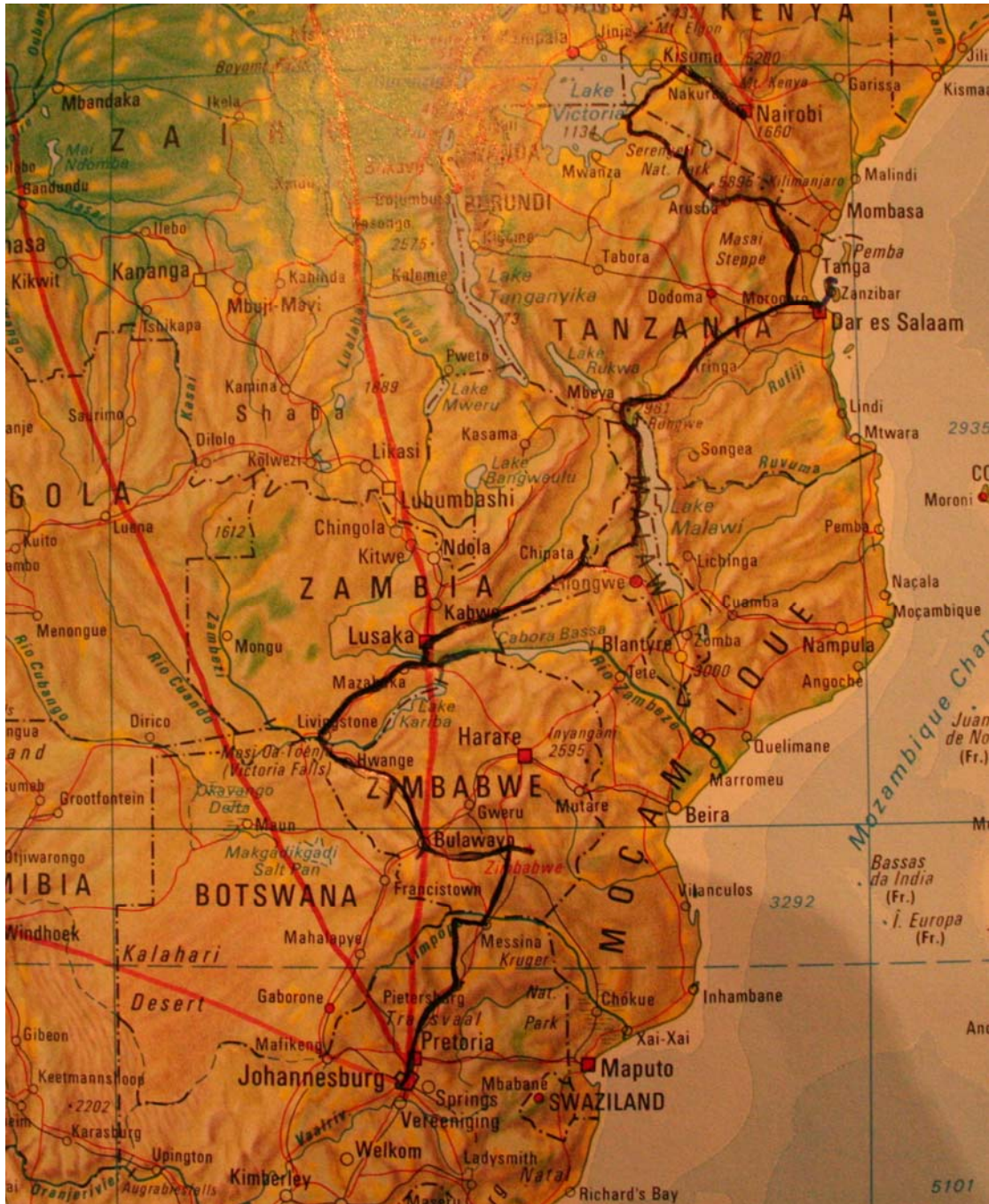


## Part 5 – AN AFRICAN AFFAIR

More than 30 million people in Africa are living with HIV/AIDS. Every day, 5,000 Africans die of AIDS; another 11,000 are infected with HIV; and some 6,000 children are orphaned



## Chapter 1 Getting Started on Safari Proves to be Difficult

Monday July 16<sup>th</sup> After a day of disrupted preparation, Riet and Henk took us to the airport where we parted with fond farewells and promises to see other again that none of us knew could be kept. Earlier in the day Ans and John Hottingar came over during the morning and later, Peter with Sana. It was lovely to see them all, but morning coffee spread into lunch time and began to seriously impinge on our packing and time to sort things out. We had to prepare a parcel for posting to Australia, souvenirs and unnecessary clothing etc so managed to do this in time for Ans to give us a lift in her car to the post office.

The Dutch postal system is a little different to ours it seems. Postage rates for parcels are set in 5kg bands so just a few grams over each limit and bingo, there goes another fistful of Euros, (A\$35 actually). Doesn't seem very fair to me, but hey, I'm an Aussie. I try to pay for the parcel by credit card, but am told that I will have to leave the Post Office, go to an ATM, use the card to get cash then come back and pay with that. You have to be kidding. I just pay with the cash I have and leave shaking my head. I thought Europe was more advanced than us.

Despite earlier planning, both rucksacks are over the 15kgs weight specification so we hope our safari guide is not too strict. We have some clothes to give away so maybe we'll be doing that sooner rather than later.

Tuesday July 17<sup>th</sup> I'm sitting in room 2309 of Fawltly Towers, aka The Park Inn near Heathrow airport where a young pretender to Basil Fawltly's crown has just upheld the services reputation for tardy restaurant service. He even has his own 'Manuel', in this case a middle aged middle eastern gentleman named Ahmed.

We should be in Johannesburg, but we are not. A huge, black storm in Amsterdam put paid to that by delaying our flight for two hours. The ground crew stopped work in the middle of loading luggage for fear of lightening strikes although as we sat on the aircraft, passengers could enjoy the sight of their bags sitting uncovered on the tarmac in the pouring rain.

Hoping against hope that the connecting flight to Johannesburg would also be delayed by some miracle (or malfunction of airport logistics) we made a mad dash from T4 to T1 once on the ground at Heathrow. Anyone who has made this inter-terminal journey will know that 'mad dash' could be interpreted a number of ways depending upon how many thousands of people you have to fight your way through, whether the travelators are working and the mood of the bus driver assigned to your vehicle (when it turns up). Fortunately for us, on this occasion we made the distance in about twenty minutes.

Joy! Our BA flight to Johannesburg was late (any other time we would be complaining) but unfortunately our joy was short lived as we began an emotional roller coaster that ended on a downer. On reaching the boarding gate, we and four other poor souls who had also made the Heathrow inter terminal sprint, were not allowed to board the plane. "there is a problem with these tickets" we were told as a smiling but firm official guided us out of the boarding line. Because our flight ex Amsterdam was so late, the flight director (or whatever they call him) had made a

decision we wouldn't make it and had allowed our seats to be allocated to waitlisted passengers. He claimed he was now trying to get us back on the plane but couldn't do so, as the manifest had already been sent through to South Africa and it was locked in.

There followed a protracted session at the desk for lost souls where British Airways clerks, who would much rather have been doing anything except dealing with us six upset foreigners, who in turn would much rather have been doing anything else except dealing with them, eventually got us booked onto tonight's flight. This is OK except it will land us in Johannesburg 3 hours after the safari leaves town. This is not good.

We were packed off to this hotel, the Park Inn, on a Heathrow Hopper, the last for the night (it was now 11.30pm), our bags locked away in security and so we were armed with just our carry on bags and two 'presents' of essentials from BA to ease the trauma. These little beauties each contained a white cotton T shirt some deodorant and toothbrush and paste. What fun we can have with that lot.

We try to check in, together with a large contingent of a Jamaican sporting team, then abandon that idea in preference of getting to the dining room before it shuts. We only just make it and have a sub standard plate of luke warm left overs from the buffet bar under the unhappy glare of half a dozen kitchen staff who obviously would like to have been on their way home instead of still having to face washing up duties.

First thing this morning I rang the Johannesburg Inn and the very efficient Sandra, the same lady who just the other day gave us confidence in regard to the Zimbabwe leg of the trip, found a way for us to meet up with the safari. She booked us on a flight from Johannesburg to Petersburg in the Northern Provinces and assured us she would organise the guide, Derrick to call past the airport and pick us up.

I've just rung Sandra again and confirmed our Africa Airways booking and exchanged mobile numbers for ourselves and Derrick – just in case there are further unforeseen delays.

Today was wasted and boring. At least breakfast was better than last night's dinner. Things here at Fawltly Towers are just not quite right – there is a big crack in the ceiling over the bath, the lock on the safe in our room can't be reopened now I've locked it (fortunately with no money in it) and after lunch, the plastic door key wouldn't operate our door. A room service lady who used her master key simply said, 'it happens sometimes' and went on her merry way.

Our British Airways allowance for lunch at this wondrous hotel is apparently 16 pounds per person, or A\$40, a goodly amount one would think, but all we really wanted, having been lying around all morning, was a sandwich and cup of tea or glass of fruit juice. But, rules apparently are rules, and Manuel, oops sorry, Ahmed, advises us that the BA voucher does not cover any drinks and if we want tea or juice we shall have to pay for them separately. The sandwich we can have from a selection of two prepackaged offerings in a glass display case, although Ahmed struggles with why we would want this rather than the huge plate of hamburger and chips he strongly recommends our vouchers will cover.

Out of principle we elect to have a glass of water rather than pay for tea, and order the sandwiches. Now things get difficult and the young Basil, surveying his domain from the power position behind the cash register, is determine he will not assist the process and soil his hands by helping to get our lunch. It takes fifteen minutes and two arguments between he and a kitchen hand before Ahmed is allowed to bring the food, which we could have reached for and taken from our position in front of the display case.

Ahmed has forgotten our water and another 10 minutes goes by before I can catch his eye to remind him. He feigns shock and horror, muttering toward the kitchen, but returns shortly with two glasses of tepid tap water. This is not the start we had envisaged for our African adventure, but none the less, an experience of its' own. Still, nothing has really gone wrong on our big trip until now, but unfortunately now it is going wrong in a big way, causing us to miss the start of the safari and incur A\$400 of extra air travel costs to catch them up.

Through all of this I have managed to stay relatively calm. Von expected I would 'blow up' at the airport after not being allowed to board the jumbo jet we could see just meters away, knowing how much stuffing around it was going to mean. I must admit I felt like blowing up and in younger days would have done so, but now, knowing it would achieve nothing except raise my own stress levels and blood pressure, I remained calm (on the outside). This little adversity is not over yet, but we will hopefully meet our group just eight hours late in Petersburg if everything goes to plan from here.

## Chapter 2 – South Africa

**In a country of 43 million people the average life expectancy is under 47 years of age. Over 7% of children die before they reach 5 years of age.**

Wednesday July 18<sup>th</sup> 13.00hrs. Happy days. We are sitting in Johannesburg Domestic Air terminal waiting to board our connecting flight to Petersburg and our African adventure but have just been advised it is delayed by thirty minutes. I am beginning to fret that this may impact on our joining the group there – will they continue to wait?

This little incident is only the last of what is now a series of mishaps. My rucksack has not been forwarded from Heathrow, God bless them. I am trying to take a fatalistic approach and not get angry, just deal with it and make the best of the situation. I know now how Bernie and Dennie felt on the Danube cruise when their bags went missing. In their case, excuse the pun, the ‘cases’ didn’t ever turn up, so I am hoping that is not to be the fate for my bag.

The flight to Johannesburg was long but OK and we arrived on time, which was a bonus. It was at the baggage carousel that I got that sinking feeling when told all the bags were off the plane but ours were nowhere to be seen.

This is a big airport and we have walked most of it during the morning searching for the bag here with the help of local BA staff, who I must say are extremely obliging. Von’s bag was on level 3 in the BA office, having been sent on an earlier KLM flight, but mine we are now reliably told is still in London. The best we can hope for apparently is that it will be sent on tonight’s flight and then forwarded to Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, our destination 5 days hence. Why am I not confident about this.

Meanwhile I now have little in the way of clothing and both our sleeping bags were packed in the missing rucksack. My underwear and wash bag are in Von’s luggage but all other clothes, travel medication including the malaria tablets we should be starting on, plus phone and camera chargers etc are all now ‘lost’ in mine.

Once it was clear I would be ‘traveling light’, we went to the airport clinic for a malaria tablet prescription which was duly filled at the adjoining pharmacy. So this start to our African adventure has been annoying and costly, but I suppose interesting, to say the least. This morning, one BA assistant helping to raise a ‘file number’ for the missing bag, almost proudly announced that mine was one of 450 that had gone missing in the last week and that currently their computer tracking system listed over 12000 pieces of missing luggage. I really didn’t want to know that and have resigned myself to never seeing my gear again.

Von is fairly stressed out at this point, as much as anything because she knows I am in turmoil on the inside, plus her feet hurt as they are swollen from the flight last night. But this has taught me an important lesson – don’t put all your eggs in one basket, or, in our case, all your sleeping bags and medication in one rucksack. The argument of course is that if you spread it between two bags, do you double the risk of losing half of it – don’t go there Gordon, your OCD is showing.

Finally, after yet another half an hour delay, a bus arrives to take us onto the tarmac for the flight to Pietersburg. I am despondent and doubting whether Derrick will continue to wait for us but try to remain positive – at least we are now heading to the aircraft. Actually we head towards three small aircraft, then stop.

For the next twenty minutes we and our fellow travelers remain captive in the hot bus while outside there is much arm waving, telephoning and then much nothing. Eventually we find out that no one is sure which plane we are to travel on, despite their only being one with a flight crew in it preparing to go anywhere. Strangely it is this one that someone eventually decides we should board.

We land in Pietersburg around 3.15pm and it is with trepidation that I hurriedly cross the tarmac to the terminal, trying to look past the building to see a safari ‘truck’. I hurry into the terminal looking wildly around then behind me hear a voice say, ‘you must be Johanna’. Joy, it is Derrick, he has waited for us. In my panic I missed him but then he is dressed in a Drifters T shirt and I had no idea we were traveling with that company, but who cares!

There are others on the safari with problems. Silke, a Belgian girl also has a lost rucksack from the BA flight we missed and hopes it is on the plane we have just traveled on. Unfortunately no, so she too must now hope that Victoria Falls brings more luck. Derrick takes us to a local trade centre and we buy two sleeping bags, then, apologising to the rest of the group for keeping them waiting, we are on our way.

It is three and a half hour drive to our first bush camp at Machete, through country that is not unlike the Australian outback. Red / brown sandy soil, savannah scrub, lots of dry almost white grasses. The country is mainly flat with just a few distant hills to be seen. We are, as mentioned, on a Drifters Tour, which is a surprise as this name has never been mentioned in all my dealings with Nigel. At this stage I don’t care, the truck is good, Derrick seems nice, so let’s go.

Derrick shows us how to set up the tents in fading light and we all jump to it, learning as we go. The tents are easy though and only take a few minutes. We really don’t have time to meet everyone properly and all pitch in to help prepare the evening meal. I’m sure we will all settle in better tomorrow after a good night’s sleep.

