

Row for Rhino - Part 1

Zambezi Source to Sea Expedition



To highlight the plight of Africa's black rhino, James Reid, Reilly Travers and James Manuel, all in their early 20s, recently completed a 2 500km Zambezi canoe trip from its source in the north western part of Zambia to the sea in Mozambique. Their journey took them through some beautiful parts of the river such as the famous Barotse flood plains, world renowned Victoria Falls, lake Kariba, lake Cahora Bassa and the middle Zambezi, through Mana Pools and the lower Zambezi national parks. The objectives of the expedition were to raise funds for various projects involving black rhino conservation in Zimbabwe, and to create awareness of the rapid decline of rhino both within Zimbabwe and across Africa.

This is their story...

Our expedition started in the early hours of June 5 2009 when we left Harare for the three-day drive to the source of the Zambezi in north west Zambia. We had organised to meet Pete Fisher, who has a farm that borders the source in the Mwinilunga district, where he very kindly put us up in one of his bungalows.

That night Pete strongly advised us not to attempt the Angolan stretch as the safety situation in that part of Angola was still unstable. He related to us how he had recently ventured into Angola at the request of a British couple to try find their son who had gone missing... He found him, dead! This was a huge shock to us, the last thing we expected to hear, and a big reality check.

This part of Angola is situated far from the capital, and the area is full of diamond mines, so the presence of any white face immediately sparks off suspicion. Pete is a fourth generation Zambian and his farm is a stone's throw away from both the Angolan and Congo borders. Any advice from him was of great importance so we decided to forget about Angola and proceed to Chavuma Falls and start from there - a decision we would regret later on.

The next day we visited the source of the Zambezi. What a wonderful experience to see the humble beginnings of such a mighty

African river. The source is located so close to the Congo border, that whilst driving there the right wheel of the vehicle is located in Congo and the left in Zambia. Given the nature of the track and the serious 4x4 and GPS work we needed to find it, our first impression on arriving at the source was one of shock at how commercialized the whole place is. However, after a tour of the area from one of the local guides, we discovered that the spring is regarded as a national monument as it is how Zambia derived its name. The vegetation is extremely thick and one almost feels as if one is in an equatorial rainforest - the kind of terrain I would never normally associate with the Zambezi. The river literally bubbles up out of the ground near the root of a fallen tree. The name of the river, according to the Lunda people is Yambezi, meaning 'the heart of everything' - very appropriate, I think.

The next day we made the long journey south to the border town of Chavuma Falls. We arrived at the falls mission where we met an American called Bob Young who has been doing missionary work for the last 50 years in Zambia. Our whole party stayed there the night. It was an emotional evening and would be our last night together as a group. The following morning our support team would head back to Harare, and the three of us would begin our three-month expedition

- an adventure that would take us through some of the most exciting places in southern Africa. The following morning we awoke, a little anxious, but none-the-less excited that the many months of planning and waiting were now over - our journey was at last about to begin.

Our first task was to portage around the Chavuma falls. They are not very big, but, enough of an obstacle to require us to walk round. The falls are so named because of the sound the water makes as it passes through the gap 'Ch-vum-aaaa'. The river here is relatively shallow and very rocky and very different to what we Zimbabweans are used to. It is not as populated as we thought, but there are isolated pockets of settlement.

This stretch of the river is surprisingly slow and we all found it very frustrating to paddle. We caught our first tigerfish along this section - the tiger here are very small but are found in great abundance and readily take a Rapala. Getting a line in the water was good practice for us as fish would make up a huge part of our daily diet. Let me assure you, although it sounds like an idyllic existence, you soon run out of ways to cook fish! We are now the world's leading experts in how to cook tigerfish 34 different ways! Food was a big problem for us: paddling requires a lot of energy, and we were always hungry. This was why Reilly and Jamie, driven by hunger, tried to kill a black mamba perched in a tree. Tempted by this 'easy meal', their little escapade soon back-fired as the mamba fell out of the tree and came straight for them. Luckily they managed to get out of harm's way. Having experienced the legendary temper of the black mamba firsthand, any ideas of further mamba hunting came to an immediate halt!

