

## Pikes Peak River Runners

**If We Eat It, Can We Check It Off The List?**

**Oct 2006**

**Africa, Zambezi River**



*By Christina King & Astrid Tucker*

**Trip Participants/Photos credits: Christina King, Astrid Tucker, Herb/Cecile Lovit, Jung, Bonnie Lindsay, Maureen McDermott, Ruth Blumkin, & Tom/Carol Bess**

[Johannesburg](#) | [Chobe](#) | [Caprivi Strip](#) | [Okavango Delta](#) | [Hwange](#) | [Victoria Falls](#) | [Zambezi](#)  
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My mother (Astrid Tucker) and I began planning this trip a year ago, by announcing that we wanted to go on an African Safari. Pete and my dad were lukewarm about going (as opposed to red-hot to spend the cash). So...we said why wait. We booked our trip in June 2006 and set an October 2006 departure date. The answer to the story title is answered later in this travel journal. Our Southern Africa trip began on October 4, 2006 and ended on October 22, 2006.

## Day 1- Oct 4, 2006- Depart from Denver, Colorado, USA:

Today we began two days of flying/traveling with British Airways to our first Africa stop - Johannesburg, South Africa. We are excited. Our preparation began back in June 2006 when we booked our trip with Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT).

Two items of note:

1. we are only allowed 26 lbs. of luggage-total! That includes the total for both carry-on and checked bags. That is skimpy for 19 travel days! When we arrive in Zimbabwe, we begin flying in small planes with strict weight restrictions. My first test pack began at 18 lbs. with only a few essential items not included; such as passport, money, etc.... My second test pack began a week later, and my total bag weight ballooned to 27 lbs. That included no lotion for 19 days! Yikes, what happened?! This precipitated a flurry of re-evaluation and more test packing. At test pack # 22, I hit the magical 25.9 lbs. by taking out quite a few "essential" items. Pete manages to worry me secretly hiding a few heavy items in my bag when I was not looking. I was so confused when I removed items and it did not change on the scale. Fortunately, Pete tells me before I radically adjust my baggage load. My carry-on backpack is full but my small, checked bag is only half full. My mom has managed to pare her baggage down to a total of 24 lbs., so I am planning on secretly dumping my lotion and a couple of more items in her bag when she is not watching. I also threw in a couple of extra "delicates" that I will throw away as we wing our way to Zimbabwe- where the baggage weigh-in gets serious. My last "luxury" item is a rubber rattlesnake designed to scare any baggage handler who might want to steal anything from my checked bag. I WON'T scare the bush plane pilots with that trick but might try to fool a couple of our safari members or friendly tour guides with the snake. OAT has a "what to pack" list. I only have  $\frac{2}{3}$  of that list packed. I only have 4 changes of clothes but the lodges include laundry service so I should be okay.
2. Another interesting OAT recommendation is to bring a large quantity of US cash because it is hard to use credit cards in Africa. Plus, African countries covet US dollars. OAT recommends that we bring \$900 in US cash per person, in small bills- nothing over a \$20 bill, not printed between 2000-2006, not torn, ripped, dirty or written on, and none of the new style of bills! I never carry that much cash! I "order" the money from my bank representative who tells me that this request is common. They have a credit union member who regularly goes to China and requests the same thing. My pile of cash is two inches high. OAT recommends that we split our cash and hide it on our person. I feel like a human being with a dollar sign above my head. My mom jokingly says she is going to stash some cash in her bra, but I draw the line there. I hide cash in every pocket- hidden and obvious on my person, including my money belt. It turns out we had money safes in every lodge and do not really need to sweat this detail. I ended up bringing back about \$350 in cash.





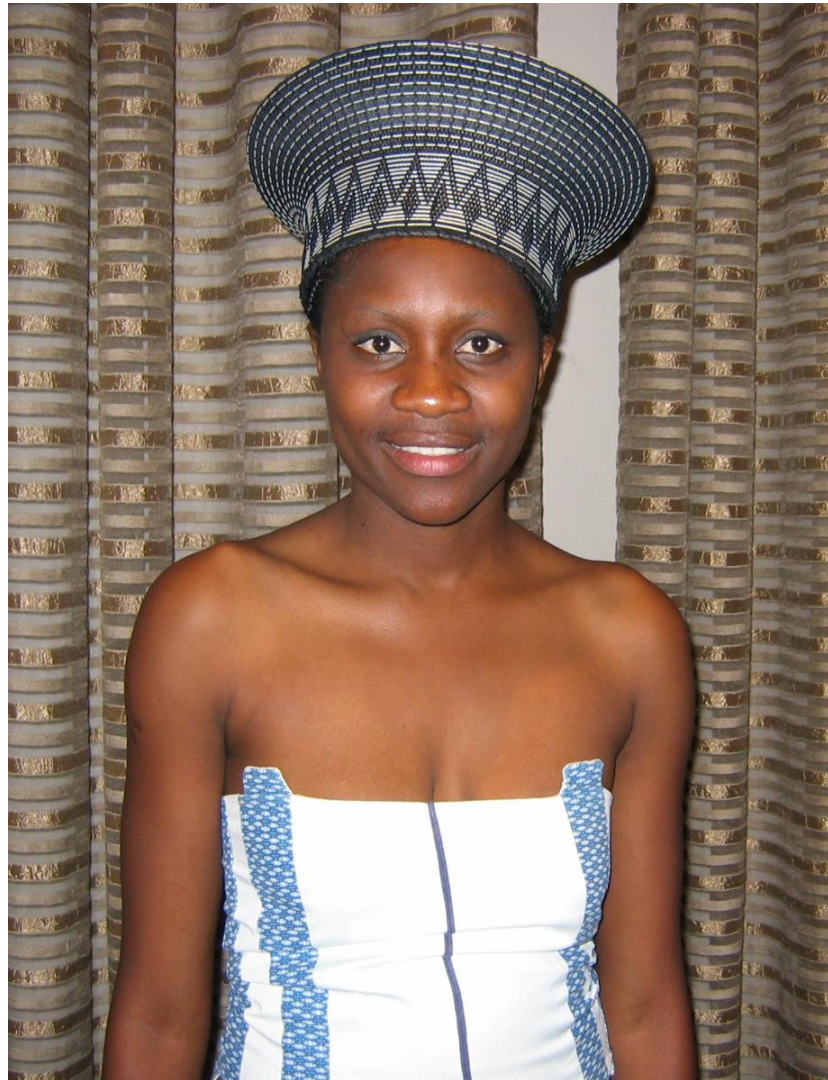
### **Travel to London (October 4-5, 2006):**

Airport security in Heathrow in London is much stricter than the US. They allow no travel size toothpaste, so I give that up along the way. Armed guards are very visible. We only checked our bags to London because on the way to Africa we had a 9-hour layover in London with a Heathrow Hilton hotel dayroom available. We used our dayroom to take a short nap between flights then boarded our last long flight to Johannesburg. We met some of our group Ethyl, Jung, Bonnie, Maureen, Tom, Carol, Ruth, and Don at the Heathrow Hilton. Bonnie noticed my Mom left her jacket on the airport terminal bench and she brought it to my Mom when we boarded the plane. London was damp, wet, and cold going both to and from Africa. FYI: Our return trip home took us 43 hours travel time from Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe to Woodland Park, Colorado. We had no dayroom on the leg home and arrived exhausted.

### **Johannesburg, South Africa (Oct 5-7, 2006):**

Our entire group converged at the Johannesburg, South Africa Holiday Inn on October 5th. Johannesburg has been ranked as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. The downtown city (from afar) looks normal, but everyone avoids going anywhere near the city center. A large coal fired power plant sits idle despite the high need for reliable electric power. I never get an answer why it does not operate. We visit Soweto which is one of the birth places of the apartheid movement and drive by Nelson Mandela's former and current homes along with Nobel Peace prize winner Desmond Tutu's home. We also drive by Winnie Mandela's home.

I feel safe and we have an informative tour of the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum. Later I read a story in the local newspaper about a young student who brought a severed human foot (including the toes) to school for show and tell. Other stories in that day's paper seemed very violent as well. Maybe my feeling of safety is naivety.



I notice large gold mine tailings around Johannesburg along with shanty towns, a "Beverly Hills" area, and neighborhoods somewhere in between that are being developed by the government. Johannesburg will be home to the Soccer World Cup in 2010 and they are frantically expanding their airport. I wonder how successfully the city will be able to handle the influx of "football" soccer fans from all over the world. We pass a large hospital where the South African surgeon who performed the first heart transplant in 1968, trained in the early 1960's.

We stop by the Regina Mundi church (World Heritage Cultural site) on the way back to our hotel and enjoy the singing/playing students. I conclude that Soweto is not one singular place but a grouping of many areas and much larger than I realized. Another interesting economic fact is that only two working diamond mines remain in South Africa and gold mine production has decreased. Coal mining reserves are increasing and gaining in production.



**Chobe (*chobay*) National Park in Botswana (*boatswana*), October 7-10, 2006 - Mom's birthday:**

We begin our trek to our first national park by traveling through three countries in one day (South Africa, Zimbabwe and finally Botswana). Thula (*tula*) Manzini, our OAT guide meets us at the airport in Victoria Falls (Vic Falls) and introduces himself as our primary OAT guide for the next three weeks. The line to enter



Zimbabwe and get our double entry visa is long and slow. The visa is \$45 US. Two people handle our entire plane load of about 150 people. One person records our passport info on a carbon paper form and one person takes the money and stamps our passports. Thula (more about him later) orients us at the airport and checks our bag weights. Thula immediately notices that several bags are over the 26 lb. limit. The 26 lb. limit will be addressed later in the trip once we start flying on the "small 5-seater planes". Thula takes full responsibility for our bags (he calls them his babies) for the duration of our trip whenever we move camps.

Dancers entertain us at the Vic Falls airport while we wait for the others to come through the long airport visa line. We start traveling immediately to our destination (Chobe National Park). First, we drive in a van to Kasane International airport (a small building) via the Botswana border. At the border we get out of the van and walk our shoes through a hoof/mouth chemical treatment dip while the van tires are driven through the same mixture.



At Kasane, we transfer to our open safari vehicles for the 4x4 drive into Chobe. Ten minutes into Chobe National Park we see our first elephant herd. Botswana is home to 45,000 elephants. By the end of our trip, I am convinced that we have seen at least 1,000 elephants. I know on one day alone at Chobe we see 350. I count them in multiples of ten. Multi-colored guinea fowl (Chobe or Government Chickens) cluck underfoot.





Note: Thula encourages us to "mark our territory" before we leave Vic Falls airport. That would reference using the restrooms. Later in the trip, our bush game drives include stops using terms such as "time to mark our territory" by "picking flowers" for women and "watering the garden" for men. Maureen thinks that we can literally pick some flowers before figuring out that this term means finding a bush to pee behind. Oh yes, on our game drives, they also check behind the bushes for lions before we actually "mark our territory".

October marks the end of the dry season. The days are HOT and mostly dry. Residents call October "suicide month" because of the heat. The upside is that this provides perfect game viewing time because the animals congregate in unusually large numbers at waterways. The rainy season usually begins in November and the animals tend to disperse and disappear within the heavy vegetation growth. We stay at the Chobe Game Lodge in the park because our original tented lodge was undergoing renovations. Chobe Game Lodge is quite an upgrade, and we enjoy our visit.



We enjoy many boat rides on the Chobe River and game drives in the early morning and evenings when the animals are more active. Our typical days start with a wakeup knock at 5:30 am, small breakfast at 6 am, off to game viewing by vehicle, walking or boating by 6:30 am for three plus hours.



Michael and Moses are our Chobe park guides. We enjoy a brunch at 11 am most days, with quiet time (learning and discovery on our own) also referenced as "L&D" until "teas and coffees" are served at 4 pm. Then we are off to another boat ride or game drive until dark. We eat dinner late (7-8 pm) then off to bed by 10 pm. One night, while walking back to our room in the dark, we spy a LARGE African porcupine in our headlamp beams. The porcupine waddles away as my mom and I watch him wiggle his quills in the glow of the moonlight.



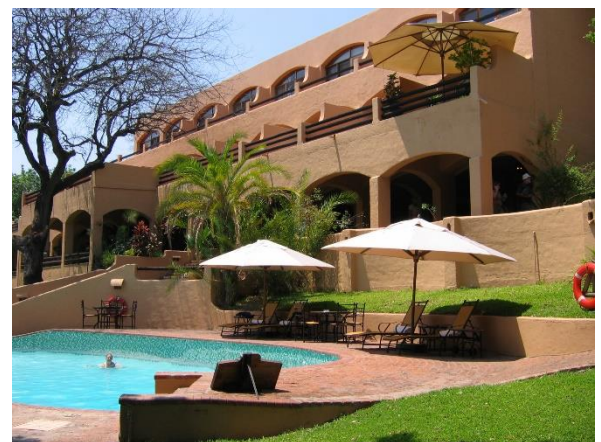


Ugly warthogs root around our hotel compound daily. Despite their frightening appearance, they are gentle creatures. I approach them easily to snap photos. They are singularly focused on snuffling and stooping on their knees in their relentless quest for food.



