ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Lovatt Smith grew up in England and went to Kenya in 1950 at the age of 20. He served as a Warden with the Royal National Parks of Kenya for many years, the greater part of his time being spent at Amboseli when he was not involved in the Mau Mau conflict. Always a true conservationist, his love of Nature in its purest sense has continued to grow throughout his later life.

He is now one of the few people living who is able to record an eye-witness account of the astonishing events that took place at Amboseli in the 1950s which resulted in the formation of the area as a National Park.

AMBOSELI — NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE is a factual account of that fascinating story and the early history of the area. It should not be missed by anyone who has experienced the wonders of Amboseli or intends to visit that part of Kenya.

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AMBOSELI — NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE — David Lovatt Smith

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AMBOSELI

Nothing Short Of A Miracle

David Lovatt Smith

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Foreword

BY MERVYN COWIE, C.B.E.,E.D.

FOUNDER AND PAST DIRECTOR OF THE
ROYAL NATIONAL PARKS OF KENYA

Memories of catastrophies, calamities and crises, which at the time seem disastrous or at best disheartening, soon fade into the shadows of the past and get lost in a quickly-changing world.

It is therefore fortunate that David Lovatt-Smith has recorded some of the interesting events and the miracle of the water, going back over forty years in the history of Amboseli. The great variety of problems which call for a warden's attention leave little time for detailed notes on day-to-day happenings but David Lovatt-Smith has drawn on his vivid recollections and presented this fascinating, and at times provocative, account of his personal experiences as a young and dedicated warden.

These problems, in various disguises, continually confronted me in the establishment and development of all the National Parks and Reserves in Kenya and which, in a word, arose through the lack of money.

We can be proudly grateful to people like David Lovatt-Smith who made up a fine team of wardens and who persevered through very difficult times with restricted finance to safeguard at least a vital part of Kenya's wonderful wildlife heritage.

I commend this absorbing story to anyone who hopes there will always be an Amboseli.

Nairobi
February 1986

To Jean

Introduction

STANDING ON OBSERVATION HILL some 33 years after I first stood there and marvelled at the breathtaking beauty of the country all around me, it began to dawn on me that I had been a witness to perhaps the greatest environmental change the area had undergone since the last eruption of the great mountain Kilimanjaro millenia before. At that time the primordial upheavals of Nature transformed the whole georama of Africa which was still in its comparative infancy. Now, in the flower of its youth, the change had not been brought about by further subterranean forces of Nature but at the hand of a new and perhaps just as terrible a force, MAN. Man, the latest addition to the species which inhabit the planet and the one with the least excuse to tamper with its everyday workings.

As I looked around me from the top of the hill that day in January 1985, I couldn't help casting my mind back just three short decades to the days when, from those same heights, I could see tens of thousands of wild animals roaming the plains with Rhinos wallowing in the mud baths just below and Lions and Cheetahs and Wild Dogs lazing under the beautiful and plentiful yellow fever Acacia trees. Life was there in abundance, and every acre boasted its own community of wild inhabitants. Now there seemed so little left. The plains were bare of game, the trees had all but disappeared and the mud wallows had long since ceased to be the favourite midday meeting place of the famous long-horned Rhinos of Amboseli. Certainly the great swamp was still there, and yes, there was a herd of Elephant and another of Buffalo with their usual flock of Egrets in close attendance. But where were all the Rhinos now? Where all the trees, the Cheetahs and the great herds of plains game?

It was man, of course, who was responsible for their absence. He was the one who brought about this desolate scene. Either directly by killing or indirectly by creating the conditions where it became impossible for them to thrive, mankind individually or collectively caused their departure. No longer, I was telling myself, was Nature now in command. No longer were the forces that fashioned the great beauty of the place able to compete with man's technical abilities and his unnatural greed. It seemed as though the human

species had now assumed Nature's role and all over the planet a dark shadow was being cast ever wider by the ravages of man in a world he has the power but not the authority to change and on an environment he does not own. I suddenly felt terribly saddened and wondered how it would be after another three decades had passed.

Yet, as I stood and contemplated this tragedy and tried to find a reason or an answer, a voice more powerful seemed to be saying "Take heed! All is not what it may first appear to be. Ponder, for a moment, the true facts. Whatever man may build himself up to be he will never replace Nature. Though he thinks he's in control now, he deludes himself. He is, after all, fashioned from the same dust as all other life on earth and is still, no matter how he boasts, subject to Nature's whims and Her plans for the future of this earth. Take heart," the voice was saying, "all is not what it may seem. Trust Her, for whatever happens, you'll see, will be for the best in the end. Only believe and it will be easier for you to endure the inevitable. It is *your* weakness if you suffer more than your due pain, because you rebel against the inevitability of change and dwell too much upon the thought of past events. What will be, will be. But Nature is still in overall command and whosoever dares to meddle too much with Her workings and fails to heed Her warnings, does so at their peril and must be prepared thereafter to reap the consequences of their actions. After all, did Dinosaurs not also once roam these plains? Above all, remember that 'Nature never did betray the heart that trusted her'."

So there I stood and wondered and tried to understand. And as I pondered, my thoughts were suddenly distracted by a movement to my right. It was a lizard that had climbed up on a small rock only a few feet away from me, with its head characteristically bobbing up and down in display. As I watched, it began to stalk a grasshopper on a tuft of grass nearby. Then I saw to my amazement that the creature had lost one of its front legs completely and only had a stump for the other. It was having to push itself along with its two sound back legs, keeping its head off the ground with the stump. It managed to manoeuvre itself to within a few centimetres of the grasshopper when its tongue flashed out and the insect was safely in its mouth.

Lizards are the favourite prey of Eagles, and this one must have had a mighty battle to gain its freedom from the jaws of death at some bygone day. But what had happened after its successful escape from the talons of that great bird? What prospect did it have with such an enormous handicap and how on earth could it have triumphed over such a terrible disaster? For clearly it had overcome its adversity and survived. How? What had motivated it, and why did it succeed against such odds? The answer can only have been

the total acceptance of its predicament and its commitment to carry on as best it could. If that lizard had, for one moment, given up hope it would have lived on for just a few more hours. Instead, it had accepted the inevitable, adapted to the new conditions in which it found itself, and thrived. In modern language it applied *positive thinking*.

As I watched, fascinated, I began to understand that the whole Amboseli story was encapsulated in the saga of that little Lizard. I could see that nothing in Nature is backward-looking or negative. She doesn't stop to think what might have been. There is no profit in that. She doesn't teach her subjects, after the advent of a disaster, to sit pathetically and cry for help. They must gather up the pieces, lick their wounds and make the best of what's left. She, it is, who is the original Positive Thinker and she moulds her subjects to the same pattern to work and plan for the future of the planet and the universe. Man, it seems, is still the only exception to Nature's design. He has yet to learn the basic rule that *all* things living are equally important and man no more so than the rest.

As I walked down from the hill I came to realise my mistake, my all too common human error. I should stop feeling sorry for myself about the state I found at Amboseli. Things must be accepted for what they are, not what they might have been. If I am not happy about the future being in the hands of man, then I must do something positive to help. After all, I did have something to offer. I knew the area as well as anyone and had plenty of practical knowledge which I would be able to transmit to others who might be in a position to influence the future course of events for the better. Not only that, but I knew I was one of the few people living with the ability to record an eye-witness account of the miracle that occurred at Amboseli in recent times. For this reason alone, perhaps I owe it to the future inhabitants of the area and to visitors to the Park to tell the story of the first years of the area as a National Wildlife Reserve so that it can be recorded for all time.

So the book was conceived. The story is a remarkable one and there is little doubt that Fate or Nature (one and the same to me) had more than just a passing hand in the events that occurred in the late 1950s. If it gives a modicum of encouragement to the future custodians of the Park to know that we also were confronted daily with disappointments, frustrations and failures which seemed to spell disaster at the time but which actually turned out to be for the best in the end, then I shall feel something positive has been achieved.

Pages 8 & 9: Evening light on Kilimanjaro from Amboseli.

CHAPTER ONE

The Seeds of Decline

WHEREVER TRAVELLERS EXPLORE the wilds of Africa they will always be able to find something of particular interest to catch the eye as they journey through the wilderness, but the traveller to Amboseli finds a very special magic about the place as he wends his way towards the Park. If he is travelling by car or even flying in, it is always the mountain that gives the first indication to the approach of the Park. The 5,800 metre high dome looms closer all the time and the traveller cannot help but be constantly aware of the mass of this, the greatest single standing mountain in the world. So vast is the landmass of Kilimanjaro that however fast one travels, the mountain seems to accompany one on the journey, so that even after several kilometres it still appears to be no closer.

Kilimanjaro, the name originates from two swahili words: *Kilima* — hill and *Njaro* — tall, is, in fact in Tanzania. The story of why there is a curve in the boundary line which conveniently gives the mountain to Tanzania instead of Kenya, is a fascinating one.

In the 1880s Britain and Germany agreed to divide this part of East Africa between themselves while at the same time paying lip service to the Sultan of Zanzibar who also laid claim to large parts of the area for the purpose of farming his very lucrative crop of slaves. Zanzibar had been the main slave market for the whole of eastern Africa for generations. Swahili and Arab slavehunters would bring in large numbers to be sold to Arabia, the Middle East and beyond. Now the British and Germans were trying to put an end to the trade.

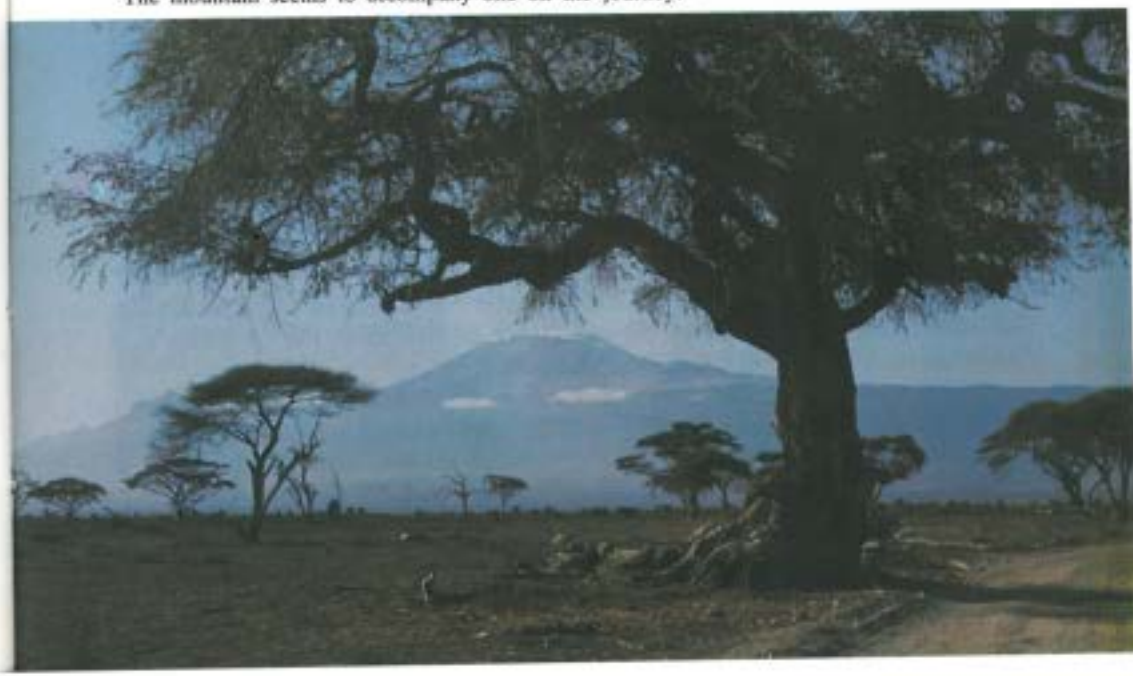
The popular story of the boundary line used to be that Britain and Germany were about to agree on a dead straight line from the coast to Lake Victoria, when the Kaiser's son, Queen Victoria's grandson, reminded his grandmother that Britain would have two snow-capped mountains on the equator, if the boundary line was straight, while Germany would have none. The Queen was then said to have agreed that this was not fair, and had ordered the boundary to be changed in Germany's favour, placing Kilimanjaro in German East Africa.

This touching little story must have been made up by some Colonial Officer to help cover up the shortcomings of Whitehall, as the real story is quite different — if not just as quaint.

By 1885 the British already had considerable interests in Uganda, but had to travel all the way down the Nile from Khartoum to get there. The quickest and most direct route lay from Mombasa, through the impenetrable Masai country, into which no one had yet dared to travel. So there was great strategic value in opening up a southern route from Mombasa around the southern slopes of Kilimanjaro away from the Masai. The British had a strong naval presence in Zanzibar at that time, trying to enforce a blockade of the slave trade. Their 'man' in Zanzibar was John Kirk on whom the Sultan relied a great deal for advice, particularly on foreign matters. Kirk's main brief was to do everything possible to run down and eventually stop the slave trade, but in so doing, he was to keep Sultan Barghash sweet. Kirk somehow succeeded in achieving both these seemingly opposing tasks admirably.

Before the boundaries had been agreed upon with Germany, Kirk managed to persuade the Sultan that it would be a good idea if he annexed a piece of land around Kilimanjaro as it was 'highly fertile and should be an asset to the Sultan's expanding Empire', knowing full well that once the Sultan claimed it officially, it would be as British as if the Union Jack itself was flying there.

"The mountain seems to accompany one on the journey."



The Sultan's army commander, another Britisher, General Mathews, was despatched with a force of men to Kilimanjaro and duly arrived at Moshi to plant the Sultan's flag. Unfortunately he was not allowed to proceed until he had given the obligatory 'reward' to the local warlord WaChagga Chief Mandara, a man with an eye to a good business deal! Bargains having been struck, the flag was duly raised on a rather decrepid old flagpole and a Treaty signed by Mandara, carried back to Zanzibar.

That, however, was not the end of the story. The Germans had got wind of what was going on behind their backs and they also had designs on the same piece of country. They immediately sent out a force of their own, under a certain Dr. Juhlke who arrived at Moshi about four months after the Mathews' party. They were also confronted by the same old wily Chief Mandara, who couldn't believe his luck! The story he told was that he had been forced into signing the Sultan's treaty against his will and that he had always wanted to go along with the Germans. He had not failed to notice the very interesting looking gifts they had brought, either. After a respectable deal had been struck, the Sultan's flag was removed and the German flag raised on a somewhat smarter flagpole. Juhlke returned in triumph to Zanzibar with the piece of paper carrying Mandara's signature, and duly waved it in front of Kirk.

As it happened, Whitehall at that time desperately needed Germany as a friend for reasons which were well outside the African arena. Troubles were brewing with France over India and Turkey, so they needed all the friends they could get. It was decided that a blind eye should be turned to Germany's somewhat 'below the belt' claim to the Moshi area, and it was never contested, much to the disgust of Kirk and the Sultan.

The start and finish points of the boundary dividing German and British East Africa had already been agreed upon and it was going to be a physical impossibility to survey a line over the 5,800 metre mountain. So the boundary Commissioners between themselves agreed to take the line around the northern foothills of the mountain, thus not only giving the Moshi area but the whole mountain to the Germans.

It is interesting to conjecture what the history of Amboseli might have been if Kirk had been ordered by Whitehall not to give in to the Germans and Kilimanjaro had always been in Kenya.

The presence of the landmass of the mountain affects the local climate to some extent. Snowfall which occurs on the upper elevations feeds the glaciers but on the lower, forested slopes, the snowfall turns to rain. The porosity of the volcanic soil and the structure of the rocks beneath, act like a drainage bed and allow the melting snow and ice and rainwater to percolate through

the interior to appear at the base in the form of springs which are situated at intervals around the foothills.

On the southern and eastern sides, these springs create lakes such as Lake Jipe and Lake Chala or they form small rivers which have their sources on the lower slopes. To the north, around Amboseli, the country is so level that the springs create great swamps, which, for all practical purposes are at the same level as the dry, dusty plains. So that when visitors arrive at the Park for the first time after a long drive across dusty plains, they are amazed to see lush green grass and papyrus suddenly appearing out of the mirage. The Yellow Fever trees *(Acacia Xanthophloea)* grow in the vicinity of these swamps where the water table is never far from the surface, and it is these beautiful trees which, with the mountain in the background, creates the picture for which Amboseli is so famous.

Since history was recorded in this part of Africa the water level in these swamps has generally remained stable, any rise or fall being so insignificant as to raise little attention from the local Masai people who owned the land and used the swamps to water their stock.

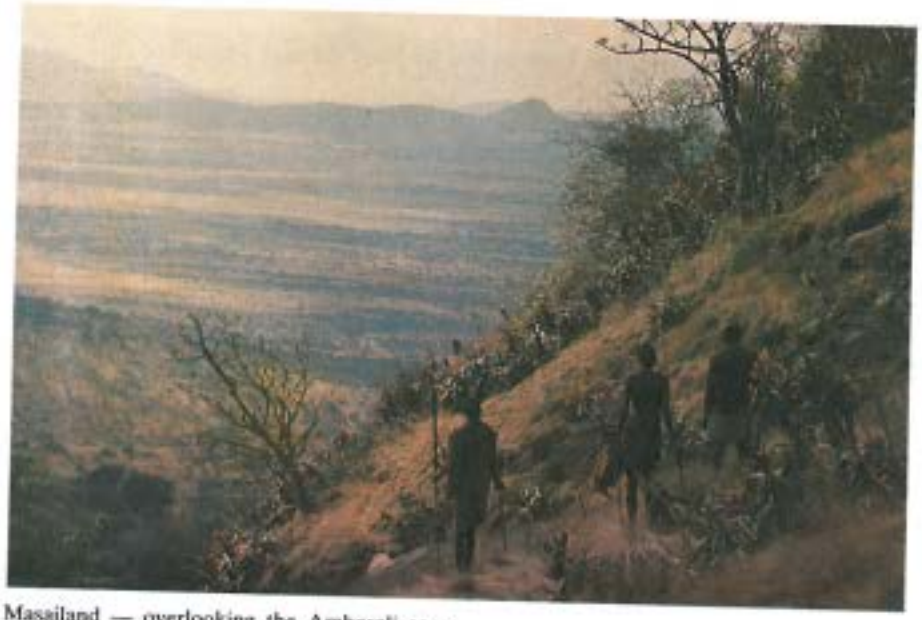
Before the Europeans came, the Masai covered the largest proportion of Kenya and they were by far the most dominant tribe of all eastern Africa. They commanded the greatest respect from all their neighbours as well as any slavehunters and missionaries who would always keep a wide berth around Masailand for fear of being attacked.

The Masai are divided into groups which are best described as 'clans'. Each Clan has a chief and the paramount chief is the *Liabon*. The Clans are subdivided into 'Sections' and it is the Loitaiok Section of the Kisongo clan that occupy the area we now call Amboseli.

The Loitaiok people always used the swamps and were happy to share the water and grazing they provided with the wild animals. On the whole, the two factions lived in harmony, the Masai respecting the wildlife and their right to the life-giving swamps. Occasionally clashes took place, particularly in the driest part of the year when both water and grazing became in short supply, but on the whole each respected the other and thrived.

In some areas, close to these swamps, the *Phoenix* palm grows which the Masai call *Tukai,* so that the surrounding area became known as Ol (the) Tukai. Within this area are four main swamps known as Namalog, Ologinya, Tukai and Ngong Narok. There are also some other smaller water-holes to the west known as Kitirua.

The earliest recorded observations of the area were written by a Scotsman named Joseph Thomson who is acknowledged as being the first European to set foot in Masai country and live to tell the tale. Just over 100 years ago, in



Masailand — overlooking the Amboseli area.

1882, he entered what was then known as the Njiri Plains from Loitokitok. He was accompanying a Swahili slavehunter who was on his way from the coast to Lake Victoria to gather another batch of merchandise to deliver to the Zanzibar slave-traders. The hunter's name was Juma Kimemata and Thomson met him at Taveta just as the hunter was about to enter Masailand with a large caravan of porters. Juma hoped to 'buy' his way through by trading beads for a safe passage, thus affording him a much shorter route to the hunting grounds to the north. No slaves were ever taken from the Masai themselves. The hunters would not dare. The Masai *morani* or warriors made very short work of anyone on whom they could find the slightest excuse to use their razor-sharp spears or *simis*, and there have been cases of whole caravans being massacred by those ferocious and brutal fighters. Although it was by far the shortest route from the coast to the more slave-worthy tribes near the Lake, even by the late 1880s no missionaries and very few slavers had managed to penetrate the dreaded Masai country.

As it happened, Joseph Thomson picked a lucky time to make his entry into Ol Tukai. The Loitaiok *morani* had just left to go on a large cattle-raid up-country and the elders who were left at home to look after the women and children seemed more disposed towards this strange white person and his

African fellow-traveller. They saw that he was apparently bringing no harm to them and because he was brave enough to enter their country, he held their respect and they let him pass through. His reputation preceded him so that he managed to travel throughout Masailand and live to tell his story.

In his book, 'Through Masailand', he marvels at the spectacle of such countless herds of wildlife on the Njiri Plains and wonders 'how so much abundance of wild animals can possibly survive on the dry, dusty plains'. At that time great herds of Zebra, Wildebeest, Hartebeest, Eland and Gazelle roamed the plains of Amboseli, accompanied by their predators Lion, Cheetah and Leopard. Packs of Hyena and Wild Dog were never far from the herds. Thomson tells of considerable numbers of Rhino but surprisingly very few Elephant and Buffalo. He was a careful recorder of the animals he saw, so we can safely assume that there were very few Elephant and Buffalo in Ol Tukai at that time, thus providing us with a valuable reference in view of the developments in the ecology of the Ol Tukai area.

Some of the species he saw would soon come to be known as 'Big Game', words which spelt disaster for many of them. Sadly Thomson himself was no exception to the obsession for killing wild animals, and he recounts exploits of shooting game 'for the pot'. He encountered his first Rhino in Ol Tukai and proceeded to shoot it and many more throughout his journey to Lake Victoria. How little can he have realised that with one stroke he was marking the beginning of the appalling decimation of wildlife in this part of Africa which, until that moment, had remained as Nature ordained since time immemorial.

He records the stalking of that first Rhino in some detail and it is sobering to reflect that as he pulled the trigger on the unfortunate animal, it was as if he had fired the starting gun for the race against time on the extermination and possible extinction of not only the Black Rhino species but also many of the larger mammals of eastern Africa. Sobering, too, to think that like so many others he just could not see the enormity of his actions. He loved shooting wild animals and was able to write about his exploits later without the slightest inkling of remorse. Why is it that so many hunters have the sort of love of nature and animals that just to see and admire them from a distance is not enough? They must go on to possess them like a child who cannot resist *picking* the flower she admires so much. Why must we learn our lessons too late when all the irreparable damage is done?

CHAPTER TWO

Having to 'Suffer Progress'

IN 1900 THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION created the Southern Game Reserve which covered a large part of southern Kenya and included the area which was to become known as Amboseli. *Embosel*, from which the name is derived, is the Masai word for the large dry lake-bed or pan to the northwest of the mountain. This lake-bed forms the boundary between the Kisongo and Matapatu clans of Masai. The creation of such a large area as a wildlife preserve was indeed a far-sighted move for those days, and while not all species of animals were protected — game-birds and certain antelopes could still be taken — there was a good measure of protection. The only trouble was that the Reserve shared a common boundary with the International boundary of Tanganyika where there was no such protection in force and where shooting was still allowed. Many herds of plains game migrated over the border in the wet seasons where their numbers would be sadly depleted.

During the first world war in 1914 the area all along the border became heavily populated with troops from both sides and thousands of animals were slaughtered both for the pot and doubtless to relieve boredom. Overall, whilst the Southern Game Reserve eased the situation somewhat, in the comparatively short time since the Europeans came to the country at the turn of the century, there was a very considerable reduction of the herds in Amboseli and the surrounding country, Surprisingly, although the Masai had lived with the great herds up until that time and looked upon them as part of their heritage, they did not seem to object to the killing which they now saw going on around them. Perhaps by then they were powerless to stop it anyway or maybe with their ever increasing herds of domestic stock they were not unhappy to see them go to make room for their own cattle, sheep and goats.

Before the Europeans came, the Masai were essentially pastoralists. They grew no crops nor did they kill any wildlife for food. They simply lived off their herds, so that the stock a man owned represented his entire wealth. Money was unknown to them. Their herds were much smaller then, partly due to the endemic diseases such as Rinderpest and East Coast Fever and partly because of the continual internecine wars and marauding which kept

Above: Loitaiok Masai women, 1952.
Below: Ivory and Rhino Horn recovered from illegal hunters in the Tsavo National Park.

herds at a much lower level.

By the 1920s, the British Administration introduced veterinary care and compulsory inoculation against Rinderpest resulting in the virtual eradication of that disease. With the cessation of all tribal wars and the restraining of the *morani* activities, the herds of all domestic stock soon swelled to many times their previous numbers. Even then, money was still of no value to the Masai. Their wealth lay entirely with their cattle, sheep and goats. The more a man had, the wealthier he was, and true to human nature every Masai strove to enlarge his wealth by increasing his possession of stock. Soon it was possible to see cattle out-numbering wild animal herds on the plains of Amboseli and in the Ol Tukai swamps. At last this part of the world, too, had been brought under the influence of western veterinary know-how. Amboseli could not escape having to 'suffer progress', and inevitably the balance of nature, so carefully maintained over the millenia was upset. If only humans were able to benefit from this 'progress' without expense to the other creatures with whom we share this planet, no one could complain. But it must be very questionable whether any but a tiny minority actually benefit in the short term — certainly the American Indians did not. The trouble is that unlike all other life we humans have no predators, yet with all our knowledge we have not learnt to control our numbers. Of necessity we can only live and multiply at the expense of the rest of life on earth. But have we that right?

Opposite above: A Masai family moving to better grazing grounds.
Opposite below: Obtaining blood from a cow to mix with milk — part of the Masai's staple diet.
Below: Loitaiok Masai married women.

CHAPTER THREE

Bold Ideals — Slender Means

THERE HAD ALREADY been plans for the creation of National Parks in Kenya before the second world war. In 1938 public demands for their establishment and for a more effective system of preservation and presentation of Kenya's wildife led to the appointment of a committee charged specifically with the task of putting forward recommendations. The main attention was directed towards what is now the Nairobi National Park. However, the intervention of the second world war prevented any successful achievement until 1945 when the National Parks Ordinance was enacted, based on similar legislation in other countries. A board of 14 trustees was nominated and Mervyn Cowie appointed as their executive officer. Nairobi National Park was subsequently gazetted followed by Tsavo and other smaller Parks. Amboseli was proclaimed a National Reserve in November 1948. Thus, no time was lost in setting aside vast tracts of Kenya's beautiful countryside for ". . . the safeguard of all objects whether animate or inanimate within the preserve . . . for the interest, advantage and enjoyment of the peoples of Kenya and the world". Bold and positive words indeed, but sadly not backed up by the financial actions required to match them. For the allocation of funds by the British and Kenya Governments turned out to fall far short of what was possible to operate these wonderful Parks and Reserves effectively.

The National Reserves, of which Amboseli was but one, were different from the National Parks in one major feature. Within a National Park the countryside and all wildlife is preserved to the exclusion of everything else and no human development allowed. It was for the benefit of the nation as a whole. A National Reserve, on the other hand, was a local term denoting an area for preservation where the reasonable needs of the human inhabitants living within the area must take preference. It was a compromise between a National Park and a Game Reserve, where the establishment of a National Park, while eminently desirable was not easily possible.

The Trustees could see the potential problems looming on the horizon in trying to make an area of land already populated by a pastoralist tribe into a conservation area. Indeed, the drastic change in the ecology of the Ol Tukai area that had taken place over the previous three or four decades was already

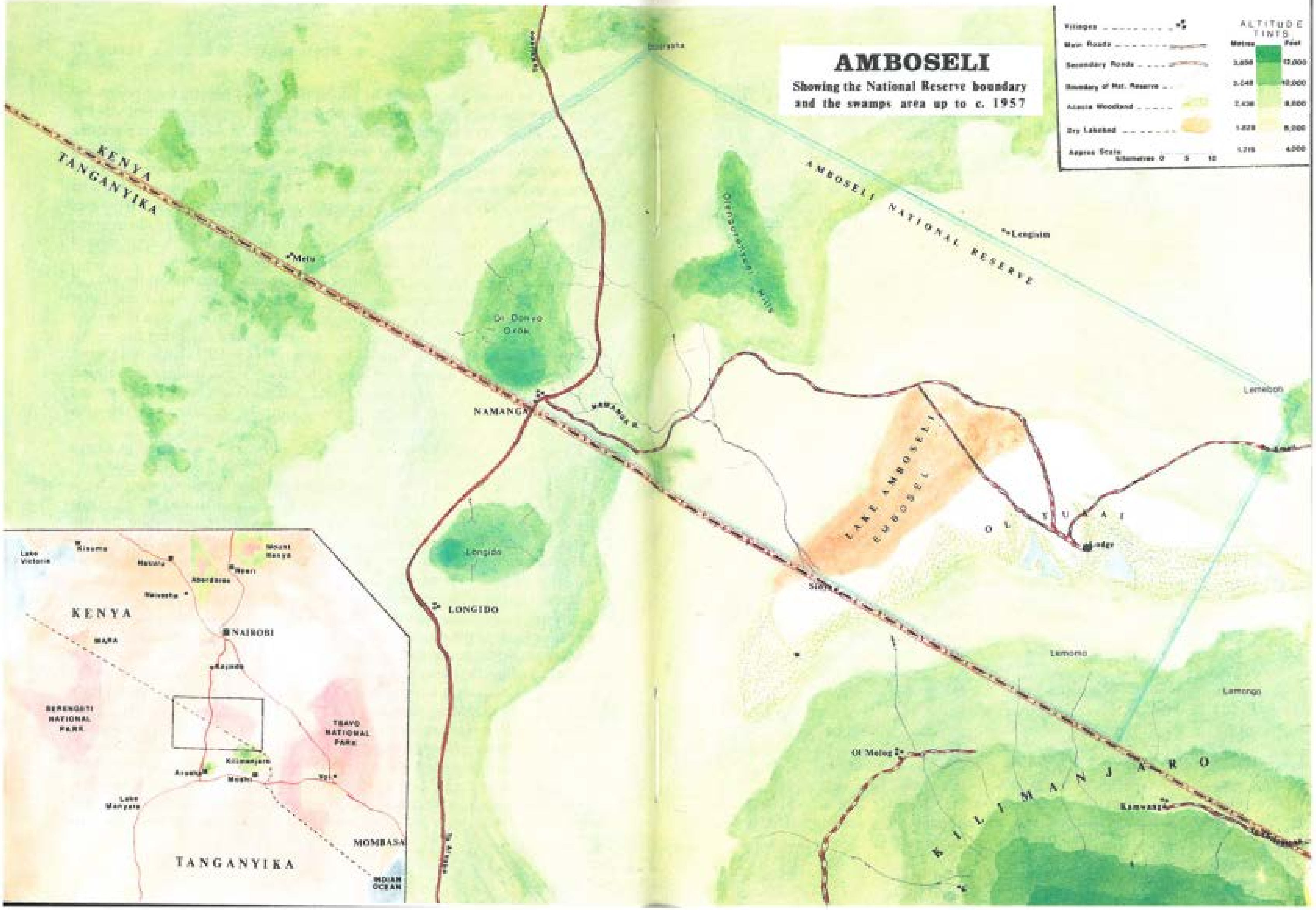
apparent to them. They would be taking on an area heavily over-populated with domestic stock which were competing fiercely with the remnants of the wildlife which once abounded there. Nevertheless, it was still a remarkable piece of country with the great snow-clad mountain ever present watching benignly over the fate of its northern environs, where those photogenic acacia trees remained even if many of the wild animals had disappeared. The animals that were left seemed surprisingly tame. Perhaps, after all, the fact that it had been a protected area for over 40 years had given them some degree of confidence. Anyway, from now on they would be fully protected with the agreement of the landowners: the Loitaiok Masai.

Even before the National Parks took over the administration of the area, it was a favourite game-viewing place for visitors from East Africa and other parts of the world. Tourists were brought in by Kuoni World Tours from their cruise ship in Mombasa to experience a night around the camp fire in the middle of the African bush. One of the main routes in Ol Tukai is still known as Coronia Avenue, named after one of the luxury ships. Budge Gethin, who owned and ran the Namanga River Hotel, had also been bringing in selected visitors on photographic safaris since the early 1930s, and knew the area better than any other European.

Budge, whose Father was a native of Co. Sligo, Eire, had lived in Kenya since he was a young man. He came to Kenya to work for the Standard Bank, but after a year went on to work for Karen von Blixen until war was declared in 1914. He volunteered and served with the King's African Rifles in the machine-gun Corps in the East African campaign. It was while he was stationed near Namanga during the Battle of Longido that he first saw his future home. When he came out of the army in 1924 he was one of the first to set up a business taking visitors on photographic safaris.

The enterprise soon developed, but while other White Hunters were taking clients out on shooting safaris, Budge would only take those who wanted to see the animals in their natural surroundings and not down the sight of a rifle. He was an ardent conservationist and was seldom, if ever, to be seen with a gun. One of his first clients was ex-King Ferdinand of Bulgaria and Budge took him to Namanga where he knew from his war days there would be a profusion of wildlife to photograph.

So fond of the Namanga area did he become that he established a staging post at the bottom of the hill known as Ol Donyo Orok (the Black Mountain). The staging post consisted of a rondavel standing in two acres of land which he acquired from the D. C. Kajiado, Clarence Buxton. In charge of building the staging post was Abdi, his Somali gun-bearer from the war days. Abdi had stayed with Budge after he left the army and became his right hand man. In


AMBOSELI
Showing the National Reserve boundary and the swamps area up to c. 1957
Villages
Main Roads
Secondary Roads
Boundary of Nat. Reserve
Acacia Woodland
Dry Lakebed
Approx Scale
ALTITUDE TINTS
Metres
Feet
KENYA
TANGANYIKA
Meto
AMBOSELI NATIONAL RESERVE
Longisim
Ol Donyo Orok
NAMANGA
NAMANGA R.
Longido
LONGIDO
LAKE AMBOSELI
AMBOSELI
OL TUKAI
Lodge
Sinya
Lemomo
Lemongo
Ol Molog
Kamwanga
KILIMANJARO
Kisumu
Lake Victoria
Nakuru
Nyeri
Mount Kenya
Aberdares
Naivasha
KENYA
NAIROBI
MARA
Kajiado
SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK
TSAVO NATIONAL PARK
Kilimanjaro
Arusha
Moshi
Voi
Lake Manyara
MOMBASA
TANGANYIKA
INDIAN OCEAN

fact Abdi stayed with him for the rest of his life and became an integral part of the safari business and latterly of the hotel at Namanga. When Budge became confined to a wheel-chair at the end of his life, Abdi was constantly at his side. The two were inseparable and their comradeship reflected the accord that stems from true respect between fellow-men.

The staging post soon became an overnight rest house and eventually Budge enlarged it into a fully fledged hotel. Namanga River Hotel became an oasis for travellers betweeen Nairobi and Arusha and also for visitors to Amboseli where the main gate to the Reserve was later sited. He continued to take many visitors into Amboseli and in 1934 established a small camp in the Ol Tukai area known as Rhino Camp. It was sited where the tented camp now stands but at that time was surrounded by a lovely stand of Yellow Fever trees, which sadly have now all disappeared. During his sorties around Ol Tukai he sometimes encountered poachers, both black and white. Because he did not like to see *his* animals being killed, he constantly made representations to the government, and when subsequently the idea of a National Park was mooted, he was one of the first to persuade the Trustees into making Amboseli a protected area. When it was eventually proclaimed a National Reserve in 1948, Budge, and later his son Pat, was given a concession to keep Rhino Camp and continue to bring in their clients. But they were not at all happy at having to abide strictly to the Park Regulations which were perhaps somewhat over-zealously enforced by the Parks administration. The regulations curtailed movement within the Reserve and closed it altogether during the rainy seasons. A certain amount of friction was inevitable which eventually in 1958 led to the closing down of Rhino Camp.

Budge's real name was Percy St. Lawrence Gethin and the origin of his nickname is uncertain. Pat believes it was his decided stubbornness and refusal to budge as a matter of principle. I like to think it was because of his great love of birds; he always had a well-stocked aviary at the hotel and budgerigars were his favourite. Even now when I hear the cheerful chatter of budgerigars it always takes me straight back there and reminds me of the welcome I, like so many other travellers, always received on arriving tired and dusty at the Namanga River Hotel.

In 1950 Ol Tukai became famous as the setting for the Ealing Studios film 'Where No Vultures Fly', later shown as the Royal Film Performance for 1952. The film told the story of a young Game Warden trying to start a new National Park in Kenya and of the problems he encountered preserving his beloved wild animals from the attentions of an old elephant poacher. The Old-Timer knew all the local inhabitants much better than the young Game Warden himself and had been shooting elephants there undisturbed for years,

and now resented the intrusion. The Game Warden of course succeeds in catching him red-handed one day and turns him over to the authorities. The Game Warden was played by Anthony Steele and his wife by Dinah Sheridan.

Together with their young son, Tom (William Simons), in the film, they experienced all the adventures which in true story-book fashion might be associated with a young family living in the bush. The most famous scene, which apparently brought the Royal audience to the edge of their seats, depicts an incident which had actually happened to the warden of the Nairobi National Park, Ken Beaton, and his little son Ronnie. The boy finds a lion cub apparently lost, picks it up to take home to Mummy, who, speechless with horror, sees the mother lioness following close behind. The boy, quite unaware of what's happening and the imminent danger he's in, is eventually seen by his Father and told very firmly to put the cub down on the ground and walk away. By this time his Mother is frantic and it is only at the last minute when the lioness is poised to spring on the little boy that the cub is reunited with its mother and all ends happily. It was a sensational sequence and the film was universally acclaimed. The lioness and her cub were of course tame ones, and were owned by Tabs Taberer, soon to become warden himself of the Amboseli National Reserve.

The actors and film crew stayed in the bandas or cottages which were part

The Warden's Cottage. Ol Tukai 1953.

of the headquarters of the Reserve. Ealing Studios added to the accommodation and brought in an electric light plant together with other comforts not usually supplied to National Parks field staff. When filming was finished, they kindly left these behind, which served as the nucleus for a safari lodge. Hay Hayward, who was seconded from the Tsavo National Park, built the Ol Tukai Lodge, as it became known, and sited it under some particularly lovely Yellow Fever trees with a view across the plains to the mountain beyond. The six bandas and all the headquarter buildings were made of papyrus from the Ologinya swamp close by. The bandas, now increased to twelve, still remain to this day though the papyrus walls have been replaced with mud bricks and there is a bathroom and kitchen attached. They have lasted longer than the beautiful but shortlived fever trees and sadly there is no longer any shade under which to sit and sip a lunchtime drink.

The Reserve was administered initially by Ken Beaton, Warden of the Nairobi National Park some 100 miles to the north. Ken was a most charismatic person. Like most Game Wardens of that era, his career began with elephant hunting but he very soon became sickened with it and applied to join the National Parks Service. He was taken on as their first warden in the field where he was able to apply his very considerable abilities to much better use. He had a deep affection for animals and a love of wildlife which showed in his writings and all his works with National Parks. His first love was the Nairobi National Park and the story of the formation of that Park will also make interesting reading one day. He went on to be appointed as the first Director of the Uganda National Parks and assisted in their initial foundation. I had the good fortune to work under him for some time in the Nairobi National Park and have valued the experience ever since. Perhaps in a way his untimely death in March 1954 at the age of 49 was a blessing in disguise, for he could not easily have lived to see the degradation of those wonderful Uganda Parks during the Amin period which resulted in the decimation of their wildlife populations.

Between them, Ken and his assistant Tuffy Marshall could do little more than make occasional visits to Amboseli and establish Ranger Posts at Namanga and Lemeboti and build boundary markers. They set up stone cairns at the four corners of the Reserve which was rectangular in shape. It stretched from Post number 49 on the international boundary near Loitokitok along to Boundary Post 41 near Namanga in the west, thence to the peak of Elemparasha Hill and along to Lemepoti hill to the north. In all the Reserve covered 1,260 square miles (3,260 square kilometres), over eight times the size of the present National Park.

On completion of the building works Hay Hayward was appointed Warden

to the newly formed Mount Kenya and Aberdares National Park. This left Amboseli with Rangers but without any regular administrative staff and as visitors were now staying at the Ol Tukai Lodge it was thought necessary for a warden to be stationed there permanently. Tuffy Marshall was therefore sent down to look after the area until a permanent warden could be appointed. Subsequently Tuffy was appointed senior warden of the western section of the Tsavo National Park and he handed over to Tabs Taberer in June 1951. The prosperity of Amboseli now really began to get under way.

'Tabs' Taberer — Warden of Amboseli from 1951 to 1962, with the lion cub 'Ambo' who was found abandoned at a few days old and reared by hand.

Chapter Four

'Tabs'

TABS WAS A TOUGH and uncompromising warden. Born on New Year's Day 1905 in what was then Southern Rhodesia he led an entirely 'wild' life, and as a boy was never far from the wilds of the African bush. He was never far from trouble, either. True to form, it was not long before he was occupied in hunting elephants for their ivory — not always legally, either. His father held a very senior post in the Southern Rhodesian government and there were some red faces on one occasion when a particularly tiresome elephant poacher had been the cause of expensive measures having to be taken in the south of the country. The poacher turned out to be none other than the son of the person setting up the ambush. 'Mpondo', as he was then known, was given a very serious reprimand and sent off to Kenya to cool his heels. Like so many other hunters, during his time in the bush he had grown to despise the killing of wild animals and after four years in the army in which he reached the rank of Major, he decided to throw his rifle away and become the proverbial hunter turned gamekeeper. The bushcraft he learnt in his younger days stood him in good stead and unlike so many of his fellow Europeans he had a good understanding of the Africans with whom he worked; more importantly because of the work he was about to undertake, he was highly respected by those with whom he worked, from the lowest tracker to the noblest chief. He was well qualified, then, to be sent into this particular arena where all these qualities would be required to the fullest extent in his coming dealings with the Masai and his charge to protect and conserve the wildlife within his area, the size of an English county. Encouragement he had in plenty from his Director and from the many visitors to the Reserve, who always left with glowing reports of the wonderful scenery and the ease with which they had seen the animals that Amboseli had to offer. Surprisingly, encouragement was not so forthcoming from the government and Trustees of the Parks who, in their first report written in June 1951 state: "In our opinion, the preservation of a large number of wild animals in the ranching areas of the Masai Land Unit, the largest reservoir of game in Kenya, will very shortly become difficult if not impossible."

