

THE ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS.

BY

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THE shooting of the *Rhinoceros sondaicus* in Lower Perak, by Mr. Vernay, reminds me of the occasion on which my brother, H. C. Barnard, and I shot a male of the species on nearly the same spot in 1898. A short account of the incident may be of interest to some readers of "THE MALAYAN FORESTER." The object of our expedition was *seladang* (*Bos gaurus*), which were reported to be in the neighbourhood of Sungei Pelawan, some miles east of the railway near Chikus.

The whole stretch of country, from the Perak river on the west to the main mountain range on the east, was then virgin forest and practically uninhabited, as I believe most of it still is today. There were a few Malay rattan cutters living near Chikus, and on Sungei Pelawan, and it was near the house of one of the latter that we made our camp. We spent the first day in searching for signs of *seladang* and were disappointed to find nothing but tracks, which were too old to be of any use. Early next morning we sent out Malays in all directions to look for tracks, with promises of rewards for news which should prove to be of value. At about eight o'clock one party returned and reported that a solitary *seladang* had passed within about one mile of our camp during the night. We were ready and started at once, reaching the alleged *seladang* tracks at about half past eight, to find that the said tracks were those of a rhinoceros. As the tracks were quite fresh the informer earned his reward in spite of having made such an egregiously silly mistake in identification.

We at once proceeded to follow the tracks. The ground being wet there was no difficulty in doing this, but as we did not know how far we were behind the quarry and could not see more than twenty yards, at the most, it was necessary to move with great caution and avoid making any noise. We decided to take with us one Malay only to share the burden of my brother's ponderous double-barrelled eight-bore Paradox rifle. I carried a double-barrelled ten-bore. We left three other Malays with instructions to wait a quarter of an hour and then to follow us with the luncheon basket and various articles, which we should want when we had bagged our game. The denseness of the undergrowth, which included a large proportion of rattan, and the need for silence, made progress slow and laborious. In ordinary jungle travelling one carries a *parang* and cuts away obstructions. This would have made too much noise, so we had to put aside carefully, or crawl under, all creepers and rattans and at the same time keep our eyes and ears open. It was also necessary to test the wind every few minutes. The rhinoceros relies on its keen sense of smell to give warning of approaching enemies and consequently it was essential not to get to close quarters down wind. There is usually very little wind

in thick forest, but we were taking no risks, and whenever the wind was behind us we waited for ten minutes or so in the hope that our quarry would change his direction.

We had been going for about two hours when we came across dung which was still warm. This, and the fact that water in the tracks was thick and had not settled, gave us hope. We continued on the track until about one o'clock, by which time we were feeling rather weary. Four or five hours of ordinary walking in virgin forest is nothing to worry one, but our stealthy mode of progress and the heavy rifles were distinctly tiring. We decided to wait for the men, who were following us, and they soon appeared. Having had something to eat and a bottle of beer each—the bottles were opened with great caution—we decided to continue on the trail. We had a pocket compass with us but, with so much else to attend to, we had not been able to watch it closely enough to give any clue to our position. We had, therefore, no idea how far we were from our camp, or of the direction in which it lay. We were very unwilling to give up the pursuit, but the possibility of being benighted in the jungle had to be considered. Anyhow, we determined to continue the hunt for at least an hour.

We had not left the place where we had eaten our lunch more than ten minutes when my brother, who was in front, stopped and pointed to something in front. Peering through the undergrowth I made out a patch of something pale brown in colour, with a shaft of light shining on it and by moving slightly I saw it was a rhinoceros covered with liquid mud. He was about twenty yards distant and was standing up in a pool of mud in which he had been wallowing. He was almost broadside on, his head pointing slightly away from us and to the left. The wallow was evidently one that had been in use for a long time and the absence of undergrowth, and small trees, let in more light than usually gets through the overhead cover in the forest. My brother fired and there was a loud snort and a rush. A moment later I saw the rhino standing about twenty yards away on our left. Whether this rush was meant for a charge or not it is impossible to say. If it was so meant, it was a very bad shot. He was broadside on and as he stood throwing his great head up and down he was a fine sight. He made no apparent attempt to move and two more shots brought him down. Curiously enough he did not fall on his side, but collapsed in an upright position with his hind legs under him and his nose resting on his forelegs.

Having duly admired him we began to consider how the trophies were to be saved and here we were very lucky. Although we had been on the trail for over five hours, we were not more than half a mile from our camp. We must have been wandering in circles. The sound of the shots brought men from our camp and they produced a small cross-cut saw. We had brought skinning knives, and various other tools, and with these we eventually cut off the head, the four feet, the tail and a large slab of skin from one side. It was six o'clock by the time we got the trophies back to our camp. Having bathed, and had something to eat, we set to

work on the skinning and tough work it was. Working by the light of torches we had, by two o'clock the following morning, completed the job. We started at daybreak for Chikus railway station and caught an early train for Telok Anson. There we packed all the trophies in a barrel of salt and they were actually on their way to England within thirty hours of the kill. I heard later that a party of Chinese went out the next day and took possession of the rhino's remains and therefrom, no doubt, they made much potent medicine.

I should have said before that we took careful measurements, between uprights, of the rhino's length, from the nose to the root of the tail and of the height at the shoulder. Unfortunately the record of these measurements has been lost and I can only remember that they were eleven feet odd and five feet odd respectively. The horn measured seven and a half inches.

At the time of the incident here recorded, there was nothing to suggest that *R. sondaicus* was becoming rare. Had we known the true state of things we should, perhaps, have left this one in peace and he might, for another thirty four years, have kept company with Mr. Vernay's old lady.

While on the subject of rhinoceros I may take this opportunity of recording the fact that the late F. J. Weld, formerly of the F.M.S. Civil Service, once got two of them "right and left." This happened in about 1897, at a spot about three miles from Batu Gajah on the road to Gopeng. It had been known for some time, that there was a rhinoceros in the neighbourhood and Weld had been out after it several times without success. His tracker brought word early one morning that a rhino had crossed the road during the previous night. Weld drove out to the place and got onto the tracks at once. How far he had gone before he came up with the beast I don't remember, but it could not have been any great distance, as he was back in Laut Gajah by midday. However he did get up to his rhino and had a shot at it. It made off and he followed it. Later on he came upon a rhino and killed it with one shot. On examining the body, to find out where his first shot had gone, he could find no mark. This was odd, because there was no likelihood of missing so big a mark, and he came to the conclusion that this was not the same animal at which he had fired first. This conclusion proved to be correct, for on going back on the tracks, he found that he had changed over from one to the other. The first one shot was found dead shortly afterwards. I did not see these animals, and I cannot say for certain of which species they were, but I think they were *R. javanensis*.
