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# BIG GAME HUNTING IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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M.D.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND A  
PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE



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the very early morning, say about five o'clock, for this will give him the best chance of getting an easy and safe shot. It is possible sometimes to approach to within one hundred yards of buffalo, when they are feeding steadily, if caution is taken to avoid being seen or smelt. Mr. Lyons, a well-known official and first-class shot of big game, for many years resident in North-East Rhodesia, was once charged in an open plain by a bull he had wounded while it was feeding. He dropped this bull within a yard or two of his feet by a shot in its shoulders from a black powder .577 rifle. This is not usual, for nine times out of ten a wounded buffalo will make off at first.

Owing to the very thick skin of a buffalo I consider that a heavy rifle should be used and a solid bullet. Though it is often possible to kill a buffalo with a soft-nose bullet fired from a Mauser of 7.9, or from a .303 into the lungs or heart at close range, it is always better to fire a shot which will cripple or do the greatest amount of damage to such a dangerous animal. Such wounds are produced by .450 and .500 cordite express rifles, and also by such hard-hitting rifles as those turned out by Westley Richards or Jeffrey.

## Chapter XXI

### THE RHINOCEROS

THE first sight of a rhinoceros must inevitably suggest that it is a relic of prehistoric times when the earth was covered with giant lizards and uncouth monsters of all sorts of shapes and sizes. The particular kind found in North-East Rhodesia is the black, double-horned variety. A few specimens have been shot carrying three horns. One thus adorned was shot close to the Chambesi River in the spring of 1910 by Captain Piscirelli, the aide-de-camp of Her Royal Highness, the Duchess d'Aosta, who was making a shooting trip through the country.

South of the Chambesi this animal is very plentiful, and little trouble is required on the sportsman's part to get on the tracks of one, and follow it until either it gets a sight of him or he gets a shot at it. There is quite a possibility of the rhino opening hostilities first, because he hates intrusions, and usually shows his resentment in no unmistakable way by suddenly charging the intruder at top speed, with his horns well lowered.

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For some reason or other the rhino enjoys a reputation of great ferocity, but I think he has been somewhat maligned. All he wants is to be left in peace, and when disturbed, his endeavour is to rid himself of the intruder, if possible, and then get away to some other part of the woodland where he may root about without molestation. He is not endowed with very good eyesight, but has a very keen sense of smell, and when his nose is greeted with the scent of a human being, his first instinct seems to be to charge direct for the place where he has located the repugnant smell. If he fails to find the intruder, he will not hunt him about, but will often go straight off without troubling further about him. Also, if he should manage to attack the intruder with his horns he will be satisfied to pass him out of his way, and shows no great desire to linger over his victim.

Some little time ago a native walking from one village to another on the other side of the Lovu River was killed by a rhino in this manner. The rhino had been standing close to the path, and sighting or smelling the native, at once charged him, and killed him with his horns.

The natives generally have a great fear of this animal, and give it a reputation of being most truculent and fierce, saying that it will even attack elephants.

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Rhino have a very peculiar habit of scattering their droppings with their horns so that the droppings, which somewhat resemble those of an elephant, are broken up and tossed about widely. I cannot myself give any explanation for this habit, but the natives have an amusing reason. They say that when the Creator made all animals He gave a needle to each, so that it could sew its own skin on ; the rhino unfortunately lost his, and had to do the best he could with a large thorn, hence his badly fitting skin. The original rhino was much distressed by the loss of his needle and came to the conclusion that he must have swallowed it by mistake ; so he got into the habit of always examining his droppings to see whether it had turned up, and all his descendants have acquired a like habit.

Rhino are very conservative in their habits, and will be found feeding in the same woods or plains day after day. They show a certain fondness for a glossy-leaved bush which grows on the plains, usually close to the more dense woodland, and these they will root up with their horns, perhaps to eat the roots. A useful way of locating the fresh spoor of one of these animals, is to walk along the edge of the woodland and examine these broken-up bushes till one recently visited by the rhino is found, when the spoor can be taken up.

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Usually the rhino are in pairs, and during the rains are frequently accompanied by a calf.

Large and solitary spoor is an indication of an old bull; some of these bulls are very old, and their horns are not much good for trophies, as they are worn down and frequently damaged. As everybody knows, the rhino has only three toes.

The best season of the year to track rhino is, of course, during the rains when the ground is soft, and there is no trouble in following it. The only thing necessary is to keep a very sharp look-out ahead.

