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MY CAMP IN THE GWANDA.

BIG-GAME SHOOTING IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE GWANDA DISTRICT OF MATABELELAND.

BY WM. W. VAN NESS, M.E., F.R.G.S.



BIG game is plentiful in many districts of Matabeleland. One of these is known as the Gwanda, where, in the vicinity of the Umzingwane River, are to be found most of the big game of South Africa. This district lies about seventy-five miles southeast of Bulawayo, and has an altitude of about 3,000 feet above the sea level; is well wooded, and has a very attractive appearance. The road run-

ning to it is a fairly good one, and is at present being put into thorough repair.*

The manner in which these roads have grown and established themselves is the essence of simplicity. They were originally native footpaths formed by Kaffirs making their journeys from kraal to kraal. Owing to their custom of walking single file, a narrow footpath was the result. It was found by those who started to open up the country most convenient to follow these footpaths. As the way commenced to be traversed by wagons it broadened

*NOTE.—This has since been done, the coach journey from Bulawayo to Manzi M'yania being fourteen hours only.

until it became a regular transport riding road, with, however, many twistings and turnings, resulting from the original pedestrians walking around clumps and shrub-wood instead of cutting a way through them; this tortuosity the broader wagon road has now accentuated.

I found the best means of traveling over these roads was in a spring-seated buckboard drawn by four horses or six mules. This conveyance, which was made by an American manufacturer, has

from sunrise to eight or nine in the morning, and from four o'clock to sunset in the afternoon. If the moon was bright we often made one trek of two hours by moonlight. In this way we covered from twenty-four to thirty-six miles a day.

The stores are situated about every twelve to fifteen miles along the road. They are on the whole very comfortable and consist of a series of huts built on the Kaffir principle. Round poles, about four inches in diameter, are inserted in the ground close to each



NICHOLSON'S PROSPECTING CAMP IN THE GWANDA BELT.

many points of advantage over the Cape carts commonly used. It is light, strongly built, practically uncapsizable, carries a very large load, and yet leaves the passengers comfortable seating room.

The bicycle is also a means of conveyance which has become very popular. Probably there are more bicycles in Bulawayo, in proportion to its population, than in any other town either at home or on the continent. The wheel is eminently suited for traversing the country, and owing to the prevalence of horse-sickness, it is being found in many cases to be preferable to a horse.

Having forwarded from Bulawayo some time previous to our leaving, forage for the return journey, and being fully loaded up with sufficient grain for the outward, we started in the morning in a buckboard, with four horses, to make our first trek, a distance of about fifteen miles. It being too hot to travel with the horses during the heat of the day, rests were taken at the stores during midday. Our treks were usually made

other, and forming either a circular or square inclosure, according to the wishes of the builder. These are then plastered over with mud, and a high-pitched thatched roof, thrown over all, makes the hut complete. Though extremely crude, they possess the great advantage of being always cool, and for this reason are much preferred to those built of corrugated iron, which, during the heat of the day, become insufferably hot.

Most of the rivers and spruits or small streams passed on the road had ceased to flow, and had only small pools of water lying in them here and there, a state of matters not to be wondered at when it is remembered that, being just at the close of the dry season, there had been no rain for over seven months. In most streams, however, there is usually a flow of water over the bed-rock underneath the sand, and water can be had by digging a hole about a foot deep. During the rainy season, however, these rivers rise very quickly, and are soon in full flood and frequently impassable.



1. CROSSING RIVER LOMENI ON GWANDA ROAD.
3. MATABELLE WOMEN CARRYING WATER.

5. AFTER THE MORNING'S SHOOT.

2. THE BUCKBOARD.
4. SPIRO'S WAYSIDE-HOTEL ON GWANDA ROAD.



WATERING HORSES—UMZINGWANE RIVER.

About one mile northeast of M'kala's kraal are several gold-mining properties of the Sneddon concessions, on which we found development work being busily pushed forward by their mining contractor, Pat Byrne. These, so far as they had been opened up, were giving every encouragement for a fuller development. Pat was quite a character in his way, and a keen sportsman. His sporting proclivities did not lie dormant, and were wider than Africa, as was evinced by the first question with which he greeted us, "Has Galteemore won the St. Leger?"

