

THAK TIGRESS KILLING SITE

I have read Jim Corbett "Man-Eaters of Kumaon" for the first time in my early teenage years, and I was profoundly moved by the stories and by the personality of Corbett. I can say that despite my lifelong love for reading and the large amount of books I've read, I have never been so impressed by any other book. The story of Thak tigress was my favorite. Not because it was the last "man-eater story" of the book I did not want to finish, but because of the sheer dramatic tension of the story and because of Corbett's writing style.

Actually, all that Corbett did was to write in rich detail what has happened during this hunt, at the Indian-Nepalese border, in October-November 1938. Corbett has never been so close to conceding a defeat during all his previous hunts. This was for the first time that during the whole hunt he could not manage to see the man-eater even once. On the contrary, it was the tigress who was stalking Corbett, and Corbett could have easily fallen a victim of the clever tigress on number of occasions. Exhausted and depressed, on November 30th, during the last minutes of the daylight Corbett conceded a defeat. He collected his men and his two goats he was using as a bait, and started 3 km walk to the village Chuka. Depressed, he planned to leave the region early next morning, leaving the task of killing the elusive man-eater to others, for the first time in his life. He was 63 years old and he felt it was time to quit. Still in the way, Corbett heard the tigress mating call, and he decided to try one more thing: to call up the tigress, mimicking a mating call of a male tiger. Knowing how clever his opponent was, Corbett did not have high hopes that the tigress would respond and come, but the tigress started answering and gradually came to Corbett. This scene, that took place in the dying moments of the daylight of the November 30th, 1938, is a masterpiece of Corbett writing skill. He is able to keep readers on the edge of their seats, describing everything in detail: the expression of horror of his men as they hear the approaching tigress roar, his frantic search for a suitable meeting place, hiding his terrorized men and goats, his precarious sitting position behind the rock, the route of the approaching tigress, and finally how he manages to shot the tigress during the last seconds of the dwindling daylight, falling of the rock on the heads of his men and injuring his jaw from the recoil of the heavy rifle. When Corbett was writing the book "Men-Eaters of Kumaon", this was the most recent man-eating tiger that he killed, and he remembered all the details extremely vividly.

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In short, I was mesmerized. I liked the story so much, that in the 1980s, when I, as a lecturer in ethnomusicology, was teaching at the Tbilisi State Conservatory, I read the whole story to my conservatory students, musicians, who had nothing to do with tigers or with conservation.

At that time I lived in Soviet Union, in the republic Georgia (now independent state), and the book I read was published in Georgian. While living in extremely closed Soviet Union, I could not even dream of visiting India in order to see the actual place where this story took place. (By the way, it is not well known among Corbett fans, that Corbett's books were translated and published in several languages of the former Soviet Union. The author of this text read both Georgian and Russian translations.)

Well, after few years of break-up of Soviet Union, I migrated to Australia. Soon I realized that in my new country traveling was not an unrealistic dream at all. So I started waiting for a convenient occasion to go to India, as I could not afford to organize a holiday trip just to visit Corbett places. Such occasion occurred when I was invited to an educational congress in Delhi in January 2011. So I secured a free week after the congress, and carefully planned my visit to the villages Chuka and Thak at the Nepalese border (the villages where the whole story took place).

Of course, I had the book written by Peter Byrne, a professional hunter from Nepal, who specially visited Jim Corbett hunting places and wrote a popular book "Shikari Sahib" (the book is also known under the name "Gentleman Hunter"). In this book Byrne tells stories of Corbett killing his man-eating tigers and leopards, and shows the photos of these sites. My dream was to go and to spend at least several hours at the place where the dramatic final showdown of the Thak man-eater took place. I actually wanted to read the whole story there, sitting at "the Rock". If you are a Corbett fan, you can probably understand my desire...

It was then, in 2010, reading Corbett story for possibly more than hundredth time, and comparing it with Peter Byrne account of this hunt, that I noticed there were some inconsistencies between Corbett and Byrne accounts of this legendary hunt. According to Byrne, Corbett was not sitting on a narrow ledge of the rock, instead he was standing behind the rock. Also, according to Byrne, Corbett did not fall after shooting the tigress, and there was no word of him injuring his jaw from the recoil of the rifle. I also noticed that the rock, represented in Byrne's book, was a different that one can imagine reading Corbett's description. So a doubt emerged in my heart, that something was wrong. Possibly the Byrne's rock was not the real place where the killing of the Thak tigress took place? Was this possible?..

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It was also at this time when my tour operator sent me an account of another Corbett fan, Dr Manfred Walzl from Germany, who was a few years before me (in March 2007) in this region and visited the Thak man-eater killing site. When I read Manfred's vividly written account, my doubts grow even deeper, as on his tour Manfred was shown a different rock (not the Byrne rock) and according to him, none of the two rocks (the Byrne rock, and the new rock he was shown) was coinciding precisely with Corbett's description. I contacted Manfred and before my trip we had an exchange of long emails about the Corbett rock with all the details. According to Manfred, Byrne's rock was a much better candidate for the real rock, than the new rock, although Byrne rock still had many inconsistencies with Corbett's description. Finally, after reading Corbett story many more times, and re-reading Manfred letters about the both rocks he saw, I came to the conclusion, that the real rock was still not found.

