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*Rhino-Hunt
in Sumatra*

By

J. C. HAZEWINKEL

(All photographs by the Author)



The one-horned Rhinoceros Sondaicus, called by the native Badak Tenggiling, owing to the resemblance of the horny-scales to those of the Tenggiling (ant-eater)

WE were camping on one of those remote native clearings in the jungle, very primitively tilled, and only occupied at intervals, called ladangs. First rice, then coffee and rubber are cultivated on those dry fields, where planting takes place without much ado between the huge stumps and logs, which still remain, after the trees have been hewed down and burned.

As usual I slept under the porch of one of those flimsy little huts, built on high poles, preferring rather the chill night air or an inquisitive tiger to the stuffy and smelly interior, generally overcrowded with children of various sizes, ages and tempers.

The sun was still hiding behind the trees of the forest, that bordered all four sides of our little clearing. Rays, filtering through the foliage, were painting the morning mist a deep, red gold, and the dewdrops on the coffee-leaves were sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow. Now and then, the distant call of the Argus Pheasant marked the beginning of a new day, and was at the same time, the signal for all nocturnal prowlers, to regain their shelters.

It was cold, accentuated by a gentle breeze, therefore nobody, though already awake, liked very much the idea of leaving the blankets.

Yet the camp ought to have been bustling with activity, to get ready for the start, in spite of the cold and the early hour.

Ought to have been! Sure! But then, why not?

Already on two previous trips in these regions, news received from the natives concerning the whereabouts and movements of a big Rhinoceros, had proved to be worthless. Nevertheless, there I was, again trying my luck for the third time, because they assured me, that now their information was really "the incarnation of truth".

So, what could one do otherwise, than believe and try once more. Besides, being an incorrigible optimist, I firmly believed in the luck of the third time. The penalty for this faith? Tracks, sure enough, all more than two weeks old, leading us a merry go round, for five consecutive days! Small wonder, everybody was feeling dejected and apathetic, lacked the usual eagerness, to be early on the trail.

Hence only a few of my men had arisen. Still wrapped in their sarongs they were busying themselves around the glowing embers of the campfire, toasting maniokroots and exchanging views, sotto voce, but nevertheless audible to me, about the improbability of ever meeting the Rhino. According to them this was entirely due to occult interference. Rather a sceptic lot they were, confound them!

And their conversation decidedly did not improve my humour, already far from being in accordance with the general colour scheme of this beautiful morning, with its crisp exhilarating air, heavy with the sweet scent from coffee-blossoms. With an angry jerk, I turned on my side, forgetting the make-shift bed, consisting of boards of very unequal thickness, covered with a native grassmat and a blanket.

The result was an expression not meant for the parlour! The act painfully brought home to my consciousness, that I was as stiff as the proverbial poker, due, to the unyielding material, upon which I had been sleeping. I was still softly—but no less hearty—cursing everything: guides,

Rhinos, mosquitoes, my credulity and the bed, when this way of letting steam off, was suddenly interrupted by frenzied shouts. Some moments later, I saw one of the guides, a venerable Hadji, emerging from the bush, still shouting, gesticulating and actually on the run! At the sight of this uncommon behaviour, I groaned with mis-

fresh track of a big Rhino, where the path crossed the little brook. Yet I was still sceptical, for it might prove to be those of a big tapir, and surely that would not have been the first time, that such a mistake had been made, even by natives.

The *Tapirus Indicus* or "saddled" Tapir, is a timid, goodnatured and quite harmless herbi-



