



MESSAGE STICK

March 2010

There has been much discussion this month concerning the Football World Cup being held in South Africa over June and July. Of particular interest to us has been the price gouging with accommodation being the focus. It has totally amazed me just how much some hotels in particular have raised their prices - some as much as 500%!!! For obvious reasons we have avoided having anything to do with such places as we are simply not going to become part of a rip off of our clients. Some hotels are also demanding a minimum number of nights stay. One hotel in Joburg demanded three nights when clients only wanted to overnight on their way to another venue.

Why do I mention this especially as we are not doing World Cup bookings? Well we have a number of our clients who simply want to go on a safari during this period and also a number of football fans who would like a few days on safari between matches. Most of the game lodges that we use have NOT raised their prices above their normal rates which is great news for us as it means that we have chosen well when placing them on our preferred list. However we are having great difficulty getting an overnight stop in Joburg for people travelling from Sydney on Qantas as the flight arrives too late to transfer elsewhere. The Perth SAA flight arrives early in the morning on some days and this gives us time to get people from Joburg directly to any other of our destinations without an over night stop.

Generally bookings for us to Southern Africa during the World Cup are quiet but East Africa is very active. I think that many people have decided to go there instead of being caught up in football fever!! We can therefore easily arrange East African safaris for you - and it is right in the middle of the migration season in the Masai Mara!

September is turning out to be frantically busy and we have many clients on Safari during this time. If you are planning a trip during the period August to November then make your bookings now as many lodges are already full or close to full but we have vacancies.

Final Postcard from Zimbabwe by Hilary

Breakfast at the Hide is an elaborate alfresco affair with endless cups of local coffee and a wide selection of hot and cold dishes arrayed around the wood-fired BBQ. Well sated, it is time for the road again.



As we climb aboard the vehicle to head off on our morning game drive, we bid farewell to a now more sanguine Uncle Al and his cohort of fellow Aussies. It proves to be a drive alright - but mile after mile of bush seemingly devoid of anything with a heartbeat - but that's game-viewing for you - unpredictable - indeed the randomness of sightings is one of its charms. From the time one leaves the lodge, until return no one knows what experience awaits, which makes everything a surprise.

This morning though I'm reminiscing about the cozy comfort of the bed I left too early! Suddenly, after a blood-curdling screech, a suicide bomber Cicada hurls himself directly at his unsuspecting target - me! After the mesmerizing silence of the morning, this "attack" makes me jump at least six inches off my seat, arms waving and face aghast. Much to the amusement of my knight in shining armour, who tells me that Cicada are harmless! I'm glad to know that there is at least one flying creature who doesn't want to picnic on my blood - but it was really the kamikaze antics of the missile-like bug performing his version of the Hakka that shook me from my morning reverie rather than his possible carnivorous intentions.



After about half-an hour we spot a leopard tortoise on the road, making heavy weather of his morning stroll. We stop to watch the little fellow soldier along while our guide educates us about their unique reproduction habits - which includes the practice of dropping their eggs on high ground during the rains with the sex of the offspring being determined by the ambient temperature when the eggs hatch after 90 days. I am constantly amazed at the adaptability and inventiveness of nature.

Our attention is diverted away from the tortoise by a passing bird, who apart from the extended tail, looks as if he has donned a black & white jersey - a long-tailed shrike who is offset against fairy floss (cumulus) clouds that are likely, at this time of year, to coalesce into stormy cumulo nimbus.

En route to a drop-off point where we will be collected by the staff of the next lodge on our itinerary, we pass the Kennedy waterholes where, apart from the rusty bucket hanging on the branch of a tree to serve as a rubbish bin, there is nothing to attract our attention. All the creatures are in hiding this morning other than my companions and me who are casting a regular wary eye at the horizon. Before long we find ourselves driving toward the advancing, swirling black clouds. Lightening bolts fracture the gunmetal grey as we don waterproof ponchos which now sound like a flock of frightened birds as they flail and flap in our attempt to outrun the now imminent storm.

Our vain attempt at shelter, as we dash through muddy puddles, from the open vehicle to an open sided picnic hut leaves us wondering why we're even bothering - we won't dissolve in the rain! But despite the rationalizing, we cling to the ponchos as the driving wind carries the torrential rain through from one side of the open hut to the other. As quickly as it started, the storm abates leaving us marooned on this picnic hut island surrounded by a two meter wide moat. As I contemplate the dilemma of how to escape from here without saturating the only pair of shoes I have brought, Leonard, our guide starts to dig a channel in the muddy ground to drain the water from the moat - God bless you Leonard!

