ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN continues his series on . . .

KENYA'S HISTORIC COAST

MOMBASA TO THE TANA

THE coastal strip between Mombasa and the Tana River runs about 125 miles and stretches inland about twenty miles.

Within this strip the soils are reasonably fertile and the rainfall is sufficient to plant a wide variety of tree and food crops. The most valuable crops sold here from small farms are cashew nuts, palm wine, copra, cotton, mangoes, citrus, simsim and bananas, in that order for 1970. Farmers can make most profit by growing the cashew nut, followed by the mango and cotton.

This part of the Kenya coast is the richest as far as agriculture is concerned, and the beauty of the landscape is greatly enhanced by the large verdant mango trees, the willowy kapok trees, the bright red bixa shrubs, and the tall, majestic palm trees whose fronds nod in the lazy afternoon breezes.

Behind the coastal strip, the landscape is entirely different as rainfall decreases from an average 40 inches on the coast to under 20 inches 55 miles inland. The population density is only a fraction of that of the coastal strip and some inland areas are still losing people to the richer coastal zone.

Since people in the hinterland are not able to harvest tree crops successfully, they engage in other economic activities such as raising cattle and goats, gathering honey, making charcoal and, at Vitengeni, mining for borites and lead.

Twenty-three miles north of Mombasa on the new tarmac road leading to Malindi is the main entrance to the largest sisal plantation on the coast. This sisal plantation was started in 1934 by a German with 1,000 acres of land and five years later was taken over by the director of the present Vipingo Estate. In July 1971, the estate had expanded to 16,408 acres of which 8,879 were under mature sisal. There are now 1,000 permanent workers but an extra 500 cutters are hired during the cutting season.

About 64 per cent of the permanent cutters are Luos, originally from the Lake Victoria area, and the remaining cutters are mostly coastal people.

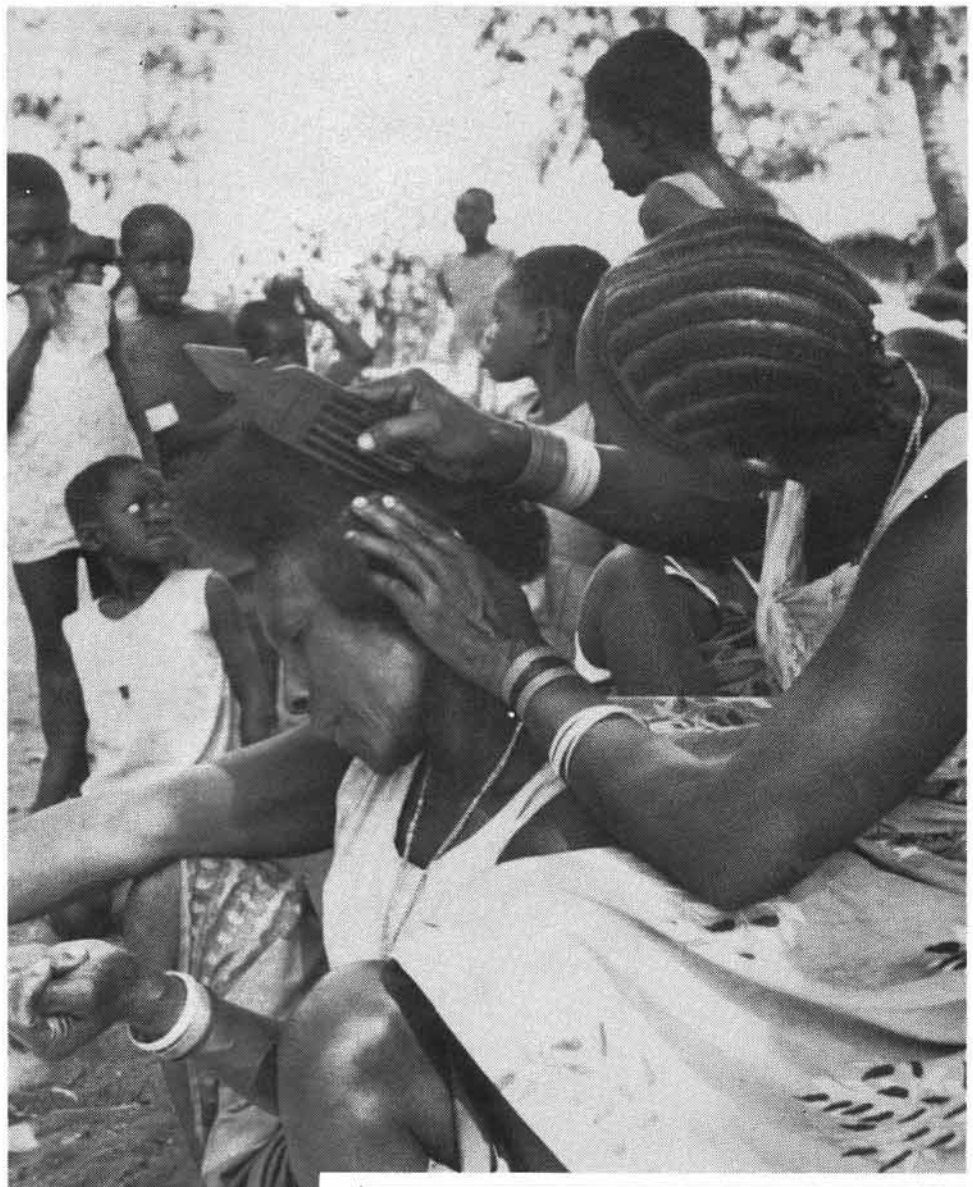
Production of sisal has expanded enormously over the past 20 years: in 1951, 1,700 tons were produced; in 1960 3,000 tons; and in 1970, 4,013 tons. But although production has increased, the price of sisal has declined sharply from a high of £U.K. 250 a ton in 1952 to £U.K. 62 in 1970. As a result, the Vipingo Estate as is common with all other sisal estates in East Africa, has been in financial difficulties over the past few years.

