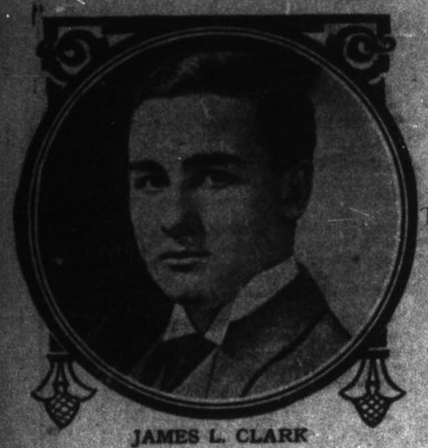
Thrilling Moment in the Experience of James L. Clark, Who Suddenly Came Upon the Huge Sleeping Beasts in the Tall Grass—Hunters Saved by Keeping Motionless



JAMES L. CLARK

JAMES L. CLARK, formerly chief animal sculptor of the American Museum of Natural History, has written a series of interesting letters from Africa, in which he tells of suddenly finding himself in a semi-circle of more than fifteen lions, which he disturbed from their sleep in the tall grass. The letters were written to his brother, Herbert W. Clark, sculptor, who executed the Vanderbilt coaching prize at Newport.

Mr. Clark, now in Africa, is twenty-seven years old and a native of Providence. He left New York on the Arabic on December 12 last, in company with A. R. Dugmore, the well known animal photographer. When Mr. Dugmore returned from Africa, in the early part of the summer, Mr. Clark remained to take out a safari of his own. He has met with much success in the collection of fine trophies and has had narrow escapes from both lions and rhinos.

In Camp, Sultan Hamid, June 21, 1909.

I AM having the time of my life here going it all alone. It's lots of fun and no end of interest, as I do just as I feel. I am camped within fifty yards of the railroad track, near a section station, as there is no water in this section and it is brought here and put in tanks for the track men. The railroad makes no difference to the game. The only objection is that the other side is part of a big reserve, and while I am trying hard on this side for the giraffe about every evening there is a herd not more than a half mile away watching us in camp.

They are a hard proposition, as their long necks and wonderful eyesight give them all the advantages. You may think there are none anywhere around and then 'way off you see something bobbing about the tops of the trees and make it out to be a giraffe's head. He may have been watching you since you were two miles off. When they start off even in a walk their speed is very fast, so it is quite useless to try to overtake them. I got close to two fine ones, but found they were not bulls.

A Good Shot.

I was returning from a giraffe hunt the other day and saw two eland bulls. I did not want to shoot them, as I thought it would disturb the giraffe if any were about, so I watched them for some time, but the temptation was too great and I decided to try a shot from where I stood. My first must have just passed his back by an inch or so, as I saw the dust kick up on the other side. I had overjudged the distance and as he still stood looking at me I took another and he dropped just as he stood. I paced the distance and it was about 335 yards, quite a good shot I thought. His back was broken just over his heart. He was a magnificent specimen, with fine horns, so I saved the whole skin and skeleton. It must be worth a few hundred dollars, as it is in perfect condition. The other bull was an old fellow and a fine specimen, as he was "blue," the way they get when very old, and valuable as a specimen, but he had one broken horn and it took me some time to decide which one I wanted, and I don't regret taking the one I did. When we were cutting him up the boys found an arrow up in his rump, embedded quite a distance, where he had been hit recently by a native's arrow.

To-day, within a half mile of the same place, I found a complete arrow sticking up in the ground, that had evidently been shot at some beast. I saved them both and it makes a good series.

To-day I came across a herd of Grant's gazelle with a fine big buck in it that I had seen twice before and wanted. To-day I stalked for about half an hour and finally from behind a bush got a shot at him, which measured 225 yards, and dropped him with one shot. I felt quite tickled, as at that range an animal a little smaller than our deer is not large along the sights. This is not my usual shooting, but happened to be two good shots. The way I have been trying to get at the giraffe is leaving camp in the dark and getting on a high hill, where I can see them, as it gets light and they don't see me going there. It is now the winter here, and in the evening a jacket is needed. In the day it is really cool also. The big rains have missed this year and there is very little water in the country, so this coming dry season will be quite a serious affair, and there will undoubtedly be much famine, as the crops are all dying or are already dead.

June 28.

I waited until I got my giraffe before I closed this letter. Yes, I got it at last, after much patience and hard work and almost a mile of crawling on my hands and knees, where the ground is covered with thorns from the trees. He was one of two that I saw from my "lookout hill" and stalked. It was about seven o'clock and cloudy, and when I got within three hundred yards I left my hat behind as I could crawl through the grass and not be conspicuous. I got to within two hundred and fifty yards, when they went behind a tree, and I waited for them to come out, but they did not. I dared not move to see them, because it would be fatal. The sun started to come out, and I was a bit worried, as I had no hat, could not go back for it and wondered when the giraffe would move.

