

# HUNTING THE ELEPHANT IN AFRICA

AND OTHER RECOLLECTIONS OF  
THIRTEEN YEARS' WANDERINGS

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## CHAPTER III

### ABOUT RHINO

A RHINO is generally a very easily killed animal. If you can get him broadside on with a big bore he almost always sits down at once. Facing he is less easy to kill, and if moving, often a very difficult shot indeed.

In British East Africa, where he is plentiful and can be found in open country, there is nothing in killing a rhino. In Nyasaland and North Eastern Rhodesia, however, where he is more scarce and always found in thick grass or bush, he is really a very sporting animal to shoot. The natives there fear him more than any of the dangerous game, partly because he is really dangerous in their country, and partly because, owing to his scarcity, they have not grown accustomed to him. They have not had a chance to cultivate a sufficiency of that familiarity with him which breeds contempt. In the latter countries he seems to walk much farther and has to be generally tracked up all day like elephant, instead of being come upon by chance as in East Africa.

I have shot a good many rhinos in East Africa and in the Lado, when under the Belgians, during the ordinary

course of trekking, either when in want of meat or because they came uncomfortably close to one's porters. Less often I have killed them to make up my license or because I thought the horns were good. However, I have never taken any interest in shooting them; it always appeared tame and uninteresting, with the exception of the few occasions when they came through my porters, in which case it was too disconcerting to be pleasant. In Nyasaland and North Eastern Rhodesia, however, the hunting of rhino was quite different, and killing one seemed a feat quite worthy of accomplishment. No doubt this was largely due to the difficulty in finding him.

Whilst hunting near Lake Bangweolo I followed one for the greater part of the day, and finally crept up, closely followed by the faithful Matola, within five yards of where he lay, heavily breathing in thick grass. Even then it was so thick that I could not see him properly, and bungled the shot, and he crashed off with a noise like an infuriated steam engine. We tracked him till dark, but did not come up with him again.

This particular rhino followed close to the edge of a grass fire for several miles. I have often read, and been told, of wild animals' fear of fire, but never myself noticed anything to corroborate this idea. In fact, rather the reverse. I have often put up game lying peacefully quite close to a bush fire. These grass fires are of yearly occurrence, and the game must be well

accustomed to them. It is only when surrounded by a fire ring that they lose their heads, and indeed this must be a very alarming occurrence, especially if there are hundreds of natives at the same time shouting from all sides.

In Nyasaland and North Eastern Rhodesia the elephant are often very bold at night, and after the harvest calmly walk into the villages, pull the roofs off the *nkokwes*, or grainstores, and help themselves to the maize cobs. When this happens, or they have been very persistent in entering the plantations at night before harvest time, the natives make large fires in their fields, and spend the night shouting and beating drums to frighten them away. Even this often does not deter them, and they visit the fields all the same. When, however, they are kept off, I fancy the shouting and the drumming have more effect than the fires.

To return to the rhino, after the ease with which one has shot him in other places, it seems odd to read the pages of one's diary and notice the long tracks after him, the excitement when he commenced nibbling thorn, which showed that he would soon lie up, and the trouble one took to bring him to bag in Nyasaland. As I have said, he travels much farther there and in North Eastern Rhodesia, and one has to follow him for long distances. As often as not one picks up his night's tracks at a water hole. He often goes tremendous distances to and from water, and perhaps his grazing grounds are seven to ten miles from the place at which he drank.



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In 1905 I was looking for elephant in the vicinity of Fort Manning. I had no thought of rhino, but was anxious to shoot the elephant on my new license, as the old one had just expired. I was following an old elephant track across a dambo, or open grassy flat, when I met a fresh spoor crossing at right angles. The grass was very thick, and the track showed as a beaten down lane of grass, but it was not immediately apparent what had caused it, as the grass was too thick under foot for any spoor to be seen. I turned up the track for a few yards, and then bent down, parting the grass so as to see the tracks under it; I had a few Angoni with me, but they were some yards behind on the old track.

