

## **Fred gets an Elephant for Christmas!**

### **We thought Kristmas at Kafunta had a certain ring to it.**

Where to go this Christmas? We both had liked Kafunta River Camp in Zambia's South Luangwa Valley and so we decided to return there for our usual Christmas break. Now begins a mixed tale to tell like the Curate's Egg. Good in parts....

As by now we were familiar with the route we decided to simply book direct with the Lodge and get our own flights there and back. Booking was easy and, silly us, we thought booking with BA would be just as easy. **Wrong!**

We never used BA for Africa as they go from Gatwick and IOM had no direct flight there.

Then Manx Airlines, our local airline was bought out by BA City Express and promptly switched to Gatwick making BA African flights more convenient. So all was booked with them to run as our usual trouble free trip. **Wrong!** Then BA realised it was us and threw a spanner in the works. They changed their African flights to LHR and despite having booked some months in advance they did not bother telling us! That would have been just manageable with a quick transfer between Gatwick, where our flight from home arrived and Heathrow where the Lusaka flight now left from. So then they put back the departure by 12 hours. So we are now arriving at LGW at 16.00 **Day 1** and not flying to Lusaka until 18.00 the following day. 24 hours totally wasted.

**Did BA show any remorse? What do you think? Come back Ethiopian, all is forgiven!**

**(Day 2)** So even at the expense of an unnecessary night in a Travel Lodge we were kicking our heels in Heathrow airport for over ten hours. So we played it straight faced and turned up at Check In at the time shown on our eTicket and expressed total surprise to be told the flight was not for some hours. Suffice to say that a bit of controlled truculence got us through the fast track check in, into the V.I.P. departure lounge and upgraded. Ho Hum! Well better than nothing. At least they fed us.

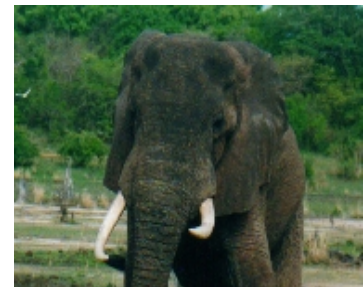
**Day 3.** Well, we arrived at 06.30 in Lusaka after a reasonable flight but due to more airline schedule changes now had to kick our heels for another day as our flight to Mfuwe was not until **Day 4**. We had heard of Chaminuka and went there for the day. (If we had known earlier we would have stayed the night also). A nice game farm with lots of animals and birds. A rustic 'Bush Camp' also. A nice Chalet was put at our disposal and the day passed quite nicely. A Black Headed Gull was duly ticked as was a strange Roller. Too far south for Abyssinian and reality dawned that we were looking at a European version. (left hand drive!) Back to Lusaka to stay at Juls, passing the airport en route!

**Day 4.** To the Airport for the lunchtime flight to Mfuwe. We were told "tickets on arrival!". Wrong! Nothing! Computers down and outside lines busy. AAAgh! Eventually your scribe had had enough. Flash plastic and buy two more tickets. Job done! Wait for plane, get stuck in lift, and just before boarding we are given 'confirmed' tickets for return. Bugger! I was hoping to have to stay. Pleasant flight. Met by Nephew Josephat and on to car with three others and off to Kafunta! Whaaa' hae! We have our first encounter with Mr Kafunta the resident bull! We beat the storm in and scrub the night drive. A party of Germans go out and get stuck. Martin radios for help and it is past our bedtime before they are back. How sad!

**Day 5.** Up at 5. Refreshed! Into park after saying "hello" to Giraffe and Mr Kafunta and Wynette the lady gate guard. Game thin on the ground but birds plentiful. Night drive ok, Pels with large fish that was unwilling to be eaten but no Leopard until having given up hope we see one draped across a tree just by the Park Gate. Starts to rain but we miss the thick of it!

**Day 6.** Skip the am drive as it is raining. The Germans have a prayer meeting in their Chalet! J. returns with news of dogs but no sightings. Fred prepares to swim the river! Blank on evening drive.

**Day 7.** A Stork day. They are everywhere! White, Abdims, Yellow billed, Saddle billed, Open billed, Woolly necked, Marabou. You call 'em and we see 'em! One even comes under the truck and



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eats a frog. At night we have difficulty driving due bugs in the air and Frogs on the road! The other guests get assertive!

**Day 8.** Less Storks today. Game still scarce. Concentrate on the little jobs. Skip night drive altogether.

**Day 9.** Rain delays departure. We go south to the hills. A party of elephants dispute right of way. Two tuskless females are dubbed 'The Ugly Sisters' (It is Christmas). One chases us down the road! We visit Chipembele and meet Anna and are given a tour. A worthy venture. On the return we are chased by the Ugly Sisters again! The Night drive gives us our second Leopard, Lions and lots of Elephants.

**Day 10.** Despite a valiant try we still get to the Park gate at the same time! A good elephant moment as the highlight. The Full Moon keeps the night life abed apart from Genets and Bushbabies. (Thick Tailed Galago for the technical).

**Day 11.** A longer day with a visit and conducted tour of the re-furbished Chichele. Fine if you like that sort of thing. "Out of Africa" meets "Gone with the wind." More Elephant Moments on the return drive with a lone Hippo disputing the water with them. It rains on the way home. We missed the bulk but Kafunta did not! We have the Lodge to ourselves now. More rain!

**Day 12.** We go south to the Lagoons along very sticky roads. Get out and push from time to time! Lots of Elephants and Giraffes, Kudu etc., We have tea at Tundwe Camp. On the way home a large bull gets "a bit close" to us. Jos. told him it is against Park rules but he took no notice! Impressive!

Evening drive starts with a meeting with the Indians from Tundwe who go on about Lions and casually mention 'Dogs!' J lets in clutch. Lodge to 'Big Baobab in the hour!



Coulthard

could not have done better! Knocking two lions off the road we find Twelve dogs, six adult and six  $\frac{3}{4}$  grown pups. Mum calls them off and we follow. The pups are playing up and chasing tails etc., when the most extraordinary thing happens. The Adults leave in "Hunting mode" but the pups stay with us. They play games round the car for about 40 minutes. Have we been left in charge? Then a distant bark gets their attention. A second bark and the pups take off **away** from the sound. The Adults had met the Chichele Lions and told the kids to make themselves scarce. What an experience. We later

find the Lions on the carcass of the Hippo we had seen with the Elephants. On the way home we see a farmyard moggie with white patches on its face which Nephew tries to tell me is a Wildcat.

**Day 13.** Today's highlight is dragging a car out of the mud. Evening drive in company with Tomas & Indra from Stockholm. Of course we have to show them the Lions but get them two Leopards on



the run home. Indra is squeaking with pleasure in the back seat?

**Day 14.** Out with the Swedish couple again and we add to their score with multiple giraffe and elephant. In PM we found some fine Bull Elephants, watch Lions hunting Warthog with mixed emotion! They fail! We get a huge Bull Kudu and to round off we get a fine male Leopard hunting Impala.

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**Day 15.** is Christmas Eve. As an early present we get “ten Dogs a Hunting” on one side of the road and Bushbuck sparring on the other! After lunch is wet, again, and the scheduled Carol Service on the Bridge is moved to the Mfuwe Lodge. Despite being a paid up Iconoclast this was enjoyable. the schools sang Zambian songs first and then we all joined in with carols. (There



was wine and Mosi to whet the whistle). Never sung Carols, or anything else come to that, with Hippos grunting below the balcony. E was plying the local Chief with Mosi and was 'invited back to his place'.



**Day 16. Christmas Day.** Lie in after the carousing. Tomas and Indra have left and we have Mince Pies and Champers by the Pool.

Lunch was Gammon, Turkey etc., at 2 PM accompanied by huge rainstorm. We scrub Night drive and send Nephew home to his wife and kids. Sandwiches at 8, a couple of gins and bed. A great way to spend Christmas!

