

**My grandfather, Ralla Ram Mohindra, as the Rail Head Station Master was there during this period. He took the Railway from Mombassa to Kisumu having arrived in Kenya in 1896 from India. He survived to tell the tales of this adventure. Suniti Mohindra Class of 1957 Duke of Gloucester School.**

### **Kenya Lodge That is Built in Honour of Maneaters of Tsavo**

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At the main reception of the newly opened Man Eaters Safari Camp at the Tsavo West national park, about 20km from Voi town, stands the picture of a white man in military fatigues and holding a gun. He exudes confidence and has an aura of victory. Although at first sight many visitors to the hotel do not immediately recognise him, he is Lt-Col John Patterson who killed two lions that were later to be infamously referred to as the man-eaters of Tsavo.

Before Patterson shot them dead in 1898, they had devoured more than 140 people, including 28 Kenya-Uganda railway line construction workers. And for his heroic deed, Patterson was awarded a bowl of honour on which were engraved the following words:

"Sir, we, your overseers, timekeepers, mistresses and workmen, present you with this bowl as a token of our gratitude for your bravery in killing two man-eating lions at great risk of your own life, thereby saving us from the fate of being devoured by these terrible monsters who, nightly, broke into our tents and took our fellow workers from our side.

"In presenting you with this bowl, we all add our prayers for your long life, happiness and prosperity. We shall remain, sir, your faithful servants, Baboo Purshotam Hurjee Purmar, overseer and clerk of works, on behalf of your workmen. Dated at Tsavo this January 30, 1899."

Patterson had always claimed the silver bowl from Tsavo as one of his most highly prized trophies, and the words on it are a testimony to the construction workers' relief when the terror lions were killed.

Today at this site where many innocent people lost their lives to the blood-thirsty beasts stands the magnificent five-star Man Eaters Safari Camp.

The tourist facility of a makuti roof and sparkling stone, forming part of the rich Tsavo heritage, has three magnificent swimming pools where visitors, including foreign and local tourists, may relax after game drives in the sweltering Tsavo heat.

The tented camp is not only a historical development that will remind future generations of the difficulties encountered during the construction of the railway line in Kenya, but is also a major attraction due to its location.

According to the acting manager, Mr Jotham Otieno, it is built at the site where Patterson, the railway project's chief engineer, killed the lions. Unfortunately, visitors sipping wine and sampling pink gin at the camp may not visualise the sacrifices made by thousands of people to open up the East African hinterland through rail transport. The railway line which many saw as a dream that would never be realised and which in some

quarters was derided as the "lunatic line," has a poignant history that few will remember. In fact, looking back at the past, nothing can be as heart-rending as the histories behind the construction of the railway line from Mombasa to Kisumu. Besides the lions which spread terror to the railway builders, or coolies as they were called, many of them died of various diseases.

"We are currently experiencing a high tourism season at Tsavo, and all our 30 tents are full," says Mr Otieno, Adding that the visitors enjoy the staff's hospitality and the diverse wildlife species in the area. Visitors also get the opportunity to view the scenic Yatta plateau and, further west, Mt Kilimanjaro, the Mzima springs, the Shetani Lava and the Roaring Rocks, among a host of spectacular sceneries.

Currently the man-eaters' saga is tickling international interest in which museum officials in Chicago are locked in a row with their Kenyan counterparts over the repatriation of the lions' remains. They had been preserved at the Field Museum in Chicago for 83 years, but currently the National Museums of Kenya wants them brought back. NMK spokesperson Connie Maina was recently quoted by the BBC as calling for their repatriation.

"We shall use international protocol to repatriate them," she was quoted as saying. "It would be good to get them back." A 1996 Oscar-winning Hollywood film, *The Ghost and the Darkness*, renewed international interest in the man-eating beasts. And US author Phil Caputo's book, *Ghosts of Tsavo: Tracking the Mythic Lions of East Africa*, was published in 1992 by National Geographic.

"Besides the history behind the man-eaters, our visitors derive satisfaction from watching lions since they comprise the famous Big Five," Mr Otieno says.

The other members of the Big Five that may be viewed in the area are the rhino, the buffalo, the giraffe and the elephant. In his book, *Red Soils of Tsavo*, Voi sisal farmer turned writer Mohamoud Visram narrates the poignant story of the railway builders in a sarcastic manner.

"However, many of these Indian labourers did not survive to see the completion of the job," he recounts. "Malaria, dysentery and black water fever took care of that...They were buried where they fell...."

"But other victims were in no need of graves. They are the people who were picked up in the dead of the night by man-eating lions..."

The man-eaters' lions were huge and one of the two measured nine feet six inches from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail, and stood three and a half feet tall.

"Apart from the poignant history behind the man-eaters of Tsavo, tourists to the camp derive great pleasure from sighting the surviving offspring of the mane-less lions of Tsavo thereby completing their desire to see the famous Big Five," says Mr Otieno.

Currently, the Tsavo lions are being blamed for playing a role in the human-wildlife conflict as they occasionally move out of the park to terrorize the local residents, giving the Kenya Wildlife Service the onerous task of capturing them in cages and moving them deeper into the park.