AN EAST AFRICAN JOURNEY

HOSTED BY CAMELLIA

Charles and Elizabeth Handy
Introduction

In November 2012 we visited the Camellia companies in East Africa by the kind invitation of Malcolm Perkins, the Chairman of Camellia Plc.
Camellia Plc is a very special company, a model of enlightened capitalism. It is, more accurately, a group of companies, spread around the world, employing, in total 73,000 people. Camellia is one of the largest private tea producers in the world but it also engages in other forms of agriculture. In addition it owns a private bank and some engineering and distribution businesses. We have often thought that Camellia’s structure, its values and its culture, could be a model for other businesses.

We had earlier visited the Camellia properties in India and Bangladesh and had recorded our visit in a book.

This invitation offered us a chance to see more of the work of this unusual company. Eastern Produce is the Camellia subsidiary in Africa and is one of the largest companies in the Group with properties in Kenya, Malawi and South Africa. Eastern Produce, we learnt, had its origins in 19th century Sri Lanka, coming to Kenya in 1948 and Malawi in 1955. In 1999 it became a wholly owned subsidiary of the Camellia Group.
We are Elizabeth and Charles Handy. Elizabeth is a portrait photographer with several books and many exhibitions to her name. Charles is the author of best-selling books on management and the future shape of work.
Camellia is one of the largest private tea companies in the world, but we were going to see more than tea over the following two weeks, for Eastern Produce also grows avocados, pineapples and macadamia bushes in Kakuzi near Nairobi and in Malawi above Blantyre.

We are hugely grateful to all our hosts along the way but particularly to Graham Mclean, the overall manager of Eastern Produce, and his wife Lucy, who looked after us so well at the Kakuzi estate, near Nairobi.
“Every morning when I wake up and look at this view I think how lucky I am to be living in this beautiful place and to be going out to do the work I love.”
It was Chris Flowers speaking, the Operations Director of Eastern Produce and in charge of the Nandi Hills tea estates. We were his fortunate guests, on the first leg of our East African Journey through Camellia country.

Lucky are they that spend their lives in tea. Acres of the camellia plant make a sea of brilliant green, dotted with the occasional tree but no intrusive buildings. Tea grows best in the hills, at around 1,500 metres, where there are hot rainy summers, cool winters and a pollution-free environment. The best climate for tea is also, by the luck of nature, good for humans; and the views are always beautiful.
Eastern Produce owns 3,649 hectares of tea in Nandi and manages a further 1,236 for other owners, employing 10,000 workers at peak times, most of them pluckers. It’s big business.
Plucking tea is a skilled job. Only the top flush is plucked – two leaves and a bud. Not easy for us when we tried, but the pluckers do it fast, almost instinctively. They have to be fast because they are paid by the weight that they pluck.
The picked leaves are then transported to the factory. Tea factories are not the most beautiful of places, but efficiency and cleanliness trump aesthetics in the factory. We found it sad in a way to see the shimmering green tea leaves dried, rolled and transformed, as they passed down the conveyor process, into the almost black powder that ends up in our tea bags. Instead we could only admire the care and attention given to the process by all involved. For the final product to be as good as it can be a devoted attention to detail is needed at every stage.

Jacob Katak
is the Production Director at Nandi
Just to make sure, the managers and supervisors taste the tea, constantly. We tried to follow their example but without success. They all tasted the same to us.

There is nothing like experience.

They had it. We didn’t.
The tea is then sent to Mombasa where the tea auctions are located. 99% of the tea is exported, some to the UK but most, to our surprise, to Egypt and Pakistan.

There are four factories at Nandi, each fuelled by huge furnaces which burn eucalyptus wood. Tea grows all the year round, although more plentifully when the rains come, so most of the factories are working all day every day.
We were escorted around the Nandi estates by the two Divisional Managers.

We had our mid-morning cup of tea here, in the park.

Simon Davies (Gen. Manager West)  David Siele (Gen. Manager East)
As they described their responsibilities it became clear that running a tea estate is much more than managing a business. It is more like being the mayor of a small town. You are responsible for the lives of all those who work and live here, and for their families. Eastern Produce provides houses for more than half of their workers.
Each house has a small garden. The workers are encouraged to grow their own vegetables and can, if well done, grow enough to be self-sufficient in vegetables, particularly if they follow the horticultural advice they are given. As far as it is possible, self-sufficiency is built into the whole system.

