

WKS go west in Southern Tanzania.

The thinking behind this trip was partly a nostalgic return to some favourite places of three of us and to take a regular companion to show him part of Tanzania he had never seen. Plans had been on hold due to Covid but it was now time to go. D, our youngest traveller whom we had treated to the descent of Van Zyl's pass in Namibia for his 50th birthday, was not really a birder so we agreed that whilst a few birds would be nice we would prioritise on seeing large mammals 'just for him'. We are all Heart really.

Whilst I try and avoid 'electro clutter' my companions still feel it imperative to bring all sorts of Apps, Taps and Laps and good luck with that. I was still with my Minox binoculars and a Nikon P1000 bridge camera whilst the lovely Lady G had space in her handbag for the small Netbook carried for backing up any photos I might get. By coincidence one of our destinations was the very location that created the need for back up when a mislaid SD Card, of Wild dogs eating an Impala had me wandering the hotel grounds at midnight in search of it. I am too young to consider Wildlife photography as other than a hobby and I do drag along a Trail camera and a plethora of batteries to feed it as well as annoy Airport Security from time to time. A torch, or as our American friends prefer to call it 'a flashlite' although I have never understood why it should 'flash'! That's it. I am packed and leave it to Lady G to deal with the non essentials such as a change of clothing, soap and shower gel etc.,

The 'Plan' was to fly from home on Isle of Man to Manchester and overnight there prior to boarding KLM to Amsterdam at silly o'clock next morning where we would board their flight to Dar es Salaam scheduled to arrive at 22.50 after a brief stop in Zanzibar. (Note this word "**brief**")

I had planned to head to Ruaha for a stay at the lovely **Tandala Tented Camp** which I had enjoyed so much in 2017 and had noted that a nearby camp offered a six day package by road with a three night stay at **Mikumu Safari Lodge** before proceeding to Ruaha for two more nights. The package included a day in Mikumi National Park, and a day trip to Udzungwa before another drive to Ruaha for two more nights at sister camp **Ruaha Hilltop Lodge** and a further day in Ruaha National Park. Just what we needed and the price was reasonable too. On arrival we would be well placed to transfer to **Tandala Tented Camp** just down the road and from there to enter Ruaha for a four night stay at **Old Mdonyo River Camp**. From Ruaha we would fly to **Lake Manze Camp** in what was Selous Reserve but now renamed Nyerere National Park in honour of "Mwalimu" Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first and much respected President. At the end of a further four night stay we would fly the short hop back to DAR to catch our return flights to Manchester and home to the IOM. All was booked and ready to go.

Well there is the Plan and as the saying goes; those who fail to plan, plan to fail. So what could possibly go wrong ?? Stormin Norman said any plan only lasts until the first shot is fired and I do wonder if he had Air travel in mind when he said that?

In planning any trip from my Island home there are various stages to pass before one can progress to the next. Some may be more stressful than others so it is good to pass each pinch point and make progress towards actually getting there as planned.

Such benchmarks as,

- 1, Will bad weather prevent us from getting off the island for our international flights?
2. Will the weather be OK in UK?
3. Will the flight be on time?
4. Will our next flight leave on time for our connection in Amsterdam?
5. Will we arrive at our destination on time.
6. Will our luggage make it too?
7. Will we get our Visas

8. Will we be met as promised?
9. Will our transport pick us up at our Hotel as agreed?
10. Will the vehicle be as roomy and comfortable as promised?

Our answers to the first four were 'no', 'yes', 'yes' & 'yes' which is 100% correct. I will leave you in suspense in KLMs capable care.

A brief Recap.

The plan as booked was for three from Isle of Man and one from Kent to meet up at Manchester Airport on 1st February to catch a KLM flight to Amsterdam where we would connect with their flight to Dar es Salaam. We would all return from DAR – MAN on 20th February to arrive home on 21st. As my old Aunt used to say “if you want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans. So wise. So true!

First up two weeks before ETD KLM scrapped the AMS-MAN rtn for 21st. The later flight was OK for the IOM3 but too late to get Kent 1 back home the same day. After a friendly exchange of pleasantries KLM agreed to switch K1 to AMS-LHR at no charge.

Not to be outdone a chap named Mick decided to join the fun. K1 was due to come up to Manchester by train so Mick called 1st February a 'strike day' to pay him back for switching to LHR.

