



We Brought Them Back

FROM THE AFRICAN DIARY
OF JOHN HALLSTROM, BIG
GAME COLLECTOR FOR SYD-
NEY AND WORLD ZOOS.



By ERIC WORRELL

PART ONE

Before World War 2, the zoos of the world were largely dependent upon a German trapper, Herr Schultz, for supplies of live animal exhibits from Africa. When war broke out, Schultz, who was delivering animals to Belgium Zoo, was interned, and supplies of wild animals were curtailed for the duration.

The termination of hostilities found zoos needing exhibits to replace stock that had died, and also to add where expansion was necessary. Schultz had been "repatriated" to the Fatherland for his part in the European recovery scheme, leaving animal trapping to be carried out by small groups of private collectors or the zoological authorities themselves. One of the first zoos to carry out this work on a grand scale was Australia's famous Taronga Park. Eminent Sydney zoologist, businessman and philanthropist, E. J. Hallstrom, chairman of Taronga Zoological Trust, personally financed the project, diverting surplus to other Australian and World Zoos.

His son, John Hallstrom, having had previous trapping experience in Africa, was among the first group sent by Taronga Zoo to the Dark Continent. He later supervised operations and now, for the first time, tells the story to our author of his safaris and the adventures in which he participated to "bring them back alive."



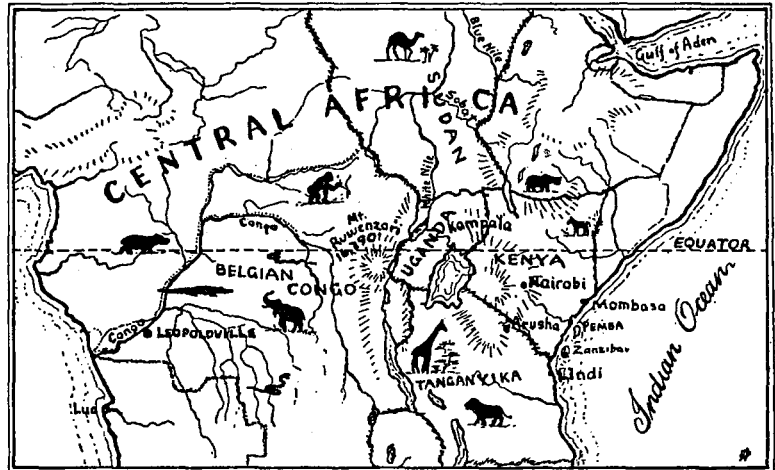
NATIVE drums throbbed far into the night sending news of white man's approach. Rain pattered steadily on the tent-fly. Somewhere on the veldt a hyena screamed. I tossed restlessly on my stretcher as recent events raced through my mind. Messrs. Brown and Hargreaves, Taronga's secretary and bird man respectively, had sailed with me from Sydney to Johannesburg.

We had purchased a three ton truck and then driven north to Nairobi. Hargreaves had pushed on alone to set up a base camp at Kampala in Uganda while Brown and I continued into Kenya to pick up a pair of cheetahs and ostriches we had been informed a resident was holding for us. This mission accomplished, we headed for Kampala.

Tonight was our last camp before Uganda. Tomorrow we would rejoin Hargreaves at Kampala. Drums still grumbled in the distance. Brown's snores reverberated in the tent and our cheetahs snarled in answer to what they imagined were the growlings of another beast.



Alive!



WE ARRIVE AT KAMPALA

Late the following night on the 3rd of July, 1946, we entered the modern township of Kampala, the city of seven hills. Captain Charles Pittman, the Chief Game Warden, accommodated our cheetahs in his own backyard until we arranged suitable housing and the next day granted permits to capture the required animals and to shoot meat for the pot.

African game laws are far stricter than Australian and they are policed at heavy expense. Taxes must be paid on every gun possessed and another licence purchased before the gun can be fired. On top of this is a special licence for each animal required to be shot. In Uganda a yearly shooting licence costs £25, plus 5/- for each firearm. It costs an extra £10 to shoot two elephants or £20 for three. £5 covers one black rhinoceros and £15 one bull giraffe. Under no circumstances can a gorilla or a white rhinoceros be shot or captured. The game laws however vary throughout Africa.