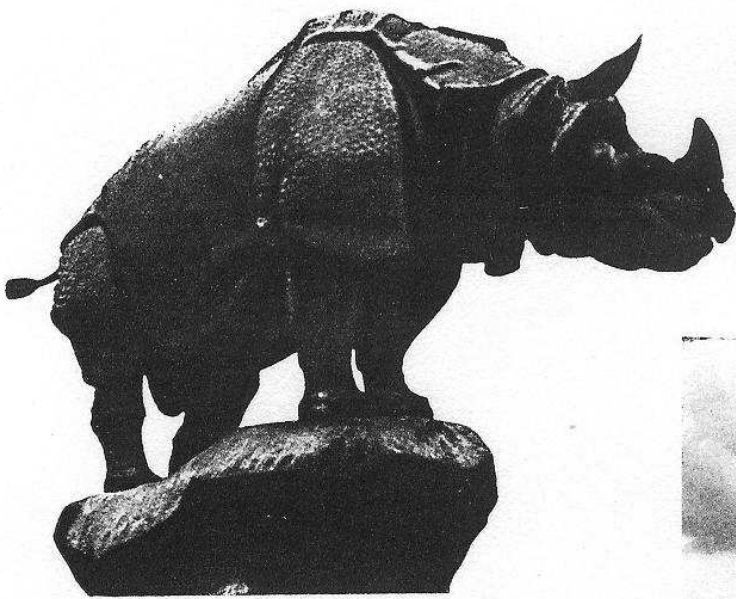
The author with a Rhinoceros Sondaicus and a Python

givings, for surely, what could that mean otherwise, than that somebody had been bitten by a poisonous snake or perhaps some other calamity, that would cause delay, even breaking off our trip. But the moment I realized the meaning of his words, I became, suddenly wide awake. Forgotten were all stiffness, gone all grumblings and grudges against Diana, Goddess of Hunting! It appeared, that the Hadji, when he went to bring water for the cook, had stumbled upon the very

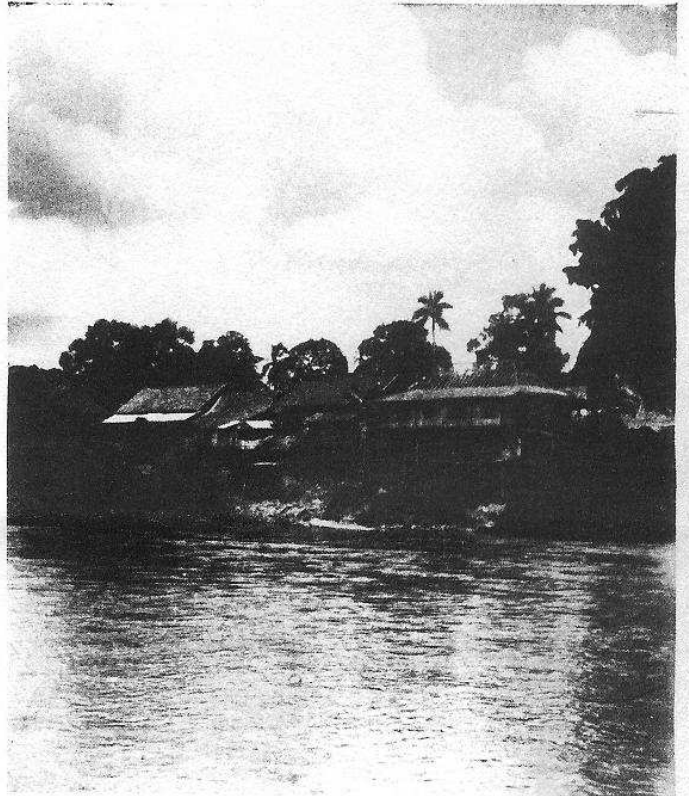
vorous animal. Its only weapons are its teeth and bulk (length 2,5 M; height 1,20 M.), for the latter may be used in knocking down and trampling an aggressor.

It has on the fore- and hindfeet respectively three and four sharp pointed toes, whereas the Rhino possesses only three, which are more or less circular. For an expert tracker it will be therefore easy enough, to distinguish them from each other.

