

THE JOURNEY FROM KENYA AND ACROSS UGANDA IN 1966

Part 1 of 2: Kenya

We have not expected that our second grand safari in East Africa would become dramatic. With our experience from the first safari in 1965 it was easier for us to prepare the necessary equipment and provisions for a three-week safari. We started the trip on August 13th and returned sound and safe on September 4th. In the old VW 1961 "Beetle" we drove almost 5000km and used about 90 gallons of gas. It was an economic trip for an old car, considering that it had already driven some 100,000km on African roads.

The engine of the car ran well throughout the whole trip, but we got one flat tire. We drove at a good speed, averaging 65km/h compared to 55km/h used in our planning. The speed was achieved probably due to being able to drive long straight road stretches that we came across in Uganda. We crossed the Equator several times on our safari through Uganda.

First let me describe the whole journey route to and from in Uganda and returning home to Mombasa again. We drove to Nairobi staying there for two days proceeding to via Lake Naivasha – Molo – Eldoret – Tororo (in Uganda) – Jinja - Kampala to Entebbe. From Kampala we continued straight north via Bombo – Kakoge to Masindi – Paraa – Chobi in "Murchison Falls National Park". Then we turned south to Masindi – Hoima – Fort Portal to Mweya in "Elisabeth National Park". After visiting Lake George and bypassing Lake Edward we continued southwards via Ishasha to Kabale from here to return northwards via Mbarara – Masaka to Kampala. The final leg was a straight drive via Jinja back into Kenya to Eldoret - Nairobi and finally back to Mombasa.

At those times Kenya was certainly less expensive than Uganda by about 15% at. We had to pay 10% tax on any bill if it was not paid in cash, and we had to pay for full board in hotels in Uganda, some 40% more than we had paid in Kenya or Tanganyika. The fuel price got higher as we traveled west. In Kenya gas was Sh4.80 per gallon; the highest price I paid in western Uganda was Sh6.10 per gallon – almost 30% more. Also, we had to pay for adult fees for Vesna because she had turned 12, thus becoming "mumsabhi kidogo", or "young lady". The recent political unrest in Uganda may have caused certain increases to general living costs too.

The tumultuous political situation seemed to have calmed down by the time we started our safari. Uganda had achieved its independence on October 9, 1962. The Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Edward Mutesa II, had become the first president of Uganda, being the king of the largest and most influential tribe in the new state. Yet on May 24, 1966, the federal Ugandan army attacked the royal compound in Mmengo by shelling the palace with the king trapped inside. He fought his way out of the burning building and escaped from Uganda to exile in London, where he died in mysterious circumstances. The monarchy of Buganda and much of its autonomy was revoked, along with that of other four Ugandan kingdoms soon after. Subsequently, Prime Minister Milton Obote changed the old constitution, turning the state into a republic in 1967.

The safari started without a hitch this time. We drove fast for the first 270km on a tarmac road up to Mtito Andei. Roadwork started from Kibwezi so we drove on the old road, the worst part of it through Emali and Sultan Hamud. At first we thought that drivers were greeting us, holding a hand on the front windows of cars coming toward us. Instead of a greeting it was a warning sign that the road section had loose murrum and stones flying through the air, smashing against car windows. This became clear to

us the moment we saw the first car with a cracked glass pane. From then on Ljiljana kept her hand against the front window when we saw an approaching car. We saw quite a lot of broken glass along the road so I had to slow down as cars passed. A real hazard was to drive behind a slow lorry or to overtake one, which could result in a cracked window at the very beginning of the safari.



At left the show-down of the horses and the Great stand and betting booths at right.

Fortunately we arrived in Nairobi safely and got to the Fair-View hotel, where we stayed a year ago, being happy with the accommodation and the food. The next morning we thought we would visit the Nairobi National Park some 10km out of town. For an hour or so we cruised on the established earthen pathway, yet we saw only a few antelopes and giraffes. Frustrated, I turned off the regular road onto a dry river bed, and we soon found a rhino calmly chewing at a distance of about 25m. Superb! Some time later Vesna thought she saw lions in the shade of a tree, but when we got closer the "lion pride" turned into a group of warthogs that we disturbed with our approach. So we gave up searching for lions at midday and returned to the exit to visit the animal orphanage there before starting back to town.



The audience between two races in front of the Great stand and in the access road to the Race course of Nairobi at right.

