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HUNTING THE BLACK RHINO WITH EIGHTY ELEPHANTS.

BY FRANCIS THATCHER.

MORE PUGNACIOUS AND MORE FORMIDABLE THAN ANY OTHER THING THAT WALKS, THE HUNTER WHO KILLS THIS GREAT BEAST HAS ACHIEVED SOMETHING.



THE dawn is just breaking. Faint yellow streaks tinged with purple slowly spread across the sky. But the great camp has been awake and up for an hour.

In the vast enclosure of brushwood are tethered some eighty to a hundred elephants which will be used to drive the great black rhinoceros from its jungle fastnesses. Loud trumpeting ring through the air, mingled with the shouts of the *mahouts*, who are getting the unwieldy animals ready for the day's sport.

They have just come back from the stream, which lies to the west of the camp, where they have stood in the cool fresh water with their trunks plunged in, drinking long drafts, while the *mahouts*, astride their necks, address them in endearing terms, urging them to drink their fill, for Allah himself only knows when they will get their next drink, as they have a hard day's work before them, crashing their way through the jungle under the scorching rays of the tropical sun.

Soon the *howdahs* are on their backs, and they file out to form line in the open space outside the camp. Some few selected ones are kneeling outside the white tents waiting for the *sahibs* who are to do the day's hunting from their backs. The express rifles, four and eight bores, and the ammunition, having been carefully put into the *howdahs*, the *sahibs* climb in, and the huge brutes ponderously get to their feet and move slowly away to join the great line waiting for them.

In Indian file they move off, preceded by the trackers and *shikarris*, or hunters, to the hunting-ground, where not only the black rhinoceros, but tigers, deer, and wild pigs abound. Pushing their way through the dense grass, ten to twelve feet high in many places, through the forest tangled with creepers and dense with undergrowth of young saplings, they at last arrive at the spot in which their quarry lies hidden, sleep-

ing through the long day sheltered from the midday heat.

Here a line is formed, the elephants about ten feet apart in a vast sea of giant *lalaing* grass, great twisted creepers, and dense scrub-brush. The line presses slowly forward, crashing through all obstacles which impede its progress. As it goes on it forms a crescent shape. Incessant shouts of "*dynee tain*" (hold to the right) and "*baccn burrao*" (forward on the left) fill the air.

With a heavy rush of wings, peacocks rise in the air, and an occasional deer can be seen dashing across the open spaces. No animal can break through the solid line of advancing elephants; they are pushed on and on until the open spaces become more frequent and the jungle thinner.

Suddenly, in an opening not twenty yards in front, the hunters see a great, black, moving mass. It is a rhino. He has been awakened out of his midday *siesta*, and he turns in his ponderous way to gaze for a moment to see what it is that has forced him from his retreat.

A shot rings through the air, quickly followed by one or two more; the rhino stumbles forward with a scream, and attempts to get away; two more shots ring out in rapid succession, and he rolls over—dead.

The elephants are brought up, and one of the *shikarris* chops off the rhino's head with a few strokes of his deadly *kukri*—a knife with a broad crescent-shaped blade. The head is put into a *howdah*, and the line again moves forward.

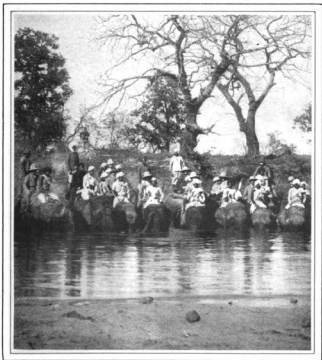
Before the end of the day, three more of these monsters have fallen to the fusillade poured from the *howdahs*. In the evening their hideous heads, with their dumpy, squat, black horns, are laid out in the clearing in front of the *sahib's* tents as trophies of the day's sport.

But this is only one phase of hunting the rhinoceros. It is the way in which "distinguished visitors" and "personages" who are "globe-trotting" in the Far East indulge in the sport.

A hunt of this kind costs a vast expenditure of money and labor, and its chief attraction is that the sportsmen cannot come to any great harm, but it is not the way your genuine hunter goes about the business. The latter sees the dangerous brute really as he is, and takes all the chances and joys incidental to the sport with his life, skill,

awkward and slow in his movements, and when unmolested wanders leisurely about, sometimes stopping to dig up the ground in sheer wantonness. When one makes a nocturnal raid on neighboring rice-fields, the destruction it causes is unbelievable.

It used to be believed, and is now among a large number of people, that the rhinoc-



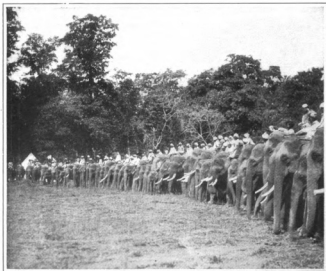
A DROVE OF ELEPHANTS, HOT AND THIRSTY AFTER A LONG CHASE OF THE RHINO, DRINKING DEEPLY AT AN AFRICAN RIVER.

and unerring aim pitted against the ferocity and courage of his foe.

It is incredible how such a ponderous brute can move with the agility and speed that it does. It charges through the dense jungle with surprising rapidity, and only the swiftest elephants can keep pace with an infuriated rhinoceros. He is ordinarily

cross uses its horn as a weapon of offense; but this is not so. Strangely enough, they use their teeth, two upper and two lower, which are as sharp as a knife.

A friend of mine killed a large male rhinoceros a year or two ago in Malaya, and the brute was cut and slashed all over with freshly inflicted wounds which looked as if



ELEPHANTS AND THEIR DRIVERS LINED UP READY, AT THE WORD OF COMMAND, TO BEAT UP THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY IN SEARCH OF THE BLACK RHINOCEROS.

they had been made with a huge razor. The animal had recently been fighting with one of his own kind, and this was the result.

