

Arrival in Kenya

Vignette: Arrival at Mbale, Taita Hills, Kenya
June to September 1973



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1973

Early 1973

Three insights (from the Real Africa, 1978)

Peter, an Old Haileyburian and former Head of School, gave an illustrated talk to Sixth Formers on his gap year in Cameroun – in a bush school, in the middle of the jungle near Yaoundé. [My diary records the talk as being on 30 June 1971, a full two years earlier.] His talk presented the challenge and beauty of working hard in a strange situation, miles away from anywhere – out in the silence of Africa, out of reach of the demands and complexities of modern civilisation: “with stars and moonlit nights, away from city lights”. Peter’s talk engendered within me the first pangs of a desperate yearning to break free and get out of the system, to go and ‘do my thing’ in Africa. Peter described his return to the UK: “You just get into the top deck of a London bus – and blow your mind...”

I heard the story of another Old Haileyburian, Andrew’s work with a Roman Catholic Mission, helping to build an Indian village. Again, his story presented the challenge of utter selflessness and sacrifice – of getting completely lost in self-giving: dying to self-interest, spending and being spent for God in the service of the poor. A sum of money was sent to Andrew to buy himself a refrigerator. The money was spent – one imagines unhesitatingly – on the project...

During the Summer Term of 1973 I read Arthur Blessitt’s book ‘Turned on to Jesus’ – the story portrayed the exhilaration of being suddenly put into a difficult situation for the Lord – and, by prayer and hard work, just seeing what you can make of it. The book presented the challenge of making dynamic progress, in both physical and spiritual work, e.g. the church that was built with bare hands in just six weeks...

June 1973

Letter from Geoff, 26 May 1973

Letter from Geoff D, written from Kiamuya Secondary School, PO Box 7067 Othaya, Nyeri, Kenya, dated 26 May 1973, and addressed to Legbourne but forwarded by my mother to Haileybury, and received in early June 1973:

This letter was written to me after Geoff (not his real name), who was also an Old Haileyburian and had been deployed as a ‘Youth Service Abroad’ (YSA) volunteer the year before me, had heard in a letter from the YSA Coordinator, Miss Lydia S, that I had been accepted by CMS on to the YSA programme for the coming academic year, commencing in September 1973.]

Dear Adrian, Congratulations on joining that unique body known as the YSAs! Actually Brian told me you’d been accepted in the middle of the holiday but it was in the breathing space between getting down Kilimanjaro and setting off for Lake Rudolf in the distant and empty north-west, and somehow that piece of interesting information, along with many others probably, got mislaid in the excitement. What reminded me was a letter from Auntie Lydia [Miss Lydia S, the YSA Coordinator], which arrived yesterday. I had been to watch a volleyball / basketball / football match two miles in one direction, run past the school four miles in the opposite direction to the post box, found it empty, run home again – to find the Headmaster waiting for me with the post! Most frustrating. Anyway, having replied to Auntie Lydia I thought I’d drop you a line to assure you that the best year of your life so far is coming up!

As you can see, I’m enjoying one of those oft-recurring delights known as a weekend. Last term I travelled a lot at weekends but for the moment I’m happier relaxing at home. My companion has relieved me of his presence for 2½ days, so I have the place to myself. This

being a day school, that is a literal statement, except for my cook, who pops in to cook the occasional excellent meal and tidy up. I envisage two days of reading (English and African history and War and Peace) and writing (hopefully replying to all the letters I'm going to get today!) and preparing lessons in a leisurely sort of way. For exercise I shall go out and cut grass occasionally with a *panga* (a lethal universal instrument used for everything from digging foundations to opening cans). What more could one want? By way of diversion there are two American missionaries coming to see the place tomorrow (the 10th and 11th whites respectively since January!) The hope is that a nice cheque will come from the gentlemen's large parish back home.

Somewhere at Haileybury there are three fairly informative circular letters, two from me and one from Brian, which would probably give you a fair idea of what you have let yourself in for! Ask the Old Boy [my Housemaster] next time you see him, if he can show you them. My first one tells of my first impressions, the favourable nature of which has more than been confirmed by the beginning of the second term. The second tells of our holidays, which were really tremendous. Brian's is mainly factual; as you can see there is a wide range of accommodation available. I think we are probably at opposite ends of the scale, myself in luxury, he in rather more primitive surroundings. Still, doubtless he's gaining rather more from the experience! If having read that lot there are any gaps, don't hesitate to write and ask. In addition, I've told Lydia that I shall be deeply hurt if she doesn't invite me to your briefing conference in September. One of the best things that I've got from my time out here is the establishment of a wide and often deep correspondence with a wide range of people. Two thirds of them are acquaintances originating from Haileybury (though only two are still at school), and so I've kept pretty well in touch, in a way I would never have done if I'd stayed at home. It is a rare day that my cook returns from his 8 mile trek without something for me.

It seems inconceivable that I shall be home in less than 10 weeks! The time seemed to stretch like an eternity when I first arrived, but it has galloped past so fast that the time has come to make plans for my return, and how I am going to occupy myself for the three months between then and October – the longest period I have ever had at my disposal, or am likely to have again for a year or two. I am looking forward to getting home again obviously, but I think I will regret it more and more as the weeks go by. What I am sure of is that my appreciation of many things that I have tended to take for granted about England will be heightened. The thing I've most missed perhaps is my music – singing and records, yet I'm sure that it will mean much more to me for having had a long break. On the subject of singing by the way, the Cathedral Choir in Nairobi is very good, and is a powerful incentive to go down occasionally. We happened to have an alto, a tenor (Brian) and a bass (me) who knew most of the hymn parts, on our trip to Lake Rudolf, and we probably provided the natives with a source of great wonder, singing hymns by the light of our oil lamp or fire every evening in the desert! The alto, Joan (who is convalescing after being very ill up there) in fact lives very close to me at home, and I think she'll probably join me in the choir there, which will be very nice.

At the moment the rains are upon us, and the whole place is much more green and pleasant as a result. The grass, which I go out and hack at occasionally, is very thick and lush – this is the most fertile area of Kenya and the part most suitable for Europeans. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century the Central Highlands of Kenya were considered the most suitable place in the world for colonial settlement. From the window by which I am writing all I can see are green ridges leading up to the Aberdare mountains, which are usually very beautiful, though clouded at the moment. I had heard from many people that Kenya gets into your blood when you've lived there once, and that you pine to be back again. I certainly will!

Well, Adrian, I must go, if for no better reason than that I am running out of space. Do write if you can, and tell me what you are up to and how you find the old place, besides asking about life out here that you want clearing up. Do you know your destination yet? God bless, Chris.

Another insight (from the Real Africa, 1978)

Another Old Haileyburian, Alan's description of Kenya – a fellow volunteer, Richard (whom I subsequently got to know in Cambridge) lived "four miles away". But what is 'four miles'?

walk in Africa like? My imagination conjured up pictures of dark forests of tall trees – tracks through the jungle, a fierce vertical midday sun, deep and cool shadows, Africans living in small villages... pictures inspired no doubt by Joyce Cary's 'Mister Johnson'.

Summer Vacation 1973

My diary written a few years later records (edited):

CMS Briefing Conference [at Foxbury] – very much 'just out of Public School'. Preparation for teaching in Kenya.

Iwerne – read 'Quiet Talks on Power', final fellowship with Robert, Derek (future leaders) and Peter, and his younger brother John. Goodbye to many close friends.

August 1973

Summer Vacation 1973 (continued)

My diary written a few years later records (edited):

Farming – the 'long straight'. A rich time, free from distractions. The W's letter arrived on my eighteenth birthday. I thought ahead to Africa. I wanted to 'lose myself' in the situation: a year then seemed a very long time. To be rid of the monotony and greyness of the UK and the Haileybury 'rut' I was in, to get 'Public School' right out of my system. To lose myself for Christ: 'Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will find his true self...' I stayed with my brother Nick, and we went walking in the Yorkshire Dales.

Another insight (from the Real Africa, 1978)

The amazing letter from Catharine W – which arrived on August 7th 1973, my eighteenth birthday – describing the Taita Hills and the Mbale situation. Pictures of the beautiful old residual forest of Africa: waterfalls, rocky outcrops, mountain peaks a few hours away. I imagined there might be a mountaintop nearby (Prayer Mount), from which you could look down over the school and Mbale valley, and think and pray – like the view I had over Kitzbühel from the mountain ski slopes in December 1972...