After lunch Ljiljana and I yielded to Vesna's longing to visit the Ngong Race Course to watch the horse racing. Ngong Course was situated in a pleasant area west of the town, and it looked almost like a park with a lot of flower beds all around the race track. The grandstand was full of visitors but we paid less for the open stand, where hundreds of people were moving freely around. Of course there were the betting booths, a few below the grandstand and others in a barrack next to the horses display fields. We stayed through six of the seven races but we did not bet. I was interested in the people and the racing procedures, whereas Ljiljana paid more attention to the ladies' fashion show. Vesna ran to and fro between the horse display fields and the race track,

commenting excitedly on the horse's chances in the races. It remained a mystery to us how she could know about each horse's genealogy and its racing achievements.

On the way back to town we wanted to view the milking of venom from poisonous snakes. One should not believe what is written in tourist guides, but first put a call to the station.

I had to make an official visit early on Monday so Ljiljana and Vesna went window shopping until we met at the Thorn Tree coffee bar of the New Stanley Hotel. At Vesna's insistence, we took a taxi to the Coryndon Memorial Museum, where we spent a few hours. Joy Adamson's aquarelles of some 100 indigenous peoples' portraits interested us very much, and we ordered her most motivating book with these attractive portraits. Vesna was more attracted by the bird showcases with the excellent and fascinating collection that the museum held.

We had enough cultural and natural education so after lunch we went to a cinema, but that did not turn out well because it was boring seeing the same movie again, despite Audrey Hepburn's good acting. After that it was time to have a good rest for the night, as tomorrow we would start our safari at last.



The meeting-point at Thorn Tree coffee bar.

I had enough of driving in the town's throng and happily drove on the tarmac up to the Rift Valley Escarpment. We stopped just for short to have a splendid view down onto the Naivasha Lake before we turned into the Lake hotel, where we had stayed a year before. After signing in we drove to the Aberdare Range. Formerly there were in this region a few large estates of white farmers; now Kenyans had many small farms with livestock scattered all over this vast range. As we neared the mountain range we had to climb a steep snaky earthen track through eucalyptus forests and tall bamboo woods. Soon after we came to the gate, and after paying the entry fees, we continued the climb up to the peak at over +3.200m ASL.

We got to the lookout at Fort Jerusalem after some 10km driving on a twisting track cut into the mountainside. From there we had a marvellous view down onto the Nyandara Range and Naivasha Lake some 1.000m below.

We decided to push on over the Aberdare plateau at say +.3.000m ASL despite the clouds gathered in the west warning of a coming rain. We passed a small lake and several meadows with many flowers in high grass, drove over small brooks and through dense forests, up and down the narrow path. Absolute stillness engulfed us at any brief

stop except for birds' chirping or other animal sounds coming out of a dense green veil. About five km from Fort Jerusalem we came to a track leading towards the waterfalls Guru and Kagura. We had just arrived at a stopping place after driving down a steep track when the first raindrops fell.



We visited the Aberdare National Park at the entrance with a hut at right.

Nonetheless we walked for some 10 minutes and jumped over rocks in a small stream good for trout fishing to get to a small gallery. From there we had a clear view of the 250m high Kagura Waterfall some 500m away. A narrow path led over slippery rocks to another place and I had to risk it, despite Ljiljana's warnings. There were no handrails on the upper platform but the view down the Guru Waterfall was absolutely a must. The two waterfalls cascade down, spraying water all over depending on the wind. This spray would certainly display the full rainbow colours if the sun were shining. I would have stayed longer and taken more photos had it not been for the rain. It was high time to return to the car because the track in "black cotton soil" (= loam) would become very slippery when wet. With the utmost care and in first gear I made it safely out of this quagmire. It was fortunate for us when it started to hail, making the ride easier and less slippery, so we made good speed to the main road, where the rain stopped.



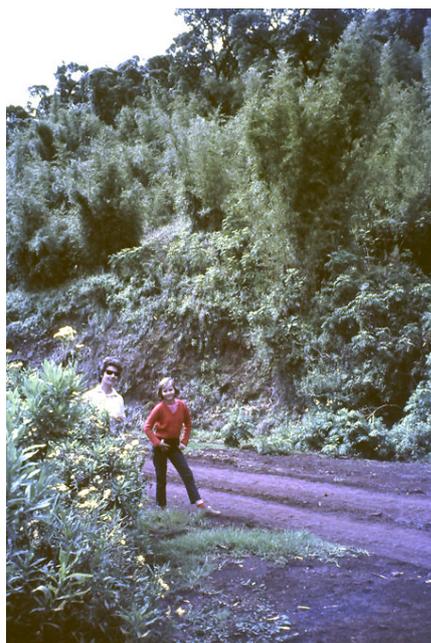
Here are views from the lookout point of Fort Jerusalem and the Kagura waterfall at right.

