

## **Africa June 12 to Oct 4, 2007**

### **Dave Cox in Pretoria, S Africa, Tue. June 19, 2007**

Hello everyone. Last Tuesday I commenced what I hope to be a four month tour of 8 or 9 countries of southern Africa. The flight from Phoenix via London to Johannesburg was uneventful but, as expected, awful. Almost 10 hours in the air to London, 4 hours in Heathrow, followed by almost 11 hours to Or Tambo Airport outside of Johannesburg and Pretoria. The time difference is 9 hours, but, surprisingly, I had almost no jet lag this trip.

I opted to stay in Pretoria rather than Johannesburg for my initial days due to the crime statistics for most of central Johannesburg. My first couple of days were comfortable in a beautiful backyard guesthouse at a B&B. Around the pool I identified my first 11 new bird species for the continent, including the large, long tailed, crested grey lourie, the small crested white backed mousebird, and the crested barbet, along with 4 species of new doves and the black eyed bulbul. As should be apparent, before traveling, online, I found a gorgeous out-of-print guide book to all of southern Africa's 1250 species of birds (the US has only half as many species).

The third day I had to move to a house across the street (same B&B) which was dreary, and required me to carry around 7 different keys, three of which were the old large keyhole type. The owners of the B&B apparently are on security overload, coupling locked gates, triple locked double doors, electric fence and full time security guard. Yesterday I had to change guesthouses altogether due to a full booking at the first. I am now in the Des Amis B&B with an absolutely lovely couple as proprietors, Africaans who spent many years during and now after formal Apartheid. (The Africaans people originally were called the Boers, of Dutch ancestry, who first settled southern Africa in the 1700s. The language, also called Africaans, basically is the same as old Flemish.) Having already spent a couple of days touring Sterkfontain and Pilanesburg with Samuel (discussed below), a black Zulu who grew up in a township part of Soweto, also during formal Apartheid, the insight into the differing views of what has happened and is happening between the races in this country is simply fascinating. I will hold off on making too many observations until I have spent a little more time here. The Des Amis guesthouse is much more relaxed, with no locked doors or gates except at night. Rather than 7 keys, I carry none.

On Saturday I took a day trip to the Sterkfontain Cave in what is called the "Cradle of Humankind" region. My ignorance is such that I had thought that most Australopithecus hominids were found in the Rift Valley area in central east Africa. In fact, most have been found in the small region just southwest of Johannesburg, and particularly in the Sterkfontain Cave. Here were found the first Australopithecus Africanus skull in 1936, the famous Mrs Plis in 1947, an Australopithecus skull from about 2.5 millions years ago, thought for some reason for over 50 years to have been a young female, but now viewed as probably male. These along with about 500 other Australopithecus fossils and thousands of extinct animal fossils make this the almost certain richest source of human evolution evidence. Also here were discovered the a large number of Oldowan and Acheulean stone tools from 2 to 1.5 million years ago. Finally, and most famously, just 10 years ago they discovered the almost 100% complete skeleton of Australopithecus ever found, named "Little Foot". The "Little Foot" name comes from the original discovery of just part of the foot in a stone on the floor of the cave. For three days they searched for, and then found, the exact spot on the wall of the cave chamber from where the stone had broken. Here, upon gradually removing the surrounding stone breccia, was discovered the complete embedded skeleton, which still is being excavated today. The breccia from which it is being removed dates it to 4 million years ago. Perhaps our earliest ancestor to date. We spent about an hour and half in the cave itself, although the passageway to the area where Little Foot is being excavated is blocked and heavily secured. In other



areas can be seen current small ceiling holes into the cave, and evidence of the past collapsed ceiling holes, into which prehistoric animals and early hominids fell. On the surface these small openings are covered with brush in rough country. It was easy for animals and hominids, especially if fleeing a predator, to fall deep into the cave, subsequently to become embedded and fossilized, with the slowly settling dust and debris from the ceiling of the cave forming breccia, which hardens similar to cement.

We also visited the Rhino and Lion Park, an endangered animal breeding area, where the wildlife lives in very large open areas, but predators are separated from prey, and the animals are fed. An excellent opportunity to easily see many hard to find species in natural settings, but not really the same adventure as being totally in the wild. On Sunday I took a very long 14 hour day trip up to Pilanesburg National Park, the fourth largest park in the South African system, and all totally wild. Here were the opportunities to see all of the Big Five (so-called from big game hunting days, these are the most dangerous, the lion, cape buffalo, leopard, elephant and rhino) as well as most of the antelope species, giraffes, hippos ostriches and zebras. I saw the big cats in the Rhino and Lion Park, but not in Pilanesburg, although a pair of lions was constantly stirring up the antelope at one watering hole. I did get to see over half of the African antelope, including waterbuck, springbok, steenbok, hartebeest, roan, kudu, impala, and wildebeest, along with hippos, zebras, giraffe, white rhinos, several bull elephants and a herd of 35 elephants, with babies, on a trek, all in line behind the matriarch. Also dozens of fascinating birds, including the sacred ibis. All in all tiring but eventful, as my trip is being built in large around viewing wildlife. I have close to a couple of hundred photos already, some quite nice of the animals. I brought along a smaller APS size sensor digital camera body (the new 10MP Rebel XTi) so that my 300mm lens acts almost as a 500mm lens; long enough for good wildlife photos, without carrying the huge weight and size of a true 500mm lens together with full size sensor body.

I have found a great restaurant-tavern called Eastwoods, on Eastwood St, near my B&B, with outside seating, very reasonable beer prices, and a great special on its T-Bone steak dinner. Rather than potatoes with the meals, I have ordered paps en sous (in sauce). Pap is a South African staple of the black population, made from ground and soaked maize, it essentially is the same as the ancient New World tamales without filling. The maize, brought from the Americas, was introduced by the Europeans a couple of centuries ago in southern Africa.

I probably will arrange for a day trip tomorrow into Soweto, where the '76 uprising started when the government tried to force the schools to teach Africans, and ultimately the birthplace of the end of Apartheid. I am looking to arrange a camping safari for four days in Kruger National Park, the largest and crown-jewel of South Africa's wildlife preserves. After that, I hope to travel a few days in Swaziland, still ruled by a Swazi king, chosen not by birthright but by selection of a "king's mother" upon the death of the prior king. From there I will travel into Mozambique. I was advised to arrange for a visa here in Pretoria, which I did yesterday. To my dismay I found Mozambique has, within the last half year, really "stuck" it to the Americans by raising the visa fee to 750 rand, about \$106 US dollars, which is required to be deposited in a national bank prior to receiving the visa. I reluctantly paid and took care of the details yesterday. I am warned that similar changes may have occurred for travel in Malawi and Zambia. We will see. So far all is quite exciting and very interesting. Till later. Dave Cox













**Dave Cox in Mlilwane, Swaziland, Sun., July 1, 2007**

Hello everyone. It has been long since I wrote because I have been without email facilities since I left Pretoria 9 days ago. I apologize in advance that it may take some time for me to respond to emails I receive. I believe that I may have to go many days at a time without access. I was supposed to have had access this last four days, but the system has been down the entire time. I have driven far to find the facility I am sending this from. More below.

The weather was beautiful in Pretoria. Very similar to February to March weather in Phoenix, cold nights, but not freezing, and warm sunny days. While still there I caused some excitement for myself when I pulled off my backpack, pulled out my camera, and went to photograph some glossy ibises eating just inside a large fenced grassy compound a couple of blocks from my B&B. Up ran a security guard seeking all kinds of information and ordering me back from the fence. Turns out it was the US embassy with, of course, its current high level of security. As I wandered around the neighborhood I stayed in, I passed perhaps 20 different embassies within blocks. Nice area but security conscious.

On Wednesday I took a day tour to the Apartheid Museum, which chronicles the history of modern S Africa and the institution of legal apartheid in the early 1950s through its turbulent years in the 60s and 70s, especially including the June 16, 1976 Soweto school uprisings, which led to a great deal of violence on both sides, and probably triggered a greatly enhanced awareness in the rest of the world. For the afternoon we visited various parts of Soweto itself, including the newly built rich zones, and some of the newest and poorest shantytowns where people live in corrugated shacks without electricity, sewer and running water only at certain outside tap locations. Still, better than many living conditions I have seen even around Mexico City. Soweto, which just is the acronym for Southwest Township, developed as



thousands of blacks moved to Johannesburg around the early 1900s to work the gold mines which had been discovered a couple of decades earlier. Around the time of the second world war, there were some forced relocations of blacks to this and other townships in the area. Today the population of just Soweto is 3 to 6 million depending on how much the latest census is believed to have undercounted the population.

A week ago Saturday I took a four day camping trip to Kruger National Park, perhaps the most famous of the wildlife parks in Africa. It is larger than the country of Israel. I was with just four other people, plus our guide/driver/cook, so was not crowded. We camped in a permanent camp site just inside the Orpen Gate, and spent over 11 hours daily traveling in a large open sided truck converted to view wildlife. I saw and got good photos of many of the antelope in the park (8 species I think), zebra, giraffe, cape buffalo, elephant, hyena, jackal, warthog, white rhino, and amazing bird life, 4 species of huge eagles (marsh, tawny, crowned and bateleur), ground hornbill, kori bustard, secretary bird, ostrich, and on the night drive, with huge luck, got a leopard on the side of the road. I got a double tent to myself, and slept perfectly well, even though it got down close to freezing, with my lightweight sleeping bag, but most importantly my lightweight wool/synthetic blend thermal underwear. We all froze though every morning on the first couple of hours of the open drives until the sun rose far enough to warm us. The camp restrooms were clean and had 24 hour hot water for showers. The food, prepared in camp at night and eaten around a roaring fire, and the huge breakfasts of eggs, bacon, sausage, tomato, mushrooms, peppers, and tomatoes, eaten at rest stops midmorning after four or five hours of game drive, was great. The first night, well after dark, we heard something just outside the fence behind our camp. The fence, incidentally, completely encloses the rest area, is high and completely electrified at top, and the gates are locked at 5:30 pm and not opened until 6:00 am. This to protect from the lions, leopards, cape buffalo, elephant and rhinos among other deadly animals. Anyway, I went with my powerful little headlamp over to the fence, turned on the lamp, and was staring into two very widely spaced blue/green eyes. As my sight adjusted, I suddenly saw I was staring face to face with a huge cape buffalo not more than 20 feet away. I almost had an accident. The buffalo was on the other side of the fence, but looking at his size, I have no doubt he could have come right through the fence if he chose. Hair raising. Then, half an hour later, a monstrous hyena marched along the outside of the fence line, 10 feet from our campfire. For the three nights we were there, the hyena came by about every 20 minutes, silent, and just walked by our camp and looked sideways at us. Very disconcerting. Either she was walking on the outside of our cage, checking out the strange animals within, or we looked like food, not a pleasant thought as burned into my memory is the image of a family of hyenas crossing the road at the first trace of dawn, with the last one, the matriarch, carrying a huge raw ribcage of some poor beast in its jaws. After retiring to the tents each night, we would be woken a couple of times with the chilling cries of the hyena family just outside the fence.

On the return from the Kruger trip, we traveled through the Blyde River Canyon, a wild and beautiful bit of scenery just west of the park. I was dropped off at the town of Nelspruit, where I found a charming B&B. In Nelspruit, as in Pretoria, nothing is close to the center of town, where I really want to be. Every proprietor I have been with constantly warns of walking around the center of town, even in daylight, and never at night. Starts to spook one about travel here. I am accustomed to doing most of my exploring on my own two legs, but am warned over and over that walking with my back pack is just an invitation to a problem. I am having some second thoughts about my ability to travel in Africa as I had planned. I still am trying to work out how to make the rest of the trip work.

