

## ***Botswana and Victoria Falls – June/July 2008***

### **June 26      Maun/Okavango Delta - Vumbura**

Departed Maun in a very smart scheduled charter flight on a Caravan accompanied by our specialist guide, Matt Copham.

The Vumbura concession was looking superb from the air with delightful scenes of elephant tromping through the delta waters. The draw of Africa happened on the first game drive into camp with sightings of a hornbill eating a puff adder, Lechwe and reedbuck simmering in the afternoon sun among the grasses, and more breeding herds of elephant parading through their water playground.

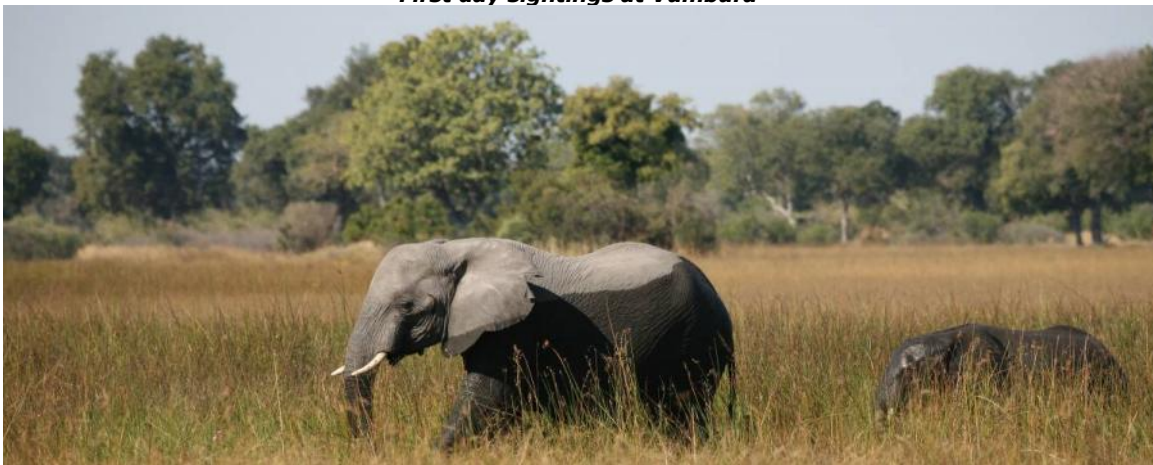
Boisin the camp-manager greeted us with his signature grin and wave and cold drink in hand on the dock at Little Vumbura.

A quick lunch and Matt was badgering my son Miles (14) and I back into the boat to take a short boat ride to a near-by island. He quickly showed off his superior guiding skills by finding a Pels fishing owl and we knew he had earned his dinner! Our game drive continued with sightings of a big herd of buffalo throwing up dust in the sunset making for great photography with back lighting. We found two male lions from the Kubu pride who were keeping right up with the herd and into the night. The best time of the day for me is the fading light of the African day with the orchestra of calls and sounds that accompany the traditional sundowner.

The evening meal was a traditional Boma dinner with the guides in camp including Kay, Lazarus and Rain and trainee camp manager, Tendai joining in the festivities around the jumping campfire light.



***First day sightings at Vumbura***



## **June 27      Vumbura**

The alarm call was early morning splashing through the shallow water in front of the tents. Dark silhouettes of Lechwe antelope could be seen through the cracks in the drawn canvas blinds.

The morning sunrise was greeted with Coucal calling in the reeds . Matt got us out bright and early for a morning walk and enroute were rewarded with a sighting of a hyena dragging a lechwe that had been stolen from the resident leopard and a few families of breeding herds of elephant.

The walk started at Jackie's Pan and soon Matt was introducing us to his collection of animal names including an implausibility of Wildebeest and murmuration of Starlings. On the walk we were able to get a decent sighting of a breeding herd of elephants, warthog, baboon troop, a lone buffalo ambling through the thicket, starlings diving onto a mongoose and a pair of giant eagle owls.

