

head out!
summer in
the mountains



reinhold
messner's **yeti**
chronicles



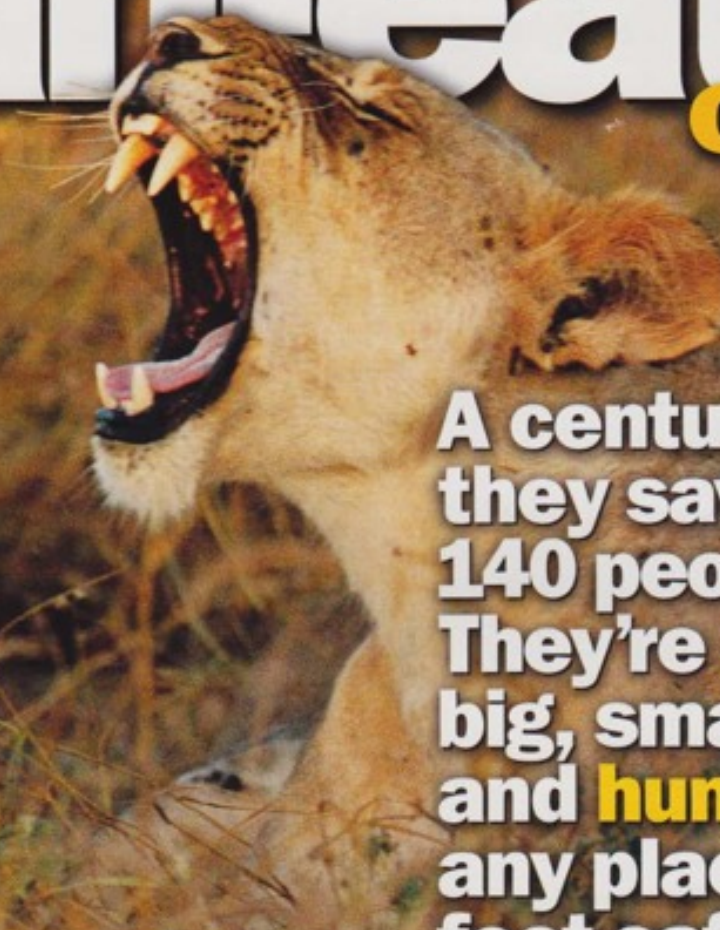
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the man-eaters of tsavo



A century ago,
they savaged
140 people in Kenya.
They're **still out there:**
big, smart, fearless,
and **hungry.** Is this
any place for a
foot safari?

zip up your tent, **bwana** !

by Philip Caputo

AMONG THE man-e

Flesh and bone: Wildlife researcher Sam Andanje holds the skull of a Tsavo lion. **Opposite:** one of five females in the harem of a male that came to be known as Scarface.



aters

Photography
by Rob Howard

Tsavo. Its name means “Place of Slaughter.” The lions that prowl its plains are known for their abnormally large size, their maneless males, and their unusual prey: humans. **Philip Caputo** investigates—on foot.

There are few words as disturbing as “man-eater.” Instantly, it dissolves hundreds of thousands of years of human progress and carries us back to our

humble beginnings, when we were puny hominids, slouching across the African savanna, huddling in fireless caves, waiting for death to rush us from out of the long grass. The thought of being devoured offends our sense of human dignity, subverts our cherished belief that we are higher beings, “the paragon of animals,” to borrow a line from *Hamlet*. The man-eater’s actions say to us, “I don’t care if you’re the President of the United States, the Queen of England, the inventor of the microchip, or just an ordinary Joe or Jill; you’re no paragon in *my* book, but the same as a zebra or gazelle—a source of protein. In fact, I’d rather hunt you, because you’re so slow and feeble.”

We didn’t know if the big male lion in front of us had ever tasted human





Above: After a day of wildlife tracking, guides Clive Ward (left) and Iain Allan relax at a bush camp in southeastern Kenya's Tsavo National Park. **Bottom, from left:** Kenya Wildlife Service rangers lug the skull and horns of a Cape buffalo; it's a mark of distinction for a Masai warrior to kill a lion using only a spear; British Army Col. John H. Patterson poses in 1898 with one of the two man-eaters that attacked train crews building a 580-mile line between Mombasa and Lake Victoria. During their reign of terror, the lions killed about a hundred workers.





flesh. He did inhabit a region of Kenya that had given birth to the two most infamous man-eating lions in history, and that still harbors lions with a proclivity to hunt man: Only two years ago, a cattle herder had been killed and devoured by a lion not far from where this male now lay looking at us with eyes that glowed like brass in firelight. He must have gone 400 pounds, and he was ugly in the way certain prizefighters are ugly—not a photogenic, Oscar De La Hoya sort of lion, but a Jake LaMotta lion, with only a scruff of a mane, his face and hide scarred from the thorny country he lived in, or from battles with rival lions, or from the kicks of the zebra and buffalo he killed for food. He was only 25 feet away, but we were safe—provided we stayed in our Land Rover. Panting in the late afternoon heat, his gaze impassive,



he rested in the shade of a tall bush beside the carcass of a young Cape buffalo killed the night before. Around him, well fed and yawning, five lionesses lazed in the short yellow grass. Two cubs licked and nibbled the buffalo's hindquarters, the ragged strips of meat in the hollowed-out cavity showing bright red under the black skin. Nothing else remained of the animal except the horned head, the front hooves, and a few scattered bones.

Photographer Rob Howard and I were taking pictures from the roof, using it to support our bulky 300-millimeter lenses. Inside, my wife, Leslie, observed through binoculars, while our guides, Iain Allan and Clive Ward, kept an eye on things.

I ran out of film and dropped through the roof hatch to fetch another roll from my camera bag. Rob stood up, trying for another angle. Immediately, the drowsy, indifferent expression went out of the male's eyes; they focused on Rob with absolute concentration. Rob's camera continued to whirl and click, and I wondered if he noticed that he'd disturbed the lion. Now, with its stare still fixed on him, it grunted, first out of one side of its mouth, then the other, gathered its forepaws into itself, and raised its haunches. The long, black-tufted tail switched in the grass.

The lion made a noise like a man clearing his throat, only a good deal louder, and lunged toward us, swatting the air with one paw before he stopped.

"Say, Rob, might be a good idea to sit down again," Iain advised in an undertone. "Move slowly, though."

He had barely finished this instruction when the lion made a noise like a man clearing his throat, only a good deal louder, and lunged across half the distance between us and him, swatting the air with one paw before he stopped. Rob tumbled through the roof hatch, almost landing on top of me in a clatter of camera equipment, a flailing of arms and legs.

"Jesus Christ!" he said, obviously impressed. The big male had settled down again, although his tail continued to sweep back and forth.

"The short, happy life of Rob Howard," I wisecracked. "It's embarrassing to see a man lose his nerve like that." A bit of bravado.

We were going to spend only part of this safari in a vehicle. For the rest, we would try to track and photograph lions on foot. How would my own nerve hold up then? Perhaps Rob was wondering the same thing about himself. He asked Iain if the lion could have jumped on the roof.

"Could have, but he wouldn't have," Iain replied, a smile cracking across his rough, ruddy face. "That was just a demonstration, to let you know the rules. Of course, you had no way of knowing that."

There was a lot we didn't know about these Tsavo lions—practically everything—and we had come to Kenya to begin filling in the gaps in our knowledge. After hiring Iain, whose safari company, Tropical Ice, is one of the most experienced in the country, we journeyed by Land Rover from Nairobi to the eastern section of Tsavo National Park—the largest in Kenya, with an area of 8,034 square miles (the size of Massachusetts). Here, some 200 miles southeast of Nairobi, you can get at least a taste of the wide-open wilds that Isak Dinesen described in *Out of Africa* and that aviator/adventurer Beryl Markham explored by air. It is the Africa that's all but vanished from the rest of Kenya's national parks and game reserves, which have become

Opposite, top: One of Scarface's mates growls in the grass. **Above, from top:** Ward at the wheel and Caputo through the roof, on the lookout for animals along the Galana River; Scarface. **Bottom, from left:** District Officer Whitehead rides past the site where a man-eater clawed him then carried off and consumed his servant, Abdullah; Indian laborers at the railhead camp, which housed some 3,000 workers; Patterson in regimental regalia; Ward (left) and Allan, who together have more than 40 years of experience tracking wildlife in Africa.





Above: Allan leads the way as the Land Cruiser follows a brick-red twin track through scrub flats in the east block of Tsavo National Park. **Opposite, top:** From this tree, Patterson shot the second man-eating lion that was terrorizing railroad workers. **Bottom, from left:** leaping Masai warriors near the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, west of Tsavo National Park; Tsavo laborers huddle in the midday sun; Patterson's bridge over the Tsavo, which was completed in 1899. Bombed by the Germans during World War I, the span was rebuilt, and is still in service.



vast outdoor zoos, except that the animals are free while the visitors are caged in minivans.

Iain loves Tsavo—the dense palm and salt-bush forests of the river valleys, the endless red and khaki plains. “Africa without any fat on it,” he called it. “It’s raw and primitive and it doesn’t tolerate fools or forgive mistakes.”

But Tsavo also has a dark history that’s centuries old. Its name means “Place of Slaughter” in a local language—a reference to intertribal massacres committed by Masai warriors in the distant past. Ivory traders told spooky tales about men who vanished from their midst when their caravans stopped at the Tsavo River for water and rest. The traders blamed the mysterious disappearances on evil spirits.

The region’s forbidding reputation spread worldwide in 1898, when two lions literally stopped the British Empire in its tracks by killing and eating an estimated 140 people, most of them workers building a railroad bridge over the Tsavo River, in what was then called the East Africa Protectorate. The predators’ reign of terror lasted nine months, until they were hunted down and shot by the British Army engineer in charge of the project, John H. Patterson. Working as a team, the lions sneaked into the camps at night, snatched men from their tents, and consumed them. Patterson, who’d had considerable experience hunting tigers in India, devised ingenious traps and ruses to bring the animals to bay. But they outwitted him time and again, proving so crafty that the workmen—mostly contract laborers imported from India—came to believe the ancient legends about body-snatching demons, adding their own anti-imperial spin to the myth. The lions, they said, were the incarnate spirits of African chieftains angered by the building of a railroad through their ancestral lands. The workers would lie in their tents, listening to the beasts roar in the darkness. When the roars stopped, the men would call out to each other, “Beware, brothers, the devil is coming!”

In 1907, Patterson, by then a lieutenant colonel, published a book about the ordeal, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, which is widely regarded as the greatest saga in the annals of big-game hunting. Still in print, it has inspired two feature films, *Bwana Devil* in 1952 and *The Ghost and the Darkness* in 1996, with Val Kilmer portraying Patterson.

While lecturing in the United States, 17 years after the book’s publication, Patterson sold the lions’ skins and skulls to the Field Museum of Nat-



Patterson sat there, listening to the crunching of bones and to what he described as a contented “purring”—sounds that he could not get out of his head for days.

ural History in Chicago. A taxidermist turned the hides into lifelike mounts and they were put on exhibit, where they have been ever since, a source of grim fascination to countless visitors. I saw them when I was in high school, and though I can’t remember any other exhibit I looked at that day, I’ve never forgotten those two lions, poised on a replica of sandstone, one crouched, the other standing with right paw slightly raised, both looking intently in the same direction. They had no manes, and the absence of the adornment that gives postcard lions such a majestic appearance made them look sinister. It was as if nature had dispensed with distracting ornamentation to show the beasts in their

essence—stripped-down assemblies of muscle and teeth and claws, whose sole purpose was to kill. But it was their eyes that impressed me most. They were glass facsimiles, yet they possessed a fixed, attentive, concentrated expression that must have been in the living eyes when they spotted human prey, decades before, on the plains of Africa.

Patterson’s account of their raids reads like a gothic novel. Here’s how he describes his discovery of the remains of his Sikh crew leader, Ungan Singh, who had been seized by one of the lions the previous night: “The ground all round was covered with blood and morsels of flesh and bones, but the head had been left intact, save for the holes made by the lion’s tusks. It was the most gruesome sight I had ever seen.”

Singh was one of the lions’ early victims, and his ghastly death sent Patterson in avenging pursuit. He didn’t know what he was in for, but he found out soon enough. The construction camps were scattered up and down the railroad right-of-way: The lions would strike at a particular camp one night and Patterson would stake it out the next, waiting with his .303 rifle—but the cats always seemed to know where he was, and would attack elsewhere.

The workmen, meanwhile, surrounded their camps with high *bomas*, or protective fences, made from thorny *Commiphora* shrubs. For a while, the attacks stopped. One night a few workers figured it was safe to sleep outside their tent but inside the boma—a bad decision. One of the lions forced its way through the fence and, ignoring the stones and firebrands that the workers threw, grabbed a man and dragged him through the thorns. It was joined by its partner, and the two savored their meal within earshot of the man’s friends.

Perhaps Patterson’s worst memory was of the night when he was in his boma and both lions carried their most recent kill close to him. It was too dark to aim and fire. He sat there, listening to the crunching of bones and to what he described as a contented “purring”—sounds that he could not get out of his head for days.



On a far-off ridge, we saw one of Africa's primitive, elemental sights—a procession of elephants, raising dust as they migrated to the river to drink.





Above: A giraffe averts its eyes as a herd of elephants departs after bathing and sporting at sundown in a Tsavo watering hole. An area the size of Massachusetts, Kenya's largest preserve shelters more than 600 species of birds and 61 species of large mammals, including the "Big Five"—lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros, and Cape buffalo. **Bottom, from left:** the vanguard of a buffalo herd that numbered about 600 animals; giraffes browse on an acacia tree; Scarface and his cubs resting after feasting on a buffalo. The lions belong to a pride of 23 animals.





Humans are not normally on the predator's grocery list. Lions are generally believed to turn to eating humans only when injuries or old age prevent them from pursuing their usual prey.

It's true that old, sick, or wounded lions have been responsible for most attacks on people. However, a team of researchers from Chicago's Field Museum headed by Dr. Bruce Patterson (no relation to the colonel) has come up with—well, it would be an exaggeration to say “evidence”—tantalizing *hints* that there may be some lions with a more or less genetic predisposition to prey on humans, even when strong and healthy enough to bring down a zebra or a buffalo. The explanation for this behavior would then subtly but significantly shift from the pathological to the Darwinian: Conditions in a lion's environment, as much as changes in its physiology, can drive it to hunt people—and there's nothing aberrant or “criminal” about it.

Still, such a beast poses a mystery, and the key to that mystery may be found in the lions of Tsavo, which truly are a different breed of cat from the glorious, regal lions of, say, the Serengeti. Most Tsavo males are maneless, and larger than the Serengeti male, which measures 36 inches at the shoulder and weighs between 385 and 410 pounds. Tsavo lions are up to a foot taller and can tip the scales at about 460 to 520 pounds, giving you a cat the size of a small grizzly. They are also distinguished by their behavior. On the plains, the adult male's role is to mate and protect the pride, leaving the hunting to females. In Tsavo, where scarcity of game makes prides smaller, males share in the hunting, and may even do most of it.

“There's no doubt in my mind that Tsavo lions are different,” Iain told us on the drive from Nairobi. “They're total opportunists, killing machines that will attack and eat even little African hares. They're also more cunning than pride lions, often killing from ambush instead of stalk-and-spring. There's something sinister about them.”

Iain is not a big-cat biologist, but 28 years of leading walking and driving safaris in Kenya and Tanzania have given him the kind of direct experience that compensates for any lack of scientific training. And he's never had an experience more direct, or more terrifying, than the one he had on a Tsavo safari last July.

It was early in the afternoon, the time when he usually checks in with his Nairobi office by satellite phone. He ambled down to the wide, sandy banks of the Galana River, where reception was better than it was in his tree-shrouded tent camp. As he chatted with his secretary, he observed a bushbuck poke its way through a saltbush thicket some distance downriver, then begin to drink. Suddenly, the animal raised its head and froze; an instant later, a lioness sprang from the saltbush still farther downriver, and the bushbuck bolted in Iain's direction, the lioness in pursuit. When she was about 50 yards from Iain, without breaking stride the lioness veered off and headed straight for him, bursts of sand flying behind her as she ran. In a microsecond that seemed like minutes, Iain realized that he needn't worry about her teeth and claws; he was going to be killed by the impact of 300 pounds of sinew and muscle smashing into him at 25 miles an hour. When she was only 20 feet from where he stood, she veered again, kicked sand all over him, and vanished.

Patterson finally got the upper hand in December 1898. He lashed a partly eaten donkey carcass to a tree stump as bait, built a shooting platform for his protection, and waited. When the lion crept in, it ignored the bait and instead began to circle Patterson's rickety perch. Patterson blazed away into the brush; the lion's snarls grew weaker and weaker, and finally ceased. The next day, the first man-eater's body was recovered. It measured nine feet, eight inches from nose to tail tip, and was so heavy it required eight men to carry it back to camp.

