

FLOODS AND CAMEL-EATING LIONS



The contrast in safari clients and their reactions when faced with Africa's dangerous game I found to be almost as intriguing as the animals themselves, ranging from wild-and-woolly to the almost-calm-and-collected. Two in the latter category came from different corners of the earth. They were different in outlook and upbringing and very different in physical make-up. But both had ability to perform coolly when the pressure was on.

Doug Mummer, the only Australian (other than my brother) to come on safari with me, was a pleasure to hunt with. Hard as nails, not a lazy bone in his body, he'd never let up when on the trail of a trophy. He was as tenacious as the hunting dogs he kept, back in Australia. When the time came to shoot, his trophy was assured. It was as simple as that.

We picked up the tracks of a bull elephant one morning, stayed on them until we caught up, finding ourselves close behind as it passed out of scrub into a clearing. The enormous backside, deeply wrinkled, was so near it seemed to blot out all else. This grey vast-

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ness was topped with a tinge of red from its daily dust-baths. The only sound was the soft squish of enormous feet as each leg took its share of the five-ton weight. A glance back at Doug showed he was enjoying every second. The slight grin; his eyes looking past and over my head had a look of wonder and appreciation as though saying, "Jeeze, I didn't think we'd get this close!" I kicked at some dirt and sticks. The bull stopped and swung its massive head to locate and identify the noise. This was all Doug needed. It was the sort of situation and angle-of-shot that could never have been attempted with many a client.

My other client was an Italian from Naples. He was a big man who had worked hard for his wealth and had not let that pursuit interfere with his physical fitness. Like Doug, he would work as hard as necessary, overcoming any difficulty for his trophies. Back

home, after World War II, he had been one of the first in Italy to see the future of liquid petroleum gas. His first step toward wealth was to buy an ex-British Army 4x4 Bedford truck to distribute this commodity. Thereafter, he had an uninterrupted rise to riches. The same single-mindedness applied to his hunting. An excellent shot, he now had the same difficult angle-of-shot at his elephant as had Doug. Nearing the beast, the same instructions were given, the same quick forward movement to get as close as possible, then the same kick at the dirt and - this time - stones (a sound foreign to the bush could cause headlong flight). The bull's reaction to the slight noise was the required one. He stopped, swung his head to look back and into doing so gave the opportunity of a brain shot. Handled as lightly as a .22 rimfire, the kick from his .458 rifle barely moved the big man's shoulder.

I had a Mexican client who was at the bottom of the scale of hunting efficiency. Homer was somewhere between that level and that of the two hunters mentioned. Back





rims as winch drums and pray nothing would break as the vehicle wound itself up the bank in its lowest 4-wheel drive mode.

When we closed on the elephant in low scrub, its back, projecting above the surroundings, gave the impression of extreme height. Homer showed he was experiencing a gamut of feelings. Open-mouthed surprise at our proximity, excitement at finding this magnificent creature after the trouble we had reaching its domain, and puzzlement on how to get a shot when its hindquarters and the scrub made this impossible. He was wringing wet with sweat. Jane was too, but showed supreme confidence in her man as she fished out a Kleenex and wiped the streaming moisture from his glasses and emo-

followed.

The scrub had opened a little. About fifty yards ahead we saw him, hindquarters and head obscured but standing almost broadside as he fed. Here was an opportunity for a heart shot. Listening to quickly whispered instructions, Homer acquitted himself as Jane expected. At the roar of his .470, the bull surged forwards in the heedless flight of a heart-shot animal. Though hidden by brush, the route of his desperate flight was easily followed by the breaking of scrub. A final crash, then silence.

When we camp up to the bull lying dead on its side, Homer could not contain himself. Behaving like a schoolboy, he climbed on the body and danced a jig, "I got it! I got it!" Before climbing down he turned his face to the heavens and yelled.

When the emotion wore off, a change came over him. He would shoot with a camera from now on, he said. "And let's



home in the USA, Homer grew chrysanthemums and did it so well that the cost of an African hunting safari was no problem. In appearance he was more suited to selling the flowers in a fancy shop from a fancy address in a big city. Probably he made this safari to Kenya with his wife Jane to fill a gap in his conversations of social occasions. Nothing in his conversations now indicated he was a hunting man. He admitted to winning a high school target shoot once and to pass a military rifle-training course with higher scores than many in his group. Jane was proud of him. That he was in Kenya would show people back home that he had hunting abilities of a standard no less than some acquaintances. She was sure he would prove himself. He did - although not as coolly as Doug and the Italian.

Nearing the end of the safari we commenced hunting elephant. It was a battle to get into the country where we expected to find a suitable bull. One gully blocking our way was so steep the only way to get the vehicle up the far bank was to use front wheel

Canvas and sufficient forward speed keeps engine dry in high water.

tion-charged face.

At such close range there is always the possibility of wind alerting the elephant. Homer was lucky. The wind behaved. The tusks were a respectable 75 pounds per side. He did not want a monster. Please, can I shoot? This is big enough! My raised hand counselled patience. Homer found it difficult to relax. So near, yet nothing to shoot at - just that big patch of wrinkled red-grey, mostly obscured by scrub.

