

RHINOCEROS HUNTING IN AFRICA.



THE "black," prehensile-lipped, or two-horned rhinoceros is still very plentiful in many parts of Africa, notably in British East Africa, British Central Africa, and Western Somaliland, in which latter country I had some exciting sport with this dangerous animal.

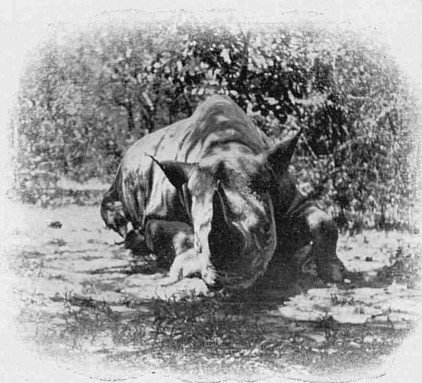
The colour of the so-called "black" rhinoceros is a dark, brownish-grey. The horns of specimens shot in British East Africa have measured as much as forty-one inches round the curve, but the average length of the front horns of those found in Somaliland is but half this. A fine male shot by me in Somaliland stood five feet at the shoulder, its length from tip of nose to end of tail was twelve feet, its girth nine feet ten inches.

The black rhinoceros subsists on the roots, leaves, and branches of thorn bush, and does not eat grass. He drinks about an hour after sun-down, and travels enormous distances to the water, for he seldom feeds near his drinking and bathing water. During the day-time he is to be found fast asleep in dense bush, well hidden from the rays of the sun. He is seldom encountered walking about after ten in the morning. All over the Boorgha country in Western Somaliland one finds a hole or trench scooped out of the ground about a foot deep, and usually by the side of a thorn bush. The animal digs up all this earth with its horn, to cover its dung, and scatter it about in order to destroy all trace of itself, on the same principle as a dog does. The black rhinoceros is usually found alone, sometimes in pairs, and occasionally I have met three together.

The danger in hunting this huge beast lies in the fact that one cannot approach him very close in order to make an accurate shot, which will disable the enemy at once, and so prevent his charging down upon one; and also that the nature of the bush in which he is found is often such that when charged one finds oneself caught up by the terrible wait-a-bit thorns, and unable to free oneself quickly enough to get out of the way.

In the thorn-bush country in Western Somaliland, where I found rhinoceroses extremely plentiful, there is seldom a tree-trunk to be found large enough to conceal the hunter, the ground is stony and uneven, and the footing consequently bad. A rhinoceros is an easy beast to come to close quarters with, if approached, as he always should be, up wind. His sight is poor, and he seldom lifts his head to look about him, after the manner of all the antelopes. The great thing when stalking him is to feel that you have his wind, to keep as quiet as possible, and to endeavour to approach directly behind his stern, in order to avoid being seen. I should advise hunters never to stand in the open when firing at this animal, but to kneel or sit down if possible under shelter of some thorn-bush, however thin; or at least to have some thorn bush close at hand to which to repair after firing. Above all, never show yourself to a wounded rhinoceros—or to any other wounded animal, for the matter of that.

When fired at, a rhinoceros will frequently dash off like a steam engine, snorting and blowing, and he is not particular in what direction he goes. Now is the time to keep one's head. Should he come crashing down towards one, the best possible thing to do is to stand or squat stock still. In nine cases out of ten he has not seen you, and will go thundering by you without noticing you. Should he come crashing through the bush behind which you are hiding, of course you must jump sideways out of his way. To turn round and run into the open before the nose of a rhinoceros is madness. He sees you, and if he wants to follow you



Rhinoceros, Muchinga Mountains, Upper Zambesia.

terrified rhinoceros racing through thick thorn-bush, leaving a track behind it as if a runaway steam roller had passed by.

When riding through thorn-bush one day I disturbed no less than four sleeping rhinos, which came charging out, blowing, snorting, and squeaking, much to the terror of my pony, who landed me about his neck more than once, and I usually found myself clinging on to his ears to save myself from feeling the stony ground beneath.