Our licences in order, we joined Hargreaves three miles from Kampala at the camp he had set up on a deserted war-time airstrip. The out buildings were to house our livestock while the disused Air Force huts served as our living quarters. This camp was not in reality a hunting camp as at this stage of the expedition the animals were captured by the natives and sold to us.

The tortuous road wound through some of the best elephant country in Africa and herds frequently caused us to pull up. It is not done to travel by night in Africa, but one night, being pushed for time, we drove a thirty mile nightmare at crawling pace, stopping each time an elephant crossed our path and nervously waited with dimmed lights until the danger passed.

We crossed the Ruwenzori Mountains on the border of the Congo into the Semlike River Valley—the home of the true pygmies. The pygmies are a shy race and we only caught brief glimpses of them peering at us through the jungle.

Passing Lake George the following day we saw the dark blobs of Hippos wallowing in the lake and vibrating their ears as they surfaced to sunbake like dozens of round leathery islands. At times elephant grass was well above the truck and the Ituri forest, the largest in Africa, was the densest equatorial jungle we had ever seen.

TO THE BELGIAN CONGO

A week after our arrival in Kampala, Brown and I set out by truck to the Belgian Congo to collect monkeys and parrots from the Congo tribes.

The native Prime Minister exercises full authority in Uganda and is assisted by a native parliament under the rule of a native king. The various provinces have their under-kings. The welfare of the white races is supervised by a European Administrator.

Before our contacts with the natives eventuated we interviewed the native Prime Minister and consequently he advised the Uganda tribes that we wished to purchase animals, birds and reptiles they captured, so that when word returned that sufficient animals were on hand we could make a safari embracing the entire area. Meanwhile we advertised in the newspapers and contacted local trappers.

Along the Semlike Road by daylight we topped a rise and were confronted by a herd of about a dozen elephants. We pulled up and the cows wandered to the side of the road, but the old bull, a temperamental-looking beast flapped his huge ears and ambled towards us. We spent an anxious few minutes waiting for it to decide whether or not to charge. Luckily it turned aside and joined the cows.

The next day we stopped to photograph another herd from the top of the hill when suddenly an old bull began his charge up the hill. Brown and I, promptly exercising discretion to the full, hastily retreated to the truck with our cameras and drove off.

Game Wardens do not accept, as a legitimate excuse, that an animal was shot in self defence. They consider that a traveller should not be in the danger area without a licence. In the case of rogue elephants and man-eating lions the Game Wardens themselves attend to the destruction of the animal or authorise special agents to do the job.

After crossing five rivers by punt we entered Stanleyville on the Congo River. The punts were primitive affairs consisting of planks lashed on a series of massive dugout canoes. These were pulled from bank to bank with steel ropes by teams of chanting natives. The villages in this area were marked on signposts with the names of the local chiefs inscribed.

We left the truck at Stanleyville and flew to Leopoldville where we arranged with the Governor for a permit to capture gorillas. This permit was something we had only anticipated securing in our wildest hopes. Unfortunately the time element prevented us carrying out our safari to gorilla country.



ON A CONGO PADDLE STEAMER

From Leopoldville we caught the paddle steamer back up the Congo River for the twelve hundred mile voyage back to Stanleyville. At all Ports of call we visited the native quarters and collected monkeys, parrots and other birds until the steamer was virtually a floating menagerie.

Huge hippos and crocodiles were a common sight on the river and at one native market, on the island of Mistanunya, joints of crocodile were exhibited for sale as food.

At most native villages the coming of the paddle steamer was greeted with great excitement. When the ship departed, small boys would paddle their canoes madly alongside and infuriate the captain by leaping into the river and grabbing the sides of our vessel with steel hooks apparently made specially for the occasion. Riding to the first bend of the river they would leap back into the river and swim ashore.

