Safari Tanzania

As a hydrologist, one of my tasks was to site water boreholes for African villages. Initially, I travelled with Sid Gill who was a middle-aged geologist. Sid was a kindly introverted man with a passion for chess. He was an expert and could play many people simultaneously while blindfolded.

We travelled in a landrover with a large 4WD Bedford truck following us with our crew of about a dozen Africans. There was great competition amongst our local employees to go on safari as they got extra pay for it which was important to them as they received a very low daily wage. If somebody didn't work properly or committed a misdemeanour we couldn't sack them as the Government would not allow us to. Consequently, there was always about 30 hanging around the compound. We punished the wrongdoers by not taking them on Safari.

We would arrive at a village where the head man had applied for a water bore to be installed. Sometimes the previous bore had stopped working or the pump had broken down. The locals would then go back to collecting water in gourds from a muddy pool often miles away. Our job would be to locate the best position for a new borehole.

It was very basic geology. We would look for topographical features which might suggest underground water. In granite country, it might be a valley probably following major joints or an intersect of joints, breccias and signs of faults or in sedimentary areas river valleys and larger trees.

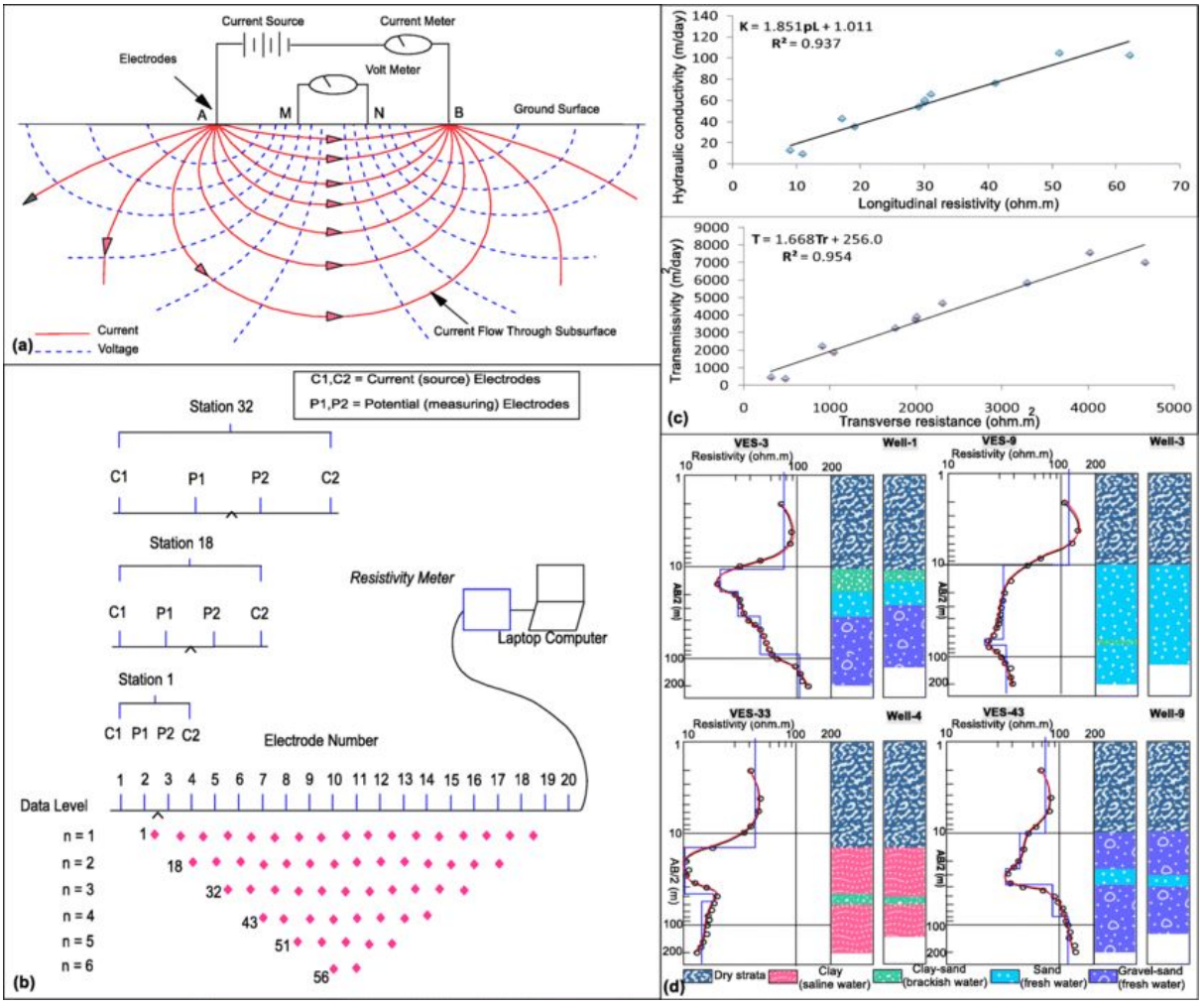
As we drove around I read the geology as well as I could and decided on a promising location. I would show my head boy where I wanted the geophysical line to be and then wait in the shade while he organised things. The first and most important thing would be a sunshade and chair for bwana. Then I would leave the shade and majestically sit on the chair.

