

13. Maasai Land

We reached the entrance to the Serengeti just before 10:00 that last morning and had to bid farewell to that incredible animal sanctuary. Then we drove for several hours through dry savannah, Maasai country. Suddenly our guide said, “Do you see that lake up ahead?” We did see the lake and thought it a good thing for this dry land, but as we came closer, the lake started to disappear. Our guide laughed and said, “What you saw is not a lake; it is a mirage. On this dry road we often see mirages like that.” One of the men said, “You mean that lake was not real?” “That’s right,” answered the guide. “It is simply your eyes playing tricks on your mind. There is no lake of water there.” We all kept watching the area as we passed it. There was indeed no lake or water. We saw lone Maasai men walking on the savannah or standing by the side of the road. “They sometimes hitch a ride this way if the cattle are several days out on the savannah,” said our guide. “We are not allowed to give anyone a ride in our tour jeeps, but other vehicles usually stop to give the Maasai a ride.”





As we came into more fertile country, some of the Maasai bomas we passed were very large. Our guide reminded us that a Maasai man can have as many wives as he has cattle to support them. Sometimes we had to stop to let long lines of cattle cross the road in front of us.



About 12:30 we arrived at the entrance to Ngorongoro Crater, where we would turn to make our way back to the Farmhouse. There were Baboons playing in the middle of the road and Sykes Blue Monkeys in the trees near the entrance to Ngorongoro. "These Sykes Blue Monkeys are only found in this forest," said our guide. "Nowhere else."



We arrived at the Farmhouse a little after 1:00, settled quickly into rooms, had a lunch of salad and pasta with beer, then climbed back into our jeeps to go to the nearby market. “This is where you can buy those souvenirs you have been wanting to buy,” said the guide. The market was fantastically interesting and busy, but very hot and dusty and smelly and full of flies where the meat and fish were sold. The soil in this entire area was again that intense rusty red. Everyone wanted a picture of the chickens going to market in the large basket tied to the back of a bicycle.



We passed a market stall selling the Maasai sandals made of used car tires, and of course I had to buy a pair. "Are you planning to come back and be a Maasai wife?" quipped Myrtle. "You just couldn't resist that Maasai chief when he put his arm around you, right?" Giggle, giggle. Whatever.



The guide took us to a small bar where he treated us to banana beer and banana wine. Now dear reader, I do like bananas, but that banana beer and banana wine were just plain BLEECCH. (Sorry!)



Myrtle and I were admiring the interesting construction of this mud building when we heard a crunching and thumping noise. This large truck had broken through a gully bridge and was now stuck, its front half on the road and its rear end sitting on the other side of the gully. “My goodness!” said one of our women. “How in the world will they get out of that fix?” “Well,” surmised one of the men in our group, “They will have to build some kind of new bridge under the truck.”



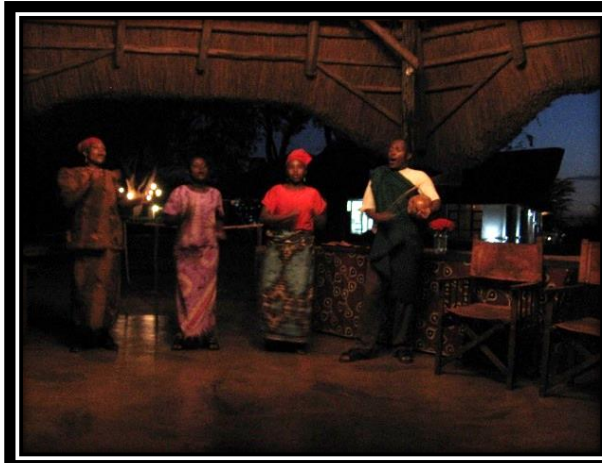
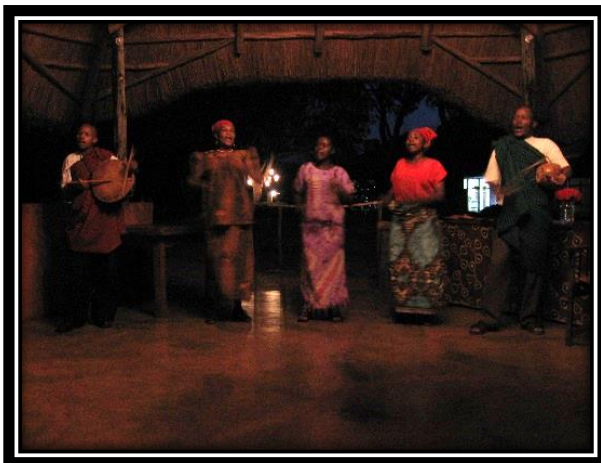
Soon there were many spectators gathered to watch this event, and Myrtle and I thought these little girls in their light blue dresses were just so adorable. Some of the cloth vendors seized a marketing opportunity and unfurled large pieces of handmade cloth for us, hoping we would buy, and this young boy was watching the proceeding intently. I wondered what he was thinking of all the commotion. On the way back to the Farmhouse, we passed a Maasai market and watched the Maasai men herding their cattle through the market. One was on a bicycle!





We arrived back at the Farmhouse at 4:00 for free time until the 6:30 briefing followed by dinner. “Tomorrow’s wakeup call will be at 6:30, breakfast at 7:00, and we leave here at 8:00 to drive back to Arusha,” said the guide. Myrtle and I packed our suitcases so we could have a leisurely morning. The next day a wakeup call at 5:15 startled us all. The Farmhouse staff had made a mistake and woke the wrong tour group. This mistake engendered more than a little grumbling among our group, who were looking forward to an extra hour of sleep. The drive to Arusha was uneventful, and even though we saw

some animals, I think we all had the feeling that our wonderful safari was over. But Mama Wilson’s staff had one more surprise for us, a performance of traditional African drum dancing. The dancers and drummers were all staff, and they were surprisingly talented. “This seems to be a last-minute production,” whispered Myrtle as we took our seats in the dining room. “I wonder if our guides arranged it to try to make up for the 5:15 wakeup call because some of the men in our group were pretty vocal about that.” Whether or not it was last-minute, it was terrific drumming and dancing.





Suddenly it was time to load the jeeps for our last ride in them, to the airport in Arusha. Myrtle and I got quite sentimental as we said goodbye to our guides and jeeps at the airport entrance. Myrtle even planted a big smacking kiss on the hood of our jeep, and I fully expected her to do the same on the cheek of our guide. But I saw her eyes dripping tears, and I said quickly, “Let’s throw them kisses.” We did this gaily, and Myrtle’s spirits revived. Nevertheless, we both knew that we would never forget our African safari in Tanzania and the Serengeti.

To be continued . . .