



Domesticated elephants drive their wild cousins across the river towards the stockade

Last River Kheda

On December ^{19,}~~18,~~ 1960 in the Kakankote forest, 80 Km. (50 miles) from Mysore city in Southern India, you have the last chance of seeing a 'river kheda'—capture of wild elephants by driving them across a river into a specially built stockade. The forthcoming 'kheda' will be the last in the Kakankote forest—the traditional venue of this thrilling event—for it will soon be submerged in the proposed Kapini Reservoir. The Kapini river courses through the jungles of Kakankote and plays an important role in this drama.

This exciting operation is held ordinarily once in 8 or 10 years and attracts sport and wild life enthusiasts from all over the country. The Kheda previous to this was held in 1953, when 71 elephants were captured. In the coming kheda, the number is expected to be 100.

The Technique

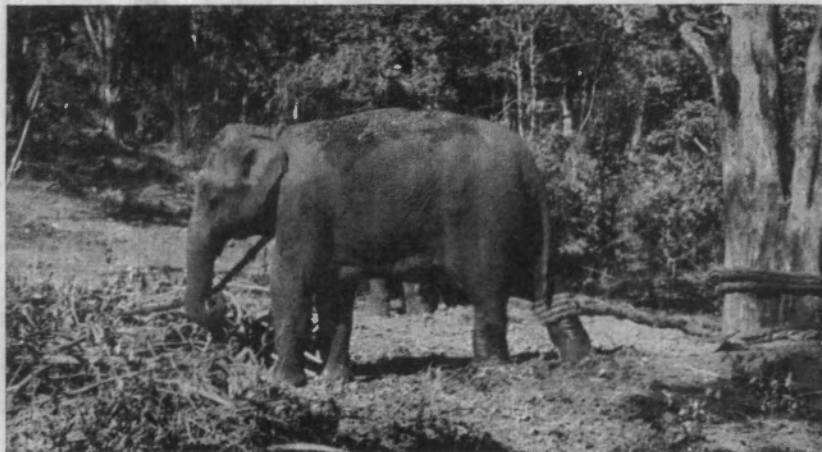
One of the most thrilling spectacles, the Kheda is a

technique by which roaming herds of wild elephants are driven into a specially prepared arena where they are captured.

The Kheda is carefully planned and skilfully executed. To begin with, hundreds of men living in the surrounding villages and known for their skill at the game are recruited by the organisers. A tribe living in the vicinity of the forest provides well-trained trackers who have an intimate knowledge of the habits of elephants. Once the herds are located by the trackers, word goes round and hundreds of "beaters" are deployed over a wide circle at an interval of 15 to 18 metres (50 to 60 ft.) from one another. Having stealthily encircled the herd, the beaters make a deafening noise with their bamboo clappers and empty tins and set up clouds of smoke. This scares the beasts and they run deeper into the ever narrowing trap in a bid to escape. A day and night vigil is kept by the trackers who fire flares during the night and raise

dense clouds of smoke during day-time. Trained elephants accompanied by trackers and clappers on foot relentlessly close in from all sides until the herd, dazed and confused by this persisting hullabaloo, are forced to cross the river at a given point. This "River Drive" is in fact the most thrilling stage of the entire operation. Seating arrangements for visitors are made at a safe place on the opposite bank, from where they can watch the trumpeting mammoths hustle themselves into the man-made trap. As the herd enters through the main gate which opens into the trench-encircled kheda, the trap-door comes down. With it the first and most thrilling phase of the operation is completed.

The next stage is the "Roping Operation"—a task which calls for both daring and skill. The roping stockade is a circular arena about 12 m. (40 ft.) in diameter and constructed of strong logs. It has also a trap-door similar to the main gate. Elephants are enticed into this arena during the cool hours of the night with sugarcane and other plants for which they have great liking. When a sufficient number of elephants—six to eight—are in, the trap-door of the stockade is closed. The following morning the actual roping operation commences. Mounted on trained elephants, the expert ropers then move into the stockade packed with captive beasts. The trained and domesticated elephants, controlled by *mahouts*, close



A big elephant is secured and tethered to a tree

in on the captives one by one and push them into a tight corner until they cannot budge this way or that. Slowly but firmly the hemp noose goes round the wild elephants' neck, belly and legs. The helpless captives are then led out under elephant escort to the "pheelkhana" where their schooling starts in right earnest. The new trainees have only one lesson to master—to obey the dictates of man. This they do in about three months' time.

The entire Kheda operation, from the time the herd



Lassoed captives in the stockade

is located up to final capture, may take four to five days. Of maximum interest to the visitor are the days when the "River Drive" and the "Roping" operations are held.

There is another place in Mysore, namely, Budi-

padaga where elephants are captured the Kheda way. What makes the coming Kheda at Kakankote really unique is that it will be the last involving the thrilling spectacle of a 'river drive'. There is no scope for such a thing at Budipadaga or elsewhere.

Interview with Bernard Newman (Continued from Page 18)

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a package deal in chartered planes so that the country could 'be done' for £200.

"This is not the best way to travel," he continued, "but it is the only answer to present-day travel needs. Even if you lost on this in the beginning it would be really worthwhile. In the end, you would stand to gain." Of that he was convinced. He also suggested that India should have some homelier and inexpensive hotels or boarding houses to cater to the needs of the middle class visitor who had no use for luxury hotels.

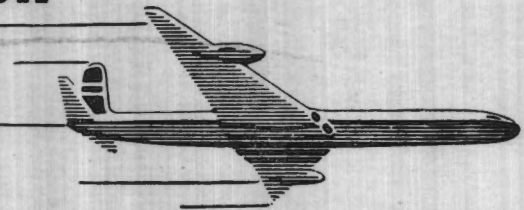
This winter he hoped to do a good deal, through his lectures, to encourage travel to India. Nearly all young Australians and New Zealanders came to

Europe, particularly England, for a year. On their return, they could have a delightful holiday in India without much strain on their purse. "I hope to convince them this winter," he said with a twinkle in his eyes reminding us of luck being with him!

Then we were in for a surprise as he and his hosts assembled outside for a photograph. How long had they been in India, I enquired. And it was little David who replied, "Nav mas". I gaped in surprise and added, "That is purer Hindi than my own. How could you have learnt it so fast!" Peals of laughter greeted my remark. For what reason I had no idea, until I was informed, "That was pure Welsh, for nine months".

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