The vessel would be making between twelve and fourteen knots and it seemed miraculous that the reckless young swimmers were not churned into the great paddles.

We visited a Portuguese storekeeper at one of the more remote villages and saw a fortune in illegal ivory stacked at the back of the store. The fortune was frozen because it could not be accepted for sale without the government brand.

We witnessed many strange and interesting native dances. One of the most impressive was the Dance of The Wanton Women. It was a sensuous dance carried out periodically by the women who have not acquired husbands. The dance is intended to provoke the watching men and usually culminates in an orgy of feasting and sex.

On the fourteenth day of our steamer trip we arrived back in Stanleyville and, before returning to Kampala, drove the three day trip to Buta to visit Father Joseph who captured the first Okapi to be exhibited outside Africa. The Okapi is a strictly protected animal recently discovered and resembling a cross between a zebra and a giraffe.

Brown and I were sitting on the hotel verandah at Buta when we suddenly spotted a native nonchalantly pedalling an ancient bicycle down the main street with a young chimpanzee sitting on the handlebars.

We quickly called out to the boy, arranged to purchase the ape and, by a stroke of luck, he was able to take us to a native who had two more.

On the 31st August we arrived back at the Kampala base.

THE ELEPHANT TRAINING STATION

Our next trip to the Belgian Congo took place less than a week later and was principally to arrange for the acquisition of some young elephants.

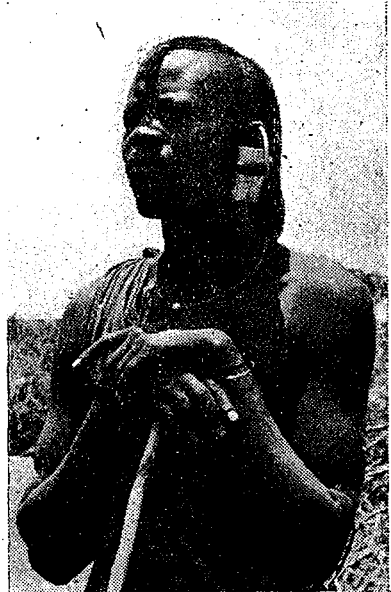
On this safari, we drove north via Lake Albert to Bunia, the eastern doorway to the mysterious Belgian Congo. Baboons frequently crossed our path while scores of gibbering monkeys scattered through the liannas stopping briefly to watch our passing truck. Here we saw, our first "duck-billed" women.

The women of this strange tribe incise the upper lip and force a small wooden plate in the incision. As the wound heals and the flesh toughens a series of larger plates are substituted until the lip has stretched out of all proportion and hangs like a duck-billed flap over the mouth and lower jaw. This practice is dying out among the young women. The plates are usually made from the trunks of the banana tree.

Two days later we arrived in Gangala Na Bodio at the



Wooden ear plugs are an important decoration for this Masai herdsman.



elephant training station. This centre is one of the outstanding Government projects of the Congo. The young elephants are cut out from the wild herds and herded into compounds. Brown and I rode on horseback out on to the reserve, where at times the elephant grass was well above our heads, and watched the elephants swimming in the river, and then later saw the training of the wild captives, under the auspices of the Game Department.

The station is a military organization and apart from working, the elephants learn to march in military formation with unbelievable precision. As a worker, the African elephant has not the strength of the Indian. It is a taller animal but has not the depth of chest nor breadth of its Indian cousin. Nevertheless it is a willing worker and when trained it seems as reliable in temperament as the Indian elephant.

The elephants are tended by a Connac, the equivalent of the Indian Mahout. The Connac is trained from a youngster to care for about three elephants, and he grows with them. A full Connac has usually working under him a first and second class private.

Elephant training is a specialized work carried out by this one particular Congo tribe. The natives believe their tribe to be immune to danger from elephants and take their lives into their hands each time an elephant hunt is organised.

When a suitable herd has been located, a U shaped fire barrier is made around it to confine the hunt, and the Director of the Training Station, accompanied by several assistants on horseback, close in until the elephants are bunched together. The huge animals are then milled around in a short circle until all the youngsters are worked to the outside.