So my 2011 trip to India became a trip to find a legendary place of Jim Corbett's last hunt.

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I started my trip after the congress to the villages Chuka and Thak with the single aim: to find the place of the last hunt of Jim Corbett¹. I had five free days. As getting to this region needs a full day of trekking from the last motorized place (Thuli Gad), and a day trekking to get back to camp, I had only three days to find the real rock².

Preparing for this task, I approached the task of finding this rock following a certain strategy of scientific inquiry. As I myself an academic, this was natural for me. First of all, I worked out the most important methodological points of the search. My central premises were the following:

(1) We must follow Corbett' descriptions in every detail for several important reasons:

(a) Corbett gives an incredibly detailed information about the rock, where it is, how far from the village, where the path is going, how he was sitting on it, how big was the ledge, where he placed his left hand, where he placed his right foot, how he was holding a gun,

1 The readers should note that the term "last hunt" is not literal – Corbett killed at least one more tiger in 1946 (a cattle lifter in Kaladhungi). We also know that Corbett also hunted lions in Africa, but this hunt for the Thak tigress was Corbett's last hunt after a man-eating tiger, described by Corbett.

2 Here I must say that for several weeks I was actually trying to find an Indian travel company who could take me to the villages Chuka and Thak by a jeep, as I was told that someone visited these villages by a motorized road. After several failed attempts to find such a company, I understood that the advice was not based on reality, and if I wanted to see these places, I had to walk very much like Corbett walked in the 1930s.

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how he put his gun on the rounded top of the rock, how and why he used handkerchief, etc). Also,

(b) We should remember that this story was the most recent hunting story he wrote in his book (hunting happened in the end of 1938, and his book "Man-eaters of Kumaon" was published in 1944), so his memories were very fresh.

(c) Corbett also mentions several times in this story (and also in the story about the Talla-Desh tiger) that he "knew every foot of the path between Chuka and Thak".

(d) As we know, while he was trying to track and kill the Thak tigress, the tigress also tried to track and kill him, following him almost all the time. So Corbett's knowledge of this path was crucial for his own survival. That's why, even when he heard the call of the tigress, and started calling her up, and when he was running down from the ridge to meet the tigress, he ALREADY knew that he was going to meet the tigress at this 4 feet high rock.

(e) Corbett was known and very much revered for his legendary honesty, so it was absolutely impossible to accept (at least for me) that he made up some details of the story in order to make them more dramatic for the readers.

So the general conclusion for me was very simple: to find the rock, I had to follow Corbett's description very closely, in all the details.

On the other hand, we must remember that:

(2) Villagers of Thak (or Chuka) should not be considered a reliable source of the information about this rock for several reasons:

(a) they were not present at the dramatic scene; the four people who were sitting behind and under Corbett, were Corbett's own people from Nainital, who, according to Corbett words, have never been to the jungles before this trip. So these four people were not Thak (or Chuka) villagers;

(b) Thak villagers were not even in their village (Thak), as after the last victim of the tigress was killed, they left the village, and only came back a couple of days after when the tigress was killed. The only person that was left nearby (in village Chuka) was the Thak headman;

(c) After killing the tigress, Corbett left the region in few hours, early next morning, not even letting Chuka villagers to see the killed tiger in the morning; Thak villagers were, as I mentioned above, in a more distant location; So Corbett did not even have time to go with the people of Thak or Chuka, to show and to tell them the details of the story during the daytime.

(d) And finally, villagers showed Peter Byrne in 1975 one rock, and at least from 2007 till 2011 they were showing Corbett fans (including Manfred and myself) a different rock, so their memory was far from perfect about this place;

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So, basically, my conclusion was that we must trust Corbett description and follow his words as close as possible in every detail. So Corbett writing was not only my primary source, it was my only source.

I also acknowledged another very important point: we need to take into account, that in the past 73 years (1938-2011) some details of the rock and its surroundings could have changed, and it is important to know what COULD have change, and what COULD NOT change.

Here is what can NOT change in the course of time:

- (1) The place where the rock is -- the distance from the village,
- (2) the basic rectangular shape of the place,
- (3) the presence of the rock ridge in the middle of the rectangular field (stretching from south to northern part of the rectangular land),
- (4) the position of the four foot high rock itself, on the Eastern side of the rectangular field,
- (5) the shape of the rock,
- (6) the presence of the ledge on the rock, its size and its orientation (also on the eastern side of the rock), and the way Corbett must have been sitting sideways on a narrow ledge should be still possible.
- (7) Corbett also described in details where he put his feet, hands and the rifle on the "rounded top of the rock." All thee details are very unlikely to change in the course of time of a few decades or even for centuries.

Now let us discuss what CAN change: first of all,

- (1) The course of path from Thak to Chuka can change, and
- (2) Accumulation of the earth and dry leaves could affect the path, or some places around the 4 feet high rock where Corbett killed the tigress.

