

THE ELEPHANT HOWDAH AS "BUTT": SHOOTING SWAMP DEER IN INDIA.

By G. M. DYOTT, F.R.G.S., Photographer of the Vernay-Faunthorpe Expedition. (See Illustrations on pages 361, 362-3.)

THE pleasure of shooting big game from off the back of elephants is not necessarily in proportion to the sporting qualities of the animal shot. During the entire Vernay-Faunthorpe Expedition to India, Burma, and Nepal, which I had the good fortune to accompany in the capacity of photographer, that time devoted to shooting gond, or swamp-deer, stands out in my memory as particularly enjoyable. It is obvious that in comparison with tiger-ringing it can never hope to be as exciting, yet, for all that, there is a peculiar fascination in beating up a vast tract of swampy country which no other form of *shikar* can equal. As this happened to be my initial introduction to big-game shooting in India, and the very first time I had ever ridden on the back of that noble beast, the elephant, I was more than interested in the novelty of the event.

In the early part of January, Mr. A. S. Vernay and Colonel Faunthorpe, A.D.C., who organised and equipped the expedition, had completed their *bandabast* for a swamp-deer shoot in the Kheri district, round about Sathiana and Sonaripur. All the camp equipment had gone forward in advance, so that it only remained for members of the party to follow, armed with various rifles necessary for the sport. My own armament was fairly extensive, and consisted of sundry still cameras, motion-picture machines, tripods, etc. Leaving Lucknow in high spirits, we travelled by train to Dudwa, a little place not far from the Nepalese frontier, and there the first thing to attract my attention was the bulky forms of several elephants walking slowly out of the jungle to meet us. Upon their ample backs our kit was secured, and within short order the procession headed for camp, which had already been pitched at Sathiana, barely twelve miles away, in the neighbourhood of some extensive swamps. Now the elephant, at the best of times, moves leisurely, so that we humans, on this occasion, were thankful when a more rapid means of locomotion was forthcoming. The roads which pass through the forest are apt to be muddy, and not suitable for motor-cars at this season of the year, but we galloped along in a Ford, happily anticipating the pleasant days that were ahead of us.

As I have already said, my lord the elephant was quite a new experience to me, so much so that everything pertaining to these remarkable creatures filled me with wonder, admiration, and surprise. When told that I would leave on a "pad" the following morning at six o'clock sharp, I was not sure whether it was a new name for a Ford, or some peculiar native vehicle that I would have to travel by. It turned out to be an ordinary elephant, with a well-upholstered mattress, or pad (stuffed with straw), securely fastened to its back by means of heavy ropes. Pads in this part of the country are very large and comfortable to ride on, accommodating three, or even four, people at a pinch. Howdahs, on the other hand, which are the strongly built, box-like structures secured to the top of the pad, are none too agreeable when it comes to travelling long distances; they are usually built with seats tandem-fashion, on the foremost of which sits the sportsman, with racks handy on either side to hold his weapons. The rear seat, less spacious, is available for anyone fortunate enough to be invited to occupy it, but he cannot shoot, that being the sole privilege of the man in front.

The regular way of mounting, after the elephant has been made to kneel down by the mahout, is to clamber up the tail; but those who are corpulent and not particularly agile can make use of a small ladder kept for the purpose. The mahout reaches his perch at the back of the elephant's head by a different route altogether. He orders his charge to lower his head, then, gripping an ear in each hand, he walks up the trunk, and, assisted by the elephant, clambers into place. From this point of vantage he can control his mount either by whispering words of command into his big ears, or else raining heavy

blows on his head. The *ankus*, which the mahout carries for the enforcement of orders, is usually a bar of metal, with a point at one end and a hooked prong on the side. If instructions are not obeyed promptly and thumps on the head are of no avail, then the point of the *ankus* is jabbed into the skin at the back of the ear.