Connacs then quickly rope the calves and secure them to trees while the mounted natives force the herd away from the trapped calves and the roping continues.

The entire operation is one of danger, as the parent elephants are always eager to attack. The honour of capturing the elephant is bestowed upon the Connac who secures the first rope. The Station is split into squads and platoons and works on a bonus system which causes great rivalry.

To become a second class private, a Connac must personally catch four elephants while a first class private must capture eight. One old sergeant's tally is twenty-nine.

After inspection, we chose four suitable young elephants and arranged with the director to have them walked three hundred miles to Lake Albert where we would attend to further transport. The four would be guided by two trained monitors and the journey would take a month.

Before leaving Gangala Na Bodio we witnessed a soldiers' archery competition and partook of a delicious native meal prepared in our honour, consisting of chicken stewed in peanut oil with menyoka leaves, red peppers and grated palm nuts.

In the area polygamy is the order of the day; one of the chiefs being blessed, or encumbered, with three hundred wives. It is the custom among the visiting chiefs to share their host's wives which possibly explains the frequency of visits.

We are all familiar with the story of the elephant's graveyard. The story is that an elephant, dead from natural causes, has never been found in the jungle. Old elephants are said to be driven by some powerful instinct to a hidden valley never trodden by whites, where fabulous fortunes in ivory are heaped with the skeletons of centuries of elephants.

All attempts by civilized man to locate the valley fail—the story goes. The director of the elephant training station at Gangala Na Bodio tells a different story. Sufficient "found ivory" to half fill an average size room is collected by the natives from different parts of the reserve every year.

Ivory is worth about 18/- per pound and the record weight for a single tusk is 250-lb., the length exceeding eleven feet. The average weight taken is around forty pounds. Elephants are the most popular game animal in Africa and despite the initial outlay for licenses and the heavy expenses of the safari, which amount to about fifteen or twenty pounds daily, a discriminate hunter with a reliable guide to take him into "big tusker" country, can substantially defray the expenses of an expedition by the sale of the ivory.

Exceptional care must be taken when hunting elephants as many a "dead" elephant had stood up and charged the hunter after being shot with a light rifle. High velocity weapons are essential and big-game experts recommend a bore of .400 or over.

The importation of a .303 is prohibited. I used a 9.3 mill, Mausser for big game including elephants and rhinos, and a high powered .22 for the smaller buck and other game bagged for the pot. I once saw a rhino shot in the buttocks and the bullet, 9.3 mill., emerged from the chest. Solid bullets only should be used against the rhinos, elephants and other leather sided beasts.

Several days later we farewelled our friends at Gangala Na Bodio and returned once more through soaking monsoonal rains to the Kampala base.

After several days in Kampala, word came from the supervisor of the Semlike Valley branch of the Rockefeller Institution for Yellow Fever Research that a baby elephant had been captured by the valley pygmies, and that he would have them hold it until we arrived.

This was particularly good news as Australia had never previously exhibited a baby African elephant.

A SICK BABY ELEPHANT

It was at the height of the wet season, and in Uganda the average rainfall ranges between fifty and sixty inches. Accompanied by one "boy" I drove the truck along the hazardous track to the Ruwenzori Mountains. We drove at crawling pace across the narrow pass of the Mountains of the Moon and down the boggy escarpment into the Semlike Valley.

I left the mud caked truck at the research station and, hiring the services of a tribe of forty pygmies, set out on foot through the teeming rain across the mountains to the pygmies' camp where the baby elephant was held.

We reached the camp at the end of a day's journey. The dejected four foot high baby was imprisoned in a stockade made by driving rows of stakes into the ground, and looking much worse for wear. Pygmies were prancing around the stockade like redskins on the warpath.

