

Handwritten text in a stylized, cursive script, possibly representing a name or a signature. The characters are dark and thick, set against a light background.

The stomach rumblings of the big bulls broke the hot, buzzing harmony of the African bush. Our little tracker confirmed the sounds with his "Kouba Temba, Kouba."
The greatest trophy on earth would soon be in my sights.

BY ELMER KEITH



I considered the African elephant the greatest game on earth, and my lifetime desire to hunt this elephant was about to be fulfilled. After five days spent on the lesser game, John Lawrence of White Hunters Limited, my guide and outfitter, announced that he had seen enough of my shooting and was going to break a precedent by taking me south for elephant at the outset of the trip.

Although the small rains were hitting Nairobi, it was still the dry season south of Arusha. John was perturbed about getting in and out of the southern Tanganyika elephant country before the rains extended that far south. After some very uncomfortable traveling, we wound up on a truck trail through dense bush that was hopelessly pitted with elephant tracks that had been made during the wet season and were now dried to the consistency of concrete.

We finally made camp on a slight ridge, deep in the tse-tse fly country, under a group of acacias. Elephants had watered nearby the night before, by boring deep holes in the bed of a sand river, where their keen sense of smell had told them of hidden water. The place was covered with elephant pad marks that extended for some miles on the backtrack as well.

In spite of the long day, John's old cook soon had a fine dinner ready by the time the boys had all the tents up. To be served a three-course dinner after such a day of travel almost as soon as we landed in camp was something. We arose at 4 a.m. to find that a small bull and some cows and calves had watered close by during the night. These incredible beasts, weighing from four to over six tons, had been within 30 yards of our tents, yet we had heard no sound. We had found one 22-inch track of a big bull the evening before, but he had not been to the water. We drove back on the track a couple of miles and found his large, fresh tracks crossing the tracks of the day before.

With my .476 Westley Richards double rifle and John's old .416 Rigby, both loaded with solids, we took his track. He traveled east down an ancient elephant road for some distance, then fed off into the bush. His huge weight left hardly a trace on the hard, sun-baked ground. Both our trackers, Galu and Goyo, were expert elephant men, so we had little difficulty following him. However, fresh droppings from the bull showed that his food had been chewed well—a sure sign of a young bull. Since we were after an old trophy tusker, we decided against tracking him any farther and returned to the truck trail.

We crawled in the jeep and proceeded another two miles and came upon the tracks of two big bulls. The tracks measured 20 to 22 inches and were made during the night. We followed them back across our tracks of the early morning through an old dry-water pan and into very heavy bush. In spite of all I had heard about the terrible thornbush of Africa, I did not find it as hard to get through as the cactus of Mexico.

After some five miles, the two great bulls began to feed, and after another mile we found their huge droppings some seven or eight inches in diameter. The boys immediately pushed fin-

gers and toes into the balls to determine their age. Their eyes lighted up when they found the droppings still very warm. We knew we were slowly catching up with our great quarry. They had fed slowly along, from all indications, but the elephant's stride is so great that he can cover distances at an unbelievable speed. After traveling some six or seven miles into the bush, we could hear their stomachs rumbling, and we knew they had found shade from the hot sun.

The air movement was very erratic, first one way and then another. The boys would dribble fine dust from their fingers constantly to check and test the air movement. We had to shift directions frequently on account of wind changes. The breeze was so slight as to be hardly felt on our dripping-wet skin, but it was sufficient to carry our scent to the keen snorkel of an elephant.

We finally located the pair in very dense bush under an old baobab tree, and we started to sneak in when along strolled a big bull giraffe that looked right down our shirt collars. We could do nothing but freeze in our half-bent positions, which we maintained for half an hour as that son of the devil strolled aimlessly along, stopping to feed on the tops of various acacias and bushes. He finally went right over to the elephant and stopped there. We pulled back and sat down under the doubtful shade of a thick thornbush for half an hour and waited. Finally, little Galu worked in and motioned us forward as the giraffe left the scene.