During L&D times (~2-4 pm), we usually hang out in our rooms and sweat underneath our fans. It is too hot to do much else. We are not allowed to walk outside of any common hotel/camp areas without a guide. At Chobe, walking in the park is prohibited.

Our Chobe hotel has a swimming pool (major luxury of the trip until we reach Vic Falls again at the end of our trip). Chobe is an internationally renowned park and lodge. On the drive into Chobe our first day, the first vehicle manages to spot a fleeing leopard (Mom and I miss it). We later try to ensure maximum chances for wildlife spotting by splitting into separate groups. Our group becomes immediately enamored of [the species checklist notebook](#) that OAT gave us. Yes, the question is asked by someone in our group that if we have ostrich on the menu (and eat it) can we check it off our species list?





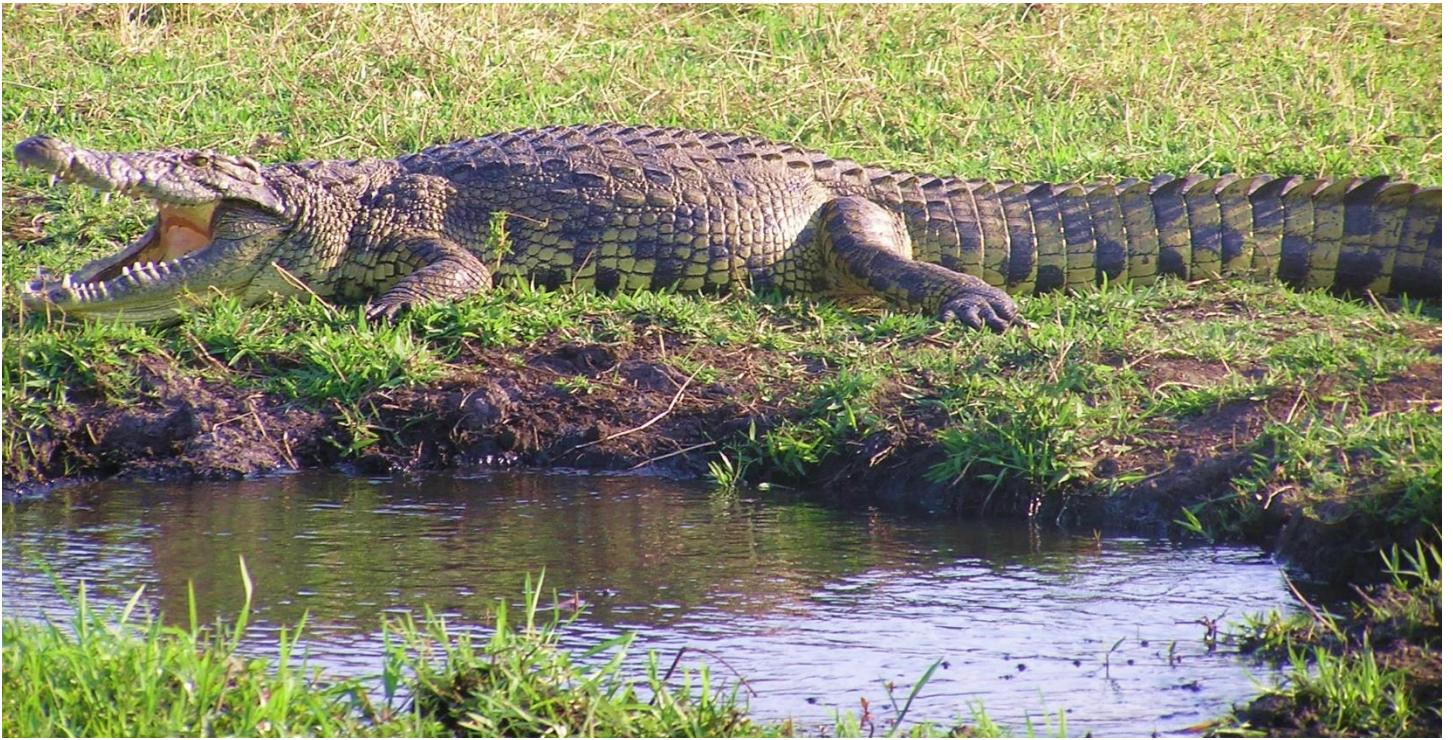
Later in our trip we see an ostrich, so the question becomes moot, but I think it is funny and note it in my journal. I decide to give this story that name because it reflects the sheer quantity of animals we saw and our fascination with them. Other items on the menu that we eat are Springbok Stroganoff, Impala steak, Ostrich Normandy, Kudu Stew, Minced venison (hamburger from a wild animal), baked beans on toast for breakfast (British favorite), and my personal favorite "Sweet & Sour Warthog". Another favorite southern African treat is biltong. Biltong (like beef jerky) can be made from many types of animals; kudu, impala, buffalo, ostrich, etc.... We enjoy a magical evening BBQ at rivers edge tonight. A brilliant full moon reflects off the Chobe river's silvery surface and shadows outline the tangled driftwood piles in the middle of the river.



At Chobe we see lions, giraffes, zebras, African Fish Eagles (like our US Bald Eagle) and hundreds of elephants (we end up seeing 350 elephants one day) on the Namibian (nameebyan) side of the river. The elephants regularly swim across the river to graze on the Namibian marshy side. Hippos abound here along with impala, kudu, and many other antelopes. We see our biggest crocodile of the trip on a boat trip during our stay at Chobe. This croc is a monster. The nearby Namibian side of the river has no organized villages. Some scattered local Namibian's fish in the river and sell their catch to the Botswana residents on the other side of the river. No one swims in the river.















My most memorable impression of Chobe is the sheer volume of the huge lumbering and water loving elephants. They come so close to our vehicles I can almost touch them. The elephants mock charge us at times, protectively shelter their young calves and cake/spray themselves with mud/dust constantly. Elephant dung is everywhere. How do you tell if the dung is from a male or female (taste it- not really) or young or old (size and consistency)? Elephants only have 6 sets of teeth in their lifetime and when they get old, they cannot chew as well, and their dung reflects rougher materials.

The smell of elephant dung is not that bad (musty and earthy odor) and the piles of dung are everywhere. Locals even make paper out of dung. The elephants' ears (shaped like the continent of Africa) constantly sway back and forth like slowly flapping cooling fans. Elephants can walk incredibly quietly and sneak beside us so easily which is amazing considering their mammoth size. The young baby elephants do not even know how to use their trunks yet. Elephants snorkel their trunks through the water while swimming and spraying cooling water. I cannot take enough pictures of them and at times can almost reach out and touch them (but I do not) when they pass by our vehicle. Some elephants mock charge us but do not seem to be serious. We quietly watch the elephant warning displays. Sometimes, I inwardly gasp when the elephants trumpet loudly in warning. At other times I can hear the elephants low rumbling sounds as they communicate with each other. The sound seems comforting and soothing, especially for the young elephants. The elephant foot prints in the fine sand display a spidery delicate outline of every foot pad wrinkle in the fine dust as they pass around us on the road. I cannot get enough of these amazing giants. Even at the end of our trip, we continue to photograph elephants with amazement and gratitude. The dessert plate artistically represents tiny cinnamon outlines of elephants.



I bring home an elephant hair bracelet from Vic Falls to remind me of their strength and grace. Thula shows us a movie of a rare pride of lions that specialized in killing elephants. Moses explains that there are right-handed elephants (those who like digging with their right tusks) and left-handed elephants (ditto but left side tuskers.....).



We see many elephants with broken, single only or missing both tusks. When you visibly see what they do with these tusks, digging in the soil, ripping tree bark it is understandable why their tusks can get damaged. We find pieces of tusk later in the trip and find them incredibly dense (very heavy for their size).



Our guides (Michael and Moses) have a depth of knowledge you cannot find in books and take care to describe everything in the most interesting of details. Everyone speaks English which makes life and communication much easier. There are more than 50 languages in this region, but English is the tie that binds. Most Africans have an English name (or nickname) along with an African name.

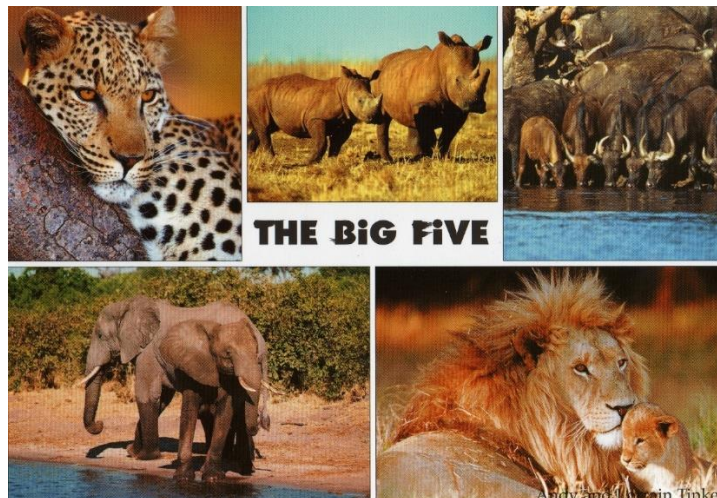
After a few days, I play the rubber snake trick on both of our guides and Moses has the most spectacular reaction of all our guides on the entire trip. He jumped back at least 3 feet from the truck seat where I placed the snake. He thought it was a real African puff adder. All the guides are good natured about this prank and ask to keep our valuable rubber rattlesnake. It is traveled to so many continents and rivers that I just cannot give it up at this stage for sentimental reasons.



Impalas are everywhere and I think of the phrase "you've seen one impala; you've seen them all". They are the "McDonalds" of the bush in more ways than one. Most carnivores eat impalas (lions prefer bigger game such as Cape Buffalo) and they have an "M" marking on their hindquarters - the original African "fast food". We also find some spotted hyenas and the "other" vehicle spots the leopard again. Mom and I miss a leopard again by forgetting and riding in the same vehicle.

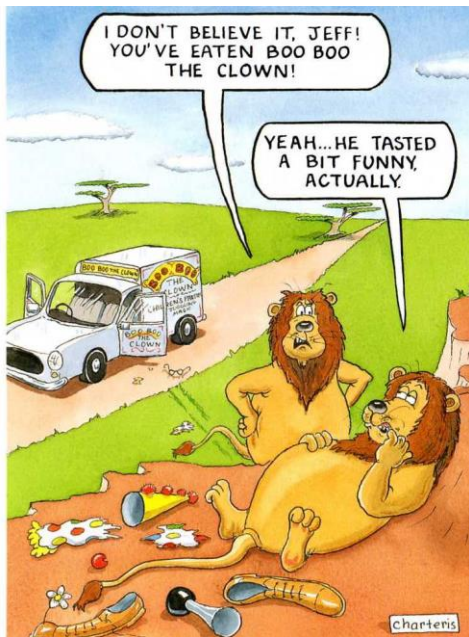
**What I learned today and yesterday: 1. The Big Five (and little five)....2. What groups of animals are called...?**

1. **Big Five:** Leopard, Lion, Cape Buffalo, Rhino, Elephant --- **Little five:** Leopard Tortoise, Ant Lion, Buffalo Weaver, Rhino Beetle, Elephant Shrew



**2. What Groups of Animals are called:** pride of lions (females, males, cubs), coalition of lions (male only), clan of hyena, pack of wild dog, troop of baboons, an office of Secretary birds, flock of doves, covey of hens, school of bream, tower of giraffe's (if they are not moving), jenny of giraffe's (if they are moving) and my personal favorite- a dazzle of zebras.





We celebrate Mom's birthday while at Chobe and Thula arranges for a cake at dinner. Before we left the US, I got Mom a special Birthday card - that I do not really get - but loved the lion theme on it. I thought it was perfect for our trip. I gave Mom a Korean face mask treatment which we both enjoy later in the trip and an activity of her choice once we reach Vic Falls at the end of the trip (African dance). Michael sweats out two flat tires on his last morning game drive with half our group and they hustle to make the tire changes in 15 minutes flat (both), and he drives full tilt back to camp (fishtailing in the sandy turns) to make sure the entire group can catch our next flight out as a group.

More about our OAT guide Thula Manzini: His name means "quiet one". His full name means "advocating for peace". Thula is 33 years old, has been guiding since 1996, he has 8 brothers and three sisters, is married to Busie, and has a ~5-year-old son Lenson and a baby girl due in January 2007. He lives in Victoria Falls and is from Zimbabwe, has lived and worked in Zimbabwean (hotels and restaurants) and went to school through the age of 17.