So, to do the proper investigation of all these details, I took a compass (to be sure of the South and East directions that Corbett amply gives in his stories), and also the centimeter with me (to measure exact length of different rocks, ledges, falling spaces). In order to measure the big distances, I was counting my steps from the village Thak to the ridge, and from the ridge to the beginning of the flat rectangular; I also counted steps from the beginning of the flat rectangular to the rock ridge on the rectangular, and then from there to

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the place where the rock must be. I spent at this site two days, January 20th and 22nd (January 21 I was in village Sem). I was three hours on January 20th (one of my guides, Nar Singh was with me on that day, waiting for me some 50 metres from me, sleeping near the "Peter Byrne rock"), and then I spent two hours on January 22nd (another guide, a Chuka villager, Hoshiar Singh, the son of Umaid Singh, was with me there, also waiting). In total I spent 5 hours in the area and made all the detailed measurements of all possible rocks in the vicinity. To be sure of the distances I also counted my steps, and then I measured exactly how many centimeters I was roughly covering with my 10 steps, and made estimates, so my measurements of the distances from the village to the ridge and to the rectangular piece of land must be quite accurate.

Most importantly, I made a long list of the details (from Corbett writing), that the Corbett rock MUST coincide with:

(1) Corbett rock must be on a rectangular piece of land, about 800 metres from the Thak village (quarter of mile from the village Thak, plus another 400 yards) from the village Thak;

(2) Rectangular land must be about 40 yards wide (East-West direction) and about 80 yards long (South-North direction);

(3) At the end of the rectangular land (on the North side) there must be a steep rocky descent;

(4) There must be a rock ridge in the middle of the rectangular land, starting in about 25 yards after the path enters the flat ground (when coming from the Southern end, from the village Thak). The ridge must be running from South to North;

(5) The path from the Thak village should be going first from Thak on a steep ridge (400 meters), and then it should go down to the beginning of the flat rectangular land (about 350 meters);

(6) The rock must be on the territory of the rectangular land, at the far right side of the rectangular land (when looking from Thak, from south);

(7) It is very important to remember that the rock must be on the EASTERN side of the rectangular land;

(8) The path must skirt around the rock and should go steeply down immediately after the rock;

(9) Rock must about 4 feet high;

(10) rock must have a ledge;

(11) The ledge must be from the opposite side where from Corbett was expecting the tigress to appear: tigress was coming from the west, so the ridge must be from the eastern side. Corbett obviously did not want to be very exposed to the eyes of the tigress, so he was trying to hide his body behind the rock (Peter Byrne as a professional hunter was absolutely right on this point);

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(12) The ledge must be narrow, as Corbett was only able to sit sideways, and he was able to place only a part of his bottom on the ledge;

(13) To keep himself steady, Corbett had to put his left hand on top of the rock;

(14) The rock must have a rounded top where Corbett put his rifle. Corbett even put his handkerchief on the top of the rock to prevent the rifle sliding;

(15) To keep himself more steady, Corbett stretched his right leg and touched the ground with his right foot;

(16) Despite holding himself on three points (sitting sideways on the ledge, placing his left hand on the rock, and touching the ground with his right foot) Corbett was still sitting not very stably, and subsequently he was knocked from the ledge by the recoil of the first bullet; The recoil of the second bullet injured his jaw quite badly.

(17) From his position Corbett had a problem of firing his rifle to the right (right from him) direction, as to fire in the right from him direction he would need to rise his heavy 450.400 rifle with his right hand only, aim and fire;

(18) Corbett could not use his left hand to hold his rifle, he needed it to keep himself on the rock;

(19) The path was approaching the rock from the left side (when looking from the rock);

(20) There was a small hump on the path about 20 feet (6 meters) away from the rock, and Corbett was going to fire in the face of the tigress as soon as it appeared above this hump;

(21) Immediately behind the rock there must be a deep space where Corbett fell on top of his four men and two goats;

(22) The space behind the rock for the fall must be about 10-12 feet deep;

(23) The path from Thak should enter the rectangular flat ground from the Southern side;

(24) In 25 yards the path should reach the rock ridge which runs from South to North;

(25) At the rock ridge, the path must bend right;

(26) After bending to the right, the path should continue another 25 yards and must leave the rectangular land on the East (long) side, or as Corbett write, at "far right side", skirting around the 4 foot high rock;

(27) There must be a space for scattered bushes on the left from the rock (Corbett found that if he laid down next to the rock on the path, the tigress could approach him through the scattered bushes without him seeing the tigress, or go around the rock from the right side from him). Corbett obviously wanted to conceal himself as much as he could from the tigress, that's why he wanted to lie down, but after he found this was not effective and safe, he decided to sit behind the rock on the ledge, sitting very uncomfortably;

(28) In his position, sitting on a ledge behind the rock, Corbett was naturally prepared to fire to the left direction only, and he was expecting the tigress to appear from the left side,

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the side from where the path was approaching the rock. This was the direction his gun was pointing at;

(29) The tigress actually did not come on the path, as Corbett hoped. After going mad not meeting her mate on the spot she was expecting him to be (she was at this moment behind the low ridge that was between her and Corbett, so Corbett could not see her), after Corbett made his last call (when they called together), she crossed the low ridge in front and bit right of the Corbett rock (Corbett describes her position of "one o'clock"), which meant she was a bit right from Corbett, an awkward direction for him to fire his rifle;

(30) If the tigress continued the same direction, Corbett would be in a trouble, as it would be impossible for him to turn the gun on the top of the rock towards right and fire, or to lift a heavy rifle with one hand and fire, without the support of the rock;

(31) The "half a dozen steps" the tigress made to her right after her last powerful roar that hit Corbett in the face ("and could have carried my hat...") was a great luck for Corbett, as the tigress came more to the left side for Corbett, exactly the place where Corbett's rifle was pointing; Otherwise, as Corbett writes, the story, "if written, would have had a different ending"...

