

THE JOURNEY ACROSS KENYA AND TANGANYIKA IN 1965

Part 1 of 2: Kenya

We started planning for our first grand safari in Kenya at the end of May, 1965. We compiled an itinerary that covered days, approximate driving hours en route, a brief route description with mileage, prospective lodges or hotels for overnight stays, and the potential program. The safari was scheduled for August 20 to September 10, so letters had to be sent to various lodges and hotels to arrange the bookings. Vesna helped set our daily routes and mileage. We divided the whole safari into nine sections so that the daily travel should not exceed about 300 miles (500km). We were relatively inexperienced in the planning of a three-week safari, yet all of us felt happy about such an undertaking.

At that time safari tourism did not exist in the form and the quality it developed in the following 40 years. We collected data and prospectuses from all the existing national parks and/or game reserves, as well as about lodges or camps. We did not have any experience with traveling across the vastness of Kenya on roads with varying conditions, as well as the sometimes unpredictable weather changes in certain regions.



View on the Bamburi Beach and the reef from the verandah of our house.

We received all confirmations by mid June, and after that I sent cheques for the advance payment to the proper addresses. In mid-July we had received all the receipts from various camps and/or lodges, as well as permission for passages and/or entrees to various game reserves and national parks. The administrative part was completed in time and the route fixed that we worked out based on the road map of East Africa. In retrospect, I believe that we were all too enthusiastic but rather naive about the difficulties and problems that we actually encountered.

We always had in our 1961 VW auto two gallon plastic containers, one for gas and the other for drinking water. In addition to these there were some oil tins for lubrication and brakes, a large gear tool box, a short shovel, several jute sacks of about 10m length (to put under wheels to prevent slipping in wet soil), extra internal tires and an extra complete reserve wheel, a chain for pulling, which we replaced with a strong 10m-long rope later, a lot of bits and pieces as replacement parts for the engine, and last but not least, a thick wooden board to be put under the jack or to support the car lifting device. There was a tent canvas piece with some long pieces of rope to cover the baggage which we might have to place on the car roof as the VW storage space was relatively small.

We carried a bag containing bed linen and cushion covers, as well as three light blankets because in a few lodges, bedding was not provided. Ljiljana prepared a long list of items we had to take like pullovers, windbreakers, long trousers, as well as shirts and underwear, all easy to wash. Of course we had a cooler box and a few aluminum boxes for food like crackers, sugar and sweets, dry cakes, etc. Ljiljana packed everything nicely in one large suitcase and one large travel bag, with several smaller packages for toiletries and medicines. The list was long, but after all we were able to place everything in the car storage. We put a few of the largest pieces on the roof rack, because Ngoa, our gardener, was traveling with us to his place near Maraca when we were on the way to Nairobi.

We were supposed to travel with the works manager's secretary, Christa Sachse, and her brother almost the whole route. Christa had a 1958 VW, older than our 1961 model, but both cars had quite high mileage. We traveled 2,423 miles in 20 days without any major breakdowns. However, there were a few dramatic situations along the way.

We intended to start on Friday, August 20, at 8:30, but I had been delayed in the factory garage as a number of items were not yet delivered. Fortunately, I checked the battery liquid level and had some arguments with the garage superintendent, who swore that everything had been checked most thoroughly. Finally we started at 10:10 and passed through Mombasa, carrying on to Mariakani some 50km away, where Ngoa got out of the car. Now we could place the luggage pieces on the roof rack into the car. Just then I could not remember seeing the travelers' checks. I asked Ljiljana where she had put them. To her great dismay, in her hurry she had forgotten to collect them from our secret hiding place at home.

There was nothing else we could do but drive back to Bamburi to get the checks. We managed to drive about 50km through the city, over the pontoon bridge at Nyali, and to our house in only 35 minutes. Our dog Knocker greeted us enthusiastically, but the two servants at home were astounded to see us back so soon. Ljiljana ran up to her room to get the travelers' checks from the secret cache, and before we left, she gave a bone to the dog for appeasement. We started again at 11:40 on our trip to Nairobi some 500km away, three hours later than we originally planned.



Ljiljana waved to the President Jomo Kenyatta passing by near Mtito Andei

We rode on the tarmac road at the maximum permitted speed of 60ml/h without stopping until we got to the petrol station at Voi. I was worrying about the late start that might get us to Nairobi in darkness, so we did not stop for lunch at Voi. Instead, Ljiljana offered sandwiches and soft drinks, which we devoured while filling the tank full of petrol. As the rule, one should fill the tank when it becomes say, half empty, for safe driving on safaris. After Voi there were

no tarmac roads; instead they changed to a murram (compacted earth) surface until close to the airport junction some 60km before Nairobi. Driving on a well-maintained murram-surfaced road is not bad as long as a grader had done the job well and the weather was dry. The potholes caused by heavy trucks are the worse part of driving on murram roads as everyone in a car is shaken up. When the potholes stop, one still feels the vibrations inside the body for some time - until the next section of road that is not yet graded.

We made good speed for the next 100km up to Mtito Andei, where the police stopped all the traffic. We had to wait some 45 minutes until the President's cavalcade passed on its way to Mombasa. We had already been on the road for 17 hours. The road surface worsened and there were many curves and steeper sections along the Chyului Hills, so I had to reduce speed to 50km/h. Now I was sure that we would not get to Nairobi before dark.

After a short stop at Sultan Hamud, we got on a tarmac road again. It was getting dark when we were passing by the Athi River, where we saw about two dozen giraffe crossing the road from the nearby Nairobi National Park. We reached Nairobi City by 18:15 when darkness had set in already. The dense traffic and poor lighting made for poor driving, and I missed the access to the Fairview Hotel on the first try. All the way I wondered why the car lights were so dim and why some oncoming drivers had flashed at me often.

My second attempt to find the Fairview was successful as I crept along the darkened streets. Once there, I had to find out why the car's lights were so dim. The reason for this mishap was a rather stupid one: loose screws that held the reflectors fixed in their sockets.

