

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFS - 5 A VISIT TO TSAVO  
AND THE KENYA COAST

P.O. Box 14246,  
Nairobi,  
Kenya  
8th July, 1973

Mr. Richard Nolte,  
Executive Director,  
Institute of Current World Affairs,  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

During the first weekend in June, the Spitzbergs three again set off on a long safari. Our major objectives were Tsavo National Park and the Kenya Coast.

Tsavo National Park is the largest national park in Kenya, comprising some 8000 square miles. Because of its huge size, it is divided into two administrative areas, Tsavo East and West. The Nairobi-Mombasa road divides the Park into its two areas.

Tsavo is known for its elephants; there are reported to be about 20,000 resident within the Park boundaries. They were once believed to be destroying their habitat and forcing it to turn into desert. Elephants, in search of the tender upper leaves, knock down trees. They also like to eat bark and, in so doing, contribute to further destruction. Scientists have suggested that in destroying the trees, the elephants were killing the ecosystem for themselves and all other animals in the area. Some scientists now believe that the land will become desert in a relatively short time; although others think that the land, rather than turning into desert, is just becoming grassland which can continue to support the native wildlife. These latter scientists contend that rather than destroying Tsavo, the elephants are enriching their environment and providing new grazing for the plains game such as African antelopes and zebras.

From my own observation, I tend to agree with the latter scientists. It does appear that the bush is becoming open grassland, particularly in Tsavo West. My husband, Irving, contends, on the other hand, that the bush is indeed reverting to desert. The controversy will have to be resolved by people more knowledgeable than either of us, perhaps in about two hundred years.

We entered Tsavo West from the Mtito Andei Gate, which is half-way between Nairobi and Mombasa. Tsavo is a very well developed park with numbered signposts and all-weather roads. It was established in 1948 as the first national park in Kenya.

We drove from Mtito Andei toward Kilaguni Lodge. Kilaguni has been made famous by its huge veranda-dining room overlooking two waterholes.



Elephants, impalas, zebras, warthogs, ostriches and sometimes rhino come there all through the day and night. We ate lunch at Kilaguni and enjoyed watching the elephants come for their lunchtime drink. There is a sign in the bar at Kilaguni which aptly reads: "The animals are requested not to disturb the guests while they are drinking and vice versa."

From Kilaguni we headed for our room for the night at Kitani. The Game Department has built a half-dozen self-service bandas, designed primarily for local residents. The bandas at Kitani are much better constructed than the ones at Amboseli; but the Amboseli is not a national park and is therefore much less developed. Our banda had a small kitchen, a veranda, a very large bedroom, and a bathroom.

After washing off some of Tsavo's red dust (it even makes the elephants red in appearance), we decided to go for a short game drive. Because of the large elephant population, it is impossible to go far without seeing elephant. We decided to make our first stop Poacher's Lookout, which is a hilltop sight with a telescope for spotting rhino. We, with our usual gamespotting luck, didn't see anything.

We next proceeded to Mzima Springs, which is renown as a good place to view hippos. The water at Mzima Springs is unusually clear and allows the visitor to glimpse more of a hippo than the usual nostrils and eyes view that one gets in more murky waters. Besides being the breeding place and nursery of hippo, Mzima Springs is also the source of Mombasa's water supply. The pumping of water from the Springs has been very carefully planned so that it does not interfere with the animal population of the Springs and their water supply.

Our first expedition to Mzima was decidedly unrewarding, mainly because we didn't really know where to look for the hippos. We certainly did hear them, but they seemed to have sensed us coming and decided to hide behind some reeds. We consoled ourselves by looking at another attraction of Mzima Springs, a sunken glass-walled tank designed by a former warden for viewing fish and hippos. The fish seemed to congregate around the tank to view us; the hippos must not have cared.

