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ROOSEVELT IN AFRICA
Hunting the Elephant

By Frederick R. Toombs



"A WILD bull elephant is the noblest work of God," recently said a well known African hunter to the writer.

Undoubtedly the sight of him lunging through a tropical forest, trunk upraised, tusks glistening, eyes gleaming, legs like moonlit shafts crushing all opposition, is more than enough to fill with awe a man to fear the soul of a mere human, no matter how steely his nerves, how true his rifle or how clear his conscience.

That Mr. Roosevelt should not be satisfied with the dangers of lion, hippopotamus and rhinoceros killing and desires to add to them the unquestioned peril of elephant tracking is cumulative proof of his ambition to experience every possible thrill that this little world affords. His chosen hunting field on the Uganda tableland affords probably the best elephant territory now remaining in all Africa. Remote from the coast, infrequently touched even on its edges by whites, growing luxuriantly the pachyderm's best liked foods, well watered and well shaded, central Uganda was apparently created by the gods of the elephant as the ideal breeding place and playground of their favorite children.

African elephant hunting is more hazardous than that of India, where the venturers have trained elephants, on the backs of which large baskets of howdahs are placed to carry the riders comparatively out of harm's way. But no such trained pachyderms are had in Africa, and the tracking and attacking must be done on foot, an operation said by the renowned authority, Sir Samuel Baker, to be the most dangerous sport on earth, for, since many elephants are killed without any danger on foot, it is absolutely inevitable that the charge of a wounded animal will sooner or later have to be met successfully by the man who presses closely into combat with him—met successfully if the hunter would preserve his life from this unseeking combat that calls forth every ounce of unswerving, unhesitating, intuitive courage. Like the hunter of the jungle lion, the slayer of the tusked behemoth

calculated to instantly bring down the animal are those that penetrate the brain, and this, of course, cannot be penetrated unless a man knows just how it is situated inside the skull.

When a herd takes alarm at a party of attackers and starts on a rampage across country the hunters must travel at a punishing rate if they desire to secure any of the specimens, and woe be unto whatever is in the path of the crashing monsters. Obstructing trees, torn up by the roots, are thrown aside like so much driftwood on an ocean shore, and they will go fifty miles at a stretch over country of a nature that men would cover only twenty miles in the same period. Frequently elephants of the same herd become angered at each other and indulge in forest duels that would make a bull-fight look like a kissing bee down on the old farm. The English authority, G. P. Sanderson, actually witnessed such an engagement and describes it and the subsequent hunt as follows:

"The elephants were separated from us by a deep ravine, and we saw them lunge ferociously at each other, cutting deep gashes with their sharp tusks. The cane tops bowed and trees shook as they bore each other backward and forward. The noise was terrific, when the beast nearest us, evidently having enough and losing large quantities of blood from his wounds, turned, uttered a deep roar of pain and fled across the ravine to near where we stood behind a clump of bushes. He began to destroy the foliage in sheer fury and grunted deeply. He was very large. It must have been a genuine monster that worsted him. Suddenly the animal backed away and stood stark still. Not a sound could be heard. He gazed straight in our direction, and I knew that he had wounded us. His frenzy now sent his ears forward, his tail up, and straight at us he charged with incredible swiftness, considering his size. I stepped out into the open to clear my gun of the bushes and fired. I looked to see where the elephant lay.

"Good heavens! He had not even been checked. To my horror he was upon me. His tusks came through the smoke like the cowcatcher of a locomotive, and I had just time to fall flat before being impaled on them. His ponderous left foot came within a few inches of my left thigh, and I