After a late brunch we enjoyed the ambiance of Little Vumbura which has a lovely library area and bar area built in and around the resident fig trees and alike. The deck area overlooks a waterway through the delta that the mokoro rides take and often the camp will arrange this in combination with a walk to Darter Island.

The afternoon drive was a combination of more interactions with elephants, hippos in the marsh area and finally a rewarding sighting of a male cheetah on a lechwe kill. We sat with him until dusk and enjoyed a moon-upper afterwards as we were too late for a sun-downer. A porcupine was the lone sighting on the night game drive back to the dock/camp.



*Elephant in the distance and Matt tracking our vehicle in the delta waters*



**Other sightings on the game drives**

## **June 28      Vumbura**

Matt was determined and bound to go back to the cheetah sighting from the previous afternoon to see what was there. His intuition of following his guiding instincts was spot on and we shared in his obvious passion with nature and bush when the lone cheetah was still where we had left him.

We sat quietly listening to the sunrise chorus of egrets and malachite kingfisher and the sight of huge bull elephant with very large tusks standing proudly in the early light with clouds of mist and wet grass. Not for long! Splashing and calling of two hyena echoed through the delta waters and they rapidly approached to chase off the cheetah.

The cheetah made his way through the Vumbura plains for over an hour sighting, and finally poised on a tree trunk - magnificent! The morning concluded with tea at the pool at Vumbura Paradise with elephant, hippos and lechwe being our Bush TV documentary.

Arrived into Vumbura Plains Camp for an overnight stay and got off to flying start with afternoon tea of samoosas and chocolate brownies. DELICIOUS !

The afternoon drive to find lion on buffalo and hyena cubs at the den did not materialize and we quietly had sundowners with curios giraffe off in the setting sunset.

The dinner setting was more formal and the managers, Rodger, Ryan and Janice gave some delightful pre-dinner chats at the minimalist bar with crazy-fun barstools. The North Camp looks over a lagoon whereas South Camp has views of the grasses of the delta. Johannes the new chef showed off some wonderful talent with his mushroom risotto!



**Fabulous cheetah sighting – we followed him for half the morning !**



**Little Vumbura setting – only takes 12 guests and has a family unit**



**Mom and Miles have one on one time on safari**



**Vumbura Plains - North camp – perfect spot for sunrise sightings**

## **June 29      Vumbura - Mombo**

Freezing morning so "nice Matt" let us sleep in until 6:30am.

As a specialist guide Matt can walk all over Botswana and he arranged our final morning to be a walk in an easterly direction hoping to pick up the recent sightings of the pack of wild dog. We did see their tracks and followed them for some distance but eventually had to turn back as we knew there was a flight to catch to the next camp. Matt got us nice and close to giraffe with his weaving bushman walk which also took us through lovely vistas under forests and around several pans.

Back for brunch which was an OUTSTANDING DISPLAY. However, more outstanding, was the quality time that my son Miles and I had shared with Matt and to be surrounded by his superior tracking skills, incredible photographic experience, encyclopedic knowledge of nature and the bush, a keen sense of humor – and we learnt why he is called the Silverback of the Okavango!



**What an education for children – spending time with bush happy guides. Matt Copham is happily known as the Silverback of the Okavango .**

Met many familiar faces on the charter flights from Vumbura to Mombo including the Russel Friedman family and the specialist guide Dave Luck. On arrival at Little Mombo there was a lovely scribbled postcard from Garth Thompson, a fellow Zimbabwean who has guided for over 30 years in Africa .

The welcome at Mombo was “like home-coming” with a lovely staff of smiling faces. Our guide Cisco introduced himself and he is pedigree of note as he has brothers and uncles are all over Botswana in camps. His private vehicle “Tonto”, which we nicknamed in confusion with the two shows Cisco the Kid and The Lone Ranger, delivered well and our first 24 hours of gameviewing at Mombo was incredible.

