





# LION HUNT

BY JOHN H. HALLIBURTON

One shot at 78 yards dropped this big male for the author (right).

The startling thing was the size of the lion's body. The creature seemed literally as big as a horse. Some call lions majestic or regal. Wild is my word. They are the wildest-looking animals I have ever seen

When I gained full consciousness I was sitting bolt upright in my cot, having risen from a deep sleep so quickly that my head cracked against the mosquito bar frame. Being a sound sleeper, I could not imagine what had caused me to rouse so suddenly from the pleasant warmth of my good wool blankets.

I listened attentively for a clue but the night remained dark and quiet. In fact, the customary night noises were conspicuous by their absence. The stillness was oppressive.

Just as I decided to dig the flashlight out from under my pillow for a look around, the answer came with spine-chilling suddenness! A deep, resonant, booming roar—accentuated by the stillness of the night—rolled across the plain and engulfed our little camp like a tidal wave washing over a Pacific atoll.

Everyone knows what a lion's roar sounds like. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has seen to that. I can assure you, however, that it sounds quite different in the dead of night on an African plain with nothing more substantial than ten ounces of duck and a mosquito bar between you and Simba.

"Gee, that was closer than the first one," whispered Frank Bennett, my hunting companion, from the adjoining cot. The "first one" was what woke me up, but it required

the lick on the head to shift my thinking into high gear.

The lion sounded as if he were just outside our tent. All guns were securely fastened in the carrying rack on the Land Rover, 30 yards away, where the safari boys were sleeping around the glowing coals of a dying fire. Frank and I could only wait, with bated breath, wondering what would happen next. I did get the flashlight ready so as to "shine his eyes" if he walked in the tent door.

The next roar came from a greater distance. Before it had died away, the boys' fire sprang into sudden brilliance as the carefully cut breakfast wood was hastily dumped on the hot coals. A babble of Swahili assured us that the boys were also aware of our uninvited visitors. The roars continued at intervals until they finally faded away in the distance, allowing us to return to our slumbers—until a rip-roaring hyena flight just outside the tent awakened us again.

We were in the lower half of the third consecutive week of an intensive search for a bull elephant with trophy-size tusks. There was no dearth of elephants but those with worthwhile tusks were as scarce as hen's teeth. We had tracked down, evaluated and passed up so many that we had long since lost count.

The search had not been completely in vain. As we continued our relentless search for big teeth, we collected two nice sable bulls, two fine roan bulls, what our White Hunter, Andrew Holmberg, classed as one of the finest trophy eland that he had ever seen, and lesser game for camp meat.

This, our third camp, was located on the shore of a pool comprising a part of—what in the wet season was—the Kululu River in southern Tanganyika. It was a marvelous game country but with one of the heaviest concentrations of tsetse flies imaginable.

Just before leaving Nairobi—700 miles to the north—we had discussed where we planned to hunt, what trophies we hoped to collect, and other similar subjects.

"Don't be too disappointed if you're not successful in getting good lions," said Andrew as we studied a map of the country. "They are getting scarce in many sections. Quite a few safaris return without any."

As we pursued our elephant hunting, our keen-eyed gun-bearers and trackers, Abdulai and Kipkemo, would frequently speak the word "Simba" as they pointed to huge pug marks in the heavy dust of the trail, or around the muddy perimeters of the waterholes.

"I thought you said collecting a lion in this area was somewhat uncertain," I said to An-

Even in Africa skinning-out a lion is cause for a crowd. The natives fear lions, but at the same time admire their power and courage.



drew as we inspected an unusually large track one morning. "Lion sign seems plentiful to me."

"There is quite a gap between seeing lion tracks about and having a worthwhile trophy in the lorry," he replied.

"A good lion is never an easy trophy. First you must locate him, then maneuver him into a good shootable position. This is much easier said than done. We will give it a good try as soon as the elephants are disposed of."

While we had happened upon lion sign from our first day of hunting, we were in the middle of the second week before we saw any of the "makers." Walking across a grassy glade, we approached a clump of thick bushes. Just at the foot of the clump lay the remains of a topi recently killed by lions. As we drew nearer, a large lioness and two almost grown cubs rose from the shade of the bush, stared at us in arrogant disdain and slowly walked off toward a nearby donga. They had eaten their fill but were reluctant to abandon their kill.

One night at an earlier camp, in the same general area, a large lion and two lionesses walked right through the center of camp. They actually passed between the two sleeping tents. They made no sound and only their tracks, clearly etched in the soft sandy soil, betrayed their visit.

Lion roars constituted a very effective bass section in the nightly symphony that we enjoyed in all camps in the Kululu area. At no other time, however, did we hold orchestra seats as close to the musicians as in the case previously related.

