



A Roadside Shrine by the Rice-fields.

HUNTING THE CAVE-DWELLING TIGER OF CHINA

By J. C. GREW

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

A LONG the coast of China, midway between Hongkong and Shanghai, there lies a tract of country quite devoid of any growth, where the barren hills which roll back from the sea to the rice-cultivated valleys inland are strewn with the gigantic boulders of some prehistoric glacial moraine, and it is in the numberless caves and subterranean passages formed by these great confused masses of rock that the sole wild occupant of the country, the Chinese tiger, finds his lair. Accordingly, the sport of tiger-shooting is here quite a different proposition from that in India and other tropical countries, where the methods of shooting are adapted to the jungle, viz.: from the backs of elephants, on foot on a jungle path, or from platforms in trees—by driving, beating or sitting up over a kill. Here in China the animal must be tracked to his cave, and if found in such a position that he cannot be driven out to the gun, he must be blocked in so that the sportsman can enter with comparative safety. Thus,

whereas in India the excitement is generally over in a few seconds, in the cave shooting a sportsman is frequently kept at the highest tension for several hours, having located the game and while still uncertain as to whether it will charge out before being successfully blocked.

I had had my fill of the jungle. Rains; flies, and eventually fever, had convinced me that tiger-shooting in the tropics had its distinct disadvantages and had made me wish for a healthful country and a respectable atmosphere, where one could enjoy living and shooting at one and the same time—a paradox in the jungle. I was unwilling to return without a tiger—glowing tales were told of this cave district; here, then, was the very thing, and I started forthwith.

It was with the keenest anticipation that I finally found myself rolling down the coast of China on the little "Haitan." The old Scotch engineer told me stories, over our pipes and coffee in the evening, of lighthouse keepers along the shore



The Huntermen with Goats, Torches and Spears.

watching the tigers play at night on the beach below, and of natives carried away from the rice fields within shouting distance of their very villages, which made me feel that at last I was in for some sport. So, though alone, except for my old Singalese servant, Thomas, who had shared with me many adventures, I was not at all loath the next morning to take my last look at a white man, transfer self, goods and chattels to the care of a yellow pirate in a dilapidated junk, and set sail for the shore.

That evening I found myself in a snug little village, tucked away at the foot of the hills, with the flooded pādi fields skirting it on one side and to the west a pagoda crowned mountain, towering like a sentinel above—far too peaceful a scene to suggest the sport on which I had come. As the guest of the village, in that I was to do my little best in ridding them of a pest, I was led up the central path through a staring and wondering crowd of peasants—who were seldom privileged to gaze on a white man, and had no modesty about showing it—among innumerable black hogs, enjoying continuous and undisturbed slumber along the highway, and past the rude hovels, within which hens, babies and dogs sprawled promiscuously. We came, at the end of the village, to a remarkable looking building—a sort of large shed with arched roof and paved floor, with one side opening to a courtyard flanked by a ten-foot wall, which, though ordinarily a temple sacred to the common ancestor of the village, was now, I learned, to be my habitation for as long as I cared to remain. It proved on inspection to be a very filthy lodging; much debris had to be swept from the floor, and several huge, black spiders driven away before I could make up my mind that it was at all habitable. A pile of straw was then shaken down in a corner for a bed, and my dressing articles spread on the altar, after which the seven Chinese huntermen, who were to be my escort from now on, presented themselves.

They stood grinning in a row, their almond-shaped eyes slanting upwards, their yellow skins burnt to bronze from work in the rice fields and wrinkled like old parchment. With one exception they were under five feet—hardly the imposing individuals I had pictured, who were to

walk into the tiger's den with only their torches to scare him and their spears to stop a charge. Their weapons, however, looked sufficiently business-like, for each carried a sort of trident with three iron prongs and a heavy wooden shaft. They carried with them also in a small basket, an exact representation in miniature of themselves—a little Chinaman who held in his hand the typical trident, and in the sand which filled the basket about him, were burning joss sticks. This, I discovered, was their idol, whom they worshipped fervently and regularly, and never in our subsequent hunting were they without him, for, as they told me, it was he who gave them the courage to hunt and strength to fight the tiger. My interpreter, a young Chinaman named Lim Ek Hui, who proved invaluable in communicating their instructions and a most interesting companion in discussing things Chinese during the long, lonely evenings, then arranged between us the rate of wages, after which being decided satisfactorily, we repaired to our respective suppers—I, to the great delight of the admiring throng in the courtyard, to knife, fork and plate, they to their chow-bowls and chop-sticks. The ten Chinamen who were to share my temple then stretched themselves in various positions about the floor, lit their opium lamps and smoked themselves into oblivion, the interior quickly becoming filled with the pungent and not unpleasant odor of the drug. Thomas found a position at the other end of the temple, as far removed as possible from the Chinamen, while I repaired to my bale of straw, and having placed my loaded revolver under the pillow, more from habit than caution, was quickly asleep amid these novel surroundings.

At dawn the courtyard was filled with the same admiring crowd of the night before—men, women and children—who watched the processes of bathing, dressing and eating breakfast much as we might observe the wild man of Borneo taking dinner at the dime museum. This was embarrassing and became, before many days, extremely irritating, though I was not in a position to resent. The huntermen had procured long, slender bamboo poles, and were winding strips of cloth about their tips, these latter being dipped in oil and serving as torches to light up the



Where the Cave-dwelling Tiger Lives—My Huntermen just Entering a Cave.



The Village and the Rice-fields, and in the Distance the Hills where the Tigers Live.

interior of the caves which we explored. Then after chow, we started out in single file, I following the head hunterman, quite ignorant as to where or into what he would lead me.

Knowing the lie of the land, they had no hesitation in choosing at once the most likely caves to explore; a tramp of some four miles brought us up into the rocky hills and here at last, with the openings of caves and passages all about us, I felt the first pleasant promptings of caution which come when one knows dangerous game may be near. The huntermen soon stopped above a cave which led directly down into the earth, while one of them led me a few yards down the hillside to station me at the mouth of another opening below, Lim translating that they were to move through the passage and drive the tiger, if he were there, down to the exit which I guarded. They quickly oiled their torches, shed their great umbrella hats, and dropped one by one out of sight into the hole.

Lim had had scruples about accompanying me on the hunt, but protests that he was indispensable and assurances of perfect safety had overruled them; he was necessary not only to interpret instructions but to hold my extra gun and pass it to me, should the two barrels of the .450 cordite-powder express prove ineffectual. I had fair confidence in the stopping power of

the express, but in case of emergency invariably took another heavy gun when after dangerous game. This gun, which was a double 10-bore, I gave to Lim, loaded but uncocked, and stationing him behind me on a suitable rock a few yards from the cave opening, awaited results.

Probably few forms of sport afford greater excitement than that of watching the opening of a cave, knowing that at any second one or more tigers may charge out and aware that if they do, one must shoot both instantly and accurately. Under such circumstances an ordinary hole in the hillside becomes a distinctly fascinating object, as one who has had the experience must realize. But I was not to have success on this hunt nor, indeed, for many days to come, for the smoke of the torches appearing through the fissures in the rock and the sound of the spears feeling about near the exit, told that the men had passed through the passage. We explored several other caves before returning to the village, but to no purpose.

In the afternoon the men informed me that this wholesale exploration of caves was a poor thing, since, if a tiger should happen to come to one of them later, the smell of the torches would prevent his entering and he would doubtless move to some other part of the country. The animals are continually roaming about and may appear in a certain district at any



The Result of the Hunt..

time, so that there is nothing to do but wait. Accordingly in the evening I purchased from a shepherd six small goats and placed them around the country within 'a radius of a mile or so, mooring each before the opening of some promising cave, and as we returned to camp we could hear their cries coming apparently from all directions. Should a tiger arrive within reach of that sound we would certainly have something to work on.

The next week was a monotonous one. Each evening we moored the goats and each morning at sunrise brought them back untouched to the village; these were the only events of the long, hot days. Occasionally I crossed the hills to the shore and had a swim, or a sail in some fisherman's junk, but most of my time was spent under a tree behind the village, where with a pillow, a pipe and a book, I did my best to make the days seem shorter.

The village life was that of the peaceful peasants of any country; at sunrise the men put on their great pagoda hats and trudged off to the rice-fields, where they worked knee-deep in water till dark. The women remained in their huts spinning, or chatted on the paths, while their babies made mud-pies and played with the hogs. Then at sunset, when the men returned from work, my courtyard became the gathering place for the evening, for the novelty of watching a white man eat, smoke and read, did not in any wise seem to pall upon them. The huntermen were next in importance and, always held an admiring circle about them as they squatted over their chow. This was a sort of soup, brewed in a big black kettle, into which any number of ingredients, from shellfish to sweet potatoes, had been thrown, and eaten with some kind of herb on the side as a relish. Tiger hunting is nothing new to them, as they make it their business, the profession being handed down in the same family from father to son. They attack the tiger in his cave, killing him with their spears, and selling the meat, bones, claws and skin at a high price, as the natives believe the possession of the claws or the eating of the meat gives them strength and bravery. The men are undoubtedly courageous as notwithstanding the fact that some of them are killed from time to time, they walk into the caves without hesitation, and many were the stories

they told through my interpreter, over their opium pipes in the evenings, of adventures and hairbreadth escapes.