In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, Vipingo Estate has recently produced a new hybrid sisal by crossing *Angustifolia* with *Amaniensii*. This hybrid does not need to be transplanted, unlike the other sisal species, so a considerable amount of labour is saved. A further attempt was made to increase profits in 1962 when a small factory was established to produce hecogenin from sisal. This is one source for cortisone.

Unfortunately, the price of hecogenin has also dropped severely from 20 Swiss francs a kilo in 1962 to 2.7 francs in 1970—and again the discovery of a synthetic for cortisone was responsible for the drop in price.

However, there is one man on the Kenya coast who owns a sisal plantation and is making a good profit — but by diversification. He is Dennis Wilson, proprietor of the 6,000-acre Kilifi Plantations, which is located just south of the Kilifi ferry and is one of the oldest plantations on the coast, having been planted with sisal as early as 1908.

Mr. Wilson purchased the estate in 1963, and at that time the plantation was near bankruptcy. He realised that the only solution was to introduce fruit trees, cattle, and fodder crops together with the sisal. At that time, 5,500 acres were under sisal, but now this has been reduced to 1,200.



Beauty—the worldwide concern of women. Pokomo girls (above) from the Tana River

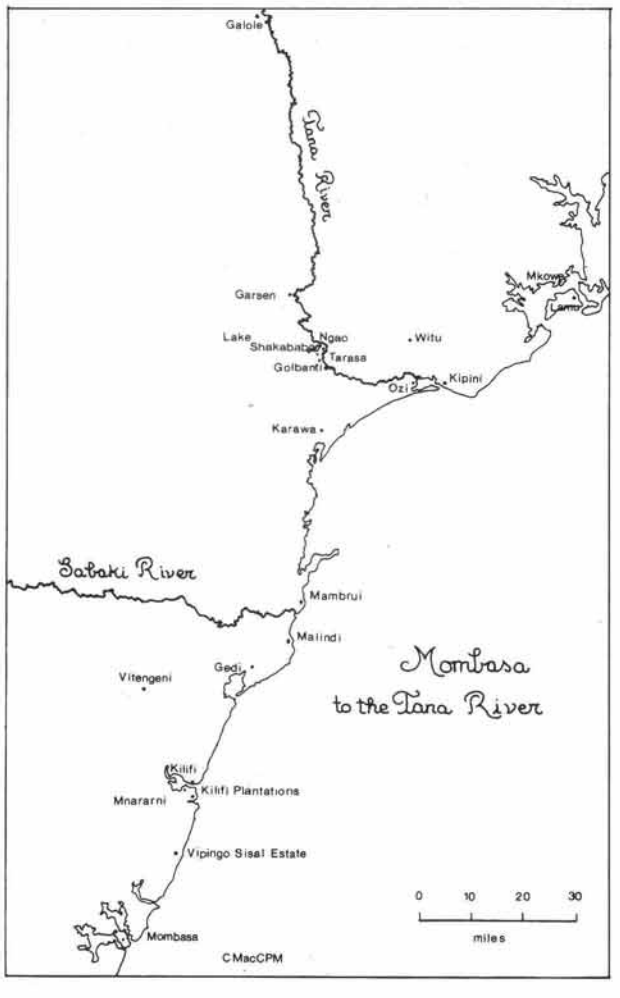
About 2,300 cattle, mostly Ayrshire Sahiwal, have been introduced and they now produce 1,000 gallons of milk daily. Cassava has been interplanted with sisal and is chopped up and fed directly to the cattle; any surplus cassava is sold.

Beans are also planted amongst the sisal, but although beans are high in protein content, they are low in sugar and thus molasses must be added before the beans can be given to the cattle. Even mangoes are fed directly to the cattle.

Dennis Wilson's diversification experiment has worked and has been a useful demonstration of the importance of a multi-purpose approach to farming on the Kenya coast.

On the south side of Kilifi Creek is the old town of Mnarani which flourished from the end of the 14th Century to the first half of the 17th.

I have twice attempted to visit Mnarani from the landward side and both times have