Then rustle of leaves brushing against rough hide came to us, followed by the snap of a small branch. We watched as the bull eased forward and branches swung back into place hiding him. We waited to let him get out of earshot in case our group made a noise passing through the same dense brush. Then we

have a change of scenery."

Camp was moved to a spot near Maralal, north-east of our present campsite, on the eastern edge of the Great Rift Valley.

Two days after our arrival, the local game warden's young assistant called on us. He had a problem. His boss was away and he could not leave the post. Could we help? A "camel safari" operating in the country below and to the north, doing photography, was being harassed by lions. Word had just reached him that a camel had been killed, the camels had been supplied by the Game Department. Camels were difficult to find and almost impossible to replace. As he couldn't

leave his post, would we go down and shoot the lions for him? Although the area was strictly for foot-safaris only, he would give us permission to use the safari car. The camels must be saved.

New to his job, the assistant-warden was unsure as to how much licence in hunting methods he could give us. Did we have to obey the game laws on hunting the lions? Yes. As we have only two hunting days left that does not give us much time. And surely, as you need to get rid of the lions or lose your camels, should we not operate as would a game warden sent to remove a stock-killer? Um, well, try for one day to shoot one under the game laws. Then, if you are not successful, use any method you like.

had forced a narrow passage. The sand river widened, then meandered for some miles on a fairly consistent course. Finding where the photographic safari had camped the previous night, we followed their tracks and caught up before lunch.

The young man in charge was not fully licensed as a professional hunter, but after talking to him, I predicted that it would not be long before he was. He too, failed to understand the junior warden's dithering, stating he would have had no trouble disposing of the lions as their behaviour was very brazen, and that if we had no luck, he would act if the lions killed again. As they had killed two days before, he expected it would be another two or three days before his party would be

name was another matter.

The Simba on our safari was a porter, a big fellow who claimed to be a Masai. His choice of work cast doubt on his claim as menial work was below a Masai's dignity. Although he was over six feet tall and assumed their dress, his bone structure was too heavy for a Masai and his walk was too disjointed. Finally, one of Africa's smaller, but sometimes pugnacious beasts, was to prove that any Masai blood in his veins had been well diluted.

Simba pestered me to allow him to come hunting, not to leave him in camp - he wanted to prove his worth as a gunbearer. After all, how could I assess his skilled bushcraft of his eagle-eyes, his knowledge of game - which

my mediocre Walian gulu gunbearers could not match - if he had to do a porter's work? As harsh country and soft sand could restrict the safari car's uses, another pair of hands would be of use. Simba was told to 'hop-in'.

Much to the disgust of my gunbearers, Simba attempted to behave as though he had already been promoted to No.1-gunbearer status. Not giving an inch, my boys soon let the new-comer know just where his place was in the safari car - certainly not where he could get as commanding a view of the countryside as they. Muttered one,

"Masai?, A Luo must have crept into his mother's manyatta one night!" (The Luo tribe inhabit the shores of Lake Victoria and are Bantu, more dark skinned and heavily-boned than the fine-boned Masai of Nilotic origin).

It was an old warthog that was to give us an insight into Simba's affinity with the wild and the wild things that inhabit it. The pig, spotted by Heekuta (whose father's name also was Simba), carried magnificent tusks. It had emerged from a shallow gully and trotted into the nearest clump of cover which was too sparse to be ideal. Its trot, one of the smoothest in the animal kingdom, is enhanced by the way the animal carries its tail vertically, the tuft of hairs on the tip lying back in the breeze, giving the creature the appearance - as one observer described it - of flying a pennant. Probably thinking it was unseen, the pig remained motionless, its colour blending perfectly with the bushes. There

Escaping from the floods



Though Homer did not want to hunt lions, both he and Jane liked the idea of a new adventure, the scenic attractions of an area in which vehicles were prohibited and the prospect of helping the Game Department.

Camp was moved to the much lower country to a point where the loaded truck could proceed no further. Then we set out to locate the other safari group and to hear their story.

Between the sand rivers which swept down from the high country, the terrain was stony and generally rough, so much so that the camel-safari had used the beds of these dry water courses as highways. As wildlife came to places where water surfaced, there was no real need to struggle over the rough intervening country. Following the same route we found the going easier than expected - the soft-sand patches were, thankfully, not extensive. Half a mile from camp, on a bend, we passed between sheer rock walls about 60 feet high through which, over aeons, water

harassed. I mentioned that we had seen lion tracks in the sand and they appeared to be following the general direction of his safari's route.

This, he said, had been the scenario ever since the lions first "joined" his safari - that they were not going to let an easy meal get too far away. He told me where he would camp that night, whereupon we set about finding baits to hang near his camp hoping the lions would find and follow smelly trails laid down just before nightfall and leading to those baits.

Finding baits was not as easy as I had expected. Homer shot well to nail a warthog and a gazelle. Another warthog added spice to the day and simultaneously ended one of our porter's hopes of becoming a gunbearer.