So more changes. K1 would now fly up from LHR-MAN on 1st with BA.

Back on plan we would still meet at Manchester on evening of 1st, dine and be ready to board the bonny blue bird early, very early, next morning.

January 31st came and we three had boarding cards for Loganair IOM-MAN and all four had “Confirmation slips” for MAN – AMS to facilitate our 'Bag drop' on February 2nd.

February 1st dawned bright and clear so tick the first two boxes. Our lift arrived on time to drive us 3 to IOM airport in good time for our flight. And we could tick Box 3.

Bags dropped and to Security. Two passed through OK but the third carryon bag triggered an 'alert' and was pulled for examination. Mine! OK it will maybe be my trail cam as it resembles a small IED being boxlike with 8AA batteries inside. No problem. Yes problem. Not the Trail Cam but traces of **Drugs! Eh? You must be joking! I have never taken anything stronger than a Fisherman's Friend and the occasional Lemsip!** A thorough search and repeated wipes did not clear me but as nothing could be found I was obviously 'clear' and free to go. But not before having to sign an 'incident' report. Blimey. Am I a marked man now?

Boarded on time and landed in MAN where our bags awaited. Checked in at our Hotel but with no sign of K1 went to dine without him. Texts said BA were running late. No change there then. Eventually He arrived in time for Dessert after which we all retired to be fresh for the silly o'clock call to attend Bag drop at 04.00.

And so it was to be. Bags dropped and boarding cards for all four pax received without any comment from the friendly Agent. We boarded and left on time for AMS where we landed an hour or so later but two hours later on the clock as we were now in Europe. It was 8 o'clock local and our next flight (to Dar es Salaam) was to board at 09.34 for a 10.15 on time departure. Tick Box 4. It's looking good. But was it? Unknown to us we were just 'Innocents abroad' to KLM and they were not done with us yet. In 30 years with them the worst they had tried was to have us arrive in Windhoek one bag short. This time they were going for Gold! Stormin Norman Schwarzkopf was right!

This tale will continue and we DO get to our Safari but I think this is long enough without pictures. To ease your wait while I venture to Scotland for two day I offer you this.

So here we are 'waiting' at the gate with boarding cards in hand, with a big Blue bird almost ready for boarding for our flight to Dar es Salaam where our booked transport would be waiting to transfer us to Jakicha Motel for the night.

The PA then announced “That KL515 would be boarding shortly but 'due to security issues' would not be continuing to DAR after landing at ZNZ. Pax for DAR would be put up overnight in ZNZ and continue next day after a wait of 22 hours. Checked luggage would remain in the plane's hold and

access would NOT be possible.” The ‘desk’ was immediately inundated by angry passengers. When my turn came I asked if we could transfer to either the Nairobi or Kilimanjaro flights so we could make our own way to DAR. I was told I would have to ask the ‘transfer desk.’ Which I did and was given an appointment number and an estimated waiting time of 30 minutes.

No way, our flight was about to board, so back to the Gate desk. I politely stated that one way or the other our luggage **would** be offloaded in Zanzibar, either on arrival or next day when the Captain was asked to fly unaccompanied luggage as our party of four would be long gone on the first available flight after our arrival. We were NOT waiting 22 hours. A ‘shrug’ later and we boarded and took off for Tanzania where, on landing at ZNZ, we were told that our luggage would be off loaded for collection after all. Nothing further from a clearly harassed FA. After leaving the plane, our companion who had been sitting further forward told us there was a plane waiting and we must collect our luggage and find a waiting Station Manager who would direct us to our new flight. Immigration was cleared quickly and we found said Agent talking into six phones and several angry pax all at the same time.

