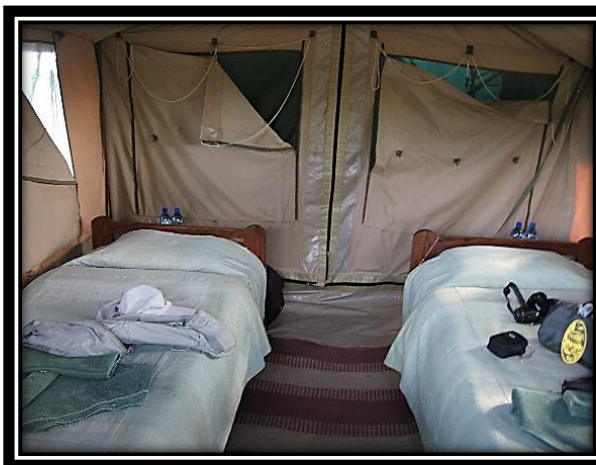
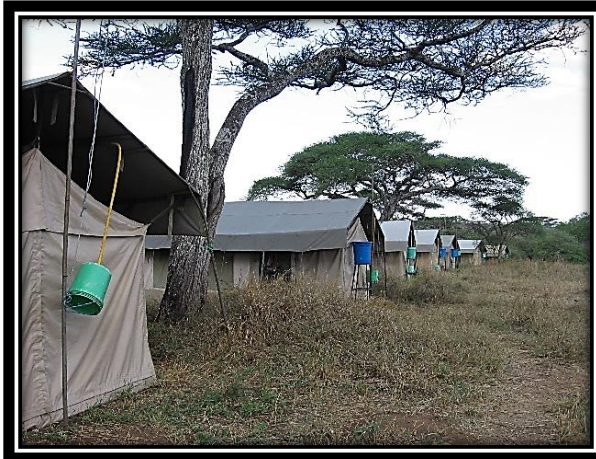


## 8. Camping in the Serengeti

We arrived at camp about 4:30 that afternoon and were welcomed with a cold wet towel and drink, pure bliss. Myrtle and I were assigned to Tent Two. There is solar power for the individual tents and bucket showers, with the famous indoor toilets, which we considered pure luxury!



After we checked in, we were invited to get a beer or wine or soda from the mess tent to relax and rest for an hour. “Don’t forget to give all your foodstuffs from your backpack or suitcase to the mess tent staff,” reminded our guide, “because otherwise you will have unwanted visitors in your tent during the night. The Baboons love candy bars and Hyenas are nocturnal animals and scavengers.” The first animal I saw scurrying around the corner of our tent was a Dwarf Mongoose. Oh, oh! Part of the Dwarf Mongoose diet is snakes. Will there be snakes here in the Serengeti, and if Myrtle spots one, what will I do? Of course my busy mind went through a million bad scenarios until I told it firmly to shut up because I was in the moment with my magical surroundings. It was totally astonishing to be sitting on my camp chair on my tent “veranda” with a glass of Kilimanjaro Beer in my hand, in the “middle of nowhere” as our guide calls this place in the middle of the Serengeti, with absolute quiet all around except for the wind flapping the tent, the soft swish of blowing grasses, and a splash or muffled “mphhhs” now and then from Myrtle trying out the shower. The sun painted the sky in brilliant washes of oranges and yellows as evening came on. An incredible, unforgettable moment.

Until suddenly there was a yell and a “Yikes!” and a thud as though a heavy five-gallon bucket of water had bit the dust. Which is, of course, just exactly what happened. Myrtle, being height-challenged as we have already noted, had a bit of trouble reaching the string that pulled on the bucket. She pulled too hard, bringing the whole thing down. I wondered later if our guide expected something like that, because before I could even get out of my nice camp chair, I heard his voice soothing Myrtle and telling her to stay put, that he would bring her another bucket of water. Thank heaven for guides!



