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Copyrighted photograph of a herd of impalla, Africa, by Carl E. Akeley

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MARY CYNTHIA DICKERSON, *Editor*

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GUN-BEARERS OF THE EXPEDITION

Wild men of the Cheringani Hills hunted with members of the expedition, giving loyal coöperation throughout the work

# TRACKERS OF THE CHERINGANI HILLS

HUNTING THE RHINOCEROS<sup>1</sup> IN BRITISH EAST AFRICA FOR  
CONSTRUCTION IN THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF A GROUP  
OF THIS FAST-DISAPPEARING SPECIES

By W. S. Rainsford

Photographs by Jenness Richardson

“IF I could only meet that great bull elephant, the bull of my dreams, the mighty tusker who will some day be seen by some lucky mortal, hide he never so cunningly, I think I could scarcely shoot him until I had hugged him for joy.” This remark shows the enthusiasm and keen determination of one of our persistent hunters and naturalists. Little know the people as they gaze in some natural history museum at some fine beast or bird, labeled with a half understood name, coming from a half unknown land — little do these people know at what cost paid in adventurous human life the stuffed specimen they admire is presented to them. Hunters, explorers, collectors, soldiers, civil servants, missionaries — the African sphinx follows her Grecian cousin’s example and may strangle them if they persist in the attempt to unravel her riddles.

The ideal African hunter or expedition leader should have the endurance of a man under forty years old, should have a copper-lined stomach and be immune to tick, tsetse and mosquito. Climatic conditions should mean nothing to him. He should prefer the borderland of a swamp or even its pestiferous depths to the breezy upland if only he can win the one thing he is after.

British East Africa has had many secrets wrested from her in the past

<sup>1</sup> Editorial Note:— The American Museum does not possess a group of the common black rhinoceros of Africa. In face of the fact that this rhino like the buffalo and zebra is positively doomed to extermination in the near future because an annoyance to settlers in the country, it seemed advisable to take steps to get material for such a group while rhinos of maximum size are still to be found.

As to big-game conditions in British East Africa, unusual interest attaches to the following quoted from a recent publication of the New York Zoölogical Society, *Our Vanished Wild Life*, by William T. Hornaday:

“As matters stand to-day in British East Africa, the big game of the country outside the three preserves is absolutely certain to disappear in about one-fourth the time that it took South Africa to accomplish the same result. The reasons are obvious: superior accessibility, more deadly rifles, expert professional guides and a widespread craze for killing big game.

“... With care and economy, British East Africa should furnish good hunting for two centuries... Mr. Arthur Jordan has seen much of the big game of British East Africa, and its killing. Him I asked to tell me how long, in his opinion, the big game of that territory will last outside of the game preserves as it is now being killed. He said, ‘Oh, it will last a long time. I think it will last fifteen years.’

“*Fifteen years!* And this for the richest big-game fauna of any one spot in the whole world, which Nature has been *several million years in developing and placing there!*... ”

“The bag limit... is ruinously extravagant... It is awful to think that for a petty sum [\$250.00] any man may buy the right to kill 300 head of hoofed and horned animals of 44 species, not counting the carnivorous animals that also may be killed. That bag limit should *immediately* be reduced 75 per cent.”

fifty years. To-day the country with its railroad line and government road and its large population of colonists is no longer the place that it was for finding large game. The Third African expedition of the American Museum had received permission to kill four rhinos and three buffalo in British East Africa — in the wilderness, not in one of the game preserves — but felt considerable indecision as to the right locality for the work. Even