While we await our next hosts, we are introduced to one of the members of the Lion Research team who regales us with stories of his new British wife's attempts to adapt to life in the African bush, including wrestles with a giant sized leguaan (goanna) who took

up residence in their attic! While the time passes entertainingly enough, the chance of getting my wet bum into a dry pair of trousers becomes ever more remote! In despair our new lion research friend radios the lodge to find out if they have forgotten us - indeed they have not, they reply, and are on their way (which, we shortly discover is another version of "the cheque is in the mail") though it seems that there has been a communication problem in that our previous hosts have a different time of collection to that understood by our new hosts. This is not an issue however as the people we use (lodges and service providers alike) operate on the basis that the person delivering cannot leave until the client (in this case us) is picked up by the next operator - thus avoiding the excitement of spending the night up a tree in the wilds of the African bush!

Finally, trousers now completely dry, we head off to Little Makololo with a darker skinned version of Indiana Jones complete with hat, gaily festooned with feathers. En route we stop to study some industrious dung beetles on a fresh mound of elephant poo as they mill around and then scurry away with their perfectly formed balls of dung. Leaving them to their environmentally friendly industry, we detour around them.

We arrive at Little Mak (Little Makololo) in time for a light lunch, during which we are given a full briefing by a very charming hostess called Angie.



This wonderful little camp is described in the advertising material as follows:

"Little Makalolo is nestled in a natural teak and mahogany forest on a concession in the Hwange National Park and sleeps eight guests in five tents or a maximum of ten guests in a private group seeking exclusivity and privacy. Accommodation is in East African safari style tents, with en suite facilities and large ceiling fans. The main guest area includes the dining room, bar, plunge pool and open fire area. The camp overlooks open plains, with game viewing starting right on the doorstep. Activities include game drives in open vehicles and walking safaris, which are conducted in the both the private concession and the national park.

Hwange National Park covers just over 14 600 square kilometers and is situated on the main road between Bulawayo and Vic Falls in Zimbabwe. It was the royal hunting grounds to the Ndebele warrior-king Mzilikazi in the early 19th Century and was set aside as a National Park in 1929. Hwange boasts a large selection of wildlife with over 100 species of mammals and nearly 400 bird species recorded."

But the description really does not do it justice. It has a charming and friendly atmosphere and while very comfortable is quite unsophisticated without electric sockets in the rooms or any phone reception but this merely adds to its charm. The manager, Charles, is a veritable walking encyclopedia on nature as well as good natured and good fun as we discover on our first game drive in the cool of the late afternoon.



The game vehicles are quite small so each carries four passengers. We are matched up with a couple of avid travelling Americans with a wry sense of humour.



Charles tells us that there are two prides of lion on their 1,600 square kilometer concession. Our first lion "encounter" is with a group of two young females and one young male. They show little interest until John drops his lense cap and, with Charles' OK, creeps out of the open-sided vehicle on the ground on the opposite side to the lions to retrieve it. Inquisitive now, one of the females rises, stalks around the front of the vehicle and looks as if she is heading straight for John, who cool as a cucumber, continues to video the encounter. The rest of us inch away to the opposite side! I wonder if they have learned the safari rules ie not to attack these noisy, four-wheeled, multi-headed animals! Her paw strikes out and she dashes back, away from the vehicle. She makes another foray and this time successfully captures the FEATHER she has been stalking from under the vehicle!! Phew my heart will take a while to slow its pace.



On our way back to camp we enjoy the mating antics of the red-crested korhaan as he soars skyward, closes his wings and bombs his way to the ground, opening his wings again just in time to avoid a crash-landing.

The dive-bombing theme commenced by the cicada this morning is continued throughout dinner as the now airborne rhino beetles gravitate towards the light and, for some extraordinary reason, me. A favourite saying of mine comes to mind "just because your are paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you" and the onslaught of flying creatures, harmless though they may be, is seriously disturbing my equilibrium!

Since our two new American friends, Mark and Marion, are scheduled to leave this morning, our game drive will take us past the airstrip, located in a long grassy vlei which owes its existence to the now dried up river that formed it. We pass a cory bustard in all his mating glory with puffed chest strutting along desperately trying to outshine a not too distant competitor.



