

CENTRAL AFRICAN GAME AND ITS SPOOR.

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AND
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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

BIG GAME SHOOTING.

THE term "sport" is purely relative, depending solely on the place or country one happens to be in and the extent of one's opportunities. The sportsman who has been fortunate enough to come across and kill elephant should be the last to decry the enthusiasm of his brother sportsman who has shown every bit as much ability in obtaining trophies of humbler game.

As much sport is doubtless obtained by the keen angler who catches a 10lb. trout, as by the hunter who kills a good bull elephant.

In both cases the sport does not lie in the mere slaying, but in the patience and skill necessary to pick out and bring to bag a good specimen of its kind. The angler who secures a 2lb. fish in some small stream has as much reason to be satisfied with his success as he who secures a ten-pounder in more favoured waters.

Nevertheless, while being in sympathy with all forms of sport, we cannot but think that big game ranks first.

In later years we have experienced the same feelings in securing a good kudu or pair of tusks as we did in knocking over our first blackbird with a catapult, or bagging our neighbour's cherished cat with our new rook rifle.

We have sometimes heard the remark that there is more sport in the use of the shot-gun than the rifle, but, as the qualities required to be successful with the former often begin and end with being a good shot, we fail to see how it will bear comparison to sport with the rifle.

While admitting that a right and left at strong driven grouse or rocketing

pheasants is not to be despised, it is often the case that the woodcraft which brings the birds to bag is the work of the keeper, and the gun if asked to do it would generally fail. Of course, even in big game shooting, there are many who think that their only duty is to pull the trigger, and that the rest of the work should be done by the native trackers, but this does not affect the argument, as such an one could hardly pose as a true hunter.

Our definition of a true hunter would be the man who is not only a good shot but who knows the spoor, habits, and haunts of his game, and who has also the patience and endurance to follow and outwit them.

Again, can there be any comparison between the trophies to be obtained with these two weapons? Of course, in the first instance, it is necessary for a man to depend almost solely on his native trackers, but even then he can take an intelligent interest in the work of tracking and stalking, and, if he has any quickness of perception, the vast fields of observation open to him will soon be apparent.

It should be his ambition to dispense with their services more and more, as without the necessary practice he can never become self-reliant.

We do not mean to suggest that he will soon render himself more efficient than the native who has spent his whole life in the bush, for, however good he becomes, it will be very long before he can afford to disregard their advice. The true sportsman will value a head the more in proportion to the amount of individual work he has performed in getting it, and the woodcraft he has shown in shooting a *good head*, for he will never kill wantonly, but only for trophies.

How incomparably greater is the value of a head, perhaps good only for the country it is shot in, than the most magnificent trophy obtained by purchase! Contrast the associations connected with the one shot and that knocked down in an auction room.

The lessons of woodcraft and tracking are often learnt young, for many of us can remember our quiet walks with the keeper on his trapping rounds, and how many hints we picked up from the old man.

Love of a country life is ingrained in many of us, and in later years this develops into a keen longing to visit foreign countries, and to experience the exhilaration of nobler sports than we can find at home.

We think the building up of the British Empire largely due to this love of travel and adventure, for in most cases the traveller has been drawn to a country because it is the home of wild game.

How many of us would ever have wished to visit Africa if it did not hold the best game shooting in the world? Few, we imagine!

Hunters have been the pioneers in many parts of this continent; if the game had

been absent, would men like Harris, Gordon-Cumming, Oswell, and Baldwin have cared to push into the interior?

The men who used to kill elephants as a business have often been termed butchers, but we must remember if they had not killed them someone else would; and besides, without the money raised on the ivory, they would have been unable in many cases to have carried on their expeditions.

Take Selous, for example. He hunted elephants in Mashonaland when there were very few white men in that country, but nowadays no one can deny that he was a temperate hunter.

It would certainly be strange that if a man found himself in a new country, without game laws, he should abstain from killing elephants for profit when they were the only means of paying the expenses of his expedition.

The game suffers more at the hands of the native than of the white man, for he is always at it, and the animals get no rest in or out of season, and the native would just as soon shoot a female or young animal as a full-grown male.

