

Primary Source:

*The Man-Eaters of Tsavo, Chapter IX: The Death of the Second Man-Eater (1907)**



PRIMARY SOURCE

INTRODUCTION

PATTERSON, THE MAN-EATERS OF
TSAVO

Introduction

From March to December 1898, two maneless male lions killed and ate approximately 35 laborers building a bridge over the Tsavo River, in modern-day Kenya, for the Ugandan Railway. Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson, a former officer of the British Army in India, was the chief engineer overseeing the construction of the bridge at Tsavo when the lions began to attack the workers. After months of unsuccessful attempts to kill the animals, including a several month interlude when the disappeared from railway camp but rumors of their slaughter filtered in from other locations, Patterson finally shot the first lion in early December 1898 and the second at the end of the month. He later wrote up his experiences in a imperial hunting memoir titled *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*.

When you first read this chapter, thinking about Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden." How does Patterson present himself to his reading audience? In what ways does he exemplify the imperial character represented in the poem? In what ways are his experiences different than this literary fantasy?

Though it was not likely Patterson's intention, this chapter can also show historians a little of the lived experiences of the Indian and African laborers working on the Ugandan railway in 1898. While reading, underline or highlight any reference you find to these laborers. You will assemble these clues during an in-class activity.

* J. H. Patterson, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures* (London: MacMillan and Col, 1907), 94-106. Annotations by participations in the *History for the 21st Century* project.

Lt. Colonel J. H. Patterson, The Man-Eaters of Tsavo, Chapter IX: The Death of the Second Man-Eater (1907)

**THE MAN-EATERS
OF TSAVO**

AND

Other East African Adventures

BY

LIEUT.-COL. J. H. PATTERSON, D.S.O.

WITH A FOREWORD BY
FREDERICK COURTENAY SELOUS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1908

M.S.M.

**Chapter IX:
The Death of the Second Man-Eater**

It must not be imagined that with the death of this lion our troubles at Tsavo were at an end; his companion was still at large, and very soon began to make us unpleasantly aware of the fact. Only a few nights elapsed before he made an attempt to get at the Permanent Way Inspector,[†] climbing up the steps of his bungalow and prowling round the verandah. The Inspector, hearing the noise and thinking it was a drunken coolie,[‡] shouted angrily "Go away!" but, fortunately for him, did not attempt to come out or to open the door. Thus disappointed in his attempt to obtain a meal of human flesh, the lion seized a couple of the Inspector's goats and devoured them there and then.

On hearing of this occurrence, I determined to sit up the next night near the Inspector's bungalow.[§] Fortunately there was a vacant iron shanty close at hand, with a convenient loophole in it for firing from; and outside this I placed three full-grown goats as bait, tying them to a half-length of rail, weighing about 250 lbs. The night passed uneventfully until just before daybreak, when at last the lion turned up, pounced on one of the goats and made off with it, at the same time dragging away the others, rail and all. I fired several shots in his direction, but it was pitch dark and quite impossible to see anything, so I only succeeded in hitting one of the goats. I often longed for a flash-light on such occasions.

Next morning I started off in pursuit and was joined by some others from the camp. I found that the trail of the goats and rail was easily followed, and we soon came up, about a quarter of a mile away, to where the lion was still busy at his meal. He was concealed in some thick bush and growled angrily on hearing our approach; finally, as we got closer, he suddenly made a charge, rushing through the bushes at a great pace. In an instant, every man of the party scrambled hastily up the nearest tree, with the exception of one of my assistants, Mr. Winkler, who stood steadily by me throughout. The brute, however, did not press his charge home: and on throwing stones into the bushes where we had last seen him, we guessed by the silence that he had slunk off. We therefore advanced cautiously, and on getting up to the place discovered that he had indeed escaped us, leaving two off the goats scarcely touched.

[†] A railway employee responsible for maintaining the quality of a specific section of rail line.

[‡] This is a derogatory term for indentured foreign laborers from Asia working elsewhere in the British Empire, in this case indentured laborers from India who working building the Uganda Railway.

[§] A one-story house with a broad front porch; a common name for European-style dwellings in the British Empire. 2

Thinking that in all probability the lion would return as usual to finish his meal, I had a very strong scaffolding put up a few feet away from the dead goats, and took up my position on it before dark. On this occasion I brought my gun-bearer, Mahina, to take a turn at watching, as I was by this time worn out for want of sleep, having spent so many nights on the look-out. I was just dozing off comfortably when suddenly I felt my arm seized, and on looking up saw Mahina pointing in the direction of the goats. "Sher!" ("Lion!") was all he whispered. I grasped my double smooth-bore,^{ll} which, I had charged with slug, and waited patiently.



Map of the Uganda Railway, British East Africa, 1909

In a few moments I was rewarded, for as I watched the spot where I expected the lion to appear, there was a rustling among the bushes and I saw him stealthily emerge into the open and pass almost directly beneath us. I fired both barrels practically together into his shoulder, and to my joy could see him go down under the force of the blow. Quickly I reached for the magazine rifle, but before I could use it, he was out of sight among the bushes, and I had to fire after him quite at random. Nevertheless I was confident of getting him in the morning, and accordingly set out as soon as it was light. For over a mile there was no difficulty in following the blood-trail, and as he had rested several times I felt sure that he had been badly wounded. In the end, however, my hunt proved fruitless, for after a time the traces of blood ceased and the surface of the ground became rocky, so that I was no longer able to follow the spoor.

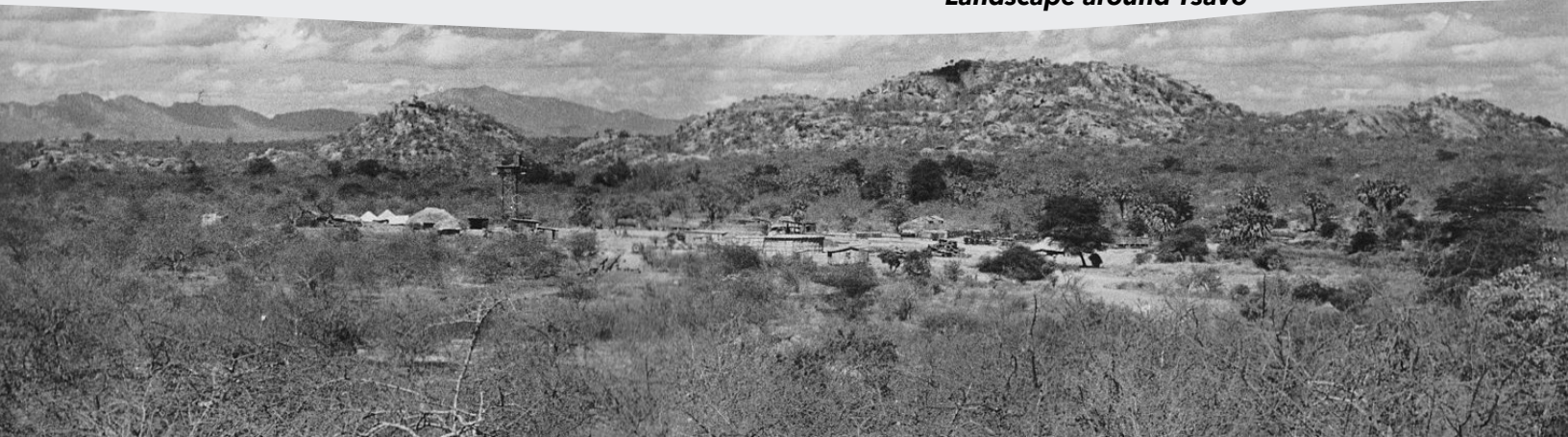
About this time Sir Guilford Molesworth, K.C.I.E.,** late Consulting Engineer to the Government of India for State Railways, passed through Tsavo on a tour of inspection on behalf of the Foreign Office. After examining the bridge and other works and expressing his satisfaction, he took a number of photographs, one or two of which he has kindly allowed me to reproduce in this book.

