

KENYAN KALEIDOSCOPE

Gradually the desert landscape becomes savannah and then scrub, a few hills appear and the train begins the steeper climb into the Kenyan highlands and Nairobi, a modern city 1,677 m. above sea level.

Nairobi is a visitors delight with familiar hotels and gift shops for the timid, native style markets and colonial style inns for the more hardy. Here Pierre Cardin suits walk side by side with goat skin capes; bold printed cotton wraps called "kangas" mingle with polyester slacks; linen safari suits custom tailored in New York or London share the dusty tourist van with faded cotton ready-mades. Nairobi is the economic, political and tourist heart of Kenya. This is where most international flights first land, where the railway branches north, where the highway puts forth its tarmac spokes, where the parliament sits, where the diplomatic community lives and where the poor and out-of-work come for succour. Here one can still sit à la Hemingway at the Long Bar at the (New) Stanley Hotel, or eat curry on the veranda of the Norfolk Hotel as did the early settlers. Nairobi is surrounded by small farms and large coffee estates. Coffee is second only to tourism in earning Kenya needed foreign currency. The laterite soil, specific altitude, hot days and cool nights allow Kenya to grow the arabica coffee bean prized for flavour and which, when blended with the robusta bean, produces what most of us drink.

Remember Elspeth Huxley's *Flame Trees of Thika*? The village of Thika lies 45 km. to the north. The road follows the same ox cart trail and one can still take tea at the Blue Post Inn. Here, too, is Fourteen Falls where Tarzan first swung in pectoral splendor. Remember Elsa, Joy Adamson's lion friend? Travel another 250 km. to Meru Game Reserve and you can sit on Elsa's Rock. Here rises 5,085-m. high Mt. Kenya from whose various tribal names comes the country's name. Travel another 600 km. through the arid, dangerous terrain of the Chalbi Desert, salt pan remains of an ancient sea, and, one arrives on the shores of Lake Turkana. Here fishing expeditions seek the enormous Nile perch which, while considerably less than trophy size, still makes a delicious dinner for 50. It is on the north-east shore of this lake that Richard Leakey found the hominid fossils which possibly date back 1.2 to 2.3 million years and add fuel to the prehistory debate.

Trains making up in Nairobi for the continuing journey to Lake Victoria often put on three locomotives to ensure sufficient power to haul and control the cars as they first climb



Even in black and white, this watercolor by MARCELLE BLANCHETTE is appealing. In its original rich tones of browns and blues, it is powerful...and this is only one of a vast collection of works each of which is equally impressive. From totally abstract to incredibly realistic, each of her pieces of art manages to capture that "luminous" quality that is present in certain fleeting moments in nature. A well established artist, to date Marcelle has had 11 solo shows and five group shows all over the world. Most recently, while on posting to Washington, D.C. she became a permanent artist with the Franz Bader Gallery in Washington and with the Grimaldis Gallery in Baltimore.

to the edge of the Great Rift Valley, descend the eastern escarpment, climb again to the highest point of the railroad and descend to Kisumu. Skirting Lake Naivasha which offers camp grounds, fishing, swimming and an English Sunday brunch and passing through Nakuru where hundreds of thousands of flamingos, pelicans and storks make their home at the bird sanctuary, the train creeps up the western escarpment to the Mau Summit which rises 2,535 m. above sea level.

Although this is too far north to see them, directly south are the vast grasslands of south-west Kenya and north-west Tanzania that are home to the enormous herds of "wildebeests", Cape buffalo and elephant so often filmed as background for the mellifluous voices of Lorne Greene or Richard Attenborough. At the edge of these migration routes, along the banks of a long dry river bed, is a prehistoric site containing hand-axe heads, carefully crafted by Acheulian hunter-gatherers between 100,000 and 500,000 years ago.

At this height the land is lush and ripe for the production of tea which likes to be cooler, higher and better nourished than coffee. The pickers work in groups, identified by the bright colour of their smocks as to which team they belong. The smocks are made of oilskin so that the women can slide easily through the closely planted bushes

without bruising the leaves. From Kericho to Kisumu the countryside changes. It is more productive with more farms and fewer gardens planted tight to the edge of the tarmac. This is upcountry Kenya — tea estates, fruit farms, sheep and cattle ranches — where even the facial features of the people are different for different influences affected the development in this region for thousands of years. These people are tribally closer to the Nilotic peoples of Uganda than to the Bantu-descended peoples of the highlands around Nairobi, and both are different from the coastal peoples. Here grow the world's most succulent avocados. No crab stuffing is needed to make a meal of these brutes. A few drops of "Lea and Perrins", or a wedge of lime turns one into a feast.

Lake Victoria, second largest body of fresh water in the world, is so large that Kenya has two coasts — one salt water, the other fresh — and the breezes off both are a welcome relief to the traveller. Mombasa to Kisumu has taken 36 hours while the track climbed and dropped 4,863 m., and covered 936 km.

Few tourists bother to come this far west now that Uganda is off the itinerary which is unfortunate since it is seeing western Kenya that allows one to appreciate its astounding diversity.