

Aritsans

Words and pictures by Phil Hill

MUKURO DISPENSARY
PROJECT
LOWER SUNA LOC.

Makuru Hill, Western Kenya.

Down a rocky, rutted, hardly used trail, an aging Land-Cruiser creeks and violently judders its way as our guide Aleshia navigates precariously through the tough terrain, towards the old mine site at Macalder, in the South Western Nyanza region of Kenya. Entering the site a man and woman are busy working next to an imposing derelict concrete structure, left behind from the days this was a vast copper mine, the man digs as the woman takes the soil, pouring it into a make-shift sluice. Shut down in the Sixties, all that remains of the mine are a few foundations and vast open shafts serving as ventilation for the underground network of tunnels. Much more domi-

nant still is the tailings dam, towering piles of waste material; left over's from the excavations, still full of precious minerals that were unable to be extracted at the time, due to technology and economic viability. At its peak, the Macalder area produced around 1 million ounces of gold between 1920 and 1950 . Children play bare-footed between the mounds, stained yellow from sulphur with air thick with its distinct heavy smell, chemicals leech out into standing water from recent rains, turning blood red, caused by 'acid mine drainage' a process resulting in parts of the nearby river Migori to record PH levels of 3-1 acidity, hugely affecting much of the wildlife



Using water from a recent downpour locals sift the soil using make-shift sluices.



Acid Mine Drainage, leeching from the tailings dam of Macalder.

that lives there.

The 4x4 can only be driven so far, leaving it next to the ruins we walk the rest of the way. In a scene reminiscent of Sebastiao Salgado's workers series, I witness what is a hive of activity. At the entrance to a large cave a man gestures at us to come over, on the whole everyone seems happy for us to wander around. We walk over, the man who shows us a piece of Gosan stone, optimistic, he hopes it contains enough gold to justify his efforts, "about 2 ounces" he tells Aleshia who then translates it back to me. There are around 200-recorded Artisan prospects in the Macalder area, they work

all hours the sun allows, doubling their efforts after any rain, the water makes it easier to sift the soil.

Back in the car, towards camp, we make a stop off at a bore mill, a fairly common sight along this stretch of road and an important part of the gold extraction process. Rocks and soil taken from Macalder are brought to one of the many mills on the backs of mules to be crushed and then panned. A man sits by a concrete pool as he takes a small amount of the crushed material into a metal dish containing liquid Mercury, he no trouble handling this extremely harmful substance, swirling it around in the pan.



Artisan Miner, Macalder



Artisan Miners, Macalder

Mercury binds the gold together separating it from the rest of the soil. Using a piece of muslin cloth he takes the panned gold and draws it between his fingers, draining off the mercury, I watch as it drips back into the dish. Opening up the muslin, he then tips the contents into his hand to show me, the result is anticlimactic. Expecting to see a fresh, glistening, golden nugget, I am presented with a small, dull, silver lump of metal. A result of the mercury processing I am told. It is a monumental effort for a relatively small amount of gold, Grasburg open pit in Indonesia, the largest gold mine in the world, produced 58,474,392 grams of gold in 2006 , the Artisans are lucky if they

get a few. Most of the profit goes to the wholesale middleman with Western connections, getting the gold to the market place. Many people not realizing where their expensive jewelry begins.

There has been a renewed interest in the Migori Greenstone Belt that Macalder is a part. Australian company Goldplat has just been granted a lease to mine nearby in Narok County , a first for Kenya, hoping to add to the 74 million US dollars it made in the sale of gold last year. Macalder too is beginning to increase its activity; London based company Red Rock



Mercury is used to bind the gold dust together



Mercury Refined gold, Appearing dull as a result of the mercury



Artisan Miner, digs the potentially mineral rich soil

Resources plans to re-process the tailings increasing the recovery rate of the minerals within, this under the condition that the environmental concerns are met.

Fresh drilling is also taking place all over the site, it all looks very promising. Geologists carefully study every drill core samples looking for mineralization, and signs of the gold in the rock. In this industry these are the kind of ventures that can make or break a smaller company. Macalder has seen this before, it was built because of the mine, and brought with it infrastructure, Jobs for the local people a huge benefit for the surrounding area.

Regardless of what western countries do in Africa, life will continue as it always does in Western Kenya.

