

Hunters of Yesteryear

1952: Nicholson with 103 and 101 pounds from southern Tanzania. It was rare for a control officer to shoot such an elephant. Most crop-raiding and problem elephants were cows or small tuskers.



Happy 75th Birthday

Brian Nicholson!

Brian Nicholson, one of the founders of modern hunting tourism, recently turned 75 at his home in Australia where he had lived since retiring as a birdshooting and tourism guide in Kenya. Brian is undoubtedly the creator of what is today's Selous Game Reserve. His intimate involvement with the area spans almost a quarter of a century, including the transition period from the colonial administration of Tanganyika to the independent government of the Republic of Tanzania.

By Rolf D. Baldus

Nicholson was born in 1930 in Eldoret, Kenya. At a time when academic degrees were deemed important than common sense, bushcraft and determination, at the tender age of 17 he became involved in animal capture and professional hunting. At 19 he joined the Tanganyika Game Department as an elephant control officer where he remained until he voluntarily resigned from his post – game warden, Southern Tanzania – in 1973. Having travelled many thousands of miles through the Reserve mostly on foot, he is still surely the person with the most intimate knowledge of the area.

In order to finance the management, infrastructure and anti-poaching operations of the Selous – which Nicholson is responsible for expanding to its present size of nearly 50,000km² – he convinced the colonial administration to allow sport trophy hunting. Working out the details himself, the hunting industry – based on low, sustainable quotas and strict control – soon flourished. As a result of successfully suppressing poaching, soon 100-pounders, fine cats, old buffalo and antelope bulls

were being harvested each safari season. Concession and trophy fees from hunting supported the upkeep of the Game Reserve. Unfortunately, this strictly controlled system was not continued after his departure.

Brian visited the Selous again in 1979 on a foot safari together with photographer Hugo van Lawick and author Peter Matthiessen, resulting in Matthiessen's book, *Sand Rivers*. In 2001 Nicholson's own book, *The Last of Old Africa*, was published by Safari Press. This classic African hunting book is amongst the best ever written and is now out of print.

Brian still takes an active interest in the future of the Selous, contributing, along with other 'old hands' of the Selous to my book on the Selous Game Reserve, due to be published in 2005, just in time to celebrate the 110th birthday of the world's oldest and largest protected area.

Talking about how he introduced safari hunting in the Selous, Nicholson writes: "A proposal to start controlled professional hunting safaris on a strict quota basis was made by me in 1953 when on safari with G.H. Swynerton, who was head of the

Game Department at the time. Ionides had always been absolutely against and hostile to any form of development of the Game Reserve, including hunting or tourism safaris – even lodges. Swynerton also flatly rejected my idea, and no further progress was made in this direction until 1962. It must be noted that tourism as a major industry in Tanganyika did not exist, and it was not until about 1958 that the Government started to recognize and invest in it with the creation of the National Parks organisation.

By 1961, with independence, tourism had evolved into a meaningful industry. For some years I had a feeling of unease about the long-term future of such a vast wilderness area and believed that to survive it had to be made valuable in terms of revenue and foreign exchange earnings for the country. In 1962 Major Bruce Kinloch M.C. was transferred from Uganda to Tanganyika and became the new head of the Game Department. He was a progressive and dynamic personality. One of his earliest moves was to split the Game Department's responsibilities and administration into four regions, each



For his achievements in developing the Selous Game Reserve and stopping poaching there, in 1971 Nicholson (second from right) received the biennial international award from Harry Tennison's Game Coin.



Nicholson shot more than 1,300 'problem' elephants with a simple hunting rifle – all by tracking on foot and mostly at very close range. This was a 100-pounder from Luhombero in 1952.



On safari shortly after marriage. Life in small towns in southern Tanzania was very hard for the game rangers' wives as their husbands were often gone for weeks at a time on extended foot safaris.

Nicholson met his Australian wife, Melva, at a dance while on leave in the UK. Although he was a rather shy bush lad and wore a torn shirt, he was able to stir her interest.



covering about one quarter of the country, with a senior game warden directly responsible to him, in charge of each region.

I was promoted to senior game warden, south-eastern region, which included the whole of the Selous Game Reserve, now about 20,000 square miles in area. My base was Morogoro and Allen Rees, who remained at Mahenge, assisted me. Kinloch strongly supported my views on permitting hunting safaris into the Selous and asked me to put forward a development plan for him to approach the Government with. Over the next 18 months, in conjunction with Rees, a detailed proposal, defining hunting block boundaries, quotas for each species of game animal in the blocks, projected revenues and foreign exchange, budget estimates to open up the areas with dry-season tracks, airstrips etc. was prepared, as well as the rules and regulations for controlling hunting safaris.

Kinloch was able to persuade the Government to back this project; funding began in 1964; and the first professional safaris started in 1965. Over the next few years the Selous Game Reserve was one of the most popular destinations for trophy hunting safaris, and became self-financing from direct revenues. Unfortunately, by the early 1970s, all this development ground to a halt with a Tanzanian brand of anti-capitalist socialism and the nationalisation of industry, including tourism. In the Selous this resulted in the entire destruction of the infrastructure, a cessation of hunting safaris and consequently the revenues they generated, and the massive, illegal slaughter of elephant and rhino as a part of the black economy.

In the last 15 or so years, the fortunes of the Selous have been revived to some extent by a reversal of Government policy towards private business and finance; aid projects financed by the German government; and a retention scheme,

which allows the reserve to retain approximately half of its income, which hopefully will be continued. However, as long as game wardens consider long foot safaris in wet or dry weather an ordeal, administration in the field will remain weak. Setting up leadership for the staff to emulate is critical. Sitting at base camp, or running around in vehicles and airplanes is neither going to set the example nor provide the detailed up-to-date knowledge required to effectively manage this great area.

High-density tourism with lodges, etc. is not suitable for much of the Selous because of heavy tsetse fly infestation, the distances involved and the lack of suitable roads, and a relatively short season when it is dry enough to visit the Selous by vehicle. Therefore, without the revenues from safari hunting, the Reserve would not be able to exist. But hunting *must* include strict adherence the quotas established for each block, and the maintenance of hunting ethics and good governance.”