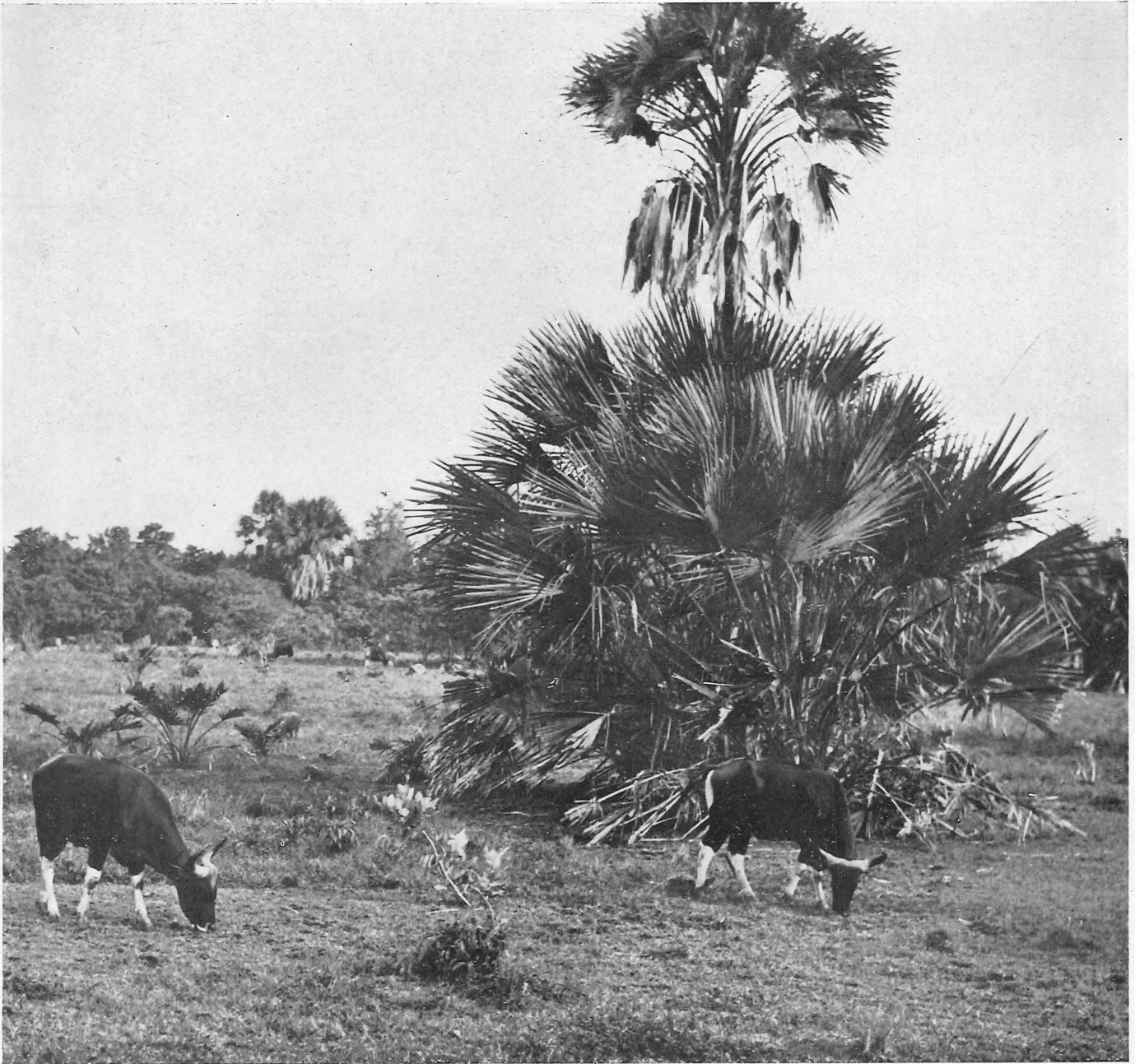


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TWO YOUNG BANTENG BULLS GRAZING IN THE WILD-RESERVE OEDJOENG KOELON — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)



A BANTENG BULL AT A POOL — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)

Among Rhino and Javanese Wild Ox (Banteng) in the Oedjoeng Koelon Game Reserve

Towards the end of August of last year I made an official trip of about six weeks' duration through the game reserve of Oedjoeng Koelon, a peninsula in the south-west of Bantam (Java). I was specially interested in exploring the interior, into which, as far as I know, no European had as yet penetrated; but this is not to be wondered at, seeing that the virgin state of this region renders exploration exceedingly difficult, and demands great physical endurance.

