

Why London Created Africa's Game Parks

by Joe Brewda

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...The sheer size of Africa's national parks is striking. South Africa's Kruger park, for example, is the size of the state of Massachusetts, while the vast park complex of Zambia is larger than Great Britain. What is also striking is the fact that a high percentage of Africa's parks and reserves are sited on national borders. In many cases, these parks come together to form binational and trinational parks that straddle these borders.

These parks are not located in such border regions for aesthetic purposes. Unlike Europe, for example, where most borders are naturally demarcated by often beautiful mountain ranges and rivers, the boundaries of Africa's states were arbitrarily drawn by the European powers at their imperial conferences. There is nothing particularly singular on the borders of these states that might not be found in the interior. The placement of parks in such regions has a different purpose: mass murder and the destabilization of Africa.

Who Set Up the Park Movement?

There were two distinct phases in the national park and game reserve movement in imperial Africa. In the first phase, the preservation phase, access to hunting was restricted to the white colonial elite, allegedly to preserve dwindling stocks of favored game. Colonial authorities often evicted native populations from their forest and pasture lands, in order to establish "game reserves," while restricting the native populations from hunting...

The second phase, which took off after World War II, was the conservation phase, in which hunting was increasingly forbidden to everyone and the ritualized hunting obsession of the colonial elite was gradually replaced by a Gaia-worshipping "ecological conscious-

ness." The "national park" replaced the "game reserve," and the camera largely replaced the carbine.

There were various regulations restricting access to game in Africa dating as far back as the Dutch colonial decrees in the Cape in 1657. But the movement to lock up vast tracts of land as reserves only began in earnest in 1896 under the leadership of British Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister the Marquess of Salisbury, when he called for the introduction of checks on hunting throughout British Africa. In 1900, Salisbury convened a conference of the European imperial powers on the issue in London.

The conference's agreements virtually eliminated the native ability to hunt, even outside the reserves, by outlawing the use of traditional snares and pitfalls as "inhumane." At the same time, it reaffirmed an earlier joint agreement among the British, French, German, and Portuguese colonies' authorities banning the native use of the firearm.

The Society for the Preservation of Fauna in the Empire, which later spawned the World Wildlife Fund, was formed to ensure that the 1900 convention was implemented. From the beginning, the society, affectionately known as "the Fauna," was associated with the British Museum, specifically the Natural History division that had been created by Charles Darwin's "bulldog," Thomas H. Huxley.

In 1933, another conference, following up the 1900 conference, was convened in London. The British delegation was led by the Earl of Onslow, who was also the head of the Fauna. The most important result of the conference was a provision for the establishment of national parks in Africa. The enabling legislation of most countries' game parks in Africa today, dates back to colonial decrees enacted in the aftermath of the 1933 conference.

The national parks and reserves constituted by the 1900 and 1933 agreements legally established internal frontiers within the African colonies that could not be crossed by the native population, on the pretext of protecting wildlife. These internal frontiers, forming colonial enclaves, continued in effect after the colonies gained independence....

Guerrillas in the Mist

In the 1960s, the British initiated their "winds of change" policy, whereby the peoples of Africa achieved nominal independence....

Within five years, most of British Africa was nominally decolonized, and a . . . native comprador class was elevated to become the new governing elite. But while the British flag was lowered in one colony after another, much of the old colonial apparatus remained, with key posts in the ministries continuing to be staffed by British nationals.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the parks system, which, by the time of independence, locked up upwards of 20% of the African colonies' lands. The chief game wardens, park police chiefs, and the parks department staff largely continued to be British nationals. Moreover, in a malicious innovation, increasingly large numbers of these parks, and in some cases the entire parks system, were put under the control of private non-governmental organizations, managed by international boards of trustees outside the oversight of the government. Today, the parks systems of Kenya, Tanzania, and Zaire are privately managed by international boards of trustees. Until 1992, Louis Leakey's son, Richard Leakey, was the chairman of the private "Kenya Wildlife Services" which runs Kenya's parks.

When Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere proclaimed in his 1961 "Arusha Declaration" that the peoples of Africa would preserve the national parks bequeathed to them in perpetuity, he was admitting that the existence of these colonial enclaves would go unchallenged. Some 40% of the land area of Tanzania today is locked up in its national park system, administered by the "Tanzania National Parks" non-governmental organization.

These parks . . . continue to be the headquarters, training sites, and safe havens of the gang-counter-gangs. On the one hand, these parks have been the centers of nominally "anti-western" Warsaw Pact-linked subversion targeting white minority or colonial rule. On the other hand, they have been the center of "pro-western" efforts to overthrow alleged Soviet client states radiating revolution throughout the continent. For example:

Rhodesia-Zimbabwe. Beginning in 1961, the Zimbabwe People's Union (ZAPU), and two years later, the rival Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), conducted a guerrilla war to overthrow the white minority-ruled Rhodesian regime. The Rhodesian effort to crush the insurgency was carried out by the Rhodesian Army, and its irregular guerrilla formation, the Selous Scouts. . . .

The ZANU and ZAPU forward bases of operation against Rhodesia were in Zambia, just outside the Mosi-pa-Tunya park, and also in the Lower Zambesi park. . . .

The Selous Scouts, the Rhodesian opponents of ZANU and ZAPU, were mustered by the chief ecologist of the Rhodesian park system, and were largely composed of park guards.

In 1980, ZANU chief Robert Mugabe became head of state of the newly created Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). But even after black majority rule was established, the civil war continued. The fleeing Rhodesian elite largely emigrated to neighboring South Africa. The Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo), which had earlier been created by Rhodesian intelligence to destabilize Mozambique after its independence from Portugal, was now deployed against Zimbabwe. The headquarters of Renamo is one mile from South Africa's Kruger park; it is trained in South African regional parks in Natal, and in the parks of the nearby KaNgwane homeland. . . .

Angola. In 1956, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was formed to overthrow Portuguese colonial rule. In 1966, its rival, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), was also formed. A civil war against foreign rule began. Following the evacuation of Portuguese forces in 1975, the conflict continued, but this time between the new MPLA government and UNITA. The civil war continued for another 17 years.

The MPLA and the UNITA were headquartered in the West Zambesi game management area in Kaunda's Zambia during the period of Portuguese Angolan rule.

Mozambique. The Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) was formed in 1962 to overthrow Portuguese rule in Mozambique. It was headquartered in Luana and West Petauke national parks in Zambia; it also received training from Russian instructors in the park systems of Uganda. In 1975, the Portuguese left and Frelimo formed a government. But the civil war continued . . . between the Frelimo government and Renamo, now based in South Africa's Kruger park. Reportedly, at least one of the major factions of Renamo has been trained by WWF personnel with the aid of British Special Air Services founder Col. David Stirling, who had been a close associate of . . . Kenyan Parks department director Col. Mervyn Cowie since the 1940s.