During the slow descent we stopped several times just to view the landscape and to listen to the sounds of nature. We saw the mountain deer just for a brief moment, and several Colobus monkeys rushing through the branches. Rain started again so we drove on fast to reach Lake Naivasha, that bathed in the sunset below us. We met two cars going uphill and wished them good luck and success. A downpour hit us when we passed through the gate as we left the Aberdares. We were back at the Lake Hotel just in time for 5 o'clock tea. After that small snack Vesna went to check the cows that grazed nearby while Ljiljana took some rest that she particularly needed after her nervous state up there at the waterfalls.



At left Vesna observes Gura Waterfall two steps and Aberdare's beautiful flowers.

Nonetheless we walked for some 10 minutes and jumped over rocks in a small stream good for trout fishing to get to a small gallery finally. From here one had a straight view on the 250m high Kagura Waterfall some 500m far only. A narrow path led over sleazy rocks to another place and I had to risk it despite Ljiljana's despair and warnings. There were no handrails at the upper platform but the view down the Guru Waterfall some 230m high was absolutely a must. The two waterfalls cascade down over several less high barriers spraying water clouds all over depending on the wind direction. This spray would certainly display the full rainbow colors if the sun would shine. I could stay longer and made more photos had not be for the starting rain.



Ljiljana and Vesna, my two girls, pose at roadside and in a meadow of the Aberdare.

It was high time to return to the car because the track excavated in “black cotton soil” (= loam) becomes rather slippery when wetted by the rain. With the outmost care and in the 1st gear I made it safely to get out of this quagmire. It was a mere fortune for us when the hail started having grain size of say 5mm as it happened on the equator +3.000m ASL. The hail made the ride easier and less slippery so we made speedily to the main road when the rain stopped there. Funny!

The service had deteriorated in the Lake Hotel since our visit last year, but the food was still good. The hotel charges were the lowest we had on our safaris. This hotel was the only one in which we did not have a bathroom within our room; we had to share the bathroom with two other rooms' guests. During my morning contemplation and making notes I heard some shooting coming closer to the hotel. I went out to the lake, wondering what kind of hunting went on in that birds' sanctuary. It was a black day for the white-faced coots, which were not liked in the sanctuary because other kinds of birds moved away from where they nested. About ten hunters were shooting the coots at the north end of the lake controlled by a ranger.



View from the boat of the peninsula in the Naivasha Lake.

When this racket stopped, Vesna and I hired a rowboat to visit Crescent Island. We did not see many birds except a few cormorants, herons, and pelicans, and a number of dead coots entangled in the reeds of water lilies. We found that we could walk dry-footed from the shore to the island. The lake water level rose up until 1964, when it started dropping again, and nobody knew the reason for these periodical changes but its depth never exceeded say 10m. There is a large shallow region more to the south of the lake where one could walk over from east to west shore and another smaller though much deeper one of about 25m where one could do the water skiing. It was not worth going there for 25km on a rather bad earthen track as I worried of a “strange crunching noise” getting from the front axle on our car.

On that afternoon we hired a motorboat with another family to explore the lake. The boat had two motors with propellers in a special casing that enabled it to cut through the weeds. Also, the driver would change the rotation direction to get off the intertwined roots. This was a rather clever assembly and the boat trip could be a pleasant adventure provided the weather did not get worse. It was rather cool out on the lake and a cold wind blew from the Aberdares.

There was nothing to see out there in the open of the lake so we turned back to the shallower regions dense with thick reeds and cane. The boat got stuck in mud just

when something broad and brown-grey stood up out of the muddy waters. It was a hippo, moving quickly into the reeds to hide, yet its wide backside stuck out of the reeds with its dangling tail still visible. The boat driver moved out of the shallows and the hippo got out and sped amazingly fast into deeper waters, disappearing from our view. A few moments later as we toured around that island of reed and bamboo, another huge hippo appeared, but vanished in deep waters almost instantly. We had seen hippos coming out to graze next to the cows in the late hours of the day a few times. The return was not pleasant as it started to rain in the Aberdares, from where we could hear the rumble of thunder. Fortunately we returned to hotel dry and just in time for 5 o'clock tea.