Simba - Swahili for "lion" - was not an uncommon name for individuals among tribes of East Africa. Whether or not the majesty of the real thing was upheld by the bearer of the

was another reason for it to remain where it was - the lack of good cover close by.

Assessing this animal's escape route was not easy. I drove in a wide circle, dropping off one gunbearer, then the other, then Simba, finally leaving the safari car and walking with Homer toward a point that I hoped would be close to the pig's escape route. Fifty yards beyond that spot was the nearest thick cover.

At my signal, we gradually tightened the circle. Our quarry was an old stager. He had us all noted, was not moving a muscle, and wouldn't do so until the time was ripe. The tighter the circle, the more surprising it was to see no reaction from the pig. Homer and I stopped at the chosen point to take advantage of an area which would allow a clear shot. We were forty yards from the pig. The boys kept moving in and began shouting. Still no movement. The gunbearers moved to within twenty yards and knew the situation was now a tricky one. Simba, mistaking their caution for fear, strode boldly forward and hurled a heavy stick into the clump. That's when the warthog made its move.

With furious grunts it charged - at Simba. Its stocky body, being so closely-coupled, generated amazing speed over the short distance and was still accelerating when it reached its target. This stalwart, the epitome of Masai courage and agility, this warrior who said he had speared his lion, stood transfixed in horror, eyes bulging, mouth agape, stunned that the pig should be coming at HIM. His consciousness was limited to the approaching grey blur and great dirty-white tusks curving over a bobbing snout, a raised mane adding to that fearsome aspect. But neither that nor the rapidly nearing grunts and thudding hoofbeats were enough to penetrate the petrified workings of Simba's brain. Nor were our warning shouts - he stood immobile. The pig was six feet away when something snapped in Simba's mind. Amazingly, his long legs jerked apart to allow the pig free passage between them! The pig wasn't interested in free passage. It was almost at top speed when it slashed at Simba's right leg, connected, sent him flying backwards and was itself brought almost to a halt. It missed a slash at Simba's other waving leg and kept moving forward as Simba, on his back, landed beside it. A final slash connected with Simba's upper left arm, when, seeing clear country ahead, the pig accelerated away, sharp puffs of dust kicked up by the piston-quick movement of its hoofs marking the line of its escape - a line I had guessed to be the 'the least likely'. Homer had no opportunity for a shot.

Simba lay still, moaning piteously. Asked if he was alright he didn't answer, but began reaching for his leg, sure that it was broken. Fearing the sight of his blood, at first he would not open his eyes. Though able to move his left arm and feel no blood, he remained lying down, eyes shut. Convinced at last that his leg was not broken or gashed and that his arm was only bruised, he opened his unbelieving eyes. Minutes elapsed before we could get him to his feet. In shock, he had turned a queer grey colour. Simba was a lucky man. The sheer size of the warthog's upper tusks had prevented the sharp lower ones from doing their deadly work.

Immobile in camp for a while, he had to

hell! We've had it if we don't reach the bank! A quick turn, gears slammed into low-ratio, eyes searching desperately for some course through the rocks on the river bank, enough engine revs to avoid useless wheelspin, then up, lurching between and over rocks and y-e-s, we had gained enough height to escape the torrent. Water splashed against the rear wheels as we crawled higher to a near horizontal position then stopped. Phew! It mattered not whether we could traverse the rocks ahead - we would simply wait until the flash-flood subsided. Alighting, we watched the rampaging water surge past. Ah yes, it was another sobering lesson dispensed by Mother Africa.



endure the laughter accompanying the gunbearer's recounting the incident, their mirth climaxing when they described his leg-splitting action. Nor could he see humour in the reaction his emphatic refusal caused when he was asked would he like to go looking for another warthog.

At first light next morning we checked the baits. No luck. That story was repeated next morning, which left us no alternative but to cut down the baits. Our safari was over.

Africa has numerous ways of reminding her human intruders to be ever-respectful. Into our emotional arena she was about to toss one of those reminders.

It was a hot, cloudless day when we headed back in the safari car along the winding river bed. The rock walls, with their smooth lower portions, were a hundred and fifty yards ahead when we were confronted with the cause of that smoothness. A five-foot-high wall of turbulent brown water roared out of the curving gap, bearing down on us at alarming speed. Anything loose on river bed or banks was engulfed or tossed to its raging crest into the maelstrom behind. Bloody

The high country around our previous camp had been drenched by a very heavy storm and the sand river was the main conduit for the run-off. If we had been a couple of minutes earlier and been caught in that gap....

It was on the second day during our return to Nairobi that we ran into our first rain, the beginning of the 'wet'. Marooned between two swollen rivers and unwilling to wait for the waters to subside, Homer and Jane were lifted out by helicopter, their 'rescue' set in motion by a radio call to head office.

They were two very happy, satisfied people who waved us goodbye through the perspex bubble as the machine lifted off. Africa had supplied the thrills they had hoped for - and some never envisaged.

Footnote:- The night we left, lions attacked the photographic safari's camels, killing one of the tethered beasts only twenty yards from the camp fire and snarling viciously at any human movement. They were feeding on it when the young man in charge shot two of them by torch light. For this action he was later commended by the senior game warden.

