

Gem Stone Safari in Tanzania

Dave Maddison

We first heard of the Gem Stone Safari in France, whilst visiting the St Marie aux Mines Gem and Mineral fair. My local club, the Peak Lapidary and Mineral Society, had taken it upon themselves to organize a trip to this truly international show. Whilst walking around the vast number of stalls we met Hubert Heldner, from Switzerland, who described the safari and what we could expect to see and find.

Having missed the organised tours for the year, and feeling impatiently excited, we contacted the source himself, Mr Nakara Matemu, Head of Mineralogy, Petrology and Gemmology Services Department at the Southern and Eastern African Mineral Centre (SEAMIC) www.seamic.org. We hoped to arrange a private trip and avoid what seemed like a lengthy wait...

After a thoroughly pleasant and sparsely populated eight-hour flight Mr Nakara and the owner of the mine, Mr Najim Msenga, met us at the airport. Both were very welcoming and eager to wet our appetites for the forthcoming adventure to the Umbra Valley. After changing Sterling into Tanzanian Shillings, we left Dar-es-Salaam briskly behind and set upon a five hour 4 x 4 ride to the coastal town of Tanga, spending our first night in the comfort of the Nyinda Classic Hotel.



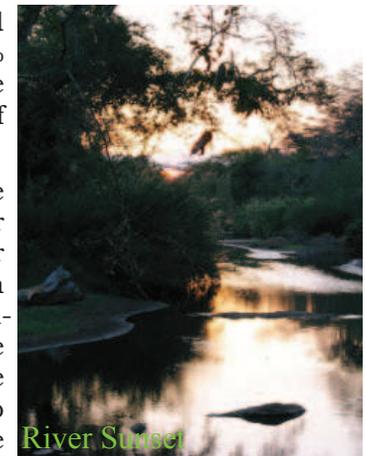
Guesthouse accommodation at the mine

the two-hour trip to the Amboni limestone caves where we were guided to nice examples of limestone and stalactites. Wasting no time at all, we were soon at the mining area of the Umbra Valley, and by 3 pm were suitably dressed to spend an afternoon digging in the dirt.

We welcomed the assistance of miners Nuru, Abbakari, Adam and John in digging the first two pits, and before our first intake of the African sunset, were rewarded with a healthy and quite surprising find of around 80 stones, 60% Garnet 40 % Sapphire with an average size of between 6-10 carats.

Our wake up call for the next morning was far more effective than our now redundant alarm clock, if not slightly unconventional and a little un-expected. A large tropical bird adjacent to the room heralded the beginning of the next day, in sync with the beautiful glowing orb steadily rising beyond the horizon. After breakfast, the same four miners that had guided us to our previous healthy find began digging two more pits, and larger than yesterdays. With the efficiency of a JCB, they soon returned 4 stones from one pit and 80 from the other. Being part of the dig ourselves, this served to emphasise the true nature of a gem 'safari' and the elements of luck involved.

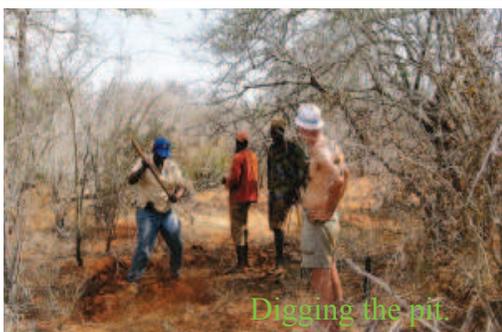
Although contented ourselves, the miners were clearly not too happy with the hand they had been dealt from these two pits. Fortunately their spirits soared later as the afternoon provided a healthier return for their earnest physical efforts, with a collection of ***two hundred and fifty seven*** stones of the abundant Garnet and



River Sunset



Mine Buildings



Digging the pit



Sieving the dirt



The following day, after procuring supplies, we left Tanga and set about

Sapphire. Afterwards, our helpful and enthusiastic guide Nakara showed us the unsurveyed surroundings of our camp, and escorted us down to the Umbra river to take in the staggeringly vast expanse of plains lying beyond.

On the way back we saw the recently constructed washing facilities that were available for use by Gem Safari members. These were able to sort dirt by the truck load and were a step up from our pits, but for an extra cost.



The Treasure - garnets, sapphires, and tour-

malines we have on the stones, we saw what resembled a chalky beach, with bright reflective white sandy grains contributing to the feelings of being in such searing heat. Happily we found twenty-six tourmalines with a chromium hue (green) to add to the diversity.