On Wednesday I finally gave up on trying to do public transportation to get to and through Swaziland (it either was taking a backpacker bus which travels 3 times a week, with a required taxi to get to the bus and then to get to accommodations, or taking crowded "minibuses" which run short distances, and would



require carrying my luggage out on the highways for distances, and change of buses at multiple spots. A big problem this trip is that I brought both sleeping gear for camping, and a small computer and related equipment to work on my pictures as I go; for the first time ever, I have almost too much in weight and size to easily go much distance without aid.). I rented a car for five days, and drove on Thursday morning down into Swaziland, perhaps the smallest country in Africa (even with its slow and windy roads, you can drive from border to border in any direction in less than four hours). It sits just south of Kruger, and is surrounded on the north, west and south by South Africa, and on the east by Mozambique. It still is ruled by a Swazi king, currently his Majesty Mswati III, a fairly young man who already has acquired about 18 wives. They have their own currency, but fortunately accept S African rands with which their currency is maintained at a 1:1 exchange rate.

I drove over a small border crossing with almost no traffic, so little problems there, then drove from the north into the mountains across Piggs Peak where most of the timber is grown. From there down into Mbabane, the capital city. I tried unsuccessfully to find an Indian restaurant in the biggest shopping area in the city, but could find no parking and continually got lost in the maze of streets running in all directions and winding back on themselves. It is a wonder I finally found my way out of the city and on to Ezulwini Valley where the king's residence is.

I have booked into the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, in the Ezulwini Valley, the oldest of five Swaziland wildlife parks, and am spending 4 days here. They have multiple types of accommodation at the main camp inside the park, and I am in a semi-delightful beehive hut, a traditional Swazi abode looking like the rounder end of half an egg, built entirely out of interwoven vines as the skeleton, and covered with reeds. Actually, these are not entirely traditional, as they have concrete floors and low sides to keep them relatively insect free, and have connecting, very non-traditional, modern private bathrooms. The restaurant up the way overlooks a lagoon filled with hippos, Nile crocodiles, goliath and grey herons, and three wonderful species of kingfishers, among hundreds of other birds. The food is quite decent; I had impala kabobs last night. Having a beer on the lagoon the first night, I was serenaded by four bellowing hippos less than 100 feet away. The grounds are not locked behind electric fences like Kruger, as they do not have four of the dangerous "big five" (lion, leopard, Cape buffalo, rhino and elephant); they have leopard. But the warthogs, impala, and nyala antelopes wander close by, vervet monkeys climb the vine covered trees, helmeted guinea fowl flocks run around. The crocs and hippos are extremely dangerous, but I am told it is very rare for a hippo to wander into camp. I am quite enjoying my stay.

The first night, because there was a large German tour group here, the camp arranged a half hour of Swazi singing and dancing, with the huge hide covered drums, just out beside the firepit. The sounds and sights were completely reminiscent of the old Africa portrayed in so many movies. This sense of living in a movie really hit me yesterday when I went by and photographed Inyonyane, known as Execution Rock. It is a large rock peak with sheer cliffs, located within Mlilwane. As soon as I saw it, déjà vu. Many years ago I saw some old African movie, must have been made in the 50s, complete with lots of dangerous wildlife, a great white hunter, suitably inscrutable black warriors, and one memorable scene near the end, where the star desperately tries to make it to the village to prevent a wrongfully accused person from being executed; he was too late, and the execution was carried out by the throwing of the accused off this very peak. Looking at the peak, I could almost relive the agonizing movie scene. The peak was, in fact, used by the Swazi for executions, though I hear that use stopped years ago. Never realized the movie was in Swaziland.

Daily I guide myself on a three or so hour game drive in my little rented car, and have some wonderful shots of hippos on their little island sanctuary, blesbok antelope with their weird white faces, the snorting blue wildebeasts, gnus for those who like the word, the herds of zebra, and one wonderful shaggy male



nyala antelope. They keep a huge fire going all evening, night and morning near the restaurant. Yesterday morning I was the first of the few guests here to head up to the restaurant, and to my huge amusement, there sleeping right next to the fire, was the big mamma warthog with her two young. Very funny, and a great picture.

Tomorrow I return the rental car to Nelspruit, where I will stay a couple of days or more to catch up some work on my pictures. Then I plan to catch the bus to cross into Mozambique to the capital city of Maputo. I hope to have time to catch up on many things there, and to find internet cafes from where I can catch up on correspondence.

Will write more later. Dave





























**Dave Cox in Maputo, Mozambique, Sat. July 7, 2007**

Hello everyone. Mlilwane, Zwaziland was relaxing and fun. The final day I almost got the little rental Volkswagen Chico stuck on some trails, probably not meant for it, in the wildlife park. I was trying to find



the white rhinos and giraffe that were supposed to be in the park. I found neither, though I found plenty of other game. Upon my return, I was told the only giraffe had died 6 months earlier, so that explains half of my poor luck.

As to driving here, it is, of course, on the left side of the road, and the cars all have the driver's seat on the right side, with the manual floor shift on the left. It only took me an hour or so to feel comfortable driving on the left side again (I learned to drive on the left side in India), and no problem using the manual shift (other than the usual cheap gear box). The part I never got adjusted to was walking up to the car. Inevitably, when I was driving, I would walk up to the left side of the car and unlock the door before I realized I was on the passenger side. Conversely, on my tours to Soweto and Kruger, I often rode up front with the driver, and I always found myself walking around to get in the driver side of the car, where the amused driver would ask if I wished to drive. Some habits are deeply ingrained.

I returned to Nelspruit for a couple of days and stayed at the same B&B I had before Swaziland. Nelspruit is a very hilly town, and the first place I have been where the laws of physics do not completely apply; no matter where I walked, upon return to the starting point I still am certain I had walked uphill at least twice as far as downhill.

A closing observation or two on S Africa. All the neighborhoods where I stayed in Pretoria and in Nelspruit clearly are white neighborhoods. During the day many blacks were working in the yards or in construction, but it seems none live in the areas. Almost without exception, every house is enclosed in high walls, with all gates or fences topped with sharp metal points and electric fences. Behind the gates are usually huge deep throated barking watch-dogs. Every gate and wall has large security company signs which all say they are guarded and protected 24 hours a day and any intrusion is met with an "armed response". In walking the neighborhoods, my only usual means of transport, I always found myself the only white person not in a car. In some restaurants and shopping areas there was some obvious integration, but it seems the white community lives in sealed enclaves. Every single one of my proprietors warned me about walking about, all apologizing for apparent racial comments, but then noting the mugging and robbery rates. In contrast to the white enclaves, while driving about the country, the majority of towns or populated areas are townships or squatter camps, the traditional black communities. Even in Soweto, the most famous of the black townships, no whites live, but many successful blacks, including the Mandalas, and many in government, now live in classy new expensive homes in high value neighborhoods. It seems clear that with the effects of the Apartheid past, in a country with a large but not majority white population that still controls much of the old wealth, and with a majority population of newly empowered blacks without sufficient infrastructure or government support needed to succeed, the racial tensions remain very high. I felt there was not even an uneasy truce at the local level. The overall sensation was not altogether pleasant. Swaziland felt completely different. And, now, so does Maputo. Neither Swaziland nor Mozambique has a significant white population that has been in control and called the country home for a couple of centuries.

From Nelspruit I purchased a bus ticket to Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, and found myself traveling across the international border on July 4. The border crossing was a little miserable. The bus driver and steward gave almost no instructions, and simply dropped us off on the S African side. Through the maze of buildings, I made out that I was to start in the S African emigration building, and got stamped out of the country. They told me just to walk on down the road. So in drizzly rain, with hundreds of trucks and people and fumes everywhere filling the mud roads, I walked a quarter mile in the direction I assumed to be the border crossing. In a building that had a sign saying Bom Venido Mocambique, I assumed I had found the immigration side. The lines were crowded and the window for "estranjeros" was closed. I got in



a line where I recognized one other person from my bus, and eventually got stamped into the country. Then back outside, where the bus had by then pulled through, and we waited another half hour in the drizzle until some customs guys had pretty much thrown all the luggage on the road as they emptied the bus trailer and sides, looking for I don't know what. They opened none of the luggage. After repacking, we continued on to Maputo, only to be stopped another half hour at the edge of town at a truck weigh station, pulled over with the heavy trucks. No other buses were pulled over. Go figure. Got into Maputo 2 hours late, and after dark. What a mess then, as all the bus passengers packed at the back yelling for each piece of luggage as it came off the bus. Mexico and Peru are well ahead of Mozambique for travel.

The last couple of days were the first sunny days after 3 days of drizzle. I have done a couple of days of exploring Maputo, the capital and largest city of Mozambique, located on the ocean with a large bay. Historically, it is at about the furthest southern part of Africa that the Arab traders, delivering goods from the East, used to come. The city gives me the same initial unkempt and dusty (in this case initially muddy) impression that I got in Cairo. Here, in the oldest part of town, half the streets are potholed or completely without pavement, very few sidewalks, everything torn up, trash collected everywhere in unsightly piles. Despite have green walk signals the turning traffic inevitably tries to run you down. The buildings mostly have old exteriors, worn by the sea breezes, and the bay is dirty. Contrast this to the sentiment of the introduction from the Lonely Planet Guide: "With its Mediterranean-style architecture, wide avenues lined by jacaranda and flame trees and waterside setting, Maputo is easily one of Africa's most attractive capitals." If this statement is true, then the remaining capitals I will visit must be real stinkers. I am probably being a little harsh on Maputo. I find it is growing on me, albeit slowly. I did find a little Indian restaurant up the street where I stuffed myself the last two nights. The owner is from Bombay, and we talked some. He asked what I was doing in Maputo. I said visiting. He enquired "Why?" stating "There is nothing to see or do here but gamble and drink beer." I noted that one out of two was ok with me. I said I had heard Mozambique really is known just for its fabulous beaches and reef diving, and perhaps I could get up north to some beach for a while. He noted that all good beaches were far away and hard to get to (unfortunately this seems to be true), and further noted that the water was chilly this time of year and filled with Pakistanis and Indians. I then stated that I had heard Mozambique had some wonderful places to see birds. He responded that driving around I would just see too many dogs and cats, and noted that I undoubtedly had already seen too many dogs and cats growing up in India. All in all, my Bombay friend was not very good at talking up Mozambique. He has offered to make me a special Pakistani beef dish this evening.

Upon closer read of my guide book, and after talking to others, it does seem that the country offers mainly expensive beach and dive resorts, either expensively reached by air with stay in first class hotels, or reached with great difficulty by chapas (minibus or other transport which you catch on the road) or chaotic long distance buses which leave from the start of highways at the edge of the cities, usually between 3:00am and 5:00am each day. I still am deciding whether to try to get to at least one seaside beach location before I travel into Malawi. I probably will stay in Maputo for another week, eating Indian food, and trying to find the exotic in the place. This is the only country in southern Africa where English is not an official language. Indeed, I find most people do not speak any English, including in the tourist bureau. I am able to sort of get along in the Portuguese, being able to read it, and understand numbers and such, but have some trouble understanding ordinary conversation as the pronunciation is so different than Spanish. Most people can sort of understand my Castellano. I have found a couple of intersection plazas where the streets are reasonably clean and lined with flame trees, though hardly justifying the guide book description. I also have visited the "iron house", built by Eiffel of Eiffel Tower fame to be the governor's mansion in the late 1800s. It is the same as the iron house he built and had shipped to Iquitos in Peru, the city on the Amazon which is furthest from any road of any city in the world. The old train station, with an iron tower designed by Eiffel's pupil, has basically no service anymore, but carries memories of busy



