

### *A Ridge too far? South Luangwa June 2005*

The Machinga Escarpment forms the western boundary of Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. It all started over a drink of something in Kafunta or on Puku Ridge at sundown some years ago. Wouldn't it be fun to walk over there for a closer look? Probably! Matters progressed on each of our visits to Kafunta Lodge over the intervening years and so over another glass of something at New Year 2005 a Resolution to "do it this year!" was made. Hence our return this June in the winter months when it is cooler! Ha! The map shows the main river Luangwa and several tributaries and the "Plan" was to follow the Lubi as far upstream as it went and then head across country to intersect a road at the Escarpment where we could be retrieved and returned to base. As the vulture flies the



distance was about 25 miles so we guessed a walking distance of 40 to be safe. 10 miles a day would be 4 days. **No problem!** Food for five days and water bottles to be re-filled en route to save weight. We would need armed scout/rangers for safety. Whose? Ours or the Wild Beasts? With Greg as guide, Fanuel the cook, and four porters to carry tents etc. plus Dangerous and Bottle (Honest), the two scouts, and ourselves, the total party was Ten. Unaware of the side bets on how long we would last before calling for help we set off for the Lubi. As the Land Cruiser departed we heard Lions fighting and set off to investigate. Well it seemed a good idea to let them know we were around. With the Scout and Guide peering into the bush it was left to me to suggest they looked left where the Lion was happily asleep in the sand river a couple of metres ahead. Ha! After a brew up we set off up the left bank of this sand river. The going was o.k. and we made good progress putting away about 6 miles before a halt was made for a drink from our diminishing water flasks. A rest from the heat was routinely taken between 12.30 and 15.30 and the plan was to set up camp around 16.30 i.e. an hour or so



before sunset. Whilst the river ran dry on the surface good cool water was to be found by digging down in the sand. Thus! We pressed on to our first proposed night stop. As we approached we saw it was already occupied by more Lions but after being spoken to nicely by Elizabeth they ran off. So we put a discreet distance between us and then set up our own camp. The Male Lion seemed to have taken umbrage as he kept up a fair serenade all night long and was still at it when we woke at dawn. He joined us again at breakfast!



The second day started with Porridge and Tea, delicious, with our Tents and bedding packed ready for a 07.00 start. The going got tougher as we crossed and re-crossed tributaries etc., and we were often in "Adrenalin" grass some 8 feet high. Game trails never seemed to be going where we wanted to go, although maybe that was a good thing? We did have some good encounters with Elephant, Buffalo, Hartebeeste, Zebra, Eland and Giraffe etc., but the only time Dangerous actually pointed his gun was when we ran into an Anti Poaching Patrol. They had had no warning of our presence in this part of the National Park but shouts of "Friendly Forces" quickly calmed things down. The Lunch/siesta stop on the second day was a bit messy as there had been a grass fire and there was Ash everywhere. Normally we used the dry river bed for both Campsites and water supplies. A routine was quickly established once we had worked out where we were and what needed to be done. Here Dangerous guards the fire



while Elizabeth and Greg discuss finer points of Tent Erection .

Makeshift resting places sufficed for our mid-day stops but care was taken each morning to leave our overnight sites clean and tidy to avoid any complaints from the Animals.



**Days Three and Four** got alternatively harder then easier depending on how broken the ground was and whether we were high on a ridge or down in a gully.

Water was always fairly near but sometimes the river bed was rocky and this made digging the 'well' a bit harder on our finger nails.



Here Dangerous watches while water is gathered up in the time honoured manner. It really was cool and good to drink and there was no need for Iodine tablets etc. It was so good that it mixed well with a bottle of whisky that had been secreted in my Pack. Well a man has to have certain standards even out in the wilds of Africa. A crate of Mosi would have been a bit heavy for the boys and who wants to drink warm beer anyway?

At the end of Day Four we made camp for the last time and calculated that we were only 3 or 4 miles from our Rendevous point with the Vehicle and our "Wilderness experience" was nearly over. The walk had been hard and a fair bit tougher than we had envisaged but it was all part of our experiences in Africa. Not to have done it would have left us much poorer, both mentally and spiritually.

The final walk in to the village the following morning was both good and bad. Bad that it was the end of our trek and sad that the whisky bottle was empty too! Nice timing! But good in that we had achieved what we had set out to do. This plus the fact that the Vehicle sent to meet us had a Cool Box with bottles of "Mosi" nicely chilled. A most welcome greeting! Henry Morton Stanley could not have timed it better!



Definitely something to be savoured with both hands!.  
(The Experience as well as the Beer.)

We got back to Kafunta River Lodge to hear about the side bets on our staying power when a delighted Ron told us that he had won due to his "inside knowledge that Fred and Elizabeth are not quitters"!

Here is how The Scotch Malt Whisky Society viewed our efforts to find water.