These were the details that I found in Corbett story that could help me to find the "correct rock" where this dramatic scene took place. So I was searching for the Corbett rock with ALL these details in my mind (actually, on the paper). As a scholar, I have a general principle in my research, that to make a positive identification, there must be no exceptions, no unexplained details.

Now the most interesting part: after researching the place for several hours, which is the correct rock?

Villagers rock (the one that they were showing to Corbett fans during the last several years, including Manfred in 2007 and myself in 2011) can not be the correct one. It fits only with couple of details, but does not fit with most of the details. Positive details are that it is about 4 feet high, it is situated at the path, it has a ledge, and there is a deep place behind the ledge where Corbett could fall. There are many more details that the rock does not fit Corbett's description: this rock is not in the right place to start with, not on the rectangular piece of the flat land, and the distance from the village to this rock is too short. The ledge is not on the opposite side of the rock where Corbett was waiting the tigress to approach from, and above all, the ledge is a way too wide (80 sm), so it is definitely not a "narrow ledge" where Corbett had to "sit sideways to place a part of his bottom on the ledge". Two people can sit on this ledge side by side. Also, there is no place (and no need) for Corbett to place his left hand to hold himself steady on the rock, because 80 sm ledge is a perfectly steady place to sit on; Also there is no place and no need for Corbett to put his rifle on the "rounded top of the rock"; also you can not stretch from this ledge your right foot to reach the ground. Possibly most importantly, from the practical point of view of a hunter, who was expecting the appearance of a man-eater, sitting on this rock would have been disastrous, as it was like

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sitting high on a stage. So on this rock Corbett would have been extremely exposed to the coming tigress, instead of hidden behind the rock as Corbett wanted and described. (Readers can see this rock on the accompanying film-documentary about our trip to Kumaon.)

So from Corbett's description it is quite obvious that this rock, where tour guides had been taking Corbett fans during the last few years (including Manfred Walzl and myself), can not be the correct rock which Corbett described in the story about Thak man-eater.

Now let us discuss the rock that Chuka and Thak villagers showed to Peter Byrne on April 20, 1975³. For simplicity I will be mentioning this rock as the "Peter Byrne's rock". This is the rock that Peter Byrne showed in his books, dedicated to Corbett hunting stories and places, and is known to many Corbett fans. It is important to remember, that Peter did not do a special research for this place, he just believed what Thak and Chuka villagers told him when he was there in 1975. He did not compare the rock to Corbett description either, as he did not have the book with him. By the way, in the book *Shikari Sahib* this black and white photo is dated as 1995, but Peter Byrne wrote to me this was a mistake (Peter Byrne's letter of June 22, 2011). The correct date, April 20, 1975, comes from Peter Byrne personal diary (courtesy of Peter Byrne). Peter's diary even specifies the name of a Chuka villager, Buloka Singh, who was photographed on the rock. The site was later confirmed by Thak villagers (Thak was well populated in 1975), but still, there are still discrepancies with this rock and Corbett description.

This rock is partly in a right place. I said "partly" because it is on the correct rectangular piece of the land (the one that is 80 yards long and 40 yards wide, situated about 800 metres from the village). But the rock is on the **wrong (northern)** side of the rectangular land, not **Eastern** side, as Corbett described. The rock does have some sort of ledge, but it is totally impossible to sit on this ledge. And there is no need to sit on this ledge in the first place, as you can stand behind the rock. There are many more details which do not fit Corbett's description. Apart from being on a wrong side of the rectangular, it is too far from the beginning of the rectangular flat place (almost at the very end of the rectangular flat land), there is no falling space behind the rock. It is also higher than the one described by Corbett (5 feet, not 4 feet). Also, even if you imagine yourself somehow sitting on the ledge (which is impossible), there is no place to put your rifle on the "rounded top of the rock". Also, the ledge is from the wrong side, not the opposite side where the tigress was approaching from, so if Corbett was sitting there, he would have been directly exposed to the eyes of the tigress

3 All these details are taken from Peter Byrne personal travel diary from his 1975 trip to Kumaon, the trip when he was shown Thak and Chuka man-eater's killing sites (he saw both sites on April 20th, 1975). I am very grateful to Peter Byrne for sending me the pages of his diary and agreeing to use them in this chapter. According to Peter Byrne words, in his book "Shikari Sahib" this photo is dated as from 1995, which is a mistake)

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which would have had disastrous consequences for Corbett. Regarding Corbett's words that he was sitting on the ledge, this is simply impossible on this rock.

