

THE SELOUS RESERVE IN TANGANYIKA

By R. de la B. BARKER,
*Author of four
volumes of hermit
Books, East African
Standard.*

CAPTAIN FREDERICK COURTENAY SELOUS, D.S.O., was my platoon officer in 1915 in the East African campaign, and it is curious that I should take up my roamings close by the vast game reserve which bears his name.

In 1921, at Dar-es-Salaam, while I was sitting outside the tent of the late C. F. M. Swynnerton, then Game Warden of Tanganyika, I was perhaps the first to hear of his plan to join the Mohoro and the Mahenge Reserves with a narrow ten-mile strip along the west of the Rufiji River, the resulting reserve to be called the Selous Reserve in memory of the great hunter and naturalist who advocated the formation of large sanctuaries in the uninhabited parts of Africa. Selous fell in action less than a dozen miles from the Rufiji during the advance in the rainy season of 1916-17. I visited his lonely grave in 1934, and again in 1940.

A game corridor was made along the south tributary of the Rufiji, the Barangandu River, in 1936, and it connected with another reserve then reaching almost to the southern border of Tanganyika. When I crossed it in 1936 elephants were every five minutes or so striding across our path, which was a well-used native track, leading from the interior towards the coast. Natives were settled here, water being available all the year round, and the elephants coming for the same reason, regularly encountered human beings with no embarrassment whatever.

Spanking the Calves Climbing the open meadows east of the Barangandu I was most amused to see a cow elephant spanking a couple of small calves, who would lag behind on the human path which we were following. They squawked loudly as she shepherded them from our approach.

Then, 100 yards or so to the south, we heard a terrific crackling and crashing and breaking of twigs where an enormous bull was brushing his hide on a hardstemmed tall bush. I suppose they rid themselves of ticks that way. I shouted at him "I'll tell the forestry officer about your destroying his trees," to keep my men steady. Fallen head-loads are destructive to crockery and other goods not easily replaced when far from civilization. He took not the least notice of my shouts and went on sawing back and forth across the convenient bush. My men chuckled for half-an-hour at his im-



A typical lake in the Rufiji area of the Selous Reserve, home of hippopotamus, crocodile, elephant, greater koodoo, waterbuck, reedbuck, buffalo and eland.

puddence in ignoring the "master." We reached a village within a mile.

On each occasion I halted nearby and gazed at the magnificent natural scene presented by mountain, forest, grassy slopes, mineral water-made bare flats, shady green meadows and dark ribboned spruities lined by trees, a mile or two north-west from the grave towards the towering Uluguru mountains of Morogoro. I longed for the brush of the late J. G. Millais to depict the scene. There was an assortment of rare animals seldom seen in one area and all were completely at home, usually oblivious of the presence of man.

Elephant and Sable On the "hot-springs" slopes of the wooded or open-forested Kipalala "mountains" as marked in the German map, were two or three groups of elephants browsing slowly along, all spectacularly visible, including one monster with enormous white ivories reaching to the short grass. They seemed to gleam—those massive tusks.

Sable antelope were in a small party below some spreading acacia thorns, one black bull shaking his head defiantly at my men, switching his tail and stamping his forefeet. The mighty scimitar horns he wore which swept back so proudly were propensive weapons to protect his friends or his kin. In another direction was

a stag-like shaggy waterbuck, also shaking his head at us. His horns were lyrate and the hornless does or hinds, which stood in a fulvous group lit by morning sun, contrasted with the greenery around with fine effect.

One greater koodoo galloped from near us and put back his long spirate horns so as to pass through a patch of cover; so laid they looked like tresses of hair flowing along his fringed neck.

To the east a rhinoceros plodded slowly over the "salt" pan and then turned up into a higher piece of sparsely wooded land. Beyond him could be faintly seen a dark heap of hippopotami on the edge of the great swamp-lake into which the drainage of the flats led. Now and then the deep grunts of hippo, followed by the shriller nasal intake note, sounded from that direction.

Off in Mighty Leaps Mpala antelope in numbers grazed along the bottom of the hill towards the elephants. Their brick-coloured coats against the vegetation stood out very sharply. One of our men seeking bark for native medicine allowed his scent to waft their way, whereupon the graceful creatures disappeared into the denser greenery of copses, their mighty leaps, with hindlegs trailing out behind like those of birds in flight, holding our eyes in wonder.