Undeterred by this somewhat depressing pronouncement (which has, nevertheless, in large measure been proved correct), Tabs set about administering his area with great enthusiasm. Poaching as such was no longer a serious problem. The Masai were always keen to report any stranger seen roaming about the area. But there were many other difficulties concerned with the interference of Masai stock by the wild animals and sorting out those problems took up much of his time. Also the *morani* were continually getting into some kind of mischief, occasionally with fatal results. They would use any excuse to go off on a lion hunt — one of their traditional sports — and Tabs would have no one killing *his* lions; they could go and find some outside the Reserve if they were all that keen to show their prowess. Lions were the animals Tabs held closest to his heart, and he made no bones about it. His pet lioness Iola which had featured in the film 'Where No Vultures Fly', had come to a very sad end when, having been told he must not take her to Amboseli with him, he had arranged to send her to the Dublin zoo. She had been crated ready for shipment and was in transit waiting at a farm near Nairobi when she managed to escape. She calmly walked up to a neighbouring farm, and the astonished farmer, thinking this to be a dangerous wild lion, took out his gun and shot her dead. Tabs never really got over the shock and though he had other tame lions later, none of them could replace his beloved Iola.

By the beginning of 1952 Tabs had his work cut out dealing with the Masai problems, the formation of new roads and Ranger posts as well as looking after the requirements of the visitors, so I was sent down to join him as his assistant warden on February 14th 1952.

One of the first jobs Tabs sent me out on, was to pacify some Masai at Namanga who had been worried by a pack of hyenas. When food becomes short, hyenas will occasionally form a hunting pack and become a thorough nuisance to both wildlife herds and domestic stock. Hunting like a pack of wild dogs, they will single out a victim from a herd and chase it relentlessly until it succumbs from pure exhaustion. When they can find easier prey such as domestic stock they will follow a herd and take two or three animals before the herdsmen can do anything about it. After two days of tracking the pack, I found the culprits and managed to shoot the two main ringleaders but my job was mainly to show good faith to the Masai as Tabs had little sympathy with these particular Matapatu who would not take the normal precautions. Having been in Kenya less than two years, and looking perhaps younger than my 22 years of age, my experience of the Masai was limited and I was afraid the elders might not have the confidence in me. I also knew their reputation for aloofness and their preference for dealing with older Europeans able to converse in the Masai language instead of Swahili. So this little episode

The Bandas at Ol Tukai Lodge. *Inset:* Upaa — Still in charge of the orphans.

helped put a small feather in my cap, and gave me some much needed confidence.

To his increasing disaffection, Tabs soon found himself acting as more of a hotelier than he anticipated. The day to day running of the visitors' bandas at the Lodge was becoming a major occupation. Dealing with visitors required qualities with which Tabs was not well endowed. Indeed, sometimes his abruptness led to some very red faces at Head Office in Nairobi. On one occasion, a leading dignitary from a neighbouring independent African state visiting Ol Tukai Lodge found to his great displeasure that he had been assigned a banda which did not have the luxury of a shady tree nearby. The Warden was summoned to account for this. When Tabs arrived, he explained that all the other bandas were already taken for that day. When this excuse did not satisfy the gentleman who was becoming rather more truculent, Tabs simply said that he was sorry, nothing more could be done now, but that next time he came to Amboseli he would remember to book him a tree! Needless to say, the African gentleman did not continue his stay but went straight back to Nairobi and complained bitterly to the Director.

After a year or so of living in 'The Cottage', one of the larger and original bandas, Tabs was given permission to build himself a family house in the same style as the other buildings with a *makuti* (papyrus) roof and 'The Cottage' was turned into a house for visiting V.I.Ps. The new house had to be sited in the same confines as the Lodge, so as to be near the headquarter buildings. Tabs built it, complete with a swimming pool at the end of the line of bandas — though at a discreet distance from them — and from then on it was known

Fennis Taberer with her friend 'Teeka'. Amboseli 1952.

as The Warden's House. Tabs and his wife, known to all as 'G', together with their little daughter, Fennis, then aged five, made it their home for the next eight years.

The Taberer's daughter Fennis had always lived in the bush. Prior to Tabs' appointment to Amboseli their home had been a tent in the Tsavo Park and she always had plenty of both tame and wild animals to keep her company. She had no fear of them and helped her Mother to look after any sick or orphan animals that were brought in by Tabs, his Rangers or visitors. But it was a different matter when Iola the lioness grew up. 'G' refused to have anything to do with her and was never very happy about Fennis being left alone with her. So when Tabs was away on safari it fell to Upaa their faithful factotum to look after Iola and tend to her needs. Upaa moved to Amboseli with the Taberers and went on to look after many more tame and semi tame orphans that inevitably find their way to a warden's house. Upaa is now the oldest inhabitant of Ol Tukai. It is still to him that any sick or orphaned animal is always brought to be taken care of.

For my accommodation as an Assistant Warden, I was allocated one of the bandas, number nine, and then later I was also given permission to build myself a small house at the other end of the Lodge. Later, this had to be enlarged when I brought my new bride back to spend the first years of our married life together there.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rhino in Abundance

FACILITIES AT THE OL TUKAI LODGE were very basic compared with the luxurious hotels of today. Visitors staying overnight had to bring all their food, bedding and cooking utensils with them. They usually stayed for two or three days, going out in their cars morning and evening for game viewing. They would generally take a Ranger Guide with them who was able to find the particular animals they wanted to see, more easily. Even from a good distance, with their well trained eyes they could distinguish a Rhino from a rock or a Lion from a tree stump and when the Lions were found or something of particular interest had happened, word was passed round at camp and the next Ranger to go out would be able to take his clients directly to the spot, thus saving a lengthy search. Tabs encouraged visitors to take a Ranger Guide with them as they were always smart and well disciplined and although visitors had to pay for their services they tended to prevent the rules of the Reserve being bent or broken. Speeding was the common fault, and getting out of their cars whilst close to the Lions was another favourite pastime, while some people, on occasions, actually tried to feed oranges to the elephants!

The whole area was closed to visitors for three and a half months of the year during the two wet seasons. There were few four-wheel drive vehicles then. The first Land Rovers were supplied to us in October 1952 and after making do with Chev or International trucks they revolutionised our capability for patrolling the area. There were no permanent tracks and cars could wander at will over the plains. Any tracks that formed, were the result of a number of vehicles following the same way and eventually making a temporary route. As long as there was not too much traffic, these tracks tended to grass over again during the rains when the whole area was rested.

For the months of April, May, November and half December the whole area was closed to visitors. The onset of the rains usually resulted in the entrance roads becoming impassable, and to avoid continually rescuing

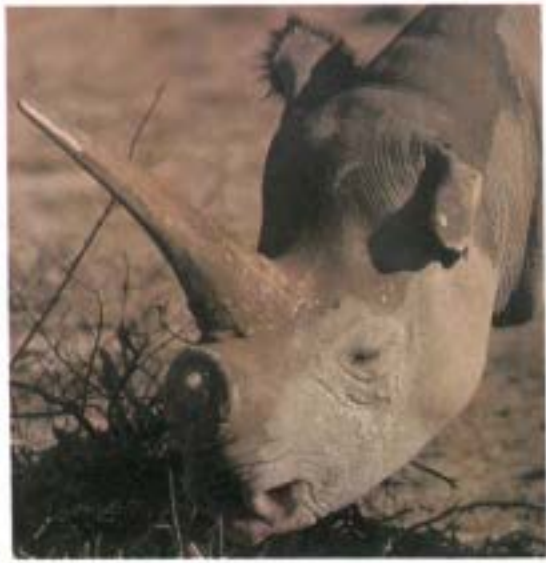
Opposite above: 'Gertie' and a calf. The Rangers called her 'Number 2'.
Opposite below: A Section of Rangers under Sergeant Mwanzia.

people, the answer was complete closure to all visitors, unpopular though this action often was. The wardens, of course, always looked forward to this time as we had the whole area to ourselves. We could then get down to some real research into important matters concerning conservation without the petty diversions of seeing to blocked drains or mending water pumps or being nice to V.I.Ps. During these closed periods we might see no outsiders for weeks on end, and if Denis Zaphiro the Government Game Warden at Kajiado dropped in on us in his little Piper Cub plane, it would be a red-letter day for us and cause for celebration. In contrast, there is now a daily scheduled flight from Nairobi throughout the year! But the main reason we closed the Reserve for these few weeks of the year was to give the area a chance to recoup from the constant pounding of visitors' cars. The animals were also spared the harassment that comes with over-zealous photographers bent on trying to get them to produce some quite uncharacteristic pose for the sake of 'a good picture'. There were, after all, as many as ten ot twelve cars going round the area at one time. Little could we guess what was to come! Today there are something like 350 available beds with as many as 50 cars or mini-buses touring the area at any time.

Amboseli soon became highly popular with tourists as more and more people took home stories of how they found and photographed Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, Lion, Cheetah and a host of other animals in just one evening's drive round. Often, White Hunters would bring their clients in to Amboseli at the end of a shooting safari so that they could photograph at close quarters the same species of animals they had been trying to shoot in other parts of the country. For at Amboseli the wildlife was becoming famous for its tolerance of humans, their cars and the clicking of their cameras. Famous enough for it to head the list of places for any visiting V.I.P. to Kenya to be taken in order to see an exciting example of Kenya's wildlife. The list of famous names rose daily in the Ol Tukai Lodge visitors' book.

Most of all it was for Rhinos that Amboseli was becoming famous. Nowhere else in Africa was it possible to see and photograph Black Rhino in such abundance, and with such comparative ease. The two best known were nicknamed by the Rangers, 'Number One' and 'Number Two', because of the size and length of their horns. More affectionately they were known to the visitors as 'Gertie' and 'Gladys, nicknamed by Syd Downey the White Hunter, ardent conservationist and Amboseliphile. No one ever knew if they were sisters or mother and daughter, but by the shape of their highly distinctive horns they were obviously very closely related and were always to be found in the same vicinity and usually with a calf at their heels. They both had horns of near record length which broke off at the base at much the same

Above: . . . the wildlife was becoming famous for its tolerance of humans, their cars and the clicking of their cameras.
Below left: 'Pixie', one of Gertie's calves which was born without ears.
Below right: 'Gladys', or 'Number 1', after her front horn had broken completely off.



time in 1960. Sadly Gladys did not live to grow much of a replacement, but Gertie grew another to much the same length and shape; in fact within ten years it was difficult to tell the difference between the new horn and the one she lost in 1960. They both produced many offspring and in 1953 Gertie gave birth to a bull calf which had no ears. He was given the name 'Pixie' and he too became famous and was much photographed.

By 1952 the publicity that Amboseli was gaining, especially from the growing number of wildlife film-makers such as Armand and Michaela Denis who were frequent visitors, meant that more and more people came to know about the place so swelling the number of visitors. The Ol Tukai Lodge was seldom empty even during week days, and at weekends it was always full. The fascination of Amboseli was that a visitor was never sure what kind of wild animal may be seen round the next fringe of trees. Everything from Elephants to Bat-Eared Foxes could be expected together with a great selection of both resident and migratory birds providing a variety of interest on every occasion.

We constructed a small waterhole about 100 metres in front of the bandas with a pipe from the Lodge main water supply. The waterhole was in full view from the bandas and always attracted a great many animals day and night. It was the one place the animals knew they would not be disturbed by the Masai or have to compete with their stock for the precious water. Visitors could sit on their verandah in the heat of the day sipping a cool drink and watch the animal world go by. Baboons there would always be in plenty, arriving on the dot of midday. Zebra and wildebeest would be coming and going throughout the hottest part of the day and there was always the resident herd of impala which never moved far from the waterhole. Occasionally a pair of lesser kudu would walk timidly up to the water's edge and if there was not too much noise or movement in the lodge to frighten them, they would take a few sips of water before tiptoeing back to the safety of the sodom apple close to the Ologinya swamp. But it was at night that the waterhole really came into its own. We noticed that the more timid animals became much bolder during the hours of darkness. Sometimes in the early evenings when visitors were busy with their supper or preparing for bed, with all the lights ablaze one could see Rhino coming in to water. The Rhino must have known that the camp was inhabited by a number of humans and when the wind was in the right direction they would be able to get their scent. Even so, they would be quite unperturbed. In daylight the same Rhino would be very much more alert and even aggressive.

It would not be unusual for a pride of Lion to water there and rest for a while during one of their nightly forays. To be woken in the middle of the night by the full throated roaring of a lion only yards away is something to

dine out on for many years after and if, on inspecting the ground outside the banda door the next morning you see pug marks where the king of beasts passed only feet from where you were sleeping, well! this was really the essence of Africa and something to be savoured always. At Amboseli it was by no means uncommon for visitors to be able to boast of the experience.

The construction of the waterhole proved a very interesting point on the damage to vegetation by game or cattle. Wherever cattle, sheep and goats concentrate, the damage to grass, bushes and even the trees is quite obvious. Not only are they pounded by thousands of hooves but the soil is pulverised until it blows away in the sky. Around this waterhole, though, which was kept under very careful observation, the grazing hardly suffered and the trees certainly did not. Even during the driest periods of the year when we counted some 700 head of plains game watering there daily, together with all the smaller game, the effect was minimal proving that wild animals do not destroy their habitat if allowed to live naturally.

The Leading Role. Everyone comes to see and hear him.

CHAPTER SIX

The Dust Clouds Gather

THE LOITAIOK MASAI had watched the growing number of visitors to Ol Tukai with a mixture of interest and apprehension. Many were inquisitive to see the somewhat weird-looking Europeans who may have just arrived from Europe or America with their pale, white faces, now red with sunburn. Some of the women, they saw, had painted their lips with a kind of red-ochre like the *morani* use for their war paint. The Masai women, always very conscious of their own looks, were fascinated to see how the European women dressed and would go off into peals of giggles and laughter at some of the outrageous styles worn on safari. So that while the women and those without tribal responsibilities were quite amused to see these strangers in their midst, some of the elders and headmen were worried that if Ol Tukai became too popular with the visitors, the National Parks or Government might try to edge them out of their lands to make way for more tourists and more wild animals. Tabs did his utmost to allay any fears they might harbour of this sort of thing happening and we always welcomed the older members of the local populus in the camp to sit and have a chat whenever time permitted. They made sure to return the compliment to us and we were always welcomed into any *manyatta* while out on our daily patrols.

The Masai knew we charged visitors an entrance fee to come into the Reserve. They could see that the National Parks were benefiting by the fact that tourists were paying to come in and see these wild animals, which, to a certain extent, they looked upon as their own. After all, past generations of Masai, unaware though they may have been about it at the time, lived here in such a way as to leave the countryside pristine and unspoilt with the wild animal herds virtually intact. This appealed to Europeans, and the National Parks, having taken over the responsibility of keeping the area pristine, were now exploiting it and encouraging visitors to come in and stay, as long as they paid for the privilege. Surely, then, the Masai argued, part of that money belonged to the Masai.

It was difficult, though, to explain to the elders that the amount we charged people to come in was nowhere near enough to pay for the administration of the Reserve let alone to give some to the Masai as well. We tried to explain

Moses Seney (left) interpreting at a *baraza*. Also, from left to right: Reggie Bosanquet, Tabs, the author, the District Commissioner and Loitaiok Headmen.

that the upkeep of the roads, the Lodge and the gates as well as the general administration of the area cost far more than we could recoup from visitors and that the National Parks were subsidised by the Colonial Government. Having said all that, Tabs still believed it was right and proper that something should go to the Masai, even if it was just a token to show our good faith so that they could feel they were getting some material advantage from what they felt were *their* animals on *their* lands being exploited.

Our Director Mervyn Cowie and Tabs had a meeting with the elders and reached an acceptable compromise for a proportion of the entrance fee money to be paid over to them. This was duly arranged, but such are the workings of local government, even in the wilds of Africa, that the money never found its way into the hands of the people for whom it was intended. It had to be paid into the coffers of the District Council at Kajiado, 100 miles away, and was lost into the general funds. So in the end, it did not help our relations with the locals to any great extent.

Nevertheless, we were able to give them help in other ways. The nearest dispensary for medical treatment was 50 miles away at Namanga, so they would come to us to treat their sick which, where possible, we were happy to do. Sometimes we would be asked to take hospital cases to Kajiado by truck and when it was serious we never hesitated.

The first such case I had to deal with, and one which showed me how varied the duties of a Warden can be, was a *moran* who had had an argument with one of his fellow *morani*, and in the heat of the moment a spear had been thrown in anger which had found its mark with great accuracy. Once the poor chap who had thrown the spear realised what he had done, he ran all the way to the camp, over three miles, to find me in the hopes that I could save his life, for he was quite certain the others would kill him if the one he had speared, died. I found the boy, for that's all he was, at the spot where he fell, with the spear still pinning him to the ground. It had gone right through the lower part of his chest presumably missing all vital organs as he was chatting away quite happily to the bunch gathered around him. For safety reasons they had left the spear in until I came, thinking I would know the best way to remove it and hoping that I would bring bandages to staunch the wound. There was no question of my funking it in front of that crowd of *morani*, most of whom I knew, and whose respect it was essential that I held. So, gingerly turning him over on his side and cleaning the other end of the spear that was protruding from his back, I took a deep breath and carefully withdrew the spear which, to my surprise, came out quite easily. The *moran* never uttered a sound. Luckily there was little blood and the wounds back and front were comparatively easy to staunch. I took him off in the back of the long wheelbased Land Rover all the way to Kajiado without a murmur from him. Subsequently I heard he had made a complete recovery, and became the best of friends again with his assailant.

Generally, our relations with all the Loitaiok people were good. Tabs and I took pride in the fact that through careful contact and open discussion on all matters relating to the Reserve, we maintained a high degree of respect with them. Tabs usually dealt with the headmen and elders with whom he shared a common interest and I with the *morani*, being much the same age and perhaps with some of the same aspirations. The main problems always arose over the activities of these young *morani* warriors. As with any young men of that age anywhere in the world, they were full of themselves and wanting to show off to each other and, of course, to the girls. The peak of their daring was to kill a male Lion with a spear, and this had been a tradition handed down over the generations. It was very hard for us to explain why this now had to stop. All along the *morani* had found it difficult to adjust to the new 'code of conduct' set by the Government. There could no longer be cattle raids and other mischievous sorties on neighbouring tribes. This inevitably left them looking for other ways to get their 'kicks'. The lion hunt tradition had died very hard throughout the whole tribe. Furthermore they could not understand why, in some areas of their own land, white people could go out

and kill Lions with their guns while the *morani* were severely punished if they speared a Lion in a fair and often for them, fatal fight. In any case, if Lions attacked their cattle, it was surely only right that they should protect their livestock and in the natural course of events it would often be an old and sick Lion that resorted to killing cattle and by spearing these old Lions it was, to a certain extent, a natural method of culling the Lion population.

Difficult though these conflicts of interest were, it must be said that the Masai at that time never killed wild animals in the Reserve maliciously except in defence of their stock.

For about four months of the year the Masai were out of the area in their wet weather grazing lands and we seldom saw them. It was in the dry season that the competition for the water in the swamps became acute. The fact that the swamps provided the major part of the only permanent water available to the Loitaiok meant that they also had to graze their cattle within striking distance of the water. The grazing herds of plains game also needed the land and water for the same reason and the drier the season the more acute the problem became. Inevitably confrontations took place occasionally ending in tragedy for either the Masai or the animals and sometimes both.

In the driest period of 1953 some irresponsible *morani* set fire to part of the Ologinya swamp, which spread close to the Ol Tukai camp and Lodge. Tabs endeavoured to control the fire by the usual devices of back-burning and cutting breaks but his task was complicated by several unfortunate Rhino in a state of panic frequently charging in between the beaters. Tabs himself very nearly failed to escape, as having dodged one Rhino he did not realise that it was followed by a second and he was tipped up in clouds of dust and smoke. Some unfortunate animals were badly burned and had to be destroyed later, while others wandered about in a dazed condition. The fire eventually died out and, as with all Africa, it took only a few weeks after the rains for the burnt area to return to its original state. However the episode served to highlight the underlying problem of trying to preserve wildlife in a comparatively small area when human activities must take preference over the interests of the wildlife.

It was difficult to see any light at the end of the tunnel. On the one hand more and more wild animals were being encouraged to come into the area where they knew they were protected and on the other, the Masai herds were continually increasing in number because of the advance in veterinary care. The conflict could only increase and it became clear that as there was no question of the Loitaiok being turned out of their own land, something fundamental would have to be done to overcome the conflict of interests if the area was to continue as a wildlife sanctuary and tourist attraction.

For the three years up to 1955, the Government were sufficiently happy about the future of the Reserve to allow National Parks to appoint two permanent Wardens and a Ranger force of 20 to administer the 1,260 square mile Reserve. The total allocation of money to run it was just £8,000. (We did not keep the money we received from visitors which was paid into the National Parks Central Fund in Nairobi). We had a small Ferguson tractor and trailer and a three ton lorry. A gang of 15 labourers were employed to carry out road maintenance and building works and there was a staff of eight to run the Lodge and look after the visitors' bandas. We had two office clerks: Simeon Kioko and Moses Seney both of whom spoke good English and were always most courteous towards the visitors. Moses was a Masai from the local Matapatu clan and would act as an interpreter for us if required. Although we could understand a good deal of the Masai language, on some occasions it was important that there should be no misunderstanding between us, and Moses was a very good liaison for us.