Letter from Catharine W, 2 August 1973

Catharine W's letter, dated 2 August 1973, and written from AC Mbale-Dabida, PO Voi, arrived on 7 August 1973, my eighteenth birthday:



The AIR MAIL letter from Kenya that arrived on my eighteenth birthday

Dear Adrian, Thank you very much for your letter. Our delay in replying was so that it could be posted on our trip to Mombasa today – which in the long run will have delayed it less than posting here at the beginning of the week. Posts to us and out from here can take a week – but from Mombasa 3 days. It will be good to welcome you here at Mbale in September. Unfortunately, Andrew and myself will be on holiday at the beginning of September and are not due to return to Mbale until Saturday Sept 15th. If by any chance your plane is delayed, you could reckon on a lift from Nairobi to Mbale on that day (we shall probably spend the rest of Friday 14th at the CPK Guest house which is next to the CMS office). However if you continue as planned, I'm sure you will be met and cared for, and we will tell Mr and Mrs S (also CMS missionaries) to look out for you – and there is a very nice Christian teacher, Peter M, who would introduce you to things in our absence – but we would have liked to be there to greet you ourselves and we're sorry about it.

I shall now attempt to answer your queries adequately – but some will be more easily left till you find out for yourself! To start with you have been misled in your geography of the place – and I enclose a sketch map (not to scale) to give you an idea of the lie of the land. At Mbale you are 'in' the Taita Hills – 3,800 feet up. Voi, 25 miles away, at the base of the hills is 2,000 feet – and the highest peaks are 7,000 feet and can be reached on foot and by bus from Mbale within ½ an hour or so. The plains surrounding the Taita Hills are arid country – scrub and semi-desert – and Voi lies here – hot, dusty and rather dirty, essentially a town *en route* to other places, rather than a place in its own right. There are two main routes up into the hills, both of which climb circuitously and quickly – the scrub and dry region changing to cactus trees, ferns and denser scrub – green where there are streams, dry elsewhere – the people scraping a living from the slopes. Once you reach 4,000 feet and above, the vegetation is richer and greener, with trees and lots of undergrowth, good cultivating land – and spectacular rocky outcrops, and near the higher peaks patches of old residual forest (very beautiful and fun to explore). The views are superb, and except during July and August unhampered by cloud or mist. The climate at Mbale is a pleasant one abroad – never too hot, but seldom chilly. Normally there are two main rainy seasons, April and October (ish), but there can be short rains in August and January, which see people through. September to June is hot weather, sun all day and at the Mbale altitude a woolly seldom worn; June to August can be cool, and a thicker jersey is needed if you go walking in the higher altitudes at those times –but generally at our level we say it's like a perfect summer, English fashion – maybe a bit warmer, with a continuous breeze blowing up from the valleys below us. The

people are friendly and accepting –we have been here four years and feel really at home – they are a very polite and courteous people, making their living off the land mainly, and a lot of them finding life very satisfying with just the bare essentials – very challenging to us Europeans who require so much to feel satisfied! There is a strong Christian background here – and there have been revival movements here in the past – and at present the Spirit is really moving, particularly among secondary schools.

Mgalu Harambee School started 3 years ago, and is a self-help school, in other words dependant on the fees of the students and giving of the local people. At the start of the school it went very well – at present it is not so smooth going, and I know they will really welcome someone who is sure to stay for 2 or 3 terms. Staff changes in these schools are frequent. Don't expect the administration to be similar to UK. It's very different. The African attitude is not the same as ours – and their methods of working very often different. You have to be prepared to accept it and do your best within it. Bring what books you feel will help you in your teaching – books are not readily available. We can't tell you what subjects you will be teaching because it all depends on which staff you have next term. But I do know they lack more on the Arts side than Science this term.

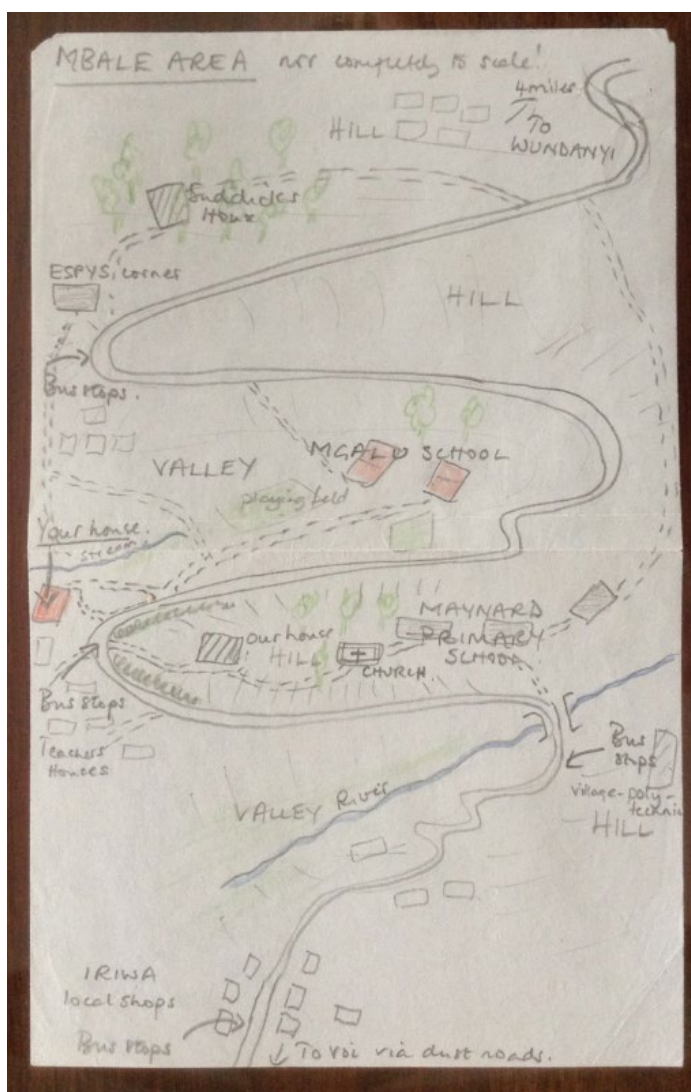
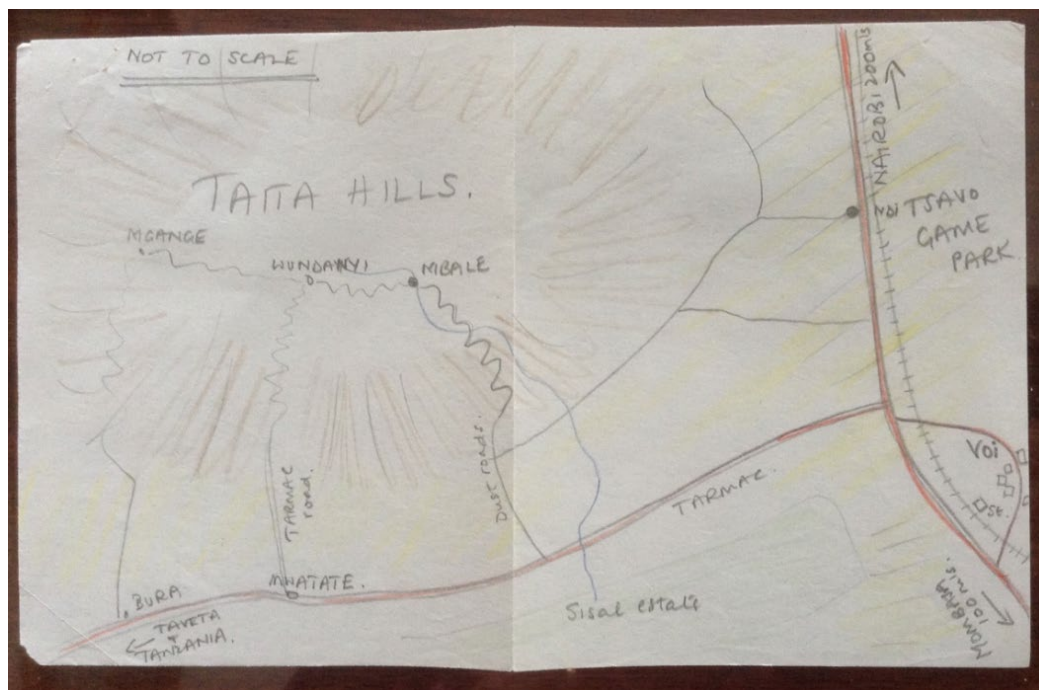
You will be living in a very nice brick house – corrugated iron roofs, cement floors – along with another teacher. At present he's a graduate from Nairobi called Aggrey O, but it could be different by next term. You will be expected to share with him, though you have your own bedroom and desk in it. There is a nice kitchen with Calor Gas stove and a bathroom with a bath *and* basin!! So you can be quite civilized! You are dependent on a rainwater tank for water; if that fails you send people to fetch water from the river! You *won't* need mosquito nets here. If you need one for a Mombasa holiday, we can lend you one. Our climate is a healthy one. The market centre is 4 miles from Mbale, 1,500 feet up, Wundanyi, where most essentials for food and general living can be bought. The local shops ½ mile away have some shops for basic things (bread, butter, some tinned food). Fruit, veg and cheap meat are plentiful (forget about cheese, sausages and bacon!) We find we live very well here. Milk is available, plenty of eggs. No shops sell medical supplies other than aspirin and antiseptics – but I run a small dispensary service and am well stocked with a range of medicaments – so I think you need not fear on that count. I can't think of anything special that you should bring out. Not having seen Miss S's list I don't know what she reckons is your basic outfit! But I should think it would apply here.

