

The American Museum Journal

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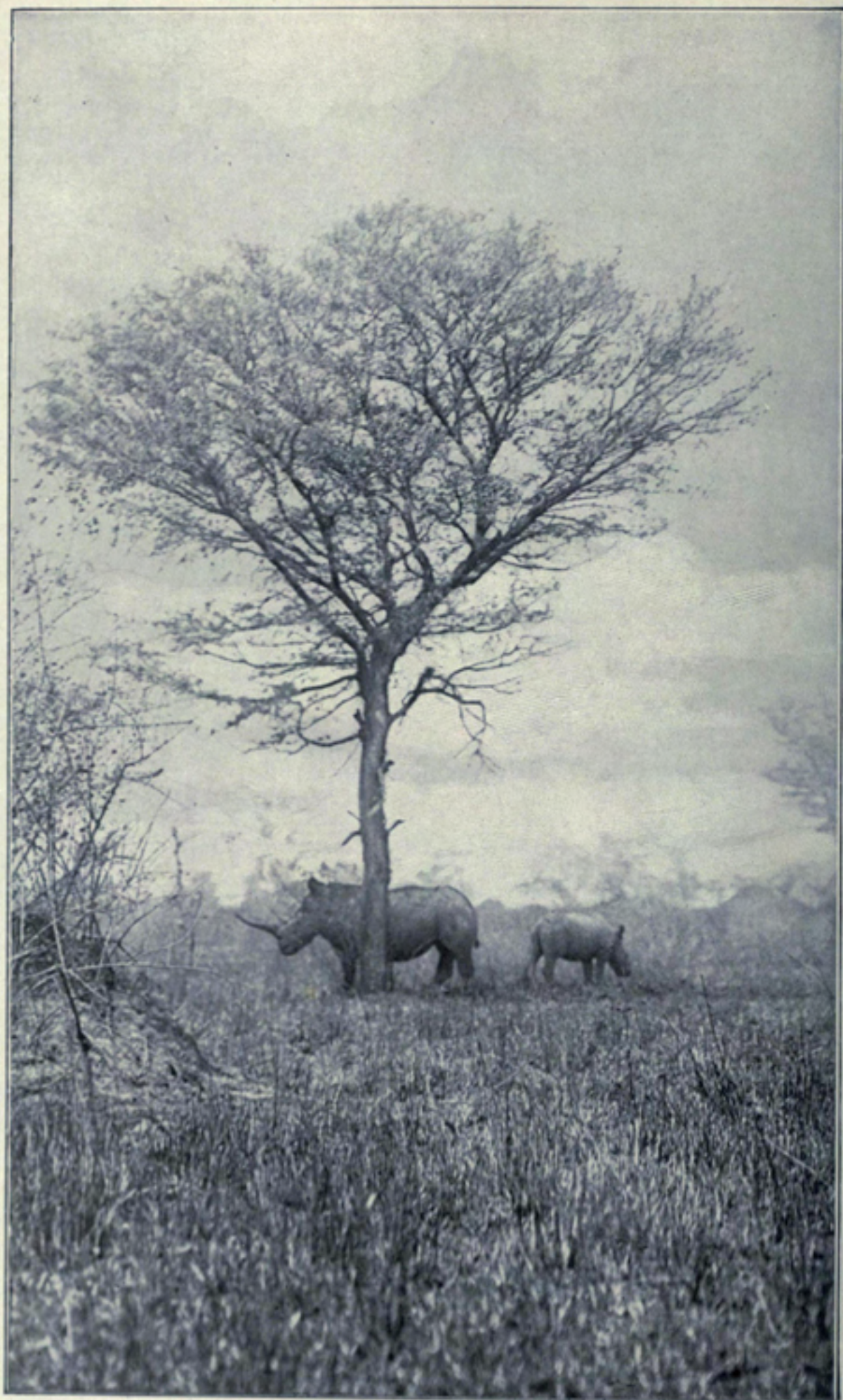
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THE SQUARE-MOUTHED RHINOCEROS

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No. 1

THE SQUARE-MOUTHED RHINOCEROS

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Colonel Roosevelt has presented to the American Museum two specimens of the rare White Rhino, and gives to the JOURNAL from his personal experiences and observations in Africa the following account of this great horned beast of the Lado. On the arrival of the skins at the Museum, work will begin at once on the task of preparing and mounting them for exhibition.