Although conditions had not been all that favourable in the previous years, 1955 turned out to be very nearly fatal for the wildlife of Amboseli. The Reserve had to endure some of the hardest conditions in living memory of the Masai. Only two and a quarter inches (60mm) of rain were recorded between 1st January and the end of October. The place was never blessed with a heavy annual rainfall but under this miserly amount it was disastrous. In normal years of drought, when the rains do eventually arrive, the vegetation and wildlife soon revert to normal as Africa has such a great resilience. But when things are so finely balanced and where the competition for the only permanent water and grazing between wild animals and domestic stock is too great, then the wildlife is the first to suffer. Where there is also no reservoir of game to top up the numbers to take the place of those which have succumbed to the drought, then the result of such a drought can be catastrophic. There were few reserves of plains game outside the boundaries of Amboseli and there is a minimum number of animals below which the species will not continue to thrive and breed. During this fatal year of 1955 two species of antelope disappeared from the Amboseli scene: one was Coke's Hartebeest and the other was Eland. Few of these species have ever been seen at Amboseli since then. The months of September and October were the worst. We estimated there were some 100,000 head of domestic stock in the 250 square miles area of Ol Tukai at the height of the dry season. The dust clouds hanging over the area became thicker each day and the number of visitors dropped dramatically; no one comes hundreds of miles over dry and dusty roads just to see herds of cattle. It became increasingly clear that while the rains, when they eventually did arrive would bring temporary relief, the

underlying threat to the wildlife was growing with each dry season.

The problem was all too easy to see. The area belonged to the Masai and provided them with their only means of livelihood. They had been there for generations. It was just unfortunate that Nature had placed these swamps which the Masai had always used, in such a wonderful setting where they also acted as a magnet to all the wildlife for miles around. The swamps were not large enough to allow all these numbers of animals to drink, and certainly there was insufficient grazing for them all.

We became aware of a very important factor during that 1955 dry season. The Masai herdsmen informed us that, contrary to what we had been led to believe, from a nutritional point of view, they disliked the grazing in the Ol Tukai area on the volcanic dust soil. They grazed their herds there purely because of the permanent water in the swamps which remained when all other watering places had dried up. This fact would turn out to be of major importance to the future of Amboseli in years to come.

The local chief was Lengu Ole Mbaa, a man of great integrity who held considerable sway over the local families and who knew only too well the problems we were all facing. We had endless discussions with him as to how we could reconcile the two factions — domestic stock and wildlife. He was as anxious as we were to keep the equilibrium. He knew, as all Masai knew, that a diversity of wild plains animals roaming over large tracts of country tend to improve the grazing, not only for themselves but also for domestic stock as well, given reasonable numbers. On the other hand overgrazing by cattle will sour the soil, and sheep and goats which are not selective grazers will strip the ground completely of vegetation. Lengu had no wish to see the end of the wild animals which were, after all, part of the Masai heritage.

When we realised they did not particularly favour the Ol Tukai lands for grazing, the obvious answer to the problem was to provide watering places for the Masai herds outside, in what they called their wet-weather grazing areas. Lengu himself had been quite agreeable to this idea, arguing that if their herds could water in areas where the grazing was of better quality, they would have much less need to come into Ol Tukai at all. The majority of local elders went along with him on the idea, although there were a few who voiced serious doubts about the scheme, as they felt they were being edged out of their lands; while the present representatives of the National Parks may be perfectly genuine, the British Government had a habit of changing their administrative staff with monotonous regularity and there could well be others coming after, who, having inserted the thin end of the wedge, would be inclined to give it a hefty blow. Nevertheless, Lengu and the majority carried the day and were prepared to go along with us on the idea, for that was all it

Rosy-patched Shrike.
Rhodophoneus cruentus.

Paradise Flycatcher.
Tchitrea viridis.

could be at this stage.

We had no money or authority to actually carry out any construction or investigation work into the ground water potential of the areas we were talking about. It would be up to our Director to persuade the Government to sanction the work and put up the money. We were very pleased to be able to report to Head Office that we had reached an understanding with the local Masai that if water was provided for them in certain areas, they would undertake to keep large numbers of stock out of the Ol Tukai area during the dry seasons of the year. It was a great step forward. No pressure had been put on the Masai to agree to restrict their stock numbers and we were most encouraged.

Mervyn Cowie, congratulated us on our achievement with the Loitaiok at this local level, but he warned us that he held out little optimism for finding sufficient money even for the hydrological survey, let alone for the actual drilling operation and pumping equipment, for we were talking about the sinking of shallow boreholes to provide the water. It was a good start, though, and proof that the Masai were prepared to show goodwill, and a valuable step in the right direction.

A great deal of formal discussion and behind the scenes lobbying by Mervyn Cowie followed, and a meeting of the Game Policy Committee was held at Ol Tukai in April 1956 to examine the whole question of game, cattle and water. It was, of course, patently clear to the committee that water was the key to the whole problem.

The 1956 Game Policy Committee, as it came to be known, was set up by the Kenya Government ". . . to design and recommend a satisfactory wildlife preservation policy for the future of Kenya". Sitting on this committee was one of the National Park's Trustees Dr Likimani and our Director, Mervyn Cowie. In its terms of reference, the committee was required to turn its early attention to the problems at Amboseli. This was good news both for the Masai and for us. Perhaps someone would begin to take some notice of the Amboseli problem at last.

After their meeting at Ol Tukai, the Game Policy Committee's report to the Government gave encouragement to all concerned. They raised the issue of Amboseli to one of 'proper land usage', rather than a dispute simply between cattle and game. They pointed out that no area should become so over-populated with domestic stock that it became detrimental to the land itself and Amboseli was no exception to this rule. The correct use for any pastoral area is the protection of the land in its natural state and as such, wild animals would automatically have their place. The problem should be seen no more or less than simply a question of good housekeeping by the Masai.

At the same time the committee reported that in their view the only long-term solution to the specific problem at Ol Tukai was a network of boreholes and water troughs to be provided for cattle at intervals outside the area, to relieve the pressure in the dry season while at the same time enabling the Masai to make better use of their more favourable grazing grounds. As a first step towards this goal, they recommended that a hydrological investigation should be carried out with all due haste, to assess the groundwater potential of the area.

These recommendations having been made public, Arnold Foster, the District Officer at Loitokitok and Jock Green, the Livestock Officer called a meeting with Lengu and his headmen, to which Tabs and I were invited, to pick out the best sites for such watering places. Seven sites were shown to us by the Masai, effectively encircling the whole area. If, indeed, water could be provided at these places there would be a radical change for the future of the whole area, not only by leaving the swamps virtually free of cattle, but also by preventing any more erosion of the soil and destruction of the vegetation created by the vast herds of cattle trekking to and fro to the water each day cutting great swathes of bare land through the plains to the swamps.

It was only a comparatively short time afterwards that we heard that the Government had decided to implement the first phase of the Committee's recommendations and our spirits rose even higher when Mr. Lehner, hydrologist from the African Land Development Board (ALDEV), arrived at the camp with his small exploration drilling rig to carry out the survey. At last

some positive steps were being taken to alleviate the situation and build on the goodwill we enjoyed with the Masai at present. We began to feel the Government was on our side after all. Little did we know the real truth of the matter!

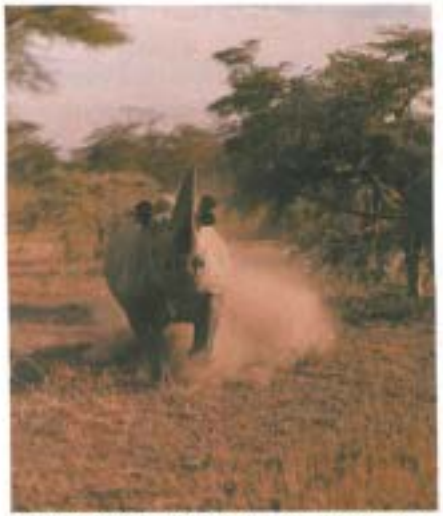
The Hydrologist's report showed that there was water in plenty at all the sites we showed him. It would not be necessary to drill to more than 150 feet (45 metres) at any of the sites to be able to obtain the required quantity of water, and at some sites, the holes would be even shallower. Now all that was necessary was to drill the holes, fit them with a diesel or wind-powered pump and build the simple concrete drinking trough. The trouble was that the Government had not declared its overall policy towards Amboseli yet, and we were left guessing. We didn't have to wait for long, though, and Tabs and I were delighted when, as a result of Mr. Lehner's favourable investigation report, it was decided to drill a trial borehole at Kitenden, south west of the Lodge, in the foothills of the mountain. In November 1956, Mowlem's drilling rig trundled through the Namanga gate into the Reserve accompanied by a hydrologist from the Public Works Department, Gerald Campbell who was to oversee the drilling operation and continue with the hydrological survey.

During the next six months, four boreholes were drilled in different areas in which water was found in quantity. Now, it was just a matter of equipping them to put the whole scheme into effect.

Alas it was not to be. From facts which have emerged since that time, it is now certain that the Government, in its wisdom, had actually made up its mind at that time to lose Amboseli as a wildlife sanctuary. It had decided the Ol Tukai area was so small that the needs of the human population must, of necessity, take preference and that if the game could not survive on its own in the dry seasons, then so be it. There was little enough money as it was for wildlife preservation even in the established National Parks, let alone for the the National Reserves which were by no means secure and which could be de-nationalised at the whim of any future Government. It was felt to be wasting good money to develop Amboseli as a preserve for wildlife and tourism. The needs of the growing human population were paramount and if the wildlife could not endure the corresponding 'progress', then they would have to go.

It was left to the hydrologist, Gerald Campbell, to give us the bad news. During the six months or so which the borehole drilling operation had been going, we had come to know Gerald very well and he was a familiar face around the camp area. A native of Co. Durham and a product of its University, Gerald came to Kenya as a geologist with the P.W.D. A great

"What size spanner did you say?"



A pugnacious old Rhino we named Ndundu, after the Reserve's first Head Ranger.

deal of his time in Kenya was spent working in Amboseli and being a bachelor like myself at that time, he lodged with me in 'No. 9', and also later when we both moved into the Assistant Warden's house together. He became a great ally to National Parks sharing much of the same visions and aspirations on the reasons for preserving wildlife in their natural surroundings here in Africa. Subsequently he worked in most of the other Parks at one time or another on various water projects before finally ending his days, still working on water development projects, in South Africa.

Gerald returned from Nairobi one day with a very long face and told us that he had been ordered to equip only one of the four boreholes, and that was the one on the western side of the dry lake-bed, well outside the Ol Tukai area. Poor Gerald, he hated having to be the one to break such bad news, made worse by the fact that the only reason that particular hole was to be equipped and put into service was because the Matapatu, in whose area the borehole was sited, had recently been bringing their herds across the dry lake-bed to the water-holes at Kitirua where clashes had occurred with our Loitaiok herdsmen. So the reason for bringing that hole into service was purely a political one which had nothing to do with the wildlife problems at Ol Tukai. The other three boreholes were not to be equipped and the driller had to cease operations. It was now out in the open; the Government had decided not to implement the 1956 Game Policy Committee's recommendations towards Amboseli any further.

There followed a great outcry. The Government came under pressure from all angles, not only from the local press but also from public opinion locally in Kenya and from abroad. By now, Amboseli had many friends from all over the world who had been there and experienced its breathtaking beauty and some of the wonders it had to offer. "Where else in Africa," they asked, "was it possible to see such a variety of the world's largest land mammals so easily and under such scenic conditions?" The Kenya Government came under increasing fire when people realised that by doing nothing it was effectively waving goodbye to Amboseli as a wildlife refuge. Articles appeared in the local and international press vilifying the Government for allowing such a situation to develop. The world's wildlife preservation societies were all up-in-arms censuring them, not the least of which was the Kenya Wildlife Society (later the East African Wildlife Society) who made very strong representations to the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring.

During this time, the Masai came in for a great deal of condemnation from the press: "Why were the Masai cattle allowed to dominate the water-holes at Amboseli? Most of their cattle are diminutive and degenerate and they should be made to cull them and sell the meat, such as it was. Amboseli is a national asset and as such it must be preserved for the good of the nation as a whole, not just one particular tribe." Letters poured into the press daily, and most of them were very critical of the Masai and their lifestyle which, far from helping to preserve wildlife as it used to, now actually threatened the future of it all over Masailand.

Much of the criticism was well-founded. There was no doubt the Masai did not require for their subsistence the enormous numbers of cattle they now had. Advanced veterinary care had meant an increase of eight times the amount of cattle in Masailand since the Europeans came and they had undoubtedly been slow in disciplining themselves on controlling the numbers in accordance with what was good husbandry given the arid conditions prevailing. They certainly could and should be blamed for bad housekeeping. On the other hand, the Europeans were not blameless either. They had brought about a situation in Kenya where there was now only a few areas where there were sufficient wild animals left to bring tourists in to see them. It was the Europeans who altered the status quo, not the Masai. The game had been turfed out of large areas of the White Highlands by European farmers to make way for crops. There had also been a drastic reduction in the numbers of wild animals generally over Kenya, particularly plains game, during the second world war, and the Masai could not be blamed for that either. It was not surprising, therefore, that the game tended to concentrate in comparatively small areas like Amboseli where the Masai happened to live.

A Masai herd being led to water at the Ngong Narok swamp.

In fact, the National Parks appreciated this viewpoint and went to great lengths to dissociate themselves from any condemnation, recognising that the Masai owned the land by right of Treaty made in 1911 with the British Government. The National Parks Trustees recognised that so long as the problems could be examined from the aspect of soil and water conservation, the likelihood of finding a solution seemed more possible. So that when the news that the Government was not going to spend the money on equipping the three boreholes, leaving Ol Tukai in the lap of the gods, the Trustees made very strong representations to the Minister, pointing out that by so doing, he had sounded the death knell of Amboseli. At the same meeting, in March 1957, the Trustees stressed their disappointment that the Minister in his wisdom could not find it possible to allocate more funds to the National Parks; giving as an example the paltry sum of only £8,800 for development purposes in the year 1957/58 for the whole of the Royal National Parks of Kenya, a figure which represented precisely a one-thousandth part of the total development money for Kenya for that year. This, they pointed out, was the degree the Kenya Government attached to the importance of their National Parks.

Looking back it seems almost unbelievable that the people responsible for such miserly sums, whether in Nairobi or Whitehall, had yet to appreciate

that these Parks and Reserves would be the one and only tangible national asset of any value that they would be able to pass on to a future Nation and to a future generation of Kenyans[1]. There is no doubt that the Kenya Government, having formed the Southern Game Reserve in the first decade of their administration, rested on their laurels. Thereafter they were slow to the point of being dilatory regarding the preservation of their country's wildlife resources. Successive experts in the field of ecology, zoology and wildlife management, since 1933 when Captain 'Archie' Ritchie, one of Kenya's first game wardens, submitted a plan for the formation of true National Parks, warned the Government of the penalties of not having a comprehensive wildlife policy for Kenya. Regrettably the Government consistently avoided grasping the nettle for the whole of the remaining 30 years until Independence, and it is to their everlasting shame that this is now an historical fact.

With all these representations about Amboseli being made to the Government from all over the world, the only suggestion they could come up with was for the area to be handed over the Loitaiok people themselves to run as a National Park and to exploit the tourist potential. Such an impractical idea only served to emphasise the lack of motivation they had to find a realistic solution. Anyone who had bothered to find out, knew that it would be impossible for the Masai at that time to embark on such a venture. They had no capital resources that would be required for an undertaking of this nature, nor did they have the slightest interest in the idea. Other than that, the Government were adamant that there would be no money forthcoming to provide the necessary water outside the Ol Tukai swamp area, and that was the end of it.

Nothing short of a miracle could save Amboseli now.

[1] It is interesting to note that P. Thresher, in a report published in the World Animal Review for 1981, estimated the value of an adult male lion in Amboseli for attracting tourist income to be $515,000 or £375,000.

Opposite page.
Above: Yellow Fever trees at one of the Kitirua water-holes.
Below: 'One Tusk Charlie'. He was always breaking bits off his tusks until he was left with only a stump.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Nature Takes the Lead

BY AUGUST 1957 the situation was becoming desperate. More cattle than ever were in the area and the dry season was only just beginning. The Masai were already losing many cattle daily through lack of grazing. They began to realise now that the grazing could not sustain the numbers of cattle, but they kept them there in order to reinforce their claim, fearing that the Government might change their mind and declare it a fully fledged National Park. For the first time relations between us and the Masai began to deteriorate seriously. The conflict of interests was just too great and the Masai were not going to be the ones to lose out just because a few white people from overseas wanted to see elephants and zebra drinking *their* water and grazing *their* lands. We began to see manyattas appearing in places we had not seen them before and found that they were not Ol Tukai people at all but had been 'encouraged' to come in to the area on purpose to help swell the numbers. Lengu was powerless to order them out as the 'encouragement' had come from Kajiado, the District Headquarters. The people in the visiting manyattas were not as well disposed towards the wild animals as the locals were, and the Rangers were soon bringing in reports of animals being found dead with spear wounds. Buffalo, Rhino and one of the resident black-maned lions from the Kania pride fell to the contests of the visiting *morani*; antics not perhaps condoned by the elders but not seriously condemned by them either. I was out constantly, investigating complaints from herdsmen about cattle being killed by marauding Lions or Leopards. Even Elephants will sometimes take it upon themselves to 'see off' a herd of cattle that have come to graze too close to them in the swamp, with disastrous results. I have seen a dozen or more cattle knocked over and killed by a really determined and bad-tempered tusker in one short mêlée.

The situation grew worse daily as the game was being forced out of the area by so great a concentration of cattle and their herdsmen. There were few waterholes elsewhere in that region except in Tanganyika and once the game was over the border it was likely to be shot. As a result of this desperate period a great many wild animals were lost in the last few months of the 1957 dry season.

A Buffalo speared by *Morani* near Ologinya swamp — September 1957.

With all the pleas to Government falling on deaf ears, Tabs and I at last had to come to terms with the reality of the situation. Mervyn Cowie, our Director, admitted to us on a visit he made in September that year that all our efforts were in vain and that the Minister concerned was not going to budge on the issue. As though to underline the expendability of the place he told us that I was to be transferred to another Park in October, leaving Tabs on his own. It was a bitter blow to us all, particularly for Tabs who had been striving for harmony between the National Parks and the Masai for the last six years without let-up. We couldn't understand how any Government could be so callous as to risk leaving an area of land that had been described as one of the most beautiful animal sanctuaries in the world.

I was sent to deputise for Tuffy Marshall, warden of the western section of the Tsavo National Park while he was away on six months leave.

Just before I left, at the height of the dry season, Tabs and I were out on one of our evening patrols when we noticed that the track on which we sometimes took a short cut to Observation Hill (route A on the map) had suddenly become water-logged and was impassable. This track went through an area of sodom apple close to the edge of the Ngong Narok swamp. The track had become boggy before, but always during the rains. Now it was towards the end of the dry season when the swamp should be receding. It was unusual, to say the least.

After I had left for Tsavo on 15th October, Tabs continued to watch the water with growing interest. A few days later he drove along the same track

again and sure enough the water had reached even further. So he decided to plant some sticks at the edge of the water to try and get some indication of how much it was advancing. To his increasing excitement, every time he went to the place he found the sticks enveloped in water, so would plant others further back. Some days he would find the water had extended by just a metre or so, others by two or three metres in one day. It now became a daily ritual to measure the water.

The water seemed to be extending down the narrow depression in which the sodom apple grew and the interesting thing was that it was covering the whole width of the depression on a front as much as 150 metres wide. Tabs could see there was a very considerable increase in the volume of water, and presumed it must be emanating from the springs which fed the Ngong Narok swamp.

Walking around in the sodom apple, which was over two metres high, was a fairly hair-raising experience as the place always abounded with Rhino and Buffalo — not the most endearing of animals to meet on foot in that thick bush. On one occasion, when he had taken his young daughter Fennis with him, he was so engrossed with planting the new set of sticks that he failed to notice that Fennis had wandered out of sight to fetch more sticks for him. Fennis was then 12 years old and was aware of the dangers that may be lurking in that type of bush. She had grown up in Amboseli and had learnt to know and respect animals in their wild environment. Tabs suddenly became aware that Fennis was not beside him and sensed something was wrong. The sodom apple was not quite so thick in that particular place and he could see for about ten metres in any direction. Everything was quite quiet and he did not want to call out to her for fear of frightening any animals that happened to be in the vicinity, and anyway he knew she could look after herself all right. However, he was about to start looking for her when Fennis appeared from behind some particularly thick bushes walking very slowly backwards towards him concentrating hard on something not too far in front of her. He watched in horror as out of the bush, not six metres in front of her walked a very menacing looking full grown Lioness. Each step Fennis took back, was accompanied by a step forward by the Lioness. The Lioness was literally seeing her off, and Fennis was keeping her head and walking backwards facing the Lioness the whole time. Tabs grasped the situation immediately and stood his ground until Fennis was beside him, and they both then carried on walking slowly backwards to where the Land Rover stood, the Lioness following with her tail swishing from side to side and her ears back in threat. She pursued them right the way back to the safety of the Land Rover. Once they were safe inside, the Lioness simply laid down on the ground and rolled

over as though nothing had happened.

Later, Tabs took the Land Rover up to the top of Observation Hill where they looked down and saw through the binoculars that three little cubs had joined the Lioness at the spot where they left her. She had good reason to see them both off her territory.

Tabs went on measuring the increase of water with his sticks for three weeks or so until the rains broke and with the ground now wet from heavy rain, the new water moved on apace. There seemed to be no stopping it. The old track on which the water was first seen was now under a sheet of open water with the sodom apple bushes inundated.

From my new duties in the Tsavo (West) Park at Mtito Andei, I heard about the progress of the new water over the radio from Tabs. All the Parks were in radio communication and we had a 'call-up' at eight o'clock each morning from head office in Nairobi. At the end of official business I would go back to calling 'Nan Peter Five', the Amboseli call sign and Tabs would give me the latest news on the developments. By mid December, Tabs was able to tell me that the water had reached the second and main track to Observation Hill (route B on the map), some 500 metres from its starting point and still on the same wide front. He could hardly believe what was happening. Here was an area of water covering some 15 acres, which only three months before had been a dry dusty stretch of sodom apple. Apart from the bushes still showing through, it was open water and at the edges, water birds began to appear: Ducks, Herons and Waders, birds we seldom saw at Amboseli apart from rare visits in the rainy season.

The new year 1958 saw the water continuing to move inexorably along the shallow depression and now it was threatening to cut off other tracks that were having to be made to Observation Hill and the whole of the south western section of the Reserve. Clearly a bridge or causeway would have to be built to allow permanent access to those areas, particularly Kitirua which had some small water holes dotted about and where the game frequented more than the cattle. The trouble was that Tabs only had the gang of 15 young labourers, the Ferguson tractor and the lorry which did not tip and therefore had to be loaded and unloaded by hand. It was not the ideal equipment to build a causeway 110 metres long by four metres wide at the top, but with no extra money, he had little alternative but to make a start before the water flowed much further.

He chose a site where he thought he could finish the construction before the encroaching water overtook it. It was not an easy task. The base of an earth bund or dam wall should be dug down into the ground to give it a good foundation, but there was obviously no money for that degree of perfection.

Rock was collected from some four miles away and brought to the site, off-loaded and placed on the ground by hand interspersed with soil to bind the rocks together to try and produce a watertight structure. Unfortunately the surrounding soil is little more than volcanic ash and useless as a binding material, so red soil had to be dug up by hand and brought in from some ten miles distance. At its highest point, the causeway was just over a metre above ground level so that in total there was nearly four hundred cubic metres of rock and soil required to complete it and it took much longer than Tabs had anticipated. The water had already reached the bottom of the causeway long before the top was finished. It became a hectic struggle, and although the rock stood firm, there were many breaches of the bund and it was by no means certain that the water could be contained without the aid of much larger machinery.

In the meantime, Gerald Campbell, who was still in the area finishing off his work on the groundwater potential, took a somewhat lively interest in the proceedings. As time went on, he began to get the feeling that events were overtaking him and that Nature was beginning to take a hand where others feared to tread. He had no easy answer as to why the water had suddenly appeared except that an earth tremor may have dislodged rocks deep underground and opened up a fissure or aquafer. But Tabs had also noted that the water was rising in the other main swamp, Ologinya, though to a much lesser extent, which made the earth tremor idea less likely.

The Masai, who had been out of the area for the previous two months during the rains, were astonished to see the open stretch of water when they returned. Tabs was anxious to ask them if they had any recollection of this happening before. But they were as surprised as he was about it and even the oldest amongst them had never seen the like of this before nor did they know of any history of the water coming beyond Normatior (Observation Hill). Nevertheless, they were delighted to see it and were nearly as excited as Tabs, who, by this time, had all sorts of ideas about how the water could be used to overcome many of the problems of the past years. But would the water stay? Or would it start receding again once the dry season started? Every morning Tabs would drive down to the causeway and look at the depth gauge installed by Gerald to give an accurate idea of the rise and fall of the water depth. So far, there had only been a steady rise.

The miracle was beginning to unfold.

Opposite above: The view from Observation Hill, 1956.
Below: The same view in 1985.

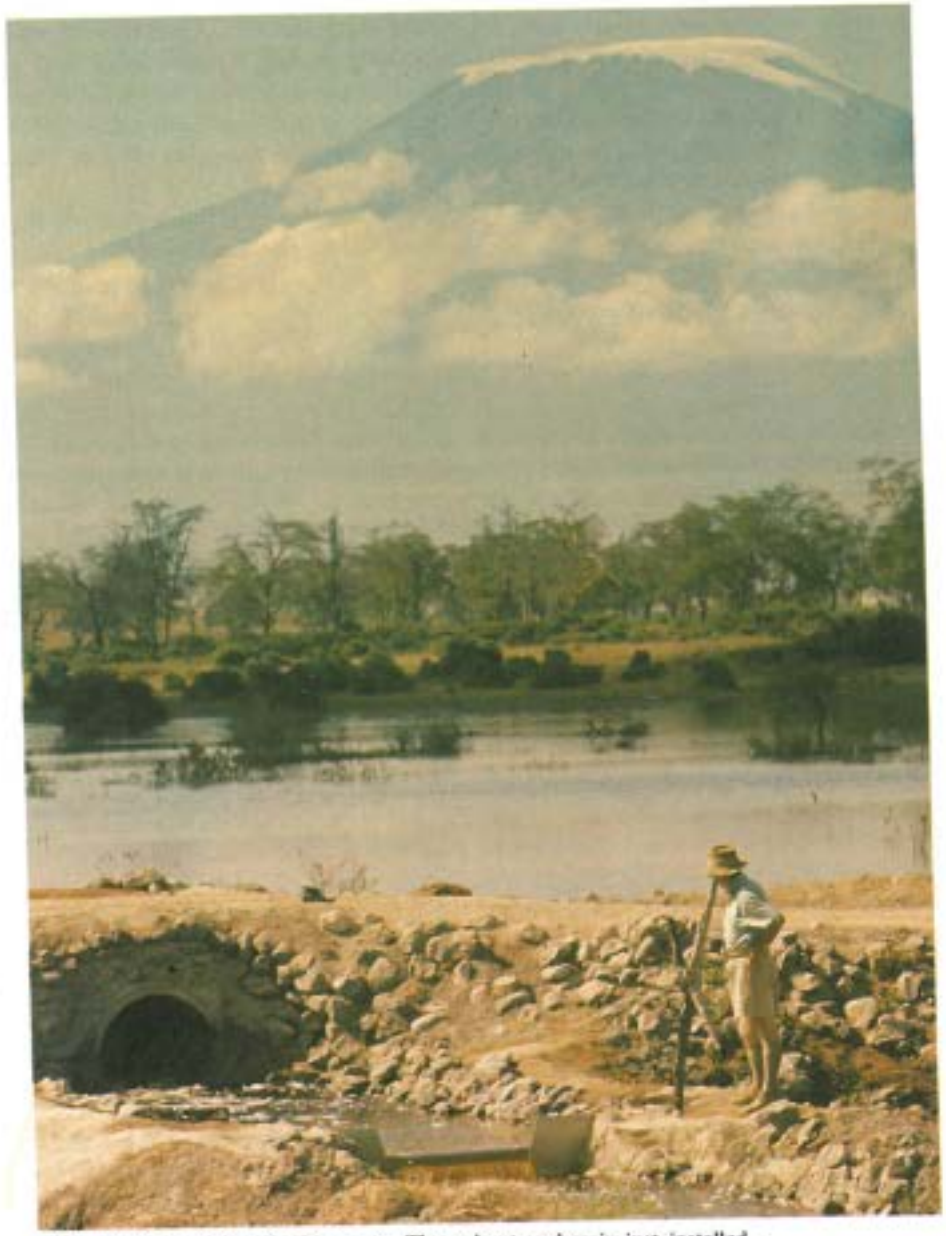
Chapter Eight

Man Begins to Help

TUFFY MARSHALL was so keen to return to his beloved Tsavo Park that he cut short his leave and arrived back a month or so early, in the middle of March 1958. Tabs has listened to this bit of news on the 'Blower' with interest. By now he was sufficiently confident the water was there to stay that he approached his Director for assistance to help with all the opportunities the new water now presented. Mervyn Cowie agreed that it was essential to exploit every ounce of potential from this providential gift to Amboseli, so he posted me back there after I had completed handing Tsavo (West) back to Tuffy at the end of the month.

What a change I found at Ol Tukai. After only five months there was an entirely different atmosphere both in the camp and with the Masai. When I left in October, I had said 'Good-bye' to Amboseli for good, and now here I was back in No 9 banda once more, with the old feelings of optimism everywhere, something I hadn't felt since I was first sent there, five years ago. I had only been back in the banda ten minutes when Tabs bundled me into the Land Rover and off we went to inspect the progress.

Although I had more or less prepared myself for what to expect, it was completely overwhelming to actually see the 1½ mile lake in place of the dry, dusty plain I left such a short time ago. It was unbelievable. The main track to Observation Hill was under four feet of water, with ducks and other waterfowl in residence. Herds of Wildebeest and Zebra had already found safe places to water and Grant's and 'Tommy's' were feeding on the lush green grass on the margins of the lake. After all the problems Amboseli was having to cope with when I left, the sight before our eyes was incredible. It was very exciting and I could well understand Tabs' enthusiasm when he used to talk about it over the 'Blower' to me. I found it difficult to take in just what it could mean for the future of the place. Tabs, who had had time to think out the best course of action to develop the water, was full of ideas to channel it down to where the Masai had originally wanted the boreholes to be sited, but knowing the resources available, I couldn't see how it was possible. But he was overflowing with optimism, and what an incredible thing if we could get the water right the way down to the lake-bed and so stop the Masai from



Tabs standing beside his Causeway. The culvert and weir just installed.

coming into the area at all. Now we would show the Government who was *really* looking after Amboseli! But how long would it last? Why had it appeared so suddenly? Was it just a temporary phenomenon that would pass and in six months we would see the land returning to a dust bowl once again? We didn't have time to stop and consider these nagging thoughts too long. We must just make the best of it while it was here.

It was fairly obvious that the main thing would be to try and channel the water, or certainly some of it, as far away from the swamp as we could possibly get it, and to where the Masai would be willing to make use of it. Tabs and Lengu had already discussed the setting up of a watering point some distance away from the causeway and the local herdsmen were very keen that the water should be provided for their herds in the form of a small trough as near to their best grazing grounds as possible. They much preferred the lands to the north of Ol Tukai on the better quality red, loamy earth. The nearest point of this good grazing land was over six miles away and so it was quite out of the question that we could get the water that far. Nevertheless, we would damn well get it as far as we could!

The next day, Tabs sent me off with Gerald Campbell to have a look at the most likely route for a canal starting at the causeway. Up to now, the causeway had been built as a continuous bund with water building up behind it. Slowly but surely the water was rising up the wall and before long, unless something was done to relieve the pressure and lead the excess water away, there would be no bund at all; washed away by the volume of water accumulating behind it.

On our way to the causeway, Gerald and I called in at old Zakimba's manyatta. I often called there to have a chat with the old headman and his family — and now I wanted to ask him if he would come with us and point out the best sites for watering troughs for the local herds, if we could ever get the water that far. Zakimba greeted me as usual with a pat on the head, much as he would one of his own sons. He was very old and had been born around the time Joseph Thomson had made his epic journey through this part of Masailand. He had been Chief of the whole Kisongo clan many years before and was now revered by all as a Patriarch. He was a wise old gentleman and had been a great ally to National Parks, smoothing over difficulties which Lengu, being only a section chief, had less authority to control. His age belied his wit and wisdom when it came to a 'baraza' or meeting of the elders. Although a past Chief has little say over tribal matters, because of his particular charisma, Zakimba's words and advice were always respected and much attention paid to them. He was a grand old man with a great sense of humour and always had a twinkle in his eye. One of his sons, Parut, spoke

Zakimba was born about the time the first Europeans came to Masailand. He was Chief of the Kisongo clan many years ago.

perfect English, and some years before, I had been invited to attend his circumsion ceremony which was a great honour, and we continued to keep in touch with each other.

Zakimba loved showing me the special places of interest in these lands where he had grown up, and never missed a chance to go round in the Land Rover with us. Most of all, he was anxious to show us the sites of old *manyattas,* remembered not usually for where sons or grandsons had grown up, but where favourite cows or bulls had been born or had died. Like all Masai, his life from warriorhood on, revolved entirely around his cattle and everything else took second place. On our way to the causeway in the Land Rover, he showed Gerald and me the site of his old *Mpaash manyatta,* as he had done a dozen times before, where he had become the proud owner of six fine bullocks paid to him as part of his first daughter's bride price. I knew the story so well and never had the heart to stop him from repeating it each time we went past the spot. It was of little consequence to the old man that this time there happened to be four large bull elephants feeding from a tree overhanging the site, and I believe he hardly even noticed them.

The three of us got out of the Land Rover at the causeway and began walking down the depression which followed on from the course the water seemed to be taking. It could hardly be described as a river bed, as in some places it flattened out and the depression disappeared altogether. It was, though, just possible to make out the existence of some form of a watercourse from many years ago. Zakimba told us that this area which had slightly darker soil was known as El Simek or Sinet, so from then on we always referred to it

as the Simek river.

After following the course of the depression for some time, we eventually came out onto the dry lake-bed of Embosel, Lake Amboseli. Gerald believed there must have been a watercourse down to the lake-bed in some bygone day, but it was impossible to say when it last flowed. Zakimba was adamant that in his lifetime they had never been able to water cattle beyond the bottom of Normatior (Observation Hill), and he had never heard any history of water from the Ngong Narok swamp reaching further that that, even in the wettest seasons.

Gerald said that given the same quantity of water that we had at the moment, and sufficient gradient, he could see no reason why it shouldn't be channelled right down to where we were standing on the lake shore, assuming there was money and machinery to do it. Zakimba's eyes really lit up and he became very excited and even more talkative, explaining in great detail how they would dig the watering trough for the cattle, and how they would be able to spend all the year round in the red soil area. (Presumably thinking how much this would benefit his stock numbers and therefore how much wealthier he would be!)

We returned the way we came in great spirits, buoyed up by the thought that the place we had been standing was, after all, almost the exact spot where we had wanted to site the main borehole for the Masai herds back in 1955. Was it coincidence? Zakimba didn't think so! "Nyama ya Ol Tukai siwesa kufa kama mungu bado iko!" "The wild animals of Ol Tukai won't die while God is still about!" he said with a chuckle and a shake of his shiny bald head.

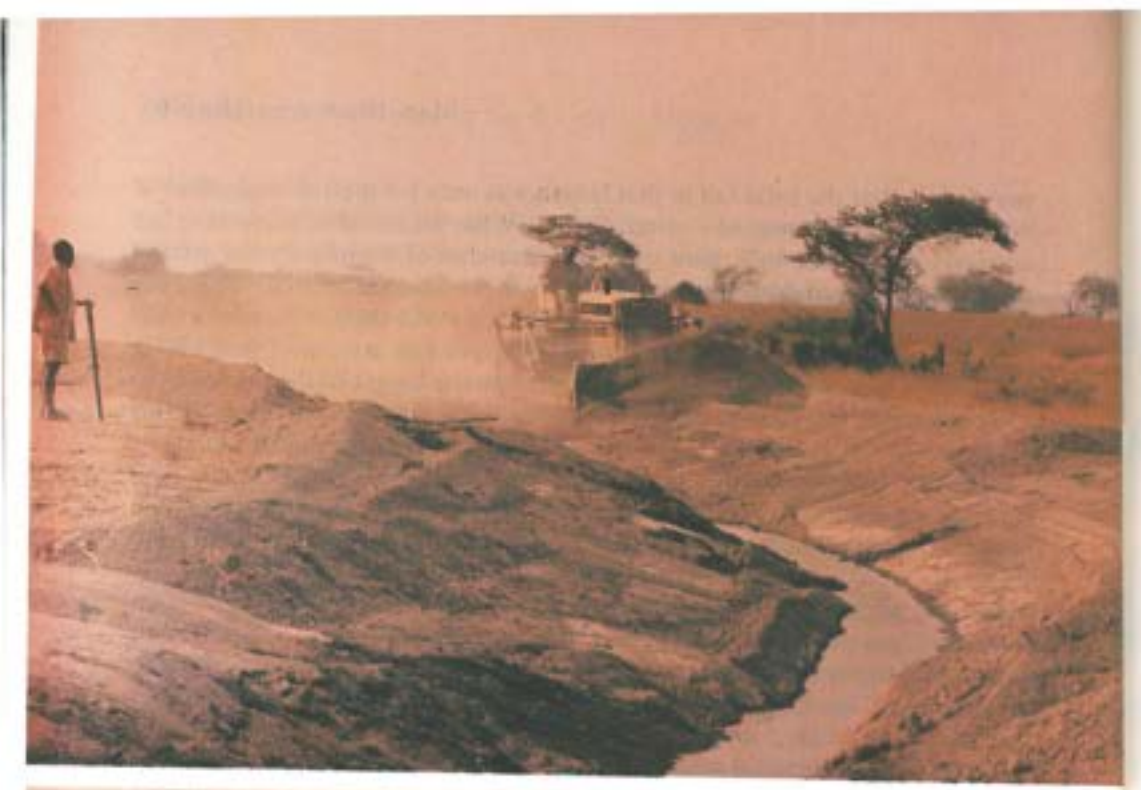
We drove back to camp and reported to Tabs. We decided there and then that money or no money we should try to put the plan for the canal into operation as soon as possible so as to have something working before the approach of the next dry season. A culvert would have to be cut into the causeway and the water allowed to flow through into a channel cut along the depression. Without any extra money over and above the normal road and building maintenance money, cutting the channel would not be easy, and in effect, the £287 officially allocated to the upkeep of roads in the Reserve would be all that we could spend on the project and road maintenance would have to go by the board for the next year or so. Firstly we had to establish that there was, in fact, a fall from the causeway to the lake-bed.

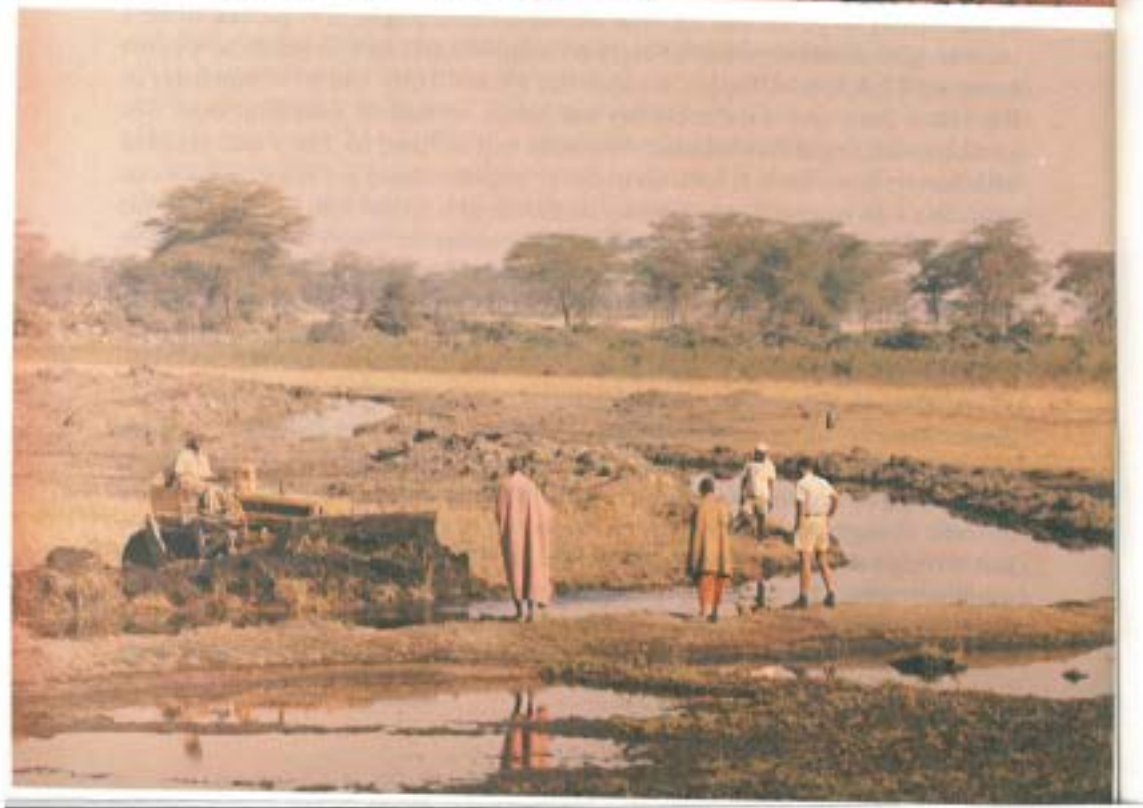
It took Gerald and me ten days of careful surveying to complete the work right down to the lake-bed. Gerald had been allowed to stay on and help with exploiting the potential of the new water. It was the least the authorities could do to help us now that the prospect looked brighter. From the causeway we found it was just under 6 kilometres to the edge of the lake. But we found to

our dismay that the total fall in that length was only 1·8 metres, a gradient of only one to three thousand — virtually flat. What we found was anything but encouraging as, although there were long stretches of completely flat ground where a channel could be dug fairly easily, there were some areas where the ground was appreciably higher, through which a much deeper channel would have to be excavated, and we had visions of expensive machinery hire killing the project. An alternative would be to increase the height of the causeway to give more fall, as Gerald believed we needed a minimum of one to two thousand in order to get the water to flow through the small canal we envisaged, but we soon found out that if we increased the height of the dam by more than half a metre the whole countryside would begin to flood and the water would be lost. So we had no alternative but to try for the canal and hope the water would continue at its present rate, or even increase.

