



Dear All

My header is from eastern Zimbabwe near a village called Juliasdale. The Msasa trees are all coming into leaf and with the backdrop of all those amazing rocks the hillsides are looking very attractive - that is where they have not been burned. In a report in the local newspaper it says that several fires have been started in the area by the villagers either to clear land or just for fun. These fires have resulted in destruction of homes and property and also loss of life. The atmosphere was full of dust and haze making the hills invisible in some instances.

In my opinion it is about time Environmental Agency staff in all the countries in Southern Africa got out of their comfortable offices and into their air-conditioned 4x4s and went to the villages to explain to the people that chitemene is dead. Chitemene is the old traditional practice of slash and burn prior to planting crops.

To Mine or not to Mine ...

This week all three proposed mines/mining activities in our region of Southern Africa are making news. In Zambia we have the proposed Kangaluwi Mine in Lower Zambezi National Park; just over the river in Mana Pools National Park and World Heritage Site is the proposed mining in two rivers for Heavy Mineral Sand Deposits and finally a mine, Fairbreeze, in South Africa which is set to destroy Mtunzini Conservancy.

The problem with mines is that they destroy the environment. I have never heard of a mine which was environmentally friendly. The mining companies blast the land to excavate the minerals underneath. They require huge amounts of water; they use toxic chemicals which leach into the environment, especially rivers from which we draw our water.

In Africa with generally high unemployment and poverty, the mining companies always propound the virtues of the money which the government will gain from mining activities and the jobs they will create for the poor people. Often governments are swayed by these arguments as they do not think of the next generation, merely their time in office.

Mines will have a lifespan of maybe 20 years and when all the miners have gone back to Australia or China, there will be a big hole in the ground; an area surrounding the mine covered in dust and debris, rivers where the fish have died from toxic chemicals and the water unfit to drink; wide roads used by the mining trucks to transport their minerals out of the area but which, in fact, have given poachers easy access into a remote area. The wildlife will, of course, be decimated by the end of the life of the mine. But some of our governments cannot think that far ahead because they feel that the problems of lack of money, lack of jobs and poverty are more real than something which will happen in 20 years time. Anyway, they won't be in office then ...

Conservationists on the African continent often have a bad name because they are always portrayed by governments as wanting to slow development – probably because, as governments often think, conservationists are just jealous. This, of course, is untrue: conservationists think about their children's future. They want their children to see the beautiful wildlife areas as we see them today. They know that in a world where greed is seen as the norm, maybe money isn't everything. They also know that man's impact on the environment is destroying the planet – we are losing our forests, our waterways, our wildlife. If the devastation of our natural resources continues, in the years to come, man will wonder how it all happened but, by then, it will be too late.

So how do conservationists in Africa try to get their message across to the law-makers in governments? In South Africa the conservationists have got a lawyer on board who has written a detailed account of the erred Environmental Impact Assessment for the Fairbreeze Mine and the impacts on the environment were the mine to go ahead. The conservancies and wildlife NGOs have also written down their concerns – all of these have been submitted to government.

In Zimbabwe the Zambezi Society is keeping the proposed mining in Mana Pools in the public eye by constantly putting the information 'out there' and submitting documents to government.

In Zambia we have done little about the proposed mine in Lower Zambezi and, in fact, all has been very quiet on that front. So, I was pleased to see an article by Peter Steyn who has recently visited the area and have included it below.

Zambia has a different population to that of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Having just found wealth from our mines we have a 'new rich' elite who mostly live in Lusaka working for government, NGOs and Embassies. These people are so happy with their income spending it all in the fancy shops in shopping malls made up of South African trading companies; they rarely visit Zambia's wilderness and have little knowledge or care about it - more concerned over their latest pair of shoes.

But one thing that Zambia's government does have to watch out for is Zambia's conservationists – we may be quiet now, but we can stand up to be counted when the chips are down. No, we don't have money and we don't have lawyers who will work pro bono, but we do have passion. We saw it during the fight to stop a hotel chain building a golf resort in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. So, no, we don't have money but we are people throughout the Zambian society who just care ... and we hope that is enough ... And, of course, we have lots of supporters working on our behalf outside the country ...

ZESCO Tariffs

Ruth Henson

On Friday evening ZESCO called a meeting at Chrismar Hotel to explain why they need a tariff increase. Very few people attended. (About 25 members of the public) Some of us wondered whether the time, location and lack of publicity was intended to achieve a small number of attendees.

ZESCO is proposing to increase their tariffs by the following amounts;

Residential	37%
Social services	19%
Commercial	24%
Maximum demand 1 & 2	27%
Maximum demand 3 & 4	32%
Mines – up to cost reflective tariffs by 2015	

Energy Regulation Board (which has the power to approve, deny or modify the increase) has given members of the public until Friday 14th September to submit comments or objections to the increase. They can be sent to tariffs@erb.org.zm or dropped at their offices. When the last increase was advertised only 46 submissions were received from the whole country. If more people are willing to write in it will have considerably more effect. Otherwise it gives ERB the impression that the cost of power is not a serious issue for the majority of consumers.

ZESCO's stated reasons for increasing the tariffs are as follows;

1. Rising cost of production.
 - a. Inflation.
 - b. Exchange rate pressures.
 - c. High commodity prices especially copper.
2. Key performance Indicators have improved.
3. The need for continued investment in production.

Looking at these arguments one by one, it becomes clear that there are other reasons for the increase that ZESCO prefers not to mention.

