

BIG GAME SHOOTING

IN

India, Burma, and Somāliland.

By

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CHAPTER XIV.

AFRICAN BLACK RHINOCEROS.

Somāli - Weel.

MY experience with this species (*Rhinoceros bicornis*) has been in Somāliland, in the southern part of the Haud and in Ogāden—the former being in the British and the latter in the Italian Protectorate. They are fairly numerous in Ogāden, but only a few come northward into the Haud.

Though massive, bulky beasts, they do not stand very high at the shoulder. The highest I measured was 4ft. 10in. (14'2).

The horns are, generally speaking, the same length in both the bulls and cows, but the bull's are thicker. Swayne says that a good pair measures 19in. for the front horn, and 5in. for the back one. The back one, however, is often much longer than that. The best pair I shot measured—front horn, 17in., and back, 11½in.

The black rhinoceros feeds chiefly on thorn bush, and is therefore usually found in that cover or in its neighbourhood.

I have never seen more than two rhinoceroses together, and have generally found them single. Colonel Patterson, in his book "In the Grip of the Nyika," relates how he saw sixteen rhinoceroses at midnight, squealing, screaming, and struggling in their efforts to get at a waterhole, only some 200 yards from his camp.

I have perhaps half a dozen times seen a cow rhinoceros with a calf, but never with more than one.

Their sight is undoubtedly poor. Their hearing (judging by my own experience) is good enough to put them on the alert when approached in thick bush which cannot be walked in noiselessly. If care be taken regarding the wind, they can be approached closely in favourable cover, but are often hard to distinguish when standing at rest under the dark shade of a spreading mimosa. I have come upon

a rhinoceros (and her calf) asleep in a sitting position under a small tree in very open bush.

Swayne calls them the most stupid animals he ever shot, but all the same I consider it difficult to hunt them successfully in the kind of jungle in which they are usually found.

They are curiously obstinate, not to say "pig-headed" animals; and if anything annoys them, they frequently make straight for the cause of it, not altering their course whatever its nature. In approaching them I have generally been charged, or at all events the direction taken by the rhinoceros on being disturbed has been straight on to me. It is true I have not known them turn after their enemy, nor (with one exception) stay to damage him, but their rush has either to be stopped or avoided, which latter proceeding is not always easy in the thorn bush they affect in Somäliland. The "rhino" in this rush puffs and snorts like a steam engine, which accompaniment of sound as the great beast breaks through the jungle is apt to give the hunter "the jumps."

I once came by chance on a rhinoceros in thick thorn bush. I was following my tracker at a couple of paces distance (proceeding up wind) when I saw him suddenly stop and commence to back slowly out of the way. The next moment a rhino charged us. We had just time to throw ourselves to one side amongst the bushes regardless of thorns, and the animal passed almost over me. She (it was a cow) went on and scattered the rest of my party, nearly catching the pony, which she lunged at with her horn as it broke loose and galloped away. Then we heard the bleating of her calf near the spot where we had disturbed its mother. It was quite small and the men offered to catch it, but I could not be bothered with it, as it would have been an immense trouble to keep it alive. An elephant would probably not have deserted her young as this rhinoceros did, though I daresay she returned to it when the coast was clear.

Regarding this rush of the black rhinoceros on being alarmed, I have heard a theory that when this species rests, it makes up its mind as to the direction it will take if disturbed, and consequently, no matter what the position or numbers of the disturbers may be, it will take that particular line; and that this accounts for the numerous cases on record of so-called charges, and of rhinoceros going through caravans on the march. It is strange, however, that this pre-determined line should so frequently be straight in the direction of the hunter, or through a camp or caravan.

I have known rhino on several occasions charge or rush towards

me on discovering my presence though I was down wind from them. Any wild animal bent on escaping (except the perverse rhino) would naturally go off up wind when its enemy was to leeward of it. I think the more likely explanation of the rhino's peculiarity is that, though intending to make off, it wishes to "have a whack" at the intruder *en passant*.

The paces of the rhinoceros are the walk, trot, and gallop. When thoroughly alarmed or in making their rush they gallop at a great rate.