To dispatch its partner, Patterson tied three live goats to a length of railroad track, then hid in a shanty nearby. The lion came just before dawn, killed one of the goats, and began to carry it away—along with the other two goats and the 250-pound rail. Patterson fired, missing the lion but killing one of the goats. The lion escaped.

The dogged Patterson stalked it for the next two weeks, and finally managed to wound it. He and his gun bearer followed the bloody spoor for a quarter mile until at last they spotted their quarry. Patterson took careful aim and fired. The lion charged. A second shot bowled it over, but it rose and charged again. Patterson fired a third time without effect. He then joined his terrified gun bearer in a nearby tree, from which he finally dropped the lion with a fourth slug. When he climbed down, he was stunned to see the lion jump up and charge him again. He pumped two more rounds into it—one in its chest, another in its head—and the huge cat went down for good. The reign of terror was over.

Throughout history, the beast with a taste for human flesh has been regarded as an aberration, even as an outlaw. Patterson's book often refers to the lions in terms commonly applied to criminals or psychopaths. Even the more objective scientific literature tends to explain man-eating as the exception that proves the rule:



Iain suspects that the lioness charged him because she was confused, annoyed, or curious. "That," he said, "is the closest I've ever come to getting killed."

If he had been, he would have joined a long roster of Tsavo lion victims, the most recent being that cattle herder, taken in July 1998. Are the lions of Tsavo predisposed to prey on people? Do they represent a subspecies of lion? Why are they maneless? Why are they larger than average? Can they tell us anything new about the king of beasts? Those are the questions that prompted us to go to Tsavo.



Allan realized that he needn't worry about her teeth and claws; he was going to be killed by the impact of 300 pounds of sinew and muscle smashing into him.

On our first day, after settling into Iain's tent camp on the Voi (Goshi) River, we drove down a red laterite road to the Aruba Dam. There is a small lake behind the dam, where Samuel Andanje, a young researcher with the Kenya Wildlife Service, directed us to the scar-faced male and his harem of five females. They were part of a pride of 23 lions, said Andanje, who spends his nights locating the animals by their roars and his days tracking them in a Land Rover.

Shortly after the male had sent Rob tumbling back into our truck, the females, with the cubs in tow, moved off toward the lake to drink. They made a fine sight in the golden afternoon light, walking slowly through the dun-colored grass with movements that suggested water flowing. Scarface remained behind to eat his fill of the buffalo before the jackals and hyenas got to it.

As the sun lowered, we heard a series of throaty grunts from the male lion, which Clive said were a call to the females and cubs to return. Clive Ward is 56 years old, tall and spare, with the face of an ascetic and a clipped way of speaking that sometimes leaves the words trapped in his mouth. Like the 52-year-old Iain, he has guided safaris for years, and is an alpinist by avocation. He and Iain have led countless parties of trekkers up Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya, and have scaled many of the world's major peaks together. Over the years, they have developed a relationship that seems to combine war-buddy comradeship with the easy familiarity of an old married couple; they bicker now and then, and needle each other, but beneath the bickering and needling, you sense an abiding bond knit on sheer rock faces and icy crags and long, hot tramps through the African bush.

As the lions padded silently through the grass, we left—it was growing dark—and came upon a lone lioness, lying at the junction of the road and

the two-track that led to camp. She didn't move as the Land Rover passed within six feet of her. She seemed to regard the intersection as hers, and, of course, it was.

The big storks roosting in the branches of trees along the Voi riverbed looked ominous in the twilight. Up ahead and across the river, waterless now in the dry season, the glow of kerosene lamps and a campfire made a more cheerful sight.

Iain believes that you don't need to practice being miserable: His safaris hark back to the stylish roughing-it of a bygone age—commodious wall tents with cots, a large, communal mess tent, outdoor showers, portable privies in canvas enclosures, laundry service, and a six-man staff to do the cooking and camp chores. On an open fire, Kahiu, the cook, whips up meals equal to anything served in Nairobi restaurants, and you wash them down with South African and Italian wines, making you feel pretty *pukka sahib*.

After dinner, we sat around the campfire on folding chairs, and once, when the wind turned, we heard lions roaring in the distance. The sound inspired Iain to offer a sequel to the tale of his encounter with the charging lioness.

"After she disappeared, I had the feeling that she'd come into camp, so I ran back and told my clients to get in their tents and zip them up, and warned the staff that a lion was in camp. Well, they looked at me as if to say that the old boy had had too much sun, and when I didn't see the lioness for a while, I figured they were right. I was about to tell my clients that they could come on out when I turned around and saw eight Africans running like hell for our pickup, with the lioness running among them—not after them, but *right in the middle of them*. The men leaped up to the truck bed in one bound. I think that old girl was very confused: She'd started off chasing a bushbuck, ended up in a camp full of people, tents, vehicles—things she'd never seen—and must have wondered, 'How did I get into this mess?' She ran out, but stopped at the edge of camp and stayed there all day. Just sat there, like the lioness we saw a little while ago."

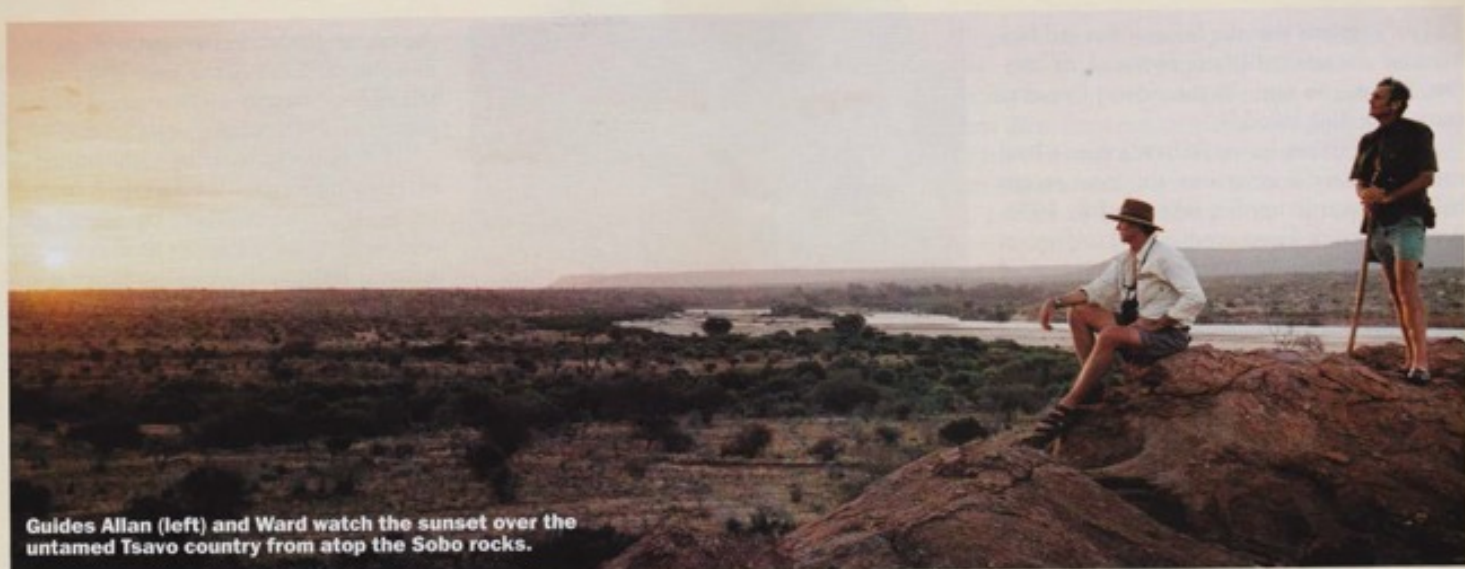
"What good did zipping up tent flaps do?" I asked. "She could have shredded that thin canvas if she wanted to."

"Lions don't recognize a closed tent as anything; they can't be bothered," Iain explained. "Just last August, in Zimbabwe, a young Englishman, the nephew of an earl, was on a camping safari. He went into his tent and fell asleep without closing the flaps. Sometime during the night, a lioness got close to his tent. He woke up and ran out, scared as hell, right into a mob of other lions. Lions like things that run, same as any cat. When they got through with him, I don't think there was anything left."

This was not a bedtime story to tell in lion country. When Leslie and

Bottom, from left: After a morning spent tracking wildlife on foot, author Caputo and his wife, Leslie, rest in a tent pitched on the banks of the Galana River; to reduce the chance of a crocodile attack, guides, rangers, and trekkers stay close together while crossing the Galana; Patterson (seated) takes a break during the construction of the Tsavo River bridge. Above: a Tsavo lion stalking. Unlike lions in other parts of Africa, Tsavo males often share hunting duties with females and may even hunt alone, using ambushes and other unusual tactics.