Inflation was 10.2% in 2010 and 7.2% in 2011. This would justify, at most, an increase of 18% for the two years combined. ZESCO is using 10 years inflation levels to justify an increase in 2012.

Exchange rate pressures are always mentioned as a reason for a tariff increase whether the Kwacha gets weaker or stronger. It's about time that ZESCO learned how to mitigate such pressures.

High copper prices as an excuse for increasing tariffs to everyone except the mines seems to me a very provocative and insulting argument. If copper is worth a lot more, thereby increasing the price of transformers, then the producers of copper can well afford to pay a fair price for electricity.

The performance indicators mentioned by ZESCO are Metering, Loss reduction and Staff productivity. All these should improve ZESCO's profitability considerably. Why they should necessitate a tariff increase I don't understand. The performance indicators that consumers would be willing to pay more for relate to consistent supply, quick repair of faults and reduced load shedding.

When asked if they had met any of the targets all they would say was that they had improved.

The need for continued investment in power production is mainly due to increased demand from the mines. Why other consumers should pay for this has never satisfactorily been explained.

A brief look at the ZESCO cost of service study and the ERB paper reveals a different set of issues that ZESCO prefers not to mention.

ZESCO's staff costs are 50% of its total cost basis even though ZESCO was reporting that staff numbers were decreasing.

ZESCO's average cost per employee is K15.2 million/month.

The Mines use 50% of the power produced but pay 28% below cost of production.

If domestic consumers have to subsidise the mines, the mine subsidy will be 30% of their bill OR The physical system will continue to degrade for lack of funding, and load shedding would likely increase substantially because the mines take priority service on a 24/7 basis.

The new power stations needed, are to supply the mining load. Expected non mining load does not need new power stations till at least 2018.

ZESCO claims there is no cross subsidy between categories but could not explain how this could be true if mining tariffs are not yet cost reflective.

Exported power is sold 15% below cost.

ZESCO employees do not pay for power; they get an allocation of 2000 units per month.

Administrative costs are high and not necessarily related to power production as seen in the following quote from the ERB chairman's speech on approving the previous increase for 2010/2011:

"The following administration costs have been disallowed:

- i. Donations amounting to K 9.5 billion;
- ii. Entertainment costs amounting to K 436 million; and
- iii. ZESCO United Football Club costs amounting to K 4.7 billion.

When asked if they had done any study on customers' ability to pay they said they had not. They claimed that some households pay more for talk time than electricity. (This may be true for ZESCO employees)

When asked if they had any concern for the vanishing forests they admitted it was a problem but would not take the blame for it.

Gill: In a report this week, World Bank has signed an agreement to finance Kafue-Muzuma-Victoria Falls Power Transmission Line Reinforcement Project amounting to US\$56 million.

Hunting Issues

Stakeholders were invited to a 2-day meeting in Lusaka to discuss the future of hunting in Zambia. Zambia has 35 Game Management Areas (GMAs) as well as its 19 (20) National Parks. (Number 20 is the Lusaka Park which is yet to be completed ...). The Game Management Areas border on the National Parks and are meant to form a buffer zone between the villages and the parks. These Game Management Areas have been used for hunting.

Leases for GMAs have been given to companies who are then given licences through the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) to hunt a certain number of animals. Over the years, though, interest by ZAWA has been more about the income raised from issuing hunting licences than about the number of animals remaining in the GMAs. Many of the GMAs are now valueless as hunting blocks; their animals have mostly been shot – those that have value to the hunter, at any rate. Hunters want to shoot lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant.

In a bizarre comment one wildlife administrator stated that it was difficult to know how many lions were in a certain area because the lions hunted at night. Having visited so many parks and chatted to Game Scouts, I know that the scouts know exactly how many lions are in their areas. If the administrators for ZAWA actually took time to go into the Parks and GMAs, and talk to their scouts and tour operators they would find out how many animals there are.

Game Management Areas are actually owned by the communities but administered by ZAWA. It is ZAWA who collects the fees from licences and is supposed to pass on a percentage to the communities. But, at the meeting, it came to light that ZAWA owes K1.6 billion (US\$320,000) to the communities. Sylvia Masebo, the Minister of Tourism, stated that this money would be paid by the end of the year and that all future income from licences will be put into a separate account.

It would appear that 20 GMAs will be up for tender by companies. (This means that 15 GMAs are depleted?) In the past leases for GMAs have often been given to companies who merely sub-lease to hunters. There have also been instances where caring hunters have refused to buy licences from ZAWA to shoot certain animals because they have said that the numbers are too small to hunt – this has angered ZAWA who 'need the money'.

So, let us see the government issue leases to hunting companies who are going to hunt themselves and not sublease and also to companies who can say, without recrimination, that they will not hunt certain animals because of the lack of numbers. We actually do have a number of ethical hunters in Zambia – it is them who need to be given these leases ... will it happen???

ZAWA Debt

During the meeting, too, it was stated on ZNBC news that ZAWA had a debt of K2 trillion. I always get a bit overwhelmed by all these zeros but I reckon that this amount equates to US\$400 million. The problem with ZAWA is that it is expected to be self-supporting; previously as National Parks it was considered to be an area which government partly funded. So we can only assume that this debt is the amount it ran over its income but has actually been funded by government as it would have been in the past.