Thursday July 19<sup>th</sup> Up at 6am after our first night with only a thin foam mattress between us and the hard ground. I had to make three nervous trips to the bushes during the night from drinking too much water during the evening. Nervous, because Derrick had emphasized that this was a bush camp and to check for animals before wandering around. I’m not actually sure what I would have done if I’d come face to face with a large four legged local, but I am sure the whole camp knew I’d been out, because in the still of night the tent zipper is very, very loud and makes sneaking out for a quiet pee impossible. Von didn’t enjoy the hard ground either so I am trying not to talk about it.

We pack up the tent and have cereal for breakfast. Derrick is specific about that. Tent first, then breakfast. He obviously has experience of how much longer it takes the other way around. He takes us for a short bush walk to see ‘Bushman’ rock paintings which are not unlike Aboriginal paintings of animals and the tribe but unlike our

Australian version, these are 'only' a few hundred years old. We see our first baobab trees, thorn bushes – acacia trees around the camp, some giraffe droppings and a fresh lion paw print (so there was company for me out there last night). Then we are in the truck and on the way, all determined to live by Derrick's law. The one thing I want you all to remember is this, it's a truck not a bus and I'm a guide not a driver. Yes sir!

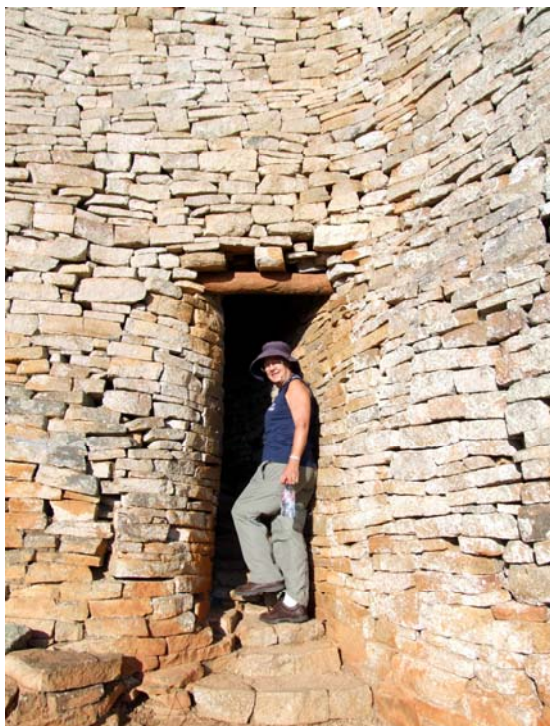
After a very cursory look at South Africa, today we cross into Zimbabwe and reach the border around 11am. Our visas are US\$30 each and there is no problem getting them, just the time it takes. This is our first experience of a land border crossing and with lots of people just standing around and no one seeming to be in any hurry, except the few locals who make a religion out of queue jumping, filling in forms and getting stamps in the passports seems to be a major exercise.

The group we are with all seem OK from what we have seen so far, although there are a couple of dominant characters on board. There is a Dutch family of four, a Belgian couple, Norwegian father and son, a couple from Adelaide and four Germans. One of the young Germans, traveling on his own, has assumed the role of 'co pilot' it seems and sits in the front cab passenger seat – a good position I would think.

### Chapter 3 – Zimbabwe

**Zimbabwe has 13 million people with an life expectancy of just 39 years. Over 12% of children die under the age of five. 55% of the population has AIDS**

So here we are in Zimbabwe the cause of our hopefully unfounded concerns about safety. Before crossing the Limpopo River, at the border on the South African side, there were large numbers of people just sitting around or laying on pieces of cardboard in the dust, waiting for who know what. On the Zimbabwe side, leaving the boarder buildings the first thing we see is a squalid shanty, home to hundreds of locals. The second thing is a smart new brick building called Limpopo Lodge, being erected for ‘wealthy’ tourists.



Yvonne at the Great Zimbabwe Ruins

There are people all along the roadsides with bags and plastic drums, sitting, standing, seeking lifts. In the middle of nowhere we see a few dilapidated buildings with a large sign announcing ‘Chicago Village’. Nothing could be further from Chicago than this. As we travel we pass compounds of small, round, thatched roofed mud huts. I guess on this trip, one thing we have in common with the villagers is that we’ll be sleeping on the ground. I look around and see lots of nodding heads in the truck – guess we weren’t the only ones who didn’t sleep too well on our first night under canvas.

We are stopped at a Police road block for what will be the first of innumerable times on this journey through Africa. There is no real purpose to the Police stopping us that we can work out. They

just ask where we are going and then wave us on. I guess they just need something to do. We visit the Great Zimbabwe Ruins – an interesting place that demonstrates that dry stone building was indeed part of African culture a thousand years ago and that contrary to common belief, at least in this part of the continent there was a highly organised hierarchical society although its’ origins remain unclear. We arrive at our lodgings for the night to find no electricity, but at least to night we have a bed and a hot shower – a luxury we will come to cherish on this trip. It seems they are breaking us in to the camping gently.

Friday July 20<sup>th</sup> We had a lovely evening at the Inn last night, sitting around a camp fire in the grounds and with only candle light and headlamps to light our way back to the dark rooms! It was nice to sleep in a bed again, albeit single and squeaky and best of all was the hot shower. Breakfast this morning ran a bit behind schedule, but hey it’s Africa where we are quickly finding out that time is not so important –

there is lots of it here. They seem to have limited amounts of things for breakfast and whilst Von got potato on her plate with the eggs, by the time my plate made it to the table, potato had turned to lettuce with some kind of hotdog, but that was fine.

Driving out along the road again, it is alive with foot traffic in places – people on the move, women with 20litre drums of water on their heads, but there is a despondency and lethargy about them or am I over-reading what I see. School children wave at us in the truck as we hurry past on our way north. I see a rusted bus stop and wonder if there is still a bus to stop there and if so, when it may come, in this country suffering the consequences of Robert Mugabe's madness.

Today I am resplendently dressed in a green white and blue striped T shirt of Von's, not having too many clothes of my own. It just fits, but that's all it has to do I guess.

Driving through Mosvingo we see queues of people stretching for 30 meters out of supermarkets and on to the pavements, all desperate to buy anything from the pitiful selection of food items left in the shops here. The traffic lights are not working – there is no power. The gas stations do not display fuel prices as most of them have no fuel to sell. For those that do, the hyper inflation makes advertising a price impossible anyway. The official exchange rate for anyone foolish enough to have changed money at a bank was Zim\$255 for US\$1. On the streets we are offered Zim\$78,000 for US\$1. no one bothers to change money – we have enough toilet paper on board. If there is something to buy here, it can be done in US or Rand.

We continue on, passing grossly overloaded trucks with people piled on top of tottering loads. People transport is the new black market in Zimbabwe as Mugabe has made the state transport system, such as it is, completely unaffordable. We pass large termite hills reminiscent of home and a crashed tour bus with it's luggage trailer still attached – the dreams of some intrepid travelers like us have ended there as nightmares no doubt.

Zimbabweans seem to be either on the move or waiting. There are people everywhere doing one or the other waiting for a ride and a few lucky ones managing to squeeze along side their brothers atop a truck. An early impression of Africa is of long straight ribbons of roads, bordered with a lace woven of humanity on the move. The roads are quite good. Much better in fact than I had expected and Derrick whizzes along. This is good for getting to our destinations but not so good for photography as we speed and bounce around. I can see now that much of our trip will have to be remembered as capturing it on camera will be impossible.

On the outskirts of Bulawao, Derrick is stopped by police with a very ancient, speed camera. He somehow manages to talk himself out of a fine and we continue into the city where once again shop windows are empty and many stores are closed. In stark contrast, a luxury car dealership and speed boat sales yard are full of shiny new stock. Pity you can't buy a loaf of bread. Heading out of town we pass large, modern brick homes, obviously those of (wealthy) whites, surrounded by high walls topped with barbed or electrified wire. It's not a place I would choose to live.

We make it to Big Cave Camp at Matopos not far from Bulawao by lunch time, where the tent sites are good and the toilet facilities clean. We set up camp and are keen to

go on our first game drive in White Water Game Park. An old Toyota open top troop carrier turns up to take us to the park where, under the watchful eye of Ian our guide, we see hippos, water buck, impala and three white rhinos.

In groups of eight, Ian took us by foot to see the rhinos and it was an experience that had the heart beating a little faster being only fifteen meters from these impressive animals with no barrier in between. A large female was with her calf and another younger female, all watching us carefully as we watch them and snap a thousand photographs. In the park we met up with two armed park rangers on the look out for poachers.



White Water Game Park – our first game drive

What happens to the poachers if you catch them they were asked. Ian answered for them saying they were either shot, sent to jail, which is an aids death sentence (Zimbabwe has an official public rate of 55% HIV aids, but in the jails it is 100%) or there are lots of crocs in the water holes here so ----- . We didn't ask for any more details.

When we leave the game park in rapidly fading light, two women with small children try to sell us curios from a stall at the gates. We are the last ones out of the park and they have waited in the hope we'd spend money on their wares. It is too dark even to see them properly and none of us buy. It is a tough life and they must now make their way in darkness down the kilometer or more of road out of the park, then to their huts, probably with little or no return from a day standing at the park gates.

Dinner tonight includes our first taste of 'pup', a staple diet food here made from ground maize. It is tasteless, but Derrick seems to like it and I fear we will have much more 'pup' before this trip is over.

We now know all the group by name – it has taken a while. Derrick is the guide, the two Germans traveling alone are Jan and Claudia, the German couple is Torsten and Angelika, the Australian couple are Shawn and Jesia, the Norwegian father and son are Jorn and Hendrik, the Belgian couple Evert and Silke and finally the Dutch family, father Marius, mother Marianne, daughter Maartje and son Jan. So far we are all fitting in and there is no issue with people pitching in when jobs have to be done. We have a washing up roster for the evening meal, with Von and I teamed with the Belgians.

Saturday July 21<sup>st</sup> We have survived another night in the tent on our thin foam mattresses. Von is coping well and not complaining too much and I'm just sorry she

can't yet benefit from the air mattress that is (somewhere?) strapped to the top of my rucksack. The new sleeping bags we bought are good and warm but a real bitch to get back in their carry bags. I think after a month of living like this, the comforts of home will be well and truly appreciated and I suspect not taken for granted for a long time.

During the night a wild cat jumped on the tent of Marianne and Marius giving them a scary wake up call but not doing any damage. We travel on and pass isolated little 'shopping centers' in the middle of nowhere. Two or three ramshackle run down shacks with strange names like 'cocktail butchery' and 'Gods grace grocery'. They don't appear to have much of anything to sell and many are shut up.

There is little traffic on the roads which makes sense as there is no fuel available. Our vehicle has tanks that will see us out of Zimbabwe before the need to refuel. Small, single axle carts pulled by donkeys or cattle are the main form of traffic we pass. Always there are round thatched roof mud huts and we see the almost surreal sight of TV antennas mounted on top of one or two of these. Are there TVs inside – I don't know, but if there are, they are not much good now without power.

Today I saw a Zim\$100,000 note (worth about US\$1.20) with a 'best before' date on it – yes that's right, 'best before 31<sup>st</sup> July 2007'. We laugh and comment that if it isn't already only good for toilet paper, that will certainly soon be the case.

Derrick stops for us to have a 'pee pee' break as he calls it, every couple of hours and if the girls didn't expect to squat behind bushes on this trip, they do now. The boys of course have no issues finding a tree or bush to water.

We arrive at the Ivory Lodge, our next camp around mid day. It is a lovely spot and after the tents are up and lunch finished we spend time in the animal hide overlooking a water hole where zebra, impala, baboons and kudu have come to drink during the afternoon. Derrick is a keen rugby fan and a staunch South African so he is very happy to stir me up about the Aussies loosing to New Zealand in the Tri-nations final. Don't rest easy Derrick, I'll get my revenge.

More old open top Toyotas turn up to take us on a game drive in Hwange National Park. Like most of their kind in Africa, they have been around the clock more than once I am sure. On the way to the park we see Painted Dogs in a sanctuary and then have a great afternoon watching giraffes, elephants, vultures, buffalo, hippos, kudu and other antelope.



In Hwange National Park the elephants come down to the water hole to drink at dusk

Back at camp, Derrick cooks another good meal, meat stew with rice and we while away the evening with camp fire talk of our African adventure. Our camp compound has an electric wire fence around it and I wonder if it is to keep the animals out, or us in – probably both.

Sunday July 22<sup>nd</sup> Most of the group were up early this morning and headed for the animal hide hoping to experience more African wildlife, but unfortunately, the wildlife had other ideas and slept in. Back at the truck, getting breakfast, I ask someone ‘where’s Derrick?’ “Who wants to know” came his voice from high above us where he had been sleeping in his swag on top of the truck. We were to learn this was his favoured spot. We make an early start and are on the road to Victoria Falls by 8.15am only to be stopped by the police after just ten minutes. Derrick patiently produces his paperwork again before a dismissive wave of a hand sends us on our way once more.

There is word from the Drifters office that the missing bags for Silke and I have been located and forwarded to Victoria Falls airport so, in a just a couple of hours we should be reunited with our possessions. 10am. The roller coaster continues. At Victoria Falls airport our bags are nowhere to be seen and the British Airways office is closed. It will be open at 11am we are told at the Information Desk. It will be open at 11.30am, a security guard tells us. It may never open we think to ourselves. Rather than hold the group up, we elect to drive on to the Drifters Inn and sort things out later.

Good news! Silke's rucksack is at the Inn and she is very happy, but mine has not arrived. Bev, who runs the Inn makes a call to someone in the know and assures me my bag is at the airport and will be delivered during the afternoon – I am hopeful but not confident.

Derrick has arranged for an adventure company to give us a presentation on what is available to do in Vic Falls. We book an elephant ride and lion walk for Von and a helicopter ride over the Falls for me, then both head off to see the mighty waterfall from the ground.

Victoria Falls are spectacular throwing up a huge 'rain' spray over much of their impressive length. We wear our \$1 ponchos to keep partially dry and spend a great couple of hours marveling at this kilometer and a half of roaring water as the Zambezi River plunges a hundred meters into the boiling pot below. A troop of baboons laze around the pathways and an impala grazes only meters away. Despite there being toilets here, local women seem to prefer to squat behind trees, even though the trunks are somewhat skinnier than the squatting women! Visitors wander through the Falls park in various protective garbs and we laugh at those who have taken to wearing plastic shopping bags on their heads to keep dry in the constant swirling spray and mist.

Leaving the Falls park, we decide to walk to the border bridge for a different view of the Falls and pass through Zimbabwe Immigration who issue us with a scrap of yellow paper – apparently our pass out. We hope we can get back in from the no man's land of the bridge.

Beyond the immigration control, a bicycle rickshaw driver cons us into paying a dollar for a "2km ride" to the bridge which we do for the experience, knowing the real distance is much shorter. It is all in good fun and he laughs at having 'got us' and we laugh at 'being got'. We walk the bridge and get pestered by curio sellers. It is the start of us becoming 'mama' and 'papa'. "Papa, help me. Buy something from my business. Papa, please Papa" and on and on. We will learn to live with this in Africa.

The experience is a good one though, as we learn that mainly by ignoring them, in the space of a couple of hundred meters, the prices drop by 75% without us even having to make an offer, a good piece of information for when we go to the markets tomorrow.

Yes! Yes! Yes! My bag has arrived. I give it a hug and hurried examination. It is largely intact and nothing is missing. It isn't even mouldy or smelly so assumedly was not one of those left out in the Amsterdam rain by the baggage handlers. Now I am happy – I even have my own clothes to wear instead of the thin British Airways T shirts and Yvonne's shirt – no offence intended my dear.

