

AFRICAN GAME TRAILS—by THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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



Hippo Hunting on Lake Naivasha

In the eighth of the great articles of African big game hunting and adventure, Colonel Roosevelt tells of his exciting hippo hunting on Lake Naivasha; of the great river horse that charged upon his boat, and of the perilous moments when he was in the very midst of the hippo herd and his craft was being bumped about by the huge beasts

With Illustrations From Photographs by Kermit Roosevelt and Other Members of the Expedition.

This is the eighth 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 and adventure 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 lion, rhino and giraffe hunting in the Sotik. That hunting over, he marched to Lake Naivasha, and the exciting hippo hunting that he had there he describes in today's article.

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FROM this camp we turned north toward Lake Naivasha.

The Sotik country through which we had hunted was sorely stricken by drought. The grass was short and withered and most of the water holes were drying up, while both the game and the flocks of the nomad Masai gathered round the watercourses in which there were still occasional muddy pools, and grazed their neighborhood bare of pasture. It was an unceasing pleasure to watch the ways of the game and study their varying habits.

Where there was a river from which to drink, or where there were many pools of the different kinds of buck, and the zebra, often showed comparatively little timidity about drinking, and came boldly down to the water's edge, sometimes in darkness; although even under those conditions they were very cautious if there was cover at the drinking place. But where the pools were few they never approached one without feeling panic dread of their great enemy the lion, who, they knew well, might be lurking around their drinking place.

Ceaseless Dread of the Lion.

At such a pool I once saw a herd of zebras come to water at nightfall. They stood motionless some distance off; then they slowly approached, and twice on false alarms wheeled and fled at speed; at last the leaders ventured to the brink of the pool and at once the whole herd came jostling and crowding in behind them, the water gurgling down their thirsty throats; and immediately afterward off they went at a gallop, stopping to graze some hundreds of yards

away. The ceaseless dread of the lion felt by all but the heaviest game is amply justified by his ravages among them. They are always in peril from him at the drinking places; yet in my experience I found that in the great majority of cases they were killed while feeding or resting far from water, the lion getting them far more often by stalking than by lying in wait.

A lion will eat a zebra (beginning at the hind quarters, by the way, and sometimes not having, previously disemboweled the animal), or one of the bigger buck at least once a week—perhaps once every five days. The dozen lions we had killed would probably, if left alive, have accounted for seven or eight hundred buck, pig and zebra within the next year. Our hunting was a net advantage to the harmless game.

The Cruel Reign of the King of Beasts.

Watching the game one was struck by the intensity and the evanescence of their emotions.

Civilized man now usually passes his life under conditions which eliminate the intensity of terror felt by his ancestors when death by violence was their normal end, and threatened them during every hour of the day and night. It is only in nightmares that the average dweller in civilized countries now undergoes the hideous horror which was the regular and frequent portion of his ages-vanished forefathers, and which is still an everyday incident in the lives of most wild creatures. But the dread is short-lived, and its horror vanishes with instantaneous rapidity.

In these wilds the game dreaded the lion; and the other flesh-eating beasts rather than man. We saw innumerable kills of all the buck, and of zebra, the neck being usually dislocated, and it being evident that none of the lion's victims, not even the truculent wildebeest or huge eland, had been able to make any fight against him.

The game is ever on the alert against this greatest of foes, and every herd, almost every individual, is in imminent and deadly peril every few days or nights, and of course suffers in addition from countless false alarms. But no sooner is the danger over than the animals resume their feeding, or love making or their fighting among themselves.

Two bucks will do battle the minute the herd has stopped running from the foe that has seized one of its number, and a buck will cover a doe in the brief interval between the first and the second alarm, from



Mr. Roosevelt and Cuninghame discussing the next few days' march, over a wildebeest shot by Mr. Roosevelt. From a photograph by Kermit Roosevelt.

hunter to lion. Zebra will make much noise when one of their number has been killed; but their fright has vanished when once they begin their barking calls.

Death by violence, death by cold, death by starvation—these are the normal endings of the stately and beautiful creatures of the wilderness. * * *

Surgeon to the Lion's Victims.

On our march northward, we first made a long day's journey to what was called a salt marsh. The so-called salt marsh consisted of a dry watercourse, with here and there a deep muddy pool. The ground was impregnated with some saline substance, and the game licked it, as well as coming to the water.

We now rejoined Mearns and Loring (members of the expedition who had been left behind at this point) on the banks of the Guaso Nyero. They had collected hundreds of birds and small mammals, among them several new species. We found that Dr. Mearns had been quite busily engaged in attending to cases of men who were hurt by lions.

Loring nearly got in the category. He killed his lioness with a light automatic rifle, utterly unfit for use against African game. Though he actually put a bullet right through the beast's heart, the shock from the blow was so slight that she was not stopped even for a second; he hit her four times in all, each shot being mortal—for he was an excellent marksman—and she died nearly at his feet, her charge carrying her several yards by him.