been attacked by bees and biting ants. On the last occasion, I led a group of V.I.P.s and we were all stung—so I suggest that if anyone wants to see the impressive pillar tomb and the mosque, he should approach from Kilifi Creek and not from the landward side.

Ten miles before Malindi are the fascinating ruins of Gedi. This Afro-Arab town was founded at the end of the 12th Century or perhaps in the first part of the 13th and was finally abandoned in the early 17th Century. It was excavated by James Kirkman between 1948 and 1958.

There are many curious aspects about the old town of Gedi, and one of these is the carefully-built latrine found in each house. Many of the houses had both bidets and toilets. Cleanliness must have been an obsession of the inhabitants of Gedi.

Malindi, the second town on the Kenya coast, after Mombasa, is one of the fastest growing towns in East Africa. During the past ten years, the population has doubled to 12,000. Malindi is also one of the oldest towns in eastern Africa which is still inhabited, having been founded by the 13th Century.

During most of the 16th Century, Malindi was the stronghold of the Portuguese, but the town began to decline drastically after Fort Jesus was constructed in Mombasa in 1593. By the end of the 18th Century, the town was probably abandoned because of pressure from the Galla, a warrior tribe which conquered most of the Kenya coast.

Malindi was refounded in 1861 by the Sultan of Zanzibar and soon prospered on account of the rich plantation agriculture which was immediately re-established. Today, Kilifi District (of which Malindi sub-district is the major contributor) is the largest producer in Coast Province of palm wine (£191,039 sold in 1970), copra (£113,323), cotton (£55,820), mangoes (£22,614), simsim (£21,180), citrus (£21,076), and bananas (£18,248).

There are several buildings and monuments in Malindi remaining from the early Arab and Portuguese periods. The most unusual are the two pillar tombs on the sea-front. The tallest of them was most certainly built in the early 15th Century, but James Kirkman now believes that the shorter one was constructed much later, perhaps in the 19th Century.

The shorter pillar is entirely different in style, the top being in the design of a spear, which probably represents majesty and power. The pillar tombs on the south coast which have the same spear motif are also 19th Century. In Fort Jesus there are two turrets with the spear design, too, and they were constructed between 1822 and 1837.