About reaching Mbale from Nairobi. If you can get to Voi there are two buses that pass through Mbale itself each day and would drop you off at MAYNARD school (which is the primary school) and from there you can ask the way to Mgalu school. (If the bus will reach after dark ask for ESPY'S corner (next stop up) and then enquire for the S's and any child would take you to their house.) An 11:15 am bus (orange one) from Voi reaches Maynard stop at 1:00 pm approx. – a 1:00 pm bus at Voi (blue and white bus) from Mombasa passes 3.30 pm approx. (And there *is* another at 4:00 pm which passes much later after lots of stops at 7 to 8 pm-ish – not recommended, as it tends to have the pub people on it!) Other buses leave Voi to go via WUNDANYI – and you'd have to make your way down on foot by road – about one hour's walk, downhill all the way. You could be directed to Mbale. If you enquire at PATELS café in Voi by the bus station, there is an English speaking Asian there and you will be shown the buses and told the times. It is not difficult.

We look forward to meeting you very much, and are praying for you now that you will settle in here and love the place and the people as we do. Please excuse my dreadful scribble, and I hope you can decipher it. With best wishes in all your preparations and a good flight out.
Yours sincerely, Catharine W.

PS Kenya as a whole has been short of school stationery since April – it could recover, but to bring some exercise books for your notes would avoid disappointment.

[Maps of the Taita Hills and the Mbale Area attached.]



Meladun

This poem was written in August 1973, during the farming season at Belmont, Lincolnshire, just before my departure for Africa:

In Meladun

The falling sun

Finds welcome lands wherein to rest.

And forests, where the shadows tread

Before him, like a mantle, spread

To cradle him in folds of red,

In Meladun, toward the West.

The hills which from the forests rise

Stand sharp against the sloping skies;

And through the valleys rivers blest

Lead fiery waters to the West.

From Meladun

The sacred swan,

Far purer than with snows caressed,

Leaves secret waters for her flight;

And, softly heard, in failing light

The swishing wings from East to West.

Ah Meladun, forever free,

Between the silence and the sea!

Through years untold the Kings of Old

Avowed thy sacred Majesty.

From Meladun

The sun has gone,

Hurrying from the mountain crest.

Tarrying, priest-like, stands the moon

O'er Meladun, the land of rest.

Brief Historical Notes on the Taita Hills

1850s – Johann Krapf

Despite early contact with missionaries, little is known of the Taita before the Kenya Christian era (mid-1800s onwards), although the existence of six major divisions (or clans) would suggest that the Taita are in fact an amalgam of several different peoples, who probably arrived in the present-day Taita-Taveta District in separate migrations possibly spread over several hundred years.

As to why they migrated here, this would most likely have been to avoid cattle raids and attacks, from both the Maasai to the west and the Oromo-speaking peoples from the north, and migrations by people who had lost their herds in such attacks. The hills, with their steep, fortress-like flanks, were an ideal refuge, being not only easy to defend, but also well-watered and lush, making agriculture a more than viable economic alternative to herding.

In the 1850s, the Reverend Johann Ludwig Krapf, the first missionary to travel to the Taita Hills (*en route* to ‘discovering’ Kilimanjaro, together with Johannes Rebmann), was positively enraptured by what he saw as:

Its rich variety of mountain, hill and dale covered by the most luxurious vegetation! I could have fancied myself on the Jura Mountains near Basel... so beautiful was the country, so delightful the climate. Our way through plantations of Indian corn and beans, past small herds of cattle ... then along fields of sugar-cane and banana, till we descended into the valley with its rich pasture lands...

In this lovely green country of hills and valleys and running streams, exhilarating air that puts new life into limp and tired Coast residents, the natives are naturally brisker in their movements than those of the lower lands, and they have not so many unwholesome microbes to contend with! This beautiful land, however, cannot be reached without passing over the dreary and monotonous plain...

The name Taita itself is commonly said to originate from ki-Swahili-speakers, who heard the inhabitants of Sagalla describe the region as “Teta” (‘defensive’, ‘quarrelsome’ or ‘aggressive’). By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Swahili had corrupted Teta into Taita and the name came to be applied both to the entire area and to its principal inhabitants. True or not, this story – as well as linguistic similarities between ki-Swahili and ki-Taita – points to the historical involvement of the Taita with the Swahili-dominated caravan trade. It is known for a fact that the Taita participated in the caravan trade with the Pare and Usambara in Tanzania, with which they traded ivory and rhino horn in return for manufactured material goods.

Things changed suddenly – and violently – at the end of the nineteenth century, when the British began construction of their railway from Mombasa on the coast to Kampala in Uganda, which included a branch line from Voi to Taveta on the border with German East Africa, now Tanzania. To build the railway, the British needed both the land it would pass along, and the ‘pacification’ of the tribes whose territories they passed through. Obtaining the land was easy enough – they simply stole it. But obtaining ‘peace’ was more difficult, and the Taita, along with the Giriama, Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii, the Nandi and the Elgeyo were all the receivers of brutal and vicious ‘patrols’ which many times ruthlessly killed men and women and exterminated their stock.

With the railway, of course, came European culture and religion. Attempts to convert the Taita to Christianity began in earnest after 1885, when the Church Missionary Society (CMS) began to spread its activities inland, and by 1892, the first Catholic Mission was established at Bura, which is now Bura Girls High School. Mbale Mission Centre, near Wundanyi, followed in 1900, and then what is still one of the biggest Taita Churches, at Wusi Mission, in 1905.

More than a century of contact with Europeans and Christianity has considerably ‘westernized’ the Taita, although they have culturally also been exposed to Kenyan influences, notably from Kamba and Kikuyu traders. Yet despite these changes, the Taita remain a remarkably homogenous group, due in part, I have no doubt, to the respect they continue to show their ancestors...

(Source: Jens Finke (2000 to 2007), Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya, a multimedia encyclopedia dedicated to Kenya's tribes and people)

1910s – Richard Maynard

MAYNARD, RICHARD ABSALOM (b. c. 1870 [in Queensland, Australia]; d. 5 February 1953). Anglican missionary clergyman. Maynard went to Kenya in 1894, being the fifth missionary to be sent out by the Victorian CMA which had been formed in 1892. In 1903 he married Miss M A Austin, an Hon CMS

missionary. He was made deacon in 1910 and ordained priest in 1912. After missionary service on the Kenya Coast, he and his wife commenced a mission station among the waTaita at Mbale in 1910, where they worked with great acceptance until 1921. They then worked at Dabida, also in the Taita Hills until they retired in 1933. He was archdeacon of Mombasa from 1926 until 1933.

Besides having the overall responsibility for pastoral and evangelistic work among the waTaita, Maynard translated the New Testament and the Prayer Book into ki-Dabida and compiled a hymn book in that language. [I recall the beautiful ki-Dabida language sung by the members of the Mbale Anglican Church.]

In recording appreciation of their 38 years' missionary service, the CMS stated: 'His work as an evangelist, trainer of native teachers and clergy, and translator of the Scriptures, laid foundations on which much of the present work in Kenya is built'. They retired to England where he had a notable ministry in Eastbourne.

(Source: Keith Cole, unpublished ThD MS 'The Growth of the Indigenous Church in Kenya'; in A History of the Church Missionary Society of Australia, 1971.)

staff of Mgalu High School, the year rounded off with the final bastion of the 'Last Mountain'...

Diary notes (6 September 1973)

Thursday 6 September 1973 – Left home around 09:00 after a rapid last pack and after disconnecting the Honda battery. Sad goodbye at Market Rasen, but smooth – and again insufferably hot – journey to Kings Cross and thence to Hoddesdon. I thought: “If London’s this hot, I don’t know what Kenya is going to be like!” Arrived at the G’s house, exhausted but safe. *[I recall Alan’s mother greeted me with the somewhat disconcerting words, “Are you terribly overweight?” – referring, of course, to my luggage!]* We picked apples and witnessed Mike’s second driving lesson, until Alan and Geoff returned at around 6 pm. Much discussion concerning overweight baggage, African IQs, local food, accommodation in Mbale. Supper was followed by washing up accompanied by four-part hymn singing, and a last farewell telephone call to Mum and Dad – particularly to thank Dad for the new watch. Alan and Geoff then showed some slides, featuring the Alps, Kikuyu rains, Lake Rudolph and the desert, Mount Kenya and the snows, Kilimanjaro.

The journey to Kenya – Nairobi and the Taita Hills – described from excerpts from my first letters home (dated 10 and 14 September 1973) and diary notes...