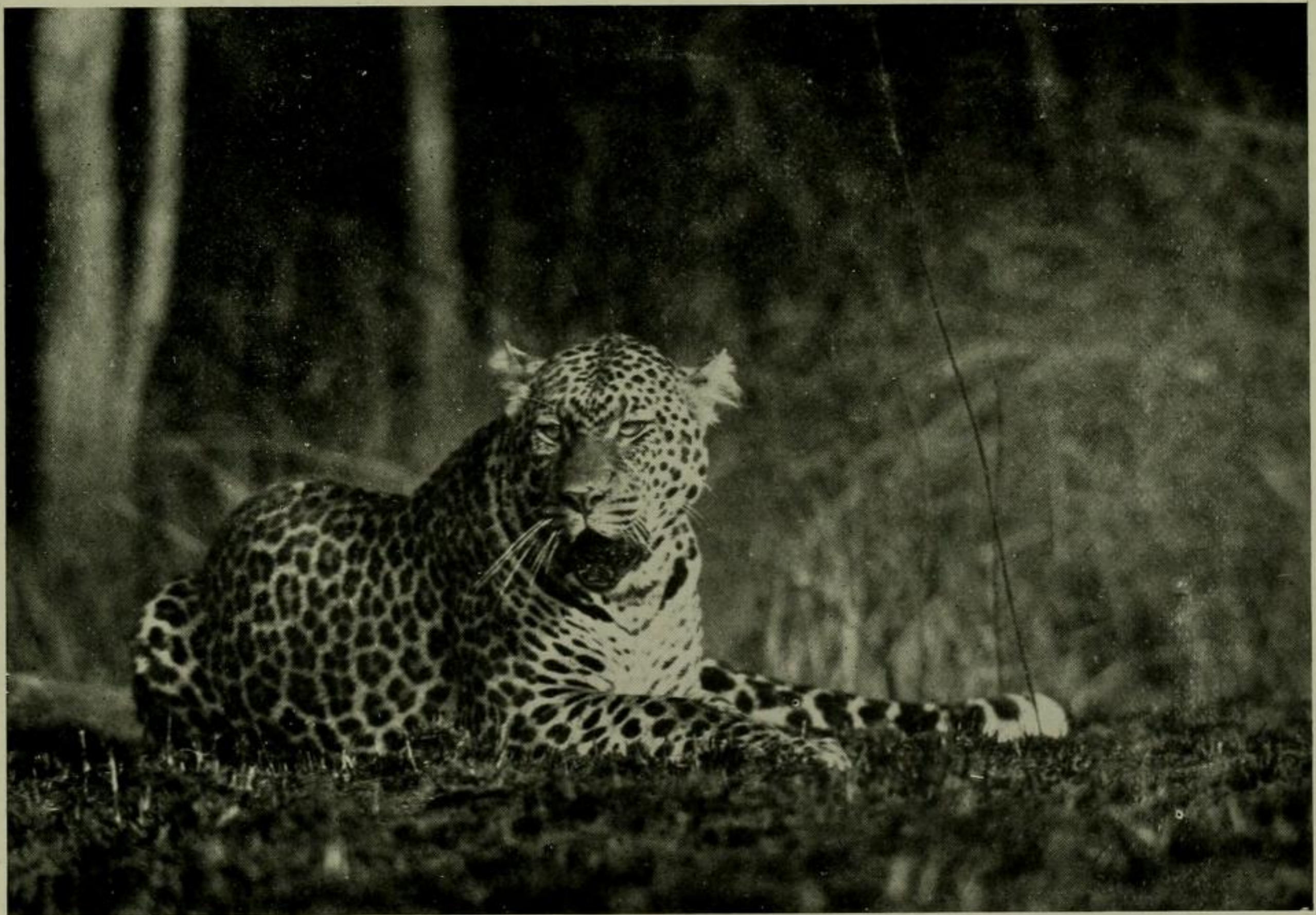


Some of the wild men of the Cheringani Dorobo who worked for the expedition. None of these natives had met a white man before the leader of the expedition went among them in 1908 when on a previous visit to Africa

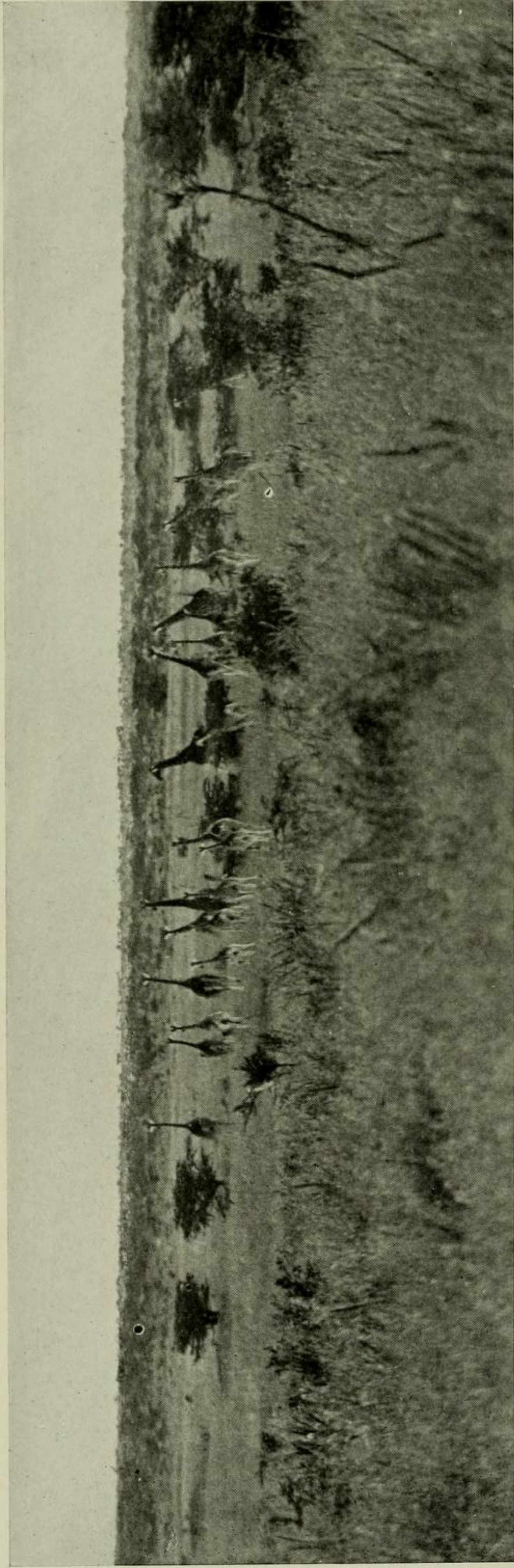
three or four years ago good specimens of African mammals could be obtained along the Uganda railroad. They have now disappeared not only from there but also from many of the localities farther afield. Such is the case in regard to rhinos in the region south of the Uganda railroad and west of the Guaso Nyiro River near the German borderland. Rhinos are found



