

READING TIME FOR YOUNG FOLKS

AMONG THE WILD ANIMALS OF EAST AFRICA

*True Experiences Related by a Young Traveler**

II. HOW A PYTHON KILLED A BULL



Map showing a part of Belgian Congo, Uganda, and Kenya Colony in East Africa.

TO SEE a giant python kill a bull is one of the most terrible sights one can ever witness. I had the opportunity once of watching such an uneven fight, and I shall never forget it.

While living in East Africa, I worked on a farm on the slopes of Mount Elgon, an old, inactive volcano about 14,500 feet high. It is situated in the western part of Kenya Colony in East Africa. (See the map on this page.) Mount Elgon borders on the native country of Uganda, which is under the protection of Great Britain. The king of Uganda, a black native with great feather ornaments on his head, is very loyal to the British government. He rules his three million natives with dignity and justice.

*The author of this article, a young man now living in Manila, has written a number of true stories especially for *THE YOUNG CITIZEN*. In these articles he tells of his experiences among the big wild animals of East Africa. One of these stories will appear in each number for some months to come.—THE EDITOR.

On top of Mount Elgon explorers have found many strange insects, and numerous *safaris* are made there every year. Elephants frequent the mountain foothills, and lions, leopards, gazelles, and zebras can also be found. The top of the mountain is so high that it is in the clouds; on the mountain top it rains most of the time.

The slopes of Mount Elgon are fertile and well suited to farming. On the great plains of Africa there is not much farming; it is not very profitable because rain falls only about twice a year, so the soil is dry and dusty. Irrigation would work wonders.

The farm on which I worked was located in the mountain country. Several streams flowed through the farm; they all came from Mount Elgon. Some of those streams in places had cut into the lava rock and formed small rapids; at other places they flowed peacefully along through fertile, grassy slopes. Tall eucalyptus and thorn trees grew where there was a little moisture in the soil. Monkeys lived in the high trees and made a terrible chattering noise when any one passed by.

This farm was an immense tract of land of twelve thousand acres. I had to supervise the work on this great area very carefully, as the native Africans are not always reliable in their work. The farm house, where I lived, was built on top of one of the lava hills.

It was necessary for me to pass through river-beds and ravines when I walked to the various fields, or *shambas* as they are called in the native African language of



A Python Crushing a Deer

that locality. With a sun-helmet on my head and heavy boots on my feet, I found walking in the hot day-time to be very tiring. It often took me more than two hours to reach the farthest *shambas*. I was not able to use a horse because the sides of the hill were too steep; no horse could climb the hillside with a rider on his back.

I always had three wolf dogs with me, but never carried a gun. I seldom saw wild animals during the day-time; the dogs ran around so much while I was walking that all game was scared away.

At one of the river-beds was a place where the path through the jungle was so narrow that the dogs had to go either behind me or in front; there was not enough space for them to go around me. This jungle path was a mile in length, and led to a stream across which a tree trunk was laid over the rapids in place of a bridge. One had to cross by this primitive bridge and then continue on the other side, half a mile, through a similar path until the open grass lands were reached. Native cattle often herded there; they were watched by an African herd boy. I was always fearful as I passed through that jungle path, but I

saved more than an hour of walking by going that way.

The path was overshadowed by thorn trees; long branches and vines hung down like curtains. The bushes on both sides were very dense, and it would have been difficult to cut a path through them with an axe.

I noticed that my three dogs were always eager to stay behind me as I went along the path. If they were in front of me, they would wait at the log bridge and then let me take the lead. They were brave dogs and had killed leopards and cheetahs many times, but in that jungle path all their bravery seemed to vanish, and they let man take the lead.

I soon understood why the dogs wanted to go behind me. One day I saw a spotted object hanging from the lower branches of the trees directly in front of me; it was a large python waiting there for its prey. I escaped by turning quickly and dashing back a little ways in the direction from whence I had come. Presently the python disappeared in the jungle.

The python is the largest snake in the world. It sometimes grows to a length of thirty feet, and frequently is more than ten inches thick in the middle part of its body. A large python will weigh 180 or 200 pounds. It is not a poisonous snake, but is very dangerous, nevertheless. It kills by strangling and crushing its victim. It coils the lower part of its body around a tree to which it fastens itself by means of a little horn growing in its tail; the other part of the body attacks the victim when it passes underneath the tree where the python has been waiting. Naturalists tell us that the crushing power of the python is almost beyond belief.

One morning I had to go through the river valley to the *shamba* on the other

side. When I came to the log bridge, the dogs suddenly stopped and began to sniff with their noses. They seemed to be excited, and kept behind me as I walked through the path. I had nearly reached the end of the path which led to the open grass lands when I heard a noise in front of me. I went forward a few more yards, and then saw one of the most horrible sights I ever saw in my whole life.

