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The Africa trip lasted for 20-odd days, going from bush camp to bush camp.

First, a friend and I flew from Johannesburg up to a reserve called Tanda Tula on the boundary of Krueger Park in the northeastern part of the republic. The reserve is 25,000 acres; however, the fence has been removed on the west side of the park, adding five million acres for animals to roam.

And roam the animals do. After sundown, we were escorted to our tents by an armed guard. All through the night, baboons hooted the approach of lions and jackals, and hyenas barked and yelped in the stillness. In the mornings, right off the steps leading from the elevated floor of the tent, the guard pointed out leopard tracks and warthog sign to reemphasis we were not to leave the tent at night.

I adjusted real quickly to following the camp rules. "Over-adjusted" is a better way to say it. If a tree frog fell on the trail at night, or a fruit bat shadowed the path just as the low moaning growl of a lioness came from the waterhole close to camp, my legs locked. To get me untracked, the guide had to beat out a one-two rythm like that used by dance instructors to encourage shy pupils to move.

We were told the camp hostess often tries to talk guests out of registering when she detects how frightened they are of the outdoors. A short time before our arrival, 400 cape buffalo blundered into the grounds one night. On

another occasion, jackals ate the rawhide cover off a drum used as a dinner bell. However, the sticks and the core of the drum were left in good shape.

Game drives started at 5:30 a.m. We drank a quick cup of tea or coffee, then loaded up in an open air Range Rover. We wore several layers of clothes and wrapped up in thick wool blankets to ride in the 40-degree winter chill. Just a few paces from camp, antelope of various species (impala, springbok, kudu, etc.) and warthogs tore off in a thick brush much like the cow jungle of South Texas.

Giraffe stared across the top of tall acacia trees, Dark old males who we were told eat 20 to 23 hours of the day moved off like water sloshing in a stream. On one of those mornings, a giraffe broke out into a clearing in a burst of speed, followed by impalas racing behind. The tracker, a dark Bantu-speaking man sitting in the front fender seat, turned and smiled: "Lion."

We had seen lions coming from a kill the night before under spotlight. But in the silence of the bush in the daylight, to see a tall animal fleeing and knowing he ran for his very life made the word "lion" sound like a pronouncement of death.

The ranger and the tracker spotted the game. (I took early retirement after mistaking a 300-pound wildebeest for a two-ton rhino.) My friend, a German father and son pair, and myself rode together. So small a party gave time to photograph at leisure and stop to see birds or animals as

long as we pleased. (Keep in mind, we had to stay in the vehicle.) Mid-morning, we had a full breakfast in a grove of trees along a dry creek bank. Three or four men cooked and served us from an open fire. As was to be the case the whole trip, the bush camps set generous tables of good food.

Unlike in other third world countries, I ate raw vegetables and drank the water without the slightest gastric indisposition. I worry more at home, as the congealed suet and reconstituted potatoes featured around hamburger joints take a hardy constitution.

On one of the night drives, we sat stunned in the bed of a dry wash, watching under a spotlight while hyenas climbed a bloody tree trunk to force a leopard to relinquish an impala killed the night before. Picture these spotted beasts, slobbering and growling, forcing the leopard, her eyes gleaming in anger, to give up her prey. As the carcass falls from the tree in chunks of hide and meat, hyenas mill about in the sand, snarling and cracking bones (bones are a favorite fare of hyenas), slashing at each other, and showing open disdain for the human audience. Such obvious disregard that as the fight loses its pitch, a male marks one of the rear tires of the Rover with a spat of urine so odoriferous that were hyenas as big as camels, South Africa would have to be evacuated.

What glorious days and nights those were, riding around with no more to worry about than bringing a soft blanket under your chin to pass through the cooler low spots, or

maybe untangle the binoculars from the camera strap. I tore from my cot in the mornings, eager to see the bush come alive, and not once did it let me down ...