

AMBOSELI TRUST FOR ELEPHANTS

Remembering Amboseli's Iconic Elephant

Greetings!

This is a special edition of the newsletter to bring you some sad news. It was posted on ATE's social media but I know some of you don't use it. The next newsletter won't be out until the end of March, but I did not want to wait until then to let you know.

The amazing, iconic, magnificent male Tim died on Wednesday the 5th of February. He was 51 years old. It was a tragedy for so many. First, for his elephant buddies who adored him, followed him and learned from him. Then for all the rest of us who cared about him: for us at ATE who have known him for 46 years; for Kenya, the Kenya Wildlife Service and Amboseli National Park, all of which profited from the tourists who came to see Tim; for Big Life and the other conservation organizations that worked so hard to keep him safe; for the local community who knew Tim well because he spent the majority of his time outside the Park on community land. Finally, his passing was a loss to the whole world, because he was a rare, spectacular specimen of a male elephant with his tall stature and his huge sweeping tusks.

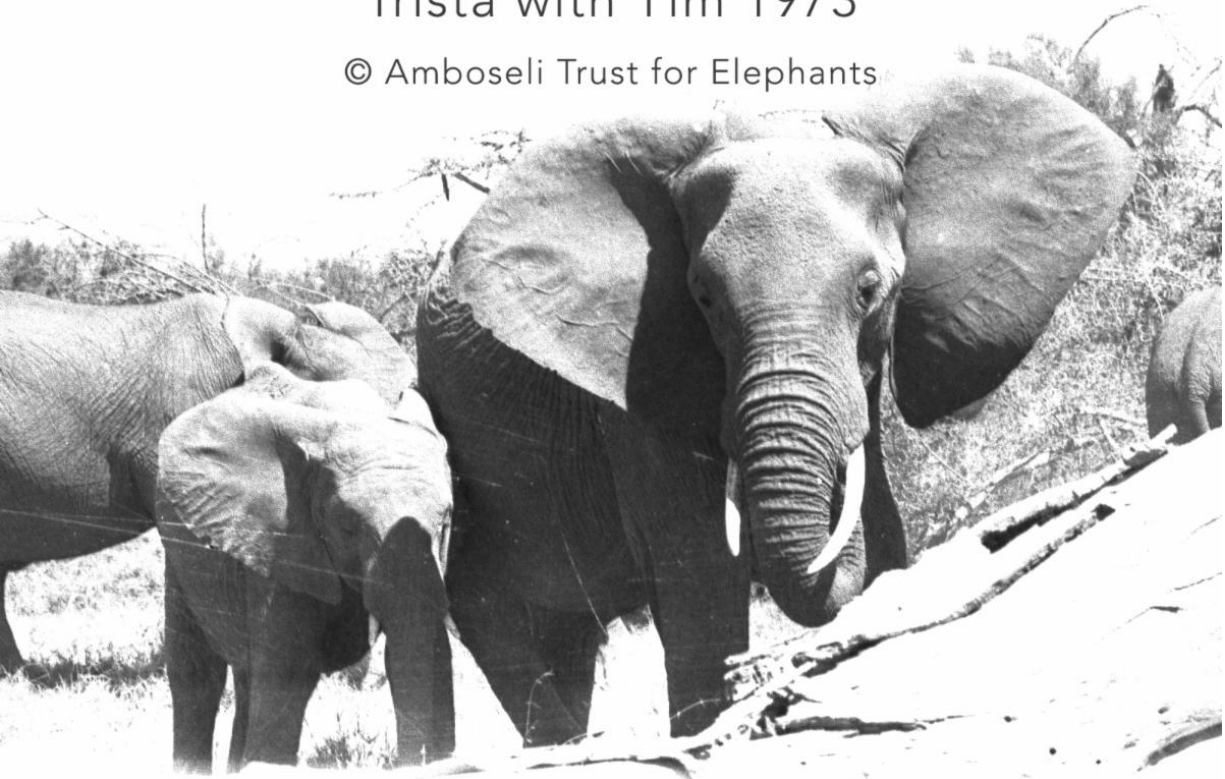
The KWS vet came and did a postmortem and concluded that Tim died of a twisted gut. Fifty one is not very old for an elephant. He might have lived another 10 years. It's hard to even imagine what his tusks would have looked like. The largest tusks ever recorded, 224 and 226 lbs., came from an elephant who was shot on the northern slopes of Kilimanjaro in the late 19th century. That would make the bull part of the Amboseli population. We believe his genes have been passed down to the current population. Tim's tusks weighed 160 and 134 lbs.

I first met Tim on 9 September 1973. He was with his mother and his family in one of the woodland areas of Amboseli called Ol Tukai Orok, which means "place of the dark palms" in Maa, the language of the local Maasai people. Tim wasn't yet named at that point. After a few more sightings I designated the family he belonged to as the TD family. It was led by an old female with long

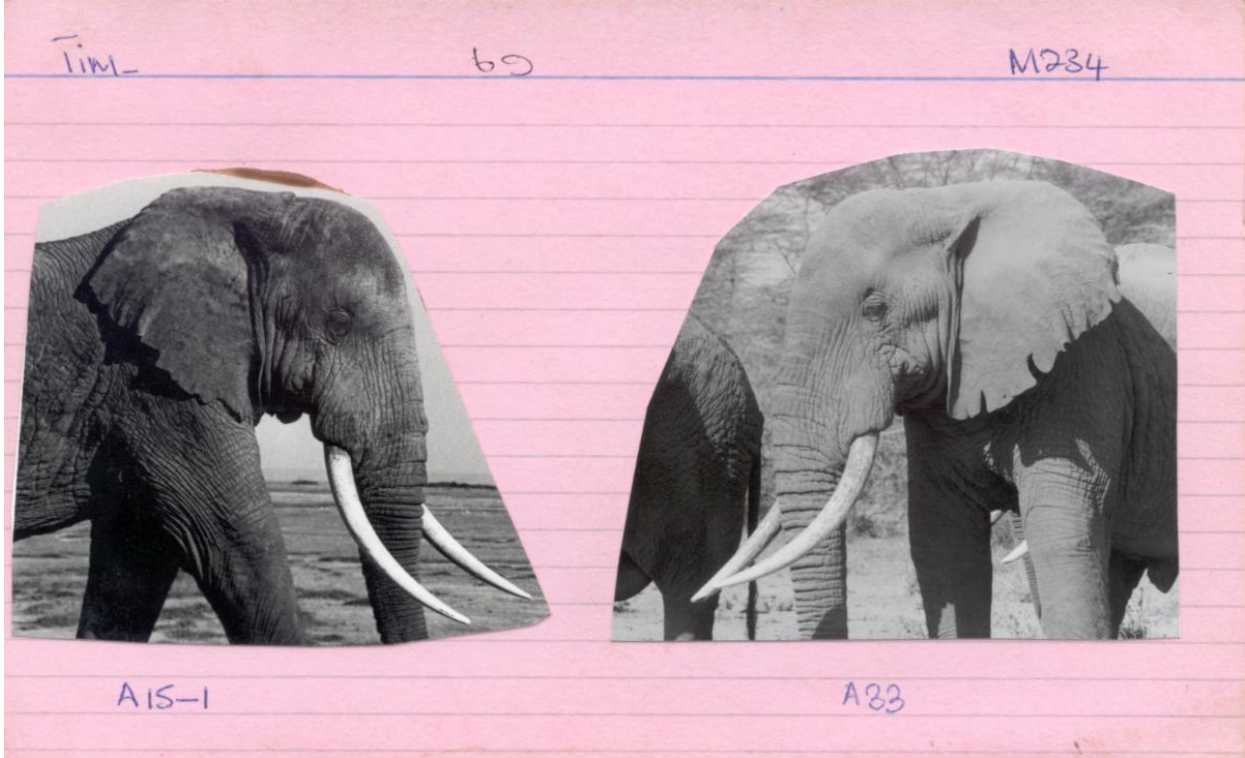
straight tusks. I called her Teresia. She had a two-year-old calf, and a second female, whom I called Trista, had a four-year-old. This four-year-old was eventually named Tim. The two-year-old was named Tolstoy. I was fairly sure Trista was Teresia's daughter which made Tim her grandson and Tolstoy was actually Tim's uncle even though he was younger.

