

22<sup>nd</sup> July

Finally the day is here when, under the bright African sun, we collect our Land Rover, home for the next 19 days. After a busy afternoon buying supplies and sorting out our kit a night in the beautiful Elegant Guesthouse was very welcome.

23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July

We were really on our way today, first stop Waterberg Wilderness campsite on the southern slopes of the Waterberg Plateau. This is a great campsite, a fabulous location and never have we been so well looked after. The braai had been swept clean, fire wood was neatly stacked and there was a bin and tap for our own use. The moment that we lit the fire Goddard arrived to check that we had enough wood. We signed up for game tracking on foot the next morning and were delighted to find out that we were the only people on it. So for the next 4 hours we had the undivided attention of Wilson, a very interesting and knowledgeable guide who got us up close to the reserve's two white rhino.

25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July

By the end of today we felt fully acquainted with Namibia's gravel roads as we spent most of the day on them with just a short respite on tar and a brief refueling stop, for the Landy and us, at Grootfontein. Our destination was a bush camp in the heart of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, home to the Jo/'hoansi. The road to Tsumkwe did seem never ending, but eventually we reached the town and continued on beyond it until we found the sign for our campsite. At the village of Makuri we were met by N!aici who took us to the campsite. Wow! What an extraordinary place, a clearing under the branches of the most enormous baobab we have ever seen. This is a magical place to stay.

We spent the next day in camp, just enjoying the place, watching and photographing the squirrels and many birds that passed through. During the afternoon N!aici came to take us out tracking and show us how he hunts. Spending time with him was a very special experience, one that we had looked forward to for a long time.

Tonight's dinner set the standard that all others have to live up to – moussaka with a crispy cheese topping. Cooking on the fire is a lot of fun. In fact we are enjoying every aspect of the camping because the Landy is so well equipped. We didn't want for anything; neither did we carry anything unnecessarily (except perhaps the table cloth!)

27<sup>th</sup> July

Back on the road today; and an early lesson in the way things work in Africa. N!aici had asked us if we could give him a lift to the main road on our way out. When he did not arrive at the appointed time we drove to the village to collect him. He was sitting shivering under a blanket with a hot drink and said that it was too cold this morning to go, he would go later when it was warmer. Of course we were already in shirt sleeves by then.

Maun was our destination today; that required a border crossing into Botswana and the loss of an hour. Despite the fact that the border is simply a gate in a fence that runs through miles of bush it was immediately apparent that we were in a different country; from the gravel roads of Namibia we were into the sand of Botswana and there were more people, goats, cattle and donkeys to be seen along the way.

At Maun we had an opportunity to change money, refuel and have a bath as tonight we stayed at Riley's hotel. We met with Annelies, Safari Drive's contact here. She has enormous knowledge of the area and was very generous with her time and advice.

28<sup>th</sup> July

With a great deal of eager anticipation we set off into Moremi Game Reserve this morning. It did not take long to reach South Gate, our campsite for tonight. So after booking in we set off on a game drive to Xini Lagoon. Although only a short distance there and back game was everywhere, including a very sleepy male lion and a lovely herd of elephant taking their evening drink.

29<sup>th</sup> July

We got an early start from camp, the first to be on the road I think, and were rewarded with lovely sightings of kudu and hippo. It is good to be able to take game viewing at our pace; I suspect that by driving ourselves rather than being guided we lose out a bit on local knowledge and being in contact by radio with other guides. On the plus side we can stop to look at anything that we want to without fear of irritating others. The birds around the lagoons along the road were lovely, even those that at first glance just looked brown were quite often more colourful and interesting on closer inspection.

Our destination for today was Xakanxa campsite and we spent all day getting there. The last few kilometers were slightly fraught as there are many tracks that seem to bear little resemblance to those on the map. The rains in this area this year have been the best for over 20 years so despite this being well into the dry season there was a lot of water around. Several of the tracks were under water where the rivers had filled channels that had been dry for many years. We were directed around one place from where a vehicle had just been pulled, the alternative was also under water but the track had remained solid. Beginning to think that we would never reach the campsite we came across more water, the ground looked good so we went for it. The water was slightly deeper than we had estimated and we did get wet feet!

It was worth the effort; the campsite was lovely and appeared to have a resident elephant that spent the entire evening working his way along the length of the campsite browsing on the trees and stopping to have a very satisfying scratch on a metal pole (flagpole?) next to us. Generally it was a lively night; after we had gone to bed the hyenas came and tipped over the metal oil drum bins, another elephant also came through camp during the early hours and announced its arrival with a loud trumpet.

30<sup>th</sup> July

It was a shame to leave Xakanxa after only one night, but it was time to move on to North Gate. This was a relatively short drive through mopane woodland with plenty to see on the way. The campsite itself is on the banks of the Khwai River, although that is difficult to see as it is full of the water lilies and reeds that are so typical of the Okavango Delta.

For the first time we experienced baboons in camp, and I'm afraid that a male did manage to get our rubbish bag. He had wolfed down the remains of a stale loaf of bread before Neil shoed him and his

entourage away. Their response to being sent packing? A female ran up an adjacent tree, positioned herself on a branch above our tent and went to the toilet!

As it went dark the hippos that we had heard grunting made their way out of the deeper water into the shallows to feed. We listened to one as it made its way towards us, rhythmically chomping through the vegetation like a machine and splashing through the shallow water.

31<sup>st</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August

How pleased we were to see a relatively new and strong looking bridge over the river here. The old one, alongside the new, was in a sorry state, rotting into the river and being enveloped by the vegetation. The other side of the bridge was a concession area run by the community of Khwai village. We stopped in the village for directions to the campsite. We were told that because of the unusually high water levels they would escort us to the campsite so that they could show us the safe places to cross the water. We were pleased that we accepted their offer as there were six water crossings in the 20km to the campsite, at least one of which was deep enough to go over the bonnet if crossed in the wrong place. Of course once at the campsite we then had to return to the village with our guide and then make our own way back, thank goodness for GPS. The guide did insist before we returned him that he collect wood with us and start a fire from the embers of a previous fire. When we returned two hours later we had a fire that was perfect for cooking on.

This campsite has to be our favourite of the entire trip, even though it was simply a clearing in the bush. An elephant made regular visits, a group of several pairs of eyes belonging we think to hyena made a trip through one evening, the birds were a delight and a large herd of impala grazed nearby. Add to that the very close proximity of the river Khwai and all the wildlife that it attracts and I don't think that this spot can be topped.

3<sup>rd</sup> August

Last night we went to bed with the sound of a lion proclaiming his territory, and we woke up this morning to the same, but much closer. A bit disconcerting as we needed to get up in the dark to be away at first light. It was with a heavy heart that we left Khwai, we had loved it there and we had a long day ahead of us to get to Ihaha. Our spirits were soon lifted by two male lions that sauntered along the track in front of us, then stepped to one side and continued through the bush as we crept alongside them. They were clearly patrolling their territory, stopping now and then to scent-mark a tree.

The journey to Ihaha was long and quite exciting as it took in some of the deepest sand that we had encountered. Everything was fine as long as we could keep going following the ruts, it got interesting when other vehicles came along the narrow track in the opposite direction and we both had to fight our way out of the ruts up onto the verge so that we could pass.

Another beautiful riverside campsite, but quite different from others that we have been in as this river is wide and devoid of the vegetation of the Delta. What it does have is lots of game coming down to drink and many birds. There were also a lot of vervet monkeys, sweet but quick! One almost made it off with our teabags but fortunately my shout caused him to drop them and run.

4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> August

Time this morning for a game drive alongside the Chobe River before leaving not only Chobe Game Reserve but also Botswana. We crossed back into Namibia and headed to Katima Mulilo for a refueling stop before heading off to find Nambwa campsite.

First stop was the park office to buy permits for the Bwabwata National Park. The office is a few km north of the road down a sand track. They have established a one way system around the building with the route clearly indicated by instructions painted on skulls. The campsite is 14km south of the road along a very sandy and quite hilly track. It is located on an island that has the Kunene River on one side and a large marsh surrounding the rest of it. A partially submerged causeway leads to it from dry land. This is another beautifully looked after campsite, we were met by Lucas and throughout our stay he ensured that we were well cared for. There is a raised platform from where you can watch the wildlife in the marsh and each pitch overlooks the river. This site wins the prize for the loudest frogs, their nighttime croaking was such a cacophony that it even managed to drown out the grunts of the hippos.

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> August

Yet another campsite that we had to leave too soon. Ahead of us a relatively short drive of 200km on a good tar road to Popa Falls. Our campsite here was a bit tricky to find, but a local man noticed our confusion, saw the roof tent and putting two and two together asked us if we were looking for the campsite then pointed us in the right direction. The campsite is lovely with a viewing platform overlooking the falls and excellent facilities. Nearby is Mahango National Park, only very small but packed with game. Within a morning's game drive we had spotted four new species of antelope for our list, including the rare sable and roan antelopes.

A strange thing happened on the way back from Mahango; in the car park of a shop we met a couple that live only 10 miles from us at home! It's a small world! Fortunately I had baked bread the evening before so we were able to invite them to our campsite for lunch. They are staying in lodges and they did make us realize how grubby we were after nearly two weeks of camping.

8<sup>th</sup> August

It feels like we are on the home straight now. It took only a couple of hours to reach N'Kwazi lodge. It was nice to have an opportunity to get clean and have someone else cook and wash up. The lodge is on the banks of the Kavango River with Angola on the opposite bank. Valerie who owns the lodge comes across as quite a formidable lady but she supports the local community by arranging activities such as dancing and village visits that the community reap the financial rewards from. She also sells crafts on behalf of the community.

9<sup>th</sup> August

Despite a comfortable night we both agreed that we had missed the tent and so today we are pleased to be heading back to Waterberg Wilderness campsite for our final night under the stars and next to a camp fire.

Tomorrow we will head back to Windhoek to hand over the Landy and fly home. We have driven 3551km through some fabulous terrain. We haven't seen everything on our wildlife wish list but we have had a great adventure. We would do it again in a heartbeat.