By now the idea of troughs for the herds coming in from the north had been fully discussed with the elders concerned and they were as keen as we were to get started on the canal. The plan was to build a series of troughs on the way down towards the lake-bed to cater for as many herds as possible. The first trough was to be sited some two kilometres down from the causeway where there would be a total fall of about one metre. One trough would at least give us something to go on and by then the authorities might, if it proved to be a success, give us some money to carry on with. We still had no machinery apart from our TEA model 'Fergie' tractor, but I knew Tuffy had a D4 bulldozer in the Tsavo Park and if we could lay our hands on that, it would improve our earth-moving capability no end. We went cap in hand to Tuffy and pleaded with him to let us have it for a short time, until we could get something of our own. We had to use all our powers of persuasion to get him to part with his precious D4. Tuffy prided himself that the roads in Tsavo (West) were the best of all the Parks and this was his prime piece of equipment for maintaining them. He was very loath to part with it at all, but in the end we managed to persuade him to let us have it for a month at the most on condition that we paid the driver and the fuel costs.

The D4 was soon on its way trundling across the Chyulu Hills from Mtito Andei some 60 miles away. The driver wasted no time in putting it to work pushing up the banks for the canal. He was very skilled and handled it well, so great progress was made — to start with. The dry dusty volcanic soil was easy to shift, though the resulting banks were a very crude and simple affair only just strong enough to contain the water. By this time a sympathetic Roads Engineer from the Public Works Department had 'donated' a one metre diameter culvert which was inserted into the dam wall and just below it Gerald installed a Cipoletti weir to measure the volume of water flowing





through the culvert. The water at last began to flow.

We made the canal two metres wide and took careful levels all the time to make sure the water would not overflow the sides of the canal. The D4 certainly did its job well where the ground was low and banks had to be pushed up, but about half way to the trough site there was a piece of higher ground some 300 metres long, which although it was barely two metres higher, gave us great problems. The bulldozer blade only moves up and down, so to dig a small canal two metres wide is almost an impossibility. Tuffy had only loaned us the machine for one month, and when the end of that time arrived we found we were still some distance from the trought site, because of this high ground. But with our gang of 15 also helping to dig, we eventually got through. The game became quite a problem too. Although the embankments were much easier to build, they proved to be very susceptible to breaching by herds of Elephant coming in to water at the channel, and the longer the channel became, the more time we had to spend each morning mending the breaches made by animals the previous night.

Although we were determined to make it work, we knew in our hearts the canal would only be a temporary affair. We simply hoped that the water would flow and the channels survive for long enough to be able to show the Government just what a difference there would be when some of the Masai herds were safely out of the swamp areas in the dry season and to prove to them that the Masai would be happy to stay out as long as water was provided in their best grazing lands. There was a lot of hoping and praying, those first few weeks, but the water continued to flow without failing us. Of course it would have been such a simple matter to install an underground pipeline from the causeway dam to the trough site, but with no money whatsoever, the idea was a non-starter.

So everyone lent a hand with picks and shovels including some of the Masai themselves, most of whom had never seen a tool like this before, let alone used one. The gang of 15 Kamba labourers had many a laugh at the expense of a *moran* in full dress, trying desperately to swing a pick-axe like the rest of us. That sort of work did not come easily for them. The only equipment they ever carried or used were their weapons: knobkerry, simi and spear, and they certainly knew how to use them!

The site of the trough was in a low part of the Simek depression, but still had to be excavated out with the D4 to bring the water in the trough to the correct height for the cattle to drink. The herdsmen were very particular

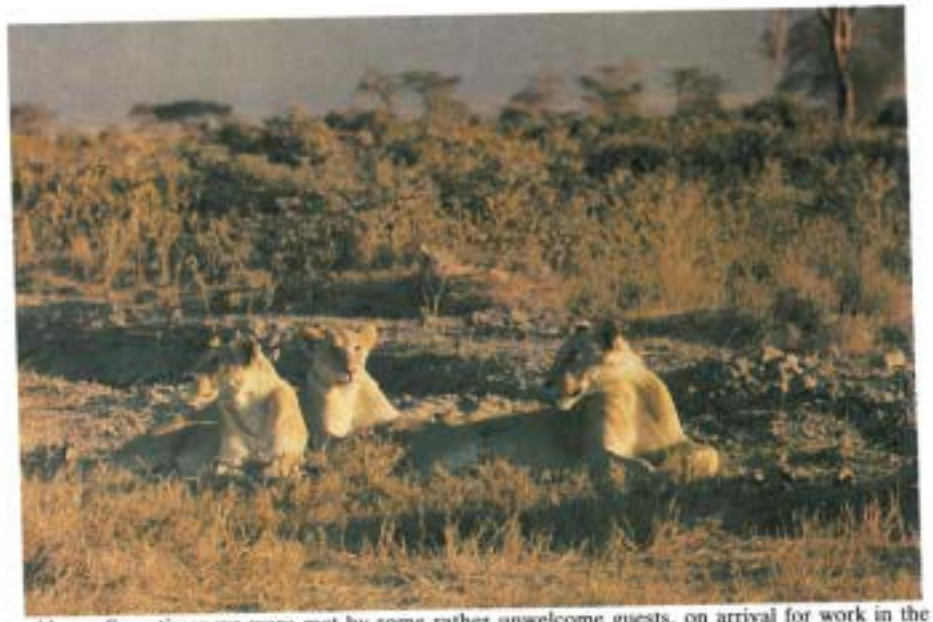
Opposite above: Tuffy's D4 channelling through a piece of high ground.
Opposite below: Trying to stem breaches in the canal made by animals watering from it overnight.

about this point. The trough itself was about 100 metres long and constructed carefully so that the water would flow down at the optimum rate, in order that about 40 cows at a time could drink. The Kisongo knew more about designing these troughs than we did, as they use them at the Sinya wells round to the west of the mountain. Unfortunately we declined to take their advice on how to form the trough. We brought in red soil which we made into a mud out of which to fashion the trough, similar to the way we made the mud bricks for the bandas. We were soon to learn our lesson.

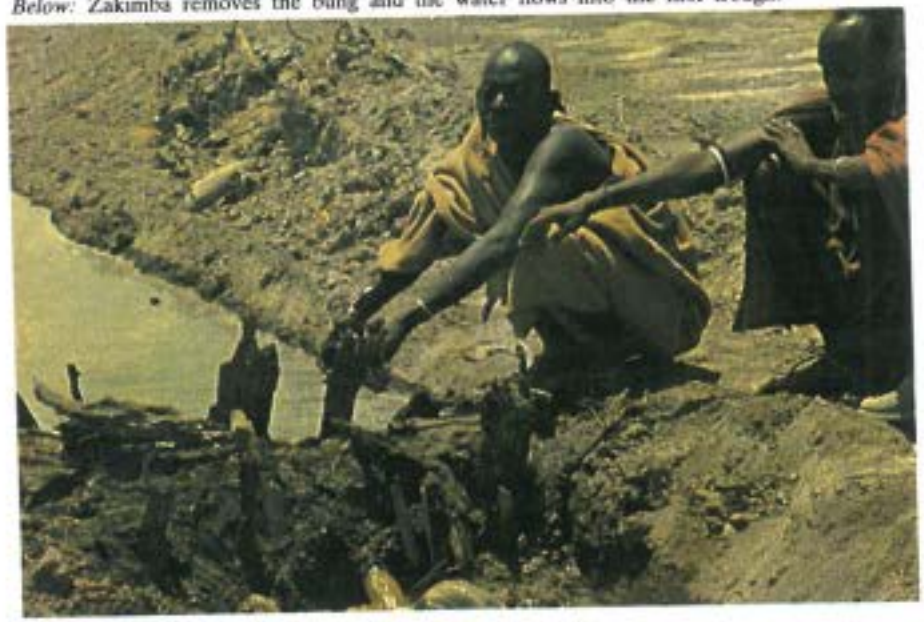
The trough was finally built and the D4 returned to Tuffy at Tsavo. We decided to have a grand opening ceremony when the first herds came in. The ceremony was to be performed by Zakima, whose cattle, of course, would be some of the first to use the trough.

The appointed day was 4th July and all the herds that were lucky enough to be chosen were assembled on the plains close to the trough site. We were all gathered there to witness the great moment. Gerald was there together with Tobe and Patsy Norris who had been working with us while on holiday from Ceylon, all the Rangers we could muster and even a few visitors who had heard about the story while in camp. The little reservoir was full and the herdsmen were ready to call in the first bunch of cattle. With a suitable flourish Zakimba drew the bung out of the pipe leading to the trough, and the water began to flow. It was a great moment for all of us. At last we had really achieved something positive out of the Heaven-sent gift of this new water. Now, Masai and wildlife together were going to benefit directly from it. Zakimba, with a broad smile on his face as the first cow came in to drink, looked over to Tabs and me as much as to say "Perhaps you Europeans did bring some good ideas with you after all."

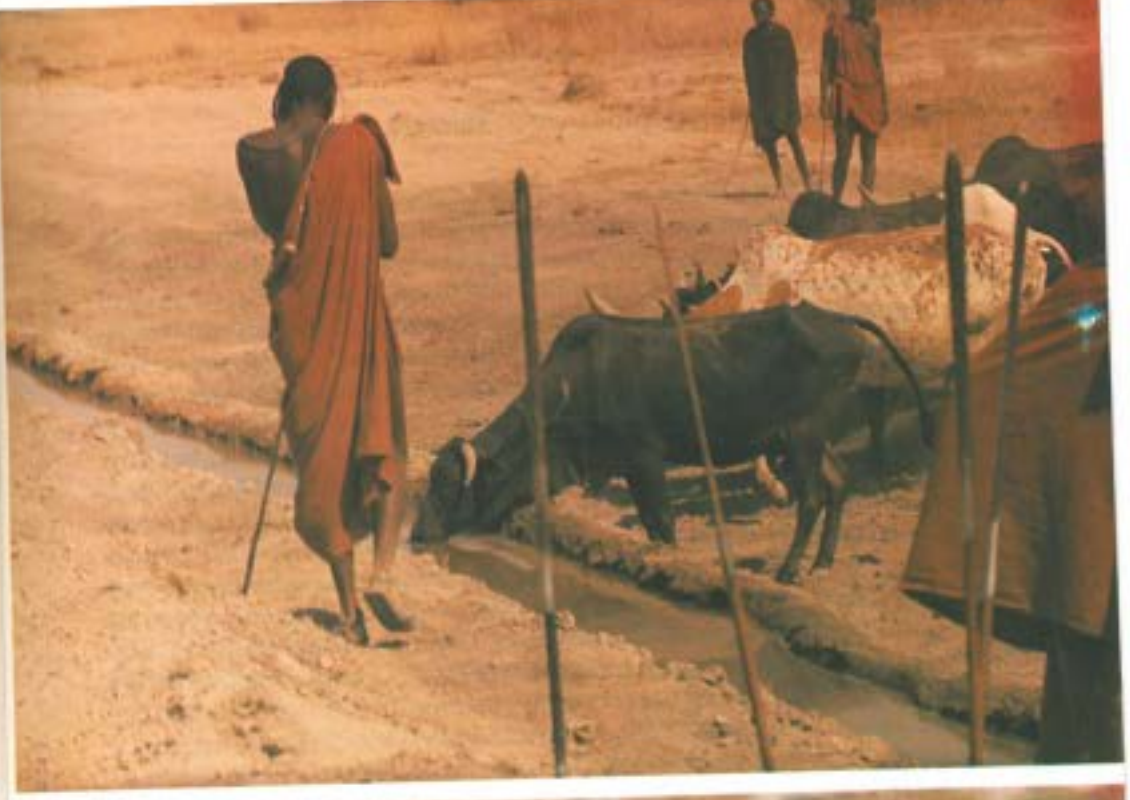
We all looked on with growing pleasure and satisfaction as the first herd was watering. Unfortunately our euphoria was somewhat short lived. Within a matter of only a few minutes the water began to pour down the trough face into the area where the cattle were standing. The Masai had been quite right. The cows were piercing the trough wall whilst drinking and it was disintegrating before our eyes. Everyone rushed to plug the breaches after each group of cattle had finished and it was only by continual plugging that we managed to get them all watered. When the last of them were through, the Masai commandeered our 15 labourers and set-to to build their own trough. Within two days they had it completed to their satisfaction, and this time it was entirely successful keeping some 6000 head of cattle out of the swamps, at the same time giving them easier access to better grazing near their manyattas. Now at last the game was able to use some of the swamps in peace.



Above: Sometimes we were met by some rather unwelcome guests, on arrival for work in the morning.
Below: Zakimba removes the bung and the water flows into the first trough.



By this time our relations with the Masai had changed completely from those of a year ago. Gone was the old antagonism. Not only were the herdsmen very grateful to National Parks for helping them to water their cattle much closer to better grazing grounds, but also they could see that we were genuinely anxious to help them and were not simply easing them out of the area in order to preserve the wild animals at their expense. This in turn led to a more mutual trust between us. Unbeknown to anyone outside, we had, in fact, formed an unofficial committee composed of the local District Officer at Laitokitok, Lengu, Tabs, myself and four local herdsmen. The idea behind the formation of this committee was primarily to encourage the Masai to become more involved with the day to day workings of the Reserve. We not only discussed specific problems which arose concerning the Masai and game, but also the assistance they were able to give us by reporting any unusual incidents they saw. Poaching was seldom a problem, but there was always a possibility of it becoming a nuisance and the Masai were soon aware of any suspicious characters in the area; also, covering the ground on foot, as they did, they would often know of incidents befalling the wildlife long before we did, and in fact it was one of Ole Kiparia's sons who brought in the first report of the loss of 'Gertie's' horn, after it had broken off. The success of the committee proved to us that as long as people are well versed in local conditions they are willing to assume responsibility and exercise it wisely. We knew there would be always be occasions when the *morani* would spear animals just for the hell of it. When this had happened before, there were always great difficulties and plenty of good excuses, but no one really believed them and we seldom got the real story. Now, whenever there was a problem on either side we would be welcome in any *manyatta* or a headman would come into the camp and we would sit and discuss the thing through. The Loitaiok were showing great willingness to accept not only the idea but the fact of National Parks in their midst. The partnership worked very well and should have been a blueprint for wildlife conservation throughout the whole of the Masai Land Unit. Given the logical course of events over the ensuing years, the Kisongo, and probably the Matapatu as well would have agreed to limit their stock numbers of their own free will in and around the borders of Amboseli. As it was, during that 1958 dry season the Ol Tukai area was relieved of a great many cattle, leading in turn to fewer sheep and goats. It was an enormous relief for all concerned, not the least of which was the vegetation which had suffered badly the previous year from the vast clouds of



Opposite above: First cow to drink at Zakimba's trough.
Opposite below: A herd waters at the new trough.

dust set up by these herds.

We now began to notice a definite increase in the level of the other swamps and waterholes in the area, though this was not as significant as in the Ngong Narok swamp. The Ologinya swamp now boasted some lovely stretches of open water on which scores of different water birds could be seen and filmed. Indeed, with all the open water around a great number of both migratory and resident water birds were to be seen at Amboseli, adding another interest to its already diverse wildlife populations. Here one could not only see many of the dry country birds such as Barbets, Sandgrouse and Bustards, but also Waders, Herons and Pelicans associated with water margins and lakes. Up to now there had been no permanent open water at Amboseli and consequently very few water birds were ever seen apart from the odd Plover or Egyptian goose. Now there was a host of every sort and description to be seen. Great flocks of waders from Little Stints to Curlews; a dozen different species of Ducks and Geese; at least eight species of Heron, as well as Stilts, Rails, Jacanas, Coots and Kingfishers and even Avocets. On one morning's patrol, I counted 62 different species of birds within the first 20 minutes of setting out from the camp. Most magnificent of all were the wonderful Fish Eagles with their inimitable call — a sound we had not heard before at Amboseli but which was becoming quite common. My list of birds grew daily and word was already getting round the ornithological world that Amboseli was the place to study water birds.

One visiting ornithologist who I failed to recognise at first, was sitting on his verandah in the Lodge one afternoon admiring a Starling pecking at the crumbs on his tea table. As I passed by, I remarked how attractive the bird was and asked if he new it was actually a Superb Starling, as opposed to others that were building nests in a nearby tree. He showed great interest and we chatted for a few moments. He remarked how lucky I was to be living in a place surrounded by such an array of beautiful birds; also that he had seldom seen such a variety of African birds in one small area. It was not until later that I discovered that I had been talking to Roger Tory Peterson, one of the world's most renowned ornithologists.

The plains game were also benefiting from the advent of the new water. Healthy herds of wild animals always encourage others to come into an area with good grazing, not necessarily to compete with existing herds but more to complement them. We began to see Hippo for the first time and even small herds of Buffalo. Hitherto, there had only been old male buffalos and it was interesting to see these herds now appearing out of the swamps. There began to be a regeneration of the Yellow Fever trees, particularly in certain well defined areas close to the swamps.

Altogether things were looking up. Nature was taking things into Her own hands and with a little help, man's destruction of previous years was going to be checked and perhaps reversed.

Spurred on by the success of Zakimba's trough, as it soon became known, we set our sights on building another further down towards the lake-bed. There now seemed plenty of water to supply a second trough, and more after that if it kept on at the same rate through the culvert at the causeway. Still crossing our fingers, we surveyed another trough site about two kilometres further on.

We no longer had the D4 to help with excavating the channel and there was still no money forthcoming to help us. Mervyn Cowie, while pleased with the feat we had performed virtually 'out of the hat', could still give us no encouragement financially. So, as more machinery was out of the question, we employed another six Kamba labourers to swell the gang. The extra Shs 300/- (£15) per month for their pay had to be found from the funds of the Lodge cleaning staff, much to the disgust of John Nthenge, who was (and still is) in charge of visitors' accommodation there. Taking the money from that source meant that John would be unable to have the visitors' bandas as spick and span as he would like but we felt the visitors would forgive this temporary laxity in such a good cause. Everyone worked hard on digging the channel and at one time or another we all found ourselves with a *jembe* or shovel in our hands working away at the end of the furrow. The Rangers were sometimes press-ganged into doing their bit and Head Ranger Mwanzia himself could often be seen stripped to the waist hacking away at the ground together with a squad of his Rangers, in time to the interminable song to which the Kambas work whenever there's a job that can be done in unison. They really are the most rhythmic people and I am sure their dancing is without equal in Africa. The annual display of dancing on Christmas day by the Kambas in the camp on the football pitch was something never to be missed. It would be so sad if, because of modern trends, their unique and individual quality of singing and dancing died out.

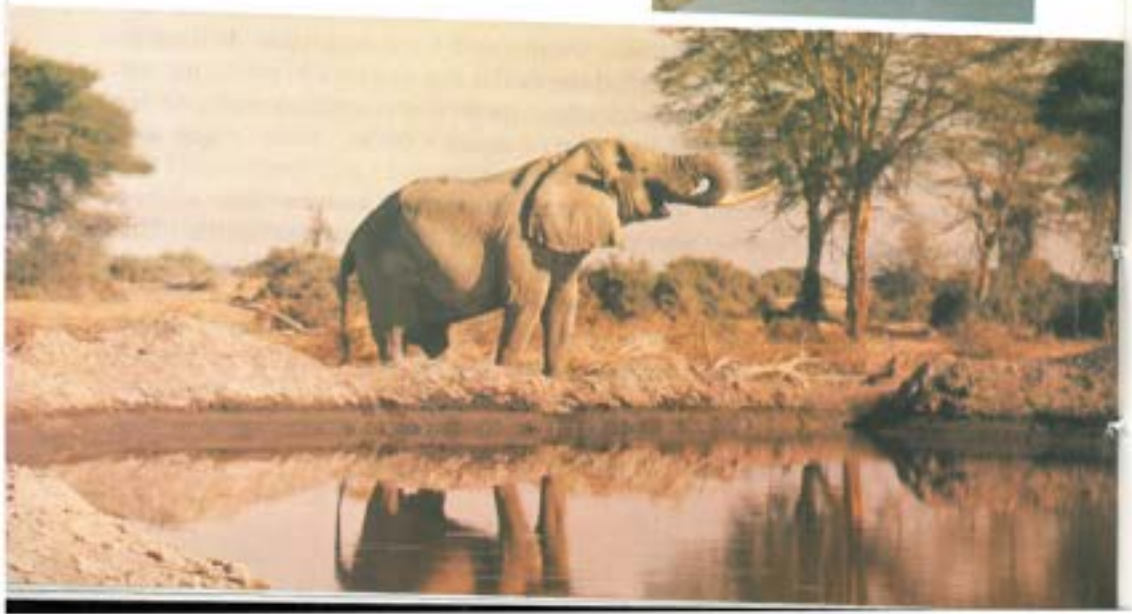
The little 'Fergie' tractor was also working overtime and the blade we had attached to the rear linkage was able to simulate the D4 to a small extent. The two kilometres of channel that were constructed between Zakimba's trough and the next one which we called Ole Kiparia's trough, were built almost entirely by hand in just over a month. The success of the first trough encouraged everyone to try and complete the next one before the height of the oncoming dry season. Having learnt by our mistakes on the construction of the previous trough, we sailed through the building of Ole Kiparia's and made it double the size into the bargain. Gerald's fears about the gradient

being insufficient for the water to flow, were alleviated by the fact that the volume of water seemed to be increasing all the time and this gave the extra impetus required to 'push' the water down the canal.

The breaching of the upstream banks by game drinking from the canal continued to give problems and eventually we gave up trying to plug the breaches between the causeway and Zakimba's trough. That whole area was becoming flooded and yet there was still enough water to flow down to the troughs and beyond. By September 1958, just eleven months after we first noticed the rise in water level back at the Ngong Narok swamp, we were able to water some 15,000 head of cattle right away from the swamp and game areas, and Ole Kiparia's trough was four kilometres down from the original boundary of the swamp; all of this was done without an extra penny of Parks or Government money.