As for the danger of hunting the rhino, no two hunters put it in the same category, for their judgments are drawn from their personal experience. Selous, the great African hunter, and one of the greatest authorities on the subject of big game-hunting, places it after the lion, the elephant, and the buffalo; but more than one man who has been in a tight place with a rhino at his heels will tell you that there is no other brute living so dangerous.

For one thing, the rhino is extremely hard to kill. When he is charging head-on, there is only one vulnerable spot, and that is through his very small eye. He can be brought down by a bullet placed three inches below the base of the ear, but the favorite spot, if you can get it, is the quarter shot just behind the shoulder.

He is sullen and extraordinarily vicious. Fortunately for the hunter, his sight is very poor, like that of the elephant, though his scent is very keen. When wounded and followed, he scents his enemy and charges headlong with tremendous speed in his di-

rection. He will stop some forty or fifty yards beyond, should he miss the object of his fury, and come charging back again at a different angle. This maneuver he will repeat several times.

The real, sportsman-like hunting of the rhino requires nerve and daring, a cool head and a steady hand, for it is done on foot. It has to be undertaken in the thick undergrowth of the dense jungle, where the interlacing creepers and giant *lianas* obstruct every footstep of your course, catching the muzzles of your rifles.

And the hunter must move in perfect silence. This is absolutely essential. Any moment, without the slightest warning, the great unwieldy brute may suddenly come crashing through the jungle, and wo to you if his charge be true, for the odds are all in his favor.

On the night before the hunt the trackers come to your camp and tell you that they have located the tracks—"puga" they are called in India—and before daybreak the next morning you start out on foot, accompanied by your *shikari*, carrying your extra rifle. It is not long before you are in the thick of the tropical forest, for the rhino

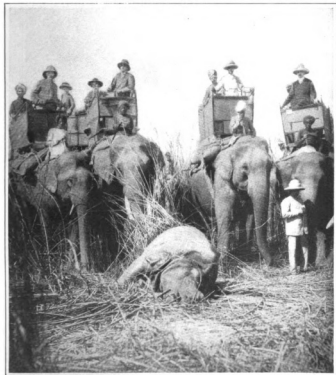
only comes out to feed in the cool of the early morning or evening.

You plow your way slowly and silently through the dank soil. Slimy branches dripping with mire slap you on the face, and bits of mud drop on you from above. The fierce rays of the tropical sun beat on your back, and myriad of flies buzz and swarm around your eyes and ears; still you keep doggedly on, for you may come on your rhino any moment.

The tracker who is just in front crouches and motions warningly with his hand. You cautiously peer over the shoulder of the

prostrate *shibarri*, and you see what, at first sight, appears to be an immense ant-heap. Presently the mass of dirt moves. It is the object of your quest, but what part of him you can't make out. In a few seconds the eight-bore speaks with a terrific roar, resounding through the silent forest. It is followed by a scream like a steam-engine in agony, and the vast bulk disappears crashing through the jungle.

Now comes the more dangerous part—following him up. He leaves a track behind him like a double cutting on a railway line, but the jungle is so impenetrable that



A SHOT RINGS THROUGH THE AIR, QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY ONE OR TWO MORE; THE RHINO STUMBLES FORWARD WITH A SCREAM AND ATTEMPTS TO GET AWAY; TWO MORE SHOTS RING OUT IN RAPID SUCCESSION AND HE ROLLS OVER—DEAD.

you cannot see a yard into it on either side. Monkeys swing from branch to branch overhead, chattering and gibbering. As you go cautiously along with all your senses strained to tension pitch, a terrific snort and a rush tell you that you have found him, or, rather, he has scented you.

He comes charging headlong at you, guided entirely by his wonderful sense of smell. You feel chilly about the spine, crouching down in the heavy mire, as the huge brute comes crashing through the jungle, carrying everything before him.

His nostrils are twitching nervously as the alarming scent reaches them. The great squat horn shows black and dumpy on the top of his snout. His little yellow eyes gleam, and the upper lip is curled back over the gums. He means business if he can only locate you.

Meanwhile you wait and wait, hardly daring to breathe. If he would only swing round and give you the fatal quartering shot. It seems hours before he climbs on to his feet again, grunting and groaning, and at last he swings round. Now is your



AFTER A RHINOCEROS IS KILLED IT IS DECAPITATED BY A NATIVE WITH ONE BLOW OF A SIMILAR-LIKE BLADE AND ITS HEAD IS TAKEN TO THE CLEARING IN FRONT OF THE SAHIB'S TENT AS A TROPHY OF THE DAY'S SPORT.

But like a great black streak, he passes within a few yards, and stops abruptly about fifty yards beyond. Again he comes smashing at you, only to miss, and again you breathe more freely. After a pause of a few seconds, with a terrific snort, he is after you once more, with another miss to his credit. Each time you could have had a shot, but it is a senseless thing to do.

Then all is silent again, and you in turn become the pursuer. You know he cannot be far off. After creeping forward stealthily, the *shikarri* touches you and points silently in front.

The rhino is squatting on his hams, and his hideous head is lifted high in the air, which he swings slowly over his shoulder.

chance. Your finger presses the trigger, and, with a scream and a rush, the rhino rushes forward, stumbles, and topples over on his side some thirty yards beyond. You have bagged your first head.

There is another species called the white rhinoceros. Unlike the black, it is square-lipped, stands about six feet high, and has two horns. It feeds on grass in the open, and is now nearly extinct.

The last known specimens were shot by Mr. Selous in southern Mashonaland, South Africa. The head and skull are now preserved in the South African Museum in Cape Town. No museum in America or Europe possesses specimens of this species, the next largest of modern mammals.

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