From this point onwards the scenery proved very picturesque, the grass being greener and the foliage of the trees much fuller than in the earlier part of the journey, while the rugged and castellated appearance of many of the kopjes formed an admirable background, presenting to the eye a complete and evenly-balanced picture. On most of the kopjes are to be found strikingly poised stones, These are sometimes standing erect, at other times lying on their side, and in all cases rest on an infinitely small base, giving one the impression that all that is needed to send them toppling over is simply a good strong push or a heavy gale of wind. Appearances, however, are at times deceptive, and in their case truly so; a great deal more than muscular effort

being necessary to dislodge them from their position.

Leaving the main road at the Geelong, we proceeded across the veldt to the banks of the Umzingwane River in the vicinity of the Nicholson Reef; and selecting a shady situation under some trees, and at a point where there was a sufficiently large pool of water for watering the horses, struck camp. In a short time everything was fixed up and a strong scherm formed for the horses, so as to protect them from lions or other wild animals which might be prowling around, after which a cursory inspection of the neighborhood was made, and the different spoors of the animals which had been coming down to the river to drink, were mentally noted.

We had with us a Matabele hunter, an old favorite of Selous', and who was on that account commonly called Jim Selous. He stood six feet two inches high, and proved quite a marvelous fellow, and possessed of great running and walking powers. During one part of the journey he kept running alongside of the trap for twelve miles, keeping up a conversation all the time with his little pickaninny, who was securely seated on the top of the baggage packed at the back; and at its close he showed no signs of overheating, with the exception of a little perspiration below his chin. His average daily walks would cover a dis-

tance of twenty-five miles, which being made under a broiling sun, showed the possession of great staying powers.

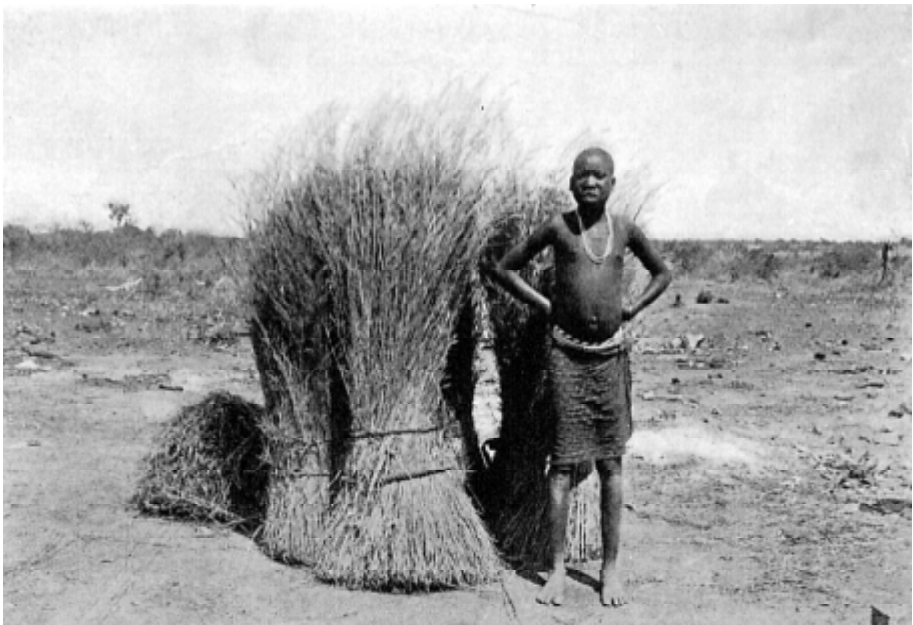
He was a splendid stalker, too, and being able to get very close to his quarry, rarely missed his shot. The natives in speaking of his shooting powers put it very succinctly, saying, "Give Jim one cartridge, he brings back one buck; give Jim two cartridges, he brings back two buck." His graphic descriptions at night around the camp-fire, of how he had brought down his prey, were quite a treat to listen to. Probably one of his best was one in which he described his encounter with a wild pig or boar, indicating in pantomime his sighting of the animal, his stalking it, and then the shot; next came a splendid imitation of the grunting of the boar as it turned at bay, followed by a lowering of the tusks and a headlong charge, after which came another shot, and with a short run it fell to rise no more. As a piece of acting it could hardly be surpassed, and rendered a translation from the Matabele language, in which the description was given, almost unnecessary.

