

TO THE
MYSTERIOUS
LORIAN SWAMP

An Adventurous & Arduous Journey of Exploration
through the Vast Waterless Tracts of
Unknown Jubaland

BY

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With Illustrations & a Map

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How a Rhino's Throat was cut—Afmadu Wells—Adventure with a Leopard—Graves of Giants—Fangal—Abdurrahman's Treachery, & the Murder of Mr Elliott at Serenli—Fangal Camp

AS I have remarked, no Mohammedan is supposed to eat the meat of any animal the throat of which has not been cut before it is quite dead, but there are occasions when some of the African Mohammedans stretch this letter of their law to a breaking-point. I recollect one occasion when I was out on patrol in the Laikipia district with a party of *askaris* of the K.A.R., who were Nubians. These men come from the Sudan, and at one time were the slaves of the Egyptians until Britain stepped in and freed them, taking over Sudan at the same time. The former slaves were trained as soldiers to reinforce the native African regiments of Uganda and East Africa, and they proved exceedingly good fighting men. A number of them were stationed at Nairobi at one time, and a squad or so were detailed to go with me on a patrol through Laikipia, towards Lake Baringo.

Most of that country, through which the Uaso Nyiro river flows, to lose itself in the Lorian Swamp, is very open. There were numerous varieties of game on the Laikipia Plateau and any number of rhinoceros. I had not intended to shoot any, as I already had got very good rhino head trophies, but the Nubian corporal in charge of my escort asked me to shoot a big bull we saw grazing in an open patch amongst scattered

scrub. For some reason the Nubians and Swahilis are particularly fond of rhino-meat. I think they have an idea that if they eat it they will derive some of that beast's strength. At that time I had a number of Kikuyu porters who were carrying my loads on their heads, all trailing after me in single file. The rhino suddenly got their wind, and, giving a ferocious snort, charged with lowered head at my caravan. The porters all promptly dropped their loads and clambered up the nearest trees, which were of the *garas* variety, not more than twelve feet high, and with branches scarcely more than six feet off the ground. Here they clung, gibbering with fright, some with their feet only a yard from the ground, hanging by straining hands to the branches where others of their more fortunate brethren sat. Puzzled by the disappearance of his expected enemies the rhino stood pawing the ground, snorting like a leaky steam-engine. I fired with my .350 Magnum, getting him in the shoulder. Down he went with a crash which shook the ground. Running up a little closer I shot him in the neck, severing the spinal column, killing him instantly. The Nubian corporal came running up. "Is he dead, *Effendi*?" he asked. "Dead as yesterday's beef," I replied, as I measured the rhino's horns with a tape-measure.

The other *askaris* had come up by now. "But if he is quite dead we won't be able to cut his throat and eat the meat," remarked one, voicing the dismay of the others. "P'r'aps he isn't *quite* dead," said I consolingly. Then, more as a joke than with serious intention, I added: "Try pulling his tail and see." The Nubian

stretched out a cautious hand and gave the animal's tail a hefty pull. "Quick, Ali, quick!" he shouted; "see, he's not quite dead! Did you not notice the body move? Give me your knife, I'll cut his throat." A huge knife was lugged out and the throat of the dead rhino was solemnly sawn through, while one of the men gave the tail several jerks, urging his comrade to hurry up and get the ceremony over before life (*sic*) was extinct! I went away, and sat under a tree and laughed until I cried.

But they all got their rhino-meat, and were quite satisfied that they had duly observed the necessary religious practices!

By this time the various porters had descended from their perches and were gathered round the huge carcass. So I decided to camp where we were, especially as there was a stream near by whence we could draw water. It was not long before tents were pitched and the men were sitting round their little fires grilling rhino-steak on sticks.

The country round Afmadu was fairly open, with scattered thorn-bush and numbers of the little *garas-trees*, which I have already mentioned as being very much like the clipped and rounded holly-trees sometimes seen in nursery gardens, and with a similar green shiny leaf, only without any prickles.