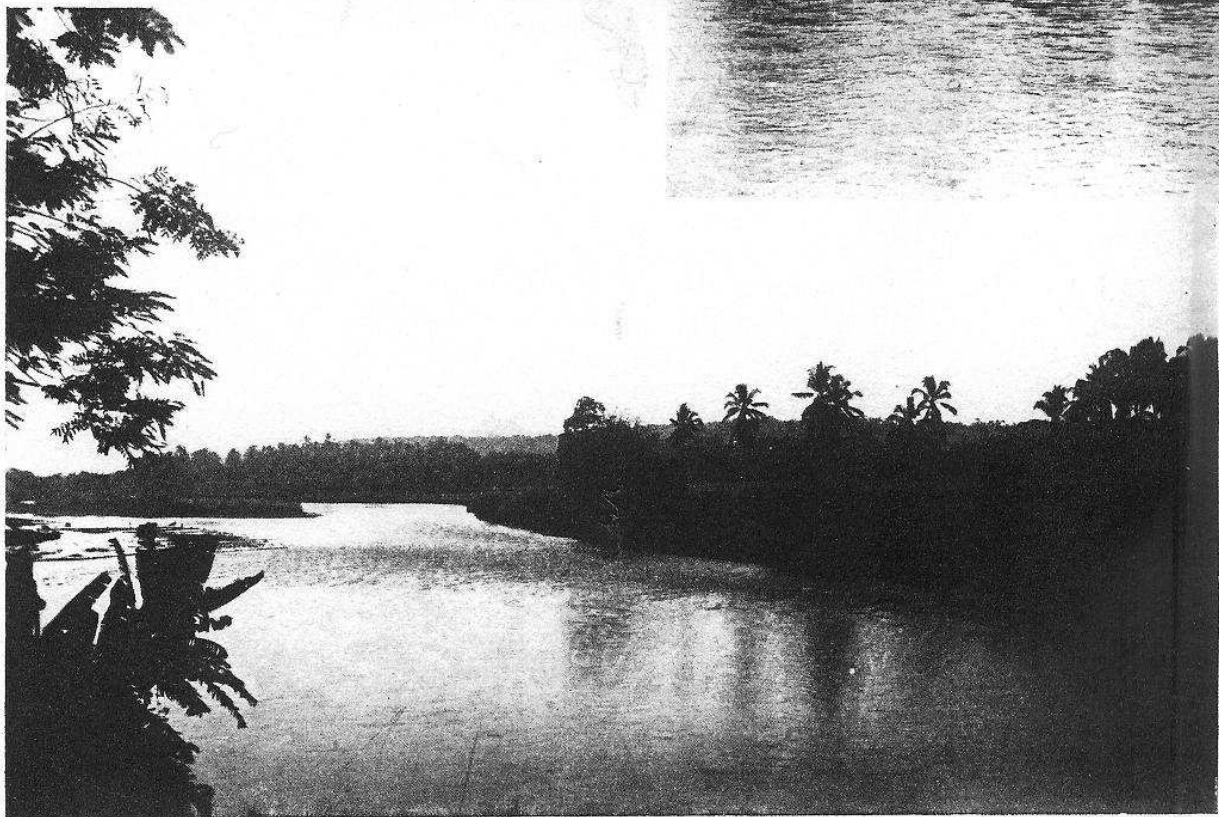
The Java Gazette



*Doesoen on the Ogan-river
(upper Palembang)*



*The Lematang river near Moeayi Enim,
with Mount Serillo, shaped like a
German helmet, in the distance*



*The
Home
of the
Rhino*

But Allah be praised, that day our luck was really incredible!

We had been scouring the bush for five days, without the tiniest bit of luck. Then, when least expected, our friend passed at less than a hundred yards from the very ladang we had chosen for our camp!

This sounds unbelievable, for the Rhino is known to be particularly shy, giving inhabited places always a wide berth. But this one, as I had occasion enough to learn on my previous trips even dared to cross the larger inhabited ladangs nearer the villages.

According to all concerned, the brute could not have gone far. So we had a fair chance.

The camp some moments previously being quiet and sleepy looking, became now the scene of a busy crowd, in order to get ready as quickly as possible. Having swallowed an impromptu breakfast, we were soon ready to leave: two guns, a guide and one bearer, while the other members of the party were to follow four hours later. Prior to leaving we had first to attend a little ceremony. The natives, though Mohammedans, still believe in evil and good spirits. So, every big forest has its Keeper, the Pojang, the Spirit of some ancient king or warrior, mostly at the same time the ancestor from whom they claim descent. Whenever they go into the bush: to hunt, fish, to cut trees, to collect forestproduce or to select the site for a new ladang, they will always try to propitiate the Pojang with offerings, ranging from flowers to a buffalo, in proportion to the importance of their undertakings. In this particular instance a couple of chickens, black and white, we specially brought with us were slaughtered on the spot where the Hadji had found the track. Incense was burned and a vow made, that should the hunt materialize and without accidents, a full grown goat would be provided as a thanksgiving.