Here we would do a resistivity survey. We had 8 workers, four had star pickets and four had reels of cable. They worked in pairs walking out a set distance in a straight line using a knotted rope to measure. The guy with the picket would hammer it into the ground and the guy with the cable reel would attach the cable to the picket with crocodile clips.

When they were all set, the head boy would generate an electrical current into the cables to the outer probes with a hand generator by frantically turning the handle. I would read the voltage from the inner probes and plot them on a graph in my book.

He would then blow his whistle and they would extend the line by a fixed amount. The diagrams below illustrate the process.

I would plot the graph of the resistance against separation of the probes (ie depth of penetration). If there was a kink in the graph it would indicate a lower resistance due to water. In that way, we could predict the likelihood of water and its depth.

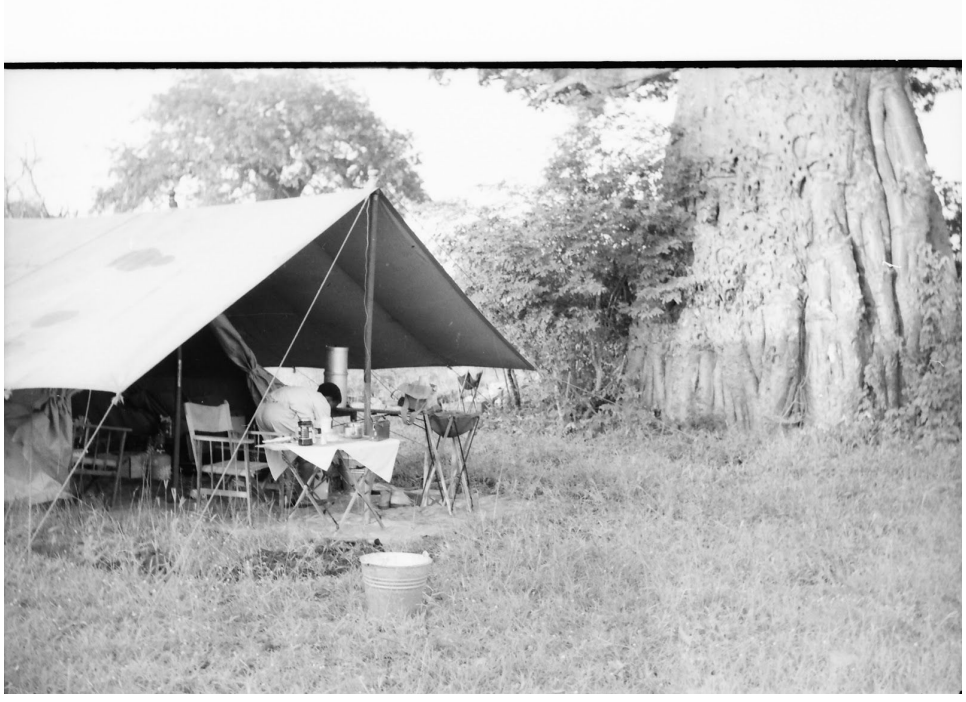


We would follow this process until we found an area when water was likely to be available. We then marked the spot with a wooden stake and showed the location to the local head man.

Some months later a drilling crew would visit the village and drill the borehole. The drill operators told me that sometimes it was so long before they could get there that they found the head man had died and the stake eaten by termites.

We finished work mid-afternoon and established our camp. Having found a shady spot I

would get out of the landrover and wave my arms about saying “mlango hapa” Swahili for “door here” so that the crew would know where to put the door of my tent.



In addition to the tent, canvas protected toilet and shower structures would be set up for me. A hole was dug and a fire lit to heat water for showers and cooking. As you can see in the photo long logs were cut and pushed into the fire to keep it alive.

Shallow trenches were dug around the tents to keep insects out and drain any rain.

After dark, we would eat our dinner at a table near the tent with a very dim light. Several metres away there was a bright kerosene lamp. In no time it would be surrounded by clouds

of insects. There were large brown scorpions attracted to the light but I was told that their sting was not as bad as the small white ones.

I made friends with a tall rangy man, Keith, who was a professional hunter. He took me on local trips and taught me to shoot birds with a .22 rifle. The birds, mainly wild guinea foul, were easy to shoot and I remember one time he killed 2 with one shot.

We would return to town with his landrover full of birds for eating. We offered them to the local Africans who refused them as they were mainly Muslims and the birds had not been killed according to the halal tradition. This seemed crazy to me, as they had a low protein diet based on beans and the bird meat would have been good for them.

Keith had taken many clients on elephant hunts. He had an amazing photo of him with huge elephant tusks crossing above his head. He was 6 foot 3 inches so they were very large. He told me he killed the massive bull elephant on the charge.

He arranged for me to go on a hunt with him and taught me how to shoot an elephant. There are only two places to stop them between the eyes from the front or the heart from the side. I left Africa before the hunt something I always regret. At that time they were culling elephants in the Murchison National Park so I wasn't concerned about them being an endangered species.

I loved Africa so much and wanted to stay there. I had been taken on as a local employee on a meagre wage but the Department of Overseas Development in the UK normally upgraded English ex-patriots to international conditions, so I expected a substantial increase in my salary.

Then a disaster occurred. On the 11th of November, 1965, Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia unexpectedly declared UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence). Consequently, diplomatic relations between East Africa and the United Kingdom became strained and Tanzania broke off diplomatic relations. So my application for international status failed and I had to return to the UK.

I will never forget the sweet smell and the lure of Africa.