

TRAVELS
IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA

In the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806,

BY
HENRY LICHTENSTEIN.

*A REPRINT OF THE TRANSLATION FROM THE
ORIGINAL GERMAN*

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Our day's journey, on the sixth of November, was performed by me more than half on foot, that I might be at liberty to collect plants and insects. I was obliged to carry, besides the apparatus necessary for disposing of the treasures I hoped to amass, a gun to defend myself in case of necessity, or to kill any game I might meet with; and thus loaded, a walk in the heat of the day was somewhat fatiguing. My trouble, however, was repaid by a large addition to my collection, and by a hare and a couple of very pretty birds which I shot. I quitted the road, and climbed among the rocks, now up, now down, over clefts and crags, till at length about noon I rejoined our party, whom I found in a place called the Hartebeestfontein, belonging to the son of one of our old friends the Louws. He was not himself at home: he had been absent a fortnight, having gone with some neighbours to hunt the eland.* They had now exceeded the time that they proposed to be absent by two days, and the wife was under no little anxiety lest some accident had befallen them. It was impossible not to share in her distress, and equally to participate in her joy, at seeing them return in the evening. The company had gone five days northwards, beyond the boundaries of the colony, and besides all the smaller game they had killed, which served as their daily food, they brought home seventeen elands. These animals weighed from seven to eight hundred pounds a-piece, so that the portion of each of the hunters was about four thousand pounds of pure, excellent flesh. This was cut to pieces upon the spot, salted and packed in the skins, and thus brought home in a waggon they had taken with them. Here it was to be smoked, and would then be a plentiful supply of cheap and wholesome food.

* The *Antelope Oreas*. These are a large sort of Antelopes they go together in flocks, and their flesh is much esteemed; the marrow is considered as a particular delicacy; the skin is extremely useful, and the Hottentots make tobacco-pipes of the horns.

The great muscle of the thigh, smoked, is more particularly esteemed. These are cut out at their whole length, and from the resemblance they then bear to bullocks' tongues, are called thigh-tongues. They are often sent as presents, or for sale, to the Cape Town, and are there eaten raw, and cut into very thin slices, with bread and butter. Thus prepared, they are esteemed an excellent *gourmandise*. The taste of the eland's flesh, when eaten fresh, resembles beef, but it is less fat, and can for that reason be kept longer when dried. In this country, where bread is not always to be had, and where fatted mutton is thought not to be wholesome as a constant food, this smoked flesh comes in as a very agreeable and salutary change.

Much has been said against these hunting parties beyond the borders; and it must be confessed that Mr. Barrow does not without justice represent them as incroachment upon the savage tribe to whom the territories properly belong. They have, indeed, been strenuously prohibited by the Dutch government, since the year 1804; a regulation which certainly has more to be said for than against it, and the best effect of which is, that it must compel the colonists to be more diligent in seeking resources within themselves; that they must now be under the necessity of making improvements in the rearing of cattle, to compensate the loss of the supplies derived from the chase. I cannot, however, abstain from remarking, that the ground on which Mr. Barrow condemns this practice, can never, as it appears to me, be maintained, and that he rests his corollary entirely upon false assumptions. In my later journeys, when I went beyond the boundaries of the colony, I was fully convinced that there was a super-abundance of wild game all over the country, which the Bosjesmans, from their natural indolence, and from the imperfect nature of their arms, are by no means in a situation to make use of as an object of advantage to themselves. Nay, I have myself heard them complain of the discontinuance

of these hunting parties, since they were, they said, beneficial to them, as they got the refuse, that is to say, the head, the feet, and the entrails of the animals, for their portion. It is, however, I again repeat, right that the possible mischief which might arise from this practice should be prevented.

The district in which the elands had been killed was still, as Louw told us, inhabited by the rhinoceros, and he had himself, in the course of his life, dispatched several of these creatures. Their flesh is commonly given entirely to the savages, who consider it as a particular dainty; and such a present is the more acceptable, since they cannot, with their weak arrows, pierce the thick hide by which the monster is defended. The skin is the only thing valuable to the colonists, to cut into strips for making the driving whips known here by the Malay name of *Schamboks*. As these whips will always sell for two, three, or even four shillings, a rhinoceros amply repays the powder and ball necessary for killing him.

