

A WALK THROUGH THE RIFT VALLEY.

In 1950 I was allocated the agreeable task of collecting about 300 heifers from Mpanda Mine in Tanganyika and walking them to the neighbourhood of Abercorn. The distance was 270 miles, of which two-thirds lay in the Rukwa Rift Valley and the rest across the Ufipa Plateau. It was a hazardous journey for cattle, the upper part of the Valley was badly infested with tsetse fly and the Ufipa Plateau was full of East Coast Fever, the month was October so hardship and fatigue had to be reckoned with every step of the way. In Tanganyika Territory it is obligatory to provide rations for labour so I had a three ton lorry. It had to carry the loads of ten herd boys, the Veterinary staff and a considerable amount of veterinary equipment for spraying the cattle etc.

The party, which consisted of Zone Guards Winbrod, Simukonda and I, left Abercorn along the new Sumbawanga Road and soon came to the old established Kawimbe Mission of the London Missionary Society. Here there is a fine Church which has been in use since 1872, I have a debt of gratitude to the staff for their great help in my struggles with Chibemba. Soon the low rocky hills which marked the border with Ufipa were reached. On one side, just in Northern Rhodesia, was Buckle's House which was to be the end of our walk. On the other side, just in Tanganyika Territory, at Mosi was the small abattoir belonging to Mrs. Damm where the meat for Abercorn was prepared. The next place of interest was the Mpuu escarpment which is the first step down into the Rukwa Valley; this is remarkable because there had been a recent earth movement, the lower slope of the escarpment had slipped down about thirty feet leaving a scar devoid of vegetation the whole way along.

Soon the turnoff for Lake Kwela (which comes into the story later) was passed. Ufipa is quite different from Northern Rhodesia - it is like going from the house to the garden, the contrast on the border is just as marked. Ufipa has wide open plains interspersed with rocky hills, one of which, Mbaa, is a fine mountain. Sumbawanga is the Boma for Ufipa and was also the Veterinary Officer's station. It must have been ideal, the best V.O. station in Africa. Everywhere can be reached on foot. There is the dramatic difference between the Plateau and the Valley. There are plenty of wild-fowl. Better still there is a large cattle population with well supported regular cattle sales and a thriving trade in hides and ghee. Best of all there is a stubborn enzootic disease. Mr. Moorhead, the fortunate V.O. now joined the

party. He had the first Land Rover in which I ever rode. The next landmark was the White Fathers' beautiful mission at Chala. White Fathers' Missions are notable for fine buildings with tiled roofs. Chala is the seat of the Bishop who to my pleasant surprise was an Englishman. Near Chala, camellias grew wild in the bush.

The night stop was the old German Boma at Namanyere. This is kept up as a District Rest House and is remarkable on two counts. The huge jacarandas, which have survived since German days, in bloom, as I saw them, were a memorable sight. Secondly, the thick tiled roof. In the old days the inhabitants of Ufipa were addicted to the nocturnal fire arrow. To counter this, all contemporary buildings had roofs of tiles embedded in thick mud.

The next place was Kisi at the top of the final escarpment. This was the only road into the Valley. This is the first place where one meets the fly which is so common in the northern part of the Rift. Looking back over the years, I feel this fly was possibly carried up from the valley by the vehicles of the I.R.L.C.S. On maps, several other roads are shown between the Plateau and the Valley. These roads were made in the German days for bicycles and pack donkeys and they have lapsed, but like Kazembe and Fide they have become part of the map-makers' tradition.

The Escarpment is somewhat higher than the Downs but is much steeper and has far fewer passes. Milupi at the bottom of the pass had a warm spring and here we set out across the huge dambo which forms the floor of the Valley. The objective was Lake Chada which gives its name to the adjacent game reserve. Lake Chada is the kind of place one comes to Africa hoping to see. It is a large pan lake, similar to Lake Chila at Abercorn but with far more slender, tall palm trees. The fleecy clouds of the blue evening sky were reflected in the still waters of the lake and soon a school of eighteen hippo came to the surface and went through their dignified routine. Three elephant walked into the shallow water and stood splashing themselves and each other quite regardless of spectators. As evening drew on a family of bush pig appeared and numerous waterfowl started flitting in. The next morning, Moorhead left us, and going north, we entered the thick bush at Sitalike where the fly at once became very numerous and aggressive. We soon came to the sandy ridge – a point of great geological interest. It consists of a barrier of sand some six feet high and a hundred yards wide which is very slowly welling up from the ground.