Though frequently found lying up in patches of grass, where the woodland is thin with little undergrowth, there is often great difficulty in locating them in thick, bushy country, especially where there are many clumps of thorns; and it is certainly no easy task to distinguish the male from the female rhino in the bush. In such places it is often thrilling work following up their spoor, as one never knows from one moment to another if one is going to run into them suddenly, or, what would be much more disconcerting, if they are going to charge without any warning upon the hunter. When these bushes are thorny and very dense, the only path possible to follow is that made by the rhino or rhinos as they have shoved their way through. Consequently, the only means of retreat is by the same path. The animal seems to

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know that the thorns, which do not affect his thick hide, will form an efficient barrier against the disturbance of his rest by other animals not similarly equipped.

My first rhino was shot in such country. It was during the rainy season, when the ground was very soft, and I noticed on coming into a village that a double track of rhinos had crossed the path that morning. I had been out after buffalo, but was unsuccessful in coming up to them. On arriving at the village late in the afternoon, I asked the head-man about these rhino, and he informed me that they had been feeding not more than a quarter of a mile away from the village, for a week, coming down to drink at the same stream from which the village drew its water.

Though the weather was very wet and broken I decided that I had a fairly good chance of getting a sight of and possibly a shot at my first rhino. On the following morning, which was grey with threatening rain-clouds, I went out with two gun-bearers, one of whom had been in my service for some time, and was one of the best trackers of game in the country, and who had the additional advantages of being fearless—as I had proved by taking him out elephant shooting—and of having a profound knowledge of the habits of game.

Following the path by which I had entered the

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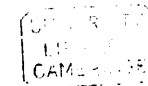
village the previous day I found the fresh spoor of where the rhino had crossed close to the water into some open country containing a plentiful supply of a root which they are very fond of eating. We followed this track for some time, seeing nothing of the rhino, however. Presently one of the villagers brought us word that the rhino had recrossed the path some half mile further up the hill. We at once made for the place indicated by the villager and took up the trail. This led from patch to patch of mimosa-thorn bushes. Several times, noticing the strong rank smell which rhino leave where they lie, I expected to see them. However, either dissatisfied with the places they had chosen, or having heard us, they had occupied and vacated several clumps of these mimosa bushes. As I was wearing a pair of khaki cotton shorts I was getting somewhat tired of forcing my way through these bushes, for my bare knees were suffering severely from contact with the thorns, and I am sure I left quite a good blood spoor. Finally, after an hour of this thrilling and painful tracking, the rhino being evidently on the move, I came to a dense clump of bushes into which a well-beaten path led, which showed it to have been occupied by the rhino on other occasions. I followed up this path through the bushes, myself carrying a .500 Winchester magazine express rifle, my favourite gun-bearer



Photo]

Wart Hog (male).

[E. G. M. Leyer.



Photo]

Cow Rhinoceros.

[F. H. Melland.

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close behind carrying a .303 service rifle, loaded with solids, and came to a small clearing about six yards across, and peering over the top of a thorn bush, I saw the point of a horn and the twitching ears of a rhino some two yards away. It was standing with its head turned from me. I took a careful shot, aiming for the base of the right ear. As soon as I fired it went down, but quickly got on its feet again and wheeled round, making for me where I was wedged behind a thorn-bush. I got another couple of shots in quick succession into its chest and side, the head of the animal being scarcely a yard from me when I fired the last shot. It then lurched over and fell on its knees, when I finished it off with a shot through the heart.

To my regret this proved to be a cow, accompanied by a calf of about a year old which I had not seen till I had killed the mother. There was no indication from the size of the horn, as seen by me at first, that this was a female. A loud crashing amongst the bushes in front of me warned me that the male rhino, disturbed by the firing, had broken out from where he had been lying and was somewhere close by. Some natives who had taken refuge in a tree were able to see over the tops of the thorn bushes and indicated to me that he was still standing some forty yards away wondering what all the noise was about.

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During this time the little baby rhino was nosing about its dead mother, keeping up a constant bleating call which made me regret more than ever that the female rhino should carry horns like the male, which similarity led to its death. As I cautiously made my way in the direction in which the natives were pointing I came upon the male some fifty yards away standing facing us in a small clearing between the bushes. As he was on the point of charging I fired at his head. He staggered and I thought he was going down, but, recovering, he went charging away through the bushes, and a subsequent shot at his retreating bulk seemed to take effect. I followed his trail for some time till a heavy rain descended, and as he showed no signs of stopping, or even of being seriously injured, and as I was wet to the skin and very cold, I left the trail and returned to the village where a warm bath in my tent and a change of clothing made me comfortable once more.

