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# LIVING AFRICA

*A Geologist's Wanderings through the Rift Valleys*

BY  
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ILLUSTRATED WITH  
PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS, BY THE AUTHOR  
AND MARGARET D. B. WILLIS



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along with silica, seems to be derived from the soda-bearing volcanic rocks in consequence of their decomposition by heated waters at some moderate depth. This implies a source of heat that must have been such as to have maintained a high temperature for an indefinite period, and, while heat is assumed in volcanic regions, its long continuance means a continued supply of energy. One possible, though superficial, source of energy, suggested by investigations of the Geophysical Laboratory, is to be recognized in the combustion of gases escaping from within the earth, along fissures of notable depth. The vulcanism, the rifting, and the hot springs that bring the soda from the zone of decomposition, all seem to be related. It looks like a promising clue, connecting the rift valley with heat and volcanic activity, but it does not point to any close relation with the Albert rift or with others that I have seen.

Ngoro Ngoro, Ngoro Ngoro. The name ran in my mind.  
"Have you ever been to Ngoro Ngoro, Lucy?"

"Yes, two years ago. Took a motor car on a bet across the Zerengetti plains and down into the crater. Seventy-five thousand head of game there. I realized what murder that meant when others followed me, and I had the game warden make it a game reserve."

"Could you do it again?"

"What? Take a car in? Why certainly."

"We won't want those porters," said I, after a bit.

As it happened we could have gotten them, thanks to Captain Sikes and the good will of Mr. Gill, the manager of the Soda Works, who, however, was plainly relieved that I had changed my mind. Having lived thirteen years at Magadi, he could better appreciate what they were likely to suffer on a march down the desert valley or over the plateau.

Thirteen years in that torrid desert! Yet Mr. Gill looks young and smiling, and I met little Master Gill, aged a few months, out taking his airing about sun up, that being the only time of day when one of his years could venture from under a roof.

We have been most hospitably entertained and well advised by our kind hosts at Magadi. Lucy had thought we could find a track leading northwest up the river called the Guasu Nyeri, which flows into Lake Natron, and that we might thus reach the Zerengetti plains, across which he would take us to Ngoro Ngoro, allowing five days from Lake Natron to the crater. But the northwest track was pronounced impossible unless we were prepared to build a road up the escarpment and it is evidently better to go back to Nairobi, whence we shall take the road usually followed by hunters going to the Zerengetti plains.

We have come on to the Fig Tree camp, beyond the Guasu Nyeri, where General Buick got stuck in the river and Chev had to pull him out. Our outfit is pitched beside a bright running stream that comes out of a ravine

in the escarpment, and we have as temporary companions three Canadians who are here to shoot rhino—"poor, jolly old rhino."

The run from Magadi to this camp occupied only part of the morning. We had plenty of time to pitch the tents, eat lunch, and get restless. Strolling out beyond the shade of the large trees beside the brook, I could see the escarpment on the western side of the rift valley and it tempted me. It ranges from two to four thousand feet in height. Parts of it are quite precipitous, and it cuts through older mountains, some of them ancient volcanoes and others residual island mounts, left by erosion. If I could reach it I might, perhaps, start back with a clear conscience for Nairobi and Ngoro Ngoro in the morning.

Leaving Solomon to cook the dinner, Lucy and I took two other boys to carry gun and camera and set out for an afternoon walk. We held westward, ascending to a broad bench land in which streams have cut shallow canyons, where basalt cliffs and shady retreats looked inviting for leopards or possibly a lion, though the scarcity of game made the latter improbable. Studying the landscape I shaped our course. Lucy following occasionally took the rifle from the boy, where he thought quick action might be needed. We started a few wart hogs and antelope. There were many fresh spools of rhino and Lucy would say, "If I were hunting I would follow that." I think he regrets my complete indifference. The

old hunting instinct is strong in him and he was moved to tell me stories:

"Poor old rhino," said he, as we paused in the thin shade of a thorn bush to look at a fresh spoor that wandered aimlessly around, "he's so near-sighted he is nearly blind. He goes blundering along not knowing where he is going. Poor old rhino."

"How does he get you then?" I asked.

"Once he gets your scent it is all up with you or him. He never lets you go until you kill him. There was Mrs. Green, a great traveler and writer, they say. She was staying at a farm when a native came in to say there was a rhino in the maize. The farmer had only a small gun and said the rhino could jolly well stay there. Mrs. Green claimed she could get him. She put five shots into him and he got thoroughly annoyed, so much so that he chased her and ripped her limb from limb. Then he went down the road and meeting a Ford with a man in it he killed them both. But then somebody shot him. Poor, jolly old rhino." Lucy's tone was sorrowful. His sympathy with the blundering beasts is delicious.

We had gone on past mid-afternoon but were still a mile or two from the escarpment. One of the boys said it was two hours farther. His feet were burning with the heat of the white baked ground. Whenever we paused he would pick out a relatively cool spot of shadow and standing in it on one foot would rest the other on his knee. It was plain that we would not have time before

dark to climb to the cliffs and get back to camp, but the light on the mountain was beautiful and tempted me to photograph. I was pushing on to an outlook when a huge red cloud rose behind us. It was the desert that had risen up on the wings of the wind. The center was dark orange and toward the margins the half tones changed to ruddy yellow against a vanishing blue sky.

I snapped my kodak ten seconds before the view was swallowed up. Then we lay behind a thorn and waited. There was no great wind, such as I have experienced in dust storms elsewhere. The whirl no doubt passed us by, though the day was blotted out. "Look at the moon," I called. But it was no moon. It was the ghost of the sun peering through the dust.

Evening was on when I approached the brook and entered the belt of tall trees somewhere in which camp was pitched. Lucy and the boys had fallen behind. They did not answer to my shout. My life insurance had temporarily lapsed. When they came up to where I waited Lucy remarked, "Just the place to bump into a jolly old rhino." I doubt if I would have run far if one had appeared. I was more tired than I wanted to admit, and Lucy's new found strength had reached its limit. Yet we had walked scarcely twelve miles. The heat gets you if the rhino doesn't.

It is late. The boys are snoring. A stentorian rhythm comes from a high platform where some from the other camp have climbed to security from predatory body

snatchers. Lucy is still over there with the Canadians and their white hunter, an old companion of his, who told a rhino story on Lucy himself earlier in the evening.

It appears that a rhino caught Lucy without a gun and most unsportingly pursued him. As the rhino was gaining, Lucy, in running past a small tree and to the left of it, grabbed the tree with his right hand and swung around it. But the rhino came up on the right of the tree. The laughter that greeted this climax prevented our learning whether Lucy jumped the rhino or embraced him.

We back-track tomorrow to strike out for Ngoro Ngoro, "the most inaccessible place in Africa."