People not only need to be fed, they also need to be kept healthy. Each Division has its own Clinic, with lists of the best plants to grow posted on the walls, along with advice on healthy living and family planning. The chart shows how much protein, calcium etc. are contained in each type of vegetable.
## Nutritional Value of African Vegetables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Amaranthine</th>
<th>Spinach</th>
<th>Avocado</th>
<th>Cabbage</th>
<th>Carrot</th>
<th>Potato</th>
<th>Radish</th>
<th>Role of Nutrients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Helps build blood, enhance bone growth, regenerate cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Content (%)</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>Helps healthy body function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories (kcal)</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrate (g)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibre (g)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicarbonate (mg)</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium (mg)</td>
<td>440.0</td>
<td>288.0</td>
<td>442.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphorus (mg)</td>
<td>103.0</td>
<td>101.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niacin (mg)</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A (IU)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C (mg)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Provides energy for energy needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then the children must be educated. The company provides primary education for all its workers’ families. Four children are seen here enjoying a break in the water garden.

Will these be some of the workers of the future? If so they are likely to be better educated than their parents and may well want better jobs. Is this a challenge, or an opportunity for the management of the future?

Of course, healthy and happy workers are more likely to be good workers but the tea business is still a business. It must be difficult to find the right balance between the mayoral responsibilities for the community and the requirements of the business. This is the challenge that faces all businesses but it is more in your face on the tea estates. Here it was clear that social responsibility and business efficiency were inextricably intertwined. You could not envisage one without the other.
It isn’t always easy. An efficient business will always be looking for ways to reduce costs. Tea is a labour intensive business. Nandi employs 10,000 workers at peak times, most of them pluckers. Mechanical plucking, as used, for instance in the wine industry, would reduce the need for labour. The 10,000 might be reduced by half or more if machines did the plucking. Nandi is experimenting quietly with one system.
If, therefore, this machine were to be introduced across the whole estate it might put up to 5,000 people out of work. That is 5,000 families with little prospect of work outside the estate. The scene opposite would then look very different. No city mayor would like to have that happen in their community. Nor would Eastern Produce. If, however, the labour costs rise faster than the auction prices for the tea, then the business pressures will bear down on the social responsibility. The hope must be that Kenya’s fast growing economy will provide enough new jobs in new enterprises to fill the gap.

We left Nandi Hills to fly down to Nairobi. We were sad to leave such a beautiful place, such welcoming people and such an interesting example of enlightened business practice.
Kakuzi

Kakuzi is a large farm, or, to be precise, a primary agriculture production business. It lies 65km North East of Nairobi and now covers over 14,000 hectares, half of which is given over to grazing for some 4,000 cattle.
The principal agricultural products of Kakuzi are avocados, mainly the dark-skinned Hass variety, and pineapples. Both are seasonal crops. The temperate climate of Kakuzi is ideally suited to avocado production. The avocados grow tall and must be tricky to harvest.

We were surprised to learn that avocados are not popular in Kenya. 75% of the production is exported. Kakuzi’s Hass avocados are particularly popular in the EU. Europeans, it seems, like the nutty flavour and eating quality.

Pineapples, on the other hand, are popular locally. 95% are sold in Kenya out of a total crop of 1,700 tons. That’s a lot of pineapples.
Pineapples are surrounded by sharp spikes. Thick gloves and protective clothing are essential. We tried, and rather quickly decided that we should leave it to the pickers who made it look easy.

Kakuzi has recently started to establish its own Macadamia orchards to replace the coffee plantings which were discontinued in 2004. The first step is to clone new seedlings from trees brought over from its orchards in Malawi.
Harry Bowman is the Group Manager for Macadamia
Harry is very pleased with the new de-husking plant which has just been built in the old buildings that once processed the coffee.

Macadamia nuts are enclosed within both a husk and a shell. At a later stage a shell-cracking machine will be installed but, as we were to see in Malawi, this is a major operation.
It all starts here, in the Nursery, where avocado and macadamia seedling are raised...
...under the watchful eye of Richard Collins, Graham Mclean and their staff.
It is aptly called the Nursery because these little babies represent the future of Kakuzi. As with humans their beginnings shape their ends.

