

JACK and the BEANSTALK

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #71 —

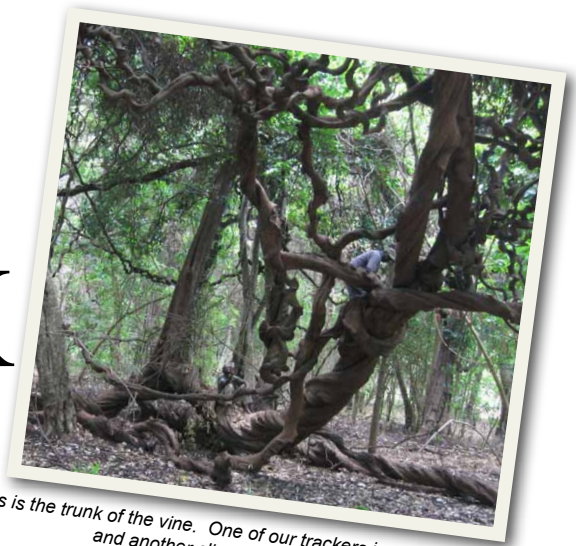
Everyone knows the fairy tale about Jack and the Beanstalk; but, let me tell you that I have been there and actually seen and touched the beanstalk -- and no longer believe it to be a fairy tale. Jack didn't actually cut it down; or if he did, it grew back -- because today it's alive and well -- in Africa.

We left a dry riverbed and drove into the small circle of trees nearby, to have lunch. There it was -- this enormous vine; the first thing that came to my mind was the story of Jack and the Beanstalk, as this was larger than any vine I could ever imagine. **Surreal** is a word that a country boy from Missouri wouldn't find opportunity to use very often, but I used it on this occasion. It means something like: 'this can't be real', 'it's beyond logic', 'beyond anything my mind can comprehend'. The

main arms of the vine were hanging on the trees under the canopy, sometimes spanning 150-200 feet between supports -- impossible!

There was no ground cover in this forest, as the canopy was very thick during the growing season -- shutting out the sunlight; and the mature trees were sparse inside, making it easy to see the multi-trunked base of the giant vine about 40 yards from where we parked the safari car.

This patch of forest was perhaps 250 yards in diameter; walking around under the canopy, the vine extended in every direction -- all the way to the top and edges of this



This is the trunk of the vine. One of our trackers is on the ground and another climbing. This is one enormous vine.

small circle of trees; and the total mass of trunks and arms must be some kind of a world record. The PH told me they discovered the vine while tracking an elephant through this small forest a couple of years back. It was now their favorite lunch place when hunting in this area.

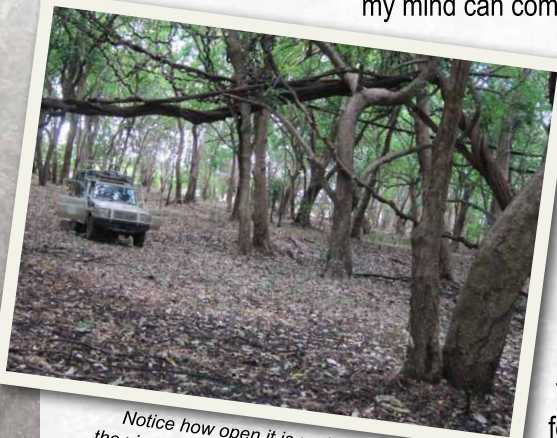
We had lunch and rested for a couple of

"...it's beyond logic.."

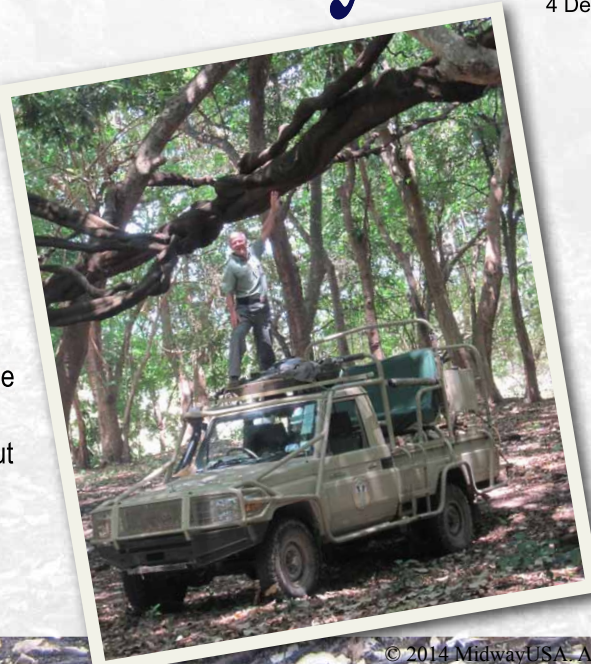
hours before departing the forest and hunting our way back toward camp. During that time, I began to understand; this was Africa and Jack's beanstalk had obviously been there for a long, long time. It had outlived the trees that it had grown on in its early years and was now supported by the second or possibly even a third generation of trees. Jack may be long gone, but his beanstalk is still there.



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4 December 2011



Notice how open it is under the canopy and how the vines are mostly unsupported. The safari car is parked directly under the vine.



This picture provides a good perspective; remember, I am 40 yards from the trunk of the vine.