

Geoff and I had the adventure of a lifetime in Africa for one month in October and November. We started out in Botswana with a participation camping safari. The first two days in the Okavanga Delta were the easiest part of Botswana as we flew in to a tented camp. There were supposed to have been 8 clients on the trip and 4 had cancelled at the last minute so we were left with 4: Geoff and I, Ron from Kent about our age and Dan(45ish) from Melbourne. At the Delta we had a camp staff of about 8 to look after us along with Pilot who was to be our guide for the whole trip. He must be the best guide ever. He knew everything about the bush having been brought up as a bushman. He could make all the noises of every animal and there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for you to make your holiday the best ever. And on top of all that he had a sense of humour. The two days in the delta included a walking safari, highlights: two giraffes, two elephants, and a black mamba the deadliest snake in Africa. We followed lion tracks through the bush to the sound of warning noises from birds and walked along the edge of the water where we found the skull of a crocodile which Pilot carried back to camp. Late afternoons and evenings we went for mokoro canoe trips where we saw night lilies, frogs, malachite kingfishers, saddlebilled storks and red lechwe which ran in front of our mokoros skipping and jumping over the water. We had mokoro paddling lessons and sundowners on islands. The nights were filled with the noise of millions of bell frogs and other night noises. (Very soothing to listen to when you can't sleep).

We flew back in to Maun before driving up to Moremi Game Reserve where we camped for three nights. This was a beautiful place with plenty of water as it is still near the Delta. Lots of red lechwe by the water along with the crocs and hippos. There was a beautiful hippo pool where we used to go for our sundowners to watch the hippos yawning plus an elephant walking round the pool in the deep red sunset. Every day we saw lions including two pairs of mating lions and a beautiful brother with 3 sisters. Lots of birds, especially red hornbills. The camping involved erecting and dismantling our tents and generally helping with the packing and unpacking, collecting firewood and we had a rota for the cooking. If it was your turn to cook, it was a bit like 'ready steady cook' as although Charles, the camp assistant, said that we were the boss and could cook what we liked, by the time we got back from a game drive he had already chosen and defrosted the ingredients, but we had to decide **how** to cook them. And then we had to eat for 8 as Pilot had already ordered the food before the other 4 people cancelled. We were woken at 5.30 am and all shared a bowl of water on a tripod (being a woman I used wipes) then we just had time for coffee and cereal if we wanted it before being on the road at 6.00 am for the game drive. It was actually quite chilly at that time in the morning but that was when the animals were around and awake. We stopped for coffee and rusks mid morning but later when it got too warm and the animals were taking their siesta we returned to camp for our brunch which, if you were on rota duty, you had to prepare. Then we could have a bucket shower, do our washing and take a siesta until about 3.30 when we went out on another game drive which finished up with a sundowner somewhere picturesque, before returning to camp almost in the dark which meant cooking in the dark. The nights were generally not so noisy as in the Delta but one night just after retiring we heard a howling hyena rushing through the camp looking for food who went right past Dan's tent.

We moved on to Savute for 2 nights. Pilot's driving ensured that the landrover and trailer did not get stuck in the deep deep ruts of the sandy roads. Savute has lots of kopjes (rocky outcrops) and on one we saw a mother leopard with two cubs. The elephants were a favourite there as you could get so close to them and watch them for a long time around the watering holes along with their calves and hyenas and jackals. We continued to see lions including one pride of 27. They were all laying around in the shade of some trees and Pilot parked so close to them that I was 1 metre away from the male lion with an open side to the landrover. I couldn't even focus on him as I had my telephoto lens in

and was too worried about moving to put the other lens in. The morning we left there Pilot saw lions' tracks that had appeared during the night.

Our last stop in Botswana was in Chobe National Park for 2 nights where there were even more elephants and plenty of my other favourites the baboons who I could sit and watch for hours. Of course there were so many other animals too plentiful to mention. But all too soon we had to say goodbye to our friends and the conversations around the campfire as our agent had booked for us to finish the tour at Livingstone, Zambia to see the Victoria Falls, whereas the others were going to the town Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. We were a bit disappointed not to be sharing the last two nights with them but this was because our very ethically and environmentally correct tour company (which was why we booked through them) didn't agree with sending people to Zimbabwe.

