



Page photographs one of the big bulls he and friend Aman dropped within yards

Forty Elephants a Day

By WARREN PAGE

The Belgian Congo is full of pachyderms—big, little, and medium-size—many with the trophy ivory sought by the Shooting Editor

THALL as a 3-story garage, the gray hulk of a taskless elephant loomed over us, so close that we could see every skin wrinkle, even flakes of mud peeling from the bulging forehead. Too close, at less than fifteen yards. Much too close.

We didn't want the toothless old girl, and hoped that she would lumber off and leave us, as two lesser cows had done seconds before. For we were pinned down, with no place to run in the tangle of green jungle. Behind the muzzles of heavy rifles, Toenmy Aman of Zurich and a friend from Ruanda, Paul Leyman, crouched on each side of me; back of us three black askaris of the Congo game department pressed against a wall of green. We could only watch

the cow's rubbery trunk as it wormed and periscoped through the puzzle of scent. No telling what was going on behind those dim and piggy eyes, but once the slab-sided cow, the tallest and heaviest female elephant I'd ever looked up at, became sure of our scent she'd either run or rush. And a rush from that distance meant grief.

We certainly hadn't intended to get into any such pickle. That morning we had looked over at least three dozen pachyderms, close to our regular daily quota on the rich Rutshuru plain. One was a good bull, the rest cows and light-ivored young stuff. We had tracked the bull for two hours until he moved into the thousand acres of jungle that surrounded a pool of year-round water. We



The base camp on the Rutchuru plain held all the comforts of home away from home



Binoculars brought out elephant herds crossing from Albert Park to Uganda



But stalking elephants in rain-soaked brush ten feet tall meant slow going

Of two feeding bulls, one stepped out of the brush, clear for Page's bullet



The road from Bukavu wound along the mountains girdling Lake Kivu

Recipe for a successful safari— mix scenery, friends, and elephants





hadn't expected others in the patch, but as we eeled through the brush in alleys left by elephants we heard belly rumblings from two distinct directions—gassy bubblings mixed with the humming mumble that elephants make when they rest in deep shade. In the maze of tracks and droppings we'd followed the wrong path and run onto an unexpected trio of cows. One was the massive old girl that now held us frozen as she tested the wind.

Not that there's anything novel about being next to elephants in the Belgian Congo. Its plains and jungle area are filthy with them, both the straight-tusked bulls of the forest country and the bent-ivory types of the savannas. That was why I had taken the comfortable and fast Sabena flights to Brussels and then directly into central Africa, to Stanleyville, Usumbura and, eventually, Bukavu, the beautiful resort town fingering out into blue Lake Kivu. There a safari outfitter, Chris Pollet, had introduced Tommy Aman and me to his friend Paul Leyman, and the three of us had started north.

It wasn't the flowered lushness of Goma, the beach village of northern Kivu, or the prospect of gazing at the mist-hidden peaks of the Ruwenzoris, the Mountains of the Moon, nor yet the thought of meeting pint-size Pygmies in the Ituri Forest that had pulled me into the Congo, though these are reasons enough for the trip. It was the prospect of encountering a host of elephants. But we hadn't planned to get quite so close to the wrong elephant.

I could hear Tommy whisper under his breath as the gray head swung and we saw that absolutely no ivory protruded from either side of the probing trunk. "Nothing at all!" he whispered.

Perhaps it was the faint whisper, perhaps a wisp of scent, but the mud-spattered bulk suddenly squared around to face us. Ears fanned out full width, like a pair of great

doors. The trunk probed forward again, then rolled back into a curl as the two ears hitched upward in the hike that is the dead-sure sign of a charge. She was coming.

And she came, rolling through the screen of brush like a Sherman tank. My 460 Weatherby was squared on the forebead, waiting for that sudden-death section of the trunk base straight between the eyes to show clear. But suddenly I was rocked by the blare of Paul's .458 beside me and realized that the elephant was dropping straight down through my sight. As she crashed to earth Tommy fired, and another red-rimmed hole appeared in the bulking head. But this shot was not needed; Paul's slug had done the job, stopped the charge. When the shaking and the excited chatter were over, we took just seven long steps from our footprints to the brow of four or five tons of dead elephant.

"One consolation," summarized Paul as we marched back toward the Mai ya Kwenda village to tell the natives they had meat for months. "This cow, of a certainty she cannot count against your licenses. Surely we fired on the principle of *legitimate defense*."

And so it was. That fool cow had charged with every intention of stamping us into grease spots.

