

# Lion Shooting in Somaliland

By Lord Delamere

Foremost among the great hunting authorities of the English speaking world is Lord Delamere. He is credited with being the heaviest killer in the party which bagged the record number of African lions some few years ago. In East Central Africa his prowess is familiar to every native. Not long ago a locality beset with lions sent a delegation four hundred miles to call on Lord Delamere to ask him to come and wipe out the destroyers of their cattle. In this article he vividly contrasts the theory and practice of lion hunting in the region which Ex-President Roosevelt will invade.

**T**HE best piece of lion tracking I ever saw lasted five full hours and is so memorable in several respects that I purpose to use it as an introduction to that general method of lion hunting.

Two of my men got badly mauled by a lion, so our camp had to stop where it was till they could be moved. After a time one of them was able to walk about with his arm in a sling, and the other was getting on well, so one night I decided to leave the big camp next day and go with two or three camels to some villages only a day's march away. Early the next morning Mahomed Noor, the headman, started with the camels. I stopped behind to get some breakfast. Just as we were going to follow, a camelman, who had gone up the river-bed close by to get some water, came running back to say that a lion had been down to drink at one of the shallow sand wells in the night. I started at once with Abdullah and two other trackers, telling my pony-boy to follow on as soon as he could get the pony saddled. When tracking, I have always found it the best plan to have the pony led some distance behind. The boy ought to have no difficulty in following the tracks of two or three men and a lion, and if the pony is kept close up, it is sure to stamp or blow its nose at the critical moment.

When we got to the well there was the spoor plain enough in the sand, but rather blurred by some rain which had fallen at daybreak. This made the tracking a little difficult after we left the river-bed, but when we had followed it slowly for some distance, we came to a place where the lion had lain down under a thick bush, evidently to shelter from the rain, as the spoor after this was quiet distinct on the top of the damp ground. This made us think we were in for a short track, for it must have been light when the lion went on again from here, and lions generally lie up shortly after the sun rises; but this day proved an exception, because it was cloudy and cool through the forenoon.

## Trailing the King of Beasts.

The spoor now led us along a sandy path, where we could follow it as fast as we could walk. When it turned off into the bush we quite expected to see the lion at any moment; but not a bit of it—he wandered about through endless clumps of mimosa and "irgin" bushes, as if he did not mean to lie up at all.

The track at last led us down a little sandy watercourse, which it followed for some distance. Up to this time we had had no real difficulty in making it out, but now came our first serious check. The nullah turned off along the side of a stony ridge, and, instead of going along it, the lion had turned up the hill. We had got the general direction of the lion had been going in, but this was no good to us, as on casting forward in the same line to the bottom of the other side of the ridge where there was some sandy ground, we could find no sign of his having passed in that direction. We spent some time hunting about, growing less hopeful as time went on. A man following a trail by sight certainly has an enormous advantage over a hound hunting it by nose, because time is of no particular object to him, and every direction can be tried in turn. After making out eastward we went back to the little water-course, and followed that down for some distance, hoping that the lion had turned down hill again; but here, too, we were disappointed, and gravitated back to where we had first lost the spoor. We knew that the lion had not gone straight on, nor had he turned back; he must have gone along the top of the ridge and then crossed into other stony hills where it was hopeless to try to track him.

Abdullah, who is never defeated, said there was a big river-bed further on in the direction in which the lion was going. It seemed a very slender chance, as he might have turned off anywhere in between, but it was the only one, so off we went. We were evidently in luck that day, for we had only gone about a quarter of a mile when we struck the spoor. The lion



seemed now to have made up his mind as to his direction, for he kept on straight down the middle of the river-bed. The sun had come out from behind the clouds, and in places the sand was very deep, so that we were not sorry when at last the track led into a little island of bush in the great flat sand. There was no doubt the lion was at home, for on casting round no sign was perceptible of a track coming out. The island, raised a little above the river-bed, was formed of a mass of thick-tangled bush and creepers clustered round a few big trees. The water coming down the river after heavy rain had washed it roughly into the form of a triangle, the apex of which pointed up the river. From this point the sides widened out to the other end, which was about thirty yards broad, the whole length being somewhat under a hundred yards.

## Driving the Lion to Bay.

The shape made it an easy place to drive, for a little way out from the point one could easily command the whole of it. The lion was almost certain to break out of one of the sides towards the bush on the banks of the river-bed, in which case I should get an easy broadside shot. If we followed the track into the place, the noise we were sure to make would be very likely to get the beast on his legs, and he would sneak out at one side as we went in at the other, especially as the water had left a lot of dead sticks along the edges, over which it would be impossible to walk quietly. Abdullah also said that from the way he had wandered about this lion must be very hungry, and would

night when we got there, and did not follow up our camels till the next day. I have described this track rather at length because it is a good example of many similar days.