He thoroughly sympathised with us in all the trials we had endured from the man-eaters, and was delighted that one at least was dead. When he asked me if I expected to get the second lion soon, I well remember his half-doubting smile as I rather too confidently asserted that I hoped to bag him also in the course of a few days.

^{ll} A kind of firearm common at the time in which the projectiles without significant spin (or rifling).

** Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. A British order of chivalry founded in 1878 and meant to honor British and Indian official who served the empire in India.

Landscape around Tsavo



As it happened, there was no sign of our enemy for about ten days after this, and we began to hope that he had died of his wounds in the bush. All the same we still took every precaution at night, and it was fortunate that we did so, as otherwise at least one more victim would have been added to the list. For on the night of December 27, I was suddenly aroused by terrified shouts from my trolley men, who slept in a tree close outside my *boma*,^{††} to the effect that a lion was trying to get at them. It would have been madness to have gone out, as the moon was hidden by dense clouds and it was absolutely impossible to see anything more than a yard in front of one; so all I could do was to fire off a few rounds just to frighten the brute away.



Photograph of the camps of the workmen, surrounded by thorn bushes

This apparently had the desired effect, for the men were not further molested that night; but the man-eater had evidently prowled about for some time, for we found in the morning that he had gone right into every one of their tents, and round the tree was a regular ring of his footmarks.

The following evening I took up my position in this same tree, in the hope that he would make another attempt. The night began badly, as, while climbing up to my perch I very nearly put my hand on a venomous snake which was lying coiled round one of the branches. As may be imagined, I came down again very quickly, but one of my men managed to despatch it with a long pole. Fortunately the night was clear and cloudless, and the moon made every thing almost as bright as day. I kept watch until about 2 a.m., when I roused Mahina to take his turn. For about an hour I slept peacefully with my back to the tree, and then woke suddenly with an uncanny feeling that something was wrong.



Photograph of Patterson's look-out

Mahina, however, was on the alert, and had seen nothing; and although I looked carefully round us on all sides, I too could discover nothing unusual. Only half satisfied, I was about to lie back again, when I fancied I saw something move a little way off among the low bushes. On gazing intently at the spot for a few seconds, I found I was not mistaken. It was the man-eater, cautiously stalking us.

^{††} An enclosure, such as a palisade or fence, made of thorn bushes.



Eugene Delacroix's Lion Attack, 1851

The ground was fairly open round our tree, with only a small bush every here and there; and from our position it was a most fascinating sight to watch this great brute stealing stealthily round us, taking advantage of every bit of cover as he came. His skill showed that he was an old hand at the terrible game of man-hunting: so I determined to run no undue risk of losing him this time. I accordingly waited until he got quite close -- about twenty yards away -- and then fired my .303 at his chest. I heard the bullet strike him, but unfortunately it had no knockdown effect, for with a fierce growl he turned and made off with great long bounds. Before he disappeared from sight, however, I managed to have three more shots at him from the magazine rifle, and another growl told me that the last of these had also taken effect.

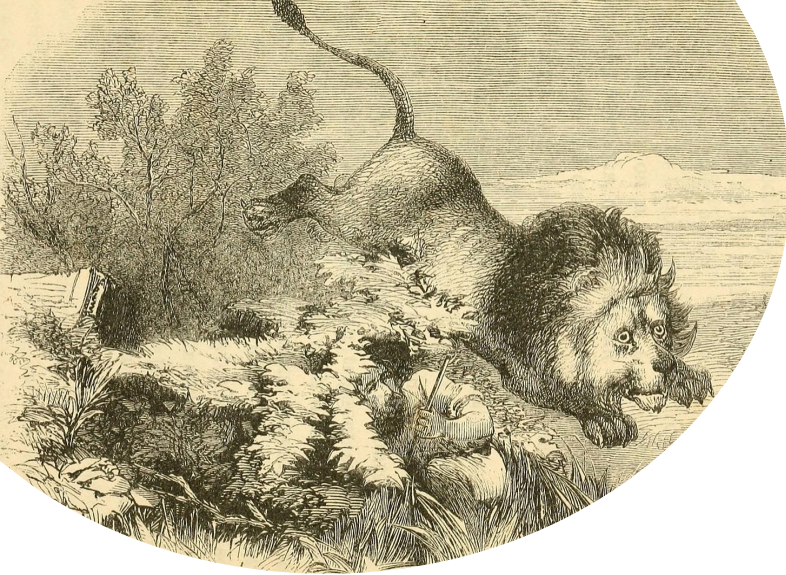
We awaited daylight with impatience, and at the first glimmer of dawn we set out to hunt him down. I took a native tracker with me, so that I was free to keep a good look-out, while Mahina followed immediately behind with a Martini carbine.^{##} Splashes of blood being plentiful, we were able to get along quickly; and we had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile through the jungle when suddenly a fierce warning growl was heard right in front of us. Looking cautiously through the bushes, I could see the man-eater glaring out in our direction, and showing his tusks in an angry snarl.

