

Zambia again. May 30th - June 18th 2001.

We are not sure how this happened but Elizabeth was keen to return to Kafunta in the dry season and try a walking safari and the visit bush camps. A few emails to and from Anke with some fine tuning to include North Luangwa NP and we were good to go.

30th May. We set off! The journey starts with a flight from Isle of Man to London's Heathrow for a flight with Ethiopian Airways to Lilongwe via Addis Ababa. Despite a late take off, good progress is made to the Capital of Ethiopia and after some ad hoc birding the journey at the airport we board our connection to Lilongwe where we arrive on schedule at 15.15 on **31st May**. We are met by the Wilderness Rep and told to identify our luggage on the Carousel but to ignore immigration etc., as our transport is ready outside. Some 30 minutes later we are airborne in a Twin engine Bonanza (I had always wanted to fly one of these.) and en-route to Mfuwe International where we land some 45 minutes later having skipped the seven hour ride by jeep. (Worth every penny, or Dollar). We are met on touchdown by Nephew Josephat and within minutes are on our way to Kafunta. Evidently no Visa is required for arriving this way. (Save \$120). We are driven at speed, catching much wildlife in our teeth in the open truck, and seeing much more in the 'fields'. F. beats J to call "Long Crested Eagle" and the tone of the trip is set. Many Elephants are seen during the drive to Kafunta where we are met by Anke, our Hostess, and settled in. We skip the Night Drive and retire early having saved a day in transit. During the night we are serenaded by the local Hippo Chorus and greeted in the Chalet by the resident Frog.



1st June. We drag ourselves from bed at 5.30 (a.m.) and we do our first drive in the Park, which is accessed by the Pontoon in less than 20 minutes. The pontoon is a triumph of 'Low Tech' and is pulled across the river by two men with slotted handles. The Hippo are not impressed. The trucks have been improved since our last visit and now sport radio and welded ladders. Wow! The drive is informative and yields good views of Giraffe, Zebra, Kudu and Impala. Minor elephant moments with small totos. Martial and Ayres Hawk Eagles. We return for Brunch and watch Martin getting stuck in the river. We find Kittlitz Plover and chicks. Nephew is now calling Elizabeth "Auntie" but Anke

seems able to cope with that. After a snooze we go on our first Night Drive which yields our first Leopard plus Bushbuck and the usual Genets.

On our return we discuss the programme as there seems to be some problems with the Itinerary. I insist that there is a gap between both walking Safaris and the return to Lilongwe. Evidently the Bush Camp is not set up yet and the trip to North Luangwa may not come off due to river levels. We shall see!

2nd June. Today we have a morning Walking Safari accompanied by Nephew, Michael and Gun toting Dangerous. That IS his name. Very informative with some accommodating Giraffe and Zebra plus Impala etc., but no 'big stuff'. The ground underfoot is badly broken by Hippo feet and now set hard which makes boots a necessity. Birds are shy but we hear and then locate a nice Pearl Spotted Owlet. Back for Brunch and a swim.



The Night drive leaves on schedule via the gate and we have more Elephant Moments particularly

from a cheeky teenager who throws his weight about. Plenty of Game including Bushbuck, again, and Warthogs for Auntie. We see a nice Raptor which gets several calls, from Kestrel to BS Kite, until Fred nails it as a male Pallid Harrier. John, who is our sole guest in the truck, is pleased with this. Sundowners are taken at Mopani spur overlooked by Zebra, Waterbuck and a lone Elephant. A pleasant spot. We then proceed with Michael on the 'spot' and find Civet, Genet and Porcupines, plus Nightjars and Coursers on the road.



After some more bush beating we come upon a large male Leopard in thick scrub but manage to keep up with him for quite a while until he gives us the slip. After that we pick up a hyena and three more giraffe plus a Pel's Fishing Owl quite close which co-operates for a photo call and makes John's night.



His night is not yet over however as we now come upon 15 Wild Dogs resting by the track.

It is dark and we watch them for some time undisturbed until they decide to go hunting. After that, crossing the river by Pontoon in the dark is a mere bagatelle. John leaves in high spirits and we discuss 'Plan C' for our itinerary which is no clearer. During the night 9 Lions march through the lodge!