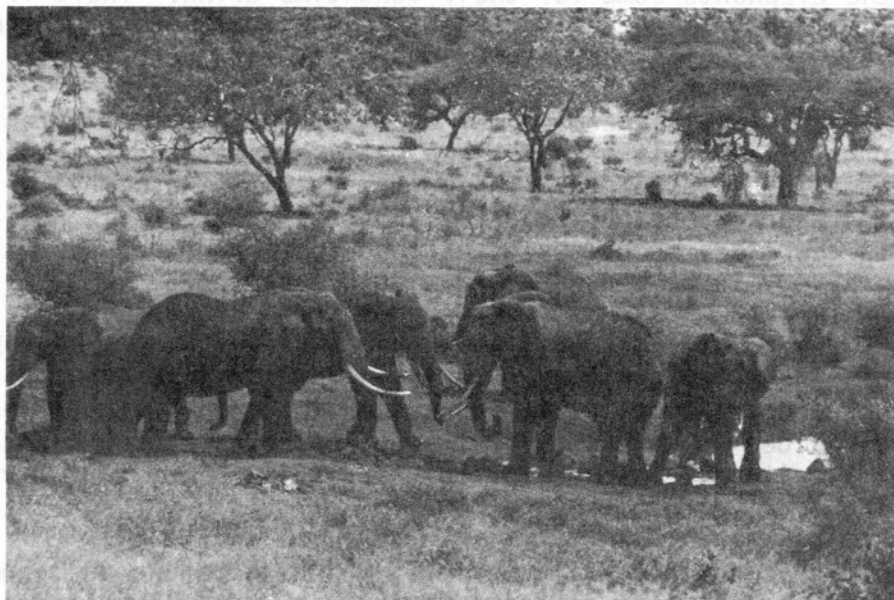
After a short afternoon rest we decided to take a dusk game drive in search of rhino, an animal that has eluded us in the Nairobi Game Park. We were advised by the staff at Kitani where we might see them. Once we got to the area suggested, we discovered we might have taken a wrong turn. It was now almost sunset. We continued on for awhile, passing a large rhino by the road. We finally turned around and retracing our steps reached Kitani. Since Tsavo is mainly bush country, getting lost can be a real danger if one travels off the main road - everywhere looks so similar.

Our night at Kitani was not uneventful. The Game Department had constructed a small waterhole about twelve feet from our banda. On hearing some strange noises during the night, we got up to investigate and discovered an elephant scratching itself on the tree in front of us. Irv shined a flashlight on it and frightened it away quite unintentionally.

The next morning we decided to go back to Mzima Springs. This time we found the right pool. Irv managed to photograph five hippos. We still



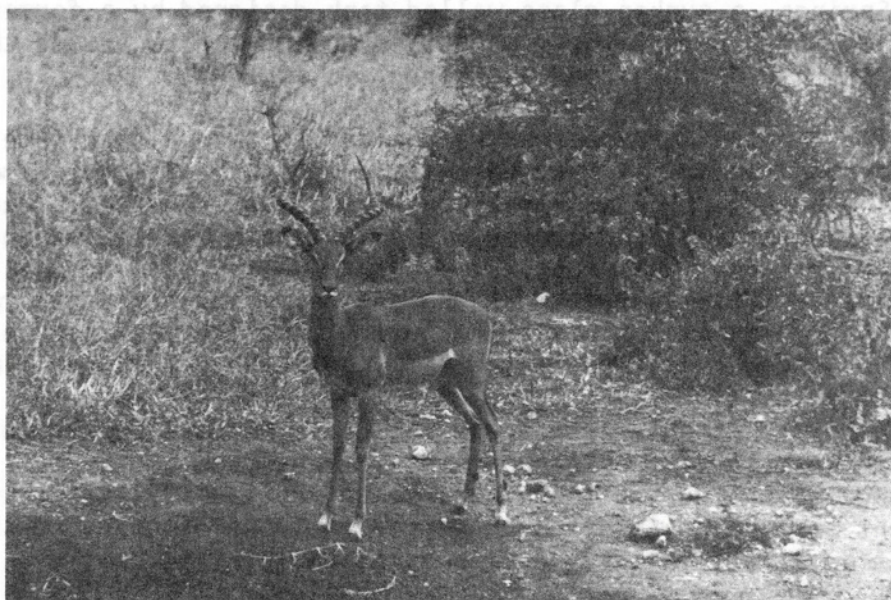
# **VIEWS OF TSAVO**



## **ELEPHANTS AT KILAGUNI**

**AND**

## **AN IMPALA IN TSAVO WEST**





remained somewhat disappointed, because we found that, at least for us, the conditions for viewing hippos at Mzima Springs were not as advantageous as we had been led to believe.