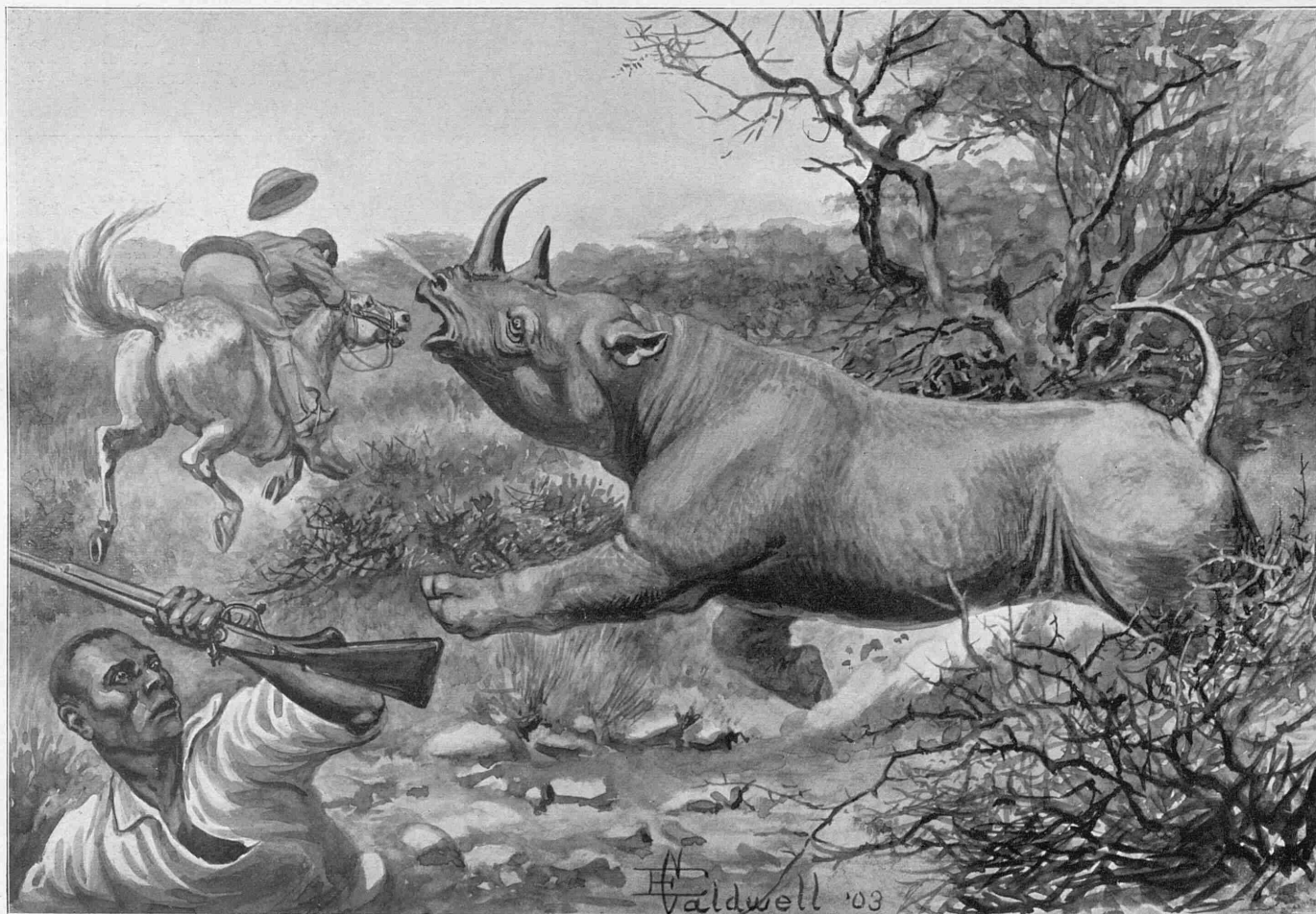
I had read somewhere that the proper place to aim for was a spot about three inches in front of the base of the ear. I found a rhinoceros in easy stalking ground, and getting very close (about twelve yards off) I thought I would try this shot with an eight-bore black powder rifle. I got a splendid chance, took a very careful aim, and pressed the trigger. I don't know which was the most scared! I never touched the rhino, but he made so much noise and commotion getting away that I lay flat on my stomach behind a low thorn-bush for five minutes after he had gone! After that I always fired behind the shoulder and followed it up quickly with a second before he had time to recover from the shock of the first. It is useless to expect to kill a rhinoceros at long range, although, of course, at close quarters any bullet will go in deep enough to kill. Oddly enough, I have with me now a solid steel bullet, surrounded by an outer covering of lead, which I found just under the skin of the neck of a rhinoceros I shot near the Webbi Shebeyii, and conclude it must have been fired by one of Dr. Donaldson Smith's party which had passed through that country a few months before me.

The skin of the rhinoceros comes off very easily and looks on the inside together with the denuded body exactly like the peel and freshly-skinned body of an orange. The skin dries to about half the thickness it possessed when first taken off the body and becomes, when dried, so



A baby rhinoceros, caught in the Somali jungle.

he will come up to you in the first hundred yards, for a rhinoceros, although such a huge, ungainly animal to look at, can get over rocky, uneven ground at a greater pace than a horse can. It is an awe-inspiring sight to see a



"Snorting and squeaking, much to the terror of my pony."

hard that the edges will cut your hand if you do not lift a "plate" of hide with care. The Somali natives prize this skin, as it makes them excellent shields (as many as twenty can be cut from a big bull) and whips, but they do not care for the flesh as food. When stripped of the epidermis, and highly polished, the hide resembles clouded amber, and is semi-transparent.