To keep the expedition supplied with food a small herd of donkeys traveled between depots in the hills and the lower country. A donkey load is 120 pounds



An African leopard. — "As matters stand to-day in British East Africa, the big game of the country outside the three preserves is absolutely certain to disappear in about one-fourth the time that it took South Africa to accomplish the same result."



A herd of giraffe. "The bag limit... is ruinously extravagant... It is awful to think that for a petty sum [\$250] any man may buy the right to kill 300 head of hooped and horned animals of 44 species, not counting the carnivorous animals that also may be killed. That bag limit should immediately be reduced 75 per cent"



Very large lion shot by Dr. Rainsford

only of small size in the region of the Tana, also in the Serengeti Plains between Voi and Kilimanjaro, as also in the country south and east of Lake Rudolf and in that about Mt. Kenia.

After much study of the question, the Nzoia Plateau especially the Cheringani Hills at its eastern part was chosen as the hunting ground, a small area, about one hundred miles by seventy in extent and some one hundred and fifty miles from the railroad. This choice of territory fortunately gave us as companions and guides, the warriors of a little tribe there, the Cheringani Dorobo.

In 1908 I had made friends with this small tribe of poison-hunters. Secure in the fastnesses of their dense woodlands, they had controlled the land for ages. Fear of the deadly poison of their arrows and the cunning secrecy of their deep-spiked game-pits had kept off the hunting safari; while the uncertain attitude toward the white men, maintained until quite lately by their neighbors, the Elgeyo tribe on the south and the Marquette on the north, had closed the door effectually in that whole countryside to every expedition other than a military one. These very shy natives now agreed to come down from their mountain villages and serve the new expedition. Half a dozen real trackers were soon picked out among them. Three abreast where the ground was open they would follow the spoor at a fast walk, and interpreting the rhino's brainless wanderings — signs which even to the safari leader's experienced eyes were invisible — would gain knowledge as to where the game was going and where it would rest.