Things looked as though I would have to lose them for my own good, so I finally discovered the front legs of the bull, and I had the tree which I was behind to see him and this left me without a rest for a long shot. I went back to the tree, got a dead branch and put it on the ground. I had to lay on my stomach where I could just see his shoulders and "let go." He jumped and ran away into a clear space, and to make sure I gave him another and he fell flat. I was quite pleased, as you can imagine, to have secured one. He was not as large as I would have liked him to be, but he is fully adult, ten and a half feet to the top of his head. Either bullet would have been fatal, the first going near his heart and the second breaking the spine just over it. I took some pictures, but have not developed them yet. I cared for the skin and it is now hanging by my tent, drying. I also got the same day a fine marabou stork that was feeding on the remains. These birds have the wonderful under tail feathers that are so valuable.

I have secured other small antelope for myself and am getting my men so they can care for the skins while I am hunting. I have twice seen a very large and very dark bull giraffe near by and have written for a special license (825) so I can get him. The skin and skeleton of such a fellow should be worth several hundred dollars, so it is a good investment.

Three lions roared in chorus last night while I was writing, about half a mile in front of camp.

June 24.

To-night the moon is full and it is a beautiful, clear and cool night. From where I sit now I can see the Southern Cross, and have only to turn around and see the Big Dipper, but not the North star, as that is just below the horizon. Last night was really cold, the coldest I have felt here. I felt cold with three blankets in a heavy canvas sleeping sack. When I got up it was disagreeably cold and I had to hurry to keep warm. The day was like a fine September day at home—clear, cool and warm in the sun.

I have been collecting several gazelles lately. They are hard to get, as they are smaller than our deer and have to be shot at over two hundred yards, as you can't get nearer. This afternoon the men wanted a zebra for meat, so I went after a bunch and shot one clean in the heart at three hundred yards with the first shot, resting, of course, on a little tree.

Don't think I'm a good shot because I tell of these, because I never tell of the misses; but I shoot much better than I did at first, as I have now got my gun perfectly sighted and know it thoroughly. I will probably be here for another ten days, then to Nairobi, and then up to Simba camp and try for lions among other stuff that I know is there. I would stir up some of these moonlight nights down here, but there are not enough lions to pay, as you may sit up a week before one comes.

I shoot the zebra for meat for the men, and it does seem a pity to see such pretty skins wasted. It's breaking the law to shoot so many, so I can't take the skins. The zebras are becoming so numerous they are now a nuisance all over the country, and they are glad to have them shot. They are soon to put twenty on the license so as to get rid of some. I shall get a special license to shoot some, so I can bring you home some skins, which are very pretty indeed.

Sultan Hamid, B. E. A., July 3, 1909.

IN my letter mailed from here a few days ago I told of the fine weather as I elegant moonlight nights we were having and that I would sit up and watch for lions by moonlight as there enough about to pay; but, with the exception of the three that roared in chorus not far from my tent as I was writing the other evening, I had heard practically none and thought this a poor place to try for them; quite different from our camp on the Tana River, where I had such interesting and exciting experiences with them.

I was out hunting impalla yesterday afternoon and came across a herd with an exceptional buck. As they are very wary animals I could not approach nearer than two hundred yards, so took a long shot and unfortunately only wounded him. I followed him for some time and got one more shot, when my magazine jammed owing to a defective shell. This stopped my shooting, of course, and with regrets I watched the big buck go away and into some thicket on the banks of a dry river. Leaving him undisturbed I returned to camp and after much trouble ejected the shell. In the morning I was out early and with my gun bearer, my second gun bearer, who carried my camera, water bottle, reserve ammunition and my big gun for the charges of the dangerous animals if we expect to encounter any, but had not been carrying it lately—and a fourth native to carry skins and meat to camp, I started on the trail and in some time was to the place I had left the buck.

Through the brush I saw a herd on the other side of the river bed, and, thinking he might be with them, descended to the river bottom, where we would be hemmed in, and went along until about opposite the herd, when I ascended the bank by the animal trails, the men passing through the thicket and tangles. The herd was up the hill, but the big buck was not there, so as I showed myself, off they ran. I handed my gun to second bearer, who follows me closely, and we walked along as close to the river bank as the bush and grass would allow us in search for the buck. The grass was waist deep, dry and tangles about the feet, so to go absolutely quiet was impossible. They suddenly appeared before me at only twenty-five yards, a number of large, peculiar heads which rose from the deep grass, so many and so situated they seemed almost on three sides of me. At first I thought the men were strange animals I could not recognize, but in an instant as some one on their backs my heart went up my throat as I exclaimed to myself, "Lions!"

