

LOG - BOOK

OF A

Fisherman and Zoologist

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ICE ACCIDENT TO THE RHINOCEROS.

DURING the hard frost of December, 1870, the Zoological Society nearly lost their Rhinoceros by drowning. The animal had been turned out in the morning as usual into the paddock behind the elephant house, while the dens were being cleaned. The snow had fallen thickly during the night, so that the pond was not to be distinguished from the ground. The rhinoceros not seeing the pond put her fore feet on the ice, which immediately gave way, and in she went, head over heels with a crash. The keepers ran for Mr. Bartlett; when he came, in a few minutes, he found the poor rhinoceros in great danger of drowning, as she was floundering about among great sheets of ice, under which she had been kept down till her great strength enabled her to break up the whole mass. Here then was a most awkward accident, under unexpected and novel circumstances, putting Mr. Bartlett's readiness of action to the test. My friend, however, with his usual courage and quickness of resource, was quite equal to the occasion. He immediately let the water off the pond by knocking away a large plug which, when the pond was originally constructed, he had thoughtfully fixed instead of a tap, a contrivance liable to get out of order. In the meantime the poor rhinoceros was in great danger of drowning, as the pond is nine feet deep, so while the water was running off, Mr. Bartlett, losing no time, sent for all the available keepers and a long and strong rope; barrow loads of gravel were at the same time strewed on the sloping sides

of the pond, to give the exhausted animal a foot-hold. The rope was then tossed round the haunches of the rhinoceros, like the kicking-strap of a horse in harness, and twenty-six men, one half at one end of the rope, and the other half at the other, pulled hard on the rhinoceros, so that in her struggles to get up the bank she would not only be supported but pulled forcibly forwards. After much hauling on the part of the men and much plunging on the slippery bank of the pond, the rhinoceros was at last landed on *terra firma*. The salvors of this valuable living property had then to look out for themselves. Mr. Bartlett had anticipated this, for he had left the sliding gate of the enclosure open just wide enough to let out one man at a time, but not a rhinoceros. When the rhinoceros was landed, an absurd scene took place: everybody rushed to the gate, but the first of the fugitives, being naturally stout, and possibly stouter at Christmas time than usual, jammed fast in the open gate, so that the other twenty-five men were in the paddock with the rhinoceros. The poor frightened and half-frozen beast luckily behaved very well; she did not rush after the men, but stood still, pricked her ears and snorted, giving the keepers time to get out as fast as they could and how they could, through the ingenious "man-hole" or guard in the railing, made in case of emergencies. Neither the rhinoceros nor the men received the slightest injury. Shortly after the accident I saw the rhinoceros munching her breakfast as if nothing had happened. This rhinoceros was the big female, which was about 10ft. 6in. long and about 5ft. high at the shoulder, and weighed at a guess between three and four tons. The ice I found was four inches thick.

I think the Society are much indebted to Mr. Bartlett for the admirable way in which he prevented what might have been a bad accident.

This rhinoceros died three years afterwards, in Dec. 1873, after having lived in the Gardens for twenty-two years.