Several of the larger freshwater rivers, indeed, can partly be navigated in small proas, but under the most favourable circumstances this is only possible for a couple of miles whereupon the journey must be continued on foot. Even in the dry season this is no easy matter, not so much because one must continually wade up to one's waist in the water, but mainly since one is compelled time and again to leave the river bed, either because fallen trees or other obstacles block the way, or else because the water suddenly deepens, making further foothold impossible, so that swimming would be the only alternative. Then one scrambles up the frequently sheer river bank, where a path must be cleared through the dense vegetation, mainly consisting of a thick growth of various bamboo species particularly luxurious along these rivers. One of the greatest trials of the explorer is the thorny bamboo, whilst the prickly "salak" and various species of rattan (hojé), make the going very difficult, especially for the native carriers. Fortunately I had more than one pair of shoes in my kit, and these I made the carriers wear in this "domain of the thorn".



HERD OF BANTENG GRAZING IN THE GAME RESERVE — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)

As there are no "tegals" or grazing land, in the interior, the big game here (banteng and deer) is very scarce. It was only very occasionally that I came across their spoor. I often heard or saw kidangs and kantjils (both belonging to the smaller deer family) and especially pigs — all animals which do not require grazing land — and sometimes I could approach them quite close. Kidangs and kantjils were never more than two in number, but on the other hand I came across pigs in the forest varying from single specimens to herds of eight. The track of the rhinoceros was not found here as often as might have been expected. The number of old rhino paths near the rivers, however, is quite large. I found these typical gullied paths, leading to the water, along every river I visited. These paths, so deeply worn into the hard river banks, must have been used for many years. They date most probably from a far distant period, when the number of rhinos was much greater than it is now, though the present number may still be adequate to keep the species from extinction, as may be supposed when we consider the data now in our possession.

On three occasions I had the good fortune to see a rhinoceros and I shall describe some of these encounters which all of them took place during the last week of my expedition.

It was pure chance, I believe, that I saw the animals. In the course of the past weeks I had seen many bathing places and innumerable rhino-tracks, but not one glimpse of the animals themselves. Following some of their beaten paths, and even remaining all night up a tree near their paths and bathing places, though I made myself as inconspicuous as possible, remained without result, so that I had quite given up all hope of seeing a rhino. I had scarcely been more than a few days in the game reserve when in the night I was awakened by frightened coolies who told me that a rhino had been heard close by. And the peculiar short call of a rhino was indeed repeated. The animal, however, moved off quickly, so that there was little purpose in attempting to follow it up. Next morning we found the spoor of two rhinos at the spot where the noise had been heard. One of the animals had pushed down a tree of about six inches in diameter, which was now lying with its roots exposed, apparently to reach the foliage and the thin topmost twigs that had been consumed leaves and all. The animal had not



CREEK IN A MANGROVE TRACT ON THE NORTH COAST OF OEDJOENG KOELON. THE GROUND IS COVERED WITH THOUSANDS OF RESPIRATORY ROOTS OF THE „KAJOE API” — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)

eaten much, however, a fact which I noticed later in other instances. A large number of trees, overturned or uprooted by rhinos, were examined, and it seemed to me that the “badak” (rhinoceros) had done this to reach the leaves and the topmost twigs, though but little of it had been consumed.

The call of the rhino was later also heard several times, twice even in the middle of the day. Apart from this noise, which was seldom heard, at least during the time that I was in the rhino country, these animals drew attention to their presence by the terrific noise they sometimes made. One night we heard a tremendous crashing of bamboo in a grove not far from the bivouac I had made near the Tjikarang River. On going to the spot next morning we found that a rhino had smashed several fairly thick bamboos to pass through the dense vegetation. The spoor indicated that the rhino had descended to the river, had followed it for a few score yards in our direction, and then had crossed to the other side, to disappear quietly into the bush.