A sign of rhinoceros I have come across, besides broken and nibbled thorn bush, tracks, and dung, are marks in the ground two or

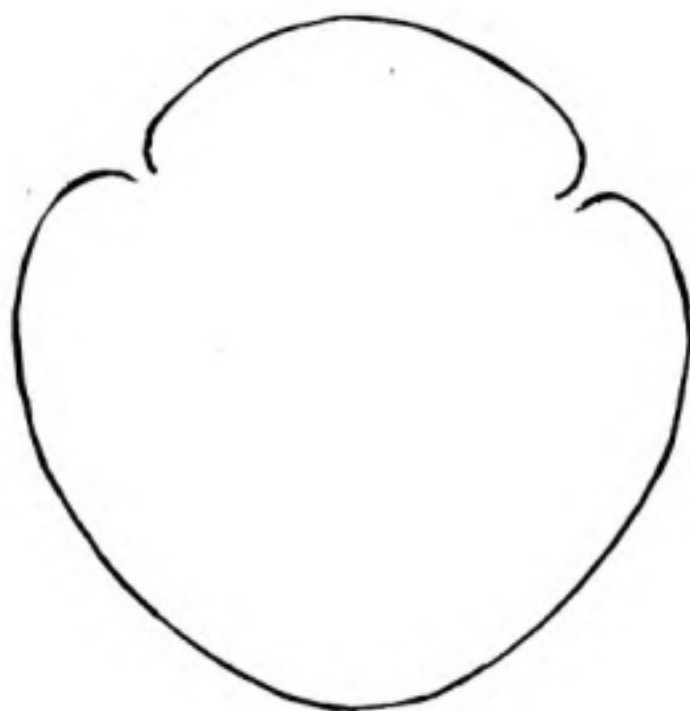


FIG. 18.

three feet long and several inches deep, made, my Somālis said, by the horn.

The dung is often deposited repeatedly in the same place, so that considerable heaps of it may be seen.

The form of the track of a full-grown rhinoceros, when clearly imprinted, showing the three toe marks (of which the middle one is much the largest), is as illustrated—about a quarter size.

I did not find any difference to speak of in the size or shape of the feet of bulls and cows, nor in that of the fore and hind feet. Both my hunters became *hors de combat*, so I had only the assistance of some of the camelmén in tracking for the greater part of my rhino shooting.

They could not tell me for certain whether tracks were those of bulls or cows, but that may have been because we never had the luck to follow a very big bull. The general size of tracks was about 10in. long and 9in. wide.

Besides the usual method of shooting by following up tracks, Swayne bagged several rhinoceros in Somaliland by watching pools at night for them. The pools were at long distances from any other water. I never sat up over water in that country.

For the brain shot, if the rhinoceros is standing broadside to you, aim just under the anterior part of the butt of the ear at the point indicated in the sketch. If at any angle, aim so that your bullet will strike the centre of a line passing through these points. In case of the animal coming directly on to you, the front horn covers the brain,



FIG. 19.

and the chest shot must be taken. A rhino in his rush or charge, if the bush is at all open, gallops in great style, head up, with high action, till within reach of a man, when he lowers his head to horn his opponent, as I have myself seen.

I have twice tried for the brain shot, and was successful only one of those times. The rhino's head was slightly turned towards me, (forming about a quarter face), and at a rather lower level than my rifle. The bullet hit just in front and under the butt of the ear, killing the animal instantaneously.

Swayne mentions a successful head shot in the following words—
“The bull dropped in his tracks, an inert mass. Going up, we found that the ten-bore had hit him exactly where I had aimed, the bullet

entering under the left ear and stopping under the skin of the right temple."

