

Across the Great grey-green greasy Limpopo. Trip Report. Fred & Elizabeth Hodgson & Others. May 19th – June 13th 2011 (My spellchecker offers Lampoon for Limpopo. How true!)

Preliminary information etc.

Again we blame Namibia. I was researching ideas for a trip there at the end of the year and Jim McKintosh told me about his forthcoming trip to Victoria Falls via Botswana and suggested we might be interested. Never having been to either place & the timing matched our T.T. escape weeks in May/June, so we were. KLM did a nice fare and we were Joburg bound before we knew it.

Southern Africa is one hour ahead of GMT and the same as Europe. Easy! There are Seasons and we were heading into Winter. Being on Capricorn, a first time for us, we were not expecting really cold weather and we were OK.

Entry requirements: - No visas for South Africa or Botswana but Uncle Bob in Zimbabwe needed \$55 to help out.

Local currency was South African Rand, Botswanan Pula and anything handy in Zim. We carried folding money in Rands and changed some to Pula as required. We also had a reserve in US\$ for Bob.

Getting there, back and around. As stated we got good fares on KLM via Manchester and Amsterdam and flew back via Paris with AirFrance in their new A380 double decker.

Food & Drink. Beer is readily available, usually South African and Namibian but the bottles are small so you needed a lot. We self catered as we were camping but meat was plentiful and the weather being fine we mainly cooked on an open campfire when not indulging in a Lodge.

Bugs, n Bowels. Peel it, boil it or forget it. We were relaxed on food hygiene here and suffered no ill effects. Malaria is a problem in the north but we saw few mossies it being winter. We had taken Prophylactics as our only precaution.

Accommodations. Mainly Camping with the truck but the occasional Lodge. See text.

Kit carried. We had decent binoculars and I had my new Fuji FS100. Elizabeth her faithful 5700. We took lots of spare batteries, chargers and Plug adaptors. **Books** “The Birds of Africa South of the Sahara” by Ian Sinclair. I had no Maps and surprisingly, we were not supplied with any by the Hire Firm. Maybe they did not want their truck back? They reckoned without Whiteknuckles’ navigational abilities. We bought a Kruger Guide Map when we got there.

Now to the trip itself: - **19th May** we flew to Manchester to overnight for the 06.05 to AMS next morning. We stayed at Bewleys as usual. Then on **20th** we flew via AMS all the way to Jburg to arrive on time at 21.00. We had a meet & greet arranged with the excellent **Airport Game Lodge** for that night. A cosy place 15 mins away with some wildlife in grounds. Next morning **21st** we started ticking in earnest with Fiscal Shrike and a very nice Red-throated Wryneck on the lawn. We were picked up at around 10 a.m. by our friends Rhoda and Tom Cain and taken to spend the next two nights with them. We had known them years, having been on Honeymoon together, and Tom had cajoled me into giving a short talk on “Life on the Isle of Man in 21st Century” to the SA Manx Society of which he is Secretary. We took in some Jburg sights and boosted the Trip and Life list with some Jburg specials including Indian Mynah. We greatly enjoyed our visit with them and were now poised for the start of the Adventure.

23rd May. We said our thanks to our hosts as they dropped us off at the Maui and Britz Depot where we met the rest of the team, Russell, Jim, Sonia. Veronica and Gabrielle. Having been briefed on where things go and what levers did what, we got under way for the 230km drive to Yellow Wood Lodge after filling Fuel tanks to the brim. All 160 litres. We arrived at the Lodge in time to take a short Game drive and meet up with two White Rhino and tick off more birds including Collared Barbets and Striped Kingfisher. A nice dinner and to bed for the last time in a proper bed.

24th May. Away reasonably early but then a shopping & Wimpey Bar stop delayed progress a while. Finally under way we crossed the Border into Botswana without problems but birding at speed kept the tick list low. Yet another stop, for fuel and lunch, (what happened in the Wimpey bar then?) and we finally got going north to our stop at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary where we arrived after dark. Not much chance of seeing Rhino. This was a 400km drive. The tent zip did not work so we slept in the back of the truck.

25th May. To make up for the late arrival we made a late departure to look at the Rhino Sanctuary and did see some Rhino and I bagged a fine Double-banded Courser too. Then out onto the road and North by



North west across the flatlands of Botswana until; some 200km short of Maun we took a right to the Ferry over the Boteti.. The Ferry lady was reluctant to move but money changed her mind. As the Ferry was only fit for one car this took time but eventually we were all across and into the National Park. Very sandy roads but we did meet our first Elephant of the trip. After some 50km or more of this we actually got to our next Campsite on Nxai pan after dark. This is becoming a habit. Once again we took to the back of the truck rather than the tent. Cooking was falling into a pattern but breakfasts were messy with our Italian friends taking two burners to make their own

coffee.

26th May. We do a game drive but fail to connect with any Elephants but we do find a huge herd of Springbok on the move and after falling away behind the others we sight a Black-backed Jackal and tick off Dickinson's Kestrel and a few more. Then it is decided to visit the allegedly famous Baines' Boababs. This involves a sandy drive of some km to a dry pan with some trees in it. Evidently they were the subject of a painting by somebody called Baines. Then as we left the Park I suggested that as I knew the way to the next site we would drop off the convoy to do birding leaving the others to go ahead to attend to lunch or whatever. We still managed to reach Audi Camp ahead of them and took a much needed G&T or too while sitting by the river watching & photoing birds such as White-helmet Shrike, Swamp Boubou, Hartlaub's Babbler and Black Crake. Dinner was taken in the Restaurant here. By now we were getting quite comfy in the back of the truck. Waking early on



27th May. We now head into the famous Okavango Delta area, usually accessed by plane and boat but we always do things different. Gravel roads take us to the gate and we take up residence at a nice site. After lunch we go in convoy for a Game drive and find Red Lechwe and lots of Elephants. Saddle Billed Storks, Sacred Ibis etc., for the bird list. We are light on Raptors though. Odd.

