

A Different Kind of Christmas...

On the Kenya Coast in the 1980's

"We haven't got a Christmas Tree!" someone remarked loudly. We were a large group of a dozen or more, family and friends, sheltering from the midday sun in the shade of the verandah at the family holiday home at Kilifi Creek on the Kenya Coast - almost on the equator. The temperatures varied little throughout the day, from the low to the high 80's, and it was Christmas Eve.



had also lived in harmony with a hive of bees at the top of the trees; we never bothered them, nor they us. But not this Christmas! It must have been the rustle of the grass skirt that upset them because suddenly the note of their buzzing went up several tones and the bees started to fly down to attack us. We yelled a warning to the others who had not yet arrived at the table and fled for the

safety of the house. Camilla carried Claire, I carried Tim and Peter, Andrew's dad, ran out to sweep him up and to safety. Fortunately Peter wasn't stung as he is allergic to bee stings - and he had no antidote - not funny.

There are no conifers at Kilifi, so two of us men, armed with a machete and accompanied by the youngsters (all under 10), set out to cut a suitable bush as a substitute Christmas tree. We found one and brought it home to be 'planted' in sand in a bucket on the verandah. The mums and girls set about decorating it - we had brought with us from England the necessary baubles. It soon looked just the job with presents all stacked up beneath.

It Must have been the Grass Skirt

Christmas Day was no different from any other, really. We all awoke as the sun rose. Camilla found in her stocking a very snazzy grass skirt, which she put on before going out to the dining tables for breakfast. These were situated under a group of shady trees between the house and the cliff edge overlooking the creek. We always ate here. For several years we

A Ghostly Sight

My Mother then appeared to review the situation and decided she had to inspect the dining area. So she put up an umbrella, draped a mosquito net over it, and marched out into the face of the bees like some ethereal ghost - an extraordinary sight! She gleaned nothing new other than that the bees had control and we would have to enjoy our festive meal elsewhere.

Our dinner that evening was eaten round the table, moved to the car park behind the house! It didn't spoil our Christmas but it was very different to say the least.

Hamish Harvey