Many of the elephant and hippo one shoots have been the recipients of native iron bullets, for one seldom kills the former without being able to find a few of their missiles in various parts of the beast's anatomy.

Of course, in British territory the native is not allowed to kill game, but he does it all the same. In Portuguese territory the natives kill most of the game, for the Portuguese official is seldom a man who cares a scrap about shooting; in fact, he seldom moves a mile from his station except in a machilla (hammock on poles).

They serve out guns and powder to their natives, and buy the tusks and horns for a few yards of calico.

The natives, not possessing strong cordite rifles, but only antiquated Brown Bess muzzle-loaders, wound considerably more than they kill, and their only idea is to get meat, the trophy being of no value to them. We have heard of the Britisher, too, who has given the native a gun to shoot meat or get heads for him. Such a man could never claim to be a sportsman.

Poison is also sometimes used to kill carnivorous animals, but we think this a shameful practice, for if the animal cannot be shot by fair means, it should be left alone. The man who poisons a lion or a leopard we put on a par with the man that would throw poison into a trout stream at home.

The laying of set guns and traps can hardly be termed sport, but is, perhaps, legitimate for obtaining some of the smaller animals (mostly nocturnal), which it would be almost impossible to obtain in the ordinary way, and which, in the interests of science, one might wish to secure; also in the case of a lion or leopard causing destruction

amongst livestock when there is no moon to sit up by, it might be necessary to set a gun for the animal, but we have never done so, and we do not think it a thing that sportsmen would care much about.

Big game shooting is like a perpetual fever—once it has been enjoyed, one always goes back to it with the same zest as before ; it is not only the hunting and killing, but the free, untrammelled, open-air life that seems to enthral one.

I suppose we inherit it from our ancestors, who lived in caves and under the stars.

To be rid of stiff collars and starched shirts and all the tiresome formalities of life in a civilised country is a pleasure in itself.

The holiday-maker feels it in a small way at home, when he leaves town for the river or country, and, in a greater degree, the man who leaves his office for the grouse moor or the deer forest, and life would indeed be irksome without these contrasts and changes.

The first thing a boy does when he gets home for his holidays is to rush off to his own den to see if his fishing-rod, gun, butterflies, or stuffed birds are all right ; then off he goes to the kennel to see his spaniel and ferrets. His first question will be whether there are lots of rabbits and trout about, and whether any rats have come back to the hayloft since he left home. That boy in his spare time will pore over books of sport and travel, and it will be his dearest wish to visit the countries he has read so much about, when he is a man. At nights his dreams will be about shooting elephants and lions, or getting to a country where no white man has been.

He will not give a thought to towns in foreign countries, but only of the mountains, forests, and plains where the big game exists. When he goes into the library he will make for the *Field* and *Country Life*, and, whenever the opportunity comes, he will be off to obtain trophies of his own shooting.

The young as well as the old sportsman ought to adhere to the rules of sport, and to treat his brother sportsmen with consideration and fairness.

He will be taught this in the partridge fields at home ; but there are certain rules in connection with big game shooting that he ought to know.

To draw first blood will generally give a man first claim on an animal, which in some cases seems rather hard, for the first shot might be a simple graze, which would cause the beast little harm, but with dangerous game might make it more dangerous to tackle than before. The man who then kills it would certainly deserve to keep the trophy. In a case like this the former would be acting in a magnanimous manner if he gave up all claim to it. Let us mention another case. A hunter might wound an animal and be unable to find it. Another man might come on it a few days after

and kill it ; in this case we think the beast would certainly belong to him unless it had been so badly wounded in the first instance as to be unable to move away.

When two men sit up over a kill for lion or leopard there should be some arrangement as to the division of the trophies, such as one man to take the skull and the other the skin, that is to say, if both fire together.

Perhaps a better way is for them to toss up for first shot. If two men were sitting up and had made no such arrangement and happened to be using similar rifles, the same bore and grooving, there might be unpleasantness if both fired together.