Drums thundered and yelling shrieks mingled with wierd chants. This in no way helped the delicate nerves of the animal nor added to its physical comfort. It appeared that the baby had lost the rest of the herd and fallen in the river. Anticipating a week-end joint, the little natives had fished it from the river but, in doing so, had handled it so roughly that the tender young skin had been badly cut and bruised and infection had set in.

On the following day, I set about making the return trip. I tied a soft rope around the elephant's neck, and while half the natives tugged at the rope the others, jabbering, half pushed from the rear. The pygmies were highly excited—so was the elephant. It endured a few minutes of

(Continued on page 123.)



Found ivory. These 8-ft. tusks present a portage problem for the trader and his native assistant.

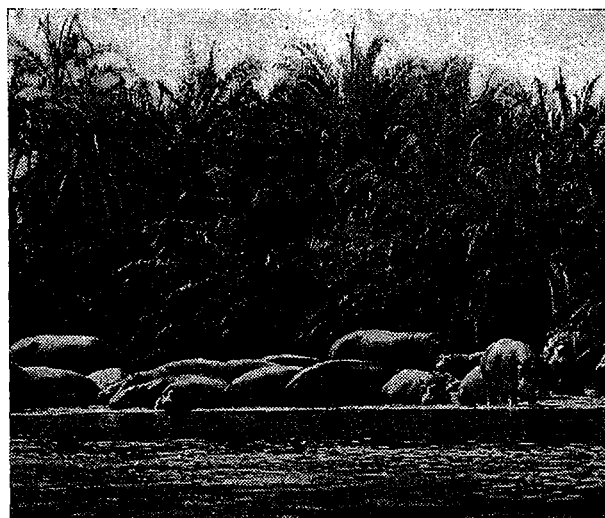


Safe in captivity. This young rhino was lassoed by Pete Jones, member of the Hallstrom-African expedition.



Left: The African gazelle.

Below: Hippos wallow in the mud of a palm-fringed river and enjoy typical African sunshine.



WEEK-END ON THE MOORE

(From Page 115.)

king fish hooked under such conditions as these provide excellent sport with fishing at its best.

The next fish hooked, and the preliminaries were much as before, proved both a thrill and a disappointment. He was obviously much larger than the first one and raced out 40 yards of line in one exhilarating rush up the middle of the river. Then he stopped quite suddenly and a start was made to pump him in. As soon as pressure was applied, he was off again, just breaking surface for a moment or two, though he was too far away to glimpse details of his size and weight.

The next moment the reel had jammed. The line tautened and sang under the strain. Two or three vicious kicks and the line parted, fortunately near the trace—and this line had held a 12½lb. salmon in a pool in the River Dee, Scotland!

I cannot claim to be anything of an authority on local fishing, having recently returned after many years spent abroad where I made fishing my hobby. I can claim, however, with some justification to be in a position to draw a comparison between certain fishing here and elsewhere, especially Scotland. Perhaps there are many who would dispute the point with me, but weight for weight and in still water under conditions described in this narrative, there is little to choose between playing a Scottish salmon or grilse and our own king fish.

We opened the stomachs of all the fish caught, and on this occasion we were surprised to find little in the way of contents except in one which contained a glutinous substance whose nature was not satisfactorily determined, and here I would draw attention to a similar state of affairs with salmon.

It is still, I believe, a moot point whether they feed in fresh water or not. Perhaps there is more to this than meets the eye, but fishing should be like that always and therein lies much of its charm.

WE BROUGHT THEM BACK ALIVE

(From Page 101.)

this undignified treatment, then wheeled around trumpeting. With one accord the little natives dropped the ropes and scattered.

The natives were rounded up, but after several such happenings the animal became obstinate and refused to budge.

A timber sled was then put together and the elephant lashed on by the feet. Slowly we began our trek, sliding the elephant up the mountains and allowing it to walk down the other side. It refused to swim the river so was floated across in a hastily constructed basket-raft arrangement.

On the entire trek the wildly excited pygmies shouted, chanted and beat their infernal drums as they pranced down the hills behind. It was useless trying to quieten them despite the adverse affect they were having on the elephant.

(Concluding instalment next issue.)

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