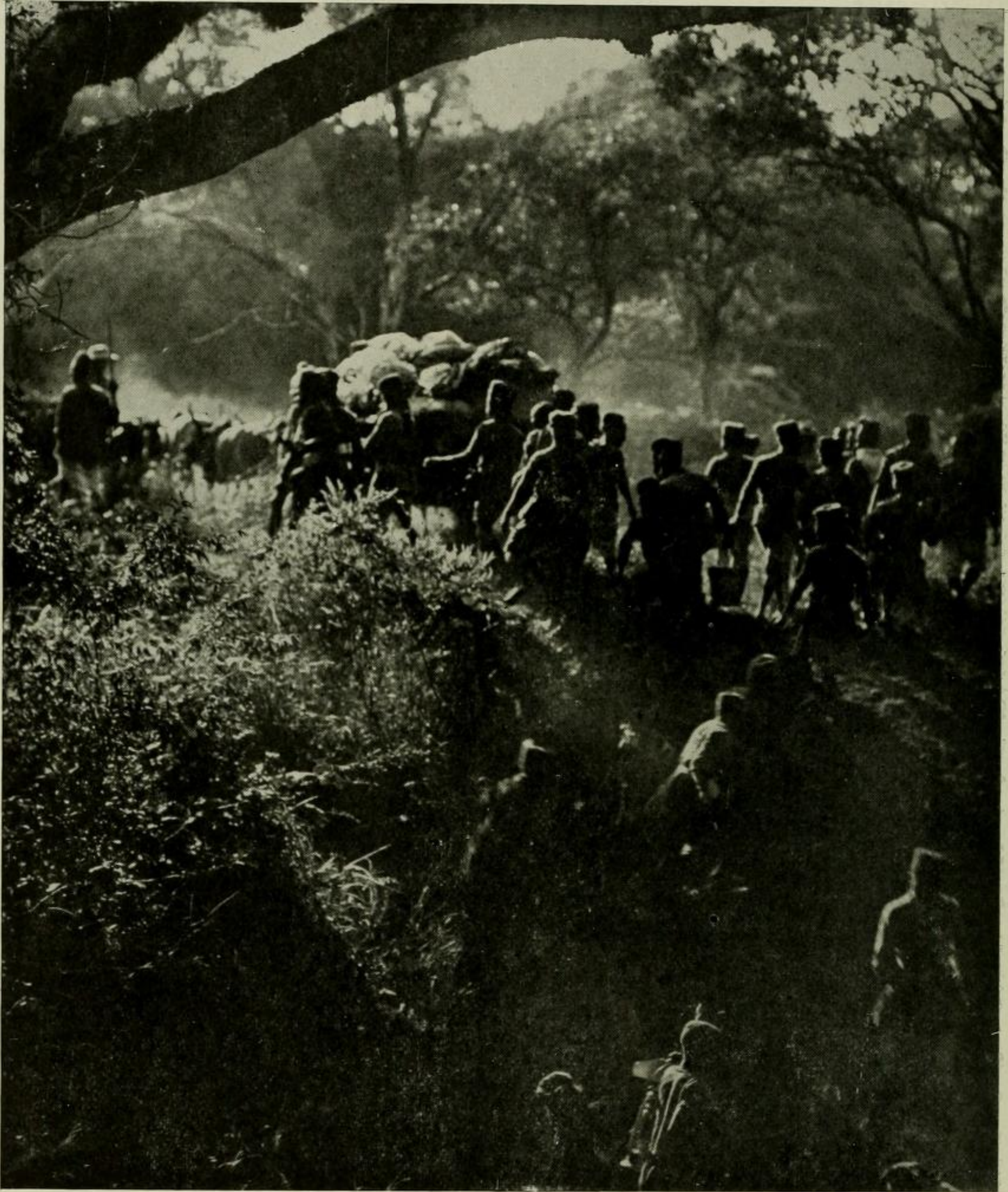
The forest was so dense at times that we used some forty or fifty natives as signallers and beaters. The method took time to organize but worked well. The Cheringani were cautious when following rhino. It is very easy to shoot this animal in the open. In dense cover it is another matter, and beaters and trackers I must confess, spent much time safely if not usefully up trees. When on the trail of buffalo, which also are easily shot in open country, only a few of the bravest would go into the black hollows that hid the beasts, and once a buffalo was wounded I had to go in with them or no one would go. Good fortune attended us however and in all the history of the expedition no one of the hundred and fifty men was seriously injured. The risk of hunting buffalo in wooded country is sadly proved, if proof were necessary, by the later fate of the very best of the natives I employed. He was a brave boy and wonderfully good as a tracker. After



A well built Dorobo

our expedition left the country another party hearing of its success secured the guidance of these Cheringani. This young native acted as gun-bearer and was killed by one of the first buffalo shot at.

