

# **This is an account of part of a longer trip starting in Kenya and travelling through Tanzania and Rwanda to Uganda. September 2017.**

**The reports of the other sectors will appear under the relevant countries.**

Who are we? Well Elizabeth and myself of course plus Chris a close friend and a more or less regular companion with whom we have enjoyed many trips and some escapades over the years since we first met in Ethiopia way back when. The fourth member was our friend, guide, bird expert and driver Emmy Gongo who is happy to drive with gusto as part of our team when asked.

We regularly visit the elephant orphans that we sponsor and I had long promised another couple that they could accompany us on our next visit and all our planning included them in the visits to DSWT properties. It is best to say at this stage that Mark Twain got it right when he wrote "*I have found out that there ain't no surer way to find out whether you like people or hate them than to travel with them*". Sadly as the trip progressed certain issues arose that, had they been mentioned at the time, could have been resolved quite easily without the unpleasantness that arose after we returned home. I only mention this in case some readers know that the four of us were actually six and yet no mention of the other two appear in the report.

**The mission.** To visit the David Sheldrick Trusts two release sites in Umani Springs and Ithumba in the north of Tsavo East National Park. This area used to be closed to tourism due to Shifta problems but is now considered safe to visit. After Tsavo we would wend our way back to Emmy's home in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Uganda for few days before flying home. The obvious route would be back to Nairobi and on to Kampala but that would not be taxing enough so we planned to travel the picturesque route to some less visited places such as Ruaha, Kitulo and Katavi. Most mortals (sensible people that they are) choose to visit these parks, if they go at all, by small plane due to their remoteness. So we decided to drive the whole way and see something of rural Tanzania as a bonus. Emmy was up for it and arrived in Nairobi with his trusty Land Cruiser to meet up with us as we lodged for two nights to allow time for buying supplies prior to setting off on our Odyssey.

The Kenyan part was straightforward as we had done this several times before. We first visited the Nairobi Nursery to meet the little ones and **Maxwell 'our' adopted blind Rhino'** before setting off next day for **Umani Springs** where we stayed 3 nights in very pleasant surroundings whilst being reunited with the staff and the keepers as well as the small herd of Orphans scheduled to be rehabilitated. We met **Farajah** and passed on 4sandi's love and affection for her own adoptee and posed for photos to send her. She was gracious enough not to ask which one was **Farajah** and which one was me.



*Farajah and I.*



*Our Umani Springs chalet.*



*Elizabeth and friends.*

More photos from our time in Umani Springs follow:-



We often met the orphan herd whilst out in the woods enjoying our own walk and Sykes Monkeys were often encountered.

The Barred Owlet was seen on one of our walks. Walking is quite safe as long as you get back before sunset. After dark is the time for nocturnal predators to go a hunting although this Large-spotted Genet is more interested in the food we put out for them.

Now it is time to drive the 90 or so kilometres of dirt road over the Yatta Lava flow and into the remote northern area of Tsavo East National Park to the Sheldrick Trusts Orphan release point at Ithumba Camp. We have exclusive use of the old camp with its five large ‘tents’ and kitchen where we prepare and cook our meals. We stopped in the small town of Kibwezi on our way to buy provisions for our stay. This is all part of the fun of our visits and the produce obtained is wonderful and fresh. We won’t show you the Butcher’s shop.



When we first went to Ithumba we were advised that “Access to the Orphans is unique” and nothing has changed since that time. It is truly humbling to be with these animals and their wild friends as they go about their daily routine. I got the usual warm hugs from my adoptees and made some new and very large friends. Our daily routine was to rise

early and get to the Stockades in time for the Orphans to be given their early milk and some Lucerne prior to them going off into the bush to browse and do what elephants do. Quite often some fully grown Ex Orphans are hanging about to join the younger keeper



dependent ones and to ‘steal’ some Lucerne for themselves. **Wendi was there with her new baby Wiva** and one morning **Yatta (right)** brought her new baby too.



Of course there were often several truly wild elephants around including some huge Bulls but they were always well behaved and polite as they sensed that they were quite safe in the immediate area around Ithumba. Whilst we had to exercise care not to take liberties when they were around it was very thrilling to be in such august company and feel so safe.



Here is a selection of random shots reflecting what I mean. The first is my Orphan Lualeni, now a proud mum, coming to say hello! Right is Emmy with Moses and the elephants taking the Lucerne.



This wild Bull just wanted to know who we were and why we were taking his photo



without his consent.



Around eleven each day the young orphans came to have more milk and a mudbath and again they were often joined by several, indeed many wild ones who had learned that this was the time that the drinking pond was also kept supplied with fresh water brought by a tanker from a river 35 km away. Tsavo is quite arid year round and particularly so during the dry season.



Here Chris is with some friends while many bulls enjoy the mudbath as Elizabeth is greeted by our old friend Rafiki from a respectful distance.

You can see more mudbath sequences on a video entitled Benjamin and the Bather.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKjI3ECyp3Y&feature=youtu.be>



I had my Camera trap with me to seek night visitors and I end this account with two that I like. Lesser Kudu are regular visitors.



After five lively days we then left Ithumba and drove south through the wilderness to cross the Galana River near Lugard Falls and reach Voi for a late lunch. After which we took the A23 (tar) road across Tsavo West to enter Tanzania at the new one stop border post near Taveta. Once over the border we were soon at our next base at Lake Chala.

For the Tanzanian part of our drive please see under that country.