Most Perilous Situation.

There were three immense beasts that had been sleeping in the grass all confronting me, but still others came into view with their short quick, half growls and a half grunt which is usually given before a charge. With this number I realized we were at their mercy and my only thought was to be motionless whatever happened and take the consequences. As I stopped my hand instinctively went slowly back for my rifle. I felt it touch my hand as the gun bearer brought it forward. I grasped it, but trembled so and did not dare to make another move. My gun bearer, seeing I did not bring it to my shoulder, pressed it tighter in my hand and whispered, "Pega, pega!" (Shoot, shoot!). To shoot would have been folly, when they were undecided what to do. It would have brought at least the wounded one on, and probably all, when suddenly disturbed, in two of their powerful bounds they would have reached us, and a second shot with any decision would have been impossible.

As they defiantly hesitated for a few seconds when they came to their feet I expected a rush at almost every instant and was beginning to give up hopes for ourselves, when one suddenly growled and bounded away. At this they all followed, and, like little fishes when a larger one chases them, they scattered in all directions. In about two bounds they were out of sight and everything was weirdly quiet except for the throbbing of my heart. I glanced around to see where my men were and found them all faithfully by me. Had there been three or four or six or eight lions I could in that time have determined up to that number, but there were many more; how many I cannot say, but I should think some twelve or fifteen.

The situation was not relieved. The lions had gone, yes; out of sight, but how far? There we were in a bad place, with the advantage all with the lions. They might be within fifteen feet of us and we could never see them. The opposite bank of the river was quite clear of underbrush and it was my strong desire to be over there. To go there meant going through more thicket and through "tunnels" in the brush, almost on our hands and knees.

To go further up or down the bank to look for a clear passage was to continue in the thicket into which the lions went. We were then some thirty yards from the river bank, when after some thirty feet of very dense thicket we would be in the clear river bottom. As I stood with my gun ready I felt very much safer than to venture out and knew there were probably less lions within a radius of twenty-five yards of me than there was within a radius of two hundred yards in any direction I might go, except for the short stretch to the opposite bank. I finally decided on the quickest way out and cut straight for the river. I had taken only two steps when I was stopped by my gun bearer's hand on my shoulder and saw his other hand point to an opening not fifteen yards away, to where I was going through, and whisper "Simba!" (lion). As I thought this our only safe retreat I was bewildered when that was blocked. Again I stood and pondered, and after some time of more anxious moments I trusted that there had been only one near by and gone off, so I led the way with cocked gun slowly and cautiously through the brush until we reached the open sandy river bottom, and with much relief hastily ascended the opposite bank to open ground. Hoping my gun would not jam if I needed it badly I lost no time, but quickly skirted along the edge of the river for some distance, hoping that a single one, or even a pair, might be making off, so I could meet them on even ground and "have it out with them," but unfortunately none was seen and I had to return to camp without whom but not regretting the fact, nor do I regret it now, that I did not fire at one of the number as they stood confronting us.

As I am writing now I hear some roaring, and after a little close experience with them I have a little more respect for them than I had. I succeeded in getting two of the antelope later, but never have seen the big buck since. I believe [illegible] and wish I could find his horns.

The next day I went over the same ground to try and stir up a single fellow, but saw none. To see lions is always a chance, but to see them in a bunch like that is very unusual. I was told that on the Guaso Nyero, where we were and where the President now is, they went in great numbers, but in the particular part of the river we were we saw no signs of lions nor heard them.

I have not yet received my license to shoot my giraffe, but expect it any day. Yesterday afternoon two immense bulls of fine color came within shot of my tent (four hundred yards) and passed out of the reserve into my hunting grounds, about a mile north of me.

In Camp Simba (Lion), B. E. A., July 22, 1909.

I BROKE camp a few days ago and came down near the station of Sultan Hamid. Here I camped and tried two days for a rare animal, the roan antelope, but saw none. I was again entertained well at the camp of Graham, an Englishman I had a card of introduction to. Here I met one of the game wardens of British East Africa, a Major Ross, an American who has been all over the world, was a pioneer in our West, fought in three Indian wars, was through the South African war, and is now here. He's interesting and a very good sort, a typical Westerner.

From Sultan Hamid I marched to Simba, which is the next station, and camped some three miles this side of the station, where I saw lots of wildebeests. These I wanted here, as well as oryx and lions. I had no trouble in getting my wildebeests (gnus) the first morning. Got three, all I could care for, out of one of many big herds that are on the plains.