28th May. Today we penetrate further into the Delta to Xakanaka on the edge of the Delta where it is very wet. We get as far as 3rd Bridge which is just logs over the swamp really and quite testing. We pass up on the option to go for a boat ride as the price is way too high and settle for more drives when African Hawk Eagle, Osprey and Malachite Kingfisher made the list. We heard Lions calling in the night for the first time but were not disturbed even by the Elephant that wandered in and out of the Camp.

29th May. Today we encounter our first and only diversion and some problems. We cannot cross the Kwai river as the levels are too high so we must return the way we came in. We try to reach Paradise pools and meet up with some very happy Elephants that were really pleased to see us. The track got very wet so we returned but not before adding Myer's Parrots and Long-toed Lapwing to the list. On the way out the lead car was hit by a Lodge truck which changed the profile of the front somewhat. Nobody was hurt and the car was driveable. However Russell felt he should go into Maun to report the matter to the Police to protect his Insurance cover. This meant that I had to lead Gabrielle's car on to Savuti Camp some 180km north in Chobe National Park over some very dodgy tracks. Not caring for dusk arrivals we cracked on and skipped lunch. At the Gate we were advised to take the Sand Ridge track, the other being unsafe. This track was deep sand in parts but low ratio and 4wd got us through OK. As we checked in to Savuti Camp the staff pointed out on a chart where our site was and where the Lions were. I thought they were kidding but as we drove on a Male Lion was at the side of the track to our campsite. Oh well. At the site I was advising on the wildlife around and bang on cue a large Bull Elephant turned up behind me. They move so quietly for one so big. He was friendly enough and we got some nice pictures. Whilst the



best picture is somewhat out of focus I give two of them here so you can judge him for yourselves...At least he did not pinch my Beer but was just after some Marula from the tree. He wandered off quite unconcerned, as

silently as he had arrived. Russell and Jim arrived well after dark but in time for dinner. Lions roared all night long as they had actually killed a Zebra right inside the camp. We **drove** to the ablution block.

30th May. The day your scribe feels abandoned. Today we head north east towards Chobe National Park and the Linyati/Chobe rivers which are fairly unique in having no source and no estuary as well as an uncanny knack of being able to flow in either direction. The track is mainly clear and firm and after clearing Moremi NP it gets a bit sandy and soft. The other cars choose that moment to slow down and then take off with wheelspin. I hit their soft patch and stick firm. I flash my lights to advise the problem but they carry on. So we get out and start digging. The folding spade keeps folding but we persist and Elizabeth gathers brush to firm up our grip. There is a firm bit just 5 metres ahead if only I can get us there. It is getting hot too. Almost there and then Russell returns having taken some time to realise he only had Gabby behind. He gives a tug from the firm ground and out we come. Phew! It would have been a long walk out. As



it is they had gone some 3 km or so before missing us hence the delay in returning. Then we gain better ground and eventually some tar before entering Chobe Park again near Ngoma. The man at the gate 'guaranteed' four species of mammal. We scored ten. They started with lovely Sable and ran through the list. Giraffe, Buffs, Kudu, Impala, Lechwe, Hippo, Wildebeeste, Zebra even Baboon and Vervets if you



must. Plus of course Chobe's famous Elephants of which we met several herds. Lots of birds too including Wahlbergs, Martial and Tawny Eagles. Then it was our turn to laugh. Heading towards us along the track were some female Elephant with young and Russell of course stopped. But he stopped at a point where there are bushes either side so no room for the ladies to pass. Sadly Gabrielle had not been briefed to stay back to leave room for "extraction" if need be and was hard up Russell's rear. OH dear! He could not go forward without perhaps upsetting the Ellies and could not go back because Gabby blocked his escape. The Ellies would

not reverse and would not face the thorns to go round. Stalemate! We could not see what was going on but could see Elephant Ears waving just by the lead car. We were told later that one of the really small yearlings had taken to playing just in front of the car. After a while the bigger Cows pushed past and the smaller ones followed through the gap. We got severe stares as they then came by us as they were not really pleased at being delayed. Probably late for tea as were we! We made the campsite just as darkness fell having had a run in with a big herd of Buffalo and watched the sun set over the floodplain of the Chobe.

31st May. Into Zimbabwe, eventually! We drove out of the park without incident, how we would have loved to have stayed, and drove to Kasane for fuel and more shopping. We lost Jim here as he was staying a night with a Vet Friend. We then headed to the border at Kazangula and after fairly swift processing, and US\$55 for Uncle Bob, entered Zimbabwe. Not as run down as we had believed although some decay. The road was good. This picture says it all really! We made good progress to Victoria Falls and checked into quite a nice Campsite within earshot. We heard there were cabins for sale so paid up all of \$10 to get a proper bed for a night. We still ate with the others etc., but the bliss of dressing while vertical was worth the splurge. After settling in we went off to see the famous Falls which were in full flow and there was much spray. We had arrived. **End of Part One.**

