HUNTING IN THE MOUNTAINS AND JUNGLES OF NEPAL
The author, age twenty-three, poses with his first tiger, an old cattle killer that was shot on foot in the forests of southern Bhutan in 1948. The rifle is a Charles Osbourne .470 double-barrel twin hammer, which fired a 500-grain round.
HUNTING IN THE MOUNTAINS AND JUNGLES OF NEPAL

BY

PETER BYRNE

Safari Press
This book is dedicated to the Sherpa, Taru, and Nepalese men who staffed my safari camps on seventy-two hunting safaris, spread across two decades. These men are Thondup Sherpa, Injung Sherpa, Tashi Kirong, Ang Dawa, Gunga Bagani, Tuli Bharie, Ang Namgyal, Phensing (Pansey) Sherpa, Jangbu Sherpa, and my gunbearer, the indomitable Pasang Lama. Without their loyalty, courage, and industry, I doubt I would have lasted more than one hunting season.

It is also dedicated to my safari clients, my campfire companions over the years—men and women whose sporting instincts, company, and conversation have given me much pleasure. I hope that, in some small way, I have been able to provide the same for them.
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I feel greatly privileged to have been asked to write a foreword to Peter Byrne’s latest book.

Peter and I have both spent most of our productive lives in the professional hunting business, covering much of the same calendar time. The difference is that I operated in East Africa, where the profession was already well established, whereas Peter virtually pioneered the pursuit of big game in Nepal.

This very interesting book covers the formation of Peter’s hunting concession in southwest Nepal, where he undertook seventy-two safaris before he retired from hunting in 1970. He then became an active conservationist, turning the 60,000-acre concession into the expanded White Grass Plains Wildlife Reserve covering 200,000 acres.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4 Peter recounts his hunting experiences with Chuck Ennis, Neal McLanahan, and James Mellon. As is often the case with serious hunting clients, all three had hunted in East Africa and, by chance, with Ker & Downey Safaris, my own parent company. I never hunted with Peter but knew him from both Kenya and Texas.

Neal McLanahan was not only a repeat safari client; he also invited my gunbearer, Abakuna Gumunde, and me to join him on his tiger hunt with Peter Byrne in Nepal. As chapter 3 relates, unfortunately, both Abakuna and I were unable to complete the safari because we contracted typhoid in India and had to leave before the end. Neal and I had become very good friends, and when I later married Betty (both of us Kenya-born) in Atlanta, Georgia, Neal was my best man.

James Mellon, or Jay, as we always called him, started his career in international hunting with a safari in Kenya and Tanzania in 1960. His first safari combined a Carnegie Museum of Natural History specimen-collecting expedition, sponsored by the Matthew T. Mellon Foundation, and exposure to African hunting with the renowned Bill Ryan as his professional hunter. I was mainly involved with collecting and preserving specimens with D. Arthur Twomey of the museum. However, Dr. Twomey and his
wife had hunting licenses, and I became their professional hunter. In Tanzania, Arthur wounded a big leopard late one evening, and, on the follow-up the next morning, it very nearly mauled me before being shot at close quarters.

Jay, who was eighteen years old at the time, collected a number of good trophies with Bill Ryan and, as many readers will know, went on to do probably more extensive hunting in Africa and Asia than any other hunter on record. Many of these exploits are very well described in his classic *African Hunter*, published in 1975.

Reading chapters 5 and 6, all I can say is that I am very pleased I never had to deal with the likes of clients X, Y, and Z. In reading Peter’s account, I think he handled them admirably.

One thing I have learned from *Hunting in the Mountains and Jungles of Nepal* and from my own observations is that tiger hunting and the habits of the beast are very different from those of any animal we have in Africa. To Africa’s Big Five—elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion, and leopard—we must add the Asian tiger as one of the most dangerous and difficult animals to hunt.

In his epilogue Peter sums up the feelings expressed in the book concisely and very well when he says, “Most important is my hope that I have been able to portray for my readers, quoting Braddon, something of the pleasant life and splendid sport that it was my good fortune to enjoy so often, under the shadow of the Nepal hills.”

Tony Archer
Nairobi, Kenya
December 2011
I am indebted to a number of people for assistance and encouragement in the writing of this book, and I will list here as many as I can recall, asking forgiveness if I have omitted anyone for lack of memory.

Al and Kim Allen, of Pacific City, Oregon, for their warm friendship and for providing me with the little blue seaside house where I wrote parts of this book. South African Eric Dolby and his delightful lady, Irene, of Neskowin, for their warm hospitality on the Oregon coast. Phil Fry, of Auckland, New Zealand, known to his friends as Fry the Spy, a very positive man who enjoys life and, knowingly or otherwise, contributes to the enjoyment of everyone around him. Tim Robson and his delightful partner, June (Junebug) Helgesen, for looking after me in Pacific City and for introducing me to the Sportsman (locally known as the Pub and Grub), an oasis of warmth and good companionship on many a cold, dark, rainy coastal night.

Gael Edith Moseley Cohen, of Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia, who played a never-to-be forgotten role in the early days of my colorful life, both in the field and out. Onward!

Joe Broger, of Malibu, California, my staunch safari agent, in his eighties and still going strong. Hem Bharal Ph.D. of Katmandu, ace bird man of Nepal’s ornithological world and good friend. Umesh Bista, attorney at law, Mahendranagar, Nepal, and White Grass Plains Safari Lodge project manager, one of the people without whom the writer’s dream might never have got off the ground. Mangal Singh, engineer and hydrologist, Mahendranagar, Nepal, whose skills and energy helped to get the safari lodge up and running. John Binder and Jeanne Field, of Brentwood, Los Angeles, for friendship and encouragement in the writing. Lisa Callamaro, of Beverly Hills, California, for encouraging my writing. Tom Dadras, of Marina Del Rey, California, for guidance in the sometimes baffling world of the Internet. Eric and Monica Tablada, of Marina Del Rey, for good safari companionship and for saving my life from time to time from the monsters of the cyber world!
Bill and Beryl Green, of Touchen End, England, for endless hospitality, including much wining and dining. Also, congratulations for miraculously surviving the Varanasi operation and the machinations of the insidious Vask and his deadly gang of thugs.

Rara Byrne, of Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, a twenty-five-year-old who, though a veteran of the far-western Terai forests of Nepal—where many a native knows her as Missy Baba Rara—is not afraid to admit that she still has much to learn from the great book of the jungle.

Cathy Griffin, of Los Angeles, California. Cathymaya—her Nepalese friends’ term of love and respect—my Georgia peach, friend, and lover, who was always there.

And last, but never least, Ludo Wurfbain and Jacqueline Neufeld, of Safari Press, publishers courageous, for taking on yet another of the author’s long-suffering attempts to be a writer.
INTRODUCTION

My memory is green enough, however, when I think of the pleasant life and splendid sport that it was my good fortune to enjoy so often under the shadow of the Nepal hills.

Sir Edward Braddon
Thirty Years of Shikar (1895)

There is a splendid view from the veranda of my safari lodge in the forests of southwestern Nepal. The brown, slow-moving waters of the Gobria curve around the lodge, separating it from the dark green wall of the jungle that marks the edge of the great forests of the White Grass Plains Wildlife Reserve. White egrets follow the river, drifting across the face of the jungle like tiny sailing ships on the distant horizon. In the evening, with a blood-red sun sinking behind the trees, *jungli murgi* (wild chicken) come out to search for seeds in the thick green grass, and with them come cheetal (spotted deer) and wild boar.

As the sun dies, peafowls wail their evening songs, and fast-flying Alexandrine parakeets flash iridescent green as they speed to their nocturnal roosts. From the unseen depths of the forest, beyond the muddy waters of the Sal Gaudi Tal swamp, where huge, one-horned rhinos wallow in the ooze, comes the snarling grunt of an awakening tiger. It is immediately answered by the alarm calls of barking deer, swamp deer, and rhesus macaque monkeys.