After we had settled in a nice room and taken warm baths, life became agreeable again, particularly after dinner. In fact, we were happy about the first safari section of 600km, despite a muddle at the beginning. We had some loss of time looking for a lost wheel cap and helping another driver with a flat tire to pump it up with our foot-pump, and finally the misfortune due to the late arrival in Nairobi. On Saturday we had an appointment in Nairobi with an architect to show us important sights.



We passed by the new mosque during our sightseeing tour of Nairobi.

Saturday morning was overcast and gloomy, not the best weather for sightseeing. We had an appointment with Mrs. Dorothy Hughes, Nairobi's well-known architect and the wife of the BPCC chairman, but we arrived too early due to a misunderstanding. My ladies decided to go window shopping but soon returned to the coffee bar, shivering in the cool climate of the upcountry. Ljiljana put on stockings she had just bought for her and Vesna. I went to the car and brought pullovers to make them feel happier. However, I had to pay my first and only parking fine in Nairobi as my parking time exceeded one hour. Warm coffees and small talk

with Dorothy made us all feel better so we started our daily program in a more agreeable mood.

Dorothy and I left the two ladies window shopping while we went on to view a new sewage system. She showed me her finished project of a new cathedral, using concrete and glass of varying colors for the facades. In the interior she had used Italian marble on the floors and walls. Later we toured the construction site of the new Parliament, and walked around the University College of Nairobi, with its most prominent building, Mahatma Gandhi's Library.

On the way back we picked up Ljiljana and Vesna to meet the Hughes family at their home. I left my car at the hotel as it was quite noisy after the loss of the muffler. On the way to the Hughes' house, Dorothy showed us the home of Roger Whittaker, the well-known singer, enclosed in a nice garden.

Dorothy's house was set out in a nice plot of some 10 acres, surrounded by a beautiful garden, on the outskirts of Nairobi. The gathering was pleasant, chatting with all Dorothy's family members, and accompanied by various tidbits and drinks.

Time passed too quickly so we had left our hosts' residence well after 4:00 o'clock. It was too late to see the movie "My Fair Lady", so we drove to a nearby arboretum. In this large and interesting park grew some 1,200 tree species, it said in the brochure. Many of the trees were conifers brought by numerous officers on leave to Kenya from all over the former British Empire.

We went back to the town, where we had a light meal before we went to the hotel, where our friends had just arrived. We were supposed to travel with Christa Sachse, the works manager's secretary, and her brother Gerhard, on a visit to Kenya. They intended to camp in a tent at some of the game parks they would visit.

We all left Nairobi on Sunday morning and set out on the north-bound main road. We were in front and made good speed on the tarmac road for some time before we noticed that our companions' elderly VW was not following us. I turned back until we found them stuck at the road side with their luggage on the ground because of a damaged roof rack. I reorganized their packing by putting their clumsy tenting equipment into their car. The rack was provisionally repaired and we agreed that we would carry on at our own speed and not wait for them to catch up with us.

I kept on driving fast on a good tarmac road through the township of Thika and further on to Fort Hall in Thika County. The countryside changed significantly as we passed through the hilly country on which slopes of rich soil grew corn and bananas, as well as large plantations of coffee beans and tea. Shortly after Fort Hall, we turned eastwards towards Embu at a split in the road and we could see Mount Kenya's broken spiky crater on our left side.

After Embu's well-developed area, we drove towards Meru, and had to slow down due to many stones strewn haphazardly on the road. We passed several road barriers with soldiers, a warning to us that we had entered the region where Somali Shifita rebels marauded. We needed permission to enter the Meru County and later, Isiolo County. A large sign reading "Equator" stood a few miles before Meru, so we had to stop and take pictures of us standing with our feet in the north and south hemispheres at the same time. Nothing happened!



The three Springers stand in the circular sign of “EQUATOR” near Meru.

Later we entered a well-kept township of Meru. There were several good-looking shops, mostly held by Indians, and an interesting parochial church. However, we could not stay there for long. After a brief respite, we had to go on because we had another 120km of hard driving before reaching our destination of the Leopard Rock Lodge that day.

At Meru, we turned eastwards on an ascending murram by-road leading into the Meru Game Reserve, where we would stay for two nights. After some hard driving, we reached the apex of the road at about 2.400m, from where we had an excellent view over the Northern Frontier Plains, with several extinct volcanoes. On the descent I was very careful, and we got to Kangeta at almost crawling speed. We saw a signboard for our destination. From there on we crept onwards on a beaten-track, mostly overgrown, and sometimes branching. Luckily, all tracks ran in the same direction so we just kept moving slowly and watching to avoid boulders or ruts or potholes. We passed a few villages and people dressed in European style greeted us, or just gestured. Ljiljana asked me to stop and ask some boys in Swahili if we were on the right way. The answer came in proper English that the direction was all right, and they bade us welcome. Obviously the Coastal Swahili was not understood there in the Upcountry.



The entrance post to the Meru Game Reserve guarded by three soldiers and a ranger to whom we paid the entrance fees.

After some strenuously slow driving along a track almost choked with vegetation, and several hard knocks on the car bottom by rocks, we got to a board marking the reserve border. Here the murrum road seemed to be better looked after, so soon we came to the entrance post, where we had to show our visitors' permit. We paid entrance fees for ourselves and for the car. Happily, we could drive at the permitted speed of 30km/h, paying less attention to the road than to the appearing animals. There were plenty of antelope (Thompson, Grant, and impala) as well as Grevy's zebras, with their round earlobes, large bodies, and attractive markings. At last we arrived to the Leopard Lodge, where the chief warden was waiting for us. He showed us to our cabin just as the sun set. We had driven almost 400km in seven hours, not counting stops.



The banda we occupied in Meru Game Reserve with Ljiljana sitting on the verandah.

The banda was an open cabin built of concrete blocks covered with a thatched roof. The roof with thatched palm leaves had a hardboard ceiling underneath. There were three beds with blank mattresses, and Ljiljana got out the bedding we had brought with us and started preparing them for the night. Next to this single room was the simple bathroom equipped with of a bathtub, a washbasin, and WC. There was hot water waiting heated in an oil drum on an open fire outside.

The camp had a small shop where we could get soft drinks and beer, as well as condensed milk and a few other similar items. We had with us a cold-box with enough food (cheeses and butter, meat sausages etc.) for about three days. We settled in our new surroundings and had our first dinner in the wildness. We sat outside our banda and enjoyed the meal as the twilight faded to dark.

A stream flowed some 20m from our quarters. On the opposite side of it grazed elephants and buffalos, while baboons moved in the trees barking loudly. Here and there along the other bank, animals approached carefully to drink from the stream.

We had ascended the nearby Leopard Rock to have a look at the surrounding the first thing on our arrival. We met there several heavily-armed soldiers, who explained the reason for their presence. The rock was a perfect outlook over the plains to the north, from where the Shifta rebels were infiltrating. Since then we felt more secure in the Leopard Rock Lodge, where we would spent two nights.

Ljiljana noticed some shimmering on the opposite bank, so we slowly approached that place. By the light of a flashlight we saw a buffalo grazing some 10m away. I wanted to take a picture, but the camera flash did not work and the buffalo faded away from the light. After a

while we tried again, walking slowly along the bank, and soon there were more buffalo grazing behind bushes at a distance of about 20m. It was not possible to take pictures so we returned to the banda and listened to the radio news before we went to bed at 9:00 o'clock.



The view to the Leopard Rock with the military post on top of the rock. Below the rock right is the shop as a white building and the power station at left.



The military post occupied by several soldiers who had a radio contact with the Command station all day.

The night was sticky and dry, reminding us of the Sudan, so we put "Nivea" cream on our lips and nostrils. Later it cooled down significantly so we slept well under mosquito nets.

We had ordered hot water and to be waked up at 5:45 the next morning as we wanted to watch the animals coming to drink at the stream. An askari (watchman) brought hot water and Ljiljana, still drowsy, made strong coffee with plenty of sugar, and filled the thermos. Within minutes we were driving out of the camp, and after some hundred meters found a large herd of elephants grazing. The group, led by a large female elephant, contained animals of different ages from small to large, some of which were young males. The elderly bulls do not stay with the herd and live as loners. It was a spectacular event, viewing the sunrise in the background over an elephant herd some 50m away.

We proceeded on an earthen track leading to the Kenmare Lodge, from where we did not get any answer as it was closed. It was sited on a bank of the early Tana River, and there we found plenty of baboons and many birds nesting. We went on a branching trail with many logs lying across it, driving through high grass, not knowing what lay in front of us. Finally we came to a brook and large boulders that made any further progress impossible. Turning the car on unseen ground was a task in itself, as well as driving around the logs. We did not see any animals that way until a young giraffe stood still in the middle of the road, allowing some photo shots before we entered the campground again. It was 9:30 and high time for breakfast, as well as a rest for the exhausted driver - who did not dare to have a look underneath the car to see how badly it was scratched and dented.

Later we got chairs out and books to read in the shadow of tall trees near the hut. This was an exceptional experience, reading surrounded by the wilderness and its natural sounds to which we were not accustomed. Being tired, we would close our eyes to listen to sounds from strange sources, and try to guess what had produced them. Chirping, squeaking, clatters and cracking, flow of water, and some far-off calls all made us drowsy, still hearing subconsciously what happened around us. It was an utterly strange feeling when we opened our eyes, wondering where we were. The "Bacillus Africanus" was truly getting possession of us. Ljiljana managed to serve a warm meal from tins and items we brought with us and cold drinks from the small shop. We took a short rest inside the hut, where it was cooler than outside in the hot sun.



Zvonko reads in a tree shade near a close by flowing brook.



The interior of our banda at Meru with our beddings on. Mosquito nets and blankets were provided by the camp.

In the afternoon we wanted to start another outing. The chief ranger, a tall blonde Swede, suggested a different route that we could follow up from a junction. Obviously, I made a wrong turn, passing very slowly over a strange-looking bridge. I inspected it after the crossing and swore not to go over it a second time. There was a steel mesh laid over several beams, covered with layers of large and small stones to form a roadway. I wondered what would happen if a wheel dropped into the gap between two adjacent beams.

We drove onward, avoiding different obstacles like large boulders and branches, but were rewarded by seeing several herds or groups of gazelles and zebras, and many more elephants at close distances. After some time we came to a dried-out swamp instead of the gate we were expecting, so we had to turn back. It was obvious that I had taken the wrong turn and there was nothing else but to return over that bridge.

As I was turning the car, Ljiljana warned me about a great herd of buffalo coming our way. Most surprisingly, the animals bypassed us about 30m away because the wind was blowing our way so they did not smell us. Some large bulls lifted their mighty heads to look at us, and then went on their way. We were very excited and Vesna counted the animals (she stopped at 250!) while the two of us took many pictures.

The setting sun warned us to get back fast, even if we had to pass over that bridge, so we were back in camp in good time for Ljiljana's dinner. I bought two large bottles of Tusker beer and gulped them down, being dehydrated and exhausted by the events of that afternoon. Later we sat in front of the hut, looking into the darkness and listening to the voices and sounds from unknown and invisible sources. After a shower, we sank into a deep sleep the moment we lay down.

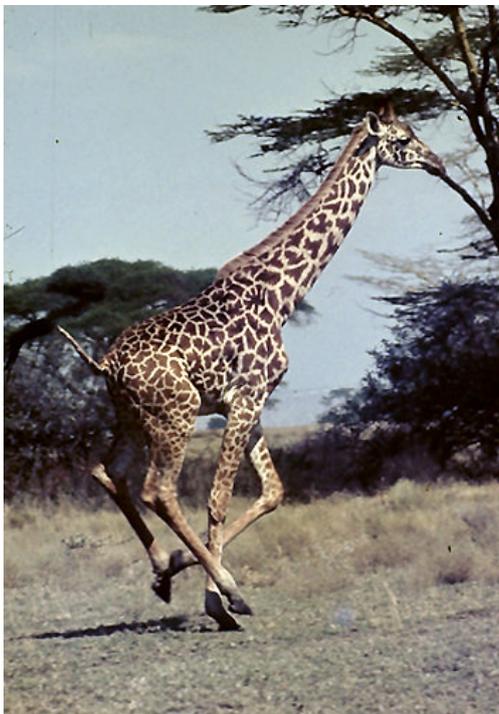
Tuesday morning we got up at 6:30 and after breakfast, we started packing bits and pieces, including the bedding, which we might not need later after all. We left the lodge after 8:00, driving on the same road as the day before, but I took the correct turn this time and soon we were at the gate house and out of the reserve. We ascended the high road and had another good look at the northern frontiers. In the plains below we could see fires ravaging through dry grass, some of which we had passed at a close distance. It was a new experience for us as the birds excitedly hovered over burned areas, somersaulting here and there to get "fried" tidbits. Larger animals and birds could easily move away from the bush fire front, but there very many others that could not escape their destiny in the inferno.