When the tracking led to success and an animal was killed, the expedition



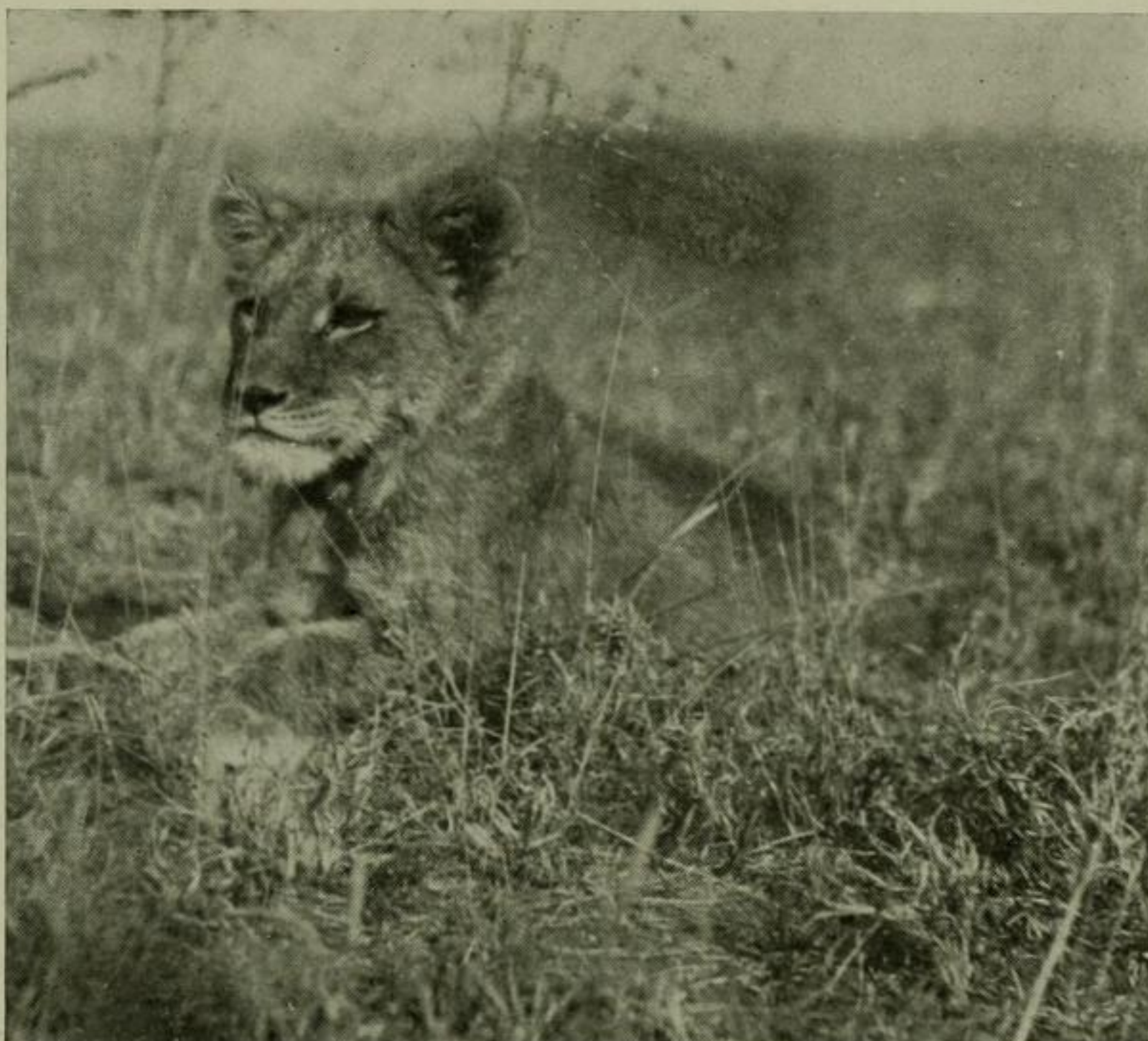
Hard work with our wagon. Deep ravines and swamp-edged streams made necessary considerable bridging and road-making

made camp and remained on the spot until the heavy skin was thoroughly cared for. Mr. Jenness Richardson, the taxidermist of the expedition, was indefatigable and also trained many of the natives — some to unusual skill — in the work of preparing skins and caring for the skeletons.

One of the great difficulties of the expedition was transportation of its



large and heavy supplies through the country of the Cheringani. This country has forests unusual for East Africa. The altitude ranges from a little over 4000 feet above sea level in some of the lower parts to 10,500 feet where dense woodlands cover the summits of the hills. Impassible ravines and deep swamp-edged narrow streams were met with everywhere