Eventually he confirmed our names were on ‘the list’ and directed us to the Domestic terminal where we would check in at the Precision Airways desk. And there we got boarding cards for THREE of our party but not the 4th, the one who had been told of the plane. Nothing would shift Precision’s Check in Staff’s denial of the 4th member of our party to be on that plane. Eventually we decided to board the three of us and for number 4 to go back to KLM for a Hotel. We would make DAR and contact our booked transport and wait at DAR for #4 to arrive at the earliest opportunity. This we did. We got to DAR at around midnight, scheduled for 22.50, to find our lift had long gone so took a Taxi to our Hotel for the evening. There we met our waiting driver for the next day’s drive to Mikumi and explained the delay. Next morning we received a message to say that Pax 4 was due in DAR at 10.30 so having breakfasted and settled the Hotel account we all set off in our hired transport back to the Airport to pick up our missing pax and then proceed direct to Mikumi. That was the theory but again KLM were determined to wreck this. There was NO plane at 10.30, it was delayed two hours. Two hours came and went, now due at 13.25, and then ‘vanished’ from the screen altogether. Next time was 14.00, then 14.25 and it eventually arrived at 14.50. Our friend was welcomed and we got into our minibus for Mikumi just after 15.10 with a 300km drive ahead. No way would we reach Mikumi in daylight.

And of course it was Friday afternoon and roads were very busy just to make it even harder for us. I will spare you from suffering the drive in detail. Suffice to say we got to Mikumi ‘Village’ around 23.00 where we were transferred to a Land Cruiser for the short ride up a mountain as due to rain it was felt the minibus would not make it up the track to our Lodge at the top of a hill. Indeed the Land Cruiser did not make it either, but nothing ventured, we decided to walk the rest of the way, about 3 km, while efforts to get the Land Cruiser unstuck continued.

And so, many hours later than planned we made our rooms at Mikumi Safari Lodge, tired but unbowed, ready for a real start next day.

The **real trip report** is now to commence. (About time too?)

No comments about KLM’s appalling failure at the moment other than to state that we now know that they knew of the problem at 21.15 on evening of 1st and seven hours before we even checked in at Manchester at 04.00 on 2nd so why the heck could they not get things organised by the time their plane landed in Zanzibar TWENTY FOUR hours later? I will be asking this and many other questions very soon.

Remember this?

- 1, Will bad weather prevent us from getting off the island for our international flights?
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Update. 1, No! 2, Yes. 3 & 4. Yes. 5. On time but NOT at the right airport. 6. Yes. 7. Yes and free gratis to IOM passport holders. 8. Sorry no. He got bored waiting. 9. Yes. 10. Yes.

So it was not ALL bad and next day we did get the group back together and having resorted to walking the last few Km, in the dark, see above, we were at our first Lodge where we will spend three nights although pedants may quibble about three as the first was almost over by the time we turned in.

So the 'real' Report is now in being. Twende.

The Lodge was fine. Nice rooms set in bungalow/cabin style in mixed woodlands with some bird life around. Whilst my Camera tap did not capture any images there was evidence around that mammals were also present.

Inside the cabins there were comfortable beds with nets and clean wash facilities etc., Meals were taken in the main building and were fine. There is a small bar too. Beers were TZsh 5,000 and Gin TZSh 7,000. (£1.60 and £2.30 respectively.) Good enough I felt.

Next morning we set off for a day visit to Mikumi National Park, down the hill and about 6km on the tar. We were a little late in arriving but entry formalities were quick and easy. Day entry was US\$30 pp.

I was ambivalent about going here as my last visit was over 20 years ago and my memory was of a dustbowl with a few rather unphotogenic mammals here and there but with a few birds. But what a difference I found. The place was very green and lush and this could not all be down to the season's rain. The place showed every sign of being cared for, with a well planned amount of decent tracks. At 3.25 sq.km it is quite large.

Our drive started well with a nice encounter with a herd of elephant including a tiny new born of less than a few weeks working hard to keep up with mum. We also enjoyed many encounters with giraffe in both large groups and smaller family units. No doubt there are predators and we were treated to watch a female lion undertake a serious stalk on some Impala. She was frustrated by a startled Warthog and gave up but we did enjoy the sighting and her intense and studied approach. Bird life was prolific with our checklist growing fast. Nothing of real note apart from large flocks of Common Pratincole at the Hippo Pond. We enjoyed our day and returned for dinner well pleased.

Next morning we set off for Udzungwa NP but my companions took one look at Sanje Waterfall and settled for something less energetic..

I would have gone, Honest Injun! Instead we walked the Prince Bernhard trail and a smaller waterfall. Butterflies in plenty and a few birds in the forest. The Highlight was a good encounter with the local monkeys. Recently split from the Iringa Red Colobus the newly named Udzungwa Red Colobus is quite striking in pelage and some are quite habituated to visitors. The group we found tolerated our proximity quite a while before moving off to feed elsewhere. It is to be hoped that the newly surfaced road through the area does not endanger them.