The days in camp at Sathiana were replete with interest. The usual programme was to make an early start, arriving at some selected spot about 9.30 or 10.0, possibly later if the place was very far from camp. The cold morning air was a grand tonic to

starting-point, and dump me and my cameras in a couple of feet of water, saying that part of the herd would pass near me; and pass they generally did. In this manner I was able to record some interesting scenes. On other occasions I would have my motion-picture machine on the back of a pad, take my place in the line with the beaters, and so record incidents of the sport from quite another angle.

Faunthorpe, in command, would direct all movements either by whistle or visible signal, causing an elephant to push forward here, or hold back at some other point. Sometimes the line would converge, sometimes spread out over a great width, and so, alternately pivoting, inclining, or moving line-ahead, we would advance over miles of desolate swamp land such as the gond frequent. As a rule, the rank grass was of such height that the bodies of the elephants would be lost to view entirely, and it was indeed a curious spectacle to see only the heads of the mahouts, or else just the howdahs, with their occupants, swaying to and fro on the grass tops like row-boats in a heavy sea. Those of the swamp deer that had not become suspicious and cleared off would frequently lie close until the elephants were almost on top of them. As they suddenly dashed off through the tall grass, it needed a quick eye and steady hand to place one's shot right, for in a fraction of a second they were out of sight and gone for good. In the more open stretches there were often times when a commotion could be seen in the grass ahead of the line, indicating the presence of some animal. Excitement would run high for a few moments till he showed himself, and then what a magnificent sight to behold a fine stag dashing through a stretch of shallow water, or else going like the wind over a patch of short grass bordering the swamp. Lucky was the man who brought off a successful shot, and luckier still if, on measuring up his trophy, the antlers proved to be more than thirty-seven inches!

Colonel Faunthorpe bagged an exceptional head of 39½ inches, and others shot by Mr. Vernay were not far behind. When the quarry has been shot, there is but one way of transporting it back to camp, and, as usual, it is the patient old elephant who does it. The shoot over, the entire party would head for home, where, round a blazing fire, the day's sport would be freely discussed.

Another delightful experience was to take a solitary pad elephant and set off by oneself at dawn, walking up some of the outlying patches of jungle adjacent to the Sal Forest. These early morning excursions, when the dew lay heavily on the grass, a pink glow still hung in the West, and the sun crept slowly over the horizon, throwing a flood of light under the trees, were experiences that remain with one a lifetime. At dawn, sambur are found feeding out in the open, and with luck the heads of several beautiful does might suddenly appear over the grass not far away. The elephant stops instantly, you wait for several seconds in anticipation, and the reward comes—a splendid stag also raises his head, and, with the sun shining full in his face, looks at you with a puzzled air. If he is the specimen you are looking for, don't stop to admire him, just shoot, and let it be quick and straight, for in a flash he and his family will be gone, and you will have lost your chance. Sometimes you don't want to kill and are satisfied with just the sight that is before you; memories live a lifetime, and, if supplemented with photographs and motion-picture films such as were taken on this expedition, not only yourself but others can enjoy your experiences.

The delightful sojourn in this locality finally came to an end, and the specimens of wild game procured were packed up and sent to the Museum of Natural History in New York, where they will be mounted in family groups, true to Nature, and prove instructive to millions of people who will ultimately view them there.



SHOT FROM ELEPHANT-BACK IN INDIA: A FINE SPECIMEN OF GOND.
OR SWAMP-DEER.

start the day on, especially as it was followed by warm sunshine. Breakfast over, we would mount an easy-going pad elephant, transferring to howdahs when on the scene of action. The line formed, and the howdahs with their guns properly distributed, the operations would start.

