



The following evening, after visiting half a dozen more local villages, I succumbed to temptation and returned to the Igoji River, trying a few casts just below the spot that had yielded last night's supper. As I watched the white wings of my Royal Coachman drift down the fast water, and begin to swing out of the current into the belly of the pool, I suddenly felt an excruciating pain in my groin. My left testicle and the tip of my penis felt as if someone had pierced them with a red hot needle. Naturally, I looked down the front of my shorts and was horrified to see about 20 *siafu* (safari ants) on my upper thighs and the nearby family jewels. Most of the ants were of the small variety, but a few, including the ones clamped to my most tender parts, were the large and vicious soldiers. A further look showed me that while intent upon my fishing, the lie of the pool, and the action of my fly, I had managed to step right into an ant's nest. Another hundred or so of the creatures were swarming up my legs. I had antagonized the creatures, and they had *ant-agonized* me. I did not stop to get an accurate count, despite my scientific training.

There was only one thing to do. Abandoning my rod over my shoulder with a flick of the wrist, I jumped into the river. It took about ten minutes to rid myself of the unwelcome pests. I'm not sure if the immersion had any direct effect upon the *siafu*, but the water certainly acted as an anesthetic, and considerably reduced the area of skin for the beasts to attack as my cremaster muscles went into a rapid reflex contraction, reacting to the change in temperature from the balmy equatorial evening to the glacier-fed stream. My fishing trip was a bit of an *ant-iclimax*.

I related the scene to the team as we sat over supper; there was a sort of pregnant pause and I guessed that they were unsure whether to laugh or not, considering that I was not only the boss, but also a *mzungu*. Eventually Austin cracked a smile, and then there was a round of good raucous laughter, in which I joined. Once we had settled down, there was a general discussion about the fact that the large soldier ants are used as sutures by some traditional medicine practitioners. The ants are held to a cut, and



allowed to clamp on to either side of it. Then their bodies are broken off behind the head so that the mouthparts are left closed on the wound.

We carried on down the tortuous road to Chuka, vaccinating as we went, and from there dropped down towards the arid plains of Tharaka. This region was more isolated than the communities along the hairpin contours above, and news of our activities had not yet filtered through. It took no time for the message to spread once a shot or two had been fired.

Supper changed from fish to guinea-fowl or yellow-neck — I had slipped a box of my own number six bird-shot into my gear. None of the rest of the team had ever tried yellow-neck before.

“This is very good,” said Austin, wiping some fat off his chin as he tucked into a piece of leg.

“Yes, almost like a good chicken, but more flavour,” chimed in Vitalis.

“I like going on safari with the doctor,” said Kipsiele. “This yellow-neck is better than the guinea-fowl we had last night.”

“Oh, I think the guinea-fowl was better, but neither was as good as the trout at Igoji,” was Austin’s contribution. As a Luo he tended to be a bit biased toward fish.

After our rabies campaign had covered the southern half of the district, we stopped for the weekend and passed through Meru to pick up more vaccine and receipts. It gave us all a chance to relax and get a decent wash. Jo was happy to chat as we sat on the verandah and enjoyed a couple of ripe avocado pears from the two small trees in the garden. From home base the vaccination team ventured north and made another circular trip, this time through the Northern Grazing Area, past Kangeta and Lare, the little market town of Maua where there was a small mission hospital, and even to the borders of the Meru National Park.

County Council revenues were strong that year because so many people were inspired to pay their license fees.