## Perils of the Man Eater.

My first experience in tracking lions was early in 1892, and the night before was rather an exciting one. After hunting elephants unsuccessfully for about a month, we were on our way south, when we arrived one day at some villages where the natives had been very much bothered by five lions which were said to be still in the neighborhood. A girl had been killed two days before, and an enormous amount of damage had been done among the sheep and cattle. The first day we camped there two of our party had shooting zerebas made at the village to which the lions generally came, and just before sunset they went off there.

I tied up our two donkeys just outside the camp, on the chance that the lions might come and look us up. Just after dark we were having dinner in the tent when there was a scuffle outside, and it was evident that something was attacking our donkeys. It was pitch dark, and we fired several shots in the direction of the sound before we discovered that the attacking beasts were hyenas. We did not mind having a donkey killed instantaneously by a lion, but we had not bargained for the poor beasts getting mauled by hyenas, so taking a lamp we went out to see what had happened. My donkey had got off with a nasty bite in the hollow of the hind leg above the hock, and we had him taken into the camp at once. The

these brutes had been partly eaten; we thought at the time by other hyenas, as it was still too dark to make out tracks. We came to the conclusion we had made idiots of ourselves, and had been shooting all night at hyenas, and we did not feel any the better when our friends came back from their night at the village and told us we had probably frightened every lion out of the country by our bombardment.

## Reading the Lion Tracks.

Abdullah still insisted that there had been lions round the camp, and a little later we found the spoor of one big lion by the body of the half-eaten hyena. The ground was very stony and there were no other tracks to be seen, but one lion could hardly have dragged the donkey and heavy barrel away so quickly, so there were probably more. The other hunters had got hold of a man at the village who said he knew where the lions always lay, so they went with him. Soon after they left, Abdullah, who had been hunting about, came and told me that he had picked up the track of one lion on soft ground a little way from camp, and that we ought to follow it. At that time none of us knew much about tracking, and we had had such bad luck after the elephants that we did not think much of our shikaries, and I did not think it was so good, Abdullah persuaded me and I went. After we had followed the track for some distance I quite caught his enthusiasm, and when the single track was joined by three others, I was divided between delight at the prospect of having four lions all to myself and the thought that per-

was over for the day after all this shooting; but Abdullah, who was almost weeping, hardly gave me time to get my wind a little before he rushed me back again. As we ran round the place where we had first seen the lioness, a fine lion appeared walking slowly out of another thicket towards us. As I shot, he turned and plunged through an opening in the bushes to our right. We ran round an outstanding bush to head him if he broke out, and met a lion facing us. Just as I fired I heard a moan to the right, so I was sure it was not the same lion. This one staggered away at the shot and fell stone dead close by.

## Death of the Jungle Lord.

Abdullah called up Jama and the pony boy, and they soon had the hide off and tied on the pony. I thought all the time that Abdullah knew all about the other one, but as he seemed to be going right home, I asked him if we had not better go and look for it, and he replied that it was the same lion all the time, and that I had missed it the first shot. I did not feel quite sure about it myself, but the moan in the bushes could only have come from a wounded beast, so I told him we had better go and look anyway. He evidently thought it was waste of time, but when we got back to where the lion had been hit we soon found some blood, and going quietly down a little path between the "irgin" bushes we came round a corner almost on top of the lion. He was stone dead. I was very pleased at scoring off Abdullah, as he had shown such evident disgust at my shooting.

We met one of our party on our way back to camp, and told him he might

At last certain signs show that you are getting near the end; the trackers take off their sandals and tuck up their loin-cloths under their belts, lest a corner flapping in the wind should scare the lion. For the first time you take your rifle from the native who has had charge of it, and, with your head shikari carrying a second rifle, steal forward until the lion is sighted or ringed in a small clump of bush. Then, when all is over, and the skin is being taken off, how pleasant it is to sit in the shade, listening to the excited talk of the natives, and letting your nerves quiet down again after the hopes and fears of the morning. You ride home to camp with the lion skin behind your saddle, while one of your men after another gives his version of the morning's proceedings in a hunting song. On the other hand, when you get a shot, and miss after a long and difficult track, it seems as if any number of lions killed in the future will never make up for the loss of this one, which is always the biggest lion, carrying the finest mane you have ever seen. The ride home to camp is then a silent one, as no lion means no sheep for the men, and they are correspondingly down-hearted.

The first thing to be done in tracking is to find fresh spoor. Natives will often bring news of spoor, but unluckily the average villager's idea of a fresh track is rather hazy. I have several times gone a long way to find at the end a track several days old. On one occasion two natives arrived, saying there were fresh lion tracks in a river-bed, luckily not more than half a mile from camp, but when we got there the fresh lion tracks turned out to be the spoor of two hyenas, at least a week old.