Before my investigation was complete, I was left in little doubt as to the owner of the tracks, as I heard the engine-like puffs of a pair of rhinos close at hand breaking down the grass. Evidently they had been lying up close to the spot at which I had hit their track and had now got my wind.

The next moment a great behorned head burst out of the grass a yard or two from me. I had no time to think, but just shoved my mannlicher in his face and pulled the trigger. He swerved, but I do not know what became of him after that, as at the same moment I became aware of the second one bearing down on me from my left. There was no time to reload, so I tried to jump out of his path, with the usual result in thick stuff, that one tripped up.

He kicked me in passing, and then, with a celerity surprising in so ponderous a creature, he whipped round, and the next moment I felt myself soaring up skywards. I must have gone some height, as my men on the elephant track said that they saw me over the grass, which was ten or twelve feet high. However, they are so very unreliable in their statements that it would be quite enough for them, if they heard what had happened, to imagine that they had seen it. Anyhow I fell heavily on my shoulder blades, the best place on which it is possible to fall, partly by accident and partly from practice in tumbling in the gymnasium.

On looking up I saw the wrinkled stern of the rhino disappearing in the grass, at which I said to myself, hurrah! for I thought that he might continue the onslaught. Somehow I had the idea that he had been playing battledore and shuttlecock with me for some time, but when I came to think it over I could only remember going up once. Possibly being kicked first gave me this impression.

Next I looked round for my rifle and espied it on the ground a little way off. I picked it up and examined it to see if it had been injured. While doing this I suddenly found that a finger nail had been torn off and was bleeding. Directly I discovered it, it became very painful.

Whilst examining this injury some of my men appeared and uttered cries of horror. I could not make out why they were so concerned till I glanced at my





**RHINO**

Trotting past my caravan in the Lake Rudolph country.

1908

chest and saw that my shirt had been ripped open and was covered with blood whilst there was a tremendous gash in the left side of my chest, just over the spot in which the heart is popularly supposed to be situated. Small bits of mincemeat were also lying about on my chest and shirt.

This was a new problem to think out; I was in rather a dazed state, so I left the consideration of my finger and began to consider my chest. I felt nothing at all except a rather numb sensation. It struck me that it must have pierced my lungs; I would soon know if this was the case, as I would be spitting blood. I waited a short time and nothing of the sort occurred, so I concluded that the lungs were all right.

Just at this moment there was a rustle in the grass; it appeared that the rhino had come back. One of my men helped me up and another put my rifle in my hands, and I awaited them, but presently we heard them tearing off again.

I was only about thirty miles from Fort Manning, and so I sent off a native to tell the other fellow there, Captain Mostyn, that I had met with an accident. Then I started back to the nearest village. After walking some time I felt faint, and so my natives cut a pole and trussed me on to it, fastening me with my putties. This was, however, so very uncomfortable that I had myself untrussed again and performed the rest of the journey on foot.



Having arrived at the village, I sent off for my camp, which was at another village, and sat down to await it patiently. After a few hours it turned up, and I dressed my wound as best I could and lay down. I calculated the time the news would take to reach Fort Manning and the distance out and came to the conclusion that Mostyn could not possibly send help before about noon next day.

I had a sleepless night till, about two in the morning, I heard voices, and then the stockaded door of the zariba being pulled down, and presently Mostyn appeared. He said that a native had arrived at sunset with the information that the white man had killed a rhino, to which he replied "Good." The information was repeated and the native seemed in a greater state of agitation than the news seemed to warrant. Then he said that a rhino had killed the white man.

This was quite a different thing. He was so agitated that Mostyn could not get out of him what had really happened, and so, thinking there must have been an accident, he got the Indian Hospital assistant, and the two set out. They covered some twenty to twenty-four miles in the dark on a bad track between 7 P.M. and 2 A.M., a very fine bit of marching, especially as they did not know for certain where I was and had to knock up villages on the way and ask for news.