## **Mudumo and Caprivi Strip in Namibia, October 10-13, 2006 :**

Land of the hippo on the Kwando River. We fly in our first series of smaller planes (still a big one - 11-seater and one small 5-seater). I had breakfast before flying along with a Dramamine to avoid motion sickness. I felt awful - I should have skipped breakfast and will do that on future flying trips. We flew to the Caprivi Strip region and Mudumo National Park in Namibia. The Chobe river actually starts in Angola called the Cuando (Portuguese influence), turns into the Kwando river in Namibia, shifts to the name Linyante for a short period in Botswana and then to the Chobe name further downstream in Botswana and then flows into the Zambezi river at the end of its course. A summary note about the Caprivi Strip; in 1890, Germans traded Zanzibar to the British for the Caprivi Strip portion of land that leads to the Zambezi river. The Germans wanted access to a navigable waterway (Zambezi river) that led to the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, the Germans signed the contract before knowing about the un-navigable Victoria Falls (Zambezi River) hurdle and then wanted to un-do the deal. British said, "no way" and Germans were stuck. Note: know all the facts before signing on the dotted line!

We stay at Lianshulu wilderness camp associated with the main Lianshulu lodge. The way to get to our camp is long and convoluted. I will try to describe it as simple as possible. We fly to a dirt airstrip at the edge of the Kwando river where a boat is waiting for us. We trudge across the Kalahari sands to reach the boats. Then we float to the Botswana border guard post (no pictures allowed) where the military is well-armed with guns and seem serious about stamping our passports. A few of us sneak some photos (not me). Our guide miscalculates the shoreline, and we bump into the riverbank knocking over Cecile (lands okay inside the boat) and others barely catch their balance. Then we continued to the main Lianshulu lodge for lunch and feeding of the big croc.

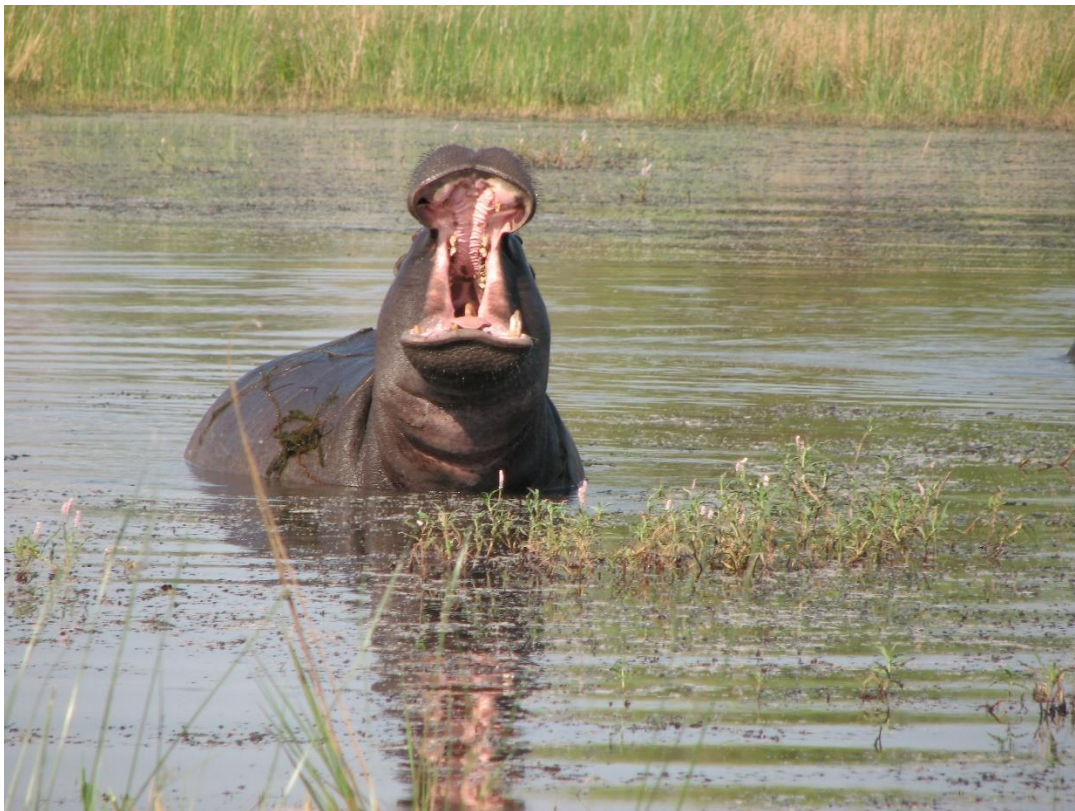
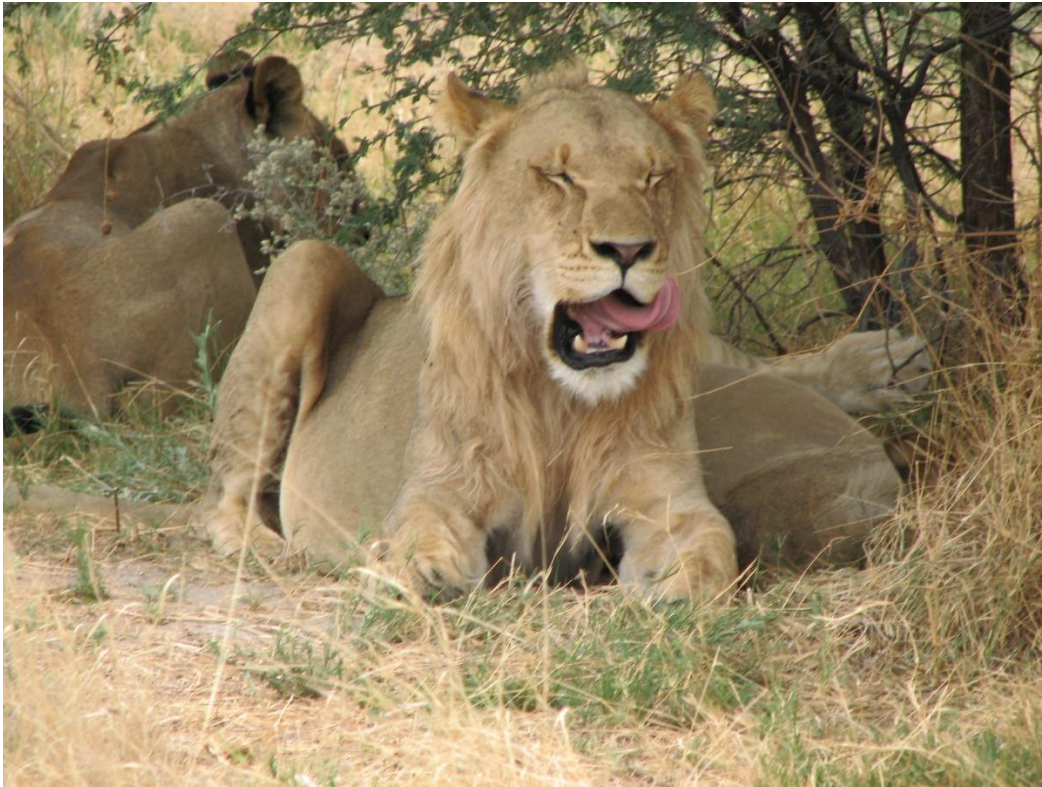
Finally, we head to the smaller Lianshulu wilderness camp. On the return trip Bonnie pranks the group by secretly convincing a Botswana border patrol guard to escort her by the scruff of collar back to our boat. We fall for this trick "hook, line and sinker" until she breaks out laughing along with the border guard.

The Kwando river could have been the location for the movie "African Queen" starring Bogart and Hepburn. I can completely imagine Bogart dragging our boat through the swampy reeds, scraping the leeches off his body, and sweat pouring off his head. We see a funny sausage tree and "fly" through the narrow river channels (called the Hippo Highway) observing hippos, crocs, and elephants. The camp elephant is called "Lonesome George" and routinely makes a lonely daily appearance. On the way back from an evening boat ride we pass some local villagers standing by a campfire along the river bank preparing to stay out all night fishing and getting eaten alive by the mosquitoes. We are bombarded on the boat ride back every night by small black gnats. As dusk settles the black gnats can coat your teeth if you are not careful. Herb and Cecile use bug netting to avoid the black gnats in their faces and teeth.





Mom mumbles something about a whale as she cross checks her species checklist tonight, maybe the mosquitoes are giving her imagination a ride. There is still joking about checking off the ostrich as we have not seen one yet.





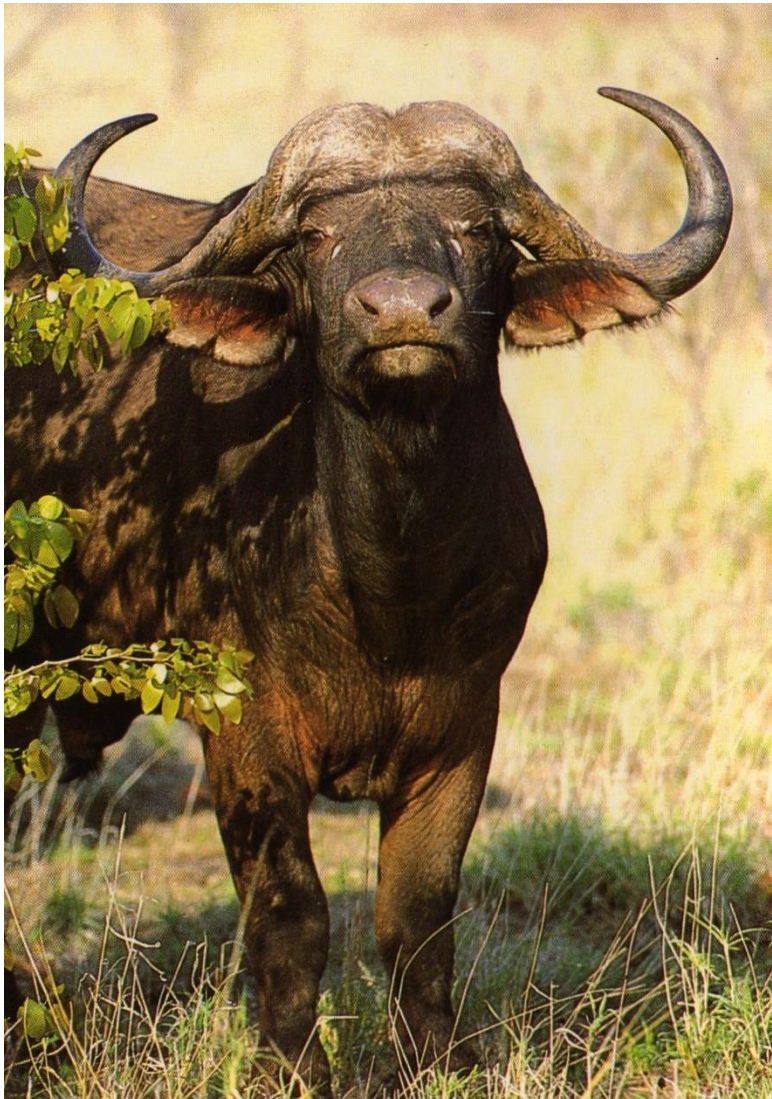
My most memorable association with this park is the numerous black shiny bulbous shapes of the mighty hippos in the papyrus reed lined Kwando River channels and cultural interaction with local villagers and school children. We see a vast number of hippos and at night they plod through our camp munching on the juicy grasses. Every night, I can hear the hippos chewing on the other side of our canvas room "walls". Our rooms are equipped with transparent mosquito netting because there are lots of mosquitoes at this camp. I am glad I am taking my malaria pills every night but do not like the vivid anxious filled dreams (side effect from the pills) that come along with them. They are not really nightmares but silly dreams about running away from something or not getting a task done or people not understanding what I am trying to warn them about. The names of our bug sprays are "Peaceful Night" for our skin, "Doom" for the whole room bug kill aerosol spray and mosquito coils that smoke the buggers out. Many other animals roam these swampy waterways including elephant, giraffe, and cape buffalo.