After a late picnic in the grounds of HondoHondo Camp, which I had 'negotiated' with manager Boniface for an acceptable rental of several Kilimanjaros we returned back to our lodge in Mikumi. Tomorrow we leave for another 300km drive west to the 'outskirts' of Ruaha National Park where this tale will continue.

This drive was quite comfortable although the climb through the foothills of the Udzungwas following the gorge of the Great Ruaha river was hard work for our esteemed Driver Joseph with many hairpins and sheer drops to claim the unwary or unlucky.

Our timing was getting better as we actually arrived in daylight. We were booked in for two nights at Ruaha Hill Top Lodge which is near Ruaha and nearly on a Hilltop. It is owned by the same family as Mikumi Safari Lodge and the reception was fine. Small cottages in the grounds with a modest

climb up paved paths. From the main Lapa there is a platform which looks out over the huge flat plain below right into the National Park some 10km distant.

Meals were good and service friendly.

I don't wish to bore folks with just a litany of what and when and propose to break the full trip into what I hope will be readable sections. As we are staying in three different Lodges I will divide the report into three parts. Our package with RHT includes one full day in the National Park so would appear to be a logical place to finish this section.

Having had a good night's sleep and an excellent breakfast we get in the open Land Cruiser that most lodges use in the south of Tanzania where little use is made of public roads unlike the northern parks. We should do well as our supporting crew has a Biblical connection with Moses as guide and spotter and Joseph, who tells us he is the father of Jesus, and we look forward to a successful day with their help.

We arrive at the Gate and deal with the entry formalities quite quickly and start seeing wildlife almost immediately. The vegetation is very green and the Ruaha river is flowing very strongly as we cross the bridge. The usual pod of hippo are struggling to hold their place in the strong current and the usually benign river looks anything but peaceful today.

I will caption the following few photographs as we go along rather than pre-list everything.

With a new driver I am always interested in how they react to elephant. Will they be shy and avoid close encounters or will they be as relaxed as we are and sit and let the ellies do their thing at their pace whilst we enjoy the thrill of such huge, and possibly dangerous, beasts approaching us? Happily Joseph is one of the latter drivers and we enjoy the main encounter of the day as it unfolds.

Next. Tandala.

After another peaceful night in Ruaha Hilltop Lodge we have arranged for Joseph to transfer us and luggage to our next lodge. This is only about 8 km away so we enjoy a mini game drive and Joseph's company for sadly the last time until our arrival at Tandala Tented Camp half an hour later. Here we are warmly welcomed by Yannis, the owner and his staff. We have stayed here before and the lodge was one of the reasons for our return this trip. We have great memories of the place. Yanni, and wife Dionysia, Fliakos built and operate this Camp and named it after the many Kudu that frequent the area. It currently comprises about a dozen roomy tents on platforms with large verandas and set well apart for privacy. Electricity is 24 hour solar. Meals are taken in the roomy lapa/restaurant and there is a bar and small 'swimming' pool. There is a waterhole in front of the Bar/lapa and this is frequented by most of the mammals of the area. Elephant, Giraffe, Kudu and Impala. Even lion, leopard and wild dogs on occasion. Birds in the grounds are numerous and visible. My checklist grew ever larger each of the three days, four nights that we were here. Food is excellent and the hospitality beyond reproach. Whilst Dionysia was away, Yanni was a great and helpful host. On our arrival he noted a lack of nimbleness in our party climbing down from the Land Cruiser and immediately substituted a smaller similarly fitted Land Rover with easier access. We met our driver/guide and settled into our tents for a restful day. More details here. www.tandalacamp.com

Whilst the rains had made the grounds lush with tall vegetation so waterhole sightings were fewer than last time, this was not really why we were here. The Park Gates are only 5km distant and this is a game drive in its own right. We could sleep the night away to the sound of lion, hyena and elephant.

I am uncertain how to proceed with detailing our three days of Game drives as they were all different and very exciting. Short of 'edited highlights' I shall just relate how it happened and hope for the best.

Day one. Our first drive set off next morning and checked in at the Gate. We get charged a daily fee for this and not the usual 24 hours.