I at once took careful aim and fired. Instantly he sprang out and made a most determined charge down on us. I fired again and knocked him over; but in a second he was up once more and coming for me as fast as he could in his crippled condition. A third shot had no apparent effect, so I put out my hand for the Martini, hoping to stop him with it. To my dismay, however, it was not there.

^{##}A breech-loading rifle wildly adopted by the British Army personnel from the mid-1880s.

Engraving depicting the shooting of a lion attacking a man, 1857



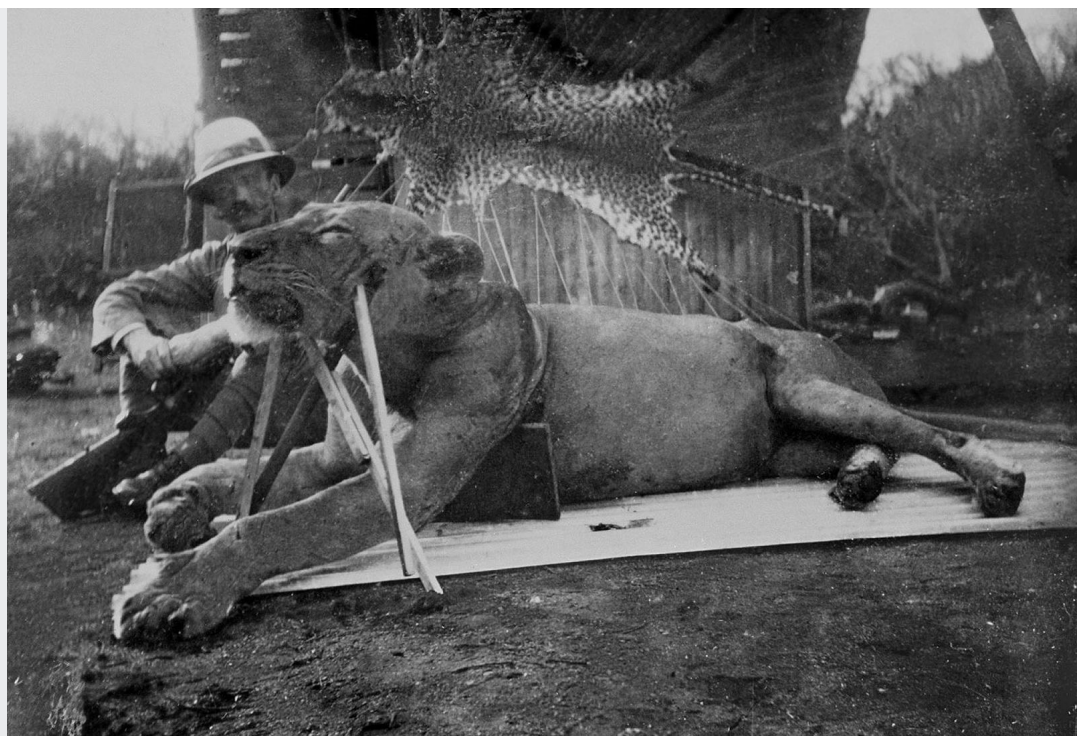


**Engraving depicting hunter
hiding from a lion, 1856**

The terror of the sudden charge had proved too much for Mahina, and both he and the carbine were by this time well on their way up a tree. In the circumstances there was nothing to do but follow suit, which I did without loss of time: and but for the fact that one of my shots had broken a hind leg, the brute would most certainly have had me. Even as it was, I had barely time to swing myself up out of his reach before he arrived at the foot of the tree.