The first settlement we arrived at was called, appropriately, Zambezi. Here we stopped briefly to supplement our meagre provisions with the purchase of bully beef, and I needed another pair of slops as I had already lost my new pair of rafters. Zambezi is teeming with people, most of whom seem to be fishermen selling or trading their catch for blankets and food.

The mosquitoes here are terrible and, coupled with the cold winter

nights, make a decent night's sleep very difficult, but it is beautiful, the banks full of huge trees. However, just as you think you are in your very own special piece of untouched Africa you paddle round a corner to find huge fields cleared for agriculture, majestic trees cut down to make makoros (traditional canoes). The area is completely devoid of any wildlife. Drifting along on the current I tried to imagine how wonderful and unspoiled it must have been once upon a time.

Downstream we came to a place called Chitikoloki. We had been told about an amazing mission which, we later found out, is the biggest in Zambia. We met a group of Americans, an Englishman and a Scotsman (is this a joke? - Ed), who were all doing missionary work. They gave us a quick history of the place and, although it was brief, we were very impressed. This particular mission even has a plastic surgery section which is so high-tech that the mines on the copper belt send severe cases down to them. They also have a dentistry facility as well as the largest leprosy ward in Africa which houses 120 lepers. The whole mission must need millions of dollars a year to run. When I put this question to them, they simply told me that they rely on faith, which they have been doing since 1914!

On day five we spotted our first solitary hippo at the confluence of the Kapompo river. Zambia has some huge rivers flowing into the Zambezi. The main tributary of the upper Zambezi is the Lungwebungu river which comes from Angola and meets the Zambezi in the Barotse floodplains.

We made frequent stops at the many towns and villages for supplies and for cell phone air time so we could stay in touch with home! It's amazing how we take this sort of technology for granted. I wonder what the likes of David Livingstone would make of it?

I have never seen so many fish being sold before. All the fish are caught in the Barotse flood plains. Fishing on the Barotse is amazing - that is why it supports so many people. The markets consisted of a huge variety of bream species, tigerfish, catfish and other smaller fish species such as the Zambezi parrot fish which we had never seen



At the source of the Zambezi, James Reid (author), James (Jamie) Manuel, and Reilly Travers. The river literally bubbles up out of the ground near the root of a fallen tree.



Left: Resting up. Right: Ngonye falls - the horseshoe-shaped cataract is impressive because of the sheer volume of water cascading over the staggered twenty metre drop.

F·E·R·E·D·A·Y·S

HUNTING, CAMPING AND FISHING OUTFITTERS

"dazzlingly precise navigation"




GARMIN™

BORROWDALE BRANCH - BORROWDALE VILLAGE

Telephone: (04) 882156 or (04) 870555
Open 08.30 to 17.30 Monday to Friday
and 09.00 to 13.00 Saturday and Sunday

CENTRAL AVENUE OFFICE - 53 CENTRAL AVENUE, HRE.

Telephone: (04) 754350 or (04) 792564
Open 08.00 to 17.00 Monday to Friday
ARMS, AMMO & SECURITY



*Early morning on the upper Zambezi
- perfect.*

before. One wonders how or how long the environment can sustain this kind of pressure.

After Lukulu the river really opens up and starts to meander which makes paddling very frustrating. The Barotse is an extremely special place - the bird life is unbelievable. I was astounded by the sheer variety and numbers of the bird life. One instance I remember was witnessing huge colonies of open-bill storks nesting in the bulrushes. It was like being at an airport; there were birds taking off and landing wherever you looked. The African skimmer thrives here because of the abundance of sandbanks which provide a perfect breeding ground for them.

Crocodiles had not been an issue thus far into the trip - in fact, the only crocs that we had seen so far were way back at Chavuma Falls. Whilst camping on the plains one night Reilly decided to wander the edge of the river and look for fish to shoot with the spear gun. Jamie and I had turned in for the night when we heard Reilly come round the corner shouting at the top of his voice.

“I got one... I got a bladdy croc!”

