

IMW-22
The White Highlands

The Highlands Hotel
Molo, Kenya
May 27, 1962

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

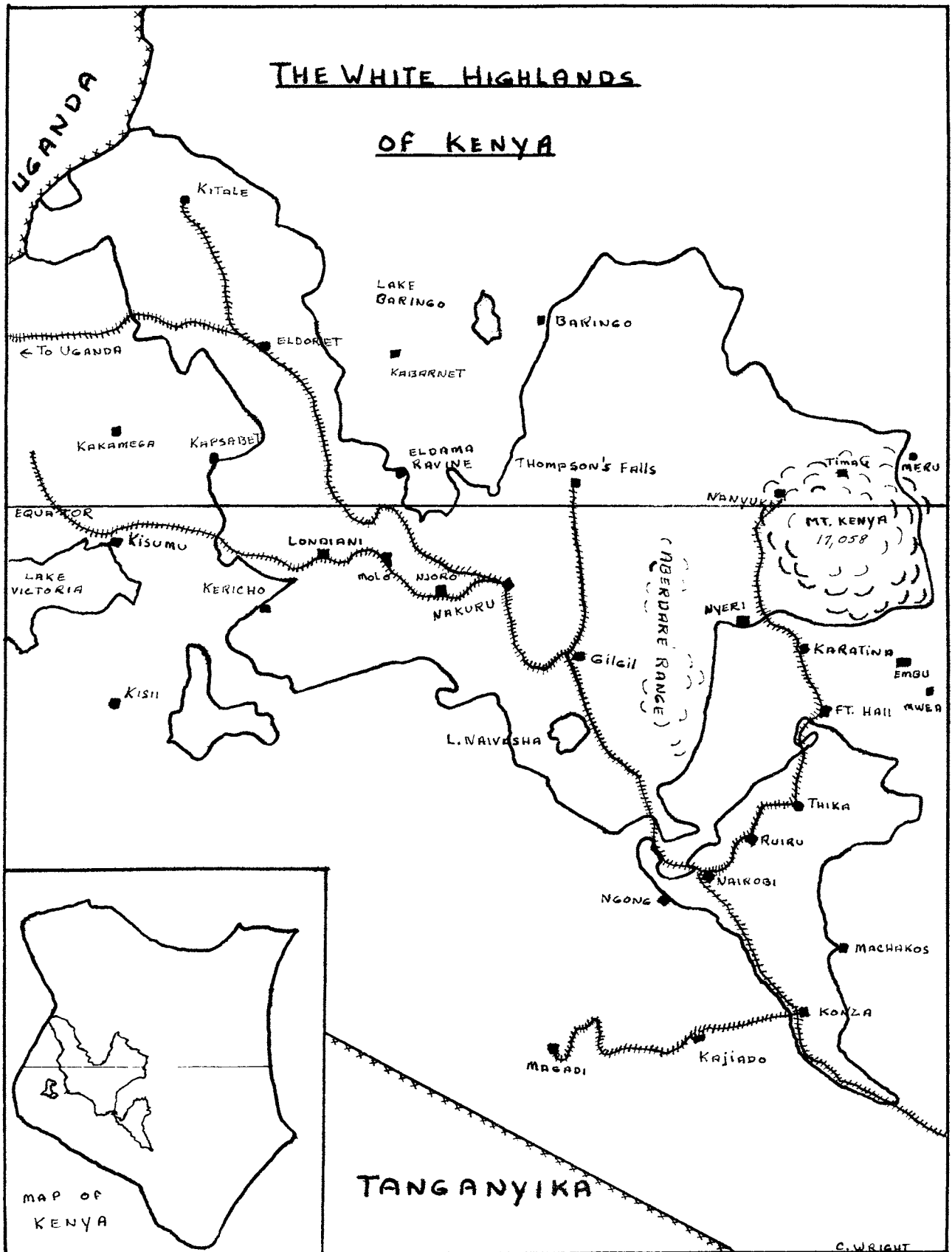
In Kenya the alienation of land for European occupation exclusively has long been a source of discontent, and only recently has this policy been modified. The problems it has raised have political aspects as well as tremendous emotional overtones. Of Kenya's 220,000 square miles about 40,000 are almost uninhabitable desert, about 110,000 are at present either not used at all by man or only very thinly populated, mostly by nomads, and about 2,000 comprise the coastal belt, most of which is not concerned with present-day agrarian problems. This accounts for about two-thirds of Kenya.