With these animals I could well imagine myself shooting buffalo in our West. The landscape, the plains and hills surrounding them, are exactly like the West, and the gnus at a distance are very dark; big heads, high shoulders and with sloping backs. When they run their gait is that of the buffalo. They have to be shot at about three hundred yards, as they will not let you get closer.

I heard many lions last night, and the hyenas were very close to camp. I am well protected with a circle of tents around mine, and each tent has its fire. The days we are having are now the finest I have seen. The nights are almost cold. The morning is cool and clear, and generally have clouds in the sky, which soon go away. A cool breeze blows all day, and the afternoons are something to live for. They are clear, with white, fleecy clouds against a deep blue sky. The temperature is not cool nor warm, but a mild breeze completes the whole and makes perfection. The peculiar and wonderful lighting of the sun in the early morning and the late afternoon is marvellous. It has the same effects with the long shadows as we get at home after a summer thunder shower has stopped and the warm sun breaks through dark clouds and gives the low, clear and warm lighting. I never knew such an ideal climate existed in any country for such a length of time and so even as it does here.

Did I tell you Graham knew of that bunch of lions I ran into and says fourteen were counted by a man not long ago? He says he has seen forty in one bunch on the plains. I never knew until I came here that the lions often go in bunches, and especially when they hunt.

At the Roosevelt Dinner.

Simba Station,
Friday Eve., July 30, 1909.

I AM at the station to-night to catch the four o'clock train in the morning, which goes to Nairobi. I am to attend the "Roosevelt dinner," of which you will probably hear between now and the time this letter reaches you. It is on the 3d of August, and as I have got about all I can get from this locality I am ready to return and try some place else.

I did not get my second giraffe, nor did I see an oryx, an animal which I wanted.

I secured a fine series of gnu here, ten in all, some antelope and some large birds. I have been hearing every night a bunch of some four or five lions, which roar on a certain hill just before dawn. The nights were uncertain as to clearness, so I did not sit up.

The other day I shot a zebra on this hill and constructed a boma, and last night sat up with the gun bearer and watched; nothing came all night, and I only heard two lions, and they were 'way off. The bunch I heard nothing of, but it doesn't say that they were not near. They might have stalked me to within a few yards and I'd never know it. A bunch of hyenas came to within a hundred yards, but evidently got our wind and stayed off and made all sorts of weird noises, as only a hyena can make. There must have been some ten or fifteen.

I am glad to leave the mudhole of alkali water which has been our supply for the last ten days. At times it caused considerable uneasiness. From this dirty, greenish water the porters caught several sort of catfish, which were very good eating. Perhaps it was the change from meat—anyway, they tasted good.

ANCHOR ICE.

IT is well known that not only is ice lighter than water, but water very near the freezing point is lighter than that which is somewhat less cold. This forms an exception to the general rule that water, like most other substances, always contracts with the cold, and it is well for us that it is so. For if contraction continued uniformly up to the freezing point water just about to freeze would sink to the bottom. Ice would form from below upward and our streams would be frozen solid. As it is, water on the point of freezing expands, becomes lighter, rises to the top and freezes there.

In spite of all this, however, what is called "anchor ice" is an apparent exception to the rule. This is a spongy collection of ice crystals that stick to objects at the bottom of streams and sometimes form masses of considerable size. Recent experiments by Lokatine, a Russian physicist, throw considerable light on the formation of this kind of ice. His experiments, which were performed on the River Neva, showed that if water well freed from ice crystals were enclosed in a watertight vessel and lowered to the bottom of the stream anchor ice never formed inside, though it often clung to the outside of the vessel. If the vessel, however, were filled with ordinary river water, objects within it soon became covered with the spongy mass. This shows that the crystals that make up the "anchor ice" are already floating in the swift current of cold rivers and that they are merely deposited on objects against or around which the water flows.

The crystals, it has been found, always form at the surface of the water, as they ought, but owing to the swiftness of the current they are whisked away before they adhere together to form a covering. The "anchor ice" always forms on the up stream side of obstacles, which shows that the crystals must come down with the current. The author recommends that the formation of surface ice be favored in Russian rivers, by retarding the current, so that the occurrence of the troublesome "anchor ice" may be prevented.

HEAT FROM GAS ENGINES

THE use of a gas engine involves the production of a good deal of waste heat. It is suggested by a recent writer that this be utilized in the operation of a hot water heating system, which could employ profitably sixty to seventy per cent of this waste. Comparing a gas engine with a condensing steam engine he finds that the former is able to supply about four thousand heat units an hour for each horse power and do the same amount of work, with consumption of only one-third as much fuel as the latter, which is able to furnish no heat at all. A non-condensing engine, however, will supply about six times as much heat from its exhaust as a gas engine under the same conditions would be able to do.

As I Stopped, My Hand Instinctively Went Slowly Back for My Rifle