We must not forget the Forestry, 1,366 hectares of it, mostly eucalyptus, of which 366 hectares are non-commercial, grown to protect the land.
KAKUZI LIMITED
LIVESTOCK + FORESTRY OFFICES
NO UNAUTHORIZED LORRIES PLEASE
The felled trees go to a wood-processing yard where the timber and poles are treated. These are made into planks or products for sale such as gates, trellis work, door frames, tables and chairs. The yard also produces charcoal and pallets for fresh fruit exports.

It needs strong arms, and tough bicycles.
It needs strong arms, and tough bicycles.
And careful supervision, by the Manager, Joel Kieti, because it can be hazardous work.
We left Kakuzi impressed by the variety of the work that they do. Of course, variety builds security, if one product has a down year others may be thriving. But there can’t be many a quiet moment, even in the close season when we visited. Luckily for Graham Mclean, the manager, there is his garden, when he has the time to sit there.

With our thanks again to Graham and all his managers
Next stop Malawi

A flight to Lilongwe, the capital, then a five hour drive to the Eastern Produce properties which lie South and South West of Blantyre, in the Thyolo and Mulanje Districts.
Eastern Produce has 5,696 hectares under tea in Malawi, more than Nandi in Kenya. There are also 1,415 hectares of macadamia and 2,345 hectares of eucalyptus.

The whole property is 40 miles long by 10 miles wide at its farthest points. Rick spends a lot of time in the car. The property is spectacularly beautiful, particularly the area with Mount Mulanje as a backcloth.

There we were escorted by the General Manager, Rick Tilley, and some of his managers, who were wonderfully generous with their time and information.
Tea production, we were beginning to realise, is the same, be it in Kenya or Malawi.

We now knew what to expect.

First, the tea is plucked, weighed, and then taken to a factory. There are five of these on the Malawi Estates, some bigger than others, some newer, but all working in the same way.
Workers here enjoy the same benefits as those in the Nandi Hills. The same schools, with diligent students.

The same houses that we found in Nandi, each with their own vegetable garden.
And the same health clinics.

Eastern Produce insists on the same standards throughout its properties.
Here, too, we found great plantations of eucalyptus to fire the boilers, as in the Nandi Hills.
But also an assortment of other lovely trees.
Eastern Produce is, we discovered, the largest producer of macadamia nuts in Malawi.

This is one of their macadamia orchards.

We had seen, in Kakuzi, how the nuts were de-husked once they were picked.

Now Andrew Thorneycroft, the Assistant General Manager of Macadamia Production, was going to show us the factory in which they break the nut free of its very tough shell. Only pigs and monkeys, we were told, have teeth sharp enough to break them.
We did, however, see the changing room for the women who work there. When they check in for work the women take off all their day clothes, have a hot shower and put on clean work clothing. At the end of their shift they come out to find a hot shower and their own clothes, all freshly laundered awaiting them. It must be some compensation for a long shift in the noisy plant.

Macadamia nuts were known to us, in Europe, as the accompaniment of pre-dinner drinks, but their main use is in cosmetics and confectionery, where their creamy taste is popular, particularly in Japan. Because they are destined for the food industry, hygiene and spotless cleanliness are essential in the production process. We were there in the off season so did not see the work in process. Perhaps we were lucky because we were told that it can be exceedingly noisy.
Without a battery of pigs to crack the nuts they are cracked by machine, leaving the women workers to pick the nuts out of the cracked shells as they go past on a belt. It is a task that requires nimble fingers and intense concentration – for hours on end. The nuts are then sorted into different sizes and qualities. This is how they look.
There can be few homes with such an idyllic outlook.

Rick and his wife, Helen, very kindly entertained us to lunch in their home.
There can be few homes with such an idyllic outlook.
We were sad to see the last of Mulanje, and of Malawi as we headed back to Britain, carrying with us warm memories of all that we saw, but particularly of the people we met.
Eastern Produce, we now knew, was more than an agricultural business, it was a community, a community with a purpose, proud of what it did and how it did it. It was, for us, a pleasure and a privilege to have been able to visit that community, although for far too short a time.

Back in London we have our packet of Kenyan and Malawan tea to remind us of the hospitality we enjoyed.
Acknowledgements

We owe a great debt of gratitude to Malcolm Perkins, the Chairman of Camellia who generously invited us to visit the Group’s properties in Kenya and Malawi, and to all the managers in these places who looked after us so generously. Our trip was an education as well as a pleasure.

We are also indebted to Gill Dexter and Graham, her husband, who turned our words and photographs into this work of art with their design of the book.