My first introduction to rhinoceros was in the month of July in the southern part of the Haud. We had noticed rhino tracks one day while on the march, and I left camp at six o'clock the next morning to work over the ground, accompanied by my hunters, Jāma and Moosa, carrying the eight-bores, and two camelmén with a '303 rifle and other necessary things. We all walked together—a compact party. About 7.45 we found the night's tracks of a cow rhinoceros and calf, and followed them up. The tracks were fairly plain in the red powdery soil, but difficult to keep to where there was much grass. The cow had made a maze of tracks, wandering about, but the men puzzled them out and we ultimately came upon quite fresh ones and dung. The men now removed their sandals. I was wearing rubber-soled boots, which made no noise. We advanced along the tracks cautiously, Jāma and I leading. At about 9.30 we came up to the rhino, standing under a mimosa tree. Jāma suddenly pointed her out—a dark form looming in the shade of the tree, thirty to forty yards off, and said, "shoot sir, shoot!" I could not make out how the rhino stood, but fired my right into the centre of the dark form. Out came the rhino, grunting, blowing, and dashing about as if uncertain what direction to take (which rather explodes a theory previously mentioned), during which time I plied her with a rapid fire from the two eight-bores, as they were reloaded and handed to me by Jāma and Moosa. After having received seven bullets, she charged me, and I dropped her at about twenty yards into a sitting position with a bullet in the chest. The calf would not leave its mother and was big enough to damage anyone going near it, so I shot it. My men raised a hunting song and warmly congratulated me on the success, each shaking hands with me.

I sent to camp for a camel to take away the trophies, which consisted of the head, tail, and those portions of the skin from which Somālis manufacture their fighting shields. I also brought away a leg of the calf for meat. Swayne recommends it as very good. Whether or no the fault lay in the cooking I cannot say, but on trying it I could not agree with him. Somālis do not eat it. They, however, are very fanciful regarding meat, refusing to eat fish, game birds, and even some kinds of antelope—Waller's gazelle for instance. In fact, they consider all game dry, and like nothing so much as a fat sheep, especially the fat.

In August I was hunting in Ogāden, and lost Moosa's services for

a time, owing to his being knocked down and hurt by a rhinoceros. We came that day unexpectedly on two of these animals, sixty or seventy yards off. Approaching a little nearer, I hit one (they were broadside on), and they both immediately turned and charged straight at me. Getting my second rifle I fired at the one leading by half a length, and then dodged to a side under cover of some bushes. The rhinos dashed on and disappeared. We had also all disappeared! and took a little time to reassemble, turning up from different points of the compass, laughing and joking at our rout. Finding blood we followed up, and in half an hour stumbled right on to a rhino (a cow) which got up within ten yards of us. As she did so I shot her through the hind-quarters which were towards me. She at once turned round and charged in amongst us, catching Moosa, knocking him over, and wounding him about the legs with her horn. Before she knocked him down I gave her my left on the flank. I then dashed about for my second rifle, the bearer of which was not to be seen for a few moments, and by the time I had got it, the rhino was disappearing in the thick bush, so that I only managed to obtain a snap shot at her stern. Going to see Moosa I found him lying like a dead man. On my speaking to him he began to groan. He had, however, escaped with some rubs and slight wounds on the leg and thighs. Blood was trickling from the wounds and he imagined himself to be much worse than he was. I then followed up the rhinoceros and came upon her in a quarter of an hour sitting down, head towards me, about forty yards away. I walked round till I obtained a flank view, then gave her a shoulder shot which turned her over on her side, and (as she struggled) finished her with another.

We got Moosa to camp supported by a couple of men. I dressed his wounds daily and he was well again in a fortnight, but I did the rest of my rhino-shooting without him.

About a week after Moosa's misadventure, we were following some fresh tracks early in the morning, when we heard the rhinoceros squealing. Approaching, we saw two rhinos standing facing each other, their noses not more than a foot apart, and evidently quarrelling to the accompaniment of plenty of "language." I got within thirty yards and fired as near the shoulder as possible at the one offering the clearer shot, they both being partially covered by jungle. At the shot the rhinos bolted, but I gave the other one my left as they galloped away, and taking my second rifle ran after them in hopes of getting another shot, which, however, I failed to do. Looking for blood we found some—the trail of one rhino only. I was pretty sure that both

were hit, so before following this trail I told the men to look for that of the other. A short way off we found it with plenty of blood, and taking it up soon came on the rhino (a bull) lying dead. The bullet (of my left) had caught him on the flank some way behind the shoulder and must have raked forward into the lungs. There was no blood to speak of from the bullet hole itself, but it was pouring from his mouth. We took up the trail of the other, following it for several hours, and finding only a little blood now and then. As this rhino continued to go straight without stopping or loitering anywhere, and the men thought it useless to keep on, I gave it up. When nearing camp they commenced the Somāli hunting song denoting success, and my followers in camp, hearing it, turned out and gave three English cheers. Somālis are always very appreciative of success in shikar.