

# Witt's Wanderings

by John W. Witt

In January, after his second stay at the Witt Point Loma Hotel, Tavern and Restaurant, the Bishop of Dar es Salaam, casually said, "Next month, we elect a new Archbishop in Tanzania and, right now, I'm second on the list. If I'm elected, will you come to the Enthronement?" Without any hesitation, Lenora and I said, "Of course!" With her usual guarded reserve, however, Lenora qualified her response, saying, "But first things first, you need to get elected before anything else."

When the word came that Bishop Valentino Leonard Mokiwa had indeed been elected to serve as the fifth Anglican Archbishop of Tanzania, all equivocation was over. We had to begin preparing for the longest journey of either of our lives—from San Diego to East Africa and back, a trip we'd never dreamed of taking before.

The details of the 300-mile drive, in Toyota Land Cruisers, on a two-lane road from Dar es Salaam to the country's official capital, Dodoma, will remain for the Rector's telling or, if left to me, will be told in a subsequent *Logos* article. What I want to relate here pertains to what Lenora and I did at the beginning, after we reached Tanzania and before the Enthronement.

"If we're going all that way," Lenora said, "we ought to visit the part of the country where the wild animals are—we ought to sign up for a safari!" I'll skip the difficulties of scheduling when we didn't know how long the Archbishop-elect wanted us to be available for the festivities expected to surround the Enthronement ceremony. Let's just say we had to make air, hotel and safari reservations at the last minute. The most fretful part of the process was getting our passports, with Tanzanian visas attached, physically back from the embassy in Washington before our scheduled departure. They arrived by FedEx overnight delivery at 7:00 A. M. on the day our plane was due to leave at Noon.

My idea of a safari has always been a civilian version of a military field exercise, cross-country trekking over the "boonies," sleeping on the ground in some sort of tent, eating food produced in a field galley and relieving oneself wherever a bit of privacy could be obtained. I'd done enough of that in the Marine Corps and I wasn't eager to reenact the process in Africa, paying for the privilege to boot. But Lenora was right (as usual!); we probably wouldn't have another opportunity, so we might as well take it now.

My preconception was completely wrong. We bounced around the countryside in something like a Marine Corps  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton truck (what we used to call a "weapons carrier"), but it was a Toyota Land Cruiser specially outfitted for the purpose. There's not much the Tanzanian tour operator can do about the unimproved roads, but the transportation was as good as you could imagine under the circumstances.

Accommodations were far above Marine Corps field standards, as well. After a few moments wondering whether someone was going to meet us at Kilimanjaro Airport and take us into Arusha, the nearest town, the first night was spent in one of the best hotels we've ever stayed in, the *New Arusha*. I'm not sure what the *old Arusha Hotel* would have been like, but the current one is luxuriously up to date, the equivalent of the best small hotels in Europe and the United States.

In the morning, after breakfast, a representative of Leopard Tours was there to brief us on our safari game drive and to introduce us to our driver/guide, with whom we'd spend most of the next week. At the hotel entrance, across from the town clock tower and the pillar marking the midway point between Cairo and Cape Town, we piled ourselves and our bags into the Cruiser and started off on the great adventure.

Before leaving Arusha, however, we made an important stop, to buy water, an important commodity where tap water is usually unreliable, if available at all. We purchased a case of 12 bottles of Kilimanjaro brand pure spring water (1.5 liters each). It lasted us to the end of the safari.

The first destination was Tarangire National Park, some 100 km. (62 mi.) on a relatively well-paved and maintained road, the A104, which also connects Arusha with Dodoma and the Zambian border. Along the way we caught our first glimpses of the Maasai, the distinctively different people of East Africa, with their brilliantly colored clothing, the men carrying the long stick, which serves as a cattle, goat and sheep prod, a weapon and a symbol of their warrior status.

Tanzania's National Parks are jealously protected by the government. Poaching of protected animals was an early problem after the parks were created, but now it is protection of the environment from the increasing tourist onslaught that has drawn the country's attention. To make sure tourists understand the stringent rules, they are posted at park entrances, with notices of large fines for violations, and a hefty admission fee (around \$50 to \$150 per group) is charged to assure visitors' attention.

Tarangire is relatively small, particularly when compared with the vast Serengeti National Park to the northwest, but our first elephants were spotted there. It was the beginning of the annual clockwise migration of zebras and wildebeests (AKA gnus) from the south to the north (Kenya) and back again, on the ongoing search for grass, their principal food source. Giraffes, Cape buffalo, gazelles, impalas, big cats (lions, leopards and cheetahs eyeing their next meal, usually a hapless wildebeest), hyenas and various birds and small animals can be seen there, as well.

Our first safari housing experience was enjoyed at the Tarangire Sopa Lodge. We were served a lovely lunch poolside, before heading out to find animals. The hotel room that night was excellent—no sleeping on the ground in a tent. Meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner, were part of the deal at each lodge. The food, served buffet style (not Lenora's favorite) was generally quite good.

Tanzanians are almost universally friendly, courteous and eager to please. They seem to be very gentle and generous in sharing whatever little they have. This autumn, I'll offer a sequel covering the trip from Tarangire, through Ngorongoro Conservation Area and the Serengeti and Lake Manyara National Parks.

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