We see birds immediately plus several giraffe etc. with a nice Fish Eagle posing by the bridge. Our driver and guide are casting around some loops and obviously searching for something special. They

were. By a sandy river we spot what look like two dead lions. Only close scrutiny reveals chest movement. I take a couple of shots and zoom in on a massive paw.

Moving off stimulates one to look up to give us a decent shot.

The day is mainly spent with close encounters with the many elephants so I won't bore you with many of those apart from one incident mentioned yesterday. We met a family group crossing our track and stopped to watch them. Lots of young ones are closely shepherded by Guardian Aunties. Another truck, we rarely saw any, approaches from the opposite direction but does not position where they would leave an 'escape' path should some ellies react to either of us. Instead it swings off the track and stops with only a small gap between us and them where the ellies were obviously going to try and pass.

This meant 'the guardian' had to pass very close to us. Fortunately, she was very good natured and relaxed. She obviously 'told' her young charges to hang back whilst she checked us out before following her through the small gap between the two vehicles. She did, and after no doubt a sub sonic rumble the little ones followed. I never cease to be amazed and the behaviour of these magnificent creatures. I will run the sequence to illustrate the point.

My only comment was that the other vehicle placed us all in a 'difficult' position should the herd have reacted more nervously to their restriction on movement. As it turned out all went well although we did get a sound telling off from one of the sub adult bulls at the end.

Then it was lunch time and the squirrels were waiting. During lunch we were 'inspected' by a curious bull who peered at us from a safe distance and exchanged news with Lady G.

After lunch were birding our way back to the Gate when I caused the car to stop to check out some BeeEaters when our driver spotted a leopard in the track ahead. She crossed quickly and vanished into the undergrowth but gradually showed herself briefly as she commenced to stalk a small sounder of Warthogs. She failed when the piggies came to check us out and vanished all together. On the way home we saw a small party of Kudu grazing and that was our day. Home for a clean up and with ellies and a leopard to talk about over dinner.

10 & 11.

I think I will run days 2 & 3 together as they do not vary much and I don't wish to overdose on either ellies or birds which are both well catered for.

As we went to get into our truck on the 2nd morning we were greeted by our two fellow countrymen who were now installed at Ruaha Hill Top who had dropped by on their way to the NP and we arranged a meet up in the park for a lunch stop. What was it that Burns said about the best plans o mice n men gannin aft aglae? Did he ever visit Africa? I swear I heard my God chuckling too.

Anyway we set off for the gate and after casting around we bumped into the two lions again but this time they at least were sitting up for the cameras. (We were not alone but only two other trucks and not a full blown "Lion Jam" that happens elsewhere.) So we took some photos that were a bit more 'alive' than the last lot. One of them had an eye defect so got named 'Clarence' in honour of the old TV programme 'Daktari'. After that it was just a matter of exploring the park along tracks that we may or may not have tried before. We did find a group of elephant in a river bed and watched two young bulls sparring up to each other. We also saw some new birds and I put a few up here that I quite like if only to show we were not restricting ourselves to elephant 100% of the time. As lunch time approached so did a huge black cloud that promised to rain hard on us. And of course it did. Remember Rabbie Burns's statement earlier. The plans got shredded. We could not get to the designated picnic site due to a flooded 'dry river'. Our driver walked down to the edge and came back shaking his head. Time to turn back and seek another venue. My photos show no pictures taken between 11.30 and 13.25 so it shows how bad the rain was. We had rearranged a new venue for lunch,

Hondo Hondo, and made our way there over muddy tracks. Our friends had not shown up so we ate alone. They arrived just as we were clearing the pots prior to leaving. It turned out they had arrived at that 'dry river' but the driver made the decision it was crossable. He was right but what he had not bargained on was the climb out on the other side was too steep and slippery for traction and they could not make progress. Or go back. Eventually they got a pull from another truck to save their blushes and drove to meet us. All was well and a group photo recorded the historic meeting. Makes a change from ellies. In the post lunch drive we noted a few more animals including a couple of Black-backed Jackals and Grant's Gazelle before exiting the gate and returning to Tandala for another evening. Next morning it was more of the same with several impressive eagles and a massive Water monitor in a river bed and a lovely Fischer's Lovebird at our lunch stop. We did get news of a possible cheetah sighting but when we arrived they had obviously made themselves scarce. We treated ourselves to a family of ellies taking a bath in a small permanent pool/swamp as well as meeting a rather anxious mum on our way back to the gate. Later we enjoyed our final G&T and meal with our host Yanni in the large Lapa bar building. Tomorrow we will be picked up by our next hosts for the drive over to Mdonya Old River Camp. Our pick up is scheduled for noon in order to maximise our time in the park without running into another 24 hour period on our scheduled flight out in five days time.

