

# TRAPPER'S



The Author.

**W**HEN I first began to tentatively inform my friends that I intended to capture some full-grown rhinos and ship them to Zoos in various parts of the world, the general consensus of opinion was that I had gone stark, staring mad. Some folk even went so far as to ask me whether I didn't mean "museums"; for, they said, it must surely be apparent to the meanest intelligence that the only way in which a full-grown rhino could be captured would be by means of a bullet in heart or brain, after which he could leave the country in a box consigned to a taxidermist. Secretly I felt they were probably right, but I meant to have a shot at proving the opposite.

Even in these enlightened days there are many people who declare that anyone keeping a wild animal in captivity, whether in a Zoo or elsewhere, must of necessity be extremely cruel and completely careless of the sufferings of the creatures under his care. To such as these the protestations of a mere trapper will no doubt appear ludicrous, but, at the risk of such ridicule, I should like to record the fact that I have never approved of the standard method of capturing rhino—shooting the cow and grabbing her calf. I have always thought this system not only wasteful of a species fast becoming extinct but also, possibly, cruel to the calf, in

that the best of trappers cannot always be certain of being able to capture the strong and agile half-ton "baby"—a failure which may well result in its death by starvation.

It was in order to demonstrate to myself that another method was possible that I first started on the pursuit of these huge beasts.

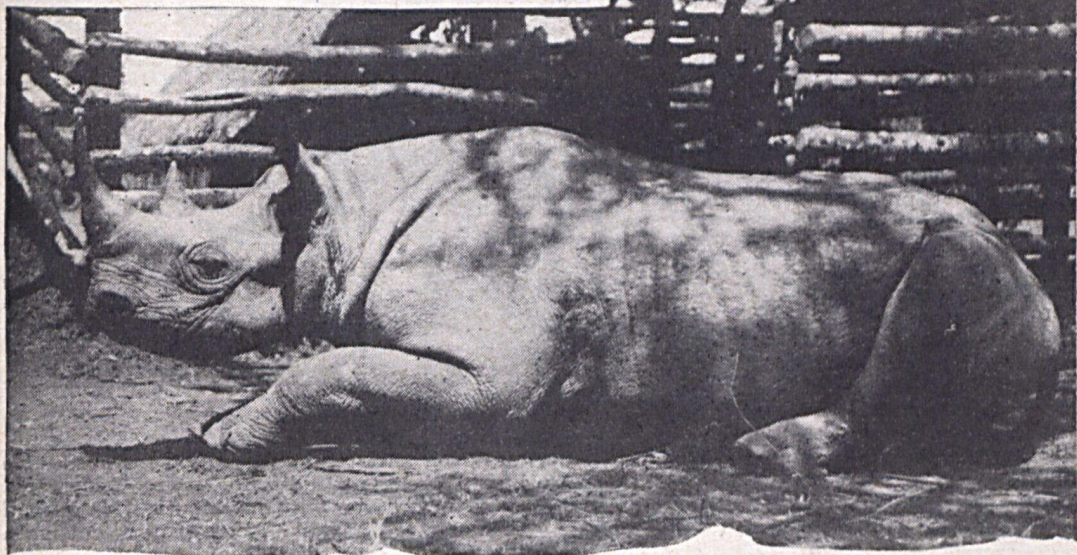
I hardly believed that it could be done, however, and so set off to prove an argument in which I had no faith, obsessed with an idea that turned out to be untrue—that the rhino is a very stupid beast. I had no other knowledge but that gained from the trapping of such creatures as giraffe and antelopes, zebras and buffaloes, lions, leopards and monkeys—in fact, practically every wild animal in East Africa save the reputedly intelligent elephant and the equally (reputedly) stupid rhino.

And, because I believed this rhino fable, I made my traps strong but did not worry very much about concealment. As a result I caught some of those clever elephants, but the rhinos—not once, but on at least six occasions—walked up to my traps, walked round them, and then walked away. As to walking in, however, they evidently preferred to leave *that* to the elephants!