The remaining third, in which 90% of the population lives, is the agriculturally productive part of Kenya. It was from this land that the White Highlands were alienated (see map on page two). The total area of the Highlands was 16,196 square miles of which only 11,724 were actually alienated. The difference consists mainly of forest reserves (only 3% of the total area of Kenya, one of the lowest proportions in the world), national parks, craters and lakes. The rest of the land was reserved for African ownership.

It has been variously estimated that the Highlands contain between a quarter and a half of Kenya's best land, but any estimate on this should be taken with the greatest of skepticism, for it obviously could be dependent upon the political complexion of the estimator. When one considers that Africans outnumber Europeans 100 to 1, however, it is obvious that Europeans have a disproportionate amount of land.

In order to understand how this situation came to be, one must return to the period of early European settlement. At the turn of the century all the available evidence tended to show there were very large unoccupied areas in Kenya. Under this assumption European settlers have been permitted, indeed often encouraged, to acquire title to land since 1901. Some was freehold but most was leasehold for a period of up to 999 years. In 1915 the Governor was given power to control land transfers between members of different races, a measure designed to prevent the sale of land to Asians.

Later, surrounding tribes, mainly Kikuyu, claimed that the land, although unused by them when it was bought, was in fact theirs by custom. This claim combined with the Africans' growing insecurity on his own land due to a vacillating land policy led to the appoint-



ment in 1933 of a Land Commission presided over by Sir Morris Carter. It was to investigate these African claims and also to define the limits of the Highlands in which Europeans, in accordance with the White Paper of 1923, "were to have a privileged position".

The Carter Commission approached its task on racial lines and set up reserves for most tribes as well as a reserve, the Highlands, for Europeans. Each was given specific boundaries, and a highly segregated system of land ownership developed. With such strong guarantees farmers in the Highlands have maintained European farming standards and have become the core of Kenya's agricultural economy, producing a large proportion of its wealth.

The Royal Commission which came to East Africa in 1953-55, however, recommended that land should be dealt with as an economic asset, that the policy of reserving land on racial lines should be ended, and that registration of existing property rights should be followed by the opening up of land on a "willing buyer---willing seller" basis.

It took Government four years to implement, in principle if not in effect, the Royal Commission's recommendations. In October of 1959 it introduced new proposals to "ensure the basis of tenure and management of agricultural land will be similar throughout Kenya, regardless of race or tribe, as far as local economic and agronomic factors will permit". A Central Land Advisory Board, appointed by the Governor, and composed of an equal number of Africans, Asians and Europeans was created. Henceforth criteria governing land transactions are supposed to be efficiency and economic benefit to the country as a whole, and transfer of land between races is permitted.

In the Highlands there are Divisional Boards which initially receive applications to lease land. These Boards consist of a majority of European farmers, but appeal can be sought up to the Governor who is advised by the Central Land Advisory Board. In fact only a few Africans have obtained farms in the Highlands, although an increasing number are getting land through Government resettlement schemes. The conditions upon which the Boards should not grant leases in the Highlands are specifically laid down:

- 1) The applicant already has sufficient land or interest in the area;
- 2) The area of land is likely to prove uneconomic for the intended purpose;
- 3) The terms and conditions of the proposed transaction are onerous; and
- 4) The information before the Board, including any proposals for development submitted by the applicant, indicates that the proposed transferee is unlikely, for any reason, to be a good farmer of the holding.

With the aim of improving African farming, agricultural standards will be strict and high. As a concession to Europeans, farmers of

any race are permitted to convert leasehold to freehold. No doubt, however, the most important aspect of the 1959 reforms is the enunciation of a definite non-racial policy. Nevertheless, the general conditions on which a lease may be refused leaves ample opportunity for racial discrimination. The effectiveness of the law largely depends upon the willingness of the European farmers themselves to join with the spirit of the times.

