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AFRICAN GAME TRAILS—by THEODORE ROOSEVELT

AN ACCOUNT OF THE AFRICAN WANDERINGS OF AN AMERICAN HUNTER-NATURALIST

A Buffalo Hunt By the Kamiti

In the fifth of the great articles of African Big Game Hunting and Adventure, Colonel Roosevelt describes his first hunt for buffalo, said by many professional big game hunters to be Africa's most dangerous game; and he tells, among many other interesting things, of the tight moment when it seemed as though the hunters would be charged by the entire buffalo herd, seventy or eighty in number.

With illustrations from photographs by Kermit Roosevelt and other members of the expedition



This is the fifth of the fourteen great articles of African big game hunting and adventure by Theodore Roosevelt that are appearing exclusively every Sunday in the Capital News. These articles, from Colonel Roosevelt's own account of his African expedition, "African Game Trails"—one of the greatest books of big game hunting ever written—the Capital News has secured for exclusive newspaper publication in the territory it serves through special arrangements with Charles Scribner's Sons.

Last week Colonel Roosevelt told of his week of hunting at Juja Farm, as the guest of his fellow countryman, W. N. McMillan. From Juja Farm he moved to Kamiti Ranch, the neighboring farm, owned by Mr. Hugh H. Heatley, and it was here that the buffalo hunts he describes today took place.

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HEATLEY'S RANCH comprises 20,000 acres lying between the Rewero and Kamiti rivers. It is 17 miles long, and four across at the widest place.

It includes some as beautiful bits of natural scenery as can well be imagined, and though Heatley—a thorough farmer, and the son and grandson of farmers—was making it a successful farm, with large herds of cattle, much improved stock, hundreds of acres under cultivation, a fine dairy, and the like, yet it was also a game reserve such as could not be matched either in Europe or America. From Juja farm we marched a dozen miles and pitched our tent close beside the Kamiti.

The Kamiti is a queer little stream, running for most of its course through a broad swamp of tall papyrus. Such a swamp is almost impenetrable. The papyrus grows to a height of over 20 feet, and the stems are so close together that in many places it is impossible to see anything at a distance of six feet. Ten yards from the edge, when within the swamp, I was wholly unable to tell in which direction the open ground lay, and could get out only by either following my back track or listening for voices. Underfoot, the mud and water are hip-deep.

This swamp was the home of a herd of buffalo numbering perhaps a hundred individuals. They are semi-aquatic beasts, and their enormous strength enables them to plough through the mud and water and burst their way among the papyrus stems



It was a nice country in which to be charged by the herd, and for a moment things trembled in the balance.—Drawn by Philip R. Goodwin from photographs and descriptions furnished by Mr. Roosevelt.

without the slightest difficulty, whereas a man is nearly helpless when once he has entered the reedbeds. They had made paths hither and thither across the swamp, these paths being three feet deep in ooze and black water. There were little islands in the swamp on which they could rest.

The Nairobi, which cut across the lower end of the farm, and the Rewero, which bounded it on the other side from the Kamiti, were as different as possible from the latter. Both were rapid streams broken by riffle and waterfall, and running at the bottom of tree-clad valleys.

Game in Almost Incredible Numbers.

The lower part of the farm, between the Kamiti and Rewero and on both sides of the Nairobi, consisted of immense rolling plains, and on these the game swarmed in almost incredible numbers. There were Grant's and Thomson's gazelles, of which we shot one or two for the table. There was a small herd of blue wildebeest, and among them one unusually large bull with an unusually fine head; Kermit finally killed him. There were plenty of wart-hogs, which were to be found feeding right out in the open, both in the morning and the evening.

But of course the swarms of game consisted of zebra and hartebeest. At no time, when riding in any direction across these plains, were we ever out of sight of them.

One afternoon we needed meat for the safari, and Cuninghame and I rode out to get it. Within half a mile we came upon big herds both of hartebeest and zebra. They stood to give me long-range shots at about 300 yards. I wounded a zebra, after which Cuninghame rode. While he was off, I killed first a zebra and then a hartebeest and shortly afterward a cloud of dust announced that Cuninghame was bringing a herd of game toward me.

I knelt motionless, and the long files of red coated hartebeest and brilliantly striped zebra came galloping past. They were quite a distance off, but I had time for several shots at each animal I selected, and I dropped one more zebra and one more hartebeest, in addition, I regret to add, to wounding another hartebeest.

A Stream of Big Game.

On another day, when Heatley and I were

out together, he stationed me among some thin thorn-bushes on a little knoll, and drove the game by me, hoping to get me a shot at some wildebeest. The scattered thorn-bushes were only four or five feet high, and so thin that there was no difficulty in looking through them and marking every movement of the game as it approached. The wildebeest took the wrong direction and never came near me—though they certainly fared as badly as if they had done so, for they passed by Kermit, and it was on this occasion that he killed the big bull. * * *

The kongoni and the zebra streamed by me, herd after herd, hundreds and hundreds of them, many passing within 50 yards of my shelter, now on one side, now on the other; they went at an easy lope, and I was interested to see that many of the kongoni ran with their mouths open. This is an attitude which we usually associate with exhaustion, but such cannot have been the case with the kongoni—they had merely cantered for a mile or so.

The zebra were, as usual, noisy, a number of them uttering their barking neigh as they passed. I do not know how it is ordinarily, but these particular zebra, all stallions by the way, kept their mouths open throughout the time they were neighing, and their ears pricked forward; they did not keep their mouths open while merely galloping, as did the kongoni.