Journey to Kenya, letter to my parents, 12 September 1973

Letter to my parents, written from Mbale-Dabida on 12 September 1973 and addressed to Legbourne, posted in Mombasa 14 September 1973:

Well! So much to relate and less than a week gone! I am writing this now on 12th (Wednesday) aiming to post it at Mombasa on Friday. Thank you very much for your letter, which I received on arrival at Mbale (only 4 days – very good!) Now, news in brief. Friday 7th: Walked up to Haileybury, cross country from Hoddesdon, and saw Mr and Mrs R-J *[Rhodes-James – I will always remember R-J, dressed in a tropical safari suit, in one of the classrooms in sweltering heat; I inquired, jokingly, “Is this Africa?”]*. I also saw the Master – in lieu of farewell ‘interview’ at the end of last term... We said goodbye, I said a big Thank you, and he wished me well. I also saw the Blakeway-Smiths. Had lunch with Geoff and Mike at Galley Hall – temperature in the 80s!

We set off for Heathrow Airport in a funny little car driven by Alan. I thought we’d never make it! At Heathrow a miracle happened. I heard that overweight was being charged at £1 to £1.50 per lb (i.e. astronomical!) In panic I transferred 8 kilos into a carrier bag (which eventually disintegrated, as hand luggage) – thus leaving a suitcase of 20 kg and a rucksack of 7 kg. I put both articles on the scales, holding my breath for the shock. Just then an airport official – amazingly – came along, snatched the rucksack from off the scales, depositing it with the ‘passed’ luggage. The lady checking the weights then looked round at the scale to see (only) 20 kg – the weight of the suitcase *[and the maximum allowance, 44 lb]* – and waved me on!

We took off 75 minutes late, circled over Windsor, and crossed the coast at Brighton – my last view of Britain. A few minutes of blackness gave way to the lights of the Channel Islands and the French coast... Over France, we crossed the French Riviera and followed the coastline of Italy through to Sicily – the moon clearly reflected in the Mediterranean waters. We ran into gathering cloud before the North African coast. I had a sleepless night in various uncomfortable positions. Dawn broke suddenly, the darkness on my right rapidly replaced by views of arid plains punctuated by dry river courses, spectacular pink mountains and possible glimpses of Lake Rudolph [Turkana]. Breakfast saw us crossing more and more fertile country until we reached Lake Naivasha, where we began our descent into Nairobi. We circled to the south of the city, landing at Embakasi Airport, to the east, with fantastic views of parched semi-desert stretching away to mountains in the east...

Moment of truth – the wheels touched the tarmac and we entered Africa! I stepped outside. The temperature? 57 degrees (Fahrenheit)! A come down from the 80s of London – I really

will have to get used to this cold weather! Nairobi Airport was extremely efficient with health check, passport check, immigration, luggage collection and customs – all over within half an hour of landing (08:30 Kenyan time).

We were met by the Reverend John R (CMS representative), who drove us through Nairobi – with its landscaped roundabouts, Jacaranda trees, white buildings and red earthworks (my first impressions), to St Julian's, near Limuru, 20 miles west of Nairobi and at an altitude of nearly 7,000 feet. A beautiful CMS house, very unlike Africa; it was almost as if we were back in England – with silver tea pots, coolness, green grass and 'civilisation'. Soon, however, I was to discover the idiosyncratic phenomena of Africa – the sun goes straight up – and then straight down – no messing about. By 10 am the sun seemed to be almost vertically overhead. It was cloudy that first day, but when the sun eventually appeared it bathed us in a gloriously dry heat (much more comfortable than the harvesting sun in Lincolnshire). After dark the characteristic, nostalgic noise of crickets and cicadas filled the air, and there was the magical, hauntingly beautiful sound of African singing in the distance. The sky, having cleared, revealed a completely different pattern of stars, and the moon with its face curiously turned (so to speak, on its side). I was accommodated in a wooden annexe with Mike, Peter and Stephen. The first night in a dark continent...

Diary notes (9 to 10 September 1973)

The next day (Sunday), I awoke refreshed after a good night, emerging from the depths of sleep: Must-get-out-of-bed, go-downstairs, put-the-coffee-pot-on, draw-the-curtains, listen-to-the-8-o'clock-news... No, no... hang on, wait a minute, where am I? This is... AFRICA!

We were driven to Limuru Bible College, three miles away, arriving just in time for a children's service conducted in Swahili. "*Baba yetu...*" [Our Father] and "*Yesu anipenda*" [Yes, Jesus loves me – sung unaccompanied, except for a solitary drum]. After the service we were taken round the college by students, and I had my first experiences of *chai*, Kikuyu, and chameleons. In the afternoon we played 'vicarage-standard tennis' on a hard and red-dusty court. John and Shirley R came and gave us a final practical briefing, with some more sobering stories of previous YSA mis-haps, including one about a YSA volunteer who was seriously gored by an elephant. The day concluded with an evening service in the St Julian's chapel. John R gave us a very relevant talk on 'service' – being served by Christ, and then going on to serve others.

On Monday morning we left St Julian's, and were driven to the CMS Office and guest houses on the hill outside the City of Nairobi, just above the Anglican Cathedral. Leaving our baggage there, we were taken to the Hilton Hotel as a focal point, and then had time for some shopping – Kenyatta Avenue, Jacaranda Chemist, Woolworths, Kolpro's (for clothing), and a bookshop – and I was done! After lunch at the Hotel Ambassadeur, I saw some of the other YSAs off to Kisumu and Murang'a in *matatus* [taxis]. It was a great spectacle: "You tek my taxi!" "No, you tek mine! He only going as far as Thika!" "He taxi no good!" I then wandered around Nairobi taking some photographs, and feeling a bit low with a slight sore throat. Nairobi struck me as a bright, friendly, modern, fast-moving city. I had some tea (to ease my throat) at a café called The Honey-pot, and had no qualms about chatting with the person next to me – we had an animated conversation, ending in his giving me his card – he was the Kenyan representative for an American Insurance Company! I then visited the modern Roman Catholic Cathedral, with its quiet spaciousness and beautiful stained glass: the late afternoon sun bathed the Nairobi skyline in a gentle light.

But Nairobi showed its darker side too: the unemployed queuing at the Ministry of Works; shoe cleaners on the streets, beggars, cripples – and, on entering Uhuru Park later that afternoon, a classic 'hard-luck' story. In some ways it was quite amusing, as it was identical to the story John R had quoted in the YSA briefing the day before – maybe it was the same person. He explained that he was studying for Year 12 examinations, he had good academic prospects but not enough money to go to school, but he could be earning 500/- a day if only he could procure "this two-wheeled cart" from a Kenyan Asian. He wanted £5 for

it. “I couldn’t possibly give that much!” Ah, but he’d let me have it for £2 if I paid the rest later. His father was killed during the Mau Mau rising a few years before. No, he had no possessions to pawn. I listened carefully to his story, and eventually gave him 2/-, which I felt was an appropriate amount. But before parting with the money I took the opportunity to witness to this man in Uhuru Park, and tried to share with him the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As I recall, he seemed to listen, and went so far as to come with me to the Roman Catholic Cathedral I had just visited, and I prayed for him there, and he thanked me. Whether this was just a manipulation on his part in an effort to extract some money from me, or whether his interest in spiritual things was genuine, I shall never know. But who knows? Perhaps on that day the seeds of eternal life were sown in that person’s heart. I pray that it was so.

I walked back to the R’s house (next door to the CMS office), where I stayed the night with John and Shirley and their family. Bath, dinner and relaxed conversation – which included admiring their nine-year-old son Malcolm’s pet snake!

By bus to Wundanyi

The next day (Tuesday) I was up at 6 am to catch the 07:00 Wundanyi OTC [Overland Transport Corporation] bus, which left Nairobi Bus Station about half an hour late. Taking the main road to Mombasa, going south-east, the city streets and boulevards gave way to dry scrubland just past Nairobi Airport. We travelled through the Township of Athi River, and then diverted left off the main road to the Town of Machakos, where a friendly civil administrator offered me *chai* (hot, sweet, thick, milky tea). Then, on through desolate, mountainous country to Sultan Hamud. We stopped to pick up some Maasai warriors, one of whom sat in the front seat next to me, complete with spear in hand! We had lunch at Kibwezi, feeling hot and tired; and then we entered the Tsavo National Park, where we saw elephants and baboons, very close to the road because of the current drought. Presently the Taita Hills appeared on our right in the distance, and we reached Voi about 3 pm – a colourful, arid market town.