A buffalo takes a mud-bath left and flamingoes and a few hippos enjoy the same one at right.

After dinner Vesna went to see the cows grazing, as it had become her routine. Ljiljana and I sat on a trunk near the shore, listening to the quiet that surrounded us. We reminisced about the hard years that had preceded our move to Africa, while we enjoyed the gentleness of this place, its quiet and tranquility. Our small family moved to the Sudan by end of 1961 that became "The Gate to Freedom" for us. Now we move freely through the East African countries so the coming to Kenya in 1964 seemed like "The Gate to Golden Age" so far. We had to stop our meditation to return to the present reality as there was no place for any homesickness after all. Just feel the gentleness of this place, its quietness and tranquility of nature. Enjoy this gift to your life now.



We visited Menegai crater again just a brief stop before proceeding westwards.

Then we got up and called Vesna, as we needed a good rest before we proceeded to the unfamiliar sections of the safari in the morning.

The next day we left the Lake Hotel at 09:00. We had promised the couple from Aden from yesterday's boat trip to show them how to get up to the Menegai Crater, so we stopped at Nakuru to explain the way. Then we filled up the petrol tank and proceeded to the unfamiliar west of Kenya at last.

We made the first 20km fast on a slowly ascending tarmac road. The next section was more winding and steeper as the road went up the Mau Escarpment. The Highland Hotel was our next stop. Separate houses were built in old English style and the whole setup gave a well kept impression. After lunch we went walking over splendid meadows towards the nearby golf course, and after the tea, Vesna went to ride a pony for an hour or so.

The golf course of Molo was probably unique in the world at that time. There were three stretches about 400-500m long cut uphill through eucalyptus and pine forests. The three open cuts were in a cascading order and in between them were horizontal links with greens. The golf course had only nine holes but it measured some eight km at a height of some +2750m ASL – a challenge at this height!. We met a lady who could not follow her husband playing a game so she joined us and showed us a few shortcuts through the woods.



Ljiljana and Vesna stand in front of the house we had our room at Highland Hotel in Molo.
One had a splendid view of the plains from the garden of Highland Hotel.

After dinner we were tired from the walks and the fresh mountain air. We were happy to have a warm bath and crawl into the bed with thick blankets. There was an open hearth where we could keep the fire going all night, because it was bitterly cold, although we were on the equator in Africa.

The next day we continued our walks over the meadows covered with a thick grass carpet on which a few sheep herds grazed. A gazelle or antelope came into sight but vanished the next moment. Vesna took more riding hours and loved the pony "Blanket". The rest of time she spent in the library browsing through the many books it contained.

Ljiljana had the brilliant idea to visit Mr. Keighley's farm from where the hotel got a kind of fine camembert cheese. In the afternoon we found the place, where we were shown the farm with its beautiful gardens, and the production of butter and cheese – which we had to taste. The slogan: "Molo cheese - pleases!" and we decided to return in a fortnight to buy some cheeses, We had to return to the hotel for it was almost 17h o'clock and the stern management kept strict rules. We really enjoyed our stay at the

Highland Hotel, but the next day I had to drive some long 525km to Entebbe in Uganda, so we needed our rest.



At left Vesna “performs” after her riding lesson she has had finally.

On Saturday we left at 09h and were on the main road to the west soon after. The good tarmac road wound up between the mountains Mau and Loldiani, which were both forested and had thick undergrowth. We crossed the equator at Timboroa at an elevation of about +2.745m, driving into the northern hemisphere again. We will never forget the alleys of mimosas trees in full bloom on both sides of the road for quite some distance. The value of this region is in its forestry, and there were a few villages where timber men lived. Sheep-breeding was part of the people’s income there. The road descended in a few sharp curves to Eldored at about +2.095m, passing by plantations of tea and coffee as well as cattle-breeding farms. The steering of the car and a slight sway of the front axle were a bit worrying.



**Vesna and Ljiljana sit in our room in the Highland Hotel at Molo.
Right are the golf-course “grass-mowers” at Molo.**

Eldored was a small town with only three parallel streets. There was a police station and a court as well as some military barracks on the main street. Ljiljana and Vesna went to the nearby market while I filled the tank with petrol. They returned happily holding a bag of large beans that one could not get in Mombasa.