The following day I sent two villagers to follow the wounded rhino's trail, but they saw no trace of him, so my hope has been that the shot in the head glanced off his thick skin and that he finally returned to look for his mate, and took away his baby to some other part where they might dwell in peace together. The body of the dead rhino was promptly cut up and eaten by the villagers,

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who rejoiced in the opportunity of filling themselves with so much fresh meat.

Although this was actually the first rhino I had killed, I had seen them before when shooting other game, and on one occasion wounded a bull, but the bullet, being a soft-nosed from a .303, did not do it much harm, and it disappeared, and though I followed it for some distance I never saw it again. I was on the trail of an eland bull I had wounded at the time, and this rhino with a companion was lying in a thick patch of grass through which the eland had passed, the track of the eland leading almost on to where the rhino lay.

Another experience I had in shooting rhino was as follows:—I was travelling from one camp to another during the rainy season, and having gone about six miles, had sat down to have breakfast, when one of my men, who had been accompanying the porters who had gone on ahead, came back to where I was seated to tell me they had seen the spoor of a very large rhino which had crossed the path within an hour or two previously, and that all the caravan were resting by the spoor in case I wanted to follow the rhino; they were afraid if they proceeded they might either disturb the animal or possibly be charged by it. I sent back word for them to wait and that I would come and examine the spoor. On arriving at the place where the

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spoor had crossed the road, I saw that it had been made by a very large and solitary bull. The ground being very light and sandy the track was easy to follow; it led away from the direction in which we were making for camp, so I sent my caravan on to pitch my tent some ten miles further along, as rain was threatening, and kept a few men back, in case I shot the rhino, to carry the horns, and the meat, of which all natives are very fond. This rhino had lain down twice, and each time wandered on. The woodland was very open, without much cover, except for occasional clumps of small bushes which would give him but little concealment, and we were able to keep a sharp look-out for some distance ahead, and were quite safe from any sudden surprise of his charging. After going some distance through the woodland, the wind being favourable to us, I got a strong whiff of the unmistakable scent of a rhino; the scent was also noticed by my favourite gun-bearer, and we came to the conclusion that the rhino was probably lying down in a clump of bushes some fifty yards ahead. We took the opportunity to climb a convenient ant-hill, and over the tops of the bushes we saw him lying asleep, close to another ant-hill fringed with bushes, under the shade of some large trees.

Making our way down from our point of vantage as carefully and quietly as possible, and using such

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cover as there was, I was able to get within fifteen yards of where we had seen him lying. A part of the base of this ant-hill gave me a convenient standing place, from which I could see him clearly with his left side towards me. Choosing the base of his left ear, I gave him a bullet from my Winchester, upon which he sprang up with a snort of rage and came straight to where I was standing. Another shot quickly fired smashed his right foreleg close to the shoulder, which turned him, and as he turned I got another body shot in. He went on, however, fairly fast, making for a *Chippia* some distance away. Following the spoor for about half a mile I came upon him standing, looking very sick, just outside the bush. A bullet fired into his neck at twenty yards distance dropped him stone dead.

On examining him I found the reason why I had not killed him at the first shot. My bullet, instead of entering the brain through the ear, had pierced the lobe, and, striking the hard, thick bone of his skull, had travelled round backwards under the skin, and lay in the neck. The horns he carried were disappointing as trophies, having very large bases, but had been much worn down. When in his prime the front horn might have been 30 inches long. This rhino was probably thirty or forty years old, his teeth, as well as his horn, being much worn down.



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I do not know at what age rhinos reach maturity in Africa, nor how long they live, but as they have no enemies except man, they probably live longer than any other animal but the elephant.

## Chapter XXII

### THE ELEPHANT

**I**T always seems to me a pity that the African elephant has proved itself so intractable in training. In a country such as North-East Rhodesia, where there is at present no transport, except by native carriers, horses and mules being unable to exist owing to a sickness which soon destroys them, the elephant would be an enormously valuable animal. As it is, the only use to which he is put is to furnish ivory for commercial uses by his death. When I look at the huge bulk of the dead elephant I invariably feel that I have destroyed with my bullet the wisest creature in the animal world that exists in Africa, for there is no doubt that the African elephant is highly intelligent. The possessor of a good pair of tusks must live in constant fear of sudden death. There are but few of these tusker bulls in the country that have not been followed and shot at at one time or other; indeed it is quite a common thing after one has shot one of these animals for the men who are cutting up the meat to bring many old iron bullets which have