Today few Africans could raise the money to buy a farm, or could manage it properly if they could. Time will alter this, but already several syndicates have purchased farms and give every indication of running them well.

The European colonial in Africa has long been the object of a good deal of criticism, much of it as highly charged emotionally as the early missionaries' condemnation of the tribal African. Recently the case for African nationalism has made a great impact, and even less attention is paid the white settler's point of view.

Understandably, the Europeans in Kenya are quite bitter about this. The attitude of a man in England, where there are no serious minority problems, is bound to be different from a Kenya European surrounded by primitive Africans. Whatever others tell him, the settler is convinced that his is a better way of life, and he means to maintain it as he sees fit. Condemnation from abroad, sometimes misinformed or unrealistic, is thoroughly resented as interference by people who do not have to bear the consequences of the policies they advocate. The Europeans are quite aware that their interests are likely to be sacrificed for those of the mother country, and so until recently they have tended to present a belligerent front.

But more important, Kenya settlers feel they have an important part to play in their country's future, and that they are making essential contributions to its development through the provision of capital and know-how. They point out to skeptics that pioneering is no picnic and that their numbers are not filled with men of the "pass-the-gin-Goddam-you-I-need-a-woman" variety. Most were in debt up to their ears until the Second World War boom helped them out of it. They also point out that standards throughout the country have risen under European management, and they suggest that if the Europeans leave standards will fall. To top it off their community is the most highly taxed in Kenya and they pay about half the country's annual revenue, most of which goes for African services. They grow about three-quarters of the agricultural produce, including an export surplus of about £20 million, and pay £10 million in wages each year.

As a result of the 1960 Lancaster House Conference which specified independence under an African government, at least 35% of the Highlands have been put up for sale, many Europeans have moved their capital from the country, and Kenya Government stock and industrial shares have plummeted.

They feel betrayed. They came to Kenya, often under Government sponsorship, to find a richer life. Now with independence

fast approaching, they can't sell their land and that same Government won't even grant compensation for it. In one area north of Nairobi, an African settlement scheme was planned, and the Kenya Government was to buy a number of European farms. Unaccountably at the last moment Government cancelled the plan, and then only a few weeks later announced they would still buy the European farms at 25% below the previously agreed prices. Two of the farmers agreed, and after another delay of several weeks Government announced they would only buy the two farms at 37½% below the agreed prices. No agreement has yet been reached.

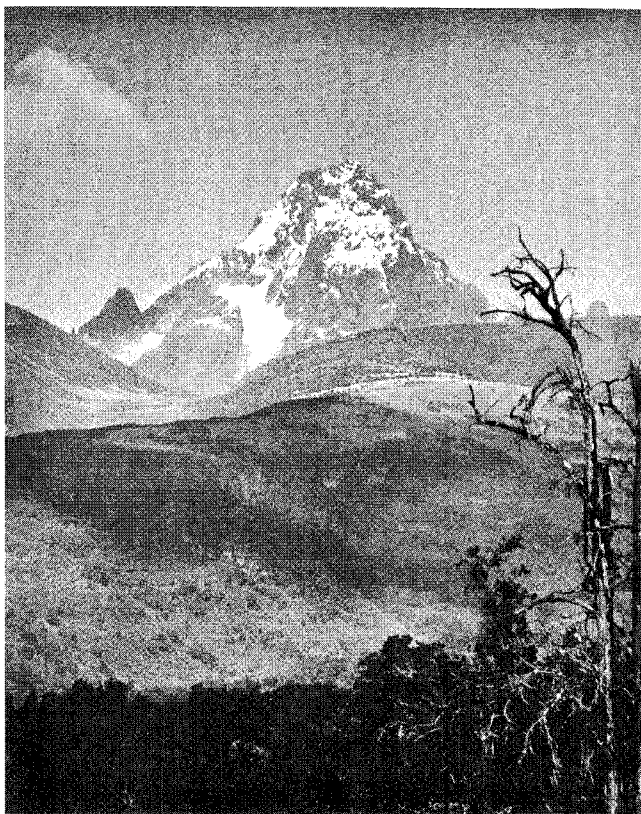
As an Njoro settler told us, "Throughout history minorities have always had it, and we'll be no exception."

