

GORUMARA GAME SANCTUARY

By

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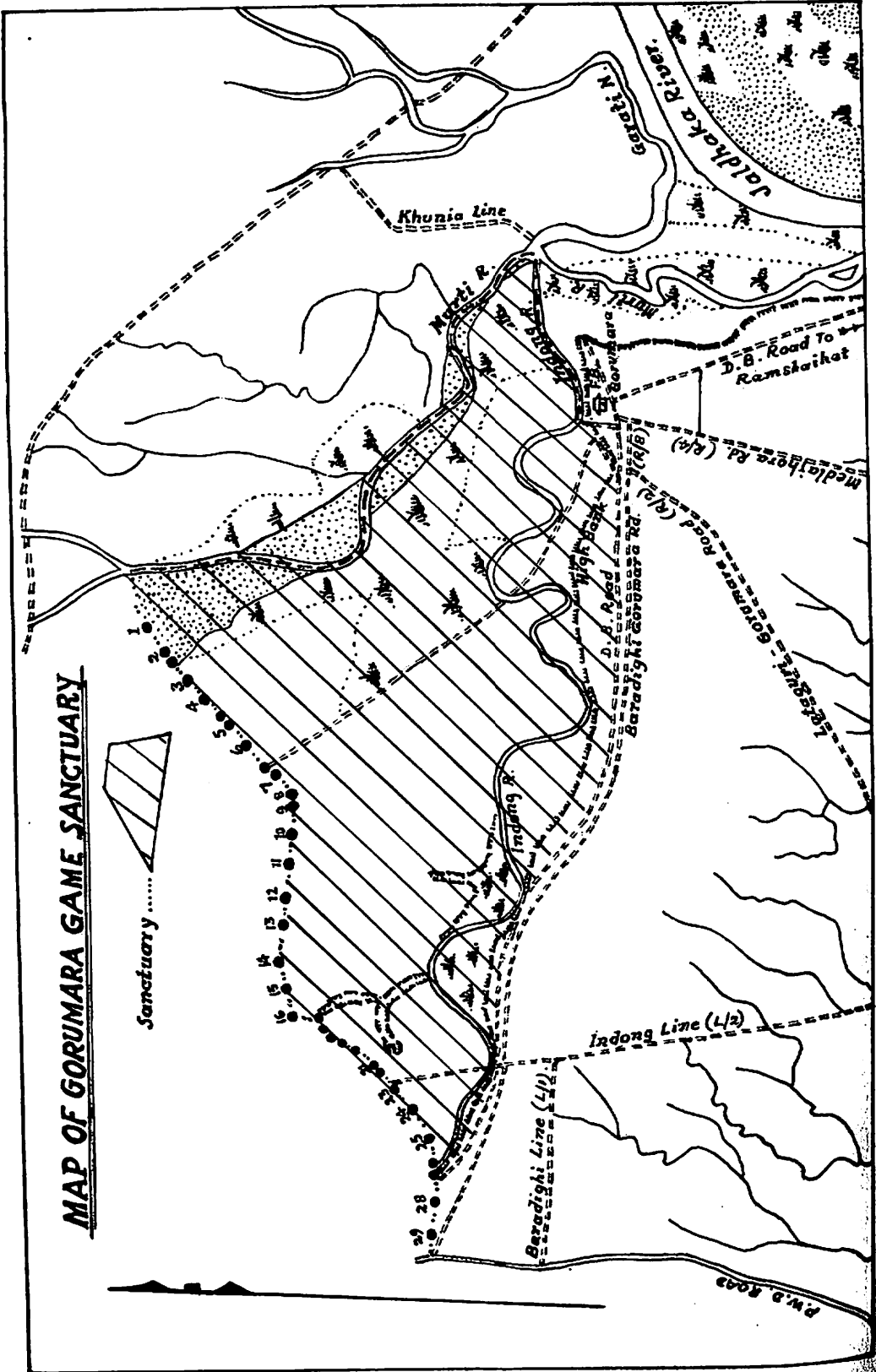
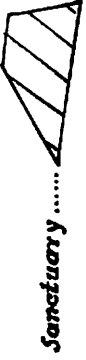
*Formerly of the Indian Forest Service.*

The Gorumara Game Sanctuary stretching across 3 rivers in the Lower Tondu Forest of Jalpaiguri district, occupies an area of 3,326 sq. miles. It falls within the administrative jurisdiction of the Jalpaiguri Forest Division, and the sphere of influence of the Tista-Toorsa Game Association. The sanctuary takes its name from Gorumara a small clearing within the forest reserve on the right bank of the Indong, the smallest of the 3 rivers draining the submontane area. The clearing, which is on the western edge of the sanctuary, holds two rest-houses together with their outhouses, and is protected on 3 sides against elephants with a 4 feet deep trench. The buildings are all wooden with c. i. sheet roof. The larger 2 storeyed rest-house provides accommodation to forest officers of gazetted rank, while the smaller rest-house on stilts is meant for the non-gazetted staff. The nearest station on the Assam rail link is Chalsa with which Gorumara is connected by a first class motor road of which 6 miles are tar-macadam, and 2 miles shingled.

