

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS IN

MASHONALAND.

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It is more than probable that before the close of the century this, the largest of all the mammals after the elephant, will be extinct. There are but very few preserved specimens in existence to give the natural history student of the future an idea of its enormous size and peculiar structure. In the early hunting days in Matabeleland, and in the high, well-watered country which has lately come to be known as Mashonaland, rhinoceroses of both sorts were comparatively common: the white (R. simus) was found usually in the open grass country, the black (R. bicornis) in the rugged hill country. It is now generally recognized that there are in Africa only two varieties of the rhinoceros, the black and the white; the old Dutch elephant hunters always believed in several, and judging entirely by this standard. Both sorts are easy to shoot, and it is small wonder when a long train of carriers has to be fed, or when natives are hunting for a supply of meat to carry back to their kraals, that a rhinoceros was always shot in preference to buck; wary and difficult to stalk as are the latter, and as a rule more tenacious of life. Furthermore it is natural that the white rhinoceros should be shot in preference to the black, for it generally carries a good deal more fat, is very much larger than the black species, and as a rule has larger and more valuable horns.

As time went on, both white and native hunters carried on their work, until a few years ago naturalists and sportsmen woke up to the fact that very few of the white rhinoceros were left in the country. This happened at an unfortunate time, for Mr. F. C. Selous, whom I may call the only scientific hunter between the Crocodile and the Zambesi rivers, was engaged by the Chartered Company to guide the pioneer expedition up to Mashonaland, and was in consequence unable to afford the time necessary for a trip to the country where they were supposed still to exist. No serious assertion has, I believe, ever been put forward that the square-mouthed rhino occurs north of the Zambesi; certainly no horns in any way resembling the massive growths of the Simus variety have been brought from there. Count Teleki claims to have shot a white rhino in North-east Africa, not far I think from Kilima-njaro; he bases his claim upon the fact that this rhino was of a distinctly lighter colour than the ordinary varieties, whereas there is no apparent difference between the colours of the real two African species; if anything, I fancy the so-called white rhinoceros is the darker-coloured animal of the two.

I have lately heard of two events which are interesting, certainly, but which I fancy bear no real significance. About twelve years ago Colonel Coke made a short shooting expedition into Somaliland. He started, I fancy, from Witu, and while hunting some distance inland he purchased from a caravan several rhinoceros horns; one of these horns, Dr. Günther tells me, it is more than probable is a white rhinoceros horn. Should this prove to be correct, it is difficult to conjecture how this solitary horn got into Central Africa. The second instance is this. Information from Lisbon has been received in London to the effect that the white rhinoceros has been seen upon the borders of the Angola country on the West Coast of Africa. Now it is possible, I suppose, that continued persecution may have driven it from the North-eastern part of Mashonaland to the upper grounds—still absolutely undisturbed—of the Zambesi; though it is extremely unlikely that it would go as far as the Angola country. Besides, the white rhinoceros is so entirely connected with the country south of the Zambesi that it is more than possible that the traveller who records this story may have been mistaken in his view.

THE TWO KINDS OF RHINOCEROS.

The main points of difference between the two species are: the shape of the mouth and the manner of feeding. The Bicornis has a prehensile upper lip and a much smaller head altogether than the Simus; he feeds entirely upon leaves and twigs, and prefers a rough, bushy, inhospitable country; he is wary and shy, quick to anger and exceedingly obstinate, inquisitive, and suspicious. The Simus has a disproportionately large head, with a great jaw which is cut quite square off in front, and the great rubber-like lips are suited for the grass upon which he feeds entirely, though in the autumn and winter, when the grass over vast stretches of country has been burnt away, it is a puzzle how he manages to get enough to sustain his great bulk. He carries his head very low, and has long ears slightly tipped with curly black hair; he is not so inquisitive or suspicious as his black brother, and is slightly more sluggish in his movements, though upon occasion he can cover the ground with unexpected speed. Another curious fact is that the call of the Simus will always run in front of the cow, while the call of the Bicornis invariably follows its mother; this habit never varies. They drink every day, or rather every night, and as a rule do not go down to the water till after midnight. When the sun gets very warm they generally enjoy a siesta, sometimes in the bush, and sometimes out in

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the glaring, quivering heat, and though they will occasionally lie in thick bushy country they do not make a point of choosing the deepest shade. When fairly asleep they do not waken easily, and they may then be easily shot or photographed.

#### HORNS AND TEETH.

I think the longest Simus horn known measures 56½ in., and I believe specimens of Bicornis horns are in existence which measure 40 in. It goes, of course, without saying that all the long horns of the Simus have been shot out of the country years ago; and should another specimen be shot and preserved, I fancy that the lucky hunter will not cavil at the length, or rather the shortness, of the horn it may carry.