When the lion found he was too late, he started to limp back to the thicket; but by this time I had seized the carbine from Mahina, and the first shot I fired from it seemed to give him his quietus, for he fell over and lay motionless. Rather foolishly, I at once scrambled down from the tree and walked up towards him. To my surprise and no little alarm he jumped up and attempted another charge. This time, however, a Martini bullet in the chest and another in the head finished him for good and all; he dropped in his tracks not five yards away from me, and died gamely, biting savagely at a branch which had fallen to the ground.

By this time all the workmen in camp, attracted by the sound of the firing, had arrived on the scene, and so great was their resentment against the brute who had killed such numbers of their comrades that it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could restrain them from tearing the dead body to pieces. Eventually, amid the wild rejoicings of the natives and coolies, I had the lion carried to my *boma*, which was close at hand. On examination we found no less than six bullet holes in the body, and embedded only a little way in the flesh of the back was the slug which I had fired into him from the scaffolding about ten days previously. He measured nine feet six inches from tip of nose to tip of tail, and stood three feet eleven and a half inches high; but, as in the case of his companion, the skin was disfigured by being deeply scored all over by the *boma* thorns.



**J.H. Patterson, posing
with the first of the two
Tsavo man-eating lions
he had shot, 1898**



**Uganda Railway
near Mombasa, c. 1899**

The news of the death of the second "devil" soon spread far and wide over the country, and natives actually travelled from up and down the line to have a look at my trophies and at the "devil-killer", as they called me. Best of all, the coolies who had absconded came flocking back to Tsavo, and much to my relief work was resumed and we were never again troubled by man-eaters. It was amusing, indeed, to notice the change which took place in the attitude of the workmen towards me after I had killed the two lions. Instead of wishing to murder me, as they once did, they could not now do enough for me, and as a token of their gratitude they presented me with a beautiful silver bowl, as well as with a long poem written in Hindustani^{§§} describing all our trials and my ultimate victory. As the poem relates our troubles in somewhat quaint and biblical language, I have given a translation of it in the appendix. The bowl I shall always consider my most highly prized and hardest won trophy. The inscription on it reads as follows:--

SIR, -- We, your Overseer, Timekeepers, *Mistaris*^{|||} and Workmen, present you with this bowl as a token of our gratitude to you for your bravery in killing two man-eating lions at great risk to your own life, thereby saving us from the fate of being devoured by these terrible monsters who nightly broke into our tents and took our fellow-workers from our side. In presenting you with this bowl, we all add our prayers for your long life, happiness and prosperity. We shall ever remain,
Sir, Your grateful servants,

Baboo^{***} PURSHOTAM HURJEE PURMAR,
Overseer and Clerk of Works,
on behalf of your Workmen.
Dated at Tsavo, January 30, 1899.

§§ A north Indian language from which contemporary Hindi and Urdu derive.

||| Mechanics

*** An honorific for Indian men, similar to Mr.

**The heads of eight lions killed by
Patterson in British East Africa**





**The second man-eater
of Tsavo, 1899**

Before I leave the subject of "the man-eaters of Tsavo," it may be of interest to mention that these two lions possess the distinction, probably unique among wild animals, of having been specifically referred to in the House of Lords by the Prime Minister of the day. Speaking of the difficulties which had been encountered in the construction of the Uganda Railway, the late Lord Salisbury said:--

"The whole of the works were put a stop to for three weeks because a party of man-eating lions appeared in the locality and conceived a most unfortunate taste for our porters. At last the labourers entirely declined to go on unless they were guarded by an iron entrenchment. Of course it is difficult to work a railway under these conditions, and until we found an enthusiastic sportsman to get rid of these lions, our enterprise was seriously hindered."