Guides Allan (left) and Ward watch the sunset over the untamed Tsavo country from atop the Sobo rocks.

I went to our tent, we not only secured the flaps, we zipped up the covers to the mesh ventilation windows—and could barely breathe the stifling air. I wasn't encouraged by Iain's assurance that lions couldn't be bothered with tents. Hadn't the man-eaters of Tsavo barged into the tents of the construction crews? But maybe the workmen hadn't closed the flaps, I thought. My sole armament was a K-bar, the ten-inch trench knife issued to me when I was in the Marine Corps in Vietnam. It was resting in its sheath on the night table next to my cot, but it seemed to me that the best thing I could do with it in the event of a lion attack would be to fall on it and save the lion the trouble.

Allan loves Tsavo—the dense palm and saltbush forests, the plains that go on forever. **"Africa without any fat on it,"** is what he calls it. "It's raw and primitive and it doesn't tolerate fools or forgive mistakes."

"Jambo!" a staff member called from outside our tent: hello in Swahili. "Jambo," we answered, and got dressed by lantern light. After breakfast, and with dawn erasing the last morning stars, we rolled out to the Aruba Dam to look for Scarface and his family.

They were not where we had left them. We drove along slowly, looking for pugmarks in the soft, rust-colored earth, until we heard a deep bass groan that ended in a chesty cough. It was so loud we thought the lion was only 50 yards away. We set off in the direction of the sound, bouncing over a prairie of short, dry grass tinted pale gold by the early morning sun, Clive, Rob, and I standing with our heads poking out of the roof hatches.

"Ah, there he is," said Iain, at the wheel.

"Him all right," Clive seconded.

I spend a lot of time in the woods, and am not bad at spotting game, but I had no idea what they were talking about.

"It's the ears, you look for the ears sticking above the grass when you're looking for a lion," Iain said, driving on. And then I saw them—two triangles that could have been mistaken for knots in a stump if they hadn't moved. We were 20 or 30 yards away when he stood up, with a movement fluid and unhurried, and I thought, Christ, if you were on foot, you would trip over him before you knew he was there, and that would be the last thing you would ever know in this world. Ugly-handsome Scarface went down a game trail at the leonine version of a stroll, then up over a rise and down toward a marsh, its green swath spread between the tawny ridges. We stayed with him all the way, keeping a respectful distance. He was one big boy, and if he was a man-eater, this is what he would do after he killed you: flay off your skin with his tongue, which is covered with small spines that give it the texture of coarse-grained sandpaper and are used to bring nutritious blood to the

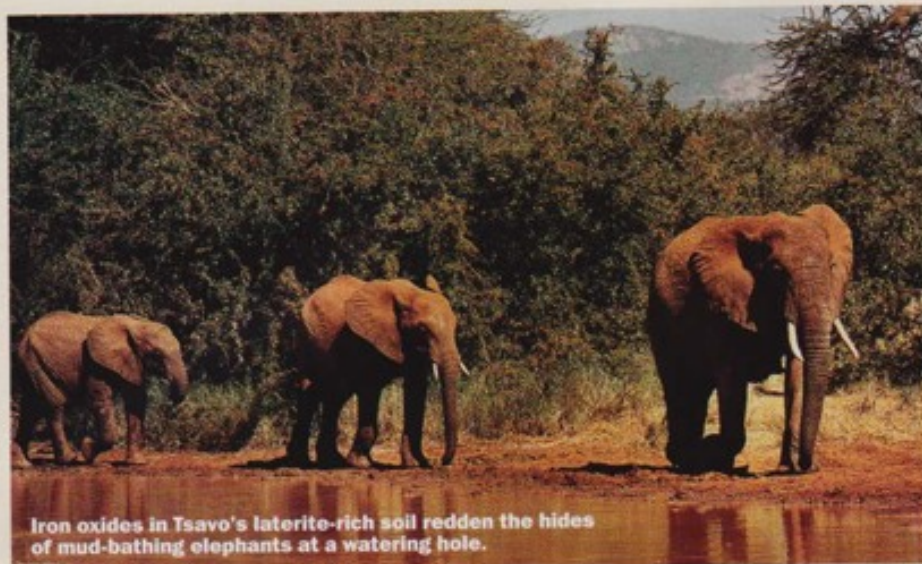
surface; next, he would bite into your abdomen or groin, open you up, and scoop out your entrails and internal organs and consume them, because they are rich in protein, your liver especially; then he would savor your meatiest parts, thighs and buttocks, followed by your arms, shoulders, and calves. The bones would be left for the hyenas, which have stronger jaws. Vultures and jackals would take care of your head and whatever scraps of flesh remained, so that, a few hours after your sudden death, it would be as though you had never existed. There is a terrible thoroughness to the mechanics of death in Africa, and we are not exempt.

Scarface led us right to his harem, and then, after posing on a knoll, he moved off into the marsh, the lionesses and cubs following soon after.

"That's that for now," said Iain. "Have to come back in the late afternoon. Let's look up Sam and try to find the rest of this pride."

Sam Andanje led us to a remote stretch of the Voi, and we followed his Land Rover through *Commiphora* scrub. I mentioned the bomas that Patterson's laborers had constructed, and how the lions had found ways through them, with the canniness of trained guerrillas infiltrating an enemy's barbed wire. Four-footed killers with above-average IQs.

"I don't doubt but that the lions had the whole thing totally wired," Iain remarked. "The difference between people and animals is that we can see the big picture, and figure out how to survive in any environment, but within their area of specialization, most animals are as smart as we are, maybe smarter." He paused, chewing over a further thought. "Take a look at this country. It's sparse and harsh—there aren't any huge herds of wildebeest, like the kind you get in the Masai Mara or the Serengeti. Tsavo lions have to take what they can get, whatever comes along. I'm convinced that they have territories they know as well as you



Iron oxides in Tsavo's laterite-rich soil redden the hides of mud-bathing elephants at a watering hole.

lions are so big, and why they're likely to turn man-eater. Cape buffalo are among the most numerous of Tsavo's herd animals, and lions prey on them. Lions elsewhere do so only when deprived of easier game, and even then only in large bands; no average-size lion will take down a 1,500-pound Cape buffalo alone. In other words, the lions of Tsavo are big because their favored prey is big, and because the dense, brushy country compels them to hunt in small groups. Still, no matter how hefty a lion gets, hunting buffalo is a risky business. Recently, Andanje found a lion stomped to death by a buffalo. More frequently, the cats suffer broken bones and puncture wounds; they then turn to easier prey, like livestock—and the people who tend it.

Tom Gnoske and Dr. Julian Kerbis Peterhans, members of the research team from the Field Museum, have discovered an interesting twist to

know your backyard, with their ambush places all staked out. They're clever. They know where to be and when."

We found no lions, and by 10:30, the quest was hopeless. It was nearly 100°F, and the cats were laid up, deep within the thickets. In the late afternoon, we returned to the marsh near the Aruba Dam. There, Scarface's harem lolled with the cubs on the slope overlooking the marsh, where a solitary bull elephant grazed. Iain parked about 30 yards from the lions, and we began observing and photographing.

Later, as the sun dropped below the Taita Hills and a sundowner began to blow, the lions stirred. A small herd of Grant's gazelles daintily walked down into the marsh to graze, and the biggest lioness, the dominant female, raised her head and fastened her gaze on them.

"She's looking for a slight limp in one of the gazelles," Iain observed. "Any sign of weakness—but gazelle isn't a lion's favored prey. They're so fast, and there isn't much meat on them, so it's hardly worth the effort. Lions are lazy hunters." Gesturing to the marsh, he returned to the theme of feline intelligence. "A lot of thought went into choosing this position, above the swamp and with most of its prey upwind, so they can see or scent almost anything that comes along. It's perfect buffalo country. The sun's lowering, they're rested, and the lions will be getting hungry soon."

On our fourth morning in Tsavo, Iain's staff struck the tents, in preparation for moving to his "walking safari" campsite at a place called Durusikale, on the Galana River. If you want to experience the Africa of Isak Dinesen, then you have to do it on shank's mare.

Roused at 4:30 a.m. by another "Jambo," we breakfasted under the Southern Cross, and then drove northward, down a road paralleling a riverbed called the Hatulo Bisani, where we had seen a large herd of Cape buffalo the day before. It was Iain's theory that a lion pride might be trailing them. During the long rains of November, the Hatulo Bisani would be a torrent; now, with a mere trickle flowing between wide swaths of bright green sedge, it resembled a river of grass.