During the stakeholder meeting in Lusaka there were calls for big changes to be made to ZAWA. It was stated in the news report that some people felt that officials in ZAWA were from an elitist group and did not reflect the will of the communities who lived around the wildlife areas and that the communities did not benefit from the resources.



Meanwhile ZAWA has unleashed a new uniform for its wildlife officers, a uniform which Sylvia Masebo, the Minister of Tourism modeled to great effect.

Kangaluwi Mine

As the editor of Safari (Africa Geographic's digital travel magazine) - Paul Steyn spends his days submerged in the world of digital story telling. When coming up for air, he prefers it to be in the middle of some type of breathtaking wilderness. He is obsessed with finding new and interesting ways of distributing digital content to anyone on the planet with even the remotest passion for Africa. Make sure you check out Safari interactive magazine for yourself.

Kangaluwi: The Lower Zambezi National Park battle begins!
By Paul Steyn on September 3, 2012 in Conservation

Alright, just a quick note before we start. I would hate for you to get half way through this post, throw up your hands in disgust and say: 'Not another seedy mining project. People are horrible, I've had enough, what's the point?'

I mention this because these were some of the thoughts that came into my head when I first heard about the plans to mine copper in the Lower Zambezi National Park.

Maybe I'm more susceptible to the emotional effects of this news, having recently visited the area this year. Experiencing the quiet flow of the Zambezi River and the animals that live off it; the big trees that decorate its bank and the feeling of being in wilderness that stretches inland for another 5000 square kilometres – it just does something to you. When you become touched by a place like this, it makes it all the more difficult to come to terms with plans to destroy some of it.

But rather than get jaded or emotional, I always say it's better to get educated and proactive. So here are a few of the facts about the Lower Zambezi National Park and proposed Kangaluwi copper mine.

The Lower Zambezi National Park is being considered as part of a greater World Heritage Area which includes the famous Mana Pools National Park.

Despite a decision by the Zambian government to halt any mining in and around the Lower Zambezi National Park, a grant was given to Australian company Zambezi Resources (A subsidiary of a much bigger company called Proactive Investors) to carry out a large scale open-pit mining license for a period of 25 years at Kangaluwi (In the middle of the park).

Zambezi Resources has set up a sub-subsidiary company in Zambia called Mwembeshi Resources. It appears that there is more than one area under prospect by Zambezi Resources. According to their report, there are several sites nearby which have potential for copper and gold.

It's been a number of months, and, although submitted, there has been no word as to the result of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The news will come from the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) which has remained very quiet through public opposition.

Open pit mines are a messy business, and include huge destruction of the area and surrounds. The issues of pollution, infrastructure, roads, noise and poaching traditionally follow these mining projects. The proposed mining area is 50 square kilometres and will be seen from the Zambezi River itself. Now for a few personal thoughts.

Of all the players in this scenario, the people I would most like to hear from are Zambezi Resources – or rather the Australian parent company Proactive Investors. I'd like to understand how an Australian company can make a claim on African resources at the expense of an iconic African National Park... even if the Zambian government, for some reason, does grant them permission to do so. There is surely an injustice here?

On the Zambezi Resources website I found an investor news feed about progress on the Kangaluwi mine, but in seven posts it failed to mention once that the planned site is right in the middle of a National Park. I wonder if the investors know this is the case? And if they did, would they think twice about the financial and – if they have a conscience – environmental risks?

The only paragraph on the website mentioning the environment reveals that they have outsourced the Environmental Impact Assessment to a company called GeoQuest. Apart from sounding a bit like a computer game, the Zambian company's core focus is consulting and contracting for the mining sector. Due to high demand, as they state on their website, they have now developed a department that can handle environmental impact assessments.

The cynical side of me starts to itch here. I can just see their board meetings now: "This is brilliant", they say, "We can be the consultants, the contractors AND the environmental assessors all at once. We consult and refer ourselves as the environmental assessors, and then when we give the go ahead to mine, we can take on the big contract too."

Isn't that a conflict of interest? Someone might say.

No. The interest is to mine and make money and that is all that matters.

I only bring up this point up to illustrate how absurd the whole situation is. You don't need a professional assessment to tell you that it is right or wrong to dig up a nationally proclaimed conservation and biodiversity area – a patch of land that has been specifically set aside for the posterity of future generations and the financial benefit of the country through tourism.

I would love for somebody to sit me down and tell me why it is not wrong to mine in a National Park. Give me some long-term benefit for Zambia that trumps the environmental, economic, spiritual and cultural losses incurred over the next 25 years of open pit mining on the Zambezi escarpment.

You might bring up the economic debate. And yes, I would say in an ideal world some of the economic benefits of mining should go to the people and the communities, but I'm afraid they never do. This has been proved over and over again. The money goes off shore and into government coffers. And 25 years later we will see the damage, look back and wonder how this could have happened.

This is why I think Zambezi Resources fails to mention Lower Zambezi National Park in their investor news reports. It's because they know that at the core of it – Kangaluwi Mine is wrong. They won't admit it for whatever reason, but they know it's wrong.

You may accuse me of over-simplifying this, but to me it is simple. The area is in line to become a World Heritage Site, is defined as a category II protected area and despite vows by the government and local chiefdoms not to exploit this area for mining purposes, plans still go ahead to destroy and poison a watershed in one of the last remaining pieces of wilderness in the world.

No mining conglomerate should be able to justify this kind of exploitation. And if they don't feel they need to try and justify it to us, the Australian public and the world, then they at least need to justify it to their investors who would be contributing to the wholesale destruction of this Park and the Zambezi Valley.

