

ZIM 2010 Trip Report

Where: Hwange, Vic Falls, Chizarira, Kariba, Mana Pools, Matoppo's

When: June 11 to July 1 2010

Who:

Chris, Marié & Rickus Prinsloo, 1998 Toyota Hilux 2.4 P D/C, 170 K km

Johan & Noelene Zwiendelaar, 1996 Disco 2.5 TDi, 370k km

Tienie & Riana Steyn, 2005 LR 2.5 TDi P/U, 80 K km.

One of our "to do" items was always to see Mana Pools. Johan went through a lot of hassle to book sites in Mana, especially at Chitake Springs, which have exclusive camp sites, and Masuma Dam in Hwange.

Friday, June 11

From various homes to Botswana border, distance: about 500 km

Me and Johan started from our respective homes (Nelspruit and Sasolburg), aiming for Kwa Nokeng, on the Botswana side of Martin's Drift border post. It seems the whole of SA is shutting down for the opening of the SWC. Got to the border at about 16:00, about an hour to get through, no hassles.

We also used Kwa Nokeng to do our Third Party insurance for Bots, saved a few minutes with this. When I stopped in the parking area, the third party was handed to me.....

Met Johan and Noelene at the camp site, then the women left to buy take aways at the "one-stop" at Kwa Nokeng, some steak burgers of which the steak were very tough...

The camp overflowed with South Africans (fleeing from the soccer??), and there must have been a few million's worth of shiny 4x4's and trailers present. The camp is noisy with all the lorries arriving at the border post.

At P70 it's a bit steep for a noisy stop-over and stupid ablutions.

Saturday, June 12

Kwa Nokeng to Elephant Sands, distance, about 515 km, good tar, thick sand last 1 km to Elephant Sands.

Left early to see how far we could get, aiming for Nata. Stocked up on meat and other stuff at Palapye Spar. We didn't want to take meat into Bots, one never knows what the latest regs are.

Had a quick lunch at Francistown, decided we will get to Elephant Sands north of Nata. Filled up at Nata with petrol and water.

Got to Elephant Sands mid afternoon, guess what, it is also overflowing with SA's!! ES have 2 ablution blocks, one "open air " and one conventional. They are both "mixed " i.e male and female share, can be a bit disconcerting! While Noelene was having a shower the next morning the water ran out..... so she asked a guy to go and find her husband (and some water).....

Saw about 3 ellies close to the camp, nice.

Sunday, June 13

Elephant Sands to Masuma Dam in Hwange, distance about 254 km, tar and dirt

Left just after 8 am. They are rebuilding stretches of the road north of Elephant Sands (to Kasane). There is a temp road, tarred but bumpy, no problem. Filled up at Panda, went through the border post. I think we were the first group for the day, no groups the previous day.

No problems on either side. Paid \$25 carbon tax. We both got Third Party Insurance before the time from our local AA offices, I guess it also helped with time/money (R200).

Make sure you get a TIP (Temp Import Permit), and keep it handy, they ask for it at road-blocks (of which there are plenty).

When they inspected the vehicles, the one official saw my VHF arial and radio, wanted to know if it is "a 2-way communications system". Told him yes, he then wanted to know operating distance, I told him less than 5 km's and he lost interest. Johan had 2 arials (29 MHz and VHF), and he didn't even get asked!!

Went through onto a 2-spoor dirt road, through the safari/hunting area. Saw some small turn-offs from the "main" road. Got to the T junction (right Hwange, left Vic Falls), road hasn't been graded in ages, but not too bad.

Signed in at the entance gate to Hwange, drove to Robin's Camp, where we paid entrance fees (\$15 per adult, \$8 for Rickus, \$5 per vehicle, and yes that's US\$!!)

Robin's Camp is deserted. No campers, nothing for sale, nothing open!! It seems they are repairing the ablution block at the camp site. The place has an air of neglect and abandonment to it. Tragic.

Drove to Masuma Pan. Not so deserted, 2 groups of campers already, seems like an overbooking. The camp attendant (Aibisha (sp?)) seems a bit flustered,

but we decided to camp right next to the hide. With a nice camp fire, everything seems fine. Hippo's are noisy the whole night, nice!

The next day one of the groups leave, and we move camp quickly.

Monday, June 14, Tuesday, June 15.

Distance travelled, 30 km, dirt road

Tienie and Riana arrived from Langebaan, they had some delay due to a personal problem, but we are glad they are here, safe and sound!

