

LARGE
GAME SHOOTING

IN

TIBET, THE HIMALAYAS, AND
NORTHERN INDIA.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS.

RHINOCEROS UNICORNIS.

Generally throughout India—*Gairdā*—*Gairá*.

THE Great Indian Rhinoceros appears in former times to have inhabited the Terai throughout its whole length, but it has been gradually driven eastwards, until at the present day the Nepal Terai is its western limit. Even there its numbers have been much thinned, and it has lately been so highly prized that it has been reserved as Royal game, the late Sir Jung Bahádoor permitting no one to shoot it but himself.

Many Rhinoceros have been shot within the last few years in the vicinity of Julpaigori; but there, partly owing to being constantly hunted, and partly owing to the clearance of large tracts for Tea cultivation, they are rapidly becoming scarcer, and the sportsman must travel still farther east before he finds them at all plentiful. In the eastern portion of the Bhútán Dooárs and in Assam, wherever there are heavy reed jungles on the banks of rivers or on the margin of swamps, Rhinoceros may be met with, and occasionally several congregate in one covert. I have myself known six to be roused in a belt of '*nul*' not more than half a mile long and three or four hundred yards wide.

The marvellous growth of the long grasses and reeds, which spring up during the rainy season in the long belt of country lying along the foot of the Eastern Himalayas, and on the '*churs*' in the valley of the Bráhmápútrá and other great rivers, has often been described; and the accounts received with incredulity by those who have never seen how vegetation thrives under the combined influences of a tropical sun and abundance of rain. Let those doubt who may, however, the fact remains that, year after year, in the short space of two or three months, these giant grasses shoot up to a height of from twenty to thirty feet, forming, with the wild cardamum, various other broad-leaved plants, and numerous creepers, a tangled cover which shelters the Elephant, the Rhinoceros and the Buffalo, as effectually as a field of standing corn affords concealment to the partridge or the quail.

I have seen a line of about fifteen Elephants beating a strip of reeds not more than two hundred yards in width, and I could hardly see the grass shake. There was not as much commotion or indication of what was going on, as would be caused by a pack of beagles drawing a gorse covert.

Runs or tunnels among the high reeds, like magnified '*meuses*' of hares and rabbits, show that the same paths through the thick jungle are generally made use of; and the

Rhinoceros, like several of the deer and antelope tribe, has the habit of dropping its dung in one place. Vast heaps of these droppings, the accumulation of years, are constantly to be seen, and native Shikaris frequently watch these spots and obtain a shot at easy distance.

The Great Indian Rhinoceros is by no means 'a thing of beauty.' Huge and unwieldy in form, with an enormous head and general pig-like appearance, it is enveloped in what seems at first sight impenetrable armour, the thick and tuberculated skin hanging in massive folds, which attain their greatest thickness on the neck, shoulders, and quarters.

So thick and tough do these folds or shields appear, as to have given rise to the popular belief that the animal is nearly invulnerable, and that it is only by striking the joints in his harness that a bullet can penetrate.

I recollect an amusing story of a soldier in the Mutiny who was placed in the guard-room for shooting a tame Rhinoceros which had been captured by his regiment. His defence was that he had read in a book that the hide of the animal was bullet-proof; and being of an enquiring turn of mind, had determined to put the theory to the test! As the shot was well directed, the unfortunate subject of the experiment fell dead, and the prize fund was several thousand rupees the poorer.

As a matter of fact, the skin is quite soft when fresh; a bullet will penetrate anywhere with the greatest ease, and a hunting knife can be driven through it with the slightest amount of force. When dried, of course it becomes extremely hard, and used to be in great request for the manufacture of shields. The hide, when polished, is very handsome and semi-transparent, and when held up to the light looks exactly like tortoise shell, the tubercles giving it a beautiful mottled appearance.

The horn of this species seldom exceeds a foot in length; it is composed of agglutinated hairs, and is not firmly attached to the skull, but rests on a slight bony excrecence on the snout, from which it is easily removed, a day or two after death. Contrary to general belief, the Rhinoceros does not make use of its horn as a weapon of offence; the wounds which it occasionally inflicts on Elephants are caused by its long sharp incisors, with which it can give a very formidable bite.

The horn is highly valued by natives both of India and China, and fetches a high price in the market; being worth from Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 according to weight. Hindoos use it in some of their religious ceremonies, while the Chinese ascribe to it the virtues of the famous Venetian glass, and believe that drinking cups manufactured from it possess the property of indicating the presence of poison.