**Day 17.** Roads very wet. A flap necked Chameleon frightened Josephat. We watch elephants consorting. One bull mating and two others fighting for their turn! Look out for calves in 2004. No, I did not take pictures! We get back to the river crossing to find it deep. J takes off boots and drives in slowly. Mid stream he gets out to check depth, above the floor, and is just in time to catch his boots which are floating off. Tried for the PM drive but river now impassable so went to Salt Pans and nearly got stuck up there. It rains even more during dinner.



**Day 18.** River down and we make Park. Water everywhere. We come back and just make it back over the river. Today we take up Elizabeth's invite to visit Chief Kakumbi and also meet the Head Warden. Chief gives him grief over lack of river crossing. After Brunch we are due in Mfuwe to pick up arriving guests but the river is too high. We go to Chipembele and steal a boat. Then in true Krypton Factor style a rope is put across the river and the boat used to ferry people to and fro. Chief Kakumbi's children come to watch and say 'hello' to Uncle Fred. The PM drive is truncated into another run in the local area. New guests are chatterers with multiple daft questions! Aaagh!

**Day 19.** Morning drive OK with lots of birds for our guests but the PM nearly ends in tears. More facile questions that a bit of pre trip reading would have rendered unnecessary. Much time wasted with trivia and night falls as a blessing as J can concentrate on his spotting. A Hippo joined us for a sundowner. The drive drew a blank and frankly they deserved no better. We will skip tomorrows trip rather than endure more of this.

**Day 20.** A lazy morning. Mr Kafunta and Uncle Joe come to the Lodge for a drink.

**Day 21.** Much rain overnight but we make the morning drive by boat. The roads in the park are running water through the bush. I have never seen anything like it. We intercept some elephant and two are getting close to us when 'the daft questions' start. The Jumbos bolt. Highlight of the PM drive was a pride of Lion refusing to get up from the road. Eventually J pushes past but this upsets Jacob our spotter who is within inches of a large male who only moves over at the last minute. This was his first close encounter and he was not impressed.



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**Day 22. New Year's Eve.** We change partners and share with two young Zambians. We see lots of Kudu etc., as the animals are pushed onto higher ground. We go and return by 'ferry'. Debate on PM drive as more thunder approaches. It pours at 4.00 so we delay and wind up with G & T watching the finest sunset ever with 18 Elephants at the river edge. A good end to 2002 and we skip the party at Flatdogs.

**Day 23.** A New Year's day trip into the park to First Foot the Elephants. A large herd of buffalo and lots of giraffe too. A fitting finish to our visit. After brunch we head for the airport via Nephew's family and his new bar. After take off we can see how much the river is up. A pleasant flight to Lusaka where we are met and taken to Juls. We are the sole guests and the lady of the house puts on Goulash and Red wine for us, plus Christmas Cake and Mince Pie. A Pleasant evening.

**Day 24.** Early start to check in for 9.15 flight home. Half hour delay and it got later due head winds. This is added to by late arrival of luggage, due we think to some being out sorted for ongoing transfers. We leave LHR at 19.10 and make LGW an hour later. Sandwiches and wine and bed.

**Day 25.** Checked in for IOM flight then breakfast. We arrive more or less on time to see the Island bedecked with snow!

The boring bits:-

We saw two separate packs of Wild Dog. (There had been no sightings for over five months.)

Multiple "Elephant Moments." Lots of Giraffe and a fair few Kudu. Too many Lions although the Warthog hunters were interesting enough. More Bushbuck in evidence than ever. Several Sharpes Grysbok and Bushbabies. Five Leopard encounters including a twenty minute audience with one.



Birds. Owls. Pel's , Verraux's, Wood, Pearl Spotted and Barred.

Raptors. both Western and Eastern Red footed Falcons. Lanner hunting Crowned Plover, a very friendly Little Sparrowhawk and a Montagu's Harrier hawking the river bank outside the bar. Touraco and Trogons. Nightjars various with lots of Pennant Winged.

First with Painted Snipe, Barred Long Tailed Cuckoo, Rufous Bellied Heron among others.

Total 251 (with 59 'new' to me this trip) bringing my Zambian total to 347.