

The Lamai Wedge in Tanzania

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Following a visit to Tanzania in the autumn of 1972, the author, who, until 1971, was Director of National Parks in Tanzania, reports the good news that the Government's decision to allow grazing of domestic animals in a critical area bordering the Serengeti National Park has in fact been strictly interpreted. The amount of grazing is declining and is likely to do so still more.

In March 1972, a report in the press that the Regional authorities in Tanzania had given the people on the western borders of the Lamai Wedge permission to occupy an area of some 75 square miles in the Serengeti National Park caused considerable concern, not only to those who regarded the Serengeti as one of the finest national parks in the world, but also to those who had come to admire and respect the Tanzania Government for its clearly demonstrated determination over the years to assure the future of the Serengeti by all possible means. However, it was soon clear that the original reports had greatly overestimated the consequences of what had been a purely local action resulting from the need to defuse a difficult political crisis in a small area near the park. In fact, the original concession was almost immediately restricted entirely to the grazing of stock and, most specifically, did not include the right to cultivate, build houses, cut wood or in any way interfere with the park's wildlife.

As a result of my visit to this area in October 1972, I am happy to be able to certify that the limited nature of the concession has been enforced by the Government and observed by the people concerned. I was able to carry out a thorough aerial inspection of the whole area, and the only signs of human use were two small herds of cattle not more than 200 yards from the park boundaries; there were no houses, no cultivations, and no cattle enclosures. Five cattle enclosures which had been erected contrary to the terms of the concession had been burnt by the police as soon as their presence had been reported by the park authorities. Questioning of the park rangers regarding the boundary not only confirmed these facts but revealed that even the very limited use made of the grazing concession was declining, and likely to decline still further.

On the question of precedents, it is relevant to record that when I was Director of the National Parks, the Board of Trustees, acting on my advice, on several occasions allowed cattle-owning people to graze within the Serengeti and other national parks, in times when grazing pressures were acute.

There remains, of course, the continuing problem of increasing population on the north-western borders of the Serengeti National Park. The way in which both the Government and the Park authorities dealt with what was locally a very difficult situation can only be regarded as the best of auguries for the future.