Amongst the game we came across in this neighborhood, were the lion, burchell zebra, tsessebi, or bastard hartebeest, roan antelope, gnu, or wildebeest, giraffe, wild boar (wart hog), sable antelope, koodoos and water-buck. We also

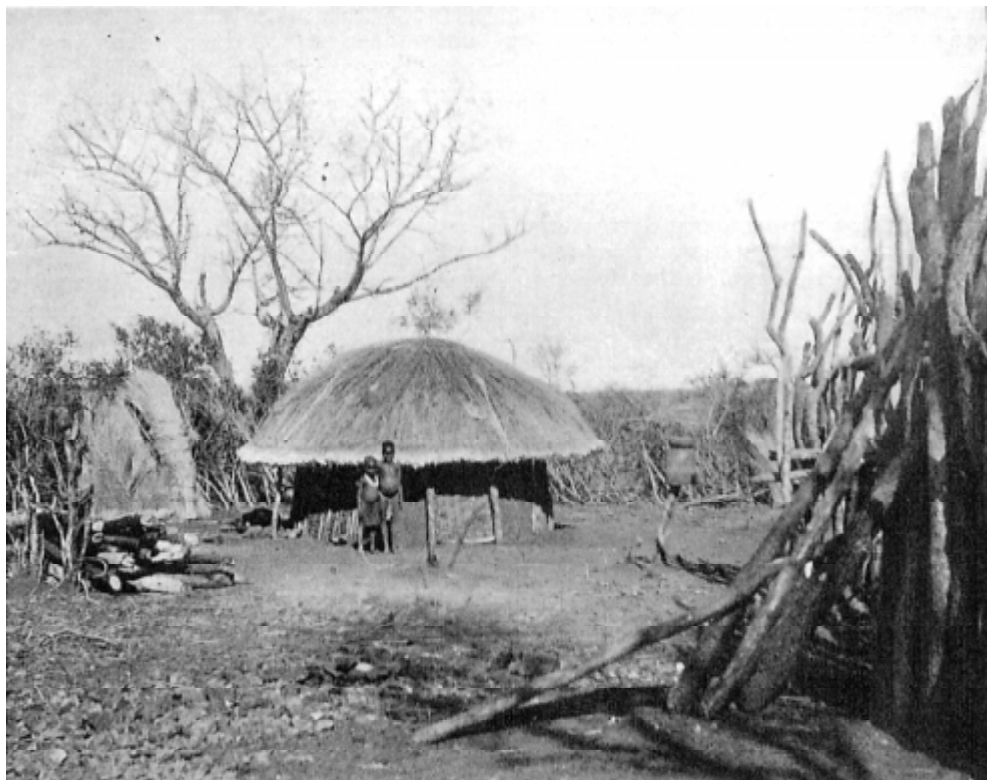
came across some elephant spoor, but did not see any of them. Amongst the smaller game were the duiker, steinbuck, and impala, or rooibuck. The antelopes require to be approached with great caution when wounded, as they possess great vitality and are in the habit of charging their assailant viciously when brought to bay.

We followed one troop in which three were wounded. On being followed up some distance one lay down and seemed to all appearances dying. However, on advancing to give it a *coup de grace* it suddenly sprang to its feet and charged, leaving me barely time to swing into the nearest tree. After butting vigorously at the tree it turned and made off into the thick bush; and as I had no cartridges left, there was nothing to do but to return to camp and trust to being able to follow it up later in the day.

