

Our return across the Great grey-green greasy Limpopo.

Trip Report. Fred & Elizabeth Hodgson & Others.

May 19th – June 13th 2011

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We ended Part One on the Banks of Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe on

31st May. We felt in consideration of the feelings of our Italian guests, sending out for a Pizza was not an option so we finished the day with a Brai in the Campgrounds before taking to our lovely Bed in the Chalet. Russell used our bed in the truck.

1st June. Despite promising a lie in we were up and making breakfast quite early which sadly for Russell meant disturbing him in the truck for access to the Fridge etc., Ah, so sweet. After a leisurely breakfast we were packed and ready to go. We declined an offer to show us the delights of the town and hit the road. Border formalities were swift and painless despite rumours of problems with Officialdom. We then arrived at Shenyati Campsite close to the Zimbabwe border. We selected our



plots and settled in. So nice not to have any pressure today. We all had a Beer for lunch before most of the party headed for Kasane to re-supply and to find Jim. Elizabeth caught up with domestic issues (Reading?) and Fred took up a vigil overlooking the Waterhole. (OK. So it was in the Bar! It **was** overlooking the Waterhole!) He was rewarded by some nice bird sighting and then a beautiful Sable came trotting to drink. What a great way to start some Wildlife viewing and how sad the others missed it. And it was not over. We had Elephants and Buffalo as well as Zebra etc. The first Elephant got very upset as

the fresh water supply was not operating. He huffed and puffed his annoyance until I found the man with the key to the tap. (See photo Gallery.) During the afternoon and into evening there was a continuous stream of animals. On one occasion a large group of Ellies were fighting and getting boisterous. The proprietor, Louw, roared “Stop that at once.” And they **did!** I was really impressed with that. During the night elephants kept tramping through this campsite. One of my favourite stops of the trip.



2nd June. A long drive with the obligatory lunch stop (in Nata) before we travelled 90km over dust to Kubu Island. This was the most basic stop of the trip but at least the toilets were clean enough. We had to boil to wash up and wash ourselves though. Not much wildlife around but the flat Pan stretching to the horizon was interesting enough with impressive sunsets.

3rd June. We exited the pan by a long drive over the crust where we had to keep to the recognised route or risk breaking through into unfathomable depths of mud. On reaching the tar we stopped to find coffee for Jim before pressing on to Sherwood for our last evening together at Kwa Nokeng Lodge on the banks of the Limpopo. A nice lodge with real beds. Dinner was provided and quite a welcome change from our own cooking. Nice showers too. We settled all our bills as tomorrow we set off on our own.

4th June. We wake up after a sound sleep and finish packing etc., by retrieving our correct complement of kit from other cars. Odd how it migrates? Then we set off together to recross the Greasy Limpopo and re-enter South Africa. All goes well and after a brief stop for goodbyes we take a left to head for



Mapungubwe. The others are to seek out breakfast coffee etc., before heading for Johannesburg and the Airport. We crack along a good road, stopping for the odd bird now such as Black-shouldered Kite and Brown-hooded Kingfisher on the telegraph wires. We arrive at the township of Alldays where we buy some provisions and a bottle or two of wine. We also find a nice coffee shop and enjoy a latte and a house special along with some spicy sausage and a muffin like cake. Then replete, we set off for the final 60km to Mapungubwe National Park. We check in at the

main gate and get a receipt but despite asking, we are not allocated a specific site but told to just pick one. We then head back and around the park perimeter for Mazhou camp site. This was a nice site but no Warden to maintain order. We had two nice evenings here that were only marred by some rowdy “Rooinecks” arriving for an illicit picnic on the Sunday afternoon. The birdlist kept growing with our first Woodpecker (Bearded) and Kurrichane Thrush. Lots of Bushbuck and plains game coming through the Camp as it is not fenced. Some 4km away there was a nice Waterhole with Hide in which just to sit and watch wildlife come by. We slept in the back of the truck as was becoming our habit.

6th/7th June. We now drive a fair distance through some interesting mountains to the town of Hoedspruit where we enter Timbavati Reserve. We had good directions to Shindzela Lodge which worked out well. While pausing to allow about 500 Buffalo cross our track we were charged by one of the more aggressive females. Oooer! We arrived in time for lunch and after settling in went on what turned out to be an eventful Game drive. Cruising along in nice light and we braked hard with the Guides eyes on stalks pointing down to a sandy gully. Two Leopards sunning themselves. Nice one Mike! (I think he was shocked too.) We took our fill of pictures before moving on. Then we found five White Rhino who did not linger but ran into cover. Then to our surprise Mike & Sam (Guides) asked if we would like to follow up on foot. Well they do weigh 3 tons a piece and we only had sandals on our feet, but no hesitation. “Yes Please!” We set off to get downwind of



where we felt they would be and there they were. Safe distance of around 30 yards so we sat on a Termite mound to watch them. As they relaxed they started to feed and seemed to be getting closer. Hmmm. Yes! They are a bit closer now and they are still coming. We wondered who would blink first, the Guides or the Rhino? It was the Guides. At about ten paces, Sam clapped his hands and they checked and moved back. Phew! Awesome animals at any distance but up close something else. After that it was high fives and back for a sundowner which by coincidence had just arrived. During dinner a large bull Elephant arrived to take water from the sand river by our

tent. Next day was a bit of an anti climax although we did see some nice birds and met Rhino and Buffalo again.