The bus, which had been almost empty when we came into Voi, suddenly filled with market shoppers returning to the towns of Mwatate and Wundanyi in the Taita Hills – sacks of coal, bananas, and other bundles were loaded on to the roof rack. The road to Mwatate was level and straight, and we travelled quickly past sisal estates, but the ascent into the Taita Hills brought a dramatic change. A slow climb of steep hairpin bends gave us superb views over the coastal plains – and ahead of us were precipitous peaks, rocky cliff faces and outcrops, waterfalls, residual forests, and primitive homesteads clinging to the slopes – almost a strangely oriental scene, like Malaya or rural Japan, but without stepped terrace farms and rice paddy fields. Miss Flora, a young Taita lady, sat next to me, and taught me some of the basic ki-Dabida greetings: “*Kwa sinda mana?*” “*Da sinda to...*” [hard to translate, but literally ‘abide safely’, equivalent to ‘How was your day?’ ‘I’m good, how are you?’ etc.] – until we reached our destination, the Government Town of Wundanyi, where I was met by Don and Lyn S, and their young children, Anne and Iain, at around 4.30 pm. I took a photograph of the OTC bus, just after it had arrived in Wundanyi, with a few local children gathered round it.

Later that evening, Don took me for a walk down the steep hillside and briefly showed me round the house where I would be living, at the foot of the Mgalu valley; but for the first few nights I stayed with Don and Lyn, in their bungalow-style house on a hillside overlooking the valley. Peter M, a Christian teacher at Mgalu High School, from the Kamba tribe around the Machakos area, had dinner with us and read bedtime stories to the children.

First days at Mbale

I awoke early the next morning, my first day in the Taita Hills – it was a fabulous, bright morning, and I watched the rising sun against the blue of the hills across the valley. Don took me down to Mgalu High School, where I was introduced, and met members of staff and students. My first experience of morning Assembly, in the white-washed Form III classroom,

was the singing of the well-known hymn, in a sort of breathless, disjointed, rhythmic way: “Just as I am, without one plea... O Lamb of God, I come... I come!” After Assembly I attended my first lesson (in Form I) with Don, which was English. Don invited me to tell the students about myself, so I spoke very authoritatively (in a commanding voice in order to establish easy control) about farming in Lincolnshire, and about Engineering. After the lesson I met the other members of staff – Peter M, who had joined us for dinner last night, Aggrey O, from the Luo tribe in Western Kenya and a graduate from Nairobi University, who is to share the house with me, Crispin M, George T and Flora M, all from the local Taita tribe. At the end of afternoon lessons I played soccer, managing to bruise my foot badly and get very breathless because of the high altitude (about 4,000 feet). In the early evening, shortly after dark, I walked down the hill to my house, taking a few books with me. Aggrey was not there, so I returned and had dinner with the S family, where I was staying – we listened to some of the Jesus Christ Superstar musical on tape, and the radio news on BBC Worldwide (more IRA bombs in London).

The next day, Thursday, I ‘sat in’ on various lessons, as a ‘guest teacher’ – this was part of my orientation. The first three lessons were with Form III, English with Peter M. Again I was bombarded with questions about England – this time at a more advanced level: demonstrations, strikes, Northern Ireland, the church in England, agricultural methods and industries. Lessons 4 and 5, also with Form III, comprised Religious Education (RE), taken by Flora, focusing on the early part of the Synoptic Gospels. Lesson 6 took the form of an English language crossword with Form I. After six lessons on the trot I was whacked! I spent the afternoon marking Form I English (53 books in all) – crosswords and grammatical exercises. Later that afternoon I walked up the hill to Maynard's Primary School (which has a main Hall) to see the Drama Group in action. I thought it was an excellent presentation, very well dramatized. It was in Swahili, and way beyond my ability in that language, but the girl sitting next to me kindly translated for me as we went along.

At 6 pm, just after dark, I went to see Aggrey at the house. George and Crispin were also there. After some discussion we went, supposedly, for an ‘evening walk’. In fact, as I soon discovered, they took me to the nearest local beer house, which turned out to be an interesting experience, to say the least. Not being a drinker by nature, I found the local African ‘maize beer’ rather repulsive – it tasted a bit like salty water, or aspirin dissolved in water. Unable to find my way back in the dark, I was detained, I thought rather aggressively, by Aggrey. At length, after much argument, and having mastered only a few ‘mils’ of the beer, Crispin and George managed to persuade Aggrey to let me go, and brought me back to the road that led to Don and Lyn’s house, explaining that Aggrey could be a very stubborn person. I had certainly seen his less attractive side. That evening I felt diffident about living in the same house as Aggrey; however, he said he may well leave at the end of the year, so I reckoned it might be a case of just sticking it out.

Mombasa and Shimo-la-Tewa

The next day, Friday 14 September 1973, I was summoned out of the first lesson to explain to Harrison M, the Headmaster, who I was and where I’d come from. Clearly there had been a breakdown in communication – Harrison, Aggrey and the other staff members had not been informed of my arrival: hence the hesitant welcome I had received!

After attending a Maths lesson with Aggrey, who appeared to be in good control of the class, the S family and I set off for Mombasa. Our first stop was the colourful African market at Wundanyi, where we picked up some fresh fruit and vegetables to take to missionary friends in Mombasa. Don and Lyn had also arranged to pick up Cephas, the Headmaster of a nearby High School. We had lunch at a service station on the outskirts of Voi, and spent a brief time watching puffer trains, much to the delight of Anne and Iain. The weather felt soporific as we left the highlands of Taita, and we began to feel the effects of the fierce tropical sun. After crossing the causeway into the Town of Mombasa, we made our way directly to the Cathedral office and saw Richard (the Bishop’s right hand man, standing in for

the Bishop as he was away in Nairobi), in order to clarify my position and role as a teacher at Mgalu High School, since that school was an Anglican one in the Diocese of Mombasa, and therefore ultimately under the control of the Bishop.

My first impressions of Mombasa were recorded in a letter to my parents, written from Mbale on 19 September 1973:

Saturday was spent buying a Chinese pressure lamp and cooking things, in the very oppressive, heavy heat, as it was a cloudy day. We drove round Mombasa Island, through the famous elephant tusks archway on Kilindini Street, past the docks and on to the sea front at dusk. We watched the gentle waves breaking on the coral reef, with palm trees sweeping the twilight beaches – my first sight of the great Indian Ocean! As we were watching your films of Lamu and Mombasa at Legbourne, Dad – then such faraway, unreal places – little did I realize that in two short weeks I would be there! [Here I was referring to the ciné films my father used to take on board his survey ships, to send home to my mother, who could watch them on the projector at home. HMS Owen was surveying in the Indian Ocean in 1961-2, and these films were taken during that time.]

Mombasa in fact is a terrific place! A mixture of European, Indian and Arab cultures – no high-rise flats or Hilton hotels as in Nairobi. There's a wonderful narrow street called 'Bia-Shara' running the entire width of the island, from north to south, very narrow and lined each side with Arab or Indian *dukas* (small shops) selling antiques, coloured shirts, carvings, and other miscellanea. You fly back through the centuries, until you turn round to find you're looking at a Lyons ice cream van! We stayed at the guest house of CITC (Christian Industrial Training Centre), which overlooks the North Creek – which is spanned by the famous Nyali Pontoon Bridge...

In the late evening we all had a swim at the Missions-to-Seamen pool – which was very refreshing after a hot day. I was then taken by Ken F, the CMS missionary in charge of CITC, to a Charismatic Christian Fellowship Meeting at the J's family (also CMS missionaries) at Shimo-la-Tewa, a small town about 20 miles north of Mombasa along the coast. This meant we had to cross the Nyali Pontoon Bridge, which, as the above letter described, "looked very romantic by moonlight."

I recall that the meeting, which was attended mainly by English and American missionaries, with some Kenyans, was very inspiring, and I found it exciting to discover that Christians are the same anywhere. At one point during the course of the meeting a prophecy was given – it spoke about trials and suffering – and I did not pay any particular attention to it at the time. But at the end of the meeting the person who had spoken the prophecy came up to me and said he thought that the prophecy applied *particularly* to me! This took me by surprise, and I found it somewhat disconcerting, but it set me thinking. It certainly proved to be true during the difficult series of events that unfolded over the coming months... We returned to Mombasa somewhere around midnight.

On Sunday morning we arrived at the Cathedral just as the Swahili service was breaking up. There I met my employer, the Bishop of Mombasa, The Right Reverend Peter M, and also shook hands with the Archbishop of Kenya, the Right Reverend Festus Olang – the Cathedral had been packed because of his presence there. We attended the English service taken by the Reverend Canon Desmond G, the Provost of Mombasa Cathedral. I noticed that the weather had much improved owing to some rain the previous night; there was a fair wind and a few heavy clouds.

We left the CITC guest house mid-afternoon, and the road seemed to climb quickly, once we were clear of Mombasa. The scrub-land appeared dark against the sun's slanting rays. Endless stretches of road opened before us, and the blue line of the Taita Hills loomed ever nearer, until we reached them at dusk. We stopped off at Wusi, just off the road between Mwatate and Wundanyi, and called in on Miss Kate C, the CMS missionary who had founded Mgalu High School some three years previously, and who was now Headmistress of Murray High School, a prestigious Government girls' secondary school. Dynamic and

vivacious, she struck me as altogether a remarkable lady – she gave us words of wisdom to encourage us amidst the present frustrations of the Mgalu school situation.

Early experiences at Mbale

I spent Monday afternoon moving into our house and unpacking. In my diary I wrote:

It is indeed a wonderful house with spacious rooms, a good kitchen with a gas stove (to which we applied a new LPG cylinder), and kerosene fridge on the way. My bedroom is especially well furnished.

A steep red-earth driveway led down from the main (but unsealed) Mbale-Iriwa road to a covered porch at the back of the house. The back door opened on to a central corridor, with doors on the right leading to my bedroom first, then Aggrey's bedroom further along. The bathroom and kitchen were off to the left, and there was a side door from the kitchen to an open area containing the main circular rainwater tank and other smaller rectangular tanks for river water. A short walk from the kitchen door past some banana trees led to a small out-house, the *choo*, ['long-drop' toilet]. There was, of course, no electricity, and no running water or sewerage.

The living room and dining room were at the far end of the corridor, and there was a 'front door' which we kept permanently locked. If you went out of the kitchen door and turned sharp right, and followed a cement path running along the side of the house, then turned sharp right again, you reached the verandah that spanned the full width of the front of the house, where there was a small wooden table and two or three wooden chairs. The most stunning feature of the house was the view from the verandah, which was superb. The narrow 'garden' of grass and flowering bushes fell precipitously away to a series of steep hills, and down to a valley bearing right, then curving left, until it fell away into the desert plains of Tsavo, and distant hills so clear you could almost reach out and touch them. In the far distance you could see the flat-topped mountain peak of Kasigau, some 40 miles away towards the coast!

When I first moved into the house in mid-September, there had been no rain for several months, and the countryside was in a state of drought – parched, brown hills and clear blue skies. When I first checked the main rainwater tank, it seemed to be almost empty, with the water level at about 7 or 8 'rings' out of 24. When you turned on the tap only a dribble of water came out, and it took ages to fill a *sufira* (handle-less saucepan) with water that I could boil to make tea. These were the climatic conditions I experienced when I moved in, and so the view from the verandah was ever clear and spectacular. But then in November the rains began, and the hills – almost overnight – turned green. When the rains came, the clouds rose up from the valleys below and mists closed in and swirled about the house. Then it was like a ship at sea, fogbound or storm-driven, shut off from the outside world and all its troubles – a place of perfect privacy, perfect freedom. I learned later that this house, called the 'Diocesan House', had been Miss Kate C's home when she founded Mgalu and became its first Headmistress, and she used to park her Land Rover in the porch at the back of the house, but I was unaware of this 'history' at the time.

After unpacking, I climbed back up the hill to Don and Lyn's house. Don showed me how to work the pressure lamp. I put the glass casing on one side, and on returning from the kitchen accidentally kicked and broke it! The casing is only replaceable in Mombasa, but Don and Lyn were going there at the weekend – so, one Chinese pressure lamp out of action for a week! Later in the afternoon I walked down the main road to the village of Iriwa, where I bought some tinned fish and other basic groceries. The shopkeepers there were very appreciative of my laconic ki-Dabida (about seven words)! I spent the evening marking Maths books and preparing the first meal in the new house, with Aggrey.

On Tuesday morning I met Catharine W for the first time – the Reverend Andrew and Catharine W and family were CMS missionaries living 'next door', so to speak, up the hill

between our house and Maynard Primary School. She had written a long, interesting 'welcome' letter about Mbale-Dabida, and life in the Taita Hills, which arrived at my home in Lincolnshire exactly on 7 August 1973 – my eighteenth birthday! It was good to meet her at last, and she drove me, in a pinkish Renault 6 (nick-named the 'Pink Panther'), to Wundanyi, as it was her shopping day. It was market day, and I was amazed by the bright colours of fruit, vegetables, linen and clothing – a vivid contrast to the drab shops of rural Lincolnshire. After spending *an hour* in the Kenya Commercial Bank cashing traveller's cheques (one quickly learns the art of patience), I had leisure to wander round the open-air food market. I was staggered at the prices: piles of tomatoes for only 10c (½p) a pile, a large cabbage for just 50c (2½p), watermelons and pineapples for 1/- each, carrots and potatoes also very inexpensive, 1 kilo of good quality beef for only 3/50 (50p per pound in the UK). I walked back – a three mile journey, mostly downhill – and had oat porridge for lunch.

After lunch I taught my first lesson: RE (Religious Education) Form III, teaching the students to make their own notes on the Temptations of Christ. After school it was '*Harambee* time', which involved carrying cement blocks for the new classrooms, which were still, sadly, annoyingly, at the foundation stage. Peter, Flora and I were invited to dinner with the W family, although Andrew had not yet returned from Nairobi and Mombasa – a good English roast, which did not come amiss, and cheery conversation and Christian fellowship till late. It was a dark, moonless night, and the tropical stars were incredibly clear.

On Wednesday Aggrey and I installed the kerosene-powered fridge, and made *sima* (stiff maize porridge) for lunch – it turned out to be a surprisingly good meal, but very heavy and filling. I spent the afternoon reading and writing letters. 'Agriculture' at the school involved watering the gardens (a few rather sorry cabbages), with muddy river water carried in *debes* [empty kerosene tins]. Some of the students kindly offered me some sugar cane to chew on – another 'first' experience. I prepared for teaching the following day, and cooked steak and chips for dinner on my own. Aggrey came in very late, rolling drunk and reeking of 'beer'.

On Thursday I helped teach Don's English class: "You are a Voice of Kenya (VOK) radio commentator. Write a commentary on Uhuru Day from Kenyatta Avenue, Nairobi." An afternoon class comprised Singing, led by Peter M – hymns and praises in full African style. I was struck by the tremendous enthusiasm, and incredible clapping rhythms. The language barrier was of little consequence: "*Asante Bwana*" [Thanks, Lord] was all one needed to know – and indeed this was the essence of all their singing; but later in the day I got caught in the cross fire with Aggrey and George, who disapproved of what they called 'emotional fanaticism'. Then on Friday there was a Christian Union (CU) meeting in Form III. My diary records:

The place was packed – a thrilling sight, particularly for Peter who has laboured hard, and suffered many frustrations, to see such a miracle take place at Mgalu High School, as is taking place at this very moment. A time of song (both English and African style), and testimony. I've never seen anything quite like it – singing and preaching with great enthusiasm! At times the noise was terrific. There seemed to be an openness, a complete lack of embarrassment or self-consciousness, characteristic of the Kenyan people as a whole, that I found very refreshing and attractive. And while it is possible to question the depth of their understanding of the Christian Faith, the sheer zeal of these young Christians is something to be admired...

In the evening, Andrew W dropped by, having just returned from Nairobi and Mombasa. I clearly remember him turning up on my doorstep, after dark – a tall, handsome figure, well-spoken and articulate, and with a positive air of confidence and capability that I found instantly reassuring. We quickly found we were on the same wavelength, and 'of one mind'; our communication felt natural, and our conversation, especially about spiritual matters, flowed easily.

Letter to my parents dated 26 September 1973

The next few days are described in a letter to my parents, written from Mbale, dated 26 September 1973:

I think I've settled into the house by now, though I got a bit of a shock, when returning at dusk on Saturday. With no lights on in the house, I observed a ghostly figure reclining on Aggrey's bed. A woman's voice – I got a hurricane lamp. Was she a friend of Aggrey's? No, she was his wife! She also had their two-year-old daughter with her. She had travelled all the way from Nairobi that day, to find Aggrey out and with no one to meet her! I had not been warned of her coming (let alone Aggrey himself), but apparently this is the African way – you just drop in unexpectedly on relatives. Anyway, Mrs O is here for the week, and treating us to some good African cooking!

Another domestic incident: on Monday, Aggrey called me to the back door. A snake, writhing around with a lizard stuck in its mouth, just outside the back door! We hurled stones at it until we got its head. I then got a photograph taken of me holding it up by its tail. It was green, about 2½ feet long, with a yellow underside. Mrs W 'fears' that it might have been just a harmless grass snake, but I am reluctant to admit it or to believe that it was! I have been assured that snakes are frightened of humans, and so should not intrude into the house.

Last Saturday I climbed to the top of a nearby ridge, 1,500 feet above Iriwa. The inhabitants of the houses I passed were pleased to show me the best route up. Frequently, not only did they point me in the right direction, but sent one of their children to escort 'the white stranger with a camera' to the next turning point. Such is the hospitality, friendliness and openness of Kenyans. Another example: it is considered the height of bad manners not to exchange greetings with everyone you meet on the road – "*Kwa sinda?*" "*Da sinda*". "*Kwa sinda mana?*" "*Da sinda to*" (in ki-Dabida). Anyway, the top of the ridge commanded a fabulous view – right over the Tsavo plains and the sisal estates just outside Voi, and towards Kasigau, a mountain about the height of Stac Pollaidh [in north-west Scotland] which I can see from my bedroom window, about 40 miles away; southwards almost into Tanzania; and westwards to Wesu rock and Wundanyi. Immediately below me: the Mbale District and Iriwa spread out like a map. I took some photographs, and when I go up again I shall do a sketch.