The foot of the Rhinoceros is peculiarly formed, having only three toes, and its trefoil-shaped track cannot be mistaken for that of any other animal.

Ungainly animal as the Rhinoceros is, it is possessed of considerable speed, and although its usual gait when disturbed is a long swinging trot, it occasionally breaks into a lumbering gallop, the pace of which is surprising.

Owing to their formation Rhinoceros do not readily roll over on their sides, and when shot they almost always die in a recumbent position, as if they had quietly sunk down to sleep.

The flesh is excellent, and cannot easily be distinguished from beef; indeed it is better than most beef that one sees in India. The tongue, which is very curiously formed, is particularly good.

The following are the measurements of an old male which I shot, but larger specimens are to be met with :—

Height at withers	5 feet 9 inches or 17 hands 1 inch.
Length from nose to root of tail	10 " 6 "
Length of tail	2 " 5 "
Girth	9 " 8 "
Girth of forearm	3 " 2 "

There are two ways in which Rhinoceros may be hunted; one by quietly tracking up the animal on a single Elephant until he is at last found in his lair, or perhaps standing quite unconscious of danger—the other, by beating him out of jungle with a line of Elephants, the guns being stationed at the points where he is most likely to break cover. In the latter case it is necessary to have reliable men with the beaters, who can exercise authority and keep them in order, for both Mahouts and Elephants have the greatest dread of the huge brute, who appears to be much more formidable than he really is. When disturbed he makes a tremendous noise crashing through the reeds, and grunting and snorting with steam engine power, but unless driven to extremities by being hemmed into a corner, I believe that it is but seldom that he will really charge home. I have not yet witnessed an instance of his doing so.

In April, 1878, I received an invitation from a friend, who had the command of many Elephants in one of the best heavy-game shooting districts in Bengal, to join him in an expedition against Buffalo and Rhinoceros. Of course I gladly accepted, and on arriving at my friend's house I was pleased to find that our shooting party consisted of only three, the very best number for such sport. Large shooting parties are very good fun, and probably (though not always) more game may be bagged than with a smaller party; but as far as the actual sport is concerned, I infinitely prefer to have not more than two companions.

When there are many guns out there is nearly always a lot of wild firing, and it is frequently impossible to tell who has actually shot an animal.

With three guns, and a manageable number of Elephants, the cream of sport may be enjoyed, and each sportsman is independent and has his fair share of the shooting, without being interfered with by, or interfering with, others.

Our first day was blank as regarded the bag, although one Rhinoceros was wounded; much of our time being lost owing to an Elephant sticking in a quicksand, from which we had the greatest difficulty in extricating her, after laboring hard for several hours.

The second day we only shot Buffaloes, which inhabited the same jungles as the Rhinoceros, so that we could never tell which animal would be likely to break covert in any given beat, and it so happened that we several times found both together.

Our third day's sport afforded an instance of this, and I succeeded in killing my first

'Rhino,' as we always called them for the sake of brevity, and as I shall henceforth call them in this narrative.

We had tracked a wounded bull Buffalo into a large and very thick covert, into which it was useless to follow him with any idea of getting a shot. The three guns therefore went on ahead, and took up their positions at the other end of the covert, while the pad Elephants were ordered to form line and beat steadily through the jungle. After waiting a long time at my post, I heard some large animal crashing through the reeds, and as the line of beaters advanced, the waving of the grass betrayed its movements. It came on very slowly, occasionally stopping for some time to listen, and again making a cautious advance. I remained still as death, but I was in a great state of anxiety lest my Elephant should become uneasy, and give the alarm. Fortunately, he remained silent, and at length the 'Rhino,' anticipating no danger ahead, and pressed by the steadily advancing line of Elephants behind him, poked his ugly head out of the reeds within twenty yards of me. I could only see his snout and his horn, and aimed above the latter for his forehead. I either took a bad aim, or my Elephant moved slightly as I fired, for, as I afterwards found, my bullet merely grazed the snout, cutting a deep furrow along the base of the horn. As the 'Rhino' wheeled round, I gave him another bullet in the centre of his ribs, and he rushed back into the reeds and through the beaters with an angry grunt.

I was using a 12-bore rifle with hardened spherical bullets, and seven drams of powder, so I felt certain that the 'Rhino' was mortally wounded, and accordingly two or three of the beaters were ordered to follow his track. They had not gone far before they shouted that they had found him, and on hastening to the spot, I had the satisfaction of contemplating my first 'Rhino.' My second bullet had struck him in the ribs, and passing forward into his lungs, had caused death by suffocation. The huge animal lay with his legs doubled under him, as if fast asleep, and it required some exertion on the part of one of our largest Elephants to roll him over. The horn was an average-sized one, thick at the base, but not very long.