For two years I worked to capture rhinos, and you may believe I didn't waste much time running after them with a packet of salt! I tried traps that rose up from the ground to catch them by the legs, and others that fell from heaven to catch them by the head or horn. I experimented with a concealed automatically-released chloroform-bag that would slip and fasten over their heads as they passed a certain spot, and also a hypodermic contrivance filled with a sleep-inducing drug which would drop on them from above. But even though I learnt to conceal my snares so that no human eye could detect anything (and the rhino's sight is notoriously bad) they continued to turn aside and make a detour around the danger-spot.

I got them in the end, of course, otherwise I should not be writing about them, and the trap which made the capture was the outcome of many efforts rolled into one. First we dug a shallow pit on a much-frequented rhino path. Work had to be done at a great pace to ensure everything being completed before nightfall. In this pit I laid a sturdy wooden platform and, supporting the four corners with ropes, drew it up to the level of the path. Over this again I draped a huge net made of thickest rope and largely meshed, with a long, heavy rope fixed to each corner. These ropes were carried over high, strong branches, two on either side of the pit, and to their ends we attached heavy logs so that when released the logs would pull the net upwards. We then covered all ground-work with dead leaves and forest loam. That was that, and when the job was done the whole gang had

# VENTURE



"Kamata" in his stockade.

## By H. R. STANTON OF RUMURUTI, KENYA COLONY

An East African hunter's account of a unique enterprise—the catching alive of adult rhinos for export to Zoos. Mr. Stanton was doubtful as to whether it could be done, but after many trials he finally succeeded in capturing three fine specimens.

to cut great quantities of thorn branches and place them in the form of a great barrage circling the entire structure to prevent any animals from going near it. Four weeks later, when we felt that all human scent had been eliminated, we opened the barrage at both points where it crossed the well-worn rhino path.

The trap was now ready except for the trip-cord, and though a wire had taken its place while we worked and waited, my Heath Robinson contrivance was balanced with such elaborate care that a few strands of cotton would have held up the heavy logs, which in bulk nearly equalled the weight of a rhino. Instead of the wire I now substituted a slim and succulent piece of cactus creeper. If my quarry would only bite or break through this he might find it as good as a ticket to Europe, for then the wooden platform beneath his feet would suddenly give way, the meshes of the net would slip up his legs, holding his body above ground-level, while the see-sawing of the ropes holding the logs over tree-branches would allow his feet to bounce impotently on the bottom of the pit, preventing him springing out of the net but taking some of his weight and thereby preventing chafing.

Days passed, but no animal ventured up to the cactus. Dismissing the carefully-designed trap as just another fruitless effort, I began to rack my brains for still another idea. Daily a native went to inspect the snare, and daily he returned with the same disheartening words: "*Hapana kitu katiya matego, bwana*" ("There

is nothing in the trap, master"). But one wet morning, when I was just sitting down to breakfast, the thing for which I had hoped and planned, but scarcely believed in, happened. The trap-watcher came bounding into camp, sweat and rain pouring down his eager black

face. "*Faro!*" he panted. "*Faro nahamatiwa!*" ("Rhino is caught!")

More than one "armchair hunter" has expressed surprise—nay, disapproval—of my lack of opportunism in that I have not a whole selection of photographs of the rhino cradled in the net. Unfortunately, however, I can only ask anyone who does not believe that the rhino was so captured to suggest some less-complicated method—such suggestions would be gratefully received. As my excuse for the non-production of those breath-taking photographs I should mention such details as the darkness of the cedar-forest in which the rhino perversely insists upon living, and of the inadvisability of attempting a flashlight photograph of a newly-caught specimen of the world's second largest pachyderm struggling ignominiously in a rope net.

There he was, however—the first adult African rhino ever to be caught and held in captivity—and when, after a new kind of rodeo, I managed to give him a hypodermic injection, he soon went to sleep. How long would he stay so? Speed, all possible speed, was now necessary. We released the heavy logs, folded and secured the net over him, and then

thirty strong men dragged him by two rope-ends on to a low wooden sleigh.