Jim happening to be in camp, his powers for spooring were requisitioned and put to the test. His quickness of observation was surprising; he was able to tell that the animal had been shot in the leg, and which leg, by the twist which it had given its spoor whenever it put its foot to the ground, and also, by the blood-marks on the tall grass, the height at which it had been wounded. These marks were only at rare intervals and so could not be used for fol-



MATABELE GIRL, WITH GRASS FOR THATCHING HUTS.



NATIVE HUT IN M'KALA'S KRAAL.



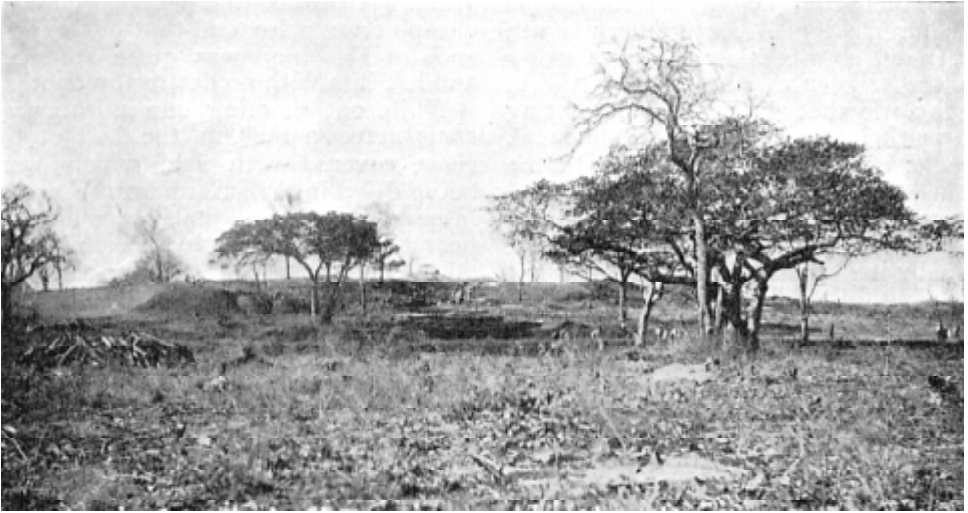
THE BURCHELL ZEBRA.

lowing the trail, which had to be done by means of the footprints only. These he followed up, picking them out from a large number of others without any apparent difficulty, tracking the antelope round trees, through grass and across open glades, until at last it was sighted standing under some trees about two and a half miles from where it had been first wounded. Another shot brought it down.

After covering it with branches, to prevent the assvovels (vultures) and

one, being about the size of a horse of fourteen and one-half hands high, and was the more valuable on account of its belonging to a species of antelope which is now becoming very rare and will probably in a short time be extinct.

The study of spoor and the ability with which natives are able to follow up game, once they, so to speak, get on the scent, are very interesting. A close study of the footprint to a practised eye-reveals not only what animal has passed but also the approximate time which



ON THE GEELONG MINE

wild animals from attacking it, and starting to return, it was found that Jim was dragging a big, heavy log after him, the reason for which was not at first evident. His only answer to inquiries was, "Wait a bit." The meaning of the manœuvre was soon clear. Owing to the great want of distinctive landmarks it is very difficult to return to the same place unless some special means are taken to mark the way to the location. Sometimes the trees are blazed, and a small white piece of cotton or other material is fastened to an outstanding branch of some of the most prominent trees to serve as a guide in re-directing one to the spot. Jim's plan, however, was perhaps the better one, as it left a heavy, unmistakable trail behind it to a point on the river's bank where it was easily picked up and followed next morning by the trap sent to bring the carcass in.

The roan proved to be a very large

has since elapsed. Old spoor can soon be told by its having had "the wind on it," which covers it slightly over with a film of dust or sand, and a few pieces of withered leaves; while in very old spoor, although the impression may still remain quite distinct, the upper edges lose their sharpness and slightly crumble away. The natives, accustomed to read those signs from their childhood, follow them almost instinctively, and are able to do so at a trot, running along with their heads down, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but noticing, even in their rapid transit, every little indication which can serve as a clue to guide them in their search. In order to fully appreciate the marvelous skill which they thus display, one only requires to try to do likewise, when it will be found in many cases no easy matter to follow up the trail at even a slow speed.