The wind had changed, making it necessary for us to circle around to the left before we made our approach. The bush here was more open, so we advanced a careful step at a time. Galu reached the cover of a small bush, then John made it to him without disturbing the two great beasts, now in plain sight only 40 yards away. Then I carefully and very slowly moved one foot forward at a time, stepping exactly in John's and Galu's tracks and being careful not to crush any dried leaves or snap a twig, until I also had reached the slight cover. The two bulls were both very big elephants, the largest I had ever seen. Both were very old, probably 70 to 100 years of age. They stood head-to-tail, their great ears slowly fanning back and forth as they attempted to catch the slightest sound. Occasionally the tail of one would twitch at a fly. We could hear the rumble of their great stomachs and intestines. There was little cover and neither bull was turned right for a good heart shot. The heart and lungs of an elephant are located differently from those in other animals: the heart is forward, about 18 inches above the bottom of the chest, right between the two front legs; and the lungs are higher and extend a little farther to the rear than the back edge of the ear.

The bull that stood quartering toward us had the tip of the left tusk broken off and his right tusk was broken in the middle. The rest of the tusks looked quite black from the gum of bark he had peeled from trees. He was immediately eliminated as far as a trophy was concerned.

The bull quartering away from us was a



beauty, fully 11 feet tall. A huge tusk, a full four or five feet out from the bull's lip, extended past the trunk. It looked very heavy and carried its weight nearly to the tip where it ended in a short, heavy point. I figured its weight at 90 to 100 pounds. I started to move forward alone to the screen of another bush some ten yards closer in order to try a heart shot, but John restrained me. He had not seen the other tusk yet and wanted to wait. So there we sat, with the sweat running down our backs and the tee-tee doing their damndest to make life miserable. The bulls were at peace with the world and apparently dozing or asleep, yet those great ears constantly fanned slowly back and forth, listening for the slightest sound, and occasionally a trunk would curl up and test the faint breeze. The old boy with the huge tusk never raised his snorked high enough for us to get a look at his left tusk. His trunk extended down to within a few inches of the ground and hopelessly covered our view—so we waited and sweated.

Suddenly, as if at a given signal, the big bulls started moving and simply swapped positions. I moved off my safety and was getting set to go forward a few feet and take the big bull as he came around, for a heart shot, when suddenly my heart almost stopped beating. There was no tusk at all on the left side!

We waited until both bulls had again settled into position for another snooze. I could see the old boy's left eye looking right at us, but because we never moved he apparently did not see us. John motioned for me to backtrack, which I did as carefully as ever I moved a foot in my life. I made it back to the boys safely, then John repeated my performance and finally little Galu retreated. We started the long trek back to camp by the straightest line the boys could lay out.

I had been up against two very big bulls and only fate had ordained that they were both left-hand elephants and not trophies. I had not been nervous in the least, so I knew when I did get my chance that I would be able to shoot to kill. It was a great experience, the greatest in a lifetime of big-game hunting.

A large number of elephants roamed that section of the African bush, and we had to be constantly on the alert, for one never knows when

he will run into a wounded elephant. A week before our arrival, a man had been killed a few miles west of our camp. Two local hunters from Manyoni, trying to fill their elephant licenses, had run into a wounded cow that charged instantly. One hunter had a .375 Magnum and he emptied its magazine into the cow with little effect. The other hunter had a good .470 double rifle, but he made his first shot too quickly and hit a tree before the cow had cleared the bush. Then he failed to score with the second barrel, and the cow was on him. She knelt down on his chest as his partner reloaded and continued to hammer her. Then the cow got up and went off a short distance and died. The hunter died on the way to the hospital.

The intelligence and sagacity of the elephant is almost beyond human comprehension. A. C. Robbie, who owns a big farm out of Manyoni and also hunts for elephants and rhinos near and on his farm each year, told us of one experience he had. At the lower end of his farm is a famous elephant waterhole where he and the game department have built a platform high in a huge tree so interested people can sit and photograph wild elephants in safety. (Tanganyika laws prohibit anyone from shooting within 500 yards of any waterhole.) Robbie circled the waterhole early one morning to see if he could pick up a big bull track and follow him out to where he had shaded up for the day—the usual procedure in elephant hunting. Robbie had circled the lower end of the waterhole, jumped the small creek below and gained the timber. He looked around and saw a troop of about 50 elephants coming up the tiny creek toward the waterhole for their morning drink and bath. An old cow with a young calf was in the lead, and the little fellow persisted in staying behind. The old lady wanted him in front, where she could watch him, so she reached around with her trunk, pulled him out in front and gave the toto a spanking with her trunk.