About 10km out of Eldoret we left the tarmac, driving on a murram surface. As it contained loose stones, Ljiljana started the windscreen “greeting hold” again. I slowed down to 40km/h, feeling badly when the car croaked with a grinding sound if I hit a pothole or a larger stone. The murram improved a bit when we passed Broderick Falls and the landscape changed to a semi-desert with low growth and shrubs. It had not rained there for some time and dust whirled up on the road.



Vesna rests at the Highland Hotel lily pond that was swimming pool once upon times.

We met a group of boys with white-washed faces, naked except for a tunic like a Masai. Ljiljana wanted to make more pictures but I was in a hurry to reach the border, expecting a long wait there. The boys had been circumcised and expelled from their homes for a few days. After a short stop for a quick picture, we drove on, with the boys running after us. The driving demanded my full attention, although I could not avoid every pothole or stone. Every time the car squeaked or whined I winced.



Pictures from two brief road side stops: left the circumcised boys and an exposition at right.

At 12:30 we got to the Kenya's border and the procedure was brief, so we were on the road in no-man's land at last. Within a short time we passed by Tororo Mountain on the right-hand side - calcareous rock in the form of a warrior, known as the national monument - and a modern girls' school on the left. The Uganda border procedure lasted longer as they had to thoroughly check several documents and fill in forms in a sticky hot hut with a sheet metal roof. Fortunately, I jumped the queue as an English couple had some problems with missing documents.

On leaving the border station we passed by the gate of a cement factory whose buildings looked rather decrepit. The plant was fairly old and it could produce only low-

quality cement. By some miracle the countryside suddenly changed and we could not believe all the greenery on both sides of the road. The change came as we left Western Nyanza to enter the Bungoma region. The tarmac road went on between thick forests, with a few cleared areas with houses and gardens with plenty of flowers and paw-paw and banana plants. We noted some differences in how the people dressed as well as their dwelling construction or village outlines compared to those in Kenya.

The speed limit was 90km/h on tarmac, although the traffic increased as we got closer to Jinja. Uganda was not the flat country that I had imagined. The roads went up and down but were mostly straight for many kilometers. Jinja was an industrial town on the shore of Lake Victoria, which is the source of the Victoria Nile. We had a tea-stop at the hotel there but had to dash on to Kampala, passing over the Owen Falls dam, a large hydro-electric power station. Vast plantations of sugar cane stretched almost to the horizon, and there were some tea plantations on the hills.



We have crossed the Equator several times on our safari through Uganda.

The countryside changed, with more villages with houses enclosed in gardens growing mostly bananas. The wider tarmac road allowed good progress but also carried more traffic. I did not see much of Kampala as I had to concentrate my attention on posts proclaiming road maps say in some 200m distance, but I did not notice a single one along the way. However, there were many shops with Indian owners and a number of modern buildings with more shops.

Driving by “my nose,” we followed a wide road winding through several small townships. Suddenly we saw the wide waters of the Lake Victoria with a few islands as we entered the town Entebbe. It was a small town with several official buildings and houses of public service built along the lakeshore, where we found the Lake Victoria Hotel too. The hotel was the most expensive one of Uganda in those days. We almost panicked as the concierge could not find our reservation at first. But at last we got a room with a balcony overlooking the lake. Below our balcony was the swimming pool, and Vesna went straight off to have a quick swim. I was sorry later that I had not followed her example.

We called our acquaintances in Kampala (the sister-in-law of our Mombasa dentist) and they arrived soon after. We had a long chat about sight-seeing in Kampala while Vesna had time to view the TV. During the news she read a magazine, as that was of no interest for her. When the visitors left we went to dine in the hotel restaurant. The food and service were fine but prices were exorbitant. After dinner it was time to get a proper

rest, particularly the driver, who was very worried about the car. I decided to seek some help at the VW service station in the morning.

The morning was dull and cloudy – perfect weather for sight-seeing. First we went to the much-praised botanic garden that one could drive through. It was a rather dusty visit, due to the lack of rain and the cars driving through whirling up a lot of filth. The general lack of upkeep and the foliage grey with deposited dirt was not inviting at all. The botanic garden in Khartoum was in much better shape despite the prevailing climate there. So we left the garden without taking a single picture and continued touring Kampala, aka "the town on seven hills". We made a brief stop at the Grand Hotel, built in old colonial style, which enabled my ladies to inspect the curio stalls and shops there. The Grand Hotel had a splendid location that was so desirable that construction had started on a new Apollo Hotel just opposite it.