Two sportsmen should never hunt together, though they might camp together, otherwise, sooner or later, there is bound to be some misunderstanding, probably over some trivial matter. A much better plan is for them to make their camps, say, quite twenty miles apart, and meet occasionally to talk over their sport.

A man should never encroach on a country that another man is in. We should think twenty-five miles would not be too great a margin to allow him, and even that is rather close. In Kashmir, if a sportsman has occupied a nullah, a person coming after would pass on, and the same rule should apply to Africa, though it is not always done. There is plenty of room and game in Africa, so there is not much trouble or inconvenience in searching out a good game locality for oneself. Camp should be changed at least every week, for in that time one can hunt all the likely ground within a day's walk.

" Knowledge of country " is essential to bushcraft, and will be gone into later. Before passing on to spoor and tracking, we would impress on the reader that he must not expect to find, except under most favourable circumstances, spoor quite as we have drawn.

Those shown are, as near as can be obtained, perfect representations of an animal, usually walking.

But generally only a small part of the spoor is visible.

An animal moving quickly makes a very different spoor, for the mud is thrown back and to the sides, and the fore part or toe of the hoof is the only part that shows, especially when the ground is at all hard.

The hoofs of most buck are much spread out when running, and the longer and more split the hoofs are, the more is this apparent (*e.g.*, Situtunga and Lechwe). The spread of the two halves of the hoof, and their distance apart, gives the same animal's spoor a very different aspect and is no guide as to the animal, except, perhaps, in an animal like sable, which habitually spreads more than others.

The droppings also vary considerably. Those of water buck during the rains

are soft from feeding on green, wet grass, but in the dry season often become firm and well defined in shape, as in our sketch.

Also the colour is no guide, as this varies considerably, except in the case of the hyæna, which is generally white.

The shape and method of deposit is what one must judge by, and the size in some animals gives an indication as to whether it is from a male or female, as with the elephant.

Of course, spoor often helps in deciding the droppings adjacent, and *vice versa*.

The spoor of young animals of the larger antelope might sometimes be mistaken for adults of a smaller species, but again the spoor of young will seldom or ever be found alone, and the footprints of the parents will furnish a clue to their identity. We have done our utmost to avoid laying down the habits of animals in too dogmatic a way, as we are convinced that those of individuals of the same species differ greatly.

Under given conditions, animals of the same species may usually do the same thing, but there are always sure to be many exceptions, and, moreover, one would never meet two animals under exactly the same conditions.

Then, again, habits differ tremendously according to locality, owing to the influence of climate, water, grazing, and on account of the natives who inhabit those localities.

Remarks about the actions of animals that live in a country which has for generations been inhabited by hunting tribes, do not necessarily hold good about the same animals when living near pastoral tribes.

So before proceeding any further, we would ask our readers to allow more individuality to animals than they are usually given credit for.

RHINO (*Rhinoceros bicornis*).

CHARACTERISTICS.

Pointed prehensile lip in distinction to the square lip of Burchell's rhinoceros (a grass feeder).

Have not the massive folds of skin which the Asiatic types have.

NATIVE NAMES.

Chinyanja	Chipembere.	Swahili	Kifaru.
Chiyao	Mbera.	Chisenga	Pembere.
Chikunda	Ntema.	Chibisa	Ntema.
Chitonga	Chipembere.	Chilala	Kiweri.
Zulu (Ngoni)	Mkhombo.		

FOOD.

Chiefly thorny trees such as Ntete (a kind of acacia), Mkuhoo and others. Very fond of the stiff thorn generally known as "Wait a bit." Leaves and twigs of Jombo and Chimpakasa.

We have not noticed elephant eating the leaves of these trees, and are inclined to think that they do not, as they are very bitter, but elephant will eat the bark of the former.

A special kind of grass called Mande, spiky stalk of Sasama (elephant also eat the latter).

SPOOR.