June 3rd. We leave at first light to track the dogs and it pays off. . They have killed an Impala right next to the trail and all seem well fed. The youngest are still pushing and pulling at the neck and head (I am now stuck as to which foto to use). The alpha female is in season and bother breaks out from time to time. We get nothing more serious than a warning 'woof' as Fred gets out of the truck to check for a reaction. After a couple of enchanting hours we move off and leave them in peace. We spend the tea break with a very obliging Giraffe before returning to the lodge by a very beautiful route along the river. The dry season opens more routes and where all was swamp between the lodge and the river is now dry grass where game is plentiful. On the pm drive we are told the dogs have gone, but Nephew finds them resting by a pond just nearby. We indulge ourselves more, with the highlight being startling a large Croc as we move off which the pack promptly start barking at in high dudgeon. More Fuji is expended. After dark it is a bit quiet, needs to be, but we see Mum and Baby Honey Badger. Jos followed up some alarm calls and nearly collided with a Hippo which was not impressed one little bit. Similarly, another adolescent Jumbo got quite stropy once he was out of reach! Back to camp where eight more lions and an Elephant put in an appearance. Still no fixed day for Bush Camps.



June 4th. We spend a whole day driving north to Lion Camp which was interesting for Kudu and multiple sessions with Warthog friends of Elizabeth. Clouds of Lilian's Lovebirds and a nice Martial Eagle were Avian highlights. Plus a Black necked Heron eating a snake! After lunch we return and whilst having afternoon tea some Puku and Impala start giving alarms. We trace this to a fine male Leopard in the reeds. Full sun but a long shot. Uncle and Nephew walk him up but he bolts into cover. Shame that, Aunty was checking the Insurance! Got some nice Kudu pictures on the way home. More Lion in the night including a fine male walking past the bar as we finished dinner. More guests arrive. We leave for the Bush Camp on 6th we are now told. (Plan 'D'?)



June 4th. We see many Elephants. The best is a herd of 19 which we park up to intercept. It works and we get approached quite closely including a big bull with useful tusks who gives us a toot as he goes by. Upon return to Kafunta, it is still Plan 'D' but we are asked to share our car with some Americans with two SMALL children. Happily they slept through most of the drive, the youngest only being 18 months. Grandmom promises not to scream which is just as well as Elephants join us for tea. No

Leopard tonight but just in front of the Lodge we find several Lion. Probably the ones which have serenaded us each evening. Grandmom does not scream!

June 6th. "D" Day. First we go on morning drive with two Americans and a Norwegian. The male sleeps and the two ladies chatter and see little. Your heroes see Pel's Owl and Raptors various. The Giraffe joins us for tiffin again and Fred convinces the ladies that it likes biscuits. When he does not accept, they are told he only likes cream ones not Gingersnaps. You can tell these people **anything!** After brunch we embark on the three hour drive to the Bush Camp over doubtful roads and two river crossings. We see a fine male Kudu. The camp is on the banks of the Luangwa in a stand of Ebony and quite picturesque. Two dome tents, a shower in



wire tailed swallows in a fallen tree.

a bucket, with modesty screen of reeds with a similar building for the toilet. As Auntie put it, a box with a lid and a deep hole. The dining area is not just open



plan, it's open air! Overlooking the hippo and a family of After watching the sun set, we are fed and put to bed. Quite a comfortable night, if noisy from Hippo Chorus and Leopard and Hyena solo's.

7th June. Hot water is on hand at 5.30 and Dangerous appears to lead us on our first walk. Lots of guinea fowl and fish eagles plus five Giraffe. Everything a bit shy down here and the ground still bad. A river is in the way so a 'bridge' is made from logs! At the end of the walk the river needs to be re-crossed, it is not deep so Elizabeth removes boots and socks but Fred just plodges through. Elizabeth partakes of the shower before brunch is served and then we river watch (and snooze). At 3 we go on another walk until



dark then return to the truck for a drive. We nearly back over a Hyena who calls up reinforcements. Back for another restful African night.