We lay about the camp, wash some clothes, read, sit in the hide. Not much game at the hide, some solitary elephants, some impala, zebra and giraffe. Apparently a big herd of buffalo moved through the previous day, and there is lion spoor around the fence, but that's about it. Maybe still too much water in the veld, also maybe poaching??? There are 2 rangers (Roger and Lucky) with rifles who do patrols, but I don't know how effective they are.

Johan had problems with a leaking power steering pipe on his car. Initial attempts to fix it in position were not very successful. He drove with Tienie to the main camp, where an old, scrapped, Defender pick-up "donated" a power steering pipe.

I also torqued the Hilux' head bolts and set the tappets. Two weeks before we left the engine was still open (another story for another day), also changed the oil.

On the last day we drove to Shumba Pan Hide en Shumba Rest Camp and back (30 km round trip). Didn't see too much game...

Wednesday, June 16

Masuma Pan to Vic Falls via Main Camp, distance travelled, 290 km, dirt and tar road

Packed and left for Vic Falls. Tienie and Riana decided to stay another night because they have been to Vic Falls a previous time. We went through Main Camp, Johan had some business there.

Main Camp also basically deserted, saw 2 camping groups. The chalets seems to be freshly painted, so I guess you can stay there too, but we didn't see too many other vehicles. The restaurant and shop were closed in 2007

In some places it seems that the road has recently at least seen a grader, at other places not at all, the bush is again claiming its territory....

In some places the old tar road is full of pot holes, better to drive next to the road.

On the main road to the Falls the informal stalls where they sell carvings, is about 10% occupied....

Bought some petrol at Hwange Village (\$1.35 or R11 per litre).

Stocked up at the supermarket in the main street in Hwange Village.

Just north of Hwange Village I got caught in a speed trap (allegedly 86 in a 80 zone)!!. Tienie was caught there in the exact same spot 3 years ago, I must have paid more attention! \$10 spot fine, what a schlep..... It seems the whole road from Hwange Village to Vic falls is a 80 km/h zone....

Got to Vic Falls and started looking for a camp site. The place where we camped in 1993 is now an exclusive boat launching venue. The place Riana recommended was deserted and derelict. The Nat Park too expensive, so we booked into the lodge in the middle of town, not too bad. IIFC about \$8 pppn, and \$5 per vehicle.

Went to the Spar to stock up, the informal vendors are a real hassle. Decided to stay with my Toy because the canopy can't be locked.

Spar is well stocked, except meat. Cooldrink cans about 90 cents, Bols \$9.50. Beer cans \$1. Boxed milk \$2 per litre.

Decided to find a decent place for a meal, Wimpy closed, Train Carriages closed, found Spur in the Kingdom Hotel. Burger \$12, Coke \$2.5, buns and chips were dry, patty small, no milk for the coffee, very few visitors. Ah, well, so one learns....

Thursday, June 17

Visited the Falls. When we got to the stalls, and enquired about hiring of rain coats, everybody screamed at us. Rickus remarked that they reminded him of the sea gulls in Finding Nemo: mai, mai, mai..... \$3 per coat, decided to give it a skip.

Entry: \$20 pp. \$10 for children, you have to show your passport. Keep your camera in a plastic bag.

Walked the route, it is a mighty sight to behold.

Took a drive to some of the other lodges, seems the Boma Place should be OK to eat (and stay). Elephant Hills Hotel also open, but didn't see other vehicles.

In the afternoon Tienie and Riana arrived, Tienie made us a nice skaap potjie

that evening.

I found some better meat at the 7 to 11, in the passage leading to Spar. \$5 for 500 grams fillet or rump. Bought some bacon and chicken as well. Filled up with petrol (\$1-28 pl), standard and LR tank to the brim for our stint to Kariba.

Friday, June 18

Vic Falls to Chizarira, about 340 km dirt road, bad at places.

Drove to Chizarira via Binga (dirt road). Saw maybe 2 or 3 other vehicles. Johan's Disco burst a tyre on a bad piece of road, tyre destroyed. He tried to find a tyre at Binga, no luck. Binga seems run down, don't know if there is fuel available?

The last part of the road (10 km ?) to Chiza is bad, but luckily not that long. Got to the office at sunset, the guy told us the best site for game viewing would be Mabola. Followed his directions to Mabola in the dark (nothing on T4A), got there when it was already quite dark. When I stopped there, the trees came alive with baboons abandoning their perches and looking for another place to sleep.

Pulled the vehicles in a laager and made fire. Ah, fire always helps. Ablutions disfunctional, no water.