One evening not so long ago, I was sitting on the lodge veranda in an old tea planter’s chair, my legs hooked up on its extended arms, a glass of Glenlivet to hand on a small peg table when a thought came to me about the scene I was enjoying so much. This view actually formed the background to a considerable number of extraordinary experiences in my life—from my time just after World War II when I came to the subcontinent as a tea planter, to my years as a professional hunter, and later in my life as a wildlife conservationist. I also realized that although I had written about some of my experiences in two previous books, *Gone Are the Days*
and Gentleman Hunter, both published by Safari Press, there were still quite a few of stories that remained untold.

Considering this in the beauty and timelessness of the evening light, I had another thought. This one was based on something I had read in one of the classic books on British India, Edward Braddon’s Thirty Years of Shikar. Writing many years after he had left India, the author was concerned about his ability to record events accurately and in a manner that would appeal to his reading audience. With more than four score years behind me now, this was something for me to keep in mind as well, for I was aware, as is any sensible person, that memory fades as one’s years advance.

With the sun a crimson orb dropping fast into the wall of the jungle, and assisted by the golden touch of another peg of the subtle alchemist (a peg, in Hindi, is a measure of whiskey), a final thought came to mind. If I did not personally document the events in question—my passing parade, so to speak—much of it would be lost forever. Over the years I had operated alone, with the exception of three assistants who were training to be professional hunters. This meant no one but I was capable of recording anything of the seventy-two safaris I took out in the Terai forests for tiger, leopard, buffalo, bison, and croc. There was no one to document the ten mountain hunts I operated in the middle Himalaya, at heights of up to fifteen thousand feet, for blue sheep and tahr. In recent years I have had exciting experiences working in wildlife conservation in these same jungles, and there was much in between. With time marching on and the sun beginning to set on a long, adventurous life, I came to the conclusion as I sat on my veranda that twilight evening enjoying the view and my glass of Scotch that maybe it was time for a summing up, a final chapter or two.

No one had ever written about the McLanahan safari, which included a professional hunter from Kenya and his legendary African gunbearer. No one had documented the three unique safaris where my clients, displaying unusual courage, each tracked and killed a tiger with me on foot. Or the hilarious hunt of a
C&H sugar heir that involved an already dead tiger, and the aftermath I shared with a Hollywood superstar. Or the little man from the Midwest who could not hit a barn door at ten paces but who finished up with a huge tiger trophy. Or the corporate mogul and his dancing bear. Or the panicky man who insisted we build his machan forty-five feet up. Or the nervous gentleman from San Francisco who booked a six-thousand-dollar safari with me, hunted for only one morning, and then went home.

No one had written about some of the narrow shaves that, for a few deadly moments, brought me to the edge of the envelope. One involved a professional-hunter trainee who forgot to release the safety catch on his rifle when charged by a buff. Another occurred when I stepped on a log that turned out to be a crocodile. In a third incident I mistakenly picked up one of the deadliest snakes in Asia; and in another, I was almost bitten to death by poisonous insects. I wanted to describe the most dangerous animals and what can happen when you encounter one to your disadvantage; the gruesome results of an attack by a rogue elephant; and what happens when a wretched villager is impaled on the horns of a savage water buffalo.

I had yet to write about the little-known antics of the rogue-hunting Indian outfitters and their unfortunate clients, including a young New Yorker who endured a month of shenanigans with them before coming to hunt with me. And I had yet to tell how Robert Ruark, the great African writer, risked his life by challenging the frauds who tried to pull the wool over his eyes.

My adventures included safaris that showed the most common of men capable of great courage under stress, or, on the other hand, hunts that produced moments of unbelievable hilarity, like the New Orleans banker who, in a moment of panic, put a Tootsie Roll in his rifle instead of a round. Then there was the Dallas, Texas, restaurant owner who firmly believed that when elephants wanted to mate, they dug huge holes in the ground in which they curled up together and contentedly copulated. There was a retired southern colonel from Charleston, South Carolina, who always
went hunting dressed in bright-red underwear from head to toe. And the St. Louis coffee mogul who bagged an old, toothless tiger with me and later “converted” it into a ferocious man-eater. Safari humor? Yes, there was quite a bit of it, and much of it had never been recorded.

These thoughts, coming to me on a beautiful Terai winter’s evening in the fall of 2009, convinced me of the importance of sitting down and completing the record I had started with my previous books. This third volume of my trilogy would be a record of years spent in a place I have loved beyond any other: the magnificent Terai forests of northern India and southern Nepal.

My big-game hunting started in India in 1947. I soon learned that not only had the British been hunting in India for more than two hundred years, but they also had recorded much of their experience in a score of well-written books. The names of the authors are legendary: Braddon, Sanderson, Inglis, to name a few. When they left India, they carried with them unique written records of their hunting, much of which was eventually published. Looking carefully at these records, I noticed something many people might have missed. Although the British hunters went after big game as often as they could and hunted hard when they were in the field, the majority of them were either hard-working government officials of the British Raj or commissioned officers of the British army. As a result, all their hunting was confined to the very restricted time they could get away from work—usually one month per year, at most. This also meant that their writings, though excellent, were the records of primarily amateur hunters. For example, Sir Edward Braddon, one of the keenest tiger hunters of them all, could count only sixteen months actually spent big-game hunting during his thirty years in the subcontinent.

For my part, I found myself able to offer a somewhat more expansive hunting record. I started out with five years as an amateur shikari in the jungles of northern Bengal. I was able to hunt professionally for another twenty years and carried on for yet another thirty-five years in the jungles of the Terai. Although
I still considered myself a student of jungle lore and would always have more to learn, I felt my sixty years in the field gave me a distinct advantage over most of the early hunters. Of course, I could not match them in numbers of game encountered, hunted, and bagged, for in those days India and Nepal teemed with tiger and other wildlife.

My hunting life began in the green hills of southern Ireland, where, as a boy, I accompanied my father, Cyril John Byrne, a gentleman farmer, in the pursuit of pigeons, pheasants, ducks, snipe, rabbits, rats, and feral cats. At first I shot with a pellet gun, a Daisy Diana air rifle; later, I used a Remington .22 and then a Purdey 12-gauge shotgun. When I was eighteen, having received the equivalent of an American high-school education in a private school—St. Mary’s College, Dundalk, County Down—I joined the British Royal Air Force. I spent four years with one of its Air Sea Rescue squadrons, mostly in the islands of the Indian Ocean. During this time, though I was taught to shoot all kinds of offensive weapons, I managed to survive without firing a single shot in anger. Those four years, therefore, might be called the nonshooting hunting period of my life—the interval between my sporting days as a youngster and the beginning of a lifetime of hunting.

I was in India when the war came to an end. Attracted by the exotic life of the tea planters of northern India—a life I had briefly experienced on a month-long trip to the tea country of Darjeeling, in northern Bengal—I joined the Dooars Tea Company. This British tea company, with offices in both London and Calcutta, had tea plantations in the great forests of India’s Dooars District, the hilly country that runs along the southern border of Bhutan in northern Bengal. The company directors, without telling me exactly where I was going, quickly posted me to an isolated tea estate in central Dooars, an outpost of the empire, so to speak. The estate was flanked by a jungle river and set in the middle of the vast jungles of the Terai, an area that teemed with game of all kinds in those days. The Terai was home to tiger, leopard, rhino, wild elephant, gaur (Asian bison), wild boar, deer, and croc.
The Terai forests—millions of acres of jungle, grassland, and wetlands, carefully preserved by the conscientious men and women of the Raj—stretched all the way along the southern borders of Bhutan, from Assam in the east to the far southwestern reaches of the little Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. The rivers that poured out of the foothills of Bhutan and Nepal were alive with game fish, and the air of the jungles was endlessly vibrant with the songs of hundreds of birds. For a twenty-two-year-old man to whom the great outdoors was heaven on earth, the Terai was a veritable paradise, and when my company signed me up for five years there as my first term of service, I could not have been happier.