We had a bit of an adventure after we left the others. A safari vehicle picked us up and took us to the Zambezi River. He left us on the side where a lot of mystified people were milling around asking us what was going on. We didn't catch the ferry but were taken across in a very small boat with an outboard engine; just the 2 of us along with our red bags and the boatman crossed the wide Zambezi river filled with hippos and crocs - no lifejackets (not that they would have helped much) and just left us on the other side where we went through immigration. Then a minibus picked us up and took us to the hotel. The ferry itself had queues of lorries waiting to cross and apparently they usually had to wait up to 7 days to get across as one of the ferries was out of service due to having tipped over on its side in the river. Several people drowned and apparently they never even found some of the bodies. So now they have solved this problem by loading the lorry first and if it does not tip the ferry over **then** they let the passengers on!

I had a culture shock when we arrived at the hotel. It seemed so luxurious after the bush. People were wandering around in smart clean clothes! I just wanted to go escape back to the bush away from all the people and luxury. We'd arrived about 10 am still filthy from packing up camp and were told our room would not be available until 2pm. But by chance I met the manager at the breakfast bar and he arranged for the room to be ready earlier. After three days there we got used to the luxury and quite enjoyed it as a nice rest before the rest of our trip. The Victoria Falls is fantastic. We had not expected too much as we were so disappointed when we saw Niagara Falls. But Victoria Falls bears no comparison it is absolutely magical. The food at the Zambezi Sun was a bit disappointing being buffet. The cheapest bottle of wine was \$26 (American) so we solved that by either drinking water or beer. The water was \$3.50 just to buy a small bottle and this came as a bit of a shock after free water while camping. We did find a little market outside the hotel where we could buy it for \$1 so we didn't die of thirst. It was cheaper to get a taxi into Livingstone, eat at The Ocean Basket **and** buy a bottle of wine, than use the buffet at the Zambezi Sun with no wine. And the food was better at The Ocean Basket. But we didn't discover that until the last night! It was a lovely hotel though and very convenient for the falls which were only minutes walk away. We did want to see the falls from Zimbabwe though as the most spray and longest length of falling water was always out of our reach from our side. We were told by the staff at the hotel that we could just walk across the bridge and wouldn't need a visa. So we did, resisting all the taxis that were plying for our business and resisting all the jewellery vendors on the bridge. Got to immigration and they wanted to charge us \$50 each for our visa (only us British had to pay such a high sum) which would have been on top of the \$20 to see the falls making \$140 for the two of us. As we had already booked to take the helicopter trip we walked all the way back again across the bridge. But this was good exercise and training for our rainforest walk to see the gorillas. When we took the helicopter we could see from the air how close we had been to the falls if only the fence had not been there. But the helicopter was well worth it as we had wonderful views and even went down and flew into and along the river gorge.

We then had to fly back down to Johannesburg and spent one night in a hotel in the Caesars complex which is like Las Vegas. What a contrast to the rest of Africa! The next day we flew back up again to Entebbe in Uganda for our Gorilla Trip. Uganda was so different from Botswana. We had to drive for 10 hours south to Virunga Mountains. It was so green and every inch was utilised for growing crops. There were terraces of veggies everywhere on the mountains. And people. I have never seen so many people everywhere along the roads. Even the first night when we drove into Rwanda at dusk there were people walking everywhere carrying things. Needless to say the gorillas were fantastic. We saw them in all three places. In fact you would have to be very unlucky not to see them. In Rwanda we only had to walk for 20 minutes over a potato field, climbed a wall and that was it, there they were. One came so close to Geoff that the viewfinder in his video went black. Back in Uganda at Mgahinga we had a more worthwhile trek of about an hour and a half each way to see them. We were so close to them. You are meant to be 7 metres away so they do not catch any human infection, but they came much closer which was nice for us. At the last location in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park it was a much harder trek. The mountain was straight up through the rain forest and it was muddy and even started to rain while we were watching them. I hired a porter to carry my bag but he wouldn't let me struggle on my own and insisted on pulling me up and afterward helping me down. The gorillas were really fantastic but I was actually more affected by the orphan music and drama groups both at Mgahinga and Bwindi. We have about 10 email addresses of kids at the Bwindi Orphanage who want to keep in touch and probably would appreciate a bit of help. I also promised I would try to find an 18 year old who would like to keep in touch with Julius who was my porter at Mgahinga and is 18. He is hoping to get to University to study law. If anyone knows of someone who would like to write to him I would be grateful. He helped organize the Orphan Music and Drama Group and arranged for them to come to our lodge. He did a good job too as they obviously didn't have the resources that the Bwindi orphan group have as there are not so many tourists in Mgahinga as there is only one gorilla group that tourists can visit. The drumming and dancing at Bwindi was fantastic and the kids were so energetic dancing with their bare feet on the stones. Apparently they used to sit naked on the side of the main road begging from tourists. Now, they have been taught all the music and dancing plus they make some very good crafts which they sell, including woven patterned baskets. In Uganda we were again travelling with great companions and enjoyed every minute of it.

