

As Soon As the Buck Is Killed, the Liver Should Be Taken Out and Cut Into Thin Slices: On Safari in Africa 1860–1960

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ABSTRACT: A safari is usually defined as an expedition to hunt, or observe animals in their natural habitat. This paper’s aim is to explore what food was eaten on African safaris, focusing on the nineteenth-century and then the first half of the twentieth. Safari guides began taking rich British and American tourists on expeditions from the early 1900s. The hunting and display of wild animals were intimately associated with the ideologies of Empire and with Muscular Christian Masculinity. Large numbers of animals were slaughtered as trophies and their carcasses provided ‘chop’ for the hunters and the African porters. The ‘deliciousness’ – or otherwise – of various meats is discussed, for example, the taste of various cuts of elephant. While the male hunters’ motivation was often to provide meat for consumption, in contrast, Mary Kingsley, on her journeys in West Africa, procured food supplies from local colonial outposts and, for instance, enthused about a tin of herring while climbing Mount Cameroon. In the 1930s Ernest Hemingway continued in typical great white hunter tradition and recounts cooking Grant gazelle tenderloin on sticks around the camp fire. While game meat is the main focus of meals, other foods were sometimes consumed.

The idea of examining the food eaten on safari arose from reading a section entitled, “On Safari” in the late British colonial cookery book, *Recipes from Bechuanaland* (123–4). We read that for “Fried Buck Liver. As soon as the buck is killed, the liver should be taken out and cut into thin pieces. These must be floured, peppered and salted to taste and cooked almost in their own blood” (123). Further recipes include a stew made with the neck and ribs of a buck (with carrots, potatoes and dumplings) and one for stewed guinea fowl (123). Other African cookery books have occasional game recipes such as Rosanne Guggisberg’s *Eating in Africa* which has a section called “Hunter’s Luck” (59–64) that includes a recipe for Zebra Stew (64).

The aim of this article is to explore what food has been eaten ‘on safari’, during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, when hunting and exploring ‘unknown’ parts of Africa was undertaken by colonial settlers and explorers. In this period “the hunting, collection and display of wild animals were intimately associated with the ideology of Empire ... and the ethos of European hunting was embedded in the imperial enterprise” (Ryan, 1997, 100). Safari guides also began taking rich tourists on expeditions early in the twentieth century.

The paper mainly focuses on the British Empire in Africa where these imperialist ideas prospered well into the twentieth century. John Beynon in his book, *Masculinities and Culture* points out that the Muscular Christianity indoctrinated in the British public schools helped to supply workers and soldiers for the Empire: “[a] huge emphasis began to be placed in the education of young men upon athleticism, stoicism, sexual purity and moral courage” (2002, 27). Furthermore, there was a “late nineteenth century cult of the hunter when bushcraft and the wilderness became the basis for an ideology of physicality, which was picked up in both Britain and the United States with the foundation of the Scout movement” (2002, 27–8). The great white hunters in Africa from Britain, and later from the United States, can be seen as products of this ideology, an ideology that promoted their superiority while perpetuating racist beliefs, so allowing the great white man to rampage through the African countryside, accompanied by numerous African servants, while shooting at nearly every animal they encountered.

Taking photographs of the shot game, or ‘trophy’, became an imperative in the nineteenth century and by the 1920s and 1930s expeditions to film the animals in the wild also became important. However, the great white hunter continued the slaughter of African wildlife for much of the twentieth century.

Nineteenth-Century Imperial Masculinities on Safari

Victorian Muscular Christianity was based on the premise that “participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and ‘manly’ character” (Watson, Weir and Friend 2005, 1). Novelists such as Charles Kingsley “viewed manliness as an ‘antidote to the poison of effeminacy’” (1). It is not surprising therefore that in the nineteenth-century various British explorers enjoyed the manly sport of hunting.

There is a large literature exploring why men hunt, addressing questions, for example, as to whether it is a good way of acquiring food or whether men hunt to gain social attention, known as the ‘show-off’ hypothesis (See Gurven and Hill, 2009; Darimont, Coddling and Hawkes 2017). Eating meat, it has also been argued is “a symbol of patriarchy resulting from its long-held alliance with manhood, power and virility” (Rothgerber 2013, 364). Most of the hunters encountered below would seem to be meat-eating show-offs.

