

**THE
WANDERINGS OF
AN
ELEPHANT
HUNTER**

BY
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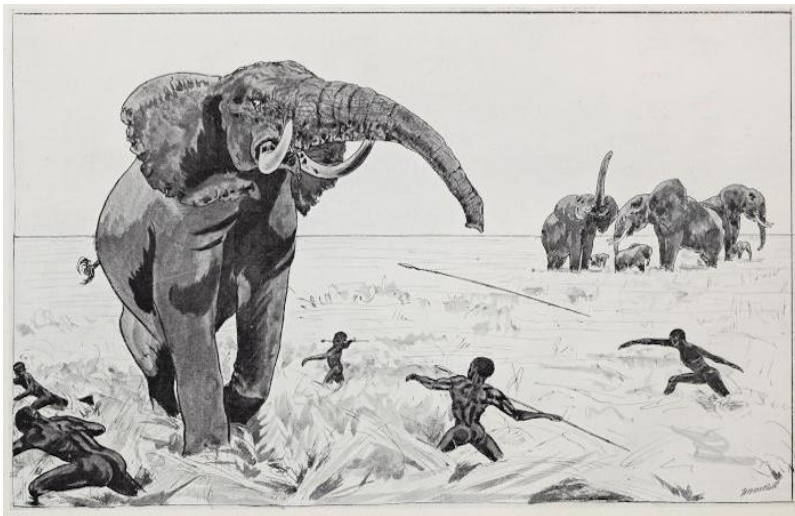
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THE WANDERINGS OF AN ELEPHANT HUNTER

I

HUNTING THE BIG BULL ELEPHANT

The most interesting and exciting form of elephant-hunting is the pursuit of the solitary bull. These fine old patriarchs stand close on twelve feet high at the shoulder and weigh from twelve thousand to fourteen thousand pounds or more, and carry tusks from eighty to one hundred and eighty pounds each. They are of great age, probably a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old. These enormous animals spend their days in the densest part of the bush and their nights in destroying native plantations.

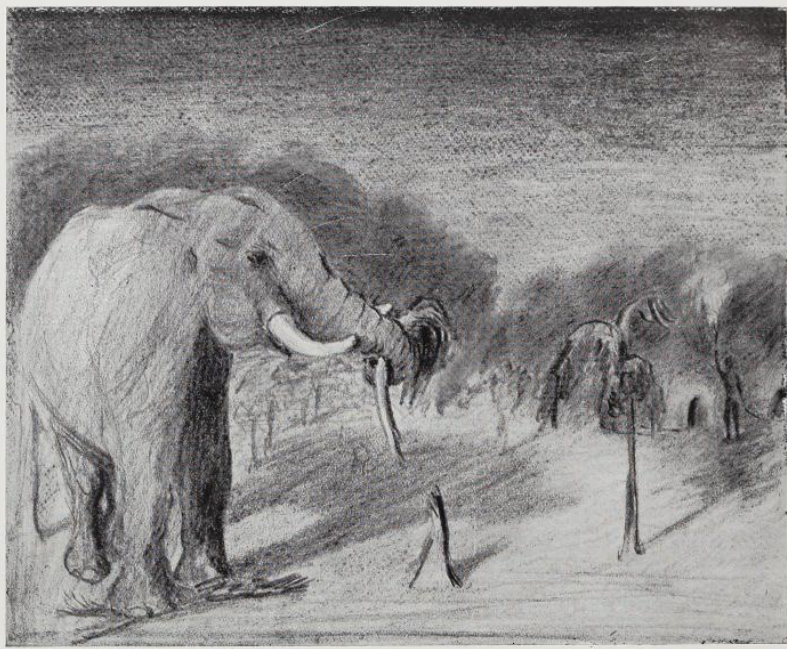
It is curious that an animal of such a size, and requiring such huge quantities of food, should trouble to eat ground nuts—or peanuts, as they are called in this country. Of course, he does not pick them up singly, but plucks up the plant, shakes off the loose earth and eats the roots with the nuts adhering to them. One can imagine the feelings of a native when he discovers that during the night his plantation has been visited by an elephant.