As we returned to the 4 x 4 we excitedly came across a group of Masai cattlemen who were eager to pose for the camera, proudly displaying their large and healthy her (fig. 8). We were all happy to experience our cultures overlap in the sharing of a beer or two late into the evening. On returning

to the camp, and sensing my intoxication from the local Kilimanjaro beer and vast array of beautiful local gems, Najim showed me an impressive selection of Sapphires, Tanzanite, Moonstone, Paraiba Tourmaline and more, available for appreciation and sale. Suffice to say it was a stroke of good fortune that there weren't any cash machines in the nearby vicinity, as my allocation of gem spending money had quickly evaporated.

The last day of the Gem Safari brought us more of the same, in terms of stones, with our finds consisting

The following day our time had come to bid farewell to the thoroughly friendly and helpful team at the Gem Stone Safari, and vowing to return in the future, Nakara escorted us to Tanga, where we stopped again in the familiar surroundings of the Nyinda Classic Hotel.



Masai herding their cattle

mainly of raspberry pink and blood red garnets. These ranged between 1.5 and 4.5 carats, with the odd smattering of rarer stones including a 29 carat garnet. Over the three days, our dig had amassed a total of 99 grams of sapphires with an average weight between 3 and 5 carat, and the occasional larger stone.

For the digging of the final two pits, our guide Nakara and the miners directed our attention to an area further along the river bank and, after a short ride, we arrived

at a piece of land with a much different colour to the vibrant red clay of the expansive plains that we were used to. Unaware of the implications that this change of



On safari with elephants

The next day we would finish our holiday by fulfilling a life long desire to immerse ourselves in the beauty of the Tarangire National Park – home to animals and scenery usually reserved for the 'Attenborough' documentary.



We plan to return to the Gemstone Safari Tanzania in 2011, any interested members of the Facet Cutters Guild who would like to join a party of up to 18 people, please register your interest with davidmaddison1@hotmail.com and check the www.free-form.ch/tanzania2 website for further details.

Details Concerning Gemstone Safaris in Tanzania

By Simon Zaletel

Editor's Comment: Simon kindly produced this article some months ago, but at the time I was unable to make use of it, and it has lain dormant as a result. The co-incidence of the foregoing article landing on my desk reminded me of its existence, and remarkably, I consider the two articles compliment one another. I must again offer my thanks and also apologise to Simon for my oversight.

Few countries in the world are able to boast as diverse a source of gem materials as Tanzania. Famous for being the only source of Tanzanite, Tanzania can also boast about being one of a handful of countries in which the rich green Tavorite garnet can be found. Beside these two rare and special finds, within Tanzania can also be found garnet of other varieties, chalcedony, amethyst (and a resulting citrine supply), ruby, sapphire of various colours, chrysoberyl, emerald, opal, tourmaline, topaz, beryl, spinel, zircon, spodomene and diamond.

A recent collaboration between the Swiss jewellery artist, Hubert Heldner and the Southern and Eastern African Mineral Centre (SEAMIC) has made it possible to experience a gemstone safari in the gem rich land that is Tanzania.

SEAMIC is an independent regional centre of knowledge and information for southern and eastern Africa. It was established in 1977, under the umbrella of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Its mission is to promote socio-economic and environmentally responsible mineral development in Africa. The founding member states were Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania. These countries were later joined by Angola, the Comoros, Uganda and Kenya.

Hubert Heldner is a Swiss jewellery artist. He is an accomplished faceter, gemstone carver and jeweller. He holds gemmology, jewellery design and faceting classes in his workshop in Montreux, Switzerland. Hubert has been engaged with SEAMIC since November 2005 training lapidary instructors who, in turn, are instructing others in the various SEAMIC member states.

The gemstone safari consists of a few days at the SEAMIC headquarters for an introduction to the local geology, mineralogy and gemmology. This is followed by a field trip to one of the Umba valley mines where you will spend a few days digging for gemstones. The final few days can be used to cut the gemstones you have found in the SEAMIC workshop. Two professional instructors will be available to assist you. Or, you may just lay on the beach for a few days enjoying the sea breeze and the coral reef at [Mbudya Island](#) Marine reserve.

The itinerary for the safari is:

1 day visit of SEAMIC headquarters and relax at the beach
2 days introduction to gemmology, mineralogy and geology
1 day of travelling and a visit of the Amboni Caves in Tanga
5 days of working in the Umba Valley mine