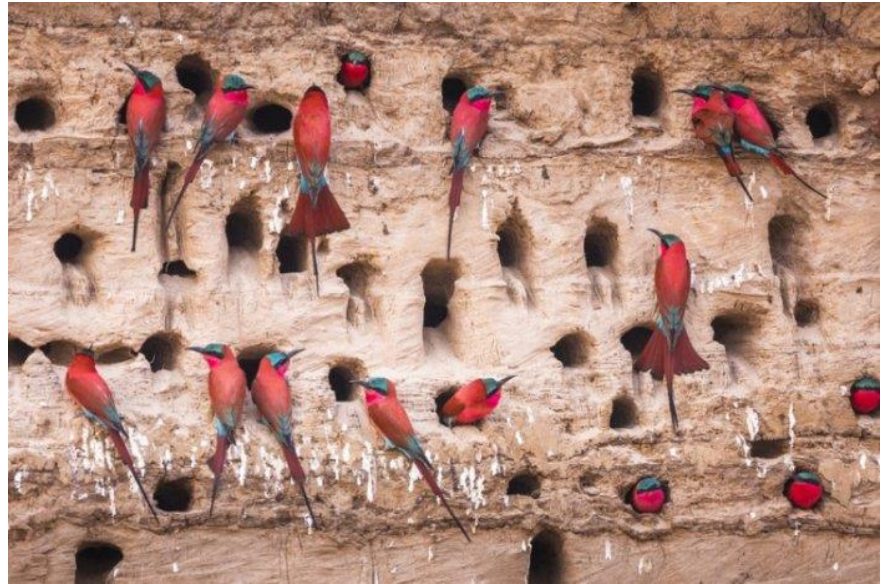








I am not a birder but there are lots of them in Africa. My favorite is the Carmine Bee eater, a gaudy bird that nests in holes pecked out of the muddy riverbank walls. We are required to have escorts to and from rooms after dark and the camp generator shuts off in the night ~10pm until 5:30 am. Our lightweight Wal-Mart headlamp flashlights come in very handy on this trip. On our boat cruises down the narrow river channels, I think that the hippos could easily push our light aluminum boat over, but they typically duck under the water when we come near. Sometimes we keep an eye on their rising mass of bubbles and when we lose sight of the bubbles, everyone



searches frantically near the boat for that telltale trace of the hippos' underwater path. Once, we surprised a hippo and her calf on shore just a few feet away from us and she got a bit aggressive. Next time we passed that particularly trampled area of reeds along the river path, we buzzed by quickly to avoid a second confrontation. Mother hippos can be extremely aggressive when it comes to protecting their young calves.

All our wilderness tented camps have thin canvas "walls", two real beds, lights, towels, toilet, sink and shower with hot & cold water. Some have mosquito netting if we are in a region that needs it. Thank goodness it cools off at night and we can sleep without being too hot. At our first camp, we arrived in the heat of the afternoon and I thought it was crazy to have heavy blankets on our beds. Thankfully, it cools off at night. We are the only guests at the wilderness tented camps. Each camp has anywhere from 10-~25 employees who live on site for many months at a time.

Everyone has a specific job (scullery ie dishwasher, cook, maid, laundress, supervisor, camp manager, guide/driver, laborer, etc...). We tip the guides and staff as a group at the end of each three-day visit. I am so grateful for the laundry service at each camp since we only have 4 outfits which I keep rotating. We get very sweaty every day and it is nice to take a shower when it gets hot.

I have noticed that the rest of the group is seriously outpacing my photography efforts. To make up for my less than stellar volume of pictures, I write in my journal nightly. Plus, the rest of the group has much more powerful and fancier cameras than mine, so I am just not too motivated to spend too much time taking photos. Every game drive or boat ride is different, and we call it a nature drive if we do not see many animals (which is rare). Each lodge is unique. Our guides at this camp are Jon and Victor - lots of fun.

We end up meeting Jon's wife at the Kasane airport later in the trip who is also an OAT guide. I have noticed that many men work for long periods (3-6 months at a time) far away from their families and wives. Unemployment is about 40% and any job is extremely valued. Cost of goods and inflation make jobs that have access to US money a coveted occupation. Victor shared with me that he was first interested in becoming a guide through a Children in Wilderness program within a company called Wilderness Safari. Victor did not immediately follow that occupation path but took a side detour by studying to be a motor mechanic as a young man. Mainly because he also loved to drive but after two months Victor decided being a mechanic



was not his cup of tea. Victor has been a guide for 8 years at Lianshulu. Victor (and Maureen) have a laugh that is contagious to the rest of us. When they laugh, we laugh.

Thula shares his personal story of how he got married in his culture. In fact, we have several cultural activities on this section of the trip (school and village visits). Thula shares his personal proposal/marriage story in the description below but explains this is commonly how the marriage process is done in his culture. In his early 20's, Thula met a special girl that he considered for a wife (her name was Busie) . Thula did not ask either sets of parents (his or hers) for permission to marry his chosen bride (Busie) but asked his uncle for permission. Young adults do not talk to their parents about relationships or potential brides. Girls require a dowry from the men proposing marriage - it cost Thula 7 cows to marry Busie (cows were given to Busie's father). Thula's uncle first listened to Thula about the possible match, consulted with both sides (intermediary role), uncle approved it (sometimes they do not), approached Busie's family and negotiated the deal. Busie and Thula married in 1999 and had their first child approximately two years after they married. Interesting that the dowry is not required to be paid up until the first child is born. Fortunately for Thula, his father-in-law was generous and allowed Thula to pay the cash equivalent of 7 cows (today's value including inflation) because with 9 boys in his family Thula's father did not have enough cows to give every son enough cows to marry. Thula's new father-in-law must have really liked Thula because he extended the payment and allowed Thula to pay his 7-cow equivalent on time (Thula made the final payment just a few weeks ago).

Not too different than some US parents financing the cost of their daughter's wedding. We think we are so different but really, we have many similar customs. FYI: Thula and Busie are expecting their second child (an ultrasound confirmed

Thula's sureness that it is a girl) in January. Cows are highly sought after and rarely slaughtered- only if cash is needed (maybe once a year). A person's wealth and status are connected to how many cows they own and their family background, especially in the rural areas. One of the guides told me that a man who owns 100 cows would be considered wealthy. I guess Tom and Carol (our California dairy owners in the group) would be considered millionaires in Africa. Our guide Jon shows us how a man proclaims his affection (in public) to a girlfriend by placing a flower Day Lily necklace around Carol's neck. Victor and Jon teach us to make our own Day Lily necklaces.



Lizauli traditional village and school visits: On our way into the village, we pass a local butcher hacking up his dead cow with an axe - he must have needed cash! The Lizauli village is a demonstration village that provides an occupation for local villagers to share the benefits of tourist visits (through sales of fees and goods) and allow locals to work in the village. I really enjoyed the school visit where my postcards are a great ice breaker.



Students are so intrigued with my postcards from home that show Colorado mountains, flowers, and wildlife. The students were studying Namibian geography today, so our mountain postcards are somewhat relevant. They asked the names of the flowers in my Columbine postcard and what type of mine was in the picture of a Colorado ghost town. I got stuck trying to describe how tall Pikes Peak (4,300 meters) is in relation to their flat landscape. None of the children had been out of this village so using an example of the height of Victoria Falls did not work. The student's geography books are open to the page on how to read topographical maps (relief drawings), but they just do not have anything big enough to relate to our altitudes. Jon (our guide) said I should have explained that it was higher than 1,000 baobab trees stacked vertically one on top of the other. That would have impressed them!

The boys (surprise, surprise- same the world over) were mesmerized by my pictures of US animals (bison, big horn sheep, mule deer). During this entire trip, every man or boy that looked at my mule deer picture was fascinated by the antlers! I asked what the students wanted to do once they finished school (girls- nurses and teachers, boys- engineers or auto mechanics). All the students I spoke to planned on leaving their village to find jobs. The students were fascinated with the postcards and I promised to give them to Thula at the end of our trip and he would donate them to the school the next time he came back (which he does on a regular basis). I highly recommend bringing postcards or pictures from home on any trip out of the country, it is a great conversation starter. I used them at every place we stayed to start lively discussions/conversation with local villagers and guides. It opens the door to allow me to ask them about their lives when I share pictures and answer questions about my home. My Mom





also brought pictures/postcards and the students enjoyed seeing her grandchildren and pictures of my father and her cross-country skiing. The students enjoyed discovering that my mother and I were traveling together on this trip.

The two girls next to me wanted to be teachers (their names were Emily and ?- I forgot her name). Emily told me her favorite subject was math! She should probably aspire to be an engineer (unlikely in this culture). The other girl had her book open and was studying business management. She shared her notebook with me, and it outlined the key principles of a good manager (open and honest communication was at the top of her list). Tourism is a fast-growing economic driver in this region, and it is good to see that the teachers recognize the need for tourism-oriented studies. The students were amazed that snow exists at our home and coats are worn in the winter. Emily commented that this (snow) must be why we are so white and that their hot Namibian sun is why they are so black. We laugh together and they say they could never survive the snow and cold!



We had to tear ourselves away from the children. I left a donation of several boxes of colored pencils (yes...part of my 26 lbs. luggage) for the teachers- for them to distribute to the neediest students or as rewards for good performance in school. A board of teachers and parents of children (like our PTA) decides how to distribute the donated items and \$ so that it will best benefit the local school/village (and students). Most students are poor, and every little bit helps. The rest of our group managed to take a lot of children photos, but I only took a couple because I spent most of the time talking.

The Lizauli village visit is a treat, and they show us all the typical necessities and comforts of home in a typical rural African village. Music (instruments), dance, fire pit (African bush TV), rodent control (homemade mouse traps), beds, grain (mainly millet and maize) pounding pestle, cooking area (kitchen), ironsmiths (workshop), kraal (garage for the cows), basket weaving & wood carving areas (hobby and money-making ventures) and food pantries (separate grain hut) make up the typical extended family enclosure compound. Virtually nothing goes to waste and recycling is a necessary part of their lives. Villagers do not actually live in this demonstration village. The community created this cooperative demonstration village to share the tourism opportunities with the entire village area (spread the wealth) rather than favor one village or family compound (creating have's and have nots). Villagers get the opportunity to work at the village in a rotational basis and display their wares in a central area which fairly markets everyone's wares and shares the dollars gained by working at the village among many villagers. It is really a well thought out project.



In 1995, Namibia began a rural water well project that planned for villagers across the country to have access to clean water within 2 ½ km of their homes. We pass one of these wells and can see first-hand how this made the village life easier. They no longer need to carry water immense distances and can plant (and water) small gardens of vegetables (such as kale and rape) for subsistence consumption. The government supplied the initial funds and engineers to sink the wells, each village must maintain the pumps and budget funds to replace parts. It is such a basic commodity that we take for granted but a huge benefit that is only recently changed their lives. Another project begun by the Lianshulu Lodge is thatch sales. Villagers used to burn leftover thatch in October (after the harvest season) to clear fields and encourage the rains to come (legend that smoke encourages rain). We see evidence of the fresh fires (still smoking embers) in many areas of this region on our game drives.



Lianshulu Lodge managers convinced some villagers to gather the thatch (not burn it) and sell it to the lodges (for their roofs) for money. We see piles of thatch for sale at every dirt path along the main road and tourist lodge builders/buyers across Namibia come to buy this commodity. This project has benefits to the villages and for the wildlife and environment. On a L&D nature walk with our guides, I found a plot of thatch being bundled (a work in progress).

One of our game drives included a visit to the local Mudumo National Park Ranger Station. The rangers (and staff) live in tattered tents inside of a barb wire encased compound - keeps the animals out and equipment secure. The ranger station had many animal skulls on display (rhino, kudu, buffalo, zebra, baboon, hippo, elephant, impala, wart hog, giraffe) along with some ivory. Raw ivory is not allowed to be exported to US and tends to be stockpiled (under lock and key) in Africa.



I particularly enjoyed reading the printed administrative rules in the Ranger Station.

They include "Don't Say" and "Do Say" guidelines for "Mr. Big or Mr. Boss". On the way to the ranger station, we pass beautiful campsites along the river and when we return, I try to talk Ron (relief camp manager) to camp out with me tonight. The potential nightly danger from lions and crocs precludes the allowance for this type of adventure.



We enjoy a traditional African Potjiekos dinner (stew and milli meal - polenta) and eat with our hands (village tradition). Potjiekos are similar to a Dutch Oven. Ron told us that during the Boer war, the Dutch ran low on ammunition and filled the smaller Potjiekos with shrapnel and used them as cannon balls. Hippo's snort, snuffle, and splash in the swamp below us while the clinking "champagne" frogs fill the night with their glass tinkling sounds. We stay up late looking for the Southern Cross, talking about US and Zimbabwean family life, political systems, and other topics. Before the trip, I had read that Mugabe (Zimbabwean president) was one of the

most notorious African dictators. Zimbabwe was formerly called Rhodesia after Cecil Rhodes (mining magnate, railroad visionary and founder of Rhodes scholarship). The inflation rate has soared above 1000%



and the people are desperately poor with a great need for affordable goods. \$850,000 Zimbabwean dollars equal \$1 US dollar before they lopped off 3 zeros this past August. Zimbabwean printed money has expiration dates on it saying it was worthless after July 31, 2006. Our US dollars spent on gifts and tips were much appreciated (and I would assume hoarded by the recipients). Families worry about immediate issues such as food and clothes for tomorrow and next week, it is not realistic for most to worry about next year or 5 years from now. Maureen enjoys several after dinner drinks but starts to mix the types of drinks. One of the guides warns her to not mix too many liquors together or she might have a "protein spill". We laugh out loud at his polite phrase of saying "vomit".

### **Okavango Delta in Botswana, October 13-16, 2006:**

We take the long backwards trek (from Lianshulu, Kwando river, small planes to another airstrip to the Moremi Game Reserve (back to Botswana) to visit our next destination - the Okavango Delta. Within 10 minutes of arriving at Moremi we find a pride of lions and ostrich. I guess the ostrich sighting makes Cecile's question moot (we have now eaten and seen an ostrich- so we can "officially" check it off our lists). The male ostrich is strutting with pink forelegs- must be a female around as this is a sign of a breeding/mating pair. We enjoy a picnic lunch on our way to Moremi camp and soak up the views.