Today most of Kenya's Europeans are reconciled to the prospect of an independent Kenya under an African government.

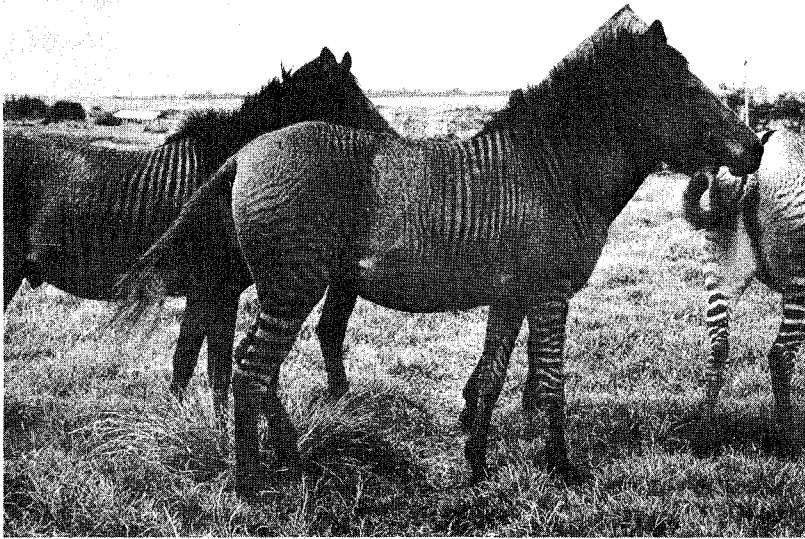
They don't like the idea at all, and many fear there may well be another Congo, but they have accepted the inevitable. Now their interest is to salvage what they can.

The economic situation has deteriorated and for the past two years has remained at an all-time low. Until a decision on an independent government is reached, there is every indication the slump will continue. This has affected the farmers in two ways: they can't sell their land, if they so desire, for even a fraction of its worth, and most farmers have everything tied up in their farms. Secondly, the market for pedigree livestock, one of Kenya's basic industries, has disappeared, and pure-bred Corriedale sheep and Friesian bulls are being sold for ridiculous prices or not at all.

Looking to the future the farmers feel they have no security at all. The recent Tanganyika Government move of transferring all freehold land into leasehold has worried many who think the same thing will happen here. Those who have leaseholds fear an exorbitant rent upon independence. Everyone is afraid of a great increase in taxation to make up the difference between Government revenue and expenditure, a difference now made up by U.K. grants. Finally the irresponsible statements of some African politicians to the effect that upon uhuru Africans can take over European land, farms and even women only adds to their feeling of insecurity.



Mount Kenya



Zebroids

Many settlers have already left Kenya, but most of them are among those who couldn't possibly live under a black Government anyway. Many others would leave immediately if they could sell their farms. But most of those who are left want to stay on after uhuru, if they can. They are Kenyans, and they don't look forward to pulling up stakes and starting all over again.

Yet no one knows what the future holds, and it is the uncertainty which is maddening. Everywhere people ask us what Canada and the United States are like. Others think of going to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand or even Brazil. Everyone wants to

have some place in mind when and if the moment arrives.

We decided to spend some time in the Highlands and find out what's going on. Our first stop was Nanyuki, a small town to the west of Mount Kenya. It's some 6,400 feet high; so the air was clear and fresh in the daytime and cold at night. We checked in at the Silverbeck Hotel which boasts a bar bisected by the equator and were relieved to see that our room not only had a view right on to Mount Kenya's rocky crags but also a fireplace which burned aromatic cedar logs.

After its climate and beauty Nanyuki is known as a town largely populated by characters, most of whom don't speak to each other. Such is life among East Africa's pioneers, but so also is warm hospitality, and we enjoyed more than our share. We first visited one of the earliest settlers who came to Nanyuki in 1912 when the area was empty save for a few wandering Masai and Kikuyu and of course the numerous wild animals.