The Indian, whose name was Ghulam Mohamed, was so done up when he arrived that I told him he had better

rest till morning, but he insisted on attending to me at once, and stitched up the wound most skilfully. He was a first-class doctor, and the job could not have been done better, for three weeks later I was well enough, though still in bandages, to start on a 240-mile march, which I performed in ten days.

I think the country in which I have seen most rhino was that about the south and southeast of the Ithanga Mountains in British East Africa in 1907 — I add the date, as game in a locality differs often from year to year; I was surveying there and quite frequently met about ten whilst trekking along.

One evening, coming home in the dark from sketching, I almost walked right into one standing quite motionless. Another day in thick thorn two rushed up the path we were following. The porters threw down their loads and dived into the thorn right and left, whilst the rhino passed right up the line without damaging anybody or anything, although they must have passed within a few yards of thirty men in all.

I find in my Diary for 5th November, 1907, "Came near to Maboloni Hill. Saw seven rhino grazing near the hill and steered the caravan safely past, leaving four about a hundred yards up wind and three about four hundred yards down wind." The next day I find "Met twelve rhino all in our immediate path. Two were lying down close to where I wanted to set up the plane table. After great difficulty they were persuaded

to move, and I began setting up the table when another appeared. Leaving here we came on a party of three lying down near a river bed, one bull, a cow, and a calf. I watched the bull making advances to the cow, which were not favourably received, as she got up and prodded him away. They lay down again, and then suddenly all three jumped up and rushed off; I do not know what alarmed them. Going up a narrow spur I met one, and steering round to avoid him came suddenly on two others lying just over the edge of the ridge.

“The cook went down to the river and said that he saw eleven and had to get up a tree.”

On the next day I met two rhino on a spur, the farthest one of which started walking towards us. It was very comical to see the man carrying my plane table, who had only seen the latter, hurriedly put down his load and bolt from the farther one right into the arms of the nearer one, which he had not noticed.

On the day following this I was out early after lion, and hearing a noise behind me, saw a female rhino and small calf racing towards me, so I hurriedly got up a tree and let them pass.

Later in the day when trekking along with my porters the same thing happened again; a female and calf appeared out of some thorn and raced after us. Loads were hurled down and there was a general *sauve qui*



*peut*, but they turned off again when they reached the loads and dashed back into the thorn.

Just after that I saw one with an immensely long posterior horn, much longer than the anterior, standing under a tree in our road. I went forward and shouted and whistled till it moved on, and then we proceeded, only to find another about a hundred yards down wind of where we wished to pass.

We were so bored with making constant *détours* to avoid these animals that we waited till he had grazed on about another 150 yards and then made a slight *détour* up wind so as to pass about 350 yards from him. When the leading part of the caravan got up wind of him, he went on peacefully grazing, but when about half had passed, he suddenly got our wind.

Instead of going away he came towards us. I had shot my two rhinos for the year before we met any of the above-mentioned animals, and so I had been trying to avoid them as much as possible. I now stationed myself in front of the caravan, hoping that he would turn off, but he came steadily on.

When he got to about 80 yards distant he still had his head up. I fired, missing him on purpose, hoping that it would frighten him, but it seemed only to encourage him, as he then put down his head and came in earnest, wavering slightly from side to side to keep the wind. His head and horns covered his heart and brain, so at 50 yards I put a shot into the side of his

shoulder, and at 30 yards I put another, which fortunately disabled his right shoulder so that he stumbled. He picked himself up and came on again, but now slowly, and the danger was past, as he was disabled and could be easily dodged.

As I was surveying, and not shooting, and had no intention of shooting at a rhino, having shot all I was allowed, I had only three cartridges in my rifle, which I had now fired. My pockets were so full of pencils, notebooks, etc., that I had handed over all my cartridges to a Mkamba guide, who could be found nowhere.