A settler had come down to trade with the Masai during our absence. He ran into a large party of lions, killed two and wounded a lioness, which escaped after mauling one of his gun bearers. The gun bearer rode into camp, and the doctor treated his wounds. Next day Mearns was summoned to a Masai kraal 16 miles off to treat the wounds of two of the Masai; it appeared that a body of them had followed and killed the wounded lioness, but that two of their number had been much maltreated in the fight. One, especially, had been fearfully bitten, the lioness having pulled the flesh loose from the bones with her fixed teeth.

The doctor attended to all three cases. The gun bearer recovered; both the Masai died, although the doctor did all in his power for the two gallant fellows. Their deaths did not hinder the Masai from sending him all kinds of cases in which men or boys had met with accidents. He attended to them

all and gained a high reputation with the tribe; when the case was serious the patient's kinsfolk would usually present him with a sheep or warspear, or something else of value.

A Haunt of the Hippo.

From our camp on the Guaso Nyero we trekked in a little over four days to Lake Naivasha. It is a lovely sheet of water, surrounded by hills and mountains, the shores broken by rocky promontories and indented by papyrus-fringed bays.

Next morning we shifted camp four miles to a place on the farm, and near the house, of the Messrs. Attenborough, settlers on the shores of the lake, who treated us with most generous courtesy and hospitality—as, indeed, did all the settlers we met. They were two brothers; one had lived 20 years on the Pacific coast, mining in the Sierras, and the other had just retired from the British navy, with the rank of commander. They had a steam launch and a big heavy rowboat, and they most kindly and generously put both at our disposal for hippo hunting.

We spent one entire day with the row boat in a series of lagoons near camp, which marked an inlet of the lake. We did not get any hippo, but it was a most interesting day. A broad belt of papyrus fringed the lagoons and jutted out between them. The straight green stalks with their feathery heads rose high and close, forming a mass so dense that it was practically impenetrable save where the huge bulk of the hippos had made tunnels. Indeed, even for the hippos it was not readily penetrable.

The green monotony of a papyrus swamp becomes wearisome after a while; yet it is very beautiful, for each reed is tall, slender, graceful, with its pale flowering crown; and they are typical of the tropics, and their mere sight suggests a vertical sun and hot-steaming swamps, where great marsh beasts feed and wallow and bellow, amidst a teeming reptilian life.

Savage Fighters Among Themselves.

There were a number of hippo in these lagoons. One afternoon after 4 o'clock I saw two standing half out of water in a shallow, eating the water lilies. They seemed to spend the fore part of the day sleeping or resting in the papyrus near its edge; toward evening they splashed and waded among the water lilies, tearing them up with their huge jaws; and during the night they came ashore to feed on the grass and land plants. In consequence those killed during the day, until the late afternoon, had their stomachs filled, not with water plants, but with grasses which they must have obtained in their night journeys on dry land.

At night I heard the bulls bellowing and roaring. They fight savagely among themselves, and where they are not molested and the natives are timid, they not only do great damage to the gardens and crops, trampling them down and shoveling basketfuls into their huge stomachs, but also become dangerous to human beings, attacking boats or canoes in a spirit of wanton and ferocious mischief. At this place, a few weeks before our arrival, a young bull, badly scarred and evidently having been mishandled by some bigger bull, came ashore in the daytime and actually attacked the cattle, and was promptly shot in consequence.

An Exasperating Feature of Hippo Shooting.

Ordinarily only their heads can be seen, and they must be shot in the brain. If they are found in a pool with little cover and if the shots can be taken close by, from firm ground, there is no sport whatever in killing them. But the brain is small and the skull huge, and especially if the shot has to be taken from an unsteady boat, there is ample opportunity to miss.

On the day we spent with the big row boat in the lagoons, both Kermit and I had shots; each of us hit, but neither of us got his game. My shot was at the head of a hippo facing me in a bay about a hundred yards off, so that I had to try to shoot very low between the eyes; the water was smooth, and I braced my legs well and fired off-hand. I hit him, but was confident that I had missed the brain, for he lifted slightly, and then went under, nose last; and when a hippo is shot in the brain the head usually goes under nose first.

An exasperating feature of hippo shooting is that, save in exceptional circumstances where the water is very shallow, the animal sinks at once when killed outright, and does not float for one or two or three hours; so that one has to wait that length of time before finding out whether the game has or has not been bagged. On this occasion we never saw a sign of the animal after I fired, and as it seemed impossible that in that situation the hippo could get off unobserved, my companions thought I had killed him; I thought not, and unfortunately my judgment proved to be correct.

A Hippo Bent on Mischief.

On the second day we went out in the launch I got my hippo. We steamed down the lake, not far from the shore for over 10 miles, dragging the big clumsy rowboat, in which Cuninghame had put three of our porters who knew how to row. Then we spied a big hippo walking entirely out of water on the edge of the papyrus at the farther end of a little bay which was filled with water lilies. Thither we steamed, and when a few rods from the bay, Cuninghame, Kermit and I got into the rowboat; Cuninghame steered, Kermit carried the camera and I steadied myself in the bow with the little Springfield rifle.

The hippo was a self-confident, truculent



Bringing the big bull hippo to shore. From a photograph by Edmund Heller.



Charged straight for the boat, with open jaws, bent on mischief. Drawn by Philip R. Goodwin from photographs and from description furnished by Mr. Roosevelt.