Of all animals the lion is the most

dangerous to encounter, on which account as well as for the sake of its remarkably handsome skin, it is considered the blue ribbon of big-game hunters. Lions are at present very numerous and very daring. Shortly before our arrival they had attacked and carried off three donkeys in one of the mining camps in our vicinity, while later on one of the horses at the Geelong Pumping Station was made away with. As a lion when unable to finish his prey at one meal, always returns to it the following evening, it was determined to make this latter depredator forfeit his life for his theft. A trap gun was set, arranged by attaching a piece of string to the trigger of an ordinary rifle in such a way that the lion, in attempting to reach its anticipated evening meal, would, by coming in contact with the connection, cause the rifle to go off, and so receive the contents of the barrel. While the trap gun rarely kills its game, usually it wounds sufficiently to permit its being followed up. In due time the gun went off, and likewise the lion, but a strong party followed it up, and overtaking it gave it its death-wound as it turned round at bay and with a defiant roar faced its pursuers. The skin proved to be a very fine one, with a very shaggy mane, and a tip-to-tip measurement of eleven feet five inches. The flesh was handed over to the natives, who seemed very fond of it, though it cannot be said to have a very appetizing look. They, however, have an idea that the eating it endows them with a leonine strength, which may account for the special preference with which they regard it.

Nothing is more deceptive in the clear atmosphere of this country than judging distances, and one unaccustomed to it is very apt to fancy that what are really distant objects are comparatively close at hand. Mistakes of this kind sometimes lead to uncomfortable results, of which my companion, Mr. Adamson, had full experience. He, while out shooting shortly after our arrival, wandered too far from camp, and was forced to spend the night on the veldt, not a very pleasant experience, especially considering that we were in a lion country. However, he took the usual precaution of camping under a large tree, to climb in case of emergency, and of building a big fire. I was very uneasy about him all night; so just before daybreak we

started in search of him, and fortunately picked up his spoor about three miles from camp. I soon found where he had spent the night, and shortly afterwards overtook him. He could barely speak, his eyes were sunken and crossed and he was quite deaf, as he had been without water for about twenty-four hours, a great deal of this time being spent in walking in the broiling hot sun. I showed him to the nearest point to strike water, where he quenched his craving thirst. As he afterwards said, at the time I overtook him he was beginning to think that water would be cheap at any price, and that one experience of this kind was quite sufficient and left him with no desire for another.

While out shooting one morning we came across a rock, in the bed of the river, covered with fish, which were being dried in the sun under the superintendence of three natives. The appearance of the water in its vicinity had all the indications of dynamite having been used, as the fish were all floating on the top. On enquiry, however, we found that the method of procedure was to mix the juice of the cactus tree with the water, which had the effect of stupefying the fish, causing them to come to the surface, where they were easily secured by hand. The fish were about the size of whiting, and as we bartered for them some of the meat of the game that had been killed, we had an opportunity of tasting them, and found them excellent, though very full of small bones.

Many and varied are the different species of birds which are to be found along the banks of the river, or further afield amongst the forest trees. A great variety of bright-plumaged kingfishers were there, floating over the small pools, watching with keen eye for the fish rising to the surface, and then pouncing downwards like an arrow to seize the hapless victims. There were also the golden-crested cranes, water duck, heron, guinea-fowl, pheasant, and further inland the ostrich. Amongst the more interesting small birds is the go-away bird, so called from the strong resemblance which its peculiar cry bears to that of an irritable old woman saying, "Go away." It proves very annoying to the sportsman, as its cry warns the game that someone is approaching, and frequently drives them away. Another

small but interesting bird is that known as the honey bird, which chirrups invitingly and tries to induce the listener to follow it. If followed it usually either leads one to a hive of wild honey, or, what is not so sweet, brings its follower face to face with a lion or serpent. I have followed these birds nine times. They brought me five times to a hive of honey, twice to hives that had already been robbed, and twice to snakes—one was a huge python and the other a puff adder. Owing to the uncertainty of what it may bring one to, it requires naturally to be followed cautiously.