We found fresh pugmarks in the road, followed them for a while, then lost them when they angled off into the scrub. A short distance ahead, the buffalo, maybe 600 of them, grazed in the riverbed, their gray-black bodies looking like boulders.

We sat there eyeball to eyeball with one of the biggest, strongest, fiercest animals in Africa—an animal that helps to explain why Tsavo

The marvelous thing was how silent they were, passing through the saltbush with barely a rustle to enter the river. It seemed to us that we were beholding Tsavo's wild soul made flesh.

such behavior: A lion that becomes a man-eater because it's injured doesn't go back to its traditional prey even after it recovers. Eating people, Gnoske says, "is an easy way to make a living."

Intriguingly, one of the Tsavo man-eaters Patterson killed had a severely broken canine tooth with an exposed root. The tooth was well worn and polished, and the entire skull had undergone "cranial remodeling" in response to the trauma, indicating that the injury was an old one. It's in the record that at least one man-eater had been prowling about Tsavo before Patterson and his bridge-building gangs arrived in March 1898. A railroad surveyor, R.O. Preston, lost several members of his crew to a man-eater near the Tsavo River early in 1897. When Preston and his men searched for remains, they found the skulls and bones of individuals who had been killed earlier still. There is no proof that an injury was the lion's "motive" for turning man-eater, but it's a plausible explanation. He might have been kicked in the jaw by a buffalo and lost a tooth; he stuck to preying on humans after the injury healed, having found out how safe and convenient it was. The arrival of the railroad workers, packed into tent camps, would have been manna from leonine heaven.

But what about his partner, who was in prime health? The Field Museum researchers speculate that an epidemic of rinderpest disease may have played a role in the lion's change of eating habits. In the early 1890s, the disease all but wiped out buffalo and domestic cattle. With its usual prey eliminated, the starving lion had to look to villages and construction camps for its meals.

Another, more disquieting, explanation lies elsewhere—with the elephants of Tsavo. ➤

We turned off the Hatulo Bisani road and started down the Galana river road toward the campsite, some 25 miles downstream. Partway there, we stopped to climb one of the Sobo rocks, a series of sandstone outcrops, to scan with our binoculars for game. The Galana, fed by melting snows on Mount Kilimanjaro, showed a brassy brown as it slid slowly between galleries of saltbush and doum palm toward its distant meeting with the Indian Ocean. Beyond the river, the scorched plains rose and fell, seemingly without end. And on a far-off ridge, we saw one of Africa's primitive, elemental sights—a procession of elephants, raising dust as they migrated to the river to drink and cool themselves in the midday heat.

Forgetting our lion quest for the moment, we returned to the Land Rover and cut cross-country toward the herd, drawing close enough to count the animals—about 60 altogether, the calves trotting alongside their mothers, a huge matriarch out front, other old females guarding the flanks and rear, tusks flashing in the harsh sunlight.

Iain and Clive are elephant enthusiasts. When they saw the herd shambling toward the Galana, they drove off to a spot on the river where we had a good chance of observing the animals at close hand. We picnicked in the shade of a tamarind tree, with a broad, sandy beach in front of us. Twenty minutes later, the elephants arrived, moving within a hundred yards of where we sat. They came on down with a gliding, stiff-legged gait. The marvelous thing was how silent they were, passing through the saltbush with barely a rustle. It seemed to us that we were beholding Tsavo's wild soul made flesh.

With cat-burglar creeps, we positioned ourselves on the shore, watching and photographing for almost an hour. The animals' trunks curved into their mouths or bent back to spray their heads with water. An incredible organ, the elephant's trunk: It contains 40,000 separate muscles and tendons, and serves the elephant as a hand that feeds, a nose, a drinking straw, a built-in shower, and a weapon, all in one.

Tsavo elephants have all the reason in the world to fear and hate people. Slaughtering them for their ivory is a very old story, going back to ancient times. And the caravans that once passed through Tsavo laden with tusks may hold another explanation for the man-eating tendencies of Tsavo lions.

Dr. Chapurukha Kusimba, an anthropological archaeologist, grew up in Kenya hearing the story of the man-eaters and Patterson's epic

hunt. Now an associate curator of African anthropology at the Field Museum, he began working with the Tsavo lion research team in 1994. Studying the traditional caravan routes from the interior to the coast, Kusimba learned that the caravans carried slaves as well as ivory. The Tsavo River was an important stop, where traders refreshed themselves and restocked their water supplies before moving on. However, historical texts suggest that they disposed of unnecessary cargo first: Captives too sick or weak to travel farther were abandoned there to die.

With so many corpses around, predators in the vicinity would have had an abundance of people to feed on. From there, it wouldn't have been a big step for the cats to go after living people. That may explain the myths about "evil spirits"—the men who mysteriously disappeared from the caravans' campsites had been seized not by devils but by lions. The slave and ivory caravans had passed through Tsavo for centuries—and that leads us to the truly disturbing aspect of the theory. *Panthera leo* is a social animal, capable of adopting "cultural traditions" that are passed on from generation to generation. If a lioness is hunting people, her young will grow to regard them as a normal part of their diet, and pass that knowledge on to their own young. The upshot is that Patterson's man-eaters may have done what they did not because they were handicapped by injuries, or even because their traditional prey had been wiped out, but simply because they came from a man-eating lineage so long that an appetite for human flesh was ingrained in them. Stalking and devouring the "paragon of animals" wasn't the exception, but their rule.

That's just a theory, but if you're in a tent in lion country it's the kind to make you wake up at two in the morning and hear the pad of a lion's paws in every rustle outside; to mistake your wife's breathing for a lion's; to picture him creeping up on the thin canvas that separates you from him; and to know that he isn't there out of curiosity or because he smelled the food in the cook's tent or because he winded a zebra herd beyond camp and is only passing by, but because he's scented you and you are what he's after; the kind of supposition to make you imagine the horror of what it's like to feel him bite down on your ankle or shoulder with his strong jaws and then drag you out and run off with you, wonderful, indispensable you, apple of your mother's eye, and you screaming and scratching and kicking and

ADVENTURE GUIDE

Tsavo National Park, Kenya

When calling Kenya, dial 011, the country code 254, then the number.

■ **GETTING THERE:** Northwest/KLM (800-225-2525, www.nwa.com), British Airways (800-247-9297, www.britishairways.com), and Sabena (800-955-2000, www.sabena.com) offer regular service to Nairobi, Kenya's capital and a major African hub. Tsavo National Park, which is split into Tsavo West and Tsavo East for administrative purposes, lies some 140 miles southeast of Nairobi on Highway A109 and is accessible by train, bus, charter plane, and rental car. For stays of up to 30 days in Kenya, U.S. and Canadian citizens no longer require visas.

■ **GETTING AROUND:** As there is no public transportation within Tsavo, visitors wanting to get the most out

of the park should bring their own vehicles or join a safari (see below). Kenyan roads can be rugged; a 4WD vehicle is recommended away from the main routes. Several international car rental services keep offices at Nairobi's airport. Central Rent-a-Car (2-222888, www.carhirekenya.com), a reliable local company in downtown Nairobi, is cheaper, with 4WDs starting at about \$40 a day plus 40 cents per mile, including insurance and taxes.

■ **SAFARI OUTFITTERS:** Safaris typically depart from Nairobi and provide guides, meals, lodging, and transportation for the entire journey. Iain Allan's **Tropical Ice** (2-884653, www.tropical-ice.com), which organizes Land Cruiser and foot safaris into parks across Kenya, features a luxurious tent camp along Tsavo East's Galana River. Prices per person range

from \$350 to \$450 a day; a minimum of four people is required to book a trip. Allan also leads groups for **Mountain Travel-Sobek** (888-687-6235, www.mtsobek.com). Their 13-day "walking safari," with visits to Tsavo, Masai Mara, and Malindi, is \$5,190 a person, including park fees and shuttle flights. Other outfitters may be found through the **Kenya Association of Tour Operators** (2-225570, www.gorp.com/kato).

■ **LODGING:** Those who opt to visit Tsavo on their own will find both bare campsites and elegant lodges. **Ndololo Campsite** (first come, first served; eight dollars a person), near Tsavo East's Voi Gate, sits next to Kanderi Swamp and its teeming wildlife. Also in Tsavo East is **Galdessa Camp** (2-547689, www.galdessa.com, full-board doubles are \$325), a conservation-oriented bun-

galow camp on the Galana about nine miles upstream from Lugard's Falls. Black rhinos populate a nearby sanctuary. Tsavo West's **Kilaguni Lodge** (2-340331, www.letsgosafari.com, full-board doubles cost \$130 to \$170) boasts a water hole and views of Mount Kilimanjaro.