The toto was mad and ran ahead of the old lady with his ears laid back. However, when he came to where Robbie had crossed he stopped stone-still, his big ears shot out and he shoved his little trunk down in one of Robbie's tracks. Grabbing a trunkful of the man-tainted sand, toto ran back to his mother and held it up to

the end of her trunk. Instantly she stopped, her great ears swung out and she signaled to the troop, which immediately reversed into a hard run back down the creek and into the bush out of sight.

Elephants live to great age, and the trophy bulls with tusks from seven to ten feet or more in length are usually from 80 years of age upward. No one knows just how long the African elephant lives, but it may be well past the age of the Indian elephant. Old trophy bulls are very wise and usually have from one to three younger askari bulls with them to sound the alarm in case of approaching danger. Two White Hunters told me of actually witnessing these askari bulls feeding and helping a wounded old bull along for days. They usually feed and travel downwind from the old bull where they can catch the first sign of danger and warn him. My friend Boyd Williams was stalking a fine big bull in Tanganyika two years ago, when a small askari bull charged him at close range. Boyd had no choice but to kill the bull, even though he carried small ivory. The old boy of course escaped. This is just another reason why hunting the great bull elephant is so interesting.

We arose at 4 a.m. the day after our episode with the one-tusked bull and took off in the jeep for a native village some 20 miles away through a maze of dried elephant tracks. The track was just wide enough for the jeep in many places and crooked as a hound's hind leg. Combine this with the fact that John Lawrence races cars for a hobby and habitually drove the jeep very fast over the rough ground, and you can well imagine my feelings as we flew around the corners in the light of the headlamps. I wondered what would happen if we had run into a herd of elephants or a rhino.

We had driven in a wide circle west from camp. We hiked along at a fast pace for an hour or so, then turned back toward the trail we had used coming out and to the sand river. Finally, by the time the sun was well up and hotter than the hinges of Hades, we reached another elephant waterhole, or what passed for a waterhole. The huge beasts had dug down some four feet with feet and tusks, then had bored holes on-plant to water with their trunks. An elephant has a storage tank for reserve water and

(Left to Right) Native tracker, Songi, the author, Goyo and Galu. The bull went 11 feet tall at the shoulders and his front feet measured 20½ inches.



waters only about once every three days, storing enough to last him for the long trek back into the bush. The older the bull, the farther from water he will go before daylight.

The boys circled and picked up the tracks of four bulls heading east; three big bulls, one of them making 22-inch tracks, and one small one. The dry thornbush and leafless acacias offered very little shade as we took up the tracks. When the boys would lose the tracks on the flint hard ground, John or I would pick them up. When we lost the tracks, some of the boys would pick them up, so that we continued at as fast a pace as possible. The troop never stopped to feed and no droppings appeared. We covered a good ten miles from the waterhole by noon and crossed our jeep trail. Here John dropped a native and told him to return to camp and bring back the big truck with water. John knew we would need both transportation and water when we got back out to the trail. We tracked the bulls for another mile before they stopped to feed. Here, one great bull had pushed over a big tree, his huge pads pushing a foot or more into the sand as he had strained with all his strength to uproot the big tree. The elephants had fed on its top branches, then had gone on again, seemingly trying to get as far from that telltale waterhole as possible before stopping. By 2 p.m. I had blistered the balls of both my feet.

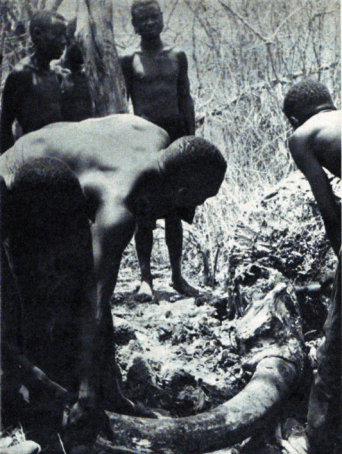
The tracks then mixed with those of a big herd of cows and calves. The latter had crossed after the bulls, obliterating the faint tracks they made. John told me to sit down with Goyo and rest, while he, Galu and the native guide worked on down into the herd of cows and tried to locate the bulls. We could hear the cows feeding, then shortly after John and the two trackers had gone we heard cows trumpeting shrilly. My arm hurt until I could not sit still, and there was practically no shade from the great heat of the sun. I walked around that old baobab, swinging my arm and trying to get some life in my numb fingers. We heard the cows trumpet four times, and after an hour or so the native tracker came back and asked, "Piga tembo, Buana?" I immediately followed the native through the dense bush, being very careful not to make noise. It was very thick stuff and we had to twist and crawl under thorn-covered limbs that hung in every direction.

John later told me that he and the boys had worked through the cows and seen nothing of the four bulls. As they headed back to us, John heard the thump of a tusk against a tree bole. All listened, and when they heard it a second time they began a stalk toward the noise. They found four bulls asleep. Three askari bulls were turned head-to-tail. Two were very large but young, with small ivory; the other chap was younger and smaller. A big bull stood some seven yards to their right facing into the wind.

When we approached John, I asked him if this was another left-hand elephant. He assured me this one had both tusks and looked like a 75- to 80-pounder. We were sitting about 100 yards from the elephant. I shoved my safety ahead on the .476 Westley and we slipped up as quietly as mice to within 40 yards. The old bull stood quartering, very slightly away from me, and I could see one long, heavy tusk projecting out of the lip a good four feet. John said he and Galu had both worked down as near as possible, and as far as the wind would allow them, and they could see the curve of the other tusk going out and up behind the huge trunk. He was a very old and heavily built bull. His tail had very few hairs left, indicating extreme old age. His big right ear slowly fanned back and forth to catch any sound; his three askari guards were also listening.

Well knowing that if I gave him a brain shot the three askari would likely charge us, I held my lips to John's ear and asked him a three-word question: "The heart shot?" He nodded assent. Sizing up the huge chest cavity, I saw the crease behind the right foreleg was too far for-





ward, but the left front leg lined up exactly with the center of the chest where the heart had to be. I eased the small bead sight until it touched the bottom of the chest. Remembering the great slope of an elephant's chest, I slowly raised the sights a full two feet higher for a shot into the top of the heart. I squeezed my whole right hand with its numb fingers until the cordite flash lifted the big rifle in recoil. Instantly pandemonium broke loose. The old bull threw out his trunk and took off at a 30 mph run, with the three askari bulls following. I pulled the big rifle down out of recoil, swung with the running bull and gave him the second barrel in the heart, but it entered a little farther to the rear.

At once little Galu and John set out in a hard run after the bulls. I opened the .476, caught the empties off the ejectors and dropped them into my pocket. Goyo shoved two more solids into the chambers and slapped me on the back.

We had hardly started after John and Galu when we heard the old bull go down with a mighty crash. When we arrived he was raising his head and throwing back his trunk. I fed him a brain shot to end his struggling as quickly as possible. John then told me only my first shot was necessary, for Galu and Goyo had seen the dust fly from the impact of the 520-grain solid and Galu told him it was placed just right.

When we reached the trail we found the native driver with the truck and a big canvas bag of cool water. I believe I drank a gallon before I quit and could feel my tissues soaking it up at each swallow. John said he and some of the boys would return the next day to take some pictures, cut out the ivory and front feet and bring them out. I told him I was going along, if I had to crawl all the way. John sent the truck driver and couple of the boys to pick up the natives who wanted to share the elephant meat. A truck loaded with natives arrived in camp late

that night. Where or how they slept I'll never know, but at daylight they were ready to go.

This proved to be a terribly hot day also, but Galu supervised the job of cutting out the ivory until it got to the critical stage; then the little tracker would take over and do the delicate chopping without marring the ivory. By 2 o'clock we had the tusks out and cleaned. We had carried a lot of water with us this day but it was all used when we turned the wild nigwogs loose on the elephant. I had never seen such a sight. They removed the hide in huge strips and immediately started cutting out large chunks of meat. The women hid all around us in the bush, roasting the meat with small fires, while they cut pieces of it in long strips for hanging over the thornbush to dry into biltong. One native ran a spear down into the paunch to let the gas escape. The natives had a very curious pipe that they all took a pull on before commencing work. Soon they were inside the elephant cutting out any fat they could find around the kidneys.

As near as I could measure, my elephant went 11 feet tall at the shoulders and his front feet still measured 20½ inches after drying a month. Rowland Ward records one elephant of 22 inches and one of 21 inches and several of 20½ inches. Heavy ivory does not always grow on the largest elephant. Russell Douglas showed me photos of an elephant with 18-inch pads that went well over 100 pounds of ivory on one side. John Hunter also records one 18-inch track that produced 164 pounds for the best tusk and 146 pounds for the lighter one. The larger the droppings, the larger the elephant, and if the food has not been well chewed it indicates old age and bad teeth.

For the top sport of all big-game hunting, I'll take the elephant and would like to go again with John Lawrence and those little trackers.