



24 August 1860 was the day on which

THE GREATEST HUNT IN HISTORY

took place in the Orange Free State

The following account of this great hunt has been compiled by joining together actual paragraphs and sentences from the descriptions published by Wm. W. Collins 1907, J. J. Bisset 1875, and *The Grahamstown Journal* of 11 September 1860.

"INFORMATION reached the Government from Sir George Grey that Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria . . . intended to visit Bloemfontein, in company of Sir George himself. Mr Andrew Hudson Bain, who was a very old resident of the late Sovereignty, and the owner of the farm 'Bainsvley', and many other 'broadacres of land' had invited the royal party to a great hunt on his farm. Some days before we arrived at Bloemfontein an express had been sent on, and a large body of natives from the tribe of 'Morocco', a native chief, had assembled in, or rather had encircled, the vast plains and provided with guns, and pack-oxen, were specially engaged to beat and drive up the game from distant parts, and having done so, to surround the vast herds of game of several kinds for the purpose of beating up and driving the game to the flats adjoining his residence. The extensive plains in the Free State are intersected here and there by belts and cross-belts of mountains, with only gaps between, through which the countless heads of large game pass from one plain to another. For days before we arrived, the natives had been concentrating from distant points leaving men in the 'several necks', as they passed on to prevent the game from escaping back to the plains, from which they were being driven towards a common centre.

"Early on the morning of the 24th (August, 1860) His Royal Highness and the shooting party of twenty-five guns in all, started for Mr Baine's (sic?) farm followed by a considerable number of Ladies and Gentlemen in Waggon, Carts, and other vehicles, and on horseback. Towards 2 p.m. the clouds of dust rising from all quarters, and the blank gunshots of the Kaffirs told that the game had been cheated out of their forenoon siesta, and were fairly on foot. Well, then, the Prince took to horse, and the battle commenced by the Prince bringing down a great wildebeast or gnu. This ferocious-looking beast turned on his Royal Highness on being wounded, and received a second ball, which rolled him over. This was the sign for the general onslaught. The hunting party advanced up the plain in extended order, a few yards apart, and masses of game kept breaking through as the pressure of the coming streams of antelopes, quaggas, zeebras, blesboks, elands, ostriches, hartebeasts, wildebeast, koodoos, etc. etc. came pouring on towards us, and, checked by our fire commenced to whirl. The plain in which we were, was of vast extent — I dare say nearly a hundred miles in circumference — and the whole of this extent was one moving mass of game. The gaps between the mountains on all sides of this plain were stopped by a living line of men, and we were in the midst of this whirling throng firing at great game at not twenty-five yards' distance as fast as we could load. The Prince fired as fast as guns could be handed to him, for Currie rode on



Prince Alfred, second son of Queen Victoria, in whose honour this hunt was arranged.



J.O.P.
Inscribed silver plate on the stock of a Westley Richards gun used by Prince Alfred during the hunt and afterwards presented by him to Mr W. J. Coleman of Bloemfontein

Thomas Baines' painting of the Great Hunt, reproduced by kind permission of the William Fehr Collection, the Castle, Cape Town

one side and I on the other, and we alternately handed guns to him as he discharged his own. As the circle narrowed there nearly was considerable danger from the game breaking through, for when a stampede took place, so much dust arose that you were in danger of being trampled to death. It became very exciting to see great beasts, larger than horses rolling over from right and left shot not ten paces from you, and also charging down with their great horns lowered as if they were coming right at you and then swerving to one side or the other. The hunt afterwards resembled more the end of a battle than a hunt. There, advancing rapidly in line, were the huntsmen (how many we cannot tell, but all possessing guns) and farther on were the unarmed enemy falling thick, and gradually edging away on the direction of the living hedge of Kaffirs, who again forced them back. During the great slaughter of the day the circle of natives was closing in; and the mass of game became so dressed together at last, that the Prince and Currie took to their hunting hog-spears and charged into the midst, driving home the 'Paget blades' into the infuriated animals. The slaughter was tremendous, considering that it did not endure beyond an hour.

How many fell on the spot, or died afterwards of their wounds, or were caught by the Kaffirs, it would be difficult to tell. The number which is reported to have fallen may be accounted for by keeping in view that one rifle bullet may kill, and certainly wound, some three antelopes under the circumstances we have been describing. A gentleman, interested in the result, took some pains to ascertain from the Kaffirs (who reaped the benefit of the hunt) the approximate tally. They say that between eight hundred and one thousand had come to grief in consequence of the hunt. Six hundred head of large game were shot on this day, besides numbers speared by the natives. The hunt lasted about one hour, and during that time it was estimated that the Prince alone accounted for some twenty-five head of Game, and the Kaffirs who benefited from, and were jubilant over, the flesh, reported that about one thousand head of game of different kinds were destroyed. . . . It was estimated that twenty or thirty thousand head of Game had been surrounded by the Kaffirs and that as the result of this 'battle', the number of Game was reduced by about five thousand head.

"Some Kaffir horses got mixed up with the terrified and maddened game and two even took shelter in the W.C. at Bain's Vley.

"Suffice it to say that such a hunt, taken with all the concomitant circumstances and incidents, has not taken place in any part of the civilised world within the present century. The fact was, that the Prince and suite (all except the Kaffirs) were weary of slaughter and most of the sportsmen looked more like butchers than sportsmen from being so covered with blood. His Royal Highness and Currie were red up to the shoulders from using the spear. It was a very exciting day, and were His Royal Highness to live for a hundred years, I do not believe he could ever see such a scene again, for the game in South Africa is fast disappearing."