W.B Lord and Thomas Baines’s book, *Shifts and Expedients of Camp Life, Travel and Exploration*, was written in the

1860s and 1870s. It is a prime example of the exploits resulting from the ideology of Muscular Masculinity and militaristic British imperialism. In a chapter on Camp Cookery it is soon made clear who is doing the cooking: "It is well, when travelling with a large party, to ascertain the qualifications of a couple of steady men, and regularly appoint them to the cooking department ..." (1876, 475).

The focus on hunting is soon established, as well as the consumption of game meat and "it is when the larger animals of the wilderness fall before the hunter's rifle that the resources of the African *chef de cuisine* are really called into requisition" (Lord and Baines 1876, 489). They tell us that when an elephant is killed, the foot can be amputated and placed in a 30-inch-deep hole in which a fire has been lit and left to burn overnight. In the morning and "the rich gelatine and other morsels are left to be dug out ... very frequently a piece of trunk is put in at the same time, and this is generally left as a stand-by, to be eaten cold, when it looks and tastes almost like coarse tongue" (489–90). Theodore Roosevelt, who travelled to east Africa in 1909, also ate elephant meat: "I toasted slices of elephant's heart on a pronged stick before the fire, and found it was delicious" (Roosevelt 1910, 253). However, another explorer, the French-American Paul du Chaillu, who had travelled in Equatorial Africa (mainly Gabon) in the 1860s, explains at length why he is not so fond of elephant meat and how he wished to give the reader a "notion how it tastes" (Du Chaillu 1869, 86). He does not really know how to describe it – "beef, mutton, lamb, pork, venison make not the slightest approach to a resemblance; and as for poultry, such a comparison would be positively aggravating" (86). At one stage various bits of elephant meat are given to him, including what is considered a favourite morsel: the proboscis. He then reports that "the meat was so tough I had to boil it for twelve hours: then I believe it was as tough as ever: it seemed full of gristle. So the next day I boiled it again for twelve hours. All my trouble was unavailing ... I may say that the more I ate elephant meat the more I got to dislike it ..." (87). One can only assume that du Chaillu's perseverance was due to his desire to eat some meat.

In *Shifts and Expedients*, we also learn that the hump of a white rhinoceros is "in reality a most delicious morsel" (490) but more detail is given to how to cook hippopotamus in a recipe set out by Sir Samuel Baker who says "I tried boiling the fat flesh and skin together, the result being that the skin assumed the appearance of the green fat of the turtle, but is far superior. A piece of the head thus boiled, and then soured in vinegar, with chopped onions and cayenne pepper and salt, throws brawn completely into the shade" (490).

Despite this masculine orgy of animal flesh consumption, the authors do add:

in some form or other vegetable matter, as acid as possible, is absolutely necessary; for no one who has not been compelled to live for weeks together upon

meat alone can imagine how utterly disgusting the smell and taste of even the freshest and most savoury joints become when unvaried by any vegetables to say nothing of the injury to health that such a diet must cause (503).

Despite this last comment, *Shifts and Expedients* is very much focussed on hunting and trapping large and small animals in the African countryside and consuming everything that could be eaten.

F. C. Selous was another famous British explorer and professional hunter who arrived in Africa at the age of nineteen and then spent nine years travelling and hunting in South Africa, Botswana and what is now Zimbabwe. The first mention of food in his *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* however would come as a bit of a surprise. It is Christmas day 1871 and he writes:

Made a wonderful pudding of meal and eggs, flavoured with chocolate; we also made a sauce of meal, milk, honey and chocolate. Both pudding and sauce turned out a glorious success, and considering the paucity of materials at our disposal, I think we had reason to be proud of it. We invited old Hendrick to dinner, and he was enchanted with the pudding, declaring he had never tasted anything like it, and, judging from the amount he stowed away, evidently thinking he never would again (Selous 1881, 5).

However, the hunter soon returns to form and as they travel northwards they come across a fine herd of giraffes: "[w]e at once started in eager pursuit, hoping to secure some fine fat steaks for supper, as giraffes are splendid eating and usually in good condition, and fat is a luxury that no one can properly appreciate till he has lived for a time on nothing but the dry meat of the smaller antelopes" (19).