Although it was a blazing hot day, we celebrated the event with a glass of whisky, and then superintended the cutting off his head and the removal of the shields, while a number of long strips were cut from his hide, to be afterwards made into whips. We selected a few choice pieces of meat for ourselves, and in a very short time scores of villagers from the neighbourhood flocked to the spot, delighted at the chance of obtaining a good supply of flesh.

I took the measurements of this 'Rhino' very carefully: they are those given above.

Another 'Rhino' was wounded during the afternoon, but we lost it among high reeds, and a savage bull Buffalo created a *divertissement*, which prevented us from continuing our search.

Next morning D. was unable to go out shooting, so S. and I went to look for the animals wounded yesterday, at least two Buffaloes having been severely hit in addition to the 'Rhino.' We were not long in finding a cow Buffalo, which had fallen in a sandy nullah;

and some vultures wheeling over the thickest part of the jungle drew our attention to the spot where we discovered the 'Rhino'—a small female—lying dead.

A little separated from the large covert was a belt of high reeds on the bank of a river, and as it was a most likely looking place, we proceeded to beat it. S. went to the end of the covert, while I skirted the edge, keeping just ahead of the line of beaters. It was not long before I heard a 'Rhino,' which moved slowly along some two hundred yards in front of the Elephants, occasionally approaching the edge of the covert and again plunging deeper into it. At length he made up his mind to at least see whether the coast was clear or not, but hardly had his head appeared, when he drew back, and grunting loudly, charged through the beaters. I immediately called them out of the jungle, and taking them back half a mile, re-formed the line, and recommenced the beat. On coming to the end, however, I found that we had not gone back far enough, and that the 'Rhino' was still behind us.

S. therefore went to the other end, and we proceeded to beat in the reverse direction. The 'Rhino' was again roused, and after dodging about for some time he at length trotted out close to me. My Elephant was unsteady and I missed the shot at the head, and as the 'Rhino' turned away, my second bullet struck him close to the root of the tail, a pretty deadly place with the heavy charges that I was using. The 'Rhino' now went straight to S., who dropped him with a couple of shots. On examining him, we found that he had a very perfect sharp horn, about a foot long. He was covered with scars from fighting, and had lost one eye!

On subsequent days we shot with varied luck, bagging several more 'Rhino,' and losing others which we ought to have got. The greatest difficulty was to get the beaters to keep their places when a 'Rhino' was on foot. As soon as the great beast began grunting and rushing about, they would scream out that he was attacking their Elephants, and with few exceptions they would do their best to get out of the way, and afford the 'Rhino' a clear line of retreat.

At length, after a very enjoyable week, we came to our last beat, a long narrow belt of reeds with a small marshy stream trickling through it. D. went to the extreme end; I was about a hundred and fifty yards from him, and S. came along with the beaters. As they approached I heard a 'Rhino' coming on ahead of them, and he passed me within a few yards, but without showing himself. Directly afterwards, two shots from D., both of which hit him hard, sent him back in my direction, and as he passed me at a swinging trot within thirty yards, I got a clear shot at him. My bullet struck him fair in the very centre of the shield, and the enormous brute rolled heels over head like a rabbit—stone dead. This was the only instance we witnessed of a 'Rhino' dying otherwise than in a recumbent position, but none of the others were thus shot dead in full career. This was the largest 'Rhino' that we killed during the trip, and had the most massive horn. I regret that I did not keep his measurements.

His skin is of a brownish-grey color, with dark vertical stripes: the hair is long and coarse, and forms a sort of mane on the neck and shoulders.

I have never shot, and have only twice seen, a Hyæna; on both occasions at night when I had no gun. The first was near Súbáthú, the second was in the station of Kasáoli. I was walking through the latter place one moonlight night, when I came upon a Hyæna on the road; the brute merely moved a little to one side, and had the impertinence to growl at me as I passed.

Hyænas often carry off dogs and goats, but I believe that they will never attack a man. They are cowardly beasts, and, when speared off horseback, never attempt to show fight, though they often give a good run.

THE INDIAN BLACK BEAR—*Ursus Labiatus*.

The Indian Black Bear, or Sloth Bear as it is sometimes called, is found, though not in large numbers, throughout the Dún and Terai. It is more plentiful among the rocky hills of Bírghúm, Singbhúm, and Chotá Nágpúr.