While the caravan was making its way from our Afmadu camp I went off at an angle to our line of march, in order to have a look at the deep river-bed in which the wells lay. I found it rather difficult to trace the exact bearing of the bed, owing to the thick bush down below, but evidently it ran in a westerly direction.

A Night Alarm—Shots & Shrieks—How we protected Women & Children from their Own Folk—Further Marches—Gruesome Remains—Giraffe & Gerenuk—An Adventure with a Rhinoceros—Seddeh Dima Fort

TOWARDS the early hours I was awakened out of a heavy sleep by a couple of shots and by the voice of the sentry calling upon someone to halt. Leaping to my feet and seizing my rifle I threw back the flap of my tent and hastened to where he was standing peering into the darkness, a few yards in front of me. The guard turned out, and the rest of my force sprang up from where they were lying wrapped in their blankets. I ordered them to take up their allotted positions round the *boma* and await orders. The sentry told me that he had heard a suspicious rustling in the bushes and a sound as of whispering voices. We all remained quiet and listened with straining ears. The darkness seemed to close down heavier. Clouds obscured the sky and not a star could be seen. For a while we heard only the constant chorus of frogs and the shrill chirring of crickets. Somewhere in the distance a hyena howled mournfully. Then suddenly the dark silence of the bush was rent by loud yells. Scattered rifle-firing sputtered out, followed by the shrieks of women and children. At a word from me my N.C.O. gave a sharp order, and there was a clicking of bolts as the men loaded their rifles. The isolated shots in the distance became more numerous and the

impala are usually found only in, or on the fringe of, forest country. I decided to try to shoot one, so made a detour, as the wind was variable and unfavourable. I told the caravan to go on slowly and ordered a couple of Arabs to sit down where we were until they saw me signal. Ali bin Omari and I, bent almost double, made our way behind clumps of bushes until I judged that we had got far enough round. Motioning him to remain behind a big baobab-tree I crept on to where a green *garas*-tree stood and peered cautiously round the stem.

I got the surprise of my life. There, facing slightly away from me, and only a hundred yards off, stood a big bull rhinoceros! He was so close that I could see all the creases in his thick hide, the tufts of hair sticking out of his piggy ears, and the whitish marks where he had rubbed himself against a tree. On his back were dozens of little brown "tick-birds," who were busy running all over him, picking off and eating the ticks which infested his body with their sharp red beaks. Every now and then they stopped to cast bright, suspicious glances around to see if any enemy was approaching. They act as guards to the short-sighted rhino in return for the free meals he supplies them, and he stands or lies, dozing in the heat of the day, secure in the knowledge that they will warn him by their shrill cries if they see anyone approaching from up-wind, while his own sharp nose will give him notice of anybody who comes down-wind.

Very carefully I crept round the stem of my tree until I got a clear view. Very carefully I lifted my rifle,

aiming at the juncture of his huge neck with his great body.

“Bang! . . .”

The bullet hit with a resounding thwack.

The rhino gave a tremendous snort, rushed forward about ten yards, stopped short, ploughed up the sand with his horn, then fell over—dead! All the little tick-birds flew off and sat in a neighbouring tree, chattering and scolding me as I ran up, closely followed by Ali bin Omari. At the same moment there was the sound of many running feet, and nearly all my followers came hastening up. It appeared that they had seen the rhino after I left and had stopped the caravan in order not to disturb it, as they thought I had seen and was stalking it. It was not long before they were all grouped round the dead beast, busily engaged in cutting it up. I had the horns, which were quite a fair size, cut off, but I told them to leave the head behind, as it was too heavy to load on to our camels.

It did not take long before the hide was cut off in strips and great hunks of meat were being carried away by the men, who loaded their share on each of the camels they led. Then, as the ever-vigilant vultures swung down to partake of the remains, our caravan of camels once more set out on its way.

Before very long we came through the last patch of bush into a wide, open, cleared space, where conifers were dotted about, and thorn-bushes stuck in the ground near heaps of sand denoted the presence of wells. In the centre of the clearing was a whitewashed stone enclosure, with several neat round huts built in lines, and a one-storeyed stone house of three or four

rooms. Outside the gate of the enclosure, and close to a pole on which was hoisted the Union Jack, stood a sentry. A bugle sounded as my caravan appeared and the guard turned out, standing to attention as I approached.