Skittish warthogs scurry away at the sound of the approaching jeep - their concern totally misplaced as they head, oblivious, straight for the pair of mating lions, tails pointing to the heavens and turning their concerned little faces in our direction every once in a while to establish if we are going to give chase. Whether or not they have seen the lions or sensed their increasing interest, their sudden change of course averts certain disaster in the warthog world. Though some of our number feel denied the spectacle of a kill, others, including me, breath a sigh of relief as we motor on toward the airstrip, past a herd of what Marion has now more aptly renamed, the bewildered beasts (wildebeest).

A lone airplane sits in wait at the Linkwasha airstrip, while in the distance, a herd of Sable antelope catch our attention. Nearby we notice the incongruity of a rudimentary but functional ablutions block with soap and a flushing toilet. Two other guests are finally scheduled to leave on the same flight as Marion and Mark, both Hong Kong residents though Bede is an Aussie through and through. They were booked on the season's last scheduled canoe trip on the Zambezi but, because of early rains, could not get there. So this is their umpteenth but final goodbye to their jeep companion Fred, whom they have been farewelling regularly for the last two days!

Their confidence in the transport vehicle is not enhanced when they hear John ask the arriving pilot if he has a replacement elastic band for the toy plane that is scheduled to fly them out!!



By the time the various checks are completed and the doors are closed, the large herd of eland has thankfully moved off the runway, the little plane would have no chance against this, the largest of antelope, who can weigh up to one ton. When the plane is only a speck in the sky and with the heat of the day building, it is time to return to camp for lunch. As we battle to sleep in the afternoon heat, we switch off the room fan - it is just moving hot air around. How silly of us not to bring our sarongs to dampen and drape over our overheating bodies. We won't make that mistake again.

We meet our new jeep companions at afternoon tea, a honeymoon couple from Singapore. An avid photographer, Inman, acquires a safari nickname that will endure in our minds long after the trip, "click click", as he has set his camera to take multiple exposures every time he hits the shutter button!

Our first stop is to watch a whole family of elephant frolic and refresh themselves at the waterhole. In the stillness of early evening we admire the reflection large and small alike as the bulk of the eli is contrasted with the tip-toeing paddle of the blacksmith plover.





Not far away we pause to watch a giraffe make her way to a small waterhole slowly, deliberately, pausing to assess every sound, her life depending on being ever present in the now - Eckhart Tolle eat your heart out! She is joined by a fellow giraffe and they take it in turns to stretch their legs and stoop to drink. Their ungainly pose rendering them very vulnerable.



As the setting sun casts its dying rays in a colourful display of pinks and purples, the radio sparks into action to inform us that the 13 member pride of lion are patiently waiting at the camp waterhole for the herd of elephants who got there first to move off. So we abandon our original sundowner venue and head off back to camp for our last night at a very lovely Little Mak. We arrive back in time to witness the departing elephants, rending the night air as they trumpet their objection to the lions' presence.



This morning we are off to the airstrip for our flight to Bumi Hills. Thankfully, long gone are the days when I worried about flying, particularly in little single-engine kites. These days it concerns me less than hopping on a bus, but I travel prepared with my bottle of water, a wet handkerchief to counteract the heat and supplement the sometimes less than efficient air conditioning and my book, just in case this is the one time the passing landscape doesn't hold me in thrall.



A vehicle is at the Bumi Hills airstrip to collect us and we set off on a short game drive which is scheduled to end at the Bumi Hills "harbour". The road, if you can call it that, twists and turns for the first couple of kilometres through parched, rocky terrain until we come to a gap on what looks like the brow of a hill, once through the gap the landscape transforms into a lush green expanse (dotted with a variety of wildlife, buffalo, elephant, warthog and birds of all shapes and sizes) surrounding Lake Kariba.



As we study a few elephants coat themselves with their version of sunscreen, mud, we notice a thin boney baby eli. It appears that he got trunk caught in a snare and the poor little guy would have died had it not been for the valiant efforts of a number of locals (including our current host) who tranquilised him and treated his wound. He is now drinking milk and putting on a bit of weight. Because poaching has been a problem in the past and the National Parks are broke, lodge owners have, with considerable success taken the matter into their own hands by employing their own anti-poaching staff and trying to educate the locals about the benefits of vibrant wildlife.