After leaving Mzima Springs, we headed for Rhino Valley, hoping it would live up to its name. On our way there, we passed through beautiful country - rolling hills, unusual rock formations, lava flows. And we did see our rhino as well. Rhinos are the animals I fear most on any game drive. They are unpredictable and can be quite fierce. Rhinos have been known to charge inquisitive tourists in autos. Although one can probably get away easily, for, in spite of their acute senses of hearing and smell, their eyesight is poor.

We next headed for Tsavo Gate and the Nairobi-Mombasa Road. The drive to Diani Beach, south of Mombasa, was long and hot.

As we approached the coast and sea-level, we left the bush and came to lush, green hills and coconut palms. The area became much more populous.

Mombasa is an island city. It was chosen as a port by Arab and Portuguese traders, because at that point there is a break in the coral reef which guards much of the coast; this allows ships to reach the island. Also, the island was easily defensible. From the Nairobi-Mombasa Road, Mombasa is reached by a bridge, but in order to travel to the South Coast, one must leave the island via the Likoni Ferry.

Once we were on the mainland again, we travelled to our hotel, twenty miles from Likoni, via a mixture of very good and very bad roads. Diani Beach is probably the best beach in Kenya. The sand is soft, clean, and white. The beach is protected by the coral reef, so the sharks cannot come in to threaten swimmers in this part of the Indian Ocean. The Ocean is warm and is a lovely turquoise color. There is always a strong wind from the ocean, so, in spite of humidity, one always feels comfortable.

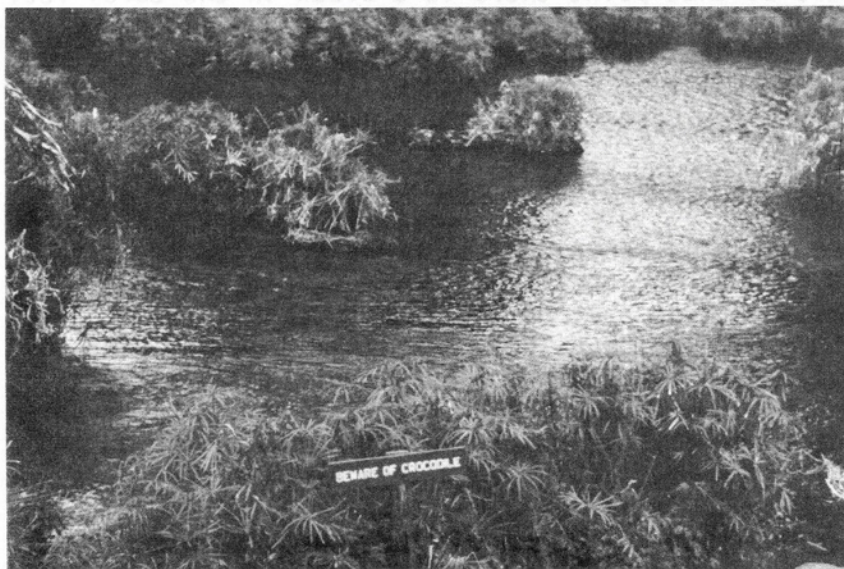
After a very pleasant three days at Diani, we headed North for Malindi, another old port. About twelve miles south of Malindi are the Gede ruins. No one knows much about Gede. It is believed that it was an affluent Arab settlement that was mysteriously evacuated in the early Seventeenth Century. After the evacuation, the forest took over and hid the city until this century. Part of the forest has now been cleared and many of the buildings have been excavated. No one knows why Gede ever existed; no one knows why it was abandoned. It is very eerie to walk amongst these ruins in the forest and imagine who lived there and what happened to them.