One of our special activities at this camp is poling in Mokoro canoes. Poling a Mokoro canoe is much harder than it looks. Maureen and I take a stab at trying this skill and I almost fall in after hearing Maureen laugh and fall into her canoe. Poling requires careful balance and concentration; we are laughing too



hard to manage it. Our ungainly poling attempts pale in comparison to our graceful guides (Max and Richmond). These Mokoro canoes have an exceptionally low profile (draft), and we glide in just a few inches in the shallow water of the Okavango Delta. Hippos live in these waters and we keep a safe distance from them while poling. Poling is slow and quiet travel. Richmond, my guide tells me that he learned at a young age to pole and fell in often as a young boy. Our other guide Max is 6 foot, 6 inches tall and presents a real beanpole image when he poles Maureen and Bonnie in their Mokoro canoe. I am glad we were on land (and not in our mokoro canoes) across the channel and a bit upstream of a charging herd of cape buffalo when they



ran/swam full steam across the swamp channel. The flying dust, flashing hooves, shiny horns, rip snorting and muddy splashing generated by the buffalo was quite a sight.





Moremi camp is special because we sleep in stilted tents and walk between areas using wooden causeways between the main lodge area and our tents. The paths between tents dip down to the ground and Bonnie confronts a hyena on the path one day. Bonnie backed away slowly and all was well. On another day we observed a hyena getting chased away by elephants and the hyena ran through our camp. The elephants angry trumpeting at the hyena created quite an impression. On another nature walk (with our armed guide - Relax) we found ourselves near a herd of elephants that never saw or smelled us. Each experience has been magical. I even found a giraffe skull, wild watermelon, and palm nuts (favorite elephant candy), woven bracelet, leopard, and hyena tracks, lots of bones, warthogs, and baboons on one of our walks.



Relax (yes, that is his name) - our armed guide - was not so relaxed when I played the snake trick on him during one of our walks. I got Carlton - our other guide too. Carlton got his revenge by convincing me to compete with him in an Impala dung spitting contest. My best attempt placed me a foot behind him, but he appreciated my effort. I placed second out of two contestants (Carlton and me); the rest of the group cheered us on from the sidelines as enthusiastic spectators. I started laughing so hard that I accidentally & prematurely spit out one of my Impala dung pellets. When it fell to the ground, I explained to our group that this constituted a 10 second rule and popped it back in my mouth to attempt another long-distance impala dung spit. They howled with laughter.



FYI: Impala dung tastes like a hard jellybean- at least I did not swallow or bite into one by accident. Carlton has a whole-body technique that allows him to spit his Impala dung pellet a long way, like a shot putter using his body to hurl the shot-put. We had fun. Relax and Carlton are really at home in the bush. Carlton teaches me how to "twist and weave" a reed into a cow whip. His whip looks much better than mine! I believe that if Carlton grew up in the Western US, he would have been a biologist- his love of the outdoors and wildlife, tracking ability and knowledge of his environment/ecosystem is quite extensive. Mom and I notice that he really enjoys "the moment" and will quietly appreciate and observe sunsets/landscapes/animals with awe the rest of us. Relax explains the world of the termite mound to us and it is not that simple. The intricate balance within termite mounds is complex and the hard dirt mounds are intertwined in the ecosystem. For example, elephants use the mounds to rest against at night, so it is easier to get up in the morning.



I asked one of the young student village observers assigned to our camp what his favorite birthday meal would be- he answered a "whole roasted chicken and a Coke". Carlton loves polenta and stew! On one game drive we came upon young male elephants sparring within a restful/grazing herd of elephants. Their ivory tusks make a loud clanging sound when they hit each other hard. The afternoons are HOT, 96°F and very humid. We enjoy Mom's birthday face spa masks on a hot afternoon, and it felt so COOL.

Thula makes us a milk/yoghurt Baobab fruit flavored drink (high in Vitamin C)- refreshing but probably an



acquired taste. After a hard rain, the air smelled like eucalyptus and lilac. Guides tell us that camel thorn bark is rubbed off by elephants and Rain Tree blossoms are similar to lilac perfume. Jackals trot across the plains at dusk and we spot hippos wandering on land near water holes after dark using a red filter spotting light. The red spotting light provides a way to find animals by their glowing eyes without blinding them on our ride home in the dark. We have a traditional African Potjiekos dinner again tonight along with dancing.





During our traditional dinner, our "chief" (Herb) and "headman" (Don) are served dinner by their wives (with me serving Mom). During dinner, I could hear the snuffling of Cape Buffalo in the dark behind us (along with their shiny eyes when I pointed my flashlight that way) but they stayed away from our bonfire.

Some of the staff share their everyday Botswana life experiences. Hospitals are free (public), private hospitals are not free, and medication is free. Schools are free and supplies are not free. Mothers and grandmothers stay home and do the chores while children go to school.



This is the camp where we consolidate down to one 26 lb. bag per two people, so we do not overload our next three small planes. We fly to Kasane, drive to Vic Falls, drop one bag at Ilala lodge, drive back to Vic Falls airport, stop by a huge baobab tree reportedly more than 1000 years old and lastly, fly on the smaller planes (3 of them) to our next park, Hwange.





**Hwange (*wangay*) National Park in Zimbabwe (means house of stones), October 16-19, 2006:**

Our guides (Themba and Lewis) greet us on the short dirt airstrip. Lewis helped build the airstrip by dragging a steel and tire rack behind his truck. Our drivers take this opportunity to pretend we are in a wild motor-cross race to get us to Linkwasha #2 camp quickly. Later, we spy a big male lion on the open savannah (part of a 4-brother coalition). These four lion brothers are in their prime and large. In fact, while watching one lion, a second lion snuck up behind our vehicle and laid down. We started backing up without realizing this and almost ran over this second lion. In fact, the lion stood up, faced us, became angry (twitched its tail- bad sign). We are startled and the guides joked about needing new pants after this incident. My gut instinct was to prepare to throw my backpack at the lion as a distraction and then yell for our guide to slam on the gas pedal. This large male lion was terribly close. Even worse is that this male lion is limping from an injury 3 weeks ago. He is probably extra irritated with us and hungry! Mom lets out a little gasp when he stalks over to our other vehicle and stares them down while closely circling the vehicle. We drive a short distance away to share a local water hole (not a bar) with an elephant herd for happy hour. We chatter excitedly about this close encounter while glancing carefully at the dark shadowy bush.









The contact calls the lion makes are unsettling (guttural and the sound travels far) and we hear them roar nightly in camp. We see the lion footprints around and in camp daily. One lion comes down to drink at the waterhole in full view of our lodge. Another time a lion grunted his contact calls as he strolled by in full view of a large wildebeest herd. The wildebeest were very unsettled but did not run away, they knew he was not hunting but snorted and sneezed their disapproval at his presence. Lewis mentions one local large pride of lions (20 in number) that is a "killing machine". Lions really are the kings of this ecosystem; they are not scared of anyone or anything.



Rania, a young woman camp supervisor, is smart as a whip. We enjoy convincing Thula that getting his son a cell phone when he is a teenager is not necessary. Most Africans have cell phones because landlines are notoriously unreliable. Mom, Rania, and I gang up on Thula's arguments about safety for his son when he is older. Thula attempts to bribe us away from our discussion by distracting us with dessert.



Baboons are noisy primates and fight a lot during the hot afternoons and early mornings. I do not think baboons are very smart. Baboons spend a large amount of time high up in trees, when they sense danger, they immediately climb DOWN the trees and start running around on the ground screaming. It appears to me that this would make them more vulnerable. Laundry staff do all laundry except for personal "delicates" so Rania warns us NOT to leave our underwear outside to dry on a bush because the baboons will snatch them. Well, Maureen must test that theory and she discovers her underpants go missing. Yup, somewhere out in the African bush, I can just picture a baboon family wearing Maureen's underpants on their heads and/or batting them around at the nearest local water hole.



The rains threaten to come (yeah) and a thunderstorm knocks out power to our generator for one day/night. The "Flying Mechanic" is called in, he clears a hidden breaker, and the power is back on the next day. We enjoy a dinner by candlelight and fire in the boma pit. Thula explains all about witch doctors (Sangomas) and their role and use by Africans today. After the rain tonight, savannah around our fire smells like sweet mahogany (is there such a thing?) and teak wood smoke. Many years ago, Hwange park staff drilled water wells, installed pumps and created water holes for the animals. There are few rivers in this park. These man-made water holes have created controversy when last year's drought created a starvation situation for animals. Elephants, antelope, wildebeest, and other animals were said to have forgotten how to migrate to rivers far away when drought hits and natural grazing forage disappears.

Hwange is bordered by the Cape to Cairo railroad line (another Cecil Rhodes project- which was never completed and stops in Vic Falls). On the other side of the railroad lies a private hunting concession. The animals avoid that area just like elk know when hunting season starts in Colorado. Lion hunting has been banned for the last two years in Hwange (research determined any lion hunting was not sustainable) and the lions know it. The lions now visit the hunt camp across the railroad tracks for an easy offal and carcass meal. "Leftovers" that attract passing lions are a byproduct from the hunters and have not yet been processed by the porters who butcher and eat/sell that meat. Occasionally, a train hits an elephant on the tracks and derails. I gather that the old decrepit train (and train tracks) are a dangerous way to travel.

Tendai (Linkwasha camp manager) takes us on a nature walk where we spot a tall giraffe peaking at us and find a snare set by poachers (we remove it). One awful sight is an elephant that has no trunk (amputated by a vagrant poacher's snare). So sad. The giraffe's face is so interesting. Their eyes are soft and friendly looking as they peer at us with their long eyelashes. Giraffes are curious (always peeking around or over a tree limb) and move their gangly legs slowly and carefully. I never once heard a giraffe make a noise.



Large shiny black Dung beetles are out and flying about, Tendai captures one for us and I hold it. Its claws are pointy and hard and dig into my palm. It is quite large. They breed in elephant dung (and other large dung) using different techniques. Some dung beetles dig into dung and revel in its round stink, others fight over it with other dung beetles and roll it into a big ball and into the bush. We laugh out loud during one dung beetle wrestling match. We find one zebra with its tail bitten off and a long claw like scar on its rump. I bet this is one that got away from a lion! My favorite bird calls on the trip is from the "work harder" bird - called the Cape Turtle Dove (in the early morning locals call it the "good morning" call and at the end of the day it sounds like "drink lager"). It is repetitive mid-morning call sounds exactly like "work harder, work harder, work harder" repeated and we hear it everywhere we travel!



Each guide must pass a series of tests and proficiency exams (written, oral and marksmanship) to be a professional guide. Their knowledge base covers animals, plants, safety, first aid, marksmanship, business planning, trip coordination and planning, languages, accounting, customer service, mechanical skills and much more. They must purchase their own guns (expensive 0.375 rifle with big 4-inch bullets costs \$2,000 US). It took Tendai two years to save up for his gun. It is a Czech rifle with no scope (not allowed on guide guns). And yes, all our guides have had to use the gun (in defense) at some point in their career.

We were supposed to visit another school near Hwange, but politics have interfered with those plans. About a month ago, Zimbabwean National Parks started enforcing a previously unenforced fee policy for entry/exit from parks if even for only a few hours. Our school visit would have fallen in that policy. This is another way to collect more fee - not to be mistaken for corruption?! Local villages and concessionaires have joined to protest this policy enforcement however, the negotiations are at a stalemate. Meanwhile, school and village visits associated with tourism in Zimbabwe parks have come to a halt and the economy in those villages has suffered. Students and tourists alike are the losers in this disagreement. I am disappointed but know that they will probably negotiate a compromise to satisfy the parks need for increased fees. Politics are not too different in many parts of the world.

Our last evening game drive at Hwange/Linkwasha camp was considered a sparse game drive until I tallied up the animals, we saw that night (ostriches, zebra, buffalo, elephants, sable, many birds, wildebeest, jackals, giraffe, and lions). I am sure we initially felt that game was sparse because we have not spotted a rhino yet. Hmmm, are we getting a bit complacent?! It is funny how our perspective has changed from the beginning of our trip at Chobe to the end (Hwange). We are treated to a wonderful interactive drumming and dancing display from the staff. Tendai, Lewis (the poet), Rania and Themba make this camp special.