Local dancers come to the lodge in the evening, performing traditional songs and dances energetically for an hour or so before finishing with a rendition of the 1960s not so traditional hit "in the jungle the mighty jungle the lion sleeps tonight". As well as traditional song and dance, the dancers unfortunately also brought with them something we have noticed on many of our African brothers and sisters, traditional odour, which wafted unwanted towards us for the duration of the performance.

We have discovered that in the town of Victoria Falls, despite it being home to the biggest tourist attraction in the country, there is nothing to buy except curios. Mr. Mugabe has certainly sent the country spiraling toward catastrophe. Some of our group went to the Wimpy Bar for lunch today and were ripped off to the tune of about US\$12 each for a nondescript 'something'. They were told after ordering burgers, 'well, we don't have this, we don't have that and finally, we don't actually have any burgers! Still, they made something up with mushrooms that kind of resembled a Wimpy burger.

We did notice when looking in Wimpy's ourselves, that the price of a basic burger in US was about \$5, but if paid for in Rand was only about \$2, so there is obviously a preference for South African currency here for some reason.

Others of our group went to the market and discovered that you can trade just about anything so we will take some of our own excess gear tomorrow and try our luck.

Even the basic things here in Zimbabwe are just not quite right. In particular toilets (although we are to discover this is an Africa wide problem), never any paper or soap, cisterns that need coaxing to operate and lights that don't work. For example at the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, in the museum there which is supposed to be a major tourist attraction, fluorescent lights flickered on and off continually, creating a weird effect in this heritage listed iconic national site. I felt sorry for the staff as they obviously didn't have the resources to even replace the faulty fluorescent tube or starter.

Monday July 23<sup>rd</sup> It's great to have a real note pad to write on instead of the scraps of paper and back of airline 'E ticket' that I've made do with over the past few days. Our room at the Drifters Inn is very good with a king size bed covered with a mosquito net. I have woken early, showered and gone for coffee and to catch up on my notes, leaving Von to sleep in , a rare luxury and more than my life is worth to disturb.

After breakfast we walk to town, which is probably too ambitious a term to use. There are a few shops although most have little or nothing to sell, but there are the markets and they are our target. There are dozens of little stalls all displaying similar carvings, paintings, beads and bangles laid out on the dusty ground under a common roof made from a maze of rusting corrugated iron sheets. It is full on from the start and 'here Mama (Papa), come and look at my shop – looking is free' is repeated over and over as the young men operating the stalls each try to entice us into their curio web.

They all work together and if one can't supply exactly what we are looking for, suddenly it appears from 'somewhere else' in the market. Knowing that the asking price is anywhere from 4 -10 times higher than what will finally be accepted the trick for us is to keep saying 'NO' and refusing to make an offer. Von finds this quite stressful for the first half an hour but eventually gets the hang of it as we wend our way slowly from stall to stall. The guys are indeed happy to trade anything, trousers, shirts, socks but try to get dollars as well. We buy copper bracelets as souvenirs for Dale, Ben and Dad, beaded necklaces for the girls and a set of carved wooden animals for ourselves. In the process I offloaded some T shirts (including the wonderful British Airways freebies), some twenty year old trousers and some pens.

With a short walk and time to catch our breath, we are in a second market with more focus on fabric and paintings. Yvonne buys two table clothes for the equivalent of \$12 and we get rid of our last Rand. We give the ladies a T shirt and some pens and pencils for their kids as well. It was really good fun and meeting up with Jorn and Hendrik we have lunch at Mama Africa, then get ready for an afternoon of adventures.

I leave Von at the Shearwater offices in town from where she will be picked up for the elephant ride and lion walk and walk back to the Inn in readiness for the helicopter flight. At the gate, warthogs are tearing apart the garbage bags left outside. I don't interfere and give these tusky critters a wide berth as I make my way inside.

Mid afternoon. Well the helicopter ride was superb and I can only now appreciate the scope of Victoria Falls. From the ground it is not possible to gauge the overall size or grandeur of them, nor the size of the Zambezi that feeds their incessant thirst. I hope the video and photos I have taken do justice to the majesty of this place. I was fortunate to get the front seat in the helicopter and so had the best photographic position. It was a short but well worthwhile twelve minutes (timed to the second by the pilot).



The impressive Victoria Falls over a kilometer in length across the mighty Zambezi River

Von will be back around 6pm having a much longer session with each of her animal experiences and I really hope it will be a day for her to remember.

Yvonne's notes.

Riding the elephant. Five of our group have done the combined elephant ride and lion walk plus Shawn and Jesia also did just the elephant ride. We signed an indemnity form saying they weren't responsible if the elephant or some other animal injured or killed us then listened carefully to our instructions to hang on tight if your animal starts running to avoid other animals or even wild elephants! Fortunately none of this happened.

I was the only person in group as a single so had an elephant to myself, with the guide of course. His name was Tsuami (close enough) and he was a young man about twenty and our elephant was a female called Dimby, who was having a slow day. Jorn and Hendrik on the elephant behind, had their guide provoke Dimby to get her into a decent walk. Very exciting and when she first took off, I nearly wet myself!

We didn't see much in the way of other wild life, but the scenery was interesting and Tsuami was very good at explaining everything. I made him laugh and he fell forward giggling like mad. After our ride I was able to feed Dimby and sit on her knee for photographs. She had very thick strong hair and eye lashes like beading cord. We were then driven back to the hut for a drink and our safety talk on lions.



Yvonne with a lazy lion on her up close and personal experience

Walking with Lions. Our lions were three (teenagers) 9 – 15 months with the males already weighing in at 150kgs. Full grown they are 250kgs and can be almost two meters tall. Peace, a male was bone lazy and his two companions weren't much better. We'd walk for a few paces and they'd flop to the ground or on top of each other like they were making a scrum. Hilarious and the

group took lots of photos of course which hopefully will be in focus as I sometimes just clicked through in the excitement. Also took some video so I hope that comes out as it was fun to watch them playing.

Thanks to some of the others in the group they took photos of me with the lions and on the way home, the lions found second gear of course. We finished our adventure with snacks and a glass of local chardonnay, yum. Apparently the ratio of walkers to lions changes with the size of the group – the more people the less lions for safety reasons so today the twelve of us just walked with the three lions. I gave the guide a \$5 tip and we did the special handshake. They filmed a DVD during the afternoon but at a price of US\$75 it was just a tad exorbitant.

Day 5 assessment of the our traveling companions.

Shawn, the Adelaide Aussie. Wants to dominate and be the top dog. It seems to me that he tries very hard to 'be the hero' wants to be first in to do everything and reminds me of someone I've worked with in recent times who acted this way as a result of an inferiority complex. Shawn and I have the potential to get each other offside very easily so I shall have to not let this get out of hand.

Jesia, the partner of Shawn. Jesia is very nice but appears to be completely dominated by Shawn's decisions. She seems keen to stroke his ego all the time. I think she is much more relaxed when he is not around.

Marius, Marianne, Maartje and Jan. This is a lovely Dutch family. Marius is a colonel in the Dutch army and is apparently due to serve in Afghanistan in the near future. Marianne is fun, fit and in good shape. She and Marius have run the New York marathon. Maartje is a very outgoing girl, pretty with a bouncy personality. Loves a chat and is keen to get on with everyone. Jan is a good looking young guy, quite athletic I think, but quieter than his sister. They appear to be a close, loving family.

Claudia from Germany. Somehow doesn't seem to be quite in tune with what is going on. She has a husband but he is on a separate holiday at a music festival in Vienna I believe. Claudia comes across as a little absent minded. A heavy smoker.

Torsten and Angelika, also from Germany. Dr. Torsten is a war historian and Angelika is in costume design for the theatre. They are a very nice couple who are well traveled, often in motor homes including an extensive Perth to Darwin trip in Australia. Torsten is also a smoker and originally from East Germany. They seemed to be taking a while getting used to setting up the tent.

Jan, the fourth German in the group. Jan is an investment advisor with Deutsche Bank. He is very focused on what he wants, why he is here and what he expects to achieve. He spoke of his family values the other night and explained that they rate actual and practical family support / unity as the main priority, but do not engage much in the hugs and kisses or warm and fuzzy stuff.

Jorn and Hendrik. Jorn is a contract purchasing manager for a large oil company in Norway. A lovely guy around 47 I think. Has a stutter but speaks good English having done his MBA at Bond University in Queensland. Hendrik has some learning difficulties and Jorn has explained he finds it hard to build relationships. He doesn't say much and I'm sure Jorn has brought him in an attempt to get him to open up a little.

Evert and Silke, the Belgian couple. A lovely couple, he is a teacher and she works with autistic children. She is very smart and is also involved in Belgian politics. Evert teaches some of the sciences and geography. They have been living together for a few months so this trip may be something of a test.

That leaves just Derrick our guide. 'Lekker Lekker like a fire cracker' is one of his favourite sayings, along with 'cool bananas'. He is king of the kids. Loves herding us around, being in control and is in his element in the bush. Derrick is very knowledgeable but by his own admission if not good with relationships and the

opposite sex. I don't think he likes committing and prefers to answer to himself. Certainly in this job, once he is on the road, he is definitely the decision maker.

I wonder what the others are writing about us in the various diaries that are being kept?

During the morning the power was off, another legacy of the Mugabe regime but at 6pm it is resumed so camera batteries and the phone can be charged before we leave tomorrow morning. We go to a large tourist restaurant, Boama, for dinner with entertainment by dancers and drummers. The food is exotic, crocodile and fish for entrée then ostrich, wart hog, impala and kudu for main course. It is all good, but in particular I enjoy the wart hog and wonder as I eat, if the meat has come from an animal that has rampaged through the town's garbage in the streets. Yum, tasty!

Tuesday July 24<sup>th</sup>. Up at 5am and the group is ready to leave for Zambia within the hour. We make it through the immigration process OK, shaking our heads at the chaotic administrative processes it is necessary to follow. The reports on the ladies toilet at the border are disgusting – apparently the worst on the trip so far. Even at the restaurant last night there was no soap in the dispenser. It gives cause for concern about the food handling practices, but no one has been sick yet – touch wood. Perhaps we are just lucky, but 'will it last' is the real question?

Leaving Zimbabwe I ponder that our concerns regarding the country were fortunately not realised. We have seen no evidence of violent crime the travel advisories warned of nor of any political unrest, having stayed well away from Harare. We have felt very comfortable in Zimbabwe and enjoyed good interaction with the people. Even the market traders worked hard to squeeze every last cent they could from us, but when the deal was done, were happy to shake hands and have some fun.

## Chapter 4 – Zambia

**Gross national product here is just US\$320 per capita in this country of 10 million people. Only 64% have access to clean drinking water and have a life expectancy of just over 35 years**

In Livingstone we stop at a Spa to stock up with provisions for our canoe trip which starts tomorrow, including water and some snacks, plus wine for Von. We also change US\$ for Kwachas as the regular shops do not take other currencies, unlike those in Zimbabwe. In stark contrast to the empty stores in Zimbabwe, stores here have plenty of everything. Strangely though the roads here do not seem to be as well maintained as in Zimbabwe, but I suspect given time this scenario will change as the lack of funding for anything in Zimbabwe gradually takes effect.

This morning we see two churches. Not unusual one would think, but they are actually the first we have seen in Africa. We travel down a somewhat better road for a few hours and notice that the small round thatched mud huts of the last few days have given way to a square variety. Guess the Zambians do it their own way. More police road checks to keep Derrick on his toes.

The weather has been superb with warm to hot days and cool evenings. We have had a couple of cold nights so have given the sleeping bags purchased in South Africa to the Dutch girls as they have been cold in the bags they brought. If they work out OK they will buy them from us.

We arrive at Kafue Kiambi camp around 5pm after crossing the Kafue river on an ancient pontoon that belches smoke from two equally ancient diesel motors. We are told this is a big advancement on the old pontoon, now beached on the river bank, as it had to be hand winched across the river, a feat that took about half an hour for each crossing.

After negotiating the river, we pass by the major truck crossing point into Zimbabwe for vehicles heading north / south. It is chaos, with hundreds of trucks parked every which way and no apparent semblance of order or logic. We are told that it often takes a day or more to get paperwork organised for the border crossing, then a driver has to know who is parked around him and find those drivers so vehicles can be shunted around and out of the way to let him out. There is a very large shanty town in the middle of this mess which may as well be called Aids City as it is the truck drivers of Africa who are a major means by which the disease spreads.

The roads deteriorate badly during the afternoon and we spend quite some time on unmade surfaces. Derrick tends to drive just a bit too fast (in my opinion – although I have kept that to myself) and hits some very large potholes. Several of us bounce high out of seats but the only casualty that becomes apparent later when lockers are opened, is a bottle of gin belonging to Shawn. Naturally he is not impressed.

Kiambi camp is on the banks of the Zambezi River and this evening Maartje manages to borrow a guitar from a guest in the adjacent lodge and we enjoy a sing song around the camp fire as we ready ourselves for two days of canoeing on the mighty Zambezi.

Wednesday July 25<sup>th</sup> Von and I both had a restless night. Von suffering from hot flushes and needing to get into the silk inner sheet to stop from 'sticking' to the sleeping bag and me from listening to all of that activity. Outside the tent there was also plenty of noise as the hippos in the river honked and hollered to each other all night.

In the morning we pack our essentials for the two days into water tight plastic buckets, put the things that don't fit such as sleeping bags into (hopefully) sealed plastic bags and then get our canoe safety briefing from Chris, the guide on this aquatic adventure. We sign indemnity forms to say that it's OK if hippos or elephants injure or kill us, then it's all hands to the decks as we load tents, chairs and provisions into the canoes, then our personal gear and finally, tentatively, ourselves, ready in Chris's words to do it 'easy on the Zambezi'.

We are all excited by the prospect of being in the water with the hippos, who we are told are very unpredictable, can sometimes surface right beside the canoes and are extremely dangerous. In fact, most animal related deaths in Africa are attributed to hippos. Thanks for that bit of information Chris. Once in the water we immediately see hippos, fortunately not too close and on the far bank, we sight elephants making their way to the water for a drink. The day is brilliant, clear skies and pleasant warm temperature. The water flows quickly, happily for us, in the direction we are going and before we know it we have covered 15kms and it's lunch time.

The river is wide, maybe a half to one kilometer – distances are hard to gauge on the water. A croc drifts by on the current, checking around for a meal. It is surreal and beautiful. After a couple of lazy hours, Chris and his offsider Wesley get us moving again and having just left Victoria Falls, it's a strange sensation looking at the river knowing that all the water we are now traveling in will soon be tumbling over that one and a half kilometers of rock face then plummeting down a hundred meters before rushing off down the deep river gorge that zig zags its' way through Zimbabwe.

We finish the 30kms for the day around 4.30pm and set up camp on 'Mosquito Island' as Derrick calls it. We are all nervous about the prospect of getting bitten to death and there is much spraying of insect repellent amongst the group. It has been a great day on the river. Very peaceful and we have seen many elephants and even more hippos, who continue to honk and call into the evening.

This is a wild camp and we have been warned not to wander off into the bush. We have a designated toilet zone not far from camp and the shovel with a roll of toilet paper shoved into the handle stands upright in the sand ready for action. As I write, two elephants have wandered down to the river bank and hippos surface not far from them, checking them out with their beady little eyes. I comment to our Dutch neighbours that it will be very boring when we return home to look at our gardens from the back door, instead of the Zambezi and its' inhabitants through the flap of our tent.