The Hartebeestfontein is a very fertile spot, and affords plenty of good feed for cattle. Louw keeps two hundred horses, three thousand sheep, four hundred goats, and a great number of horned cattle. A very neat nice young wife, and five stout, healthy children complete his domestic happiness; while his cheerful, contented spirit, and frank integrity of mind, render him worthy of all they can bestow.

We found the cold again here pretty severe at night, though the thermometer rose in the day to twenty degrees by Reaumur. In the winter months deep snows sometimes fall, and it is so cold that the inhabitants of the Roggeveldts, in order to preserve their cattle from want and disease, remove to the neighbouring Karroo, which lies some thousand feet lower. If rain falls at that period of the year, the Karroo, though it is at other times wholly dry and unfruitful, becomes a glorious meadow. Every colonist of the Roggeveld has, therefore, besides his proper habitation, a place

in the Karroo, which is called a *Legplaats*, and for which no duty, as for a regular farm, is paid to the government. Here a small house is erected, which at the beginning of spring is forsaken again, and remains empty and open. The drought begins to come on in September and October, when the family return to the hills, where they commonly remain till May or June. As the *Legplaats* is sometimes several days journey from the dwelling-house, it will be easily comprehended that these migrations twice in the year, with wife and children, bag and baggage, must occasion a good deal of trouble and expense.

The country upon these heights is more level, and less wearisome for travelling, than in many other parts we had visited. The valleys are broad and open: only here and there solitary eminences rear their heads: from the summits of many of these there is a fine view over the Karroo below. The stone is covered with a very thin coat of earth, but between the crags grow a variety of delightful aromatic plants, as for instance, different sorts of *oxalis*, *diosma*, *pelargonium*, *chrysocoma*, *pteronia*, *othonna*, and others; the *nudicaulis*, and *cotula globifera* abound more particularly. These afford a wholesome food for the sheep and horses, and enable them to subsist during the drought of summer, supposing the usual fall of snow and rain in winter not to fail; but this it unfortunately did in the years 1803 and 1804. When we were here, therefore, the stock of sheep was comparatively small to what it is at more favourable times. The flocks had not only suffered from want of food, but in consequence of the usual rains falling, they were infested with the sleep-louse to such a degree that many thousands died in consequence. The district contained at one time not less than eighty thousand sheep; but in 1805 they were reduced to half that number. The climate of the Roggeveld mountains has, in a course of years, undergone a considerable change. Old people remember very well, that half a century back the super-abundance

We stopped here a part of the following day, and found in the inspection of the premises, and in the conversation of the very intelligent people who were collected together, a high entertainment. The Field-commandant, Lombard, was one of those who in the year 1790, in conjunction with Mr. Jacob Van Reenen and others, undertook a journey to the very farthest extremity of the Caffre country, in search of the persons who were saved from the wreck of the Grosvenor East Indiaman. He related to us many anecdotes of this journey; and among other things, the conversation turned upon the unicorn, and the various opinions entertained as to the existence or non-existence of such an animal. Lombard declared he was not disinclined to believe in its existence, though he had never seen one himself, or knew of anybody by whom it was reported to have been seen. What Mr. Barrow has said upon this subject seemed the principal ground on which he rested his opinion; we shall in the sequel examine into the portion of weight which may be allowed to his reasoning. The Commissary-general repeated here the engagement made by the governor both at this and many other places in his journey, to give a strong new waggon with a team of oxen and all its appurtenances* as a reward to any one who should bring a complete skin of this animal, with the horn and skull-bone, to the Cape Town.

Our host, Dupré, notwithstanding his distance from Zwellendam, is overseer of the church there, and is obliged to attend service every Sunday. The journey takes from six to seven hours, so that he is obliged to set out in the middle of the night; yet, although near sixty years of age, he returns the same day. Among his slaves was a Malay more than a hundred years old, and perfectly blind: for the last thirty years he had been unable to work, but was not the less entirely maintained by his worthy master.

* Worth all together about five hundred dollars.