We had been close to elephants earlier in the hunt. It's hard to avoid them on the Rutshuru plain, because that panhandle, stretching generally north between the closed areas of Albert National Park on the west and Elizabeth Park along the Uganda border, is prime open country for elephants in numbers. The wedge-shaped plain—cut up by shallow draws that mark the beds of ancient streams which once flowed into the deep water of the Kwenda—is rich in feed. It becomes particularly lush in October as the Congo rains are beginning, and the elephants move out onto it from the blue hills on either side, and even commute back and (Continued on page 129)



Congo bulls carry ivory of two types: short, bulky, like Page's bull above or the slender forest type Aman shot



In two hours a mob of hungry natives hacked every scrap of meat from the elephants' bones



Men slashed off chunks with furious abandon, fought over choice parts, yet never seemed to gash each other

Forty Elephants a Day

(Continued from page 37)

forth between Belgian and British territory. Hippos sleep sluggishly in its deeper swamps; black buffalo, the *Caffer equinoctialis* variety that is only slightly lighter in the horn than the buff east of Lake Victoria, feed out into the new grass areas. We hadn't made a precise tally each evening, but certainly we had been looking over forty elephants a day, from mile-away glassing ranges down to mutual inspection at a few feet.

"How many in that herd we got into yesterday, Paul?" I asked. Paul is a young Belgian who went to the Congo when Europe blew up with World War II. He had remained there to establish himself as an innkeeper in the grassy hills of Ruanda—an innkeeper who preferred to close his house and hunt whenever possible.

"Thirty or forty," he replied. "We clearly counted the noses of two dozen, no?"

"Counted the nose of one in particular, I'd say," put in Tommy as we rattled along the road toward camp. "In fact, I counted a wart right on the end of it!"

That had been another elephant unexpectedly close. Even as we left the car that morning to strike off onto the plain on foot, we had heard in the road-bordering brush the careless crashing of feeding elephants, two small herds that seemed to be working toward each other. We had pussyfooted upwind into the thickets, pecking at one gray mass after another until the movements of the elephants themselves forced us to the edge of a 300-foot bank cut by the rushing flood of the Kwenda. There had been herds of buffalo on the far side and a few elephants standing like sidehill gougers on the escarpment itself. To work free of the herds that had already been checked out as having no great ivory, we had sneaked along the bank and so back into dense forest—only to find ourselves completely surrounded by elephants.

Big bulls aren't likely to mix in with cows, calves, and young males, but we had little choice except to stand and hope the herds would feed around us. In the deep jungle no breeze stirred, and the animals fed at backyard range. We could watch a clear alley in the wet green, see the searching trunks and flashes of white ivory, and watch pillarlike legs as the elephants moved about. Three went silently by at ten yards or so and seemed safely past until

one wheeled and began to feed on the very brush that concealed us. That elephant must have had a bad cold. Surely it should have smelled us, because the trunk ripped away and stuffed our shelter into a pink maw only feet from us. Minutes passed before the young bull, no good as a trophy, moved on. If there had indeed been a wart on that economy-size schnozzle, Tommy could hardly have missed seeing it.

But seeing elephants close and seeing them far isn't necessarily seeing trophies. Tommy and I weren't looking for 100-pound tusks, though we might hope for them. Under pressure of time, we'd be willing to settle for a pair of 30-kilo bulls—60 or 70 pounds to the side.

"That hammer-headed old cow ruined our chances on the bull at Mai ya Kwenda," I grumbled the next evening as we dined on roast backstraps from a young wart hog. "And except for that good tusker we spotted in the shamba ten miles up the valley when it was too dark to shoot safely, we haven't so far seen anything surely over 60 pounds."

"Don't forget the smart one we tried to stalk last night," put in Tommy. "He'd have gone eighty at least."

"Hard to forget that one," I agreed.

And indeed it was. We'd run into every possible bad break on him. Heading southwest from the Uganda border station on the graveled road (the roads in the Congo, carefully kept up by squads from every village, are the best I've seen in any African area) we had spotted the backs of two bull elephants hulking over a rise in the plain. The glasses showed both to be shootable, and one very heavy. But as we trotted off in a downwind circle they slowly disappeared into a valley of scattered bush and rich new grass.

It should have been a cinch to work down into that valley and into shooting position, but those bulls were smart, especially the old fellow. They promptly took up a position smack in the middle of a herd of ten or twelve. No matter how the herd moved, the best bull stayed precisely dead center. There wasn't enough cover in the saucer for good concealment, and when we slipped down over the rim to make a stalk we ran into a jumpy young cow that stood like a sentinel squarely across our only feasible approach. We couldn't approach from the right because of a breeze, nor from the left because of the screen of feeding young bulls and cows. Stymied.

As we waited for a break the sun dipped lower and lower and finally

dropped, leaving us only a few brief minutes of equatorial twilight to make a desperation move upwind. That didn't pan out. Two bulls with long but light tusks turned up on the wrong side of the wrong bush, caught our scent, and spooked off with the whole herd. Even as the elephants shuffled off toward Albert Park, Foxy Grandpa still held his post dead center. He knew his stuff, which was probably why he still sported such handsome ivory.

Elephants everywhere but never quite the right one in the right place. We had looked them over not only on the plain but on the hills. A villager came galloping one morning to report that two bulls, one of huge dimensions, with tusks longer than the 6-foot stick the black had brought as a measure, had crossed the road only a few rods above our camp, at a point where the plain butted into steep grassy hills. In the first hundred yards of wading along the spoor through dew-soaked grass we were soaked to the hips and in a quarter mile were puffing from the climb. And when we found the bulls there weren't two but six; they weren't bulls at all but cows, and none of them carried enough ivory to make a good pair of pistol grips!