Trista with Tim 1973

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Over the next years I watched Tim grow and become more independent. His mother Trista died in 1977 of unknown causes. At the time Tim was eight years old, well beyond weaning, but still dependent on his mother for care and protection, and it was a serious loss for him. Fortunately, he continued to be cared for within the family. However, as all young males do, Tim struck out on his own when he was about 15 years old in early 1984. It was a difficult time to leave his family because in 1984 there was a terrible drought in Amboseli. Many elephants died including, Tim's grandmother, Teresia, who sadly was speared as a result of increased competition between pastoralists and elephants for the dwindling vegetation. As a young male on his own, Tim had to find those last patches of food and avoid coming into contact with the Maasai and their livestock. It was a dangerous period but he got through it. I suspect he stuck with some of the older males who taught him where to go and how to stay safe.



Tim's ID card with photos from 1994 when he was 25 years old

Once the drought was over in 1985, Tim still had a lot of growing and learning to do. At 16 years old he wasn't even as tall as the largest females. Slowly over the years he continued to develop socially and physically. He had to learn all the necessary skills for being a successful male. When he was 27 years old he came into musth for the first time and continued to do so almost every year for the rest of his life. Musth is a period of raised hormone levels when dominance interactions with other males and the pursuit of females occurs. At first males of this age are only in musth for a short time, but as they get older and bigger (males grow throughout their lifetime) they might be in musth for three months each year.

Older bulls tend to choose an area that is their "bull area" or their temporary retirement area when they are not in musth. Tim chose the Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary. Over the years as more and more people moved into the area to farm, Tim learned to enjoy eating the crops grown next to the Sanctuary and it got him into trouble several times. He was speared at least three times and had to be treated and he also got completely mired in mud and had to be rescued.



Tim in full musth in 2013



Tim with his buddies including his Uncle Tolstoy to his left; they will miss him



Taking time off to have a cooling mud wallow

When it was clear that Tim was an outstanding male elephant, carrying glorious tusks, and it was also evident that he was a problem for local farmers, he was collared so that he could be followed. In this way, both the farms and Tim could be protected. The ranger teams deployed to manage Tim's appetite for tomatoes grew to have a huge respect for how sneaky and clever he could be, and how much he cared for the other males who joined his nightly excursions, especially the youngest males whom he would actively protect as rangers tried

to deter them from entering farms. Eventually his collar fell off, but by this time Tim was so famous among the community members that he was actually monitored most of the time.



Famous wildlife photographers and artists came specifically to Amboseli to photograph and paint Tim; this beautiful watercolour was painted by Sophie Walbeoffe

Tim was much loved and respected by the males with whom he shared his range. While some males become less sociable as they get older, Tim was always tolerant and friendly with males of all ages and we rarely saw him on his own. Tim was also much appreciated by the females in Amboseli. They always greeted him warmly when he came to test them to see if one was ready to mate. If a female was in oestrus he was especially gentle with her unlike some of the other bulls. We are sure that's one of the reasons he was so popular, because females were relaxed and able to stay with their families throughout the mating period, instead of being chased and separated. Without DNA analysis we're not sure how many offspring he has, but it has to be a good number. His legacy will live on, but we will miss him terribly.

Cynthia Moss
Director



Tim and Echo's family, the EBs, in February 2019

Tim's Life (1969-2020) by the Amboseli Trust for Elephants

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Our ability to follow Tim for almost all his life has been thanks to the support of caring people from around the world. You too can make a donation that would help us continue to follow the Amboseli elephants, including Tim's offspring, for many years to come. We know there are up-and-coming males that will make up Kenya's next generation of iconic elephants: we are looking forward to sharing their stories with you.



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