

Tanzania day 2: the Safari Commute

Today I meet the team: we breakfast, talk about the plan for the week (travel, measure, measure, rest, travel) and set off on the road to Iringa. I've now been in 2 of the "big 5" wildlife countries and so far have seen: 1 dog. I'm hoping we might see something else in the parks. The road is very quiet – most of the traffic has stopped because of the traffic jams around the flooded bridge, which is great in terms of having the road to ourselves, but not so great in terms of being the only car around for the traffic police to stop. They stop us and show the radar gun (the most common sensor that I see around here) – speeding. We stop next to one of the communities making woven baskets – I'm tempted to go shopping but know that would just increase our chance of a fine. I see another dog. We pass the waterfall where our driver once took a hippy who tried to teach him about transcendental meditation. All the police want to talk to us, to see the car's papers – today they must be bored.

And then we enter the Mikumi National Park. Right away there are baboons – mothers with frisking children, big proud males with bright bulbous bottoms. Then giraffes, posing tall under shady trees. Impala peeking through the bushes. Elephants ranging in the distance. Wildebeast and zebra sharing a watering hole. And more giraffes. Someone jokes that this is the "safari commute". We eat good African food just outside the park (last night the hotel staff made me a late meal: of chicken and chips, then eggs and frankfurters for breakfast), then continue through the plains and along a river. As promised, there are Masai herding cows whilst on their mobile phones ("they carry two at least"), and small boys with sticks and goats. I look at an NGO crew in their big white 4x4 and wonder how many of them actually know what it's like to be poor – not poor as in student, but poor as in having to make the difficult choices you make to survive. We see onion stands near the river – you can map your location here by what's on the vegetable stands: onions, mango, tomato, peppers, and finally, in the high plains past Ikaya, potatoes. We climb, past a crashed lorry, up a mountain road that Nicky tells us once had a phone at each end because it was too narrow for vehicles to pass). We're in high meadowlands now, and there are many sunflower fields.

We stop in Mafinga and choose a hotel – the cheaper one that just opened today. I sign in as their first guest, and put "Webb" in the "tribe" column. We eat local chicken, plantains, rice and big sweet avocados and talk about maps.