Naturally, I had to provide that goat, plus the necessary items, and they would feast on it!

Trailing Rhino in the Sumatran jungle necessitates the utmost dexterity, for its capacity to smell and hear are very extraordinarily developed.

Furthermore the paths followed or made are so irregular, twisting back and forth, that when one expects it still in front, it may turn up, quite suddenly, behind or beside you and then mostly to the disadvantage of the hunter. Though they like to follow and use the forest trails, when feeding, they will generally leave them, and then tracking becomes an infernally uncongenial task! One has to wriggle through the hardly disturbed tangled masses of brushwood and creepers, taking exceptional care not to make too much noise.

And this may go on for hours and hours! Now, when tracking elephants, they will kindly oblige you, even a solitary bull, by making a more easier path to follow, for they act more or less like a steamroller.

In Sumatra, where the Rhino does not live in open plains or sparsely covered places, it is necessary to keep on the look out for fresh tracks, and then to follow them up, until you overtake it.

This in a jungle, which is one intertwined mass of undergrowth and creepers, in which the ill-famed rottan plays an important and extensive game of "wait a little". Or, in dense secondary bush, thickly interspersed with shoulderhigh alang-alang grass. Which means, it is no job for a big party, three or four men at the most, while the rest with the camp-outfits have to follow some hours later, along the same trail. This trail has now been especially marked, lest they should lose their way. The larger the pursuing party, the more dangerous it becomes, in cases of sudden attacks, due to the inability to scatter, as it would, in more open country. Even accidents may occur, for in the excitement somebody may be hurt, even shot.

Though it had not rained for over a month, the track was easy to follow, for luckily our friend did not use the beaten paths, preferring to make a new one. At about eleven o'clock, the track became much clearer, so with the utmost care we advanced, now and then stopping motionless to listen. Suddenly we heard terrific snorting, and the sound of a heavy body crashing through the underwood, but after some moments, silence reigned supreme again, this being due to the un-



*Specimens from the
Sumatra hunter's
Paradise*

*Tapirus Indicus (Tenoeh)
two young specimen, one
still with stripes the other
already "Saddled"*



canny way these animals, representing so many tons of flesh, muscles and bones move through the forest without making unnecessary noises.

With nerves taut through excitement, we crept on, careful to the utmost, for anything might be happening now. Arriving at a cluster of big trees, we found, that had we but come some minutes earlier, we could have surprised our pachyderm taking its bath in a mudpool.

In these pools, called koebangs, the Rhino likes to wallow, just like the buffalo, to cover its hide with a thick layer of mud, to protect, it against heat, leeches and ticks. These koebangs are found at fixed intervals, in the haunts of the Rhino, that it may indulge in its particular hobby, as frequently as it likes. Now trailing became decidedly, unpleasant for in no time we were covered with the same protective layer, due to the mud, which had stuck to the underwood.

This went on for about three quarters of an hour, and by that time we were totally unrecognizable, for mud, sweat, leeches and rottan—creepers had played havoc with our features and clothing, not to mention the strain, which was telling severely on our nerves. Then as suddenly, that well remembered snorting, immediately followed by an angry roar and stamping of the brute's massive feet. That indicated business without a doubt!

On he came, though nothing was to be seen. The direction from the uproarious noise he was making, showed us, that my native hunter was his direct object. I saw him taking aim, then without shooting making a dash sideways. Almost at the same moment, a big black mass crashed at breakneck speed through the underwood, near the spot, where the man had been standing. The brute was gone so quickly, that I did not get the

chance to shoot. Swerving back in a wide arch, he now made a dash at the two natives, who were lagging behind. A yell, somebody's incoherent prayers! We went back as quickly as possible, fearing the worst. But what we saw, was too much for our already overtaxed nerves. We simply had to laugh, and laugh! Our holy man, the Hadji, clung, like a huge flapping bat, head down, to the branch of a very providential tree, still invoking Allah, most urgently, not to forget the Pojang! When at last we had got him down, and soothed his terror stricken mind, he told us, that the Rhino nearly got him, and that the brute was a very big one, with a long horn. Well, that was just the stimulant we had needed. After my hunter had explained to me the reason, why he had not been able to shoot—he had clean forgotten to push back the safety-catch—we took up the hunt again. Yet I was afraid that to-day, we should not get the chance of a second meeting, with our thick skinned friend. But thanks to the chickens—bless them! our luck held true. In less than ten minutes, he was again announcing his friendly intentions, followed it up with a rush at us. This time we were prepared. Two shots! Roaring the colossus was stopped, as if by a giant hand. Swaying to and fro, he slithered down on his fore knees, after some uncertain steps, and finally fell down on his side, spitting and groaning. Vainly he tried to get up again. Some last contortions and grunts, then stillness, the more expressive after the previous hubbub. We approached as cautiously as possible, for he might not have been quite dead. But he was!

Great rejoicings! For me, because all expenses, troubles and vexations, were at last crowned by getting this really very big male specimen of the one-horned *Rhinoceros Sondaicus* Desm (or *Javanensis* Cuv), one of the biggest of its species.

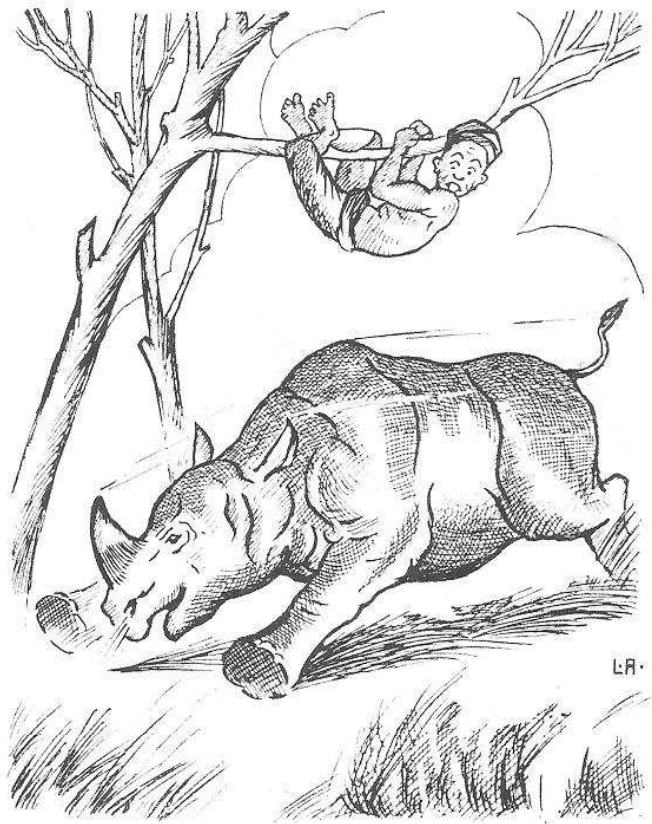
Its length, without tail, was 3.15 M; its height 1.38 M. The length of the horn, measured along the slightly curved foreside, 37 c.M., with an oval shaped base, 22 c.M. long and 15 c.M. wide.

Heretofore, zoölogists had not been aware, that the *Rhinoceros Sondaicus* was also native to Su-

matra, and not only to Java and the mainland of Asia. This one, the first of a series of seven shot by me, proved it beyond doubt.

As an example of our luck, a picture is also given here of the Rhino together with a five Meter long Python, that I shot the same day, in the afternoon. On of the men nearly stepped on it, when he went to the water. It laid coiled up in a shallow hole, still digesting after having only recently feasted, as we could determine later on, on a wood-cock, a porcupine and a Kantjil (dwarf-muskdeer). The Python, who had also nearly finished sloughing, was too lethargic to move, so I got a chance to shoot it, when called.

Rejoicings for the natives, because they had been ridden of Rhino, a dangerous neighbour, who was more feared than the elephant, and had been scaring them for years, when they were going to their isolated ladangs, with their wives



Safety First!

The Java Gazette

and children. along lonely bushtrails, only armed with smooth-bored rifles, none of them even breechloaders.

Great rejoicings for my men, because they had in anticipation a big feast, in which a goat, a very big one to be sure, had to play an important part.

And what about our friend Rhino? Well, he went the way of all Rhinos, i.e. to the chemist's of the Celestial Empire, with hide and hair, to give—with more or less results—Youth and Vitality, to old sinners and patriarchs, who still refused to renounce the Pleasures of Life.

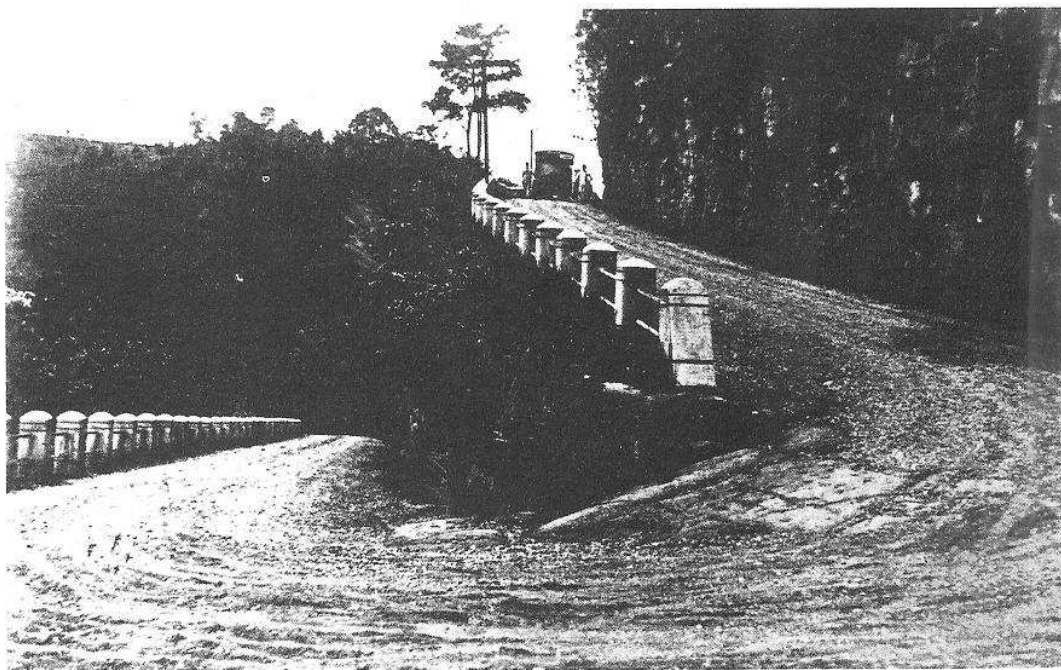
The Chinese gladly pay quite a lot of money for the hide of the One-Horned Rhino (up to Fl. 1500—), and especially the Chula or horn, will fetch fancy prizes, even up to 4000 guilders. The Two-Horned Rhinoceros Sumatrensis is, on the contrary, far less valuable, will fetch in fact only about one tenth of the above mentioned prize-limits.

Hide, horn, blood and other parts of the body, pulverized or as an extract, provide the most

essential ingredients for very potent and renowned medicines. According to the Chinese and the Natives those medicines should be able to give back lost strength, youth and vitality and cure various diseases. The horns are sometimes modelled into goblets. Water or some other liquid when left in such a vessel for some days, should then become a veritable panacea against all ailments and diseases, even tuberculosis and the plague.

Further on, poisoning the possessor of such a goblet would be impossible, because the poisonous mixture would immediately begin to effervesce, if poured into it.

The belief attached to the magical curative and invigorating powers of those drugs, is a survival of animism. The Rhino is to those simple minded people the symbol of exuberant male vigour, and accordingly that much coveted strength must adhere, more or less powerful, to every part of the body. In using those parts as a medicine, it would be possible to impart some of that strength to the consumer.



Road from Lahat to Pagaram