Take note that you have to be self-sufficient in every way (food, water, fuel etc).

Saturday, June 19

Drove just a few km.

Made a nice breakfast, (bacon, eggs, toast, tomato and onion gravy sauce/stew/whatever)

Drove to Mabola hide with Tienie and Riana. Saw some waterbuck. Nice hide and nice view, but no game. Saw fresh lion spoor on the road.

That night I made "Voetspore" chips on the fire, was quite spectacular!!

Sunday, June 20

Drove from Chizarira to Kariba, about 315 km, nearly 12 hours!!!!

We first went to the office to settle the bill (campsite = \$75, entry fees \$15 pp, \$5 p vehicle)

Me and Tienie then drove to the scenic views picnic sites, awesome views!!

Marié said she can stay a week and look over the valley.

Caught up with Johan on the "main" road. Then the fun started. This road carries very few vehicles and isn't maintained at all. The previous years' potholes from the wet season are still there, and they are quite deep. Speed 10 - 30 km/h. We met another group on the road, they came from Matusadona, they said it took them 4 hours from the main road to Tashinga (60 km), and 4 out again. Said that we won't get to Kariba that day, recommended bush camp,... but we decided to at least try.

Farming activities seems to consist of maize and cotton farming, I think all by hand. I only saw one tractor on the whole stretch. Some people were carrying sugar cane, but I didn't see any sugar cane fields. Many of the locals have a stash or store of maize, which it seems is the main source of food. Felt like one steps back in time.

We took the short-cut to Kariba (the so-called "power-lines" road), not to Karoi. When we got to the turn-off, decided to wait for Tienie, we were not sure if we were on the right track. When Tienie didn't arrive after 20 minutes, Johan decided to go back and look for him, he said he was going to transfer diesel but it shouldn't take so long! A few minutes later Johan let me know that Tienie had hit a bad hole at speed, he hopped off the road and bent the LR's steering rod in the ditch. It happened just out of reach of the 29 MHz radios. So while we were waiting thinking he was transferring diesel, he was repairing the Landy. Luckily he didn't roll or caused more serious damage. He removed the rod and straightened it, replaced it again.

We then took to the road again, but Johan and Tienie got stuck behind a slow bakkie. We were driving through elephant territory, saw lots of dung but no ellies (good and bad!!)

Saw Kariba's lights in the distance, but didn't realise that they actually were some long way away, we still had some way to go over the mountain...

Eventually arrived at Charara (Zimbabwe's Angler's Union camp) at about 20:30. Only made blikke (bread and meat balls heated on the primus), everybody was too tired to do much else. Really a very long day, one of the worst I have ever driven. It really taxed everybody and everything.

Hippo's in the camp, be carefull!!

No fuel available between Vic Falls and Kariba!!

Monday, June 21 to Wednesday, June 23

Drove to Kariba a few times.

The original plan was to make one bush camp between Kariba and Mana, but Tienie said there wasn't really any place suitable for this, so we decided to stay at Kariba for the duration. also it is a short trip from Kariba to Mana.

Time to do some washing, fishing, site-seeing and rest our sore backsides!!

Charara is a nice place, but the ablutions are full (and I mean full) of mozzies and spiders and all kinds of goggos, but they have warm water!! I guess at \$5 pppn you shouldn't expect too much! We also had to apply for temporary membership for the angler's club (\$5 for the whole group for the whole time). Wood is \$3 per wheelbarrow.

Next to the Spar (S16 31.033 E28 50.878) in the Batonka Village is a TM shop, also very nice and well stocked, with everything except rusks (beskuit) and milk of any kind, even fresh fruit and veg. Much better than the Spar in Kariba itself.

Went on a sunset cruise at the Caribbea Bay Hotel (the Pink Hotel, entrance at the Total garage). \$25 pp, only available if there is enough bookings or interest, I think 10 people min. One can order drinks and platters for the cruise, we took our own. Went to Antelope Island (didn't see any antelopes, only monitor lizards and hippos, and a nice sunset). No other cruises available.

Also visited the dam wall. Go to customs, hand in passports, get a gate pass, get a stamp from Interpol, then you can go down to the wall and walk on it. Awesome, the dam is overflowing in a huge way. Three sluices open. Seems they are increasing the electrical capacity on the Zambian side. Read somewhere they want to do the same on the Zim side.

Thursday, June 24 to Friday, June 25.

Drove from Kariba to Chitake Springs in Mana Pools Nat Park, about 130 km

Got a permit at Marongora Village, 1 permit for whole group, includes a fishing permit for 6 fishes per group per day.

