



# Safari TELEGRAPH



**FOCUS ON**

## THE MIGHTY ZAMBEZI

Despite being only Africa's fourth largest river (after the Nile, Congo and Niger), the Zambezi River has to be one of the most iconic and beautiful rivers in the world. Best known for creating Victoria Falls, the world's widest waterfall, the Zambezi snakes approximately 1600 miles through six countries, from its source in north-west Zambia to the shores of Mozambique where it empties into the Indian Ocean through the Zambezi Delta. Although the river influences people and wildlife for its entire length, there are three particular regions that have become very accessible and are popular tourist destinations.

Victoria Falls, straddling the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, is one of the world's greatest scenic highlights. Here the Zambezi changes from a wide, gentle river to a raging torrent once it 'drops' the 111 metres into the Batoka Gorge. Known locally as 'Mosi au Tunya' (the Smoke that Thunders), the Falls are at their most impressive from February through to June when water levels are highest (be prepared to get very wet when visiting on foot at this time of year). In 1855, explorer David Livingstone was the first European to set eyes on Victoria Falls,

and famously commented that 'scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight'. To this day, one of the best ways to view the Falls is from the air, taking an aptly known 'flight of angels' by light aircraft, helicopter or microlight. Victoria Falls town (Zimbabwe) and Livingstone (Zambia) both offer a wide range of activities from horse-riding, elephant-back safaris and river cruises to adrenalin sports such as bungee-jumping, jet-boating and white-water rafting. Birding is excellent along the shores of the Upper Zambezi above the Falls, and the Mosi au Tunya (Zambia) and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) National Parks provide some game-viewing opportunities. There are also some interesting cultural experiences on offer, especially where exclusive lodges are working in partnership with local communities.

Down river from Victoria Falls, Lake Kariba was created by the building of the Kariba Dam in 1959, a project which now provides hydro-electric power for much of Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Lake is a haven for wildlife and birdlife, especially on the southern Zimbabwe shores where there was, until a few years ago, a thriving tourism industry focusing on the Matusadona National Park and environs. As



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soon as Zimbabwe recovers from its current state, Lake Kariba will flourish again.

Below the Kariba Dam, the river becomes known as the Lower Zambezi and continues peacefully as the boundary between Zambia and Zimbabwe until it enters Mozambique for the final stage of its journey. Both Zambia (Lower Zambezi) and Zimbabwe (Mana Pools) have designated National Parks adjoining the river, creating one of Africa's most beautiful wildlife regions. Canoeing safaris, fishing for 'tiger fish' and boat cruises are conducted on the river, whilst game drives and walks explore open flood plains, dense thickets and beautiful woodland. The birding and game-viewing is superb, but it is the stunning natural scenery and the character of the mighty Zambezi River that really capture the imagination.



**OFF THE BEATEN TRACK**

## PRIMATE PARADISE - Rob visits the Mahale Mountains

'We are close' said our guide Gabriel, 'put on your masks'. With our surgical-style masks in place and our cameras ready, we stood in silence and listened. Nothing!! Gabriel spoke quietly into his radio, checking with his tracker who was up ahead somewhere in the forest. His conversation was cut short as the forest erupted with the unmistakable sound of primates, a cacophony of screaming and emotion. 'Are they hunting?' I thought to myself, remembering the wide-eyed journalists we had met earlier who described how they had witnessed this chimpanzee group hunting and eating a red colobus monkey a few days before. As the forest crashed around us, Gabriel ushered us to one side of the path just before a large male emerged from the undergrowth a few yards ahead. Taking little notice of us, he proceeded to charge straight past, before sitting down in the middle of the path. As our heartbeats settled enough for us to take a decent picture, the forest erupted again and a grumpy looking male emerged, gazing down the path towards the first male. "They have been fighting" said Gabriel 'if they start up again, just stand still'. As it happened, just a few moments passed before some 'seen it all before' females and jovial youngsters emerged on to the path and the tension subsided.