We couldn't believe it. Soon we had our first croc cooking away on hot coals. Sadly, though, Jamie became extremely sick from eating



When you are hungry, just about anything is fair game - some require a specialised pallet!

the croc and spent the following day running for the toilet!

The inhabitants here are the Lozi and they are all loyal subjects of the Lozi Royal Family who have ruled here for hundreds of years. Apparently the descendants of the Lunda-empire in the Congo established the Lozi Kingdom in the 1600s.

Even today the Lozi kingdom remains rich in traditions as reflected in one of the most spectacular ceremonies in Zambia – the Kuomboka (meaning ‘to move to dry ground’). The Kuomboka usually takes place around March-April – towards the end of the rains – when the water level of the Zambezi river rises. The plains in western Zambia then become flood plains and the settlements become islands. Apparently the Lozi wanted autonomy from Zambia some 25 years ago. After extensive negotiations with the Zambian government the Lozi were eventually given special powers to govern their own land without upsetting the status quo of Zambia.

The royal family, we learned, have been sending their children to private school since the early nineteenth hundreds. We met the son of one of the chiefs. He had just returned from a six-year stint at UCLA in America.

We arrived in Senanga on Friday morning and spent the entire weekend camping at Senanga Safaris. This was a special part of the trip for me as I celebrated my 23rd birthday. Here we met up with Creigh MacMillan who had brought us a new tracking unit and, more importantly, some biltong (happy days). We managed to put a big dent in our finances as well as the lodge's beer supply - we had a really good weekend.

It was with some excitement that we left Senanga. Today we



Battery World (PVT) Ltd

THE POWER TO PLEASE

GO THE DISTANCE

THE GO BATTERY

duCELLIER

BATTERIES

Harare Granitside (04) 757575/8
 Chinhoyi Street (04) 794200
 Bulawayo (09) 75496, (09)66379
 Kwekwe (055) 23797 (055) 21073/91
 Mutare (020) 64843 (020) 63850
 Chinhoyi (067) 25666
 Masvingo (039) 264601

health

INTERNATIONAL
GROUP LIMITED



MOVING!

WE WISH TO ADVISE OUR VALUED HEALTH INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS OF OUR NEW BUSINESS ADDRESS:-

OUR NEW BUSINESS ADDRESS WILL BE :-

Ground Floor
 West Block
 CABS Head Office Complex
 Northridge Close
 Northridge Park
 BORROWDALE
 Harare

+263 (0) 4 853 0834/5/6/7

Contact your Broker or Agent, or our regional offices
 E-mail: admin@healthintergrp.com

would be leaving the barren wide open spaces of the Barotse for a change of scenery - trees! We had been on the plains for two weeks and the constant meandering of the river had made paddling very hard, so to be leaving was a welcome change.

Our next obstacle was the Ngonye falls - we had heard so much about them and were very keen to get there and see them for ourselves. We camped one night, still a couple of kilometres above upstream of the falls. That night we listened in awe to their thunder-like roar.

These beautiful falls mark the transition point of the Zambezi from Kalahari sand floodplain to basalt dyke - the latter eventually contributing to the magnificent gorges of the Victoria Falls.

The horseshoe-shaped cataract is impressive because of the sheer volume of water cascading over the staggered twenty metre drop. We avoided going over the falls thanks to a local fisherman who very kindly redirected us back up river and helped us carry the kayaks around to the base of the falls, directly below which are a series of spectacular rapids which we had to go through.

Due to the uniqueness of the of this area a Peace Parks initiative has been set up by an NGO in conjunction with Zambian National Parks. A small protected area around the falls has been demarcated and they are in the process of stocking it with game. What was nice to hear, is that rhino are at the top of the list.

We thoroughly enjoyed negotiating this stretch of the river. The area is beautiful and the river flows very fast, making paddling a joy.

That night we came across an exquisite tree house on the bank. We paddled on past wondering who the heck would be living in such a structure in this remote part of Zambia! Just then a local from the house paddled down to us and persuaded us to come and stay there - on condition we telephoned the owner and asked for his permission, which we did. The owner was another American missionary, Daniel Scott, working in the local area. He has a beautiful home - flat screen TVs, a walk-in-fridge, and the whole residence runs on the most amazing solar system I've ever seen. According to his staff, Daniel works just one day a week - I think I'm going to become a missionary! The highlight of our stay was having the luxury of a hot shower.