On arrival at the "harbour", Maxwell, having transferred our luggage to a pontoon, informs us that he must re-park the jeep under the canopy of trees. The reason he gives us is that Momma bird needs to feed her three babies in the nest she made in the glove compartment of the jeep. The mystery of how all these twigs kept appearing in the glove compartment was solved when the jeep remained in situ for four whole days allowing the determined African Pied Wagtail sufficient time to finish her nest and deposit her eggs. So now we are enchanted to see three little unperturbed heads peeking out from the profusion of feathers.



With the open Landie strategically re-parked we head off for our 10 minute pontoon ride for Musango Safari Camp and are told that our host Steve Edwards is due to return this afternoon, until then we have the camp entirely to ourselves (apart, of course, from the staff and the pilot who flew us in and will, tomorrow fly us out). First we tuck in to a more than ample, lunch selecting a most delicious spaghetti bolognaise from the huge array of salads and other cold dishes - my resolve to avoid putting on weight on this trip is weakening!!

After lunch we are led to our "room" noticing the water vistas on both sides of the path (this being a quite narrow island). Plenty of time to have a skinny dip in the very inviting plunge pool on the front veranda of our "honeymoon" suite before the, now habitual, afternoon ziz.

At afternoon tea we are greeted by a recently returned, larger than life, Steve who suggests a late afternoon safari cruise, which will give us a different perspective on the wildlife as it seems that the animals are less threatened by boats than by road vehicles and so tend to stay put for closer observation. Steve proves to be an excellent guide with a deep knowledge of the bush - as one would imagine of someone who worked for the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management for 18 years, three of which was spent as Warden of Matusadona National Park. He has recently acquired an interest in palaeontology as a result of the discovery of a dinosaur fossil site in the Matusadona National Park.

Musango Safari Camp is situated on its own island, just off the shoreline of the Matusadona National Park with an abundance of wildlife from buffalo and elephants to the rare black rhino. It is also an ornithologist's paradise with a myriad of birds to be seen frequenting the birdbaths in front of the lodge and rooms.



Under thatch, the large luxurious safari tents each have en suite bathrooms built out of natural stone. These tented rooms are set in thick forest, and all face east over the lake, towards the rising sun. The verandas offer panoramic views across the bay of the Matusadona National Park and mountains whilst the swimming pool area and the bar/lounge platform are an excellent place from which to view game.



Musango offers a variety of experiences: from total relaxation at the camp, walking safaris, big 5 game drives, tracking of wild black rhino in the adjacent rhino sanctuary, village tours to canoeing, game cruises, tiger and tilapia fishing on Lake Kariba and, because of their involvement in the Painted Dog reintroduction research project, can almost guarantee sightings of these wonderful creatures. Activities are fun, informal and operated by trained and experienced guides.



Nature lays on the post-dinner entertainment with a magnificent lightening storm at a comfortable distance - perhaps the Greek Gods have resumed their battles!

All too soon it is time to leave this delightful homely place. Oh how I wish we could linger longer! Obviously my psyche doesn't want to leave either as is indicated by my omission to pack my MP3 - at least that is how I think my oversight would be interpreted by Mr Freud. But say goodbye we must to a beautiful place and wonderful hosts recognising that every hello holds the seeds of goodbye.

This morning the last leg of our trip will take us to John's old stamping ground, the Zambezi Valley, albeit armed now with a camera rather than a rifle. However, because of early rains we cannot fly to the Ruckomechi airstrip and must instead fly to Chirundu and transfer by motor boat to the camp.

On arrival at Chirundu we are delighted to meet up with Bede and George again, they are scheduled to fly out on the aircraft that brought us here. The burning question on my hyper-sensitive lips is whether because of the early rains, the tsetse flies have become active? Oh dear - they have! Bearing in mind that after 25 years in Australia, I still react badly to mozzie bites, you can just imagine my reaction to tsetses to whom I was first introduced only last year!!! There has been no opportunity to acquire what I have been told is the best tsetse repellent, Avon Soft Skin, so I must console myself with the fact that I have brought a suitcase of medicinal remedies for all classes of ailments - indeed John is planning to retire on the proceeds of the sale of those remaining when we return to Oz!!

Zooming along the mighty Zambezi, it is expected to take us an hour to reach the camp which is situated in the middle reaches of the Zambezi River, a hundred kilometres below Lake Kariba. Meanwhile we enjoy the passing panorama, holiday homes, lodges and little villages all stretch their arms towards the expanse of river. As we pass people fishing, washing clothes, children playing all return our friendly waves. Eventually we reach Ruckomechi, which is a relatively new camp having recently repositioned itself further up river. There are few guests as the camp is due to close for the 5 month wet season after we depart tomorrow.