I can't say for sure why (although I have my suspicions), but nobody in power is taking responsibility for this mine in Zambia. So it's up to us to point out how obviously wrong it is.

Because sometimes the obvious needs to be pointed out by a lot of people at once in order for others to take notice. ...

ZIMBABWE

183 Vultures Dead in Gonarezhou

After killing an elephant in Gonarezhou National Park, the poachers smeared poison on the carcass. The end result was the death of 183 vultures which fed on the carcass. The poachers wanted this result, of course, because it is vultures who give away the site of a killing.

Flamingos

From Kalizo Lodge

Hi Gill, that same picture that Peter sent in was more or less the same as we got that passed our lodge a few weeks back, they flew from Katima side and a little later passed the lodge again heading towards Katima. While we were sitting at the water's edge a guest remarked *do you get flamingoes* and I said *no only pelicans*, and not long after that the same guest said ... *and what are those*, I said *well, I be damned, they really must of got lost from Livingstone to Katima*.

Underground Aquifers

Scientists have found a massive aquifer in Namibia. A team from German Federal Scientific Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources states that the underground water supply could supply water for hundreds of years.

In April the British Geological Survey and University College London published a report identifying reserves of "fossil water" across Africa, possibly as high as 100 times more than that available on the surface.

Namibia's newly discovered aquifer covers a wide area of 70 kilometers by 40 kilometers and is located in northern Namibia.

Adventure Travel World Summit 2013

From the Namibian Economist

After bidding with eight other countries and being short listed in the top three, Namibia eventually won the bid to host the 2013 Adventure Travel World Summit. "It is my great pleasure to announce to you that indeed the Land of the Brave will have the opportunity to welcome the delegates of the 2013 Adventure Travel World Summit (ATWS) here in Namibia, we have brought the Summit home!" a jovial Minister of Environment and Tourism Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah announced on Wednesday.

Initially it was expected that 600 delegates will attend the Summit but Nandi-Ndaitwah emphasised that because of the momentum the Summit has received, over 700 delegates are expected. The cost of the Summit is estimated to be N\$10 million and according to Nandi-Ndaitwah, the budget will include preparations as well courtesies for the guests.

The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) is a privately held, for-profit industry trade group that serves to network, educate, professionalise and promote the adventure travel industry. A team of inspectors arrived in Namibia during May and according to the minister, the inspection was a success. She added that the country's victory to host the Summit did not originate from the 2011 ATWS held in Chiapas, Mexico where the first delegation of Team Namibia attended, but began with the country's commitment to conservation as represented by the establishment of national private conservation areas and the formation of communal conservancies.

President of ATTA, Shannon Stowell who paid a visit to Namibia in June praised the country's model of conservation saying that it is a story that should be told. "Namibia offers one of the most compelling success stories in tourism today, one of joint venture tourism and partnerships between communal conservancies and tourism enterprises, therefore the delegates are sure to gain immense insights from their experiences in Namibia," Stowell said. The minister said the spirit of comradeship was the main factor that played a significant role in Namibia winning the bid. "As Namibians, we are ready for the challenge of hosting the Summit and thrilled to welcome the Adventure Travel Tribe to the land of endless horizons where wildlife and humans are free to roam and still experience true nature," Nandi-Ndaitwah stressed.

Nandi-Ndaitwah, who left for Switzerland after announcing the results, further said that the benefits to the country will not only include the direct exposure but that the Summit will also make a huge contribution to marketing of the tourism industry through websites and trade magazines. "We want to invest in business tourism and conferencing so we are expecting an increase in the northern American tourism market during the pre and post adventure activities," the minister added. The ATWS will take place from 26 to 31 October 2013 in Swakopmund and Windhoek and registration will open on 17 September 2012.

BOTSWANA

Flamingoes over Maun

From Ngami Times

Hundreds of Lesser Flamingoes have been spectacularly sighted over Maun and other parts of Botswana as they fly towards their breeding grounds at Sua Pan in the Nata Bird Sanctuary area. The breeding ground is home to about 40 000 of the birds and is one of a handful of breeding areas in the world. The migration of approximately three million Lesser Flamingoes from the northern hemisphere and East Africa to the south and west Africa is an annual occurrence which helps bring hundreds of birdwatchers to the sanctuary, a popular tourist area. Flamingoes' habits and anatomy make them remarkable. The shape of their beak and the way they feed are peculiar. Thanks to a gland enabling them to void salt through their nostrils, they are the only species which can live in salted areas such as Sua Pan.



POACHING 'KILLING WILDLIFE BY 2017'

From Ngami Times

Much of Botswana's wildlife could be wiped out by 2017, according to a new study on the impact of poaching in the Okavango delta.

The consequences of at least 100 000 animals a year being killed over the next five years will cause a massive decline in tourism and the economy as wildlife is one of the main reasons why foreigners come to the delta. The domino effect on Maun in general and for safari companies and lodges will be significant.

There is also the danger of foot and mouth disease (FMD) spreading more widely as the illegal trade in bush meat gains a foothold in cattle farming areas.

Poaching is also likely to increase significantly as soon as the trophy hunting ban in northern Botswana comes into effect from October 1. According to a recent presentation made to the parliamentary commission on tourism, the director of the Botswana Predator Conservation Fund, Tico McNutt, quoting from studies previously undertaken, says there has been a significant decline "in most recorded wildlife species". These include impala, zebra, tsessebe, kudu, giraffe and lechwe.

