***Subject – By Cultural Tourism Project Team***

***Conquering bush land on foot – Country side***

***From Destination Tanzania ISSN-8278 July-September, 2006 Issue No. 020***

You do not see Tanzania from the window of a land rover roaming the Serengeti, Ngorongoro and other attractions, or from some vantage point on the top of the snow capped of Mt. Kilimanjaro, you see it clearly and wholly through its people –through interaction with them.

The man behind the grand schemes is none other than, John Henry Ngowi who has big ideas for facilitating interaction of visitors to national parks and other attractions with people in the surroundings.  A programme has the objective of ensuring people within and in the surroundings of Ngurdoto/Maasa bush land blend nature and cultural tourism for development.

Mr. Ngowi, the founder Coordinator of the scheme has come up with the ideas to establish a programme on Mt. Meru foothills, Maasai bush land and west Kilimanjaro plains specifically for the purpose.  The benefits from the project are intended to be shared equally with the local communities in areas.

The Ngurdoto 30 kilometers north of Arusha adjoining the Arusha National park, Ngurdoto and Maasai bush land.  It is a diverse forest region conspicuous for its variety and abundance of birds, wildlife and butterflies.  It is also know to have the widest and largest range of birds and animals in the northern circuit.

The area is an important buffer to the Arusha National Park, as well as Mt. Kilimanjaro, both significant reserve flora and fauna.  The gentle Meru and Maasai ethnic groups long ago settled here and established homes as they stick to grazing and tending to small farms throughout the forest.

Population pressures and social development, however, are increasingly  making pressure to bear on the natural environment.  The Ngurdoto and Maasai bush land development program has therefore been establish to meet the challenge through preservation of the natural habitat, traditions and culture, while facilitating education and social development programs.

Both Meru and Maasai people around Ngurdotoo exhibit amazing generosity to visitors in the beautiful villages and surrounding forests, and are often ready tosllow them try some of their traditions and culture.

Around the area one is able to see a variety of wild life species including black and white colobus, blue and varvet monkeys and a host of other small game species.  Walking around along  elephant natural  trails one can venture to view buffaloes from close range.

Among the attractions around the area is a volcanic vent know locally as the supernatural well.  It is set dense rain forest and abounds with dragonflies.  It is reputed to be the home of benevolent spirits.

From the slopes of Mt. Meru one can do a walking safari through the rain forest, and Maasai bush land following elephant trails to view different species of birds, and wildlife, butterflies and plants.  As you do so you interact freely with Meru tribesmen, bonafide inhabitants on the foothills of Mt. Meru.

The beautiful sceneries of Mt. Meru and Kilimanjaro can be observed from Ngurdoto village situated 30 km north of Arusha National Parks The beauties of Arusha National Park and Ngurdoto Crater compelled the famous actor John Wayne to shoot a film he named \*Hatari\* in the surroundings of the Park, Hatari is a Kiswahili word for danger.

From Ngurdoto village to Maasai bush land, you come across Mkuru camel camp about 60 km from Arusha town.  On the same way there is the Momella Lakes, the home of flamingoes, different water bird, and the athletic hippos.  Close to the Momella are other three lakes called Shishton which are famous for fishing,swimming, and water birds viewing.

Elsewhere, you come across Mkuru in the Maasai bush land which is very attractive area, where one can view different animals and birds.

People often walk or ride camels and their Maasai warriors through acacia bush land catching a rare glimpse of different kind of animals and looking onto the majestic snow capped slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Meru.

The distant blue hills of Longido – with telltale rock face and Mt. Gilai provide addition view.  One takes about 7 days to trek through the plains of the Maasai bush land to Lake Natron and Oldonyolengai-Maasai mountain of God, still active, where there a lot to see on the way.

From the back of a camel you can see different species of wildlife and birds, go away birds, starlings, plovers, sun birds, barbets, hornbills, thrushes, among many others in the areas of Ngabobo, Ngatasuka and Ngerian Maasai villages, which are very remote and unknown to traveolers.  These are very beautiful landscapes, where people coexist with wildlife, and which visitors will get value for money.

Trekking along this route offers the most memorable lifetime adventure for the visitors.  Walking through the Maasai semi arid bush land, is not only fantastic way to view game but also offers a rare opportunity to stay with Maasai to experience their daily life activities.  In this remote and virgin bush land you can view all the wildlife species parallel you find in national parks.  You can see giraffes, zebras, baboons, antelopes, wildebeests,  small bucks, black and white colobus, porcupines, kudus, gerenuk

As you trek on the way to Lake Natron and Oldonyolengai (Maasai mountain of God), the plains of Maasai bush land (Gilai plains), offer majestic scenery of the wildlife and domestic animals grazing together.

From Gilai plains, to Lake Natron, through Oldonyolengai, which is a volcanic activity, you will enjoy the marvelous and beautiful landscapes of the mountain Lengai, Gilai, as well as Keremasi.  Local people can challenge you to climb.  Oldonyolengai can be climbed in two days.  Lake natron is famous for breeding of flamingoes, the wonderful soda water, and home to different species of water birds. In the lake area one can visit thundering waterfalls, and also the unique Ngarasero river whre it strangely fresh and cool in the midst of hot area.

Lake natron, famous for soda water is spectacular for its sceneries as well as for diversity of water and shoreline birds , include large flock of flamingoes.  The varied region of Maasai bush land also offers unlimited opportunity for exploring nooks and crannies meandering through lush maintain bush land and glades.  It is also offers opportunities for hiking along scenic ridges or old animals trails.

On the way back from Lake Natron you can visit Engaruka plain one of the Tanzania’s most important history sites.  Some 500 years ago it is believed that a farming community of several thousands people developed ingenious irrigation and cultivation system in the area.

The water that flows from the great rift valley escarpment was channeled into stone – build canals and led to the stone – bench terraces.  For unknown reasons, the farmers left Engaruka around 1700.  The ruins to date provides a legacy of the highly specialized, and integrated agricultural economy. The place famous for early human civilization where one can visit very old irrigation system and old ruins dating back to thousands of years.

The ruined city of Engaruka abounds, with colorful birds, butterflies, and graves from the Germany colonial times.  It is also famous for old blacksmith activities that enabled inhabitants make weapons including spears, arrows, knifes, axes, and other items like hoes and cowbells.

Maasai bush land experience is unique and exciting, offering experience of true African environment and village life.  The large remote areas and wildness a little know to traveler but provide honey besides being deal to filmmakers, photographers, cycling treks, and birds watchers.

The area is also a uniqiue area for researching on traditional medicine herbs and plants.  Indigenous Maasaii knowledge on traditional medicine generated considerable interest among researchers.