Sport.

THE ELAND OF THE BAHR-EL-GHAZAL PROVINCE.

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It is said, and with truth, that no place in the world is without its compensations for those who are able to appreciate them. This is eminently true of the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The climate is bad; the health of all serving therein is, as a rule, poor; for about six months of the year travel is almost an impossibility owing to the heavy rains, but the countless herds of big game which roam over certain parts of the province are an ample compensation to the British resident who possesses the sporting instincts of his race. It will be admitted, perhaps, by all familiar with the big game of the Bahr-el-Ghazal that the finest and most noble of them all is the "giant" eland. This species, which is known to science as the Taurotragus derbianus, is very much larger in every way than the eland of the Southern African provinces, the Taurotragus oryx. It is, moreover, a much rarer animal, and I believe it is practically confined to certain districts in Senegambia, Haut Ubangi, and the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province. Certainly, until the Anglo-Egyptian occupation of the Sudan, specimens of the heads and horns of this species of eland were very rare in Europe, and even now are very uncommon. The British Museum, I believe, is still waiting for a specimen, but a much smaller collection of trophies in London possesses two specimens of the "giant" eland. I refer to our Mess at the Royal Army Medical College, which, through the kindness of Major Bray, displays in the ante-room two beautifully-mounted heads.

The first mention in literature of this species of eland is probably that to be found in Schweinfurth's book, "In the Heart of Africa," but the description and illustration given are much more like that of the South African eland. Possibly the one specimen shot by this author was a small, immature one.

The Bahr-el-Ghazal eland appears to be very local in its choice of a habitat, and this peculiarity is probably due to the fact that certain trees which are its favourite food are only to be found in
certain districts, and on this account the herds always remain more or less in the same areas.

Wau, the Fort Desaix of Major Marchand, which is now the capital of the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province, is fortunate in that one of these areas is situated only about 20 miles distant from it, and harbours a large herd of these splendid animals. This herd, which is naturally regarded as the special property of the British officers' mess, has supplied most of the heads which are now to be seen in Great Britain. Its existence is, however, now pretty generally known to big game hunters, and very occasionally permission is granted by the Governor-General to some enthusiast to proceed to the Bahr-el-Ghazal for the sole purpose of shooting one of these animals. We also know where other herds are to be found in this province, but there is no necessity to advertise their whereabouts. En passant it may be of interest to mention that Marchand’s fort, which he named Fort Desaix, has now been pulled down to make room for new Government buildings, but the Governor, Major Gordon of the Leicestershire Regiment, has preserved a portion of the walls, and has arranged for a tablet to
be placed on it to commemorate what was certainly one of the finest marches made by troops in the modern history of Africa.

This year up to the beginning of June, four bull eland had fallen to the rifles of different British officers and officials, and the sight of a very fine head obtained by the Governor decided me to proceed to the eland country before the rains became too heavy, and to try to shoot one, if possible, larger than that killed by Major Gordon. I had already shot one of these animals in 1906, but he was a most inferior specimen, and can be said to have been shot almost accidentally. The manner of his shooting was as follows: I had sighted a herd of eland, and, having marked down a huge bull as my prospective victim, had crawled up to the cover of an anthill from which I intended to fire. Unfortunately my stalking was only too good, as immediately behind the anthill lay another eland which I had not seen, and which was quite unaware of my proximity until I got on to my knee to take aim at the big bull. He then jumped up with a snort, and startled me so much that I instinctively shot him dead.

I was comparatively inexperienced in big game shooting in those
days, and the startling appearance of a huge beast only about three yards from me must be my excuse for shooting what was quite a small bull. This time I determined to do better, and having obtained the necessary leave of absence, I set out from Wau on June 11th, for the eland district, accompanied by my servants who went not willingly, but of necessity, as they could see no use for a journey in the rainy season. I arrived at the village of a local potentate, rejoicing in the name of Dud Majok, which is situated near the eland country, soon after mid-day in the middle of a violent thunderstorm, and was obliged to take shelter for the rest of the day in one of the native huts. These huts are waterproof, but unfortunately their only entrance is through an oval hole made in the mud wall, which is just large enough for a man, not a fat one, to crawl through on his hands and knees. This is a trying and undignified way of entering a house, and when about half way in, one is conscious of a feeling of helplessness, in the event of any native wishing to get his own back.

