



#### BAMBI'S PRAYER

Our Guardian and Benefactor,  
 The Wild Life Protection Society of South Africa,  
 Blessed be thy name.  
 May thy works be extolled in the Councils: And,  
 In all the classrooms of our Land.  
 Preserve for us our natural pastures,  
 And generously fill our watering places.  
 Forgive us if beyond our bounds we stray,  
 And hide us from those who hunt by night and day.  
 Enjoy nature's beauty which the good Lord made for thee,  
 Zealously guarding this sacred trust for all posterity.  
 As it is within your power to destroy your wild friends,  
 'Tis on the greatness of your hearts that our security depends.

A.A.M.



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## A visit to the Nimule National Park in the Southern Sudan

Written and Illustrated

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**A**FTER the four-hour journey by truck from Juba along a good all-weather road to the south, we were informed by our tiny guide that we had reached our destination. This was confirmed by a notice board indicating that the route to Nimule National Park veered off to the right.

This National Park is one of three that exist in the Sudan, in addition to 14 Game Reserves. It is the smallest of them all, but the easiest of access to the tourist, since it lies on the main route between Mombasa and Cairo. It is some thirty miles long and almost two miles wide and is situated on the Sudan-Uganda border, at the northern terminus of the East African Railway Steamer service, and lies between the Nile and the mountains to the west of the river—a stretch of uninhabited country. This National Park was established primarily to ensure the preservation of the square-lipped rhinoceros.

It was quite dark when we reached the newly-erected Resthouse some distance from the road, with the result that we had to wait in suspense for the next day. After dinner we sat and listened to a herd of elephants trumpeting down beside the river—I say we, because the party comprised a group of students who were visiting the



A view of the Nimule Park across the Bahr el Jebel.



Crossing the river to the Park.

Southern section of the country at the invitation of the Sudan Government. We were up at 5 a.m. next morning and after a light breakfast clambered hurriedly on to the truck which took us down to the river. Mist enshrouded the land as the sun rose. The mountains on either side of the river were green while those in the distance appeared blue.

There are a number of huts close to the river bank. This is the Game Rangers' Camp. We were obviously expected; Sayed Bechir El Hag Ali, Inspector of Game Preservation for the Equatorial Province, stood waiting with three armed Game Scouts and the Park Warden to take us through the Nimule National Park. On their wide-brimmed hats each wore a silver badge of the Game Department—an elephant.

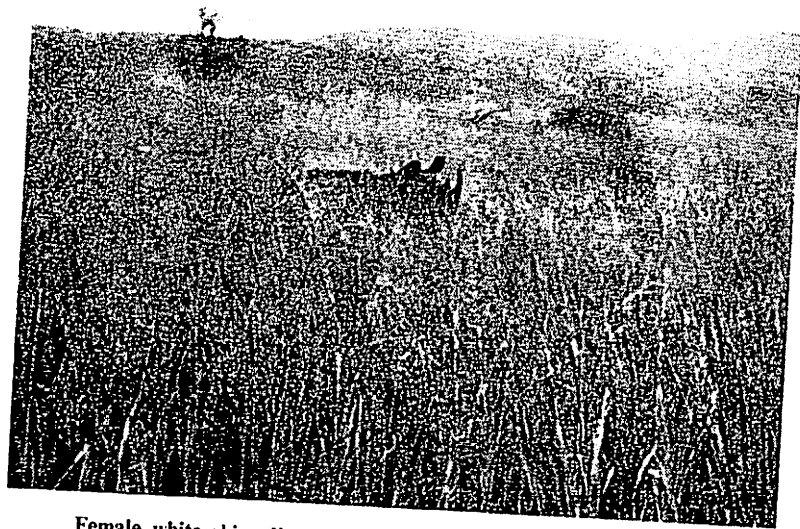
To reach the Park, we first had to be taken across the river by boat for the Nimule Park lies on the left bank of the Nile. At this stage of its course the river is not very broad, but was flowing very fast, as in October the rainy season had not yet ended. Large papyrus islands, Nile salad (*Pistia stratiotes*) and Water Hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) dominate the scene. Lily-trotters ran over the floating plants at the banks, Sea-swallows darted over the surface of the water and a pair of Pied Kingfishers perched in the papyrus. A screaming Fish-Eagle cruised high in the sky where his melodious call resounded—the only sound at this early morning hour.

As we arrived at the other bank, the first animals of the Park came into view. They were Mangabeys (*Erythrocebus patas pyrronatus*),

warming themselves on large heaps of rocks in the morning sunshine, for, as the mist clouds emphasize, it is really cold at night.