By virtue of its position on the high bank bordering a fairly extensive riverain type of forest in the combined flood-plains of the rivers, Indong, Murti, Jaldhaka and Daina, Gorumara commands from its elevated position, a pleasant view of the riverain forests stretching away to the north-east, and of the Bhutan hills beyond. The feeling of being shut within a small clearing in a fairly dense Sal Forest never oppresses a visitor to Gorumara. The high bank would be about 30 feet above the small Indong river immediately below. Gorumara is ideally situated for making observations of what goes on in the forest below, and by way of taking full advantage of this circumstance an overhanging observation platform supported by Sal log cantilever has been provided at a vantage point on the edge of the high bank. To aid observation 2 strips radiating from the Indong river immediately below are cleared of scrub

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# MAP OF GORUMARA GAME SANCTUARY

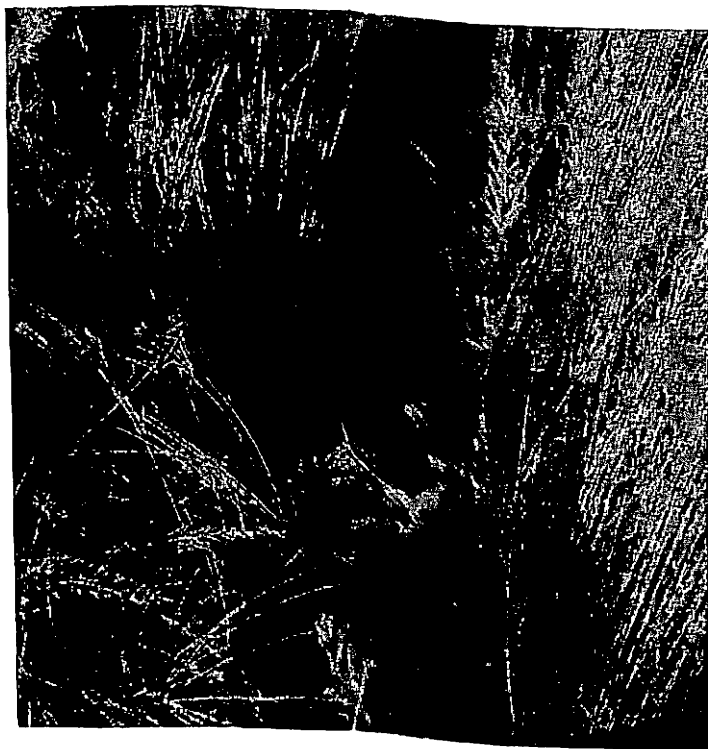


and tall grass at the end of the rains each year, and these extend upto the next river, which is the Murti. One can spend hours on this platform without feeling bored, and as many years record in the visitors' book would testify, many a visitor to Gorumara has seen, from the security of this platform, quite a number of wild animals in daylight. The one person who has seen the most is, of course, the chaukidar of the rest-house, who is always there. I remember several occasions when I had an exciting time in this sanctuary. About November, 1951, a cow-rhino with a very small calf was frequently seen. A tiger was after this calf, and one afternoon in early December when I happened to be at Gorumara with some friends, the tiger went for the calf. The cow at once charged the tiger, and a fearful battle ensued about 300 yards from the platform. There was a lot of movement, and the tall grass often obscured the view, but the little that could be seen kept the small crowd at Gorumara spellbound for 30 minutes or so. All was quite thereafter, but the battle was inconclusive. About 3 weeks later I saw the Cow-rhino and her small calf again. The calf looked normal, but the cow was emaciated, bore deep claw marks, on both flanks, and seemed to walk slowly with some difficulty. In the third week of January, 1952, the second and the concluding round of battle was fought during the night, and the poor, much weakened rhinoceros was killed together with her calf. I was not at Gorumara at the time, and the news reached me the following evening. I reached Gorumara on the 3rd day, and I found the remains of the two animals on the right bank of the Indong, a little upstream of Gorumara. This time there were two tigers, and the calf had been completely eaten together with about a third of the cow. There were no vultures, and from the signs imprinted on the soft earth no carrion eaters such as bears, wild pigs, and civet cat had visited the kill. That proved that the killers were constantly there until my arrival.