A major expedition was undertaken by Henry Morton Stanley between 1887 and 1889, travelling from the mouth of the Congo in West Africa to Zanzibar with the aim of rescuing Eduard Schnitzer, who had embraced Islam and became known as Emin Pasha (Lyons 1994, 13). An Irish doctor, Thomas Heazle Parke, known as *Bwana Doctari*, accompanied the Stanley expedition and wrote a famous account of it in his *My Personal Experiences in Equatorial Africa* (1893). Attached to the expedition were 812 persons, including some white British officers and over seven hundred mostly Zanzibari, Sudanese and Somali porters along with an Arab slave trader, Tippu Tib, and his harem (Lyons 1994, 23).

They observed and shot a few jungle animals along the way. Stanley did at one stage have to kill his own donkey to feed "the desperately hungry men each of whom was given a pound of flesh. The officers received a larger allowance, four pounds apiece. Parke enjoyed his meal and watched the ravenous men struggling 'like pariah dogs' for the hide, hooves and blood. The tidbit (sic) was the tongue" (Lyons 1994, 66).

The expedition often seemed to be short of food, so that they had to resort to looting the fields of maize, bananas and

any other food that belonged to local African villagers. If the Africans objected they shot some of them. For example, when Parke was on a looting expedition he reports that "I shot two men who were in a canoe as I thought they were escaping with a goat" (Lyons 1994, 63). There is considerable detail of what the expedition leaders ate including the unlikely story that Parke, who had spent the day dressing ulcers, ate twenty bananas in one sitting (Lyons 1994, 63). Having found Emin Pasha, the British officers returned to Europe, and were enthusiastically welcomed by the Prince of Wales in Cannes on the French Riviera; they dined with the Belgian King and Queen in Brussels and were feted by royalty and everyone when back in Britain and Ireland (Lyons 1994, 175–180). While their Victorian Imperial Muscular masculinity was not focused on 'bagging' large African game, it was redirected at a cruel and racist treatment of Africans, including the hanging and flogging of any porters and servants who were deemed to have committed some crime.

For the former US President Theodore Roosevelt's hunting and collecting expedition of 1909 another large retinue was assembled, consisting of some 500 porters. When they set up camp they had a dining tent, a cook tent, a skinning tent and a provision tent. Roosevelt provides details of the many animals his party ate but also of some of the food he brought with him, explaining that in each provision box there were "a few cans of Boston baked beans, California peaches and tomatoes" (Roosevelt 1910, 22). He tells us that the flesh of the Thomson's Gazelles (which they call Tommies), and the Grant's Gazelles, are delicious (52). Wart-hog is also "good to eat" (87) while the giraffe's heart was "good eating" (303).

When the party arrived back at the camp in the evening, Roosevelt would "take a cup of tea, with crackers or gingersnaps, and after a hot bath and a shave I was always eager for dinner" (Roosevelt 1910, 295). And then "setting down to supper of Eland venison and broiled spurfowl; and surely no supper ever tasted more delicious" (170).

Not many African cookery books emerged in the early twentieth-century. The first Zimbabwean one was Mrs. N. Chataways's, *The Bulawayo Cookery Book*, originally published in 1909. This includes a brief section on cooking, while out on an expedition in the Veldt, with a recipe provided by Major R. Gordon, D. S. O. This is "Ducks à la Polynesia: [p]ut a very hot stone inside the bird; then wrap all up in banana leaves and bury in a wood fire for 20 minutes or so. ... Feathers need not be removed till after cooking ... all come away quite readily then and leave the bird quite nice and clean" (145). There is little doubt that game meat is a dominant component of nineteenth and early twentieth century safaris.

Mary Kingsley: a Tin of Herring.

Few women set about exploring Africa. However, Mary Kingsley describes in her *Travels in West Africa* how she undertook various expeditions, starting in 1893, including

journeys up the Ogowé river in present day Gabon and a climb to the top of Mount Cameroon. She did not go hunting, but collected insects and fish and observed the habits and 'fetishes' of different ethnic groups. She writes "I have never hurt a leopard intentionally; I am habitually kind to animals and besides I do not think it is lady like to go shooting things with a gun" (Kingsley 1897, 545). She even mocks the men when she remarks that "the largest leopard I have ever measured myself was, tail included, 9 feet 7 inches. It was a dried skin and every man who saw it said 'It was the largest skin he had ever seen, except one that he had seen somewhere else'" (546).