The dense part of the bush where the elephant passes his day is often within half a mile of his nightly depredations, and it is only through generations of experience that these wicked old animals are enabled to carry on their marauding life. Many bear with them the price of their experience in the shape of bullets and iron spear-heads; the natives set traps for them also, the deadliest one being the falling spear. Of all devices for killing elephants known to primitive man this is the most efficient. The head and shank of the spear are made by the native blacksmith, and the whole thing probably weighs about four hundred pounds and requires eight

men to haul it into position. To set the trap a spot is chosen in the forest where an elephant-path passes under a suitable tree. A sapling of some twelve feet in length is then cut. One end is made to fit tightly into the socket of the spear-head and to the other end is attached a rope. The spear end of the rope is then placed over a high bough at a point directly over the path, while the other end is taken down to one side of the path, then across it and made fast to a kind of trigger mechanism. It is placed at such a height from the ground as will allow buffalo and antelope to pass under it but not a full-grown elephant. He will have to push it out of his way. This part of the rope is generally made of a bush vine or creeper. If all goes well, an elephant comes along the path, catches the creeper on his forehead or chest, pushes it sufficiently to snap it off, and then down hurtles the huge spear, descending point first with terrific force on neck, shoulder or ribs. I have seen taken from an old bull's neck a piece of iron three feet long and almost eaten away. The wound had completely healed and it may have been there for years. If, however, the spear strikes the spine, death is instantaneous.



THE FALLING SPEAR: THE DEADLIEST NATIVE ELEPHANT TRAP.



THE MARAUDING BULL.



This spear, weighing about four hundred pounds and provided with a twelve-foot shaft, is hung head downwards from a tree. The rope, of vine or creeper, which holds it up, is stretched across an elephant-path, so that, in passing, the animal must snap it, liberating the spear to drop upon his own head or ribs.

To get within hearing distance of these old elephants is comparatively easy. You simply pick up the enormous tracks in the early morning and follow them into their stronghold. Sometimes, after going quite a short distance through fairly open forest, you begin to find it more and more difficult to force your way along. The tracks are still there, but everything gives way before the elephant and closes in behind him again. Here in the dark cool parts there are no flies, so that the flapping and banging of ears, the usual warning of an elephant's presence, are lacking. The light begins to fail; air currents are non-existent, or so light they cannot be felt; the silence is profound. Monkeys and parrots are away in

the more open parts. You may expect to hear your game at any moment now. You hope to see him, but your luck is in if you do. At the most you will see a high and ghostly stern flitting through the undergrowth, sometimes disconcertingly close in front of you. Literally nothing indicates the presence of such an enormous animal, and if it were not for the swish of the bush as it closes in behind him you would find it hard to believe that he was so close. His feet, softly cushioned with spongy gristle, make no sound. He seems to know that his stern is invulnerable alike to bullets or spears; while his huge ears, acting as sound-collecting discs, catch with their wide expanse the slightest sound of an enemy. He shows no sign of panic; there is no stampede as with younger elephants when they are disturbed; only a quiet, persistent flitting away. You may concentrate on going quietly; you may, and probably do, discard your leg gear in order to make less sound; you redouble your stealth; all in vain. He knows the game and will play hide-and-seek with you all day long and day after day. Not that this silent retreat is his only resource—by no means—he can in an instant become a roaring, headlong devil. The transformation from that silent, rakish, slinking stern to high-thrown head, gleaming tusks and whirling trunk, now advancing directly upon you, is a nerve test of the highest order. The noise is terrific. With his trunk he lashes the bushes. His great sides crash the trees down in every direction, dragging with them in their fall innumerable creepers. The whole forest is in an uproar. Much of this clatter the experienced hunter writes off as bluff, for after a short, sharp rush of this sort he will often come to a dead stop and listen intently. Here, again, his long experience has taught him that his enemy will now be in full retreat, and in most cases he is right. Certainly no native hunter waits to see, and most white men will find they have an almost uncontrollable desire to turn and flee, if only for a short

way. With the deadliest of modern rifles it is only a very fleeting chance that one gets at his brain. The fact that the distance at which his head emerges from the masses of foliage is so small, and the time so short until he is right over you, in fact, makes this kind of hunting the most exciting and interesting of any in Africa, or the world, as I think most men who have experienced it will agree. If the shot at the brain is successful the monster falls and the hunter is rewarded with two magnificent tusks. And great will be the rejoicing among the natives at learning of his death, not only for the feast of meat, but also to know that their plantations have been rid of the marauding pest.

II

THE BRAIN SHOT AT ELEPHANT

The hunting of the African elephant is now restricted in so many ways that it is difficult for anyone to gain experience in the shooting of them. In most of the protectorates or dependencies of the European powers a licence to kill two in a year costs from £40 to £80. It therefore behoves the sportsman to make a good job of it when he does come face to face with these splendid animals.

Twenty-five years ago parts of Africa were still open to unrestricted hunting, and it is from a stock of experience—gathered during years devoted to this fascinating pursuit—that I am about to draw, in the hope that it may assist the sportsman to bring about a successful termination to his hunt and perhaps save some unfortunate animal from a lingering death due to wounds.