An immense python had attacked a young bull which had gone after the succulent grass at the end of the jungle path. The great snake had loosed itself from the branches of the tree where it had been lying in wait, and had coiled around the body of the unfortunate bull, strangling and crushing the animal with all its power.

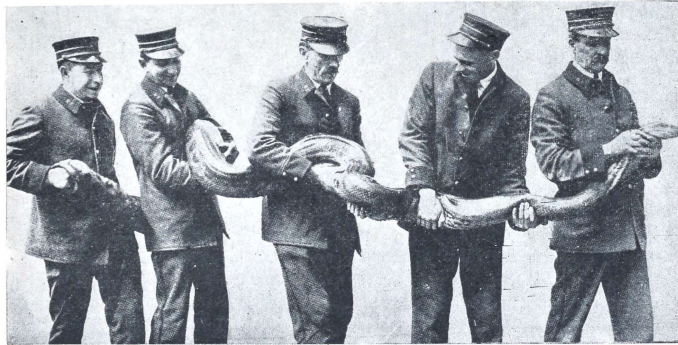
I saw the young bull spring into the air and strike the body of the python with his hoofs several times, but that did not loosen the terrible grip of the snake around his body. The bull fought with his head, but all his movements seemed

to make the snake only more furious. It would have been dangerous to have tried to help the bull.

The snake hissed with its ugly mouth and tried to bite its victim under the neck. And always it kept squeezing and squeezing. Finally the movements of the bull became slower; the snake had taken all the breath out of the bull by its strangling grip. The poor beast fell to the ground in a little while, but the snake did not leave him. It coiled itself once more completely around the animal's body. A few convulsions of the bull indicated his last death agonies. Then he was dead and the snake had won the fight.

I stood there and watched that immense reptile begin to crush all the bones in the bull's body. The snake had to crush the bones of the bull, otherwise it would not have been able to swallow its victim. Pythons cannot chew their food; they swallow it and then digest it. Their teeth are not strong enough to

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Keepers in a Zoo Preparing to Feed a Python.

HOW A PYTHON KILLED A BULL

(Continued from page 55)

crush the bones; the preparation of the food is done by the terrifically powerful body.

The python began at the front part of the bull's carcass and moved toward the back, crushing all the bones as it did so. It was a terrible sight. It took the reptile more than half an hour to get the body of the bull ready for swallowing. Then it dragged the carcass away into the jungle.

All this time my three dogs had stood behind me paralyzed by fear. When I continued my hike, they followed so near to me that they even touched my boots several times.

A few days later three natives came to our farm house and offered me the skin of the python. They had found the reptile in the act of swallowing the bull's body. The snake had swallowed most of the carcass, but was unable to get the head down—the head was sticking out of the python's mouth. The enormous reptile was helpless in this position, and it was easy for the natives to kill it with their long spears.

For a long time I kept

WHY JOSE GOT THE HIGHEST AVERAGE

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in your school?

4. Was Jose acquiring some good habits?

5. Do you know any boys like Jose?

6. Do you know any boys not like Jose?

7. Has this story helped you? How?

8. What kind of man do you think Jose will become?

the skin of the python, which was a little more than twenty-four feet in length. But finally I gave it away, because every time I looked at it, I was reminded of that terrible struggle of life and death between the mighty king of the reptiles and the helpless jungle bull.

REVIEW

1. What is a python? (See the encyclopedia.)

2. Find Mount Elgon on the map.

3. Find Uganda on the map.

4. What is a *safari*?

5. What are some of the wild animals found in this part of East Africa?

6. Tell about each.

KAPTAIN KIDD GOES TO SCHOOL

(Continued from page 59)

every day?" I accusingly inquired.

There were many grave shakings of heads. A cat must come to school if he wishes to know h-ow!

But next day Kaptain Kidd walked right in with the sunshine, his tail electric, upstanding with joy. He wound the gyrating tail among many little legs and even braved the teacher's ankles. Patted by velvet hands, he promenaded the aisles.

Yes, Kaptain Kidd was back, ready to be petted, have a bite to eat, perhaps to learn h-ow, and incidentally to listen at that interesting mouse-hole behind the teacher's desk, hoping to hear a minute squeak there. After all, to listen thus is his accomplishment, the one thing he knows best. And his way of knowing h-ow was never taught in any school. That's the great advantage of being a cat.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you like this story?

2. Has your school a cat pupil like Kaptain Kidd? (Perhaps your teacher will permit you to bring one if he is nice and clean and well behaved.)

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