12th

Our pick up took place on time at noon and as this is barely half a day including a transfer to another lodge one would imagine there will not be much to report.

But Africa and Tanzania don't always work like that.

Entry formalities dealt with and we motored on over the Rufiji bridge where we took on final look around as this would be our last crossing and took the normal route to the central area instead of the expected drive west into currently unvisited territory. Our driver and guide Godson seemed to know where he was heading and we had a packed lunch aboard so we sat back and studied the fauna as usual. Shortly after we were told that he had heard news about the two cheetah we had caught a brief glimpse of yesterday and they had been seen this morning. And so they had.

We could see them lying on the wrong side of the very muddy pool, where we had watched the ellies bathing yesterday. It took some time to find a firm crossing point but having done so we were able to see the cats had risen and were moving slowly off. Fortunately they wanted a drink first so we could keep with them for a while. You can imagine the number of photos we took in the 20 minutes we were able to keep close in contact but there is no space for all of them here.

So a few will have to do. We were well pleased with this as Cheetah are not that easily seen in Ruaha and we had only been in the Park an hour.

Indeed it was almost 14.00 and time for lunch already.

Whilst lunching I managed to get clear pictures, I did not say 'sharp' but clear of a Beautiful Sunbird in a nearby bush.

Lunch was soon over as we had around 40km or so to drive but this still was unhurried and I took a family portrait of some Zebra as well as indulging in yet more encounters with friendly ellies.

After a while our track more or less followed the dried bed of the Old River and we spotted four lion in the sand. Two adult females and two six or seven month old feisty and alert cubs. Well that was worth a stop.

Soon after with the area looking more familiar we approached Mdonya Old River Camp the strange zig zag route through a small wooded area which I presume is to preserve the relative remoteness of the camp 'frontage' for viewing from the tented area.

We were made most welcome with the usual hot towels and cold drinks and checked in to our tents that were to be our homes for four nights.

The tents were much as I remembered them being set well apart on concrete hard standing with a sitting out area overlooking a large grassy area where giraffe and impala could be seen grazing and many birds also evident. This will do for me.

Inside the tents was quite roomy with a large bed and plenty of space for clothes etc., and the usual offices out back through another set of zips.

I noted a large electric fan but no evidence of a light switch which seemed odd. If there was electric power why make us dress and undress by paraffin lamps or torch? If the Solar cells could run a hungry electric fan surely they could give some lights as well?

Meals at camp were taken communally in a large bug proof 'marquee' type structure with the usual camp fire for pre or post prandial beverages. There was also a large mess tent /lounge available. Battery charging was available.

NEW.

So here we are at Mdonya Old River Camp for four nights with three days of Game drives in an area somewhat further west than central. There are plenty of birds in the camp grounds too and mammals can be seen from the tent too.

So we set off after an early and pleasant breakfast with high hopes. Our departure is noted by two Black-backed Jackals.

And shortly thereafter we are accosted by a bull elephant demanding that we spend time with him. We are not sure if he wants to chat or just show us what a good chap he really is.

He proceeds to curl his trunk around a substantial branch but makes no attempt to break it or even browse from it

15th February. We see very few ellies on our drive which takes down the valley of the old river with its sandy bed and lovely Palm and Leadwood trees.

The driver seems to know where he is going and pretty soon we do too. Lions in the river bed. NUT this is a lion jam as about six or seven cars are jostling to get the "best" view of a cat about 300 metres away 'over there, under that log!' We see a sandy brown lump in a sandy brown river bed. The term "Best view" is very subjective here even if we could get in position.

Godson turns to us and says he has heard that there is a leopard sighting about 35 minutes away and asks if we want to persist with these lions, (rumours there are TWO) or should we pull out and go and try for the leopard. Guess what we replied!!

So we had a brisk drive for about 30 minutes before turning off the track towards a car under a tree. Has it gone? Can you see it? And as we get closer there he is.

Lounging along a branch with his tail hanging down in a classic pose.