Dating from the Portuguese period there are two outstanding monuments, the Vasco da Gama cross and the Portuguese chapel. The cross, made out of Lisbon limestone, was carried from Portugal by ship and put up outside the Sheikh of Malindi's house by Vasco da Gama in 1498. But because of its obvious Christian connotation, the cross was taken down. However, under Portuguese insistence, it was put in its present location some time in the 16th Century.

By the 19th Century the wind and sea had seriously eroded the original shaft of the cross, so in 1873 Captain Malcolm of H. M. S. Briton re-inforced the shaft by putting a cone of cement around it.

In the southern part of the town is the small Portuguese chapel which we know for certain was built before 1542 as in that year, St. Francis Xavier stopped at Malindi in order to bury one of the sailors who died on his ship.

In 1933, the chapel walls were inspected and underneath a thick coat of plaster was found a painting showing the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross. To protect the painting, the Kenya Government in 1934 ordered that the Crucifixion scene be covered with whitewash until such time that proper display facilities were made available. It is now time, perhaps, that an expert should be commissioned to remove the whitewash and reveal this valuable painting in one of the earliest Christian churches in tropical Africa, other than in Ethiopia.

An entirely new attraction in Malindi is "Birdland", the largest aviary in East Africa open to the public.

Barbara and Mike Glover, the owners of "Birdland", have been collecting birds for many years, and opened the aviary in February, 1971. Since then it has expanded tremendously and now contains 700 birds of 80 different species.

All the birds are of the tropical variety, three-quarters of them indigenous to East Africa and the others from such places as Brazil, Australia, the Philippines, India, Indonesia and China. All of the non-indigenous birds and even a few native to Kenya come by air from dealers in England.

The Glovers have several rare birds, including the beautiful orange, black and white troupial, and the stunning bleeding-heart pigeon originally from the Philippines. Unfortunately, the female was killed recently when the male broke her neck while aggressively pecking at her.

A great variety of foods are given to the birds, including minced meat, boiled eggs, seeds, peanuts, and day-old chicks. Diseases are no problem, but snakes certainly are; they break into the cages and eat the eggs and also the smaller birds. Civet cats and mongooses also occasionally do a lot of harm.

A difficult bird to keep in captivity is the young Carmine Bee-eater because it survives solely on a diet of insects, yet the Glovers have been successful in raising some. They have a bird hospital and occasionally injured Carmine Bee-eaters are brought in. When they receive a baby, the Glovers give it injections of glucose for 10 days and afterwards they usually find that the bird is able to eat grasshoppers and meal worms.

The highlight of "Birdland" is the Walk-In, a large cage which visitors can enter in order to study the birds at close hand. The Walk-In is attractively landscaped with a great variety of tropical plants, a pond, and even a small waterfall. But the main attraction is of course the birds themselves, some of which are so tame that they will eat out of your hand.

Another specialty of Malindi is snake safaris!

Mark Easterbrook, a young man who used to catch snakes for Jonathan Leakey, offers visitors snake safaris to the Gedi Forest, which has perhaps the greatest concentration of snakes in all of East Africa. Over a three-month period Mark Easterbrook caught 1,100 mambas here.

On this unusual excursion, Mark transports about five persons, usually German, Swiss, French, or Italian tourists, from Malindi to Gedi. There he has three assistants who accompany the group on a walk through the forest looking for snakes.

When a snake is found, Mark identifies it and proceeds to catch it. The most common snakes found in the Gedi Forest are green mambas, olive sand snakes, black mambas, puff adders, boomslangs, twig snakes, and tiger snakes. A typical safari will last three hours and an average of four snakes will be caught. Besides snakes, Mark will also point out to the visitors various types of vegetation, birds and any wild animals seen.

Since October, 1970, Mark Easterbrook has also been giving snake shows at night at various hotels in Malindi and Mombasa. These shows last about one hour during which Mark publicly exhibits six of the most deadly snakes in East Africa: green mamba, black mamba, spitting cobra, forest cobra, rhinoceros horn viper, and puff adder. And, as a public service, Mark will go after any snake at any time in Malindi. Within the past year, he has caught a 4½lb. puff adder in one international hotel's wine cellar and in another hotel, a spitting cobra entwined on the Assistant Manager's telephone!