This village, as, do all the small towns of the district, regarded itself as one large family, being descended from the common ancestor to whose memory my temple was built, and so closely do they adhere to this idea, that intermarriage is forbidden and a man must choose his wife from elsewhere. They are a simple, trusting lot and have great faith in the medicinal powers of a white man. One morning a woman stalked into my temple on her diminutive feet and pulled me by the sleeve to her house near by. Her husband was lying groaning on his straw bed and wooden pillow, having fallen out of a tree and evidently hurt his spine. It was clear that nothing more could be done than to ease the pain, so I ordered hot water applied and rubbed some salve on the injured spot. The next morning the woman returned and thanked me profusely, saying that the pain had ceased. Later I was called in to see a fever patient and gave him a few grains of quinine, for which he appeared in person to thank me the next morning, evidently quite restored to health, more by the mental than by any physical good done him.

These were the peaceful surroundings in which I found myself, and watched the days pass slowly by, until the first event occurred which told that game had arrived at last and roused all my energies to bring the hunt to a successful close as speedily as possible.

I was awakened at one or two o'clock in the morning by the loud barking of a dog, which was immediately taken up by all the other dogs in the village. This was unusual, as seldom anything disturbed the silence of the town at night, and I was wondering vaguely what could be the matter, when the men in the temple were all on their feet, some running for their spears, and others to get my gun out of its case. In a minute we were out in the village street in the moonlight, where the dogs were bolting up and down, barking furiously and evidently much disturbed at something; though the cause was not apparent. And just then I distinctly saw, off in the rice-fields, a shadowy form sneaking away—a dog, perhaps, or a pig, though it looked like something larger—

and though my first impulse was to follow, I saw at once that it was useless. The barking of the curs soon subsided and we returned to the temple.

In the morning great excitement prevailed in the courtyard; the whole village had apparently gathered there and were talking and gesticulating violently. Lim translated that a dog had been taken away in the night, and that a tiger was undoubtedly about. The huntermen had meanwhile gone out to inspect the goats, and returned with the news that one had vanished, the rope being parted clean and the animal completely disappeared without a sign of blood. I was on the spot immediately and found the report true, with no vestige of any track to work on. There was nothing to do. To smoke up the caves by exploring them was clearly unadvisable, so we returned to wait in patience till nightfall. The anticipation of sport near at hand, made that day seem endless. The morning blazed wearily till tiffin* time, and the afternoon hours dragged till evening. Then, finally, the sun sank and by seven o'clock I had the remaining four goats at their posts and, as nothing more could be done, prepared to sit up over the fifth, which was the loudest bleater, in the hopes that the tiger would pick him out for his night's kill.

We found, some five yards from the goat, a suitable rock, which shaded us from the moonlight, and waited, the animal crying lustily and being answered continually by one of the others which was within call. The first hour or two of this sitting up was not had, but eventually one's eyes become strained from peering through the moonlight, and with the help of a sharpened imagination, picture a moving form in every rock and shadow; so before midnight I found myself involuntarily starting at every new shape on which my gaze fell. The goat had by this time quited down and the huntermen were fidgeting, so it seemed better to give it up, and silently and in single file we covered the three miles to the village.

But the discouragement of the evening was not to last. The men had gone out for the goats at sunrise, and I was awakened on their return by a tremendous clamor; they were all shouting at once, running about the temple for their spears,

and preparing the torches in a way which looked like business. Lim himself was so excited that he could hardly translate, but I finally quieted him enough to learn the news; all five remaining goats, including the one over which I had sat up, had been killed, the country around was covered with blood tracks, and only one body and one head had been found. I endeavored vainly to repress a war-whoop.

The preparations which ensued were such as would have convinced an observer that the village was about to make a sally against a hostile tribe—the villagers sharpening their knives to cut down the bushes should the tiger have to be blocked in his cave, the huntermen arranging the torches and getting the oil, and the sportsman making sure for the fifteenth time that his gun barrels were spotless and his cartridges in pockets quickly accessible.