Visitors to the Park usually travel on foot in order to approach nearer to the animals. As a result we resembled a Safari of the olden days, as we marched in a long line through the high, wet grass. The entire region is decidedly rocky and comprises terraces and gentle slopes from the Ilongwe Mountains down to the Nile. Every few kilometers it is traversed by deep wadis (ravines) that provide water and shade for the animals throughout the year. The carefully-laid game trails of the elephants, which are also often used by other thick-skinned animals, facilitate progress in the man-high grass. Here and there we passed spots where the grass was shorter and criss-crossed with the tracks of other wild animals. Frequently we encountered a duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia abyssinica*) or an oribi (*Ourebia ourebia montana*) in these places. These small antelopes must have been soaked right through when pushing their way through the coarse dripping grass. They were drying their hide in the morning sun when we saw them. In one such clearing in this sea of grass, three Uganda Kob (*Adenota kob thomasi*) gazed back at us, but before anyone could as much as raise a camera, they had disappeared with long leaps into the grass.

After a quarter of an hour's march—our trousers meanwhile wet through up to the hips—we reached a tiny hillock. A fine panoramic view was possible from here. Open plains stretched to the foot of the mountains, dotted with single trees and patches of thick bush. At various points herds of Kob were grazing, while a number of



Female white rhino listening intently to the approaching stalkers.

Lelwel-hartebeest ewes were observed keeping very much to themselves.

The entire district was strewn with boulders. But this proved an illusion as binoculars disclosed that the boulders moved from time to time and that they had white teeth. They were elephants. The grey-brown giants were half hidden by the high grass. From our observation point we were able to count more than fifty elephants. In some places there were herds of up to fifteen, but more often groups of from three to five.

Meanwhile the Game Scouts had discovered some rhinoceros. They pointed out three of these animals, which could only be recognised in their habitat through binoculars. They were the Square-lipped species (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*), the rarer of the African rhinos. The Game Preservation Inspector estimated the number of these animals in the Park at about 100 and said that improvements in the park should ensure their continued existence there. Considering the smallness of the area of the Nimule Park, the number of square-lipped rhino is amazingly high.

Accompanied by the Game Scouts we stalked one of the square-lipped rhinos, which was standing in a favourable position so far as the direction of the wind was concerned. One of the Game Scouts went ahead with the safety catch of his rifle at the firing position. The second scout was in the centre of the group, and the third at the back, to ensure against any possible surprise. Up to now it had fortunately not been necessary, with visitors on foot in the Park, for an attacking animal to be shot in the defence of a person. The Game Scouts, all Sudanese, are reliable and are conversant with the peculiarities of the animals.



Scattered herds of elephant in the Park. The Nile is visible as a white ribbon in the distance.

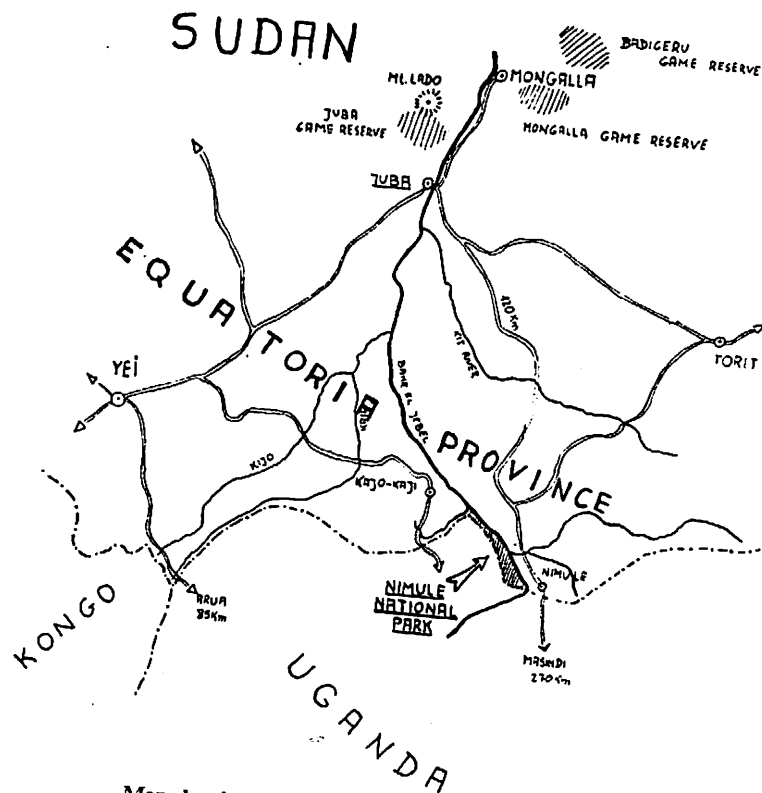
We were able to take our first photograph from a small boulder. It was not of only one rhino, but two. We had a nursing mother animal before us. Judging from the movement of the grass she appeared to have become very much on the alert. She could not get the scent, however, and ran nervously to and fro. Above the rustling of the grass, as the rhino broke through it, could be heard the click of cameras. Of the rhino calf, little more than a dark shadow in the grass was to be seen. The cow raised her head, with its two massive horns, and tried to find out what was going on. We approached to within fifteen metres of the animals, but to avoid provoking the mother to attack, we withdrew.

