

BOOKS BY
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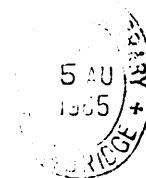
The Windward Road
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Travels of a Naturalist
in and out of Africa

ARCHIE CARR



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wilderness it cherishes. Not long ago, lunchtime caught me in one of these parks. I was driving a car full of my family at the time. When my children are travelling and lunchtime comes upon them, it is a crisis, and something has got to be done at once. There were victuals in the car that day, and all we required was a place to park and eat. For miles, with the tension growing, I kept trying to draw up beside the road where it ran along a little river; but every layby was filled with cars. Picknicking people were clotted in every slight break in the rhododendron. With hysteria looming in the car, I raced out to the camp ground and threaded a maze of car-lined roads for ten minutes before I could find any way to leave the crawling queue of vehicles. Finally, by sheer courage and good fortune, I fought my way into a space a car was leaving.

As the children struggled over the food, I sat there looking out at what the world was coming to. For acres of what had been, the last time I saw it, silent forest, I could now see no way to walk, for the clutter of tents, cars, and people. There were queues at the fireplaces, and out where once there were only ruffed grouse, a man was selling, for fifty cents each, bundles of firewood brought in from somewhere else. There were trees there still, but more people than trees; and over along the creek that sang unheard in the clamour of the lovers of wilderness, there were dazed frogs still, but more babies than frogs by far. The scene in that wonderful old place of my youth was only a little more sylvan than downtown Cincinnati. And yet, when you get to thinking about it, there is no sense in sneering at one's species for flocking to the woods. Sneer at the abundance of people – deplore it more than any other human attribute – but not at their wanting wilderness. Only the hankering that makes man clutter and track the parks will ever make it possible to save any wilderness, anywhere. I don't mean that the African fauna preserves have to be turned into recreation areas. But there is no sense kidding yourself that, being away off in Africa, they will stay safe from the clamour of humans. Forty thousand visitors went through little Nairobi National Park last year, and at some seasons you have to get reservations months ahead to be sure of accommodation in Kruger

Park. The visitors are not just local folk, and American tourists who are going everywhere. A new European lust for Africa is spreading, and a new interest in natural history. German, French, and Italian people are showing up in droves with telephoto lenses, and building up traffic in some of the parks to a critical level.

But this problem of too much love can probably be solved – somehow – because it proves the economic value of wilderness; and economics will loom large in the eyes of the new African governments, and will help get their support for conservation generally. Meanwhile, there are other people in the preserves who are doing more damage than the tourists, and not for love. These are the poachers. On my arrival in Nairobi one day I opened a copy of the *East African Standard* and read big headlines that rejoiced over the destruction of a poaching gang in the Tsavo National Park. The gang had, in a period of two and a half years, killed 3,000 elephants, the paper said. Tsavo is a big place, to be sure. It covers 8,000 square miles and there is vast wild country around it. But even so, 3,000 elephants seemed a lot; and I walked down to the Game Department to see what the men there thought of the paper's figure. They thought it was a careful estimate; and they said, moreover, that it was only the number of elephants killed for ivory, and did not include the unknown hundreds of calves that must have died because they lost their mothers.

Policing a place like the Tsavo preserve is a hard job; and it is the same in all the best game areas, because the best terrain is likely to be the most remote, and the most devilishly easy for poachers to work and hide in. Out in those tough, thirsty places you are working not just against hungry tribesmen but against rich old Chinese with talented concubines and run-down vigour, whose agents pay well for the new potency they believe they get from rhino-horn shaved into a cup of wine. The old mandarins of past times killed the rhinoceros out of much of its Asiatic range that way; and with a little more time they can kill it out of Africa, too. That is a strange thought to me: that the big slow-grown rhinos and elephants, only barely left over from Tertiary time, are rotting finally away for a snout horn, or