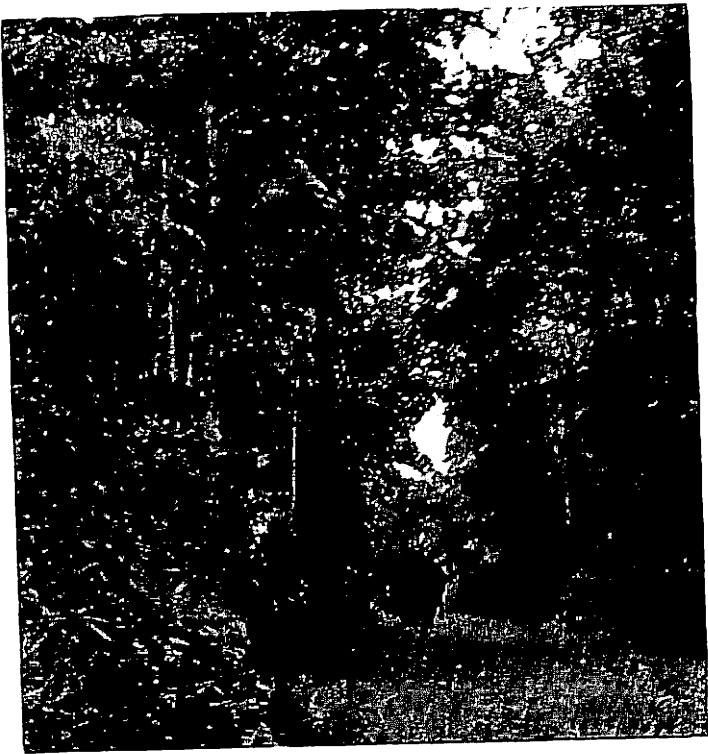
Two lone bull elephants, who were never seen together, were a feature of this sanctuary some years ago. One was a *Mukna* (a tuskless bull) while the other was a tuskier with the long right tusk intact, but carrying the stump of a broken tusk



Observation Platform overlooking river at Swamara



Rhino tunnel through tall grass  
Photos—Author.



A lone *Muckna* elephant in the sanctuary



Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in wallow  
Photos—Author.

on the left. While going about alone in the jungle I inadvertently came very close to both the animals on numerous occasions, but they were quite harmless, and never did anything more than making a little noise. In October, 1951, a lone tusker unknown in the country-side, appeared in the Kumani forest in the Kalimpong foothills, not very far from Gorumara, and started doing a great deal of damage to both human life and property. In November the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling proclaimed the animal for destruction. The animal however, continued at large, and at the close of the year he shifted his haunt to the Gorumara forest, which was in the adjoining district of Jalpaiguri. He was a stranger to the locality, and when he first arrived nobody suspected him to be the rogue from Kumani. For a week or 10 days he went about taking stock of his new surroundings, and then suddenly one day he engaged the one-tusked bull to a fight. At the end of the fight, which lasted only about two hours, the one-tusked bull was killed outright, but even then the killer was not connected with the Kumani rogue. A few days later he seized a man on the forest road, and almost reduced him to pulp. It was then that we started regarding him seriously, and we got evidence that he was the rogue of Kumani fame. Poaching in the Gorumara sanctuary became rife from November, 1951, and all efforts made by the small protective staff proved unavailing. The killing of a man had however, a very salutary effect, and as soon as the identity of the rogue was established all poachers' guns became silent. Soon after this the elephant was once again proclaimed as a rogue, but this time by the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri. One afternoon when I was at Gorumara, someone brought the news that the rogue had just been seen close by. I quickly decided that I should take him on my movie before he was destroyed. Followed by an orderly carrying a rifle I went about looking for the animal, and after a while we found him in the thick *Sal* jungle. He stood still and stared at us for a minute or two as if in amazement at someone, who did not run away from him. Then he started manoeuvring for a position from where to launch, a charge at two defiant men. I had to keep moving with him for considerations of both defence and favourable light. When I had exposed a few feet of my film the

animal grew impatient, and without further ado made a savage charge at us from a distance of about 50 yards. At first we ran for a position of vantage behind a close group of *Sal* trees, and once there, I exchanged my movie camera for the rifle, and gave the animal a shot on the head when he had come dangerously close. It was a soft nose bullet, and it found its mark rather high on the head. The massive animal was dazed all the same. Without turning he immediately put himself on the reverse gear as it were, and swayed his huge head from side to side as blood oozed out of the bullet hole. The rogue was never seen again alive or dead in any part of the North Bengal forests, and presumably he went up the Jaldhaka valley and disappeared into Bhutan.

A long tongue of forest running south from the Bhutan border on the west of the Jaldakha river is known as the Tondu Reserve and it is in the southern half of Tondu (Lower Tondu) that Gorumara is situated. At its north-western extremity it touches the Kumani forest in the Kalimpong foothills. The Kumani forest, which holds a salt-lick in Rongo compartment No. 1 on the left bank of the Nuxal Khola, has been generations past, a rendezvous for scores of herbivorous animals from the adjoining Bhutan, the foot hills forests of Kalimpong and the farthest end of the Tondu forest. There is no other salt lick to serve the animals of those forests. Upto the outbreak of World War II the sanctity of the salt lick was respected, and many well-trodden game paths converged to the salt-lick from several directions through dense forest. There was a large concourse of wild animals, elephants, gaur, sambhur, cheetal, muntjac and others, to be seen in the precincts of the salt lick and as an Assistant Conservator serving in those parts some 30 years ago, I remember I used to be afraid even to approach the salt-lick. The war proved to be the undoing of many things, and the preservation of wild life was one among these. Throwing the basic principle of management of forests and of wild life to the winds, most accessible parts of forests were heavily exploited, and large clearings were made all over for labour force establishments. This fever of unbalanced action lasted for several years after the termination of the war in 1945, and a very great deal of damage was done. In the context of our