The spoor of the large spotted hyena is not unlike that of a lioness on certain ground, but the difference can easily be told, because a hyena has claws like a dog, whereas the retractile claws of a lion are always sheathed and leave no mark. The best way to find spoor is to look for it yourself with good trackers. Should there be any villages near camp which lions have been in the habit of raiding it is very necessary to get there as early as possible in the morning. If once the large flocks of sheep and goats and herds of camels which have been shut up in the villages all right are let out, the ground all about is a mass of indistinguishable footprints, and every path from the village is choked with long strings of beasts going off to their feeding grounds. Hitting off a lion's spoor under these circumstances is almost impossible, and the dust raised by the herds is very disagreeable.

Besides villages, any well in the neighborhood is a good place to look for spoor. If a lion is about there ought to be no difficulty in picking up his spoor within a day or two.

## Baffling Ways of the Jungle Folk.

Rather curious coincidences are sometimes brought to light by spoor. Not very long after the date of the story just related, one of our party went to a place where two lions had been killing regularly, and sat up two nights for them with a donkey as bait. The lions must have left the district for a day or two while he was there, as there were no fresh tracks to be found anywhere about. The day after he came back to camp I happened to ride out in that direction. Soon after we started we came on the spoor of two lions, which led us along a path till we came to the shooting zereba. The night after he had left, the lions had walked over the very spot where his donkey had been tied up in the middle of the path.

A little later, again, I happened to be at a place where he had camped a few days before. A lion roared near my camp several times in the night, and next morning I heard he had taken a sheep from a village close by. We picked up his spoor in a river-bed near the camp, and after following it for some distance came to some wells. The lion had drunk twice, and between the drinks had laid down under the fence of a shooting zereba, which had been made to watch the water. After drinking the second time he had gone away.

Now and then when tracking you come across places where lions have killed, and if it is on sand or bare soil, you can tell everything that has happened almost as well as if you had seen it. We were camped once on the edge of a river-bed and thick covert ran right down to the back of the camp. One night there was a tremendous scuffling in these bushes, so in the morning I went out to see what had been going on, and found that two lions had been chasing a warthog, which had just saved its bacon by getting underground. It must have been a very near thing, as the lions had ploughed great furrows in the sand at the mouth of the hole, showing they had pulled up pretty sharp. Warthogs generally go to ground when pursued, and as there is no second opening to the burrows, and presumably no chamber at the end where they can turn, they always go in backwards. This has actually been seen by sportsmen who have been riding after them with a spear. I should think this pig can hardly have had the time to do this. Perhaps he got jammed in head first, as he refused to be smoked out when we tried it.

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Agitation regarding the pay of French military officers has had some effect, for the minister of war has asked for an extraordinary credit of \$400,000 to supplement the pay of the officers, which has not been increased since 1870. In that time nearly every grade of state official has had his stipend raised, but the sub-lieutenant has had to make both ends meet as best he could with six francs a day and the lieutenant with eight.



HE PLUNGED OFF WITH AN ANGRY SNARL.

sleep lightly. These considerations decided us to drive. I posted myself with Abdullah a few yards out from the point, and the other two men, having collected some stones, began throwing them in at the far end. Abdullah was right about this lion sleeping lightly; for at the first stone there was a growl and a crash in the bushes and then, for a minute or two, not a sound. The men started to walk down, one on each side, shooting and throwing in stones. I was watching them, and wondering what had happened to the lion, when there was a faint crackling just in front of us, and he appeared at the point of the island. Although we were standing within a few yards of him, and absolutely in the open, he did not see us.

He was facing straight towards us, and was so close that I did not like to fire at him as, on receiving the bullet, he would be very likely to plunge in the direction he was going and be into us; nor did I want him to come any closer; so, as he stepped down on to the sand, I moved my rifle up towards my shoulder to attract his attention. He saw the movement at once, stopped dead, and turned his head sharply towards us. For the fraction of a second I thought he was going to be startled into charging, but he plunged off to the left with an angry snarl at us over his shoulder. As he passed I pulled, and he skated along on his stomach and fell down a little ledge in the sand. This slewed him round, and he lay facing us, spread-eagled on the sand, evidently quite unable to move. All the life in him seemed concentrated in his eyes, which glared at us furiously. Another shot put him out of his misery. The first shot, a very bad one, had grazed the spine just in front of the withers; another quarter of an inch higher and it would have missed altogether.