During the day I did have one piece of good fortune when I noticed water in the plastic bag protecting my camera. Fortunately I noticed it in time to ensure no damage was done and I made sure it was better sealed for the rest of the paddle. Chris and Derrick go fishing for Tiger fish while dinner is cooking after they have caught

several small fish for bait. They return empty handed, but lured by the sight of a fishing rod I kill half an hour by catching some more bait for them.

By nine o'clock we are all in bed, happily tired from the fresh air and activity. It is good to lay listening to hippos honking and frogs singing as we drift off to sleep. The frogs sound like our bell birds but have more of a 'ping' than a 'ring' – if you know what I mean. The hippos come to within about 20 meters of camp during the night, making my call of nature excursion a little more exciting than I would have liked!

Thursday July 26<sup>th</sup> There is a beautiful sunrise this morning with that magical star appearing as a huge scarlet ball above the Zambezi. I hope my photographic skills have done it justice although such moments can never be adequately captured in pixels on a computer screen. I am happy to say that 'Mosquito Island' has not lived up to its' name. As we are here in winter it seems the mossies are on a holiday of their own, in warmer more humid climes – good. We are up and breaking camp early but in relaxed fashion. I think half of the sand on mosquito island is in our tent but we'll be able to sweep it out tomorrow so who cares.

The hippos continued their honking all night but amazingly some of the group must be very good sleepers as they heard nothing, or perhaps it was the mesmerizing flights of the fireflies we watched into the evening that put them into a tranquil trance and blissful sleep – didn't work for me, but the fireflies were good to watch.

Another lovely session of gentle paddling down the river. We are almost complacent about the wildlife now and the rush for cameras at first glimpse of a hippo is no more. At morning tea time, Chris tries his luck fishing again and bingo, he lands a fifty centimeter tiger fish. He offers me a chance and I have two big hits but can't hook them. Damn, I would love to have caught a tiger fish in the Zambezi – think of all the lies I could have told about that and how big it would have grown over the years! I'll just have to settle for having caught the bait.

Shawn barges in with 'you've had your turn' and takes the rod from me without so much as a please or thank you. He then proceeds to cast straight over an island of tree branches and snag the line, immediately blaming the gear. "it's different with the reel on that side". Mate, as the old saying goes, a bad workman blames his tools. Shawn has to hang on to the rod until Chris launches his canoe and frees the snag from the other side of the little island. I hold my tongue but watch from a distance, chuckling with amusement.

We stop at a grassy spot for lunch and Derrick manages to catch a tiger fish this time. Sipping our tea, Von who has been contemplating the river for some time makes the profound statement that we are "having tea made from Zambezi hippo pooh water" I guess she is right, but strangely enough, Roibos and hippo pooh don't taste too bad at all. Not sure what says about the flavour of Roibos.

The weather is magnificent and we laze on the grass in the sun. If this is Winter, I wouldn't want to be doing the trip in Summer. Funny how you adapt to what you have and where you are. All the ladies are happily trotting off to the toilet behind a bush simply because there is no alternative, yet in our normal lives this would be an option of last resort.

Von has borrowed my knife and is scraping off the remnants of her nail polish as she has no polish remover. There hasn't been a whole lot of washing going on during the canoe trip, just plenty of underarm deodorant being used. Marius however is maintaining his army standards and shaves religiously every morning and sometimes in the evenings too. This morning he foamed up with hippo pooh water and looks as smart as ever.



Elephants join us for lunch during the Zambezi canoe trip

As we prepare to leave our lunch spot, a family of eight elephants come to eat and drink just meters away and we spend a lovely half an hour watching and filming them. Paddling on, we pass through the middle of reedy marshes and very close to some grazing buffalo. One bull is definitely not amused and begins to show interest in our canoe which is at the back of the group so we increase our stroke (and heart) rate and quickly catch up with the others.

Our camp for the night even has toilets and showers and although the water is not much more than a trickle, it is hot and we enjoy a good wash after two days in the canoe. Chris asks me if I want to fish again but unfortunately there are no more bites so we settle down around the camp fire reflecting on 60kms of Zambezi paddling. Excellent. Derrick and Chris cook a brai of sausages, lamb chops, kebabs and of course, tiger fish. A great way to finish a unique experience that we will always remember.

Friday July 27<sup>th</sup> We had the first hint of tummy troubles overnight when Von suffered some stomach cramps but fortunately it only required a trip to the toilet to solve the problem. We have been lucky so far and, touch wood, will continue to be.

Another magic sunrise over the Zambezi this morning but I think I am the only one up to appreciate it. In some ways I wish I could sleep better, but then there's plenty of time for that later and I'll never see a Zambezi sunrise again so I think I'm getting the best deal.

Suddenly, a flurry of activity as we are packing up from breakfast. A local guy has walked into camp with a baby elephant he is hand feeding from a bottle. The little six month old, Zamba, as we learn he is called, was found walking by himself in the bush so the locals are trying to bring him up. We all take lots of photos and Zamba amuses himself by trying to push us over as we kneel and crouch to get good angles. He may

only be a meter high but he's strong. He chews on my hand for good luck before deciding his bottle tastes much better. Good luck little fellow – I hope you make it. A large aluminium speed boat arrives from Kiambi base camp to take all our gear back and sure enough it is all loaded in and on top of the boat, including seven of the canoes. The other three are attached with tow ropes and with Derrick somehow wedged in the front they set off for the return journey. Half an hour later another boat arrives to take us and for the next three hours we speed back over our Zambezi canoe course, stopping for photo opportunities and twice because we run out of fuel. Hey, this is Africa, it's a minor problem.

Back at camp we have to choose new sites as another group of travelers have arrived. They are South Africans on a round trip from Johannesburg and seem to want to keep pretty much to themselves. We have a relaxed afternoon with some of the group going by boat to a village with Chris. We elect to stay at camp to do some washing, give each other a hair cut, have a swim and good long shower whilst there is the opportunity.

Our evening meal is in the lodge restaurant and yummy, we have a rump steak, the first steak in a long time, in fact I can't remember having a steak since we left Australia. We are not given an option as to how the meat is cooked and it arrives overdone, but that seems to be the way they like it here. Still, it's steak, so who's complaining.

I watch the Dutch family at dinner. They appear very close and Marius dotes on them all. Two days ago, Marianne emotionally told us of their last few years. It seems that for seven years, Marius' work took him away during the weekdays and he only returned at weekends. During this time Maartje had a major problem with her shoulder when she was training with the Dutch water polo team which sent her spiraling into depression. Jan had hearing problems and had to have an implant to rectify the situation. Marianne had to deal with all this by herself for much of the time with Marius finding the problems difficult to deal with and basically using his work enabling him to escape the problems at home.

She indicated that this trip was a new start for the family, hopefully to bring them back together. He is certainly trying from what I can see, probably realizing that he nearly lost it all. We explained to Marianne how close we came to breaking up four years ago and she shed some tears as her situation is so similar. I wish them the best of luck, they seem right for each other and I'm sure they will work it out.

Saturday July 28<sup>th</sup> 8.15am and we are sitting by the side of the Kafue River waiting to board the pontoon. We've been here for three quarters of an hour already but the pontoon is broken down – one of the diesel engines is not working and it seems this is a regular occurrence. The government mechanic who should be working on the job is on leave for two weeks, so a local farmer has his guys working on the problem, although you can't rush these things by the look of it. Luckily for us, the farmer needs the trucks on the other side of the river over here so has a vested interest otherwise who knows how long we will be here. Maybe it would have meant resurrection of the old hand winched pontoon as we are told has happened in the past.

10am and we are still here, but out of adversity comes opportunity. We have spent the time interacting with local children who have arrived at the ramp out of curiosity to see 'the whites'. Von makes paper cranes to give away, the Dutch give balloons that the kids love and Jesia has stick on glitter shapes that all the kids and indeed their mums are now wearing as earrings.

I make friends with a tiny 11 year old girl called Estanda and give her a pen. She speaks reasonably good English so we talk about her life here in the village before she disappears for a while. She returns with a baby strapped to her back, obviously mum wants a break and Estanda stands there rocking up and down in perfect control like a miniature mother. Guess they train them young here.

The diesel engine has fired up a few times belching out large choking clouds of smoke, only to die again after a few seconds. We are told the timing shaft need adjustment so we do not anticipate leaving any time soon. Goats are laying in the hot sun bleating, legs tied together ready for market and eventually the girls from our group convince some locals to move them into the shade. Von and Maartje feed them banana skins and Von gives one a drink of water from our supply poured into her cupped palm. The goats owner looks at her curiously, obviously wondering why she would bother.

A local tells me that there is talk of a bridge to overcome problems with the pontoon and apparently the World Bank have visited the area recently so it is hoped that money will be made available soon.

We wait and watch intrigued by local life – one of the toddlers is wearing a jacket with a retail store plastic security tag still attached to the middle of the back. Obviously its' origins are dubious but we assume the mother thinks this is a fashion accessory or somehow part of the garment. Either way we photograph him in amusement. Another little one walks around in one sandal – I guess one is better than none when it's all you have.

Finally around 11.45 the diesel roars into life amidst a last huge cloud of white smoke and continues, at least until we are safely over the other side and on our way. Today is going to be just one of those days as an hour up the road and we have another unscheduled stop when the truck runs out of diesel in the main tank. The reserve tank should automatically feed into the main tank when it is low but this has not happened. Derrick says it is a gravity system, but whatever it is, it should work and I get the feeling that it is a 'cheap solution'. Fuel is pumped manually for half an hour, the injectors bled then we carry on to Lusaka for some quick shopping and lunch.

The shopping centre is very good, modern, large, clean, with fully stocked stores busy with smartly dressed and prosperous looking shoppers – a stark contrast to the rural areas from whence we have come. We move on having lost so much time and stop for the night at Bridge Camp on the way to Luangwa, our original destination being well beyond reach today.

Sunday July 29<sup>th</sup>      Up at 5am and we break camp in the dark as we have a long day of driving on bad roads ahead of us. In the dark I manage to loose my Swiss Army knife I later discover, which is a shame as I have had it for many years.

Traveling over the bumps and corrugations I reflect on images Africa so far: long straight roads, lots of people on the roadsides, women carrying water in plastic containers on their heads, small thatched mud brick hut villages, townships with small, dilapidated flat roof buildings proclaiming 'enterprises' or 'investments', groceries, butchers and other shops with names like 'God Gives Barbershop' all on their Coca Cola branded signboards. Many of these have closed doors, look uninviting and there is little external evidence of produce or display. In Zambia we see rows of chaff bags on the roadsides laden with fuel charcoal for sale and on the roads, overloaded trucks with these bags bulging and ballooning well beyond the width of the vehicle. Police road checks for no obvious reason other than to ask where we are going.

Goats, pigs, cattle and chickens wandering across the roads at will, only quickening their pace at the last minute to avoid becoming a statistic. There is a lack of dogs. I expected to see more but so far there have been few. The light here is strange. It is a hazy light and even though it is made worse by smoke from the burning of grasses that is taking place to make way for new growth to come with the first of the rains, it is hazy still. I expected great clarity as in an Australian winter but Derrick says it is not so and indeed claims their summer light to be much clearer. I can't work that one out.

We pass a sign that reads 'Flying stones for next 20kms'. I watch carefully but don't see any!

The afternoon drive is arduous on the bumpy dirt roads and it is hot in the truck. Yvonne, suffering badly today from the heat and her hot flushes feels quite unwell by the time we reach Wildlife Camp on the edge of the Southern Luangwa National Park. As soon as we pitch the tent, it is into the swimming costumes and the camp pool, which has Von feeling much better in a matter of minutes.

This camp is good. Plenty of flat tent sites and clean facilities. There are monkeys and baboons wandering through the camp looking to make mischief and steal what they can, so we keep the tent closed and our eyes open. There is some time to catch up with washing and to take advantage of a hot shower before dinner. Part of the group went on a night game drive and returned having seen two lions with cubs and a couple of hyenas plus the usual suspects of giraffe and zebra etc.

Monday July 30<sup>th</sup> I wake to the sound of water dripping on the tent. Could it be the first rain since arriving in Africa? It stops after a few seconds, then plop, plop, plop, I realise that something is doing a wee and pooh on the tent! My heart races a little and I hold my breath, praying that Von doesn't start snoring and scare whatever it is into attacking us. The barman in the camp told us last night that hippos frequently come through the camp at night to graze, so it must be a hippo right here, right next to us!

Laying there not daring to move incase the beast treads on us I listen intently but can hear nothing. Has it gone? I didn't hear footsteps. Is it eating? I can't hear chomping. Then, as I come fully out of sleep I conclude that the sounds I did hear could not possibly represent the volume of stuff a hippo would let fly with. I whisper to Von 'are you awake' but get no reply so lay there until the alarm goes off at 5.30am before

venturing out. I quickly discover that the culprit of the toileting on our tent was a black faced monkey sitting in a tree branch directly above us. I'm glad we didn't have a close encounter with a hippo – but hey, it would have made for a great story.

We leave early on a game drive and are disappointed not to see any big cats although there are plenty of elephant, zebra, antelope and giraffe etc. Scrambled eggs for lunch – a luxury and everyone is happy. There is time to relax before we set off for a short days' drive over the poor road to our camp for the night.

I am sitting under the thatched roof of the open bar in the cool afternoon breeze contemplating the Luangwa River panorama before me. The river wends its' way lazily towards the Zambezi. What a shock this slow flowing water will get when it eventually meets up with its' fast moving powerful cousin. A hippo lays half submerged, moving only an eye and I think this is so reflective of the pace of Africa. Everything here happens at its' own pace in its' own time. You can't hurry Africa.

We trundle along in the truck and I try to steal photos of life here; some huts, a village compound, a dilapidated store with a wonderful name that conjures a very different image to the reality I see, but it is difficult through the windows of the moving vehicle. I mourn the missed opportunities to capture the culture, the heart and soul of this place. There have been so many images I would love to have taken – bare bottomed babies and toddlers playing in the dirt, how the people live, the shack city at the Zimbabwe / Zambia border, men sitting doing nothing with nothing to do, the women carrying water and wood, always working.

All this and a thousand other things. I know that whilst I am glad to have come to Africa I am also sad to know that I have only scratched the surface in understanding this place and that I will now always have more questions than answers.

It is sad to see some of the children developing a beggar mentality, running smiling, waving at us in the vehicle, then holding out their hands for money. Unfortunately it is the tourism industry that has created this as we are seen as being rich, which, compared to them we are. It is the well intentioned, but I think misguided, individuals who have given money for nothing, devaluing the cultural relationship that are at the root of the problem.

I wonder too about the children and their future. Most seem to be getting basic education at least, but how will they be able to break free of their meager rural existence and gain an opportunity to improve themselves. I suspect only a very few will achieve this and the majority will see out their lives the way their parents and all the generations before them have, in a tiny micro world unable to ever experience what we lucky ones can – the opportunity to leave our own villages and experience a wider world. Our camp this evening is at Mama Rula's, a green oasis with good showers and toilet and even an internet connection albeit painfully slow, but hey at least it is a connection to the rest of civilization.