On the fourteenth of December we crossed the Krombek-and-Vet rivers, and stopped for the night at the house of Cobus Dupré, the son of our former host. We found here also a great number of the neighbours assembled, among others Dupré's father-in-law, Hilgard Müller, a very worthy old man, and another of the party who went with Van Reenen to the Caffre country in search of the Grosvenor's crew. This place had formerly belonged to him, and was no way inferior in the excellence of the buildings, and in the good order and regularity of every thing about it, to what we had seen at the senior Dupré's. The cows were here, as there, brought into covered stalls to be milked, a very unusual sight, since they are generally milked in the fields, and left loose in the kraal at night. He had near two hundred, all very handsome animals.

There was an apartment in the house appropriated solely to the performance of divine service; in it was an organ, on which one of Müller's daughters played very well. It was built in the place itself by a person of the name of Hoddersum, who was still living at the Cape Town when I quitted the country, continuing his trade, and gaining a very good livelihood by making harpsichords.

The country is here so fertile, that in a year when there is a tolerable supply of rain, wheat will yield seventy or eighty fold, and barley ninety or a hundred: in very dry years however the seed is scarcely more than returned. By more than one of these people it was remarked that the Lamziekte is not so frequent when there have been several rainy years in succession as after long continued droughts.

On the following day we rested some hours at the Zoetemelks-river, having previously crossed the Caffrekuils-river. At the house of a certain Fori, or Fauri, we first saw the manner of preparing the aloe-gum, which is very simple. The thick fresh leaves are gathered in August, September, and October; the sap is left to run out slowly, after which it is somewhat

by the wild animals in going to and from the river. The rhinoceros is very frequently to be seen in these parts, and is often hunted by the colonists of Camdeboo and Agtebruintjeshoogte. This animal is one of the most dangerous to travellers by night, since he rushes forwards impetuously with blind rage at every noise of which he is informed by his acute hearing, or at every object betrayed to him by his more acute smell. Examples have been known of these monsters running by night against a waggon, and overturning it, trampling down and destroying both that and all the oxen attached to it. As there were in many places fresh traces of them to be seen in our route this day, it was judged prudent in the evening to put the strongest of our young Africans in front, since, from being more experienced, they would be better able, if necessary, to encounter such a danger.

Our waggons did not arrive at their destination till some hours later than ourselves. But notwithstanding its being so late, we were all glad to get a hot supper, having lived for two days upon nothing but ship biscuit and dried beef. We therefore took our dinner and supper together at two o'clock in the morning.

We now learnt that neither Geika nor any of the people belonging to him had been seen by our messengers, although they had gone on to a considerable distance towards his habitation, in hopes of meeting him. They were therefore immediately sent to his usual residence, which was a long day's journey on horseback from our then station, with a commission to inform him that the Commissary-general was exceedingly mortified by not finding him at the appointed place; that relying entirely upon his word, he had undertaken a journey of thirty hours, which at this time of the year, and at his age, was very fatiguing, and delayed him very much in fulfilling the other purposes of his expedition. He could not therefore wait longer than two days, and if the King was not

arrived by that time, he must have the mortification of returning into the colony without having seen him.

On the very evening of our arrival we had the consoling prospect of a storm coming on, by which the air was very much cooled and refreshed. In the following days a reviving rain fell from time to time, which soon made a surprising alteration in the appearance of the country. As it is naturally fertile, our wearied oxen soon recovered their strength against the renewal of their labours. Our young people amused themselves with hunting very eagerly, and brought many a nice piece of flesh and many a beautiful skin home with them. The large game had been recently very much frightened away, since one of our companions, by name Philip Botha, had but a few weeks before held a great hunt here. He, with two friends, and some Hottentots, had coasted the Great Fish-river almost to its mouth, and had in twenty days that their journey lasted, between going and returning, killed five hippopotami, eight rhinoceroses, nine hartebeests, two wild boars, and five wild goats; smaller game and birds, and indeed springboks, they thought hardly worth shooting. The whole booty, in the fat of the hippopotami, in rhinoceros' leather, in skins, and flesh, was sufficient to fill three large waggons, and when carried home and divided, supplied the three families with food and clothing for several months; it was even expected that a pretty sum of money would be made of some objects which they proposed selling at their next journey to the Cape Town.

The insects and plants we collected here were most of them entirely new to us, nor did I find them again in any part of our travels. Among other things, we killed a very large snake, with a perfect lemon-coloured skin, regularly spotted with black; it measured about five feet in length. We were never more molested by birds of prey, particularly on the second day, when we had killed a young ox, some portion of which having