The Tana River, which originates on the slopes of Mount Kenya and in the Aberdare mountains, is the longest river in Kenya, flowing 440 miles to the Indian Ocean.

Between the mouth of the Tana and the town of Garissa live the Pokomo, a Bantu-speaking group of people. They can be divided into three groups: the lower Pokomo, who have been influenced by the Arabs and are consequently Moslem; the middle Pokomo who live around Golbanti and Ngao mission stations and have become Christian; and the upper Pokomo, who live on the banks of the Tana River north of Garsen and who are mostly Moslem on account of their proximity to the Somalis and Gallas.

It is the middle Pokomo who are the most accessible to outsiders since they can be reached by road during the dry season within a couple of hours of driving north from Malindi.

On this road, some 45 miles north from Malindi, is the Karawa holding ground where cattle from Lamu and Tana River Districts are held before they are brought down to Mombasa for sale. In the past, many thousands of cattle would be driven down, on foot, from Somalia and Lamu District to Mombasa, passing through Karawa on the way for veterinary checks, but it has now lost importance since in recent years the ship "Bonsella" has been picking up cattle directly at Makowe, opposite Lamu island. In 1970, for instance, 37,649 cattle (of which 15,485 were from Somalia originally) travelled by this ship to Mombasa.

Twenty miles farther up is the village of Tarasa which is not to be found on maps because it is so new. From 1965 to 1971, the road from Tarasa to Ngao, the largest town in the area, was cut off completely because a culvert was washed out and was never properly repaired, so that traffic could not get through.

Golbanti, another town in the area, was also cut off from Tarasa on account of

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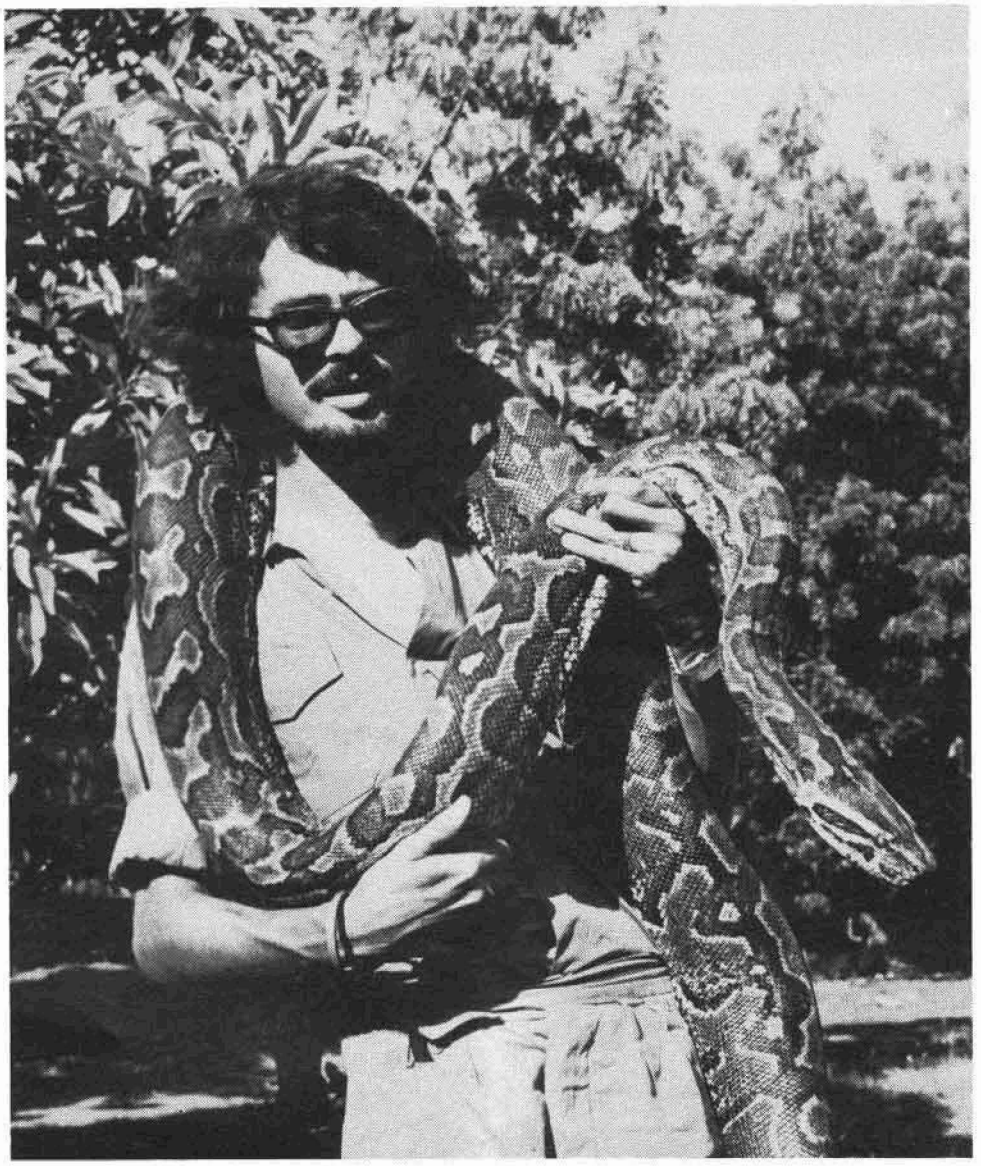