We were walking in the forests of the Mahale Mountains National Park on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in western Tanzania. Watching the chimps was fascinating. While the senior males strutted and posed, the females seemed far more relaxed and gentle. The youngsters did as you would expect, chasing each other around trees, wrestling on the floor and racing each other up vines. Gabriel was able to tell us about all the individual chimps, their status in the group and, in many cases, their personalities. Chimps live in a strict (but changeable) hierarchical society. What was most interesting was how each senior male not only had its own very distinct personality, but also a clear 'political' agenda. Size and strength is a crucial part of dominance in chimp society, but so is that political acumen. The most successful 'chimp kings' manipulate their group members, creating alliances and gaining loyalties where and when they are needed. True politicians! Another interesting fact was that whilst chimps fiercely protect their territory, and will kill intruder males without question, females are allowed to go 'on holiday' to visit other groups. A female may choose not to return for some time (if ever) or may often arrive back pregnant. This may cause a little tension with the dominant male if he is smart enough to do his 'maths', but logically this 'roaming' policy allows the chimpanzees of any given region to maintain a healthy gene pool.

In addition to wonderful chimpanzee viewing, the Mahale Mountains offered us good sightings of red colobus monkey, stunning red-tailed monkey, blue monkey, and the tiny blue duiker. Leopard, bushbuck, warthog, vervet monkey, baboon, black and white colobus monkey, and a huge variety of birdlife, also inhabit the park. Later that afternoon, we enjoyed a traditional dhow cruise on the lake and watched hippo in its crystal clear waters while palmnut vultures, giant kingfishers and fish eagles patrolled the lakeshore. It was a truly magical and enchanting destination.



### The Selous, the golden jewel of Africa - Bill explores the hidden depths

The vast untamed wilderness which is the Selous Game Reserve, covers about 55,000 sq. kms of southern Tanzania and is the largest protected area of land in Africa. Bisected by the Rufiji River, most of the Reserve lying south of the river is allocated to hunting concessions, while to the north, photographers get the chance to experience the superb wildlife.

In our Summer 2008 newsletter, you may remember me mentioning a forthcoming trip to The Selous Project, a ground-breaking safari operation on the banks of the Luwegu River in the southern Selous. Ground-breaking, because the owners had decided to turn the remote 300,000 acre hunting concession over to photographic tours, without the Wildlife Department (who run the reserve) losing the 'hunting' revenues. The area is sublime and, although Lukula Camp required a little more work to take it to the levels required, we believe that it is now worth visiting. We tracked wild dog for five hours on foot, crept up on a small herd of elephant to within 25 yards, and enjoyed the thrill of stalking buffalo. Hippo grunted all day, lion called at night. This was the wilderness at its best and it will only improve. For the 2010 season, regular twice-weekly departures have made the concession far more accessible. Certainly something for the experienced safari traveller to consider.

Wild Dog are also being seen regularly in the traditional photographic safari area north of the Rufiji River where Lake Manze Camp provides an excellent value for money, no-frills safari experience, whilst Selous Impala, Selous Safari Camp, Sand Rivers and Beho Beho offer progressively higher comfort levels. A real highlight of this region is the opportunity to enjoy wonderful boat cruises on the Rufiji and its associated lake system, an activity that adds a dimension to many East African safaris. A week in the Selous, combining 'north and south' would be a superb overall safari experience.

# A walk through the Masai Mara

Kenya's Masai Mara is understandably known as one of Africa's greatest game-viewing destinations. But when game-viewing is this good, there is not a huge requirement for diverse activities and, traditionally, most game-viewing in the Masai Mara takes place from vehicles. We would not argue with this, especially as finding and viewing the big cats (for which the Mara is particularly famous) is always going to be easiest from a vehicle. However, for those looking to combine game drives with some excellent walking, a few good options do exist.

## **Serian Camp and Suguroi Treehouse**

Serian Camp and Ngare Serian are two excellent tented lodges on the banks of the Mara River in the north-west Masai Mara region (Mara North Conservancy). To the west of the river, owner Alex Walker has a private concession of 4,500 hectares which he uses exclusively for walking safaris. It is within this concession, on the edge of Suguroi Hill (part of the Oloololo escarpment), that Alex has built the unique Suguroi Treehouse, a wooden platform wedged between large boulders and the trunk of a large tree. Facing east to catch the magnificent sunrise, the treehouse offers stunning views out over miles and miles of African savannah.

Whilst taking the 'sleep out' option does require you to give up the comfort of the lodge for a night, it is well worth it. You are accompanied by your Masai guide, and a small team of staff who prepare the beds (bedrolls with mosquito nets), and take care of all the cooking. Combined with some lovely walking, this is a really memorable experience.

## **Kicheche Bush Camp Fly- Camping**

Located in the exclusive OlareOrok Conservancy, bordering the Masai Mara Game Reserve, Kicheche Bush Camp offers walks to complement game drives. However, for a slightly more dedicated experience, they offer overnight fly-camping expeditions. Departing camp on foot in the afternoon, your guide walks you through to the fly-camp (set up in advance of your arrival by the small safari crew) where you arrive before sunset. After hot bucket showers, the evening is spent around the camp fire, listening to the myriad of African night sounds. The following morning, breakfast is taken before an extended walk back to Bush Camp where you arrive before lunch.



