

## Mapungubwe National Park (28 Sep–3 Oct)

By Bruce Turner

Mapungubwe National Park is situated at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers in the Limpopo province where Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa share borders. The park was established in 1996 and opened to the public in 2002.

After packing on Saturday, we left at 5am on Sunday (28<sup>th</sup> September) morning, with a stop in Polokwane for breakfast.

We met Andre Reyneke and his wife on route (only because they were also in a Landy that we ended up waving and eventually meeting). They decided to head towards Musina, while we headed towards Alldays. The Alldays route is definitely a lot quicker.

I filled up in Alldays as this is the last opportunity to do so before reaching Mapungubwe although we found out later that 30kms east of Mapungubwe main gate along the R572 there is a garage with a well stocked shop. Consumption was 15.1 ltrs per 100kms. My worst consumption so far which I think is due to the very strong head winds that we had endured since Pretoria.

After checking in at the main gate, you have to back-track about 5kms, turn right and then travel along a very badly corrugated dirt road for around 20kms before you get to the turn off to the Mazhou campsite. I reduced tire pressures to 1.8 bar and only found the road comfortable at about 60km/h.

The area is in serious need of some rain and is very dusty and dry. At the turn off to the campsite we were greeted by Reedbuck, Zebra, Impala and warthogs.





We were lucky as we arrived in front of 3 other vehicles so although we didn't get the perfect campsite we got one of the better remaining campsites although it was right next to the only road in and out the campsite. As we were setting up a 4<sup>th</sup> vehicle arrived only to find that they didn't have a campsite for them. One group had stayed a day longer and were no where to be found. They ended up being offered a night in Leokwe tented camp.

After setting up camp we went for a short game drive along the very dry Limpopo. Note that if you are camping you are allowed to use the swimming pool in the Mapungubwe tented camp. (about 1km away from the campsite)



It was a shame to see that there are still barbed wire fences along the river road and it looked like no maintenance had been done along the route in a long time.



That night after everyone had gone to bed, I heard Lion very far away, jackals and hyena.



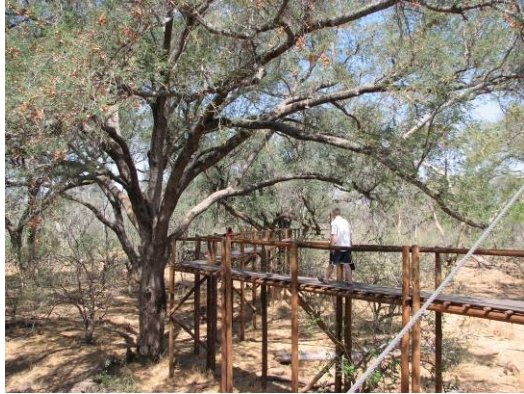
The next couple days was spent on game drives and on the Eco Trail which was in very bad condition due to a large amount of damage to the vegetation from Elephants. Some of the tracks were so bad that it was impossible to get through without a lot of effort to clear the tracks.



On one drive on the eco trail we came across a herd of around sixty Elephants taking a swim in a small dam. (Approximately S22.24965 E29.27517) What was interesting is how they all waited in a queue until it was their turn for a dip. We sat watching them for around 45 minutes mainly because we were surrounded and we didn't want to push our way through a herd of elephants.



We also visited the tree top walk which was a thrill as the game wonder around beneath you and at the end of the walk there is a hide next to the Limpopo, which although very dry was still great to see.





On Wednesday while sitting in camp a family arrived in a Defender. They ended up camped about 30 meters from us. All they did was complain about all the souties, ka\*\*\*rs and that the “wilde-tuin is net vir die f\*\*\*\*n engels mense” which amused Andre, and Johan, who are both Afrikaans, who were camped on the opposite side of the campsite (out of 9 campsites there where 3 English, 5 Afrikaans, and 1 Swedish families – so who knows what they were on about). They lasted 1 night. By the looks of all their equipment (being new), I think it was their first time and they were looking at blaming everyone else for their misery. Fortunately, as they were leaving my neighbours who were just getting up, caught them trying to steal our chairs, while we were on an early morning drive. Good riddance!!

We also did the very touristy thing of taking the heritage tour to Mapungubwe hill; riding in a game viewer Landy and all. Fortunately no-one saw us as we were the only ones on the tour and I must admit it was very interesting. Basically you are taken on a road that is not accessible for private vehicles, to an archaeological dig, then up 147 steps (IIRC) to the top of Mupungubwe hill.



Mupungubwe Hill



Volcanic Dyke in the distance

After much exploring we decided to take the long way home, to see a bit of the country we hadn't yet visited. Going past towns such as Maastroom, Beauty, Swart Warter, Tom Burke, Ellisrus etc. We hoped to find something on route to spend the night but just decided to head for home. As we joined the N1 just South of Bela Bela, we came across a huge veld fire.



In some places the smoke was so thick that we could not see 10m in front of the Landys bonnet. Very scary, especially when you have idiots driving without lights on at very high speeds.

Overall it was a great trip. I would however only go back after some rains. Our average temperatures were in the high 30's and reaching 40 deg on Friday. At night the temps dropped after about 11pm to low 20's and just below 20 in the early hours of the mornings.

At the main entrance they are busy building a Heritage building and Museum, which should be an interesting visit. Currently the famous golden rhino and other artefacts that were found at Mapungubwe, are being kept at the University of Pretoria. Hopefully they will be returned to Mapungubwe after the Museum is complete.

Negatives:

- THAT family!!
- The campsites should have been spread a bit further apart as there is enough room to do so
- All the barbed wire should be taken down as it's not doing much anyway
- The 20km dirt road is in serious need of fixing/upgrading, to get rid of the corrugations

Positives:

- The sounds of Lion, Jackal and Hyena every night
- Plenty game
- The park does not have the commercial feel like Kruger yet.
- We seldom came across other vehicles while on game drives

