



Monday, June 14, 2010

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1. Shenton Safaris - Newsletters

1.1. 2009

Derek has been so busy guiding, building new hides, grading new roads and helping the anti-poaching team so far this year he hasn't yet managed to do his newsletter. However you can keep up to date with the goings on at camp by checking out Jules's photographic newsletter [here](#)

1.2. September 2008

1.3. Greetings all

Finally I get a chance to sit down and write this long-awaited newsletter. Apologies for the delay once again, but the daily demands of camp have been too busy up to now.

After our lengthy spell out of the valley, we returned home from Australia in early April with our first born – Sapphire India Shenton - to begin preparations for the safari season. This involves vehicle and kit maintenance, purchasing supplies and of course camp-building. We do all the basics at our base plot near the Mfuwe airport where we keep chickens (for eggs) and grow vegetables and fruit for the camps.

By late April, we are grading the 35km road up to camp so that we can drive up and begin the camp rebuild and makeovers. This is great fun and there is always much excitement and anticipation amongst the team. The three rains watchmen who have been isolated at Kaingo for six months (except for a couple of leave trips out) are very ready to "hand over " to the regular Kaingo staff. So while loads of grass, bamboos, fuel, staff and supplies make their way up to camp, the watchmen and their stash of dried fish caught and smoked over the rainy season are ferried out to their welcoming families.



The grading team crossing the Luwi river on the very first trip up to the camp by road in late April this year (my favorite toy - a John Deere 6620 with harrow and heavy triangle).





The road crew in action...



The road crew at the end of a long, hot day of opening the road up to the baobab forest.

The work begins at a nice relaxed pace but as D-day arrives for camp opening, the screws turn and all the million and one practical jobs involving plumbing, welding, painting, fixing, cleaning, sourcing, sweeping, thatching, mending, weaving, supplying, connecting, planning, training, un-packing and re-arranging become a frantic exercise in multi-tasking and management that speeds up every waking moment.



Our visiting Aussie cousin, Ian Shenton painting the stairs down to the deck.

The day we put in the deck over the river in front of Kaingo is always a big one involving all the staff. It takes a coordinated effort and care must be taken as the Meccano-like pieces are put together over the water (there are some hairy moments with me in the water to the waist as I anchor the four support posts –we make sure Jules isn't within sight when I do this) as crocodiles lurk just below the surface. In fact, some weeks after opening, "Stumpy" – our local 15 ft male croc - grabbed a bushbuck who was grazing too close to the edge right where I'd been wading a few weeks earlier! Once completed the structure is anchored safely on the water for guests to enjoy taking in the vista of waterbirds, wallowing hippos and drinking game, whilst kept cool by the breeze off the water during lunch each day.



The hippo hide must be rebuilt from grass and bamboo each year, but remains on the same classic corner at the confluence of the Mwamba and Luangwa rivers, just up-stream from Kaingo, tucked in right beside 150 of one of Luangwa's biggest, noisiest attractions.

The elephant hide, built high in the trees above the main elephant crossing point in the area, remains in-situ during the rains, and has been a great success since the elephants returned to that crossing point last year; it is extremely popular for "sleep-outs".

Finally everything is in place, but it is only after the first guests have been enthusiastically waved off on the first game-drive of the season sitting on newly canvassed seats, in newly sprayed safari vehicles following newly graded game-viewing loops that one can one feel the safari season is truly underway. And the twenty week journey through nature's wonderland has begun for another year.

Enough talk about preparation -the point is really just to ready ourselves for the amazing wildlife world that sweeps one along with it while staying at Kaingo Camp and Mwamba Bush Camp.

Since the beginning of season we have had exceptional game-viewing including, hippo kills fed on by scores of crocs, a pair of Martial eagles fighting, leopard cubs x 5, lion cubs,croc taking a bush-buck in front of Kaingo, wild dogs hunting and taking down impala then losing it to hyena, elephant river crossings,the birth of a puku, lions in both camps, plenty of kills and some hyena/lion fights.

The Cooksons wildebeest around Mwamba camp seem to be thriving and becoming tamer by the year; lions have been active since we came in with the return of the

Hollywood pride to back to the flood plains north of Fish Eagle lagoon although more recently have been forced north to Elephant bend by the Mwamba pride – in particular three young males who are roaming the area and stealing kills. The two old Mwamba Males that have held this pride for the past 6 years have not been seen and have seemingly left these young ruffians to manage "the farm". Stand by for more information in my next newsletter as there have been another group of three big males (with beautiful fullsome manes to rival those of the Mara) that look like they might be in to challenge the three youngsters of the Mwamba Pride.