We looked them over up on the mountainsides. Beyond the spot where Chris Pollet had set up camp for his own clients we found a jeep track that he had cut through the rugged volcano peaks beyond the Kwenda. Its switchbacks told us that he had spotted a good bull for his customer. So we tried it and found plenty of elephants. Two bulls of a bunch of four looked good through the binoculars as they sidehilled around the mountain shoulder. But when we clambered across to peer at them at twenty or thirty yards, we found that the longest tusks were hopelessly skinny. Then the quartet winded us and pounded off down the hill like mountain goats.

"I've seen elephants higher," I said as we watched them go, "as high as twelve thousand feet on Mount Kenya. But not in such steep country."

"This is a new breed," laughed Tommy. "They crossed with some of our Swiss Alps chamois to make the chamiphant."

And from the way the Congo bulls can navigate rocky volcano slopes, he is probably right.

Tommy and I had experienced all the frustrations that beset big-game hunters. He had slopped around with me in the bongo jungles of French Equatorial Africa, and after we'd bagged the elusive bongo we had

spent days vainly trying to meet up with a gorilla. We knew that, given time, we'd find proper elephants, but we were running out of time. He had to go back to his leather business in Zurich, and I had another safari date over in Portuguese East Africa.

So we stopped in at Chris' camp for a council of war. He and his client had spent the day on the plain searching out buffalo and had taken a fine trophy; so they were in a magnanimous mood. It seemed a good time to do a little borrowing.

"Chris," said Paul, "we need a good tracker. The three game-department boys know the country fine, but they couldn't track a truck through a mudhole and we have already twice wandered off onto the wrong spoor with them. How'd you like to trade our three askaris, Happy, Dopey, and Grumpy, for your boy Maviresha?"

"And we'll throw in a good left handed pitcher to boot," I added.

Chris would get the damp end of the stick in such a swap, and he knew it, but he and his client had already taken most of the game open in the area, and would shortly be shifting camp over into Ruanda for the mixed game of that beautiful land. He could afford to lend us Maviresha, a hawk-eyed tracker who had served a long apprenticeship as a poacher in the Makenba area and had a diploma from one of the Congo's best jails.

"Take him with you," he said grandly, "but remember you're going to have to run to stay with him."

As it turned out, we didn't have to run at all, not more than half a mile anyway.

Red as the guts of a ship's boiler, the African sun was edging over the mountains next morning as we left the jeep half a mile behind the village of Mugomba. There the track ended at a low escarpment. To our right spread the rich bottoms of the Kwenda and black dots against the green—feeding buffaloes. Beyond a flat valley was another low escarpment, and dimly beyond that were the tall cones of five volcanoes. This was the lush Virunga range, habitat of the mountain gorilla. Picture-book Africa. There had to be elephants in it somewhere.

And there were. Off to the left and far upwind three gray hulks moved through the bush. Ivory showed clear on one, heavy and long. If we played this situation right there'd be no need for Maviresha's tracking skills, or anything else save speed. The elephants were obviously working across the upper valley floor and would probably climb the bank opposite. We had to get there first.

two hours of hard work chopping out the tusks. Two elephants down within a hundred yards of each other mean twice as much congratulation and twice as much work with the ax. In the Congo, where villages are not too far apart and the bush telegraph works far faster than Western Union, a downed elephant collects a crowd of meat-hungry natives within minutes; two, and you have a mob scene worthy of Cecil B. De Mille! Natives come from every quarter of the compass—men, women, and children, all armed with knives.

Nothing is wasted. When we left, laden with the ivory and the choicer sections of feet and trunk, the mob was mopping up a few scraps from a few bones. All the other meat of two 5-ton elephants had been hacked off and carted away—in baskets, on heads, in the back-slung scarves where Congolese women usually carry their youngsters. The circling vultures would get only to peck at grease spots.

But there was one thing more. Who would buy dinner at the Bahnhof, Aman or Page? Tommy's tusks were well over a foot longer, but the lance-shaped nerve we'd slipped out of them had seemed overlong too. Hard to tell. And we couldn't be sure until we were back in Bukavu and had the ivory weighed for payment of

the small trophy tax. At just under 35 kilos the tusk, they averaged as 75-pounders. But mine totaled 200 grams more, and 200 grams is almost half a pound!

I still haven't collected that dinner, because my northbound Sabena flight five weeks later didn't stop in Zurich. But it will be collected. Make it that special kind of sauerbraten, Tommy—and we'll have every one of those forty elephants a day to hunt all over again for dessert.

Treetop Tough Guy

(Continued from page 63)

wrestled along the full length of the tent every night, all night long. Nothing frightened him away. He ate the rubber shoulder pad on a rifle and eluded all the traps set to catch him. He virtually drove the hunters crazy.

This was no isolated performance. Red squirrels have been giving hunters headaches ever since the days of Dan Boone and Ethan Allen. Boone almost lost his scalp one day when a red squirrel betrayed his treetop hideaway to a band of Indians below. Understandably, he never liked either red squirrels or redskins after that. And many a serious sportsman today will share the first half of his sentiments.