In hunting elephant, as in other things, what will suit one man may not suit another. Every hunter has different methods and uses different rifles. Some believe in the big bores, holding that the bigger the bore therefore the greater the shock. Others hold that the difference between the shock from a bullet of, say, 250 grs. and that from a bullet of, say, 500 grs. is so slight that, when exercised upon an animal of such bulk as an elephant, it amounts to nothing at all. And there is no end to the arguments and contentions brought forward by either side; therefore it should be borne in mind when reading the following instructions that they are merely the result of one individual's personal experience and not the hard and fast rules of an exact science.

As regards rifles, I will simply state that I have tried the following: ·416, ·450/·400, ·360, ·350, ·318, ·275 and ·256. At the time I possessed the double ·400 I also had a ·275. Sometimes I used one and sometimes the other, and it began to dawn on me that when an elephant was hit in the right place with the ·275 it died just as quickly as when hit with the ·400, and, *vice versa*, when the bullet from either rifle was wrongly placed death did not ensue. In pursuance of this train of thought I wired both triggers of the double ·450/·400 together, so that when I pulled the rear one both barrels went off simultaneously. By doing this I obtained the equivalent of 800 grs. of lead propelled by 120 grs. of cordite. The net result was still the same. If wrongly placed, the 800 grs. from the ·400 had no more effect than the 200 grs. from the ·275. For years after that I continued to use the ·275 and the ·256 in all kinds of country and for all kinds of game. Each hunter should use the weapon he has *most confidence* in.

The deadliest and most humane method of killing the African elephant is the shot in the brain. Its advantages over the body shot are numerous, but among them may be mentioned that it causes instantaneous death, and no movement of the stricken animal communicates panic to others in the vicinity. The mere falling of the body from the upright to a kneeling or lying position does not appear in practice to have any other effect than to make the others mildly curious as to what has happened. On the other hand, if there are several elephants together and the heart shot is employed, the one hit almost invariably rushes off with a groan and squirm for fifty or a hundred yards, taking with him his companions, which do not stop when he stops, but continue their flight for miles. Another great advantage that the brain shot has over the heart shot is that with the former there is no search for the dead animal, whereas

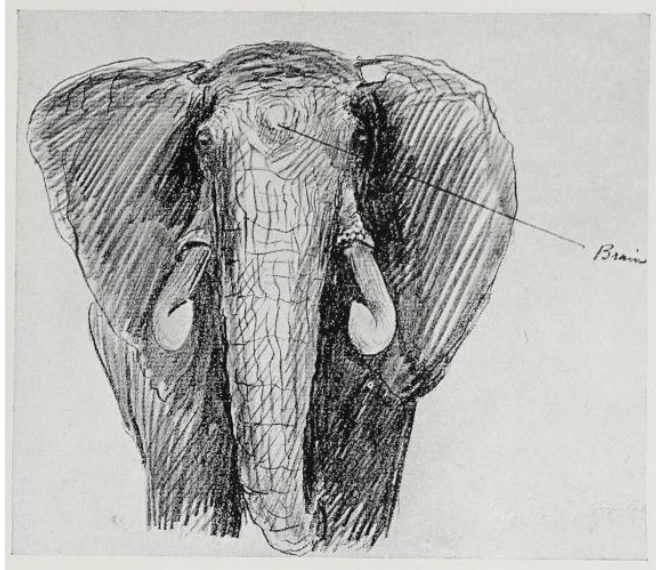
with the latter it is sometimes extremely difficult to find it in thick bush even when lying within fifty or sixty yards of the spot from which the shot was fired. Again, the smallest bore rifles with cartridges of a modern military description, such as the .256, .275, .303 or .318, are quite sufficiently powerful for the brain shot. The advantages of these I need hardly enumerate, such as their cheapness, reliability, handiness, lightness, freedom from recoil, etc. For the brain shot only bullets with an unbroken metal envelope (*i.e.*, solids) should be employed; and those showing good weight, moderate velocity, with a blunt or round-nosed point, are much better than the more modern high velocity sharp-pointed variety. They keep a truer course, and are not so liable to turn over as the latter.



THE DEADLIEST AND MOST HUMANE METHOD OF KILLING THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT IS THE SHOT IN THE COMPARATIVELY SMALL BRAIN CONTAINED IN HIS GIGANTIC HEAD.



THE BRAIN SHOT FROM BEHIND.



THE POSITION OF THE BRAIN WHEN THE HEAD IS VIEWED FROM THE FRONT.

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