It was very hot and the activities of the fly made it a tedious journey but after some hours Mpanda Mine was reached. This was a developing lead mine at railhead on a spur from Tabora. It had been decided that the prime movers at the mine were to be gas engines working on gas obtained from the distillation of wood. I foresaw an effective and early end to the tsetse fly problem. Alas many years have elapsed since I last saw Uruwira minerals quoted. I fear the wheels have long since ceased to turn whilst the tsetse flies rampage unchecked.

The train arrived. As there was no unloading ramp the cattle had to be persuaded to jump out of the metre-gauge trucks. There were no accidents. The cattle were then watered in half-drums, which had been carried on the train, with water which had come in the tanker car from Tabora, as there was none to spare at Mpanda. Here I was joined by V.A.Sichoni, L.O. Cunningham and a young V.A. whose name, alas, eludes me. An energetic and resourceful trio. With dusk, we set out on foot, driving the cattle, the lorry following with the stores; we hoped to get through the dense fly to Sitalike under cover of darkness. It was however a bright moonlight night and the fly were by no means inactive. Cunningham, who is of the rufous type, was quite badly stung and suffered an allergic reaction for some days.

We took stock of the situation. I had made several dummy runs and the route to be followed was quite familiar. It was hot October weather, water and grazing were scarce, water points were about twenty miles apart. It was decided to march through the night from one water-point to the next and then rest for two days and a night before marching on again. It would perhaps have been better to do a short march every night and have one night without water. It was decided to remain in the Valley as long as possible to avoid the East Coast Fever which is prevalent on the plateau. The nearest point in the Valley to Abercorn was Sikalitu where the Escarpment was to be climbed and the cattle marched 90 miles across the plateau to tick-control near Abercorn without delay.

The Rukwa Valley is quite broad, most of the way it is not possible to see both escarpments at once. We kept close to the western escarpment, relying on finding water at its foot where, in the rainy season, the rivers come from Ufipa in a series of falls and pools and then flow across the plain to Lake Rukwa. At this time of year all streams had retreated from the Valley floor. On one occasion we climbed from one pool to another up the escarpment and in a gulley about half way up we found the skeleton of a hippo. In Lake

Kwela on the plateau there are many hippo and it seems that from time to time they are joined by others climbing these water stairways from Lake Rukwa.

Because of the heat we travelled at night. On several occasions we lost part of the herd through fright caused by predators, but they were always found without difficulty the next day. In those parts, cattle were news and stragglers were soon reported to us. Once I took the shotgun to find kwali or a sand grouse. The countryside was small thorn thickets and little glades. I passed from one glade to another and found myself practically within arms length, but fortunately, not face to face with an elephant. I retired hastily only to find myself far too close to a herd of buffalo to be comfortable. On rest days when we were not searching for strayed cattle, Cunningham would shoot kite hawks on the wing with his .22. At this he was very good.

There were two White Fathers' Missions in the Valley. At one there was a medical lay-brother who had a dreadful line in obstetrical horror stories – some of which remain with me to this day.

Then the cattle began to founder. About one third of the mob had received Antrycide before leaving Tabora. These were identified by branding but they could have been identified by laminitis, for it was only in them that the foundering occurred. It was real Laminitis with great pain in the feet which became very hot with throbbing plantar arteries and high temperatures. It was hoped that the cattle which foundered would provide fresh meat but on inspection they were all heavily infected with measles especially the heart.

The heifers were immature but even so some were calving down on the march. These calves had no chance of survival. Circumstances were too arduous. Lifting the calves on the lorry proved a waste of time because the dams had neither the udder development nor the sense of responsibility to care for their offspring. In the many months I supervised this herd, none of the heifers managed to rear a calf. This and subsequent observation has led me to the belief that indigenous cows hardly ever manage to rear the first calf.

On reaching the southern limit of fly the unantricyded cattle had to be dosed with dimidium bromide. This was an undertaking! There was neither wood nor labour to make an efficient crush. In the ensuing struggle a few head must have got overlooked, for on arrival at Chilwa, there was a small

outbreak of trypanosomiasis. This was successfully treated with antrycide and there were no deaths.

The next geological feature of note was Maji Moto, the hot spring which came out of the ground very strongly and unbearably hot. At sundown it was a remarkable thing to see the village goats rush to the spring, they knew exactly where it was cool enough to drink and gulped down the hot water with evident enjoyment. For some reason we decided to bathe after dark. By the light of the pressure lamp we were enjoying the hot water thoroughly until we became aware of disapproving noises outside the circle of light. We soon realized that we were keeping the local elephants from their evening drink! In some confusion we picked up the light and by the time we had moved off the elephant were busy at the spring.