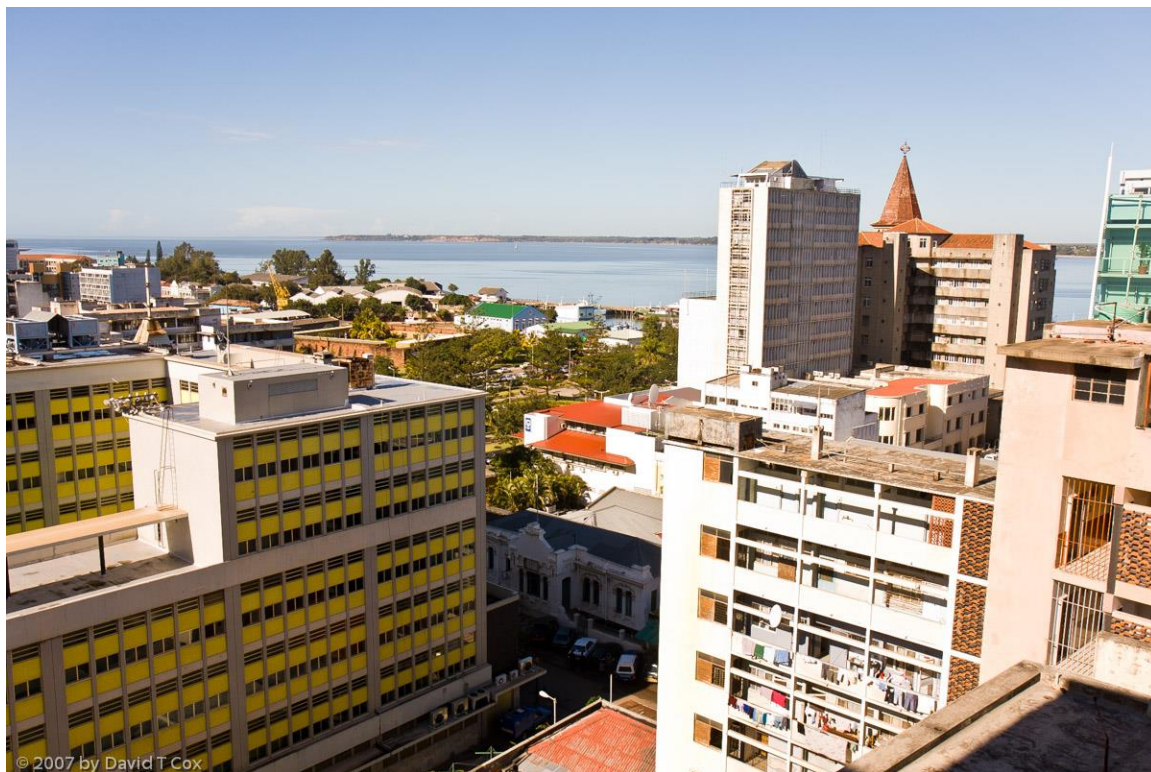
colonial days well prior to the almost 20 years of civil war that lasted into the 90's. Just below my hotel window is the largest mosque in the old town, and right now, 12:30, they are broadcasting the calls to prayer. The sunset yesterday from my 12th storey window was stunning, and I have found under \$3 liters of Portuguese table wine which is very tasty. The guide book suggests never walking around with a bag, but I have ignored the advice, finding there is no simple way for me to get around with my camera gear and photograph the scenes without carrying the bag. I simply do not get the impression that the city is any more dangerous than Mexico City or Cairo; it does not at all give me the sensation I got everywhere walking the neighborhoods of S Africa.

I have no idea what I will do from here, but will probably make some tentative decisions on Monday or Tuesday. Will write later. For now want to go copy and paste this document into an email and send it. I have been using a little flash drive to transfer my emails from my computer to an internet cafe. Today my computer completely wiped the memory of the flash drive after providing me 4 different sequential notices that it had removed 9 different viruses and then finally removed a trojan horse before wiping the entire drive. All that I picked up yesterday in one internet cafe. These machines here are dangerously dirty. Will have to trust my computer protection. Got to run; I still want to go out and enjoy the fine weather.

Dave



















**Dave Cox in Tofo, Mozambique, Mon. July 18, 2007**

Hello everyone. Maputo grew on me some, as I eventually found a couple of sections of streets that were pretty and tree lined. I continued to have reasonably good food at my Bombay friend's Impala restaurant,



where he had some Pakistani dishes prepared for me. Also, visited the Museum of Natural History a week ago Sunday. Interesting, but not of great help in identifying some of the ungulates I have seen in the parks. The stuffed animals were some of the rattiest I ever have seen, and the heads of the great cats looked like painted and faded pillow animals. They did have perhaps the only set of elephant fetuses, from a week to 9 or 10 months, probably in existence anywhere; wow. However, the city still disappoints. The majority of main roads, although tree lined, are also wind- swept trash receptacles, with either non-existent sidewalks, or, more frequently, concreted tiled sidewalks where the tiles are broken and deep muddy holes full of trash exist to trip the unwary. Some deep memory tells me this probably is similar to what Bombay was like when we moved to India in 1952.

Twice I was stopped by the local police, who apparently have the authority to stop tourists and search and request passports with current visas. Of course they are simply looking for opportunities to get bribes. Very frustrating. The view along the bay and coastline is pretty, but there are no beaches until 10 kilometers north of town, and the water in the bay is very dirty. Just not an attractive place to spend much time, although I have walked through the gardens of the two most expensive hotels and, walled off from the town, they are quite pretty, offering good views from high up over the ocean. My hotel room, with a nice 11 storey view to the west, offered quiet time to catch up on work on my pictures, read some sci fi, and sip some of the very decent and inexpensive Portuguese table wine while smoking my pipe and watching the sun set over the bay and ships and the mosque next door.

Last Wednesday I moved from the Hotel Ibis in the Baixe (low area) to Fatima's Place Backpacker's hostel in order to get an early morning shuttle out of town. I stayed a couple of days, and again was reminded why the backpacker places of the world don't always give an authentic view of the cultures. All evening the places are full of the mostly young and adventurous travelers, exchanging advice and stories, but it is 100% western culture. In the hotels I usually stay in, and parts of town where I eat and wander, I often go days without seeing foreigners. Did meet some nice people from Switzerland, Holland and England. At 5:30am Friday morning several of us got up to take what was supposed to be a backpacker shuttle from Maputo to Inhambane and Praia Tofo to the north. The day was one of those trips from hell. The shuttle stopped on the "junta", the completely chaotic outdoor place outside Maputo where almost all long distant transport starts and terminates. After almost an hour they completely filled the small shuttle to overflowing, trying to stuff all the backpacker's luggage in the back seat, breaking some purchased items of others in the process. The bus then stopped innumerable times for the very fat driver to eat, rest, and for an hour to try to get a new car battery and fix a broken mirror. The trip which was supposed to be express and about 6 hours took 10 hours, for all of which I was stuck in a painful cramped position. Welcome to Mozambique, Dave. From the tales I now hear from travelers from the north, almost all travel is this bad, and more difficult than the door-to-door pickup and drop off of our trip.

Anyway, Inhambane is one of the oldest trading towns on the southern coast of Africa; I have not spent time visiting it yet, as we just passed through it on our way to Tofo, just across the little peninsula. Tofo is situated on the Indian Ocean, and is one of the prettiest beaches I have seen, and reputed fabulous diving. My Lonely Planet Guide refers to Tofo as "legendary". I have found a little cottage, one of several at Nordin's Lodge, up on the little 20 foot sand dunes over the beach, and here I sit in the middle of about 10 kilometers of golden beach stretching around the bay of azure water. I sleep under a mosquito net (yes, the one big downside is plenty of evening mosquitoes) with the full sound of the surf less than a hundred feet outside my door. I have a little fridge to keep juice and beer cold. Yesterday morning I ran about 5 kilometer up the beach to the north, and walked back to see the stranded jellies and pick up seashells. I am right next door to a large backpackers place with a good restaurant, and several acquaintances I made in Maputo are staying there. As I type this part of the email, looking over the ocean, I have just been using my binoculars to watch a large pod of presumably humpback whales swim



by. Several of them were huge, with just a single side flipper or the dorsal hump dwarfing the little fishing boats on this side of the whales. They were easy to spot at first, because the ocean looks like it is breaking out with a bunch of mini geysers as the whales spout off. Yesterday my friends all went out with the local dive shop on an “ocean safari” which goes daily, when the weather is calm, to find the whale sharks. I have always understood whale sharks to be extremely rare to see, but here they find them almost every day, and then snorkel and dive with them. I will wait for a calm sunny day and take the safari.

I still am trying to decide how to get to Malawi as it is 4 days of arduous bus/chapas rides north from here. I am going to check on the internet for flights to Tete, in northern Mozambique, where I would be just a couple of hours from the border. Amazingly, there exist no flights whatsoever between Mozambique and Malawi, which are neighboring nations. It has nothing to do with their relations, just that there is insufficient traffic. The only way to fly to Malawi from Mozambique is to detour through South Africa, taking a day and costing over \$750. Crazy. If my only option is to fly to Tete, assuming I can accomplish that, I probably will stay a while longer here in Tofo. Will write later. Dave















### **Dave Cox in Maputo again, Mon. July 23, 2007**

Hello everyone. The Tofu Beach was so beautiful and relaxing, I stayed for 8 days. Every morning I would run several kilometers and then walk on the beach and watch the sunrise. Every afternoon could be spent lazing on the porch over the beach, eating fresh roasted cashews which grow everywhere around here, and sipping on an ice cold beer, reading sci-fi. The dogs of the beach are wonderful. Two, almost German Shepherds live here and follow me. One just goes crazing at the edge of the surf, chasing the waves coming in at top speed, back and forth, barking merrily. Makes me laugh. A few days ago, down the beach at Dino's, I was watching the sunset with two beautiful big brown dogs, maybe Ridgebacks. I assumed they belonged to the restaurant. One other family from S Africa was there by me. We all petted the dogs. Then the dogs started barking at something down the beach, and one of the waiter kids came up with a stick to chase them away. The dogs went crazy, barking, growling and then charging the waiters; I thought the stupid idiots (not the dogs) would get hurt. It has always surprised me how many people in third world countries are frightened of big "foreign" dogs, and get dangerous reactions out of the dogs. Both dogs went under the table with the S Africans, and were just ready to eat somebody alive. The waiters couldn't approach. We all asked to whom the dogs belonged, and no one knew. I finished my beer and walked down the path to the beach, and sure enough; both dogs followed me all the way down the beach jumping and playing with me. Of course everyone thought I had brought the vicious dogs.

On Tuesday I went into the tiny and seldom used airport by the old town of Inhambane, where to talk with anyone re flights I had to climb to the tower. After determining that there were no flights directly north that would help me get to Malawi, I gave up and purchased a ticket from Maputo to Tete for this Tuesday. I have returned to Maputo for this flight, which will get me to within a couple of hours of the border of Malawi, where I am headed next. After arranging the flight, I explored the town. Inhambane is one of the really old towns on the east coast of Africa. Arab traders have sailed to and traded with it for longer than



a millennia. Vasco de Gama stopped here and called it the “land of the good people”. In the 18th century it was a major trading port for ivory and for slave trade. In the 20th century, Maputo became more important and Inhambane sort of died.

Wednesday, I went with Tofu Scuba out on an “ocean safari”, where we boarded a high speed dive vessel and went around the point of the beach to the open Indian Ocean to find whale sharks. I always considered them extremely rare to spot anywhere in the world, and others have confirmed my view. But here they find them daily. In two hours, we had found five different whale sharks. I dove (snorkeled) with four of them. They tended to stay at the surface, and once you find them, they tend to be slow moving enough that with high energy leg work with fins, equivalent to slow jogging, you can stay with them. I had bought a cheap disposable underwater camera, and so swam with one for about 15 minutes, getting on all sides and very close (a couple of feet). The tail fin felt just like hard rubber. They are gentle but massive creatures, and despite being sharks (they are fish, not whales), they eat plankton. These were each about 20 to 25 feet in length (I think the huge open water ones get up to 60 feet). They are pretty, with black bodies completely covered with big yellow-green spots. This was a rare treat for me. So good, in fact, that I went again on Friday for another two hours of swimming with the giant creatures. Friday we got a couple of really big ones, probably well over 30 feet.

