

IF THE SERENGETI HIGHWAY IS BUILT...

I have always wanted to travel, but never really did. It wasn't until meeting my wife that the desire started to become a reality. Her lifelong dream was to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and I had always had a dream to conquer a mountain at some time in my life. In 2007 we both traveled to Tanzania and climbed Kili. On February 15, 2007 at 11:50 am, my wife and I exchanged wedding vows on the summit. Three days later, we were on safari into the Serengeti. We spent a week in the Serengeti and Ngorogoro Crater. As photographers, it was another dream come true. A pride of 16 lions with cubs 10 feet from the car, twin brother Cheetahs stalking along a roadway, a Leopard and cub slinking through the grass, and of course who could forget the millions of Wildebeest roaming the land. We camped at a tented lodge at Ndutu and could hear the lions at night and even felt the thrill from the hyenas raiding the camp at night. One even sniffed my wife's head through the tent inspiring her for a bathroom run shortly after! We met great people, like our guide and a street artist from Moshi. It was the most amazing experience in our life and it changed our lives forever. Four years later, we have traveled around the world and visited seven of Africa's countries. Africa is the only place we have ever visited more than once. Over three separate visits we have been on safari through South Africa, up through Botswana, into Kenya's Mara, and back to Tanzania. Four years later, we now own a tour company and professionally sell our photography. Four years later we still keep in touch with our two friends in Moshi and have even helped put one through college. All of this started with a simple trip to the Serengeti.

If the proposed highway goes through, it will eliminate any reason for visiting the Serengeti. Our travels through Botswana and Zambia proved this. Botswana used to have a "great migration". But in 1985 in an effort to stop the hoof and mouth disease, they erected a fence to stop cattle movement. Shortly later, over half a million Wildebeest were found dead against the fences as it had cut off their migration route. Botswana's migration never recovered and Botswana is clearly not on the list of countries to visit to see the great migration. This year we visited Chobe National Park in Botswana. A new highway has been installed that cuts off the north from the south of the park. There are speed signs posted everywhere and some speed bumps here and there. There was even park rangers posted, just like Tanzania is promising. Yet, I was still able to film a shipping truck speed at over 20km/hr over the limit and then proceed to push its way through a family of elephants trying to cross. I photographed the truck missing one of the elephants by less than 5 feet. This also happened in front of a park ranger. Nothing was done. It proved that regardless of the desire to put in limits, limits will not be followed and not be enforced. In Zambia they are building a highway into South Luangwa National Park. While there, we were told that many of the animals that were seen along the drive, are no longer seen anymore. People have built more houses, plowed more land, and vehicle traffic has doubled...and it's not even finished yet.

It is flat out idiotic to think any commercial road through the Serengeti would not alter the wildlife and the great migration. If the great migration was altered, like Botswana, it would not recover. The Wildebeest would stop their numbers and the predators would leave soon after. Any reason for going to the Serengeti "to see incredible wildlife", would cease. As a tour operator, right now the top recommended circuit for safari goers is the Manyara/Ngorogoro/Serengeti circuit. With no great migration and no predators, I would not recommend Tanzania to first-time safari tourists anymore.

There would be too many other circuits in surrounding countries that would yield better bang for the buck. A circuit through Botswana or Kenya would become the better recommendations.

Any commercial road, dirt or otherwise, through the Serengeti would eliminate the reason to visit the Serengeti and push Tanzania down on the preferred list of countries to visit for safari. You cannot have a river, build a dam, and expect life to go unaffected.

It could take several years to see the effects, but nonetheless the effects will happen and those effects would destroy the whole idea of why visiting the Serengeti is a premiere world destination.

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