Early the next morning we arrived at the field of operations, where two of the natives, who held themselves to be full of cunning in all matters connected with the eland, met me and raised my spirits by informing me that the elands were as the leaves of the forest for multitude, and were to be found close at hand. I did not believe this, but hoped that perhaps some had been seen recently. That afternoon about 3 p.m., we sallied out and spent four hours looking for the numerous eland, and returned to camp without having either seen any, or even come across fresh tracks. We saw plenty of other game, including one herd of seven roan antelope, which I did not attempt to shoot. It is always advisable when after one kind of animal, to refuse to shoot any other big game you may chance to meet with. The natives, who are always willing to accompany a British officer on a shooting trip, are only after two things, and the love of sport is not one of them. They want meat and "baksheesh." If you give them the first, before you have shot the animal you want, they will gorge themselves and be practically useless for a day or two afterwards.

The next day was passed entirely in the forest looking for the eland, and again we saw neither the herd nor any fresh signs of them. A neighbouring village, however, sent in a deputation to say that the eland were so numerous and so tame near them that it was hardly an exaggeration to say that they would feed out of their hands. This was, of course, an attempt to persuade me to leave the village I was stopping at and to proceed to theirs, in which case they
would profit by any meat killed, and any "baksheesh" that might be going. This tale was met by my villagers with the news that one of them had that evening sighted a large herd close at hand, and that without doubt we should kill one on the following morning. Both tales being manifestly untrue, I decided to keep my camp where it was.

The next day, before dawn, we were out again in a fresh direction, and tramped for three hours over wide grassy plains dotted with clumps of trees. At 9.30 a.m. we came on the fresh tracks of a small herd of eland, and these, the wind being favourable, we were able to follow up with all speed. About 10 a.m. we sighted the herd, and made out nine animals, all of whom the natives with me insisted were bulls, stating that at this time of the year the cows, together with their newly-dropped calves, herd apart from the bulls. This may be so, but I had never heard it before, and was very anxious not to shoot a cow eland by mistake for a bull—a mistake which it is very easy to make in thick country, as the horns of the females are very little inferior in point of length to those of the males.

After sighting the herd the real stalk began, and never have I had a harder one. The herd was standing in the shade of a thick grove of trees in the midst of a grassy plain, and the only means of approaching near enough to get a shot was by crawling through the grass on one's hands and knees. This is a most fatiguing mode of progression at any time, and when you have about half a mile to cover in this way at 10 in the morning in June under an African sun it is little short of horrible. However, it had to be done; so taking a .400 double-barrelled rifle, which I always use when after heavy game, with me, I started to crawl through the grass accompanied by one of the native hunters. At first it was not so bad, but after about 200 yards the soil consisted of a kind of coarse gravel, and my knees suffered horribly; the heat was also awful, as not a breath of air could reach us owing to the long grass.

At last, however, we got up to within about 130 yards of the herd, but could only make out the heads of three of them, the others being more or less hidden by the trees. One of the three which were in full view appeared to have a magnificent head, and, after wiping the sweat out of my eyes and waiting until my wind came back after the exhausting crawl through the grass, I gently got on to one knee and fired at him. The welcome slap came back to me as the bullet struck the beast, and he staggered
and fell. Immediately, however, he got up again and rushed off through the trees, taking the same line as the other animals. We ran after him, and my feelings were unpleasant as I thought he might perhaps be only slightly wounded, and that I should lose him after all. It was not to be, however, as about 300 yards on we found the poor beast lying down and looking at us with the pathetic, questioning eyes of a dying animal. He had been shot through the lungs; the ball had entered behind the near shoulder, a little too low to traverse the heart, and on its exit had shattered the off shoulder joint. Another shot put him out of his pain, and on examining him he was found to be a splendid bull in perfect condition, the mane and tuft of hair on the dewlap being exceptionally long and thick. His horns measured 36½ inches in a straight line, being exactly 2½ inches less than the one shot by Major Gordon, and about 3½ inches less than the largest recorded head. His neck at its broadest part, including the dewlap, measured 29 inches, and his height was about 17 hands.

The Governor had given me permission to shoot another eland, if I should see a really good one, for the British Museum, but having obtained one at great expense of vital energy, and the loss of most of the skin of both my knees, I decided to be content. Fortunately I had with me a servant who is skilful in the proper manner of skinning the heads of buck, and I was able, with confidence, to leave this work to him and to return to camp, which I reached about 1 p.m., pretty thoroughly done up with the heat. The following day we returned to Wau with the trophies, and since then I have been using all the means at my disposal to preserve the thick, heavy skin of the head and neck, and succeeding but indifferently. Owing to the time of the year being the rainy season, it is very hard to prevent skins from decomposing, and much of the hair of the mane has already slipped, and I fear that all my taxidermist's skill will be required to mount the head and to preserve anything like the natural beauty of the animal. The photographs reproduced are those of two eland shot in the Bahr-el-Ghazal by Captain W. D. Kenny, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, who has been so kind as to give them to me for the purpose of illustrating this article. The photograph of the dead female emphasises what I have mentioned above concerning the difficulty of distinguishing the bulls from the cows.