Two days later, we made an unsuccessful reconnaissance for elephant up the river, studying the small waterholes which were all that was left to mark the dry season course of this sizable river. Just before noon, while crossing a semi-open plain on the way back to camp—still 15 miles distant—my attention was attracted to an object near a bush growing on the edge of a dry donga. For some reason it did not quite fit into the picture. I asked Andrew to stop and we turned our binoculars on the spot. The 7x50 glasses brought into clear focus the motionless, posed head of a lion extending above the grass. He was so still that he could have been one of the pair guarding the entrance to New York's Public Library transported to this faraway spot. He was staring straight ahead and partially away from us.

Closer scrutiny revealed a lioness lying directly behind him. She was sleepily looking about her, occasionally licking her paws like a giant house cat. They both seemed oblivious to the Rover and were enjoying the cool shade of the bush after the activity of the night before.

Andrew studied the lion for some time through his binocular, then turned to Frank, whose turn it was to shoot, and said, "Frank, he's a big lion—right in his prime—but his mane is not too full. You look at him and let me know what you think. I believe we can find a better one but then again perhaps we can't. It's a gamble."

After a long look, Frank replied, "He looks mighty good to me. A bird in the hand and all that sort of stuff, you know. Let's take him if we can."



*Choosing a tree to hang a lion/leopard bait is a science. This one attracted a leopard too small to shoot, but the lions stayed away.*

The setup was ideal for a stalk. The jeep stood right beside the dry water course, deep enough to conceal a man. This donga meandered across the plain right up to the lions. About 100 yards away from them, a clump of small trees grew on the very edge of the depression. Frank selected this as the place from which to shoot as he and Andrew slipped down into the donga and began to make their way to the trees.

They continued down the donga at a rapid rate and soon reached the trees. Kipkemo,

Abdulai and I had ringside seats. Frank cautiously crawled up the side until he could see over. Neither lion was aware of the impending danger. The lioness looked as if she were asleep, while the lion gazed stonily off to the west.

At the report of the .300 Magnum, the lion made a half spring then fell back against the base of the bush where he had been lying. The lioness, on the other hand, sprang to her feet and looked in all directions in a bewil-

dered and belligerent manner, searching for the unknown adversary. We all remained motionless in the hope that she would retreat peacefully. She finally did—very reluctantly—stopping every few yards to look around.

When she was about 200 yards from where the lion lay, she sat down on her haunches as if to contemplate the strange events of the last few minutes. I now drove the Rover up to where Frank and Andrew crouched on the edge of the donga. They got in, one at a time,

being careful to keep the lioness—who was still emitting low growls and watching us attentively—covered at all times.

Again we waited for her to move off and finally drove up to the lion. Although he was finished, there was still some life left in him. Taking Andrew's advice, Frank put a well-placed .22 bullet into the beast's brain before we dismounted from the jeep.

"Captain, that doesn't look much like an Everglades bobcat, does it?" said Frank as we both stood looking down at his fine trophy. "Now I, too, am a big-game hunter. A mighty *bwana*, fearless protector of the weak. I want you to address me as 'Sir' from this time on!"

"Yes, SIR," I replied.

The skinning was completed in short order but it required twice as long to remove all fat from the carcass. Andrew patiently waited until it was all carefully collected and placed in an empty glass jar. The natives value it very highly. They render it into a sort of lard which is credited with many magic properties. It is used in witchcraft, cures rheumatism, instills bravery into the user, and has many other uses. Frank took a small jar to try out.

Encouraged by his success, I suggested to Andrew that we take a respite from the elephants and see if I could duplicate the feat. He agreed, so we spent the afternoon hanging the antelope carcasses that we had collected the day before (less the head skins and forequarters which had been removed) as lion baits. An area to the east of camp where we had heard lions roar was selected.

There is far more involved in hanging a lion bait than merely pulling a carcass part way up in a tree and securing it there. The selection of the proper tree is most important. It must be strategically located with reference to water and cover; it must have a suitable approach which will permit the hunter to get in range without detection; and the location of the sun in early morning and late afternoon is important. It is difficult for a hunter to find a tree that meets all of these requirements even though he's in the midst of a forest.

In the proper selection of a bait tree, the White Hunter has a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate his skill or to show his lack of it. Holmberg proved to be a past master at both lion and leopard baiting.



The next two days were also spent in elephant hunting but we inspected the baits morning and afternoon. They had both been visited by hyenas and one, located near a big thicket, had attracted a fair-size leopard.

"We won't bother with him," said Andrew. "These low-country leopards are not good trophies. They are much larger in the Musuma District where we plan to hunt after we finish with the elephants."