It is interesting, that in Byrne's photos there are two possible positions of how Corbett was positioned on the rock: in one photo a Chuka villager (as mentioned above, Buloka Singh) is sitting on top of the rock (not on the ledge!). On another photo it is Byrne himself, photographed hidden behind the rock. Byrne, himself a professional hunter, chose the best position in case IF Corbett was to meet the tigress at this rock: behind the rock. But if we accept that Corbett was hidden behind the rock, then lots of details that Corbett wrote about his awkward sitting position on the rock must be totally wrong: how he was sitting sideways on the narrow ledge, with his right foot touching the ground, left hand stretched to hold on the top of the rounded rock, his rifle resting on a rounded top of the rock, and also him falling after the shots from the ledge straight behind the rock, on the heads of his men and two goats etc. So if we accept that Byrne's rock is the right one, we need to accept that Corbett made up plenty of details of his hunt, which, knowing Corbett's personality, is absolutely impossible. In short, after seeing and examining the place for five hours, measuring all its parts, I became convinced that Byrne's rock could not be the rock where Corbett concluded his hunting career of man-eaters.

So neither of these two rocks can be the rock where Corbett killed the Thak tigress.

I believe the main reason why villagers showed the wrong rock to Byrne in 1975 was primarily because THE COURSE OF PATH HAVE CHANGED between 1938 (when hunting took place) and 1975 (when Byrne visited Thak). Corbett is very clear in his description that after reaching the rectangular piece of land, and going straight 25 yards on the rectangular land, the path bends RIGHT just before the beginning of the rock ridge.

Today (and in 1975) the path skirts around the rock ridge from the LEFT side and then continues straight to North, leaving the rock ridge on the right side. So the path changed, and today the Corbett rock cannot be seen from the contemporary path between Chuka and Thak. If we accept the idea, that the path have changed (and this is obvious from Corbett's description), then everything falls in its place. So, we need to follow Corbett description to find the right course of the path, and after this, try to find the right rock on a long forgotten path.

Both Manfred and myself agreed in the course of our long email exchange, that the new path that is currently running there, has changed since the 1938.

So I followed Corbett's vivid description in every detail, went on the right side from the rock ridge, and I believe I found the rock, where Corbett set when he shot and killed the Thak man-eater on November 30th, 1938. You can see the photo of the rock, taken on January 20th 2010, the day when I saw this rock for the first time.

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This rock is exactly in the place as Corbett describes, and is coinciding with all the descriptions that Corbett provides in the story. But let us follow the course of events. As I was not rushing anywhere, I was checking directions and measuring everything with compass and with the measure tape.

First of all I made sure that the "rectangular piece of flat land" the where the rock must be placed was the correct one. For this I counted the distance from the village to the ridge, and then from ridge to the rectangular land. I also checked with the compass where are the South-North-East -West sides (I suggest anyone who will be following Corbett footsteps to take compass, as Corbett is usually very specific about the directions). Everything was correct -- short sides of rectangular are the South and North sides, long ones -- East and West sides, and the path enters from the South part. Then I followed his further descriptions. Entering from the South end, and following the path, I counted 25 yards (in my counting, it was about 22 meters, which is about 25 yards), and I came to the beginning of the rock ridge. Today, as I have already mentioned, the path skirts the ridge from the left side, but according to Corbett's words, the old path was bending to the right. So I followed Corbett's words, and at the ridge I turned right, and went around the rock ridge. I went about another 30 meters and after few minutes of the search I found the rock which fitted Corbett description perfectly.

Or, let me say, "almost perfectly". See more details below.

The rock I found is in the right place (25 yards to the ridge, plus 30 meters right from the ridge to the East side of the rectangular piece of land), it is a right height (115 sm today, or almost precisely 4 feet high, which easily can be a result of accumulation of the earth and leaves at the rock). From behind it is much higher (where the villagers and goats were positioned). It has a narrow (18 sm) ledge on the back of the rock (east side of the rock, opposite where the tigress was coming from as Corbett indicated -- tigress was coming from the western side), there is also a fall behind the rock, so the rock is much higher from behind than 4 feet. Corbett fell there after firing his rifle. Also, if you sit on the ledge, the only way to sit on it is to sit sideways, with your left side of your bottom on the ledge, and stretching your right foot to reach the ground to keep yourself steady (this is exactly as Corbett describes how he was sitting on the rock ledge); Also mind, that if you are not about 6 feet tall, you cannot reach the ground with your right foot, and in this case sitting on the ledge becomes virtually impossible. Also, your left hand must be stretched holding on the top of the rock, so you can keep yourself steady; and surely, there is also a "rounded top of the rock" in front of your chest to rest your rifle there, while waiting for the tigress to appear (Corbett placed his handkerchief on the rounded top to prevent slipping of the gun from the top of the rock, so I did as well). You can check these details on the photo of Hoshiar Sings sitting at the rock in Corbett's position. All these details coincide perfectly with Corbett's description.

There is also a bump from the rock on the old path 6 meters on the left from the rock (where Corbett was expecting the tigress to appear and to shot her in the face). There is a low ridge about 8-10 meters directly in front of the Corbett rock. It was behind this low ridge the tigress went mad not finding the male tiger. And there is also a fall behind the rock, just under the ledge where Corbett was sitting.

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So everything fits perfectly, with the only one exception: the fall behind the rock is not as deep as Corbett describes.