At left a view of Kampala's down-town and another picture taken near the town center.

We continued down the main road, entering an alley of tall trees inhabited by zillions of bats, aka "fruit dogs". The bats were a real nuisance but the municipality kept them as the best "dudus" exterminators – the best insects killers. However, the bats made such a racket that one could hardly hear one's own voice there. Also one had to watch where one stepped as there was a lot of muck and filth everywhere along the alley.

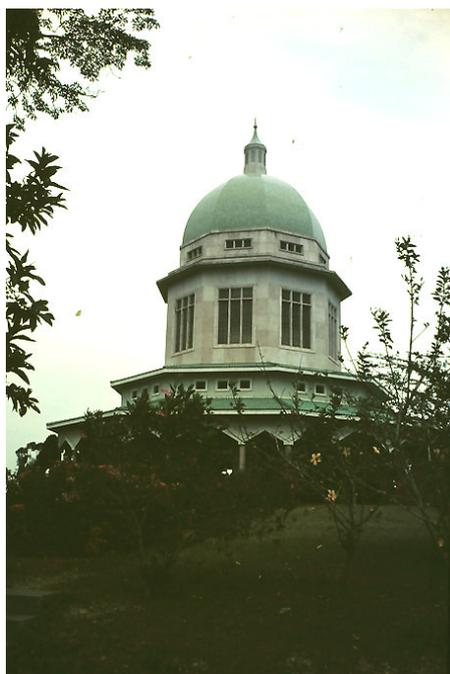
Not far from the bats' location there was a huge hospital compound - probably the largest in the whole of Africa. The hospital had all possible departments and provided rooms for the Makerere University School of Medicine. The School of Medicine was the only one in Africa in those days. Kenya started the process of establishing such a school of medicine in Nairobi but it would take years to accomplish this task.

There was no point in cruising through the vast compound so we continued to another of the highest hills of Kampala. On top of this hill stood the temple of the Baha'i Faith religious sect. The Baha'i Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder, Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), is regarded as the most recent of the messengers of God that stretch back beyond recorded time and include Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad. We entered the temple which had nine corners - one corner for each of the world's religions. The religious sect is fiscally mostly supported by the US now. Outside the shrine there was a splendid view all around, including the other six hills on which Kampala was built.

Cruising for some time, we moved back and forth through the Mengo City Council and then the Kampala City Council. Later we learned there were five kingdoms in Uganda, of which the Buganda kingdom was the oldest and generally most developed by the

proud Baganda tribe. It was four months since the federal government had put down the "mutiny" of local tribal authorities in favor of centralized governmental.

We entered Mengo City, the capital of Buganda kingdom, and went to see the church that English missionaries had built some 100 years before. They had educated the Bagandas but were in constant dispute with French missionaries, who built another church, St. Paul's Cathedral, on the next hill. The latter one looked almost like Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris but was built of fire-baked bricks. Next to the church stood an open hut, under the roof of which were several huge drums. The well-known Buganda drummers used them to announce a danger or a fire and would transmit news throughout Uganda.



The temple of Bahá'í Faith religious sect had been built on top of another hill. Ljiljana and Vesna accompanied by our friends sit on a bench in the temple interior at right.

We returned from the Namirembe hill to downtown Kampala, where all the important government buildings were clustered, like the parliament, high court, and former king's palace on a lake. Of all the official buildings, I liked best the one on which a large sign read "Mengo Municipality - All Departments". Imagine a state that has all its departments in one single building! We approached the king's palace gate but two sentries jumped out from behind and motioned to us to move away "mara moja", that is, instantly. We toured around the palace surrounded by a 2m-high brick wall and noticed a few bullets holes, but no serious damage from the warlike attack. Fortunately the Uganda people did not know yet the injuries caused by a real war.

However, it was high time to have our lunch and to get rid of the dog that Vesna had asked to take with us on our morning tour. I cannot remember to whom it belonged, but I suppose it was from our friends in Kampala. The dog, a semi-alsatian, smelled badly and was restless most of the time. It made me nervous with the squealing so I could not concentrate on what I wanted to enjoy. Also, the dog's moaning reminded me of the "whine" of my car that should go for the badly-needed service the next day. After we delivered the dog I could relax, but scolded Vesna for taking the dog with us.

