

The BURNING of AFRICA

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #18 —

If you like to set fires and burn things up, you're called a pyromaniac – except perhaps in Africa. There, if you burn your thumb flicking matches off the striker strip of a match box and set fire to thousands of acres of tall grass, you're just part of the team; because the annual burning of the grass is one of the grandest side shows of a safari, especially for early season hunters in East Africa.

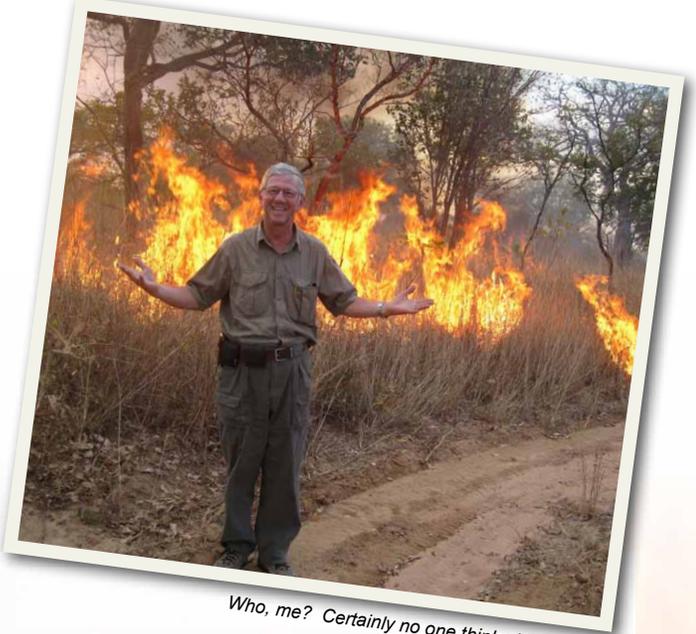
The rainy season generally comes in late December and runs through March. This is also the hottest time of the year and the grass grows like crazy till the dry season comes. The road crews start the burning process long before the hunting season

opens, but generally the grass is too green to burn completely and when the first hunters arrive in July, the burning process continues on up

to October – after which the law prohibits further burning as the fires get so hot they can damage the trees.

There are two reasons to burn the grass, first, within a few days of burning, green sprouts come back from the roots and provide a welcome source of fresh grass for all the grazing animals, second it's a lot easier to see and track animals after the grass is burned. Interestingly, the fires die out in the cool dampness of the evening air.

Sometimes we set the grass on fire as we walk back to the car after losing an elephant or buffalo track, or finding a 'non-shooter' at the end of the track. Other



Who, me? Certainly no one thinks I lit this fire!

times we might drive down the dirt roads flicking out matches as we go. We lit this particular fire in the early afternoon, as we left our lunch tree to head out for the afternoon hunt. We were at the intersection of two dirt roads, and none of the four quadrants had been burned, so today we burned the first one.

“... one of the grandest side shows...”

There is one serious danger when burning and that is the wind. It can shift without warning and you go from upwind to downwind in a matter of seconds. I know of one safari car, complete with guns, that was burned up when the wind unexpectedly changed.

I'm not a pyromaniac, but burning the tall grass of Africa is one of the lasting memories of my Safaris there.

Midway USA

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Baraini Camp
Selous Game Reserve
Tanzania, Africa
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They call it elephant grass, because it's tall enough to hide an elephant.



Yes, this is a big fire, but it burns very quickly and doesn't seem to harm the trees – except the dead ones.