With regard to the teeth, their general pattern is similar to that of the great Indian rhinoceros (*R. unicornis*), but upon examination show a more complex structure; the hollows become filled with a whitish substance which is generally known as cement, and as is natural in a grass-eating animal they have comparatively tall crowns. Neither of the African varieties has any tusks or cutting teeth in front of either the lower or upper jaw.

#### HOW I BAGGED MY GAME.

About the middle of 1892 I was on the Zambesi, and after spending some time with the Portuguese I returned to Salisbury in Mashonaland. On the way we found three rhinoceroses and shot the calf, but the two old ones, though badly wounded, managed to get away. Next morning my companion, Mr. Arthur Eyre, succeeded in shooting an old cow; she had a small calf with her, and we captured it with the intention of bringing it to England. In spite of our greatest care, however, it died on the ninth day. I wrote an account of this to the *Field*, and received subsequently a commission from an English collector to shoot a specimen for him. In the first few days of June, 1893, I started alone from Salisbury, and by the greatest of good luck found some spoor in north-east Mashonaland before the end of July. I then formed a permanent camp, and began to work up and trace the spoor. For five days from sunrise till dark I patrolled and quartered every yard of country for a good number of miles, and on the sixth day I saw—though so far off that they appeared just as dark specks—two of the huge brutes I was searching for. The first thing to do, of course, was to get below the wind, as when they were first sighted the wind blew directly from me to them. In an hour's time I was crawling towards them through the fringe of bush, that lay about 150 to 170 yards below the open position they had chosen for their midday siesta. I thought they might give me some trouble, so I took my coloured boy with me—he could shoot rather well, and carried a single twelve-bore rifle. As I crawled on my stomach towards them with the greatest possible care, I saw one of them had become suspicious and had got on to his feet, evidently much disturbed. When I saw this I flattened myself as much as possible into the sharp grass stubble and black ash—this latter the result of a devastating grass fire which had occurred a few weeks before. It seemed hours before this very painful crawl brought me to the small tuft of dry grass I was making for. After waiting for some time I was relieved to see the other brute stand up. I whispered to the boy, and then knelt right up. The larger bull was on the left, almost facing me; the other stood broadside on. I did not wish to break any great bones, so I did not fire at the point of the shoulder—which would have been the usual shot under the circumstances—but put the bullet from the ten-bore "Paradox" between the first two ribs and into the lung; as the huge brute spun round I put the second shot behind the ribs; it travelled forwards, and also, I found afterwards, reached the lungs.

#### A STERN CHASE BUT A SHORT ONE.

The boy's rifle went off almost simultaneously with my first shot, and as the rhinoceros went off in opposite directions we jumped up and followed them at our best pace. For over a mile the old bull went like a steam engine; he gradually, however, settled down, and I came up and gave him two more bullets from behind: this helped him on again, but not for more than half a mile. I soon ran up to him and found him beginning to stagger; for all this time he had been throwing blood by the gallon from his nostrils. One more shot finished him, and as he sank down with a kind of sob, the buffalo birds left him, and with shrill notes of alarm they flew up, and circling for a few minutes over us they disappeared in the direction the other rhinoceros had taken. I was completely exhausted by the severe run, and, taking out my pipe, I sat down for a short rest upon the huge grey head. The second bull succumbed about half a mile from where I had first fired. It was now well on in the afternoon, and my skerm (or camp) was about six miles away, so leaving the animals where they were I went to the camp, packed up all my goods and came back again. It was then close to sunset, and I had only time to take two quick shots with the camera and make a cut in the stomach and bush the carcass up for the night. I then went to the second bull, cut him open, bushed him up, and then in the pitch darkness proceeded to make a large skerm, for it was to be my home for several days at any rate. Next morning the carcasses had swelled considerably, but I managed to take a few measurements and make some sketches before skinning them. For eleven days I stayed at that skerm, cleaning the bones, drying the skins, and watching the boys, for they had a habit of throwing the smaller bones away. It may be imagined, with the quantity of small scraps of meat lying about in that hot sun, that in a few days the place had grown—well, unpleasant!

It is a curious fact that under the skin of these two animals I found six native bullets, which they must have carried about with them for years; two of these bullets were of hammered iron and four were of lead. This remarkable fact is decidedly in favour of my argument that it is impossible to preserve the very few remaining specimens, as the natives of course do not look at the matter from the same point of view as scientists at home; they want meat, and when they shoot or trap an animal, which is luckily seldom, they do not preserve the skin.

I stayed about that country a few days longer, and eventually brought the specimens into Salisbury—not without a very considerable amount of trouble. A few days after that I left Salisbury with the troops for Matabeleland, served through the whole of the war, and then in January I came home. The rhinoceroses preceded me by a few weeks; one of them will be set up in the Natural History Museum at Kensington; the skeleton of the other goes to the Cambridge Museum and the skin to the Hon. Walter Rothschild's museum at Tring.

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Coryndon, R.T., 1894. The white rhinoceros in Mashonaland. Pall Mall Budget, 19 April 1894, p. 16, 1 fig.

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[Text of both items is the same.]

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