The prettiest bird is the African jay, which has a beautiful plumage, and is seen at its best when glistening in the sun's rays. Vultures are very plentiful, and we saw several Lo-Ben eagles with their brilliant red beaks and feet, and velvety black plumage, as well as several white-hooded fish eagles.

Of all the birds, however, the most peculiar was one which we saw one morning on our return journey. This bird, while on the wing, had the wavering flutter of an exceptionally large butterfly. The body is drab and white speckled, about the size of a thrush, and with a head resembling that of a night hawk, while the wings are larger than those of a pheasant and most peculiarly formed, with a long white feather from the point of each wing, running straight back parallel with the body. This feather must be at least eighteen inches in length. The tail is long and mixed with white feathers, which come about flush with the long feathers on the ends of the wings. There is as yet no specimen of it in the London Zoo, nor have I seen any description of it in any ornithological work. It always lights on the ground, is an exceptionally fast runner, and inhabits the little caverns and holes in the rocks. It seldom makes its appearance until near night-fall. This is only the second time that I have seen the bird during over three years' travel in this country.

The insect life is full of interest, many of them being so like inanimate objects as to escape detection. Amongst these imitators the two most wonderful we came across were one which to all appearance was simply a withered leaf, and another which seemed like a small twig off some tree. Both these, when looked into, were endowed with life,

though what use they served, it was difficult to make out. Their imitation of the objects which they represented was so thorough as to make it next to impossible to detect them unless by accident, or the eye happening to rest on them while they were in motion.

During the trip I experimented with several types of .303 bullets, viz.: the solid, the hollow-point, soft-nosed, and Jeffery split. The solid bullet is not of much use unless in the case of a hind shot, so that the bullet can traverse the whole length of the animal, when it proves very effective; and several of them should always be carried in your belt in case of an opportunity for this shot arising. They are also useful for shooting guinea fowl and paauw (bustard). The soft-nosed did good work with the smaller buck; but with larger game, I found that the nickel part of the bullet sheared off the expanding soft lead, so that when the bullet stopped it was very little larger than when it entered, while small chips of lead were found in the wound along the course of the bullet. For large game the hollow-point and Jeffery split bullet seemed by far the best, preventing the animal from running, save in very few cases, over a hundred yards, when shot in a vital place.

A rather strange fact seems to be that if the first shot should not be in a vital spot, then the animal is able to withstand any following shot in a vital part without appearing to be very much affected by it. It would appear as if having been able to withstand the first shock it is in consequence better able to endure succeeding shocks even though much more severe than the first. There is, therefore, every necessity for taking care that the first shot is sent home in the proper quarter, otherwise a good deal of trouble will be involved in bringing the animal to book.

I found the best sporting rifle is a .303 Lee-Metford with Martini action, having an ivory-tipped Beach-Lyman foresight and a dull black oxidized hind-sight, with a fairly wide notch. The ivory-tipped sight is a great advantage, as it does not reflect the light and shows up well against the black background afforded by the skin of the game, enabling them to be covered much more quickly, a fact which makes it specially adapted for running shots.

Horse sickness, while at all times a terrible plague, can, to a certain extent, be guarded against by being very careful with the animals. They should be walked about after coming in from a run, so as to cool them gradually, and then at night they should be blanketed to prevent them getting chilled; it is also very dangerous to allow them to eat the grass when the dew is on it, which is usually before eleven o'clock A. M. or after four o'clock P. M. When let out to grass it is usual to knee-halter them, so as to prevent them from traveling too far or bolting in case of a sudden start. As once a horse disappears on the veldt it may almost be given up as lost.

Just before preparing to return, several wagons passed us laden with grain, drawn by spans of thirty-two oxen in each. The oxen are most important and serviceable draft animals in Africa, being able to take heavy loads and travel at a fair pace, their food consisting exclusively of the grass they pick up along the road. These wagons were from the Impotane district, a district full of castellated kopjes, and inhabited wholly by a very large native population. Traders

visit these hills, and in exchange for limbo, beads, blankets, etc., receive large quantities of grain, which they in their turn sell to the mines for feeding the native labor. Donkeys are largely used for the transport of goods, being able by means of pack saddles to carry loads up to 150 pounds each. They go slowly, but do not require much attention, feeding on the veldt at night, and being found when wanted by means of a bell tied round their neck. They are often used by prospectors for carrying their provisions and other necessaries.