Mark Easterbrook and friend. A snake safari to the Gedi Forest is one of the Malindi experiences.

THE COAST

(from p. 25)

the flooding of the Tana River during much of this period, so Tarasa developed because the road linking up with the main Malindi-Garsen road remained open.

An Arab who had originally wanted to build a shop at Golbanti but was discouraged by the local people decided to open one at Tarasa.

Following this initiative, some of the Pokomo built shops and then a post office was opened. With this impetus more shops were built and Tarasa became the transport headquarters for the seven buses (all Arab-owned) which serve the area. Today, there are more shops in Tarasa than in Ngao and Golbanti combined. Thus a new community was born as a result of neighbouring towns allowing their roads to deteriorate so badly that they could not be reached.

In 1885, the famous Methodist missionary and explorer, Thomas Wakefield, went to Golbanti to establish "one of the most promising, if not *the* most promising position for mission work in East Africa, on the bank of the Tana River, with a waterway of several hundreds of miles, leading to numerous races in the interior".

Mr. Wakefield was to be sadly disappointed. In 1886, Reverend and Mrs. Houghton along with eleven other people in Golbanti were killed by tribesmen; inauspiciously, the Reverend was speared when he was on top of the mission house patching the roof.

In 1893, Sir Frederick Jackson, who later became Governor of Uganda, visited the mission station, now under the Reverend Howe, and he found the station derelict with the main dwelling inhabited by bats, the walls covered with tiny insects and a horrid stench prevailing the atmosphere.

Today the Methodist Church, which has probably been rebuilt according to the original designs of the Reverend Wakefield, is a small and simple building.

NO COMMERCE

Almost all of the inhabitants in Golbanti are Pokomo. They live in medium-sized rectangular mud houses with palm frond roofs which differ from the typical Swahili house in that the walls are not reinforced with small rocks or plaster and by the absence of toilets of any kind. There are only two small shops in the town, both of which are owned by Arabs.

One characteristic of the Pokomo that stands out is their almost total lack of involvement in modern commerce. Few Pokomo in the entire Tana River District own lorries, modern businesses or even medium-sized shops. One explanation for this is that the Pokomo have been isolated from the rest of Kenya because the roads serving the Pokomo areas are often flooded by the Tana River. There is also the further difficulty of the general lack of primary and secondary education during the colonial period.

On the banks of the Tana River, just outside Golbanti, a few people cultivate rice in the swamps that arise from the Tana during the rainy season. But the main crop for this area is maize, which is planted farther away from the banks and is the staple food for the middle Pokomo.