To beat successfully a swamp of gond does not imply the use of many elephants in the lines. On this particular occasion we had some ten or twelve animals

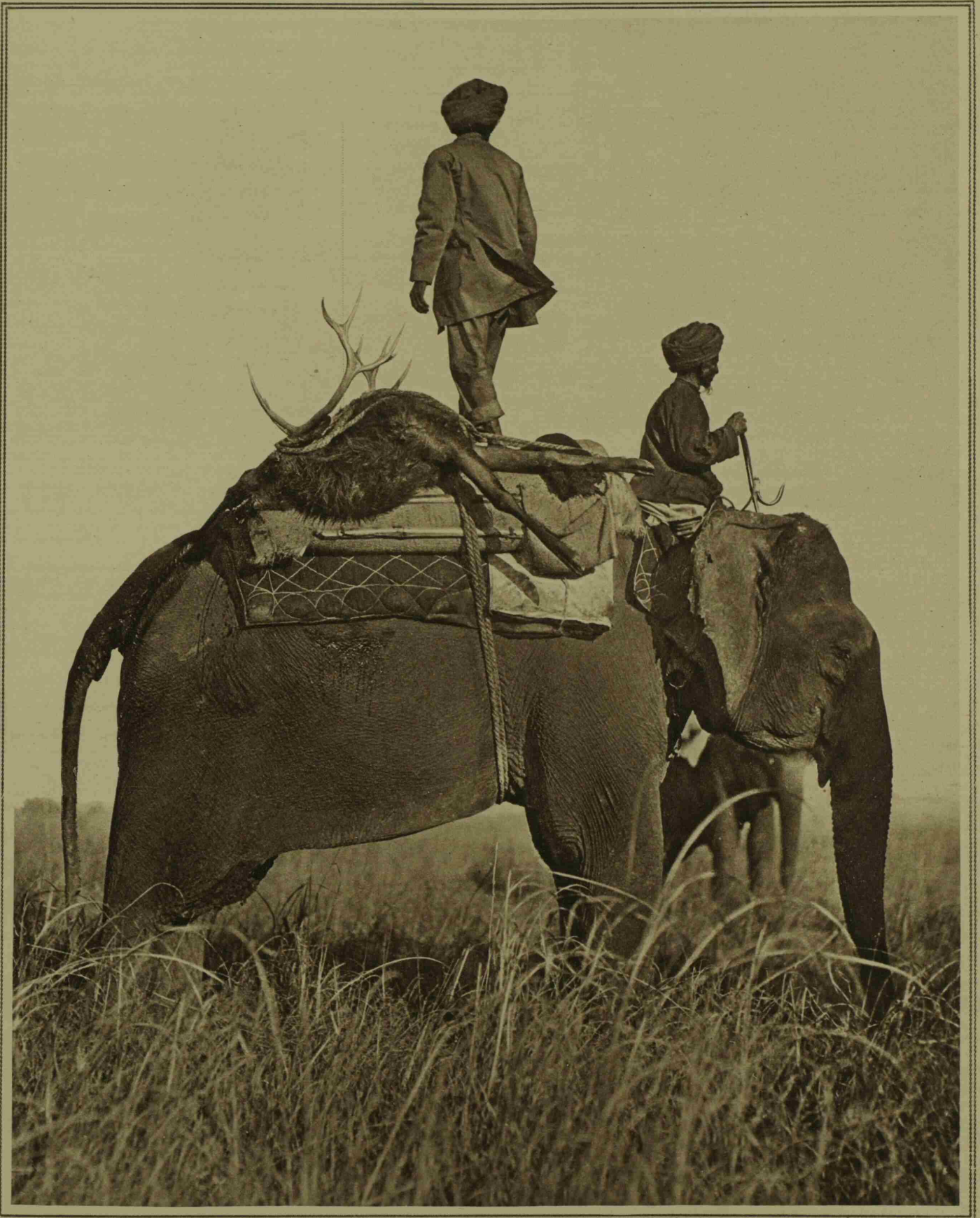


THE PARTNERS IN THE EXPEDITION: MR. A. S. VERNAY (LEFT) AND COLONEL FAUNTHORPE, DIRECTOR OF THE SHOOT, WHO BAGGED AN EXCEPTIONAL HEAD WITH ANTLERS MEASURING 39½ INCHES.—[Photographs by Mr. G. M. Dyott, F.R.G.S.]