8th June. Another 5.30 start with Dangerous and back over the river but this time Elizabeth keeps her feet dry! Warthogs and Puku and lots of birds. On return to the river a convenient dead tree is manhandled into a perfect makeshift bridge and officially opened as the "Aunt Elizabeth Bridge". Pizza for lunch today, with table cloth and serviettes plus iced drinks as usual. Really comfortable home from home. No radio contact with base yet. Who cares! The afternoon's bridge building exercise is abandoned when the wood causes the river to back up and come round and wash the guide's boots away! During dinner a Bushbaby puts in an appearance. The moon is now full.

9th June. While we are enjoying a fry up breakfast, we are evicted from our tents for a 7 am start to drive back. We see some Raquet-tailed Rollers. At the main river crossing the car struggles on two wheel drive and digs in hard. We have bust the half shaft. Nephew is heard to use a rude Anglo Saxon word. The village turns out and whilst there is no AA man, much use of brushwood and logs plus the lid from the cool box gets us free after the car is lifted bodily out of the hole it has dug for itself. We thank our helpers and continue as Front wheel drive only. We pass many Warthogs, Zebra, Giraffe, Buffalo and Elephant plus our second Giant Kingfisher on the drive home. Kafunta



come on the radio to ask why we are late for Brunch! The evening drive, yes we are gluttons for it, and see a large herd of Buffalo plus several Elephants. It turns out to be a 'spotted' night. Civet, Genet, Serval, Hyena and finally a female Leopard. Back near the Park Gate we get good views of another Honey Badger who comes close for a pose. We need a push start from here so keep the engine running until back at the lodge. Dinner and then to bed ready for an even earlier start tomorrow for the long drive to North Luangwa.



10th June. The hoped for early start is delayed by an Elephant grazing on the bush outside our chalet. Fred leads a trusting Spouse past after saying "don't run and don't look back. Ignore it!" So She does. We gain the breakfast room only to find the staff have stayed in the kitchen to avoid the ellie so we chase them up and eat a hurried meal. On

the way through Mfuwe we call on Nephew's and say 'hello'.

The drive north was character building. No-one had passed this way since the rains in November and the track was none existent. We did much casting about to pick up old tyre marks and several digging sessions were involved. Eventually we arrived at the river, and it was too deep to cross! We were supposed to be met this side and ferried over in a Unimog. This did not happen. Our spotter waded over to speak to five 4x 4s who had materialised on the other side. One



fitted with snorkel brought him back. They are a party of returning South Africans who have been to the Equator and they throw out their luggage and put ours on board and take us over. Our spotter is detailed to go to the village and come for us in four days time. (Plan E). We transfer to the camp car for the two hour ride. We wait an hour for somebody called Bob who fails to appear. The driver

does not know the way but makes it eventually. We are greeted by a stressed hostess who has just had a run in with a Spitting Cobra in the dining room. Elizabeth thinks we are in a P.O.W Camp! She may be right. Earth floors, no walls and a treehouse that looks like a guard tower! Maybe it will look better in the morning! We eventually get fed and retire. **(Note. Elizabeth's notes of this day take up over five pages of her book, I have had to edit quite severely as the journey up and back would fill another book.)** We are asked what has happened to Bob? Who he? Evidently



somebody who was to follow us from Mfuwe but remain some distance back to avoid our dust trail. Lions and Leopards call in the night, and I mean visit not sing. It was just the other side of the reed screen.

June 11th. In daylight we examine our new home. Mud floors, Reed mats, En suite facilities, Iron framed beds, torn mossy nets. (The barrel in the picture is the shower, very chic!) It is a POW Camp. We have a nice view of the river whilst lying in bed though. A Giant Kingfisher is our neighbour. After tea we go on our first walk, see lots of Buffalo and other game but no sign of either Elephant or Lion. The endemic Cookson's Wildebeest also fails to put in an appearance but an enjoyable walk nevertheless. After brunch, and a snooze, we go for our afternoon walk and see more Warthogs, Impala, Zebra etc., and eventually Wildebeest which promptly run away. The night drive yielded a large Croc looking for a new pond and a friendly Civet who poses for us. Things are looking up as we don't have to wait too long for dinner tonight. Actually we are getting to like this place, despite the initial shock.