Midmorning of the next day, we happened upon a log stockade housing three honey hunters who were plying their trade in the surrounding forests. Andrew stopped and engaged them in conversation as he always did when meeting natives in the forest. They conversed some time in Swahili. Finally, he turned to me and said, "Down the trail about a mile, a game trail leads to two small water-holes. A large lion killed and devoured a topi there two nights ago. The natives say he is still in the area. We had better turn off and have a look."

We found the game trail as described and followed it in an easterly direction until it dead-ended at a dry waterhole. It was now only a circle of sun-baked and cracking mud. Here we also found the scant remains of the topi. After the lion, then the vultures and lastly, the ants, had finished with it, only a section of hide, the smell, and a few of the larger bones, remained.

About 200 yards farther south was another

hole with a small pool of stagnant water remaining. The two holes were separated by a hedge of bushes with a ten-foot gap where it passed directly between the two holes. At the water's edge were numerous pug marks of a large lion and other evidence that he had frequented this spot recently.

Nearby was a good bait tree with a dense thicket of major proportions extending right up to its base.

"He's been here," said Andrew, "and he's a good one! Let's provide him with another tempting meal before he moves out of the area."

"That should be easy," I replied, as we had been encountering common game suitable for lion bait all morning.

As is so often the case, when you want something badly it becomes hard to find. It took us fully two hours and several miles of hunting to collect an old topi bull.

We picked him up and quickly headed back for the waterhole. While still about a mile away, we took the carcass out of the car, tied it to the back with a stout rope and dragged it in a zigzag fashion up to the foot of the bait tree. Here it was hoisted by means of the Rover until the forequarters were about five feet off the ground and securely tied to a strong limb. It was a dainty morsel to set before a king—and I hoped a majestic one would feast upon it!

A number of the more persistent stars were still out as we departed camp for the lion bait next morning. As we rode silently through the dim light of early dawn, I recalled many of the lion hunting stories I had read over the years. Stories of charging lions, man-eating lions, lions attacking without provocation, lions mauling hunters, and such. I could not help but wonder what my reaction would be the first time I faced Simba with intentions of bringing about his sudden demise, seeing as how his ambition toward me would very possibly be the same. I had the strong conviction that I would know the answer before I saw camp again.

Finally, we reached the Euphorbia tree that marked the game trail leading to the dry hole. Andrew cautioned everyone to be absolutely quiet as we drove slowly and toward our destination. Just before reaching it, Andrew cut off the ignition and allowed the Rover to coast to a stop.

By prearrangement, the gun-bearers handed me my Model 70 .375 Magnum and Andrew his .470 double-barreled rifle, but stayed in the jeep. This was to be our show. We loaded quickly and hurried down the edge of the hedge separating the two holes. It furnished ideal stalking cover and the soft, sandy soil was conducive to a silent approach.

As we carefully slipped along, I recalled Andrew's advice given at dinner the night before:

"You must be very careful when stalking lions. These big cats have the sharpest eyes of any game. One false move and they are gone. Above all, you must make your first shot a good one. It would be murder to hunt a wounded lion in the heavy cover just back of the bait tree. If you aren't sure—don't shoot."

The sun was just lifting above the horizon and illuminating the area clearly when we reached the dry hole. Out in the center, near the remains of the topi, stood a large hyena. He eyed us with indifferent suspicion.

"This is a good sign," Andrew whispered. "There must be a lion on the bait, otherwise old Fisi (hyena) would be on it himself. Nothing else could keep him away."

We dropped down and crawled the remaining short distance toward the gap. The hedge did not cut off sharply but thinned out gradually. Here we stopped to look the situation

over. Nothing resembling a lion was visible. In fact, the only sign of life was a jackal sitting on his haunches just to one side of the bait.

Suddenly, I felt Andrew's grip tighten on my arm! As the cover was open and I did not want to risk any sudden motion, I turned my head slowly toward him.

My eyes must have popped out like a lobster's as I beheld the apparition that advanced toward me. Seconds before there had been nothing there! It was a lion all right, its head and mane told me that quick enough. The startling thing was the size of its body. The creature literally seemed as big as a horse. It had never occurred to me that he would appear to be so huge.

Many observers describe the lion in his native habitat as majestic and regal. "Wild" was a better description of this one's appearance. He was the wildest looking animal I had ever seen. His atrocious table manners had left his face and mane blood-smeared as he filled his stomach with topi until it resembled a stuffed sausage. He had retired to the heavy cover to sleep after his meal and had either heard or sensed our presence. He was now coming out to challenge any disrespectful creature with the audacity to molest his personal banquet.