At eight we were on the spot where I had kept watch the night before. The string which tied the goat had been torn off short and at a distance of ten yards was the head of the animal, torn roughly from the body. The men then brought up for my inspection the body of still another goat, untouched except for two distinct teeth marks in the neck, made as cleanly as though by a vampire. This was excellent news, for the tiger had clearly killed more than he could eat, and must have retired for the day to some cave nearby to sleep off his gorge. But actually to track him to his lair was no easy work, for the trails of blood which led in several directions were quickly lost in the low scrub, and in a few minutes we had to abandon the idea. To search all the large caves in the vicinity and trust to fortune to find him seemed the only thing to be done.

Then followed a scene which, under the circumstances, was thoroughly amusing, though at that time I was too impatient at the delay to appreciate it. The huntermen set the idol, which, as I have said, they invariably carried with them while hunting, on a rock, and gathering about it they lighted joss-sticks and proceeded to worship in the usual manner, clasping their hands, waving the joss-sticks three times up and down, and then placing them in the sand about the image. They then asked the idol if the tiger was in a certain cave which opened within a hundred yards

* Luncheon.

of us, at the same time throwing up two pieces of wood, each with a smooth and a rough side. Should they come down even, the answer would be affirmative; if odd, negative. *Mirabile dictu*, the reply was "yes." The men immediately picked up their spears and ran down hill to the cave, which, like most of them, was formed of immense boulders, opening by a crevice leading straight downward. Then, stationing me at its mouth with warnings to be ready, they entered.

Five minutes passed. A hunter reappeared and said something which caused the crowd of villagers who had approached with us to scramble back up the hillside; Lim's eyes bulged as he whispered excitedly: "Get ready, Master, tiger inside."

The sport was now on in earnest. Bulletins were announced at regular intervals from below; at first they could see but one paw of the animal, then he moved and showed himself in full—"very large tiger," Lim translated. They were trying to drive him out; he might charge from any one of three openings, and I was to watch them all carefully, for it would be quick shooting. A half hour passed. Then came up the announcement that he had got into a small passage and could not be driven out; they would block him in, after which I must enter. The villagers immediately set to work gathering bushes, which they bound together and threw down to the opening, while the hunters came to the mouth and dragged them in. They worked quickly and quietly, but with a subdued excitement which kept my interest at highest pitch. My finger was on the trigger for four hours, nor did I dare take my eyes from the openings, for the men had cautioned me that until finally blocked, the tiger might charge out at any moment.

It was past midday when the seven men emerged and beckoned me to enter. I slipped down into the crevice, landing in a sort of small chamber which was partially lighted by torches, though my eyes, just from the sunlight, could not see where it led. They led me to one side and pointed to a narrow shelf or ledge, from which an opening seemed to lead straight into the face of the rock; Lim, who was behind me, translated that I was to crawl into it until I came to the tiger. This did not sound

reassuring, but knowing that the men were quite trustworthy, and would not send me into a risky position, I scrambled quickly in, dragging the express behind, as I was too cramped to carry it with me.

One of the men held his spear ahead of me in the passage, though he himself stood behind. I crawled slowly in for some ten feet; it was quite dark and I was ignorant as to where the animal was, or how the passage ended. Then there was a loud snarl within a few feet of my face, and I knew by the sound that the tiger was in another cavern opening off mine. My eyes were now becoming used to the darkness, and by the light of the torches which had been thrust into the tiger's cavern from underneath, I could see him in full. He lay on a ledge of rock, facing me, his green eyes shining and blinking sleepily in the light, his great striped back moving up and down as he panted from fright and anger. His face was not four feet from mine when I had come to the end of the passage, but there was little danger, since he was too much cowed by the light to charge, and had he done so, my opening was too small for him to enter. I lay a full five minutes watching him. At the end of that time I moved the express slowly into position, being badly cramped; the tiger snarled angrily as he saw the barrel approaching him and drew back restlessly, still roaring. This was not pleasant to hear. I then fired, without being able to see the sights, but trusting to hit a vital spot. He gave a few leaps—lay panting—and after two more shots, was still.

Once in the opening again, I realized for the first time at what high tension my nerves had been kept during the four hours of watching, and with the strain over came the natural reaction. In another hour we had dragged the tiger up to the mouth of the cave, photographed him and then carried him, suspended from a pole, to the village, while the peasants ran alongside, laughing, shouting and showing their delight generally. The occasion was all that could be desired. I skinned the body on a large flat rock in the village, found to my satisfaction that it measured ten feet six inches from nose to tip of tail, and then adjourned to the temple, where a feast of triumph and tiger-meat was held throughout the evening.