What food does she bring on her travels? She purchases provisions from the French, German and Spanish colonists and officials. When climbing Mount Cameroon, then under German rule, she writes that she and her men are anxious for 'our chop' (556). During the climb it is often pouring with rain and she writes, "my teeth chatter with cold as the breeze chills my saturated garment while I give out the rations of beef, rum, blankets, and tobacco to the men" (557). The men are usually provided with beef and rice for their 'chop' while higher up the mountain Kingsley tells us that "I dine luxuriously off tinned fat pork and hot tea, and then feeling still hungry go on to tinned herring. Excellent thing tinned herring" (572). Mary Kingsley's tinned herring seems a world away from the men's elephant trunk eaten cold the next day.

Tourism, the Safari Guide and Man-Eating Lions.

Safari expeditions for tourists began at the beginning of the twentieth century when "about half a dozen men began the safari business at about the same time" (Herne 1999, 7). Nairobi in Kenya was at the centre of operations and, for example, tourists arrived from the United States by ship to Mombasa and then travelled up the 'Lunatic Express', as the Uganda Railway was often called. Food is first encountered in Herne's *White Hunters* during the building and maintaining of this railway, opened in 1898. However, it is humans that were eaten by man-eating lions and in 1899 some 28 workers on the railway were killed and eaten (26).

The trains did not have dining cars, so the travellers would alight at various Dak bungalows with catering provided by a Goanese firm in Nairobi. "With the exception of the Dak breakfasts (oatmeal porridge, bacon, eggs, toast and coffee), few travellers praised the meals, which invariably consisted of soup, stringy beef, potatoes, cabbage topped off with banana fritters and Ceylon tea" (Herne 1999, 38).

The cost for each tourist of going on a hunting safari in 1907–8 was between 350 and 500 dollars a month: this provided food for the numerous porters and other African staff. It did not cover the cost of the client's own food and the hunters were expected to buy their food at The Army and Navy Stores in London and transport it by steamer and rail, especially boxed, to Nairobi (Herne 1999, 62).

Food On Safaris in the 1930s.

The golden age of the African shooting Safaris continued into the 1930s. These, according to Brian Herne were leisurely affairs. Clients were woken up before dawn with a cup of tea and then provided with “a hearty breakfast served in a special mess tent by uniformed staff” (Herne 1999, 167). After the morning hunt a picnic lunch was provided, often on fine china. “Specially built wooden chop boxes might contain cold guinea fowl or sliced game meat, cheeses, fresh baked bread, along with delicacies like ham, sausage, or pâté from provisioners in Nairobi, or even as far away as Fortnum and Mason’s in London. A selection of fine wines, or at least hot tea or coffee, might be considered appropriate” (167). When the hunters returned to camp in the evening, they were provided with hors d’oeuvres and a drink, then “a hot canvas tub or showers awaited them, before tucking in to a multicourse formal dinner served by candlelight or pressure lanterns” (167).

Ernest Hemingway in *Green Hills of Africa* wrote of going on a safari in East Africa in the early 1930s with his wife Pauline and accompanied by between 15 and 50 porters and others (2016, 243). In a typical white hunter fashion, they bagged every creature in sight and Hemingway himself, for example, slaughtered 3 lions, 3 buffalo, 1 rhino, 2 cheetahs, 6 impalas, 30 Hyenas and many, many more which he claimed were mostly shot for meat (243). His wife, unlike Mary Kingsley, joined in the hunt including shooting another lion.

Much has been written about Hemingway’s racism and toxic masculinity. For example, Josep Armengol-Carrera has argued that

Hemingway’s work seems primarily concerned with celebrating himself as a white male hunter, with women and black men acting as foils to his self-image. Not only does *Green Hills of Africa* represent trophy-hunting as a proof of (white) manhood, it depicts the hunt as an eminently homosocial competition between and among (white) men (2011, 46–7).