Perhaps he thought the hyena was returning to try again. In any event, he was in as foul a mood as any cantankerous old man disturbed from an anticipated siesta.

He noted the slight movement as I eased into my favorite sitting position and advanced straight toward us with every sense alert and his intense gaze focused on our spot.

I placed the post reticle of the 2½X scope on his massive chest. As long as I live I shall never forget how he looked. Every action bespoke power, alertness and arrogant belligerence. He plainly had a chip on both shoulders.

The sparse bushes in which we crouched were no thicker than my wrist. The thought occurred to me that they would be small protection from an angry lion. He advanced about 50 yards out of the cover directly toward us and stopped. Although his eyes never wavered from mine, his body turned slightly.

"Now is the time," my brain signaled. I steadied the post on the point of his right shoulder and squeezed off the best shot possible under the circumstances.

At the report of the gun, all hell broke loose! The lion emitted a series of roars that literally shook the earth as he leaped straight up and went into a fit of gyrations that made it difficult to tell which end was which.

"Shoot him again!" snapped Andrew and I noted out of the corner of my eye that he was not carrying his .470 over his shoulder!

I found it most difficult to hold on any particular spot as the lion offered the same type target as would a rapidly bouncing ball. The shot—when I finally got it off—proved most effective. It stopped the violent activity as suddenly as the first shot had started it.

"Reload and be ready," said Andrew. "There may be a lioness or two about and they sometimes charge under these conditions."

This was not the case, however, so we walked over—with guns still at the ready—to where he lay.

"Well, the king is dead," said Andrew as we lowered our guns and relaxed for the first time since getting out of the jeep. At this point, Frank and the gun-bearers drove up.

He was an unusually large lion—past his prime—but with a good mane and perfect teeth—not always found in old lions. He was a handsome trophy.

The first shot, which was fired from a measured distance of 78 yards, actually was the

only one necessary. The 300-grain Silvertip bullet entered the point of his shoulder, breaking it, and continued through the lung section, slightly above the heart, passing out just behind the left shoulder.

The second shot was the amazing one! In spite of the fact that the lion was thrashing around so violently—it was impossible to hold on any particular spot—the bullet entered the right eye without touching the lid.

"Always place your shots here," I said to Frank, pointing to where the right eye had been, "and you will never have any trouble from a charging lion."

"It was certainly well placed," he replied with genuine admiration in his voice—not knowing the circumstance of the shot.

"You blokes kill all your game too early or too late for pictures," said Andrew as he took a reading with my exposure meter. The bright equatorial sun soon took care of this deficiency and the picture-making was completed in a few minutes.

Since it was so early in the morning it was decided to load the lion into the Rover, take it back to camp, and let Matinge, our head skinner, do the job there at his leisure.

As we turned off the trail onto the path leading into camp, Andrew blew the horn in a peculiarly rapid manner—the usual signal to all that a major trophy had been bagged. The Rover had hardly stopped before the boys were swarming over it and me, with the usual congratulatory rites. This is all part of the safari act but they put so much gusto into it and make it seem so sincere that it inflates one's ego, to say the least.

The word had spread to the little fishing camp across the pool and boats began to arrive almost immediately bearing men, women and children. They gathered around in a very excited manner to view the lion.

Natives of this section fear the lion above all animals. The honey hunters and poachers build the heavy log stockades for one reason only—protection from lions. The herdsmen build the thorn bomas as protection against Simba's raids. They consider the lion a personal enemy to a much greater degree than is any other animal. We were told the game department records indicate that man-eating lions account for approximately 100 native deaths in Tanganyika yearly. It is easy to see, therefore, why the death of a lion is celebrated with such rejoicing.

I was in the tent reloading a camera as the noise continued to grow in volume outside. Finally, Frank came in. "I think they are about to elect you Mayor," he said. "You had better go out and make a speech."

Having no ambition to hold public office, I declined. After a while, the noise subsided as the natives appeared to lose interest once the hide was off, the fat removed and the carcass carried into the forest and dumped. Before this was done, however, the "lucky bones" which are located in the front of each shoulder, were removed and presented to me with some ceremony.

In the weeks that followed, we had numerous encounters with lions but as our licenses were filled we only admired and photographed them. It is amazing how close one can approach a lion in a vehicle. As smart as he is, he apparently never associates a human with an automobile. On one occasion, we were so close to a group of four that I could not get all of a big lioness' head in the view finder of my camera using a 180mm lens.

None of these motorized encounters, however, approached producing the thrill that came from viewing old Simba through my rifle sights as we crouched facing him at his own eye level in the little bushes, and watched him stride majestically toward us. This is the thrill that makes a hunting trip worthwhile.