Since a 1996 survey by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), only elephants and Cape Buffalo have shown an increase in numbers. There are at least 180 000 elephants in northern Botswana. McNutt says the only conclusion to be drawn from this is that illegal hunting – poaching – will be responsible for the decline.

The report says: "While the actual frequency of illegal hunting remains unknown in NG26 concessioin area, results demonstrate the potential impact of uncontrolled hunting. Importantly, illegal hunting could entirely account for the significant declines of wildlife populations in the Okavango, as reported by Michael Chase in 2011.

"There is a nearly continuous removal of wildlife for meat despite an Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) presence in the area."

The report adds that a professional hunter who hunted in the area for 14 years until 2009 catalogued photographs as evidence and estimated "conservatively two giraffe per week" were being killed in the eastern sections alone.

Wildlife management areas (WMAs) drive the bush meat trade and when coupled with the fact that there are few consequences for illegal activity, such as few arrests, low fines and a few prosecutions, it can be assumed, the report says, that poaching will continue until the laws are changed.

In addition to illegal hunting is the poisoning of carcasses which results in vultures, for instance, being found dead as well as other scavengers.

This week, an attempted poaching of a buffalo in the Chobe National Park was averted by a safari guide who with his clients had watched a vehicle come to a stop near a herd and shots fired, wounding a buffalo. A scuffle broke out between the guide – a professional hunter – and the alleged poacher, who was later traced by police but denied having been in any incident. Police however went to the scene and found a badly wounded buffalo which they then shot. The alleged poacher was later arrested.

Crossing the Makgadigadi Pans in a home-made wooden go-kart By Ben Freeth

Like all the best expedition concepts, this was an easy one! My young sons, Joshua (12) and Stephen (10) decided to make a go-kart that would sail and could be used on an expedition to raise funds for the Mike Campbell Foundation. So, with some cheap Zimbabwe pine, a few tools and some bicycle wheels, we made the vessel. On a windy Sunday, we found an empty car park in Harare and sailed it up and down the tar using a pre-1980 Optimist dinghy sail that had proved its worth in innumerable regattas. The vessel went at great speed and it was rather fun – but we all felt that the expedition had to be over more than a car park!



We looked at a map and discussed the possibility of the Makgadigadi salt pans located in northeastern Botswana, southeast of the world renowned Okavango Delta. Surrounded by the Kalahari desert, the Makgadigadi is technically not a single pan but many pans with sandy desert in between. They didn't look too big on our little map, but we were unsure how our rather holey "made in Rhodesia" sail would stand up to a howling August wind in that unforgiving wasteland southwest of Zimbabwe.

It was then that we hit on the idea of powering the go-kart with a kite. It would obviate the inevitable sore heads from the low swinging boom that scythed across the deck - and it would give a lot more room for the three of us to perch on our little craft.

We made a few successful wheel modifications using extra bicycle wheels and car inner tubes that would allow our weight to be displaced over the thin salt crust of the pans. Then, after some rather hairy self-taught kite flying trials at home and on the beaches of Mozambique, during which we became prone to levitating at considerable heights, we felt we were ready.

The Meteorological Department in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, was very efficient and gave us all the historical wind records – showing the direction and wind speed in August. We set off, confident that we would storm across the pans with the galloping fury of being harnessed to a span of the area's famed wildebeest and zebra that range across the area in Africa's second largest wildlife migration.

Unfortunately our back-up team was not up to full strength. I discovered that my little daughter Anna's passport had expired and we could not get a new one in time. So my wife, Laura, opted to stay behind with Anna while "Granny Claire", my mother, who was out on holiday from England, would do the honours of sending us off and – hopefully! – receiving us at our intended destination.



Day 1

We arrived at Sowa pan and were amazed at its immensity. It stretched out like a great vast ocean before us – flat, featureless and, like the sea, clearly unforgiving. There was very little wind but before my last sip of tea, made on a fire the boys had got going from the reflector of my torch, Josh said, “Let’s go!”

We assembled the go-kart, tied down our 50 litres of water and some other scant essentials, and made sure the map, GPS and compass were safely on board. Now the go-kart, which we’d named the Mike Campbell “dune dancer” to raise funds for the Mike Campbell Foundation, was ready. There was only a slight wind, but we got the five-metre arching span of the kite pumped up and launched and then we were away.

It was high drama sailing out to Kukonje Island in the sun, dust and wind. At times we were going faster than the boys could run after they had launched the kite. With the wind behind us we had to use our rudimentary brake system copied from a traditional ox wagon, to stop the go-kart from catching up with the kite which was twirling ahead in fierce figure of eight loops. The setting sun cast dappled light across the pan and the dusty salt billowed behind us as we careered along in a westerly direction.

The African stars are famed throughout the world – but out there on a moonless, dry Kalahari winter’s night, the stars are at their most magnificent. To lighten our load we did not bring a tent so we camped out under those stars - close to Kukonje Island. Lying on my back in my sleeping bag on the surface of that vast pan and looking upwards with my binoculars, I counted about 150 stars just within the four imaginary lines that enclose the constellation of the Southern Cross. It made us feel very insignificant.

Beyond, in an uninterrupted view that stretched to every horizon, there was no light nor any sign of man. We were nestled in the folds of the unending silence, completely alone. I spent many hours caught up in the excitement of it all, looking up into the vast and vaulting heavens, watching the shooting stars.