available, but seldom were more than seven or eight used at once. The skill and knowledge of the man directing the shoot plays a much more important rôle. First he must be able to control the mahouts, by no means an easy task. Secondly, he must know how and in what direction to manoeuvre the elephants; thirdly, he must be very familiar with the habits of the gond, so as to forecast their movements when disturbed; and, lastly, familiarity with the lay of the land is essential. Colonel Faunthorpe is a recognised authority in India on shooting off the backs of elephants; he seemed to have every phase of this sport at his finger-tips, and the success of the photographic side of the expedition was largely the result of his extensive knowledge of the subject. He would take me to some open strip of swamp, miles away from the

AFTER A GOND SHOOT: AN ELEPHANT BRINGS HOME THE "BAG."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. G. M. DYOTT, F.R.G.S., OF THE VERNAY-FAUNTHORPE EXPEDITION.



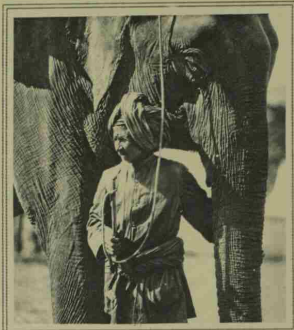
"AS USUAL, IT IS THE PATIENT OLD ELEPHANT WHO DOES IT": THE ONLY METHOD OF TRANSPORTING THE "BAG" BACK TO CAMP—THE CARCASE OF A SWAMP-DEER SLUNG ACROSS A "PAD."

In his article describing the expedition, on page 360, Mr. Dyott says: "My lord the elephant was quite a new experience to me. . . . When told that I would leave on a 'pad' the following morning at six o'clock sharp, I was not sure whether it was a new name for a Ford, or some peculiar native vehicle that I would have to travel by. It turned out to be an ordinary elephant with a well-upholstered mattress, or pad (stuffed with straw), securely fastened to its back by means of heavy

ropes." After explaining the method of mounting an elephant, the equipment of the mahout who drives it, and the details of a hunt for gond, or swamp-deer, the writer continues: "When the quarry has been shot, there is but one way of transporting it back to camp, and, as usual, it is the patient old elephant who does it." Other photographs illustrating the expedition are given on a double-page in this number.

THE ELEPHANT AS THE HUNTER'S MOUNT: "BEATING UP"

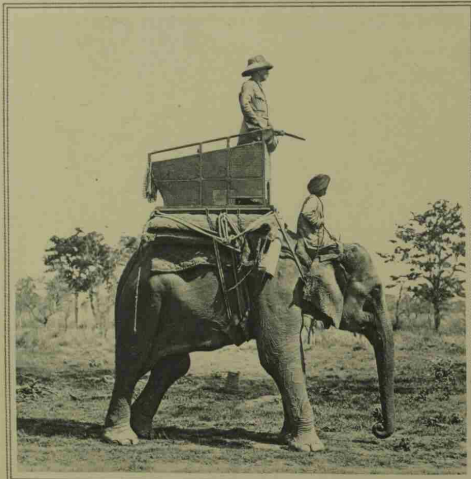
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MR. G. M. DYOTT, F.R.G.S.



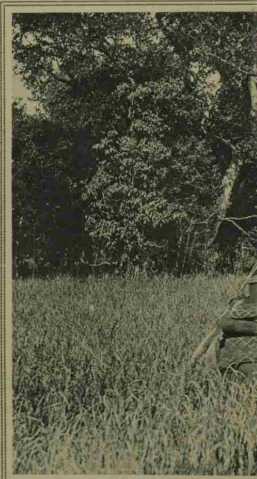
CARRYING HIS ANKUS, A POINTED METAL BAR WITH A HOOKED PRONG AT THE SIDE: A TYPICAL MAHOUT (ELEPHANT-DRIVER).