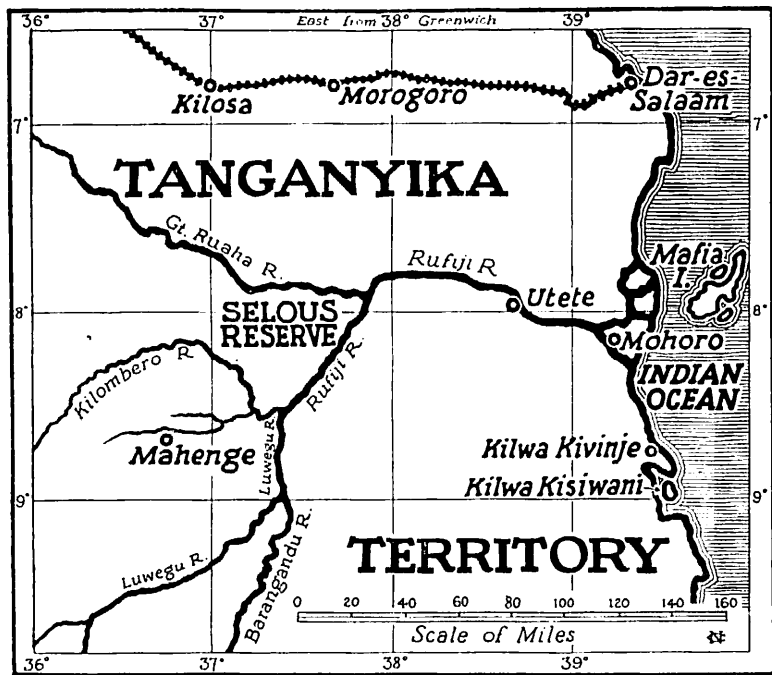
Gnus or wildebeeste and hartebeeste and reedbuck were all in view and a range round would locate more species. Bustards and ground-hornbills we had encountered that hour and francolins

One of the author's temporary camps in the Selous Reserve.



had called on all sides. A mighty herd of buffalo had held us up for a half hour on the track some miles back, and giraffe had stood close by gazing down at our men with their head loads. Zebra adorned the landscape with their black and white stripes and amused us with their trotting off, heads held at an angle so that they could keep an eye on us during their retreat. Their manes and tails seemed to express equine vanities as we watched their gait and their plump horsey rumps and saddles. They certainly did suggest the prime of condition as zebras nearly always do.

When we halted at the simple concrete grave and marble plaque in the tall grass and bush cover I thought of the bronze bust of Selous on the stairway in the Natural History Museum in South



Information received from Mr. Barker as we went to press and after this map was prepared indicates that the approximate centre of the Selous Reserve is at the junction of the Great Ruaha River with the Rufiji. The Reserve occupies areas immediately north of these two rivers, and south and east of the Rufiji, as well as the area to its west shown in the map.

Kensington. This is wonderfully lifelike. It is just how he appeared to us on the veld at Kajiado in Kenya, when he led our morning marches in 1915, sometimes halting to watch a giraffe or other game. He used to carry a Ross small-bore rifle over his shoulder, holding it by the barrel. He was then well over 60 and yet could outwalk most of us. He taught us how to creep up

to game or enemies behind cover. I showed him my method of using the toes and not the knees in snake-like approach. He commented that any method of getting close to a quarry unseen was the end in view. I have since used rolling to preserve bare knees from sharp stones or thorns.

To-day the Selous Reserve is seldom visited, partly because of the lack of roads and perhaps also partly because sleeping sickness is present to the south. In fact the reserve has been enlarged south of the river and the Natives have been removed so as to counter the spread of the disease, which progresses wherever Natives live in hamlets in the wilds in tsetse country, and whenever they do not come in for treatment as soon as they become infected.

There is, however, one route in Tanganyika which enables one to see the Uluguru Mountains at Morogoro on the central railway. Drive by motor to the north-western part of the Selous Reserve, safari through it to the Rufiji River, go past the lonely grave of the great African hunter and naturalist and continue on to the Rufiji River at Mpanga. Here one crosses by canoe, called from the southern inhabited shore, and may travel in a large hired canoe down the fascinating Rufiji River to motor road communications with Dar-es-Salaam at Utete (headquarters of the district administration) or one may travel on to the delta and the sea, where a coastal steamer may be picked up at Nyamsati, or Mafya. Failing the timely visit of a steamer, a dhow may take one to Dar-es-Salaam in a few days if the monsoon is blowing in that direction or to Kilwa if not. At Kilwa there is the famous Kilwa Kisiwani, where more than a thousand years ago an Arab traveller saw the "most beautiful city on earth." The ruins today are of much interest, the remains of an Arab fort and of a Portuguese one, hold one spell bound at the evidence of ancient splendour. Small pieces of old crockery and porcelain are still be collected on the pebbly beach and lucky folk find Chinese and other coins.

Like Supernatural Eye Between here and Kilwa is Mpara hill, where a strange light is often seen soon after dark. It is generally thought by scientists, to be an electric-brush discharge. Sometimes it takes the form of a bush-fire or of many fires, but when I saw it in 1940 from Singino hill in the north, it was a massive white glare with a central core of such intense illumination that it appeared to me as a supernatural eye of some omnipotent power or spirit looking at us.

In 1917 when Selous was killed with Sergeant Long and the rest of the reconnaissance party from our regiment, the advance was held up by the very abnormal floods of that year, and many South African and other campaigners have in consequence remembered the Rufiji country with disfavour. Having spent 20 years off and on in that wild-life paradise I have known the area in drier and pleasanter moods. The season to avoid is from February to May, the height of the rains.