View article on my blog:

<http://www.philhillphotography.co.uk/blog/archives/2319>

Images available for license via my archive:

<http://philhillphotography.photoshelter.com/gallery/Artisans/G0000PP-FIA8HVTzQ/>



MG_4600.jpg



MG_4602.jpg



MG_4605.jpg



MG_4607.jpg



MG_4608.jpg



MG_4611.jpg



MG_4612.jpg



MG_4615.jpg



MG_4616.jpg



MG_4617.jpg



MG_4619.jpg



MG_4620.jpg



MG_4621.jpg



MG_4622.jpg



MG_4623.jpg



_MG_4624.jpg



MG_4635.jpg



MG_4636.jpg



_MG_4642.jpg



_MG_4648.jpg



_MG_4651.jpg



_MG_4660.jpg

Contact Sheets



MG_3572.jpg



MG_3924.jpg



MG_3943.jpg



_MG_3947.jpg



_MG_3948.jpg



MG_3976.jpg



_MG_3981.jpg



_MG_3992.jpg



MG_3995.jpg



MG_3998.jpg



MG_4002.jpg



MG_4003.jpg



MG_4065.jpg



MG_4066.jpg



MG_4068.jpg



MG_4071.jpg



MG_4073.jpg



MG_4074.jpg



MG_4081.jpg



MG_4088.jpg



_MG_4091.jpg



_MG_4298.jpg



_MG_4299.jpg



_MG_4300.jpg



MG_4313.jpg



MG_4314.jpg



_MG_4315.jpg



_MG_4321.jpg



MG_4322.jpg



_MG_4325.jpg



_MG_4327.jpg



MG_4329.jpg



_MG_4345.jpg



MG_4346.jpg



MG_4347.jpg



MG_4349.jpg



MG_4351.jpg



MG_4370.jpg



MG_4378.jpg



MG_4379.jpg



MG_4386.jpg



MG_4388.jpg



MG_4394.jpg



MG_4400.jpg



_MG_4405.jpg



_MG_4406.jpg



_MG_4407.jpg



_MG_4408.jpg



MG_4413.jpg



MG_4416.jpg



MG_4417.jpg



MG_4419.jpg



MG_4420.jpg



MG_4421.jpg



MG_4423.jpg



MG_4427.jpg



MG_4432.jpg



MG_4433.jpg



MG_4434.jpg



MG_4436.jpg



MG_4440.jpg



MG_4441.jpg



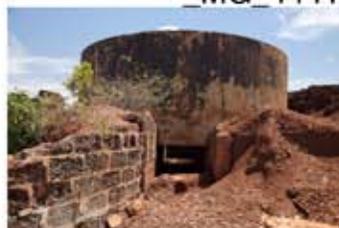
MG_4442.jpg



MG_4443.jpg



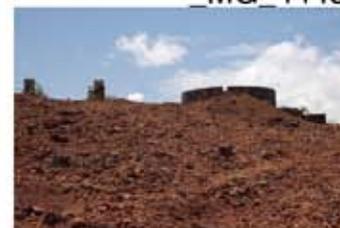
MG_4444.jpg



MG_4449.jpg



MG_4453.jpg



MG_4459.jpg



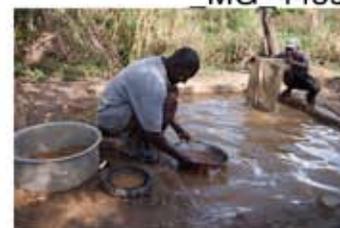
MG_4460.jpg



MG_4462.jpg



MG_4463.jpg



MG_4598.jpg



MG_4600.jpg



MG_4602.jpg



MG_4605.jpg



MG_4607.jpg



MG_4608.jpg



MG_4611.jpg



MG_4612.jpg



MG_4615.jpg



MG_4616.jpg



MG_4617.jpg



MG_4619.jpg



MG_4620.jpg



MG_4621.jpg



MG_4622.jpg



MG_4623.jpg



_MG_4624.jpg



MG_4635.jpg



MG_4636.jpg



_MG_4642.jpg



_MG_4648.jpg



_MG_4651.jpg



_MG_4660.jpg

Phil Hill Photography

www.philhillphotography.com

philhill@philhillphotography.com

+61 (0) 488 792 560