Just like other white hunters they started before daybreak with a cup of tea and then “[b]reakfast in the dark with a lantern, cool juice-slippery apricots, hash, hot-centered, brown, and catsup spread, two fried eggs and the warm promise-keeping coffee” (Hemingway, 2016, 139). They had lunch out on the hunt taken from a ‘chop-box’ (2016, 145). In the evening Hemingway tells the reader about his supper one day. In front of the fire he is drinking whiskey and water when his driver, Kasmau brings him some tins that they might consume for supper: “[T]here were three tins of Christmas special mince-meat, three tins of salmon, and three of mixed fruit, there were also a number of cakes of chocolate and a tin of Special Christmas Pudding” (2016, 164). Hemingway rejects these and is offered “a thick, long chunk of roast Grant gazelle

tenderloin ... some bread ... [and some beer] one of the big German liter bottles ... Each man had his own meat or collection of meat pieces on sticks around the fire ... I was eating a piece of hot broiled liver I had lifted from one of sticks of the Wanderobo-Masai and wondering where the kidneys were. The liver was delicious” (164–5).

In Hemingway’s account in the *Green Hills of Africa* there is little difference between Hemingway’s approach to the safari and British imperial ones of the nineteenth century. His particular version of sexist ‘white man’s’ toxic masculinity mimics those of F. G. Selous and others. However, his approach to the shooting of game does change later in his life as shown in his *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* where he is more interested in observing the animals than killing them (Armegol 2011, 43–46).

Children On Safari and the End of Empire.

The long tradition of boy’s adventure stories, for example, Ballantyne’s *Coral Island* (1858) or Rider Haggard’s *Allan Quatermain* (1887) continued into the middle of the twentieth century. Among these there were a number of books published in which children went on Safari. One example is Georgina Battiscombe’s *Two on Safari* in which the two children, Nigel and Adela, head off on a safari guided by their father’s head ‘boy’, a former Masai warrior, Oloilim. This is a story set in late colonial Kenya and includes a lion hunt where Nigel is awarded the severed lion’s head because he had saved one of the Masai hunters by firing his airgun at the lion, distracting it for a moment. At the end of the story the young Nigel is hoping to join his father in shooting, and he is promised a new rifle (149). The ideology of Muscular Christianity is still extant in 1946 and young Nigel is being suitably indoctrinated.

In the last decades of colonial rule in East Africa, children were often brought on these safaris during the school holidays. Hilary Matthews’s father was a missionary who in 1955 became Bishop of Northern Uganda until the family left the country in 1964. He was not a hunter, but once shot a deer when they had another family with them, whose father did hunt. Matthews writes:

We’d pack up our Land Rover and a trailer with all the gear. We always stayed in what were called ‘rest houses’ which were very basic buildings with nothing inside – just the 4 walls, maybe divided into 2 rooms and a kitchen space and usually a thatched roof and an outhouse nearby! So, we didn’t need to take tents, but took everything else, including mosquito nets, canvas bath, camp beds with thin roll up mattresses, bedding – no sleeping bags in those days! ... I seem to remember eating a lot of roasted corn on the cob, often had “posho” for breakfast which was porridge made with cornmeal. We usually took our cook with us. (email to author, April 27, 2021).

Hilary's brother, Andy, remembers that a friend, who travelled with them to Madi Opei, near the Sudanese border, shot a kongoni and a warthog, both of which they ate. "[t]he wart hog was just like tough ham" (email to author April 27, 2021). So even on these relatively late colonial safaris, African game was on the menu.

Conclusions

There is a cultural imperative in most societies not to eat certain animals and many people, not just vegetarians, would be horrified at the safari hunters eating the meat and offal of elephants, monkeys, hippopotamuses, giraffes and the other game. We should note that many of the same people however would accept the slaughtering of large animals in their millions in meat factories in their own nations. From the nineteenth century, imperial and Muscular Christian masculinity drove a fascination with killing African game, eating the meat, and the collection of hunting trophies. In the twentieth century, this hunting has only slowly been replaced by safaris for rich tourists housed in comfortable lodges and tents in the bush and focussing on photographing the same large animals. The imperial Muscular Masculinity that originally drove these enterprises has only slowly loosened its grip on the safari industry, so that in recent years vegetarian options are offered in some of the luxurious safari lodges. Inclusive safari holidays can be purchased online, while webcams situated in various locations in Africa allow a European to sit at his or her computer and watch 'live' the comings and goings of large African game. (see for example, Namibia: Live Stream). However, for much of the time since Lord and Baines's *Shifts and Expedients of Camp Life*, meat from African big game has remained the main course of many safari menus.

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