Also, almost every late afternoon, the humpback whales would come out to the point visible from my front porch. I would sit for several hours with my binoculars and watch them breach. Fabulous. When active, I would get a breaching whale every minute or so. I saw two very unusual breaches. Normally the big whales come straight up out of the water like a Polaris rising from a submarine, but usually stop climbing when about 1/3 to 1/2 out of the water and fall back in sideways creating huge splashes. But one giant kept rising till over two thirds out of the water and then, incredibly, as it fell, it pulled its tail out so that the entire whale was suspended above the water, a full body breach. Absolutely stunning. The splash from the belly flop which followed was titanic. The next day I caught two huge whales come out and do a breach simultaneously, side by side. I never have seen either event captured on film so assume them to be very unusual.

Back in Maputo I again was stopped by the police for a passport check Saturday night, just walking down the main street from the Ibis Hotel to my Hotel Tivoli. I got frustrated at this fourth confrontation, stated that they must stop the practice, and requested their names and identification for my “report”, which they refused to give; we all marched down to the local station just a couple of blocks down the street. The two police that stopped me complained to their superior that I mouthed off and accused them of wanting money. I confirmed to the captain that that is what I understood was going on, that every main hotel warned its guests, every guidebook warned the tourists, and it generally seemed well known, that this is what the Maputo police do. The superior kept trying to calm me down by saying they were the police and just doing their job. I asked how it was that their job was checking immigration status of whites, and I again requested all of their names for the report I was preparing. The police superior dismissed the two regular police back to their beat, and kept telling me they just were doing their job, and inquiring what harm had been done to me. I confirmed they had not actually asked me for money. He would not admit that my just being stopped and questioned, with the unspoken threat always hanging for a bribe, should be a problem for me. He kept inquiring about the nature of the report I was “preparing”, but refused to give me any names or id for his officers. We wound up discussing the big soccer game to be played Sunday, here in Maputo, between the Mauritania national team and the Mozambique national team. I just had had supper in the Hotel Ibis with the Mauritania team. I considered the confrontation a stalemate. Assuming it was a stalemate, I hope, for at least a few days, that these police will be more hesitant to stop foreigners, and more polite if they do. For those who may think I am naïve, I have considered the possibility, which I consider extremely small, of there being an alternative, in the eyes of the police, to a



stalemate having occurred; that is, knowing where I am staying for the next couple of days, they could plan an "accident" or "incident" to occur (planting drugs during a "search" is a common "incident"). I have decided, out of an abundance of caution, to keep a low profile, and not go out at night, until I depart on Tuesday.

Tomorrow morning I fly to Tete, where I intend to stay overnight, and then take minibuses to the border of Malawi, from where I can travel by minibus to Blantyre. I am hopeful from all reports that Malawi is less of a hassle and easier to navigate than Mozambique. Later, Dave

### **Dave Cox in Blantyre, Malawi, Fri. July 27, 2007**

Hello everyone. I flew from Maputo to Tete in the northwest of Mozambique on Tuesday. The flight was ontime (left 5 minutes early) and uneventful. Tete sits on the great Zambezi River, in a dry plain covered with the huge baobab trees. These, which you probably have seen in pictures, have enormous swollen trunks rising perhaps 40 or 50 feet or more, which can be over 10 feet in diameter. Very impressive. Tete is a small dirty town, with the only main hotel closed for renovation. I stayed in a cheap weekly/monthly rooms for rent, opting for one of their only larger rooms with a bathroom. Huge but dirty, and no hot water. No taxi service exists from the Tete airport, which is 10 kilometers from town. I just had to beg and then negotiate a ride into town with others. Here I found a market full of dried fish with a most unpleasant smell, and there found and purchased my first trial of a Mozambique wine, made with claimed Portuguese grapes. Back in the room, I swear that wine tasted just like the market fish smelled. Oddly unpleasant, but I have an iron constitution for most new flavors.

From Tete, the next morning I had to walk out to a main road, with my luggage, and wait for a minibus heading to the border of Malawi. This is where travel gets a little rough. After an hour to fill the minibus, we finally set a new record (for me) for number of people crammed in; 27 human beings in a tiny minibus, only three of whom were children. After we hit 23 I kept thinking this could be a world record, and then, when they kept stopping for someone else, I wondered if some kind of miracle was happening. 27 people!!! Try to picture a small van with even 14 people; very like those circuses where clowns keep pouring out of a tiny car. They finally delivered me, after a couple of hours, to the border of Mozambique, where I went through emigration. From there I had to find a shared taxi to go 7 kilometers to the immigration facilities for Malawi. After that, I had to find another shared taxi, where they packed a huge woman in on my lap in the front seat, for the 10 kilometer ride to the first little town. From the town I could catch another minibus for the two hour ride into Blantyre, the commercial capital of Malawi, and not a bad little town.

Here they have the Malawi brewery licensed from Carlsberg, and make a very decent high strength "Special Brew" which I find in the grocery stores for about 60 cents a bottle. Before I found I could use the guesthouse fridge to keep it cold, I tried the only red wine I could find, a bottle of "fortified" Zimbabwean wine; I managed to choke down close to half a bottle (it did start to taste less horrid at the halfway mark; maybe I should have kept going). The other half of the bottle may help clean out some slow running drain pipes. Of money, it is a little inconvenient trying to deal with it here. Many businesses don't accept cards, and those that do charge a 6% fee for "processing" any credit card (or debit). I normally like to deal with local cash, but here only two banks even have atm machines hooked up for international transactions; and they limit cash withdrawals to 20,000 kwacha. That may sound like a lot, and as the largest note they deliver is 500, it amounts to a huge stack of money. Unfortunately, the exchange rate is over 140 kwacha to the US dollar, so the maximum withdrawal is just over a hundred



dollars per day. The machines often are not functioning, and when functioning have long lines trying to get cash. Not ideal

I got taken by a brand new (to me) method, changing my last Mozambique meticals (currency) to the Malawi kwachas. In the 8 or so kilometers between border posts are dozens of young men who converge on you, if you are a foreigner, to exchange the local currencies. Trying to work both currencies back into dollars and then figure the rate between them, I negotiated a 5.2 kwacha per metical rate, then counted out my remaining notes of Mozambique currency at M1,320. The guy I was dealing with used a little calculator and showed me the result of 5,450 kwacha, which somehow didn't seem right to me. I was rushed, walking with all my luggage, standing in the middle of a hot road with 10 or so other exchangers all shouting for my business, so I demanded he loan me his calculator, and I did the computation twice myself, and it did indeed come out to 5,450 kwacha. After the exchange I was in the taxi and thought "wait a minute", a rate of 5.2 times 1,320 should be over 6,800. Incredibly, somehow they had figured out how to rig the little electronic calculator to do "wrong" math. It only cost me about \$10 US, and it was so astonishing that they could rig a little calculator to do consistently funny math, that in retrospect I decided it was another worthwhile lesson in the variety of ways one can be cheated while traveling. Immediately following the bad exchange, a great confrontation happened for my business with the next share taxi. The first car grabbed my bags and put them in the trunk. Immediately, a fellow from the nearby small minibus taxi can and tried to take my luggage out to put in his vehicle. While I was shouting at both "groups" (all taxis and minis use helpers to fill them, and so have little groups vying for business), they were close to blows, all the while yelling at me the the other driver was just a thief trying to cheat me. What a fun choice. I decided change under these circumstances may not always be the wrong choice, but if it is, I always feel worse than just being screwed by the first choice. So under this questionable "system", I stuck with the vehicle that first grabbed my bags. I did successfully get to the next post.

I am staying at a small resthome called Henderson Street Guest House, with just five large very old rooms, all with bath, set in some quite lovely gardens at the edge of the center of town. Blantyre is at some elevation, so it often is cloudy and the heat of the lowlands doesn't penetrate. The area is called the upper shire, and the lowlands to the south and west are the lower shire (very Tolkein but for the fact the pronunciation is "sheeray"). Many restaurants here have curries and Indian influence. Malawi so far seems very like I remember much of central India. It has none of the stress of South Africa, and although very poor, none of the risks or unpleasantness of Mozambique. I quite like the feel except again I am finding that transport, to get anywhere except the major cities, is very difficult. At the guesthouse I met a very nice white couple of Zimbabweans who were among those forced out of the country by the current government of Mugabe. Under what they refer to as the "20/10", they were given 10 days to leave the country, being permitted a maximum of 20 kilograms of belongings. They left a huge farm which supported 1,500 workers, and basically lost everything. They now run a small tropical plant business from Malawi, and wait for Mugabe's government to finally completely collapse, which most believe is imminent. Mugabe gave their land to one of his army commanders. They think that under the precedent set some years ago after the end of the Mozambique conflict, they will eventually get their land back in a few years, and so are just waiting. If I have time, they invited me to visit them up on the shore of Lake Malawi.

I already have booked 4 days in Liwonde National Park north of here, on the great Shire River, which park and river are famous for Nile crocodiles and hippos, and the great herds of elephant living in the forests at the rivers edge. Also for its dramatic bird life. I will head up to the park on Sunday, and am really looking forward to getting back into the wilds. I am trying to arrange some portions of my travel now through Zambia, as this is the very busy high season there, with the parks and Victoria Falls area in Zambia particularly crowded. I am traveling though this popular area at a bad time for independent travel,



but that seems to have been my luck much of this trip. Will be in touch after my Liwonde adventure.  
Dave









### **Dave Cox in Lilongwe, Malawi, Mon. Aug. 6, 2007**

Hello everyone.

I stayed in Blantyre until Sunday a week ago. My last full day I visited the St Michael's church, which I believe is the oldest protestant church in sub-Saharan Africa. Livingston's famous voyages into the heart of Africa were up the Zambezi and the Shire Rivers. The Zambezi is one of the world's great rivers, draining Angola and the Congo and running through Botswana and between Zambia and Zimbabwe (used to be North and South Rhodesia), before crossing Mozambique to empty into the Indian Ocean. I already have been on it once in Tete, Mozambique. I will be on it again in Zambia at the world famous Victoria Falls. The Shire River is a great tributary of the Zambezi running down through Malawi, and Livingstone traveled up the Shire for the first time when his way was blocked up the Zambezi. Upon his returns to Scotland, he talked the church into sending missionaries up the Shire, and perhaps the earliest protestant mission station was formed by the Church of Scotland in what is now Blantyre. In the 1880's the missionaries built a church of brick, which resembles a small but ornate cathedral, and did so with no architecture experience whatsoever. It is quite dramatic.

From Blantyre I traveled to Liwonde town, and from there to Liwonde National Park, the oldest and greatest wildlife park in Malawi. The trip to Liwonde town only required two transfers between minibus and bus, and was uneventful (a good thing). Liwonde town sits on the great Shire River, and is a dusty little hive of thatched and corrugated huts and wooden shacks. The hotel I stayed at was a long rambling mosquito infested place. The only transport around town and out to the river is by bicycle taxis. For those of you familiar with 3 wheeled bicycle taxis (in India, rickshaws), this is not the picture. These are just your classic steel bicycles with the rear rack padded and with tie down ropes. Young men peddle them up and down the roads. To get the kilometers across the bridge and down a dirt track to the boat dock I had to hire two, one to carry me and the other to carry my tied on luggage. (I chose to enter the



park from Liwonde town, even though it cost me a 40 dollar boat ride each way into the park, because the only other option was to get off a minibus 13 kilometers from the park camp and take bicycle taxis 13 kilometers through the forest, where one is warned not to venture in the evening as the elephant herds may block the road. The elephants kill many people each year.)