Whilst on a trip along another river we startled a rhino in the daytime. The animal rushed into a clump of bush not far from us, and escaped across the river, but I did not even see it. Apparently the colossus had rudely disturbed some pigs from their siesta — at least they squealed most lamentably for some time about the spot where the rhino had crashed through the shrub.

An encounter with a rhino did take place much later and, as usually happens in such cases, it was quite unexpected. I have just written about “good fortune” in coming across a rhino, but I can assure the reader that I felt anything but happy when I saw the first rhino approaching. The weather was gloomy and, after taking our bearings by the compass, we were hacking our way through the dense thorny growth of salak and rattan that covered the place. Suddenly we stumbled on the bathing place of a rhino. It looked as though the wallow had only been there a few days and had been filled by the recent rains. From the fresh tracks, the still bubbling water, and especially the mud still slowly dropping from the surrounding leaves, it was plain that the rhino, probably startled by our approach, had only just left the pool.

The native who accompanied me was quick to inform me that the animal would return,



WILD PIG ROOTING IN PASTURE LAND — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)

and strongly advised me to choose a tree which I could climb should the necessity arise. I left him to do what he thought best, and began to measure the spoor. I had barely begun, when I heard the call of the rhino not far away, and soon after also the heavy tread of the animal, whence I judged that it was approaching at a trot.

My native companion had disappeared: I found later that, as he had been unable to find a suitable tree to climb, he had hidden behind a salak bush, and there, about 5 yards from the "urat" or rhino path, calmly awaited events. Hearing the animal approach, I left the bathing pool and ran about 20 yards to the rear, where I remained standing, as I did not intend under any circumstances to let the opportunity pass by of seeing a rhino. My patience was not tried long. I had hardly laid aside my notebook, callipers, and measuring tape, when my wish was fulfilled, and a rhino appeared at the edge of the pool. It was of medium size: its slightly raised head carried a fine horn which must have made my native companion's mouth water.

The animal apparently tried to get our wind, but in this it did not succeed, seeing that it was to windward of us, and that the path on which it stood had not been trodden by us. Most likely, however, the colossus saw me seated there, for it suddenly came at me with a speed that I would never have believed possible. The heavy mud of the pool did not seem to hamper it noticeably; at the moment it cleared the wallow, I rushed to a sturdy tree which I meant to climb, but found this impossible as the rains had made the trunk too slippery. I was therefore compelled to crouch behind the tree, not more than half a yard from the animal's path. "If the rhino sees me", I thought, "then my only chance of escaping its attack is to dodge around the tree!" Thank heavens, this was not necessary! The rhino suddenly halted at about eight yards away from me, and after a moment it turned and rushed off almost as quickly as it had come. I have an idea that it saw nothing it could attack, and that it had no notion as to where the intruder lay hid. My rucksack, notebook, etc., lay undamaged and were not even considered worth examination by the rhino, though it had been quite close to them.

Just that very day I had left my rifle in the proa after having carried it around with me for weeks, and I lacked the foolhardiness, quite unarmed as I was, to find



VIEW ON A RIVER IN THE GAME RESERVE — (PHOTO HOOGERWERF)

out whether its conduct had been the result of curiosity, or whether it had contemplated attacking me. My own conviction is that the rhino meant to attack, and never again will I take the risk I took on that occasion, the more so since I wish to avoid any necessity of shooting one of these animals.

The other members of the party, i.e. the four native carriers, when they heard the rhino approach, had followed the course of events from a safe distance, and now came along to find out what had happened to the "tuan" or white master. As I had so often experienced before, so also this time it was evident that in time of danger or emergency little or no help is to be expected from this sort of people. The carriers who accompanied me on this trip seemed to be in a continuous state of terror of rhinos and tigers, and were only induced with the utmost difficulty to spend the night elsewhere than along the coast. At first they wanted to spend every night up a tree, but eventually they abandoned this idea, and slept on the ground, as I did, under the waterproof canvas provided for them, trusting in the rifle I had brought.