■ **RESOURCES:** Contact the **Kenya Wildlife Service** (2-501081, www.kws.org), which administers Tsavo East and Tsavo West, or the **Kenya Tourist Board** (2-604245, www.kenyatourism.org). Lonely Planet's **Kenya** guidebook (\$19.95) is up-to-date and comprehensive. Colonel Patterson's gripping account of the original Tsavo lions, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (St. Martin's Press, \$22.95), will give you at least two good reasons to zip up your tent at night.

—McKenzie Funk

punching, all to no avail, until he releases his grip to free his jaws to crush your windpipe, and the last sensation you have is of his hot breath in your face.

Such were my waking nightmares that night. And yet, only that afternoon, I had been as captivated by a lion as Joy Adamson had been by Elsa. We had left camp on a game drive, and rounded a bend in the road a few miles downriver, and suddenly she was there, walking purposefully ahead of us. There was nothing beautiful about her: Old scratches and cuts marred her skin like sewn rips in a threadbare sofa, and her ribs showed, though not in a way to suggest starvation so much as a spare toughness. If the sleek pride lions of the Serengeti are the haute bourgeoisie of the leonine world, Tsavo lions are the proletariat, blue-collar cats that have to work hard for a meager living. I recalled Iain's description of Tsavo as a land intolerant of fools and unforgiving of mistakes. This lioness blended right into such a landscape; she looked neither tolerant nor forgiving, but very focused. We trailed her, but she was never alarmed. Now and then, she threw a glance at us, just to check on our distance or our behavior. If we edged too close, she simply angled away, maintaining a space of perhaps 15 yards. A lady with a mission, she went on through the intermittent saltbush with the steady, unflagging pace of a veteran foot soldier.

After she covered some two miles, the lioness began to call with low grunts. We figured she was trying to locate her pride, but if they answered, we did not hear them. Another quarter of a mile, and she stopped and called more loudly—a sound that seemed to come from her belly instead of her throat, part moan, part cough. *Wa-uggb, Wa-uggb*. In a moment, two cubs bounded from a saltbush thicket a hundred yards away. They leaped on their mother, licking face and flanks, and she licked theirs.

With her cubs following, the lioness retraced her steps, and we again followed. The wary cubs often stopped to stare or hiss at us. Iain speculated that she had stashed the cubs in the saltbush to go scouting. Now she was leading the cubs back to the pride.

It would be good if she led us to the pride; our four-day foot safari was to begin the next morning, and knowing where the pride was would give us an objective. I love walking in the wild, but I love walking with a purpose even more. The lioness pressed on with her journey, and then she and the cubs pulled one of the vanishing acts that seem to be a Tsavo lion specialty. We looked for ten minutes; then, as suddenly as they'd disappeared, they reappeared, wading across the river. They stopped on a sandbar in midstream. There the cubs gamboled for a while, one mounting its forepaws on its mother's hindquarters and allowing her to pull it along as she looked for a spot to complete the crossing.

"All we need now is background music from *Born Free*," Iain remarked, but I thought of Santiago's dream in *The Old Man and the Sea*, his dream of lions on the beach.



At rest in the shade after a morning's trek: from left, Adan, Philip and Leslie Caputo, Allan, and Ward.

I'm not sure how, in the span of a few hours, I went from feeling sorry for a real lion to being in abject terror of an imaginary one.

The lioness plunged into the river and swam the channel, the cubs paddling after her. The three climbed the bank and were swallowed by the saltbush. We were sorry to see the lioness go; for all her scruffy appearance, we had grown fond of her and her self-possessed air. Still, she looked awfully lean, and I said that I would have felt better about her prospects if I had seen her and the cubs reunited with their pride.

"Don't worry about her," Iain commented. "She's in complete command of her situation."

I'm not sure how, in the span of a few hours, I went from feeling sorry for a real lion to being in abject terror of an imaginary one. At two in the morning, the rational brain doesn't function as well as it does at two in the afternoon, and you start thinking with the older brain, that cesspit of primeval dreads. Or maybe my heebie-jeebies were a reaction to another of Iain's bedtime stories, told over another of Kahiu's superb dinners: grilled eggplant, pumpkin soup, and bread pudding with hot cream.

A Texas couple and their two sons were on safari with Tropical Ice. One midnight, Iain was awakened by the parents' screams: "Iain! They're here! They're coming in!" He tumbled out of bed, unzipped his tent flap, and saw a lioness walk past him. Worse, he could hear other lions in the underbrush near camp—and the crunching of

bones. Iain shouted to his clients to get on the floors of their tents and cover themselves with their mattresses. More lions appeared, playfully batting at the couple's tent, as if to tease the frightened occupants. Iain, who was trapped in his own tent, yelled to his two armed Masai guards, who had managed to sleep through the commotion. As they approached the thicket in which Iain had heard the hideous crunching noise, they were greeted by growls. The Masai did not live up to their reputation as fearless lion hunters; they fled in panic. It turned out that the lions were guarding their kill, which wasn't a person, but a warthog. Iain attempted to drive them off by clapping his hands—a sound that normally frightens lions, because no other animal makes it. It had no effect on these lions, who eventually just sauntered away.

The next day, as Iain brought the pickup around, he saw what he termed "a horrifying sight." A lioness was strolling alongside the woman's tent, which was open at one end. As calmly as he could, Iain told her to come out, but not to run, and get in the car. She had no sooner jumped in and shut the door than the lioness rounded the corner and walked into the tent. Had the woman still been inside, the lioness would have killed her. "Maybe not eaten her," Iain added, reassuringly, "but definitely killed her, because she would have tried to run." ➤

Dangers imagined are always worse than dangers confronted. I was in good spirits the next morning, and actually looking forward to facing a lion on foot, if for no other reason than to conquer my fear. To protect us, Iain had contracted two Kenya Wildlife Service rangers, Adan and Hassan, who were armed with semiautomatic assault rifles. Dressed in jaunty berets, camouflage uniforms, and combat boots, they looked more like commandos than park rangers. Only safaris with special permission from the park's senior warden are allowed into the vast area north of the Galana; the guards are strongly recommended.

I hoped that Adan and Hassan would not imitate the behavior of the Masai in Iain's story. If they did, we didn't have much else in the way of self-defense: my trusty K-bar; Iain's Gurkha kris, a souvenir from a trek in the Himalaya; and Clive's Masai short sword, called a *simi*. African lore is full of stories about strong men who have killed lions with knives, but lions weren't the only dangerous game we might encounter. The saltbush forests easily conceal elephants, Cape buffalo, and the hippopotamus, which kills more people in Africa than any other mammal. Since Tropical Ice started running safaris in 1978, Iain's guards have rarely had to fire over the heads of elephants, and have never shot a lion, but they have had to kill six hippos, which are very stubborn and very aggressive.

With Hassan on point and Adan as rear-guard, we waded the warm Galana to the north side, Iain instructing us to stay close together so that we would sound not like seven average-size things but like one big thing—an elephant—to deter crocodiles. We saw one of the reptiles, a nine- or ten-footer, 15 minutes after we'd forded. We continued upriver toward the Sobo rocks, and ran into a dozen hippos, entirely submerged except for the tops of their dark heads and their piggish, protruding eyes. They tolerated our photographing them for a while, but when we crept closer, one big bull lunged from the water with astonishing speed, his cavernous mouth open and threatening. A warning, which we heeded by moving on.

The morning was overcast and breezy, but by ten o'clock the air was hot and searing—reminiscent of Arizona in July. We had the whole immense wild to ourselves, because most tourists are unwilling to walk miles in triple-digit temperatures, and too timid to confront wild creatures on foot. What a difference, to observe game animals on their own terms. To photograph them, we had to read the wind as a hunter does, practicing stealth and watching for the slightest motion. We stalked up close to a band of Cape buffalo and a small elephant herd, and the experience was far more satisfying than driving up to them. Sweating, exercising caution and bush-craft, we earned the right to bag them on film.

We were on the last mile of the trek when we found pugmarks in the sand, leading straight along the shore toward a grove of doum palms some 300 yards away. They were deep and well-defined—that is, recent. Iain and I fell into a discussion as to just how recent. Clive, looking ahead with unaided eye, said they were very recent, because two lions



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were laid up under the palms. Clive pointed, and Iain and I raised our binoculars.

"It's a log," I said. "A big palm log."

Iain concurred.