My favorite dance was the Gold Miners "Cleaning the Shoes" dance. It was about gold miners who worked in South Africa and how they cleaned their shoes at the end of a long day. Themba explained that his

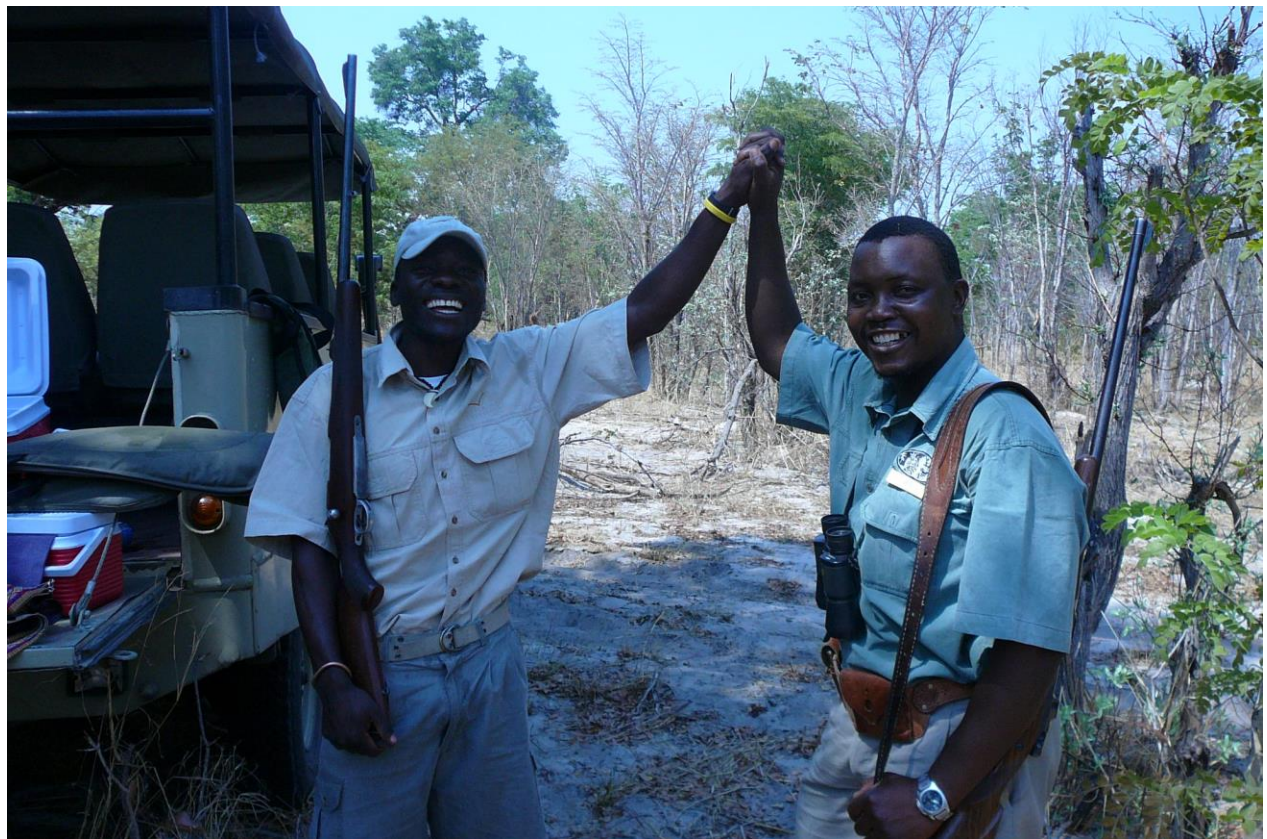


grandfather worked in the mines, taught his father this dance who then taught Themba (who is good at this dance). Their dance footwork was fast and furious to match the drumbeat . I loved it. Themba fooled us by pretending to fall and hurt his back during the dance and then leapt to his feet to continue. He had me completely fooled. Everyone had their own rendition of this dance, kind of like a chorus of footwork from each person as they took their turn in the firelight spotlight. They asked us to show them an American dance and we looked so pathetic compared to their robust dancing. Bob and Carrie waltzed and the rest of us Hokie Pokied under Cecile's lead mainly because we could not think of anything else. Africans sure do live a more vibrant life than we do!

Our last morning in Hwange was supposed to be a leisurely drive to a location for a game walk. A few minutes into our drive, Tendai got a radio call saying that the rhino had been spotted a short distance away (about 15 minutes or so). He turned to us and asked us what we wanted to do. Of course, we jumped on the opportunity and told him to stomp on the gas pedal and not let Lewis pass us on our way to the rhino spotting. On the way, we did not even slow down for a passing male lion and a female lioness. In fact, we were so obsessed no one even pulled out their camera for the lions. Support bras were in full use on this wild ride. We got to the rhino location and the spotter told us the rhino had just disappeared into the bush. We had missed the rhino. Not to fear, Tendai and Lewis made a quick decision. They circled our vehicles downwind, parked at the end of the brushy area where the rhino had last been spotted, got us out of the car, guns at the ready and asked us if we wanted to go on foot. Of course, with no hesitation, we gave a united "YES"! Single file and quickly with Tendai leading the way, Lewis catching the rear, 14 of us silently followed Tendai into the bush. This was amazing because we have never been that quiet. Tendai quickly found the rhino's fresh tracks on a relatively large game path and we were off on our chase. The rhino meandered a bit but Tendai never lost its tracks. I do not think we were ever more than about 10 minutes behind the rhino (we even found two of his fresh urine marks and a warm dung pile) but were struggling to keep up with the rhino (which we had not seen yet). Tendai was certain we could catch it when it stopped to graze and encouraged the group to keep the faith. TWO HOURS later (of fast walking) we DID!

Tendai halted, signaled Lewis to circle around, sensing that the rhino was near and watched from the back of our group. Lewis was tracking so close to the ground that he almost walked directly into the grazing rhino (we were downwind, so the rhino did not sense us). Then the rhino came into full view between the dense scrub bushes/trees. We immediately crouched down close to the ground and froze. Tendai flanked us (gun at the ready just in case) to provide a distraction in case the rhino unexpectedly saw or smelled us and decided to charge. We crept around at his signal and got within about 30 feet of the rhino using bushes as cover and crawling on our stomach/hands/knees. I did not get any photos of the rhino but could clearly see him. My camera kept focusing on the close in shrubs and would not focus behind the cover where the rhino posed for us. Those in our group with better cameras got some photos. However, the entire adventure of tracking and finding the rhino is burned into my memory. We watched the rhino for about 20-30 minutes until he sensed our presence. The rhino's eyesight is poor, but their sense of smell is good. The rhino started peering our direction and we faded backwards on Tendai's signal. I felt that I held my breath the entire time. This was so special! We hiked back to a cutoff, sending Lewis back to the vehicles to drive one around so we did not have a two hour walk back.









*The Rhino Stalkers!*

While we waited for Lewis, Maureen, and Bonnie (X-ray techs) helped us piece back together a Sable skeleton. Lewis ran back to the vehicles (took a shortcut) and drove back relatively quickly, and we piled into one vehicle for our shuttle back. Even, Tendai and Lewis exclaimed afterwards how rare this event was. Everyone (including our guides) were bursting with pride and excitement after tracking and finding the rhino successfully with our large group. We gave high fives to each other after that adventure. In hindsight, I have no idea what I would have done if the rhino would have charged. There were no big trees to climb or hide behind. There were bushes everywhere but the rhino could have flattened those in one second. Oh well, I am glad I did not have to think about it at the time, guess I would have tried to run away and hope that the rhino did not want to chase me. About half our group completed their "Big Five" viewing experience after our rhino stalk. Mom and I saw four of the "Big Five" and many other animals. We exceeded our expectations for the trip. I never thought that we would get so close to this many animals and have the experiences that we had. I think it is amazing that the lions took the backseat to the rhino today. Our group leaves Hwange in two waves (two planes first) then a single plane that came much later.



**Victoria Falls National Park in Zimbabwe, October 19-21, 2006:**







We arrive in two groups to Vic Falls (Ilala Lodge) and ten of us (minus Mom, Carol, Tom, Herb and Cecile) enjoy Thula's tour of Victoria Falls (one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World). Grand Canyon and the Rio de Janeiro harbor are two other wonders that I have visited which makes a total of 3 of the 7 for me. Victoria Falls are big (~350 feet high), wide (~1 mile), thunderous, white, and green and stupendous. I spend two hours and thoroughly enjoy the many varied views. The water is low (dry season), and I can only imagine the volume of water that must pour over the lip of these series of cataracts during high water. I fall behind our group and linger at each overlook gazing at the mist and enjoy the spray coating my glasses and head. The cool rain/spray from the cataracts feels great because it has been so hot. The lush vegetation hugs the cliff edges no doubt watered by the constant overspray of water. I can only imagine the explorer Livingstone reaching this "Smoke that Thunders" portion of the Zambezi river (and Victoria Falls) and finding this awesome cataract. It had to be a heck of a horizon line (in the whitewater world)! The falls roar loudly as they plunge over the basalt rock ledges. I can see outlines of people in the island area at the lip of the falls. Helicopters buzz continuously all day. Boaters and other recreationists complain about helicopter noise in the Grand Canyon but Vic Falls tops any noise from tourist overflights in the Grand. It is constant and I find it annoying. Tomorrow I will run the whitewater rapids of the Zambezi just below the Danger point lookout overlooking the "Boiling Pot" rapid. Mom and I enjoy her birthday gift on our first night in Vic Falls with a trip to an entertaining African Dance show.



## Zambezi River Whitewater Adventure

[Check out the video I made of this rafting adventure!](#)

I wake up early and am excited to begin my Zambezi whitewater rafting all day adventure. [Shearwater Adventures](#) is the major recreation concessionaire in the area and does most of the recreation concessions in the area. While I spend a full day on a Zambezi whitewater trip with Shearwater my Mom takes the Vic Falls tour with Thula, visits a local home for lunch, tours the local food and flea markets, stops by the famous Victoria Falls Hotel, and tours the Livingstone museum and city on the Zambian side (another stamp in her passport). Others in our group select elephant rides, helicopter tours and shopping in the open market. Nobody in our group chooses the bungee jump, micro-flight, lion tamer (lion walking), sunset cruise, jet boating, bridge tours, zip line across the gorge, Victoria Falls high tea or game drive activity options.

The Zambezi is a big river compressed into the narrow Batoka Gorge below Victoria Falls. October is a low water month, but my guess is that the volume is much bigger than I am used to. Flows vary from 12,500 cfs to 320,000 cfs during the rainy season. I would take a wild guess and bet it was close to 50,000 cfs today. The river flows seem pushier and bigger than the Grand Canyon (which is typically in the 20,000 cfs range when I am used to running it). Our river guide (Sean- 19 yrs. old) comments that the rains have started earlier this year so maybe it is a bit higher. It is not 12,500 cfs because one of the rapids (Patella Gap) is a marker rapid for low water. Patella Gap rapid is not a big factor today. Shearwater goes through a detailed safety talk at the edge of the cliff before we climb down to the waiting rafts. I chose an oar boat when the head boatman explained that the paddle boats would flip, and that flipping was the best part of the adventure. We put on lifejackets and helmets for the climb down to the river. Porter's haul everything else down to the river- boats are carried by three porters in a deflated long rolled up sausage of a boat. Safety kayaks are carried down carefully balanced on a porter's shoulder. One porter gracefully handles one frame even though this is an awkward load on the narrow/steep stairs. There is no road in or out of this river canyon. The first hurdle is to climb down into the gorge (~350 feet) on steep steps welded into the black basalt walls. Some steps have railings, others do not. I concentrate on watching each narrow step carefully, so I do not trip. It would be a long fall if I misstep. It is straight down and then a scramble over black boulders and narrow cliffs to waiting inflated rafts. I will never complain about a "bad" put-in or take-out again. We put in just below the first rapid #1 (there are 21 today) called the Boiling Pot.





Each boat has a one juice (Tang) jug and one water jug. We all share one cup to drink out of and pass it around with no qualms. By the end of the trip, I figure I have drunk a pitcher full of Zambezi water (forced up my nose during hole bashing), so it really does not bother me at this point. FYI: I do not get sick on or after this trip for which I am grateful. In fact, we immediately jump into the warm river to cool off and practice pulling each other into the floating boat. We had five boats on our trip (ended up with 4 at the takeout). I was in the only oar boat along with a few others and a trainee (and the croc biscuits- aka river boarders). FYI- I stopped counting the flipped paddleboats after the fifth flip of the day. I think one paddle boat flipped 3 times. There were many swimmers in most of the boats including ours (including our trainee). I fished the trainee out of Gnashing Jaws of Death rapid and he gave me his Nyami, nyami (snake) amulet from his neck as a thank you at the takeout. The South African trainee was on his second training day and he had never rowed a boat before. He had trouble holding on in the rapids. It will be interesting to see if the trainee sticks with this job, however Sean told me that 1 year ago, when he started, he did not know how to swim. I helped haul in another Irish girl who fell out of our boat, but she lost her shoe in the process. Her Irish friend (in our boat) walked out at lunch.

