

# ADVENTURE IN POBITORA



**SARAT C. NEOG**

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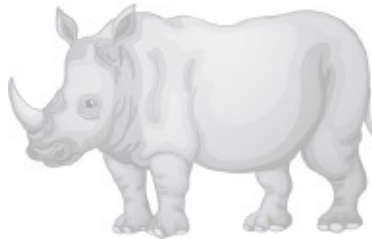
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Published in India by Prowess Publishing,  
YRK Towers, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur,  
Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600016

ISBN: 978-93-89097-44-3  
ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5457-4726-1  
Mobi ISBN: 978-1-5457-4727-8

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

# CONTENTS



*Foreword*

Prelude

Forest Ranger Robin Neog

Kunal at Pobitora

Mysterious First Night

New Friend

Night Operation

A Hut in the Jungle

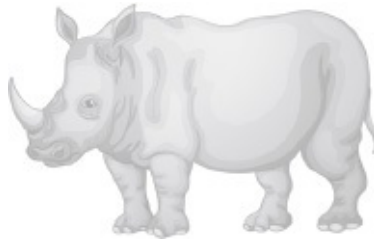
Ranger Neog Appeared

Porag Disappeared

Rhino Horn Missing

Time to Return

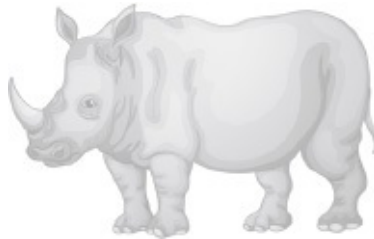
# FOREST RANGER ROBIN NEOG



**O**n completion of forest training at Dehradun, Robin Neog was posted as the Range Officer of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. A true lover of Nature, Neog was very happy to join his duty at Pobitora near his own village. He vowed, on the very first day at Pobitora Sanctuary, to protect the animals of the Sanctuary. But he had to face problems hitherto unknown to him. For a population of 102 rhinos, the compact area of 38 sq.km is considered to be totally inadequate as the rhinos need more food and space. Though the notified area is 38.8 sq.km, only 16 sq.km area is the effective rhino habitat. Growing infighting among the young males has been another disturbing fallout. After sunset, about 20% of the rhinos mostly males use to stray out of the sanctuary for food and space only to return to the sanctuary by next morning. Some of them even love to visit the riverine areas risking their own safety and necessitating intensive monitoring by the forest guards on boat. The brilliant and sincere forest officer Neog divided the guards into three small groups. One for monitoring by the river side and one for the east as several villages surrounded the sanctuary. The other mobile group was always kept ready at the Forest Office for any emergency. He also frequently visited the jungle driving his official jeep. Neog though provided with official residence close to his office, preferred to stay in his own house at village Borkuloi at a distance of about 3 kms. In spite of so many steps taken by him to stop poaching, poachers loved to break the law. Three days ago, he heard gunshots inside the sanctuary and immediately with the mobile group rushed to the spot only to find a rhino dead. The horn was already taken away. Rhino poaching has escalated in Assam with steep rise in demand for rhino horns in South Asian countries. Actually the rhino horn is made of compressed keratin fibres, the same material that is found in our fingernails and hair. Yet some people in South-east Asia believe that the rhino horn has medicinal properties. It

is, therefore, in great demand and the poor animal has to pay dearly. No doubt the poachers are local villagers. But they must have links with outside sources. There must be someone who is buying the horns from the poachers.

## KUNAL AT POBITORA



**A**t the breakfast table, Kunal said, “Papa, my school holidays will be over soon. I would like to spend two nights at Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. My friend Dadul will accompany me. Can you arrange the trip, dear Papa?”

“Why not, my son? Your Robin khura (uncle) is now the Range Officer of the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. I will talk to him. Rest assured. He will make all arrangement for the trip. Now, I’m proceeding to my office.” After about two hours, Kunal got confirmation direct from Robin khura. Kunal was much delighted.

Fourteen-year-old Kunal with his school friend Dadul reached Pobitora in the afternoon to spend some time in the midst of Nature. Kunal loved adventure while his friend Dadul loved bird-watching. The two boys had been friends for years, sharing all their joys and pains since class IV. Kunal’s uncle the Ranger Robin Neog made all arrangements for their comfortable stay in the forest lodge and instructed the Beat officer Mohan Hazarika to look after them. The forest lodge, housed in an old Assam type building, was no doubt spacious but lacked modern amenities. For that simple reason, foreign tourists prefer to stay in the nearby tourist lodge. The boys were allotted Room No. 3 close to the dining hall. In Room No. 5, the peculiar occupant was a forest researcher named Mihir Das. With bearded face and a dark complexion, Das was avowed worshipper of loneliness. Next two rooms were found to be vacant. The extreme room was occupied by one Bishnu Dahal, a tourist from Nepal. Short statured. Soft-spoken but definitely not a perfect gentleman. Within the spacious compound of the lodge, Kunal noticed one old Assam Type quarter with red coloured tinned roof without repair for several years. Beat Officer Mohan Hazarika was the lone

occupant of the house.

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