We had a briefing by campfire with popcorn and drinks while the cooks prepared our dinner. “Tomorrow’s wake-up call is 5:30, leave here by 6:15, breakfast on the road, back by 10:00 - 10:30, then brunch and free time until 3:30, then evening Game Drive 3:30-6:00.” Then the guides brought us big hot towels to wash our hands and faces. “I could totally get used to this!” exclaimed one of the women happily. Then we were served a dinner you won’t believe, dear reader. If you were imagining that we were going to be chewing on some antelope jerky and dried sour Maasai cornbread, guess again! The delight we found in the dinner wasn’t just because of the magic of eating by candlelight in the middle of the Serengeti; the dinner itself was amazing: cauliflower soup, fried tilapia, steamed carrots, roasted potatoes, a wonderful spinach salad, followed by



banana/coconut mousse with yogurt on top! Can you imagine eating that kind of food camping in the Serengeti? It quite blew us away, and we were in a bit of a daze walking back to our tents by flashlight, our stomachs so contented that I don't think any of us had a care in the world!

Now you would think after all that that we would sleep like babies, but I had a lot of trouble sleeping that night, period, much less like a baby. Dear Myrtle decided that we needed to take full advantage of the "beneficial energies of the night air in the Serengeti," whatever that meant, and sleep with the heavy canvas tent flaps down and only the mesh screen up. Well, as soon as that sun went down it took all the heat with it and within an hour I was cold. The thin blankets didn't seem to stay tucked under me. They kept sliding all over the place, mostly onto the ground. I got up shivering, rooted around in my suitcase until I found the Maasai toga I had bought at the boma, and wrapped myself snugly in that, pretending that I was a Maasai warrior. But as soon as I started getting comfortable, a godawful roaring started up and it sounded like it was right outside our tent. It wasn't of course, wasn't even close. But if you have ever heard male Lions roar in the night, dear reader, you will understand how unnerving it is. Myrtle, of course, heard nothing and seemed unbothered by the cold, probably because she had enough alcohol burning in her to keep three people warm, I thought nastily. I decided to try to close the tent flaps, but dropped my flashlight when I jumped because there was a barking noise right outside our tent. At that point I gave up and dove for my cot and wrapped up as best I could, pulling my suitcase up onto the cot with me, which was really not very comfortable, dear reader. But I survived, and in the morning our guide said the barking I heard was a Jackal, not the Leopard that was prowling around the camp. A Leopard! Yikes! I wasn't sure how that information was supposed to calm my nerves. I determined that even if I had to tie Myrtle down, I was going to close our canvas tent flaps from now on!

Nevertheless, we all made it onto the jeeps on time, sleep or no sleep, because, face it, a roaring Lion could not keep us from experiencing a game drive in the Serengeti! Shortly after we drove out of the camp, nature treated us to a spectacular good morning with a gorgeous Serengeti sunrise, and I thought, "How can anyone have a bad day when this greets you in the morning!"



We immediately started seeing animals going about their morning feeding routines: a beautiful Reedbuck with the sunrise turning him a brilliant russet color, male Thomson Gazelles and Grant's Gazelles together, Baboons on a kopje, Black-faced Sun Grouse, baby Servals, Cape Buffalo, more Reedbucks, and lots of Giraffes eating acacia trees.



“The Giraffes have prehensile tongues to point the thorns one way, and then they can safely chew the thorny Acacia trees, which are very nutritious,” said our guide. We passed a controlled burn, an important part of land management, Silver-backed Jackals, a troop of about 20 Baboons, beautiful Candelabra cactuses, and hundreds of Gazelles, both the Grant’s Gazelles and the smaller Thomsons Gazelles with their distinctive stripe. “Gazelles do not need water,” said our guide, “and they can go six months without water.”