We were now entering baobab country which in my opinion is the very essence of Africa. Buffalo beans made their presence felt. This is an experience to avoid. It is extremely irritant and very persistent.

Radiator trouble was constantly with us. The plain had just been burnt and the wind was always following. Under these conditions the radiator frequently became clogged with ash. To remedy this, one plug is removed and the fan disconnected. One end of the pipe used to siphon petrol is held over the plug hole and the other close to the radiator from behind. The engine started up, the quick, hard blasts from the open cylinder soon blow ash and grass seeds from the radiator.

We arrived at Sikalitu at the end of our march in the Valley in good heart. We had lost some thirty head from laminitis but the remainder seemed likely to survive. Here there was plenty of water and some grazing, and here we had the first heavy rains. We decided to split. Cunningham was to force the Cattle up the escarpment along the trace of the old German road while I would take the lorry round by Isi and we would meet at Lake Kwela. Here the cattle would be sprayed for the march across the East Coast Fever infected Ufipa Plateau. After the storm I had difficulty in getting back to Milupi. Streams which we had crossed dry-shod were now too deep for the vehicle. Fortunately there was a lull in the rains and the streams subsided somewhat and it was possible to creep through with the fan disconnected and the distributor more or less waterproofed with the camp washstand. I was however considerably delayed and the herd reached Lake Kwela several

days before I did. It was probable that they became infected with East Coast Fever here.

Lake Kwela is a small brother of the mighty Rift Valley lakes. Just like the giants, it is long, narrow and deep. It is alive with waterfowl and hippo abound. Here the cattle were sprayed with Dubble Bennex. It had to be done with stirrup pumps and all the water carried by hand, a laborious undertaking.

The march across Ufipa was much easier than the one in the Valley, the rains had come, the grass was growing nicely, it was much cooler and the laminitis was over. We made Lake Sumbu, a wide shallow pan lake, like Chila. When we arrived it was nearly empty with wide margins encrusted with saline. There were large flocks of pink flamingo. There is a theory that these pan lakes like Uninge, Chila, Sumbu and others gave Dr. Williamson the clue which led to the discovery of his famous mine, hut this is hardly the place to elaborate this fascinating idea.

Northern Rhodesia was reached at Chilwa where we established the first quarantine camp. Chilwa lies on the border on the old German Abercorn - Sumbawanga road. This road was completely disused but on the Tanganyika Territory side stand heaps of stone, each a day's task for repairing the road. These tasks mark the line of the road and they must have stood there for nearly 40 years. On the hill above Chilwa is the remains of a very small and primitive fort. The Stone Age relics had not yet been found at nearby Kalambo Falls but I have by me as write an artefact picked up at Chilwa. Chilwa was also remarkable for a very large and beautiful mushitu.

One night I was safely in bed when the peace of the night was disturbed by a great commotion, cattle lowing, people shouting and the kraal being rent asunder. Very apprehensively, I picked up the torch and rifle and went out, expecting at least to find a pride of lions. Instead I found V.A. Mukalabai in shorts with a light cane dancing about slapping himself. I soon joined him in the dancing because the cattle had been stampeded by mpashi ants and the ground was crawling with them.

I had been joined, on arrival at the border by Mr P.H. Wright and V.A. Mukalabai to help with quarantine. East Coast Fever (probably contracted at Lake Kwela made its appearance, with a few fatalities showing the red infarcts in the kidneys typical of E.C.F. This outbreak was combated by the

classical method of taking every animal's temperature every day and moving to clean pastures every 16 days. All this shaking down of thermometers caused a painful bursitis of the elbow in those who did the temperaturing. As well as this the herd was sprayed every three days with Dubble Bennex, still using hand stirrup pumps. This soon brought the outbreak under control and there were, if I remember rightly, no further cases. It is worth recording that the temperatures were very constant on 101.4°F. So much so, that I have never believed since in the "normal physiological variation" of temperature.

At the second move of pasture the herd arrived at Buckle's house within easy reach of the Departmental dip tank at Lumi. This greatly simplified tick control. The quarantining of this herd on the border lasted from early November, 1950 until early March 1951, during which time there were small outbreaks of East Coast Fever and Trypanosomiasis both of which were soon brought under control. The cattle were sprayed or dipped every five days and the temperature of every animal was taken for thirty-four days. Blood and gland smears were continuously under examination by Mr Wright and the herd was under my control and supervision the whole time.

Subsequently some of these cattle were distributed locally whilst others walked to Isoka and Kasama.

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