Ruckomechi Camp lies in the heart of the Zambezi Valley within the Mana Pools National Park. Shaded by a large grove of acacia and mahogany trees it commands a superb view of the mountains of Africa's Great Rift Valley across the river in Zambia.



Guests are accommodated in ten spacious en-suite tented units, including a honeymoon suite, all of which overlook the Zambezi River. Each tent has both indoor and outdoor showers, and the camp boasts a favourite amongst guests: its outdoor 'bath-with-a-view' in a secluded, scenic spot. The central dining, bar, library and lounge areas face the escarpment and are connected to the rest of the camp by low-level walkways that minimise the environmental impact. There is a separate deck with infinity pool for swimming and sun bathing, and an inviting, cushion-strewn star gazing deck.

The camp vegetation is dominated by broad canopied albida trees, much loved by elephants for their rich nutritious pods; these animals often join visitors in camp for a light meal!

The area is renowned for large numbers of elephant, buffalo, hippo and eland, especially in the winter when they concentrate along the river. Predators such as lion, leopard and wild dog are all found in the area. Birdlife is superb, particularly for both mopane woodland and riverine species with numerous local specials like Collared Palm-Thrush, Racket-tailed Roller, Purple-banded Sunbird and Black-throated Wattle-Eyes.



While activities include wildlife viewing in open 4x4 vehicles, on motorised pontoon boats, on foot, in hides and in canoes, I opt to spend the afternoon in the library of the tsetse-free camp, gazing from time to time over the wide expanse to the distant mountains and luxuriating on a comfortable couch in the still, silent, warm air, where the egrets fly towards the pink rising sun, while the hippo makes his way toward the enchanting peacefulness of the Zambezi river.

It seems that I have recovered by equilibrium.

News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

(With thanks and acknowledgement to Neil White and David Blumberg of Savanna for photos)

Savanna have had a holiday from the Newsletter for a month so instead I have added some of the great photographs that Neil White sends me from his game drives and David Blumberg (a co-owner) also added to the mix. I am sure you will find them as much of a pleasure as I do. Enjoy!



Baby Leopard!



Bee Eater alighting



Lilac Breasted Roller in flight



Live training!



Moon Owl!



Come on bubs we gotta move!



Jumping Leopard



A Close Encounter (Look at the faces!!)

How's that? I have many more that will shortly be posted to our web site

News from Botswana

A Rare first, Canoeing Safari in the Selinda Reserve, Botswana



Take the opportunity to experience a rare 'first' - canoeing through the magnificent Selinda reserve in northern Botswana.

In 2009 dramatic rains resulted in epic floodwaters. For the first time in three decades, the Selinda spillway flowed in full and eventually the waters of the Okavango Delta connected with the Linyanti and Kwando rivers to the north. This means that for the next year or two, it is possible to canoe this river connecting these two ancient waterways. The 3 night Selinda Canoe Safari replicates the safari experiences of old as you navigate along the Selinda Spillway over four days, camping along the banks of the river wherever the safari finds itself at the end of the day.

Along the river you encounter many species of wildlife such as elephant, buffalo, sable antelope, roan antelope, wild dog and you could also come across cheetah, lion, leopard... As you may imagine, it is also a birding paradise.

Each Canadian canoe takes two guests who paddle their canoe downstream under the guidance of the trail leader. Even though the canoeing is mostly with a gentle current behind you, ideally you should be reasonably fit to enjoy this canoe safari. The days are spent paddling along the Selinda Spillway with stops whenever there is something of interest to be seen on the banks. Where you finish at the end of the day's paddling is where you camp that night - so no arduous paddling to get to the next overnight camp. At the end we recommend adding a night or two at either Selinda Camp



Contact us for more information on this safari.

The Mysterious Savute Channel flows once again

(With thanks to Savute Elephant Camp)



Famous, mysterious, forgotten, stolen and now found again! The Savute Channel, one of the greatest mysteries and fascinations of Northern Botswana, is flowing again after nearly 30 years of lying dormant. Covering over one hundred kilometres as it flows from the Linyanti River (fed from the Zibadianja Lagoon), through a gap in the Magwikhwe Sand Ridge, past Savute Elephant Camp, it is only a matter of days before it reaches its final destination, the Savute Marsh in the Mababe Depression, in the middle of the Chobe National Park.