Now we're off! Hurry, boys, he looks like waking!

Sweating with anxiety as much as exertion, we hauled our massive captive to the timber stockade a hundred yards away, built as the first preliminary for the trap. At last, after what seemed like hours, but in reality were only minutes, he was safely inside, his shroud unfastened, and the great bulk rolled off. Then we were able to breathe freely, and I stood back to admire my prize.

He was young, for his front horn did not measure more than thirteen inches, but he was most certainly full-grown. Looking at his two-ton body lying there in a *boma* in which I felt that even a large elephant would be secure, was a tremendous thrill—but the biggest thrill was yet to come! He opened his eyes, and in what seemed the same instant was on his feet and careering madly round and round the stockade, snorting defiance at every step. There and then I christened him "Kamata," which means "Caught."

After about three weeks of ever-lessening charging and "huff-huffing," Kamata began to settle down to captivity, and at the end of a couple of months was eating out of our hands

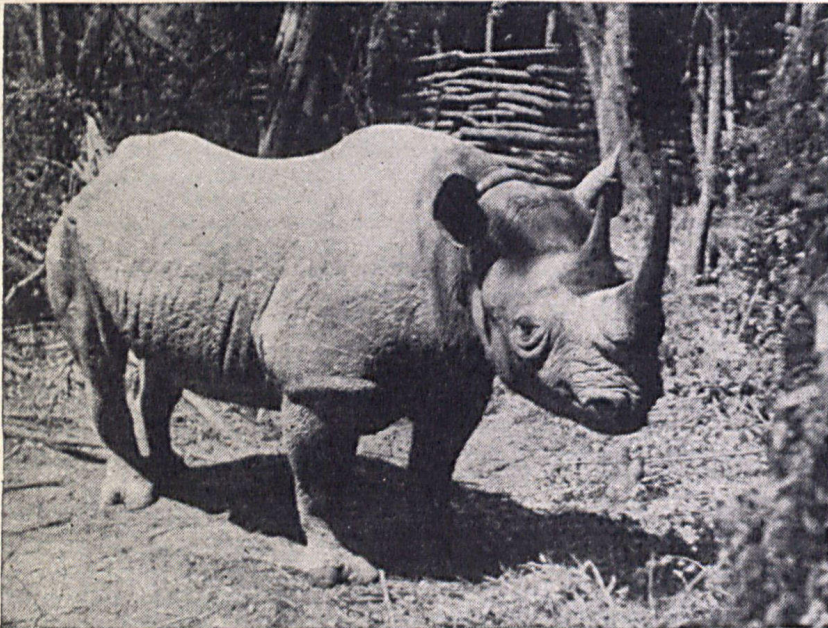


Making the road through the jungle.

and even allowing us to scratch his nose. He had a great partiality for sugar, and would stand before you with his mouth wide open if there seemed any likelihood of your putting a sweet into that great pink cavity. Then I decided that the time had come to start the next part of my boast—that I would export him alive, and not in a box consigned to a taxidermist. I had a huge crate made for him and placed it near his *boma* entrance. A sloping earth ramp enclosed by stout posts connected this crate (still perched on the trailer) with the stockade. This arranged, I invited Kamata to step inside, and as sugar-cane and a good deal of that treacherous cactus bark tastefully festooned the walls, he was pleased to accept, and was soon going up and down like a bus-conductor collecting fares.

Before we could transport our prisoner, I had to turn road-maker and build a reasonably smooth highway through tangled jungle and across swift river where no road had ever run before.