Right: Fish Eagle *(Cuncuma vocifer).*

Below: Elephant watering from the reservoir serving Zakimba's trough.



CHAPTER NINE

Per Ardua Ad Embosel

BY THE END OF 1958 it was clear the Zakimba's trough was soon going to be inundated by the rising water. The canal was continually being breached and the water was progressing down on a wide front along the width of the depression. In order to keep a drinking trough open at that site, plans were put forward to pump water from the stream into a new trough built on the higher ground at a point just above the threatened trough. Once again this scheme, costing relatively little, had to be abandoned because of lack of money. So we set our sights on building a new set of troughs right down on the dry lake-bed where Zakimba had shown us the ideal site on our first walk down the Simek depression just a year ago. We could see now that two or even three troughs at the edge of the lake-bed would be of the greatest value. Many thousands more stock from both the Loitaiok Kisongo and Matapatu could be discouraged and perhaps prevented from coming into the Ol Tukai area at all if they were diverted to this point on the lake-bed. One of the main advantages of siting the trough at that particular place was the lack of any vegetation there, so that although many thousands of head of stock would congregate there, the ground would suffer no appreciable damage from the pounding of all those hoofs. Another major benefit which would result from these new troughs was that Zakimba agreed to move his own *manyatta* over there, within easy reach of them; thus the last of the Masai villages would be removed from the immediate vicinity of the swamps and for the first time, the game would have access to them without competition from the Masai herds.

Unfortunately we had a problem. The Simek depression up to this point had run in an easterly direction straight towards the lake-bed. Now, only some 500 metres away, it took a turn to the south going parallel with the lake shore, coming out into the lake-bed another two kilometres further on. The reason for this change in direction was an outcrop of higher ground which formed a natural barrier to the shortest route to the lake. This piece of ground was known as 'Mlima wa Kifaru', Rhino Hill, so named because some years before we had found a dead Rhino lying there under rather strange circumstances. On first inspection of the dead beast, we could find no indication of why or how it had died, but on turning it over, we could see

quite clearly a large gash in the Rhino's belly where a tusk had pierced. From nearby tracks, we established that the nearly full-grown Rhino, weighing over a tonne had been lifted bodily clean off the ground by an Elephant. Only one tusk had entered the body and the unfortunate animal had only been able to walk a few steps from where the encounter had taken place before it dropped dead. It must have been fast asleep and been taken completely by surprise by a very bad tempered old bull Elephant. As to why it happened, we never found out, nor have I ever heard of a similar incident before or since.

The problem with Mlima wa Kifaru was that if we followed the natural course of the depression all the way round, it would mean a further two kilometres before we reached a site for the new troughs, two kilometres which the herds would also have to travel, about which the herdsmen were not at all happy. It would certainly be much easier as it was simply a matter of continuing with the slow but now well established method of forming the canal. But with Zakimba's trough about to be put out of action any day by the rising water and Ole Kiparia's full to capacity, there was little time left before some of the cattle would be back in the swamps.

To take the short cut through the hill would mean using a large machine to dig the channel as we found the 'hill' to be over two and a half metres high. The cost to excavate this out with the correct machinery we estimated to be about £1,000 which made the whole idea quite impossible and this time there was no question of digging through the hill by hand. Even the D4 would not be man enough for the task. We put the idea out of our minds and started digging the alternative route, much to the disappointment of the Masai.

Meanwhile the news of all this activity had reached the ears of the Governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring. He had heard about the new water at Amboseli and about the efforts we were making to try to exploit it to the benefit of both the wildlife and the Masai. Being a keen ornithologist he had also not failed to hear about the profusion of birds now at Amboseli. In August 1959 he decided to pay us a visit to see for himself what was going on.

I had just returned from leave with my new bride, Jean, when Sir Evelyn made his visit. Jean and I had met at Amboseli earlier in the year, when she visited Ol Tukai Lodge with her mother. It was a bit of love at first sight, though she teased me later that the only reason she really married me was so that she would have a chance to climb Kilimanjaro! We did, in fact spend part of our honeymoon climbing the mountain which was an unforgettable experience. But that's another story!

Tabs asked Jean and me if we would accompany the Governor and his party on a tour of the Simek River and water troughs and it was with a tremendous feeling of satisfaction that I was able to show His Excellency not

Left: Ole Kiparia and one of his herdsmen.
Below: Hippo with a deep gash in its shoulder from fighting.

only the abundance and variety of birds along the margins of the swamp, but also the very happy relations we had with the Masai. He watched as herd upon herd came in to water at both Zakimba's and Ole Kiparia's troughs and he spoke to several herdsmen. He was able to see the enormous advantage of all these thousands of cattle having to tramp less than half the distance to water than if they were having to water at the swamp, with the consequent decrease in damage to soil and grazing.

He was clearly impressed with what he had seen, and at a packed meeting he held with the Masai later, he spoke about his belief that so long as the Masai and National Parks were able to get to grips with the problems that lay

ahead on a local basis as was happening at present, the future of Ol Tukai looked very rosy indeed. He went on to say that he would like to see the future of Amboseli lying in the greater delegation of authority to the elders of the Kisongo and Matapatu people themselves. For this reason he was recommending to the District Commissioner that the unofficial committee composed of local Masai, National Parks and the District Officer, should now be made official, with the intention that such a body should eventually take over the running of the Reserve completely. Now that he understood the Masai had accepted the idea of a tourist attraction in their midst, and had their promise of co-operation in making it a success, such major steps forward must be welcomed and should be built upon. He said that he had already obtained a commitment from the National Parks authorities to work together with the Masai and with their expertise in running Parks or Reserves of this nature, he could see nothing but a promising future for the area as a wildlife sanctuary and tourist attraction, with the one overriding condition, which was, of course, that the new water in the Simek River continued to flow at the same rate. Without that 'gift from heaven' he was afraid it would just become another cattle ranch, with no wild animals and certainly no tourists. The Masai elders, of whom there were between 50 and 60 at the meeting, listened to the Governor's words with unusual attention. One after the other, Chiefs, sub-Chiefs, Headmen and Elders got up to reply and said how relieved they were to hear that the Ol Tukai area was not going to be taken away from them and made into a National Park from which they would be excluded, as was the rumour going around the district Headquarters at Kajiado. They said they would co-operate with the Parks staff as much as possible regarding stock numbers in Ol Tukai, and looked forward to hearing more news of developments on the partnership idea for Masai and National Parks to run the Reserve jointly. The *baraza* ended on a note of great optimism and everyone felt that Amboseli had taken on a new lease of life.

After the meeting, I took the Governor down the Simek to where we had reached with the canal so far. I was careful to show him our current problem concerning the high ground at Mlima wa Kifaru and explained why it was so important to be able to take the short cut to the lake bed. He could see how near the water was to the required site but barred from reaching it by the high ground, and he was able to appreciate my frustration at being so near and yet so far. He questioned me closely as to reasons for getting the water to that particular point on the lake-bed and on the importance of getting it there quickly, before the cattle were back in the swamp further up river. He was most sympathetic and even intimated that it may be possible to get help with finance for the project.

H.E. The Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring's *baraza* with the Masai Chiefs and Headmen. Ol Tukai, August 1959.

I certainly must have created a good impression as less than week after his visit a message came over the radio from Head Office to say there was a grant of a thousand pounds on its way to us 'For David to take the short cut'. We were all overjoyed.

Once the money was in the bag we lost no time in employing Santa Singh, a firm of earth-moving contractors in Nairobi to carry out the work. They loaded one of their D8 bulldozers with scraper onto the first available goods train to Sultan Hamud, which was the nearest railhead to Amboseli. The D8 driver was a villainous looking Gujerati fellow who actually had a heart of gold and for whom nothing was too much trouble. His unpronounceable name sounded rather like 'Littlemore', and as this turned out to be somewhat apt, the nickname stuck.

The 60 mile trek from Sultan Hamud took three days and with Littlemore's own caravan pulled behind the scraper, the whole lumbering procession looked somewhat incongruous to any unsuspecting visitor passing it on their way to the Reserve. The 60 mile 'dash', made at a speed of 4 m.p.h., went without mishap and they arrived on site on October 14th 1959. Immediately they went into action. On the face of it, this very large machine should cut the nine foot wide channel over the distance of 450 metres in about 10 days.

To begin with all went well. The bulldozer and scraper, nicknamed 'Percy' and 'Vera' by Jean having once heard the driver's name, made short work of the top few feet. With a bit of luck there should have been some money left

over to help with making the troughs down on the lake bed. But our luck did not hold out. Unfortunately a strata of very hard silica rock appeared at a depth of about one and a half metres down. So hard did this rock prove to be, that with all their weight and power, 'Percy' and 'Vera' just bounced off it and could not shift the flint-like layer. The width of the channel was determined by the width of the scraper at nine feet, so that the bulldozer blade which was a foot wider, had to be removed from the D8 tractor before the start of operations. So that piece of equipment could not be used on the rock. Even though we found the layer of rock to be comparatively thin — not more than 50 centimetres in most places — it was so hard that try as they may, the machinery could make no impression on it.

Fortunately we were on good terms with the manager of the meerschaum mine at Sinya which was just over the border in Tanganyika. It was here that the famous Amboseli meerschaum pipes were made, and the manager, Howard Ashley, had an air compressor which he was persuaded to bring over together with its two jackhammers. The idea was to try and penetrate the layer of rock to weaken it so that 'Vera' could get a grip on it. The idea was good but in practice the area of rock was so large and so hard that it took ages to drill through. After half a dozen holes had been drilled, the chisels had to be taken all the way back to the mine to be resharpened, a round trip of 40 kilometres or so. We drilled the holes close together and though 'Percy' would charge into the channel at full power with 'Vera' set as deep as possible, they would emerge at the other end with barely a wheelbarrow full of rock. After 'PercyVera-ing' for two days, all we had to show for our efforts was a large area of rock scraped clean and covered with holes. The scraper was just unable to crack the rock.

The next suggestion was to use explosives. Howard Ashley had a few sticks of gelignite and a licence to use explosives, so he came over next day and set off one or two sticks to see what happened. The resulting crater provided the answer to the problem. The trouble was that he only had 14 sticks of gelignite and one stick was sufficient for only three square metres. We were going to need at least a couple of cases of 48 sticks each to do the job. While we were blasting away with our few remaining sticks, Syd Downey, who happened to be staying at the Lodge at the time, came over to see what all the noise was about. We explained what we were trying to do and Syd, bless his heart, sized up the situation, went straight back to the Lodge and sent one of his Land Rovers off to Arusha to collect two cases of the explosives for us. The next day the Land Rover returned safely with its precious cargo, all paid for by courtesy of Ker and Downey Safaris Limited.

The blasting then continued but progress was very slow. After a fortnight

Above: Some of the gang of Wakamba labourers working on the channel.
Below: 'Percy-Vera-Littlemore' excavating in 'David's Cut'.

with 'Percy Vera' on the site, the cut was barely half completed and the money was running out fast. We tried not to think of the financial side. As long as we had the machinery working, we prayed that someone else might take care of the payment. Head Office always seemed to be able to find money from somewhere in a crisis and once we had the channel through, nothing else mattered. It became a routine of drilling holes, and planting the gelignite, at which, licence or no licence, I had become a dab hand (though at the cost of some really crashing headaches from handling the explosive).

Days went by and tempers began to fray. There was always a good supply of 'experts' on tap willing to give advice, but it just came back to the same answer: anything quicker required more money. It was at matter of 'Percy Vera Littlemore' each day. I was out there from dawn to dusk and Tabs was there whenever his other commitments allowed. He was getting noticeably edgy and so was I. When the scraper was at a standstill one day because of a broken blade and the air compressor had just stopped for the umpteenth time blocked by dust in the air filter, Tabs came over and suggested I should have a drink with him that evening. During the conversation he was very concerned to hear if everything was all right with my married life as I had been acting so strangely just lately! I explained that there was nothing wrong at all in that direction, it was just that I was not good at hiding my frustration over the channel. He admitted then that he was also fed up with the whole thing, as he was taking a lot of 'stick' from Head Office about the money running out. The short rains had not yet broken and it was hot, dry and dusty and we all knew that if the water did not get through and the £1000 was wasted, not only would it jeopardise our relations with the Masai, but also we would be unlikely to get any help for the project in the future.

By 7th November the money finally ran out. Tabs knew this, and I knew it. So did 'Littlemore', but no one mentioned it and we just continued on. A letter was sent from Head Office saying that the machinery must now be sent back without fail. Somehow that letter got 'mislaid'. Progress with the gelignite was still painfully slow and as we came near to the last few sticks we had to use each one very carefully to make sure it had the maximum effect on the rock. Nevertheless, progress, however slow, was being made and the gallant gang of labourers — most of whom were boys of only 16 years old — dug away at both ends of the cut where it was more shallow and soon we began to see the end in sight.

Since 'losing' the letter from Head Office, there had been frantic messages telling us to send the machinery back at once and that the owner Mr Singh would be on his way down to claim the machine back. But Tabs managed to find enough excuses to hang on to 'Percy' a few more days, just long enough

'Littlemore'. We never found out his real name.

to reach the edge of the lake-bed. We had prevented the water from entering the cut as it would have been churned up into mud and the rock layer made more difficult to crack. So the last few feet of ground at the entrance to the cut, was left to be breached on 'Opening Day'.

On November 24th, 'Percy' finally broke through to the lake. For the whole of the six weeks it had taken to get through, 'Littlemore' had remained with his machinery every single day. He had looked after it with love and care and it had repaid him by giving him no trouble apart from the odd broken blade. Considering the hardness of the rock it was no mean achievement. Although 'Littlemore' had always lived in a town, he was not the slightest bit perturbed at the nightly 'visitations' he had from the animals around his caravan which was parked at the work site, way out in the bush. He would often wake up to find tracks of lion or elephant around in the morning and tell us of being woken in the middle of the night by 'something' scratching itself against the side of the caravan. Though he knew little about them, he seemed to have no fear of wild animals at all and always appeared perfectly at peace with his surroundings.

We had checked and rechecked the levels of the cut to make sure there would be no doubt about the water flowing down the canal. That evening we were to have the thrill of breaching the remaining ground to allow the water to flow down our very expensive cut finally bringing it the full six kilometres from where it had started flowing only two years before. This was the very spot on which we had stood with Chief Lengu in 1955 when trying to persuade the Government to sink a borehole here and then again later with Zakimba

when the water first started to flow and he chose it as the ideal place for troughs in order to keep the cattle out of the swamps. It seemed unbelievable that such a dream was now about to become a reality.

Quite a crowd had gathered to watch the opening ceremony. There was the usual smattering of Masai, including of course Zakimba who never missed a chance of a bit of excitement like this; Howard Ashley from the meerschaum mine, without whom we should never have succeeded in making the cut; Gerald Campbell and a host of Rangers and camp staff all of whom had worked hard on the canal. Also some visitors who had been invited to witness the great event, though I think few of them realised the poignancy of the moment. The Kamba labourers were told to breach the remaining piece of ground and at last the water began to gush down the channel while we all cheered like mad. It was a moment of joy for all of us, and one of great significance to me, personally.

Our joy, however, was short lived. To our growing horror the water slowed up and gradually came to a halt barely halfway down the cut. We were transfixed. We could not believe what was happening in front of our very eyes. The water was simply disappearing. I jumped down into the channel and as I did so, it dawned on me what was happening. It was nothing to with the levels; the water was reaching as far as the area of hard rock and then soaking down into the ground through cracks caused by the explosives. They must have opened up fissures underground through which the water was simply disappearing. It was too much to bear. I found myself desperately trying to block up the cracks in the ground and encourage the water along a bit more. But it was hopeless. Plenty of water was entering the cut, but by the time it was halfway along, all the impetus was gone and nothing, it seemed, would persuade it to go any further. It was too late to start rechecking levels or to try anything else and in any case 'Littlemore' had already packed up ready to make an early start back to Sultan Hamud the next morning. We simply could not keep him any longer.

The visitors we had invited, discreetly took their leave of us and the Masai drifted quietly away without a word. The rest of us left, shattered and very disheartened. After six weeks of desperately hard work, drained physically, and mentally worrying about the cost piling up, we had to face the fact that the project in the end had been a failure. We knew when we kept the machinery on 'illegally', that if the project failed we could end up by having to pay the extra cost ourselves; so that didn't help, either.

That night we had the first of the short rains. A violent storm broke over the camp and I had a very restless night. I dreamt of being engulfed in walls of water, unable to move my feet which were stuck in a horrible gluey mud.

The next morning Tabs and I were due to go and site a new Ranger Post at Lengisim on the northern borders of the Reserve. Having woken up late and therefore been somewhat later than usual for the Rangers' daily drill parade on the football field, I did not see Tabs until the radio call-up at 8am. He arranged to pick me up after breakfast so that we could just call in at the cut, on our way to Lengisim. There had been a fair amount of rain locally and we hoped the storm may have reached as far as the cut when it might have helped the situation a bit. On our way we passed 'Littlemore' with his machines already well on his way back to Sultan Hamud, but we did not stop to talk. He waved to us and looked his usual happy self.

It had turned out to be a glorious sunny day after the night's storms had cleared the air around. There was a freshness that always follows the first rain after a long dry period when withered leaves and blades of grass, brown from the months of cruel dessication, shake off the dust and a tinge of green appears once more like magic in anticipation of the days of regeneration soon to come. This is the time when a special fragrance, peculiar to the plains of Ol Tukai is revealed; only once or twice a year is this sweet smell of life unveiled. Giving to all a promise of good times ahead it seems to emanate from the very earth itself. This spirit of optimism becomes infectious. Even the bedraggled old wildebeest, the epitome of despair and dejection as he plods his way with hunched shoulders and mournful moans over the bare dusty plains at the height of the dry season, even he catches the feeling of fresh new days to come and submits, perhaps a shade self-consciously, to a show of skittishness, kicking his heels in mock aggressiveness and stotting stiff-legged across the now dust-free plains.

As Tabs and I followed down the same old track we knew so well that led to the Simek, we ourselves began to catch this feeling of optimism abroad. As we drove nearer the cut we could see the dry lake-bed with its tantalising mirage but the closer we drove the more we began to realise that it was not the usual mirage we saw every day; *there really was water this time*. Somehow we couldn't believe there had been enough rain during the night as it usually took some days of heavy downpour before producing a covering of water on the lake-bed. The closer we came, the more we realised there *was* water covering a small area and we were too excited even to suggest to each other what it might mean.

We went on in silence until we came near the bank of the cut where we could see some Masai gathered. We got out of the Land Rover and walked (or did we run?) up to the edge to look over and the most wonderful sight imaginable met our eyes. The canal was covered from end to end with water and it was flowing perfectly unhindered down to the lake. It was a memorable

moment for both of us. Tabs, who was never given to much outward signs of emotion turned to shake my hand and slap me on the back.

I was completely and utterly speechless with a mixture of emotion and enormous relief flooding over me. If there could be said to be a precise moment when the future of Amboseli as a wildlife sanctuary was clinched, I believe it was then. The water, as it flowed down the channel of the cut, signalled for me the climax of the partnership we had entered into with Nature all those months before, when She provided us with a rich storehouse of water — the tool for us to do the job of ensuring the security of the wildlife for many years to come at Amboseli. We knew there were question marks on the distant horizon, but for now, between us, we had overcome the seemingly insurmountable problems of too little water and no money to provide more. At this moment we had the landowners, the Masai, in complete accord with us, the National Parks, and a treasure house of water — currency to buy time until a future Kenya Government would appreciate the true value of Amboseli and be prepared to spend some money to keep it for all time. It was indeed a happy moment.

Zakimba was standing beside us beaming all over his wizened old face. He had caught the magic of the moment. "Mungu nilizaidia watu walizaidia wenyewe," he said, simply — "God helps those that help themselves." We all shook hands warmly and congratulated ourselves. The task was now virtually complete. Afterwards, we realised that although we had seen the water disappearing down into the small cracks in the canal, these had filled overnight with the extra water from the rain and it had been sufficient to saturate the ground fissures and allow the water to continue its flow. Given time, even without the overnight rain, this may have happened, but we didn't stop to think of the whys and wherefores, we were so utterly relieved, and we went on our way to Lengisim in the highest of spirits.

Subsequently it was a comparatively easy task to construct the three troughs on the lake shore and thereafter many thousands of cattle used them daily. The excess water was led off to form a small lake of about 100 acres down on the bed itself. Tuffy parted with his D4 once again to allow us to push up a bund to make the lake within a lake. Gerald Campbell called it Lake Conch because of the millions of conch shells brought up while digging the bund, and the lake became host to many more flocks of water birds. Zakimba named the cut 'David's Cut', because he said there would always be some of my sweat and tears flowing down it!

Simon Trevor joined us in 1960 to take over my place when I was to be posted permanently elsewhere. Before Jean and I finally left Amboseli on 22nd June 1960 we had the joy of seeing great flocks of pelicans on Lake

Conch together with masses of other migratory birds which made the stop-over while on their journey south. The greatest thrill of all came when a sizeable flock of Flamingos flew in and stayed for some days. The thought of seeing Flamingos resident on the once dry old Lake Amboseli because water was flowing down to it from a river six kilometres long, albeit with a little help from us, well! . . . to all those that knew the area and had lived through those difficult and almost catastrophic years when the fate of the wildlife was in the balance, to us it *was* nothing short of a miracle.

Flamingos and Pelicans on Lake Conch.

CHAPTER TEN

Reprieve — For How Long?