Day 2

The wind took a while to pipe up next morning – and so we did not get going until late. Eventually we were off on a reach, battling to get the dune dancer really singing because the wind was not strong enough and the direction was not ideal. Soon the wind dropped



completely. We stopped and sheltered from the intense rays of the sun under the scant shade of the kite while we ate lunch. Our exhilaration ebbed considerably as we discussed the possibility of pushing our craft westwards so as not to waste time. The lifeless pans are no place to linger.

I attached a bridle rope to the steering axle and strode out in front while the boys pushed on from behind. We crunched over the surface of the pan for the rest of the day, panting and sweating profusely with the exertion of heaving our craft along. It was not unlike a great snow field where the surface has been melted by the sun and then frozen to form a crust that is broken with every foot fall.

Then in the distance we saw what looked like an abandoned vehicle out in the echoing loneliness. Inching forward, we were drawn towards it, fascinated by something that broke the bleak, barren profile of the flat expanse.

As we drew closer, we realized it was a rock – but it was no less intriguing on reaching it to see that other creatures had also discovered it, as if drawn by its magnetism. At its base we found owl droppings, a few feathers and faded springbok spoor...

On and on we trudged, becoming one with the empty reaches of salt and sky. We passed the bleached remains of a zebra skull and then a little further on a hornbill's skull and leg bones. Stephen found a fossilized grasshopper and then an entire bird – a starling I think – desiccated and white. "This place is scary" he said.

As the sun dropped towards the rim of the horizon, we walked on into its receding rays. Light shone through multiple holes in the pan's crust where it had lifted from the mud. It was as if the whole surface had come alive with tiny illuminated subterranean passageways of golden light and shadow beneath our feet.

Checking our bearings, we headed for another rock and reached it just before dusk. This one was about 20 feet across and a foot and a half high. It was somehow comforting to camp beside such a solid, ancient feature. I introduced the boys to savory pancakes – a great meal when water is scarce. It was cold and we snuggled into our sleeping bags, thankful to lie down and sleep after a long and wearying day. The boys commented that it was the first night that they had ever slept out in the bush without a campfire – for there was nothing remotely suitable for kindling in sight. The GPS indicated that we had another 26 kilometres to go before we reached Kubu island. "Let's get going early," Josh said, "even if there is no wind."



Day 3

Somewhere close to the rock a cricket started to sing. It didn't continue for long, but it was amazing to hear the sound of a living creature in that place of emptiness and death. We thought it must be pleased to have company at its lonely island. After a little while it stopped and then some time later started again, only to fall silent soon afterwards.

After a cup of sweet black tea we headed off. With each step forward, "cricket rock" gradually disappeared behind us and once more we were all alone – a tiny little speck of a vehicle in the great white sea, the only object breaking the surface.

It was breathlessly still but at last we felt a slight breeze spring up and so got the kite ready – only to have the wind disappear again.

In the still, early morning our long shadows stretched far ahead, like a path. They were the only point of reference in that barren, empty wasteland with its unbroken horizon. As we pushed on, our shadows marched in front of us then moved slowly around to our left until, as the day wore on, they were finally behind us. We felt like three sundials telling the time to the surrounding empty white infinity.

There is a certain discipline about moving onwards towards nothing. The wheels turn around and around, while your tracks stretch back towards the starting point. After a while all conversation stopped as we focused on pushing, placing one foot on in front of the next into the great unchanging beyond.

To relieve the monotony and keep up morale, we decided to break up the journey and stop for five minutes every two and a half kilometers to rehydrate.

After a slow pushing plod of nearly five hours, Stephen, always scanning ahead, sighted an island swimming on the horizon.

There was great excitement and we steered for it, thankful to have something tangible to aim towards. It seemed to be floating above the surface of a still sea which reflected its shape in the glassy water. At noon we finally came upon the low, barren island which was about 40 metres in diameter. Strewn about were thousands of carcasses of dead flamingos, mostly juveniles. They looked like fossilized dinosaurs bleaching in the sun.

We moved on. The surface was harder now, without the crunching crust. "Do you want to ride on the dune dancer?" I asked Stephen.



“No, I will carry on pushing,” he said wearily, although I could see he was getting tired.

“I would prefer to push rather than pull,” I said. “Can you steer us on the right compass bearing?”

He assented and we pushed on, ever westwards, towards the unbroken horizon until dead flamingo island disappeared behind us and we were all alone again. I found it easier to push, and with the hard surface we started to make better time. The crust was only a few millimetres thick and our feet slipped periodically on the mud underneath. It was a clear that a vehicle would immediately be bogged down if it tried to cross this section of the pan. Scattered here and there on the surface were unhatched flamingo eggs.

At one of our stops I pulled out the ginger bread that Laura had made for the trip. It was sticky and moist and quite warm from the unrelenting heat that was making us sweat so profusely. We all agreed it was the best ginger bread that we had ever eaten. Subsequently Josh declared that “everything we ate out there was the best food I have ever tasted.”

Eventually, having covering 16 kilometres, a small, dark island appeared directly ahead. We stood up on the wheel arches, craning our necks and peering through the binoculars. This put a fresh spring into our mechanical steps and we moved forward with a new surge of speed. Slowly, ever so slowly, the island came closer, its floating form reflecting itself in the glassy mirage. Gradually, imperceptibly, hour by hour, the diameter of the reflection decreased until eventually the island settled on the surface and through the binoculars we could see trees and rocky features punctuating the skyline.