That afternoon, Mr W took me to a Government school near Wundanyi to see a foundation-laying ceremony by the local MP (reminiscent of Haileybury Speech Day). The schooling situation is that if you attain a certain grade at the end of primary school examinations you gain a place at a Government secondary school. Those who fail can only receive secondary education at Harambee schools, where the students have to pay fees. Thus Mgalu is composed of students who are either not so bright, or badly taught – quite a challenge for teaching! The classrooms for Forms III and IV are still at foundation stage: our \$1,000 question which was 'find the right angle' has been abandoned: it now stands at 'find the horizontal and the vertical'!

As to my appointment, Mr W assures me that as a YSA volunteer I was posted to Mgalu High School long before the current over-staffing crisis. However, the Headmaster Mr Harrison M refuses to allow me to teach until the official forms, signed by the Bishop, arrive from Mombasa. Communication is very slow and sometimes frustrating. As you always say, Dad, and now I *heartily* agree with you: Centralised Administration is a Great Mistake! Mr S and Harrison M have been battling it out in Mombasa, with Richard and the Bishop. Mr S assures me that Mr Harrison M is being removed (hopefully by the end of term), to be replaced by a strong, Christian Headmaster, and that two thirds of the present staff are due to be transferred to other schools – one of them by the end of the week, which means I'll definitely be teaching by next Monday. Until then I have had rather less on my hands than I would have wished: helping marking, learning Swahili (the most logical and easiest language imaginable), but I should be able to prepare for the syllabus courses I shall be conducting for the rest of this week.

There are some terrific people around here that I'm getting to know. Christianity here is by no means shallow or artificial. Students who have become Christians tend to get very excited and worked up – but there is a genuineness and maturity in Peter M, who has laboured hard,

and suffered many frustrations, to get the Christian Union at Mgalu into the shape that it is. The W's too are wonderful missionaries, always full of hope and calm, a great help to me during the present staff upheavals...

Prayer Mount, Aggrey High School and Mbale Church

The climb up the ridge behind the village of Iriwa on my first Saturday in the Taita Hills was significant, in that I discovered a mountain that I would later call 'Prayer Mount'. Although I did not reach the 'summit' on this first ascent, there were several later occasions when I climbed Prayer Mount. I gave the mountain this special name because it commanded superb views over the entire Mbale District and beyond – out over the hills and on to the plains, dappled with the blue-grey shadows of clouds, away from the 'island' of the Taita Hills, to where my far-reaching gaze could make out the beginnings of the outside world. Here I could pause and meditate, and so to speak 'pray over' the various crisis situations I was facing – immediately below me, or away beyond the horizon.

On this occasion I set out at 08:30 on Saturday morning to climb up the ridge above Iriwa, taking a route up a steep spur through several *shambas* [farms], then on through forests of ferns and palms. Though this was not (as I was later told) the really old residual forest of East Africa, I nevertheless felt myself slipping back through time into a primeval woodland. A rocky outcrop afforded my first view over Mbale, and my gaze took in the road to Wundanyi past Espy's corner, the W's house, over the bridge and on through Iriwa – almost every house in the area visible. The two photographs I took link together to form a striking panorama of the Mgalu valley, and panning to the right, the ridge above the path leading up to Wundanyi. Everything looking parched yellow-brown in the grip of a severe and prolonged drought.

That afternoon Andrew W took me to Aggrey High School, near Wundanyi, for a foundation-laying ceremony. Looking around the buildings, which included a well-equipped science laboratory, one could well understand why Government school students are to be envied! The foundation plaque for the new school hall was laid by the Minister for Tourism and Wildlife, and also the MP for Wundanyi. This was the Honourable Minister Shako, who was also the organist for Shigaro church. It so happened that on Christmas Day, Andrew W and I went to this church for the main morning service, and Minister Shako was there, playing traditional (African-style) Christmas carols on the organ! The proceedings at Aggrey High School, which were conducted mainly in Swahili, ended with the National Anthem, during which the Kenyan flag was raised, and the Pledge of Loyalty given: "to strive to build this country in the living spirit of our motto, *HAR-AM-BEE!*" The word '*Harambee*' is a Swahili word that means 'Pull together', or 'Everybody strive together', and it is a popular Kenyan motto. So, when the Minister ended his speech by shouting this word loudly, it was like a rallying cry, with everybody joining in a rousing chorus – it was a heart-warming experience!

That evening I was invited to have dinner with the W family, and afterwards we went out on to the expansive lawn in front of their house and gazed at the stars: Pegasus, Cygnis, Saggiarius, the Summer Triangle (Arcturus, Deneb, Vega), and Jupiter. Through Andrew's powerful binoculars we could see four of Jupiter's moons – like tiny pin-pricks of light, evenly spaced in a perfectly straight line, because we were observing their orbitals side on. We also saw the uncanny glow of a bushfire down on the Tsavo plains, in the far distance.

The next day was my first Sunday in the Taita Hills, and I attended Mattins at the Mbale Anglican Church, which was situated further up the hill, just above Maynard's Hall. The church was full, the men in white shirts or suits, the women brightly dressed. It was a normal, Prayer-book Mattins service, but – in true African style – it lasted nearly two hours! The sermon was preached by the Reverend John N, using a mixture of ki-Swahili and ki-Dabida. After lunch with the W's, we all drove over to Murray High School to see Miss Kate C. The S family and Peter M were there as well, so it was a like a family gathering! I attended the students' Christian Union meeting, where the guest speaker was Cliff B, from the UK. Once again the singing was pursued with rare zeal.

Ngangao Forest

The next week, at the school, was fairly uneventful, and I spent some time learning Swahili and beginning a cataloguing process for the library. The highlight was setting an English dictation for Form I. I made the mistake of selecting a passage from 'Journey to the Jade Sea' by John Hillaby, which included several difficult words such as 'horns', 'promptly', 'plunged', and 'rifle'. Together, the class generated a total of 27 permutations of 'rifle', including 'rightfull', 'right food' and even 'rough wog'!

On Saturday morning Aggrey and I set out to walk to Wundanyi. We were picked up by an English couple driving a Datsun, members of the Trinity Fellowship, who had stayed with the W's overnight and were on their way back to Maseno [in Western Kenya]. They kindly gave us a lift into town, and once there we shopped for groceries, having abandoned plans to go to the Kenya Commercial Bank because of the end-of-the-month cash scrum.

In due course the W's picked me up, and we drove uphill past the peaks of Wesu and Yale (pronounced 'Yah-lay') to Ngangao ('Ng-gang-gao'), a mountain plateau surrounded by 'the old residual forest of East Africa'. We had a picnic lunch in thick, but very cool jungle – a beautiful forest of old trees and enchanted ferns. The air was filled with the magical sounds of tropical birds, and possibly monkeys, the wind sighing overhead. But then we were shocked into reality when on setting out for the highest point, Catharine very nearly stepped on a snake! Long, thin and bright green, it slithered away along the lower branches of a bush, coiling itself around them – a green mamba, the first snake the W's had ever seen at Ngangao. Unpleasant too were the safari ants, which were adept at penetrating socks and trousers! Such hazards overcome, we climbed through the coolness of the forest, enjoying the distinct visual beauty of each kind of tree, and inhaling the rich fragrance of strange flowers and ferns. Deciduous vegetation suddenly gave way to pines, where the silence was deepened by the rich red carpet of pine needles under our feet.

Presently we emerged on to an expanse of smooth grey rocks interspersed with pine trees and gorse bushes (looking almost like the Highlands of Scotland), from which the view was sensational. Immediately below us the densely populated and fertile Taita plateau stretched away, rising gently towards the highest peaks – Vuria, Yale and Wesu. Behind us, in the distance, lay the township of Voi, distinct in the sunlight, and the Tsavo plains – a patchwork of sunlight and shadow. In front of us the plains of Tsavo West stretched away into Tanzania, and Kilimanjaro – its peaks hidden by cloud. Panning from the left, the North Pare mountains in Tanzania overlooked Lake Jipe on the border – a strip of light clearly visible without binoculars; and where the mountains jutted out like a promontory on to the plain, stood a single white building, Eldoro Secondary School, 50 miles away! Bushfires sent out slanting columns of smoke, in Tanzania, to the right towards Taveta. Panning further to the right, the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro itself, a huge grey-blue silhouette, rose above the dark grey desert plains.

We made our way back down through the forest, pausing to observe palms and firs growing side by side, and a tree against the sun covered in bearded lichen. And so we descended back into the Taita Hills, again looking distinctly oriental in the grey clouds and mists.