On the opposite side, away from Golbanti, stand a group of tall, conical straw houses, unlike any other dwellings near the Kenya coast. All the huts are dark inside, for there is not even a hole in the top of the roof for light to penetrate—or for smoke from the cooking fires inside the huts to escape.

Looking around the interior of one of these houses, one will find only rudimentary furniture: a bed, a chair and one-cabinet which is generally about eight feet tall in keeping with the architecture; the shelves hold cooking utensils and personal belongings.

These houses belong to the Orma, a sub-group of the Galla, who in the 19th Century were attacked from the west by the Kwavi Maasai and from the north by the Somalis. By the middle 1880s ,the Galla were forced to retreat with their cattle from the fertile coastal strip to the drier and more remote areas west of Galole and Bura, where the majority of them remain today. Golbanti happens to be the southern-most point where they are now found.

The Orma, like most of the Galla, still raise large herds of livestock. Around their houses they keep pens to protect the cattle and goats during the night. They sell their milk to the Pokomo, but rarely mix with them socially. In the past, the warlike Orma were a greatly feared enemy, but today the two groups live peacefully together because the Pokomo have become sedentary agriculturalists and no longer compete with the Orma for pastural lands.

On the way from Golbanti to Ngao is Lake Shakababo. For many years now the Luo, who are originally from around Lake Victoria, have been fishing for tilapia in this lake and other lakes and swamps in the area.

GOOD FISHING

About five years ago the Pokomo also started fishing in earnest in these waters, having learned the techniques of using nets and traps from the enterprising Luos. Now there is a fairly prosperous fishing industry as the result of the two groups getting together.

Some of the fish are put on ice and sent down to Mombasa fresh, while others are filleted and frozen in a small factory outside of Ngao and later sold in both Malindi and Mombasa.

Before the Pokomo began fishing commercially, they had almost no surplus income to buy luxuries, but today they sip *Pilsners* and *Tuskers* in bars that they reach by bicycle and listen to music on their new radios.

Towards the end of the late 19th Century, the German Neukirchen Society, a very conservative Lutheran group, under the direction of Ferdinand Wurtz, built a church in Ngao which is still standing today. The church is perched on the top of a small hill and is more attractive than the one in Golbanti.

In 1893, the mission house was built and is still the largest residence in the town. Since its founding, there have been Europeans periodically residing at the mission station, mostly to run the hospital. Last year, when I visited Ngao, Dr. Fox was in charge of the hospital and he had been there since 1964. His patients were maternity cases and several children who were suffering from marasmus and kwashiorkor.

Dr. Fox told me that the most common diseases of the area are bilharzia (schistosomiasis), malaria, hook worm, and tuberculosis.

The hospital is quite modern with piped water and electricity provided by a generator; it is the only hospital between Kipini and Galole.

As might be expected, the missionaries at Ngao also proselytize. They have been reasonably successful in converting neighbouring Pokomo to Christianity—and one reason for this is the handed-down remembrance that during the late 19th Century, the Arabs at Witu apparently treated some of the Pokomo badly. Many of the Pokomo decided to become Christians rather than Moslems

All in all, the coastal strip between Mombasa and the Tana River is of great and varied interest. Malindi, in fact, has some significance in world history. It was the only place on the East African coast where Vasco da Gama and his crew were treated with friendliness, and, as a consequence, Malindi became the capital of the Portuguese possessions north of Mozambique. The town is celebrated in many stanzas by Portugal's greatest poet, Camoens, and even Milton mentions the present-day centre of Kenya's coast tourism in *Paradise Lost*.

However, other places on this part of the coast hold little significance to the outside world. Most of the Tana River towns fall into this category especially due to the fact that they have been cut off from the great towns on the coast. Even during the present century, many of the places in the Tana River District have had a poor transportation network and few schools so that it is all the more difficult for people living there to participate in the economic and cultural life of modern Kenya. Fortunately, matters are now rapidly changing.●

BOOK REVIEW: THE LONG AFRICAN DAY

"The Long African Day." by Norman Myers, published by theMacmillan Company, New York. Collier-Macmillan Ltd., London US price : $25.