The Midgans (low caste Somalis) hunt these animals with bows and poisoned arrows, and sometimes on horseback with long swords with which they hamstring the retreating rhinoceros after the manner of the Ham-ran Arabs, which mode of hunting the late Sir Samuel Baker described. My most exciting adventure with these dangerous animals occurred in very stony, hilly, country covered with very thin thorn-bush.

I and four gunbearers were searching along a dried-up river-bed for fresh elephant spoor when we came across the tracks of a rhinoceros which had evidently only just left the river-bed. It was barely light when we found the spoor, and there appeared to be every chance that the animal would be found near at hand. We advanced cautiously up-hill away from the river-bed and had scarcely proceeded more than a few hundred yards or so when we heard a thorn-bush branch crack, and bending down under the bushes we espied not one but two fine rhinos carelessly wandering along and feeding as they went. Slowly and surely we wormed our way through the boulders and tangle until we got unseen within about thirty yards of the two animals. The wind was very shifty among the rocks, and one of the beasts evidently got a taint of us, for he put up his head, cocked his ears, and listened. Although I had seen and shot at rhinos before I had not so far bagged one, and I suppose I was too anxious, for instead of waiting to try to get nearer I feared they would be off, so fired at the biggest, which was standing broadside on to me. At the sound of the

rifle there was a terrific commotion, and the whole bush seemed to me to be alive with rhinos, although there were in reality only two. The smaller of the two came thundering down the hill and passed us on the left, squeaking like a pig, whilst the biggest made off at full tilt up-hill. On running up to the place, where the latter was standing when I fired at him, we found some spots of blood, and these we at once began to track up the hill. Now, going up-hill on a wounded rhinoceros is a dangerous game, but as we had the wind blowing down-hill in our faces and expected the rhino to be miles off by then we did not realise our danger. After going a very short way we saw the rhinoceros above us, and should then have immediately endeavoured to get at him on the side wind, but instead of this I fired up-hill. The result was a most determined charge. I can see about two tons of black mass coming down-hill at us now. I don't remember exactly what happened, but I know that mass came down upon us at about fifty miles an hour. Whether I was pushed, knocked, or simply jumped aside I know not, but I found myself lying on my back, my rifle five yards away, and I could see absolutely nothing but a thick cloud of dust. When this had blown away I saw one man by my side, two others crouching behind some thorn-bushes opposite to me and looking down-hill I beheld to my horror my head shikari careering violently down the hill hotly pursued by the infuriated rhinoceros, which gained quickly upon him at every stride. When nearly at the river-bed the man either doubled or stumbled round a thorn-bush whilst the rhinoceros, which had followed him round like a terrier after a rat, caught him with his horn on the lower part of his back and tossed him high in the air. The man seemed to turn a complete somersault and landed with a sickening thud through a thick thorn-bush on to the stony ground. As soon as I could I snatched up my rifle and rushed down towards the rhino, which stood over the

man's body facing me in such a position that it was impossible for me to shoot. The rhinoceros gave the man one or two digs with his horn, and I picked up a stone and threw it at the beast, when he immediately looked up at me and then turning tail ran off into the bushes receiving two barrels as he went. We all ran down to the shikari and found that he was alive. Falling through the thick thorn-bush had saved his life, but he had a very bad cut along the side of his head through which the skull was showing and his body was bruised all over but no bones broken.

Giving my water-bottle to two of the men, with instructions to send for a camel to fetch the wounded man back to camp, I took up the tracks of the wounded rhinoceros, which I soon found. I could not get my gunbearers up very close, so ordered a volley to be fired at the brute. This made him spin round and round several times and then stand swaying under a thorn-bush. We got closer, and gave him two more volleys, and then I crawled in within a few feet of him and finished him with one in the neck. Thus died one of the most dangerous animals I have ever had to deal with. I counted eleven bullet holes in his skin and the first one, a large spherical solid ball had gone straight through the heart. When I got home I found my shikari had regained consciousness, and when asked where he felt it most replied, "on my behind." I sewed up the gaping cut in his head, and although he had fever and did no work for a fortnight he ultimately recovered completely, and shortly after stalked me up to within fifteen yards of another rhinoceros, which I killed instantaneously.

C. V. A. PEEL.

Our picture of Rhinoceros, Munchinga Mountains, is from a photograph by Mr. C. H. Pemberton, the remainder by the author.



MISS EVA KELLY,
The light-opera artist, and wife of Mr. G. P. Huntley.

MISS DORA BARTON,
The popular young actress, of Drury-lane, St. James's Theatres, etc.