

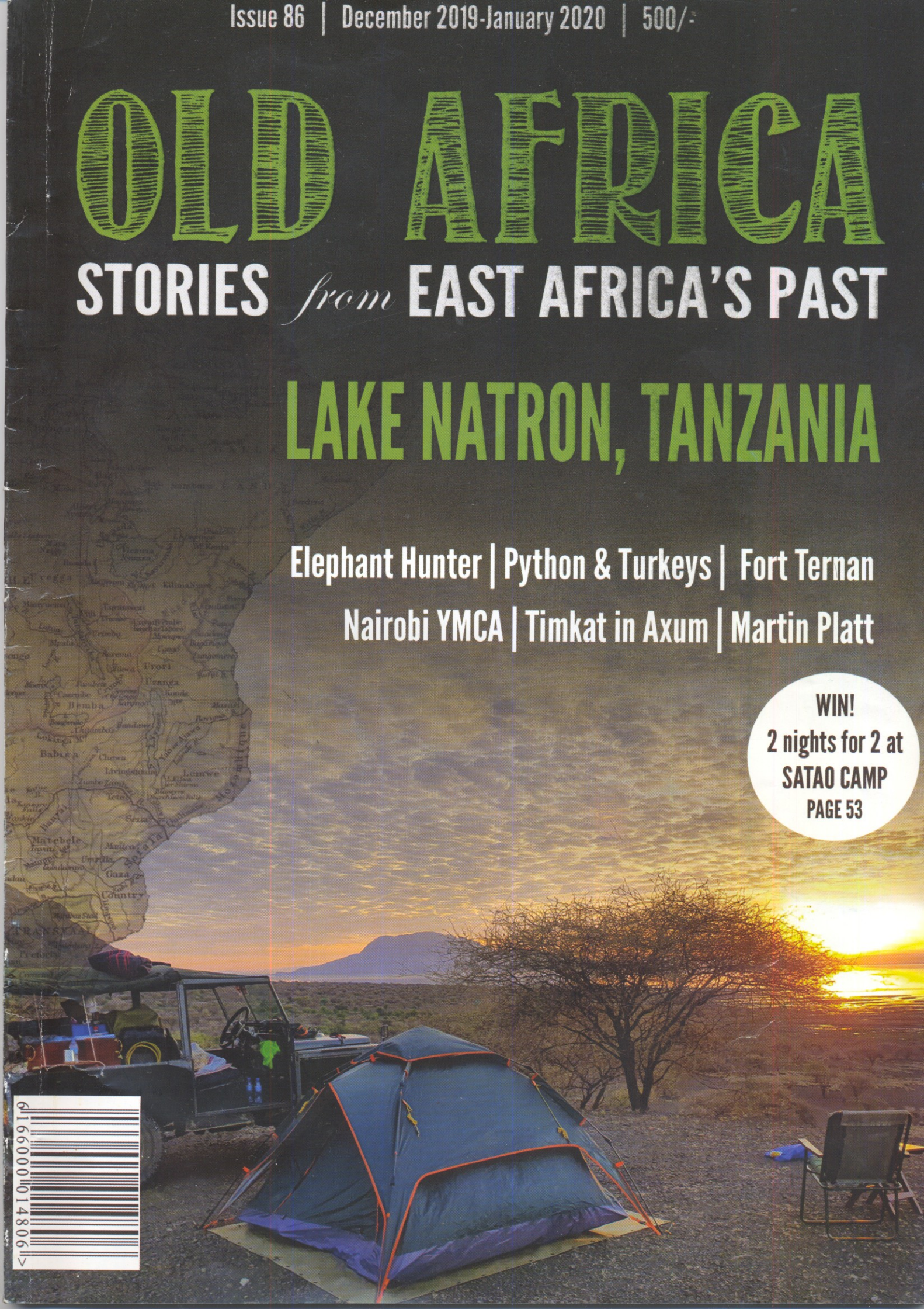
OLD AFRICA

STORIES *from* EAST AFRICA'S PAST

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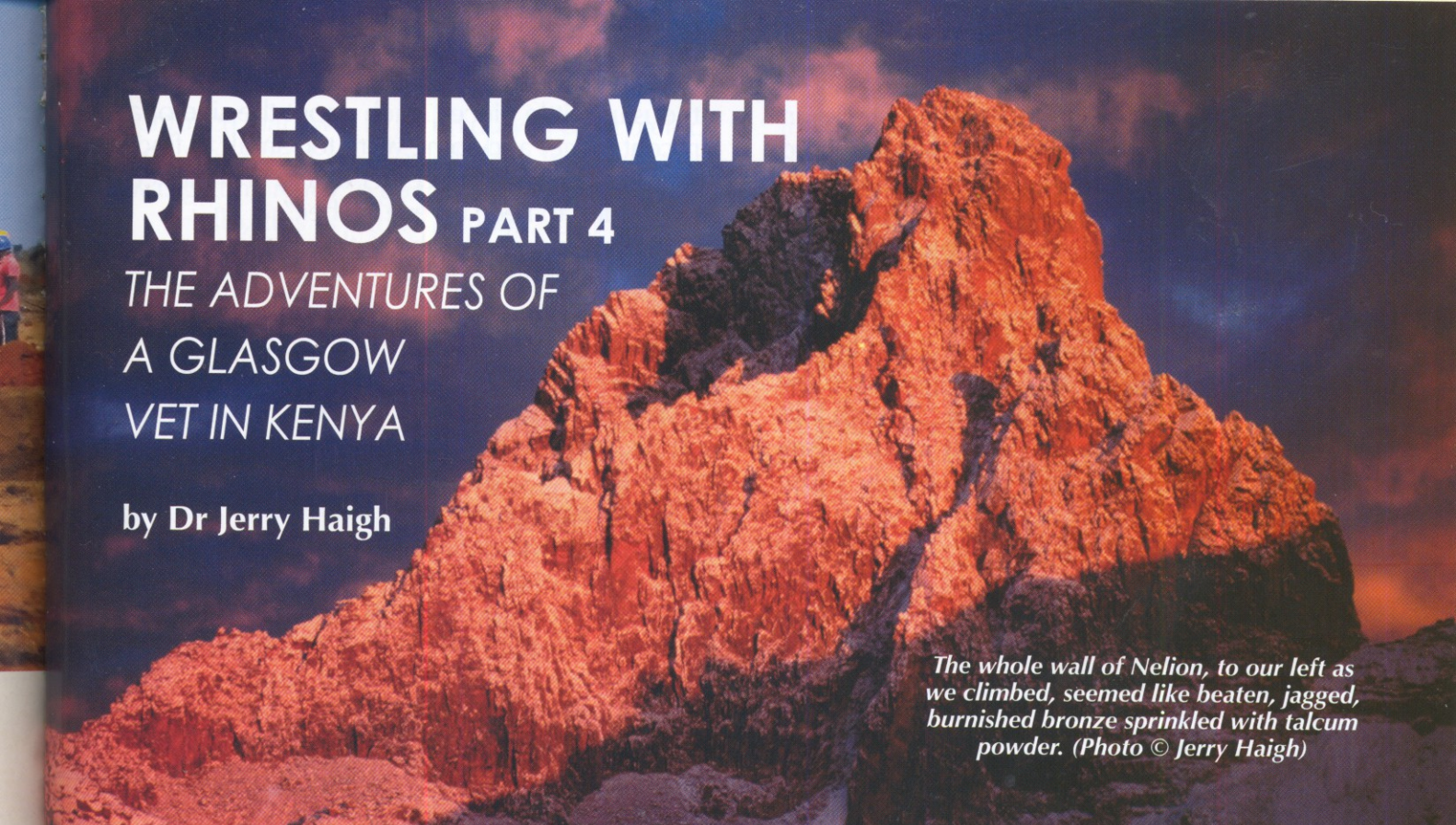
WIN!
2 nights for 2 at
SATAO CAMP
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WRESTLING WITH RHINOS PART 4

THE ADVENTURES OF A GLASGOW VET IN KENYA

by Dr Jerry Haigh



The whole wall of Nelion, to our left as we climbed, seemed like beaten, jagged, burnished bronze sprinkled with talcum powder. (Photo © Jerry Haigh)

In part 3 of *Old Africa's* condensed version of Jerry Haigh's book **Wrestling with Rhinos**, the author meets President Kenyatta and treats a cheetah. Here's part 4 where the young intern at the Faculty of Veterinary Science in Kabete receives another cheetah as a patient and a lucky horse mixes with a car windshield. You can order the full book from the author's website www.jerryhaigh.com or from amazon.com

1966 I soon had another cheetah to deal with. While I was checking an ancient spaniel's somewhat manky teeth, a phone call had come in from Dr Toni Harthoorn concerning a young adult animal which had been brought to him by an out-of-town client. He needed to use the X-ray facilities and would arrive in about 20 minutes.