Getting everything packed up, and having our buckboard loaded with over twelve hundred pounds, including several hundred pounds of dried venison (biltong), which we were able to leave as an acceptable gift at the different mining camps along the route, but retaining the heads and horns, we set out on our return journey. Being further advanced in the summer, the country was looking even greener and consequently prettier than when we came down, most of the trees being in full foliage and with quite a fresh look about them. The most useful tree, one that is fairly plentiful in this district, is

known as mopani, which has been found to be able to withstand the destructive attacks of the white ant and borer, and therefore especially adapted for mining purposes. It is very hard, and takes a good polish.

As the mopani is the most useful, so is the "yaach am beeche" the most annoying. It belongs to the thorn species, and has peculiarly hook-shaped points, which cut and tear the hands and garments of any one who may be so unfortunate as to get into their clutches. The translation of the name is "wait a bit," and the

name is certainly most appropriate, as once caught by this bush it takes a good deal of time and patience to get rid of it, for often just when finishing removing one branch and congratulating yourself on getting free you find yourself entangled with another.

Those on horseback have generally the worst of it, as the horse does not usually wait a bit or cannot be pulled up as quick as is necessary, so that very often the rider leaves his hat hanging in the tree and also the greater part of his shirt. The disappearance of

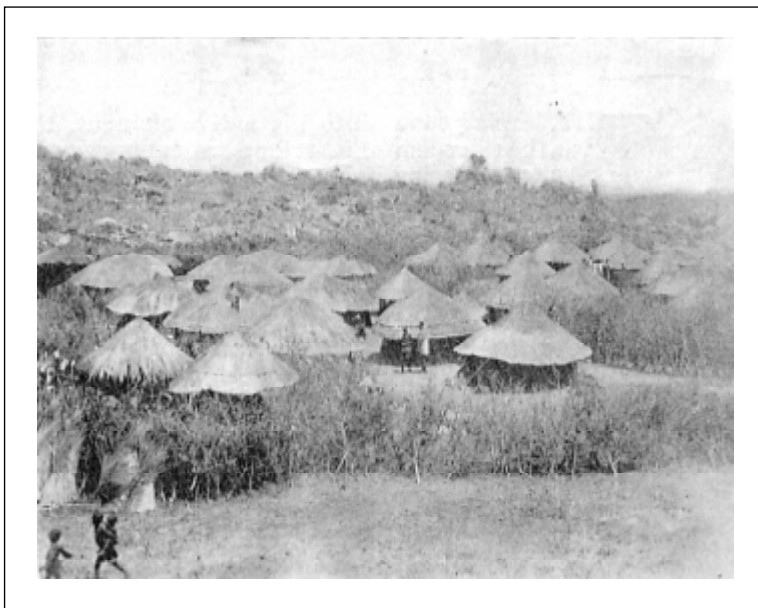


the cactus tree.

this affectionate bush tree from the veldt would greatly rejoice the hearts of all those who have in any way had the misfortune to make its acquaintance.

On rearriving at Manzi-M'yania, we paid a visit to the Sabiwa Reef, of the Rice-Hamilton Exploration Syndicate, near Vubucheque Peak, which is one of the finest reefs in the country. Resuming our journey we drove in the early morning between the Isindi Kopjes, where we saw many large baboons, which walked leisurely away at our approach, while numerous wagons laden with mealies and other product from Pietersburg were passed wending their

these, however, were showing signs of having the rinderpest, one of the most deadly cattle plagues which have ever visited Africa. Wherever this disease, which consists principally in a wasting away of the intestines, has broken out the loss of cattle has been appalling. As practically all transport work was done by means of oxen their almost total elimination has proved a terrible drawback to the country at large, as well as to individual owners. Its far-reaching effects will probably continue to be felt for some years to come. In spite of all the precautions which are being taken and the inoculating reme-



A MATABELE KRAAL.

way slowly to Bulawayo. Some of the wagons carried fowls with them. These, whenever the wagons outspanned, were let out of their coops and allowed to pick for themselves. On again inspanning, the driver gave his whip a crack and immediately the fowls all came running and of their own accord reentered their temporary basket habitation, and the wagon resumed its journey. It is just the kind of arrangement which an Irishman would describe as "moighty convanient."

