In 2006, I offered my son Tom, as a 60th birthday present, a trip to anywhere he would like to see, as long as I could go with him. He chose a safari in Tanzania. At 82, that was okay by me! We flew from London to Dar es Salaam, on the way seeing Mt. Kilimanjaro poking above the clouds. At the rather mildewed, chaotic airline terminal we found that no one knew anything about us, which was kind of scary because we thought we were in a tour group. But we were rescued by a man from an internal airline who got us sorted out and onto a single-engine 14-seater headed for Selous Safari Camp, the first of our three camps.

The plane dropped us and our bags at a deserted dirt strip surrounded by scrubby forest (“miombo”), leaving with a cheery, “someone will be by soon to fetch you.” And before we got too nervous about being eaten by wildlife, a jeep did arrive. On the trip to the camp, when we got excited at seeing some impalas and giraffes, we were told to relax— we would see zillions in the next few days, and indeed we did.

Our hosts, a young American couple, introduced us to our guide, our butler, and our houseboy(!), and immediately loaded us onto a boat trip on an oxbow lake of the Rufiji River. The trip was fascinating: on the river we saw a herd of hippos (well, ears and nostrils), dozens of crocodiles, and elephants drinking and bathing, and in the woods were impalas, reedbucks, a waterbuck, cape buffaloes, and giraffes. And the birds! Hadada ibis, spoonbills, fish eagles, yellow-billled storks, a goliath heron, egrets, and Egyptian geese to name just a few. We saw as much wildlife in two hours as we had hoped to see in a week. An impressive start! That afternoon we went on the first of the numerous game drives of the next nine days, getting up close to a herd of elephants, seeing monkeys, baboons, a hyena, and getting a really great education from the very talented guide.

The whole place had a Polynesian look, with high-pitched thatched roofs. The community rooms - library/bar and dining room - were raised about 10 feet above the ground and open all around with a view of the lake. Our platform-mounted tent cabin was quite comfortable, even luxurious, but when darkness fell that first night we knew we were in the jungle – all night long there were loaud snufflings and rustling RIGHT outside the tent as hippos and other large animals foraged through the camp. We were told never to leave the tent for any reason at night, were escorted to and from our tent by Masai staff, and provided with a whistle to call for help if needed. After the morning bird chorus our butler would arrive with a tray of coffee and biscuits balanced on his head for us to enjoy on our porch. It was very exotic.

Highlights of our Selous experience included our first baobob tree (a surreal experience – they look as if a thick syrup had been poured on an upside-down tree and then solidified), a group of lion cubs whose parents totally ignored us, an educational walk (our guide carried an elephant gun to “reason with” wildlife), the grave of Captain Selous, killed in WWI leading African militia against German troops, and classic, Hemingway-esque African savannah. Back at camp, we found a young elephant browsing the trees next to our cabin. I suggested that my only son would get a better picture if he walked past the animal to the porch – fortunately, that worked out OK.

The rest of our trip, to safari camps in Mikumi and Ruaha National Parks, was at least as exciting as Selous, and perhaps there can be a second installment of this narrative.

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Margaret and a baobob tree; Tom’s elephant; a herd in defensive formation; classic African savannah; giraffes, giraffes!; we brake for lions