

DESIGN CULTURE INSPIRE TRAVEL ART
PEOPLE STYLE HISTORY PASSION LITERATURE SOUL & MIND
PHOTOGRAPHY RHYTHM
FILM BOOKS LIFE

Thee Agora

— BECAUSE HUMAN RELATIONS ARE WORTH RECORDING —



THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Introduction

The man eaters of Tsavo made their indelible mark in history as the ferocious blood hungry lions who in December of 1898 managed to bring the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway famously known as the “Lunatic Express” , to a standstill for nearly 3 weeks.

The lions were elusive at worst and seemed invincible at best. After what seemed like a rampant, unstoppable killing streak, the coolies were disposed to believe that the lions were not real flesh and blood animals except in their appetites. Instead, they were said to be the angry spirits of two departed native chiefs, who were protesting against the passing of the railway through their land.. In a way, “they were made to symbolize African resistance, as well as the mutual opposition of nature and technology, raw tooth against polish steel “.

But history is a lot like music, it takes both the musician and his instruments to come up with a beautiful symphony. Each instrument is of equal importance, from the harmonica to the accordion, from the flute to the trumpet; each note however subtle or however high is as vital a part of the symphony as the next.

Much is known about the man eating lions, but very little about the men who were actually eaten. This is a story about instruments, instruments of different ages, instruments of different races from different places .Because, while the lions made history as the conductors of a ravenous orchestra, the unsuspecting men who fell prey, equally played their parts as the elemental means through which the symphony was complete.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you: The Men of the Man eaters.....

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS



THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Narain

One of the first people to mysteriously disappear from the Tsavo camp was a sikh jemadar who went by the name Narain.

Narain who had initially served as a sepoy in India was a former soldier of the British East India Company and had been assigned to Colonel J.H Patterson's personal staff. He also specialised in stone building and had come as part of the railway building team that had been chosen to set and dress the piers of the Tsavo Bridge



Building Tsavo Bridge

One evening as was his routine, Colonel Patterson was making his rounds around the camp accompanied by Narain and a friend named Charles Rawson. Patterson who walked around with an infamous little black book made it his duty to point out any defects that he found were of hindrance to the railway's progress. That particular evening he noted down evidence of some serious faults.

The coolies were noncompliant, their living quarters were unclean, explosives were left unguarded and materials carelessly used. However of all these defects, there was one that he felt called for immediate attention. Patterson observed that there was no union jack anywhere around the camp.

He proceeded to the administration hut and asked the officer in charge, a barrage of questions that went something like this:

*'Is this land not a possession of the crown?
And are these men not subjects of the queen?
And is not the railroad not an undertaking of the crown?'*

To all these, the officer wearily nodded in affirmation.

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Patterson then turned to Narain and asked him whether he was familiar with the Union Jack and whether he could make one, to this Narain replied, “Yes Sahib” after which he went off to the stores to obtain the necessary materials. After a short while, he returned with strips of Manchester cloth in red and blue, and some lengths of white cotton.

Throughout the rest of the evening, Narain carefully stitched together a flag that was not entirely accurate but was somewhat recognisable and later that night he reverently laid it on the colonel’s bed. Afterwards a fellow jemadar named Ungan Singh admitted him to the tent and Singh was the last person to ever see him.

The next morning Patterson demanded an investigation to the jemadar’s disappearance. A search party was sent out to look for him and after 12 unsuccessful hours, his case was taken to be one of desertion.

Later that day a coolie working ten miles down track failed to board the trucks retuning to camp. Another party of nearly 30 men was sent to find him, but returned with nothing.



A camp of men at Tsavo

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

The soon to be rampant streak of mysterious deaths and disappearances had just begun. Up until this point rumours had begun to spread all around the camps, that there were man eating lions which seized people from their tents in the dead of night.

Many believed that the unexplainable disappearances were not just merely cases of desertion as the British officials had chosen to think. As it were, some of the officials were even convinced that the stories of the vanishing men were made up, just so the coolies would receive each other's daily allowances.

But as fate would have it they were soon to be proved gravely wrong.

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Ungan Singh

Ungan Singh's case was a rather horrific one and it is his death that brought the immensity of the lion threat to light. Singh was a powerful sikh jemadar who had been put in charge of Patterson's wellbeing . In total, Patterson was served by four Punjabis and a cook all who were answerable to Singh. The Punjabi's, swept the tent, cooked, cleaned and drew water for the bath, among other duties.