THAT'S HOW IT REMAINS TODAY in 1985. It was 25 years before I returned to Amboseli and found it with the 'New Water' still flowing down the Simek River in even greater volume than when I left. Most of the people I spoke to, had no idea that the Simek had not always been there and were amazed to learn that less than 30 years beforehand there had only been a small swamp which did not even reach as far as Observation Hill. All the area of swamp and open water downstream from there was once just part of the dry dusty plain.

The water has increased in volume over the years and the causeway has had to be nearly doubled in length and built up further in height. Sadly Warden Taberer did not live to see the true fulfilment of his work. He died in 1967 only five years after leaving his beloved Amboseli. In recognitionof his work and dedication to the wildlife of Amboseli, I asked the present warden Geoffrey Lolkinyiei if the causeway could henceforth be known as Tabs' Causeway.

The area of Zakimba's trough is covered with a mass of papyrus and ithanji grass and over the site of Ole Kiparia's trough, is now a large open lake with hippos residing in the deepest part. Water flows down Davids Dut at many times the rate it used to, and Lake Conch is an unrecogniseable swamp well out into the dry lake bed with herds of wildebeest and zebra grazing on the fringes. Not only is the water now reaching the lake through the cut, but it is also travelling along the original depression that went south providing yet more grazing and water in that area as well. The miracle has taken root and the Ol Tukai area has continued to grow as a wildlife sancutary second to none, giving pleasure to thousands of visitors each year from all over the world.

The old Amboseli National Reserve was replaced in 1971 by the new Amboseli National Park covering a much smaller area coinciding more or less with just the Ol Tukai area. As to the wildlife itself over the same 25 years, though there have been a few encouraging developments, overall, there has been a very noticeable decline in the numbers of most species with the exception of Elephant, Buffalo and possibly Lion. The most significant loss

has been the depletion of the rhinos. When I left in 1960 we knew of about 60 in the Ol Tukai area alone and up to the 1970's Amboseli was still renowned for its Rhinos. Now there are less than a dozen, in the whole of the area covered by the old Amboseli National Reserve.

I saw three females each with a calf at heel and these will clearly not be sufficient numbers to carry on breeding unless others are brought in. There are also less Cheetah, Giraffe, Baboon and Hyaena as well as other smaller mammals such as Bat-Eared Fox. How much of the reduction in the numbers of these animals is due to the enormous decrease in the Yellow Fever trees, others more qualified than I, will be able to assess, but certainly the lack of trees now give the whole of Ol Tukai a completely different aspect to thirty years ago.

There are considerable gains in numbers of the resident Elephant and Buffalo population. Both these species rely heavily on the swamps for food and water and the increased swamp area, which must be at least six times the size it was prior to 1957, has a great deal to do with the prosperity of these species. Amboseli must surely be the best place in the world to see and study wild elephants in comparative safety and at such close quarters. The amount of plains game appears to be greatly reduced and there is certainly a marked reduction in the numbers of Thomson's gazelles. But the birds have benefited greatly from the increase in swamp area and the variety and profusion of them make it indeed an ornithological paradise.

Many people asked for my opinion as to why so many trees have disappeared at Amboseli in the past 20 years or so. The estimates I have heard vary as to the actual amount of decrease and there is no doubt that the major proportion of acacia woodland has now disappeared.

The reason, in my opinion, is quite simply the disproportionate numbers of elephants now residing in the Park as compared with 50 or 100 years ago. Even 30 years ago in the 1950's it was not as easy to see an Elephant in the Ol Tukai area as it is today when herds are guaranteed to be seen only a short drive from any of the Lodges. I am told that 600 elephant now reside in or near the Park.

The reason for this extraordinary increase is, I believe, twofold. Firstly the swamps have given rise to much more food than was available years ago. The increase in water resulted in more vegetation, which in turn encouraged more elephants to come into the area and reside there. If the swamps ever return to the 1957 level, I believe there would be a drastic reduction in the elephant population.

Secondly I believe the increase is traceable directly to human development on the fringes of the Park. Elephants have been protected in the Amboseli

area since the Southern Game Reserve was formed in 1906 and I venture to suggest that as a result of this protection, from then on the numbers gradually increased. The main difference, though, was that the elephant population was not static then. They migrated over the whole range of the southern part of Kenya and into what is now Tanzania. In the 1950s we could see a herd in Ol Tukai one week, and two weeks later we would see the same herd 50 miles away the other side of Namanga Hill.

There were plenty of times when it was difficult to see any elephants at all in the Ol Tukai area and it was not until the 1960s that we began to recognise individual bulls that remained month after month. Now their migration routes have virtually been cut off. There is considerable agricultural development on all the fringes of the Park with the possible exception of the northern boundary. In the Kimana, Loitokitok and Namanga areas there are settlements which now effectively cut the migration routes completely. One of the main migration routes westwards used to be along the Namanga River and round the base of Ol Donyo Orok Hill. It was not uncommon for visitors staying at the Namanga River Hotel to be woken at night by an elephant feeding on the *makuti* roof of their banda. When I enquired from the petrol pump attendant at Namanga in 1985 as to whether I could see some Elephants nearby, he looked at me in blank amazement and told me there had been no Elephant near Namanga for many years. It is likely to be the same story at Loitokitok.

Thus the herds have been 'caught' in the Park where they know they are protected, and as it were 'fenced in' away from angry farmers worried about their crops. There has, for the first time, become a resident population of Elephant in Ol Tukai, something quite new for both the area and the Elephant themselves. This has resulted, in my opinion, in an unbalancing of the whole ecology of the area from the top of the food-chain downwards, directly affecting the numbers of other species as a result — Giraffe, Baboon and Vervet Monkey to name the obvious ones.

There is no mention of Elephant by Joseph Thomson during his brief journey through Njiri, or Ol Tukai a hundred years ago, so it must be reasonable to assume that when we first began to note the Elephant population with any degree of accuracy in the 1950s, the numbers were already on the increase even then. Now there are many more.

Elephants appear to know the areas in which they are protected. Warden David Sheldrick of the Tsavo National Park used to say that he could tell where the boundary of his Park was when he was flying over, by the numbers of Elephant on one side and the absence of any on the other.

The main bulk of their food is grass or similar vegetation. It appears that

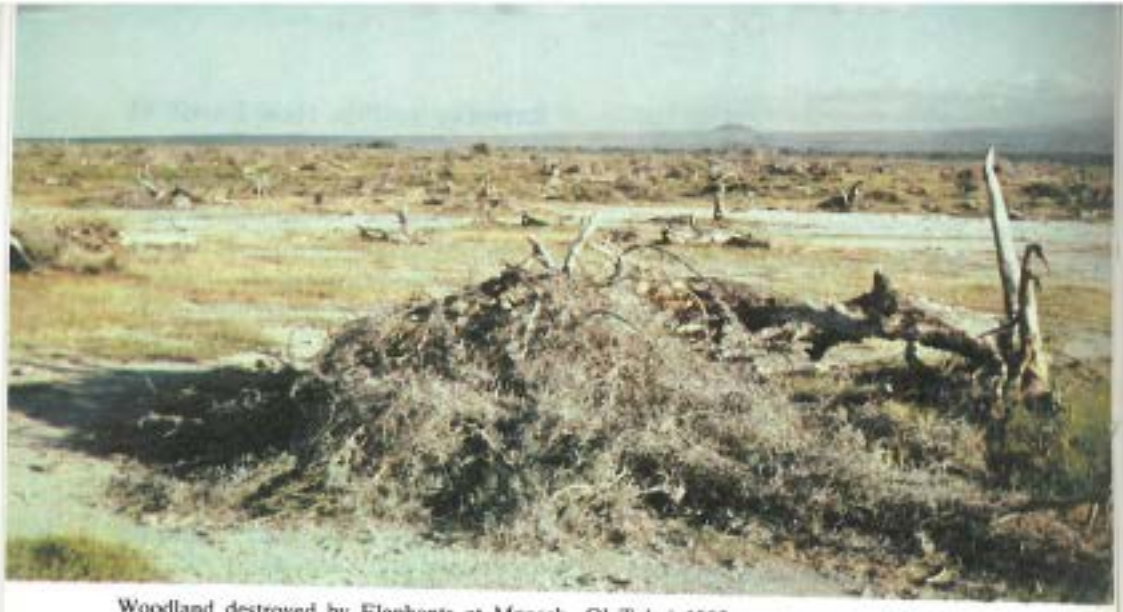
under 'natural' conditions they will only feed from trees occasionally. In the late 1950s it became not uncommon to see bull elephants pushing down trees and feeding from them. It was, however, very unusual to see herds of cows and calves feeding from trees. This was before the herds became resident all the year round. Only a few bulls were residing permanently and these were the ones which were damaging the trees. We were concerned about this new phenomenon even then, and later, when they began indiscriminantly de-barking larger trees which died as a result, we became extremely worried. So when I returned 25 years later to find so much more farming developments on the boundaries of the Park, I was not wholly surprised to see such devastation of the trees. I found Amboseli was not the only place to be affected, either, all the other Parks in which Elephants reside have their share of trees killed by de-barking.

Before, when the Elephant populations roamed freely and unrestricted, I believe they obtained all the necessary minerals, vitamins and trace elements they required from the different terrain and vegetation through which they ranged. Now, I assume, they must try to obtain these necessities from a much reduced range and who knows what there may be in acacia bark which is important to the health or even survival of an Elephant which no longer has free range. Elephants kept in captivity in zoos cannot remain healthy unless given a constant supply of minerals and vitamins.

The proof of this conclusion for me, lies in a piece of woodland in Ol Tukai in the area known as Mpaash. When I left in 1960 there were about ten acres of flourishing acacia woodland, the growth of which we had been recording carefully over the previous years. On my return to the same area 25 years later the trees had all been flattened. One could see that each tree had been systematically stripped of its bark and the smaller branches chewed and eaten. Every single tree was dead and it was clearly elephants that were responsible.

Perhaps when the numbers of Elephants increase in a locality, it is in their nature to reduce the tree cover so as to enable more grass to grow. David Sheldrick certainly felt this to be the case when elephants decimated the tree cover in the Tsavo Park in the 1970s.

For whatever the reason, we cannot escape the conclusion that having created a sanctuary for Elephants which is considerably smaller than their boundless natural range, we must face the fact that the area is not going to remain as we humans would like to see it. In an area as small as the Amboseli National Park we have a choice of Elephants or acacia, but not both — not in any quantity, anyway. A compromise might be the answer, but then it becomes a zoo, managed according to advice given by the scientists.



Woodland destroyed by Elephants at Mpaash. Ol Tukai 1985.

With all the research work being done on elephants at Amboseli by dedicated scientists such as Cynthia Moss, Joyce Poole and others, one would hope that something of value to the Elephants will emerge, but it would be a brave person who would stick their neck out and tell the Warden of Amboseli with any degree of confidence to reduce his numbers of Elephants to so many per square kilometre in order to keep the Park with some degree of acacia woodland attractiveness. Regrettably someone will do it before long and thus the slippery slope to a controlled environment by man will be greased a bit more. Better far to let Nature decide. The history of man's endeavours to improve on Nature is littered with examples of crashing mistakes learnt too late after the harm has been done and the repercussions have become irreversible.

As to the new water and why it appeared in the first place, one can only give thanks and make an informed guess as to the scientific reason why it has continued to flow in ever increasing quantities. Increased rainfall would be an obvious cause, but I have searched all available rainfall records for the northern slopes of Kilimanjaro, which must form the catchment area for the Ol Tukai springs, and they show that there has been no appreciable increase in rainfall since 1933 when records were first started at Loitokitok. The records also show conclusively that there was no sustained increase in the years just prior to 1957 when the Simek first started flowing. It must therefore be safe to assume that rainfall fluctuation is not the answer.

The glaciers on Kibo, Kilimanjaro's main peak, have been receding at a steady rate since Hans Meyer first recorded a decrease seventy five years ago. Subsequent scientific investigations, notably those carried out by Sheffield

University in 1955 and by Stephan Hastenrath from the University of Wisconsin, have found the glaciers to be receding at a fairly constant rate all over eastern Africa. These studies show that as the rate of melting has remained constant over a long period, this also is exceedingly unlikely to have contributed at all to the increase of water from the springs.

There has, however, been a catastrophic de-afforestation of the montane forest on the northern slopes of the mountain and this, I believe, could have contrbuted to the advent of the 'new' water. It is well known that a great deal of water is required for the absorbtion and transpiration of tropical montane forest and its complementary vegetation. An average of 760 millimetres (30 inches) of rain falls on these lower slopes annually, where up to the 1930s the forest remained for all practical purposes in its 'natural' state. In the 1940s some cutting down of the indigenous forest took place, between Loitokitok and Kamwanga in Tanzania, and this was replaced with conifer plantations. In the 1930s the forest was cleared on the north western slopes in Tanzania to make way for European farms at Ol Molog and during the 1950s we recorded seeing some intensive fires sweep through the heathlands above the forest. All this may have had a bearing on the ground water-table, but I believe the main cause has been the drastic reduction of the forest cover along the whole of the northern slopes which started in the 1950s and has increased progressively since that time.

When I returned to the Loitokitok and Rongai area in 1985, I expected to see less forest, but I was not prepared for the scene of devastation with which I was confronted. Square kilometres of the old indigenous forest had now disappeared. In its place were thousands upon thousands of acres of maize and other crops. The remaining forest must be a fraction of the original. The Masai, who are said to own the land but have never farmed it themselves, let it out to anyone by the acre for the sum of Shs 300/- per year. There appears to be no limit as to the amount of tree-felling allowed with the land turned into farmland. Nor is it as though the local people require the extra food. Most of the produce is transported out of the area to towns in Kenya and Tanzania. It is difficult to understand why any Government could allow the destruction of something so irreplaceable and of such great intrinsic value to the Nation as this virgin, tropical rain forest, for the paltry sum of just 20 dollars an acre.

Is it not possible, however, that quite by chance this sad turn of events has been the very cause of the new water appearing at Ol Tukai?

Rainwater that fell on the forested slopes in former years, would have been taken up and absorbed in large measure by the great forest trees and other complementary woodland vegetation. Now, with nothing but shallow-rooted

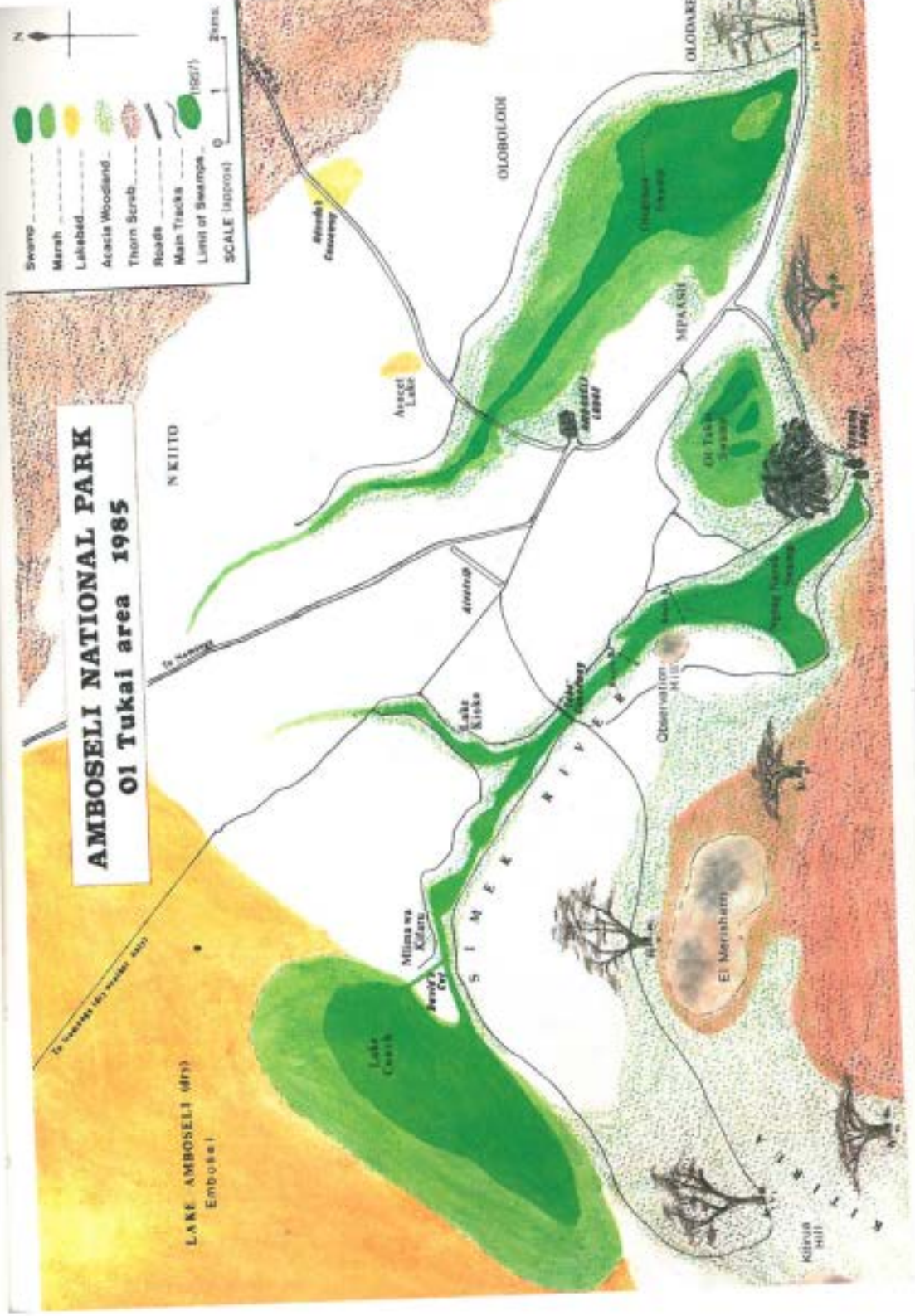
farm crops left to soak it up, the rainwater simply percolates down the very porous volcanic soil to swell the volumes of water appearing at the foot of the mountain as the springs at Ol Tukai.

Whether or not this is the cause of the 'new water', it remains to be seen if the relentless destruction of that montane forest will have a detrimental effect on the annual rainfall of the whole area. If so, it will be the Masai themselves who will be the first to suffer and the Shs 300/- per acre per year will come nowhere near to compensating them for the losses they will suffer.

Nevertheless, whatever phenomenon it was, to Amboseli the 'new water' was indeed miraculous. Looking back to those critical years of 1955 to 1958 and having spoken to some of those responsible to Government at that time, it is quite certain that if the water had not arrived at the time it did, the Government would have been unable to justify keeping an administrative staff there. Without constant protection, the wild animals would have dispersed as they have over the rest of Kenya Masailand, apart from Masai Mara, and there would have been no Amboseli National Park. For this reason, if for no other, Amboseli must always remain as something very special in the annals of the world's wildlife sanctuaries; those who visit it and those who gain employment from it can feel a little privileged to witness its boundless beauty and enjoy its remaining wildlife.

Whether it can continue as such a comparatively small sanctuary, with all the pressures from human development on its borders and from a Government trying to squeeze as much out of the tourist potential as it can, is doubtful in the long run. The Parks staff will have to work with Nature, at the same time as keeping the confidence of the Masai. The Loitaiok did not find it easy to come to terms with the new Independent Government's policy towards Amboseli and there were grave problems as a result. These problems are now in the past and hopefully the younger generation of Masai will gradually face the fact, as all races have to from time to time, that sacrifices have to be made in order to achieve security for the future and a degree of prosperity for their children.

Nature has provided Kenya with unique and wonderful wildlife refuges. It is now up to those in authority to make sure they hold these areas as bastions against the tide of modern human development, so that all peoples of the world, and particularly the local peoples who secured those areas until the Europeans came, have something of value to hand on to those that come after.



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The book would not have become a reality had it not been for the encouragement of my wife Jean. She was a constant source of support to me and helped a great deal in the preparation of the book. Her sharp eye and red pencil worked wonders with my prose.

No book of this nature would be worthy of the Kenya it endeavours to describe without the seal of approval by someone who knows the country as well as Mervyn Cowie does. I am therefore deeply grateful to him for agreeing to write the foreword to the book. I am also indirectly indebted to him for the Director's Annual Reports of the Royal National Parks of Kenya, 1946 to 1960, to which I have referred in some measure.

I also acknowledge my thanks to Pat Gethin for a short history of his father and the Namanga River Hotel; the Royal Geographical Society who kindly put their map and book libraries at my disposal for some early records; the Keeper of the Royal Archives for finally laying to rest the story of Queen Victoria and the Kenya Tanzania border; the Kenya Meteorological Department for supplying me with rainfall records of the Loitokitok area; and Fennis Taberer for lending me some interesting black and white photographs and helping to fill in some gaps about her father's life.

Lastly, I am indebted to Ken Ward, himself a fanatical Kenyaphile and a remarkable photographer. He not only provided me with several superb photographs but also gave inspiration and encouragement when it was most needed.

Picture Credits

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With the exception of those listed above
all the photographs and the maps are my own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Lovatt Smith grew up in England and went to Kenya in 1950 at the age of 20. He served as a Warden with the Royal National Parks of Kenya for many years, the greater part of his time being spent at Amboseli when he was not involved in the Mau Mau conflict. Always a true conservationist, his love of Nature in its purest sense has continued to grow throughout his later life.

He is now one of the few people living who is able to record an eye-witness account of the astonishing events that took place at Amboseli in the 1950s which resulted in the formation of the area as a National Park.

AMBOSELI — NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE is a factual account of that fascinating story and the early history of the area. It should not be missed by anyone who has experienced the wonders of Amboseli or intends to visit that part of Kenya.

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