Since November 2008, its painstakingly slow meander (falling only 18 centimetres for every kilometre covered) has been keenly followed by many, and yet, surprisingly, the water seemed to arrive overnight at Savute Elephant Camp. The camp awoke on the morning of 5 January 2010 to the sight of a river flowing in the place of what was once a dry bed and a small, yet well frequented waterhole.

Guests and staff alike at Savute Elephant Camp are marvelling at the surreal reality of being in a riverside camp in the middle of the once bone dry Chobe Desert. Herds of wildlife are delighting in the fresh new water source, celebrating the abundance of the Channel, the dramatic call of the African Fish Eagle is once again piercing the air of the Chobe National Park, and the crocodiles are slowly making their way towards the Savute Marsh, prospecting for greener pastures.

History of The Savute Channel

The Savute Channel has only ever flowed intermittently. It last flowed from 1967 to 1981 but since then the Channel and the Savute Marsh have been dry, a phenomenon that has occurred on and off over centuries. Until recently, the Channel was open

grassland, home to numerous animals such as large herds of Zebra, Impala and Wildebeests, and abundant predators such as Lion, Cheetah and Wild Dog. Gaunt skeletons of trees, now long dead, that grew in one of the earlier dry periods, line both the Channel and the Marsh. These trees would have had at least 50 years of dry conditions in which to grow and mature into the size they reached before drowning during a subsequent flood.

Records show that the Savute Channel and the Marsh dried out during the 1880's. Dr David Livingstone commented, on his way to discovering the Victoria Falls in 1851, that it was a "dismal swamp". The Channel remained dry until the summer of 1957-58 when heavy rains in the catchment area of the Angolan highlands re-flooded the Chobe river system and the Channel flowed once again until 1966. Its irregular flowing pattern continued until 1981, when the Channel seemed to dry up completely and be lost forever. This occurrence (including the fate of the animals which lived in and depended on the Channel's waters) is chronicled in Derek and Beverly Joubert's documentary film, "The Stolen River".

This cyclical feature of wet and dry in the Channel is not completely understood, but it is generally believed that tectonic activity deep below the Kalahari's sandbed, is responsible. Others argue that its flow is primarily dependent upon the rainfall in the Angolan highlands which feeds the Okavango and Chobe River basins as well as the Savute Channel, however there have been times when its source has been overflowed and yet the Channel remained dry. As Northern Botswana experienced very strong seismic activity in April 2008, as well as a super flood season, it is once again hard to distinguish whether both or just one of the factors are causing the Channel to flow again, or whether it is pure coincidence. The mystery in all of this is what makes the Savute Channel so intriguing to all who come across it.

Compiled by Christoph Holzapfel and Onx Manga

Issued by Gabrielle Palmer, Public Relations Manager for Savute Elephant Camp

News from Zambia



News from Robin Pope Safaris - Zambia
(With thanks to Rita)



For various reasons, apart from the occasional amazing sundowners I spent most of my time in the office this week. The biggest reason being because I am due some days off this next week. I am looking forward to a few restful days on Zanzibar, a destination highly recommended by Neil Rocher. It will, I am sure, include some "Jacques Cousteau" adventures. So yes, I'll scuba dive. On a note closer to home - without even leaving the camp the wild life has come to me, yesterday on my way home I was stopped by massive elephant bull! As I'm sure you would not be interested in my week in the office I asked Lucinda to give her news from the bush.



So it begins.....

As the Emerald season continues we all watch the river with growing anticipation - its height is discussed daily and any change in the level is closely watched. This may seem like a strange thing for us all to be doing, however the river level is very important for several reasons including the speed with which the level can change and our River Journey Safaris to Nsefu. When the river is in full flood the journey up and down becomes easier and faster, and the ebony groves are flooded making them wonderful places to go on the boat. We have now had Nsefu open for nearly a month and the guests staying there have all had the most fabulous time.



The safari starts and ends at Nkwali so I get the chance to meet the guests and hear all about their trip up river and some of the highlights of their stay - always slightly green (with envy) making, but fun nonetheless. Recently we had guests in camp who were going to Nsefu, John and Clair, and guests who were staying at Nkwali for a couple of nights, Jane and her son Tom. Over a glass of white wine one night we discovered that Jane had last visited the Luangwa Valley some 43 years ago. As she was so young she could not remember the name of the camp but she did know that it was Rondavels - step forward Nsefu! A remarkable story, completed by the photos of Nsefu that Jane brought with her from that trip with her family.