Wild Dog sightings have been outstanding this year and the new pack (of 6 males and 1 pregnant female) of dogs Jules showed in her June newsletter ([see them here](#)) have now been identified by the African Wild Dog research team and called the Kaingo pack which is most exciting! We think they are denning in the area, so hopefully there will be some pups later in the year. Additionally 3 females of the Luwi pack seem to have dissented and have been hanging around the Kaingo dogs. We're hoping for lots of pups! We have also just recently discovered an active hyena den.

Recently we put in a mobile hide at a beautiful lagoon we have only had vehicle access to this year. It is directly inland from Kaingo and we have called it Wild Dog lagoon as it is the area the dogs have been spending some of their time. We can drive or walk to it and we have had great success observing elephants and other animals drinking there at sundown. The lagoon is also home to a family of Egyptian geese together with 12 goslings- last time Jules and I were there we witnessed a Fish Eagle swoop in to try and take a gosling.







On a walking safari out of Kaingo the other day we had stopped to watch some elephant a little way off when – thump, thump, thump – three big wart-hogs exploded out of a burrow we were approaching just metres from where we were standing; they came out with such speed and momentum had we been right in front of their hole someone could have been hurt – never a dull moment in the bush and a reminder that one has to be alert at all times to the many tricks in nature’s hand.





Camp-outs are a very special activity we offer for guests out of Mwamba (these are a completely back-to-nature experience with just a mosquito net hung under the stars and fires to keep the animals at bay – they need to be pre-booked). This involves walking out with armed scout, guests (up to four), porters and a chef to a remote location inland from Mwamba Camp and spending a night sleeping out under a net beneath the stars of the African sky. I found a remote lagoon last year close to the baobab studded plain, hidden away in the adjacent Mopani forest so was keen to explore this as a new site for camp outs.

I took a group in early July to this very site and we were not disappointed. The setting was perfect as we arrived off our 2hr walk and watched the sun go down on this green oasis which was full of water birds including more than one hundred Spurwing Geese. This lagoon is of central importance to hundreds of mammals roaming these parts including a big herd of buffalo, warthogs, plains-game and baboons. No one got a whole lot of sleep that night as we lay and listened as a large pack of hyenas harassed a big old male lion on a kill 500m away and the buffalo herd moved around through the thickets awaiting their turn at the water-hole. The camp-fires were stoked all night and we returned to "civilization" (Mwamba Bush Camp) the next day very much on a high – feeling at one with nature.

The guides we have working for us this year are Patrick, Mayam (many years experience from further down the river) and myself as grade 1 walking/driving guides backed up by Mwila Zulu, Retief Barnard and Alison Cockerell who have all proved to be excellent driving/photographic guides.

Gayle Olivier who worked until recently in Botswana heads up the catering and front-of-house at Kaingo while Annabel from UK is based at Mwamba. Alison Cockerell as always runs the office/bookings with great efficiency.

As always our commitment to the valley and its wildlife is very high, we spend much of the early season grading roads for other camps (once our network is complete) and, most importantly grading access and firebreak roads for ZAWA, some roads as per their

name serve as a break to stop poacher's fires from razing the entire area. The roads aren't always enough though and I have been out in the back country with my guys fighting fires to protect this precious habitat a couple of times already this season. The access roads are graded with the sole purpose of providing quick and easy access for ZAWA/SLCS to drop in ambush scout teams upon our reports of shots fired.



Fire fighting with some of the guys and Jules' brother Ben



In terms of our commitment to serving the people of the valley, the orphanage build has picked up speed again. As soon as camp was open we were able to send all our building staff back down into Mfuwe to pick up where the project was left before the rains. The main building is up and ready to roof now, to read more about the orphanage [click here](#). Please do get in touch if you would like to provide financial support to the orphanage – all funds go 100% to the building there are no administration fees of any kind.



The main admin and kitchen building at Hanada Orphanage - awaiting its roof.

Jules and I have also had to build a slightly bigger and more secure staff house for ourselves and Saphire at Kaingo Camp and are enjoying the challenges of bringing her up in the bush.



1.4.

Until later then, salani bwino (stay well) and best wishes for 2008!

Derek Shenton

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