## Chapter 5 – Malawi

**Only 57% of the 12 million people can access clean drinking water. A staggering 18% of children die under 5 and the average life expectancy is 38 years. Gross national product is a tiny US\$170 per person**

Tuesday July 31<sup>st</sup> We are on the road before eight this morning and have the chance to walk the last couple of kilometers to Chipata township whilst Derrick goes in search of gas for our cooking stove. We meet him at Shoprite, every major town seems to have a Shoprite or Spa, and stock up on goodies for us and essentials for him, before making the short drive to the Malawi border.

I think Jesia is losing the plot with camping. I jovially said to her this morning as we were putting bags into the truck lockers, “we’ll know how to do this soon” to which she replied in a surly tone, “I’m over it.” Oops, still more than two weeks to go.

We pass through the Zambia and Malawi immigration offices filling out the same details of name, passport number, nationality etc each time, just on different coloured bits of paper in slightly different formats. We haven’t seen anyone actually check any of these yet and I am tempted to make some deliberate, comical errors but the thought of the consequences just in case it was spotted makes me put that silly thought aside.

On the Malawi side of the border, kids again swarm around the truck with their “Hello, give me” calls. We answer hello but give them nothing. Jesia is having a turn in the co-pilot’s seat today – I think she needs a change and some ‘space’.

We enter Nkhatakota National Park which immediately provides a different landscape with a dense, green canopy of trees, quite different to almost all of our travels to date. Derrick tells us that we will not see much wildlife in Malawi as most of the game has been hunted out. This may be one reason for the dense vegetation if the elephant and giraffe are not eating out or knocking over the trees. Also of course in the National Park there is no human habitation and hence no land clearing. It is lovely to see the green trees after days of dusty bare earth.

Leaving the park, the trees quickly thin out though and the all too familiar landscape of dry sparsely vegetated countryside to which we have become accustomed returns. Our campsite at Lake Malawi is good and we change the dust for sand. Luckily there are only a few campers here before us so finding a site for the tent is not difficult. Two other overland trucks arrive shortly after us and their occupants scramble to find a spot. Soon we are all in tent city and for the first time have close neighbours, two English girls who establish home less than a meter away from us.

Tomorrow is a rest day here, so the younger ones gravitate to the bar to kick up their heels. We sit around the table and talk ‘till 9.30pm, late for us on this trip, then head happily to bed. I was glad tonight not to have Derrick’s beloved ‘pup’. He likes to prepare this, but if I never have the starchy tasteless stuff again, I won’t be sorry. Derrick does an exceptional job in providing us with good, if mainly basic food, with his limited resources and he maintains the variety, but buddy, you can keep the pup.

Wednesday August 1<sup>st</sup> Well, it's thirty nine years today that I left England as a twenty year old with Ralph, Ted and Brian on what has been a great journey through life. I could not have imagined back then, when we all thought that after two or three years we would be back in the Old Dart to live 'normal' lives, that nearly forty years on I would only just recently have returned to that country for any length of time and today be sitting by the side of Lake Malawi in Africa. Our mission back then was to 'go around the world'. None of us has completed the circuit yet, but this adventure has rekindled my enthusiasm to fulfill that mission and on our return home I will turn my mind to the Americas, for me the last remaining challenge.

I feel fortunate to have had so many travel experiences in my life and am much richer for them. This trip has certainly given me cause to reappraise our way of life with its' focus on materialistic needs. Whilst it would be foolish not to be comfortable, I find myself feeling less and less of a need for luxuries and excesses. That of course is all relative and what I consider a luxury is nothing to those with great wealth, as the luxury for a village dweller here may equate to a necessity for me.

Up early again, 5am and make coffee at the truck. The camp is quiet and it seems I am the only early riser other than a lone security guard who silently shuffles along on his rounds. Going for a walk up the beach the sunrise is pleasant and I look at the waves breaking on the beach. Not unusual in its' own right but I remember that this is a lake not an ocean, albeit a very large lake, about a quarter the size of Malawi, so to see what is essentially a surf break, is a little strange. On the beach villagers are already active. I am immediately besieged by local youngsters wanting to give us a 'tour' of the village, obviously in return for money.

Back in camp I reflect on how our diverse group of travelers is working as a unit and consider it to be surprisingly good. Shawn of course tries to be first at everything and impress by doing the most so we just let him get on with it. In other regards there are always plenty of volunteers for food preparation and other things that need doing. The evening meal wash ups work just fine with the clearly established teams formed for that task early on. Everyone in the group is pulling their weight which is great and in general we are a reasonably harmonious lot – thank goodness.

Later in the morning, a group of us go for a walk into Kande village with some local young guys, George, Puff Daddy and Dixon. They don't ask for money but the intent is clear. They are very informative, show us through the village, make sure we can take lots of photos and tell us about themselves. It is an excellent experience. There are lots of kids who line up to be photographed then clamber to see their images on the digital camera screens.

On the way back to camp, we allow George to lead us to his 'shop' where he and a cousin have wood carvings and paintings for sale. We buy a couple of paintings after the normal haggling session in order to give them something for spending the time with us. All these guys tell us they are still going to school and have ambitions of being accountants or engineers which is great to see. Leaving George, another lad shows us a wooden mask he is trying to trade. He says he wants socks so Yvonne takes hers off, old and dirty with dust as they are. He hands over his piece of craft, pleased with the trade. I'm not sure who got the better deal, but Von felt happy that he at least had socks to wear now.

The youngsters here have all adopted fancy names and on the walk we meet Tom Cruise, Isaac Newton, Donald Duck, Winston Churchill and Julius Cesar. Who would have imagined all of those luminaries being at Lake Malawi at the one time.

After lunch we venture up the beach to the fishing village and another glimpse of life here. Naked and near naked children, their black skins shining and sparkling in the water and sunlight, swim and play on the beach using empty wine cask bladders for floats – wonder where they got those from?

The people of the village appear to be happy and healthy, the men, many with shirts off, have good physiques and they are all well fed so I presume the fishing is good. One or two of the kids ask for things, but most want to hold hands and walk along with us. The day is great and we enjoy our interaction with the locals in warm sunny weather. Some of our group spend much of the day swimming in the lake which looks inviting, but we have been warned about ‘bugs’ in the water here and cannot take the risk with Von’s eyes.

Tragedy this afternoon. A middle aged English guy from one of the other groups has drowned in the lake. We saw him this morning at the bar. He was somewhat overweight and apparently had quite a few drinks before going out into the water. Reportedly he went down and was out of sight for about 4 minutes before fellow travelers found him and dragged him out.

Shawn and Jesia helped with CPR but by the time an ambulance arrived to take him to hospital he had not regained a pulse and was later pronounced dead. The ambulance was apparently poorly equipped and did not have a defibrillator. We can only imagine the impact of this on the man’s wife who is on tour with him and indeed their whole group. Needless to say it has put a dampener on the whole camp.

Shawn also got injured during the incident, treading on a sharp piece of wood in the sand that penetrated up through the sole of his foot by about two centimeters, so he is now not in good shape.

Yvonne, Claudia and I were not around when all this was happening as we three had taken up an offer by ‘Julius Cesar’ to go to another village to see local dancing. The others declined having ‘had enough of villages for one day’. As it turned out it was a highlight of the trip so far. Several villages had got together for what is an annual event to tell the story of their year in song and dance. Today was men’s day and tomorrow apparently the women perform.



Malawi villagers tell the story of their year in song and dance near Lake Malawi

There were about two thousand people in a large circle in the village centre when we arrived with we three being the only whites. That was a little disconcerting, but Julius stayed close by us and we soon relaxed as it became apparent everyone was in festive mood and didn't mind us being there. The men danced and sang in groups to the sound of drums and horns made from gourds. The audience gave money to those they thought were dancing well and cheered for their favourites.

We spent a wonderful two hours there and it was fantastic to be able to see authentic tribal activities rather than the contrived dancing that happens in restaurants. The trip to Africa continues to get better and the interaction of today has been great.

Marianne is badly affected by today's tragic event at camp and explains later that at nineteen, whilst on lifeguard duty at a swimming pool, she had to give CPR to a child of seven, who as it turned out had had an epileptic fit in the water. The child subsequently died and today's occurrence has brought all of these bad memories and the trauma flooding back for her.

It will be good to leave this camp tomorrow and leave the tragedy behind us, hopefully improving the mood of the group and blotting out some of Marianne's bad memories.

Malawi is regarded as one of the poorest countries of the world, but what we have seen indicates relative prosperity. Something that does leap out at us though is the amount of garbage strewn through Kande village and along the roadsides wherever

there is habitation. It is not just here, but wherever we have traveled so far on the African adventure. Blue plastic bags. Thousands of them discarded, lay tangled with paper and cans and bottles. I guess it's just another example of our first world materialism being imposed on the third world that knows not how to deal with it.

The Africans do not seem to put a value on their environment in a way that I can recognise and their traditions and culture obviously do not extend to dealing with modern day waste materials – it just doesn't seem to worry them. In olden days I presume their carrying baskets were made of grasses or reeds or even wood. When they broke or were worn out discarding them was not a problem as mother nature took them back over time. Now the blue plastic bag is discarded in the same way, but nature has no way of re-assimilating that petroleum based product back into the earth.

Thursday August 2<sup>nd</sup> Shawn is limping badly today on his injured foot. Silke has a very good first aid kit including some hypodermics and antibiotics (apparently her grandfather is a doctor and has provided this and some training), so she has given him good help with all this.

As usual I was up early and had picked a spot on the beach near two dug out canoes to photograph the sunrise, but just before the sun became visible over the horizon, two white guys from a nearby lodge, came down onto the beach for a swim. In itself this wasn't a problem, but them stripping off and throwing their clothes over the canoes I wanted to photograph didn't impress me at all. I quietly moved further along the beach and ended up with some good shots using other dugouts.

I knew I brought duct tape for a good reason. A piece of my watch has broken off where the pin that holds the strap to the watch body is located. A quick repair job is done and we are in business again. Doesn't look that flash but it's functional.

Yvonne is going through a really bad spell with her hot flushes. Every half an hour she is ripping clothes off and flapping madly to keep cool. I see the other women looking and thinking "Bloody hell, I hope it's not going to be like that for me!" I know our doctor will be getting a visit from Von as soon as we are back, to talk about HRT as all the other pills she is taking are no longer having any, or at least, good enough effect.

Another police road check once we are on our way. "where are you going?" "Egypt" says Derrick. "Oh!" from the surprised officer, "OK, you can go".

Arrived at Chitimba camp, also on Lake Malawi around three pm. It is a good camp and some of the younger troops play volley ball on the beach. The mood of the group has definitely lightened. Outside the camp gates there are curio sellers at several stalls and I have fun bartering and buying bracelets for the girls back home. They want US\$5 each to start with – I end up buying 10 for \$7 setting the benchmark for the rest of the gang when they make their way into the melee.

## Chapter 6 Tanzania

**Tanzania has an infant mortality rate of over 10%. Of 36 million people, 68% have access to clean drinking water and on average can expect to live to 45.**

Friday August 3<sup>rd</sup> It was very warm overnight - too warm for the sleeping bag and humid with it for the first time on this trip. We are up early and on the road by just after six am, heading for Tanzania and a long day's drive. Leaving the lakeside campsite this morning, it was strange to see a Coca Cola delivery truck off loading crates of drinks to an individual in a hut on the side of a dirt track in the scrub. But in Africa as anywhere, I guess you sell it where you can.

Police road blocks frustrate us but we make the border and transit amid the normal administrative chaos. Getting out of Malawi proves more difficult than getting into Tanzania due to some very officious gentlemen exercising their authority, but all is well after half an hour or so for us. Derrick on the other hand was hassled about his truck insurance so the whole exercise took well over an hour on the Tanzanian side.

Standing directly under a sign that read "money changing is illegal" Derrick changed US dollars into Tanzanian Shillings for us all. The sign was as effective as the one under it that read "loitering in this area is prohibited", but then maybe the hundred or so loiterers in the area just couldn't read.

The transition into Tanzania, brought with it an immediate change in landscape. The area is more lush, green and mountainous. We pass through heavily vegetated hilly terrain with many banana plantations and evidence of other agriculture and without research, it would seem that climatic regions had a lot to do with the placement of the border in days gone by – rain and crops for Tanzania, but not for Malawi.

Pondering this, I have been surprised how (relatively) affluent the Malawi people appear to be considering it is such a poor country but most of all, they have impressed me with their generally positive attitude.

We pass through tea plantations now and once again, as in Malawi, there are many people on the roads, walking and cycling. Unlike their Zimbabwe cousins though, sitting, waiting, these people move with a purpose and portray a much healthier picture of life. Tanzania comes across as being economically focused with all the agriculture we see in these first hours but despite the order of it, we pass through haphazard shanty villages along the way. Derrick has some fun with a local banana seller and gets an extra discount when he insists he wants straight bananas not the bent ones on offer – and he says it all with such a straight face.

It makes me think of the contrast between these African nations and the highly regulated societies we have seen in England and Europe. There are of course merits to both, but I love the concept of Africa where inventiveness, resourcefulness, initiative and innovation are what make things happen rather than bureaucratic regulation.

We drive into more arid areas, some of it very 'Australian' – eucalypt trees bounding large managed pine tree plantations, and pass numerous broken down trucks on the

way. Bits of bushes rather than high visibility cones on the road are the only 'safety' measures to guide us around them.

Our camp at Iringa is good with excellent showers and good water flow heated by a log fire. Jan Vanzeijts and I clean out the drinks cooler box, again, - second time in three days it has needed to be done as once again, some oily foodstuffs have leaked and everything inside is coated with an oily film. We make a rule tonight at dinner that no more food is to go into the cooler box.

Saturday August 4<sup>th</sup> I think we will all be glad when we don't have to 'move house' every day – it gets a little tiresome pulling down the tent and stuffing all our belongings into the truck locker, although that is a small price to pay for the adventure we are having.

We pass new mud brick huts half erected and old mud brick huts half collapsed – it is often difficult to tell one from the other as we speed along. Speaking of which, Derrick is pulled over again for speeding by the Tanzanian police in their smart khaki overcoats (it is winter for them) and pressed white shirts and trousers. I suspect that these guys are more serious than their Zimbabwe counterparts, and that proves to be the case. Derrick pays an on the spot fine and complains they have taken his beer money, but doesn't look too worried.

We drive through Mikumi National Park, it's landscape sprinkled with wildlife and its' road with speed humps. Derrick doesn't see some of them and we all become airborne in the cab. I guess the truck, named Sarskia at Jesia's suggestion, is now well and truly Christened.

My one criticism of Derrick is indeed that he sometimes drives too fast. On several occasions I have felt he is right on the limit of his ability to control the vehicle and this morning we were only centimeters away from cleaning up a cyclist. I know that we spend less time on the road if we travel faster, but also believe in the adage of 'better to arrive later than not at all'.

A hundred kilometers from Dar es Salaam and the change in traffic is very noticeable. Gone are the largely empty roads of the trip so far and a steady stream of trucks pass us from the other direction and we begin to have traffic build up in front of us. On the outskirts of the city we strike a traffic jam that continues for the next few kilometers to the Bahari camp north of the city. We take an hour to travel this short distance. As we pass slowly through the growing hustle and bustle of street side stalls, industrial areas and masses of moving humanity, it feels as though we are in a role reversal. Suddenly we are the ones in the 'zoo' being observed by thousands of curious eyes.

At first glance our camp is good – adjacent to the beach, brick facilities buildings and level ground to pitch the tents on. On closer inspection of the toilet and shower blocks however, a familiar story unfolds of dirty conditions, no paper, soap – what's that?, water that works sometimes and is cold when it does. Oh well, it's Africa.