## **Campi ya Tembo, out of Saruni Camp**

Owner of Saruni, Riccardo Orizio, saw the opportunity to offer something a little more authentic, and built Campi ya Tembo to satisfy those with a desire to see more of Africa on foot. This small and intimate tented camp is tucked away in a hidden valley within the Lemek Hills, and is the base for a project he set up with the local villagers called 'Warrior for a Week'. Here guests can spend any number of days (it does not need to be a week) in the company of the local Masai people going about their daily business, entirely on foot of course. This is a genuine cultural experience as you get to join them on their daily activities and adventures, and will come across wildlife as they do in their normal day-to-day lives.



**SAFARI SNIPPETS**

**The Art of...**

For those who love art, or have an artist buried deep within themselves, Africa cannot fail to provide you with unending inspiration. There are a number of safari camps where resident artists can help you fulfil your dreams (Chiawa Camp in Zambia's Lower Zambezi, Saruni Camp in Kenya's Masai Mara). Or, swapping the brush for a camera, why not join one of the specialist photographic workshops we arrange for Wild Arena (www.wildarena.com - Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Namibia, and Botswana) and Photographers on Safari (www.photographersonsafari.com - Kenya and Rwanda).



**Old Mondoro, Lower Zambezi**

This great little eight-bed camp is about to undergo a small re-build but we are assured by Grant Cummings that it won't lose its real charm of an old-style safari camp. The living tent is being marginally enlarged and the shower moved outside under the stars. We used to say that if you have been to Africa and not slept in a tent, you have been on 'holiday', not 'on safari'. I might suggest that if you're going to Zambia and not including Old Mondoro, think again!!

**White Lions of Timbavati**

In 1975, 'white' lion cubs were discovered in the Timbavati Game Reserve bordering South Africa's Kruger National Park. Until 2005, intermittent generations carried the recessive gene but since then, no 'white' lions had been seen. In early December this year, however, two new cubs of about eight months showed themselves. One of our favourite camps, Tanda Tula, is located within the Timbavati, the perfect base to see one of nature's strange mysteries (the recessive gene is thought to be similar to that which produces the 'King' cheetah, coincidentally also found in the same area).



**Namaqualand flowers - Bill reports**

We've had a number of editorial snippets about the flowers over the years, but I've not yet managed to convey just how spectacular this natural phenomenon is. Following our small group excursion into Namaqualand in September, I'm still staggered at the vast floral diversity and sheer beauty of the area; an experience which surely rivals the wildebeest migration or predators of the Serengeti/Mara eco-system. List this in your 'top 50 travel things to do before you die' - simply stunning.

**Destination Africa**

As usual, 2009 has been a year of improving our knowledge and ensuring standards are maintained for your holidays. Bill travelled to Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and southern Tanzania. Rob has been to Kenya, western and northern Tanzania. Michele visited the Seychelles, South Africa and southern Tanzania where she included the islands of both Mafia and Zanzibar. Mary covered Cape Town and northern Tanzania, as well as getting married and honeymooning in Australia! Jane travelled to Kenya to experience Ride Kenya and explore the Laikipia.

**Season's Greetings**

This year, we have decided not to send out Christmas cards and have donated the usual amount we spend to one of the charities we support, the South Luangwa Conservation Society (www.slcs-zambia.org). SLCS do an enormous amount of work both within the National Park itself (anti-poaching, snare removal, management and monitoring programmes etc.) and with the surrounding communities on which the long term survival of the wildlife area depends (upliftment projects, education and training etc.).

Other long term projects we support include two bursaries a year to the Koiyaki Guiding School in Kenya's Masai Mara ([www.koiyaki.com](http://www.koiyaki.com)) and sponsoring a child through higher education via the Loldia School Fund ([www.lodiaschoolfund.org.uk](http://www.lodiaschoolfund.org.uk)).

As we wish you Season's Greetings, why not consider the perfect gift at this time of year - helping someone in Africa to a new and brighter future.

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**Destinations Travel Show, London**

For those planning to visit the show at Earls Court, London (4th - 7th Feb), we will be exhibiting as usual and look forward to discussing your holiday plans with you. We do have a limited number of complimentary tickets to give away so please contact us if you would like any.