"SOMETIMES THE LINE WOULD CONVERGE, SOMETIMES SPREAD OUT OVER A GREAT SUCH AS THE GOND FREQUENT": A GROUP OF FIVE



"A RECOGNISED AUTHORITY IN INDIA ON SHOOTING OFF THE BACKS OF ELEPHANTS": COLONEL FAUNTHORPE, THE COMMANDER OF THE EXPEDITION, IN HIS HOWDAH.



"PADS IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY ARE VERY THREE OR EVEN FOUR PEOPLE."

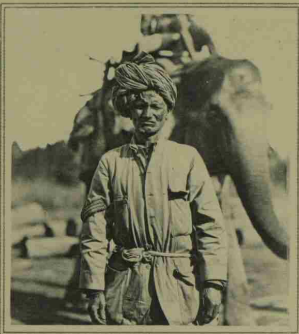
In our last issue (for August 13) we gave some interesting photographs showing detail of the texture of an elephant's hide, the curious formation of its tail and the under surface of the foot, and the relative smallness of the eye in comparison with the animal's enormous bulk. As we then mentioned, those photographs were the work of Mr. G. M. Dyott, F.R.C.S., who accompanied as photographer a recent big-game hunting expedition in India and Burma, conducted by Mr. A. S. Vernay and Colonel Fauntorpe, A.D.C. We now give, here and on other pages, a number of Mr. Dyott's photographs illustrating what he himself found to be one of the most novel and enjoyable episodes of the hunt (if not so exciting as tiger-ringing)—that is, the shooting of gond, or swamp-deer, from elephant-back. "There is a peculiar fascination," he writes in his descriptive article on page 360, "in beating up a vast tract of swampy country

A VAST TRACT OF SWAMPY COUNTRY" AFTER GOND.

OF THE VERNAY-FAUNTHORPE EXPEDITION.



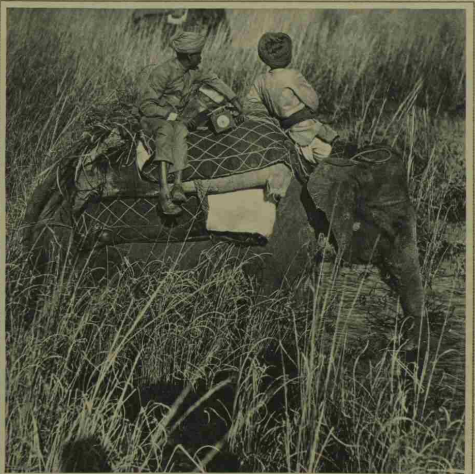
WIDTH, AND SO . . . WE WOULD ADVANCE OVER MILES OF DESOLATE SWAMP LAND
LADEN ELEPHANTS WADING THROUGH DEEP WATER.



A TYPICAL NATIVE SHIKARI, OR HUNTER: KALOSINGH,
ONE OF THE INDIANS WITH THE EXPEDITION.



LARGE AND COMFORTABLE TO RIDE ON, ACCOMMODATING
A PAD ELEPHANT IN SHORT GRASS.



"AS A RULE, THE RANK GRASS WAS OF SUCH A HEIGHT THAT THE BODIES OF THE ELEPHANTS
WOULD BE LOST TO VIEW": A PAD ELEPHANT IN SWAMPY GROUND.

which no other form of shikar can equal." Describing the pad elephant, he says: "Pads in this part of the country are very large and comfortable to ride on, accommodating three or even four people at a pinch. Howdahs, on the other hand—which are the strongly built box-like structures secured to the top of the pad—are none too agreeable when it comes to travelling long distances; they are usually built with seats tandem-fashion, on the foremost of which sits the sportsman with racks handy on either side for his weapons." The mahout, or driver, reaches his perch at the back of an elephant's head by walking up its trunk, gripping an ear in each hand. He controls his mount "either by whispering words of command into his big ears, or else raining heavy blows on his head. The ankus which the mahout carries is usually a bar of metal with a point at one end and a hooked prong on the side."