On Sunday (30 September 1973), Mrs O and her daughter Winifred left in the early morning, Aggrey accompanying them as far as Voi. I went to Kenyatta High School, near Mwatate, with Andrew W for Communion (in English), followed by a Christian Union meeting in which I was asked to speak for two or three minutes. Public speaking, unprepared, was quite a test – but I think my words were well received. I was then shown around the school: a Government Boarding Secondary School with three streams up to Sixth Form A level – very superior, with dormitories, well-equipped class rooms, laboratories and workshops. Being on the plains, the atmosphere was hot and sleepy compared to that of Wundanyi.

Revival and commitment

In a summary of the year written in 1978, shortly after I left Cambridge University, I wrote:

When I arrived in Taita, revival was in full swing – part of the great East African Revival, sweeping across the continent like a bush fire ablaze – the ‘Breath of Life’, as described by Patricia St John. At Mbale, students were witnessing to one another; many were being saved, and some were baptized with the Holy Spirit. During the morning service on Sunday 30 September 1973 at Kenyatta High School, Mwatate, I came before the Lord in prayer and, as an act of commitment, asked him:

1. to make me a soul-winner – one able, by the Holy Spirit’s power, to lead others to a personal faith in Christ, that he would grant me the gift of evangelism and the privilege of seeing people saved and born again: “You shall receive power when the Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses...” (Acts 1 v 8);
2. to make me above all a man of prayer – one who knows how to pray with power – for the conversion and salvation of sinners, for sanctification and maturity in fellow Christians, that “Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3 v 17) enthroned as Lord: “Pray at all times in the Spirit... for all the saints...” (Ephesians 6 v 18).

Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, August 1973



St Julian's Guest House, Limuru, September 1973

Arrival at Nairobi Airport, early morning, Saturday 8 September 1973



Left: My very first day in Africa, St Julian's Guest House, Limuru



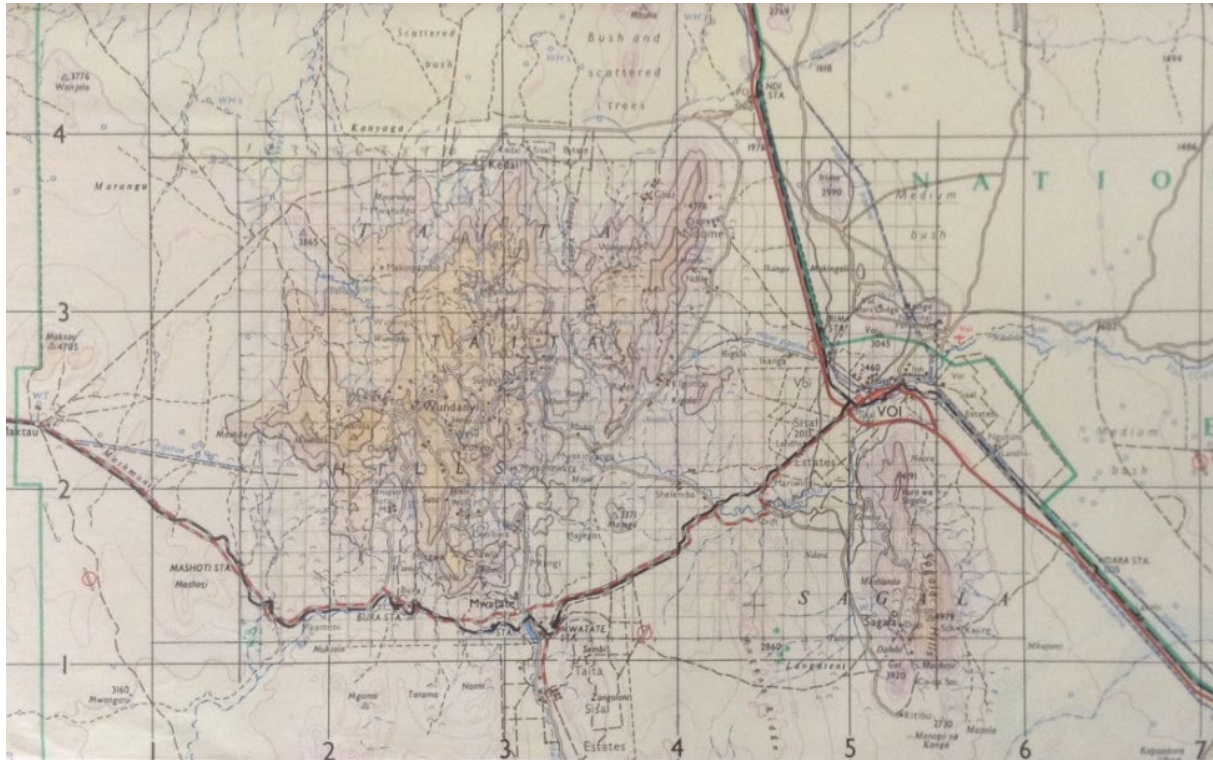
Left: Jonathan playing the guitar, Ian sitting in the back garden at St Julian's



Far left: The YSA group outside St Julian's Guest House. I am at the back, at the base of the rainwater tank



Nairobi and Arrival in the Taita Hills, September 1973



Hilton Hotel, Nairobi



Roman Catholic Cathedral, Nairobi



Arrival at Wundanyi by OTC bus (11 September 1973)

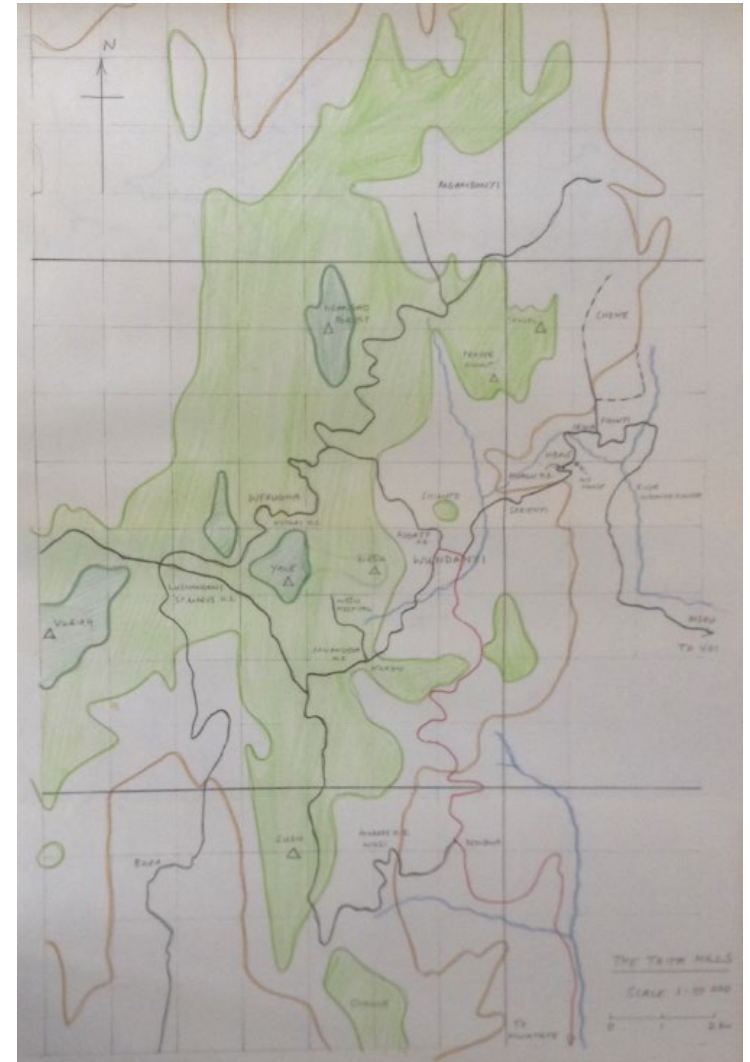
Survey of Kenya 1:250,000 Map Series; portion of VOI Sheet (Government of Kenya, 1971)

Mbale-Dabida and the Taita Hills, September 1973



Above: View over Mbale-Dabida District from the first ridge (22 September 1973)

Right: Map showing central parts of the Taita Hills, including Wundanyi and Mbale, and the main peaks – Vuria, Susu, Yale and Ngangao



Mbale and Mgalu High School, September 1973



Far left: View along the front verandah of the house at Mbale



Left: View towards Rong'e



Left: Tea on the front verndah of the house, with geraniums in the front garden



Right: Mgalu High School, set in the floor of the valley. Main building, with staff room and library (far left), Form I (middle) and Form III (right). The foundations for the new school building can be seen in the foreground

Mbale and Ngangao in the Taita Hills, September 1973

Left: View from the summit rocks of Ngangao Forest; Andrew, Catharine and Margaret W

Far left: Self at Ngangao Forest, with the township of Werugha and the sharp peak of Yale in the distance, and Susu on the far left (29 September 1973)



Left: Bridge over the Mdongo-dongo river, during drought

Right: Plan of the house – sketched in late September 1973