We had arrived at Seddeh Dima Fort at last!

while all the friends and relations come in and partake of the food provided.

The food consists of great platters of rice and meat, dishes of roasted *buni* (coffee-beans) floating in sizzling butter, plates of sticky, sweet *halwa* (a sort of Turkish delight prepared from arrowroot boiled in sugar syrup), and small cups of black coffee, as mentioned before.

It is not until the last guest has gone that the bridegroom attends to the bride, feeding her with his own fingers from the various plates and dishes prepared for the marriage feast.

The bride is not allowed to utter a single word for two days (this must be a great strain!) and does not come out of her new abode until a week has passed.

Amongst some of the up-country Somalis the bride is treated very harshly by her husband during the first month of marriage. He ties her hands to a beam, so that her toes only just touch the ground, and then beats her hard with a whip made from the hide of a rhinoceros, frequently drawing blood. She is not supposed to utter even a moan during this exquisite torture; and Somali women I have asked about the matter assure me that this is a great point of honour amongst them, and that they really do not make a single sound. When the husband is tired he lets her down and bathes her wounds. Apparently they do not beat their wives so frequently after the first month, doing it only now and then to "keep her in her place."

Once the first child is born the wives appear to be free from this special sign of affection, unless, possibly,

From a scientific point of view it would be worth organizing an expedition, under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society, in order to explore the glaciers and ice-fields thoroughly and to scale the summit, making careful record of all geological, botanical and meteorological conditions.

Game which lives in the forests and amongst the bamboos, or on the high moorlands above, differs considerably from game in the lower altitudes, principally in colouring, size and thickness of pelt. The colouring is dark to black, as, for instance, in the beautiful black leopard and black otter, both of which varieties have been obtained, but are extremely rare. There is a big blackish bush buck, which the Imperial Institute authorities in London named the "*Tragelaphus Haywoodii*," much to my amusement and interest, as I happened to be the first to shoot and send it home. His head is finer than the average bush buck and his coat has thick hair, almost as deep as a fur. A giant hog is found also, both here and on Nyeri Hill. The full-grown hogs stand about four feet at the shoulder and are big in proportion. Natives say they used to be very numerous until rinderpest came along, when they died in hundreds.

As regards birds on the upper slopes of Kenya Mountain, one finds the pretty bush guinea-fowl; a large kind of partridge, about twice the size of the ones at home; a very big pigeon with a mottled breast, the green pigeon, a small greenish parrot, and sundry others.

The tailless hyrax is very common, living in the hollow trees. There are three varieties which I have

come across: the ordinary brown one, in the lower country; the one with a white fleck in the middle of his back, in the forests; and a black-and-white striped one, in the bamboos.

Blue monkeys abound, herds of them swinging and chattering from the trees as one climbs over fallen logs and dead stumps in the thick forests. In the bamboos are numerous colobus monkeys, with long white tails, white fringes to their black coats and white whiskers. They are much prized for their fur by dealers, but, like most of the other monkeys, are strictly protected, only two being allowed to be shot on each game licence in a year.

The views one can obtain from the highland moors at about an altitude of ten thousand feet on clear days are marvellous. Far away below to the east and south-east stretches a wide grey sea of bush, unbroken by hill or rock to the distant horizon, dry, thirsty and inhospitable. That is Jubaland. More to the west and north-west the country is open and undulating, cultivated in wide patches by natives with maize, bananas, sweet potatoes and yams. The farther western horizon is broken by a line of bluish hills, the Aberdares, at the foot of which lies the Laikipia Plateau, and whence comes the Uaso Nyiro, which flows into the Lorian Swamp away down near the edge of that grey sea of bush. Above rises the sharp black peak of Kenya, with snow lying in its deep ravines and white glaciers covering its bare, rocky feet. Here there is moorland, with fine champagne-like air—so fine that it hurts as one breathes.

Burns and rills are everywhere. Great clumps of