

A RACE WITH A CROCODILE by Alfred Leclair

I was sent to survey a piece of land of 1800 acres for the extension of the Rubber Estate where I was employed. This land was bordered on one side by the Bila river, the river that has the record in Sumatra for losses of human lives by crocs. That very morning I had witnessed, whilst being polled up the river in a dugout canoe, an unsuspecting monkey coming down the river to drink, being seized by a croc which at first sight appeared to be a log stranded in shallow water. I had already surveyed part of the area and was now practically running parallel to the river. At one time when looking into my theodolite a hanging creeper a few feet away interfered with my sighting so I walked up to it and slashed it as high as I could reach. At the same time though, I was stung by a wasp on my neck. Then I heard a hum increasing in amplitude and looking up I saw a swarm of bees coming down from the top of the huge tree to which the creeper was related. They had been disturbed by my action and were on the war path. In a few seconds thousands and thousands of wasp (or were they bees) were on me. I tried to run but caught my foot in a root and went sprawling in the mud. I hit and kicked but this was no way to get rid of the wasps. I scrambled to my feet and knowing the river was near I made a dive across the cluster and reached the river at a bend where the bank is high and the water deep. This meant that if I jumped I could not climb back again but with the hundreds of wasp clinging on to me and the thousands in the air waiting for their turn to do their duty, crocs or no crocs, down I went and remained under as long as I could. Coming up again I saw the sky was invisible by the wasp waiting for my reappearance so I went down again until at last the battle field was clear. Then I started swimming down the river, well in the centre, searching for a place to climb out.

All of a sudden I heard a huge splash on my left near the border. A croc sunning himself on the river bank had apparently spotted me and was on his way to investigate, with a bit of breakfast in view. You have all seen or heard of races in swimming pools, a mere flea bite compared with my speed to reach the opposite bank. I sighted a partly exposed root of a big tree, the river having washed away some of the soil surrounding it, caught it and scrambled up as far as I could go. Looking down, I saw the snout of the sun of a gun just out of the water below me. I could not go up any more; I had to stay where I was hanging on this root. Very fortunately the boatman who brought my lunch appeared round the corner and understood the problem at once. He came on paddling for all he was worth and the snout disappeared. I dropped into the dugout trembling from the strain I had just gone through, but safe and sound however within a few minutes. I had a high fever and told the boatman to take me home where a servant spent hours taking out hundreds of stings from my face, head, neck and back.

INSIDE A HERD OF ELEPHANTS AT 2 AM by Alfred Leclair

This happened in 1912. Having visited a friend on a new three speed Norton motorcycle 80 miles away, I left to return home at 1 am. The carbide lamp was good and the free exhaust had a friendly and pleasing tone. At about half way the lamp began its usual annoying dodges, blowing out at every hard bump and as the road was white and quite visible I gave up trying to keep the lamp lighted. When passing an area of virgin jungle the road became very difficult to see and I had to slow down and was not feeling happy. At speed there is no danger but at 20 to 25 miles per hour a tiger could easily catch me up. Then, there was no more road to be seen; there was something big and black. I knew there were no bends in the vicinity so I applied the brake as hard as I could and my front wheel bumped slightly into the leg of an Elephant, he was across the road, his head turned to face me, there was a herd of them crossing the road, I raced the engine to accentuate the noise he jumped a couple steps backward I took this opportunity to turn round but more elephants had come out of the jungle and had blocked my way back, however with the engine all out making a terrific din each one stepped back or side way, they were a little frightened of this new thundering and fire spitting element. I was allowed to pass unharmed and I returned to my friend for the rest of the night.