It is smaller than the Himalayan Black Bear, and is differently shaped, having a long head with largely developed lips, and slenderer limbs than the other species. The color of the coat is a rusty black, with a white V-shaped mark on the chest, and a greyish muzzle.

The hair is coarse and long, attaining its greatest length on the forequarters. The claws are most formidable weapons. Unlike most other Bears, which appear to delight in cold climates, this Bear seems to be regardless of heat, and inhabits some of the hottest localities in India.

Its favorite haunts are rocky hills, where it spends the heat of the day in a cave, or under some shady tree. It lives upon fruit, larvæ of insects, roots, &c., and it is excessively fond of the flower of the mhowa tree, to obtain which, it will travel great distances. I have never heard of this Bear eating flesh, either killed by itself, or carrion.

It is said to be extremely savage, and to attack people when quite unprovoked, but I do not believe that any animal, as a general rule, will go out of its way to attack man.

Common as this Bear is in certain districts, it has so happened that I have never been able to devote any time to its pursuit, and though I have two or three times hunted for it, it was under unfavorable circumstances. The only one that I ever saw was in the Bhútán Dooárs when I was beating for Rhinoceros, and as I only had an indistinct view of it in the long grass, I mistook it for a Pig till it was too late to get a shot at it.

THE JAVAN OR SUNDERBUN RHINOCEROS—*Rhinoceros Sondaicus*.

This comparatively little-known Rhinoceros is still tolerably abundant in the Sunderbuns or Gangetic Delta, where it inhabits the swampy islands near the sea face. It is also found, but rarely, in the Sikkim Terai, where, I believe its existence was not known for certain until I recognized it in 1878.

It is sometimes known as the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros, but when full-grown it is little, if at all, inferior in size to the other species.

It may be recognized by the different arrangement of the heavy folds of the skin, by the somewhat slenderer head, and above all, by the curious tessellated appearance of the hide, which is very different from the tuberculated armour of *Rhinoceros Unicornis*.

The female has no vestige of a horn.

In May 1878, I was hunting not far from the left bank of the Tistá river, with two friends, S. and L. One day we had pitched our camp at a place where we were told that Rhinoceros were to be found, and had spent the whole morning in a fruitless search for them. That there were 'Rhino' in the neighbourhood was evident from the fresh tracks, so we went out again in the afternoon.

After beating through a considerable extent of forest, we came to a wide grassy plain, and while crossing it, we roused a 'Rhino' out of a muddy watercourse. We did not catch sight of it, but the disturbed state of the water showed that it had just left, and we presently heard it moving through the high grass. We had not much difficulty in tracking, and in about a mile we overtook the 'Rhino,' which turned to gaze at us. S. fired and crippled it, and knocked it over with a second shot.

Our Elephants, which were all nervous untrained animals, refused to go near the fallen 'Rhino,' and as we endeavoured to force them in the proper direction, a calf, which we had not previously observed, rushed through the grass. L., who could not see how small it was, fired at once, and struck the poor little beast, which uttered a loud scream.

This was too much for the nerves of S.'s Elephant, which at once bolted at full speed in the direction of the sál forest, which he was only prevented from entering (to the imminent risk of his rider) by the Mahout's throwing a blanket over his eyes.

In the meantime L. and I were endeavouring to find the calf, but though we dismounted from our demoralized Elephants, and hunted for it on foot, we could find no trace of it in the heavy grass.

On going to examine our prize, I at once recognized it as *R. Sondaicus*; and on telling the natives who were with us that this was not the ordinary Rhinoceros, they informed me that they were aware that there were two kinds.

A Goorkha who was with me filled a soda water bottle with the milk of the dead Rhinoceros: I had the curiosity to taste it, and found it excellent.

S. had some very handsome shields and trays made from the hide; which, when dried and polished, looks like tortoise-shell.

THE PIGMY HOG—*Porculia Salvania*.

This tiny animal hardly comes under the heading of 'Large Game,' but being so nearly allied to the Wild Boar, I have mentioned it in its proper place.

It is an inhabitant of the Sikkim Terai and Bhútán Dooárs, but very little is known about its habits. As it lives in perfect forests of grass, there are not many facilities for observing it.

I can give no detailed description of the animal, never having inspected one. I believe that it is exactly like a miniature hog, only rounder in shape, and nearly tail-less. I have

MAP OF
THIBET, THE HIMALAYAS
AND
NORTHERN INDIA.

Illustrating U.S.A. Kinkadee's "Large Game Shooting in Tibet &c."

Scale 1:1,000,000

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