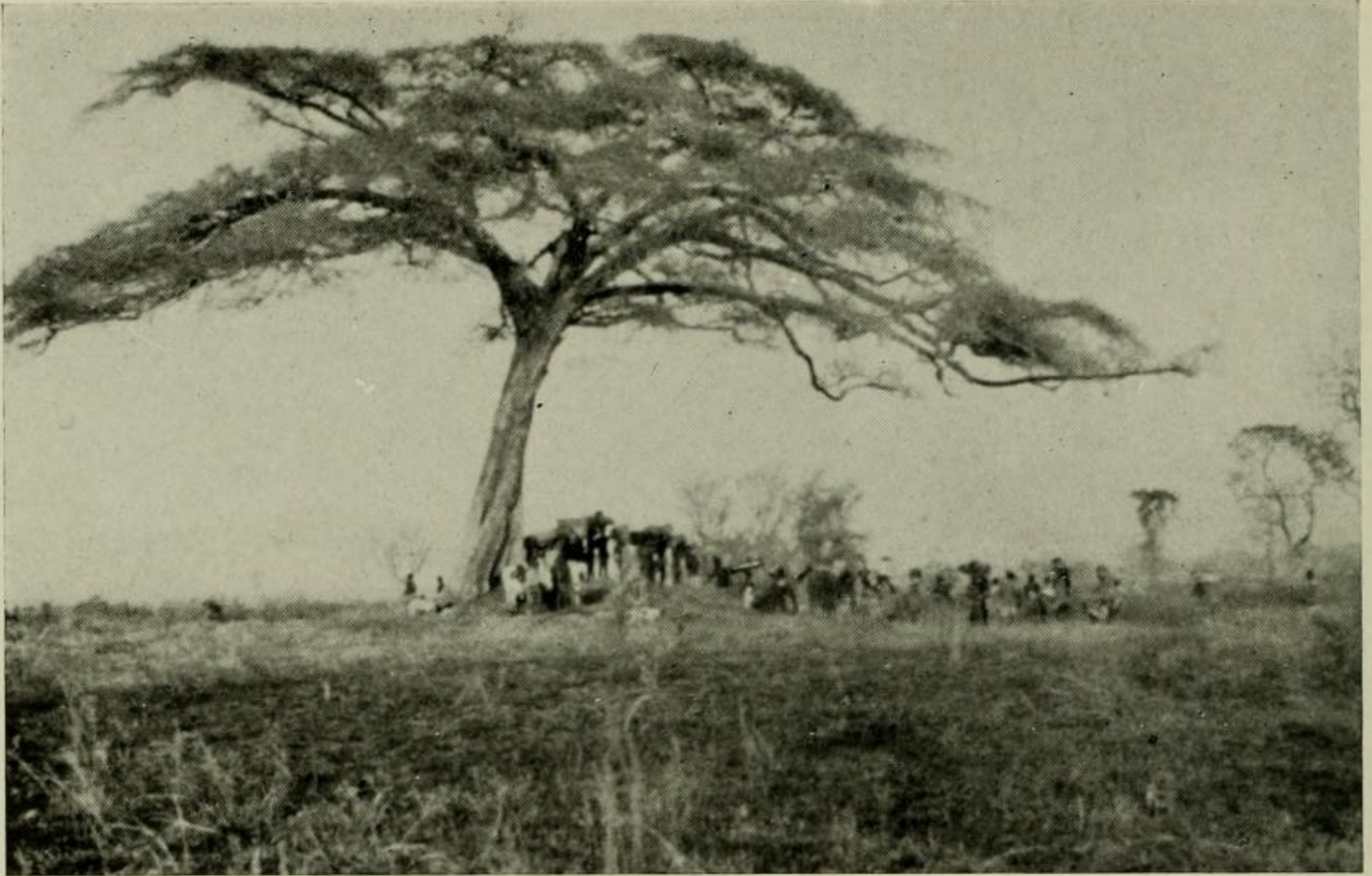
One-year-old lion

and made necessary considerable digging and rough bridging and road-making.

Our usual method of transportation was by ox team. Sometimes as many as thirty-two oxen were put in the iron chain that hauled our wagon. Almost two tons of fine salt were necessary for the preparation of the skins. A large tent in which many men could work on the skins had to be carried; also a great weight of *posho*, the natives' food of ground meal. Our consumption of this was about two hundred pounds each day. *Posho*, as all well know who have left civilization far behind in African lands, is the cause of the chief difficulty of all explorers. It may be impossible to procure, once off the main lines of travel, and must be had not at intervals but always. The breaking up and ruin of expeditions is often due to