June 12th. Up at first light again and another walk is planned. This time we head downstream towards where we heard the Lions in the dawn chorus. We see Buffalo and pass on. Then the Lion roars back where we have come from so we retrace our steps as we must have passed close by them in the 'Adrenaline Grass' as it is called. No sign at first but then we spot them across the river heading for where we have just left. Contrary to what you/we would expect, we then set off at a brisk pace TOWARDS where they will cross! In doing so we get very close to the aforementioned Buffalo who don't look all that pleased to see us. Maybe the Lions are making them nervous as well? We get to the Lions tracks but they are into deep bush and we decide that perhaps the photo would have not come out.... Oh well, nice try. After a while we settle down for a drink of tea by a small pond and watch various



birds come down to drink including Lilian's Lovebirds, Red billed Firefinches, Twin spots etc. We seem to have neglected the little jobs this trip so here is one for the file to show there are no hard feelings! We continue our walk past most game seen before and learn lots about the various trees and plants we find en route, both from Nephew and the local guide, Joffrey. Nephew ventures the remark that communication seems a problem up here. Auntie observes that it is not just here! After the usual brunch and snooze break, we set off for another drive using the vehicle first to get further into the bush. Nothing much to see from the hills where we walk but scenically very nice. Elizabeth thinks it was more of a ride out for the staff. Back at camp we are joined by two couples who have flown in. One British and one American. The latter are a bit 'red-necked' and question whether it is 'necessary' to have Josephat eat with them. Fred says they do not have to and he will arrange for **them** to eat outside should they prefer. They mutter but stay. Still no news of Bob.



June 13th. An early start for the drive 'home' and having checked that all is packed we set off for the river. We check at the scout post where we are informed that our car will be waiting over the river and a boat has been arranged to take us over. Fred was hoping to have to wade with the Hippo. Shame. We arrive at the river, no boat, and no car either. Just as we are drawing straws as to who goes in the river first, news comes that the boat is at the scout post. We return to see a very small dug out waiting for us but no car at the other side. "There is a problem!" E, as befits her status is invited into the canoe first and is ferried, with some difficulty against the current, across the Styx by a 'boatman' who we are now told has never carried passengers before! One by one



the party crosses, but Elizabeth walks the last half as it was faster. **We are told the car is stuck some five kilometres away so off we go on an unscheduled safari assisted by the local Game Scouts. After the route march we come upon the car in some difficulty at a river crossing. Nephew adds to the problems by promptly going axle deep in soft wet sand. More undergrowth is destroyed in our efforts to extricate the car and finally**



after a couple of hours we actually get the car out by taking it to where we have come from! All we have to do now is get it back over to where we are going! This



is achieved at high revs and speed and thankfully nothing breaks. We thank our helpful scouts, who think it is all a huge joke, and proceed through the bush. The track is a little clearer now as the 4 Afrikaans vehicles are two days ahead somewhere. So, we discover is Bob! We come to one of the first hard bits and find Bob camped there with a sick Land Rover. As we cannot pass, we winch



him out. He has lost his Half Shaft so continues without. We have had no news since! It is now late afternoon and we stop for drinks, but it will be very late when we get to Kafunta. This area is called "Africa's last frontier". How true, how very true. We meet our first vehicle since Bob, and he does not count, and learn the Afrikaans are only four hours ahead despite having a three day start. By now we are enjoying a splendid sunset and a flock of 300 Crowned Cranes goes overhead. Fred. earns Brownie points by calling 'Pearl Spotted Owlet' and shows where it is to Nephews total amazement. It gets dark

whilst we are transiting Nsefu sector and we promptly get two punctures within 30 mins. We have plenty spares, a jack but no handle!! Kafunta radios and asks "How is it", Josephat says "Bad!" and hangs up. We finally regain a better road and around 8 pm the BP sign in Mfuwe is in sight. Kafunta asks "What progress?" Nephew abruptly says "close" and signs off. We get to Kafunta to a rapturous reception as I think Ron and Anke feel a complaint may be forthcoming. Not true! After a quick sluice and a double G & T, order is restored. The journey was not without its humorous moments and after all, is this not why we came? Anke is very relieved. The lodge is quite full now and we retire straight after dinner.