At last, however, all was ready for the start of the long and perilous journey. As Kamata did not know much about motors yet, I decided that until he could be gently broken to them a thirty-man-power engine would suit him better, so I attached a long rope to the front axle of the trailer and arranged my "helpers" along it. Kamata had now



"Romeo."

settled down to the serious business of eating, and was quite undisturbed when the rope tautened and the trailer began to roll slowly forward. There were no brakes on the vehicle, for it had been constructed to do all its travelling dependent on my lorry. It was primarily this fact which so nearly upset all my plans (in more ways than one!) and earned the name of "Scare Corner" for a certain turn on my home-made road. This particular place had given me trouble from the start, lying in a steep watercourse, right across our way. Bearing in mind that the road would not be used many times, I knew that the cost of bridging the gully would be prohibitive, so that when I found a narrow ridge running across it, making a passable, even if steep, track, I thanked Heaven and directed my road down to it. When the grading was finished I brought my lorry over it, noting that, if carefully and slowly driven, this vehicle, which was approximately the same size as the trailer, could descend the valley side, turn the sharp corner which overhung the precipice, and get up the other side quite successfully. Naturally much braking was necessary to accomplish this, and I realised that Kamata's chariot would need most skilful handling.

When we reached this spot, therefore, I had the whole business worked out. Attaching a spare rope to the back axle of the trailer, I gave it a couple of twists round a selected tree and put the rope into the hands of Kamata's pullers. Instructions were simply explained—the rope was to be slowly paid out, and under no circumstances was anyone to let go of it until the trailer came to a standstill at the bottom of the valley. Eagerly my assistants nodded and said "*Nāiyo*," until I felt certain they understood. Reassured, I took my place on the front of the trailer, where a



"Caesar."

rough steering-wheel would guide our passage. The word was given and we started off. Inch by inch we edged down the perilous incline, and I had time to note out of the corner of my eye that Kamata was lying down asleep. Thereupon I wondered whether it was worth while shouting to the "boys" to let her go just a little faster.

If my mind was on increased speed, however, it was certainly scarcely prepared for the suddenness with which that speed came! Not

a hundred yards away on the hillside, though hidden among the trees, I heard a rhino give a loud and angry snort and start to crash through the forest. Simultaneously, it seemed to me, I felt Kamata struggle to his feet, and a moment later the trailer began to career down the incline! If I had not turned the corner at the bottom it seems most improbable that I should be writing this, so I will ask you to believe that I *did*. As to *how* I did it, I can only say I don't know. I believe that



"Kamata" in his travelling crate on the trailer.



The beginning of the journey.

loose earth on the road, which brought the trailer to a standstill at the turn, probably saved my life as well as Kamata's. It would be too much to imagine that if the trailer's speed had carried it up the other side I could have steered it safely on to the roadway during the inevitable run back, with a very-much-perturbed Kamata still turning round and round in his crate, trying to locate his snorting friend, thereby both threatening the balance of the trailer and blocking what little view I ever had of the road behind. But the loose earth was there all right, and we heard no more of the wild rhino, so that by the time a bunch of shame-faced "boys" had descended from their perches on the trees and gathered round the trailer Kamata and I had almost regained our wind, and I was able to tell my helpers what I thought of their behaviour.

A few months after this I sold Kamata to an American Zoo, but not before I had proved that my prisoner, in allowing himself to be tamed after capture, was not a freak rhino, but simply an example of the really fine nature underlying the "rough-diamond" exterior of the species. I made this proof by two more captures—"Cæsar," who has carried his beautiful twenty-five-inch horn all the way to the Belle Vue Zoo in Manchester, and "Romeo," whose thick front horn is a few inches shorter than "Cæsar's,"



"Kamata" just after his capture.

and who now awaits the end of the War in order that he may travel to London Zoo, by which he has been purchased.

One thing, however, still worries me about this rhino business. I have now captured three rhinos—three large, upstanding males—and the last of these, "Romeo," is still in his forest *boma* in the midst of a region that has been the home of rhinos for generations. Nightly "Romeo" sends forth his queer and rather heartbreaking love-call—something between the cry of a young calf and a cat's miaow—but he calls in vain.

Where, and oh where, is Juliet?