John and Clair went up to Nsefu and, by all accounts, had the most wonderful time on the river with Daudi and the camp to themselves, seeing the wonderful birds and animal life that this time of year brings with it. They took some new photos of Nsefu for Jane and Tom, which they will send them by e-mail when they get back so the family can see the camp as it is 43 years later!

I am sure the Roach's would have been amazed at the water levels we discovered under the deck the day after they left. The water had been rapidly receding over the course of their stay. Here is a photo I took of the deck that day. It never ceases to amaze me how the water can change its levels so quickly and dramatically.

The building is also continuing at pace, with the new swimming pool at Robin's House completed. In fact it has had its first swimmers. The new dining room and swimming pool at Nkwali is also beginning to take shape. The thatchers are busy on the roof, the finishing layer of the swimming pool has been applied and we even have some rather large stones from the Chindeni Hills, large enough for Obelix (Character in Asterix comic) would be proud of. The largest mobile in Zambia - made from a termite eaten tree, now being referred to as our doughnuts, has been hung to create a wall between swimming pool area and dinning room! It is fascinating and fabulous watching it all come together, although the size of the stones meant it was no mean feat getting them here as you can see! - Lucinda

Flying to southern end of Malawi's beautiful namesake lake, poetically referred to as "Lake of the Stars". We just bought a professional 'star-gazer' telescope to watch the stars from the privileged view of Pumulani. Imagine a clear and brilliant sky, flooded with a billion lights, watching satellites going over across the sky. I can't wait to try it... I think I'll stay up all night!

I'll be back on Tuesday next week, so next week you will not hear from me, "It's Monday" will be entirely be written by Lucinda.

So all the best from us all in the Luangwa Valley.

News from Colin Bristow - Eco Logical Africa (Zimbabwe)

I just loved this note from Colin and I am sure you will too!

I have just been through a big learning curve of value systems in safari life. My latest safari revolved around a combined family safari with five seven year old girls - from England. The parents wanted their little girls to experience Africa through my eyes and I was given a blank page to build any itinerary. I decided on one destination where there was a mixture of nearly everything ranging from safety in big game territory to sleeping outside. On the second day I threw my carefully thought out paper in the dustbin and followed a natural flow in human expectations and values. It was fascinating. I changed my normal safari routine by slowing and varying the pace and becoming hands on in contact with nature, culture and history.

Traditional safaris have a normal activity profile of routine game drives, eating marathons and long siestas because there is no activity in siesta hour. I turned this upside down by encouraging the parents to participate in their kids safari activities and the kids were given the freedom to set the pace for the adults. I stopped feeding top heavy information and built a model on expanding on a question by building a story around it. Twice a day we collectively wrote in a journal the highs and the lows of the morning or afternoon and once a day we all created a personal drawing on a subject selected by one of the girls. I have an idea that the parents enjoyed their bush interaction more than their kids.

For me, surprise and intrigue became an amazing entertainment tool. Instead of pointing out features and animals, I made everyone search for something that I had seen like a wasp capturing a spider; a kudu bull camouflaged in deep shade; *Massospondylus* dinosaur bones exposed on a river bank; a large African Rock Python curled up in the hollow of a Mashatu tree.

One morning we were invited to a neighbouring village for breakfast. The cultural interaction was fun and wild salty spinach and white maize porridge was on the menu. Every evening we sat silently in a different area and identified mysterious noises - elephants feeding; hyena's whooping; leopards coughing; moths buzzing; fruit bats tinkling. A whole new exciting and surprising world evolved from sound and we roasted sticky marshmallows over a slow Mopane wood fire.

One of the girls asked me how we can save the African animals. I told her and everyone around the fire channel one - bush television fire that she was saving the African animals by coming on safari. Sadly the "eco" aspect has come down to simple economics and the dictum "**if it can pay its way then it will stay**" holds true in Africa. Tourism is the great environmental catalyst because it creates economic value and this is where the private operator thrives. Tourists create demand, the private operator supplies the demand and there is a valuable knock on effect in employment, support services

(transport, accommodation, shops, and this can be expanded) and taxation and we all save the environment through sustainable use.

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Close

That's it for another month. I hope you enjoyed the photos. More next month.

Happy Safaris!

John

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