After a brief stop for gas, we drove on the northern tarmac road to Isiolo. We waited for a while there for our companions, but they had not been seen at the fuel station, so we left, aiming to reach Samburu Game Lodge by noon. The first 65km of the road were set out nicely through woods of cedar trees, which made for pleasant driving. After Isiolo, we had to pass over another high point on the road at some +2.700m, from where we came down into a completely different landscape of grass and underbrush, low thorny acacias, and scrubs.

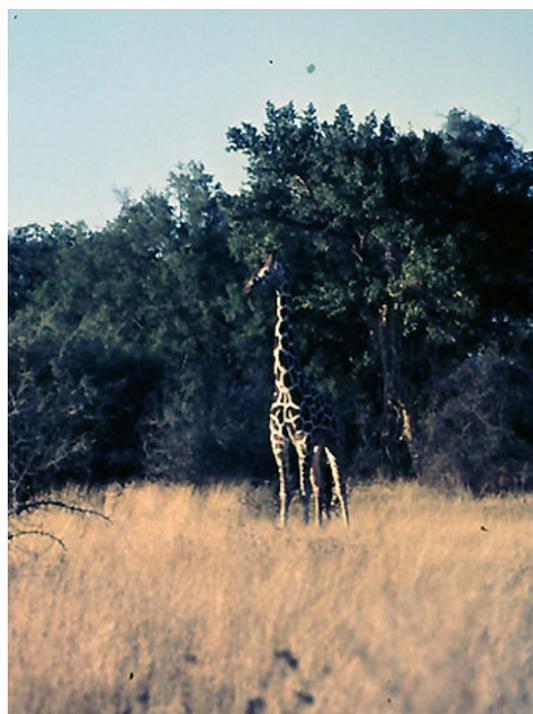


The great of herd buffalo that came our way that passed by undisturbed by our presence.

We entered Kenya's desert regions and after Archer's Post, went over a bridge on the Uaso Nyiro River. There was actually a military outpost instead of the entrance to the reserve. We had to produce our entry permits and asked soldiers whether our friends had passed already. As their names were not found in the register, we left their permits with the sentry and continued our drive. However, the road condition worsened considerably after we left the army post.



A Steppe giraffe running having having one leg on the floor only.



A Reticulated giraffe found in Marsabit National Reserve near Samburu Lodge.

There were some 30km left to the lodge but certain stretches of a few kilometers were in an utterly derisory condition. Sometimes I crawled at less than 20km/h despite a bone-dry surface, avoiding obstacles like large rocks or cracks or potholes on that "road" 10 to 15cm

wide. Sometimes a horrible screech or bump came from underneath the car floor; tearing at my heart and making me worry for the low-bodied Beetle.

After a sharp turn we saw a hut and a ramp, which we approached and stopped. Written on a board was "Marsabit National Reserve", and we were met by three well-dressed soldiers and a game warden. We produced our permits and the reservation, and the warden collected the entry fees. We got instruction to follow a road marked M1, so we moved into the Isiolo Game Reserve, a vast area that had been enlarged recently.

We were in good time to reach the lodge some 20km away, but we needed a good 45 minutes to get there. We knew about the abundance of animals in this reserve, and soon we came across a large number of Grévy's zebras, impalas, gerenuks, Thomson's and Grant's gazelles - all grazing in large herds and not scared by our approach. We saw a few herds of Eland antelopes and many Hearty beasts (gnus), as well as one rhino, but it was far away.

In Meru Reserve we came across 14 of the 29 recorded species, but in the Isiolo Reserve we had more luck. We came across some 17 different species out of a known 31, but at closer range and in much greater numbers. The track became more dusty and difficult, so my full attention was required, particularly when crossing several gullies. Small weirs kept a constant water depth of less than 15cm, but the crossing them was still tricky every time.

We scared vultures on a carcass a number of times, and scared off the smallest antelopes Dick-Dick too. The roadway worsened, becoming really dusty, an ideal region for Oryx antelopes, with their long razor-like thin horns. Then we arrived at a junction in a dust cloud outside and inside the car. At last I noticed a green line not so far away that marked the banks of Uaso Nyiro River, where the lodge should be.



The Grévy's zebras differ from the Steppe ones by their markings having narrower stripes and the ear lobes are round.

I turned to the right to reach the river but once there, I could not get over it. I drove down river for a while on a fairly good track, and then turned upriver as the time was passing, and there was no sign of a bridge. We passed a herd of elephants grouped in the shade of a tree cluster, while we whirled up clouds of dust (again inside the car) and rushed through drifts filled with sand. Finally we came to a board: "Dry weather road only - four-wheel vehicles." Well, we knew it now, having come that way! Despite this erratic ride we got to the M1 road just there and moved on in the direction of the green line, which was now close.

Soon we came to a concrete bridge built over the Uaso Nyiro River, and on the right was the Samburu Lodge, less than 100 meters away. Just on time, we entered the lodge with enough time for a well-deserved lunch - it was 13:30. A pleasant receptionist showed us to the hut we had booked for two nights. It was a cabin of 16x5m with a verandah 4m wide that opened to the river bank a few meters away. The walls were constructed of cedar logs and screens; the ceiling and floor were made of cedar boards, and the roof had a cover of palm leaf "slates". The interior was luxurious compared to the Meru Lodge. The spacious bathroom had a shower and a bathtub, a wide washbasin, and a chest with drawers, and a WC. The room 8x5m had two spacious beds and a couch (mosquito nets available); there was a wardrobe and armchairs, electric lights, etc. We had not expected such comfortable accommodation at this place. Later we found out that the lodge and its surroundings had been privately owned for about two years. The lodge region stretched some 8km up and down the river. The lodge itself was enclosed by a wooden stockade of sharp-pointed stakes.



This is a Steppe zebra with a calf. Note the wider stripes and the pointed ear lobes.

After a brief inspection, Vesna started feeding Velvet monkeys and ground squirrels that were watching us from the verandah handrail, and even on the floor. Ljiljana chose clothes to be washed and placed them in the bathtub, so I went to inspect the reason for the dust getting into the car. To my dismay, I found two holes on the left side in the floor plate under the rear bench. At first I thought they were made by the acid corrosion when the battery overturned some time ago. However, more inspection from underneath showed that a rectangular rod had been ripped off, most likely by a strike on a rock or something similar. It was not too important as this rod was used to insert the lifting device safely when a tire had to be changed.



The entrance to the Samburu Lodge at the north bank of the Uaso Nyiro River.

Everybody took a quick shower and changed clothes to go for lunch. The eating place was pleasant, with an open view of the river and the savannah in the background. After lunch we relaxed for half an hour and then moved to the swimming pool at the south corner of the enclosed area. It was a real pleasure to cool off in the pool of clear water until it was time to go out watching for animals.



Vesna feeds monkeys in front of our house inside of the Samburu Lodge.

The park was crisscrossed by many tracks running between bushes, tree groves, and grassy plains in the hilly country stretching along the river. Just outside the stockade we came across a lioness resting in the shade; she was covered with dozens of ticks. We came so close to the animal that Ljiljana could almost have reached out and picked up the ticks. I could not remember that we ever came so close to a lioness. She was not bothered by our closeness and taking pictures, but we did not dare to get out of the car because of the ticks. After a while we continued upstream and found a number of reticulated giraffes. They were larger than the savannah ones that we had seen before. Their markings were larger and they had much darker brown coloring than their relatives on the plains.

After 8km we turned at the northern park border and returned to the lodge just when our friends Christa and Gerhard arrived, almost five hours later than us. While we went to the swimming pool our friends got to their lodging. We met them at the dinner table again and heard to their story about the trip from Meru. They had engine and tire problems that accounted for their late arrival.



The picture at left shows our room in Samburu Lodge. At right is the broad verandah next to the restaurant and open towards the Uaso Nyiro River that left bank is about 15m far only.

The menu was in French. The dinner was excellent, including the main course of venison. Ljiljana and Vesna enjoyed the venison, perhaps because they did not understand the French names for the meat that was from local wild animals.

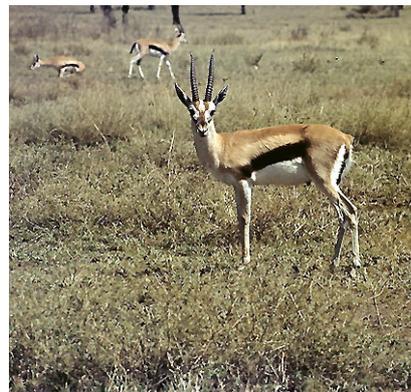
We went to bed and slept well under the mosquito nets and the veil of night, lulled by voices of crickets, monkeys, and many undefined sources. Animals were coming to the river to drink. The river was about 60m wide but the water level was low so we did not see either hippos or crocodiles despite the closeness of 15m to the lodge.

We got up for early morning tea and were out by 6:00. First we drove up the river but saw no animals except a group of elephants. Back at the lodge, we found our friends getting ready for departure as they had decided to stop at Nanyuki. Their front axle needed some repair and two tires had to be patched up too. We said goodbye and agreed to get together later. From now on it was simpler to plan our onward journey although it was for a short period only. After they left we searched the opposite side of the lodge, but that proved to be in vain too: there were no animals except a few gazelles and guinea-fowls.

We were back to the lodge for breakfast at 9:00, after which Ljiljana cleaned the car inside and out while I sealed the two holes in the steel floor plate. After that was done, it was time for relaxation at the swimming pool, where we met a couple and an American lady, with whom we had a pleasant conversation. The man was a former “white hunter” and his wife represented the owners' consortium, which ran first-class hotels like the Kenya Safari Club and the Treetops. The couple drove a Rover and looked after their American guest, who had been on safari for three weeks.

After a perfect lunch and a short rest, we went out for another search, going upriver again. We found the lioness at another spot but nothing else, so we turned off the river path and followed a bush track in the hilly country. Soon we came up to the top of the ridge some 500m above the river, from where we had a marvelous view of the plains. We followed a herd of Oryx antelopes but the shy animals disappeared in the thick bush.

The bush tracks were loops so one would always return to the starting point. I chose one ascending track to the unknown until it started descending, most probably in the direction of the lodge. We came across two VW cars whose drivers were wondering which way to go. I suggested that I would continue downward, and if I did not return, they could follow me.



The gerenuk gazelles at left and a buck of Thompson gazelle at right in the hills of Isiolo Reserve.

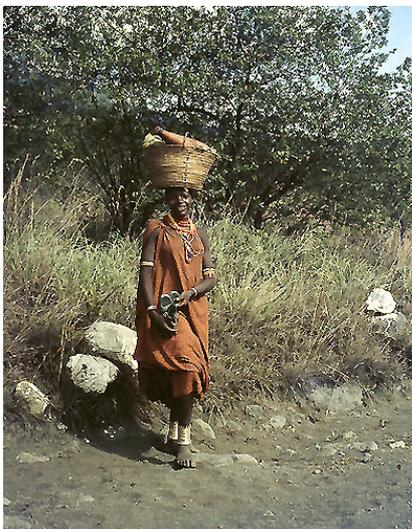
I proceeded at a slow speed of about 20km/h, watching for rocks or other obstacles for low-slung VW cars. Suddenly we came across many groups of animals, mostly gazelles, waterbucks, and reticulated giraffes. I stopped often to take pictures up close as the animals were

not disturbed by our presence at all. These were probably the best ones we ever made of these animals.