8th June. We sadly left Shindzela for some time in Kruger NP. It was never high on my list but as we were in the country we thought we may as well. We headed first to Letaba Camp and found again that we were just expected to pick an empty site. This was a comfortable site and our only night of rain. We still managed to cook our BBQ and enjoy the hungry Hyena looking soulful on the other side of the fence. The Camps were fine and the scenery superb. Very different to East Africa. Animal viewing was only so so. We did have some nice Ellie moments but in low numbers. I am not sure about Tarred roads in a Wilderness.

9th June. Our next camp was Setara about 60 km further south. Here we found our first Rhinos but at quite a distance. Traffic was certainly heavy too especially on the main bits. Best birds came almost by accident. Stopped for some Parrots and assumed “Myers” but found they were Brown-headed. Nice tick. Then Elizabeth had been photoing Francolins that I had dismissed as Red-necked. But the legs were black not red. Swainson’s. Another tick. Our camp site this time was better and whilst having a quiet Beer I was invaded by a family of Dwarf Mongoose. The young ones were only about six inches long and very curious. They climbed into everything and even hopped onto my feet. Quite lovely things. I wonder if they make good pets? Eventually an anxious mum led them off. This site was also remarkable in that we



both got lost coming back from the ablutions block in the dark and ended up wandering around until we found our tent in quite the “wrong” direction. My fault!!

10th/11th June. We drove even further south, it is a big park, to Lower Sabie where for our last two nights I had splurged on a Chalet. Still self catering but a proper bed and En suite facilities. Bliss! Our Game drives continued to be eventful with a family of six White Rhino and some nice Buffalo. We had to fight our way passed a road block where idiots in true Kruger style were clustered around a distant/ephemeral Lion sighting. We took to some back roads again and found plenty of our own animals and birds. Again Elizabeth wiped my eye with another Francolin. I had found Coqui, the first and only one of the trip, but then another ‘different’ species caught her eye and Natal Spurrow was added to our list. Best of all however, was us stopping to help a small Turtle, that was well away from water, to safety. We had just started to move off when a large male Cheetah calmly stepped onto our road and walked towards us. And not another car in sight. He came on towards us quite unconcerned and posed before turning off into the grass. A really nice way to end our visit. Back to our chalet where we cooked our final meal, Mushroom and Onion Omelette, accompanied by Pilchards in a Chile Sauce followed by Peaches & Ice Cream. Washed down by our last bottle of excellent South African wine. We then packed and got ready for the off tomorrow.



12th June. We had arranged handover of the car between 15.00 & 16.00 at the Depot which was about 6 hours away. Our plane was at 19.35 so that worked out well. We thought to leave no later than 9 but as we were up and breakfasted by 7 we set off then. OK. So we will have time to kill in Johannesburg but no need to rush. Good move! Here began the drive from Hell!

We again fought past a Lion Jam (the same one as yesterday) I wonder if anyone actually saw anything? Then just before exiting the Park we had some nice moments with a big Bull Elephant before putting Fuel in the car to get us to JBurg on empty. Out of the park and onto the main road west which was called an N road but clearly was not M standard. Two way traffic and no hard shoulder! We made good time and passed through some very nice scenery until about half way there was a bang and I lost the front Tyre. Changing the wheel was OK but I could not release the spare which was under the truck.

Eventually I waved down a passing Hi Luxe so the driver could show me how it was done. Out spilled seven likely lads who willingly set to and helped this old man change the wheel etc., without being asked. The spare was soft so needed air but the compressor was appearing to take out more than it was putting in. Eventually, as the nearest pump in our direction was some 50km away, these lads escorted us back 20km the way we had come. That was a long drive at 40km. Then all tyres were put back to 3 Bar and we could head on homewards. The episode had cost us an hour and now we had no spare.

After about 150km the fuel gauge was low so I put in 20 litres and on we went. About 80km from JBurg the warning light came on so more fuel was added and by now I was on a dead line that we should make but it would be tight. The next thing was due to poor markings in some road works we missed the exit we wanted. This was quickly followed by getting on the wrong road altogether. I then just followed the airport signs and ended up doing a drive through of both the “Drop off” and “collection” zones at Departure and Arrivals and leaving the airport again much to the amazed/concerned looks of the Police. Thankfully they did not stop us so we did not waste any time explaining. I knew my way from the airport to Britz Depot and arrived there 10 minutes later at 15.50. Phew! A quick handover with list of itinerary and the punctured wheel (spike), good bye to Russell who had turned out to check us in, and we were taxied to the Airport. AirFrance staff were attempting to get us to check in at booths but we were having none of that and used the Desk.

The flight was in the new Airbus 380 double-decker. I had blagged seats on the upper deck which was nice and quiet and after take off and a decent meal we got some sleep. Changing planes in Paris I contrived to lose Elizabeth but that’s another story. She turned up and we both made it home without further problems. Total species count was 217 if anyone is interested.