This lion was quite maneless, except for a few long hairs on each side of the neck, and his teeth were worn down quite short, so he was evidently very old. He was in very good condition, notwithstanding, but his stomach was quite empty, which accounted for his going so far before lying up. We had to stop at the main camp for the

other was completely disembowelled and must have been killed instantly. We could not find any dead hyenas, but we were pretty sure that one or two must have been hit. Seeing that if the lions did come to the dead donkey there would not be much chance of hitting them on so dark a night, we pulled the carcass right under the skerm or fence round the camp, and to prevent hyenas dragging it away, tied a rope to one of its legs, and passing it over the fence, fastened it to a heavy water barrel inside the camp. We sat up for a bit and got a few shots at hyenas, and then we went to bed, telling the sentry to keep a sharp lookout and to let us know if lions came to the carcass.

Some time after I awoke to find Abdullah bending over me, with my rifle in his hand. He was frightfully excited, and all I could get out of him was "Libah, sahib, libah!" ("Lion, sir, lion!") Jumping up I rushed out just as my companion fired two shots into the darkness. The first thing I saw when I got to where he stood was that a great piece of the skerm round the camp had disappeared, leaving a broad gap. I could not for a moment think what had happened, and then it struck me that when the carcass had been dragged away the water barrel must have got hitched against the inside of the interlaced mimosa boughs and the whole lot had gone together. It was frightfully dark outside, and we stood peering out for some time without being able to distinguish anything; but after a few minutes we could hear something tearing at the flesh quite close by. We had a shot or two at the sound, and the beasts, whatever they were, went away. As at that time we knew nothing about lions, we were not quite sure that they were not hyenas after all; but Abdullah stuck to it they were lions, so we got our beds and lay down one on each side of the opening, just behind the fence to watch, hoping that the brutes would come back. Nothing further happened, however. At daybreak we sallied out to see if by any chance we had managed to hit a lion, but we only found two or three dead hyenas. One of

haps I had more on my hands than I could manage alone.

After a track of about an hour we came in sight of two or three big thickets of "irgin" bushes surrounded by open mimosa scrub and intersected by narrow paths. My second shikari at that time was a very tall fellow, called Jama, with enormous feet. Several times during the track Abdullah had turned round to pitch into him for making such a noise, and now he confided to me that "Jama walk all same cow," and that we had better leave him behind here with the pony and boy, as the lions were sure to be in the place in front of us. Knowing nothing about it, I agreed and went on with Abdullah. We were walking quietly along the outside of one of the thickets when Abdullah suddenly clutched me by the arm and pointed towards a tree standing on the edge of the bush yards off. The tree was divided into two towards the bottom, and the sun was throwing the shadow of a bush on the ground inside the hollow.

This was where Abdullah was pointing, getting more excited but I could make out nothing at all, until a great yellow beast moved suddenly out of the shadow and slipped away on the far side. I fired from the hip, letting off both barrels into the tree. We rushed round to the other side of the thicket just in time to see a fine lioness come out. I could not get a clear shot at once, and when I did, after running some distance, I was shaking so that I could not get on her at all, and missed. She kept lobbing along just ahead, every now and then stopping to look around and show her teeth at us. Each time she stopped I shot, but so badly that I wasted seven bullets at different ranges without touching her. The first six did not seem to annoy her at all, but the last hit the ground just under her teeth, and either the bullet so close, frightened her or a stone hit her, for she sprang off with a snarl and a flourish of her tail and, putting on the pace, in a minute or two ran clean away from us. I was terribly disappointed and annoyed with myself, and I thought of course, that everything

run across the lioness if he followed our track back to the place we had come from. An hour after we got back to camp he came galloping up, having seen two lions, curiously enough both males, and had shot one with a better mane than either of mine.

I have at another time described two different methods of hunting lions. One of them could hardly be called a method at all, as it depended on news brought in by natives as to where a lion had actually been seen. The second plan consisted of tying up a donkey for a bait, and sitting up to watch at night. A much more interesting way of hunting lions than either of these and a very successful one if the native shikaries employed are any good, is this process of tracking them. A lion lies up in some cool, shady place for the day, unless the sky is overcast and the sun cannot get out, when he will occasionally be found hunting at any hour. If you can strike his spoor of the night before there is a very good chance of following it up to where the lion lies, should the ground be suitable. There is no form of hunting so exciting as this. When the spoor is found there is generally nothing to show if you have struck it early or late in the lion's wanderings, so that it is quite a chance whether it leads you for hours over all sorts of country, or whether, after half a mile down on a sandy river bed or path, it turns off into a thick patch of reeds or bush close by, where the lion is lying. It is extraordinary how the excitement grows as time goes on, and still you keep the track sometimes very slowly, where only now and then part of a footprint can be seen on a soft place between the stones, at other times as fast as you can walk over soil where the track is visible many yards ahead. And when the spoor is lost and minute after minute goes by while you cast about vainly in every direction, how wretched you are, and how quickly your spirits rise again when a low whistle or snapping of the fingers announces that one of the trackers has hit it off further on!