

# Encounter with a Lion

By Ray Punter

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It occurred on Sunday, 19th November, 1961, near the small settlement of Kasiya which is about 30 miles/50 km north west of Lilongwe. In fact it is pretty well due north of Namatete on the Lilongwe/Fort Manning road and there was a Police Post there. At the time I was stationed at Lilongwe in Special Branch under the DSBO, Basil Williams. I was friendly with a Game Department chap called Roye Tribe and he had left his rifle with me for safe keeping while he was away on local leave. He returned from leave on Saturday 18th November, but did not collect

his rifle that day. The following day a Police radio message was received to the effect that a lion had been surrounded by local villagers in an area of bush adjacent to their village and requesting the Game Ranger go there and shoot it (it had been frightening the villagers and killing their cattle).

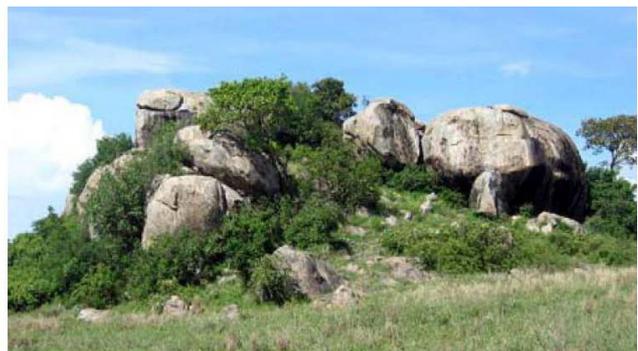
On being contacted by Lilongwe Police Station, Roye Tribe came to my house just after mid-day to pick up his rifle and asked if I'd like to go with him as back up. I replied that I would go but would first have to go to the Police Station to get a 303 rifle as I only had a shot gun at home. He said not to bother but just to bring my shot gun which I did.

I am now not sure quite how, but two other off duty Police Officers became involved at this stage, to wit, Peter Walder and Paul Sheffield. They were not armed and literally came along for the ride. And so it was that the four of us set off for Kasiya in the Game Department's vehicle. We called in at the Kasiya Police Post and picked up a Constable who guided us to the village in question. On arrival we found an area of bush about the size of a football pitch surrounded by 200 or more Africans many of whom were up trees acting as spotters. They all seemed to be armed with pangas, spears or knobkerries along with something metal (tins, pots, pans, lids) which they could bang to drive the lion in the direction they wanted.

At one side of this area was a gently sloping rocky outcrop (known as a dwala in Rhodesia) and it was decided that Roye and I (and the other two) would position ourselves on the rocky slope and the Africans would then drive the lion towards us. Roye and the other two were about 20 yards to my right and somewhat higher than I was so had a better view; I was about 15 yards from the edge of the tall grass at the foot of the rock. At a given signal an almighty racket broke out with much shouting and banging of pans and lids, etc, accompanied by excited pointing by those up the trees as the Africans started to move through the bush. It was quite an unnerving experience to know that a very much alive lion was being driven towards us!!



*Estimated location*



*'Dwala' type rocky outcrop*

Ten minutes or so later I became aware of the top of the grass moving slowly in front of me and within seconds I had a clear side view of the lion moving from right to left. My shot gun was loaded with Alphamax SSG in the right (choke) barrel and AAA in the left. If I did nothing the lion would escape so I up and aimed at the base of its neck and fired the right barrel. The lion went down but ten seconds later it was up and bounding towards me. I gave it the second barrel full in the face at close range (about 10 yards) which knocked it completely over backwards and I saw all its belly. But it still wasn't done for and came at me again.

I knew that Roye was close at hand with the rifle and judged that I, with two empty barrels and an angry lion coming towards me, didn't have time to reload and decided the best thing I could do was get out of the way so that Roye could get a clear shot. I turned and ran a couple of paces up the rock and then threw myself on the ground. The next instant I felt the lion on me and then heard a rifle shot. The lion left me, there was another rifle shot and the lion dropped dead a few feet away. This all took place in a matter of less than 30 seconds.

Roye had shot the lion twice in the base of the neck and in so doing had unquestionably saved my life. Very fortunately I had not been bitten by the lion but it had stuck its claws into my right buttock area so that I had some deep wounds there and lesser ones on my right leg. The back of my shirt and shorts were covered in blood and initially the others all feared the worst but in fact it was all from the lion. There was a great deal of relief all round!!! My injuries, although sore, did not bleed that much and I was able to walk unaided.

The African villagers were all very excited and there was no shortage of volunteers as they carried the dead lion to the vehicle. I remember asking them to lift it up and not drag it on the ground as I didn't want the skin to be damaged!

When we got back to Lilongwe I insisted they take me home first rather than straight to the hospital because I wanted to tell Norah what had happened and for her to see that I was all right. She was three months pregnant with Graham at the time and was naturally shocked at the realisation of how close she had come to being widowed. I attended Lilongwe hospital on a daily basis for the next couple of weeks to have the lion claw punctures cleaned and dressed. This necessitated dropping my shorts and lying across the operating table with my bare bottom exposed. The wonderful nurse who treated me was none other than Joanna Le Mesurier, wife of my O i/c Central Division! I always had a special rapport with Joanna after that right up to the time she died in her 90s.

For the record Roye insisted I had the skin because I shot it first, albeit not very effectively! I skinned it myself and pegged it out on the drive at my house in Baron Avenue to dry, covered in salt and alum. I subsequently had it mounted at Mitzidi Mission in Blantyre and still have it to this day.