Monday morning I took the boat up the Shire River about 20 kilometers to the Mvuu Camp. The Shire River runs through the park, and it is absolutely filled with great families of hippos, snorting and bellowing, and occasionally coming up under boats. This time of year the hippos have their new babies, and the young are just incredibly curious, continuing to move in front of their mothers to get better looks at us tourists. Certain sandy banks of the shores are beds for hundreds of huge Nile crocodiles. The marshes on the banks are home to large groups of elephants. The park is renowned especially for its bird life, with over 400 species accounted for here. Mvuu Camp, in the heart of the park, offers full board accommodation in small stone walled-tented roof chalets, or overflow tents. My first two nights were in a tent, and the third upgraded to a chalet. Full board meant three huge buffet meals, plus morning coffee and afternoon tea, each day, and both a morning boat game safari and afternoon-night driving safari, daily. In addition to the river life, the game drives and night drives displayed about 8 antelope species in addition to the hippos and elephants. I opted for two days drives in the special high protection area called the Black Rhino Sanctuary in hopes of seeing this rarely seen beast. I did not see the black rhino, but in the sanctuary did get all of the four largest African antelope, the eland, kudu, sable and roan, as well as the Lichtenstein hartebeest. Once again, failed to encounter the lions, although we saw their fresh prints. At night in the camp we were serenaded by the bellowing hippos that seem never to sleep, coming right into our camp to graze (rather a frightening thing as I had to leave my tent if I needed to use the bathroom at night; hippos kill more people than elephants, lion or buffalo), and the frightening wails of the non-dangerous bushbabies. The birdlife was astonishing, and I got hopefully great photos of malachite kingfishers, the great African fish eagle (one of which we got to see kill a young meter long monitor lizard), the very rare Bohm's bee-eaters, and openbilled storks, among dozens of others.

My first two days I was befriended by a young Danish couple, and, because the others in camp all belonged to one of three large groups, we got to go on all game drives with just the three of us, making the drives considerably more pleasant. He was the manager for sales for Carlsberg Brewery in Blantyre, Malawi, having just been stationed there for two years after a stint in Cambodia. Carlsberg is the famous Danish beer, and I discovered that about 50 years ago, the foreign minister of Denmark wanted to do something special with Malawi. Instead of a tea plantation or something more "normal", he talked Carlsberg Brewery into opening their first foreign operation in Malawi. Now, with operations in over 50 foreign countries, the Malawi plant still is one of the most successful. So here in Malawi one finds real Carlsberg, in what they commonly refer to as the greens, browns and golds, everywhere. And cheap. Nice.

Thursday I returned by boat to Liwonde town, where I got a lift up the hill to the minibus station (station is always a misnomer here; more a gated dusty area where the minibuses stop to fill up). I had to take one minibus to the nearby town of Balaka, from where I caught a second midsize bus to Salima; this bus, with a dead battery, had to be push-started each time to run. From Salima only matolas run down to Senga Bay; matolas are what they call the mini-pickup trucks which act as shared taxis. Well, these matolas filled me with more astonishment (and fear) than even the minibus which packed in 27 people. Long after I would have hopped out of the truck, if I had been able, and long after I thought a new record already had been established, we kept adding riders to the huge bags of grain, the 21 inch boxed TV, the boxes of drinks and the people's luggage, achieving eventually 24 adults; I mean people were sitting on the roof of the truck, clinging precariously to the tailgate, and where every square inch of the bed was covered, they managed to squeeze feet in to simply stand motionless in the middle. This, plus the man on my left was hanging onto a catch of about 20 fresh small fish, which I tried to keep off my lap, and the woman on my



right had an unhappy live chicken in her lap. When I told the story the next day to the Sri Lankan managers of a hotel down the way, they said I was on one of the better rides as I hadn't had to share it, in addition to the above mentioned riders, with several full grown goats. I thereafter actively started looking for a private ride back out of Senga Bay.

Senga Bay is one of the pretty stretches along Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa. It shares borders with Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. Originally (and still on the Mozambique side) it was named Lake Nyasa by Livingstone, such that the name of Malawi until independence some 43 years ago was Nyasaland. This is somewhat funny, as Livingstone gave the lake the name the natives called it, not realizing, apparently, that Nyasa in the native tongue merely meant "lake", so that he named it "Lake Lake". Lake Malawi or Nyasa is home to more species of fish than any other inland lake in the world. These are the famous cichlids, found only in the central African lakes, and diverged into hundreds of species occupying myriad niches. The type the natives call "chambo" is a mainstay in the diet, and delicious; many other species are brightly colored and a mainstay in the world's aquarium market.

At Senga Bay, for the second time in Malawi, I found myself at a hotel owned by Muslims, where, although they have a full service restaurant, they sell no beer. This was inconvenient as the hotel, as are almost all hotels, was kilometers from anywhere where goods can be bought, and there are no taxis or other forms of transport. As luck would have it, my first full day as I was coming back from a long hike, I encountered the coca cola distributor delivery truck on the dirt road just down the way from my hotel. As further luck would have it, this also is the beer distributor, and with final good luck, after I gave them my tale of woe about the hotel not serving, they agreed to sell me, at wholesale prices, whatever I could carry back to my fridge. I stocked my private fridge with Carlsberg greens and golds for the duration of my stay. As an amusing aside, while I was chatting with the Sri Lankan managers of another hotel down the way, they informed me that the male half of the Muslim owners of my hotel had just stopped by the evening before, as they always did when in Senga Bay. The male owner and friend left the wives out in the car, and snuck into the hotel bar to slug down two or three expensive shots of whiskey before returning to their wives and families.

My luck held, and on Sunday I met Hasan, born in Tanzania, living in Dubai and a resident of New Jersey, who said he is in the aviation security business. Anyway, his company provided him a private car and driver to take him to the lake and back to Lilongwe, and so I achieved a free ride all the way from hotel in Senga Bay to hotel in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. How I had hoped I would be spared the ride in a matola back to Salima, in which I was certain, this time, I would ride with goats. Lilongwe is very spread out, but the Old Town, in which I am staying, is compact and full of good little restaurants, including Indian, and bars. I have confirmed that the agency I worked with from Blantyre, has confirmed the next stage of my trip, starting this Thursday, to go first to South Luanga Park and then Livingston, at Victoria Falls, both in Zambia.

Overall, the people of Malawi are by far and away the most friendly and least threatening of people anywhere I have been in southern Africa so far. Everything about the countryside, the homes, the vegetation and the people reminds me of growing up in India during the 50s. Even the electricity, which we did not get until the late 50's in India, goes off several times a day (or night). I began to think this was chiefly a problem with Senga Bay, because it is out on a peninsula, but here in the capital it already went off last night and then again mid-morning today. Mosquitoes are pretty bad in places, but they are very poor and slow flyers and easy to swat, and as long as one has a fan on at night they cannot navigate in even slow moving air. Real wimpy compared to what I am used to in the jungles of central and South America. Later. Dave









































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**Dave Cox in Livingstone, Zambia, Thurs. Aug. 16, 2007**

Hello everyone. Before I left Lilongwe I walked across the river to the shantytown and old market. Although the market was colorful and the river had interesting scenes of people washing their clothes, behind the market were the shantytown “bars” and eating places. I was absolutely overcome by the



incredible odors of the open pits, surrounded by plastic, used for toilets, along with the mountains of garbage, sad humans going through it along with the dogs, and waste tossed on the river banks, mingled with the fresh and rotting fish and the cooking of huge pots of nsima, the national food consisting of maize porridge. The area was infested with flies, and was as fetid and ugly a living condition as ever I have seen, or smelled. Very sad.

Thursday I traveled into Zambia, formerly northern Rhodesia, to the South Luangwa Park. The last 120 kilometers to the park are bad dirt road, which requires 4-wheel drive during wet season. I had arranged to travel with a tour group going to the park using landrovers. Crossing into Zambia was the first border I have crossed where they had a window for "health services", and they asked for a certificate of yellow fever vaccination, even though I had been told Zambia did not require shot certificates. My inoculation certification was stolen in Barcelona last year along with my passport, and is not as easily replaced as the passport. I thought I might be refused entry into Zambia. I explained to the official that my certificate had been stolen, but that I did have the requisite vaccination. He looked at my passport, then loudly said "In Zambia old people don't lie!", and let me through. Amused, but prepared to be slightly offended at the reference to my age, I asked if he determined I was "old" enough not to lie by seeing my birth date in the passport. He assured me, and those around, that that was indeed how he had known my true age. Mollified and relieved, I passed on to immigration, where I had no problems.

South Luangwa Park, on the Luangwa River, a tributary of the Zambezi River, is reputed to be one of the best parks in Africa to spot lion, leopards and dangerous game. I stayed 5 days at Flatdog's camp on the River at the entrance to the park. "Flatdog" is a reference to the crocodiles. The camp is open to the river and the bush, and is perpetually interesting, and at times downright dangerous. The camp is spread out over a long distance through the scrub. Every day African elephants would come through camp grazing, and cutting off access between the various facilities. We were told to keep at least 50 meters distance, and never to run from them, but to stand ground if they charge. At least twice I encountered a group of elephants coming slowly through the brush as I was half-way to my chalet. Wide detours off the trails only increased the chance of further surprise encounters. Sunday morning I got a good picture through my bedroom window of a large bull elephant confronting the chair I would sit in just outside my chalet over the river. Twice a full grown female elephant was ripping up the tree just outside my front door (within 20 feet), keeping me inside until it decided to leave. Walking by the registration office for pictures the first day I encountered a cape buffalo walking across the road. Every night the hippos came up from the river and grazed through the camp, making walks to the chalet at night a little frightening. The river banks were infested with Nile crocodiles, but they did not leave the river. Usually the camp had night help with big torches to help make sure guests actually arrived at their doors. With respect to the dangerous animals, the camp had a notice which read:

"The land on which Flatdogs Camp is situated is privately owned. It is also a sanctuary for wild animals. If you leave the camp on foot you are: 1. Trespassing; 2. Disturbing the wildlife; 3. Placing your life in danger; 4. Placing our business in jeopardy. If, after reading this, you still wish to take a "little stroll" on your own, please pay your bill and pack your bags before you go, as in the unlikely event of you returning alive, you will be asked to leave."

The game drives into the park were often like being part of a pack of hunting predators. The vehicles of our camp and the others would communicate, and we often would find ourselves as part of 6 to 10 landrovers chasing and encircling target animals, or spreading through the brush to drive them out. The targets of this activity were the lions and leopards, which we saw almost every drive. This must be what people come for, because I saw only 4 species of antelope (one, the puku, is rare and only found here and in northern Botswana); nothing compared to the dozens of species found in each of the other parks.



But finding lions or a leopard in the other parks was a rare event. My first night we came almost on top of a pair of lionesses with 3 cubs, later a male and female lion resting under a tree, and then directly under the tree with a leopard with its kill, where a huge spotted hyena came along to pick up the dropped pieces of the carcass. The second afternoon we got a beautiful leopard out for its hunt, sneaking through a deep trench running through a pan with the puku herd. The park is full of elephant and cape buffalo herds, and a huge number of spotted hyenas. This definitely was dangerous game country. In addition to the dangerous animals, the park also has an endemic subspecies of zebra, the Crawshai, and also the Thornicrofts giraffe, both animals with differently patterned markings than the more common Bechel's zebra and reticulated giraffe. The camp always was full of chacma (yellow) baboons and vervet monkeys. Also got great views of the saddlebilled storks and a western banded snake eagle, and a pair of African fish eagles attacking a Wahlbergs Eagle.