Our oar boat did not flip but had one close call but landed back down right side up at "The Mother" rapid. The Zambezi had one class 6 (rafts were ghost boated through), six class 5's, several class 4's and some class 3's rapids. The river was classic pool/drop and a relatively narrow compressed gorge (considering the high flows). The big rapids that I recall were Morning Glory, Stairway to Heaven, Gulliver's Travels (I think we had trouble here), Midnight Diner (we took the Kentucky Fried Chicken Run here- there are three choices in this run), Three Ugly Sisters and the Mother, Devil's Toilet Bowl, and Oblivion (kind of like Hermit in the Grand).





The big rapids had huge waves and holes and were very compressed and pushy! The ghost boated rapid (Commercial Suicide) was awful looking (I am glad we walked around it) with a huge recirculating falls hole. The boatmen jumped in Commercial Suicide (just below the recirculating falls hole) after each boat was pushed downriver to retrieve it. Most Class 5's don't have sneaks, some Class 4's have sneaks. I felt that at this water level the biggest rapids of the day were Morning Glory, Stairway to Heaven, Gulliver's Travels (Land of the Giants), The Mother and Oblivion. We pass one hydroelectric power station on the Zambian side with the turbine house that was under water at high water 15 years ago. We also float by a large nyami, nyami pictograph on a cliff along the river.



We had one major incident at Midnight Diner rapid. One paddleboat that took the Muncher route (100% flipper of the paddleboats in our group) had a girl get her lip cut by a flipping paddle. She ended up with a 2-inch cut completely through her lip with blood and bruising all over the right side of her face. Frankly, I think they are used to these types of injuries, I did not take a picture because the injured girl was really upset (wait until she sees a mirror). After the guides butterflyed her cut lip, she walked out with a guide (along with others) at lunch. I heard afterwards that the medical clinic in Vic Falls stitched her up. We had 5 safety kayakers that included two kayakers that shot video and pictures at some of the major rapids. I bought an exciting DVD of our trip including many highlights from the past year included in the DVD. The boatmen were very good- knew the lines, were experts at flipping boats back over quickly and gathering their swimmers, however they have not run any other rivers anywhere else. You do not ask "when did you last flip" (because that would be yesterday) but "how many times did you flip yesterday". We picked up quite a few swimmers and transferred them to their original boats.



We munched down on a BBQ lunch at a side canyon (with a foot trail out to the rim). The group was diverse (Irish, South African, Holland, etc... with only some of the group who could speak English). I visited with 5 South African medical students (whose first language was Afrikaans). It turns out that we both could understand each other quite well because Afrikaans has many words in common with Swedish. I spoke in Swedish, and they were fascinated that they could understand me so well. We spoke in English too, but they preferred Swedish. They explained that their medical school studies were taught in English which made their schooling even harder. Again, a small world. The medical students were shocked at the high cost of medical insurance in the US.

Because so many passengers hiked out at lunch, they deflated one paddleboat (porters carried it out) and redistributed the people to end our trip with one less boat. They fully expect people to walk out at lunch and have porters assigned there to prepare lunch, carry out the equipment and escort out weary and frightened boaters/passengers. Shearwater appears to be the largest company in the area (a few others smaller ones exist - on the Zambian side included) and in addition provides many other Vic Falls activities (bungee, helicopters, etc...).

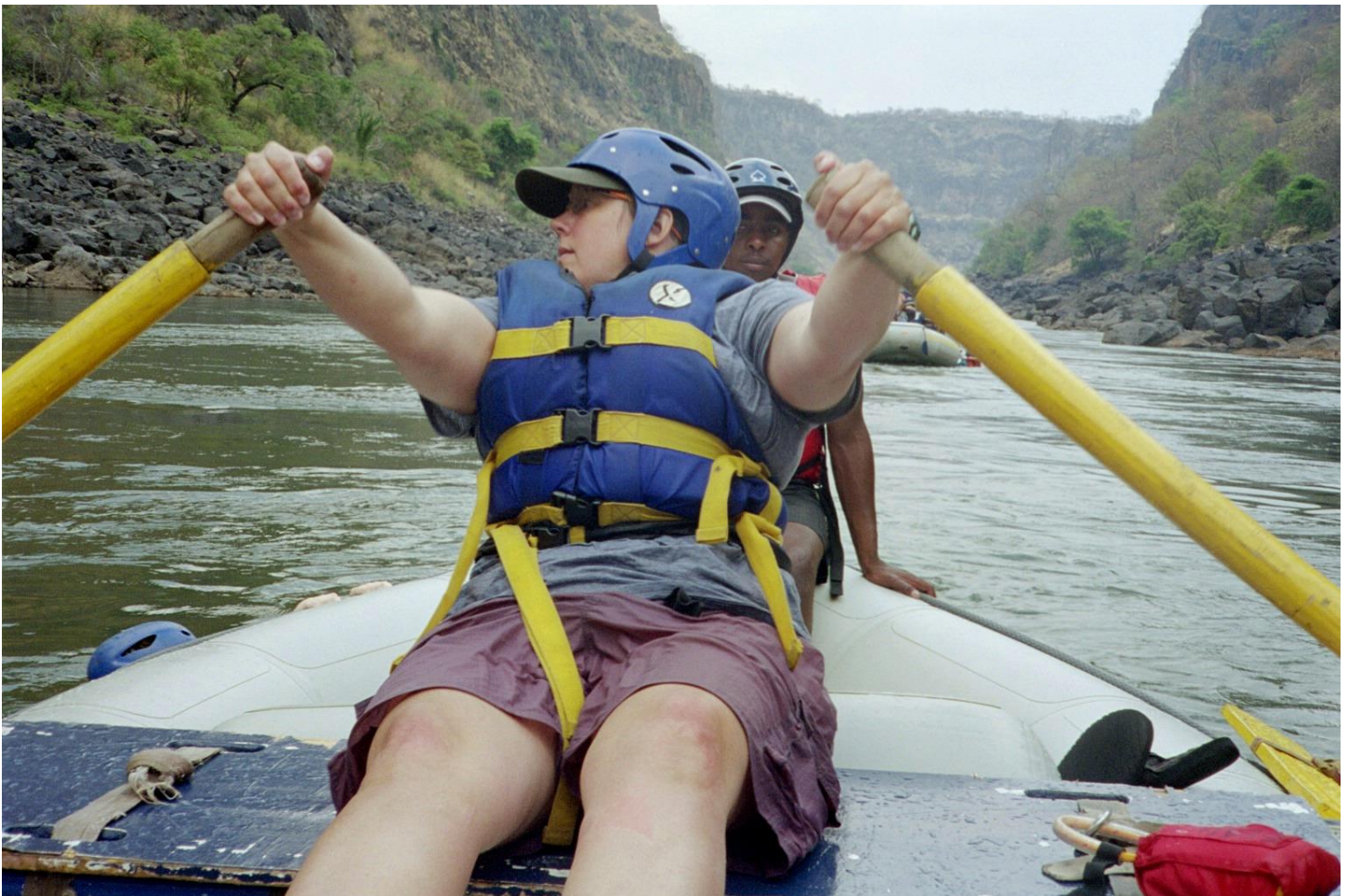
Note: Crocodile biscuits are the river boarders. We had two river boarders in our boat (one guide and one passenger) that waited until after lunch to start boarding. They "crawled" exhausted back into our boat whenever they got tired.





Hippos and Crocs: Hippos and crocodiles routinely get washed over Victoria Falls (typically at high water) and die. Smaller (tiny ones) crocs can survive the Vic Falls 350-foot plunge and live in the section of river we boated on. However, these small crocs only tend to get up to about 5 feet max before getting washed down river every year during the high waters of rainy season. We spot one croc on the rocks about 3-4 feet in length, but I do not get it in camera range quick enough to get a photo. For some reason, all of us swim in the river (with no qualms) on purpose (to cool off) and not on purpose (flipping and falling out) and the thought that crocs are in the river does not seem to faze us. Sean explained that these smaller crocs think humans are too big to eat. Either way, this sounds like one of those situations where your mother would say, "if everyone jumped off the bridge, would you do it"? Well, they are Bungee jumping off the Vic Falls bridge and yes, since everyone else went swimming, so did I. I do KNOW that on all the other African rivers we boated on (Chobe, Kwando), nobody swims because of the croc danger. Many African children do not learn to swim because of this danger. The rivers sure do look inviting when it is HOT!

Sean let me row in the flat/riffle water but not in the rapids. I think he was shocked a woman could row. Sean then proceeded to hook the remaining 3 rafts to our raft when I was rowing to see if I could row them too. We all laughed and had a good time. The oars were very heavy, but I am used to heavy wood oars (Gull's) and learned on heavy ash oars in 1980. Even so, these homemade African wood oars felt like heavy mahogany and must have weighed about 60+ lbs. or so each.

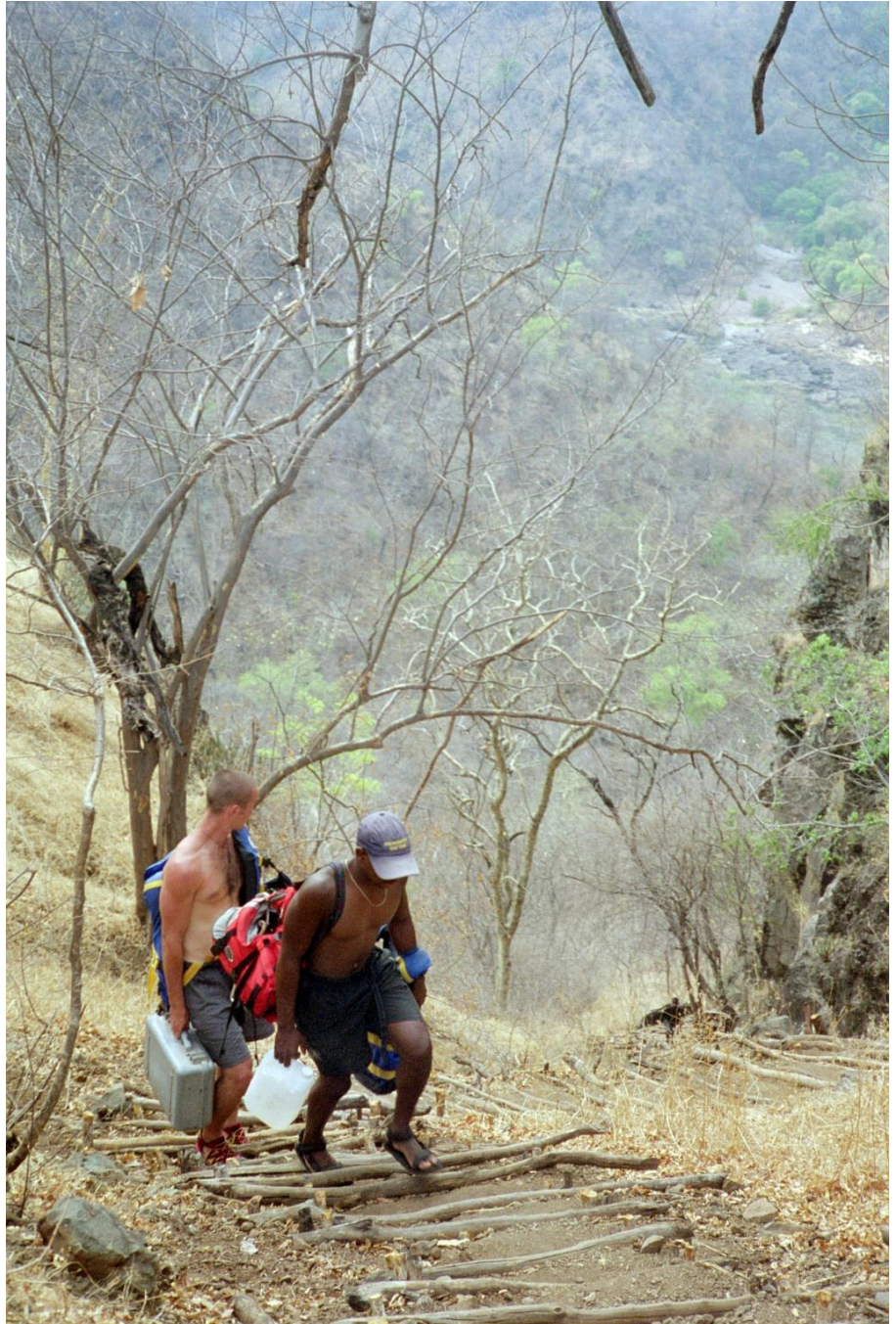


They used a U bolt oar stand and bicycle inner tubes to attach them onto their homemade aluminum (barebones) frames. All other equipment was modern (16 foot South African made self-bailing rafts - copies of



Avon's, Carlisle paddles, American's cup vests/helmets, etc...). So.... why did we lose a boat? At our lunch stop, the girl with the cut lip, and others who had enough of flipping decided to walk out. This was a half-day trip takeout anyway and the only place to get out before the end of the day. We went about 20 miles on our full day. Most of the monster rapids were before lunch but we still had big rapids after lunch as well.