We had plenty of meat, and the naturalists had enough specimens; and I was glad that there was no need to harm the beautiful creatures. They passed so close that I could mark every slight movement, and the ripple of the muscles under the skin.

A Most Dangerous Game.

But the game we were after was the buffalo herd that haunted the papyrus swamp. As I have said before, the buffalo is by many hunters esteemed the most dangerous of African game. It is an enormously powerful beast with, in this country, a coat of black hair which becomes thin in the old bulls, and massive horns which rise into great bosses at the base, these bosses sometimes meeting in old age so as to cover the forehead with a frontlet of horn.

Their habits vary much in different places. Where they are much persecuted, they lie in

the densest cover, and only venture out into the open to feed at night. But Heatley, though he himself had killed a couple of bulls, and the Boer farmer who was working for him another, had preserved the herd from outside molestation, and their habits were doubtless much what they would have been in regions where man is a rare visitor.

The first day we were on Heatley's farm, we saw the buffalo, to the number of 70 or 80, grazing in the open, some hundreds of yards from the papyrus swamp, and this shortly after noon. For a mile from the papyrus swamp the country was an absolutely flat plain, gradually rising into a gentle slope, and it was an impossibility to approach the buffalo across this plain save in one way to be mentioned hereafter.

Probably when the moon was full the buffalo came out to graze by night. But while we were on our hunt the moon was young, and the buffalo evidently spent most of the night in the papyrus, and came out to graze by day. Sometimes they came out in the early morning, sometimes in the late evening, but quite as often in the bright daylight.

We saw herds come out to graze at 10 o'clock in the morning, and again at 3 in the afternoon. They usually remained out several hours, first grazing and then lying down. Flocks of the small white cow-heron usually accompanied them, the birds stalking about among them or perching on their backs; and occasionally the whereabouts of the herd in the papyrus swamp could be determined by seeing the flock of herons perched on the papyrus tops.

An Animal That Is Given a Wide Berth.

At night the buffalo sometimes came right into the cultivated fields, and even into the garden close by the Boer farmer's house; and once at night he had shot a bull. The bullet went through the heart but the animal ran to the papyrus swamp, and was found next day dead just within the edge. Usually the main herd, of bulls, cows, and calves, kept together; but there were outlying bulls found singly or in small parties.

Not only the natives, but the whites were inclined to avoid the immediate neighborhood of the papyrus swamp, for there had been one or two narrow escapes from unprovoked attacks by the buffalo. The farmer told us that a man who was coming to see him had been regularly followed by three bulls, who pursued him for quite a distance.

There is no doubt that under certain circumstances buffalo, in addition to showing themselves exceeding dangerous opponents when wounded by hunters, become truculent and inclined to take the offensive themselves. There are places in East Africa where as regards at least certain herds this seems to be the case; and in Uganda the buffalo have caused such loss of life, and such damage to the native plantations that they are now ranked as vermin and not as game, and their killing is encouraged in every possible way. The list of white hunters that have been killed by buffalo is very long, and includes a number of men of note, while accidents to natives are of constant occurrence.

The First Sight of Buffalo.

The morning after making our camp we started at dawn for the buffalo ground, Kermit and I, Cuninghame and Heatley, and the Boer farmer with three big, powerful dogs. We walked near the edge of the swamp. Before we had gone two miles, buffalo were spied, well ahead, feeding close to the papyrus.

The line of the papyrus which marked the

edge of the swamp was not straight, but broken by projections and indentations; and by following it closely and cutting cautiously across the points, the opportunity for stalking was good. As there was not a tree of any kind anywhere near, we had to rely purely on our shooting to prevent damage from the buffalo.

Cautiously threading our way long the edge of the swamp, we got within 150 yards of the buffalo before we were perceived. There were four bulls, grazing close by the edge of the swamp, their black bodies glistening in the early sun rays, their massive horns showing white, and the cow-herons perched on their backs. They stared sullenly at us with outstretched heads from under their great frontlets of horn.

The biggest of the four stood a little out from the other three, and at him I fired, the bullet telling with a smack on the tough hide and going through the lungs. We had been afraid they would at once turn into the papyrus, but instead of this they started straight across our front directly for the open country.

A Running Fight for the Bulls.

This was a piece of huge good luck. Kermit put his first barrel into the second bull, and I my second barrel into one of the others, after which it became impossible to say which bullet struck which animal, as the firing became general. They ran a quarter of a mile into the open, and then the big bull I had first shot, and which had no other bullet in him, dropped dead, while the other three, all of which were wounded, halted beside him.

We walked toward them, rather expecting a charge; but when we were still over 200 yards away they started back for the swamp, and we began firing. The distance being long, I used my Winchester. Aiming well before one bull, he dropped to the shot as if poleaxed, falling straight on his back with his legs kicking; but in a moment he was up again and after the others. Later I found that the bullet, a full-metal patch, had struck him in the head but did not penetrate to the brain, and merely stunned him for the moment.

All the time we kept running diagonally to their line of flight. They were all three badly wounded, and when they reached the tall rank grass, high as a man's head, which fringed the papyrus swamp, the two foremost lay down, while the last one, the one I had floored with the Winchester, turned, and with nose outstretched began to come toward us. He was badly crippled, however, and with a soft-nosed bullet from my heavy Holland I knocked him down, this time for good. The other two then rose, and though each was again hit they reached the swamp.

(Continued on following page)



Wildebeest bull shot by Kermit Roosevelt at Kamiti. From a photograph by Kermit Roosevelt.



Mr. Roosevelt and Kermit Roosevelt with the first buffalo.