Rather than face 3 torturous days of land travel across Zambia, I paid an outrageous price (\$360) for a ticket on a small prop plane to fly directly from Mfuwe, at the entrance to the South Luangwa Park, to Livingstone in the south. Livingstone is the town on the Zambian side of one of the world's greatest natural wonders, the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River. The river marks the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, which share the fall's tourism. More tourists used to go to the Zimbabwe side, but now with that country on the verge of collapse, the Zambian side is the hotbed. This is the height of tourist season, as it is summer holidays for all of Europe, which provides the majority of tourists here. Dr David Livingstone was the first European to view the falls, "discovering" them on his first great journey across the heart of Africa, as he traveled down the Zambezi River. He named the falls after Queen Victoria. The Zambezi River here is over a mile wide, and flows slowly along the flat plain. Suddenly, the ground breaks open in a spectacular 350 foot deep narrow chasm with vertical cliffs, and the mile wide river simply plunges down into this gash. At one end of the gash the river continues its course at the bottom and does switch-backs several times as the river continues deep within the earth, forming white water rapids as it courses around the switch-backs; a river runner's paradise. The falls is spectacular, and the spray rising out of the gorge can be spotted from 50 kilometers away. Walking along the top, as the winds shift, one is perpetually rained upon from the spray. I arrived soon after sunrise and was treated to the marvelous rainbows formed in the gorge by the sun hitting the clouds of spray. Livingstone wrote in his journal, in 1955, "On sights as beautiful as this, angels in their flight must have gazed." I hiked down into the gorge at one point to a river spot known as the "boiling pot", and watched a dozen inflatable whitewater rafts take off for a multiday rafting trip. Deep within the narrow gorge, the ecosystem is lush rainforest, with tropical palms, due to the perpetual spray, while on the dry surface the land is scrub thorn forest. On the great Zambezi Bridge spanning the gorge at this point, they operate one of the world's deepest bungee jumps. I had no interest in trying after watching from below, and hearing the screams of terror of those who seemed to drop endlessly. I was incredibly fortunate to come upon a pair of trumpeter hornbills just 15 foot away in a tree. All in all, the falls lives up to its reputation.

I have also visited the Livingstone Museum, which has a large collection of all the original letters Livingstone wrote from his three journeys through Africa, as well as a number of memorabilia of his. It even has his family tree, showing all descendents born through 1965, and so I realized a number of his great-great-great grandchildren (I probably blew the number of "greats") are about my age. The museum also has a small but good quality collection of natural history exhibits (stuffed animals and birds), which put to shame the exhibits in the much larger Natural History Museum in Maputo.

Saturday I have arranged to travel for just three days into Botswana into the premier Chobe Park. Actually I am booked at a semi-expensive (for me dreadfully expensive) private lodge within one of the private game reserves which border the Chobe Park, where I will have all meals and game drives included within the price. The experience should be great. I also had wanted to get into the Okavanga



Delta area, but this being the height of tourist season, and its prices being the highest in all of southern Africa, I simply have not found any reasonably priced transport (all transport into the delta itself is by private charter flights which service the private lodges actually within the delta) or lodging that would give me any kind of decent experience. I will travel on to Namibia next week. Later. Dave Cox





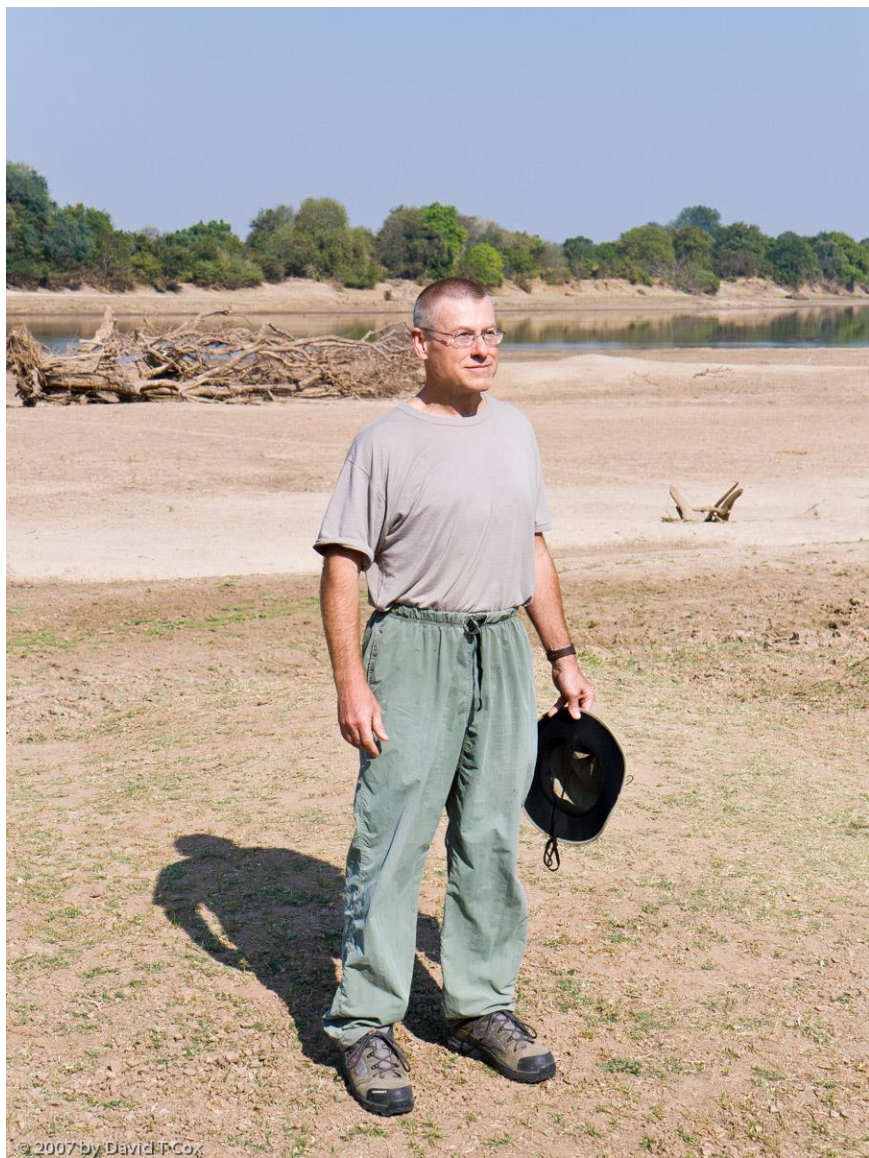








































**Dave Cox in Windhoek, Namibia, Fri. Aug. 24, 2007**

Hello everyone. Before reporting on the goings-on here, I want to comment on my sadness at hearing of the huge 8.0 magnitude earthquake which hit under the Peru coast last week. The BBC news reported



that most deaths and destruction were at Pisco, the delightful little town where three years ago I spent three days on my journey south of Lima. It is the jumping off point for the Ballesta Islands, and for the graveyards of the great 3,000 year-old Paracas culture. Pisco was reported to be 70% destroyed; from the news pictures I recognized the ruins of the church on the town square. Then just south of there, the next town I had visited for its terrific regional museum, Ica, was reported to be 30% destroyed. My last access to news was right after the quake hit, when deaths were reported at 500, but I assume the total is much higher than that.

I have traveled far since last I wrote. From Livingstone I traveled into Botswana last Saturday. I was standing by the minibus on the highway outside Livingstone, waiting for it to fill to leave for the border, when a semi-truck came by and stopped for me. The driver was a grizzled Africaner hauling copper ore from Zambia to southern Botswana. He said he had been driving all of southern Africa since 1958. You should have heard the minibus guys yelling that he was a thief, for picking up one of their customers, while he was yelling back that I was his white brother. Brother! That was interesting. He gave me a ride to the ferry at the Zambezi River, which constitutes the border between Zambia and Botswana. More than 100 trucks there were backed up waiting for the ferry, such that he said it would take him two full days to cross. I just had to check out at the emigration post and climb on the next ferry. On the Botswana side, the Elephant Valley Lodge I was booked into picked me up for my 4 day visit to the world renowned Chobe National Park on the Chobe River front.

The lodge is in a private game park, bordering Chobe Park, with its own watering hole. The bird life was fantastic, and, indeed, the owner told me the South African Birding Society has had an annual meeting there. This was one of the private lodges with the huge permanent luxury tents, with power, coffee, private baths, etc. The food was wonderful, and I probably gained several pounds. Every night herd after herd of elephants came to the water hole, and jostled for position and hierarchy. We would eat dinner out over the water hole to catch all the action. During the day the area attracted bushbucks, impala and chacma baboons among other animals. Each day we did a morning game drive to the Chobe River, and from there a boat ride on the Chobe into the National Park. Every evening we did the game drive near the river front in open 4-wheel drive vehicles. The park is overfull of elephants even though they lost 25% of their numbers in 2003 to anthrax. Every day I saw the same pride of female lions with their 3 almost grown cubs. On the final day, from the boat, we witnessed one lioness almost make a successful attack on a huge male waterbuck. I had spotted the lions up under brush on the river edge, and our boat stopped, along with several others, to watch. A careless waterbuck came walking along the river edge right to the point below the lioness and started to drink, unaware she was 20 meters behind. Even though the pride had killed a sable 4 nights earlier, and so were not really hunting, she could not resist. She crept onto the sand slope behind the waterbuck and made a dash from about 15 meters. The buck made one giant and very lucky leap directly into the river and swam out to a nearby island, where the lioness decided not to go. One minute later some approaching warthogs got the attention of one of the teenager cubs, who probably was emboldened by what mom just did. The cub took off after the warthogs for a half-hearted 50 meter run, while the hogs kept going as far as we could see.

In the park we also saw a large variety of birds, including many marabou storks, a rare hooded vulture among whitebacked vultures on a baby buffalo kill, a rare whiteheaded vulture, Bradshorn hornbills and an African hawk eagle. For the first time I also saw the red lechwe antelope, and a large herd of roan antelope. All this along with many cape buffalo, reticulated giraffes, puku, sable, hippos, crocodiles and steenbok.

On the first two days, on our drive to the park, right where we turned off the small paved road, was a semi-truck which had turned over the night before my arrival. On the third morning they hauled the truck



away, and that afternoon hauled away its freight load, leaving only a scar on the roadside. The fourth morning as we approached this same spot, there was a new truck, almost on top of where the other had sat, with its cab smashed in, but no other visible damage. It had taken out the power pole, explaining the camp's loss of electric power that night and morning. We stopped, and there behind the truck was the massive male giraffe it had hit square on during the night. The giraffe's body had been right at the cab height and really totaled the truck. Fortunately the driver was not seriously injured, and I gave him a little money to help him out. I decided that particular spot was very unlucky for trucks.

On the fourth day I returned to the ferry, crossed back into Zambia, and got a shared taxi back to Livingstone for the night. From Livingstone I booked the twice weekly Intercape Mainliner bus which travels all the way to Windhoek, Namibia, a 19 hour journey. We traveled three hours to cross the Zambezi River at the tiny point where Namibia sticks a long finger, called the Caprivi Strip, between Angola and Botswana, all the way to Zambia. We then followed the Caprivi into Namibia proper and down to Windhoek, the capital city.

I am in a delightful German hotel, called the Hotel Pension Steiner, near the center of town where I will headquarter for the several weeks in the country. The breakfasts include several aged cheeses and fresh baked loaves of several types of bread each day. Windhoek is a modern and clean city with modern shopping centers and good restaurants. Today I have finished booking my main destination in Namibia; Etosha Park, which rivals Kruger as the most renowned of Africa's wildlife parks. I have rented a car for starting next Tuesday, and have booked self catering lodge double rooms with the Namibian Wildlife Resorts for 5 nights, in the three different campsites, inside Etosha Park. I now trust my own skills as rivaling, if not exceeding, those of the driver/guides I have had in the major parks for spotting and identifying game and birds. With almost 6 days to be immersed in the park, alone, I am very excited about what will be a culminating wildlife experience.