The takeout is almost as bad as the put-in in steepness but now we must go up ~350 feet (so in my opinion- it is worse)! Fortunately, at the top, we have cold drinks and can shop at the display of wood carvings made by our guides. I ask Sean which one he carved and buy one of his mahogany wood hippos (it is heavy). At the end of the day, I am beat but loved the trip and glad I had no personal mishaps.







**The Victoria Falls**

Shearwater starting point. 'Big Eddy'

Boiling Pot

Rapid No. 1

Rapid No. 2

Rapid No. 3

Rapid No. 4 'Morning Glory' Grade 5

Rapid No. 5 'Stairway to Heaven' Grade 5

Rapid No. 7 'Guliver's Travels' Grade 5

Rapid No. 6 'Devil's Toilet Bowl'

Rapid No. 8 'Midnight Diner' Grade 5

Rapid No. 10 'Gnashing Jaws of Death'

Rapid No. 9 'Commercial Suicide' Grade 6

Lunch Spot

Rapid No. 11 'Overland Truck Eater' Grade 5

Rapid No. 12A, 12B, 12C 'Three Ugly Sisters'

Rapid No. 14 'Surprise Surprise'

Rapid No. 15 'The Washing Machine'

Rapid No. 17 'Judgement Day'

Rapid No. 13 'The Mother'

Rapid No. 16 'The Terminator'

Rapid No. 19 'The Last Straw'

Rapid No. 20

Rapid No. 21

Rapid No. 22

Rapid No. 23

Rapid No. 24

Take Out 1 ±700 ft (220m)

Take Out 2 ±700 ft (220m)

# SHEARWATER RAFTING

Victoria Falls - Zimbabwe

**This is to certify that**

CHRISTINA KUNE

**successfully survived the biggest, meanest white water in the world - the mighty Zambezi River, in nothing more than a rubber raft.**

Guide : SEAN

Date : 2010/06

**SHEARWATER RAFTING**

Don't forget to check us out  
[www.shearwateradventures.com](http://www.shearwateradventures.com)

MEMBER

ZIMBABWE RIVERS ASSOCIATION

**MARS**

**RAZ**  
RAFTING ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE  
APPROVED OPERATOR

Zimbabwe Tourism Authority



**Astrid's write up of her day:** After spending two hours with Carol, Tom, Cecile, Herb and Thula viewing Victoria falls, which were spectacular even at the 30% level, I went on to the home hosted lunch. I managed to see rafts in the river below the Falls and wonder if they are Christina's group. There are only five of us who take advantage of the home hosted lunch. The rest of the group are doing other activities or shopping. Flater, the hostess came to pick us up at the hotel. Our first stop was a local flea and vegetable market. Flater asked us to take several pictures of whatever we wanted and then mail the printed copies to her to give out later to the local people. We obliged her with scenes of vendors and merchandise. The flea market had a lot of things, clothing in bundles on the ground and hanging on hangers. Cloth materials, many in vivid colors. Shoes, bracelets, toys etc... even toothbrushes which I as a retired dental hygienist was pleased to see. The vegetable market had many different beans, lots of tomatoes and kale. Also, some dried foods, again dried kale and fish and a little meat. Everybody asked to be photographed. In the back, they had repair shops for bicycles, radios, and scrap metal of different kinds. Barber, beauty salon and some vendors cooking in large pots.

After about 20 minutes in the flea market, we went on to Flater's home for lunch. On the way we would see lots of school children coming or going to school, since they all go home for lunch, and on many corners a "tuck shop", their version of a 7/11 quick shop. The van stopped by a house that was obviously in a bit of an upscale neighborhood compared with so many other shacks. It was a two-room house built about 6 years ago and made of stucco/cement, grey inside and out. The house was surrounded by a wall and with a nice front garden with several trees, two among them, guava, and mango. A sleeping dog of mixed origin lay by the front door. One of the very few dogs we saw anywhere. Flater explained to us she lives in this house together with 21 other family members. She is a widow with 3 children, oldest was 21 and works as a gardener at one of the hotels. Her husband died of lung cancer 7 years ago and she then moved in with her sister (the home belongs to her sister). She herself works as a maid in a local family's home all day except when she does these home hosted lunches for OAT. The living room where we ate converts into a bedroom at night. It had several upholstered chairs, and I noted a sewing machine, a boom box, and some pictures on the wall. One picture, a poster, was of Mount Everest. She told us their TV was broken right now.





*Our meal was a sampler of what they eat. First, Flater washed our hands before our meal commenced and we ate the traditional way (with our hands). We sampled a drink made from corn meal. We all sipped carefully out of the metal mug. Then Flater brought in metal plates and lots of different dishes. Stir fried Kale, peanuts mixed with beans, small piece of beef meat, a small fish, maybe 3 " long cooked in oil, polenta, beans, and mopane worm, deep fried. I ate one mopane worm! and it tasted quite good. Flater went around the room and asked questions about us; "what we do for work, how big were our families and where we came from?" We also asked her questions about her family.*

*After our home hosted lunch visit, I managed to squeeze in a visit to the historic grand 5-star hotel called Victoria Falls Hotel. It was indeed grand and built in 1904. It had a beautiful view of the Vic Falls bridge connecting Zimbabwe and Zambia.*



*Next, I crossed the border into Zambia for an afternoon tour of the Livingstone Museum and a short tour of the city of Livingstone . The border crossing required two different guides and another Visa stamp in our passports. The city of Livingstone is about twice the size of Victoria Falls. It looked rather run down. It was from here that the famous explorer, David Livingstone saw the famous waterfalls for the first time. Several buildings dated from early 1900's. There is a bar still in existence that was one of the first places where colonial black and white people congregated together. We went by a school which at one time had been a synagogue for the Jewish merchants, who had found their way to Zambia in early 1900. An Anglican church is still in existence, maybe from Livingstone's days. The tallest building in town was an 8-story building used for offices and it looked very worn.*

*The Livingstone Museum was hot, no air, nor fans that we could see. A very pleasant young woman docent gave us a guided tour. The museum was divided into several wings surrounded by a courtyard. One wing held*



*the Natural History part with displays of early man and lots of stuffed animals. One large room had everything you might want to know about David Livingstone, the man's family history, his expeditions, tools, letters and so on. Another part had the struggle for Independence and then some history of Zambia's later political figures. I used the restroom, and it was totally without water, no toilet flushing nor hand-washing facilities available. We also visited the gift shop which had some trinkets and we all bought something, everything was very inexpensive.*

*Our docent guide told us about her trials to get to the USA. She had received a scholarship to a college in Brooklyn, NY and even had her ticket to go to the US. But still of course needed a visa. She went to the American Embassy in the capital, Lusaka. She was told to pay \$80 and come back the next day. The next day she was told it was some mix-up and she would have to pay another \$80. She paid. Then come back the day after that. She returned and was told the person she needed to see was not there and she would have to return. This scenario seemed to repeat itself several times and finally she could not wait any longer and gave up. So, she has yet to get to the US. She admitted, if she ever got to the US, she would probably stay in the US. That may be the reason she was having trouble getting a visa. As we were leaving the museum the mural in the entrance showed the many faces of Zambia and Swede Dag Hammarskjöld, whose plane crashed and killed him in that country, was one of their faces to honor. I (being Swedish) pointed out that they had misspelled his surname and the receptionist got quite excited and said, "yes, yes, I have told them so, but they did not believe me". He now has the Swedish expert to back him up and I assured him he was indeed correct (it was misspelled) and they promised they would write it in the correct way.*

*David Livingstone (1813-1873) seemed to be a hero to many in the area. He was a visionary in the respect that he abhorred slavery and wanted to make life better for the natives. He had a medical and theological degree. He was the man who put Victoria Falls on the map for the rest of the world. His personal life was not as successful, his wife died young of malaria, while staying with him in Africa and his children blamed the father for her death and became estranged from him. There are several statues of him and of course the town of Livingstone is named after him.*

**Shopping day:** Mom and I cannot compete with the rest of our group's shopping abilities. We fit in some shopping the morning we leave and call it good. The rest of the group have luggage bags that have now had "babies" and "grandbabies". Bag weight is no longer an issue since we will be on big jets for the long flights home. Maureen trades her watch for a market item, then she trades her shoes for a big African drum and walks back the hotel (shade hopping) barefoot getting blisters from the hot pavement along the way.





Bonnie photo documents this saga, laughing all the way. Maureen borrows Cecile's watch for the next day or so. I stop into the Deaf/blind/handicapped fund-raising store to purchase some items and help a good cause. I wish I would have brought a bag full of basic items from home to donate to this store. People cannot afford goods and will trade you for anything that you have on your person (pants, shoes, shirts, pens, watches, etc..). Mom bought a hippo and a metal warthog that is the perfect gift for my dad. That metal warthog comes back to haunt Mom because her bag was opened while in transit - likely London (lock was cut) and searched somewhere on our way home. Mom did not lose anything but her wooden box and hippo leg broke because the searchers did not wrap the items up after they searched her bag. Dad was able to fix the broken



items with some wood glue and shoe polish when she got home. I bought a wooden bowl, an elephant hair bracelet, and a necklace (along with my guide's hippo). I hustle to the Shearwater shop to pick up my rafting trip DVD (good) and a short visit to check out the Victoria Falls Hotel. Shearwater sells a standalone highlight whitewater video that is fantastic- I recommend contacting Shearwater to buy their DVD if you are a boater. Thula's family visits us right before we leave.

I wish we would have stayed in Vic Falls at least one extra day and felt rushed at the end of our trip. The length of stays at each game park was exactly right (~4 days per area). Activities in Vic Falls include bungee jumping, zip line across the gorge, rafting, sunset cruise, jet boating, elephant ride, Livingstone museum and city tour (Zambian side), open market shopping, Victoria Falls hotel high tea, safari, etc....

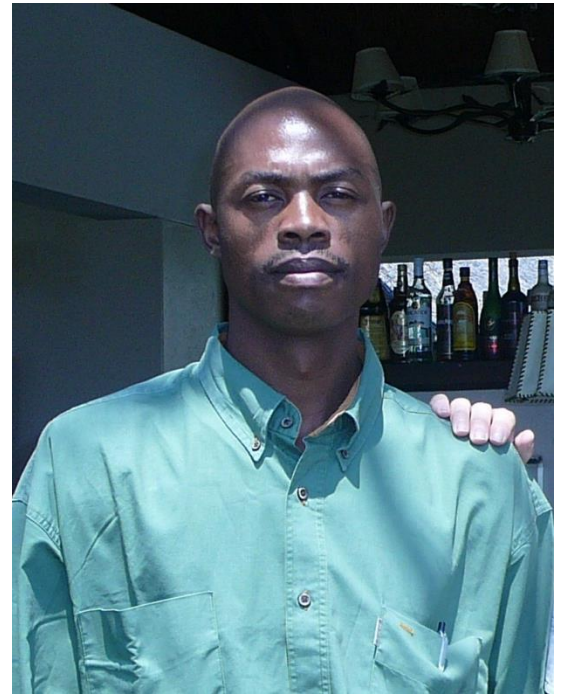
Lodging options in Victoria Falls: The Kingdom or Ilala Lodge are probably the most reasonable and convenient to downtown hotels to consider. I think The Gorges Lodge on the rim of the Batoka Gorge looks unique but it is quite a distance from town, which makes walking around impossible. I am sure the Victoria Falls Hotel is out of our price range but nice!

#### **Six of my personal highlights in Africa:**

1. Wildlife- Our ability to get so close to so many animals.
2. Communication- Everyone could speak English (well) and it was easy to communicate. no need for translators.
3. Elephants- lots of them!
4. Rhino Stalk- Thrilling for everyone involved including our guides.
5. Resourcefulness- African's waste little and reuse everything possible.
6. Whitewater on the Zambezi- FUN! and BIG!



**Thanks to Thula:** I have saved the best part of the trip for last. Thula made our travels so much easier and was a wealth of information. He was patient with repetitive questions, our silly observations, explaining the many wonders we saw and the history behind them, shepherding our "babies", making complicated transfers as efficient as possible, introducing us to new experiences and best of all, allowing us to learn and discover southern Africa. Thula is enthusiastically open to learning opportunities and represents the best side of Africa and its future. Thula made our trip fantastic! From my heart, thanks Thula. I wish him great success in the future. If you want to contact Thula Manzini, he can be reached at Box 145, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe ([waterburg@comone.co.zw](mailto:waterburg@comone.co.zw)).



**Back in Colorado, October 22, 2006-** 43 hours travel time after leaving Victoria Falls until we reach our front doorstep! We leave on a Saturday, spend Sunday in an endless cycle of daytime (seems like the movie Groundhog Day but we never reach nighttime). Sunday seems to last for 40 of the 43 hours. We have long airport layovers in Johannesburg and London. I think we sleep 4 hours at best on both of our 10-hour plane flights. Four days after returning home, Colorado faces an early winter season snowstorm that dumps at least 2 feet of snow on us. I guess winter is here. It seems like a dream that we were really stalking a rhino on foot in the bush just a few days ago.