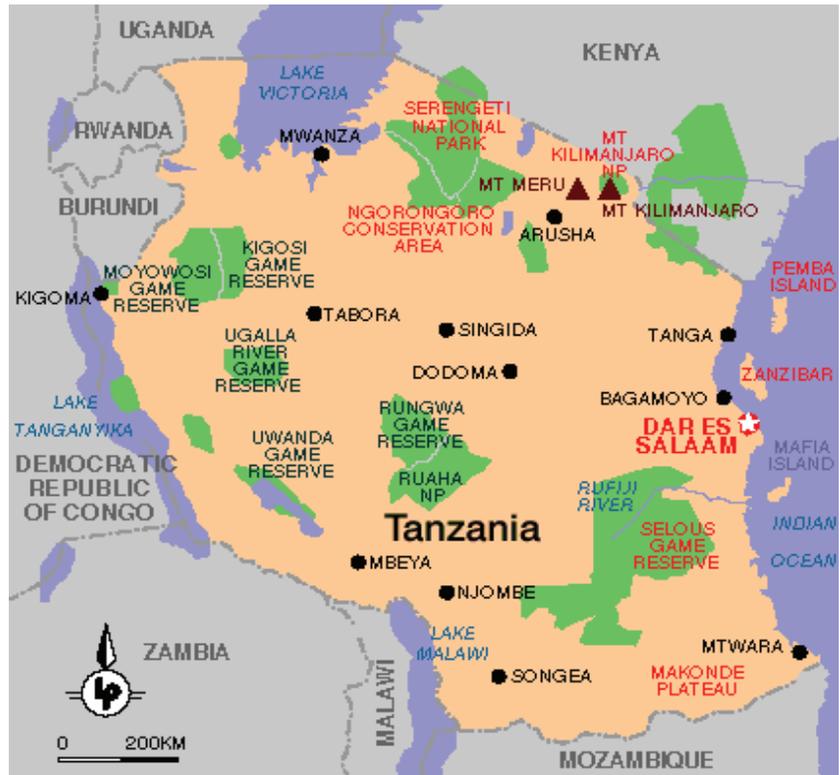
2 days resting

5 days lapidary workshop and/or enjoy the beach

17 days total

You will need to bring working clothes and appropriate shoes/boots for working in the mines, sunscreen and sunhat (average temperatures 24-29°C), a long sleeve shirt and mosquito repellent.

Expect to travel on rugged roads in 4 wheel drive



vehicles, some nights in a tent with only basic facilities. Quality hotels will be booked when available nearby.

The package price, US\$1980, covers the hotel with breakfast, lunch at SEAMIC, transfer to and from the hotel, travelling costs to and from the mines, 3 meals a day at the mines and includes the mining fees.

Not included is supper during the days at SEAMIC as well as lunch during the days off. The export taxes for your gemstones, plus a commission for preparation of the necessary papers, are also not included. You will need to make your own flight arrangements to Dar-es-Salaam.

All gemstones cut or rough, need export papers, prepared by a licensed broker. All rough gemstones are subject to a 5 % export tax. The value of the rough is assessed by a licensed stone broker at local prices.

The application fee for the papers is \$20. The commission for a broker is negotiable, at

All cut stones are exempt of export tax, but still require export papers.

This years' safari is already sold out. However, there is another safari planned for January 6th to 23rd 2010 and another being planned for January 2011.

Outside of the advertised safaris, a group of eight can specify a safari time and mining area of their choice. Here is a concise table of mining regions and minerals available in each:

Mining regions	Minerals
Umba Valley, Tanga	Sapphire, Garnet, Tourmaline, Spinel, Zircon
Morogoro	Sapphire, Ruby, Moonstone, Amethyst
Songea, Tunduru, Namtumbo	Sapphire, Chrysoberyl, Garnet, Aquamarine
Dodoma, Kigoma	Yellow cat's eye opal
Arusha	Tanzanite, Garnet, Tourmaline

To enter Tanzania and join the Gemstone Safari, a tourist visa is required.

A business visa (available at the same price) is strongly recommended if you plan to buy rough stones from licensed dealers in Tanzania.

It is advisable to obtain visa's in advance from Tanzania Embassies and High Commissions as some airlines may require it before allowing you to board. Passports must be valid for at least six months.

Malaria is common in Tanzania. Visitors are strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication commencing two weeks before travel. It is recommended to take vaccinations against hepatitis A, polio and typhoid.

Modern hospitals and chemists are available in Dar-es-Salaam, Arusha and other major urban centres.

The local currency is the Tanzanian Shilling (Tsh). Visitors can take in any amount of foreign currency, subject to declaration. Taking out of foreign currency is limited to the amount declared upon arrival. Import and export of Tanzanian currency is however prohibited. Major currencies such as US dollars and now the Euro and travellers cheques can be converted at major hotels, banks and forex bureaus in the main towns and tourist areas.

For further details about the safari visit the following web site:

<http://www.free-form.ch/tanzania2/gemstonesafari.html>

Contact Hubert Heldner with questions or for arrangements at:

Mr. Hubert Heldner
Avenue des Alpes 70
P.O.Box 1261
CH-1820 Montreux Switzerland
Phone: +41 21 963 89 77
Fax : +41 21 963 89 78

e-mail: artistes@free-form.ch

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Contact Steve Smith 0191236 2909

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