We also passed several herds of oxen being driven to town for sale. Some of

dies adopted, the general feeling is that this is as yet an incurable disease.

The big game has practically not been affected by this disease, with the exception of the buffalo and koodoo, which died in large numbers. The disease is gradually dying out in Matabeleland, and we hope to shortly be entirely free from it.

At several points were observable grass fires. The grass grows very tall, in some places as tall as a man on horseback, and in the dry season is often set on fire. Sometimes it is lit for the purpose of removing the old and allowing

the new grass to come forward; in other cases prospectors set it on fire in order to be able to search for the reef, while in some cases it is set on fire for mischief. In any case the blaze is a very pretty sight, and can be seen a long way off; but if not carefully guarded is sometimes apt to do more damage than good, on which account efforts are being made to put a stop to the practice, unless in cases where there is a sufficient reason for its being resorted to.

Passing through the Matoppo Hills, the great stronghold of the Matabeles, which is at many points impregnable,

and crossing the Lomeni River drift, where the scenery proved exceptionally pretty, we were once more re-entering Bulawnyo, well satisfied with our trip and able to look back with pleasure upon many little incidents attending it, and also feeling as we found ourselves once more in touch with the partially forgotten outside world, that there are few better ways of enjoying life than by spending part of it away from the artificialities of ordinary civilization and among the many interesting animals, birds, insects and the native life with which Matabeleland abounds.

ROD FISHING FOR THE LEAPING TUNA.

BY S. J. MATHES.



THE leaping tuna is the tiger-fish of the Pacific Coast, the king of the mackerel family, the largest and most active of its kind, attaining a weight of several hundred pounds. It is a veritable demon in point of ferocity and a most accomplished athlete and acrobat. The tuna usually takes its prey on the bound, as does the tiger, and the tuna fisher must have his nerve with him

when the great fish comes leaping after his bait, or else his first impulse will be to drop the rod and leap overboard for safety. The tuna is only caught in trolling, and a steam launch is generally used to tow the small boat from which the anglers fish.

It is a great sight to see a school of these big fish feeding. They leap out of the water ten or a dozen feet and descend on the hapless flying-fish, which is their approved diet, with a velocity which defies the lightning's flash for swiftness. Perchance the flying-fish, to escape his pursuer, has taken wing and is speeding through the air, as he vainly imagines, to safety. The tuna darts through the water with equal swiftness, and when the flying-fish drops again

into his native element, there he finds his relentless enemy waiting to give him a warm reception and take him in out of the wet.

The tuna has been known to leap over a boat, to tow a boat twenty to thirty miles, to fight the angler more than fourteen hours, and, after exhausting several men, at last, with frenzied energy, to break away and gain its freedom. The tuna seldom surrenders; it fights until its last gasp, and is frequently brought to gaff, after several hours of fierce fighting, stone dead, having fought with indomitable pluck until the last spark of life had departed. Tarpon fishers declare that a tuna has all the "steam" and vigor of three tarpons with all the tarpon's tricks and many of its own. To tell of some of the experiences of the sportsmen now on the island necessarily lays one open to the suspicion of telling "fish stories" of the rawest sort, even exceeding those of the Munchausen variety.

Up to four years ago it was deemed impossible to take tuna with rod and reel, and it was seldom they were taken even with a heavy hand-line, which was then the only means in use. One day, however, an angler, while fishing for yellowtail with a rod and light line, hooked a tuna, and after a struggle lasting several hours, in which his boat was towed a number of miles, he succeeded in bringing it to gaff; and then dawned a new era in fishing. The remarkable feat was heralded far and wide among