After the Etosha experience, I expect to book a three day camping safari down to the Namib Desert to the world's greatest sand dunes. After that I probably will head back into South Africa for the balance of my trip. Later. Dave

































#### **Dave Cox back in Windhoek from Etosha, Namibia, Tue. Sept. 4, 2007**

Hello everyone. I picked up my rental car last Tuesday and was delighted to get a free upgrade from the serviceable but really basic VW Chico, the most common cheap car in southern Africa, to a new Toyota Corolla, with air and power. I drove the 500 kilometers north to Etosha Park, and along the way was amused that road "caution for animals" signs, which usually display a leaping antelope, here displayed the image of a warthog. Sure enough, along the highway sides were dozens of grazing warthogs, which often decided to cross the road as one approached. Etosha is the huge world famous desert park surrounding the Etosha Pan, the salt lake-bed of an ancient inland sea, which still partially floods in some wet years. The salt pan itself is over 120 kilometers across. The landscape around is punctuated with the tall fingers of the termite mounds, showing the white, grey or red colors of the underlying soil. The geology is such that 3 different types of natural springs fill waterholes around the edge of the salt pan formation. Large concentrations of wildlife live in the mopane forests, bushveld and sweet grasslands surrounding the pan. Through this pan border region run myriad gravel roads winding through the various ecosystems and leading to all the waterholes. Although during the winter dry season (now) the area seems almost devoid of green, the thorn bushes and grasses provide adequate food, and the many waterholes provide the water, to support huge numbers of springbok, black-faced impala, kudu, wildebeest, hartebeest and zebra. These in turn support the lions, leopards, cheetah and hyena. Famous and endemic to the area are the gemsbok or oryx, with their wonderful black masked faces and towering (over a meter long) horns, wandering the edges of the pan. Also found here in forested areas are the Dardara dik dik, the tiniest antelope in Africa, standing only about 15 inches at the shoulder. Both I found in good numbers for photos.

I pre-booked 5 nights inside the park, spread between the three different fenced camps. Camp is a bit of a misnomer, although a majority of the visitors do camp. The sites contain air-conditioned double rooms



and expensive chalets. The camps are surrounded by electric fences, and the gates are locked between sundown and sunrise, requiring all visitors to be inside the camp before dark. The three camps are about 70 kilometers apart, and each is situated by one of the better waterholes, which can be viewed day and night from within the camp. I stayed in one of the double rooms. The restaurant service provides three meals a day, all buffet style. I was able to enjoy eland and oryx steak, and kudu and crocodile roast. The eland and kudu are similar to beef and the croc, surprisingly, was a white meat like pork, and delicious. Far better that I eat croc than the other way around.

Etosha has not only the unusual and endemic beasts, but the largest elephants I have seen anywhere, huge reticulated giraffes, many ostriches, with the males performing their incredible mating displays out on the Etosha Pan for the seemingly uninterested females, elands, spotted hyenas and many many lions. I spent much of one late afternoon by the Rietfontein Waterhole, where 3 females and one young male lion were camped out, and watched the poor springbok and zebra herds circle at a distance, unwilling to try to move in for water. Then along sauntered a new lioness with three young and very playful cubs. The cubs really liked biting and hanging on to their mother's and each other's tails. After they situated themselves on my side of the waterhole, along sauntered a big male, marking territory, grunting and growling and finally situating himself directly in front of me. I could have stayed much longer, but as it was a half hour drive back to the Halali camp, I had to leave well before sunset. Other waterholes attracted an incredible variety of wildlife in the heat of the day. At times there were zebra, wildebeests (gnus), springbok, kudu, hartebeests, impala, oryx, ostriches and giraffes, all jockeying for drinking space. Together with the larger animals also came black-backed jackals, kori bustards and all manner of other birds. Of special interest to me were the many red crested korhaans and black korhaans, which are large running birds, the pale chanting goshawks, which are huge accipiters which often hunt in packs, and the rare African eagle owl, the largest owl.

I drove a total of almost 900 kilometers of dirt roads inside the park during the 6 days there. I really wanted to spot a black rhino, which I had not yet been able to capture. Both the white rhino and the black rhino are endangered, but the black rhino far more so, and far harder to spot even if the numbers are good. For many hours over 2 days I drove a back road, appropriately named Rhino Drive, through mopane/thorn-grassland which was ideal habitat for black rhinos, which are browsers. Not a bit of luck. Then at the Halali camp waterhole, on my third evening there, along wandered a black rhino about 15 minutes after sunset. Finally! With luck holding, my last night in the park, at the Okaukuejo camp waterhole, two different black rhinos wandered up to drink after sunset, along with about 20 giraffes, a spotted hyena, and a lone very silly bathing oryx. Clearly the trick is to not try so hard out on the desolate, hot road stretches, but to just sit around the camp waterhole in the cool of the evening, drink a bottle of wine, smoke the pipe, watch the sun set, and wait for the rare beasts to arrive.

I am now back in Windhoek at the delightful Hotel Steiner, but this Thursday go on a three day safari to the southern Namib Desert to visit the huge sand dunes, said to be the tallest in the world (a claim challenged by Peru around the town of Nazca). Until later. Dave

































**Dave Cox back from Namib Desert, Namibia, Mon. Sept. 10, 2007**

Hello everyone. I traveled on safari with Crazy Kudu (now merged with Mad Dog, imagine the vibes) down into the Namib Desert and the Namib-Naukluft Park. The scenery is spectacular, dry desert and the more than 100 kilometers of giant sand dunes of all colors, some over 300 meters in height (over 1000 feet). We set up tents and camped at a place called Sesrium at the edge of the dunes. The first evening we were driven to some small dunes and, pointed in the direction to travel, hiked to wherever we wanted to watch the sunset. I walked half an hour, constant climbing, to the peak of some dunes, enjoying the varying colors of the sand in the evening light. Large ants with white/blue/black/red bodies were everywhere on the dunes, along with various beetles, and all left little footprints in lines across the sand. That ants leave visible footprint trails, that you can easily follow, gives an idea of how fine the sand is. At the top I found the ants seemed to try to attack me. Wherever I put my pack, or tried to sit down, they would start to come, climbing up my pack or legs. Nothing would scare them into running or turning. So I started a little war, and would put my hand in the sand under each ant and throw them about 15 feet away. I swear, they turned right back, no matter which direction I threw them, and marched right back, often in a frontal line which seemed like a military attack. Very interesting behavior. I described it as warfare; someone in my group suggested amor rather than war. The sunset was terrific, and then I had to rush to get out of the dune field before it got too dark to see.

Friday we traveled into the middle of the park to Dune 45, the 45th giant parabolic dune counting in from the ocean. It is not a relatively big one at 130 meters in height (others are over 300m), but the crest above the slipface (the slipface is the steepest side of the dune falling from the crest, and is where the sand "slips" down to cause the dunes to migrate in that direction) comes down to near the road and is climbable. We arrived at about 6:30, at the crack of dawn, and climbed up along the crest to the highest point of the dune. Although only 430 feet high, the whole trek was probably almost a kilometer of



climbing through sand which flows almost like water. Go more than a couple of feet to either side of the crest and you start the long journey down the side of the dune, with little hope of climbing back up. We watched sunrise from the top, and as the colors and shadows changed I got a number of beautiful photos of the surrounding dunes. All are in pastel shades of red, orange, yellow and grey. Although we could not climb the slipface itself, there were jackal tracks up one side and down the other.

We then hiked 5 kilometers through a dry lake pan and across a number of small dunes to Sossusvlei, where a 900 year old "new" dune cut off water to a flooded area, leaving the now 900 year old stumps of trees which used to live there. Some of the dunes around Sossusvlei are over 300 meters (1,000 feet), forming a series of the largest sand dunes in the world (Nazca, Peru has one dune over 300 meters, claimed by Peru to be the highest in the world, but it is a single dune). Traveling down the slipface of dunes is like going down a 45 degree slope of honey; the sand travels with the buried foot each step in a slow flow, leaving no trace behind of footprints. Although one can travel down the slipface, I don't think it possible to climb up one. Needless to say, because the almost liquid-like sand would rise up above the ankles, after crossing each little dune we had to stop and empty our shoes. Very very tiring hiking through sand that deep and fine. This morning, three days after that hike, and after three prior cleanings, I still was beating sand out of my shoes; I think I got more than another tablespoon out. It was like the magicians at the Renaissance Festival who every few minutes pour water out of a vase that magically seems to be refilling itself.

We also visited Sesriem Canyon which is a slot canyon similar to the ones we have in northern Arizona and southern Utah. On the edges of the dunes and in the dry pans we saw a number of springbok, oryx, ostrich and blackbacked jackals. Nearby we saw herds of camels which now live wild here (originally from northern Africa). On the drive back through Gaub Canyon we also saw klipspringers, little antelope that live like mountain goats, and mountain zebra.

Back in Windhoek I have been working my photos on my computer, as I have every chance I have had on this trip. Unlike all my prior trips, where upon return to Phoenix it has taken me over two months each time to get my raw photos converted to dng (a photoshop raw format), numbered, copyrighted, labeled, adjusted, rated, sorted and then copied and opened to jpg for viewing on a monitor, this trip I am totally current, meaning all photos to date are completed. Carrying the computer has cost me weight and trouble, but I think it was worth it.

Last night I visited the Grand Canyon Spur steakhouse, a South African chain with a hokey northern Arizona Indian motif. The food was good and the beer cold and cheap. This Wednesday I fly South African Air from Windhoek back to Johannesburg, and will stay in the same B&B in Pretoria I stayed in upon first arrival. Already I am looking forward to Eastwood's pub. I still have 3 weeks before my scheduled flight back to Phoenix, and am thinking of renting a car and spending my last two weeks driving around South Africa. Later. Dave

















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**Dave Cox in Durban, South Africa, Sat. Sept. 22, 2007**

Hello everyone. I flew from Windhoek to Johannesburg on Wednesday a week and a half ago. The flight was uneventful except for my good fortune not to have to pay an excess luggage fee. After booking the flight I was informed, even though the flight was international, my fare structure limited me to 20 kilos of checked luggage. With my computer and camp gear my checked luggage normally is closer to 28 kilos. I managed to transfer my heavy pieces to my carry-on day-pack, and brought my checked luggage to 21.5 kilos, which apparently was within the grace range. Many other international passengers were having to fork over extra payment at the check-in counter. I tried to act natural with my still small day-pack which now weighed over 15 kilos (33lbs of all camera and computer gear).

I arranged a packed self-tour for my final two weeks; Monday morning I left Pretoria in a rental car, and am traveling for 15 days in KwaZulu-Natal, considered perhaps the most interesting province of South Africa, and home of the famed Zulu. I visited the Drakensburg Mountains for three days. This World Heritage Site contains spectacular peaks and escarpments, along with famed San rock art in the caves. My first two days were spent near the Amphitheater in the Royal Natal Park, probably photographically the most well known point in South Africa. Here the escarpment is a cliff face running over 8 kilometers in length with a height of almost 3,000 feet; it is pegged at each end by peaks. My third night I spent down near the central Drakensburg near Giants Castle and Cathedral Peak. These mountains were one of the main refuges of southern Africa's first "modern" peoples, the San people, also known as "bushmen" or, today, up in Namibia, where some of the few remain, as the Namib. All of the guides describe them as having been a short people with "protruding bellies and big bums". They speak the language famed for its use of clicks and whistles. The earliest "recent" residents of southern Africa, their presence dates back at least 7,000 years. I have been told, although not reliably, that up until 1950 one could purchase a license to hunt and shoot them in Namibia. They left behind an astonishing amount of cave paintings called the San rock art. Much of this is found in caves in the Drakensburg. Similar to archaic rock art



worldwide, it mostly consists of red, white, black and yellow pigments used to paint scenes of the animals they hunted, and the people dancing, hunting or your guess is as good as the guides. They think much of the painting may have resulted from shaman's hallucinations while undergoing ceremonies. I viewed rock art at three different places and found it fascinating.

I spent one day traveling with a small tour group to the "back" side of the Drakensburg into the tiny country of Lesotho. Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa, but is a separate country. It is entirely a mountain country, with the lowest point at over 1,300 meters (4,000 feet). We went in by dirt road, passable only in dry season, to one of the most remote parts where we were guaranteed to see no tourists other than ourselves. Although high up in the mountain pass we passed through a tiny South African immigration post, on the Lesotho side the post appeared long abandoned. Almost all the homes are the traditional rondavals, or circular houses with thatched roofs. We did some hiking up to nearby caves and saw some poorly protected San rock art. Near the caves I had the great good fortune to spot two endangered bald ibises up on a nearby cliff ledge, and got a couple of good photos. We spent close to an hour with a sangoma, which is one of the traditional healers. They are quick to point out that the sangomas, who only heal, are to be distinguished from the witchdoctors, who perform as much evil as good. To become a sangoma one must be selected by the ancestors, usually through a dream or some powerful sign. If selected, one cannot refuse to become trained, or great misfortune will fall. We also visited a house where they just had brewed the native "beer" from cane and barley. There are no bars, but various families may brew occasionally, and then post a white flag outside the house announcing the availability. Sitting outside this rondaval were three old men, very happy, with their big plastic liters of the beer. It looks like dirty water with thick patches of scum on top, but doesn't taste like dirty water; more like soured milk with a dirty bite to it. Actually, the taste was no worse than pulque in Mexico, and the consistency better. I quite enjoyed it.