Miles and I had missed the morning baby giraffe and lion interaction which we heard was amazing, but thankfully we had an equally exciting time ourselves starting in the afternoon and turning into the best game-viewing on all my Africa trips. First followed the **lion and they were hunting a herd of buffalo** – magic sighting of male lion running forward with mane flying back – Bob Marley as he has big dreads! Ran into **3 wild dog** and whoopee followed them for a good hour as they ran towards Chiefs – came into open area and they chased down lechwe until the water got too deep. Continued following them and they found a small impala which we missed seeing. Ran into a **cheetah male** who was sauntering through and Cisco picked up **a caracal** in the background in the fading sunset. Fabulous sighting! Enroute home ran into **Legodima female leopard and her two cubs** drinking near camp!

Natalie met us back in camp and Tsile and Cisco joined us around the campfire before dinner. Early to bed as early to rise was happening!



**The lion hunt**



**The three wild dogs were such a treat to see**



**Late afternoon light and the continuing Mombo mini -documentary with sightings of a cheetah and caracal**

## **June 30      Mombo**

Found Legodima in the early morning light sitting under a tree quite near camp. Then Cisco picked up another male leopard in a tree with a kill. As we watched him a 3<sup>rd</sup> male leopard came into the picture who he thought was the father of the two cubs. We got a few nice pictures of him before we looked for the cubs – a female and male and what a treat to view them. Can you believe we saw 5 leopard s within an hour all in a very small area? We spent a delightful few hours working our way around the various sightings.



**Legodima and her two cubs – a female and male**



Poster (the Save the Rhino guy) came on the radio - he had found two rhino so headed on a long drive north. Got our Big Six sighting- both a black female and a white male rhino together - very rare!!



**The black rhino in the background is a browser, the white rhino in front is the grazer**

Finished up with picturesque lunch spread at the hippo hide and felt incredibly lucky to be viewing at Mombo - the place of plenty. Hooked up with Legodima on the way back to camp but she was laying up in a shade. What a morning!

This afternoon Cisco wanted to find us the resident Maparota pride - 20+ with two lions and about 4 cubs. Picked up the tracks and he followed them until light ran out. It was a different kind of drive as Cisco was using his skills as a guide to find us wildlife and it is incredibly exciting to have him point out what he is finding in the patchwork quilt of the African *veld*.

Back in camp it was "Boma night" so had the wonderful "braai brashness" from Simon the chef with about 10 selections sitting in traditional black pots over warm glowing coals. Tsile was overseeing dinner and then herded us upstairs as Poster and his Mombo choir was the after dinner entertainment. Lizzy, one of the Managers of Main Mombo had a spirited voice along with being very sassy and getting guests to dance the African way. A fun, fun evening and I was eager to make a purchase of their CD in the shop on our last morning.



## **July 01**      **Mombo**

Up early as Cisco wanted to continue the tracking of the lion so headed over to the rhino boma where he had picked up the tracks yesterday. Drove for 7 hours tracking ... to Lechwe Heaven and traversed along an entire river line. Saw many, many lion tracks of all sizes, hungry vultures in trees, zebra grazing peacefully, kudu grazing peacefully, lechwe grazing peacefully - and no sign of lion. With the sun high in the sky we headed home tired but having enjoyed a morning of tracking. There was a reward as we found the two males of the pride lying up as we headed back to camp. Nat our tireless manager had late brunch waiting and new visitor, Grant Woodrow who heads up the whole Botswana Wilderness operation.



**Early morning sighting leaving camp**



**The lion and the culprit of all those tracks!**

The afternoon we kept on with the lion tracking but still no fresh-fresh signs so Cisco knew that a sighting of the two leopard cubs would keep us happy. He searched and found them in the late evening light having a bit of playground fun on a branch.

Poster did an excellent pre-dinner presentation on the Mombo, rhino mixing in his humor along with the seriousness of the re-introduction of rhino into the Delta.

Our final evening in Botswana ended with conversations around the campfire. The background hippo splashing through the delta waters kept us serenaded.

## **July 02                      Mombo – Livingstone – Toka Leya**

Cisco was eager as the first day, for the final game drive. Found the two lion cubs playing at their tree and Cisco picked up a hyena coming along who had a wiff of their scent, our hearts pounding, we could only hope that the cubs saw him. Rejoice they did and were up in the tree in a flash...Yeah! Dare I say it....more lion tracking and gave up with still no fresh tracks.



There was just enough time left to find Legadima who had another kill only to find that the same male had snuck in and got it from her. We watched hyena and baboon trying very hard to scare the male out of his place of hiding.

Taps (from Zim and the GM of Mombo camps) joined us for brunch and a lovely "laid-back" ambassador for Mombo and the Wilderness Botswana Camps in general. Our private vehicle (Tonto) was the hit of the trip at Mombo as it gave us the perfect schedule to be game-viewing at all hours of the day! The rooms are perfectly under-stated and yet have all the refinements of a Premier Camp. We thought Little Mombo had the most idyllic setting overlooking the floodplain in front.



**Our guide Cisco and faithful Tonto**



**Little Mombo setting**

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Our scheduled charter went via Chobe airstrip (Savuti, Dumatau and Kings Pool) where we saw the new Zibjianja location in Selinda and also the flood waters making their way up the Savuti channel. Picked up more clients at Kasane and continue onto Livingstone. Paid US\$275.00 at immigration for our 2 visas, and proceeded to Toka Leya. Gavin McCabe was with a group of happy Wilderness safariers including 3 of our AAC clients.

Toka Leya has a great feel and the setting on the upper Zambezi River is magnificent. The rooms are large and all beautifully situated along the river ecosystem. George and Chipso the new managers are running a good show. Stayed in camp for sunset and enjoyed sundowners on the deck. First international reception on the cell phone!



### **July 03 Livingstone - Victoria Falls**

Had an 8:00am sunrise cruise with Donald (ex Tongabezi) who showed us elephants on the islands, hippo still on the island beaches and the first migrant skimmers arriving as the water levels were dropping on the Zambezi river. Lots of microlights flying overhead! Would highly recommend going in the morning as no other boats around and had the mighty river and all its glory to our selves.



Time to cross over the border into Zimbabwe, with no hassle change of vehicles and paid our 2 visas of only \$100.00 total. Yvonne was at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge to meet us which was a perfect sign that things were normal after the elections. After a delicious lunch overlooking the waterhole, Yvonne organized an afternoon of canoeing on the upper Zambezi.

Picked up by Shearwater vehicle and Menguzo was the guide who gave a good safety talk and took us through quite a few small rapids before Raymond was there to take us out. Saw waterbuck, baboons and some buffalo.

We thoroughly enjoyed dinner at the Boma with lots of game meat and some great drumming. They also have a CD out giving the Mombo choir competition!



**Afternoon and evening fun in Victoria Falls**



**Wonderful to see my two friends and mentors – Yvonne and Esther**

## **July 04                      Victoria Falls**

Met Yvonne at 9:00am and our resident Vic Falls ambassador Esther was there too – these two wonderful ladies have been mentors for me for many years . Alex was our wonderful driver and visited the two schools that we sponsor. First was Chamabonda Primary School in Victoria Falls. And then Chinotimba which is the oldest school in the Falls. Very interesting as the second election results (June 2008) were posted up outside the classrooms as it had been a voting station , and all the precincts in Vic Falls were won by the opposition even though he was not standing in the election.



**A week after the elections and the local kids were happily attending school at Chamabonda**

Had tea at the home of Esther and her husband, Stanley. Picked up some Tanganda tea at the local supermarket and had quite a billionaire rush seeing all the zeros after the Z W\$dollar sign! After lunch went to have a quick inspection of the Victoria Falls Hotel before we walked over to the train station to hop on board the cocktail ride onto the bridge.



**Leaving with happy memories**

Had our final dinner in Africa at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge and was very thankful that Victoria Falls and Zimbabwe had pulled through this last round of elections .