Drove over the Zambezi escarpment, very nice view of the Zambezi Valley.

Dirt road baddish (corrugated and holes). Paid entrance fees at the entrance gate (\$15 pp, \$5 vehicle)

Turned right after the entrance gate and went to Chitake Springs. Missed the very small turn-off but the GPS alerted me. There are 2 camp sites (1 & 2). 1 is next to the river, and in the dry season elephant and buffalo walk right next to the camp. Still too much water all over, we saw 7 wild dog when we went in, and that evening we saw 4 lionesses next to the river. Saw one elephant in the river. # 2

site is on a hill between huge baobabs a bit past the spring, very nice views, especially with a full moon.

The next day we made breakfast again, then went to the springs, saw one lonely buffalo bull, some impala. No dogs or lions. Biting flies everywhere, they dive-bomb the vehicles and us. Constant war to keep them out or dead.

Saturday, June 26 to Sunday, June 27

Chitake to Mana, 70 km dirt road (corrugated and some holes)

We originally had three nights at Chitake, but decided that we had to see the river as well. So we packed up and went to Nyamepi after 2 nights. Transferred the one night and paid for another night, so we had 2 nights in Nyamepi as well. Again, lots of South Africans. Zim parks have a strange tariff structure, a river front camp site is \$100 p/n (6 people), but the other camp sites are \$20 pppn, so we being 7 in the group, it was cheaper to pay for a river front camp site. But the guy couldn't tell us if there was an open site, because the bookings is done through Harare, and they didn't let him know if # 11 was taken (only open site). He said we had to wait till late to make sure nobody else with a valid booking pitched up before we make camp.

So we relaxed on # 11, until we went for a drive, Johan and Noelene stayed behind. I was returning (nearly dark) when Johan came on the radio and told me another group did arrive with a valid booking, so they moved further down the river. When I got there (my chair was still there), the lady walked up to me looking very concerned and said "Oh, no, don't tell me you are also booked here?" I said: "Seems we have a double booking" and looked at her face fall. Started laughing and said it's OK, we are moving. We moved to an unmarked site so nobody could chase us again.

The next day we had some washing done, and drove around taking in the scenery, and tried some fishing. It is an exceptional place. Next time I will go in the really dry time (late August, September), when there isn't any water in the veld. Saw ellies, impala, water buck, zebra, lots of baboon, a herd of buffalo, many crocs, hippo. Had three hyena in the camp during the nights, so pack everything away.

Monday, June 28

Mana Pools to Gweru Antelope Park, 548 km.

Holiday nearly over, :-((

On the road to Mana Pools gate, Johan let me know that he has brake problems. Right front brake pipe broke, and he only had a half litre spare brake fluid. He

tries to kink the flexible pipe closed with a cable tie, but it still leaks. Eventually he clamps the pipe with a vice grip, now he at least had brakes on 3 wheels.

At Makuti he decides to go to Harare for repairs, while we will try to go to the Ruins at Masvingo. Tienie will go with Johan. So we said our goodbyes, again a good holiday with good friends.

At Chinoyi I turn to Kwe-Kwe, then to Gweru. Saw that I won't get to the Ruins before dark, then decided to give it a skip and go straight to the Matoppos, but first got to get to the Antelope Park in Gweru. Got to Gweru in the dark, no lines on streets, no lights, some robots not working, lots of pedestrians, and then the GPS took me through the poor part of town, on a dirt road, with a electrical black-out, instead of on the Bulawayo road....., donkeys, taxis etc.

Eventually got to Gweru Antelope Park, seems civilised!!! Enquired about a room, nothing available except the manager's A-frame @ \$50 pppn, a bit steep so I decline, rather camp @ \$5 pppn. Very nice ablutions, lights, warm water, mirrors etc!!!

We rather spent the extra money on dinner, buffet: pork chops, pieces of meat, rice, veggies and desert. \$15 pp and \$8 for Rickus. Bar ran out of beer and wine. Some overlanders present, but they are quiet.

Only the next day could we really see what's going on, quite a nice place, but a bit of a circus atmosphere. Activities include elephant rides, walking with lions, lion feeding, cub feeding etc. A bit artificial to me, but I guess it works for some.

My dollars are low, paid in rand, they gave me a good roe (7.6 or so).