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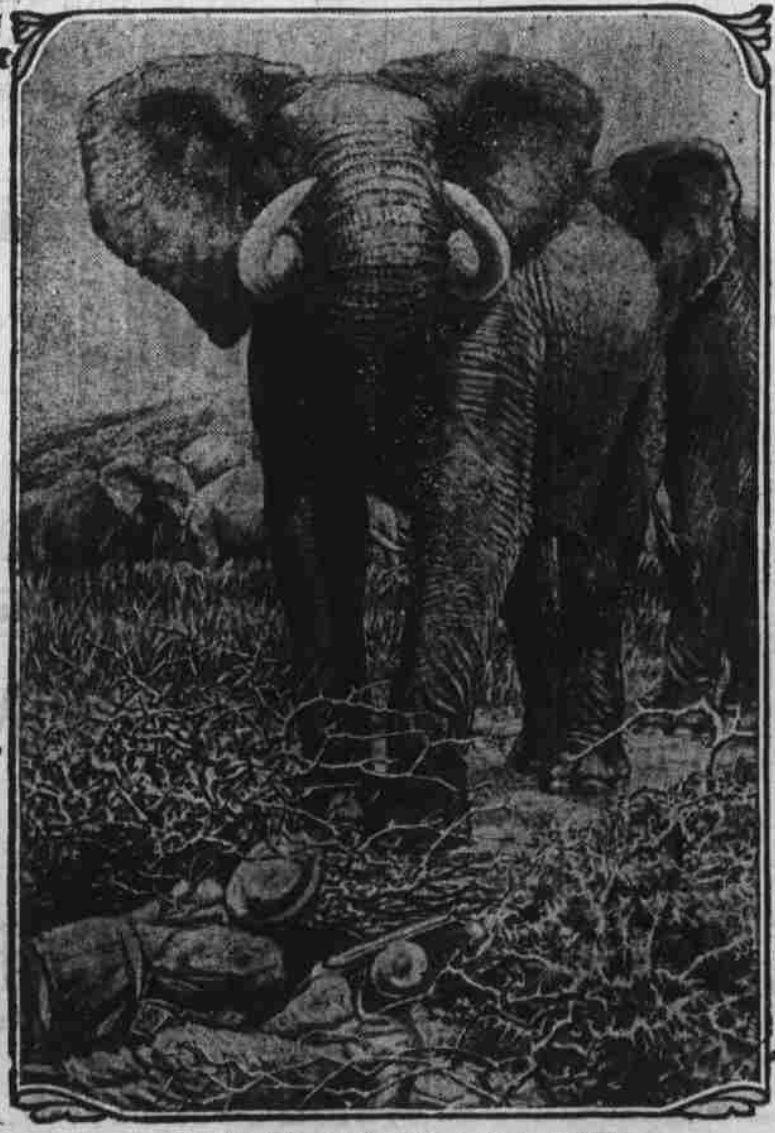
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has thrown his life in the balance, and if the balance swings against him only he himself is to blame.

Another way of hunting the beast in a safe way, unknown in Africa, is the Indian custom of organizing immense drives with from 300 to 500 men, encircling a herd of elephants and forcing it by noise and other demonstrations to enter a large, specially prepared inclosure, termed a kraal. There the tuskers can readily be killed, or the beasts can be taken out individually and trained to the various kinds of work they are capable of performing. While it is true that elephant drives somewhat similar in nature are at times resorted to in Africa, they are conducted on much smaller scales, and the beasts are driven in front of the hunters who kill them instead of into inclosures.

In elephant shooting it is vitally important that the hunter have a detailed knowledge of the makeup of the brain of the beast, as the shots best

would have been crushed had I not drawn my legs forward as, shrieking shrilly, he rushed directly over me.

"My companion escaped by leaping into the ravine. The beast kept straight on, and disappeared leaving me soaked and my hair matted with the blood that flowed from his wounds."

When elephants fight each other one of their favorite tricks is to bite off each other's tail. Females are especially fond of doing this to rival females in the same herd. Elephants roam about and feed both during day and night, usually resting from 9 or 10 in the morning until the middle of the afternoon. In warmest weather they bathe frequently and roll around in the mud. At such times they are shot comparatively easy. They are expert swimmers, going through the water with only the tips of their trunks or the tops of their heads showing above the surface. An elephant shot in the water floats, while a hippopotamus sinks. The fastest rate at which African ele-

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phants have ever been known to travel is about fifteen miles an hour, the maximum length of their stride being from six and a half to seven feet.