Historically, the area all through KwaZulu Natal, just east of the Drakensburg, was the ground of many of southern Africa's great battles, and it is filled with battlefield monuments. Here were most of the major battles of the Anglo-Boer wars, the Anglo-Zulu wars and the Boer-Zulu wars. Of these, the most well known in the US, mostly due to movie renditions, probably are Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift and Blood River. In 1879, in Isandlwana, the Zulu annihilated the main body of British force in the area. Hours later, attacking the nearby outpost of Rorke's Drift, 4,000 Zulus were turned back in a successful defense by 139 British soldiers. The 1979 film "Zulu Dawn" is the film about the Isandlwana British defeat, and the 1964 film "Zulu", starring Michael Caine, tells the tale of Rorke's Drift. Blood River is the site of the 1938 defeat of 12,000 Zulus by a small force of Voortrekkers (Boers), avenging an earlier massacre of a Boer diplomatic party by the Zulus. I enjoy reading the history of these conflicts, but am not big on battlefield monuments, and so bypassed visiting the actual sites.

From the Drakensburg I traveled two days ago to Durban, and am staying at the Durban Manor, a hotel on the bay in a fascinating colonial era building full of century old glory and furniture. I visited Durban for a different experience, to see one of the world's largest aquariums and to walk the famous beaches. Instead, my first night, I went to the nearby Royal Hotel for its famous huge (and very expensive) buffet, and was given my most recent case of food poisoning. I can easily count on my fingers the cases of food poisoning I have suffered; it is amazing how each experience is seared into my memory. These are those times where for 6 hours one wishes to die rather than allow the body to continue its cleansing process. Normally after eating tainted food I have had the reaction hit within 3 hours. This time it did not hit for 8 hours, arriving at 4am. The delay was unusual, but the rest of the experience was not. For 6 straight hours the bathroom was my home, and I simply wanted to die. I spent 34 hours in bed, and got up this morning feeling weak, but basically having survived despite my wishes during those 6 hours. I just don't know why nature has to make the nausea and other symptoms so darn unpleasant. I suppose



it could be a not so gentle message not to repeat the meal that initiated the process. Now that I think of it, having noted that each episode is seared into my memory, I guess nature created a pretty indelible message. I will not eat the buffet at the Royal again (nor day-old chicken mole at the corner restaurant in Cuernavaca, Mexico (1978) nor pickled herring on the steamship the night before docking in Hong Kong (1966)).

Tomorrow I head up to spend the next 8 days in the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (try pronouncing "Hluhluwe", not three times fast, but just once and slowly; it is pronounced just as written), Greater St Lucia Wetland Park and Mkhuze Park, three of the premier wildlife and birding areas of South Africa, and my last and best chance for spotting the elusive cheetah and wild dogs in the wild, as well as the big five. I will report after visiting. Later. Dave



















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#### **Dave Cox in St Lucia, South Africa, Thur. Sept. 27, 2007**

Hello everyone. I am sorely disappointed the food poisoning caused me to miss the opportunity to see Durban. Durban was the town Gandhi was brought to in 1893 as an indentured laborer, and where he later formulated and perfected his famous peaceful protest style which ultimately ended the British Empire. I was looking forward to visiting and eating in what in effect is "little India" in Durban, and located my hotel close by. Anyway, that is passed.

Sunday I drove to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park and spent two days in semi-luxury in one of the chalets at Hilltop in Hluhluwe. Tuesday I drove to the other half of the park, Imfolozi, and stayed in a rather wretched "rest hut". Hluhluwe-Imfolozi is famed for having the "big five", particularly lots of white rhino. I saw and photographed many white rhino, including two separate beasts sporting nasty gore wounds. One was a large male which had been gored inside the back left leg, and the other, a female with a calf, had been gored badly on the side. I got photos of both, with wounds. I can only figure these rhinos, being relatively dense in the parks, must have many violent confrontations. Either that or they get into fights with the buffalo. Speaking of which, the parks also were full of huge buffalo. The last day I spent driving out to a very remote corner of the park, and from a blind saw a buffalo which had just been attacked by lions; lions, if choosing to attack a buffalo, always will go up on the rear to try to bite through the spinal column above the hind quarter to cripple the beast. This buffalo's entire back half was red from running blood. The vertebrae were exposed over the hind quarter, and claw marks ran down the flanks. I gave the buffalo only a 50:50 chance of survival, especially if it were to attract the lions again. Indeed, they may have been following, but I didn't see them. I did however spot lion prides twice. The first day as I drove up onto a ridge, lionesses, obviously on the hunt and tracking something, ran up to the road. This was my first encounter with lions in the wild where they were not being lazy. My hair stood on end. The large lioness was incredibly tense and, continuously testing the air coming from the direction they were headed, she ran back and forth around my vehicle, completely ignoring it. Both my windows were open,



as I was taking photos, and this lioness scared me. Then suddenly another lioness caught up and they all took off at good speed on up the hill.

I had good luck with birds also, getting photos at my first encounters with crowned hornbills, woollynecked storks and a cuckoo hawk. The parks also had great herds of Nyala antelope, which I only have seen in small numbers in Swaziland before. But most importantly, which I save for last, I FINALLY got my cheetah. True, it was about 500 meters away, being lazy, but it is the first, and perhaps only, cheetah I ever will see in the wild. I had wanted also to see wild dogs in the wild, but as only about 2,000 still exist, and of these only about 500 in all of South Africa, I will understand if I never see one. Still, I have Mkuze Park for my final three days of this trip, and it has wild dogs. Maybe.

Yesterday I drove down to St Lucia Estuary, at the south end of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. I am staying here at a backpackers for two nights. Today I drove into the park, saw a little wildlife, but very little. I had hoped for some great birding, but I understand the park is into a multiyear drought and has been badly damaged by fires, and is undergoing some controversial reconstruction. Anyway, if there is spectacular wildlife and birdlife, it is not visible from the areas we are allowed to drive through.

After Mkuze Park, on Monday I drive back to Pretoria, and Wednesday I start the awful 30 hour trip back to Phoenix, of which 9 hours will be sitting in Heathrow Airport, London. This has been a long and, sometimes, difficult trip, and I am looking forward to Phoenix and tipping a few with friends. Later. Dave









**Dave Cox back in Pretoria, South Africa, Tue. Oct 2, 2007**

Hello everyone. My southern Africa journey is concluding. I drove from St Lucia wetlands on Friday to the small game park called Mkuze. It is well out-of-the-way. Terrible dirt roads through little Zulu villages in order to drive in, it is tucked just south of Mozambique and Swaziland. After paying way too much for the old and depressing hut in Imfolozi, I expected even worse in Mkuze where I was paying much less for a safari tent. I was very pleasantly surprised to find a traditional huge permanent tent, with double beds, electricity, full bathroom, and, wonder of wonders, attached to the porch a full half open kitchen with fridge, stove, coffeemaker, and all cooking utensils. This was good, as there are no restaurants in Mkuze Park, and it is a full hour drive to the nearest town. I spent three nights, cooking for myself, and spending the evenings out on the porch, sipping wine, reading, and watching the impala and nyala antelope wander by.

The second evening was quite exciting; just at dark as I was reading on the porch, I heard something loud drop onto the top of the tent. A minute later what appeared to be a huge squirrel dropped down along the



wall of the kitchen, and proceeded to help itself. I realized it was my first up-close view of a bushbaby: a thick-tailed bushbaby to be exact. Normally you only hear these creatures at night, as they cry like a human baby, hence the name. They have large eyes, and look a little like lemurs, but are almost the size of a raccoon. Well, this one stole several slices of brown bread I had put out for a sandwich. I managed to get a couple of flash pictures of it.

Together with Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, which I just visited last week, Mkuze is where the white and the black rhinos have been brought back from the brink of extinction. I understand that in 1960 there were only about 30 breeding pairs of white rhino left anywhere in the wild, and they all were in Hluhluwe and Mkuze. Now white rhinos in the wild number over 2,000, and have been placed in numerous parks, including Kruger and Pilanesburg. Black rhinos now are badly endangered, and, again, it is in these three parks they are most numerous, especially Mkuze, and are being highly protected. The black rhinos just stay well hidden, but the white rhinos are everywhere in these parks. My last day I spotted a very large male, right beside the road, using a bright red termite mound to "anoint" itself; it first worked its horn all through the slightly damp mound until the horn was bright red. Then it climbed physically over the mound, stretched out its back legs, and proceeded to rub its male member all over the top of the mound. I never have seen anything like this, and do not know its purpose. He then proceeded to go in little circles, tearing up the ground with his horn and feet before turning and spraying three huge billows of white secretion over the area; at least this I recognized as marking the territory. Fascinating!

For the first time, I also managed to get photos of all three species of duiker, the red, blue and common. These tiny antelope always stay in thick undergrowth, and generally you only get a flashing view of the animals as they turn and fade into the thickets. I also got to see and photograph the toothiest warthog I have seen; I have seen thousands. This male, in his prime, had absolutely enormous tusks. They must have measured nine inches (22 cm). With birds, I managed to add collared barbets, crested guinea fowl and a longcrested eagle to the interesting birds I have photographed. All in all, Mkuze was a satisfying finale to my safari journey.

In review, ever since I was a young boy growing up in India I have wanted to visit Africa to go on safari to see the animals. This trip was for the purpose of fulfilling that dream. In looking back over the last 4 months, I have visited 10 game parks in southern Africa, including the four which are most world famous. I have stayed in sleeping bags in small dome tents in Kruger, Liwonde and Namib, in semi-luxurious safari tents in Chobe and Mkuze and luxurious chalets in Hluhluwe, Etosha and South Luangwa. I have eaten camp style where all food had to be brought in and prepared, and eaten from heaping buffets overlooking wildlife in waterholes and rivers. I have seen and photographed 55 species of mammals, including 25 species of antelope, all of the "big five" and all big cats; indeed, I have happily seen every animal I ever hoped to see and many I never knew existed. Only missing are the very endangered and rarely seen wild dogs (which I have seen and photographed in breeding parks). Finally, I have learned close to 200 new birds species, and photographed about 85 of them. All-in-all, a very successful safari adventure to fulfill my childhood dream.

Two ironies: First, I have worked hard ever since Kruger seeking to find the very endangered and elusive black rhino; finally I get to see and photograph several black rhinos as they came to me while I was relaxed in the evening overlooking my luxury camp waterholes, sipping wine and smoking my pipe. Second, it has been four years since my last illness, a case of flu while studying Spanish in San Miguel. I have traveled through Peru, Guatemala, Egypt, Turkey, Mexico and 8 countries in southern Africa, eating in tiny grubby cafes and from street vendors, never even getting an upset stomach. Then, in Durban, in a four star hotel, at its finest restaurant overlooking the bay, I spend a fortune on a meal and lose two entire days recovering from food poisoning.



Yesterday I drove the 7 hours from far eastern Kwa-Zulu Natal back to Pretoria. It rained the whole day. It had been cloudy and drizzling much of my time in Hluhluwe and Mkuze, keeping the temperatures down, but keeping things very dark which made photography difficult. I realized I came to southern Africa at the beginning of winter and the dry season, as that is the best time for the game parks. I have stayed until now I have entered the beginning of the wet season. Time to return to Phoenix, where summer should be gone. Weird that I have managed to completely miss summer this year. Tomorrow I start the 30 hour journey home. Later. Dave





















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