16th February. Today is our final day in Ruaha and nobody will be surprised to learn that we feel we have done rather well in this lovely Park.

Our plane is not until 13.00 so there is time for more to come.

Having settled up our bar bill etc., we take our leave of Mdonya Old River Camp with mixed feelings. A great place to stay but I wish there had been lights in the tents. Sometimes folks try too hard to recreate the old ambience of romance and miss the point that some modern inventions can improve life without spoiling the overall effect. After all, everywhere now seems plugged in to the mobile phones and Interweb thingy so why do we still have to dress and undress in the bloody dark?

On arrival at the airstrip early and as we were still inside the 24 hour rule to depart the Park no later than our time of entry four days ago or pay another full day's Park Fee our driver obtained permission to slightly over stay by an hour or so from the Park Warden at the airstrip. We were also permitted to leave the airstrip to take a picnic at the nearby site about 2km away by the river as long as we

kept to the authorised direct route.. So off we went down to the river under the watchful eye of a Hippo.

As the time for our plane approached we set off to return to the airstrip but not by the same route but through the small village that houses the Park Staff. Oh dear. We were promptly intercepted by a Park vehicle and our driver got a good telling off. The Warden was red-faced with annoyance and our driver showed the colour with his blushes.

We were NOT allowed to be here and had abused the goodwill of being allowed to slightly overstay our time. All ended with profuse apologies and we were escorted back to the 'Terminal Hut' for our plane. All ran to time and we boarded the 12 seat Caravan of Safari Link to transport us to our next destination of Metemere just outside Nyerere National Park recently upgraded from Selous Game Reserve. We ran to time but were somewhat shocked to see the airstrip quite full of planes. Evidently a small concern was running day trip Safaris from Zanzibar complete with a game drive vehicle into the Park. We were met by our new driver and guides, Abu and Zak, from Lake Manze Camp, loaded up and set off on what I remembered as a rough game track of about 50km.

That was surprise number two. There is a new dam under construction and this project demands infrastructure and my memory of the road received as rude awakening. We had a double lane 'smooth' marram track. The term smooth was somewhat overstated as we all know what heavy trucks will do a a wet gravel surface. Add to that the seemingly never ending procession of full to capacity Safari vehicle's returning from game drives and that drive was not very enjoyable. No chance to stop to enjoy any sightings through the dust. We made reasonable if uncomfortable at times progress west until after an hour or so we reached our turn off. Due to recent rain and hot sun this track was much harder on progress, and our vertebrae but at least we had the track to ourselves.

Our drive diverted for an obligatory lion sighting....

We later could see Lake Manze ahead of us and secreted amongst the Doum Palms was Lake Manze Camp where we would stay for our last four nights on our trip. Again I had stayed here previously when owned by Adventure Camps and had many fond memories of the place. Particularly the enthusiastic then manager Richard.

What would we find this time? Well the large Lapa was just the same as I remember as are the tents on their permanent bases where I had good memories of being in close contact with friendly ellies going to and from the Lake via their shortcut passed my tent.

17th February. The tale continues as we awake fresh from our dreams and take breakfast prior to setting off on our first Game Drive around Lake Manze. Today's programme is for a morning drive and to return for lunch and some rest time before going on a short cruise on the navigable loops of the mighty Rufiji river which includes the lagoon known as Lake Manze.

Boat cruise. Bushbabies and Genets at dinner. **18th February** Our second full day went like this..... We set off to try and get through a particularly boggy area that could lead us to some cats according to Guide Zak. As we headed over the savannah we saw movement in the grass and pausing to check it out we were delighted to see this large Monitor emerge and make its way towards us. Hyenas. Carmine BeeEaters hawking insects. Side-striped Jackals, Buffalo and Eland.

19th February. After aborted trip north we set off and find 13 Wild dogs by a pool. The see off a Hyena and the pups chase baboons.

After lunch. Bohm's BeeEater and Pearl spotted Owlet.

20th February. Our last full day dawned bright again and we were 'told' by our hosts that we would be going off after breakfast to the airport for our flight out to DAR. Could we be packed and ready to leave by 10.00? Now let me be clear, this camp was not full so they did not need our tents and indeed they were on the cusp of closing for the rains. So why the haste? I can guess as this had been a prevalent theme throughout our stay here. To our 'host', guests were apparently something to be endured at arm's length.