ON our trip in Africa for the Smithsonian, in addition to the series of specimens of big game for the Smithsonian itself, we also prepared a few skins of the largest and rarest animals for other collections: a head of the white rhinoceros for Mr. Hornaday's noteworthy collection, a bull elephant for the University of California, two cow elephants and a bull and cow of the white rhino for the American Museum of Natural History. I was especially anxious to get this pair of white rhinos, because the American Museum is in my own city, because my father was one of its founders and because my admiration is great for the work of the men who have raised this institution to its present high position. The skins of the two cow elephants were prepared by Carl Akeley, with whom I had gone after them; the other specimens were preserved by Edmund Heller and R. J. Cunninghame as a labor of love.

The white rhinoceros is, next to the elephant, the largest of existing mammals. There are three groups of existing rhinoceros: the two-horned species of Africa, the one-horned species of the Indian region and the little Sumatran rhinoceros — the three separate stems of ancestry going back at least to early Pliocene and probably to Miocene times. At one time rhinos of many different kinds and covering the widest variety of form and habit abounded in America, and in Europe species lasted to the days of palæolithic man.

There are two wholly distinct kinds in Africa, differing from one another as much as the moose does from the wapiti. They are commonly called the black and the white; but as in fact they are both of a dark slate hue, it is better to call the former the hook-lipped and the latter the square-mouthed. They intergrade in size, but the square-mouthed averages bigger and longer-horned. The hook-lipped or common black kind is still plentiful in

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many places from Abyssinia to the Zambezi; it is a browser and feeds chiefly on twigs and leaves. The white or square-mouthed kind is now found only in a game preserve in South Africa and on a narrow stretch of territory along the west bank of the Upper Nile. It is purely a grazer.

In its range the square-mouthed rhino offers an extraordinary example of discontinuous distribution. It was originally known from South Africa, south of the Zambezi, and was believed to exist nowhere north of that river. Then, when it had been practically exterminated in South Africa, it was rediscovered far to the north beyond the equator. In the immense extent of intervening territory it has never been found.

We spent over a month in the Lado, the present habitat of this huge sluggish ungulate. We collected a good series of specimens, nine in all — bulls and cows and one calf. Of course, we killed none save those absolutely needed for scientific purposes. All told we saw thirty or forty individuals and Kermit got some fine photographs, the first ever taken of living members of the species. Their eyesight was so dull and their brains so lethargic that time and again we got within a score or so of feet and watched individuals as long as we cared to.

They drank at night, either at the Nile or at some pool, and then moved back, grazing as they went, into the barren desolation of the dry country. About nine o'clock or thereabouts they lay down, usually under the scanty shade of some half-leafless thorn tree. In mid afternoon they rose and grazed industriously until sundown. But as with all game, they sometimes varied their times of resting, eating and drinking. Ordinarily we found the bulls singly and the cow along with her calf; but occasionally three or four would go together. Cow herons frequently accompanied them, as they do elephants and buffaloes, perching unconcernedly on their heads and bodies.

They were not difficult to get as our trackers followed their trail with little difficulty; and they seemed less excitable and bad-tempered than their hook-lipped cousins, although on occasion they charge with determination, so that a certain amount of care must be exercised in dealing with them.



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A HERD OF ELEPHANT IN AN OPEN FOREST OF HIGH TIMBER

Photograph taken from the vantage point of the limb of a tree five or six feet from the ground and twenty-five yards distant

The elephant and the square-mouthed rhinoceros are the largest of existing mammals. Colonel Roosevelt has presented two elephants to the Museum in addition to his valuable gift of a bull and cow of the white rhino