From Gede we went to Malindi. Malindi was, at one time, a favorite resort for British settlers. It has now become the domain of the package tour. This change was reflected not only in the people who were staying there, but also in our luncheon menu - it was written in French, Swahili, and German; but not English. At Malindi there is also a break in the reef, but no one has ever been attacked by a shark there; or so the ads say.

Malindi appears to be quite overdeveloped. It lacks the quiet, unpeopled atmosphere of Diani, which is still a place where you can take a solitary walk along the beach, at least for the next few years.

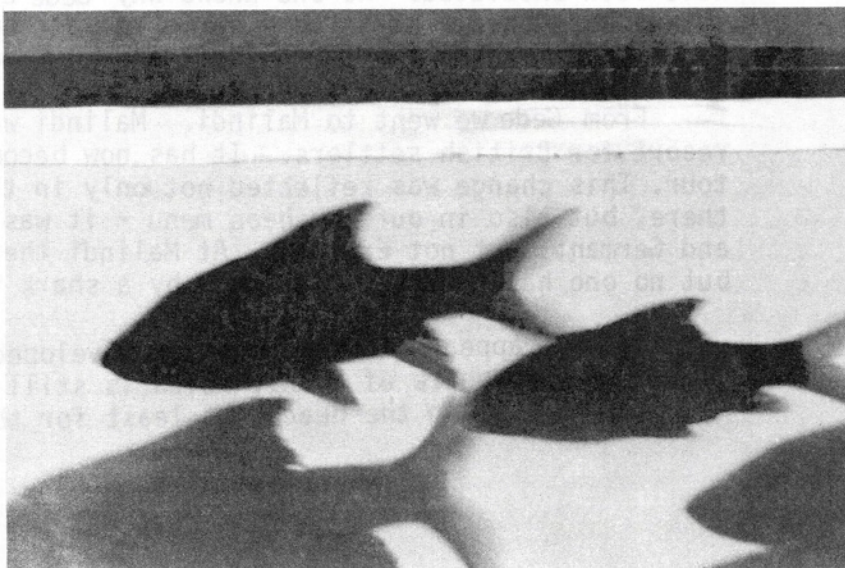


**MZIMA SPRINGS  
PERSPECTIVES**



**CAN YOU FIND THE FIVE  
HIPPOS IN EACH OF THESE  
TWO PICTURES?**

**FISH ON A CIRCLE  
LINE TOUR OF  
TOURISTS IN TANK**





After lunch we returned to Mombasa. In the old town there is still a strong Arab flavor. The streets are narrow and the buildings more Arabic in character than African. There are also many Asians in Mombasa, and they are the tradesmen of the town. Due to the strong Arab influence, most of the people of Mombasa and the Coast are Moslem. The men often wear small, beaded hats and the women may be seen with the traditional black veil when outside their homes. The dhows (Arab merchants ships) still come to Mombasa on the monsoon winds and Arab sailors are a part of the Mombasa tableaux.

We stayed only one night in Mombasa proper, and after lunch we headed once again toward Nairobi. We spent the night in Tsavo East, a convenient stopping point en route to Nairobi. We very much wanted to compare and contrast the two Tsavos. Tsavo East lies to the south and east of Tsavo West. It is lower in altitude than its sister park, and therefore it is more arid. It is mostly typical African bush country; therefore game spotting is difficult.

We entered Tsavo East from the Buchuma Gate, about a forty five minute drive from Mombasa. It was another half hour to our banda at Aruba. The Park seemed devoid of game until we came within three miles of Aruba Dam, an artificial lake with a permanent water supply.

The elephant is the dominant feature of Tsavo East. The other animals are affected by it not only because of its destruction of trees, but by the elephant's unique ability to dig waterholes in the dry river beds. They provide, for themselves and other animals, sources of water during droughts.

On one of our game drives we saw a huge herd of buffalo making their way to the Galana River. The Galana is formed by the Athi (the same river that flows through Nairobi National Park) and the Tsavo River. It provides permanent water in Tsavo East as the Tsavo does in the West. On this same game drive, we managed to see yet another rhino.