Raymond Hook is about 75, sports a grey goatee, is of keen mind and gives an impression of great gentleness. He lives strangely or rather has gone native. We liked him immediately. He invited us in for tea (his own honey and butter) and we talked of his early days in Nanyuki when the Laikipiak Masai moved south to join their brethren, and lion were still masters of the bush.

"Sendayo was a Masai laibon (the Masai equivalent of chief) from the south who, as a result of his political activities after the First World War, was exiled to Nanyuki. Now it happens that one of Mount

Kenya's subsidiary peaks is named after him, and when I told him this he replied, 'Just like the British!' which of course it is. He was an old man when he was eventually released, and he returned to die among his people."

Raymond Hook is also a well-known naturalist. He showed us his most interesting creation, the zebroid. A cross between a horse and a Grévy zebra, it is sterile, like the mule, although with stripes and much better looking. He has sold several to zoos, but so far their only practical use has been to carry provisions for safaris up Mount Kenya. "I got the idea from an American science magazine about twenty-five years ago, but those things (pointing outside to an ancient Jeep) have ruined the market."

He also keeps two serval cats and seven caracals (African lynx) which he uses as breeding pairs when zoos want specimens. Another strange animal we saw was the crested rat, a rare nocturnal creature. Hook catches them by hand (it appears they walk slowly) for zoos and museums. Numerous peacocks were wandering about.

His most notorious escapade was when he imported several coypu or Brazilian water rats about twenty years ago. Unluckily they escaped and now are a potential threat to crops and earth dams.

We talked of African agriculture. "Yes, the Africans have done a lot recently. They're good gardeners, but they're not good farmers. Who knows what will happen if they take over European farms. Their production will certainly drop. I'll stay here no matter what, because this is my home, but most people will leave if they can't make a go of it under an African government. The Africans don't know how to run this country; I think they'll have to keep the Europeans on for a long time to come."

A crested rat

After a quick visit to the Nanyuki Sports Club where the rage was croquet, we returned to the Silverbeck and were invited to visit Raymond Hook's brother, the Commander. Logan Hook is a personality in his own right, and he greeted us on his porch where he pointed out the skin of a bongo, a rare forest antelope.



"That's the bongo Teddy Roosevelt didn't shoot. You have to be very quiet when hunting bongo, and he talked too much. But, I shouldn't say that, should I!"

Commander Hook came to Nanyuki in 1922 at the invitation of his brother who sold him 100 acres. He built the Silverbeck Hotel, which he and his wife have managed until recently when they turned over that responsibility to a Belgian Countess, a refugee from the Congo. The food has improved, but life remains much the same. He can still be seen in front of the hotel each morning supervising an old African whose sole job is to raise his old sloop's colors. The Commander was obviously delighted to tell his stories to someone new and after pouring drinks, he started right in to get as much said as possible before his wife returned from town.

He first showed us his remarkable collection of paintings, some of which were by his father, a past President of the Royal Arts Society. He told us of the time he met the Empress Eugénie when he was seven. But the most interesting thing he told us about was the day, moored off the Turkish coast during the First World War, when he was in command of a sloop with a name suspiciously like Geranium. There an American ship, the U.S.S. Dixieland, came alongside, and while its Captain joined him for a glass of champagne, the crews had a regatta. When the American longboat won, the British ship fired a salute. It happened to be the day before the end of Ramadan, and the Turks thought the shots signified its end, and so they rushed down to the beach to end their fast. He didn't tell us their reaction when they learned the truth.