Finally the landscape took on the appearance of a vast expanse of sea at low tide, with Kubu Island, like Robinson Crusoe’s island, devoid of people – but with signs of life. We noticed a dry stone wall and clambered up to it. Stretching for several hundred metres, it is thought to be an outpost of the Zimbabwe complex of enclosures and it was eerie to think that people had once lived in this place. We discovered porcupine spoor, then a raven greeted us.

Look, two people,” Josh said. We stared at the strangers through the binoculars and, as they drew closer, I walked out to meet them.

“Hello Ben,” the man said, “are you looking for Claire?”

We realized then that we completed our crossing of the pan and that in this weird place with its ancient ruins and gnarled, other worldly baobab trees - different to any baobabs I have seen before – we were back in civilization!



It was clear the with the lack of wind that there was no time to journey on to Chapman's baobab to the northwest as planned, but decided it was a challenge we could possibly take up another time.

With special thanks to "Granny Claire" who met us at the end after many, many hours of driving over the dusty, trackless and dangerous wastes of the Makgadigadi.

And thank you to all those who donated towards supporting the Mike Campbell Foundation on this expedition, we are most grateful for your support.

Our target was £10,000 and the amount raised so far is £5,125.32.

If anyone else would like to contribute towards the expedition fundraiser, please go the Just Giving website, it's very quick and easy.



<http://www.justgiving.com/mikecampbellfoundation>

The Mike Campbell Foundation is a charity working towards the restoration of the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe. It is committed to seeking redress for the gross human rights violations committed against some of the now poorest and most vulnerable people in the southern African region.

We will continue to strain forward towards the goal.

BEN FREETH

3 September 2012

SOUTH AFRICA

Oribi Survey

During September an oribi survey will be conducted in South Africa. The survey is being overseen by Dr. Ian Little. EWT Threatened Grassland Species Programme.

All landowners are requested to complete survey forms which can be downloaded from:

<https://www.ewt.org.za/WHATWEDO/OurProgrammes/ThreatenedGrasslandSpeciesProgramme/OurProjects.aspx#Oribi>



Ground Hornbill Survey

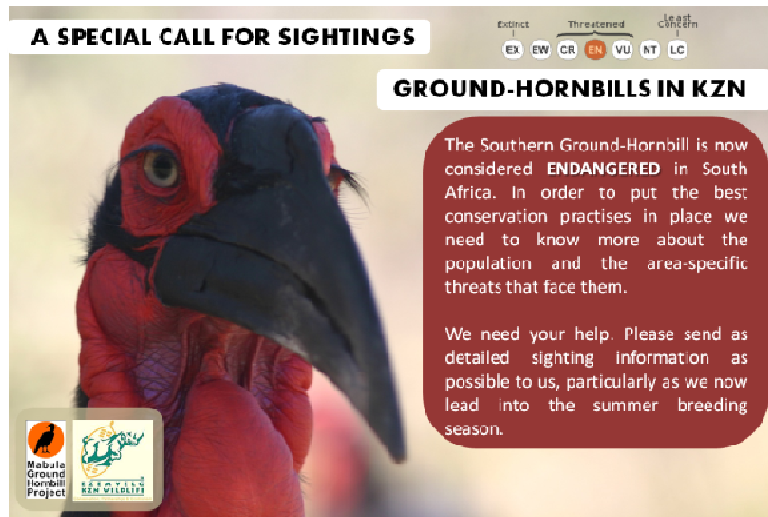
For more information and to submit your sighting please contact:

Email:

project@ground-hornbill.org.za

Tel: 083 289 8610

Fax: 0866 200 255



KOREA

IUCN World Conservation Congress on Jeju Island, Republic of Korea. 6-15 September

From Michael 't Sas-Rolfes

Conservation Economist (Independent)

Just a quick update from Jeju. Yesterday there were a few significant sessions. First, there was an update on the elephant and rhino poaching crisis in Africa. The Chinese (and Vietnamese) were conspicuous by their absence.

I did not learn much new from this session other than the shocking figure that 68 field rangers have already lost their lives this year alone in skirmishes with poachers in Africa.

This was followed by a small workshop on 'mobilizing knowledge for enhanced governance of trade in wildlife between Africa and China'. There was one Chinese representative present, a number of TRAFFIC / WWF folks and a few South Africans, including Bandile Mkhize and Thea Carroll from DEA. We did not learn much from China in this session. They continue to treat rhino trade as a serious offence and have no idea to what extent it takes place within the country.

The main market is still perceived to be Vietnam. No official from Vietnam attended either session, but a WWF representative who had done work on the Vietnamese market expressed the opinion that it will take a long time - possibly several generations - for Vietnamese attitudes toward the consumption of rare wildlife products to change. He explained that consuming products such as rhino horn is a status symbol and aspirational, driven by top politicians and successful yuppies.

There was also a USAID rep present who said that Hilary Clinton has now taken a personal interest in cracking the poaching problem. And WWF-International announced that they are throwing their weight behind a massive campaign to raise the political profile of the poaching crisis to mobilize more political will and resources.

I raised the concern that perhaps this might still not be enough, referencing the failure of the War on Drugs, despite the mobilization of significant resources for that. To this, Steve Broad, the head of TRAFFIC, responded by stating his belief that the wildlife market was different to the drugs market, that there are relatively few kingpins and that it would be easy to take them out with a more focused effort.