The second and third rhinos we encountered the following day. The second was seen about noon for a short time, about 60 yards distant, beside a river bank. We first noticed a severe shaking of the pandanus plants that overgrew the banks, and then soon after the rhino emerged. This animal was larger than the one of the previous day, though the horn seemed to me noticeably smaller. Only for a moment did the beast turn its mighty head in our direction, then, though the wind came from our side, it crept into the water; however, it turned immediately and disappeared in the pandanus, a few yards from the place where it had entered the water. Most probably we would have been able to observe also this rhino for a longer period, had the wind been more favourable.

To see a rhino appear out of a pandanus grove is a sight not easily forgotten. It reminds one of the weird scenes which must have taken place in the tertiary period, when dinosaurs and other prehistoric pachyderms skulked in such uncouth vegetation.

The second rhino we came across that day — not more than two hours later — was laying peacefully in its wallow, like a water buffalo, in a small muddy river heavily overgrown with

nipa palms on either bank. The only movement of the beast, which was larger than either of the two previous ones encountered, was the constant motion, to and fro, of its ears. As it lay there, almost covered with water and with its ears moving, it reminded me of a hippopotamus. After having observed it at my leisure for some minutes, at a distance of about 30 yards, I endeavoured to attract its attention by making a noise. This only resulted in the monster heaving its head with its enormous horn out of the water to get our wind, in which apparently it was unsuccessful. Only when I moved to the edge of the river it stood up, so that a large part of its colossal body came in sight. Then with all its might it endeavoured to climb the steep muddy bank down which it had slid to the water, but all its attempts failed. It slipped back, and then tried the same tactics at another spot a few yards further, with the same result. In its efforts some heavy branches lying in the river it lifted by its head and heaved over its back. After the failure of this second attempt it forded the river. Its whole body was submerged, and only the huge head and a part of its small tail appeared above the surface. The animal advanced to the very spot where I was standing, and I thought it wise to climb a tree which, overhanging the river, made an excellent observation post.

Also a third attempt to gain the land was unsuccessful; it then walked to and fro in the river, emitting a loud snorting every few seconds. Finally it managed to clamber up a less precipitous part of the opposite bank, and disappeared rapidly in the nipa grove.

Another uncommon encounter was with a tiger, again in broad daylight. This animal we saw at a distance of about 55 yards quietly bathing in a shallow part in the middle of an inland river. Only a small portion of its handsomely striped back, the head, and the tail, were to be seen above the water level. From further observation it was obvious that the tiger had been actually bathing, and was not fording the river. At this spot, where the water was overshadowed by heavy vegetation that allowed but little sunlight to penetrate, the skin of the big cat was in strong contrast to its surroundings. When it saw us, it disappeared with a few rapid bounds along an old rhino path into the dry bush. The spoor showed that it was a large specimen.

On several occasions we saw otters, also alongside the rivers in the interior. Once we came across a troupe of 12 or 15 that were apparently hunting fish in the water. Unfortunately the nimble creatures got wind of our presence, and made for the bush. They remained for a few minutes under cover at the edge of the undergrowth, peeping at their strange visitors through the thick foliage whilst uttering their peculiar loud screech. Otters appear to make a practice of sliding into the water from the bush; and their "chutes" I saw at several places. It must be a pretty sight to see these animals gliding down the bank into the water. When near these chutes, I was often conscious of the penetrating characteristic odour which emanates from the otter or its excrements.

Monitors were also much in evidence, though more often along the coast than in the interior. Here these reptiles live mainly on fish, whilst along the coast they eat carrions, fish, crabs, and sea turtle eggs. At least, I often saw monitors busily seeking turtle eggs along the sea shore, and I found that their excreta usually contained the tough parchment-like egg shells.

These turtles have a hard struggle for existence, for they and their eggs are the prey not only of man, but also of the monitors, and probably also of other animals.

A. HOOGERWERF.