"I am telling you, lions," Clive insisted peevishly. "Two bloody lions. One's maned, too."

Then Adan said, "Lions, 100 percent," but he spoke too loudly. The log lifted its head.

My binoculars framed an atypical Tsavo lion, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer emblem with a golden mane, lying in the shade with his companion and gazing straight back at us. With the palms overhead, the scene looked biblical.

The easterly wind favored us. We began a stalk, heading up over the embankment to approach the lions from above, Rob and I with our cameras ready, Adan with his rifle at low port, prepared to shoot if necessary. Hassan's was braced on his shoulder, the muzzle pointing backward at the rest of us. Iain pushed the rifle barrel aside. Hassan shifted the gun to the crook of his arm, holding it upside down as if he were cradling a baby, and sauntered along like a man strolling in Hyde Park, instead of in Tsavo with two big lions just ahead. A less than reassuring guard. I decided to grab his rifle if I had to.

We filed along a game trail between the saltbush and the riverbank, closing the distance. The idea was to capture an image of lions up close—while on foot. All right, what was the difference between a picture taken from a car and one taken on foot? I don't know, only that there seemed to be a difference. Listen to the ancient Roman Stoic Epictetus: "Reflect that the chief source of all evils to man, and of baseness and cowardice, is not death, but the fear of death." Still true, I'd say. The real point of life is to be brave; it is to master fear of death, which is the genesis of all fears. And one of the exercises by which you can steel yourself to that fear is to confront something that could break your neck with one swipe of its paw.

I don't wish to exaggerate the emotions of the moment. None of us was trembling. Instead, we were apprehensive, in the old sense of the word. We apprehended, in a state of heightened awareness—alert to every sound and movement. Coming abreast of the palm grove, Iain walked in a crouch, and we followed suit, trailing him

and Hassan over the lip of the embankment to look down into the pool of shade beneath the trees. I raised my camera.

The lions were gone. They must have fled at the sound of our voices, though we never saw them move. Their tracks disappeared into the brush. It was as though they had dematerialized.

Two hours into the next day's trek, we found evidence of an old lion kill: the skull and horns of a big Cape buffalo, resting in the grass beside a *lugga*, or dry streambed. Iain and Clive poked around, studying the area like homicide detectives.

"Probably an old bull, alone," said Iain. "The lions were down in the *lugga*, behind that big bush, three of them. They sprang at the buffalo from the side, just as he was about to come down the bank."

But that was all the evidence we saw of lions that morning. By eleven o'clock, with my shirt soaked through with sweat and my eyeballs feeling sunburned, we crossed back to the south side of the Galana, where we were picked up in a Land Cruiser—and were told that we need not have walked ten miles to find lions; they had found (Continued on page 146)

(Continued from page 94)

us. Soon after we left, four males had appeared on the north side of the river, almost directly across from camp. By now they had moved off.

I took a nap after lunch, took some notes, then sat shirtless and shoeless in my camp, my baked brain a perfect tabula rasa. Iain appeared, walking fast over the Bermuda grass. Gesturing, he told us in a whisper to follow him, and to be quiet. The four lions had returned.

With cameras and binoculars, we ran on tip-toe. Across the river, between 200 and 300 yards downstream, two of the four were crouched on the bank, drinking. Their hides so perfectly matched the sand and beige rock that they seemed made of the same stuff. I put the binoculars on them. They lacked manes, and I would have thought they were females, but their size suggested otherwise. Thirst slaked, one turned and padded up the bank, and it was clear that he was a male. He disappeared into a clump of doum palm; the second drank a while longer, then joined his friend. A moment later, the first lion emerged to walk slowly into the saltbush behind the palms, the other following shortly afterward, and then a third.

"See how relaxed they are?" said Iain, softly. "They're not acting as if they're aware we're here. If they are, and they're this casual about it, we may have some major problems tonight."

Just as I got out of my seat to fetch my field notes from my tent, the fourth lion showed up. He caught my movement and stopped, turning his head to face in our direction. Carefully raising my binoculars, I eased back down, and had the unsettling impression that I was staring into the lion's face, and he into mine, from a distance of, say, ten yards. Crouched low, the joints of his bent forelegs forming triangles, his shoulders a mound of muscle, sinew, and tendons, he was so still that he could have been a carving. Like the others, he had no mane.

No one knows the reason for this characteristic. It is thought by some that it evolved in Tsavo males because a mane is a liability in such thick, thornbush country. Another theory is that pride lions on the plains sport manes as symbols of power and health to attract females and warn off rival males. A mane would be useless for those purposes in Tsavo, where vision is often limited to a few yards. However, bald male lions do occur throughout sub-Saharan Africa, though they tend to be found most frequently in harsh scrub-bush habitats similar to Tsavo's. What's really intriguing is that some experts in leonine behavior believe they have identified a historical trend in man-eating, which can be traced geographically to such environments. If they are correct, it could mean that maneless lions are more likely to prey on humans.

You can ask Wayne Hosek about that. Hosek, a 56-year-old California estate planner and hunter, was born in Chicago; he had also seen the Tsavo man-eaters in his school days, and had become mesmerized by Patterson's saga. Many years later, in 1991, he was on a shooting safari near Zambia's Luangwa National Parks, a region of dense bush. People in the town of Mfuwe, near where Hosek was

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hunting with a professional guide and trackers, told him that they had been terrorized by a huge lion that had killed and eaten six of their neighbors. They thought it was a female, because it had no mane. Local hunters had shot six lionesses, believing each was the one responsible, but the attacks continued. The villagers pleaded with Hosek to rid them of the menace. For the next week, he and his guide virtually relived Patterson's experiences. Tracks told them that the lion wasn't just big, it was enormous. But it also was canny, outsmarting them time after time. It always seemed to know where they were and how to avoid them. As Hosek describes it, the experience ceased to be a sport and became a kind of war. Finally, concealed in a ground blind, Hosek killed the lion with one shot, from a range of 70 yards. The lion indeed was without a mane, but it was a male—and huge. Four feet at the shoulder and ten feet, six inches from its nose to the tip of its tail, it weighed 500 pounds—the biggest man-eating lion on record.

The nature of the environment, the size of the lion, the absence of a mane—Hosek's trophy fit in with the theories. I reflected on that, gazing at the big fellow across the river. He crept down to the edge of the bank, lowered his head, and drank, pausing to look at us again. He then leisurely climbed back up and lay down in the shade. If he was concerned about us, he didn't show it.

"What did you mean, if they know we're here and are casual about it that we could be in for problems tonight?" I whispered to Iain.

"They won't attack, but they could come into camp." He didn't say what led him to make such a prediction, and I didn't ask.

That night, as we sat around the campfire, the lions began to roar from across the river. It was deep and resonant, a sound like no other.

The finish line for that day's walk was the starting point for the next. Driving there, we saw two of the lion quartet on a beach, quite a ways off, but they were soon gone. From eight in the morning till noon, we trudged ten miles to Sala Hill, which rises as a perfect pyramid out of the savanna, but we could not find the pride that the four males and the scruffy lioness belonged to.

We made a more concentrated effort the following day, beginning at the spot where we had seen the female and cubs cross the Galana. Distinct pugmarks were printed in the fine sand near a stand of doum palm. The strong sun-downer winds in Tsavo scour animal tracks pretty quickly, so the prints must have been made last night or early in the morning. There were more on the sandbar, where the cubs had cavorted with their mother three days earlier, and on the opposite bank. One set of tracks led us into the saltbush, and to a lion's day bed—a patch of flattened grass and dirt—but we lost them farther on, where the earth was like pavement and covered with foot-high yellow grass.

"You can see why that movie called them ghosts," Iain said, referring to *The Ghost and the Darkness*. "They're always in ambush mode. They stay hidden, come out to hunt and kill, then hide again. They are ghosts."

His commentary was borne out a little farther upriver, when we struck the track of the two males spotted from the truck the previous day. Again we followed it; again we lost it. The lions could have been anywhere or nowhere. As Adan pushed into the saltbush, his rifle at the ready, I mentally compared Tsavo lions not to ghosts, but to the Vietcong: masters of concealment, of hit and run, showing themselves only when they chose. I was beginning to appreciate what Patterson had endured a century ago. It

was an adventure for me to track these lions, but I would not have wanted to be charged with the task of finding and killing them.

We continued upriver. Then Adan found another set of prints. "These are very new," whispered Iain, pointing at one. "This is now."