Also, *The Spectator*^{†††} of March 3, 1900, had an article entitled "The Lions that Stopped the Railway," from which the following extracts are taken:--

"The parallel to the story of the lions which stopped the rebuilding of Samaria^{†††} must occur to everyone, and if the Samaritans had quarter as good cause for their fears as had the railway coolies, their wish to propitiate the local deities is easily understood. If the whole body of lion anecdote, from the days of the Assyrian Kings^{§§§} till the last year of the nineteenth century, were collated and brought together, it would not equal in tragedy or atrocity, in savageness or in sheer insolent contempt for man, armed or unarmed, white or black, the story of these two beasts...



**A train crosses a finished bridge
on the Uganda Railway**

††† A London newspaper

††† A region in Biblical Israel

§§§ Assyria is a Mesopotamian civilization that ruled portions of West Africa from approximately 2600 BC to 609 BC.

...To what a distance the whole story carries us back, and how impossible it becomes to account for the survival of primitive man against this kind of foe! For fire—which has hitherto been regarded as his main safeguard against the carnivora—these cared nothing. It is curious that the Tsavo lions were not killed by poison, for strychnine is easily used, and with effect. (*I [Patterson] may mention that poison was tried, but without effect. The poisoned carcasses of transport animals which had died from the bite of the tsetse fly were placed in likely spots, but the wily man-eaters would not touch them, and much preferred live men to dead donkeys.*) Poison may have been used early in the history of man, for its powers are employed with strange skill by the men in the tropical forest, both in American and West Central Africa. But there is no evidence that the old inhabitants of Europe, or of Assyria or Asia Minor, ever killed lions or wolves by this means. They looked to the King or chief, or some champion, to kill these monsters for them. It was not the sport but the duty of Kings, and was in itself a title to be a ruler of men. Theseus,^{||||} who cleared the roads of beasts and robbers; Hercules,^{****} the lion killer; St. George,^{††††} the dragon-slayer, and all the rest of their class owed to this their everlasting fame. From the story of the Tsavo River we can appreciate their services to man even at this distance of time. When the jungle twinkled with hundreds of lamps, as the shout went on from camp to camp that the first lion was dead, as the hurrying crowds fell prostrate in the midnight forest, laying their heads on his feet, and the Africans danced savage and ceremonial dances of thanksgiving, Mr. Patterson must have realised in no common way what it was to have been a hero and deliverer in the days when man was not yet undisputed lord of the creation, and might pass at any moment under the savage dominion of the beasts."

Well had the two man-eaters earned all this fame; they had devoured between them no less than twenty-eight Indian coolies, in addition to scores of unfortunate African natives of whom no official record was kept.

^{||||} A hero of Greek mythology, famous for slaying the half-man, half-bull creature known as the Minotaur.

^{****} A hero of Greek mythology, famous for his strength.

^{††††} A saint and hero of Christian mythology whose red cross on a white background was adopted as the English national flag (as opposed to the Union Jack of the United Kingdom).



The maneless male Lions of Tsavo, shot by Lt. Col. J.H. Patterson, on display at the Chicago Field Museum, 2008

Image Citations:

Page 1:

Lt. Colonel John Henry Patterson, 1922, Public Domain,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John_Henry_Patterson_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John_Henry_Patterson_(cropped).jpg)

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Page 3:

Map of the Uganda Railway, Mombas to Port Florence, British East Africa, 1909, Public Domain,
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Countryside at Tsavo, looking west from the Nairobi-Mombasa main road, 1952, CC: BY SA, East African Photographic Service of the Regional Information Office, Nairobi, Kenya,
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Page 7:

Uganda Railway Near Mombasa, c. 1899, Public Domain,
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Heads of Eight Lions Shot by the Author in British East Africa, J. H. Patterson, *The Man Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures* (London, Macmillan, 1908), Front Material, New York Public Library Digital Collections, Public Domain,
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Page 8:

The second man-eater from Tsavo shot by Lt. Col. Patterson, 1899, Public Domain,
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