We then lay down on a boulder for a short rest. There were the tracks of elephants on the ground and their droppings were also in evidence, the huge dung heaps as large as footballs. In a low-lying hollow the dark bodies of animals were visible among the grass. They were Defassa Waterbuck. It was a herd of bulls and the tips of their horns protruded above the top of the grass. The bright interior of their ears and the white above their eyes were clearly visible to us. They scented our intrusion into their habitat.

We continued our march, the Game Scouts testing the wind direction with bags of dust, and leading us round in a wide curve to a herd of elephants. To make the approach easier we followed a game track but only succeeded in stumbling in the foot holes of elephants. Our stalking led us past two bull elephants, that slowly climbed up from the river to the mountains with their backs to us. Then we came upon a small herd of five, of which we saw little more than the outline of their backs. Then, however, one of the elephants—in all probability the leader of the herd—turned towards us and flapped his giant ears. He was obviously excited and warning the intruders, as a result of which the Game Scout led us back some distance from the herd.

Not long after this we found a small heap of rocks with a single tree among them, and round about a herd of elephant was browsing. One of the young animals was climbing playfully over the rocks and gave us our first opportunity to photograph one of the thick-skinned species, free of a screen of grass. Suddenly the direction of the wind changed and once again one of the animals spread his great ears and started to move inquiringly in our direction. We immediately retired and made a detour with the object of approaching from another direction. From a slight eminence we now saw the herd quite close in front of us. One elephant stood completely exposed under a tree. Further away were another two herds of elephant and on the horizon the blue mountains of Uganda. One could spend hours among these grand surroundings, but we had to tear ourselves away from the scene and continue our tour.

As we descended to the bank of the river, the Game Scout raised his hand in warning. There was a movement in the grass, but nothing could be seen. Then suddenly heavy animals were heard moving through the grass and the earth rumbled like the sound of a drum beneath the beats of heavy hoofs. A few paces ahead of us were the



Map showing where Nimule National Park is situated.

tracks that showed we had intruded on a herd of buffalo, that had been resting in the grass. Together with one of the Game Scouts, I climbed on to a heap of rocks to get a better view of the buffalo herd. There must have been from 15 to 20 of them, but it was impossible to count them accurately in the long grass. The herd was standing in a hollow with their massive heads raised and facing in the direction of the Safari as they scented it. The black beasts with their heavy horns presented a wonderful sight in the yellow plains.

The sun was already high in the heavens as we set off again over the Nile. We then went some distance by truck along the right bank where the vegetation was thick and luxuriant—tall acacias, kigelia trees, thickly overgrown with creepers, Borassus Palms and bush, with Papyrus on the river side of the road, and irregular sloping green hills covered with savanna on the other. The road ended beside raging waters—the Fola Rapids. For a distance of half a mile the Nile here forces its way through a ravine thirty to forty metres



Fola Rapids in the rainy season.

wide. It was still high-water and the mass of foaming water presented a magnificent spectacle. This masterpiece of nature is also part of the Nimule National Park. As we left, a Bateleur Eagle flew away over us, as if saying goodbye.

Sayed Bechir El Hag Ali informed us that, in addition to the animals we had seen, there were also warthogs, bushbuck and hippo in the Park, the last-named also occupying the khors and wadis during the rainy season, i.e. in the dry watercourses, apart from the Nile, during the summer. The number of hippos is in excess of 100; the number of elephants, permanently in the Park, in the vicinity of 300; while there are hundreds of buffalo that have their habitat in the Park. There are no giraffe, lions, roan-antelope or tiangs.

There is no poaching in Nimule Park on account of its limited size and the fact that a shot can be heard everywhere. Nevertheless, in the surrounding regions near the borders, there is a certain amount of poaching by the local Madi from Uganda, but only to a very small extent. They place wire snares for buffalo, hartebeest and waterbuck, while smaller game is shot with arrows. Only very seldom is an elephant or a square-lipped rhino killed by poachers. The locality is therefore exceedingly favourable for the game, as is borne out by the condition of the animals, that continue to increase in numbers. The permanent staff in the Park comprises a Park Warden, two armed Game Scouts, two Guards and a ferryman.

This National Park might well become an attractive stopping-place for tourists undertaking the Nile Valley trip to East Africa, but up to the present the number of visitors has been negligible, ranging from 21 in 1957 to 53 in 1960. There is probably nowhere else in the world where White Rhino, elephant and buffalo can be so easily observed and photographed from so short a range as in the Nimule National Park! It is worth a visit!