

Time to Escape from the Well Ordered Road: Pamela Irving

In 1989 I went to Africa. After 11 years working for the same company in the same division with all requests for a transfer somewhere new falling on deaf ears, I quit and headed for somewhere new of my choice. ‘We’d have to retrain you in the new job, and train someone else in your job. It would cost the company money,’ was the logic of the laboratory manager.

‘Yes, but surely it’s to the company’s advantage to have people happy where they’re working,’ I argued.

‘That may be the case, but it’s not the way we do it here.’

Thank you, laboratory manager. Wild animals as far as the eye can see on the endless plains of the Masai Mara beat looking at blood samples any day. A pink ribbon of flamingos along the shore of Lake Nakuru. The laboured last breaths of a buffalo on the Serengeti, his muzzle clamped tight in a lioness’s jaw. A portly pink hippo, disturbed from her day-time nap in a waterhole, wandering along the bank of a creek. Gin and tonics at sunset on a Botswana riverbank. Dusty rides in the backs of trucks, for hours in the blazing sun. White-water rafting down the Zambezi. Aeroplane rides over Victoria Falls. Trekking in the Chimanimani hills in Zimbabwe and Mount Mulanje in Malawi...

When I got back to Adelaide eight months later, I started a journal based on my notes, which I unimaginatively called *A Journey Through Africa*. It now rests unfinished in my filing-cabinet.

Here is the opening entry:

I spent the early morning hours of my 40th birthday trying to sleep on the wooden verandah of Mrs Roche’s Guest House in Nairobi, Kenya. Mrs Roche’s three large guard dogs paid no attention to two white strangers arriving unannounced at 2am and letting themselves in through the huge iron gates. If we’d been black it would have been quite a different story. The Aga Khan Hospital across the road attended to a steady stream of walking wounded from Mrs Roche’s – all local blacks attracted by the rubbish heap just inside the gates and foolhardy enough to run the gauntlet of Bruno and Co.

The start of my escape to Africa...