

HOW FAR NORTH CAN YOU GO?

(By Mike Harper)



Towards the end of 1961 I was posted to Karonga as Second-in-Command to John Clements and had only been there a short while when I was sent to Fort Hill (now Chitipa) on the borders with Tanzania and Zambia. It was the rainy season and I went in my car up a very muddy, slippery road bisected by rivulets or vleys.

I found Fort Hill to be a small place with a couple of African stores, a Customs border post and a WNLA (*Witwatersrand Native Labour Association*) depot.

My Police Station had not been built or my house so I had to live in a caravan with minimal cooking, washing and toilet facilities.

The loo was a hole in the ground surrounded by a thatched fence and visiting in the rain it was with an umbrella in one hand and a loo roll in the other! Food was in short supply but could be ordered from Karonga or

Mbeya (Tanzania) and flown in by the Nyasaland Beaver air service which called once a week.

The only other European official was a rather eccentric Assistant District Commissioner who lived in a prefabricated hut with his cat Trotsky - which went mad and had disappeared. He also kept a pack of mongrel dogs which he called the Fort Hill Hunt.

Two and four engined planes came and went to the WNLA airstrip which was built on a long muddy slope causing planes to skid and slide on the landing. There was a four holes golf course on the airstrip with play having to stop for the aircraft carrying the African labour to and from the mines in South Africa.

My temporary police station was a small building which would become the Police canteen but we had few reports because of the policy of not posting African police to their home districts. My men spoke Chinyanja but the local people spoke mostly Msukwa which made communication difficult.



We had two interesting cases, one where a man was accused of being a witch when his brother's children died suddenly. The village urged him to visit a famous witch doctor, the Great Chikanga, who lived near Rumi and be 'unwitched'. He refused and a fight in ensued in which he wounded his brother. Police arrested him and the case was heard by the Resident Magistrate at Nkhata Bay, some miles away. He was convicted and find £1 to be paid in compensation to his brother and urged to visit the Great Chikanga without delay to avoid further trouble in the village. Sound advice but contrary to the Prevention of Witchcraft Ordinance.

The other case involved the arson of a thatched hut where the villagers allegedly traced the accused by following his footprints in the mud. The case was also heard by the Resident Magistrate at Nkhata Bay who wanted to test the expertise of his trackers. He had an earth tennis court sprayed with water and got several people to walk on it including the accused. He then asked the trackers to pick out the accused's footprints which they were unable to do. I pointed out there was a difference between following a solitary set of footprints from picking one out from many. However the Resident Magistrate was not convinced and acquitted the accused.

After six months I was promoted to Assistant Superintendent and posted to Kota Kota to take over from Paddy Adair. By which time my house and the Police Station had been built and the weather had improved - but I was not sorry to leave!

Mike Harper
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