Ljiljana interrupted my reproaches, admitting that it was her idea as she pitied the dog staying alone at our friends' home. So that was it, but it saved my good spirits for the rest of day at least.

In the afternoon we drove up the Radio Hill, from where we had a perfect view of the whole city and Lake Victoria not so far away. On the hill slopes there were modern dwellings enclosed by large gardens. These residential areas were the best parts of Kampala, particularly when it had been raining. However, I got tired of driving for an hour and a half through these areas, particularly viewed from the driver's seat. Even the amiability and friendliness got tiresome and boring, so it was time to get back to Entebbe. Obviously the Indian influence prevailed in the city, kept clean nearly to European standards, yet I missed the flair of an old town like Mombasa in the city of Kampala.



The cathedral of Kampala built of bricks on one of the hills and the church interior at right.

Back at the hotel, Vesna went straight to the swimming pool, and Ljiljana took pleasure in looking at the woven baskets she had bought. Weaving objects of dry grass or palm leaves was the traditional home industry in this region.

We left Lake Victoria Hotel early Monday morning and drove to Kampala. I left Ljiljana and Vesna downtown to do some window shopping and to buy some supplies for the upcoming long safari drive, then I drove to the VW service station, where the manager, a German himself, inspected my car after it had been hoisted up. He explained that the front axle was fixed to the chassis by four bolts in the 1961 VW models. The repairs would cost USh850 and I would have to wait six days for the new parts. The price did not matter, but we intended to continue our safari and planned to be back on Monday next.

The front axis plate held four bolts to the chassis yet there were fine cracks on the left side of this plate. Somebody had tried to weld a few in the factory garage. The right side seemed sound so the German advised me to drive carefully, avoiding shocks to the front axle caused by potholes or cracks in the road. By Jove! how could one avoid those on Uganda's murram roads? Also the engineer explained how to remove the car bugle ring in case it squeaked at the smallest quiver. Shaking hands, the German wished me "Hals- und Beinbruch" ("Break neck and legs") and a safe return on Monday next.

It was almost midday when I drove out of the VW service station, worrying about the long drives in the coming week. I met Ljiljana and Vesna at the agreed downtown point, where goods were stocked in the car. We were ready to start the week-long safari, first to the north and then down south, following the west of Uganda. At midday we took the main road to Bombo - Kakoge - Masindi to our goal of Paraa in Murchison Falls National Park. On the way out of Kampala we passed the huge compound of the hospital. It made me wonder whether we would return safe and sound to the VW service station in Kampala or end up in this hospital. Who could tell?

However, it was high time to have our lunch and to get rid of the dog that Vesna had asked to take with us on our morning tour. I cannot remember to whom it belonged, but I suppose it was from our friends in Kampala. The dog, a semi-Alsatian, smelled badly and was restless most of the time. It made me nervous with the squealing so I could not concentrate on what I wanted to enjoy. Also, the dog's moaning reminded me of the "whine" of my car that should go for the badly-needed service the next day. After we delivered the dog I could relax, but scolded Vesna for taking the dog with us.

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It was pleasant speeding up the almost straight tarmac road, but I heard a wheel cover fall off, disappearing somewhere into the bush. I noticed that the "brand-new tires" were worn down considerably and we had changed the rear tire on the driver's side for a reserve tire. The manager of the VW service station thought the "brand new tires" were actually renovated old tires. This was obviously done at the factory garage, where I was had been told that brand-new tires were mounted on my car especially for this safari. Bastards! What else could happen to us, I wondered.



I drove this straight stretch of an undulating road for some long time.

Soon after Bombo the road surface turned into murrum, and somewhere I made a wrong turn, so I had to return a short distance to get back onto the right track. Another bad sign? The murrum road was well kept up, and was almost straight, but with ups and downs so we could not see far. Settlements became scarcer as we drove through grassy plains that were probably marshy in syncline. We saw many herds of grazing cattle but there were no large farms like those in Kenya in some regions. We crossed several bridges and I missed the correct turn again so after turning back, I had to

overtake a cistern truck again. The driver waved happily to us every time we passed him. I hoped it would not necessary for the truck to tow us to our obviously mutual goal.

The road was smooth, almost as if somebody had ironed the murrum. This made driving easy and smooth so we entered the small orderly town of Masindi. We passed on a short stretch of tarmac the post building, the district commissioner's house, Barclay's and Gridley's Banks, a modern school building. etc. I got petrol and we drove on towards Gulu and the Murchison Falls National Park some 90km away. First the narrow road passed through steppe country with high grass, then we entered a thick forest and came out of it at the edge of the escarpment. There we had a marvellous view of the Victoria Nile River, lit by the last rays of the sun, except for some ominous dark clouds far to the west.