Corbett mentions 10-12 feet (about 3 - 3.5 metres), but today the fall is only about 2 meters deep (about 7 feet). I measured the rock from all sides. From the front, from the side where the tigress was coming the rock is 115 sm high, from behind (where the ledge is and where there is a falling space where Corbett fell) the rock is 210 sm high (seven feet). The ledge (measured from behind), is on the height of 110 sm from the bottom). So the only detail that this rock does not coincide with Corbett's description is that the falling space is not as deep as Corbett writes.

To coincide with Corbett's description perfectly, all 100%, I proposed that the falling space must have been in Corbett time at least about a meter deeper than it is now. Could this space be deeper 72 years ago? I believe it could.

The place of the fall is a kind of a nullah, which gradually goes down, and after some distance (about 10 metres) another rising piece of land is starting, and it is very possible that during the proceeding 72 years seasonal monsoon rains filled up the nullah with the earth, rocks and falling leaves (particularly as the new path was found and this side was left for good), so I proposed that the depth of the fall behind the rock was gradually, during the seven decades, filled up with the earth and falling rocks.

To check this possibility, I checked the ground behind the rock, just under Corbett's sitting place (under the ledge) on January 22. I proposed that in case if it was a solid rock, it would be impossible to imagine that 72 years ago it was a deeper fall there (solid rocks are much more stable than the earth), but in case if it was mostly a soft earth there, then it would be possible to have the deeper fall behind the rock in Corbett time, and it later decreased by about 1 meter or more during the past 72 years, filled with earth and leaves during several decades.

So, on my second visit on January 22, I dug the earth behind the Corbett rock, under the ledge, in the place where Corbett must have fallen on top of his men and goats. I did digging with my pocket knife. I managed to dig a hole of about 40 sm deep, and I could clearly see that there was only a soft earth, no solid rock. I took video of my initial digging effort. So I came to conclusion that the falling space behind the rock was deeper 72 year ago. My second and third visit to Thak (in 2012 and 2014) convinced me that my suggestion was correct.

If the fall was deeper in Corbett's time (which I believe was the case) then **all** the Corbett's descriptions are coinciding with this rock: (1) how far it is from the Thak village, (2) where is the rectangular piece of land, (3) where is the rock, (4) where is the ledge, (5) how big is the ledge, (6) how you need to sit on the rock sideways (7) with your right foot touching the ground, (8) with your left hand holding on the top of the rock, and (9) putting the rifle on the top of the rounded rock, (10) with the space for the fall just behind the rock where

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Corbett placed his four men and two goats, (11) with a bump on the old path 6 metres from the rock, (12) with the low rock ridge in front on a distance to fit the dense bushes and then about 3 metres of more open ground. So everything is coinciding. Also, when you sit there on the narrow ledge, sideways, you also understand why Corbett could not turn his rifle to the right from his side, or to use his left hand to support his rifle: because he was sitting with his chest virtually against the face of rock, and he had no space to change his position. So we can say that absolutely all the details of Corbett descriptions are coinciding with this rock. With so many precise details, I believed this identification was as precise as the identification of somebody's fingerprints.

That's why I became convinced that this rock, which I saw for the first time on January 20th, and around which I spent 5 hours measuring and studying the whole place (even digging the earth under the ledge) during 20th January and 22nd January, is the right one. After my measurements I can say that there is not a single detail that makes it impossible this to be the correct rock. Apart from my own estimate, all the members of our 2012 and 2014 parties had long conversations with detailed analyze of Corbett words, and plenty of measuring. All of us came to the firm conclusion that the rock identification is positive.

The rock has couple of deep cracks from the front (western side), and a part of the rock on the right side is partly broken away (not affecting the part where Corbett was sitting). Parts of the rock and the ledge are now covered with green moss, and lots of big red ants lived there in 2011. Possibly the ants lived there 72 years ago as well, but Corbett does not mention them, because (1) it is unlikely that Corbett would pay attention to the ants when a roaring man-eater tiger was coming towards him, and (2) in the beginning of the night (it was already dark when Corbett set there) ants could have been already gone to sleep (and missed the dramatic show!)⁴.

Here is also a photo of our 2012 party members, after we restored the deeper falling space behind the rock. You can see one of our Indian helpers sitting on the rock (like Corbett), and others are sitting behind the rock, like four horrified villagers and two goats were sitting on November 30, 1938.

In 2012, during our group's visit to this rock, we affixed the metal plate, commemorating the site of the last hunt of man-eating tiger of the legendary hunter and conservationist, and dig behind the rock, to reveal the initial falling space behind the rock. Today the falling space is 3 metres deep. Possibly in 1938 it was even deeper, it is hard to tell (Corbett mentions "10-12 feet below me").

After coming back from India in 2011, I informed Jerry Jaleel, the head of the Jim Corbett Foundation (in Edmonton, Canada) about the finding and sent him several photos of the newly found rock that I took. Jerry studied my photos and my description in close detail, compared it with the Corbett story, and was very excited to conclude this was definitely the

⁴ in April 2012, when our group visited the rock to reconstruct it, the red ants were gone, instead, we found a big colony of big black ants living behind the rock, in the Corbett falling space. Most likely the dwellers at the rock change quite easily.