Johan and Tienie drove to Harare at quite a sedate pace, considering the state of the Disco's brakes. Which meant that they hit Harare right smack bang in the middle of peak hour traffic ! Nerve wrecking, to say the least. Upon finding the Land Rover dealership, Johan was told that the workshop was in another part of town ! He eventually found the workshop, where it was agreed that he would take the Disco to them early the next morning.

Tuesday, June 29

Gweru to Matoppos via Bulawayo, about 140 km, tar.

On the road to the Matoppo's in Bulawayo there is a Shell garage and a little shopping complex with a Spar and a butchery. Stocked up on some meat etc. Bought fillet for R80/kg.

Got to the Matoppos. Plan was to stay 2 or 3 nights to do game viewing and fishing. Was told at the gate that there are "large concentrations" of game

including rhino in the game park. Drove to Rhodes'grave, they want another \$10 pp to see his grave and the "world view". Ja raaight, as if it is something that they created, so I pass. Got to Maleme dam, camping sites seem OK. Showers have warm water, but dank and dark.

Drove to the game park. Saw 1 rhino and 1 klipspringer. Many nice granite koppies formations. Fishing doesn't seem feasible, lots of waterplants. Decided that we contributed enough to Zim's economy, time to head home.

At the Land Rover workshop in Harare a mechanic removed the broken brake pipe, and then went searching for a replacement. Which eventually turned up at 12:00

In the mean time Johan & Tienie went into town to draw money, only to find that all the banks have run out of cash !

After the repair they decided to get brave, and go for Beit bridge. The drive up to Masvingo was not bad, but thereafter the trip became downright dangerous with speeding trucks, busses and cattle in the road. And it was getting dark. Another nerve wrecking experience.

They arrived at Beit bridge at approx 20:30, and made it through in an hour. Some of the staff on the SA side were not very friendly, and some was downright rude.

Trying to get a bite to eat in Mussina resulted in another bad-service, bad attitude experience

Wednesday, June 30

Matoppo's to Marnitz Mini Town, about 550 km, 8 hours

Went into Bots at Plumtree. no problems.

They are rebuilding the road from Plumtree to Francistown. Again temp road next to the main road, but a little annoying speed hump every 500m, with a 80 km/h speed limit. Found that the Toy doesn't feel the hump if I go over them at speed (80). Francistown is quite busy, with all the trimmings (Nando's, Wimpy etc).

Drove to Martin's Drift, crossed between 3 and 4. Bought take-aways at Marnitz Mini Town and decided to camp. Manager/owner? said we could eat out take-aways in the dining room, and then said we could use the caravan his daughter always uses, so we don't have to pitch tents. Thanks!! Nice ablutions, women's bath room still has a bath in it, but will apparently be shortly replaced with 2 showers, so Marié decided to shower in the men's bathroom. Security present during the night.

R40 pppn, good value for a stopover.

Johan & Tienie meanwhile left Mussina early after staying over for the night. They stopped in Louis Trichardt and had a huge big breakfast at Mike's kitchen.

Thereafter they headed for Sasolburg, where Tienie & Riana stayed for 2 night before tackling the last stretch of their trip to Langebaan

Thursday, Jul 1

Started for home. Ate breakfast in Potties at Jenet's, in the main street next to the new mall. Wimpy like breakfast: toast, bacon, eggs, pork banger, and a large chocolate milk shake!!!

Arrived at home in the afternoon and started to recover!!

High points:

We saw and experienced some remote and beautiful places (Masuma, Chizarira, Chitake). Mana will see me again if they get realistic with their fees. A Kariba housebout is also on my to-do list.

Low points:

Zim's park fees are too high.
Vic Falls are very commercialised (always have been I guess)
Zim isn't cheap any more (due to the \$?)

Recommendations and impressions:

Take enough dollars!! (Enough \$ 1 notes, change is scarce)
Take enough \$\$\$\$'s!!

Many police road blocks, no problems (bribery attitude etc.) anywhere.

Tar roads generally in good condition, they repair pot holes.

Roads in the north basically deserted when you are out of the towns, but be careful of stray animals (donkeys etc).

Not much economic activity evident, farms still carries last year's weeds.

People seem extremely poor in some places.

Spar and TM shops are well stocked, prices just a little more expensive than SA.

People friendly and helpful everywhere.

Fuel prices and exchange rates worse the more remote you get.

Take enough dollars!! Did I mention to take enough dollars?

Credit cards were accepted in very few places. Cash is king ! And only Visa card, not Mastercard is recognised.

Thanks to our travel companions, it was great!! Recommended Christmas present for Tienie: a spade with a long handle!!!