

# KLOOF<sup>AND</sup> KARROO:

SPORT, LEGEND, AND NATURAL HISTORY

IN

CAPE COLONY,

WITH A NOTICE OF THE GAME BIRDS, AND OF THE  
PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF THE ANTELOPES  
AND LARGER GAME.

BY

H. A. BRYDEN,

*Member of the South African Committee.*

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purpose I will take the colonial boundary as it was best known—viz., having the Orange River for its limit to the north, and the Kei River to the east, and not including Griqualand West and Transkeian Kaffraria, which are now actually under Cape Colonial Government.

One hundred years ago, then, there were to be found within the territory I have indicated the elephant, black rhinoceros, hippopotamus, buffalo, zebra, quagga, lion, and leopard; and of the antelopes, the roan antelope, eland, hartebeeste, koodoo, gemsbok or oryx, black wildebeeste or gnu, bontebok, blessbok, springbok, rietbok, vaal or grey rhebok, rooi or red rhebok, klipspringer, duyker, boschbok, grysbok or grys steinbok, steinbok, oribi, and the blaauwbok or kleenebok. From this category I have omitted the white rhinoceros (*rhinoceros simus*) and the giraffe. Both these animals are stated to have been found in the Colony at a remote period; and, indeed, Barrow, in his travels, asserts that the former of these animals was plentiful in Great Bushmanland in 1796. From the nature of the country, it seems not improbable that this may formerly have been the case, unless scarcity of water in that parched region interfered; but, as the point seems involved in doubt, I have refrained from including this animal. As regards the giraffe, there is no certain and reliable evidence as to its former existence within the Colony; but it may be pointed out that this animal has, within the last one hundred years or so, been frequently shot within a day or two's journey north of the Orange River (see Paterson's, Le Vaillant's, and Campbell's travels in 1777, 1784, and 1813 respectively); and, sharply and

curiously defined as are the geographical limits of occurrence of many African animals, there seems no sound reason, other than nature's caprice, why the camelopard should never have crossed into the colonial limits. The rude drawings in the Bushman caves near Graaff Reinet and in other parts of the Eastern province, and an old tradition of the Hottentots, that this animal was formerly found in the Amaebi or thorn country (now part of the Queenstown division), are, at all events, some slight evidence in favour of the theory that the giraffe in ages past browsed south of the Orange River.

The Elephant (*Elephas Africanus*) is happily still to be found in Cape Colony. In the Knysna Forest, where they are preserved, and where the Duke of Edinburgh shot a fine bull in 1870, they are still not uncommon. In the dense bush-veldt thickets of the Eastern province, especially between Uitenhage and King William's Town, where they are almost inaccessible, and in the Zitzikamma Forest and Addo Bush, they manage to maintain their ground. Even down to 1830, the elephants in this part of the country were vigorously hunted for their ivory, and must have been then numerous; and Barrow, in 1796, mentions that between Bushman and Kareeka Rivers the country was a very nursery of elephants, and that in this region one Rensburg saw a troop of four or five hundred crossing a plain between the bush veldt.

The Black Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros bicornis*).—A hundred years ago this rhinoceros must have been common in the neighbourhood of the Great Fish River, and between it and the Kei; and in the rough bushy country west of the former river, not far from

its mouth, Barrow speaks of it as being abundant. The last specimen seems, according to Gordon Cumming, to have been seen as late as 1849 in the Addo Bush. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, and during a greater portion of the eighteenth, this rhinoceros roamed freely over the whole of Cape Colony, where the pasture suited; and its Dutch name rhenoster yet remains on many a hill, river and fountain.

In 1851, there lived on the Great Fish River an old Boer, named Bezuidenhout, who in his youth had killed many rhinoceroses on the eastern borders of the Colony, and in Kaffraria itself. The old man at that time was about eighty years of age, and still affectionately retained, long after his more civilised fellow-Dutchmen in the Colony had discarded them, his immense long "roer" (elephant gun) and "veldt broeks" (literally, field breeches)—the ancient garments of leather worn by the old-world Dutchmen of the Cape. Many a good hunting story could the old man tell, and amongst them was one in which the "veldt broeks" had played an important part. One day, when out shooting, Bezuidenhout was charged by a wounded rhinoceros, which caught him with its horn between the legs. The Boer, miraculously, was unhurt, and managed to cling to the animal's head, while it rushed madly onwards for nearly a mile, as the old man always stoutly swore; at length, in entering a grove of stunted trees, the frightened rider managed to clutch a branch, and hoist himself out of harm's way. The old man always attributed his wonderful escape (for he suffered only a few bruises) to the strength and thickness of his leather breeches. The story seems

almost incredible, but those who knew the old man and who told it to me believed in it; and amongst the marvellous escapes of African hunters, it is not altogether improbable. Old "Veldtbroeks" (as he was called) and his rhinoceros story were well known in the Eastern province five-and-thirty years ago.

The Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*), although I believe it only disappeared finally from the Great Fish River within the last twenty years, is now only to be found in the waters of the Orange River, and there only to the westward of the Great Falls. Formerly it abounded in every river in the Colony. I believe a few are still to be found in the rivers of Kaffraria.

The Buffalo (*Bubalus caffer*) is still fairly numerous in the denser parts of the bush veldt of the Eastern province. In the Knysna Forest, the Zitzikamma Forest, on the slopes of the Great Winterhoek range, and between Sunday River and the Great Fish River, and the Great Fish and the Kei Rivers, these fine animals find sanctuary. A few are shot every year, especially between Wolve Kraal and Uitenhage; but the thickets in which they lurk are so thorny and impenetrable, that hunters find their sport attended with much pain and peril, from the lacerations of the bush and the dangerous nature of the buffaloes in these gloomy thickets.

The Zebra (*Equus montanus*), as I have pointed out in a former chapter, is still fairly abundant on some of the mountains of the Colony, notably the Zwartberg, Witteberg, Great Winterhoek, Baviaans Kloof, and Sneeuwberg, and near Cradock and a few other places.

The Quagga (*Equus quagga*), or quacha, is now quite extinct within the Colony. Formerly it abounded on every plain, and with a very little preservation, might even now be adorning the landscapes. The last observed on the Great Karroo were three that still remained, in 1858, near the Tiger Berg, in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen. In a subsequent chapter I have dealt at some length with the decline and fall of this handsome and interesting quadruped. I was told not long since that quaggas were still to be found in the Outeniqua district, but I subsequently ascertained that my informant had confounded them with zebras, which did undoubtedly exist there. It is a moot point whether Burchell's zebra (*Equus Burchellii*) was not formerly found within colonial limits. Paterson's "Journeys," 1777-8-9, would certainly seem to imply that such was the case; while on pages 318 and 319 of his "Travels," Barrow speaks of an animal of the zebra kind, yet differing from the quacha and true zebra, seen near Bambosberg at the end of the last century by several Dutch hunters, which in several respects answers to the description of Burchell's zebra. Naturalists have, however, laid down, chiefly on the authority of Cornwallis Harris, that this species never came south of the Orange River. It is much to be regretted that no record of South African travel exists between the time of Peter Kolben, 1705, and Sparrman, 1772. Such a record would, probably, have done much to establish the true geographical distribution (now for ever in doubt) of several animals, notably the giraffe, white rhinoceros, and Burchell's zebra. In 1705, Kolben's time, the

present colonial territory and its fauna, except within less than one hundred miles of Cape Town, were very little known.

The Lion (*Felis leo*).—Since January 23rd, 1653—when according to the quaint old Dutch journals, now preserved in the Colonial archives, “This night it appeared as if the lions would take the fort (*i.e.*, the present Cape Town) by storm”—this animal has been gradually, but surely, exterminated or driven back. In the same year, 1653, Governor Van Riebeeck encountered a lion in his garden; and the king of beasts long held his ground against the Dutch intruders. Even between 1825 and 1830, when Steedman travelled in the Colony, the lion was exceedingly plentiful; but probably from the date of the introduction of percussion caps its downfall proceeded more hurriedly. It would seem that the lion had finally disappeared from the Colony by 1850 or thereabouts, or perhaps, in the remote parts of Bushmanland, a little later. The present Queenstown district was one of its last strongholds.

The Leopard (*Felis pardus*) is still common in nearly all the mountains of the Colony, and is, from its habits and habitat, principally kept down by means of poisoned meat. It is, however, occasionally shot, and occasionally severe and even fatal accidents happen in encounters with these dangerous brutes.

The Roan Antelope (*Hippotragus leucophæus*).—This magnificent and exceedingly scarce antelope—the bastard eland, or bastard gemsbok of the Dutch, sometimes also called by them in bygone days the blaauwbok—was formerly found within the Colony, but apparently only in the Swellendam division, and in the neighbourhood of the Breede River.