June 14th. We are off on a game drive and are quickly in Chichele area where we find a small herd



of Elephant with small young. Later a full pride of 10 Lions lazing in the sun. These are the first lions we have seen in the Park. We take coffee with the Giraffe and tease Martin's party about giving them biscuits. Close views of a Hoopoe. After brunch we share the vehicle with the Bishop of Lilongwe and his party. They did not 'do' birds and made that plain. How Unchristian! The Americans asked all the usual daft questions and everything was either 'cute' or 'cool'. Yuck!! The highlight was them wandering off at the Sundowner

stop and nearly getting eaten by a Croc which dashed past them for the water. Maybe it had given

up eating Christians? I enjoyed it. We found a Leopard after dark and then came upon 9 Lions just starting to hunt. We watched them gather together, stretch, and then set off very purposefully. This was probably the most activity we have seen from Lions. Dinner was a bit subdued and stilted, as whilst Bishop Peter was o.k. his retinue were a bit wearing. "Throw them to the Lions" took on a new slant, and maybe the Romans had a point!

June 15th. Our last full day. The truck to the Pontoon was full. Two Dutch, Wim & Paula, and two Germans. One called Knut so he would be no use in a flood! However the three males got out when in the Park and continued on Foot with Dangerous and Michael. Paula stayed on, as her leg was bad. (Tsetse bite!). She was good company and a keen birder as well as a fan of the Elephant family. This is just as well as we have the best 'Elephant moments' of the trip. A family of female and young, quite near to us and who contentedly fed and walked towards us. It looks as though another page is needed! (Will it never end?)



I can find space for another one or two 'moments fotos'. Will this do? As you will guess this was a close encounter and well handled by Nephew throughout. My concern was that as the toto came VERY close indeed almost touching us with his little trunk, he may have squealed and provoked mum to defend him by trashing the car. A touching moment which we all enjoyed. Paula was a bit red from holding her breath as she had not had 'Elephant Moments' like this. We left them in peace and got a good bye toot from one of the Teenagers. On the way out we found a female Bushbuck with tiny lamb and Temninck's Coursers by the Lodge. A good morning which unfortunately was not matched by the night drive. Over lunch we check out Ron's 'Chat' which Fred thinks will be a Wheatear from the description. It is a Capped Wheatear. The Park was very busy with Eclipse traffic tonight and it was a bit like Brighton Sea Front. We did see the usual Genet, Porcupine and Hare but no big cats. We also visited Norman Carr's Grave. However another car had seen a Bull Kudu knocked over by two lionesses near Chichele, so we will go there tomorrow.



June 16th Our companions this morning are the two offspring of a couple who are walking. They



have been warned that Fred will feed them to the Lions if they misbehave. In fact they are quite Angelic. (Fear is a great motivator) We go straight to Chichele and find the Lions trying to hide the remains of the Kudu. There is a Hooded Vulture and a Tawny Eagle awaiting the main chance but the young lioness is having none of this. She charges several times while trying to bury the Offal and eventually she succeeds in dragging the remains of what was a full grown Bull Kudu behind a rock. The strength of her neck muscles was awesome. We sadly return for Brunch to pack for home. We say our sad farewells and



promise to return before long. Do they do timeshare here? Nephew drives us to the Airport and is looking forward to a whole evening with his family before being back at work as the lodge is quite busy. The Pilot is waiting for us and we take off straight away in a small Bonanza single engine job. Lilongwe in 50 minutes and we are met, processed and driven into town to stay at Heuglin's Lodge. Quite comfortable. We have dinner and turn in for an EARLY start.

June 17th Up at THREE to check in for 5.30 flight. Apart from the Pilot taking us to Entebbe first, all went well. Brief stop at Addis then LHR via Athens. Oh Well. On time and a good bath in the Hotel. A good trip all round. Maybe longer in North Luangwa next time as there is unfinished business up there. Are we going to go again? You betcha boots! Elizabeth 'does' Africa now.

We both enjoyed seeing Nephew again and the look on some faces at the 'relationship' was fun to see. One or two queried how we had a 'black' nephew so we used to say it came from my brother's side of the family and I do not think the penny ever dropped! You **can** fool most of the people ALL the time!

THE END