The last part of our trip was in Tanzania. We flew in to Kilimanjaro Airport close to Arusha. We visited Lake Manyara National Park before travelling on to the Serengeti where we were lucky to see what was an early start to the migration which because of early rains meant that herds of wildebeest and zebra were amassing in the north of the Serengeti rather than the Maasai Mara. We stopped by a river where I could have watched for hours as they were crowding together getting up the nerve to go and drink in the river and then once they were there they would suddenly decide to run off again. We saw 2 cheetah in the Serengeti but no leopards. Also we were lucky to see 3 rhinos in the Crater. One of the highlights was Loliondo for 3 nights. It is to the east of the Serengeti and there were no other tourists there at all apart from those staying with the Maasai at the Tented Camp where there was only one other couple apart from us. The Maasai were great taking us for walks and meeting other Maasai families and all the little herdboys who go out all day on their own. They have maize porridge for breakfast and then one boy could be in charge of about 100 cattle all day with only a spear to protect him - no water or food until he meets up with other boys at dusk when they herd the cattle into corrals of thorn bushes for the night and sleep in there with them. They are aged from 5 to 10 and do this in the dry months when there is no grazing for the cattle near their villages. So they cannot attend school all year until after 10. We also

met some Maasai who were living in a cave near our camp. As Loliondo is not in the National Park we could walk where we liked accompanied by Maasai with spears and we could drive off road and at night. They said there was not so much game as usual as there were more Maasai in the area than usual because of the rain and they had come across from Kenya for the grazing. But we did see plenty of giraffe, cokes hartebeest, hippos, a lion kill with vultures and even saw zebra chasing cheetah which Elias our guide had never seen before in his life. He thought the zebra were going to try and kick the cheetah! After the Ngorongoro Crater where we saw everything (except leopard) all in one day including rhino and flamingoes we moved on to Lake Eyasi where we met a tribe called the Hadzabe who are in decline as they are hunter gatherers and the onion growers have taken up a lot of their land. We went out hunting with them for rats and squirrels. They were eating berries off the trees and they caught one little mouse by digging in the ground and 1 squirrel by chasing it and killing it with bow and arrow. They took them back to camp and put the squirrel on the fire and shared it with about 25 people, singeing a little bit at a time. Then they had an archery competition. Geoff had a go and managed to lose two of their arrows. Then they did dancing and I had to dance with them.

Before taking our flight home we flew in to Nairobi. We spent a pleasant 8 hours at a The Rusty Nail, a beautiful restaurant with a lovely garden, where we could take a shower and have tea on the terrace finishing up with a delicious dinner before being picked up and taken to the airport.

We certainly have some wonderful memories and wish we could go back and do it all again. It is hard to get used to the cold and wet in England. But it was good to see all the family and grandchildren when we got back. Also appreciated at home are bright lights to do things in the evening, our own shower and toilet, washing machine, phones, internet, muesli, information, hair dryers, electric toothbrushes, doctors, home, car, cheap wine, wardrobes, drawers, knowing where things are.