On one particular ominous day, Patterson had gone off on a hunting expedition and assigned all the Punjabi's to various other duties. Leaving Singh with the daunting task of preparing that evening's bath. Singh who was already alarmed by the disappearance of Narain was cautious about being alone and hastily went about preparing the bath as fast as he could.

Nervously he splashed the water into it and forgetting that the bath was made of a flammable material (Indian rubber) he placed it on the fire and went down to the river to fetch water.

By the time he was returning, the fire had been put out and all that was left of the bath was a black, pungent, smouldering mound. A disappointed Patterson stood there in abject displeasure while Ungan Singh himself was more horrified at the repercussions of his mistake, than at the piteous site of the bath that lay before him.

It was now getting dark and after the all the chatter and banter caused by the "shocking bath scandal" had died out, the men returned to their tents, in preparation for the next day. That night Ungan Singh was taken.

The next morning Patterson is quoted
"I was aroused at daybreak and told that one of my jemedars, a fine powerful Sikh named Ungan Sing had been seized in his tent during the night and dragged off and eaten ..."

On reaching the spot where the body had been devoured, a dreadful spectacle presented itself, The ground all round was covered with blood, and morsels of flesh and bones, but the unfortunate jemedars head, remained intact... "



The tent from which Ungan Singh was taken

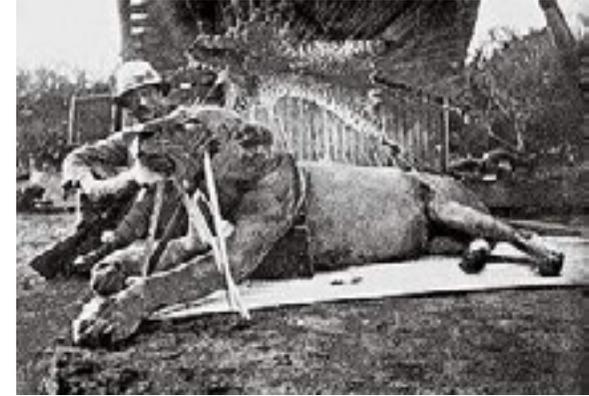
THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Singh shared a tent with 6 other men, one of them who had witnessed the entire ordeal. He described how at around midnight the lion put his head through the open tent door and took hold of Ungan who was lying closest to the opening. He then heard Singh scream “Choro!” (let go) and next minute he was being dragged out of the tent and into the woods.

His helpless companions could only lie in fright and listen as Singh fought for his life in vain. After the death of Singh, chief railway engineer, George Whitehouse called for a full inquiry into the lion menace, it was now clear to everyone that the camp was under attack.

At this time the various camps were scattered around Tsavo such that there was approximately an 8 mile radius between each of them. It so happened that the lions never struck the same camp twice in succession, which only made it more difficult to predict where they would attack next.

They outflanked every defensive post and eluded any traps set to catch them. After the unfortunate death of nearly 28 men, Patterson eventually hunted the lions down after a nine month odyssey, killing the first one on 9th December And the second one 20 days later.



first lion shot 9th december 1898 , image courtesy wikipedia



second lion shot 29th december 1898 , image courtesy wikipedia

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

But the killing of the two lions in Tsavo did not bring an end to the terror caused by lions in general, those who thought that the lion nightmare was over were yet to be proved terribly wrong. As they would continue to terrorise railway workers throughout the course of the railway construction. So much so, that rewards were given to anyone who would shoot or capture any lion that was found within a 10 mile radius of the railway line.

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

John Williams O'Hara

In March of 1899, Mr. John W O'Hara a 35 year old engineer from India was seized and killed by a lion in the presence of his wife and two children.

Mr. O'Hara who was in charge of building the road from Voi to Taveta, was in camp with his family, the camp was situated approximately 12 miles from Voi. During the night a lion entered their tent, it seized O'Hara by his head, killing him instantly and dragged him from the bed with such stealth that the wife only noticed that he was not there a few minutes after he had been seized.

When she woke up she found her dead husband lying outside and the lion standing within two feet of her. The lion was then frightened away by gun shots which were fired by the African guards who were on duty.

Today Mr.O'Hara's grave can be found at the Commonwealth Voi War Cemetery .



THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

C.H Ryall

Mr.C.H Ryall was the superintendent of the railway police, a special force of about 200 strong that had been recruited to maintain law and order within the railway zone

On June 6th 1900 Mr.Ryall was travelling in his inspection carriage from Makindu to Nairobi, he was accompanied by a German trader named Huebner and an Italian trader who went by the name Parenti. When they got to the station at Kima they received word that a man-eater had recently been spotted close to the station, a couple of nights before.

Immediately, they went about trying to track down the lion before it got dark, but by the time the sun was setting, they were no closer to finding the brute than they were to foreseeing the catastrophic events that were to occur that night.

During the early hours of the night they all sat on guard in the inspection carriage, as each one of them took turns to keep watch. When it was Ryall's turn he persuaded his two friends to lie down for a while, as he kept watch alone.

He stayed up for a couple of hours, and after failing to hear any suspicious sounds or movements outside, he came to the conclusion that the lion was unlikely to appear that night and he lay down on the lower berth of the carriage and fell asleep.

Little did he know that all this while the lion had been watching them all through the night, waiting for them to sleep. It crept towards the carriage and silently opened the sliding door which shut itself behind it. It was now stuck inside the carriage with the three men.

Standing on Parenti who was sleeping on the floor, it seized Ryall and after failing to find any other way to get out of the carriage, it broke through one of the windows and carried Ryall with it, into the bush.

Huebner and Parenti remained physically unharmed but were psychologically traumatised let alone shocked. As for Ryall's remains, they were found the next morning about a quarter mile away from the site.

It seemed that this particular lion had a peculiar craving for railway staff, as in the subsequent days following Ryall's death he had unsuccessfully tried to obtain a meal by actually climbing onto the roof of the station building and trying to tear the corrugated iron sheets.

The terrified baboo who was on duty that night sent a telegraph message to the traffic manager

" Lion fighting with station . Send
urgent succour " .

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Luckily enough, the lion got itself injured as it tried to tear through the iron sheets and much to the baboo's relief; it was forced to abandon its frenzied quest that night. A few days later it was trapped and captured by two Indian men. It was then put on display for several days, after which it was shot.



Lion on display at Kima

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

However ,the lions were not always successful in their hunger driven pursuits, on some occasions they failed and when they did, they did so, miserably...

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

The bunniah with the noisy, magic, oil tins

One late night, an Indian Trader (bunniah) was riding along on his donkey when all of a sudden a lion pounced on him, knocking him down and leaving the donkey badly wounded.

It was just about to seize the trader when it got one of its claws entangled in a rope that the trader had used to tie two empty oil tins around the donkey's neck with. The rattle and clanking noise made by the tins as the lion walked gave it such a fright that it ran straight back into the woods desperately trying to get away from the sound.

The terrified bunniah was so relieved he scrambled up the nearest tree and regardless of the strong winds and the biting cold he stayed up there for the rest of the night.

Dallas and his mattress

Shortly after the bunniah's episode, a Greek trader named Themestocles Pappadimitrini often referred to as Dallas was sleeping blissfully in his tent when a lion broke in and instead of seizing him, it made off with the mattress he was lying on.

Themestocles, albeit rudely awakened was left petrified but at least he was unharmed.

14 lucky men and an unlucky bag of rice

On another occasion, 14 coolies who were sleeping together in a large tent where one night rudely awakened when a lion jumped onto their tent, ripping straight through it. The lion landed with its claws on one of the coolies' shoulders, tearing it up mercilessly and instead of grabbing the man himself, it accidentally seized a bag of rice and made off with it.

Realising that it had not grabbed its intended "good" it dropped the bag in disgust a few meters away from the tent and went back into the woods, obviously in utter disappointment.

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS

Many men died and many more were affected by their death; some of the incidences were tragic while others were harrowing or in the least, entertaining.

For the friends, families and colleagues of these men their deaths left a permanent scar in their hearts and memories, while to those of us who can only read and write about it decades after it happened, they remain stories to be treasured and to be shared.

For there must exist a balance between nature and progress, between life and death, between joy and sorrow and through this balance the entire symphony that is existence remains whole.

Such was the fate of the men of the man-eaters.

THE MEN OF THE MAN EATERS



Written and compiled by Tayiana Chao : chao@theeagora.com , @TayianaC

For more information : visit

www.theeagora.com

or find us on :

Twitter: @TheeAgora

Facebook : Thee Agora

Email: info@theeagora.com