



The blog below was written during the 2013 planning trip I took with Scott Isom to Kenya and Tanzania. One of our primary objectives during in-country scouting trips is to “get the bugs out” of the itinerary. Little did we imagine the literal nature of that task on this particular evening in Tanzania.

Please be aware that WAI travelers experienced nothing of the now ridiculous-sounding discomfort Scott and I endured. This blog is therefore intended both to entertain and to give insight into the sometimes intense mechanics of planning a Walking Adventure.

Again, this is NOT the type of experience our clients will feel. Our goal is to “get the bugs out” of the itinerary before our travelers arrive.

Mosquito River: Getting the Bugs Out Misery in Migunga April 19, 2013

The day began with promise, though early, as we left the lodge outside Kenya’s Amboseli

National Park and headed for Tanzania. Massive Kilimanjaro cooperated, looming 15,000 feet above us, the tallest free-standing mountain on the planet. The border crossing at Namanga went smoothly, despite learning that Americans warrant the special consideration of a \$100 visa fee rather than the \$50 charged other nationalities.

Livin, our Tanzanian driver, was a friendly sort, much easier to understand than our Kenyan driver, and George, our Kenyan handler continued the journey over the border with us. Details of the next few days were discussed as we drove south. Info we'd received from our Kenyan partner about the next few days in Tanzania was turning out to be incomplete, and in some cases just flat wrong. Fulfilling what we'd been promised in our program appeared, in some cases, logistically impossible.

One issue, in particular, was a intriguing-sounding experience dubbed "hunt with the Hadzabe tribe". Timing looked particularly awkward for this excursion, and Livin kept stressing that the Hadzabe are not the kind of people with whom you can make a plan. If you show up after they've left for their hunt, you won't see them. Hmmm... how was this going to play out when our lodging turns out to be a two-hour drive from where they supposedly "live"?

First order of business, after lunch in Arusha, largest town in the area, was inspecting a tented camp and planning a walk on the shores of Lake Manyara. The lodge was pleasant, the room large and airy, with lovely views over the lake. We are in the rainy season, so the walk took us through grasslands lining the lake that were lush and often sitting in a couple inches of mud and water. Zebras accompanied us, flamingos lent color to an already gorgeous blend of sky and water, and we left contented that this will be a good addition to the program.

Our lodgings for the night were at Migunga Forest Camp, accommodations we were to inspect and compare with our earlier stop by Lake Manyara. This is where things really started to come unhinged. Migunga is on the edge of a community known as Mto wa Mbu, translated from Swahili as "mosquito river", an ominous harbinger of the night ahead. It is set amongst a lovely grove of huge, yellow acacia trees, but arriving late in the day as light was fading, it felt dark and damp and rough!

Some of these African tent camps are quite luxurious. This one was not! Arriving at our tent, the porters unzipped the entry flap and showed us into the tent. He made a point that there were "many mosquitoes", urged us to spray the room with the aerosol can provided and burn the bug coil. He then pulled down the mosquito netting (standard bedroom equipment on the journey so far) around the bed before leaving.

Scott and I washed up in preparation for dinner back at the dining room. As we used the bathroom, we noticed a sign posted in the bathroom warning guests that mosquitoes are a part of the experience at Migunga, and to take appropriate precautions. Before leaving, I therefore sprayed the main room and adjoining bathroom with the large can of insecticide and lit the insect coil. With socks pulled up around the hem of my pants, and shirt buttoned

to the top, I joined Scott on the trek through the now-fully-dark forest to the restaurant.

The dining area was open on one side, with mosquito netting draping all but the doorway-sized opening into the area where tables were set. On the other side of the dining room, a hallway of sorts led back to the kitchen. We were the only guests eating on this night. Our meal was served by a lovely young gal with a sweet, soft voice, and the food was quite good. The room was very much on the dark side, however, and halfway through the meal, our meager company of two was supplemented by a group of bats that began flying back and forth between the main opening and the hallway, which must have opened to the outside.

The intense, solve-the-problems-of-the-world discussion Scott and I were engaged in would probably have been even more focused but for the disconcerting Adams Family-like aura lent by the bats. The aura was only amplified by the chorus of mosquitoes that started "singing" to us about the time dessert arrived. We decided to suspend the conversation and take cover back in our tent.

Unfortunately, this morning's 5 am start was to be upstaged by an even earlier 4 am start tomorrow. One of the logistical problems we'd been discussing with George and Livin was the drive to meet the afore-mentioned Hadzabe tribe. This excursion had been represented to us as an afternoon experience. Yet as any hunter will tell you, game moves around more in the early morning, and the place we were supposed to meet the tribe was about a 2-hour drive over bumpy country roads. The solution, at least on this planning trip, was a 4:30 am departure!

To mitigate this, we both opted to shower before bed, shortening morning prep time. When it was my turn, I noticed a sizable beetle navigating the bottom edge of the mirror frame and was later joined in the shower by one of his tropical-sized mates. The coil was doing its job, so a strong, pungent odor permeated the main room, but didn't seem to be having any impact in the bathroom. The beetle duo was only part of the insect retinue - several flying species added their welcome to my evening bathroom experience.

After spraying the bathroom again with the aerosol can, which by the way was about the size of a fire extinguisher, I coughed my way through the mosquito netting and rolled into bed. Before leaving home, we'd been advised by the travel medicine nurse to treat outer layers of clothes with a mosquito shielding spray before the trip, so I wore one of those to bed on this insect-themed night as an additional precaution to the aerosol spray, mosquito netting, burning insect coil, and the Malarone pills we were both taking that are guaranteed to stop malaria dead in its disgusting little tracks.

Lights were out by about 9 pm and we lay there in the dark trying to process where we were and how much we would have to restructure it to ever fit into a Walking Adventure. We heard no sounds of humanity or civilization. But the natural sounds of the tropical acacia forest were deafening, especially the frogs. I've never heard night sounds at this decibel level. I kid you not; a rock concert would have sounded like a whisper by comparison. I lay in bed in the dark listening; some other critter was also out there adding his grunting to the

cacophony. For the next few hours, I dozed fitfully, my profuse sweating adding to the general discomfort. About midnight, I decided to make a couple of adjustments and got up to fetch my earplugs. Shedding the mosquito armor of my shirt, I crawled back in bed successfully having blocked the sounds of the night with the ear plugs.

I slept most of the next four hours and when my alarm went off, Scott was already up getting ready, apparently not having slept. We dutifully went through the motions of dressing and packing on this shower-less morning. We'd told the girl at reception that we didn't need porters, especially at that hour of morning, but there they were, already outside our tent door 20 minutes before our agreed upon 4:30 am departure.

to be continued...