

# A BUSHMAN'S NOTES

IN THE course of my travels I have visited the source of two African rivers. One in Nigeria, the Kaduna, rises on the Manjoc Plain below the Jos escarpment and is notable for a strange thing. In the evening when one prepares to camp below the stars as fat as fairy lights, after the heat of the day, the water which bubbles up from the spring is cold and very refreshing, yet in the morning after a very cold night near freezing, the water is warm and very comforting.

The depth of the spring is such that it takes 12 hours to warm and 12 hours to cool so that in the morning the water reflects yesterday's sun, and in the evening holds last night's chill. But there are neither bees nor trees here, so let us move on to the source of the Zambesi where there are both in abundance.

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By **ROGER SILBERRAD**

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Here the spring rises within an impenetrable clump of giant bamboo from which the infant stream emerges northwards, gradually swings to the west, then the south and finally flows east to the sea.

The source is surrounded by many square miles of brachystegia forest with a huge honey potential. There are also Driver ants, termites, honey badgers, caterpillars and the occasional air frost. The latter two can destroy all the flowering buds, and the others can quickly destroy an apiary, particularly if it is concentrated on the ground and perhaps not visited with a blow lamp every day.

In these conditions there is no doubt of the advantages of keeping bees in the trees rather than on the ground. Thus, here bark-hive beekeeping reigns supreme.

Annual losses on the ground from absconding and from Driver ants can be well over 100% of the starting figure, taking into account the replacement colonies collected during the year. This takes no account of the work involved in

taking and hiving these replacements.

Whereas properly maintained and baited bark hives recover at least some of their own absconded colonies without any labour involved. Ant losses are relatively small because bark hives are dispersed over a wide area and never concentrated like frame hives.

When bark hives are hung on wires as opposed to being tied into the branches, they are less vulnerable to honey badgers, and can also be lowered to about chest height above the ground for harvesting. This makes the removal of combs very much easier, not least because many of the attacking bees will return to the tree and attend to the man waiting there to refix the hive afterwards, also with two buckets on the ground, one for honey combs and one for pollen and brood trimmings, quality control starts at once.

A high pollen content in honey is no bad thing. Indeed it is the reason for the popularity of local honey whereby sufferers from hay-fever can become sensitized against the pollen in their district.

What really damages bark-hive honey is the brood juices from crushed larvae. Unless these are removed immediately, fermentation is very rapid and the entire sample becomes fit only for honey beer. Fresh brood trimmings make a very refreshing drink and are the natural perquisite of every harvester.

Pressing the comb after cleaning is very dependant on absolutely thorough hand picking, for it will certainly crush any remaining larvae. Where the equipment is available, a tropical extractor fitted with cages will produce a much cleaner sample.

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