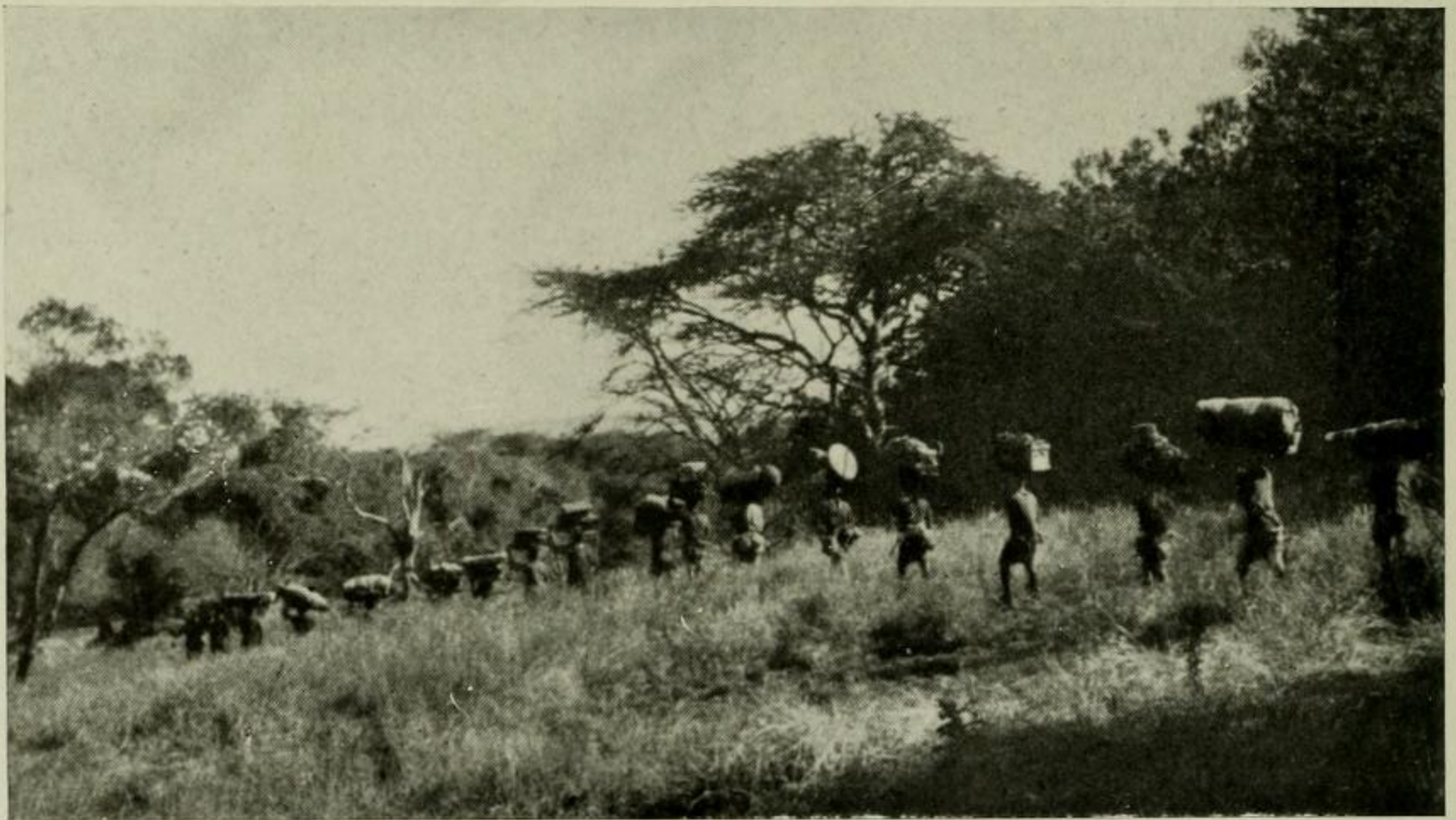
Chita cubs. The chita or hunting leopard differs from all others of the cat family in the lack of retractile claws. It hunts antelope, reedbuck and kudu, stalking the prey with stealth and cunning preliminary to a lightning-like rush. For a considerable distance it can outstrip the swiftest antelope



The expedition halted under a thorn tree ninety yards in diameter

the failure to provide *posho*. In British East Africa government land regulations require that each porter engaged receive regularly his pound and a half of ground meal a day. Failing that, he has a grievance against his employer that frees him from any obligation to serve. Now one hundred men eat 150 pounds a day, i.e., 4500 pounds a month, or 27,000 pounds in six months. In our case we had been obliged to carry all this over one hundred and fifty miles on men's heads or by donkeys before it was available.

To keep the expedition in food I hired a small herd of donkeys (a donkey-load is 120 pounds) and kept it constantly traveling between depots in the



We were obliged to transport the supplies and equipment of the expedition one hundred and fifty miles from the railroad to the Nzoia Plateau

hills and the lower country under the guidance of capable and trustworthy natives. This plan as a rule worked well, but often the camp was denuded of all porters for days together, in order to keep up the ration supply.

How the Cheringani have preserved their tribal life (they only number a few hundreds) is a mystery. Perhaps their preservation is chiefly owing to two things: their poverty and their poison. They are not, or have not been, owners of herds, and not to own herds in Africa is at least to avoid



Bull buffalo head. The expedition had been given government permission to shoot three buffalo for a group in the Museum

having to pay heavy insurance risks. Four-fifths of the fighting done between tribe and tribe has been about cattle. Until the English came, the very existence of the cattle-owning people had been altogether dependent on its organization for war as among the Masai, or on its possession of a country in which the herds could be hidden or defended from the powerful cattle-raider. The Masai for instance, the great cattle-owning tribe, have for the first article of the tribal creed, "In the beginning God gave all cattle to



These poison-hunters had unusual ability in interpreting and following the rhino's wanderings.

the Masai." Hence the natural and inevitable corollary, "The Masai have a right to any man's cattle."

In their poison the Cheringani have a very terrible weapon and they are extraordinary in the suddenness of their movements. The making of the poison is a guarded secret. After some months they were willing to show me the tree it was brewed from, but as to the details of its production they were persistently silent. As in the poison-making of other lands, certain complicated rules must be obeyed and customs followed. The poison-maker must leave his hut and his women-folk for weeks or longer. He must live quite alone and work alone. So much I learned. The poison loses strength by keeping, so much they admit. I am inclined to think this loss is rapid.