With research all the rage these days, it might be interesting if someone were to study the evolutionary changes in the dimensions of Christmas stockings. One assumes that they must be getting bigger to accommodate the ever-increasing deluge of giant picture-books which bursts into the bookstalls towards the end of each year. This one, "The Long African Day", is yet another in the heavy weight lists, with some 400 pages and 300 photographs. Unlike most in its class, this is not to be scanned idly for its pictures alone; it is perhaps really two books in one, with as much emphasis on the words as on the plates.

However, just like everyone else, let's look at the pictures first. Norman Myers has built up a good, solid reputation in East Africa as a good, solid photographer of wildlife, one of his pictures are reproduced in this issue of Africana, and you will see that they are very pleasant. But they bring to mind a remark made many years ago by John Grierson, the "father" of British documentary films, who, in his earlier days was a film critic of great perception and honesty. Grierson took a look at "Thunder over Mexico", a picture directed (but not completed) by Eisenstein (the "Battleship Potemkin" chap), and delivered himself of this penetrating and very shrewd remark: "The clouds and the cactus will pass for great photography among the hicks, but they are, of course, easy meat for anyone with a decent set of filters". In much the same vein, though with a great deal of humility (for who among us has a photo-album containing shots halfway as good as those by Mr. Myers?), I would suggest that, given a Hasselblad and a lot of time, there must be many photographers around who could achieve very similar results.

Mr. Myers' pictures are interesting; they show interesting things being done by animals in interesting places, but to me they simply do not catch any atmosphere at all; they give nothing of the smell, the harshness, the solitude, the tranquillity of the African bush. Now before everybody starts jumping at my throat for being so savage, let me hasten to say that I know of no-one in this field who can do much better. Mirella Ricciardi, whose "Vanishing Africa" has won such plaudits, came nearer to an answer than most with her pictures of tribal types and ceremonies, using a gritty, contrasty photographic technique. But, excellent though her book was, I don't think I would join a queue to buy another which used the same techniques again; as a one-shot effort, fine; more a bore. So maybe this is not the answer to wildlife pictures. What is? The movies should surely give great scope for projecting atmosphere, but can you think of one, or part of one, which made you say "Ah, yes—*that* is Africa!" Darned if I can.

Africa, then, is pictorially elusive, and it is thus no reflection whatsoever on Mr. Myers' abilities that he has gone no further than everyone else with his wildlife pictures: they are statements of fact. no more . . . but Africa is surely a lot, lot more.

Now for the text. A lot more here than just statements of fact. The basic ingredients are rich indeed, for the author has gathered on immense amount of information from research scientists and observers all over East Africa and has presented it in a light and easily-digested fashion. The framework in which these facts and opinions are set is reflected in the title of the book, "The Long African Day"; it is divided into four parts, "The Early Day", "The Middle Day", "The Late Day" and "Into the Night". In each, comments are made at length upon the behaviour of the creatures which become active or inactive during them. He goes much further than this, however, and roams through the National Parks and Game Reserves of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, explaining the immense problems that confront conservationists in so many different areas for so many different reasons. It is all good stuff, authoritative because of the experts he quotes, provocative because of the questions raised and entertaining because of the very nature of the places and problems and creatures he describes.

The author also uses his title in an allegorical sense to review the tumultuous events of Africa's 225 million year existence. Considering this period as the time from dawn to dusk, he reminds us that most African animals appeared when the day was three-quarters done, that man appeared in his cave only six minutes ago, and that he emerged from it with the last few ticks of the clock. And yet within those few ticks "he has destroyed creatures without number, especially in this 'civilised' period of history. If the wildlife of Africa is to be saved", Mr. Myers concludes, "it will not be at the eleventh hour, but at half a second to midnight". With such morsels of food for thought is this book sprinkled.

Well, there we are: two books for the price of one ('though, at $25 a time, maybe that should read 'two for the price of two'!); a big, fact-packed, picture-packed volume covering a long African day and a wide African expanse; written with fire and devotion by an ardent conservationist. Mr. Myers has forged a valuable piece of weaponry in the fight for wildlife survival.

D.T.