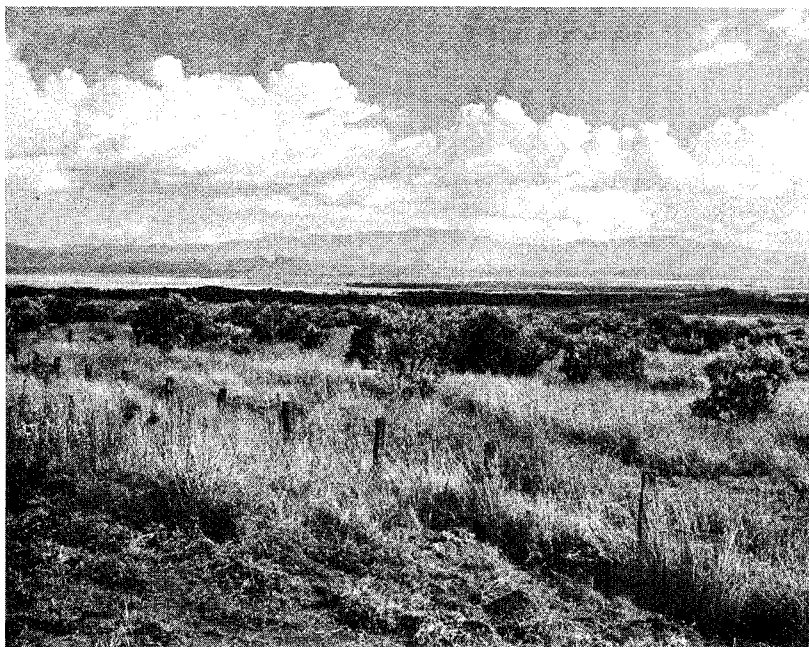
The next day we went to see Ken and April Sutherland. Ken, who came to Kenya after the Second World War, manages a massive cattle and sheep ranch of some 11,000 acres near Timau, a town on the northern slopes of Mount Kenya. He obviously loves every inch of the land, and after a hearty lunch he took us around it. We saw many wild animals which he encourages by putting salt down at their waterholes. We also saw healthy herds of African cattle, upgraded with some European stock admixture, and in the midst of one herd stood a lone eland, the largest African antelope, which had been there almost since its birth.

April said, "We don't intend to leave Kenya unless we have to, but we must consider the children's safety and education. We don't want to worry about them in our own garden, but until things get better, we do. They're four and five years old now and soon they'll go to school. We don't want to send them away, but will there be a good school nearby then?"

Ken added, "I'm frankly pessimistic about our future here. I think we'll have to go to Australia or New Zealand, and I'm not looking forward to it."

Our next stop was Njoro, a single row of Indian dukas (shops), in the heart of the White Highlands. It was here that serious white settlement began when in 1903 the first big grant of land was made

to Lord Delamere who, more than any other, pioneered on a bold scale and introduced European breeds of cattle and sheep. He was given a grant of 100,000 acres, some of the most productive farmland in Kenya, although at the time many people thought him foolish to pay a rent of \$550 a year for it. "I started to grow wheat in East Africa," he wrote, "to prove that though I lived on the equator I was not in any equatorial country."



Lake Elmenteita and the Mau Escarpment taken from the floor of the Rift Valley.

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Delamere invested millions in Kenya, much of it in grand experiments which often failed.

His aim was to make Kenya a white man's country, and if he lost money (at one time he had to live on \$550 a year), he also showed others how best to avoid the costly mistakes he could afford to make. His farm at Njoro was only one of the many he owned. His biggest problem was to raise soil fertility, and today, light and thin as it is, it is more fertile than it was in 1903.

The largest of the many farms into which Delamere's grant was later divided was owned by Lord Egerton of Tatton. In 1939 he gave 800 acres to the Government for use as a training school for Kenya Europeans anxious to take up farming. When Lord Egerton died, he left a further 2,900 acres and money to develop them. Egerton College lies above Njoro on the lower slopes of the Mau Escarpment. On a clear day one can look a long way down the Rift Valley past the extinct volcanoes of Longonot and Susswa.

We visited the Principal, Mike Barrett, early in the afternoon. Energetic and imaginative, he loves his job as well as being the right man for it.

"Egerton is primarily for Kenyans, but we try to have as many from other countries as possible. Almost all are on bursaries of some sort---one has a Pig Board bursary---and only seven or eight pay their own way. There are now about 47 students but by next October we hope to have between 110 and 120."

Egerton offers a two-year diploma in agriculture, preceeded by a year of practical experience, and since fees only provide a small amount of revenue, about three-quarters of the annual expenses are met by Government.