We shall see.

Thea Carroll from DEA pointed out that South Africa was spending massive amounts of money to try and solve the poaching problem through enforcement and so far had little to show for it. She expressed concern that we simply can't keep this up without seeing some return on this investment in the foreseeable future.

The bottom line is that WWF / TRAFFIC remain committed to the enforcement approach and, as far as they are concerned, legal trade was not really even up for discussion at this point.

In the evening there was another relevant meeting, this time to discuss a proposed IUCN motion aimed at phasing out the practice of bear farming in China. This is relevant, because bear bile, like rhino horn, is considered important in Traditional Chinese Medicine. For this meeting, many Chinese representatives were present (from the Chinese State Forestry Association and TCM representatives, among others) and they expressed very clear opposition to the motion.

Alongside this meeting I had some discussions with some folks who are close to the Chinese and aware of their position. Their bottom line is that they strongly defend their use of TCM and have no intention of backing down on this. They are not willing to yield much ground on bear farming: although they have apparently invested quite heavily in improving farming practices for the sake of bear welfare, they wish to continue with bile extraction and firmly believe that this helps with the conservation of wild bears. With regards to rhino horn, they have removed it from the official pharmacopeia but are not willing to condemn its use in traditional medicine as ineffective, because they remain of the belief that it does have healing powers. In Vietnam, I believe that rhino horn remains 'in the books' of both the official and unofficial traditional pharmacopeia references, not as a cancer remedy, but to treat other ailments.

So, all in all, Tim, I think the chances of traditional practices relating to medicinal use changing anytime soon are not great. I can't comment on ivory, but I also note there is a strong Asian culture of status, prestige and gifting, which is also very unlikely to change anytime soon, **coupled with a belief that people are way more important than animals**, so I would say we are fighting an uphill battle on the 'demand reduction' side.

The WWF Vietnam guy also expressed the opinion that getting Chinese heroes like Jackie Chan to denounce the use of rhino horn might impress some teenage Vietnamese girls but would be very unlikely to have any influence on the politicians and entrepreneurs who are the real users of the product. I hope these comments are useful!

COMESA ANNOUNCES DATES OF BUSINESS FORUM FOR KAMPALA SUMMIT

Following the hugely successful COMESA Tourism Forum, recently held in Nairobi with participants from the 19 member states, the COMESA Secretariat has just notified the participants of another opportunity to meet alongside the COMESA Summit 2012, due to be held at the Commonwealth Resort in Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda.

Between November 11 – 17 will a business exhibition take place while the COMESA Business Forum will take place November 13 and 14.

The 8th COMESA Business Forum is an annual private / public dialogue and a dedicated Business Partnerships Forum that brings together many of Africa's top business leaders, international businesses and regional policy makers on one platform to engage on common agendas that support business interests in the COMESA region. The Forum is held alongside the 16th COMESA Summit and provides a key opportunity for the private sector to meet and interact with key policy makers from COMESA countries, during the Forum and Summit.

This year, the regional forum in Kampala is co-hosted between the Private Sector Foundation of Uganda and the COMESA Business Council.

It is understood that following the success of COMESA's first ever Tourism Forum in Nairobi in August this economic sector will be on the agenda for the Kampala meeting and both the secretariat in Lusaka as well as the lead consultant are working flat out to provide a range of findings and recommendations generated by the Nairobi meeting for tourism sector participants coming to Kampala.

In the COMESA region, SMEs dominate the business world cutting across all priority sectors in Agriculture, ICT, Transport, Energy and **Tourism** among others.

Amongst the upcoming agenda points will be two of importance to the tourism industry across Africa's largest trade block and it is expected that many attendees of the Nairobi Tourism Forum will also attend the meeting but in particular these two sessions:

GOING GREEN- A NEW WAY TO DO BUSINESS IN AFRICA

- Today's necessity for sustainable businesses. What are the various approaches to renewable energy that support the SME sector?
- A green business has become less of a luxury and more of an obligatory effort for a company's sustainability. The Forum will address the various opportunities of going green and the alternatives available to your businesses.

TOURISM AND BUSINESS

- E- tourism; Tourism Online- bridging gaps across the region;
- The World Tourism Organization (WTO) General Assembly in Africa- what is on the agenda?

Expect live reports from the COMESA Summit and the Business Forum and watch this space to get all the relevant news updates in November.

OTHER STUFF

Chinese Solar Panels

The Chinese are the biggest researchers into solar panel technology. The government subsidises the research and the making of solar panels. These subsidies, apparently, have angered the US and Europe and to counteract the subsidies the US and Europe are considering applying tariffs to solar panel imports.

This is, of course, a political move and not one which will help the world move towards greener energy.

To read more about this go to:

http://www.avaaz.org/en/a_ray_of_hope_on_climate/?bQUJTcb&v=17625

THE SMILE

From the Zambia Daily Mail

INTEREST groups in the wildlife sector have proposed a ban on hunting of big cats in Zambia such as Lions, Tigers and Leopards due to prevailing low numbers of the species in national parks and game management areas.

Have a good week

Gill



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by QUENTIN ALLEN

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MUCHINGA ESCARPMENT

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OPENING EVENT - ALL WELCOME

Thursday 6th September 2012 from 17hrs

SHOWING

Friday 7th to Saturday 23rd September 2012
Monday-Friday 9-16hrs + Saturdays 9-13hrs

INFORMATION: 0977-415391 & 0979-602032