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right rock where Corbett killed the Thak man-eater. He soon released part of my text and couple of my photos in a special issue of the "Tiger Trails", a journal of Jim Corbett foundation. Jerry also placed two photos of the newly founded rock on Jim Corbett website together with comments. It were these photos, placed on the Jim Corbett website, that brought to me the attention of several avid Corbett fans (Fernando Oliveira, Kotecha Kristoff, Priyvratt Gadhvi), and gave us the idea to organize a new trip to the villages Chuka and Thak in April 2012. The book that you are reading is the result of this trip, and is written by the participants of the trip. You can read the whole story of our trip later in this book.

If you want to visit Kumaon and want to find this rock, it is easier to start from Thak, you need to follow Corbett's description, follow the path to the ridge, then down from the ridge to the rectangular piece of land. On the rectangular piece of land you must turn right before the beginning of the rock ridge (instead of following the path and skirting the ridge from the left, as the path goes today). Then you will need to go around the rock ridge, and continue about 30 meters. There you will be able to see the Corbett rock. Of course, today you can recognize the rock also for the metal plate that we affixed on the rock in 2012, in the naturally existing crack. The text on the plate is written in two languages, English and Hindi, and it reads:

"This is the rock where on November 30th, 1938, in the dying seconds of daylight, the tigress known as the "Thak Man-eater" was shot in a dramatic encounter by Jim Corbett - India's Legendary hunter and pioneer conservationist. The tigress became a man-eater after she, still nursing two cubs, was wounded twice by poachers. On the 9th - 12th of April 2012, admirers of Jim Corbett from different parts of the world, paid tribute to this great son of India, dedicated friend of tigers and humble servant of humanity."

When I visited Thak in January 2011 there was one family in residence. Unfortunately, these people are not the old Thak villagers, they are Chuka villagers. In fact, the head of family is Sundar Singh, Hoshiar Singh's brother, and Umaid Singh's son⁵. As I understand, the Thak villagers abandoned the village for good in the first years of the 21st century, but the village is visited by Chuka villagers, who stay there sometimes for several months. I Believe this is better than to have Thak village completely abandoned. Most of the Thak village is reverting to the jungle and it is not easy to walk the streets of the village today. In 2011 I was not even able to find the main road of the Thak that is clearly visible on Peter Byrne photos from 1975. In 2014, April 23, Manfred and I visited Thak once again, and measured the "rectangular piece of land" to compare it with Corbett's estimates. Its width was about 50 meters (Corbett - "40 yards"), it's length was 105 meters (Corbett - "80 yards"). From the point where the old path was turning right (at this point the rock ridge starts) to the actual rock where the tigress was killed, is 33 meters (Corbett - "25 yards").

⁵ Sundar Singh was 63 years old in 2011, his wife was Durga Devi, 50 years old, and they had three children, a daughter Claoti, she was 30 years old, sons Parvati Singh, 29, and Devsi Singh, 23. They also had another son, Barasi, who died some time ago.

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Interestingly, all the measurements of larger distances were given in Corbett account in conservative numbers. Smaller distances are very precise. The height of the rock from the front (tigress's view) is 115m (Corbett - "about four feet), and the falling space today is about 3.20 metres high (Corbett - "10-12 feet"). If you use the GPS for finding the rock, location of the rock on the map is 29° 11'093''N 80°14'132''E.

One additional remark must be discussed about the place where Corbett and his four men heard the tigress calling for a mate. According to Corbett: "The path, as I have already mentioned, joins the ridge that runs down to Chuka a quarter of a mile from Thak, and when I now got to this spot where the ridge is only a few feet wide and from where a view is obtained of the two great ravines that run down to the Ladhya river, I heard the tigress call once and again across the valley on my left." The current path from the Thak village runs on a side of the ridge, so on the left side of the path you can see nothing but the side of the ridge. In order to find the place Corbett is talking about, the place where Corbett heard the tigress calling, you need to climb the ridge, and from there you can see the "two great ravines that run down to the Ladhya River." Most likely in 1938 the path from the Thak village was going (at least partially) on the top of the ridge.

And at the very end of this chapter let me say a few words about the crack where we affixed the metal plate. The crack is very deep, and the whole right top section (if looked from the front, as the tigress saw the rock) is actually separated from the rock by this crack, so after some time the large section of the rock might fall off. When and why did this crack appear? If you sit behind the rock, on a narrow ledge, exactly in Corbett's position, your stretched left hand will naturally be placed on the top of the rock rounded head, exactly where the crack starts today. If this crack was there in 1938, Corbett would have definitely used this crack to have a better grip on the rock, and possibly even he would have save himself from falling off the rock. But Corbett does not mention the existence of this crack. According to his words, his left hand was placed on the "rounded top of the rock". So, most likely, the crack was not there, and it appeared after the November 30th 1938, during the last seven decades.

We know that rocks can gradually disintegrate, but as a rule, this takes a very long time. Is it Possible that there was any other, external factor that contributed to the appearance of the crack? We know that a powerful physical shock, received by a rock, can sometimes break or intensify the natural processes of the rock disintegration. Bearing this idea in mind, I would like to propose that the appearance of the deep crack on the rock could possibly be a result of the dramatic hunting episode on November 30th, 1938. More precisely I suggest that the crack possibly appeared partially as the result of the impact of the heavy rifle discharge, which was placed immediately on the rock top.