Still there is an internet connection here so Von and I head that way after dinner. We find the computer room OK, but it is all locked up. It takes half an hour for guards and others at the grounds to find a key, then we are let in and left to our own devices. I

unwittingly choose a pathetically slow computer that gives me a screen message about Trojans every couple of minutes and drives me slowly (no rapidly) nuts. Von has better luck and between us we check incoming mail and let the people important to us in the world, know that we are still alive.

Sunday August 5<sup>th</sup> If anyone did want a shower in the morning they were out of luck as there is no water. Nor is there water in the toilets, which more of a problem. It seems the man whose job it is to turn the pump on, has slept in and has to be woken. (We realise on our return here after the trip to Zanzibar that this is not an isolated incident as exactly the same happens then).

Poor Jan Vanzeijts unfortunately had diarrhoea this morning so had to contend with the facilities. He later told us that when getting up from the toilet at one stage, the whole thing came with him. Sorry for him – but glad it wasn't me.

So, exotic Zanzibar is our destination today and there is excitement in the group as we leave in minibuses taking just what we need for four days – the rest of our gear and the tents, all locked safely in the truck. The traffic is much easier, being a Sunday morning, but still we have one chaotic point where a taxi driver has just parked his vehicle in the middle of the road and left it for some reason. There is much shouting, honking of horns and revving of engines before suddenly there are vehicles going in every direction. What chaos? This is Dar es Salaam. This is normal.

At the ferry terminal, we have to go through a migration process even though Zanzibar is part of Tanzania. We fill out the inevitable form with all the same information we have now done a dozen times and with a certain amount of nervousness let our passports go out of sight into the administrative nightmare behind the glass window. Eventually they all come out again and after a two hour wait to board the ferry, we finally leave half an hour behind schedule for the two hour trip.

There is the expected chaos in Zanzibar at the immigration entry point with everyone from the boat wanting to queue jump. Then our booking for lunch is changed as the restaurant has filled up with New Zealanders ahead of us, so take away is organised to be delivered to our hotel in Stone Town. I suppose it qualifies as a hotel, but let's say it is an experience and probably rates ½ star – just because it exists. The toilets and showers are ordinary and once again there is no hot water.

Stone Town in Zanzibar city is basically a slum, the old part of town, run down, dirty and smelly. Despite all that, we have a great afternoon initially being shown around the old slave market and underground holding areas by a guide, then being left to our own devices. Von and I check out the old original city that is Stone Town with its' narrow streets and laneways. There is plenty of rubbish in the streets and there are skinny cats everywhere. This is a Muslim community evidenced by the dress of the locals and we are careful not to offend by directly photographing people.

We have fun bartering with some Masai boys in a shop who very undiplomatically call Von a 'strong (big) mama with a fat neck', when a necklace she tries on is too small for her, but we buy souvenirs for those at home before heading off with the other troops to the outdoor food market to buy dinner. The market is alive with traders and masses of people, local and tourists, all buying food from the 'pick out what you want and we'll grill it for you' stalls. It's good fun but the quality leaves something to be desired. Yvonne's banana is grilled to the consistency of a rubber dildo and she dispatches it into a waste bin.



In Stone Town, Zanzibar Yvonne barter with Masai storekeepers

The place grows on you though. The narrow streets are a maze and it is very easy to get lost. Buildings are poorly maintained and above head height there is a spaghetti mess of electrical and telephone wires hanging off the outsides of buildings stretched from one side of the roads to the other. The people are friendly though and there is lots of "jumbo – jumbo" (hello) called out and we have fun. It's a very different experience to the rest of Africa, but a good one so far none the less.

The hotel rooms only have single beds and the Dutch family are all in one room. Poor old Marius' face dropped when it became obvious they would have to share. He obviously had other ideas for being alone with his wife, as I'm sure all the men do who are here with their partners.

We are back at the hotel around nine thirty whilst most of the group have gone drinking – being on the wagon it is not something that has great appeal to me these days. A wedding reception is underway across the street with drums and horns and singing, all very loud and it goes on and on. I don't know when it finishes but we have long since drifted off to sleep under our blue mosquito nets held together with duct tape and band aids!

Monday August 6<sup>th</sup> We survived the warm night despite the noise of a cat fight taking over from the wedding noise around 4am and a lone mosquito finding its' way through the band aided battlements of the netting to buzz annoyingly in my ear for a while. I hope it is not a malaria carrying mossaie despite our religious taking of the medication.

We meet the troops at breakfast and everyone seems to have survived the market food experience despite our many reservations about the health issues – I'd rather not see the hygiene levels in daylight thank you very much. It makes me think though that the

toilet / shower recesses in this hotel, where, when sitting on the toilet your chin rests very comfortably on the sink, is an absolutely perfect design for those who have a less fortunate experience eating in the market. The shower rose also drips overhead and when on the loo it is necessary to lean toward the wall to avoid getting wet – another perfect design for cleaning up the mess of those suffering a market place malady.

Leaving the Stone Town slum behind, taxi buses take us to the Butterfly Spice Farm for an interesting couple of hours to see how spices are grown. We get to smell and taste all sorts of lovely things, then have a tea tasting with pieces of many different fruits including Jack, which some had heard of before, but not tasted. It was delicious and would fit very well in a summer time salad. To celebrate our visit, one of the workers has been making plaited banana leaf mementos for us all and presents little frog necklaces to Von and the girls. Torsten and I get banana leaf ties.

The taxis take us on to the Amaan camp on the northern beach of Zanzibar. Joy and happiness, good quality rooms, clean toilets and showers, toilet paper and hot water, oh, the luxury! Everyone is very happy as we have the next three nights here. The camp is lovely with little beach areas easily accessible, restaurants, bars, and internet. Just outside the camp and along the beach there are other resorts, villages and curio shops.

We have lunch as a group after an hour long wait for the hamburgers that Derrick has ordered – hey, it's Africa time, then go exploring in the curio markets. Like in Zimbabwe I'm sure the stall owners are all related as what one hasn't got, another has and it gets handed over for sale without question.

“Mama!, Papa!, come inside my shop. Looking is free. You are welcome” rings out like a tape recording as we walk around. Submitting to temptation and going into a shop is an invitation for the hard sell to start, but we are seasoned barterers now and we have fun buying more souvenirs to take home.

Walking along the beach we see Masai boys parading around in their scarlet robes seeking money for photographs. I guess it's easier than herding cattle and protecting them against lions, still a sad indictment of where this proud race is headed.

We eat dinner in the Fat Fish restaurant, atop the beach watching the dusk fall and listening to the waves lapping below us. It is a very pleasant way to spend and end the evening.

Tuesday August 7<sup>th</sup> This morning we go for a walk to Nguwi Village near our camp with Ali, a likeable fellow with whom we are going on a dhow snorkeling cruise this afternoon. as part of the deal he offered to show us around the place where he has grown up. We are surprised at the squalor and garbage that is evident throughout the village. I ask Ali why it is so and he says the village will clean it up and a truck will take it away. I can't believe this as the accumulation of garbage is years old but I guess for him it's a face saving story so I do not say any more about it.



Nguwi village children love to see their images on the camera screen

It is a Muslim village and many do not want to be photographed – some of the kids cover up or run away, particularly the girls, so we respect their privacy. In the fishing village there is a donation box and we contribute before photographing the fisherman mending nets and boat builders constructing new dhows and repairing others. We also visit the local aquarium to see and feed green and hawksbill turtles.

On the way there the sky darkens and we shelter from some heavy rain fall – unusual for us on this trip, but it doesn't last for long. We worry in case the weather is bad for our sunset cruise but by afternoon it has cleared up and thirteen of us (Jan Hansen, Shawn and Jesia have gone on an all day snorkeling cruise) go to Ali's beach area to get fitted for snorkels, masks and flippers.

All kitted up on the outward journey in the dhow, we cruise along with the aid of an outboard motor to the first reef where we will snorkel. I hadn't given it any consideration as Von had no hesitation in saying she wanted to do it, but she is quite nervous, having not snorkeled before. When she tells me this, I recall that on the only other occasion we had the chance to snorkel on the Great Barrier Reef in 1998, Von elected to watch from the boat.

We put on our gear, keen to get to it and I jump into the blue ocean immediately taking in water as the mask is not sealing properly against my moustache – same problem as in 1998 I recall. Then, they gave me Vaseline to help make seal, but here in Zanzibar I just have to get on with it and I come up spluttering, amazed at how sore my throat feels the instant I almost swallow some salt water. I quickly conclude drowning would not be pleasant.

As I surface I see Yvonne dive in head first with mask and snorkel firmly in place and then she is gone. I wrestle with the mask for a while before swimming around with one hand while the other pinches the mask firmly around my nose to stop the water coming in. I have no option but to have faith that Ali, with his big, glistening black body in the water and his crew on board, will ensure Von and indeed all of us don't drown, and so proceed to take in the underwater spectacle.

It is a lovely experience – colourful coral and fishes moving gracefully in the gentle swell. After 20 minutes or so we move to another spot for a second session then to the

beach where we walk to a restaurant and have a well earned coffee. The price is a rip off US\$5.50 for the coffee, but we haven't had a cappuccino for weeks so it goes down very well.

Back on board, the sail is lowered and we cruise gently back along the beach as the sun sets out to sea. We all enjoy the relaxed journey in this magical setting. A lovely hot shower back in our room then dinner again in the Fat Fish – rice and fish, which makes a pleasant change from the fries that have accompanied just about everything here so far.

Wednesday August 8<sup>th</sup>  
Claudia,  
Yvonne and I spend most of the morning in the curio market bartering for various bits and pieces. Claudia needed help to 'get tough' with her bartering technique but is more confident now. Yvonne bought some batik paintings to make an African wall hanging.



A magical sunset as we cruise home under sail on a dhow

After lunch we walk to the fishing village to see the day's catch and are only just in time. At the auction room, the action is nearly finished but we see enough to identify that snapper and leather jackets look to be much the same here as in Australia. The various catches are thrown onto a concrete slab where the flies carry out a very thorough inspection before the auctioneer carries them around taking bids. I guess our fish meals all start in the same place, but I'd rather not think about all that fly activity.

The rest of the afternoon is relax time and we spend it on the beach, enjoying a swim in the warm waters. In the evening, Claudia and Jan join us for an all you can eat seafood dinner on the beach very close to our camp. The interpretation of all you can eat is a little different here to Australia, but reality is we did eat all we could by the end of the meal.

I had some debate with Suleman the waiter at the end of the evening as the price had been negotiated in US but he asked for payment in Shillings. We didn't have any shillings so eventually, after a bit of theatre and table thumping we paid in US. Yvonne tipped him extra to make up for any shortfall and everyone was happy. Back in the room, most of my meal went down the toilet, my stomach rebelling at something and recalling the flies in the fish auction, I was not surprised.

Thursday August 9<sup>th</sup> My stomach has recovered this morning which is good news. I am ready to leave and get back on the road again. Our time here has been enjoyable, but for me, probably a day too long. Yesterday could possibly have been better spent

seeing something new, but on the other hand, the rest has freshened us all up for the remaining week of the trip.

Just writing that makes me incredulous that there is only a single week left of this massive adventure we have embarked on. I knew it would be that way but the realisation is still a shock, a little like a death you've been waiting for – the finality still hits home when it eventually happens. I expect when I wake up in our bed at home on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, I will have that sense of emptiness and finality.

Sitting outside I watch the daily camp clean up routine that is underway. Ladies with straw brooms sweep leaves from the sandy pathways and it is somehow incongruous to see one of them talking on a mobile phone as she works. They may not have much here, but they have a mobile phone.

Administratively these people are not good. Everything, such as getting a bill and working out change, takes a very long time. It all has to be written down in multiple copy receipt books, but we the customer, never get a receipt. When it is time pay they can't find the papers and have to ask what we have spent. It takes a calculator to work out five minus three and a half.

This morning the milk on the breakfast bar was no good and it took until well after our breakfast was finished to 'find' more milk. We give up, foregoing the coffee and have black tea instead. Derrick sleeps in after going with some of our group to a party way down the beach until the early hours of this morning. He comes sleepily to the door in response to our knocks. "Yeh, yeh, I've been doing paperwork". Pull the other leg mate, it's got bells on!

We get underway, back down the pot hole ridden goat track that lead us here from the main road Outside the straw broom brushed camp, the blue plastic bags again flag the masses of garbage that has been dumped in the bush. I fear it is already too late for Africa to solve this problem, but hope I am wrong. How to change the value sets of millions of people throughout a continent is a daunting question far too big for me to tackle.

Back in Stone Town there is time for a quick lunch of a stringy old chicken leg in a dodgy local restaurant. It reminds me of a meal Yvonne and I had in Bali twenty five years ago – the two chickens must have been cousins. Then it's down to face the immigration chaos again before heading back to the mainland.

Drama. Jorn and Henrik can't find their ferry tickets and immigration forms. Rucksacks are emptied and searched but to no avail, so \$70 later they have new tickets and amazingly, close to time, we board the ferry.

Our return journey to the mainland is much rougher than the first crossing and many on board are sick. I am very close to joining them, not being the world's greatest sailor, but, somehow manage to keep it all together. At one stage though I had to leave our seats for a more open area to get a little air. I ended up sitting on a large sack of onions toward the back of the boat, shirt off, sweating profusely from the heat, but mainly that horrible nervous 'oh God am I about to lose it' feeling. It doesn't help

when you are feeling sea sick to look out of the back door only to see someone worse off than you vomiting violently. I quickly focused on something inside the vessel.

Others, including Evert & Silke, who had been sitting in the open at the bow of the boat, had to crawl back in half way through the voyage, because it was so rough and it had started to rain heavily. They and their adventurous pals looked like drowned rats coming back into the cabin. Mercifully this voyage was over in about two hours and we were then soon back at the Bahari camp north of Dar es Salaam.

Friday August 10<sup>th</sup> Very hot overnight, there were mosquitoes in our tent that feasted on us and many of the group did not sleep well. The water pump man slept in again so guess what, no water in the toilets and showers so at 5am, our get up time for an early start, there were some grumpy characters in the group.

Derrick needs diesel for the truck but has no cash – the service stations do not take cards. So despite our early 6am start we stuff around for half an hour trying to find an ATM that works while the Dar es Salaam traffic begins to grind to a halt. Driving in Africa is technically on the left, but the reality is drivers aim for where there is a space – biggest wins and a good horn is essential.

I see an old bus trundling down the road. It has been in an accident and rolled on it's side which is now partially caved in. The bus is still somehow driveable and its' operator is still making money from the poor buggers who have to use it (they just have a bit less headroom on the left hand side. It makes me think that so much in Africa works on the principle of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' except here they have taken it to a whole new level; 'if it is broke but still goes, just a bit, somehow, sometime, don't fix it, it's fine'.

We make our painfully slow way through the traffic and deep rutted unmade roads, garbage strewn along their sides. I am glad to be leaving Dar es Salaam, for me it sounds exotic but disappointingly is just a very unattractive old dirty town. We retrace our steps for two and a half hours then head north west, bound for Arusha. On route we descend a steep winding mountain pass bounded on one side by metal safety barriers long since bent, battered and broken down from many impacts. They are of little real use now but remain as a reminder that travel on these roads is precarious. We pass other overland tour vehicles, competitors for Drifters, and one with flapping plastic sheets for windows and backward facing seats leaves us all thinking we chose the right company to travel with.

The truck's main tank runs out of diesel again. Derrick is not playing safety first in this regard so we again start the now familiar process of manually pumping fuel from the reserve tank and this time we drain it. Hopefully Derrick will buy sufficient fuel at the next opportunity to avoid this happening again. While the fuel transfer takes place I set up a ball game with local kids and have lots of fun throwing and catching a football with them. They are quick to learn and participate.

Derrick is not having a good day. Down the road he gets pulled over again for speeding and from the window I see the old radar gun held by the policeman has registered 90 something. The speed limit is 80kph in Tanzania. Amazingly, Derrick

talks his way out of it by telling the policeman we have fuel problems and “you are wasting my diesel, I must get to a fuel station”. He is waved on – lucky boy.

Heading into Arusha we pass through large plantations of sisal and manage a few cloud affected glimpses of Kilimanjaro that we all madly snap away at with our cameras. Masai camp is home for the night and Derrick, in better mood, produces his best meal of the trip (from my point of view), chicken fillet in a lovely sauce with potato, rice and corn on the cob.

It is our turn to wash up again tonight with the Belgians. Once more and that’s it. The young ones again head to the camp bar and the thump, thump, thump of brain numbing disco music. Mercifully I fall asleep soon after ten o’clock, despite the musical accompaniment.

Saturday August 11<sup>th</sup> Man this is a noisy camp. I must have slept alright though as I don’t feel too bad this morning, but I woke many times. First it was the music, then loud voices, then car horns (first time we have camped near a road) then dogs barking. There are dogs everywhere in this camp and as I write one comes to sit by me looking for attention. Henrik is also up and petting other dogs, looking at the world through his greasy glasses that we have to remind Jorn to clean. Armed guards wander around, one with a club and one with a very old, large bore elephant gun, to protect us from who knows what.

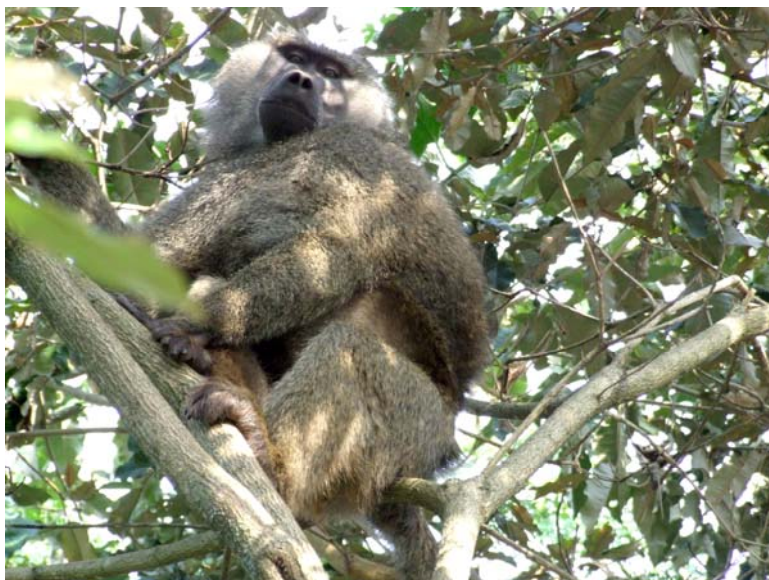
We phone home on the mobile this morning just to touch base with only a week until we return. Yvonne spoke to Dianne who assured us all was well, but Mum and Dad were out. We may try again tomorrow if we have signal at the right time.

The morning is spent walking through Lusaka and a Masai market, buying more small gifts to take home, whilst Derrick does the shopping, finds gas and (hopefully) buys enough fuel for the rest of the trip. I also buy a new watch on the street for five dollars as the duct tape repairs to mine are beginning to fail. At five dollars, half the price of a new battery in Australia, even if this only lasts me until we get home, it will be a good deal.

Our schedule calls for an extra day in Lusaka after we leave Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti but none of us are keen on it so Derrick is happy in this dry season when it is possible, to move on to the shores of Lake Victoria, a much better idea. I didn’t come here to see cities, I’m not a city person and to me they all look the same, dirty, busy and particularly unattractive, so I am very happy with the decision.

We stop at a lookout over Lake Manyara on the way to Ngorongoro and again the light is incredibly hazy almost completely blocking out the distant mountains. A traditional wedding is taking place so we watch on as the bride, groom and wedding party finish their walk with singing and dancing then rather inelegantly clamber into the backs of utilities for the ride back to town. They are happy for us to take photos but would like copies so give Marius an address when he offers to oblige. We note that there is a camera being used by one of the party who looks like he may be ‘the professional photographer’, but maybe he is not a very professional professional. Who knows, but I’m sure Marius will look after them.

The landscape changes quickly into heavily vegetated hilly country and soon we are climbing steeply through rain forest to the Ngorongoro National Park. At the entrance to the park, baboons play on the truck, happy to have a new toy for a while. A Masai woman sits on the ground with two small children and I offer them little paper cranes made by Von – the children are reluctant at first but eventually take them. I indicate to the woman I would like to take a photograph but she immediately rubs her fingers together asking for money, so I politely decline and leave them, receiving a scowl in return .



A large male baboon gives me the eye, Ngorongoro Park gates

Arriving at Simba camp on the lip of the great crater, we find a city of tents already in place. There are hundreds of people here but we manage park next to another Drifters truck, a little older than ours and not so well designed. Once our kitchen and storage units are on display, we are the envy of the camp and quite a few people take photos of ‘Sarskia’.

As the sun disappears over the crater rim, the temperature drops quickly and significantly so we huddle over dinner in our big coats, quite cold after the hot sun of the last couple of weeks. Once again the facilities here are primitive and disgusting. I never make it into the shower blocks as there is always a queue, but I hear they are nearly as bad as the toilets that I elect only to use as a last resort. The camp site is littered with animal dung and we are warned that wildlife frequents the place at night so to be wary of walking out in the dark. During the night we hear hyenas and in the morning one of the guides tells us a buffalo bull was grazing near the truck until first light.

Sunday August 12<sup>th</sup> We are up at 5am, again, quickly have coffee and some cereal in the dark and are ready by six, when the old Toyota game drive vehicles arrive to take us down into the Ngorongoro Crater. Shawn makes sure he gets the front seat of our vehicle and even when the roof is off at the bottom of the crater and we stand, he gets up high blocking much of the forward view for the rest of us. When we stop after about three and a half hours, we ensure Von, Jorn and Henrik who have been in the cramped back seat get to sit up front. We spend six hours driving some eighty kilometers through the crater after a steep six hundred meter descent. It is an impressive mighty place, approximately seventeen by twenty kilometers in size. Unfortunately though the light is again hazy, dusty, smoky, I’m not sure, but not that good for distance photography.

The animals are more prolific here than in any of the other game parks, but so are the people looking at them. At one time during the morning twenty one game drive vehicles are visible on the plains. Early on we see a cheetah in the grass at some distance. This is apparently a rare thing so we are pleased. There are huge numbers of wildebeest, zebra, gazelle, impala, hippos etc and then towards the



Zebra, wildebeest, buffalo and impala are all seen in large numbers

end of the drive we finally see two lionesses with a total of three cubs. They are only thirty or forty meters away, but are brilliantly camouflaged in the grass and even at that distance, very difficult to see.

We have a long drive in the afternoon to get out of this national park and into the Serengeti National park before our 24 hour pass runs out – this would be a financial disaster for Derrick as I believe the cost is well over US\$100 each. There are no sealed roads and we drive through seemingly endless plains that I am tempted to call boring, but nothing here is boring and I am sure it is my untrained eye that is at fault rather than the environment.

Derrick is not well, suffering from a bad cold or flu, symptoms that he fears may be the start of malaria. We hope he is wrong.

Ngorongoro has been a highlight although it seems the times our group has had in Africa of being ‘alone’ are over, as this place and the Serengeti are the amongst the most popular tourist game spots along with Kruger National Park in South Africa. I know it is selfish but I prefer the parks where we were alone. For me it’s like bushwalking or climbing a mountain, I don’t like to share that space with anyone when I’m there. Selfish it may be, but that’s how I feel about it.

Monday August 13<sup>th</sup> Another early start and breaking camp in the dark so we can spend time in our truck on a game drive through the Serengeti. I’m beginning to get over the camping side of things, but hey, I can think of far worse places to be and soon get rid of those negative thoughts. It is cold and Shawn, sitting toward the front of the vehicle wants the window down even when it is dark. We have a few words and he reluctantly puts the window back up for a while – maybe he realises most of the girls have coats or sleeping bags wrapped around them to keep warm from the draft.

It is a slow start as far as animal sightings are concerned but as the day progresses we see more and more and even one more lion fifty meters away laying under a tree. We’ve managed to see four of the big five, missing out on the leopard, although I’m

sure the leopards have seen us. We do see tsetse flies for the first time though with a few of the little critters getting into the truck to give some of us a bite. Hopefully they are not the fever carrying flies. It's just like being at home in the Australian 'lottery of life' really, there are lots of things that bite and sting and have the potential to cause problems, you try to prevent them and hope like hell the bad ones don't get you.

It is a long drive from six am to three thirty pm when we finally exit the park on a very hot afternoon and after another hour and a bit, reach our Lake Victoria camp site at Musoma. It was a little strange after being on dirt tracks for two days to be back on the bitumen seeing lots of people on the move again. As we drive the first stretch out of the national park, there are large herds of zebra and wildebeest – maybe more even than we saw in the park.

The Serengeti was a surprise – vast grass plains with areas of sparse thin thorn trees, areas of lush green densely vegetated areas around the waterholes and river courses. Some areas were burnt out, I think by the rangers as it looked to be in a controlled pattern and troops of baboons wander through these areas grazing on new green shoots.

We are all pleased to be at our beach side camp on the lake and after two dirty days of dust and no shower I beeline for the facilities as soon as the tent is up. The water is not hot but tepid and clean. Dirt drops from my hair as soon as the water hits it and eventually, black feet look reasonably normal. It feels great to be clean again. Derrick has problems with the vehicle and works on it with the aid of a whisky we give him whilst Silke and Maartje supervise pumpkin soup and vegetarian spaghetti bolognese at the kitchen.

After we go to bed, there is a commotion as a girl is bundled against her will, crying and screaming into a four wheel drive by three guys. The security guard at the camp is involved so we assume it is nothing too serious but it's not nice hearing someone in such distress. We later hear there had been a 'fight' at the bar so assume it was related to that.

Tuesday August 14<sup>th</sup> We should have been able to sleep in this morning but at five am when the call to prayer blasts out from a nearby mosque minaret, we discover that Musoma is a Muslim town. Drifting back to sleep we are again blasted awake half an hour later when a reminder call goes out to the faithful and the camp dog barks his response for five minutes. Sleep, such as it was, is finished.

Coca Cola just about owns Africa. So many of the shop signs have been provided by that company as part of their marketing campaign. The red Coke branding is prominent with a white space for "God's Groceries" or "Man Kind Coffins" or whatever other name the store has. The real power of their marketing is brought home as we drive through Musoma and see a very large roadside Coke sign that reads "Musoma Government Hospital" – only in Africa.

Being a Muslim community, there is an intense dislike by the locals for being photographed and at one busy junction a woman wildly waves bananas and yells at Marius as he tries to photograph the scene. We pass through the inevitable police road blocks 'personed' by big mama police women in their smart navy skirts, white shirts

and shouldering ancient AK47 rifles. I wonder when and if they would use them but don't want to find out.

Yesterday at one of the check points there were road spikes set up ready for use so they are serious about stopping whoever they are targeting. This part of Tanzania appears more prosperous than the areas to the south with numerous red brick homes with corrugated iron roofs mingled in between the more traditional mud brick, thatched roof huts.

Last night I couldn't stand Henriks greasy glasses any longer. It's not my problem but to see him looking at the world through a haze frustrates me. I helped him wash the glasses in washing up liquid in a bowl of water and they came up crystal clear. He was delighted and it was good to actually be able to see his eyes. I wonder though if he (or Jorn) will do it again unprompted.

We exit Tanzania through one of the least chaotic border posts and on the Kenyan side pay US \$20 for a visa. Yvonne and I are suitably impressed when the friendly Kenyan immigration chief officer feels like a chat and is keen to show pictures of his daughters on his mobile phone.

## Chapter 7 – Kenya

### **Kenya has 32 million people who are largely literate but still suffer high child mortality, low access to clean water and a life expectancy of just 45 years**

Tuesday August 14<sup>th</sup> continued. Crossing the border into Kenya it's as though we have changed worlds not just countries. The mud brick huts and thatched roofs are gone, replaced totally by normal brick walls and corrugated iron roofs. There is an even greater density of people and activity on the roadsides with frequent 'shopping centers' all bustling and busy. Far more people are dressed in newer, modern clothing.

We pass through large areas of sugar cane plantations and pass many trucks heavily laden with cane moving in both directions.

BANG! The right hand side front windscreen on the upper level of the truck cracks into a spider web pattern as a protruding piece of cane from an oncoming truck smashes into it. Derrick has pushed his assertive / aggressive driving just one step too far and met with someone who didn't move out of the way. The road surfaces are very bad here and traveling fast, trying to avoid people, cyclists and pass other vehicles going in our direction he finally didn't quite get it right. Fortunately it was not serious, but he is visibly pissed off as I imagine in his contract, he may be responsible for that type of damage to the truck although I decide it is better not to ask.

As we pass through the cane fields with their workers shacks and rusting iron roofs, the occasional jacaranda tree in bloom and with the lush landscape of a thousand greens beyond, I can't help but think we could be driving through a hinterland town on northern Queensland coast.

During stops today I get the chance to talk to a local who was keen for a chat, interested in where we came from, our trip and what we thought of Africa. We talked at some length about the similarities and differences in our two countries and in particular the chasm in philosophies of building wealth for tomorrow in Australia as opposed to the African need to provide for today before thinking of anything else. He talked of the differences in the pace of life and he left me a profundity that 'in Africa we may lack many things, but we have time for each other and that's important'. It certainly is and perhaps in our busy first world lives we can learn from that simple philosophy.

At lunch time, Von and I talk to a young woman who has been standing watching us eat. Mirian is her name and we learn she is a single mother with a three year old daughter who she invites us to go with her to see, but unfortunately we don't have time. Yvonne gives her an Australia pin for her blouse and she is delighted. When it was time to say goodbye, she asks if we can give her something (money) not in a begging or forceful way, but almost as if it is 'just what you do if you get the chance to talk to a tourist'. We politely refuse, she smiles, says God bless you and walks on up the street.

There are road spikes at every police road check we have seen in Kenya. Derrick says they are to stop a massive illegal car trade but possibly also to stop insurgents as the threat of terrorism is very real here due to the high number of western visitors.

We are getting a mixed reaction from locals that is hard to completely work out. Some, like those we have met and spoken to are friendly and many on the streets wave. Others are quite antagonistic making a variety of unpleasant hand gestures. The very young are keen to wave and smile, the older kids wave but hold the other hand out for money.

As we travel on, sugar cane gives way to banana plantations which in turn give way to miles of tea plantations. This country is certainly more fertile and agriculturally productive than any other we have been in. Then strangely, just before we reach Kambu camp, for the first time in Africa we see sheep and real horses as opposed to goats and donkeys. The roads here are terrible, strange when it is obviously a more developed and prosperous country than those to the south where we have traveled. Even the bitumen roads are badly potholed and there is no sign of any maintenance activity going on to improve their condition.