I called out for more cartridges, and meanwhile the rhino came slowly stumping on and I retreated before him. He had just reached the spot at which the porters had thrown down their loads, and I expected to see him begin to amuse himself with them, when my dog, who had only been a spectator so far, thought it about time to join in. He rushed barking at the rhino and the beast turned round and round, facing him, while the dog rushed round and round trying to get at his heels.

Whilst this diversion was in progress the head man discovered the Mkamba guide up a tree, secured the cartridge bag, and came running up with it. Getting a convenient side shot, I finished the rhino. We cut off the horns with a hatchet to hand in at the next government station we passed, and continued our march.

I have only mentioned a few of the rhino incidents which happened when I was sketching in that country.

It must be remembered that we were not looking for them, but rather trying to avoid them, as they delayed our marches and hampered my work.

In the same country a rhino suddenly started up and came rushing towards us. When we shouted at him he thought better of it and turned round to make off, disclosing the fact that he had no tail. This seemed to tickle the porters very much, and as he disappeared with his small stump, in place of a tail, sticking straight up, he was sped on his way with shouts of derision. They seemed to imagine that his lack of a tail made it specially impertinent of him to have attempted to come for us.

Once when I was sketching on a hilltop to the south of Embu where lion had been heard for several nights, after finishing my work, I sent my men back to camp with the instruments, and myself made a *détour*, hoping to meet a lion. Whilst passing under a tree, I noticed a rhino coming slowly towards me. The tree was easily climbable, and my first impulse was to get up and take some photographs, but then I remembered that I had no camera. So I moved a little out of his path and watched him. He came slowly up to the tree and lay down underneath it. I regretted very much the absence of my camera; one could have taken a splendid illustrated interview from a perch on the tree.

Rhino, in spite of the thickness of their skin, appear very subject to sores. There are almost always large



sores on the chest or stomach, and often enormous festering sores on other parts of the body. They frequently, too, are cut and gashed about, these being probably caused by fighting together. A female I shot once, amongst other gashes, had one vertical one extending from the centre of the back almost to the stomach. That is to say, it went nearly halfway round her body. It seems almost inconceivable that such a wound could have been inflicted with a prod of another's horn, and yet I cannot think of any other cause to which it could be attributed.

When I was hunting in the Lado Enclave in 1908, I found the white or square-lipped rhinoceros very common about Wadelai and close to the Nile for some days to the north. Although I never looked for them or followed up their spoor, I was constantly meeting them. As it was a grass country, they could not be seen so easily as in a country such as that described above, so they must have been even more numerous than they appeared. It was curious that on no single occasion did my Baganda porters recognise what they were when they saw them in the grass, but invariably said, "There is an elephant." The same held good with the spoor, as they always said that it was elephant spoor.

I suppose that as they are not met with in Uganda proper they had never seen them before. One would have thought that after seeing them once or twice and cutting them up, they would have learnt to distinguish

them from elephant and that they must have noticed how different the spoor was from that of the latter. This was the more remarkable in that they were really very good at detecting and spooring elephant. I have always noticed that, however good a native may be at hunting and tracking the game he knows, directly he meets something new to him he is not only hopeless, but makes the most wild and impossible shots. One would think a trained tracker would be too cunning to go so hopelessly wide of the mark as they do. The tracks of a waterbuck and hartebeest are often very similar, but a good Nyasaland tracker would never be in error about the two.

I have never heard a tracker on meeting a spoor new to him say, "This is a spoor I have never seen before." He always finds a name for it amongst the animals he knows and generally chooses one that has no likeness to it at all. The first time I saw the spoor of Lesser Kudu I at once recognised it from its likeness to that of the Greater Kudu, but my tracker, who had come with me from Nyasaland, where there are none of these animals, said "Mpala." Yet I cannot pretend to anything like the knowledge or the ability of these men, which proves that they hunt more by instinct than anything else, and do not use their heads.