We came down just next to the lodge and went on down river, but once again in vain as before. On the way back we came across six elephants standing in the middle of our way some 50m from the swimming pool. We had to wait some moments until the group made the passage free and to rush in the lodge to warn visitors about unexpected guests. A few minutes later the elephants were gone.

It was soon dinner time and we were quite hungry. We were so tired after this exciting day that we were in our beds at 8:30. We were too tired to start with the packing now - we would do it tomorrow!

We got up at our leisure on Friday, August 27, to start the second week of the safari by driving from the north provinces of Kenya to the west. We crossed the bridge and followed the right bank of the Uaso Nyiro to Archer's Post on a dry earthen road with lots of gravel that banged on the floor plate like machinegun fire. At 30km/h we drove through an empty countryside, wondering where the animals had disappeared.



A Masai woman waiting at the road leading towards the open air market near Isiolo township.

At Archer's Post we saw Samburu Masais dressed in their native red clothing. We wanted to take pictures of the women with kids, but they charged for each picture, so we forgot it. We went on to Isiolo and proceeded without stopping at the road forking to Naniyuki. The tarmac road climbed after Ngare Ndare, with splendid views mainly towards Mt. Kenya, enveloped in clouds most of the time. Passing through a cedar tree forest, we went through some passes that brought us to green valleys, some of which were fenced as for the pastures.

Short of Naniyuki we came to the access road to William Holden's Kenya Safari Club so we risked 15km to arrive to an iron gate and a board stating: "Members only!" and "Daily membership fees £1 p.p." Forget it!

Back at Naniyuki, we got gas and were given the message that our friends had repaired their car and had driven off towards Thomson's Falls and Gilgil on their way to Naivasha. We had a different idea: to cross through the Aberdere Range to get to the same place. However, we did not know then that the road through Aberdere's was closed. Naniyuki made a good impression with clean, wide streets, many shops, and nice houses with nicely-kept gardens, and its countryside with many well-cultivated fields.

Soon after the town we crossed the Equator again to continue in the Southern Hemisphere on a macadam road towards Nyeri at a good speed of up to 80km/h. We reached Nyeri after a short but steep climb. The nearby countryside was well known for the cultivation of coffee and tea, and there were many plantations of bananas etc. Nyeri was a modern town that was started after World War II with wide streets and good public buildings and houses set in beautiful gardens.



Ljiljana and Vesna point to the Abardare National Park board informing about the possible access for the four-wheel drive vehicles only.

After lunch we went to the police station to enquire about the road conditions in the Aberdere Range. An officer explained that the passage was not possible even with a Land Rover, due to the recent heavy rains. Seeing our VW Beetle, he said: "Just forget it, please!" So there was no other way but to proceed to Fort Hall and then to Nairobi; that was about a 200-km long drive on a tarmac road. We had passed through it before, but it was still pleasant to traverse this hilly country with rich soil and cultivated meadows.

In about two hours we got into Nairobi centre during the rush hour, which made the journey rather strenuous. Passing through the town centre, we got on the main road that leads westwards towards Uganda. From there on, the ride was relaxing as we passed through the western suburbs. On the hillsides were private houses sited in gardens with mostly reddish bougainvilleas flashing like stars in lush green surroundings. Outside the city we entered the Kikuyu Land, with cultivated fields with vegetable and orchards on the hillsides. Heavy clouds gathered in the west, making me anxious to get down the escarpment before the rain started.

At the roadside stood children and some women offering their various goods for the sale. There were trays with vegetables or fruits, but also some other trade objects like ornaments and woven baskets. Ljiljana saw a beautiful multihued basket made of dry grass and asked me stop. The moment the car stopped, a flood of objects was pushed through the open windows, so we closed them all to prevent pilfering.

Ljiljana got out of the car and found the girl holding that basket. She took it and returned to the car, followed by the girl and a cluster of other children, shouting and offering their goods. She opened the door and a few hands with various objects came after her. There was nothing else to do but to start the car and move slowly forward so that the crowd dispersed. However, the poor girl ran behind for some time and got her money after all.

It was high time to get down the escarpment on the road with too many bends, which could be dangerous in the rain that might start at any moment. The drop down the escarpment is

about 600m to the Rift Valley's floor. Italian war prisoners built this very remarkable road that reminds one of Alpine roads.

About halfway down we got into a real downpour and darkness set in. I slowed down cautiously around the bends. Several miles out of Naivasha we saw the dim surface of Lake Naivasha in the last weak rays of the setting sun. The last drops of rain fell as we reached our destination of the Lake Hotel on the lake's east shore. It had been a long day for the driver as we started at 8 a.m. and drove some 465km in 10 hours. I was dog tired for sure!

We had enough time for a bath and a stroll around the gardens, which were echoing with bird song, before dinner was served at 8:00PM. We found our friends at the dinner table. They had encountered no problems on their route from Nanyuki via Thomson's Falls and Gilgil to the Lake Hotel. They had erected their tent somewhere nearby and I asked whether they would find it in the darkness. Their route was a bit shorter, but there was nothing exceptionally interesting to see except the waterfall. Then I recorded some birds' sounds as they were settling down for the night. We were back in our room and in the beds by 9:30 already.

I woke up to the songs of birds, which were extraordinarily loud, and went out to make a recording of them. Lake Naivasha was a bird sanctuary and it was forbidden to damage the flora or to disturb, chase, or hunt the birds. My two ladies were still relaxing, so I checked the car floor and saw that my repairs had performed rather well, so I just added some drops of brake oil for better sealing. I stood there wondering whether we would be able to get through all the way we planned without more holes or some other damage.



The Lake Hotel on the shore of Lake Naivasha. In front of the hedge cows graze freely.

After a perfect English breakfast, we went to search for our friends nearby in the large garden. We did not find them but I got three minutes of an ideal recording of a nightingale songs. As our friends did not appear at the time agreed upon the previous night, we decided to leave alone towards Nakuru some 40km away. On the way there we stopped at Kariaudusi near Lake Elmenteita, where an archeological site had been opened recently. They had found stone tools, bones, and other artifacts estimated to be nearly 100,000 years old in a dry river bed. We gladly paid the entry fee, which supported the people doing their job meticulously by unearthing bits and pieces, brushing off and washing even the smallest particles they found.