Much the same size as that of hippo, but if the spoor can be seen at all clearly, easily distinguished from the latter as it has but three toes, all of which are very broad, and more resemble a section of a hoof than a toe. From the smaller size and the impress of the toes it can easily be distinguished from elephant spoor, even if only a small part can be seen, except in the grass runs to be alluded to. The dung is much the same size as hippo's, but the rhino frequently returns to the same place to deposit it, a large pile often being seen in his beaten tracks; he also generally breaks it up and sometimes scratches up earth over it, in the same cursory manner that a dog often does. It is not, however, an invariable rule that the dung is broken, as we have seen some unbroken, old and dry enough to be eaten by white ants.

HABITAT.

Bush and tree country where there are sufficient thorn trees. Also found in hilly country and often found in places where there are rocks coming through the soil, for which they are easily mistaken. It is not so partial to the neighbourhood of a big river as the elephant, and frequently only drinks from holes.

HABITS.

Even more given to making beaten tracks or runs than elephant, especially to and from water, and these are used the more, as he appears to wander in a much more confined area than the latter. These pathways are often made through the dambos, where the grass would rise up in a wall 12ft. high on either side, and the floor would be a layer of dead and trampled grass, usually all lying one way, like the feathers of a bird.

On this floor of dead grass it is not easy to find a track or the sign of anything having recently passed. When a fresh track is followed into one of these runs, as often happens, it will be as well to first look carefully at the opposite side to see if it has only crossed the path.

If the animal has not left it again he will usually follow the path in the direction in which the grass is lying. If he has not, the grass will be seen ruffled up instead of pressed down. Having once decided which way he has gone, it is easy enough to follow the path, watching either side carefully to see if anything has left it. Every track breaking away should be examined carefully until it has been determined which is the right one. This may be done by parting the grass and looking for the impress of the toe, or seeing if any green grass sprouting underneath the dead is bruised.

Sometimes both paths have to be examined for some distance, when an acacia recently nibbled, a leaf or froth dropped from the animal's mouth, his smell where he has stood, his dung, or some other indication may be noticed. In such a case it is valuable to know which trees he feeds off and which are peculiar to the elephant. Any thorns nibbled will be a rhino, whereas the bark only torn off a Mkuhoo will be an elephant.

Places will often be found where he has scratched up the earth with his feet. The fore foot is larger than the hind, but the difference is not so marked as in the elephant. Moreover, in mud or a place where the whole foot can be seen it will be found that they are both fairly round in shape, but generally only the impress of the toes will be visible. Although the rhino is as obtuse as the elephant in hearing and seeing, he is perhaps more respected by the native than any other animal, the

reason being that though his occasional charge is usually a blind rush straightforward, he has been known to chase round his enemy, turning with great quickness; moreover, on winding man he does not always make off in the opposite direction as does the elephant.

It would seem as if on lying up he had mapped out his line of retreat, and whatever occurs afterwards, whether the wind changes or whatever direction he is threatened from, if disturbed he will go off puffing and snorting at an incredible pace, taking the line he had originally intended. If this is the case, we think it would explain why rhino charge through caravans in East Africa and why he so frequently passes at close quarters to a hunter or between him and his followers.

To say, however, that he never charges with malice is erroneous, as cases have come under our notice, and in one instance without other provocation than that the hunter intruded in what he might consider his private domains.

As regards approaching him, we think it no exaggeration to say that under favourable circumstances he can be approached within a few yards without his becoming aware of it.

This is only when unaccompanied by birds, as when they are with him their movements would generally lead him to suspect that something was wrong.

The broadside shot at the ear is the best, but the neck and shoulder are also good spots to aim at.

For his mid-day halt he will often lie up in some thick patch of thorn jungle, in which it is excessively difficult for the sportsman to move at all, and necessitates the breaking back of numerous branches and continual unhooking of person and clothes. In such a place if the rhino is disturbed it is exceedingly difficult to turn quickly in the right direction to shoot if he passes near, and it would be very unfortunate for the hunter if the rhino selected the same path as that in which he is struggling. The horns of females are often extremely long and thin, while those of the males are much thicker, especially at the base.

The former are sometimes found to have been broken off. Maggots, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long with pink heads, often amounting to thousands, are found in the intestines of an animal on being cut up.

NOTES.

NOTES—(*continued*).