A dry wind blew through the acacias, the palm fronds rattled. I flinched when a sand grouse flushed five feet away. Great predators can make their presence known, even when they aren't seen or heard. When such monarchs are near, your senses quicken, for the simple reason that your life may depend on it. I had experienced that keenness of perception several times in Alaska, coming upon grizzly tracks, and once in Arizona, crossing the fresh prints of a cougar while I was quail hunting, but I'd never experienced it as deeply as in those haunted thickets of Tsavo. There was something else as well. To walk unarmed in the lion's kingdom demands a submission not unlike the submission required of us in the presence of the divine, and it graces those who walk there with the humility that is not humiliation. I was acutely aware of being in

a place where I, as a man, did not hold dominion, but had to cede dominion to a thing grander, stronger, and more adept than I.

"I believe that if one of us, right now, tried to walk back to camp alone, we wouldn't make it," Iain said. "The lions would study you, see that you're alone and defenseless, and attack." Suddenly, he stopped, wrinkled his nose, and said, "Smell that?"

I shook my head. My sense of smell was the only one that had not been heightened; I suffer from allergies and my head was stuffed. In fact, one of the things I'm allergic to is cats.

"A kill. There's something dead, rotting in there," said Iain, gesturing at a thicket.

The wind eddied a bit, and I caught it—a little like skunk, a little like week-old garbage.

Adan and Hassan pushed into the saltbush, while we who were unarmed waited in the open. When the two rangers emerged, several minutes later, they reported they had found nothing except hyena and jackal tracks, indicating that the carcass, wherever it was, had been abandoned by the lions and was now the property of scavengers.

The trek ended at the palm grove across

from camp, where the four males had laired up. A lot of pugmarks, and some stains in the sand where the lions had urinated, but nothing more.

"Make a perfect movie set, wouldn't it?" Clive whispered. It was two days later, and we had just made our way through the saltbush and entered a grove of old doum palm. The trunks of the high trees were worn smooth where elephants had rubbed up against them, and the lanes between the trees were like shadowy halls, some blocked by flood-wrack from the rainy season—barricades of logs and fronds behind which a dozen lions could have lurked unseen. We expected to hear a low, menacing growl at any moment, an expectation that was not fulfilled until, making a circle, we came out of the trees and reentered the saltbush. The sound wasn't a growl, however—more of a loud grunt or bellow.

What happened next happened all at once. A cloud of dust rose from behind a thicket, Adan whipped around, leveling his rifle, and Iain said, "Get behind me!" to Leslie and me. Just as we did, certain that we were about to be charged by a lion, an elephant appeared, not

20 yards to our right. It was a young female of some two or three tons, shaking her head angrily, her ears flared. She stomped and scuffed the earth, then started toward us. Adan fired a shot over her head to scare her off. She stood her ground and let out a trumpet, her ears flaring again, dust rising from her feet, dust spewing from her hide as she tossed her great head back and forth. Iain yelled to Adan in Swahili. Adan fired again, and for an instant I thought he'd shot her—some trick of light made a puff of dust flying from her shoulder look like the impact of a bullet. In the next instant, as the female ran off, I realized that he'd put the second round over her head.

Iain lit into Adan, all in Swahili, but it was plain that the ranger was getting a royal dressing down. I couldn't understand why.

"Rangers are supposed to know that you don't have to shoot at an elephant to scare it off," Iain explained. "That female was old enough to have seen other elephants shot by poachers. You had to have been here in the eighties to appreciate it. Elephants are traumatized by the sound of gunfire. They're very intelligent animals, and it's not necessary to fire over their heads. A handclap will do it, or just shouting. What we try to do on a foot safari is to observe without disturbing the animals, and move on without them ever being aware that humans are around."

Before heading back to Nairobi, we made a pilgrimage to the "Man-eaters' Den." After Patterson had eliminated the two "brutes," as he called the lions, work resumed on the Tsavo River bridge. While waiting for a shipment of construction materials, he took a break to explore some rocky hills near his camp and to do some recreational hunting. He was in a dry riverbed, pursuing a rhino, when he spotted something that stopped him cold.

"I saw on the other side a fearsome-looking cave which seemed to run back for a considerable distance under the rocky bank," Patterson wrote. "Round the entrance and inside the cavern I was thunderstruck to find a number of human bones with here and there a copper bangle such as the natives wear. Beyond all doubt, the man-eaters' den!"

After taking a photograph, he left his find, and from that day in early 1899 until recently, its location was lost to history. Patterson's characterization of it as a lion's den has aroused controversy and skepticism among naturalists and zoologists for a century: Lions are generally not known to be denning animals (the tale of Daniel in the lion's den notwithstanding).

In 1996, the Field Museum team endeav-

ored to determine who or what had been the cave's true occupants. That year and the next, Kusimba, Kerbis Peterhans, Gnoske, and Andanje made extensive searches southwest of the Tsavo River bridge—the direction Patterson said he'd followed on his excursion. Nothing was found until April 1997, when Gnoske, after rereading Patterson's descriptions and comparing them to the landscape, realized that Patterson's directions had been way off: The "rocky hills" mentioned in the book were not southwest of the bridge, but northwest.

The day after making that determination, Gnoske, Kerbis Peterhans, and Andanje found a cave in a shady riverbed only a mile from the bridge. It perfectly matched the one in Patterson's photograph. After 98 years, the man-eaters' den had been rediscovered.

But was it the man-eaters' den? The next year, the team sifted through the dirt to recover human bones and examine them for teeth marks; if there were any, the researchers could determine if they had been made by lions, hyenas, or leopards. They looked for the copper bangles Patterson had seen, as well as for human teeth to distinguish between Asians and Africans; Asian teeth would be all but incontrovertible proof that the victims had been the Indian railway workers.

The result of that work was surprising, though inconclusive. Kusimba believes that the legendary cave was never a lion's den, nor any sort of den, but in all likelihood a traditional burial cave of the ancient Taita people, who once inhabited the Tsavo region. Gnoske and Kerbis Peterhans, on the other hand, favor a theory that the bones in the cave were, in fact, the remains of lion victims, though they were probably dragged there by hyenas.

Earlier in the trip, when Rob was shooting pictures at park headquarters, Kusimba took him to the cave. Now Rob would show it to us. Iain and Clive, who had never seen the cave, were as eager for a look as Leslie and I. So, with Rob in the lead, the guides became the guided. After thrashing around for a while, we came to a ravine. Rob shouted. And there it was, with a corridor between two big boulders leading beneath an overhang and into a cavern.

"Well, I don't think it looks so fearsome," said Iain, who doesn't have a high opinion of Patterson, considering him to have been an imperial martinet, a so-so hunter, and something of a grandstander.

I agreed that the cool, shady spot was almost idyllic. Then again, we were not trying to build a bridge in the African wilderness and, at the same time, hunt down two clever cats that were using our workforce as a fast-food restaurant. To Pat-

terson, with his memories of his workers' screams, of his crew leader's gruesome remains, of the tense, interminable nights waiting with his rifle, the cave could well have appeared "fearsome." And given the ignorance about lion behavior that prevailed in his time, it was understandable why he may have mistaken a burial cave for a man-eater's den. Imperial martinet or not, he did pretty well with what he had.

That said, I did find Patterson's characterization of his adversaries as brutes and outlaws objectionable. I recalled our second to last morning in Tsavo, as we sat in camp and watched a zebra herd warily come down to the far bank of the Galana to drink. They had been waiting on the ledge above the river for a long time, suffering from what Iain termed "the paradox of survival." The animals were parched, but feared that a lion or crocodile was waiting for them at the river's edge—lions and crocs know that zebras must drink eventually. And so the whole herd stood still, gazing at the river with what seemed to us equal measures of longing and dread, until the desperation of their thirst overcame their fear. Even so, they did not rush down with abandon, but watered in orderly stages. A dozen or so animals would drink, while the others waited their turn and the stallions stood watch. If one group got greedy and took too long, the stallions would let out a series of loud, sharp brays. It was a strange, distressful sound, falling somewhere between a whinny and a bark.

A layman should not anthropomorphize, but to me, the stallions seemed to be saying, "You've had enough, get a move on, we don't have much time." In a way, I identified with them. They were prey; and, out there, so was I. But that recognition did not offend my sense of human dignity. The offense was to my human pride. Nothing wrong with a little pride, except when it becomes excessive. If I had been in Patterson's boots, I would have pursued the lions with as much determination as he—after all, his first responsibility was to finish the bridge and protect his workers' lives—but I don't think I would have regarded the lions as savage brutes violating some law of heaven. If anything, they were only obeying the fundamental law of all creation, which is survival.

To realize that I shared something in common with the wary, anxious zebras was merely to acknowledge my true place in nature where nature is wild, the stage on which the drama of predator and prey is played out. ▲

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