After another up-and-down road, we stopped at a lookout with a splendid view of the whole of Lake Nakuru, surrounded by a thin green belt of forest. There were many white patches

moving slowly on the water, looking like clouds floating in a blue sky. Ljiljana exclaimed, "Flamingos!" and it looked as if millions of those birds were in a constant motion, forming various forms or shapes.

On the approach to the lake stood a notice board stating, "Dry weather road only" or "Road flooded - do not try!" so we just followed the rule. After a few hundred meters, the road surface became soapy so we turned in another direction, followed by a strong soda stench. We drove on some 3km until we came to an open spot from where we could see the whole lake with many thousands of birds. The young birds had white plumage, while the older ones were of a light pinkish color, interspersed with red feathers. Where the ground allowed an approach, we tried to get near a group, but the birds flew off to another place. There was a constant croaking in the air that sounded like zbrugbruzbrugbrrr ... brrrzbrug", as well as the quacking and cackling of other kinds of birds. The din was so loud that one could not hear one's own voice in a conversation, and there was a revolting smell. Any attempt to get closer to the birds was hopeless, leaving us with soaked and soiled shoes. The birds just flew off, leaving us in filthy mud, stupidly trying the impossible.

We had to abandon the idea of having a picnic somewhere nearby due to severe attacks by ravenously hungry mosquitoes. We returned to town and found a pleasant restaurant where we could enjoy a meal without being molested by voracious insects. Later we decided to visit the Menengai Crater outside Nakuru. First we passed through Nakuru's reputable part with nice houses in beautiful gardens that tempted Ljiljana to look for plant shoots she could collect. After a while, the road changed from tarmac to a kind of hard-packed volcanic sand so the VW could go up only in first gear. After some 20 minutes of slow driving, we reached a forest of cedar and eucalyptus trees, and after passing a sharp turn, we got to the rim of crater.



Ladies going shopping at Nakuru Market. View down to Nakuru during the ascend of Menegai Crater.

The view was absolutely marvelous in all directions. There were sign posts showing distances in miles to various capitals around the globe. Stepping next to a barrier at the crater's rim, we looked down onto its floor some 600m below, completely covered with thick vegetation. It was beautiful - the crater rim enclosed by a green forest on a barren rock wall, and the floor carpeted with dense bush in which there were no animals. Our contemplation of the scene was broken by the arrival of four VW-Kombi buses with dozens of Salvation Army people, who swarmed out everywhere. We took off to a nearby 15m-high steel pyramid to have a last look into the crater and the far surroundings. Over the opposite edge of the crater we saw Nakuru, and farther out, the lake shimmering in the early afternoon sun.

Christa and her brother could not stay longer as they had to start their journey westward to Uganda. They had decided to drive some 1,000 miles more, visiting some interesting spots.

We exchanged farewells and good wishes and I gave them our itinerary, as they believed that we might meet in Ngorongoro Crater a few days later. Shauria Mungo!



Ljiljana pointing to the Lake Nakuru standing at the rim of the Menegai Crater.



Ljiljana climbed the lookout tower erected on the peak of Menegai Crater.

It was time for us to return, mainly because we wanted to visit a farm on our way to the hotel. We apparently had misunderstood instructions given by our friends in Mombasa, as we could not get there at first, the rain spoiled the next attempt, and the driver was fed up with driving. When we arrived at the hotel, the clouds cleared in the west so we went to the lakeshore to view the striking sunset. Ljiljana had brought the sound recorder and we moved closer to the trees. We were sitting on a large tree trunk listening to birds twitter as they settled for the night. When the birds' warbling died out, new sounds took over from frogs and crickets and other insects.

We entered Nakuru, the third biggest town in Kenya, soon after that. On the main street there were many modern public and private buildings, and a covered market place. Our friends arrived just as I was getting gas. They went with my girls to the market while I went to the bank for cash. The shoppers came back with some fresh fruit and Ljiljana experimented with several carved wooden combs that she had bought in the native market. These combs were to be the first of a large collection later. Then we all drove off to see the flamingos on the lake some 3km from Nakuru.

It was time for dinner, which ended with a dessert named "angels' soufflé" that we liked very much. After dinner, there remained only two things to do: have a bath and go to bed. I was tired from driving and slept like a log, forgetting everything else around.

After breakfast, we decided that we would stay at the lake that day. We hired a rowboat, and dressed in swimming trunks and hats and shirts, spent the day on the water. We took a water pitcher and some dry cakes and fruit, as well as the recording equipment with us. We set out rowing vigorously at first in an open channel between a thick cover of blue-violet water lilies. We spent a fine day without traffic noise or congestion or any problems except for rowing between thick water growths. When we got tired of rowing often we used the oars to push us forward when we got tangled in the roots. We wanted to get to Crescent Island that was separated by a channel from the peninsula where we had spent the night. Several paths were cleared through the carpet of water plants, allowing better progress, but we were getting tired of rowing or shoving so we paused often while Vesna checked on birds' names. She had two books with her titled "Tropical birds" and "East African birds" and with great accuracy she marked each kind we saw along our path.

We passed through the channel but the idea to circumnavigate Crescent Island soon had to be abandoned due to the wind blowing against us. It was easy to turn around in the open waters so we returned with the wind to the channel and the way we came. From somewhere

came a strange sound like “honk honk hooch hooo huh” that we could not record because of the wind blowing against the microphone. The sound came from a few hippos that inhabited the lake in quite a number.



Scene during the boat trip on the Naivasha Lake. The bird at right is a Great heron.

Tired but happy we came to the landing, astonished that we had been out for a full four hours. It was time for lunch, followed by a good rest. For some unknown reason, Vesna made some racket that woke us up. Ljiljana was annoyed and said that we would not go to look for the farm. Instead, Vesna would have to stay in the hotel while we went to Nakuru to fill up the petrol tank and to buy some food for our next day-long journey to Kenya South.

