

RAMBLES
IN
LION LAND.

*THREE MONTHS' LEAVE PASSED
IN SOMALILAND*

By

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14TH ('THE PRINCE OF WALES'S OWN') WEST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT,
H.M. ASSISTANT DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS,
PHOTOGRAPHS, AND MAP

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called all three in turn to our tent, and presented each on parting with a handsome coloured tobe, in the folds of which we had placed an envelope containing a substantial sum of money in proportion to the deserts of each. By this means, no one except the recipient knew that he was receiving anything more than a tobe, and thus all heart-burnings were allayed.

Our intention, after leaving this district, was to travel south towards Ogâden, where we trusted to come upon rhinoceros and zebras.

Our course lay through a very thickly-wooded country, thorn-bushes and trees of every size and denseness quite shutting out all view on every side. The road or rather pathway tended south-west, and the whole day's march was more or less downhill. Had this not been noticeable from the track alone, the increased temperature told us that we were leaving the actual Haud plateau with its cool and bracing climate.

We saw some aoul, oryx, and a dead bustard partially eaten, probably by a leopard, but the ground was hard, and we could find no tracks to guide us after the marauder.

As we proceeded the country became cut up into

deep and wooded ravines. We left the main path and plunged into this broken ground. It was an ideal place for panther or lion, being thickly overgrown with trees and creepers, and there was a general cocking of rifles as we passed through some of the more gloomy parts of the torrent bed. On the sand were many lion tracks, unfortunately pronounced to be several days old. In due time we regained the path we had left, and after a good march of about twenty-seven miles we arrived at a zariba, where we found the natives just driving in their herds of cattle for the night. These were the first Somalis we had come across who possessed no camels, and as far as I could see, no horses; their wealth consisting in, as I have noted before, cattle and sheep. We made our zariba a little way beyond the native enclosure, and washed as usual before an enormous and curious crowd of spectators. Several presents of milk were brought us in the native wicker jars, called "hâhns." These vessels are a peculiarity of Somaliland. Ignorant of the use of metal, and there being no trees suitable for carving into wooden bowls, the Somalis have adopted these hâhns, which are generally manufactured by the women-folk. They are cleverly formed of very closely-woven reeds and bark strength-

ened by the introduction of wicker ribs. In appearance they are by no means uncomely, and there is generally some attempt at ornamentation in the shape of white cowrie shells and bark frayed in fringes. The largest are about two feet six inches in height. They are naturally very light, but are fragile, and apt to leak at awkward moments. One article of equipment which is frequently carried by Somalis on a journey is a water-bottle. This is also, like the milk and water hâhns, made of woven fibre, but of course it is smaller in size, and holds about a pint of liquid. They are wonderfully neatly made, with a stopper and sling for carrying.

Every village we came to always sent us hâhns of milk. This of course was extremely thoughtful of the worthy Somalis; but often the hâhns had a most frightful contaminating effect on the contents, as such an idea as cleansing the sour milk or grease from the inside never entered their heads. The consequence was that J—— and I never could drink the milk thus offered. In addition to these drawbacks, the donors naturally expected some return or acknowledgment for their gifts, so we were forced to expend for milk, often undrinkable, four times the amount which would have bought as much as we required for

our meals. Needless to say, however, our followers made short work of these milk gifts, háhns or no háhns!

The following day we sent out scouts to collect information as to the whereabouts of our next victims, the rhinoceroses.

I find in my notes that the temperature at noon was 86.5° F. in the shade; at 2.30 p.m. 86°; maximum during the day 90°; minimum during the night 55°.

The jungle and forest surrounded us closely on every side, so that no view of the surrounding country was obtainable. This day we first came in contact with the Abyssinians. During the morning I was in my tent writing up my diary and notes, when through the open door I suddenly saw a great stir in the camp, and was surprised to see all our men rushing about and seizing their rifles and other weapons. Such an unusual movement caused me to look further, and then I saw approaching our zariba two strangers on handsomely caparisoned mules. The leading rider possessed features totally unlike the Somalis, and was, moreover, shorter in stature, and his thick mop of black hair was brushed up from his forehead. He was dressed too in quite a different costume to our Somali friends, and wore a white cotton tunic or

blouse reaching to about half-way to the knees. It was open at the throat, and a girdle held it in at the waist. His nether garment consisted of a pair of short white trousers, fitting close in at the knee, and cut in fact very like ordinary riding breeches. Round his neck was a thin leathern necklace, from which hung a small gold cross. His face was certainly not prepossessing, and his eyes had a sinister expression; so altogether he did not appear an engaging gentleman. His companion, who rode on the second mule, was a young Somali with yellow tousled locks, dressed in the usual tobe, but without weapons of any sort. The pair dismounted at the entrance to the camp, and followed by the whole of our men scowling and with their fingers itching on the triggers of their rifles, they came towards my tent. The Abyssinian visitor and I shook hands, and having ordered the followers to retire to a respectful distance, came to business. The Abyssinian, by means of his Somali interpreter, who was probably a slave, then delivered a long address, the gist of it being, that all his countrymen in the neighbourhood had received orders from their "General" to treat all Englishmen with the greatest courtesy, and that they (the Abyssinians) were to render the English every help in the matter of supplies and

water ; and for these reasons he had been sent to welcome us, and trusted that we would accept a present.

It was a great deal more likely, however, that he had been sent to find out what our party were doing close to their outposts at Jigjiga, on the Harar road. I, of course, answered in the same strain as he had employed, telling him that we were on a sporting trip, and trusted to find rhinoceroses near the spot where we were then encamped ; that it was true that the English were friends of the Abyssinians, and that we would be glad to accept a token of their friendship. After a few more minutes of double interpreted conversation concerning the prospects of sport, and an ineffectual endeavour to learn from my visitor if there were any elephants in the neighbourhood, we shook hands again, and parted. But not for long, for I was to see the fellow again under different conditions. At about six o'clock the same evening, just as we were about to commence dinner, a crowd of excited Somali villagers arrived, and begging an audience, laid before us a complaint against our Abyssinian visitor of the morning. It appeared that when he had left our camp, he had gone to the neighbouring Somali zariba, and there, with his countrymen's usual high-handed manner,

Both J—— and I surmised that our Abyssinian visitor of the previous day had originated from this party, and I wondered, as we advanced, whether the gentleman in question had returned, and if so, whether our meeting would lead to a row. Riding up to the Abyssinians, I pulled up opposite them. Uncertain as to our attitude, they of course had unslung their rifles, but as they saw I was unarmed, they evidently perceived that we had no hostile intention, and when I shook hands with the one who appeared to be their head-man, all the rest clustered round my pony, and cordial greetings were interchanged. I looked round and scrutinized their faces. Our visitor of the previous day was not among them!

Our conversation was very limited. The only word, and I was not at all certain that even that was Abyssinian, was the style of their sovereign. So, in an interrogative tone, I exclaimed, "Negus." They all laughed heartily at this, and with many a nod pointed towards the west.

Our followers seeing that the dreaded Abyssinians were not treacherously inclined, regained their confidence somewhat, and with a swagger, and much display of the rifles they carried, ventured up close to their hated rivals. Our camels had not yet arrived,

us, showing a steady pace. They then sat motionless when the lightning was close. They had drawn water from the water-hole, which was a rocky dish in the ground, and had their tender manna-eats, and were evidently ready to start, but they seemed to be awaiting the arrival of some help. I questioned whether they were expecting our return at this day when I visited the site, while some were armed with wooden French Larch sticks, and found their manna-eats were not tender, manna-eats were full of maggots. In appearance, they were somewhat better than the specimens of *Trachypus* that I have seen elsewhere. We had already seen some being eaten, light-colored, and full-headed. Some of them had the head removed, and were a very good size. Their bodies were as already mentioned, the three being taken to us, the water to the red leather manna-eats. This gave them water, a most appropriate. They were all very content, and when they discovered on telegraph in the shape of a small round object, they again sat on the line but without action to meet all lightning with warning, and called this time round, we would take one of the manna from the water-hole which, by some means or other, they regarded as their property. (7)

assured them that such were our intentions. They further told us that they were out after rhinoceros, and had for the last two days been after one, but without success.

They still hung about, apparently looking for some one, or something, that never arrived. At last, however, they made a move, and having loaded up the water-bags on the mules, and given us a farewell salute, they started down the valley in the direction of their camp.

Shortly afterwards we saw our camels swaying down the hill-side, and soon, a pleasant camp was made a few yards from the natural well. The water was plentiful, and the universal bath came in for plenty of use. J—— and I indulged in a good bath, then the ponies and donkeys were duly watered, after which a general washing of clothes took place.

All our skins were unpacked and aired, being at the same time well sprinkled and drenched in turpentine, which is by far the most effective stuff for preserving uncured skins from destruction. J—— and I each had one of the camel men to look after our skins and heads, and see them properly cared for, both in camp and on the march. My man was called Mahomed Dualeh, while J—— had a young

fellow named Adan Ali. Right well did they look after their charges, in fact their care seemed excessive, for upon entering one's tent sometimes one would stumble over a huge pile of skins. On inquiring what in the world they were doing there, Dualeh would rush up, and explain that he thought it would rain, and he wanted to keep the skins dry. Little actions like this were typical with all our followers, and it was very pleasing, for in all things they seemed just as keen about our interests as ourselves.

During the afternoon we were encamped at this water-hole a dozen Abyssinians, accompanied by some dogs, paid us a visit. They all looked very smart with their bandoliers full of polished brass cartridges. One of them had among his Lebel cartridges several eight-bore steel-bulleted cartridges.

After our visitors had gone, we asked our headman Abdi why they hunted rhinoceroses?

"Oh!" he replied, quaintly enough, "for their shells!"

The next morning we came across the Abyssinians once more, this time at their own encampment, about two miles from the well where we had first met them. Their tents were surrounded by a high thorn zariba. On our approach there was a general seizing of

rifles and girding on of swords, long straight-bladed weapons, the handles ornamented with the large silver Maria Theresa dollars. The occupants of the zariba met us with cordiality, but there was a lurking sense of distrust in all their movements. As our camels were some distance behind, we were obliged to await their arrival, as the country we were about to traverse was trackless, consequently the whole of our party were obliged to march together, to prevent being lost.

Having exhausted our courtesies with the tenants of the zariba, we lay down outside in the sun, and waited for our caravan.

The Abyssinians evidently conceived the idea that we were bent on mischief, for, as we reclined outside the enclosure, J—— and I had our attention called to the very marked and, to our ears, familiar sounds of filling of magazines, and the click of rifles evidently being loaded, and we also noticed a general withdrawal of our former hosts inside their zariba. We, of course, did not shift our position, but we made a remark between ourselves, that we hoped they would not take a "pot shot" at us through their thorn breastwork as we lay basking in the sun. The probability was, I think, that the Abyssinians wished to impress us that they were perfectly prepared for

any treachery or perfidy on our part. Our camels at length hove in sight, and we took leave of the dreaded "Amhâra." J—— and I had both learnt at school that salt was a priceless commodity in Abyssinia, and that a man of salt was a man of wealth, so we offered some pieces of rock-salt to them on leaving, but as they appeared to be quite indifferent to it, we could only presume that another belief and popular fable had no foundation in actual fact. Not to be outdone, the Abyssinians brought us out a platter full of ground red pepper, and offered the contents to us. I took a pinch, and can affirm that for pungency, flavour, and aroma it was without an equal. A final hand-shake all round and we cantered away, and soon picked up our caravan.

The presence of Abyssinian outposts, and roving parties well armed with modern rifles and abundant ammunition, are a more serious matter than may at first appear.

Every year Abyssinian patrols push further and further from their borders into Somaliland, and finding that their raids and levying of tribute on the defenceless Somali meet with no check or remonstrance, their boldness naturally increases. Every year a greater stretch of country comes under their

miles; not that much progress is actually made, for their peregrinations consist of a mazy intersection of tracks, as if their nightly travels had been somewhat aimless. Shortly after dawn the animals retire to some dense thicket, and there sleep the day away.

There is but one way of hunting rhinoceroses in this part of Somaliland, and this is by tracking on foot, the denseness and the thorny nature of the growth precluding any other method of getting near them. As may be supposed, an animal of such bulk is not a very difficult subject to track, the beast's safety depending on its keen sense of hearing, and its excessive anxiety to get away from anything human. In the few days I stayed in this rhinoceros stronghold I came across some dozen animals, and in no case did any I met evince the slightest desire to charge me. On more than one occasion, however, aware of approaching danger, and unable to locate its direction, the rhino has dashed out of its retreat towards the point from which I and my shikarris were advancing, with only one idea in its heavy head, and that escape. Fortunately, the course taken by the alarmed beast has never actually coincided with my line of advance, otherwise I should doubtless be under the impression

that I had been deliberately charged out of pure malice. That these animals do not sometimes charge I do not for a moment dare to assert, but I have come to the conclusion that they only do so on rare occasions. J— was the recipient of one of the charges, which episode I will relate in its proper place.

The Somalis have of course never seen anything like a locomotive or train, so their sole idea of anything of extraordinary bulk moving with more than usual velocity is confined to the hackney carriages which ply for hire in Aden. When describing the furious flight of a startled rhino they explain that the animal goes "ghari-ki-muafik," or "like a cab"! As a matter of fact, the animal's flight is a great deal more like a runaway railway engine going through the forest, for the animal dashes on irrespective of obstacles, and one can hear the trees crashing down as they come in contact with his enormous head.

On picking up a trail the stalk or hunt commences. It is very exciting, for being unable to see further than a few yards in front, owing to the dense undergrowth, the hunter is never aware when he will come upon his quarry; the animal may be ten paces off or ten miles. For this reason, from the moment a track

is taken up, one's vigilance and suspense never slacken for a moment.

One of the very first rhinoceroses whose trail we followed had made itself comfortable behind a very dense thicket, and we approached so quietly that neither tracked nor trackers became aware of their proximity to each other until the respective parties were a few paces apart! On this occasion the rhino became first aware of our approach, and we were all startled by a furious snort almost in our faces. Then there was a general skipping aside, as we heard the crash of timber. Fortunately the animal broke cover away from us, and I caught a glimpse of him trotting away with his head and tail well up, sniffing the whereabouts of his enemies. It was the nature of the forest growth, and the haunts selected by the rhinoceroses, that made their shooting so difficult, and in a certain sense so disappointing.

Let me explain. I have tracked, for instance, up to within ten paces of a rhinoceros, and yet so dense has the bush been, that I could only see a small portion of the animal, whether the head, or back, or side it was impossible to tell. A shot even from a ten-bore rifle with steel bullets does not have much effect on a rhinoceros, unless a vital spot is struck, and

consequently upon the occasion noted above, I wounded the animal, and although I followed it for hour after hour it eventually escaped.

The tracks were plentiful enough, and generally there was little to choose with respect to their freshness, so it all became a matter of luck whether the trail selected was that of an animal who had chosen his mid-day retreat close at hand, or who had taken into his head to quit the district.

One very good example of this is still fresh in my memory. J——, who had much better luck than I had in the rhino country, one morning started a few minutes before me, and found within two hundred yards of camp a very fresh track of a large rhino. He naturally took up the trail, congratulating himself on his being first out that morning. I quitted camp ten minutes later, and of course came upon the identical track with the tell-tale footprints of J—— and his shikarris, which showed me clearly that it was an exemplification of the proverb that "the early bird" obtains the worm. Bemoaning what I then thought was a continuation of my bad luck, my shikarris turned aside to seek fresh tracks.

Twenty minutes afterwards I had killed a fine rhino, and had wounded a second, whereas J——,

as I learnt afterwards, followed the first tracks the whole day. These led him miles and miles from camp, and he was at last forced to give up the pursuit, and eventually returned empty-handed to camp.

The week we were encamped on the Tyuli Hills was the hardest, as regards exercise, we had during the whole trip. The going was enough to try the patience of Job, for in the whole expanse of rolling bush and forest-covered land, there was not a thing that grew which did not have thorns on it, and I have already described them as being formed like very sharp and sturdy hooks. These horrors would at critical moments snatch your hat off, or would scratch across the surface of one's boots and clothes, making noise enough to frighten all kinds of game away from the neighbourhood. In passing a narrow passage between bushes, an evil-laden branch would perhaps sweep across your face, and fix its hooks into ears or throat, while another on the opposite side would deliberately entwine itself around the legs, getting a good purchase in one's breeches. The only way to free oneself was by careful and deliberate methods; any wild rush for freedom simply made matters worse, for a dozen more branches would

become disentangled in a moment, and fix their victim with a still firmer grip.

It was a regular occupation every evening when camp was reached to devote half-an-hour to picking out the points of thorns broken in one's devoted body. This hooked species of thorn was chiefly maddening, but there were others capable of inflicting injurious wounds.

One day I was walking along when I trod upon a broken branch ; the next instant I felt something strike my leg, and a thorn about three inches in length pierced the stout box-cloth gaiter I was wearing, penetrated my riding-breeches, and plunged an inch into my calf. The point happened to land in a muscle or tendon, and my leg for a few minutes was quite paralyzed. Luckily the spike did not break when I withdrew it, and no permanent damage ensued. Another horrible growth, more annoying than injurious, was a kind of spiky burr, which found its way into one's clothes and bedding with the most extraordinary persistency. Had these burrs been endowed with life, they could scarcely have been more successful in their efforts to annoy.

I came across in my encounters with rhinoceroses females accompanied by a little one. Even when thus

accompanied the mother never evinced any desire to charge our party, although in all these instances we were only a few feet off. With the usual angry snort from the full-grown animal, and a corresponding pig-like grunt from the youngster, they both invariably did their best to make off. Rhinoceros flesh is excellent to eat, more especially when the cut is from the carcase of a young one. In appearance and taste it is not unlike beef, although with rather less character about it.

One incident, although of no importance in itself, may be noted here concerning a leopard, which animals are generally, and rightly too, credited with being very wide awake. On leaving camp one morning, I walked right on to a young panther with a beautifully marked skin. He must evidently have been fast asleep in the long grass through which I was walking. I took a flying shot as the animal bounded away, but without result.

The only human beings we came across in this part of the country were a few half-nude gum-pickers. These poor wretches seemed to be the most miserable people, and their life must indeed be precarious. Clothed with a few shreds of a tattered robe, discoloured with age, they roam through the heavy "bush," picking