Stalking one or two particular animals from a herd (the herds in Uganda number from ten to fifty members) is a task requiring consummate hunting skill. The herds travel with the females in front and the bulls in the rear, and herds are usually attached from either the side or the rear. Solitary bulls, called "rogue" elephants, generally wildly vicious even before attacked, also present interesting problems. The natives have developed great aptitude in following and interpreting the footprints (spoor) of the quarry, whether lions, elephants, antelopes or other game. If it is old the edges have crumbled and they are filled, or partly so, with drift sand and bits of leaves. Wounded elephants are also tracked by the blood stains on the elephant grass through which they pass, and by the height of the stains on the grass it can be estimated how dangerous the wound is.

In "On Safari" Abel Chapman tells of an attack by a bull elephant that almost cost him his life. He says: "Archer and I approached to within thirty yards of the animal (near the shore of Lake Baringo, British East Africa) and hoped to get a good shot without detection beforehand. Suddenly the wind shifted, and the elephant caught our scent. Instantaneously he was all alert. Suddenly he disappeared in the jungle brake, and while trying to spy him a heavy crashing heard directly before us told us he was coming. At once a big square forehead appeared directly above us in the tall grass (ten or twelve feet high) only a few yards away, resembling the hoary gray tower of some old village church.

"I placed a 303 bullet in his temple at the point described by experts, 'half-way between the eye and the orifice of the ear,' though his ear was as big as a barn door. Archer, in front, tried the effective forehead shot, aiming at the base of the trunk. The beast swerved from sight under these blows, but quickly reappeared again just as I had reloaded. He crashed at us viciously from our right, and we each put bullets into his head from the side, his ear almost touching our rifle muzzles. Archer hitting him with a 40 and I with two more 303, following with two lead slugs from a 45 black powder rifle. But these total seven shots in vital parts had no apparent effect, and the beast headed into a heavy thorn jungle. We followed, but for miles he outsped us, and we reluctantly gave up the chase, marveling that any animal could live, much less travel, so far and so fast with seven ordinarily deadly bullets in his skull.

Our natives continued the pursuit twenty miles and gave up. Later the beast was found dead at a point about forty miles distant, his great tusks, weighing ninety pounds apiece, having been taken by a native ivory trader.

"This elephant was estimated to weigh almost 12,000 pounds, the greatest weight known being 14,000 pounds, and this latter animal stood practically twelve feet high, the record height for the modern pachyderm."

The elephant carcass is a choice prize for the natives. They climb upon its side and cut a large hole straight down into the interior, just as a mining shaft is sunk, and the natives climb down out of sight in the "shaft" to hunt about for choice morsels. A coating of elephant fat and blood is a popular substitute for clothing among certain Uganda savages, who believe that no people should wear clothes until after marriage.

Elephant hunters in Uganda find ant hills a valuable aid as observatories. These hills tower to, a considerable height, and many of them can be easily climbed. Others rise sharply like smokestacks, and, being hollow, holes are frequently dug in their sides and fires built for cooking. A perfect draft is produced by the hollow interior, and the smoke is carried off at the top. So numerous are these hills that they are a distinctive, a typical, feature of the country. Cases are known where hunters have saved their lives from charging elephants by dodging behind convenient ant hills.

The charge of an aroused elephant herd is, by the way, a sight never to be forgotten if the object of it escapes with his life. A writer in the Geographical Magazine describes such an assault by African elephants near Lake Rudolf, as follows:

"We entered a patch of dense African jungle. Huge prickly aloe, enormous cactuses with long sharp points and a tall feathery plant like privet made up a safe asylum from ordinary mortals. Very few minutes sufficed to turn hunters into hunted. No. 1, a cow, charged down on us. Jumping aside, I killed her as she rushed on my gun carrier not four feet from him. Hardly had we struck the spoor of another when a young bull suddenly bore down on me. However, a lucky forehead shot laid him low. While skinning one of these heads the whole place seemed alive with elephants smashing toward us. Seizing my rifle, I ran ahead. Suddenly a line of over forty elephants broke cover, about twenty-five in the first line jammed together like a cavalry regiment charging. Being only twenty yards from me when they appeared, with the center bearing directly down on me, I own to feeling they had the best of me. I saw my only chance was killing the flank one. In a second I dropped the left hand one, which, falling inwardly, inclined the whole troop a little to the right. Within ten yards I fired my remaining barrel, dropping another, causing still further deflection to the right. Another second the flank one on the left rushed past, almost knocking me down.

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