Toni was already well known for his pioneering work on animal capture, and had done some impressive things with the rescue of rhinoceros and many other species that had become stranded when the Kariba dam filled up. In wildlife veterinary circles, he was considered the world authority. He was also head of the department of physiology at the university, and taught the junior veterinary and medical students at Chiromo.

He soon arrived, together with his wife Suzanne, who had worked with him on many wild animals. Toni, all 6' 3" or so of him, was carrying the cheetah in his arms, and took it straight into the X-ray unit.

"This animal is a pet whose owner feeds him raw meat most of the time. This morning the cheetah was frightened by a strange animal getting up on top of his cage. He took a violent leap and I think he has broken both his legs. Here, have a feel," he said to me.

Both hind legs were bent at an unusual angle at the hock joint or heel. The cheetah did not seem to be in any pain, but he made no attempt to stand. Suzanne kept him quiet by stroking him, and he even started to purr.

The X-rays told the story. Both heel bones were broken across the middle at almost identical angles. For an animal built for speed, with long hind legs that create huge leverage, the heel bones play a crucial role in the final push for the sprint. One broken bone would be bad news. To have both broken at once was a disaster. The X-ray also revealed the probable reason for the breaks. The walls of all the bones in the legs were paper-thin.

I knew that my limited experience was quite inadequate to repair this sort of damage, and Toni too knew his limitations. He said to his wife, "Sue, I wonder if we can persuade Mr Griffiths to help us. He's an orthopedist with the Glasgow team at Kenyatta."

Being used to British ways I knew that human surgeons, once they become specialists, change their titles from Doctor back to Mister. This is a throwback to the early 19th century, the days of the barber surgeons. The idea of calling on a human surgeon to help in such a case had

never occurred to me, but once voiced, it was an obvious solution. Two days later, as I administered the anaesthetic, Mr Griffiths inserted long bone screws down the shaft of each broken end of the heel bones, carefully lined the broken pieces up, and screwed them together. We checked the alignments with another X-ray.

Because of the fragile state of all the bones, the surgeon felt we could not simply leave the animal without support. "We must cast both legs to support him until some healing occurs. Any athletic movements will almost certainly cause another break, probably over the screws. If that happens, the heel bones will be impossible to repair."

The solution was simple, although no doubt uncomfortable for the cheetah. We encased both lower legs in plaster of Paris for two months.

"I'll get after the owner about the need for roughage, especially calcium and phosphorous, in the cat's diet," said Toni. "The cat will also need supplements of bone-meal to help his bones regain their proper strength."

When the plaster came off the fractures had healed, and the X-rays showed overall signs of improvement in bone density.

We had to deal with whatever came through the door or over the phone. One of the strangest cases I ever encountered came to me the latter way. Over afternoon coffee one day, one of our field service clinicians explained that he had gone out that morning to see a client, Paddy Migdoll, about a horse.

"Mrs Migdoll had sent out one of her mares, April First, who had just come out of training, in the care of a syce (groom). He had been instructed to keep her under control at the end of a long rope while she grazed. Well, she jumped away from him and pulled the rope out of his hands, and then took off through the coffee for home. She ran between two rows of bushes and up an embankment, jumped out on to the road, and landed plumb across the hood of a small car, one of those Fiat bubble jobs that you see here."

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked.

"That's the strangest thing. A lady was driving the car, taking her little daughter to school, and was suddenly confronted with a thousand pounds of horse smack in front of her on the windshield. By some miracle, both she and the child were uninjured. The car was totalled. The horse also suffered some pretty severe damage. They caught her up and took her back to the stables. I got the call. The horse was pretty badly shaken. I was able to get some of the biggest bits of glass from her hide, but the windshield had shattered into

a thousand little pieces, each about the size of a ten-cent piece, and some were too small to find. I reckon we'll have to see her again, and I asked Mrs Migdoll to keep an eye on her."

Thinking no more about this bizarre tale, I set off after work for the Impala Club for a rugby training session. Under the whip-and-carrot approach of coach Duncan Brown, we engaged in arduous circuit training for about the first half of each 90-minute session, followed by a variety of drills, including ball-handling skills, that were more fun.

As the rapidly falling dusk settled in at five to seven, Duncan called for one last run up the pitch, practising scissor movements. "Pair off, take a ball to each pair, and come up the pitch crossing every ten yards or so. Take no more than three strides with the ball in your hands."

I mistimed a switch and tripped and fell. In good light the fall would have been inconsequential. Falling is an integral part of the game. Unfortunately, this fall was followed instantly by a searing pain in my shoulder. Duncan wasted no time in getting me to Nairobi Hospital, my right arm cradled against my chest with my left hand holding my wrist. I suppose that neither of us smelt exactly as sweet as the roses, after 90 minutes of hard work in sweaty rugby jerseys, but the nurse in the casualty ward did not seem to mind.

"Right," she said. "We'll have to cut your right arm out of this sleeve, and then perhaps you can slip the rest of this thing over your head. Nasty rough game, you should have more sense," she added with half a smile.

I was too uncomfortable to reply. She split the red shirt from wrist to shoulder and before I knew where I was she had it on the table beside me. After X-rays had been taken and we sat for a while in the examination room, she returned with a doctor who examined me and said, "Nothing broken. You look as if you've dislocated your collar-bone. Nurse here will fix you up with a figure-of-eight bandage. You should keep it on for two to three weeks, depending upon how you feel. Nurse, please give Mr Haigh 100 mgs of Pethidine before you pack him off."

"Will I be able to wash at all with the bandage on?" I asked the nurse as she strapped me up, pulling back my shoulders into a military posture.

"Oh yes, just get someone to help you take it off before you bathe or shower. I expect you vets know how to put bandages on, don't you?" she said, this time with a proper grin.

Duncan delivered me, safe, sound, and a little woozy from the Pethidine, back to my flat. I had

forgotten that I was to go on duty at eight o'clock, and was sitting in a sort of daze when, just as I was getting ready to go to bed, the phone rang.

"Hello, this is Paddy Migdoll. Can someone come out and look at my horse? Professor Aanes came here this morning, but the syce tells me she's pretty poorly."

Knowing that I was not exactly in good shape, I started to phone around, desperately trying to find a substitute. But everyone was either at the club, at the movies, or out to dinner. There was nothing for it but to set out, driving more or less one-handed, shifting gear with the left hand while holding one spoke of the wheel with the other in a gingerly fashion and hoping that no sudden turns would be needed. Mrs Migdoll greeted me as I drove into the yard. We walked over to the stables together and she repeated the saga of the morning's events.

The thoroughbred's painkiller had worn off, and several more bits of glass had worked their way to the surface. In the inadequate lighting of the stable I stood and looked at the animal. The whole of her right hand side was scattered with a host of tiny and not-so-tiny puncture marks. She was visibly upset, and in quite some discomfort. Using a pair of fine forceps I pulled out a couple of glass chips, but each time she flinched and struggled. My painful shoulder and one-handed approach made me nervous, a feeling picked up by the perceptive patient. To continue I would have to sedate her. A visit from a clinic colleague in the morning would have been the sensible course. But being either pig-headed or dulled from pain, I foolishly decided to carry on.

Moving round to the front of the horse I said

to the groom, "Put the twitch on her nose, and I'll give her an injection in the vein so that we can work."


The mare, objecting to the entire procedure, reared up and struck out with her forelegs. One of the striking hooves caught me right on the point of my recently dislocated collar-bone.

My next memory is of sitting in the house on a sofa being ministered to by Mrs Migdoll. As I came round, her husband handed me a stiff brandy. It was quite some time before I was able to get back into the Land Rover and make my way home. The horse's name was April First, but my condition was no joke.

I took a couple of days off work, but with the resilience of youth and a fit constitution I was back in the small animal clinic by the end of the week, limited only slightly by the bandage.

A group of my Impala rugby teammates and I, sitting at the bar after practice one evening, decided it might be fun to climb Mt Kenya. A couple of weeks later, we were grinding slowly up a rough mountain track in a four-wheel drive Land Rover through bamboo and a host of huge lichen-covered trees. We stopped the vehicle at the forest edge and made our way up on to the moorland. The first day we had to contend with the so-called vertical bog, and most of us fell in up to our crutches at least once.

The first night's rest at the Teleki hut, at about 13,000 feet, was most welcome. Several rock hyraxes turned up to greet us. Having lived among the rocks near the camping hut, they had become habituated to climbers, and they stood around hoping for handouts of food. We sat and marvelled at the array of peaks around us and



Sunrise viewed from Point Lenana. The golds, reds and oranges of the sunrise glazed the underside of a carpet of cloud.
(Photo © Jerry Haigh)

the giant lobelia and groundsel plants growing on the sides of the valley.

By the time we reached top hut, at an elevation of about 15,000 feet, we were puffing and blowing. We had planned to have rice with our first course of tinned meat. However, it proved impossible to cook at this altitude. The water boiled, and boiled, and boiled, but the rice was still rock hard after 30 minutes of boiling. Porridge in the morning created the same problem.

The climb up the side of the Lewis Glacier in the dawn light to Point Lenana, the third highest peak, and reachable by non-technical climbers, was truly spectacular. The golds, reds and oranges of the sunrise glazed the underside of a carpet of cloud. The whole wall of Nelion, to our left as we climbed, seemed like beaten, jagged, burnished bronze sprinkled with talcum powder.

My year in Kenya was drawing to a close. When my contract ended, I had no need to rush back to Scotland. My brief trip to the coast at Christmas had given me the yen to go back again. I had been offered a bed in Mombasa. I had sold my car and borrowed a 50-cc motorized bicycle, full frame size, with the tiny engine beneath the seat, from a friend at Kabete. I stowed the scooter in the luggage compartment and set off on the train.

The borrowed scooter was an ancient one, and it needed a new spring for the carburettor. I hadn't been able to find one in Nairobi. If I was going to explore Mombasa's Old Town and the neighbouring coast, I had to find a solution. My host suggested a backstreet where spares could often be found. The small thatched shop, with its hand-painted sign, had the rusting remains of Vespas and numerous pedal bikes out front. With little confidence I showed my problem to the proprietor. He turned to a teenager nearby and spoke to him in a tongue I did not recognize. The boy beckoned me to enter, and behind the banana leaf facade I saw several large piles of mixed wheels, chains and other unidentifiable bits of machinery. He took a brief look at the carburettor in my hand and stuck his arm into one of the piles. After a few minutes of grunting and puffing, his hand emerged holding the same type of carburettor, with its spring intact inside.

The revamped bike gave me lots of freedom to explore. On the first day I pattered around the old town, with its narrow streets and curbside coffee emporiums. I visited Fort Jesus, with its tangled history of conquerors and rogues that included Arab, Portuguese and British invaders. I didn't have much spending money, but it cost nothing to look at some beautiful carpets almost buried

in the bowels of a dark shop with heavily shaded windows. I drove under the huge artificial tusks that meet above four lanes of traffic in what was then Kilindini Road. I passed the Konzi mosque, a corner of which jutted out a yard or so into the traffic lane on what's now Digo Road — the mosque predates the tarred road and naturally takes precedence.

I boarded the ferry at Likoni, on Mombasa Island's south side. Muslim women clothed from head to foot in black *buibuis*, and others more gaily dressed and carrying large loads upon their heads, babies in cloth slings behind their backs, or both, chattered cheerily. Battered old trucks massively overloaded with produce and several bicycles wheeled by slim men all poured off the ferry at once. A young man with a portable radio perched on his shoulder made sure that the volume was turned up high enough so that everyone would take a look at him and his status symbol. The smooth tones of the late Jim Reeves, still hugely popular at the time, were an odd contrast to the chatter of other languages. A roadside hawker tried to lure passers-by behind a hastily erected screen to view a two-headed calf.

Later that day, near the old Arab town, I found my way to the water's edge and sat watching the ships in the harbour. An *ngalawa*, a small outriggered dhow, moved across the water's surface, creating ripples as it went.

Next morning I went looking for a more secluded spot and headed north past the Nyal Beach hotel. Quite soon I found a small beachside restaurant hidden among the trees, which was a congenial spot to relax on the beach. I drank delicious fresh fruit juices. Big moist slices of paw paw (papaya) with a squeeze of lemon juice across them were another treat. I spent most of the day in an indolent half snooze; occasional dips in the almost bath-water warm Indian ocean broke the monotony. Every now and again another human would appear on the white beach with its fringe of coconut palm and casuarina, but most of the time it was deserted and pristine. The rising tide had washed away the footprints of all previous visitors.

And so my time was up. It had been a fabulous year, but I had to get back to the UK, see my family, and look to my future. Little did I realize that after a very few months I would be back again, this time for a much longer stint, and that my future held many wild animal cases and much co-operative work with a certain medical doctor.

To be continued...