

Photo Essay

Aardvark hunt in Kenya

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While teaching science as a Peace Corps Volunteer at Mirogi Secondary School in South Nyanza District of Kenya (near the south shore of Lake Victoria), I observed the local residents hunt an aardvark. Although it is known that aardvarks are eaten throughout Africa, there is little published on traditional hunting methods.

In April 1968 the secondary school students interrupted a biology class and said that some local men had located an active aardvark burrow and were going to spear it. We decided to observe the process.....



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Figure 1. The area was a gently rolling open savanna woodland with a moderate density of subsistence farmers. A small group of young men had located an active burrow not too far from a small seasonally flooded depression in the landscape that held some standing water. The plan was to dig a ditch between the pond water and the aardvark burrow, then flood the burrow and spear the aardvark as it tried to escape.



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Figure 2. The ditch was dug with "jembes" (large hoes) – about a 100 metres long and 30-odd cm deep.



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Figure 3. Once the ditch was completed, the water was allowed to flow into the ditch.



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Figure 4. However, the water was dammed just short of the burrow until the ditch was completely full. Then, the dam was removed, quickly flooding the aardvark burrow.



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Figure 5. As the burrow quickly began to fill, a pair of hunters with spears ready listened at the burrow entrance for the aardvark....and they waited...and waited.

After a couple hours, there was still no sign of the aardvark and the students and I had to return to the school compound nearby. The hunters kept at it, diverting more water and waiting. They eventually succeeded in spearing the aardvark, which was butchered among the hunters' families. I managed to salvage the skull, which was deposited in the collection of the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi.