



BOTSWANA 2007 AUGUST 18-31

"Monkey 2, this is Monkey 3 - come in please! "

"Monkey 2, copy"

"Are all 4 monkeys in a row and present?"

... and that is how we started off on our annual Botswana sojourn into the bush. Our party consisted of John & Jean (Billy's parents) together with Mike (friend of John and Jean), Billy-Bob and Jane (our friend from Pilates), Gerard & Jacqueline (our neighbours) and Jeremy and moi. In other words half of our complex was on the move. Four 4x4's and rooftop tents plus our now newly replaced bush trailer.

Admittedly the car, in which John, Jean and Mike travelled, looked genuinely like "African's on the move" ... the rear windows on all sides displayed a view of squashed colorful mattresses plus other household paraphernalia. During our journey more and more items in their car got dumped into the back of our "bakkie" as trying to fit it all back in again proved to be a long and tedious exercise with pushing, shoving, grunting and timeously shutting the rear door with brute force when possible. Then again, are we surprised? Jean, who must have been a 'full blooded Voortrekker Woman' in past times, hauled out the most extraordinary kitchen utensils to enable her to bake us fresh bread (!) on the fire every day, produced flapjacks at our Gala-Breakfast and brewed up enormous pots of curries and chicken stews, enough to feed an army. We ate like kings and queens throughout. Jean is a must on any future trip!



Monkey 1 was the radio code name for Gerard & Jacqueline, and all 4 vehicles became 'monkey-coded'. Monkey 4 being our African Vehicle with John, Jean & Mike were often out of communication as with only one plug to their disposal they gave priority to connect the cool box with beers rather than linking up their radio.

Our first day saw us ending up in Botswana at Lake Letlhakane in an off-road overnight camp where there was absolutely nothing by way of water or facilities; just bush, sand and nature, little deer and a most gorgeous sun-set.



That first night we found out that come hell or high water, cold in temperature or not, Mike insisted on a shower. He hung a bucket in the tree on the left and ever since I have been trying to secretly spy on him. Our first week in Botswana still had pretty chilly evenings and all of us wrapped up in jerseys with beanies covering our heads were full of admiration for this bold cleaning action.

The next 3 days were spent in the Kalahari Desert at Sunday Pan and close to Deception Valley. Readers of Mark & Delia Owens' book 'Cry of the Kalahari Desert' will know of Deception Valley as the home base for their research into the brown hyena. I was there!!! Once again no water supply but we did have a long drop and a shower area (bucket-system) - see Jeremy's and my (little) feet - where we make do with a 5 litre water bag warmed up during the day in the sun and emptied into a bucket. From a game point



of view we did not see much but the solitude, the silence and serenity in our camp and surroundings was unbelievable and



a brilliant start to unwinding and leaving the stress of living in the big city well behind. According to the professional bird watchers, the birdlife was grand and even I now know the beauty of a crimson chested shrike. We did our game viewing drives first thing and in the afternoon, slumped around in our chairs reading a book or taking a nap, dozing in the hammock we had brought along and around the hour of 5, bodies started to recover from heat and rest and shower proceedings preceded preparing the fire to cook another sumptuous meal. Another horrible day in Africa!

After this solitude onwards we went via Maun to stock up on provisions, fuel and water (we used the local fire hydrant at a petrol station) to get into Moremi (Okavango Swamps) where our first camp would be the famous and well known 'Third Bridge' camp. Immediately on arrival an elephant came to say hello, gently destroying a tree whilst we, undeterred, routinely unpacked and set up.



Needless to say that the baboons were in full force again and all men jumped up to chase them away with throwing stones and all women were put on watch-baboon-duty' as these dreadful pests have mastered and improved on the art of stealing from right under your nose and out of the car or tent. It had been a long and dusty road to Third Bridge and as we settle into our chairs around the campfire under the trees after sunset, sipping from our drinks, all of a sudden Billy-Bob seeing some

movement behind Jean's chair, jumps up with his wine-goblet in his hand (always prioritise what should be preserved) and before we can say 'what!' our eyes turn to a brown hyena with Jean's cool box in his mighty jaw being chased by Billy. All our torches light up this marathon run and there is this huge blue and white cool box full of veggies (the hyena did not know that yet) being carried away towards the bush. Billy's shouting made hyena drop the box and we marvelled at the punctures it had made and how strong his jaws must have been to lift that box as we needed two people to actually carry it. As it so happens we will gather much more wildlife evidence of destruction to our possessions in the course of our trip. We also discovered a trail of spilled wine to track Billy's chase - this of course is a very important matter as well.

After re-filling our glasses and re-hashing the scene which had just played before our eyes and exclaiming how cheeky and scary in fact that hyena was, coming up so close with us totally unaware of its presence not 1 meter behind our chairs, we raise our glasses to toast 'Welcome to Africa' and much to our shock and afterwards both disgust and hilarity, we feel a spray of 'water' dropping onto our heads and into our wine. What was that?! Apparently the baboons had not taken lightly to our shenanigans to chase them away, decided on a sweet revenge and chose that very moment to pee on us 'en masse'. And what a shower we got! Yuk! Never did we move campfire, tables and chairs that fast, away from the tree and out into the open.

The cheeky hyena returned a few more times that evening and was not at all fazed by our shouting or making noises to chase him away. All torches were constantly shining on the areas all around and behind us and its constant presence restricted us in making an elaborate supper as movements away from the campfire to your truck to retrieve foods became a high risk operation.

Ironically as much as we proclaimed that surely Jean must have been a 'Voortrekker woman' in her past life, this was really Jean's very first trip into the wild bush and somehow the animals must have sniffed that out as she was dogged down by unfortunate incidents. Thoroughly shaken by having had a hyena breathing in her neck, Jean decided that no ways was she going to walk to the ablution block at Third Bridge but take the car instead. It took quite a while before we saw the headlights of her car bobbing up and down the track back to camp. What took her so long? After she had her shower and came out of the toilets, who but guess sat right at the entrance to the toilets waiting for her? Yes...our dear friend the hyena! From that night on we don't think Jean (or John for that matter) had a good night's sleep ever again - mind you, as an added value to fear, they as well as Mike, slept in a tent on the ground whilst all others were on top of a roof or in a trailer shortly off the ground. It kept crawling around our tents that whole night and further nights in same camp. Here is our friend...



That night we had visitors ranging from screaming baboons to hyena, hippo and roaring lions in the background. One of the baboons jumped onto Gerard & Jacqueline's tent very early in the morning and they got a huge fright as well as a huge elephant that paid their tent a visit.

The next day we were off to a flying and early start to Mboma Island where we were to catch a boat to venture into the swamps for the day. On our way in we heard horrific trumpeting behind us where we knew Billy and Jane to travel. We had alerted them, via radio, to a herd of big elephants we had just encountered on our path of which the young bulls just wanted to show off and mock charge. However a second vehicle to pass by and through their territory was just too much to humor and loud trumpeting reverberated through the air. Believe me, this is scary - us being way ahead in a closed car heard the noise and sat up straight. Jane told us afterwards how they were sandwiched in between the same boisterous obnoxious young bulls and that they did not even dare to breathe, let alone blink their eyelids. That sort of 'hot dog' feeling surely went through their minds with possible last thoughts for their beloved.

We cruise around the next corner and low and behold, right there on our track, sits a lioness looking forlorn into the field across the track. We follow her gaze and discover a further 5 lions all doing what lions do best 'lazing around, on top of and next to each other, yawning, blinking, resting'. A good beginning of another day in Africa!

Of course the usual array of springboks and other 'bökkies', lots of black-backed jackal, giraffe, kudu, gemsbok, bat eared foxes, warthogs, zebra and other animals and lots of birds crossed our way and around 9 or so we arrive at the boathouse. Our guide (Xhawa?) made us comfortable on his boat, asked from which camp we came and on hearing Third Bridge he wondered if we had heard about the hyena playing havoc through that camp? 'Of course!' we exclaim in unison. 'Well' says Xhawa, did you also hear about that 8 year old girl last week that got attacked by him?

"Christin Chalwin-Milton was sleeping on a chair next to her tour group's campfire at Third Bridge camp, Moremi Naature Reserve, at about 21:00 last Thursday when the scavenger attacked her from behind, grabbing the left side of her head. Ralph Chalwin-Milton, Christin's father, said on Wednesday at the Sandton Medi-Clinic where she's recuperating that at first he thought her chair was falling over and ran towards her. When he saw she was being dragged off, he realised that a hyena had his child in its jaws. Chalwin-Milton stormed at the animal shouting, and scared it off. "I could see immediately that she was seriously injured," he said. The hyena tore Christin's head open from her eye to behind her ear, and ripped her left ear off. Chalwin Milton picked the ear up off the ground and put it on ice. They tried to get hold of a helicopter to fly Christin to Maun, but didn't succeed. Chalwin Milton then rushed her to hospital in his own 4x4 vehicle. "She was on the front seat and a tour guide, Tshonolo Moje of Karibu Safari, sat behind me and showed me the way," he explained. "About 40 km from Maun we met up with the ambulance and an emergency service worker also climbed into my vehicle and started treatment. The ambulance followed us all the way to Maun." Christin was first treated at the state hospital in Maun against rabies and tetanus, and then transferred to the private hospital. Chalwin-Milton says the family realises how lucky Christin really is. "One doesn't easily survive being bitten by a hyena." Christin's ear can be reconstructed and her facial muscles and nerves, as well as her hearing and sight are in tact. Chalwin-Milton said in spite of the attack they were "still crazy about the Botswana bush".

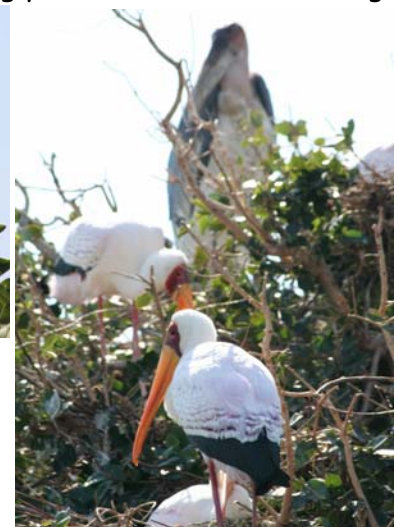
And our Italian fellow-travellers who were again present in abundance this year around wrote the following:

Terrible Night in Moremi 3rd Bridge *I came back yesterday from my holiday in BOT. I was in Moremi 3rd Bridge at about 9pm I was in my tent and I heard many shout of scared. I jump down on my*

roof tent immediately and bring the Spanish's tourist car in order to check what's happening. When I arrived on 2 campsite I saw the terrible scene the Hyena has bite the young child girl on her face and it dropped her ear. The guide of KARIBU tried for more one hour to contact emergency rescue via radio and shot 4 bengala to ask help but nobody (helicopter or ambulance) was arrive. Fortunalry there are two Spanish doctor that they has stabilized the child health conditions, after three hour, we have decided to bring the child at the south gate where they met the emergency rescue. They bring the child in Maun medical center but they has suggest to bring the child to Jo'burg in qualified hospital. The night before the same hyena was arrived very close from us it tried to catch our rubbish but I shout and the animal went away. I think that some stupid people feed the wild animal in order to see very close so these animals has began aggressive and without fear to go close the human. However it's inaccetable that during the night thera aren't park rangers on guard at the north and south gate to answer at help request. A part this horrible accident I spent a fantastic and exciting holiday in this wonderful country. Sorry for my bad english and greetings from Italy. BR

Hopping on board with our lunch boxes for a day of cruising in luxury on the watery waters of the Okavango swamps, a gentle breeze caressing your head -no driving, bumping up and down or hard steering- no, a wallowing on the water day! Fabulous! Swaying through the reeds, gliding over the water lilies and spotting the truly amazing and abundant bird life in trees and around the swamps. Our first port of call being an injection in the propellers of the boat to 'chase' a clump of about 10 hippos who were in our way and it was a first time for me to see them bouncing up and down and under the water to make way. What a violent movement for such a humongous beast!

Next big moment was an area that was full of Marabou Storks (ugly creatures with ball bags hanging from their necks) (food storage) and pretty yellow billed storks that were breeding and we parked the boat up close and personal and just looked up into these bushes full of them. Over 50/60 birds? With being so close and enormous lenses we could not get that scene onto a pic but I tell you what: impressive and awesome it was!



Just imagine this picture being ten-fold and filled to the brim with birds and eggs. We sat there quite a while with a huge monitor lizard (leguaan ?) checking us out at the same time.

'Sailing' away again from a little island where we had disembarked for lunch to revitalize our inner organs and the usual drinkie-poo, we now all fall into some sort of a coma, a combination of being on the water, middle of the heat of the day and a belly full of food and drink, on a gently rocking boat made all our heads sag to our chests and secretly close our eyes behind our sunglasses. Feeling terribly guilty after all we are out here in the swamps and we paid for it!!! Xhawa who obviously had experience with dozy tourists guided us to his own secret pool (no hippo, no crocodile he said) and invited us to jump into the water. Weren't it for Mike & John who did

exactly that and stripped down to their underwear, us 'young one's' had to reconsider swiftly and in no time a variety of underwear was on show. And hey, did it perk us up!

All smiling and refreshed.

Returning from Mboma Island back to Third Bridge Jeremy proceeded to still cruise at less than 20 clicks an hour to watch every little bird and mongoose along the way to which I commented 'Listen, can we speed it up a bit, there are only so many National Geographic movies I can bear to see in one day'. A change of scene which did not involve bird/game viewing was obviously on my mind! Back to camp and back to the hyena that came to visit us again and again. One time I was off to our trailer to get our toothbrushes with Jeremy hot on my heels with a torch and with a little glance to my left I discovered our friend right next to us. Brrrr. 5 Minutes into our bed, we hear a terrible racket in a camp next to us with screaming and hollering and after calling out to each other 'what is happening' we knew our mighty jaw friend had scared the shit out of our neighbours. Nice to be safely tucked into your tent!



The next day was windy and sand was blowing into our noses and ears which made being outside very uncomfortable so most of the day we spent in the car cruising around. It could be that day when the others (not us) saw the cheetah or a pair of them at Fourth Bridge. Monkey 4 radioed it in but we were too far away to make it in time. We all went our own merry way once we finished breakfast - with our 'alarm' every morning in the form of John & Mike who would get out of their tents at 4am to re-heat the fire and their mumblings would reach my ear in the tent, much to my obvious not-a-well-puppy-in-the-morning distress. At that same eerie time Jeremy would start tossing and turning and waiting to get out of the trailer, which did not do anything for my wanting to get back to sleep again. Needless to say I was a tad grumpy until the fog in my head would fade away and my spirit would fully awaken again.



We also had the champions of snorers in our camp in the form of Mike, John and Gerard (Master of Snores of note!) that even the call and grunts of lion did not supercede their noise. However, that did not bother me too much as you are healthily tired in the evening after a day in the open. Jacqueline missed out on a lot of sounds in the night as she had stuck major plugs in her ears sleeping next to her beloved Gerard. Jane also was utterly comatose every night and snoring like a trooper as Billy can testify to that. He tried to

awaken her many times with the call of lion almost in your tent (and if you ever heard that call you know how that sound penetrates right into your bones) but all it evoked was a Jane opening up one half-sorry eye, say 'huhh' and flopping back into the pillow to merrily proceed with her snoring sounds. One night Billy even propped a pillow behind Jane to make her sit up and listen to the lions but all that happened was that Jane's head flopped immediately towards gravity and continued sleeping sitting up.

On to Xaxanaka camp for the next 4 days! (pronounce Ka-Kaa-na-ka) still in the same Moremi game reserve. It is the camp with the airstrip where last year a bush pilot had to fly around and around until the elephants were off the strip so he could put the plane down, remember?

We were meant to be one night in Kwai and then 3 nights in Xaxanaka but this holiday with not being on the move every day to another area or another camp was extremely pleasant and relaxing. Early morning game drives, somewhere out on the drive a picnic lunch and then return to camp to relax, read a book etc. Jemmie of course has no rest in his bum but fortunately for him there were always things to fix. Once more our gas-stove was playing up, his GPS had to be repaired at one stage and the roller-drawers needed some tuning up.

We arrived at Xaxanaka and this camp is well known to us for the elephant that invaded our space last year. As soon as we set up some neighbour campers came to warn us about 'an elephant that comes and visit the camp every night and to please put our veggies and fruit away as he is after that'. We knew about this and that evening after our showers we prepared for the evening. Oranges and other fruits were duly put away -tucked into fridges- or cars. We decided to wait for Jumbo's visit before we would prepare our meals which included vegetables. The fire was up and running, drinks were in hand and we are all parked leisurely in our chairs around the fire - sort of so →

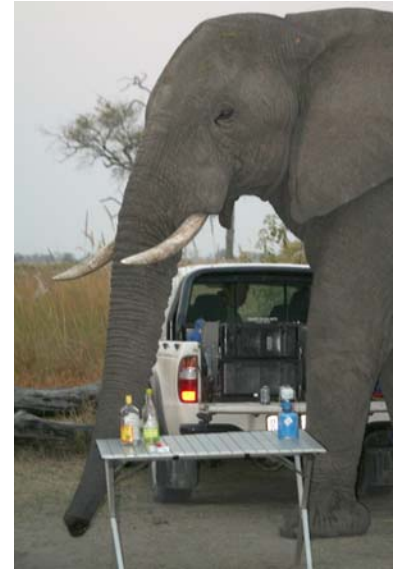
I get up to fetch something from our car and automatically look around to check what is happening out there and see Jumbo with his trunk pointing my direction approaching us in a steady pace.

I alert everyone and cameras and Gerard's video recorder are all switched on (we had them all ready waiting for J's visit) and when I turn around Jumbo is now in front of our car (the white one you see in pic and me still standing behind the car - that is how steadfast Jumbo's pace was). He was a big boy....truly a humongous beast! He goes past our car and right next to it is our trailer



Billy and I demonstrating a purring dove after elephant story

standing close to a tree and Jumbo finds his path blocked by our washing line. He now had to squeeze himself between the trailer and the tree and merrily bumped our gas-stove hanging its hinges and ends up right in our circle of chairs around the fire. Everyone sat silent as a mouse in their chairs and no-one moved. I at this stage back off to the left of our car and just stood there with a fixed nervous grin. Because my lawdy-lawd is he BIG! Jumbo then notices an orange coloured dustbin bag, sniffs at it, decides to grab it with his trunk and sways it around left and right and left again and then drops it. Nothing of importance in there obviously. He is now right behind Mike and John in their chairs and Jumbo stands right behind them, and we hear Mike saying in a trembling voice and



(Lineke hiding in car)

eyes like saucers: "I am fearless, I have no fear, do you guys see any fear on my face?" as Jumbo now waves his trunk in front of Mike and John.

Imagine them sitting in their chairs, and the top of their heads do not even reach Jumbo's knees.....Jumbo sniffs on Mike's drink; John who was sipping a gin-tonic with a slice of lemon thinks better of it and reasons 'if this boy is into fruit, let me offer him some' and raises his drink, tilts the glass a bit to present his lemon slice offering and Jumbo sniffs and sniffs oh so gently around that raised glass. Both John and Mike are now like wooden statues and remain that way throughout. (On the film it is the most extraordinary scene - hard to describe what we experienced. And these pics being so small cannot reflect the true scenario.)



Mike & Johnny being brave

I don't like this (Jean)

Jumbo now decides to sway away from Mike & John and heads for Jean in her chair who has her hands clasped in front of her mouth and keeps saying 'I don't like this' - I don't like this' and me, seeing Jumbo heading my way, get into the car 'doing a Simon' (this is what Simon did last year

when an elephant was near). Jumbo is now behind Jean at Billy's car and sniffs through his kitchen and the car windows. A few 'hey' and 'oi' shouts by Billy make Jumbo turn around, back to Mike & John area and he sniffs a bit around our trailer, goes to Mike's tent and sees his famous dinner jacket on top of the tent and trashes it around just for fun. Trash, trash through the sand and dust, his favourite jacket of all! (Mike's wife would have loved this as she simply hates his multi-coloured jacket and can't get him to dump it). After that little trick he heads to John & Jean's tent and 'bingo' his trunk has sniffed out something interesting. On the video you hear us talking and Jean saying (who had recovered a bit from her close-up with him) 'what on earth is he smelling in our tent - there is nothing in there' and then realisation dawned upon her and she utters 'oh no, oh how stupid, I left a bag of apples in the tent!'. Jumbo now starts really rousing the tent around with his trunk and we see the tent flopping left and right and as his senses confirm the presence of apples he starts kicking the tent with one of his huge front paws.

In the meantime all campers surrounding us as well as three big tourist game trucks loaded with guests had stopped at our site and camera's are clicking frantically, flashes of cameras go off, people commenting, game-rangers warning the tourists saying 'see what happens if you have fruit or veggies in your camp' and our men, fearing their tent being smashed to smithereens now start shouting 'Oi!!! ' Hey!!' and I still shout to Jeremy: "No heroics!!" from my hiding place in the car. Jeremy, thinking he can distract the elephant from that tent, does a desperate grasp into our trailer (where we had hidden some oranges) and throws it towards the elephant. Jumbo just dryly picked it up and threw it down his throat and continued his kicking against the tent. The tent is now flattened and handbags, apples, passports, reading glasses, etc are steadily crunched below his 5-ton force. Nothing we do helps even when the game-rangers got involved and started to shout to the elephant. Jumbo is on a mission.

With these masses of people around and cameras flashing with shouting and noises, I decide to stay safely in the car as Jumbo can now at any time turn around and get really pissed off with us. We are after all in the wild and this is a wild animal which in one split second can turn around and kill. The most frightening part of it follows now as the three game-trucks decide to get into action and first one truck drives straight into our camp revving his engine like mad. All of us had already as soon as the coast was clear when Jumbo was concentrating on getting the apples out of the one tent, retrieved well behind the danger-lines with me still stuck in the car. So there goes truck no. 1 with tourists hanging on to anything they could get a grasp on, bouncing up and down revving up close to the Jumbo. Jumbo undeterred. Truck reverses back. Truck no. 2 now with their scared guests in the back comes from a different angle and drives up right to the elephant with hooting and revving. This is where I thought things could get very frighteningly out of hand - if Jumbo would get cross then that would be it for all of us. Jumbo does get irritated, shakes his head a few times, turns away from the tent and starts heading out back into our circle, coming across the orange dustbin bag again and crossly trashes that bag around a few times and then all three trucks 'herd' him out of our camp.

As soon as Jumbo was safely away we dash to the destroyed tent and Jane gets in there with a warm cloth and soap and we clean out the tent and the smell of smashed apples and spray it with dettol and aftershave and doom, anything to erase any whiff of an apple as you could bet your ass that Jumbo was going to come back for more. Different emotions ran through our camp. From tears by Jean (feeling guilty) and frights by Mike and John (who once he got out of his chair, walked towards us symbolising he had now definitely soiled his 'broekies'). Mike was in such a state that he just stayed in that chair forever with his eyes still not moving or blinking. And all the rest wiping the sweat from our eyebrows and at the same time elated at this huge adventure! *There are of course lots of pics but not possible to show! We have the whole episode however on CD, filmed by our one and only Film Producer 'Earl Grey' and it is an absolute scream!*

From that day on we were known as 'the Elephant people' - wherever we went, miles away from the camp on our way home to Johannesburg already, we stayed overnight at Khama Rhino Sanctuary and a group of campers drop in at the restaurant where we were eating and we hear 'Look, those are the Elephant People!' Famous at last.

Jumbo did return in the night and stood right at our entrance into our trailer blocking our view and making the whole night turn black. Thank heavens he did not like the smell of dettol and aftershave so after demolishing a huge tree he went on his merry way. It is clear of course that neither John nor Jean slept that night. They could not sleep in the destroyed tent and slept instead in a spare tent of Gerard & Jacqueline, placed only a few centimetres from their old spot.

The next day we agreed to meet each other for a day of leisure at the Hippo Pool or rather 'The Hide' as it is called. A hide is a lookout on wooden poles where one can safely watch the birds and game and this one was overlooking a big water area full of hippo's. About 10 or so were lying close to shore and we installed ourselves into our chairs (forget the hide) with books and binoculars and picnic lunches and basically sat and watched the whole day at whatever popped out of the bush or



the water. Gerard & Jacqueline got horribly delayed getting to us by herds of elephants and as we thought we could hear the distinct rumble of the Hamilton (their truck which usurps about R 100 worth of diesel just by starting it) coming from one direction, it would fade away again and then the rumble would come from a different direction. This all due to dodging elephants and other obstacles (broken bridges) along their road and going through muddy pools, Gerard's testing of 'how deep can the Hamilton sink'. We heard them circling around us for about an hour before they reached us.

As we enjoy the silence, the chirping of birds and sort of snooze around in our lazy chairs after lunch, all of a sudden that whole bunch of hippo's gets up with loud noises of trashing water and I, I just made a run for it direction car. My goodness, all quiet and then in one second they are all up and trashing in the water heading for us (that is what it looked like). Jeremy figures while the hippos were resting and sleeping and wallowing head to toe half immersed in the water, one of them must have dropped a huge fart which gave them all a 'groot skrik' and made them jump up!

Heading back to the camp in time to shower before no doubt Jumbo would come visit again, we all sit tightly again around our fire and stiff drinks to watch his entry. When Jem and I went to the shower we went past a site with new occupants of 10 macho men and lots of tents and cars and in the one car with the door open, I see two huge bags of fresh oranges. We stop and tell them to please hide it away, because of Jumbo, blah, blah, and they sort of waive us off with 'yeah...sure we know'. Very arrogant and macho.

As we come out of the shower, Jumbo is right there and slowly heading his way towards the site of the new campers, followed by our site. So having had a bit of a brush off with these machos we decide to zip our lips and move quickly to our own camp, informing the others that some hell might break loose on that particular site. And yes, hooting started, macho men fleeing in cars, Jumbo sniffing car windows where men were hiding and another type of chaos is there.

Jumbo however kept himself occupied by another interesting tree with lots of yummiie things it appeared. Macho men must have put the oranges away after all but were on trembling legs because of its massive presence all of a sudden in their camp. After a long time it headed out to our site. I had vowed to myself not to get into our car and had arranged my chair behind a table (as if that helps), with Gerard's and Jeremy's chair sandwiching mine. That arrangement made me feel a bit braver. We have all camera's ready again, but campers on the other side of us, carried a whip with them and cracked the whip on seeing Jumbo which



made it veer off into the bush. I was pretty cross. There I was, ready to brave the storm and then some idiot cracks a whip and the storm just blows over. It blew my bubble big time!

That night we had lots of hyena's who liked Jean's washing bowl and other pots and pans and carried those away into the field. We found a variety of our belongings when we started investigating the next day where all our stuff was. Roaring lions in the distance and elephants all over.

Jaqueline's birthday morning arrived - a banner with 'Happy Birthday' was duly draped across the chairs around the fire, decorated further by a number of cartoons that Jane had worked on the previous day at the Hide/Hippo Pool. Hilarious cartoons of the events that encountered G&J. They were great! After breakfast our usual individual trips and the radio then announced 'two cheetah' - Monkey 1 and Monkey 4 were close by and spotted both of them for quite a while. They were drop dead gorgeous and crossed the road in front of them. The radio crackled into life again later with 'wow, a leopard!' Immediately Jane and Billy, whom we were with at Dead Tree Island, radioed Jacque and asked if the Leopard had a red bow? And if so, to please take note that this is our birthday present for her? We did race through to try and spot the leopard who was close to our camp but both our vehicles came too late. Alas. However, that morning Billy/Jane and us



had the great fortune of spotting a wild dog kill. Three wild dogs in the wild was a first for all of us as they are endangered creatures and rarely spotted. One of them was wearing a radio-collar around his neck. They were feasting on a little bokkie and in no time there were only skin and bones left. Which was at the point where 3



different types of vultures that tried to encroach into their space already, much to the annoyance of the wild dogs, descended onto it and finished it all off.

That night we had champagne and beautiful snacks and special nuts to celebrate Jacq's birthday.

Onwards we move - now basically returning tracks to South Africa but still very much on holiday in Botswana as our last 2 nights would be spent at Lekhubu Island - an extremely stark place of nothing but white salt pan sand but with the most amazing little islands of baobab trees and the most extraordinary sunsets that make you drool. It was at Lekhubu where we had planned to stage our 'Gala-Evening' in contrast to it's 'nothingness' and we would drape our aluminium tables with starched table cloths, decorate it with silver candelabra, put on gala dresses and "hat & tails" for the men. Planned perfectly in tune, according to our GPS, with the full moon in place on that very night.

We exit Moremi via South Gate where Jeremy thinks half of the Hamilton's innards are hanging out and within moments the men are all under G&J's truck to have a look. Gerard does not notice anything different on his steering wheel but rather be safe than sorry, we decide to get to a Landrover garage in Maun where we had to stock up in any case - refuel and get water. Maun also has this delightful little 'airport café on the corner where all the rough and tough game-rangers meet' which has become our favourite lunch break for drinks with ICE and a fully fledged brilliant meal! We co-ordinated our refuelling and shopping to be done as no time was to be wasted if we wanted to enjoy a lunch at our little airport café because to get to Lekhubu was still a long drive ahead. Arriving in Maun and gathering at the petrol pump, Gerard's Hamilton after a second check was declared safe to track back to Joburg, but Monkey 4's truck (Mike, John & Jean) was now spurting oil like mad. While most of the men crawled again underneath this car with high-lift-jacks and all that jazz, Billy still needs to pump up his tyres. Once again often we had to deflate our tyres and pump them up again, a tedious exercise especially for Jeremy and me as we have 6 tyres with the trailer. BillyBob returns to the scene of Monkey 4's demise and finds out when Jane wants to retrieve her handbag that this is now stolen. Bar R 1,000 in cash, this bag contains her passport, ID document, driver's licence, credit cards, cell phone and other important documents.

It is close to 40 degrees, mid-day full sun, and there we are without one handbag and with one car seriously sick. Jane gets another cell phone and frantically stops credit cards, whilst Monkey 4 has to be taken to a garage. Between us girls we fear that we never make our lunch-date at the airport café, something we had so been looking forward to, with all this drama. However, being it noon everything comes to a complete standstill in Botswana, so hooray, the police station and the garage would only re-open at 14.00 hours which gave us ample time to stock up on groceries and liquor, relax and fully enjoy a glutinous meal with loads of ice in our drinks!

After lunch, Billy and Jane disappear to the Police station, Mike/John & Jean are at the garage, G&J and Jem and moi go off to the National Parks Board to discuss alternative campsites as we figure with all this delay that it would take to get things hopefully fixed, we will never reach Lekhubu Island and during lunch we decided to change our plans to accommodate our misfortunes. The garage declared Monkey 4 unfit to go into 4wheel drive and Jane had to try and reach Gaborone on Friday morning (two days away) to pay a visit to the SA Embassy and get a temporary passport. This definitely threw Lekhubu out as you need 4wheel drive and it was too far away to get in time on Friday to Gaborone. At 15.30 hours rather than staying in a pristine camp in Maun, we leave this village for another rough camp en route where Jeremy and I were last year - we felt that we could get there with a two wheel drive only (otherwise we would just have to tow) and which camp was towards the direction of Gaborone. Leroo-La-Tao is the name of the camp, south east of the Makghadikghadi Pans, which means, 'Spoor (track) of the Lions'. (Hah and did we have lions!)

Arriving at the dirt road off the beaten track and deflating our tyres again to conquer a 5km stretch to Leroo-La-Tao, Monkey 4 in two wheel drive still gets stuck in the sand, so do we with

our trailer, and a second stop follows for more deflation. It is then that we see an elated Jane with a cell phone stuck to her ear jumping up and down and screaming that her handbag has been found, dumped into another bakkie, emptied of only her cash and less cell-phone, but believe it or not, they did leave her the simcard! The people who found her handbag in the back of their truck were on their way to Gweta Lodge which happened to be north of the Makghadikghadi Pans so the next day we decide to make a trip of it through the Makghadikghadi Game reserve and fetch her documents. A good plan Baldrick!

We arrive late at Leroo-La-Tao and set up camp as quickly as possible - and have a hasty shower as the sun had set already and we had heard there were lots of lions. Also a quick meal was on the agenda with us being so late in camp and as we enjoy our drinks and make pasta and warm up other leftovers, we hear loads of zebra just barking away in the night. Not just one or two, no whole herds. Never heard that before and it was Billy who told us that it was zebra as we could not place these sounds. All of a sudden we hear this stampede of hundreds of hoofs, throwing up enormous clouds of dust and shining our spotlights, right behind our trailer we see the zebra running for their lives. An awesome sight! Right past our camp. That evening we heard the anguish screaming of one of them as it was taken down by a lion or so we assumed. Numerous times later that night the stampede started again and then we heard the lions... and oh lawdy-lawd, we sat up straight in bed as they came closer and closer and closer. The roaring was deafening. We knew the rest of our camp was also wide awake as the snoring from the various tents immediately stopped, to continue happily later when all was quiet again. They were so close that Jeremy at my suggestion to please put his feet under the duvet (they always stick out at the end of the bed and my fear was that the lions would see the dark outline of his feet, they are keen on that) actually decided to zip up the outer tent to hide his feet, as we had only zipped up the gauze as per normal. I was fine with just the gauze but Jeremy felt safer zipping up the outer canvas halfway. We spent the night watching, listening and being in total awe of the sound of lions. Another kill ensued and lots of screaming in the night. Rustling of leaves and the breaking of small twigs on the ground of all sorts of beasts right outside our tent kept us guessing throughout. John & Jean in their tent on the ground were shitting themselves all night. Not so much Mike as I heard him snoring away. This was also the night that Billy tried to prop up Jane to make her listen to the sound which we know did not work. How anyone can sleep through this is an absolute mystery.

The next morning we see loads of lion tracks all over our camp and around our tents. Never shy to check out nightly experiences with other campers we heard the following story from our neighbour campers. They were a middle-aged Afrikaans couple who also slept in a tent on the ground. Before they left for their adventure in the Botswana bush they were advised by friends to take a 'koek blik' (cake tin) into their tent together with a wooden spoon and if the lions were close they should hit the tin and the noise would scare the lions away. Well, our lions were circling their tent that night and in doing so, one of their tent pegs came out and half their tent collapses. Whereupon the woman, without a hint of panic or fear, says to the man: "Pa, ek dink es tyd dat jy die koekblik slaan" (Dad, I think it is time that you hit that tin). No panic, no chaos,

nothing but a nice little calm suggestion of 'perhaps you should hit the tin now'. This story floored me big time.

This day was the day of fetching Jane's documents but also the day that we decided to have a Gala-Breakfast instead of the Gala-Dinner as G&J had to leave that morning because of our changed plans. They had booked in addition to this trip another stay in the Tuli Block and where we were now was too long a drive to get there in time so they had to hook off. Thus the Gala-Breakfast was put into action whilst we still had our whole group together.

Billy and Jem appeared in white t-shirts and black tie, Jane dressed up as a middle-east princess, Jean wore a silver lame top and long sparkling diamond eardrops, Jacqueline became an African Queen and I wore a purple feather boa and bright coloured sarong with Gerard dressed up as Madiba (Mandela), Mike in his famous, specially washed, multicolour jacket and John ...well John took hat and tails literally coz' Jean had fabricated a steel wire attached to a belt and concocted this real 'tail' ! We dressed up our table with a skull and bones (found nearby - the place was littered with skeletons due to our permanent resident lions), champagne was cold, the silver candelabra propped and our Voortrekker Woman was in fine form making us delicious flapjacks! She was later taken to task by Mike and John whose patience ran out with the mini flapjacks and proceeded to basically fill up the frying pan with the mixture and ended up cooking fabulous pancakes!



**Official record of sublime idiots in the bush from left to right:
Jeremy, Lineke, Billy, Gerard, Jacqueline, Jane, Mike, Jean & John 'with tail in hand'**



After breakfast we waved a sad goodbye to our fellow bush friends Gerard & Jacqueline and climbed into two cars as Monkey 4's truck in 2 wheel drive could not cope with our journey to Gweta Lodge. It was a long and tedious, bumpy, dusty and hot road - about 100 clicks over dirt roads and a further 100 on tar road (inflate, deflate....) and Billy found himself alone and awake with 3 fellow passengers nodding off as there was absolutely nothing to spot! Our resident general surgeon Mike who drove with Jem and moi, regaled us on hospital stories and kept us wide awake. Arriving at Gweta Lodge I immediately checked for the sign that would spell the word 'bar' (which was right at the sparkling blue pool side...awful as we had no swim gear with us), and followed suit by the rest of thirsty travelers we guzzle down a round of drinks with loads of ICE! Jane's documents were retrieved from reception and we celebrated our fortune by treating ourselves to a nice lunch at the lodge. The trip back was promising to be as boring as the way to, but at the end of our trip, on par with the position of our camp, we decide on a little detour to go via the 'hippo pool' which proved to be a riverbed in the hope of seeing some sort of game.

Well...what we discovered there made up for the whole long trip and we discovered exactly why this was skeleton country or perhaps Lion's Paradise and understood all the night sounds we had heard. This riverbed was full of game we had never seen before: herds of zebra's and wildebeest with skeletons, skulls and bones scattered all over and hundreds of vultures present and still picking on the leftovers of the night before. The riverbed's border was



on one side a steep uphill and on the other side our camp with behind our camp a fence. Thus the animals were herded by the lions towards the steep uphill or against the fence and 'tjakka' with no way to escape, another easy kill.

In awe and with mouths agape we slowly wound our way through the riverbed and watched for a long time at the movement, the dust, the huge numbers of game (once again, the pictures can not reflect what we saw there, except for one shot that Billy made - see next page - that gives you a good impression of the beauty of it). No wonder our nights were filled with the sounds of the wild.



Back at camp we were filled with trepidation for the night ahead as we knew Lion's Paradise would be action packed again in a few more hours.

BillyBob's pic: Lion's Paradise-Wildebeest & vultures galore



We could not wait to get to bed - This did not apply to John & Jean who had taken the Afrikaner story to heart and had been seen practicing hitting their empty cookie-tin and belting out a special song 'Da kom die Ali Baba-a-a'. Cookie tin, wooden spoon and J&J went all to bed together. That night when the lions came all we heard was a soft ticking on the cookie tin and a very trembling squeal of John 'da kom die Ali Babaa'.

Soon the sounds started and our ears were treated to a whole orchestra of jackals singing. It was just hair raising and too beautiful for words- the still of the night and a very long beautiful song from I don't know how many jackals! Also a first! And then the zebra came and stampeded around our camp. Barking away and throwing up dust. Wildebeest were crawling all over the place. After midnight the lions made their presence known again but the sounds we heard were further away than the previous night. Instead Jeremy and I had a huge elephant right at our trailer transplanting a tree and chewing away and his rumbling noises made the trailer shake.

Next day it is pack-up time again and off we go to have an overnight stop at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary before we cross the border back into South Africa. Contrary to our two action-packed nights our stay at this camp was so laid-back and non-dangerous that John, Jean and Mike decided not to even put up their tents and slept out in the open, ignoring creepy crawlies and a possible rhino or two.

As we relax during the hot afternoon and Jem and I are off to book the restaurant for a dinner



(yes, a restaurant - very civilized boring overnight camp) we came across a mother rhino with her baby and Jeremy discovers he has now lost his wedding ring....!

All in a days work. Now I have to marry him again.

Jane is on her knees and hands to grovel through the sand, we empty dustbin bags and our eyes are constantly shifting over the sandy

ground to see if we can find it.

No such luck I'm afraid.

Dinner was had, our infamous elephant adventure caught up on us again as that group of people arrived and upon seeing us shouted: 'hey there are the Elephant People' and we decided another bottle of grape-juice should be ordered so we can all sleep well!

The border crossing took a long time - full of trucks and cargo and lots of truck drivers, so the SA customs people re-directed us 'white people' to a special office which implicated that we would get through faster but we ended up with the Commander-in-Chief of the SA Police himself- looking very much like 'Uncle Bob of Zimbabwe- behind a computer typing in our passport details with one finger after first having to search his keyboard for the right letter for about 5 minutes. We stood a long time in that queue!!

Safely across - Mike, John & Jean parted ways and the rest of us thundered back home! All cell phones are up and working and all family and things at home were fine and dandy.

Another successful trip into Africa!

Wiz love from the same trailer trash people

Jeremiah & Linus xxx

At Deception Valley - Jem, me and Gerard