The bandas at Aruba are superbly constructed. They have to be, being so close to a large, permanent water supply. At Aruba there is also a ranger post. The complex is surrounded by a deep trench to keep elephant and other animals from the ranger's houses.

Aruba is truly an oasis. Tsavo East is hot and dusty most of the year, but at Aruba there is grass, water, and a cool, refreshing breeze from the dam. The animals come here to drink and escape the heat of the African bush. It is essential for their continuing survival.

We awoke early the last morning of our safari in order to start uphill toward Nairobi. Our homeward journey was too eventful. Our first flat tire happened when we were about two miles outside of the park: the bumping on the rough road had ripped a valve on a tire. Fortunately we were in an inhabited area and a friendly African stopped to help my not especially dextrous husband change the tire. Then we proceeded posthaste to a service station at Voi to have the tire repaired so that we would not run the risk of a flat without a spare.

Just past Mtito Andei (the Gate to Tsavo West which we had entered on the outward journey), we passed a major accident, which we later learned had



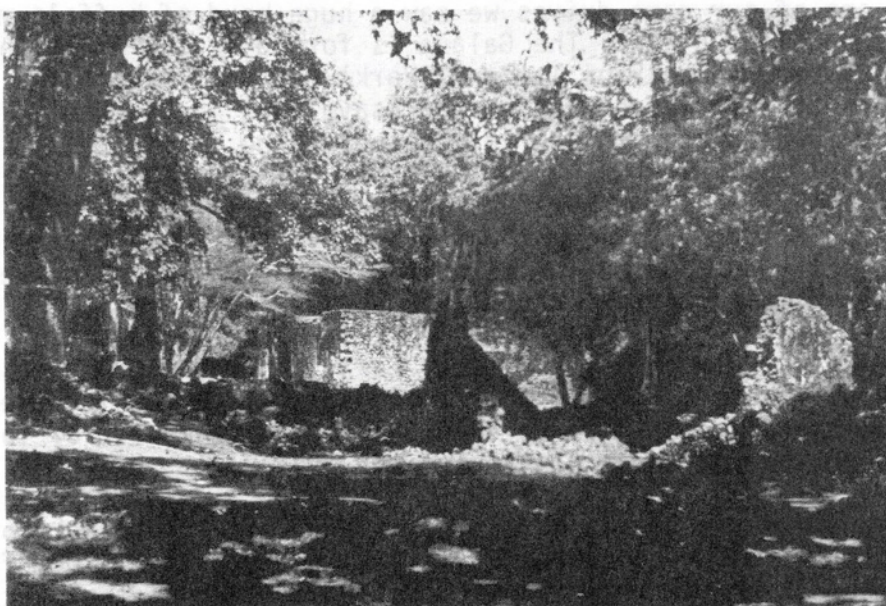
resulted in two fatalities. The Nairobi-Mombasa Road is notorious for its accidents: it may be one of the highest risk roads in the world. It has been recently blacktopped, but it is still only a two lane road with blind curves and dips; yet because of its tarmac surface, it is considered to be a racecourse, with its heavy traffic of large tanker trucks viewed as obstacles to be jumped, much as the barriers in a steeplechase. Unfortunately we didn't avoid the glass on the road. A few miles further along, and at a speed of 140 km/hr., we had another flat tire. Once again we were in an inhabited area just outside the national park, and two friendly Africans stopped to assist. This time the tire was ruined. So we limped and prayed the remaining one hundred and fifty miles to Nairobi. Happily we had no more flats.

We have now seen a great deal of Kenya. We are regularly struck by the impressive combination of scenic beauty, interesting animals, and, most of all, friendly people, which is Kenya. There are many more places, people, and animals that we would like to see, but they may have to wait for our next trip. We have promised ourselves that we shall return.

Sincerely,

*Bobbi Spitzberg*

Bobbi Spitzberg



THE RUINS OF GEDE IN THE FOREST

Received in New York on July 17, 1973