Tonight, our last camp is the first wet one. The skies threaten as we pitch the tents then open up during the evening. We have pulled out the large canvas awning from the side of the truck for the first time and huddle together beneath it whilst we have dinner. A little river runs through the middle of our dining room, between the chairs and under our feet. Big pools of water build in the awning and we use the broom to raise the canvas and create waterfalls over the side.

Our group is quite buoyant, maybe because it's our last camp, but I detect a hint of sadness creeping in as the evening progresses and the realisation that our adventure is nearly over begins to sink in.

Wednesday August 15<sup>th</sup>      A final bad night on the foam mattress – I won't miss that now this is all over – and I only sleep fitfully from three am. I'm first up and head to the truck to put the kettle on. Maartje and Derrick are sleeping on mattresses on top of chairs under the awning – I think Maartje would like to have had the opportunity to share something of a romance with Derrick, but it has been difficult in this public environment.

The canvas awning does not want to wind back into it's housing properly this morning after we discover a cog on the winder has broken off. It takes four of us to slowly coax it back eventually and I don't think Derrick will be quick to use it again.

Before leaving camp we have a group photo session in front of the truck then head off on the last day of driving to our final destination of Nairobi. The roads are terrible, some unmade, some just potholes, the traffic busy and chaotic, each driver seeking the easiest way around the holes and trying to get ahead of those in front. This is real life dodgems.

At our morning pee break, Derrick fortuitously discovers that the truck compressor is almost falling off. Most of the pop rivets holding it on have sheared and need replacing. He has the equipment and spends the next hour sorting out the problem. Lunch is at the Rift Valley lookout where we are 8000ft high and during the morning have been as close as 20kms from the equator. During this break we enjoy a last bartering session with traders and buy two Masai blankets, some very nice necklace and earring sets for the girls and some wooden bowls.

We arrive at Nairobi, or Nairobbery as Derrick calls it because of the high level of crime, at around three pm, 7004kms after the vehicle left the Johannesburg Inn in South Africa. The Hotel Heron is fine although the grand reception area is somewhat more splendid than our rooms, but hey, everything is clean, the water is hot, there is soap and toilet paper, what more can you ask.



The safari group from left: Marius, Marianne, Jan, Jessia, Shawn, Torsten, Angelika, Maartje, Joern, Henrik, Jan, Yvonne, Derrick, Evert, Silke, Gordon, Claudia

During this trip, without referring to our paperwork, I have been convinced that we fly out tomorrow morning early, so ask the hotel reception to confirm the flight for us and to arrange a transfer to the airport. This seems to take a long time and Kenya Airways don't answer the phone. I begin to worry, but then realise it is just happening in African time. I study the itinerary sheet whilst the receptionist is waiting on the phone and suddenly realise I am wrong about our flight – it is the day after tomorrow, which is good as we have an extra day to spend in Nairobbery!

So, our days of camping and traveling in the truck are over. It will seem strange as it has become routine to be pitching and packing up tents, stowing bags in the lockers and 'making do' without all the luxuries of home. As I write, I receive a cappuccino deliciously hot and strong, my reward for surviving the trip and I'm sure Von will have something strong of her own later.

This evening we all (except Shawn and Jesia who have gone to see friends in the city) share a meal at the hotel, our last supper and reminisce over parts of the trip. Angelika has offered to prepare a 'photo book' of the best of the best photos from each of us and we set the guidelines for our contributions. Derrick has been a large part of the tour's success and I am elected to offer him a vote of thanks for all his efforts that

causes him embarrassment and for the first time in our presence, to be lost for words – but just for a minute mind you.

We all retire by around ten pm, somewhat subdued and I'm sure with the adrenalin from the excitement of the trip well and truly gone. It is nice to sleep in a bed again, (even though it dips viciously in the middle), and not on a slope in a tent in a slippery, synthetic sleeping bag that slides on the sleeping mat to one side of the tent or other during the night. We roll together, happy to be able to snuggle up again after our sleeping bag enforced separation.

Thursday August 16<sup>th</sup> The shower system took a full ten minutes to deliver hot water to us this morning, but poli, poli (slowly slowly) this is Africa. I am first up from our group it seems, situation normal, and head to the restaurant for coffee. In preparation for this trip and indeed during it, I have weaned myself of the eight to ten cups a day that has been my norm over the last thirty years.

The main reason being to try and reduce the amount of diuretics I have, as I have an increasing problem with having to 'rush to the toilet'. I did not want to cause problems by having to stop the truck for toilet breaks or having too many night time excursions and have been pretty good. I know I have an enlarged prostate and may have to have something done about that in due course, but having been tested earlier in the year also know my PSA was only 1.5 so I don't have a cancer problem, in that area at least.

I have managed well on the trip, and now relish that one cup of coffee a day, first thing in the morning to get me going. I did celebrate last night though when the group ordered tea and coffee before going to bed. I had a strong cappuccino and paid the price by laying awake until the early hours.

Yesterday a group of us arranged for a tour of Nairobi by mini-bus, the safest way to see this city we are told so this morning we head off in two buses with doors locked and windows up, just to remind us of the car jacking and mugging reputation this place has. Nairobi is clean and busy and there are even public open air areas where signs indicate it is illegal to smoke. Other than that, it's just another city, nothing special and not something that will rate as a memorable moment in this trip.

The buses take us directly to Carnivore after we have finished the tour. Carnivore is a world famous restaurant where, according to various websites, one can eat all kinds of exotic meats such as Zebra, crocodile, giraffe, ostrich, wildebeest and more. Unfortunately though, despite Jorn downloading this information just before our trip, we learn that the government apparently banned the sales of all these meats with the exception of ostrich, a year ago. Instead we have chicken, beef, pork, turkey and lamb, all very nice but there is some disappointment that we can't eat what has made this place famous. I later check the restaurant's own web site and discover they do in fact advise the changes so Jorn' information was obviously from another out of date site.

It is a great experience though with large roasts brought to the table on Masai swords and carved over your plate. A great atmosphere and you can eat as much as you like,

which we all do and feel bloated by the time we are taken back to the hotel around 3.30 in the afternoon.

Our group is splitting up today to head homewards. Shawn and Jesia left this morning before we went on the city tour, and this evening the Dutch, Jorn & Henrik are leaving together and later on, the Germans. There is some panic in the early evening when the minibus ordered for the Dutch and Norwegians fails to arrive. After half an hour of waiting, two taxis are organised and they leave with somewhat less time than they had hoped to clear check in at the airport. The Germans have organised the hotel shuttle, as we have for the next morning, so we are keen to see if it is on time. It is and we rest a little easier.

The minibus ordered by Marius turns up forty five minutes late claiming he was held up in traffic. We tell him his fares have gone and he goes off happily enough, not seeming to mind too much. Silke, Evert, Von and I, the only ones left to depart in the morning sit in the restaurant for an hour and talk for the last time. I can't eat, my stomach is not too good after the rich food at Carnivore, at least I hope that's all it is.

Back in our room we pack for the last time and leave a few old bits of clothing for the cleaning lady. By now I have diarrhea and spend the night with cramps making dashes to the toilet.

Friday August 17<sup>th</sup> 4am, the alarm goes off and we are ready and waiting for the shuttle in the lobby before half past four. When nothing has happened after another five minutes I get the reception clerk, who assures me 'the driver is on the premises', to go and find him. I am sure from the look of him when he emerges with the car a few minutes later that he was sleeping, but it's not a problem and we make the airport in good time on the empty roads. James, the sleepy chauffeur, drops us at the wrong terminal though and we have to walk, fortunately only a short distance, back to the international departures.

I'm glad we have plenty of time as it is a painful process to get checked in. Nothing seems to be working properly. The weigh scales lock up, the conveyor belt is jammed, the boarding pass printer has packed up, ripping Von's pass in the process. Eventually, we get through but by now I am sweating profusely and not feeling at all well. Making our way through security is relatively easy and once inside the airport proper, I head for the bathroom quick smart. For the first time on the trip the medical kit is used and the diarrhea tablets get a work out. They do their job well and I have no further problems on the way home.

Our flight to Johannesburg suffers the inevitable delay but this doesn't matter as we have six or more hours to kill at the airport there anyway and it gives me time to reflect on our African experience. I like Africa. The people we have been able to interact with have all been friendly, the market traders whilst trying to squeeze every cent from us have been honourably dishonest in their dealings and I can deal with that. 'Africa time' would become a frustration for me in the longer term, but I could learn to deal with it - in time. For someone who's working life has been dictated by the watch, it has been a challenge though on a couple of occasions.

Simple things here become complicated. Simple mathematics and mental arithmetic seem to pose a real problem for many of the waiters and clerks we have encountered, although the market traders have conquered mental arithmetic much better. Administrative functions and systems seem difficult too. Confusion reigns supreme much of the time, but then maybe it is only confusion for me as those involved all seem very comfortable with what is going on. All in all though it has been not only fantastic in Africa, but a marvelous three months away that both Von and I would do again at the drop of a hat.

At Johannesburg our flight is delayed for one last frustrating time by an hour and a half. In the boarding area I strike up a conversation with a South African couple and learn they are visiting Australia for a week to check out areas they might like to migrate to. Apparently they have a small game park on the Botswana border that the South African government is taking off them and they have had enough.

Later on the plane, I think of this conversation and see an opportunity to discuss our house that we would like to sell, so seek them out. They, Chris and Judy, are very interested and promise to visit us in a week's time before they return to South Africa. Well, who knows, it would be freaky if they were interested enough to purchase, but then I guess you have to make your own luck in this world – nothing ventured nothing gained, and certainly nothing to lose in speaking with them.

Saturday August 18<sup>th</sup> Another memorable flight for all the wrong sleepless reasons. I just could not get comfortable and didn't have a nice time at all. Doing laps around the plane I am envious of the nodding heads all over the place. The plane is only half full so many passengers have been able to stretch out across two and even three seats – that would have been nice. Von seems to fare a little better as she enters her movie world, cackling her way through 'Wart Hogs' and 'Happy Feet' before appearing to have a decent sleep.

We checked our luggage through from Nairobi and I am not at all confident of it appearing on the carousel in Sydney, but, doubter that I am, it pops up safely once we are on the ground on home soil. Our quarantine and customs checks are not too bad and we only lose some tea containing cinnamon and from spice packs, cinnamon sticks and packets of cloves. Von can replace those so the gifts are OK. Everything else passes inspection and we emerge to the arrivals area expecting some sort of reception committee.

Dale had sent us an SMS saying he and Megan were here, but coming through fairly quickly, they had gone for a drink and are nowhere in sight. We are soon reunited though and are on our way home, where we learn John, Fien, Dianne, Ben and Mid the cat are all waiting for us. It is lovely to see them all and great to be back home in familiar surroundings. Mum and Dianne have prepared a lovely meal which we enjoy and give out some of the presents brought home from Africa. The others from other places are hopefully on their way in various packages coming sea mail, so will be gifts for later in the year.

The cat is especially pleased to be out of Dianne's 'jail' and back home where he can roam free. I give him a cuddle, he gives me two smacks with his paw, fortunately with claws in, for being away so long. Sorry Mid.

## **Part 6– And Now It’s All Over, What’s Happened and What’ Next.**

Today is October 18<sup>th</sup>, two months since we returned to Australia and I will finish these writings today. It has taken much longer than I imagined and for the UK section has become much more than a travel diary as I journey back into my childhood. I didn’t know I was going to do that but am pleased as it has been almost a cathartic process putting those memories down on paper.

It has made me realise that there are stories still to be told and I feel drawn to tackling that of the huge event in my youth that changed the course of my life; the story of how I came to be in Australia. I will need help with this, my memory alone will not be sufficient but Ralph, Brian and Ted, the ones I traveled with then are all still here and will help me I’m sure.

But what of now, what has transpired in the time of our journey through the UK, Europe and Africa. Happily Mick Schimanski is still with us and is feeling good. He has outlived the specialist’s prediction of four to six months when first diagnosed with cancer and told me just recently, ‘I don’t feel like I’m about to die’. Mick has been working three days a week which tires him, but I’m sure gives him great satisfaction and something for his very positive outlook to focus on. Well done Mick, keep going mate, we wish you well.

More good news is that Oma now is very well managed in the nursing home in Nowra and is doing well. On a recent visit to John and Fien, we visited Oma at the nursing home and Fien also brought her home for a lunch time outing. She is a happy soul most of the time, lost in her own world, revisiting events already passed and inventing others that will never be, but if she is happy and has no other worries in life, it’s a wonderful outcome.

Chris and Judy de Roo, the South African’s did visit us to look at the house but will not proceed to purchase it. They were, I believe, genuinely interested and spent three hours here on their way back to Sydney, but on returning home to South Africa, advised us there were too many question marks about their future to make the commitment. I thank them for keeping their promise to visit and wish them well in sorting out their issues with the South African government as they seek compensation for the reclamation of their land.

I am very glad Von and I spent the time we did in England as I have developed a new respect and appreciation for the country of my birth having now seen more of what it has to offer. I could never live there, but I now understand why so many do and what there is to be had in the country and lifestyles it offers. My relatives and friends there were all wonderful to us and we would welcome the opportunity to reciprocate that hospitality here in Australia at any time.

Mum is back where she belongs and I am glad to have upheld my promises to her in making that happen. It can be debated whether she should have ever come to Australia and issues surrounding that have been extremely divisive between Ray and I on the one hand and Marion on the other. I believe it is now best laid to rest. I don’t believe I have grieved for Mum yet and I don’t know why. I have been sad yes, but that’s not grief. I guess I will have to deal with that in my own time.

Being away for these three months has punctuated my life and is resulting in major changes for me, some of which I am struggling with. Working for myself, the time away meant that my income streams from consulting dropped away and I deliberately had not marketed myself in the time leading up to the trip knowing I could not service new clients. Since being back, my major client has sold his business, something we have been working towards for years and therefore a most successful outcome.

For me however it means most of my work is gone and I face the crossroads of wanting to retire to spend more time traveling in Australia and beyond, but being unsure of how to cope with having so much time. A common problem I know. The decision would be made easier too if we could sell our house which was always part of the grand plan, but with it being a unique lifestyle property that maybe only one in a thousand will like and the market in our region being very subdued, the plan is still only that.

In the meantime, I must admit that 'the bug is back', the travel bug that is. Von and I have plans all be they vague plans, for traveling with our camper in Australia, but this trip has given me a renewed interest in completing what I set out to do in 1968 when I left England. The objective then was to 'travel the world' which of course can be interpreted in a vast number of ways. For me though, the Americas and in particular South America, remain the last frontier to be reached in my quest to see the world.

It is not yet finalised and no money has changed hands, but there is a strong prospect that we will get to South America next year for a forty five day overland journey across Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. This too would be a wonderful experience and no doubt the source for another journal such as this.

Yvonne and I are continuing to keep fit in anticipation of that South American escapade. It includes several days hiking the Lares Trail up to 4500 meters high in the Andes on the way to Machu Picchu so will take a big effort, especially for Von. She has done amazingly well so far given the severity of her arthritis but has much more to achieve if we are to walk the Andes. If it doesn't come to pass, it will be for physical reasons, not for want of effort or trying.

So, here endeth the story of a most memorable three months and I hope that those who may read this are able through the words to share some of those experiences with us.

Writing finished 5.30pm 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007.