Our flight was not until 15.10 but we were to leave, with picnic lunch, at 10.00. and game drive, no problem there, but why not lunch at camp??? I would stress that the staff were fine but 'host' was a misnomer.

Packed already so after farewells etc., we set off on our two hour drive to Mtememe airstrip about 90 minutes away.

After getting well clear of camp to find 'new' ground to search, the car met the 'main road, and whilst we did see some antelope the most excitement came as a family of Banded Mongoose crossed the road ahead. The car then left the main road and headed down towards where I knew Impala camp was located but we did not go there. Instead Zak advised us he was looking for 'somewhere nice' to stop for our picnic. so we carried on with the drive and explored many side tracks etc., On our travels we came down to the river edge again and watched a 'Black Heron' doing its Umbrella act to shade any fish around. The morning continued with the car continually casting around allegedly seeking a nice picnic area. This begged the question that if the practice of a picnic on the way to the airstrip was the norm, how come they don't already know of 'a nice place'? After exploring several rough tracks that seemed to lead nowhere and sometimes involved back tracking out we got to a lagoon and stopped for lunch. To be honest it did not look much different to many other sites we had passed by although it did contain a lone Pink-backed Pelican which we disturbed as we got down from the truck.

A nice thing about these two camps we have used is that a 'picnic' breakfast or lunch is not the usual offering of an indeterminate sandwich with maybe a roadkilled chicken leg, hard boiled egg and fruit drink with straw. In the Southern sector they do do the job properly

So after a decent break we set off for the airstrip and our plane.

We checked in, I think, and waited in the shade for a plane.

It arrived and some pax got out and after they had cleared away with luggage we were invited to board for our flight to Dar es Salaam. We took off and after 40 minutes we were overhead Dar es Salaam but we did not land. Instead we carried on to Zanzibar where we landed. Some pax got out as did the pilot.

We sat a while and sat some more, more out of mild curiosity than anxiety. Some excited Chinese boarded and found seats and promptly took selfies of all and everything that caught their attention. Eventually the pilot returned, got in and fired up the engine and took us to Dar es Salaam. Nice.

We arrived at the domestic terminal and picked up our bags and walked outside. Our friends grabbed a trolley and loaded the luggage whilst I went to pick a taxi for the international terminal which I knew was a fairly long walk away. Our companions would like to walk instead so we set off. I knew the way but had never walked it before. Oh well, first time for everything.

We got to the fenced area with exit gate and were told we could not take the trolley out even though we were going to the other Terminal. So we opted to carry our bags and left the trolley with the nice man at the gate. It was about 35 degrees in the shade or would have been if there had been any.

I was comfortable enough as I knew the way even though the terminal as not in sight.

Eventually we turned back in towards the International terminal and I selected the one where we had waited all day three weeks earlier for our friend to arrive from Zanzibar. I did this because I knew, well, there was a nice restaurant from our earlier use of it.

I don't know the name but the Logo read "BAO" if that helps. We sat outside and ordered Mango Surprises and Tangawezis for us all. And the late afternoon went well and as the time for check in approached, 20.00, we continued our walk to the KLM check in quite refreshed (and having grabbed a luggage trolley). Check in went well and security was the usual friendly African one as was Emigration.

The plane loaded on time and we left Tanzania with some sadness and many memories.

21st February. Three of us had a long layover in AMS but #4 headed for his quick connection to LHR which he made OK.

Probably home and enjoying a cup of tea before we had arrived in our next layover in Manchester.

We made it back to IOM without further issues and the trip ends here.

We filed our claims with KLM over the debacle outbound and this is still ongoing four weeks later. all claims acknowledged and referenced but nothing else has been heard other than a letter dismissing the claim as it was weather related. This is obviously an error as we have it in writing that 24 hours before our flight was due the plane was stopping in ZNZ for 24 hours to ensure crew rest time.

I quote. "we are forced to adjust our route. To ensure safe flight operations and respecting the crew's legal rest and working hours, the flight in Zanzibar will be delayed by 24 hours before we fly on to Dar es Salaam. Which means, unfortunately that your flight will arrive with a delay of 24 hours in Dar es Salaam."

No mention of 'weather' or maybe this was a spelling error and they meant "Whether we can be bothered to fly you to DAR or not"?

Back in TZ in August but flying with Ethiopian.