We saw Tawny Eagles. Two Augur Buzzards tried to chase the Tawny Eagles off, and the Eagles went deeper into the trees. I was surprised to see how beautiful the Augur Buzzard was, black and grey and silver with the strong, pointed predator beak. I thought all buzzards were ugly things, but these Augur Buzzards were beautiful. We saw a Rock Hyrax with four babies. We saw Jackals, a mama and daddy Egyptian Geese and their babies, Hippos, Crocodiles, Herons.





We passed an alkaline lake, very salty from the mineral salts in the rocks. We saw beautiful kopjes teeming with smaller animals seeking the protection of the rocks and boulders.



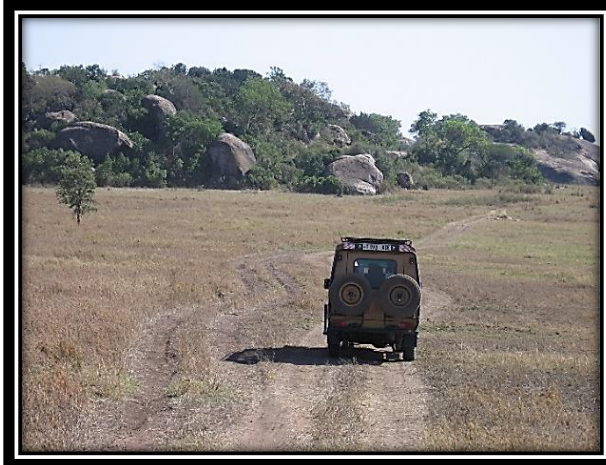
We saw African Grouse, many Cape Buffalos and Baboons. We saw Reedbucks and the distinctively striped African Jackal.





As we rounded this kopje about 9:40 that morning, our guide heard the distress calls of the Rock Hyrax and communicated with our other two jeeps that we should pull over and wait. Sure enough, within minutes we saw an African Leopard walking on the kopje rocks. “Leopards are solitary animals and travel alone,” said our guide. “The Hyrax are now hiding in the cracks in the rocks, as are the Agama Lizards. The Hyrax is the size of a rabbit and is a favorite meal for predators. Strangely, despite its small size, it is related to the elephant. Unlike most mammals, it has no tail.”



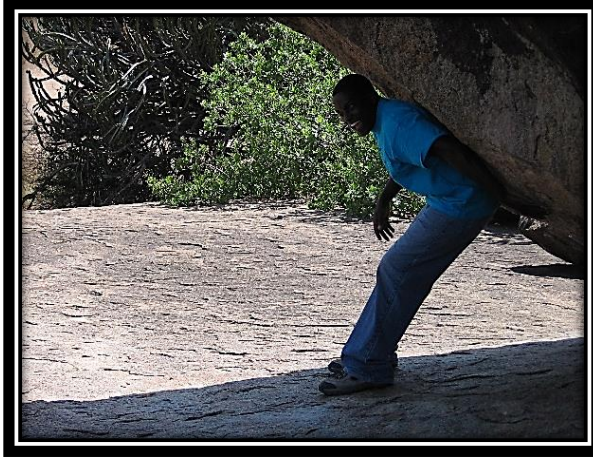


In another kopje we saw Maasai painting on the rocks. “This is from the time the Maasai lived here,” our guide told us. “The Maasai used this cave for circumcision. In 1959 the government forced them to move out of this area.” We stopped at another kopje and climbed to its top. I was astonished how high it was. “This kopje,” our guide informed us, “is called a Simba Kopje because it is so tall. The Simba Kopjes are often used to spot Lions on the savannah.” The guides showed us a granite rock on the top that made a strange metallic sound when its thin places were struck. Very unusual.





One of our guides bent down under the gigantic slanting boulder and pretended to be holding it up. Of course, we all had to take a photo of our “strong” guide! Myrtle wanted a photo of her holding up that boulder too, but sad to say, she looked so much like a doll playing that the photo was not a success.



As we climbed down from the kopje and continued our game drive, we saw many more Gazelles, a male and female Ostrich pair, some Spotted Hyenas, and this magnificent Waterbuck.



To be continued . . .