It would be very hard to measure exactly the impact of such a shock on the solid rock, but some shock was certainly absorbed by the rock when Corbett fired his heavy rifle, 450/400. We know that the rifle was placed on the top of the rock, some two feet from where the crack starts today. Actually, Corbett made not one, but two shots from the 450/400 rifle, but

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I am still discussing only the first shot, as the first shot was made when the rifle was placed on the rock, but the second shot was made when Corbett was falling of the rock and the rifle was in the air (the recoil of the second shot hit violently Corbett in the jaw). So most likely only the first shot, made when the rifle was rested on the top of the rock, administered a physical shock to the rock.

Even if we consider that the crack appeared purely following some inner natural processes of rock disintegration, there is no reason to deny that the shock of the heavy rifle discharge could intensify the process of disintegration of the rock. So, there is a possibility that the deep crack, where we placed the metal plate, is the result and the witness of the dramatic hunt that happened on this rock at the sunset on November 30th, 1938.

It is a stunning view of the Sarda river and Nepal from some of the houses of the Thak village. Happy to find someone in Thak village⁶, and following Corbett's advice, I wanted to give a small gift to this family, but in order not to offend them, as Corbett suggested, I left a bit of money under a small stone at the entrance of their house on both occasions when I visited their village and their house. I think it will be nice and symbolic gesture for every Corbett fan, who will be visiting Thak, to leave a bit of money to anyone, living in village Thak at that moment, as if Corbett himself leaves some gift for the simple Indian villagers, whom he loved so dearly.

⁶ In April 2012, when we camped at Thak, Sundar Singh family was not there, although their house condition indicated they still return there for prolonged periods of time. We were also told that last year most of the villagers returned to Thak in order to celebrate a religious festival which takes place in Thak once in every five years. Sundar Singh was accompanying us on our 2014 trip in the Thak village, and allowed us to have our camp next to his house, the only populated house in Thak today.

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Photo #13. This is a 2012 photo of 10 year old Jayalukshmi, the youngest member of our party, sitting on a rock which Chuka and Thak villagers showed to Peter Byrne on April 20, 1975. Photo of this rock with a Chuka villager, Buloka Singh, sitting in this position showing which side the tigress approached Corbett was published in the book *Shikari Sahib* and was a great inspiration for me to see this place.

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Photo #14 The rock where Corbett called up and shot the Thak man-eater on November 30th, 1938. You can see the narrow ledge where Corbett was sitting. On top of the rock, the place where Corbett rifle was placed, you can see the copy of the book “Man-Eaters of Kumaon” I had with me.



Photo #15 The rock where Corbett called up and shot the Thak man-eater on November 30th, 1938. Hoshiar Singh is sitting awkwardly on the narrow ledge of the rock, exactly in a position as Corbett describes: right foot reaching the ground, left hand stretched and holding on top of the top of the rock, and his “rifle” placed on a rounded top of the rock (on a handkerchief). Photo was taken by the author on January 22 2011.

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Photo # 16. Hoshiar Singh is sitting at the same rock, the view from the other side. Hoshiar is the son of Umaid Singh who remembered Corbett visiting Chuka in 1938. Hoshiar accompanied me on the 22nd January trip to Thak and waited for two hours until I made all the measurements and digging. You can see him on these photos sitting in the exactly as Corbett was sitting there on November 30th1938. On this photo, taken from the South, you can see better the falling space behind the rock.



Photo #17. This photo is a reconstruction of the situation how Corbett was sitting at the rock on November 30, 1938, with his men and goats under his sitting place. The only difference is that "Corbett" on this photo is holding with his left hand on a crack in the rock, not on the rounded top of the rock. This crack most likely appeared during the last 73 years (photo by Manfred Waltl, 2012).

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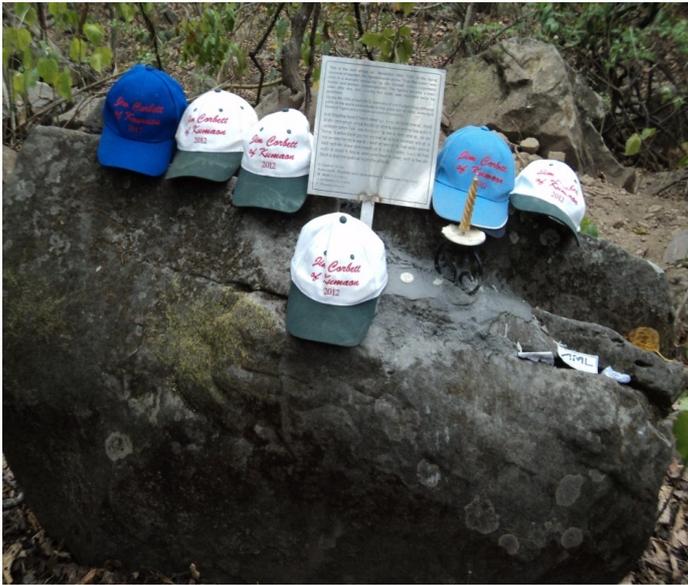


Photo #18. The rock where Jim Corbett killed Thak tigress, with the Memorial Plate and the candle, and the Jim Corbett caps of our 2012 trip members.



Photo #19. In 2015 author of this chapter visited USA and spent two unforgettable days in the company of the Thak tigress skin.