The bridge over the Victoria Nile's rapids we had to cross on our way northwards.

It was 16:30 so there was no time for "romantic" sightseeing as we had to reach the last ferry leaving at 18:30. Vesna pointed to a few elephants and buffalo herds along the route. The steep descent had a surface of cotton soil, or sandy clay, that could easily turn into a quagmire when wet. Soon we arrived at the park gate, where we paid the entrance fees and bought a map. Of course Vesna enquired about lions and other major animals. As I drove on as fast as possible, Ljiljana complained about my wobbly driving. I stopped, although I was unnerved at being some 15km from the ferry landing. Oh boy, the new tire on the rear right wheel was flat! Blast!



Victoria Nile rapids we saw along our way to the Paraa Lodge.

Prospects were bad as the rain was approaching rapidly. We all got and looked for the reserve tire and the jack. Placing the jack, I got the car up a little to remove the flat tire. When I was putting on the other wheel, the car shifted, bending the gear in the jack. Unfortunately, the stone under the front wheel did not prevent the car from moving. I could not remove the jack! So Ljiljana and I lifted the car enough for Vesna to put a board under the rear wheel, then I could pull the gear out of its hold, bending it by brute force.



I took this picture when we had to stop due to a flat tire as bad clouds were closing in.

After that I reinstalled the jack and hastily finished that awkward job. As we finished packing all the bits and pieces, the rain started. The downpour hit us with full force as I started the engine. The restricted view forced me to drive with the utmost concentration the last 15km in a way I had never done before. The road was slippery and a sharp turn would take us off the road. It rained continuously and water spilled over the road surface so I drove through shallow drifts at a few places. One was rather risky as I had to go through a rivulet to detour a demolished bridge.



We are crossing the Victoria Nile on one of regular ferry boats plying this river.

Vesna continued pointing excitedly to any larger herd of elephants and buffalos, but my whole objective was to get to the ferry in time, and that made me nervous. Then the rain stopped suddenly so we could see in the shimmer of the setting sun the waiting ferry at the left bank of the Victoria Nile. We saw the Paraa Lodge on the opposite side

with a few buildings, some of which were under construction. We reached the ferry in time, and its two strong outboard motors moved it across the strong river current swollen by a lot of rain. Within 15 minutes we were on the other side.

We were a bit concerned about the accommodation on a construction site. The largest building looked like a plant, so we jokingly imagined that it could be a factory for the production of hippo meat. Our doubts were soon dispelled as we were given "The Royal Cottage" for an additional charge of Shs5. This investment was worth of it as the lodge was about 25m from the river bank and far enough from the construction site. The works were for a new hotel and the other ancillary buildings for the staff and of park management.



A large number of hippos still keep to the sandbank just across the Paraa Lodge.

The cottage had a wide verandah overlooking the Victoria Nile before it flowed into Lake Albert. From here the river flowed north under the name of Albert Nile. There was a fishermen's village across the wide waters and there had to be plenty of hippos. Their smell was unmistakable! We noticed hippos basking in the river shallows some 30m down river from our lodging. It was not just the hippos' smell; we could hear their grunting and puffing sounds like: HO! HOO-HO-HO-HUUUH!



The night visitor at Parra Lodge "Royal Cottage" – a large hippopotamus

There was no electricity but the gaslight was OK for us. A warm water shower was welcome after that very hard day. After a brief rest we went to the restaurant, where we enjoyed a standard good meal produced by the Uganda Hotels Ltd.

After dinner we left the restaurant, walking to the cottage along a footpath dimly lit by several gaslights. It was almost pitch dark, yet we noticed a dark shadow close to our cottage. Moving slowly, we could see the silhouette of an elephant browsing on a bush next to the house. I took a few haphazard shots using the camera flash, waiting for a while until the creature moved towards the river. (The pictures never came out due to the great distance!) In the wee hours of the night I heard a strange munching noise from the verandah. I got up and with camera ready, unlocked the door. The shadow filled the whole of my sight lit by the moon down to the river. A hippopotamus grazed broadside some 7m from me. FLASH! I could not see anything! The next moment that massive body vanished. The resulting picture was full of the hippo's body.

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