We had in some way a different feeling on the way back as there was no usual noise coming from the rear seat. We were used to Vesna’s chatter or querying or muttering most of the time. No wonder - she was a young and spirited teenager of 11 years. Yet we had to admit that she was the most attentive one of us, particularly when it came to noticing animals or interesting things. As the driver, my full concentration was on the road and driving the car. Ljiljana was responsible for judging where and when we should stop to take pictures or a recording and of course for feeding us too. She also took notes about the travel events that I could use to write the report later.



Left herons and warthogs and right are buffaloes and an Egyptian goose rest on the Crescent Island.

We found Vesna somewhat disgruntled by the reprimand but she showed us an extensive record of animals that we have seen on the safari up to then. This made us all cheerful again and we praised her for her efforts and her attentiveness. Ljiljana asked to be commended for her hard rowing efforts too, and showed a blood blister under her wedding ring.

We packed what we could put aside and went out to do some sound recording of the settling birds before we went to dine. After some chat with a few guests we left the dining room,

walked through the park to the lakeshore, and were in bed by 9:00 o'clock. We expected a long and difficult drive to Kenya South the next day so it was necessary to have a good rest, particularly for the driver, whose perseverance and energy would be in demand. The information we could gather about road conditions to Kenya South were rather scarce and incomplete. Our next destination was the Masai Mara Game Reserve and Narok was the only large township on the way over the Mau Escarpment.



We met the Steppe giraffes often along the route to Masai Mara region.

We started soon after breakfast and shortly before we got to the main road to Nairobi, there on a small board stood the name of the farm we were supposed to visit. There was no time for it now as I expected a long drive with many slow sections to the Masai Mara region. We missed the junction for Narok and had to return some hundred meters to get on that gravel road. It was easier to keep in the wheel ruts but the shaking was hard to bear after a while. On some stretches the ruts were deeper so the higher middle part scratched the bottom of the car. That was bearable so long it was soil, but rocks made an awful screech. Sometimes I tried to get out of the ruts but risked falling into a gully or sliding on the wet black cotton soil (notorious loam!) or hitting a stone.

The ride on the graveled road along the Mau Escarpment was not a joy. The first 15km the road climbed, demanding particular attention when driving behind another car through a cloud of dust. On the Suswa plateau, the road section had been leveled by a scraper recently, allowing speeds of up to 40km/h until a board announced to "Drive slowly!" You MUST drive slowly – Escarpment." The descending road had been cut into sedimentary rock and some volcanic tuff and was very tricky, partly due to many curves and its narrow width. At last arriving down in the Rift Valley, we crossed a river over a massive bridge and after a short climb came to Narok at 11:00. We had needed 2.5 hours for this first stretch of some 100km of the total of 240km envisaged for this day.

Narok was a small town but clean, probably because of the garbage collectors like ants and many scavenger birds sitting in wait everywhere. In the town we saw the Masai, dressed traditionally in their red tunics wrapped around their naked bodies. They carried long spears and sheathed long double-bladed knives and truncheons thrust into belts. We had learned not to take pictures of a Masai on our previous encounters. The women were similarly dressed and wore adornments made of threaded small pearls that were really decorative.

We left the town soon after getting gas and enquiring about the way to the Masai Mara Game Reserve, despite Vesna's strong protests. She had seen several horses in a paddock probably belonging to a riding school or club. I could not grant her wish to stop as I had to

drive another say 140km on an unknown road. Soon I saw in the mirror two cars approaching at higher speed as their drivers obviously knew that road of hard macadam. A Rover with a priest as the driver was followed by Ford Taunus, and they passed us at 70km/h, which was madness under those road conditions. I wished them to go to hell and continued driving at 50km/h until we arrived safely at the reserve entrance.

The Masai Mara Game Reserve consisted of two parts. In the so-called developed part, the Masai tribe built their settlements (“boma”) and used the lands as pastures for their cattle herds. The other part remained as the original wilderness where the animals could move about unmolested. We needed permits for both parts when signing the entrance book (names, address, date and time of entry as well as car and permit numbers). A good-looking Masai woman asked us to take her to a nearby boma but we had to refuse because of the Masai’s specific body odor that you could not get out of the car seat fiber.

The hard-rolled road surface enabled faster driving over the plain but small gravel thundered against the car floor, even at 25 to 40km/h speed. We crossed several dry gullies with concrete floors which we had to descend and ascend with care because of the VW's low body. We met several Masai herdsmen (cattle and goats) who were mostly boys, and whose dogs ran after us barking, particularly when we had to pass a gully. We waved to them and they reciprocated, calling their dogs back. Due to the high-standing sun, we noticed some mirages (known as the Fata Morgana) appearing in the steppe's vibrating hot air like those we had seen in the Sudan.

After some 30km in the steppe, we saw the Ford Taunus pulled by another car back in the direction of Narok. Had my curse worked? After a while we got onto an old track with black cotton soil that is notorious when wet for turning into a slippery quagmire dangerous for any car caught into it. I had to watch to bypass some section with deeper ruts that were reminders of past rains.

We came to the Olemelepo Gate and paid the normal entrance fees Sh10 for the car and Sh5 p.p. Vesna was declared as “toto kuba” (girl big) so she paid the same Sh5 as a “memsab kidogo” (lady small), explained the cashier with a wide smile. At some distance from the gate, Ljiljana got out some sandwiches that we ate, accompanied by flies. That was the first and last time we tried to eat in the wildness as tsetse flies could be a real nuisance.



Water eagles nest at left and a young eagle seeing of its mother.

Sleeping sickness was well controlled, and only 20% of tsetse flies present a danger. Tsetse flies follow large moving objects like a car, and when you stopped, you had to make sure to close all windows instantly. However, if you moved far enough away from a car or anything larger, then the flies would not get at you. We remembered reading this in one of Grzimek's books, so we stepped out of the car to finish eating our sandwiches at a reasonable distance away - a picnic a la tsetse. Soon after this stop, we arrived at the gate of the Keekorok Lodge that would be our two-night stopover.

*** * * End of Part 1 of 2: Kenya * * ***