The Cheringani trade the poison made by them to the surrounding tribes. The Nandi, their neighbors on the other side of the Nzoia



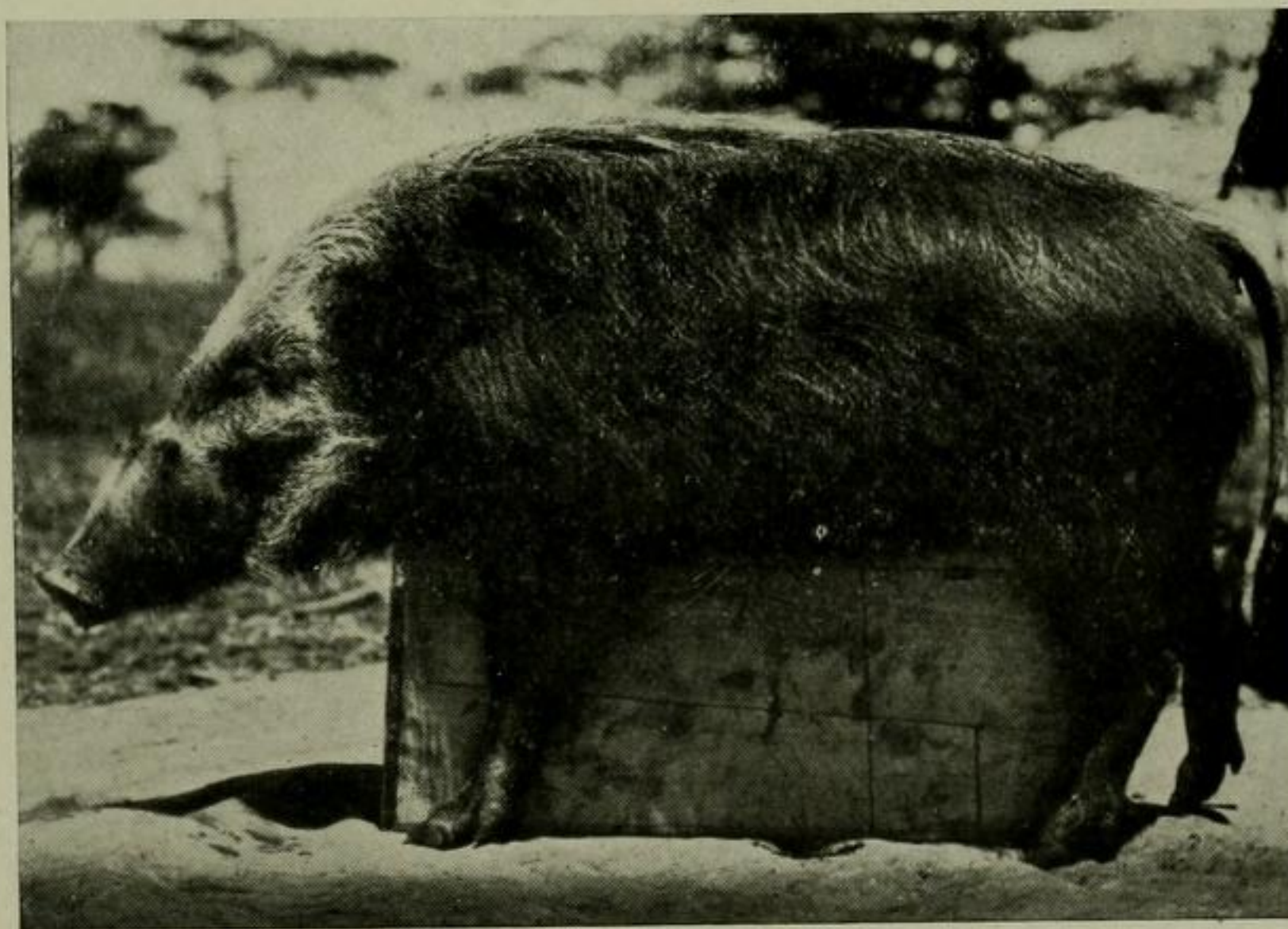
Black rhinoceros head. The main aim of the expedition was to procure material for a black rhinoceros group in the American Museum

Plateau, used it in their war with the Government a few years ago and several soldiers in the King's African Rifles were struck by poisoned arrows. When men were wounded, the doctors told me, the poison seemed to affect the heart but yielded to arsenic and the wounded did not die. From what I have seen, one struck by poisoned arrows such as the Cheringani make—if the poison be freshly brewed—cannot fail to die almost instantly.

The unhunted region of the Cheringani range was chosen for the work of the expedition at the advice of Mr. Woosman, Chief Game Ranger of British East Africa, whose great ability and experience gives his judgment value. The success of the expedition must be largely credited to the work of the trackers chosen from the wildmen of the Cheringani Dorobo. They had had little experience hunting with white men previously but nevertheless gave us their steady co-operation. I have had in past years considerable experience of trackers and tracking but never before in Africa have I seen work done comparable with that of the trackers of the Cheringani.



Capturing a viverrine cat alive



Silver-haired pig of the African forest. This is a species rarely captured and more rarely photographed