"We've had a complete change of policy here recently. Lord Egerton was most specific in wanting only Europeans to benefit from the College, and yet many of us felt this was not appropriate at this time. In 1960 Government decided to integrate, and after quite a fight the Governing Body resigned en masse. Only a few then on it remain today. On the whole the Europeans around here took it badly, but they're beginning to get more friendly. Our next door neighbor now even gives lifts to our African students, and a few weeks ago one of the old die-hards was seen dancing with an Arab student after a school play.

"The students have taken it much better. There are seven European seniors who began under the old system, and we have been most careful in not pushing them together with the Africans. But the new class has been wonderful. Everyone gets along very well. The College makes no effort to get people together, but they are doing it on their own. The only practical difficulty we encountered was in using the bathrooms, but after a demonstration all was well again."

Later we talked to Lord Egerton's manager about the white-only provision in his will. He felt that although Lord Egerton might not have liked the present trend of political development, he would probably have approved of the College training Africans. "He would have wanted the people who were going to run the country to know something about the job."

The next day we visited some old friends from London, Donald and Ruth Thomas. At a time when many settlers are leaving Kenya, they have just leased a farm of 585 acres and are looking forward to a long tenancy. Donald Thomas told us that when he applied to the Land Board for permission to rent the farm, "We were refused on the ground that the size of the holding was uneconomic. The real problem appeared to be that our next door neighbor wanted the land himself, and he happened to be on the Board. For some reason he changed his mind, and so now we have a farm that is officially uneconomic."

Our last call was to a delightful woman, Nellie Grant, one of the first settlers in the area.

"We're not going to be run out of Kenya by African politicians. It will be the fleas and rats. Have you ever seen so many?"

When Lord Delamere sub-divided his farm, he constructed a large water pipeline and then encouraged new settlers to buy the land. Few could afford to. "When I came to tell him I couldn't pay him at the time, he told me not to worry and to pay when I could. He did that to everyone, because he was generous and wanted to see Kenya settled by Europeans. It was nothing down and all your life to pay."

A story is told of Nellie Grant when she sold home-made marmalade (around 1922) to customers in Nairobi. Evidently the manufacture of marmalade calls for prolonged boiling, and she forgot that liquids boil at a lower temperature at high altitudes. At that time she was living at Thika, about 5,000 feet high, and so she didn't boil the marmalade long enough. The night before she was to take a large consignment into Nairobi, she heard a series of explosions in the bathroom. Since it was the only room in the house that was waterproof, the marmalade was stored there. When she rushed in, she found it all over the walls and ceiling, and it appeared that through lack of boiling the stuff had begun to ferment and then burst its jars. She rushed it to Nairobi to sell it before all the jars exploded.

We asked her about this story, and she admitted it was true. "That marmalade was quite alcoholic, you know, and not a few of our customers liked it very much too!"

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The European minority and its land pose one of Kenya's most difficult problems. The Africans, anxious to prove their abilities, want the land on which the settlers live. The settlers feel their legitimate interests will be sacrificed to the imperatives of British and foreign opinion, the "You've gotten yourself into this mess; now get yourself out of it!" variety.

As with most problems it's not that cut and dried. Our trip taught us many things, among them that settlers often live in a completely different age, that ingrained attitudes die slowly, and that psychologically a dominant position sometimes affects individuals badly. History, however, has only caught up with Kenya since the Second World War, and if we came away from the Highlands with one strong impression, it was that the Europeans are catching up too. But now, of course, it's probably too late.

Many of the people we met were of the older generation who arrived early in this century. With them we usually talked of the past for the future has little to offer them. Obviously the younger people have a greater stake in the country, and everywhere we went we found a great desire to remain. Even though Kenya is predominantly an African country, it is obviously in its own best interests, economically, that the Europeans remain, at least temporarily. But economic realities don't always coincide with political necessities. If the Europeans can remain on terms acceptable to themselves and to the new leaders, then they will form a core of progressive and valuable citizens.

From here their prospects don't look too bright.

Sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright