

TRANS-OKAVANGO, BOTSWANA TRIP REPORT

May 2011 – Lynne Glasgow

After an early breakfast at the Johannesburg Intercontinental (the ideal hotel for overnight, when arriving in the late afternoon and leaving again early the next day) we boarded the Air Bots wana flight to Maun. This is always an interesting flight, as everyone on board is setting off on an adventure! On arrival, we were met by our Wilderness Air pilot and flew south to Kalahari Plains camp. After a quick freshen up, it was time for our first game drive! We were not disappointed, as there were lots of oryx and springbok, and I saw my first honeybadger in daylight! Dinner was scrumptious; to mato soup, rump steak, potato au gratin and cauliflower; all hot and tasty and accompanied by good South African wine.



Next morning was a 5.30 wake up for coffee and light breakfast before driving to Deception Valley for a day of game viewing. A wonderful picnic lunch brought out from camp and set up for us. In the late afternoon we returned to camp for a cultural walk with one of the Bushmen. We learned how to make fire, snare a rabbit, make bow arrows and how to communicate using the Bush Telephone! After dinner we had a great lecture from the senior camp guide about how the Kalahari formed and the river system that feeds the Delta. Kalahari Plains is a great camp, in a very unique ecosystem, and well worth the journey to visit and stay for a few days.



We were up before sunrise in order to set off on our scheduled charter flight to Chitabe for a site inspection of Chitabe and Chitabe Lediba Camps. Our next mode of transport was a helicopter which whisked us to Banoka Camp. This new camp in the Kwai Concession area is a great example of reducing the carbon footprint, as the camp generates much of its own power from solar panels, has a super water filtration system and operates a rigorous re-cycling program – all behind the scenes, but available for viewing by interested guests. After a bush lunch at the edge of a lagoon, our helicopter took us off to the Tsodilo Hills, a UNESCO World Heritage site with over 4,500 rock paintings over a 6 square mile area.



Our overnight stop was at the newly refurbished Vumbura Plains North Camp. Wow! This is a Premier Camp with all the bells and whistles – it took me 10 minutes just to find all of the light switches in my gorgeous room.

Next morning we were up and on the move by 5.30. Our helicopter ride over the Delta gave a good perspective of the water inundation. This is the third year of what looks to be part of a 25 year cycle of great water flow into the Delta, and many of the camps are reorganizing their game viewing to accommodate more water activities.



The next part of our adventure would be by motorized boat, expertly guided by Lawrence, who has grown up in the Delta and whose knowledge of the channels, the birdlife and animal behaviors was incredible. The full day boat trip included a stop on an island for lunch and swim. In the afternoon there was fishing from boat, without much luck! We had a quick stop at Jacana Camp for quick site inspection. This camp has 10 beds including a family tent which is a double with inter-connecting twin which makes it ideal for families. We arrived at Xigera Camp just after sunset and had a very interesting lecture from Map Ives, Wilderness Safaris' Environmental Officer in Botswana.



Today we took our boat at sunrise and headed to Chiefs Island, landing at Mombo Camp . We were ready for some game viewing on dry land and Mombo Camp did not disappoint! Our game drive was only just over an hour, but we managed to see two prides of lion, many giraffe, lechwe and zebra. Mombo Camp was full but the staff still managed to serve us an exquisite lunch before sending us off on our way to our final camp. This time, we experienced the Okavango at its pristine wildness. A fly camp had been set up with individual dome tents, a full bush kitchen and mess tent. Drinks around the fire, time to reflect on a wonderful visit to the Okavango Delta and a great sleep ! I am already looking forward to my next visit to this beautiful, diverse and ever changing land.