I can't recall being as cold as I was along this stretch of the Zambezi. We would wake up and put as much clothing on as we could, and at one stage I was paddling with my socks on to keep my feet warm!

We had been told of an ex-Zimbabwean living approximately 50km above Katima Mlilo. With the prospect of some company, a decent night's sleep, as well as a few cold beers we stepped on the gas. We were determined to reach this place even if it meant paddling at night. The sun had gone down and we were still paddling, not really sure where this guy lived, when we came across a huge set of rapids. We couldn't make them out in the diminishing light, but by their sound, they were big. We stopped to study our maps and take a look at the GPS unit to figure out the best route. We decided to stick to the west bank, it looked more braided and thought it would be easier to paddle. Very slowly we entered the rapids, not sure of what was ahead of us, when Jamie suddenly shouted, "hippo!" With that we all very quickly paddled out of its way. After this incident we would paddle a bit, stop and listen for hidden dangers as well as figure out, by their sound, which rapids were smaller and take that route.

Just then, whilst battling a set of rapids through the darkness, we came across Mr and Mrs Moir! After a lengthy discussion about what we were doing there, and what the 'hell' we were doing paddling at night, they invited us to come have supper with them, which we accepted. Dave and his wife are in the process of building their retirement home on the banks of the Zambezi. Dave was born in Mongu, Zambia and started work in the local bank. Over the years he rose up through the ranks and had recently moved back from Hong Kong. He is very knowledgeable on Zambian history and gave us an interesting run down of the history of the Lozi and the Barotse or western province. It was great chatting to him.

The next morning, after a restful sleep, we said our farewells and



Our staple diet consisted of bully beef and rice or sadza - supplemented with whatever we could find...



Croc egg olette.



Tiger recipe number '24'.



A favourite - bream, croc tail and figs - an unusual combination.

parted company. We had not gone more than about a kilometre, down a very fast-flowing rapid, when I came around a corner and t-boned a tree! I immediately capsized and, to make matters worse, Reilly and Jamie were ahead of me. I started shouting for them to come back and help and by this point my kayak was completely under water and everything was wet. My concerns were all the electrics in a box I was carrying but as we found out later they all seemed to be ok. We spent the remainder of the night building a huge fire so that our kit could dry off. The river before Katima Mililo was a pleasure to paddle as there were lots of rapids and the water was flowing fast, making paddling very easy.

We stopped in Katima Mililo and had a well-deserved meal of sadza and meat which was a nice break from rice and muesli. We also had a few beers at the local shebeen where we met a very interesting character called Uncle Joe, who told us that he was working for the Zambian government and was on a 'secret' mission and couldn't tell us what it was. We therefore decided that if we fed him with lots of beer he would confess to his secret mission. Ten beers later he still wasn't budging so we gave up and paddled across to the other side and had a lay up for the night.

We were now entering the Kaprivi strip Which is the border between Namibia and Zambia. We only had three days to complete this section as we were expecting to meet Kate O'Donahue a great friend of ours who was going to complete the Kazangula to Victoria Falls section with us.

Our strategy for this section was to wake up early, paddle hard till about 2pm then sleep till 6pm and then paddle on into the night till midnight...



To be continued...


In the next issue we will re-join our intrepid trio as they continue their journey to the Indian ocean.




Camp life.

UNCOMPROMISING RELIABILITY


- ROBUST AND IMMENSELY STRONG ENGINES.
- PERFECTLY MATCHED PROPULSION PACKAGES.
- EVC – ELECTRONIC VESSEL CONTROL.
- FIRST-CLASS SERVICE






VOLVO PENTA

FOR EASIER AND GREENER BOATING



AVOCA
MARINE
SERVICE, SPARES & SALES

Contact John or Mike Biss
Cell: 0912 233 468 or 0912 200 517
Tel: (061) 2501 or 3255,
Andora Harbour, Kariba.
Email: avoca@iwayafrica.com