toes, which make his track easily distinguishable from the hippo's four-toed footmark. When he gallops he can travel much faster than he looks to be going.

He wanders about in an apparently aimless way, but usually deposits his dung in the same places for several days at a time, returning regularly about half an hour afterwards to spread it abroad with his horn and nose. I have seen him do this on one occasion, and it accounts for the long deep scrapes one sees in the ground. He can see very little twenty yards away from him, but his nose is very good. I have seen one begin to gallop three-quarters of a mile away on getting the wind of a caravan.

He is most alarming to look at, but—and it is a very big “but”—how often does he really charge in anger? I am sure—and most people in Africa will agree with me—that he gets so fussed at the first sound or smell of a human being that he starts galloping quite aimlessly before he can make up his mind where to go. Now if I suggest that it is not charging, I have got to prove it. First, What worries him? The smell of a caravan or human being. Why does he always go straight for a caravan or human being? Because, like most animals in the jungle, he *runs away* up-wind. (N.B. It is most un-



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A RHINO LOOKING NASTY JUST BEFORE CHARGING

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fortunate for the caravan that it should be up-wind! If it wasn't, how could the rhino scent it?) Q.E.D.

On these occasions porters hurl their loads (they have no brains, or these would go too) into oblivion, and shin up trees. Every one who is armed loads in a desperate hurry. Master shouts for his big rifle, and everybody is on the *qui vive* to see what is going to happen next.

It is true a beastly rhino, on a similar occasion to the one depicted, came across my own roll of bedding, and actually charged it from a distance of exactly two yards, and what is more, he knocked spots off it. He tossed it, and finished by sitting and rolling on it, thinking, no doubt, that there was one man less in the world. I laughed immoderately.

On another occasion I had just lined out some hundred Masai armed with spears and shields to rush a hostile village, when a rhino turned up, going like smoke. It was most interesting to see how little they made of it. Eight or ten skipped out of the way. He passed through the line, and I saw him still going strong in a cloud of dust two solid miles away on the sky-line. This took place on the River Tana under Mount Kenia.

The funniest thing I ever saw connected with one of these antediluvian beasts was when five porters had with great difficulty climbed, and

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were sitting in, a very flimsy thorn tree, and were hanging on by their eyelids. The rhino, unfortunately for them, couldn't see the tree, and by a great mistake hit it with a leg in passing, and must have been more than horrified to find five fine fat porters come hurtling past his ears, having been shot out like so much rotten fruit. No one was damaged, and I am sure the rhino must have been more frightened than any one.

It is quite true that on certain occasions they are really nasty, and do charge in a most vindictive way. A great friend of mine had the misfortune to lose his arm thereby. Doctor Kolb lost his life in a similar manner, and I know of a case in which a poor old native woman was charged without provocation and was killed. I myself was charged once. I met a rhino running away from the caravan, and thought he was doing a charge. I fired at fifty yards, and stupidly hit him too far back. That was all he wanted. He was hurt, and charged the flash, having discovered where I was. I found I had only one cartridge left with me, so had to let him get to fourteen yards to make a "cert" of him through the neck.

A cow rhino with a young one is, of course, quite different. She is a real brute.

Again on Laikipia plateau, I was being taken by some Wandorobo (excellent local hunters) to a place for eland. I appeared carefully and



A GOOD HEAD



AN ABNORMAL HEAD. THE BACK HORN IS LONGER THAN THE FRONT ONE

Rhinoceros

quietly from some thick bush, and was horrified to find myself surrounded on three sides by four rhino, the nearest twenty yards, and the farthest fifty yards away. All had got my wind, and had their heads up. I did not like taking on the chances of four rights and lefts, added to which I did not want a rhino at all, as the eland ought to have been round the next corner (and were). I hoisted the white flag, and thanked my stars when I had got clear.

Their hide is a good inch thick, and polishes with oil and sand-paper till it is quite transparent. Table-tops made of the skin look very well, and whips and sticks are also admired. The whip is the toy with which punishment is administered to the naughty porter, and is misnamed "kiboko," that being the native name for the hippopotamus. A short horn is worth keeping, as it makes a first-rate inkpot or paper-knife. The bull has a thicker horn and usually a shorter one than a cow's, which sometimes grows to a yard in length.

On the Tana River they drank at 5.30 a.m., fed till 10 a.m., and appeared again after their siesta at about 4 p.m. On Laikipia they seemed to sleep less in the middle of the day. On the Guaso Nyiro, on the German border, I only saw a small one, although I know for certain that there were some huge ones there. In that district they always fed in the night, and had gone to lie up in the thick stuff by 5 a.m. My friends

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saw them, and I their traces, but I could never set eyes on the beasts themselves. Their times of feeding differ according to the heat or cold of the various districts they are found in.

The first time I ever shot one in East Africa I thought I had got quite close enough, sixty yards, but that did not please my Masai orderly, who seized me by the arm and made me go to twenty-five yards before he was satisfied. I did not like it one little bit, but I found myself under his orders and so had to do it. Nothing happened, of course, except the death of the rhino, and my terror of them disappeared from that date, although they are awkward-looking at times.

They are found almost all over East Africa, though they are not so numerous near the dwellings of men as they used to be. From Kiu to Kilimanjaro, on the Tana River, and up north on the Guaso Nyiro are their favourite localities apparently, and they are found round Lake Natron, on the Laikipia plateau, up to Lake Baringo, Kitui, and all down the German boundary.

A good average front horn is twenty-eight inches.