It was during these years as a planter that I acquired the expertise and experience that later allowed me to become a professional hunter. I spent every minute of my spare time in the Bengal forests and grasslands and read every book on natural history and big-game hunting I could find. In the forties and fifties, as certain books became available, I collected the classic works of Jim Corbett, the great man-eater hunter and naturalist. His writings so enthralled me that I read all of his books at least three times, and in recent years I made him the centerpiece of Gentleman Hunter, my book on man-eating tiger.

Soon after I took up my post as a planter in “tea,” as we used to call the profession, I equipped myself with a battery appropriate for amateur hunting. My principal rifle was a Charles Osborne .470 DBH (double-barrel, hammered), and I accompanied it with a Ruger .30-30 and a Winchester lever-action .22 fitted with a Redfield 3X9 power variable scope. My guns consisted of two 12-gauges; a Joseph Lang side-by-side; and a single-barrel, sliding-action, six-shot Winchester. My hunting gear also included fishing tackle. Hardy and Company of London supplied me with my split-cane fishing rods, while Verona’s, a famous fishing tackle shop in Calcutta, sold me the lures and lines I needed to outwit the wily fish of the jungle rivers and circumvent what we called the mighty mahseer, the great, fast-water, fighting carp of the lower Himalayan rivers.
During my years in tea in northern Bengal, I shot a number of small game, mostly deer and wild boar, not as trophies but for the pot. I also shot two leopards and one tiger. Leopards were living in a bamboo thicket within the tea estate where I worked, and when a female worker blundered into one of them and was mauled, the estate manager asked me to shoot them. I baited them with goats and within a week had disposed of both of them.

I shot the tiger in the lower Bhutanese forests—quite illegally, for foreigners were not allowed in that country in those days. I stalked it on foot and killed it with a single shot—a 500-grain round from the Osborne. This big, old tiger lived in a ravine about a mile north of the Indo-Bhutanese border. It was relatively harmless, living on deer and wild boar in the bamboo forests, and, from what I gathered from local villagers, it did not even take cattle. I went after it and shot it because in those days it was regarded as the right and proper thing to do for any young sahib (foreign gentleman) new to the country. In addition, it was almost imperative that one's rifle be “blooded” if one hoped to gain a reputation as a shikari.

Kipling wrote about this venerable tradition in his great story “The Tomb of His Ancestors,” which tells of a young man coming out to India and going after his first tiger. I feel it is required reading for anyone with an interest in this aspect of the traditions of tiger hunting among India’s British colonials. It will help to explain why, when I had only been in the country for a month, my fellow planters and their wives were already asking me, in all seriousness, if I had got my tiger yet.

A photograph in this book shows my tomb-of-his-ancestors-cat an hour or so after I got it. I had the skin cured by those veteran taxidermists of British days, Van Ingen and Van Ingen, of Mysore, India, and, as always, they did an excellent job. It was a fine trophy, with the head fully mounted and the mouth set in a ferocious snarl. The pelt, which hung on the dining room wall of my tin-roofed planter’s bungalow for many years, retained its hair and color for a long time and was an enjoyable
conversation piece. Eventually, the heat and humidity and the insidious bugs of the monsoon summers got to it, its markings faded, and it began to lose its hair. One day, when traveling in Sydney, Australia, I gave it to a friend, and that was the end of it. I never took another trophy. During my years as a professional hunter, there was an unwritten understanding that professional hunters did not take trophies. The only deer and wild boar I shot were for camp meat, and the only tiger and leopard I put down were those wounded by my clients.

In 1953 I resigned from the tea company and, at the invitation of one of the scions of the royal family of Nepal, Prince Basundra Bir Bikram Shah Deva—brother of the king—moved to Nepal. With two Sherpas to carry my camping gear and weapons, I walked into the country from Darjeeling, India. On foot we traveled three hundred miles of middle-Himalaya trails that ran from Darjeeling to Katmandu. At that time Katmandu was a serene, silent, beautiful city with no traffic or tourists, and its people were innocently happy. The ancient buildings shone in the crystal-clear air of the Himalaya. Basundra, as he was known to his friends, helped me obtain a ten-year professional hunting concession in the far-western Terai.

From Katmandu I walked south with my two men, down into the Terai. Then we hiked another three hundred and fifty miles to the west, through the provinces of Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur. At the western end of Kanchanpur lay the area of my new concession. At the center of it was a stretch of terrain known as Sukila Phanta, or the White Grass Plains. I spent a couple of weeks there to check out the area before crossing over to India and taking a train to Bombay. From there I embarked on a P&O (Peninsula and Oriental Steamship Company) liner for Sydney, Australia, where I spent the summer. I started taking out my first hunting safaris that October, with some extra rifles that included a brand-new Holland & Holland .375 from London and a skeleton camp staff of three Sherpa camp men and a Sherpa cook.

I ran my professional hunts in the western Terai for three years, through 1956. In 1957 I took time off to organize and lead
three Himalayan expeditions searching for the Yeti, or the so-called Abominable Snowman. These long, high-altitude searches lasted for three years. My close friend Tom Slick, a Texas oilman, sponsored them. I then spent two years working with Tom in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, researching what was variously known as the American Yeti, the Sasquatch, or Bigfoot. My book about the phenomenon, *The Search for Bigfoot*, published by Simon & Schuster, was a bestseller in paperback.

When Tom died in an air crash in 1962, I returned to big-game hunting and continued for another eight years. In the winter of 1969–70, I took out the last of my safaris and closed down my hunting operation. I then spent a year camping in my concession and creating a sanctuary there, a park that eventually came to be known as The White Grass Plains Wildlife Reserve. This is the site of my safari lodge, now established as a nonprofit scientific research center catering to wildlife conservation projects within the reserve.

This is where I live now for most of the year. This is where, after a day’s work at one of my wildlife conservation projects, I sit on the veranda of my lodge with good friends, watching the sun go down and reminiscing about days gone by. Sometimes I have my men build a good sal wood campfire down on the bank of the Gobria River, close to the green wall of the jungle, and we sit down there in canvas-backed campfire chairs, listening to the age-old sounds of the dying day and inhaling the scents of the forest as they gather on the cooling air. Then it’s time for a relaxing peg or two of the subtle alchemist and, of course, some good tales around the campfire—not a few of which my readers will find in this book, and all of which I truly hope they will enjoy.

Peter Byrne
Pacific City, Oregon
The White Grass Plains, Kanchanpur, Nepal
Map showing Peter Byrne's concession in western Nepal.
The natural home of the tiger is the forest-clad foothills of the Churia (Siwalik) range of the Himalayas, with the enclosed duns and valleys, and the adjoining forests of the flatter Terai. This great belt of tiger country stretches the whole length of Nepal, a distance of nearly 550 miles on the map, and for more than half the year it is deadly to man owing to the malignant Terai malaria. But from December to March it is a perfect paradise, with a glorious climate, wonderful scenery, and always to the north the incredible panorama of the eternal snows towering in the sky.

Olive Smythies.
“A Maharajas Shoot” in Ten Thousand Miles on Elephants, 1961

In the great Terai forests of northern India and southern Nepal, where I conducted my big-game hunting safaris, there were several ways to hunt tiger. One was to use beaters to flush the cat out of cover to the waiting guns. Another was to go after the big cats from the backs of trained, domestic hunting elephants. A third method was to use a combination of elephants and beaters. A fourth was to lure the tiger with young domestic buffaloes, live or dead, and endeavor to shoot over the buffalo bait from a machan. Finally, there was the method hunters always regarded as the most sporting: to take the tiger on foot and on the ground.

All my clients who took tiger trophies used one or more of these methods. Before the safari, comfortable in a corporate office chair or leaning on an oak bar at the country club, many of them vowed that if I would allow them, they would go after their cats on foot . . . and on the ground. Not long after arriving in camp,
however—with the dark wall of the mysterious jungle nearby and perhaps the snarling roar of a tiger echoing through the trees—they quickly changed their minds. In the end, only three of my safari clients, out of more than one hundred, were game enough to go after their big cats in this time-honored way.

Hunting tiger with beaters was fairly successful if an experienced person organized the beat and nothing went wrong. A beat consisted of fifty to one hundred men or more, and the initial planning included an assessment of the willingness of these men to carry out orders. It was important that they move side by side in a steady line, not more than ten feet apart; that they stay together; and that they walk slowly and quietly toward a predetermined point at the end of the drive.

The location of the end point depended on where the hunt organizer thought the tiger would go when the beaters pushed it out of cover. To predict the direction of the cat’s escape required a careful preliminary study of the terrain. For a tiger will not allow itself to be beaten out of cover unless there is more cover in the direction it is being driven. Trying to drive a tiger from cover into the open usually has just one result: The cat turns and charges back through the beaters, sometimes mauling one or two and driving the remainder from the field in panic. Driving the cat from cover to cover is essential to a successful beat.

Beaters are nearly always local villagers. Some may have hunting skills, usually acquired while poaching, but many do not. Participating in a beat may be their first and only experience in the jungle. Believing there is safety in proximity, they have a tendency to bunch up as soon as they get into dense grass or brush, leaving gaps in the line. Tigers do not like being beaten and often prove very difficult to move. If the beaters bunch up, a clever cat will take advantage of the gaps and slip through the line, silent and unseen, quickly disappearing.

I have run approximately one hundred beats, and I have seen some amusing things. One of these occurred in 1955 near the village of Barbatta. My clients were a German couple. He was shooting;
she was taking pictures. The beat was for an old tiger that had lived in a big patch of grass near the village for many years. The cat had taken a lot of cattle and had injured one or two villagers who had stumbled upon it unawares. Now the villagers were delighted that someone had come to kill it. I had no problem mustering about one hundred and fifty men. On a sunny winter’s morning, I got them all lined up at the edge of the grass patch where the tiger lived. The patch was about four hundred yards square, with thick grass stems that measured an even six feet high.

With the exception of one or two boys, all the men carried six-foot staves. As they disappeared into the tall grass, we marked their progress by the tips of their staves. When they started the beat, I got my clients up on a small hummock at the far end of the patch and told the husband to load up and get ready. I loaded my Holland & Holland with 300-grain softnose rounds and took a position a few feet behind them and to their right. Since I shoot from the right shoulder, I could cover them if the cat charged and the husband was unable to put it down.

Within ten minutes the beat was nicely under way. From our slightly elevated position we could see, far out in the grass patch, a long line of staves slowly advancing toward us. The tips of the staves extended about a foot above the grass.

The beat moved well; the men followed my instructions to move slowly, stay in line, and make minimal noise. After five minutes, my client asked me in a whisper if there was any sign of the tiger. I said there was, but I didn’t want to talk and promised to tell him later what I had seen: small birds rising out of the grass near the center of the patch, well ahead of the beaters and obviously disturbed by something moving there.

A good beat, I thought. With a bit of luck my client will get his shot, and if he doesn’t bugger it up, he’ll get his trophy. These thoughts were foremost in my mind when suddenly a tremendous roar shattered the air—a veritable blast of sound, coming from the center of the patch. The roar was quickly followed by some deep-throated growling and a single heavy, coughing grunt. Then
there was silence—a silence that seemed to set the stage for the ensuing comedy.

With the sound of the first roar still echoing in my ears, I watched the long line of staff tips suddenly come to a shaky halt. The wooden tips all stayed motionless for about ten seconds. Then, smoothly and quickly but in total silence, all the tips started to flow toward the center of the line. They gathered silently, as though in conference. Then, soundlessly, the one hundred and fifty wooden tips turned as one. Like a river of panic-stricken lemmings, they went racing out of the grass in the direction of the village.

Within thirty seconds of the tiger’s roar, the beaters had all gone, and the grass was silent and empty. The tiger, content to have disposed of the rude mob advancing on its private quarters, was no doubt getting ready to go back to sleep. And my puzzled client had not the faintest idea what had happened or why his tiger was not charging out to give him the shot he wanted—and his trophy.

I took the couple back to camp and, trying hard not to laugh too much, explained what had happened. Being Germans, they were not overly endowed with a sense of humor and were not amused. A few days later, we went back with elephants and beat the old cat out. The husband got his trophy, and the wife got her pictures. When they left to head back to the fatherland, the handshakes I got, though offered unsmilingly, seemed sincere enough.

Not long after I began to hunt professionally in Nepal, I leased seven hunting elephants that belonged to an Indian named Nivair Singh. He was the owner of a sugar plantation near Palia Kalan, just south of the Nepal border. Nivair would send the elephants to me at the beginning of the season, which lasted from six to eight months, and I would send them back when I was through. There were five females and two males. Both males had been trained for hunting and taught to stand to the charge of a tiger or leopard. The females were not trained for hunting and served as beating elephants.

The group, which included seven mahouts and seven feeders (called grass cutters), had simple requirements: a village within walking distance where the men could buy food; a shady place for
their camp under the trees and not too far from my hunting camp; a nearby water source, preferably a river; and an area with enough grass and brush to allow each animal about six hundred and fifty pounds of green fodder per day. Between hunts, the group rested. But when I had hunting clients in camp, the men saddled up the elephants early each morning, walked them into camp, and went out with us from there. Or, starting long before dawn, the men took the elephants to a predetermined hunting area to wait for the hunting party to arrive by vehicle.

One could sit on the back of a shikar hatti, or hunting elephant, in either a howdah or a gaddi. The howdah was an enclosed, boxlike contraption with woven rattan sides that made it look like a big basket. Inside was a seat for one or two people and a rack for rifles or guns. The whole thing was strapped to the elephant’s back with one thick, woven rope of coconut fiber that went under the animal’s upper chest; the tie-down also included support ropes that went under the animal’s tail. The gaddi is best described as a large, thick cushion made of hessian sacking and filled with tightly packed straw. It was strapped to the elephant’s back in the same way as the howdah and was designed to seat two people. For my clients, and for all my hunting, I used the gaddi.

Hunting tigers from an elephant’s back was dangerous and challenging. It was challenging because a number of things could go wrong when seven elephants in dense jungle tried to follow a set plan. They sometimes disappeared completely in fifteen-foot-high grass, and the mahouts had no means of communicating with each other. It was dangerous for the client, the mahouts, and the professional hunter. The principal hazard was falling off and being trampled by an elephant in panic or savaged by an angry tiger. There was also the danger of being shot by an excited client, which did happen.

You would have to be very unlucky to be trampled by a domestic elephant, for elephants are extremely careful where they place their feet. Under normal circumstances, they will actually step with great delicacy over someone lying on the ground, but elephants are always nervous during a tiger hunt. They scent the
big cat and are afraid of it, and they bolt easily, especially if they are beating elephants. When an elephant bolts, the rider must grab the sides of the howdah or the ropes of the gaddi and hang on for dear life, forgetting about rifles, binoculars, and everything else.

It is well known that one can be swept off an elephant's back by the lower branches of trees. If one happens to fall off, there is the unsuspected danger of being attacked and gored by the elephant itself. An elephant fleeing in panic has only one desire: to put as much distance as possible between itself and the fearsome object. It has eyes only for what is ahead and completely forgets that it has riders on top. In vain, the mahout beats and jabs it with his steel goad as the screaming elephant thunders through the forest, seeking to escape the cause of the terror, which may very well be pursuing it. Even in a state of panic, the elephant uses its peripheral vision to watch for movement. If a rider falls from its back and suddenly appears in the animal's peripheral vision, the elephant construes this large and unknown shape as something coming after it. In blind terror it will sometimes turn and attack the perceived threat. When this happens, the results for the fallen rider are inevitably fatal.

A hunt for a tiger using elephants usually lasted a couple of hours. In most cases, the cat was simply driven out and shot; sometimes, however, it slipped away in the dense brush and disappeared, and, unless there was another promising area close-by, everyone went home for the day. In contrast, preparations for the tiger hunt were often prolonged. The groundwork for each sortie might occupy a week or more, and this was the professional hunter's responsibility. The working plan for the hunt started with knowledge of the whereabouts of a big cat. If the PH did not have this knowledge, he could determine the cat's location by watching the movements of vultures, jackals, and other carrion eaters that are attracted to tigers' kills; by studying sign on game trails and territorial scratch marks on tree trunks; or by using village intelligence.

Once the PH had decided upon an area, it was his job to carry out a careful reconnaissance. This would include a study of the cat's movements in the surrounding area: where it stashed its
kills, whether it had a fixed lair, and where it went to drink. The PH would examine the lay of the land, determining the density of the cover and whether there were wild bee or hornet nests. He would also identify any barriers to elephant movement, such as deep mud or heavy thorn brakes. He had to scout open areas that would allow for a shot. Last, he had to determine the availability of secondary cover for the big cat when it was driven out.

The clients took no part in this preliminary work. They simply expected it to be done by the time they arrived. If the PH knew his stuff and put his back into the work, it usually was. Clients often had their first sight of the hunting area from a vehicle when they arrived, and their next view from the back of a shikar elephant. Before taking the clients out to hunt, the PH would carefully describe the hunting area, often using sketches and measurements.

On a hunt, I usually kept my two big hunting elephants together, the client on one and I on the other. If it was the client's first time on an elephant, I might ride with him, sharing his gaddi. If he had been out before, I stayed close-by and within visual range on the second shikar hatti. I kept the beating elephants out on the flanks, two on one side of the hunting elephants and three on the other.

One way of getting in on a tiger, with the client riding, was simply to move the line of elephants into the brush or grass and try to get the cat up and moving in order to give the client a shot. Another method was to position the client at the lower end of the area, on the ground or in a small tree, and wait there for the beating elephants to move the tiger within shooting distance. The latter method was usually more successful. However, an area with dense brush, hollows and holes, deep mud, and thorns did not always allow for this. In that case, I applied the simple method of the moving line.

When the client shot a big cat and it went down, I always instructed him to shoot it again. Next, I carefully studied the still carcass. Then and only then would I get down and make sure the cat was dead. Only after that would I allow the client to join me, and I would have everyone, including the reluctant tiger, pose for pictures. We used ropes to haul the big cat onto the back of one of
the beating elephants, where we would securely tie the cat to the elephant. At this juncture most elephants seemed to recognize that the big cat was dead and raised no objection to carrying it back to the waiting vehicles, where we would unload the cat and haul it back to camp.

There were several other ways of carrying a tiger out of the field and back to camp. Buffalo carts from a village were a possibility, or villagers could carry it out on a sling made of bamboo poles and grass ropes. Sometimes a specially trained elephant would carry the cat in its trunk. More often, the cat was lashed on the riding pad on top of the elephant, something I have done many times myself.

One variation of tiger hunting with elephants was to include a combination of human beaters and beater elephants. This allowed the human beaters to drive the big cat from cover, while the beater elephants served as stops on either side of the guns. Carefully placed in the form of a V, the beater elephants often succeeded in funneling a big cat into shooting range of the guns positioned at the point of the V.

When elephants were not available or when the cost of beaters was prohibitive, the most popular way of hunting tiger was the simple bait-and-wait (B&W) method. One could bait with a live or dead domestic animal or a wild animal that had been killed by the tiger. The best bait for tiger is always something of substance, like a young, medium-size village buffalo. Larger buffaloes are also useful as bait, but villagers are reluctant to sell them because they are often difficult to handle physically.

A tiger prefers large bait because it is a big eater. A hungry adult male will eat fifty to sixty pounds of meat at a sitting. There are two reasons for this. First, the cat has most likely expended considerable effort in the hunt, and it makes the most of the opportunity once its prey is down and dead. Second, the cat is aware that, from the moment it finishes eating, a large number of carrion eaters will be after the kill. Although the cat usually hides its kill under piles of leafy branches and grass, carrion eaters may find it. When this happens, the kill quickly disappears, especially
if vultures are involved, and the cat is left with nothing. The carrion eaters of the Terai include vultures (the most active of the scavengers), jackals, bears, wild boars, wild dogs, crows, ravens, magpies, and crow pheasants. In addition, Terai villagers, who are mostly Hindu, never hesitate to carve up a tiger’s kill and carry it home for the pot, unless it is a cow, which is sacred to Hindus.

Hunting by the bait-and-wait method requires the construction of a machan. The platform should be about fifteen feet above the ground, facing the place where the bait will be tied. The machan should face north or south. If it faces east or west, the shooter may have to deal with the glare of the rising or setting sun.

Machans are usually built of bamboo and cutcha rasi (coconut fiber rope). If bamboo is not available, strong branches from almost any tree will suffice. When building a machan, one always uses cutcha rasi. It is not only cheap and available throughout northern India and Nepal, but it is also elastic. Bamboo or branches firmly tied together with this tough, brown rope will remain locked and immobile, even under physical stress.

The structure itself consists of a platform large enough to accommodate one or two persons, with sides high enough to conceal them when they are sitting down. A seat of some kind is important because sitting on a flat surface, even if it is cushioned, quickly becomes uncomfortable, forcing people to move. The less movement there is, the less noise they will make. To create comfortable seating in the machan, one can build hollows in the floor big enough to accommodate the legs and feet of the shooters. Seating should also include something on which to rest the back. One can use folding canvas chairs in the machan if the floor is firm enough. Planks will make the floor firmer.

It is important to cover the top of the machan after basic construction is complete. The sides and top are covered with leaves or grass, sometimes both. This provides protection against night dew and also offers greater concealment for the occupants if there is moonlight.

One shoots from a machan through longitudinal slots built into the front and sides. Slots are better than holes, which may
restrict rifle movement. Although one always hopes the big cat will come from the front, where the bait is, additional slots in the sides are necessary in the event the tiger comes from either side.

One enters a machan by ladder from the rear, where there is a small door with rope hinges. The door also serves to conceal the shooter or shooters. Once they are inside, they close the door and firmly tie it shut.

If the hunter plans to use live bait, he purchases a young buffalo and takes it out to the area he has chosen. There he ties the animal to a stump, a stout tree root, or a thick stake that he drives into the ground. This is to prevent the big cat from taking the bait away after killing it. Before tying up the bait, the hunter gives the animal water and a small pile of green fodder on which to munch while awaiting its fate. The small-brain bovine has no idea it is being used to attract something that is going to kill and eat it. Often, after finishing off the fodder, it will lie down and go to sleep.

Tigers hunt with their eyes and ears; they have a very limited sense of smell. If the bait lies down and goes to sleep when it is dark, a tiger may walk right past it without detecting it. The hunter must use something other than the presence of the bait to attract tiger. For this purpose he hangs a small bell from the neck of the bait, hoping its ringing will attract a tiger. Tigers always associate a bell with cattle because many wear bells so that the herders can find them in the dense forest.

When all is ready, the PH and his men take the shooters to the machan, climbing into it as quietly as possible. They haul up their unloaded rifles on nylon lines, and in the same way they bring up bottles of drinking water, flasks of hot coffee, and blankets against the night chill. They also haul up a small flashlight for use within the machan and a powerful searchlight for spotting the tiger if it comes after dark. That will almost certainly be the case because tiger do not move around much in the daylight.

After the clients are settled and their rifles are loaded, the PH and his men return to the safari camp to wait until it is time to pick up the clients. However, the PH usually stays with the client
if it is the client’s first time on a machan, and the PH always stays if the client is a woman. Before going into the machan, the PH arranges a time to pick up his clients and bring them back to camp. The clients may wish to return within an hour of their sit, or they may decide to stay through the night and return in the morning. A signal consisting of three rifle shots, spaced a few seconds apart, supersedes any previous arrangements. (This was the procedure in the old days, before two-way radios and cell phones.) This signal indicates that the clients want to be picked up immediately, and as soon as the PH hunter hears the shots, he acts without question and goes immediately to get them. Camp may be several miles away and seemingly out of earshot, but in the damp night air of the Terai, summer or winter, a rifle shot can be heard for many miles. The PH will ignore single shots, which may indicate that the machan sitters are shooting at a tiger or, as sometimes happens with nervous clients, the buffalo bait.

Hunting from a machan using dead bait entails much the same procedure. Dead bait is tiger kill, which, most often, the tiger has partially consumed. Hunters often use this type of kill to bait a cat, expecting it to come back for a second meal. The hunters cover the kill to hide it from carrion eaters. Sometimes hunters leave a couple of men near the kill for the day to keep jackals and hyenas away.

Tigers often lie up close to a kill, especially if they are unable to drag it into dense cover and conceal it. They prefer concealment, whether before or after eating. They cannot carry off and conceal a securely tied buffalo bait, so, to protect it from vultures during the daylight hours, they may lie up close-by. When approaching the machan for a dead-bait sit, and when climbing into it, hunters must consider the possibility that a tiger is near, watching its kill.

The dead-bait sit differs from other machan sits in the approach to the machan and the method of getting into it. The machan sitters must enter in complete silence, load their weapons, and then settle down quickly and remain absolutely quiet and still. Two attendants climb up to the machan with them, talking in low
voices. If the tiger is nearby, it will hear this. If the tiger is not already watching its kill, it will often move up stealthily until it has a view of what is going on. It will see men and movement—perhaps a man or two on the ground. It may even see the shooters climbing into the machan.

The two attendants make sure the sitters are comfortable and then, continuing to talk in low voices, join the men on the ground. All of them, including the PH, if he is there, walk away from the area. The tiger will hear the men and may even see them, but it will have heard or seen only a party of men moving around, talking quietly, and then leaving. And if the machan sitters are now fully concealed and totally silent, the tiger will construe from its brief period of cautious inspection that a group of men came to the kill area, stayed for a little while, and then left. A tiger cannot count, and if the machan sitters have taken precautions, the ruse usually brings it out into the open, allowing for a shot.

If the shot is successful, or if the shooters think it is successful, they signal the PH with three shots and wait until he comes. They are on no account to come down from the machan until he arrives. The PH brings his vehicle as close to the machan as possible and, without getting out of the vehicle, quietly asks the shooters what has happened. He ascertains whether they have shot a big cat, whether it is close-by and visible, and so on. If the shooters tell him the cat has been shot and is visible, the PH first tries to see the cat from the car, often without getting out. Amateur hunters may have had some previous experience with big game, but they are not always reliable when it comes to providing this kind of information. Though they may be able to see the cat from the machan and believe it to be dead, the cat may actually be wounded—stunned by a big bullet or perhaps partially paralyzed after a hit in the spine. In other words, the PH may be dealing with a highly provoked and very dangerous animal.

For this reason the PH gets as much information as he can from the persons in the machan above him and tries to relate this to what he sees in the shape and form of the big cat. Then,
having cautioned the machan occupants to remain as silent as possible, he gets out of the vehicle with a heavy rifle—in my case, always an H&H .375 loaded with 300-grain rounds—and makes a slow and silent approach, always toward the rear end of the carcass.

The PH watches the animal carefully for about a minute and then, rifle loaded and cocked, approaches the animal. With extreme caution, he pokes the muzzle gently into the rear end of the carcass. If there is no response, he moves slowly and carefully around the body toward the head. There he touches the muzzle to one of the cat’s eyes, and if there is absolutely no reaction, he steps back, sets the rifle on safe, and turns to tell the machan occupants they have their trophy.

During the initial check, if there is even the slightest response when the PH puts the muzzle to the rear end of the cat, he instantly shoots the animal. The back of the head offers the best shot, given his position at the rear end of the animal. He reloads at speed and stands by for another shot; if necessary, he shoots again. A PH knows that “dead” tigers kill more people than live ones. He also knows that big cats experience a powerful adrenaline rush, often brought on by the proximity of a human being. This adrenaline rush can arouse a tiger from the deep coma sometimes caused by the smash of a big bullet, and it will come roaring out of unconsciousness to wreak frightful vengeance.

When the PH has completed his checking procedure, with or without a second shot, he gets his clients down from the tree and into the car. The men he has brought with him, till now sitting silently in the vehicle, load the big cat aboard, and the happy hunters head back to camp. This procedure concludes the machan hunt with either live or dead bait, and as long as the client has made a good shot and the cat has been put down, there are usually few problems. Sometimes, however, the hunter comes from camp in response to the shots of his clients, and the cat has disappeared. This gives rise to a whole different set of circumstances.
First, the PH tries to ascertain whether the cat has been hit. He does not depend on the client to tell him this but, loaded rifle in hand, carefully searches the immediate vicinity of the kill to see if there is any blood. If he cannot find any and is reasonably satisfied that there is none, which indicates the client has missed, the PH will immediately get the clients down from the tree and into the vehicle and back to camp.

If there is blood, indicating a hit, the PH does the same thing. He gets the clients into the waiting vehicle as quickly and quietly as possible and takes them back to camp. If there is enough light, the PH returns and goes after the wounded tiger. He may take a gunbearer with him but does not take the client. The PH then tracks the big cat and shoots it. If there is not enough light, however, he will wait until morning. It goes against a hunter’s grain to leave a wounded animal to suffer, but, dangerous as it is to follow up a wounded tiger in daylight, in the dark it is little less than suicide. The PH will plan to be back at the kill site as dawn breaks, preferably accompanied by a good gunbearer with a backup or shotgun. And from there, as the light grows, he will track the tiger to where it is lying up and put it down.

In very rare cases, a PH will take a client with him after a wounded tiger. This happens only when the client is well known to the PH, has proved himself to be a first-class shot, and has a solid background in big-game hunting. I have never taken a client with me after a wounded tiger, and if I were still hunting, I never would. Things can go horribly wrong when people panic, and few amateurs will stand to the roaring, snarling charge of a wounded and enraged cat—whether tiger or leopard. Panic is the usual reaction, and, more often than not, it has fatal consequences for the PH, his gunbearer, and even the client.

Hunting with beaters, with elephants, with a combination of elephants and beaters, and from machans are all sporting methods of going after tiger, and they are ethically sound for amateurs with little experience. But for many hunters, the finest hunting in the world is going after a big cat on the ground and on foot.
When this quintessential method results in a successful hunt, the client eventually comes face to face with a big cat on the ground and at close quarters. I’d say the odds of survival for the client are an even fifty-fifty, though they are not necessarily that good before he has fired a shot. A big cat’s normal reaction on encountering humans is to bolt and get into cover as quickly as possible. A hunter moving very quietly and cautiously in tiger territory, however, often surprises and provokes a tiger. The tiger’s reaction may be an immediate and defensive attack. Surprise is one element of the so-called five instances of provocation, and this element has proved fatal to many an unwary hunter. For tiger and leopard the instances of provocation are: (1) when a cat is surprised; (2) when it is eating; (3) when it is mating; (4) when it is wounded; and (5) when it is trapped or thinks it is trapped—for example, when it is driven and perhaps surrounded by beaters in a cul-de-sac or in a dead-end ravine.

If the big cat has not been surprised and provoked, and its attitude is simply that discretion is the better part of valor, and it stands for a shot, then the client can take the shot, provided he can see the animal clearly and its position allows for a killing shot. If the animal goes down, the client immediately shoots again, whether or not he thinks the animal is dead. In the excitement of the moment, many a client will forget that the PH has instructed him to do this. If the client does not shoot the tiger again, the PH will do it for him.

With the big cat down, the client quickly proceeds to reload his rifle and then waits to see what the cat is going to do. If the PH has had to fire, he also reloads. Together, they wait in silence, standing perfectly still, for this is probably the most dangerous part of the hunt. The cat is down, yes. It has been shot twice, yes. But is it really dead, or has it just been knocked out? Will an adrenaline surge cause it to get up and attack?

Short of shooting the tiger again, time is now an element that offers safety. It is imperative to wait at least three or four minutes, with the carcass of the cat in full view, before going in on the animal. Checking the animal is the job of the PH, and he usually does it.
alone. He asks the client to stand back and wait, and to kindly keep his rifle pointed in a safe direction, preferably skyward, until the PH completes the check. When he has finished, the PH will wave the client in to the kill and congratulate him on a successful hunt.

If, however, the client’s first shot has wounded the tiger, a completely different scenario becomes necessary. There are several possibilities, and none of them good. The wounded tiger may attack the client and the professional hunter. Equally bad, the tiger might go roaring off into the brush to disappear, giving the PH the nasty job of following up. Although the PH has allowed the client to take the big cat on foot, follow-up is solely the PH’s responsibility, with the client safely back in camp.

If the client’s first shot has wounded the tiger and it charges, the PH will fire instantly to put the cat down, no matter what the client is doing. If the PH succeeds, the hunt is over, and the client has his trophy. If the PH misses and fails to put down the charging cat, then he will probably lose his client. If he loses his client, the PH may well be blackballed within the client fraternity, which would severely affect his career. If, in addition to losing his client, the PH becomes a victim, then his career is over in any case. During my career, not one of my clients was killed or even injured. And the fact that I am still vertical indicates that in all cases of attack, I was successful in preventing the big cat from going home.

Hunting a tiger on foot and on the ground is one of the most thrilling and dangerous forms of sport known to man. It is one that has killed and injured not a few hunters. But those who use this method and come home with a trophy take pride in knowing that they acquired it in the most sporting way possible. I had three exceptional hunters who took tigers in this manner, and the stories of these three, courageous men and their hazardous hunts on foot after tiger are described in the following pages.
Danger not only adds zest to all forms of sport, it also tends to sharpen the faculties and to bring into focus all that is to be seen and heard in a forest. Danger which is understood, and which you are prepared to face, does not in any way distract from pleasure.

Jim Corbett
The Talla Des Man-eater, 1952

Charles Ennis, or Chuck, as he liked to be called, was a big, gangling Texan from San Antonio, Texas. He was about fifty when he first contacted me. When we met, he told me he had made his money in the car-park business. I asked him what this meant, and he explained that he traveled all over the United States, looking for unused property conveniently located in thriving cities. When he found a desirable lot, he would locate the owners, negotiate a lease, and convert the space to a parking lot. This usually involved nothing more than putting up a toll booth and a sign and maybe some fencing. He would find a manager or a management team to handle it on his behalf, and he would then move on to the next property.

He first contacted me via Grindlays Bank—my bank in India and England—to ask if I had any safari openings for the 1965 season. He cabled because there was no mail service in far-western Nepal in those days or, indeed, anywhere in the country. There was an Indian post office at the Indian embassy in Katmandu, but one had to be in Katmandu to take advantage of that, and it was
very unreliable. Likewise, there was no cable service in Nepal, so Ennis had to use a combination of an Indian service, my bank in Delhi, and a post office close to the western Indo-Nepal border.

One of the clerks at the Delhi branch of Grindlays—a fellow I kept on a healthy retainer—forwarded any cables that came in for me to the post office in the little town of Palia Kalan, just south of the western Indo-Nepal border in the Keri district of Uttar Pradesh. From there the postmaster—also on retainer—sent a runner to my camp with the cables. The runner also took my cables back to Palia, where the postmaster would send them out on my behalf. My permanent runner, who came on a bicycle, was a grease monkey working with the Palia Kalan Esso Petrol Station and Garage. Its owner, a fat Bengali bunnia (Indian shopkeeper or moneylender, or both) was an acquaintance of mine. I usually paid the runner a dollar per run.

I cabled Ennis back to tell him my schedule was open in December. I asked him to contact my Los Angeles safari booking agent, Joe Broger, who would handle the booking and payments, give him all the information he needed to get to my camp in Nepal, and notify me of Ennis’s date of arrival at the Indian border. I told Ennis he could travel by car from Delhi to the border, where I would pick him up and bring him into camp.

In early December I got a cable from Joe, saying Ennis would be at the border-crossing at a certain time. He would be bringing his own weapons, and he would be alone. Joe added that Ennis wanted to try for a tiger on foot. Unlike the usual client, for whom this valiant impulse usually lasted no more than a day or two, this fellow seemed to be serious, Joe told me. I read this part of the cable and thought, Ho, ho, ho—just wait until he gets here and has spent a couple of days in the deep, dark, scary jungle of the Terai with me, and we’ll see how quickly he’ll change his mind.

In those days some of my clients, aware of the hazards of Indian highways, came from Delhi to Palia Kalan by rail. I picked them up at the Palia railway station and brought them in by back roads—Taru buffalo-cart tracks—to my camp. Others came by
road through India, and I met them at Banbasa, where the old locks bridge of the British canal system enabled vehicular traffic to cross the Sarda River into western Nepal.

Of the two points of entry for clients, I preferred Palia Kalan, though I found it thoroughly depressing. It was a typical north Indian city, gloomy and overcrowded. In the cold winds of winter, the air was filled with eye-stinging dust; in summer, the streets were a sea of mud in the monsoon rains. It was a miserable place of about ten thousand despondent, sour-faced, humorless people. Once, on a cold, damp winter’s day, I encountered an archaic and macabre custom in one of the cheerless streets. A dozen women, dressed in dirty white clothing, were walking abreast, howling and screeching as if the end of the world were imminent, and waving their arms above their heads—their glaring eyes and distraught faces raised to the leaden sky. They were professional funeral mourners, hired by some bumia to lament the death of a family member. I remember how the ghoulish aspect of the women’s shrill wailing made me shudder.

Every time I went to Palia, I could not wait to get back to Nepal. The dismal city had one advantage, though. From there I could drive straight back to Nepal on jungle roads, avoiding the Indian Customs and Immigration checkposts. The nearest one, at Banbasa, consisted of broken-down, straw-thatched bashas (mud-walled huts), where grim-faced baboos (government clerks) sat at rickety wooden tables covered with torn, dirty plastic sheets. It would seem the sole purpose of these pot-bellied, myopic little individuals was to cause anyone trying to cross their sacred border as much hassle and annoyance as was humanly possible.

How long does it take to read and stamp a passport? Five minutes, ten? At Banbasa it took at least an hour and often longer. Ennis looked at me curiously when we got his paperwork processed in just under an hour and a half. As we drove away from the miserable post, he laughed when I told him he was lucky; sometimes it took twice that. I was relieved; some of my clients found the Indian border-crossing circus very irritating. For this
reason, whenever the opportunity arose, I preferred to pick up clients at Palia Kalan, awful as it was, and bring them in on the little-known jungle roads that happily, if illegally, bypassed the absurdity of the Indian border bureaucracy.

Soon after Ennis first contacted me, I had a one-week break from a safari, and, after a couple of days’ rest, I used the remaining time to scout for a good campsite for his safari.

When I started hunting professionally in Nepal, in the winter of 1953, I established a routine for locating my camps. I chose a different place for every season and even for each client, if time allowed. I enjoyed exploring different types of terrain, and I also tried to balance the number of trophies my clients took from each area. The liberal terms of my license allowed me such freedom. Under the patronage of my friend Prince Basundra, the Nepalese government’s department of Forests had given me a document stating that the districts of Kailali and Kanchanpur were to be my professional hunting concession. These two provinces encompass all of the Terai west of the Karnali River, an area of roughly 1,500 square miles.

In effect, I could camp wherever I wanted to. Sometimes I took my clients into the province of Bardia, east of the Karnali. When the required trophy was gaur, I took them as far as the Churia Hills of south-central Nepal, due south of Katmandu. There were virtually no restrictions of any kind in those days, and if one had a couple of good four-wheel-drive vehicles, good tough men, and reliable camp gear, one could go just about anywhere and camp wherever one wished. My documents actually may not have stated this, but, as a young professional hunter running my own operation, I was not given to listening to authority, and this was how I blatantly interpreted the vague restrictions concerning my concession.

Before Ennis came for his hunt, I built a safari camp on the western bank of the Bauni River, the central jungle river in my hunting concession. The place was at the edge of an area generally known as Sukila Phanta, or the White Grass Plains. It was about a mile east of the Taru village of Singpal (later known as Singpur). The camp was within a few yards of an age-old elephant walk,
where the great beasts still forded the river. I placed the campsite on a high bank about ten feet above the river, high enough to get a little air movement in the hot afternoons and safe from crocs at night. I built the camp with the help of my men and an assistant, John Bonney, a thirty-year-old Englishman who was spending a season with me as an apprentice professional hunter.

At dinner on the first night, Ennis talked with Bonney and me about his hunting background. He had hunted in Africa and Alaska, as I recall, and had a few trophies. Apart from that, his big-game background was limited. I told him that before going after tiger, we would spend time in the forest so that he could get to know something of its sights and sounds and smells. We would also shoot meat for the pot—deer and wild boar, which he might enjoy. In this way I would be able to gauge his shooting skills and his general attitude toward big-game hunting. He had never previously hunted in Asian jungles and had little knowledge of what this entailed.

Before we went to bed, Ennis said he had spoken to my agent about going after a tiger on foot. He asked if my agent had passed on this request. When I said yes, he told me he had done quite a bit of reading about the various methods of tiger hunting, and he would really like to have a shot at one on the ground if I would allow it. I forget what I said in reply, but I was thinking, *Give him a few days here in the Terai jungles, and he will soon change his mind.*

I was quite wrong.

Ennis had brought a Remington .375, and he handled it with competence. He was safety conscious with the weapon, which I appreciated; he timed his shots well and chose his targets carefully. I let him start to shoot with Bonney, and a couple of days later, he picked up a brace of wild boar and a big cheetal buck for camp meat.

During our first three days together, I took him around the phantas, or grasslands, of the White Grass Plains to let him get accustomed to the area. A bull elephant in musth (estrus, or sexual desire) charged us, and the huge beast got quite close. We were able to jump in my safari car, drive away, and keep going
until it got tired of chasing us. I noticed that the encounter, which might have upset many a client, did not seem to bother him at all. A big dog leopard dropped out of a tree right in front of us when we were walking near camp. Then a huge python—all sixteen fat feet of it—slid past Ennis’s tent just as he came out for morning coffee. All of this he handled very well. He said he found it amazing and exciting. If it frightened him, he kept his fear under control and did not show it. After he had spent five days with me, I told him, early one morning over coffee, that I had decided to give him a chance to go after a big cat on foot and on the ground.

He was delighted and could not wait to get going. I said we would start at once, but it might take as much as a week to actually get in on a cat. This meant seven days of walking, scouting, and checking for sign, as well as listening to what the jungle folk—scavengers and carrion eaters—had to tell us. Then we might be ready, and, with a bit of luck, I might be able to get him a shot. Although I had known the man for less than a week, I had a feeling that, when the time came, he would hold up under the stress of a face-to-face encounter. He would not panic and run, and he would do the right thing: Without hesitation, he would shoot straight and true and put the cat down before it had the chance to come at us with deadly intent.

And I had just the tiger for him.

Haria gow (village) was fairly large with about seven hundred and fifty plowshares, east of Rani Tal, a lake in the heart of the WGP. For months the villagers had been asking me to rid them of a big tiger that lived in the jungle next to the village. It had lived there for years, and it had killed their cattle. It had also killed two men and badly mauled two others who had the misfortune to stumble on it while herding cattle in the forest.

“It is a monster, sahib,” they said. “You must come and kill it for us. We will reward you with a big feast. Rice, lentils, vegetables, and fruit. And wild boar, which, of course, your good self will most kindly provide.”
I had hunted in the jungles around their village occasionally for some years and knew the gow well. By chance, I also knew of the tiger in question and had a rough idea where it might have a lair. It was a big male, which, the Haria headman told me, had a strange habit of grunting or growling when it walked. I asked him if he knew why it did this and whether it might have been wounded. He did not know. He just knew the tiger made a frightening sound that would scatter the villagers like chaff. The fastidious requirements of my clients had so far prevented me from going after this cat. When I told them it was old, some of them were concerned that it might not have a good pelt and would not make an impressive trophy. And there was another, more sinister reason why I had not gone after it. My knowledge of its hunting range suggested that its lair was somewhere within the maze of old walls of an abandoned fort deep in the Rani Tal jungles. This stronghold had once been the home of a minor raja (prince) known as the Singpal Raja. The tangled, abandoned set of ruins made it a decidedly formidable area in which to hunt.

The Singpal Raja was a Nepalese paharia (hill man) named Deuba, from the Dadeldhura district, about one hundred miles north of the WGP. Little is known about the raja, for the Taru people of the area are illiterate and have no written records. Around 1850 the raja and his brother decided to come down to the Terai and take possession of untitled land, build forts within it, and take up residence. Some speculate that the raja's brother built a fort in Bardia, one hundred miles east of the WGP. The raja himself decided upon the far southwestern corner of Nepal, and he built a massive fort in the jungles that are today the WGP. The fort was situated a mile north of Singpal, which was named after him. According to legend, he lived in the fort with his rani, or queen, and Rani Tal, today one of the principal lakes of the WGP, was named for her.

The one opening in the mists of time is a single historical mention of the place by Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts of the world. While he was a young gazetted officer with the British army, stationed at Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, he
hunted in the WGP with fellow officers. In May 1895 he wrote in his journal that he and his friends had a camp on a small hill on the northern bank of the Bauni River in the WGP. They had come in by bullock cart from Tanakpur and had brought shikar elephants to hunt tiger.

One evening in camp, his journal tells us, he wondered if the Singpal Raja and his rani, in their great fort nearby, might invite them to dinner. Apparently there was no dinner invitation. But what is more important is that this journal entry by Baden-Powell is the last known record of the raja, his rani, and his followers. Afterward, it was as though the jungle had swallowed them. Any record of them today is based on mere speculation.

What happened to them? Were they wiped out by malaria? As hill people, they would have been susceptible to this disease. Or was it smallpox? Cholera? Typhoid? Did they succumb to powerful bandit gangs from across the Indian border? Whatever it was, only the massive walls of the fort remain, fifteen feet wide and at least twelve feet high, with gaps where there had been gates. The walls were constructed of huge bricks, which had been made for the raja locally. The scope of the walls indicates a huge, oval-shaped compound about one thousand yards in circumference. It lay roughly from east to west, with Rani Tal near the northeastern corner. Within the compound are scattered remnants of buildings, but there is little left now. The local villagers have been taking the bricks for their own use for one hundred years. Only the remains of the walls stand, surrounded by what must have been a moat. It is interesting to note that to this day, for some inexplicable reason, few trees will grow within the moat.

It was within this ancient fortress that the Singpal tiger lived.

I sat down with Ennis and told him about the cat. Then I sent Bonney to the village to bring the two men it had mauled. I watched Chuck carefully when he examined their dreadful scars. One of the men had been bitten in the face; he had lost an eye, and his face was distorted and disfigured. The other had been bitten in the shoulder and walked with a crooked stoop. Ennis was