



The wildlife alone is worth the trip to the Dark Continent. (Mark Rackay/ Special to the MDP)

ADVENTURES IN AFRICA

This column is part of an ongoing series that will appear monthly. Many aspects of Africa, wildlife, culture, and safari life will be covered here, along with a few hunting tales along the way.

A near lifelong dream was fulfilled earlier this summer as I finally made the trip across the pond to the Dark Continent, Africa. As soon as I was old enough to hunt the suburban outback with a Daisy BB-gun, in pursuit of grasshoppers, field mice, and other dangerous game, I dreamed of hunting really dangerous game in Africa.

My wife and I got serious with trying to make this trip several years ago, then COVID got in the way. Post-COVID, the prices for airline tickets doubled, but we forged on anyway, giving the family finances a double hernia, for this once in a lifetime trip. Those who know me

understand what a trip of this magnitude means to an adventure seeker and hunter, like yours truly.

I plan on writing about this trip over multiple columns, spread out over time. There is so much to see and do in the wilds of this country, that a couple columns could not even begin to cover the adventure.

Many writers launched careers writing about hunting in Africa, such as Hemingway, Ruark, Capstick, and Boddington. I have no desire to pen the next African hunting novel but will try and share some experiences in this column.

We decided on a traditional safari style hunt rather than the concession type plains hunts offered in South Africa. The safari hunt is conducted on foot and in hunting vehicles, with a professional hunter (PH) in charge, a gun bearer/ tracker, and a second



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

tracker. These trips last longer, as we spent 21 days on this trip.

We chose Desfountain Safaris in Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in southern Africa known for its dramatic landscape and diverse wildlife, much of the wild country held in private ownership and large hunting concessions.

Zimbabwe has a decent economy with agriculture and mining being the largest exports. Most of the country's employment lies within Harare, the capital city, and several other large metropolitan areas.

The vast majority of Zimbabwe is very wild, occupied by small settlements and scattered villages. The average Zimbabwean worker makes around \$300 a month.

The Zimbabwean government has a difficult time with currency. The Zimbabwe dollar has an exchange rate of somewhere near one dollar US to 2,500 Zimbabwe dollars.

For those of you traveling there, the US dollar is accepted everywhere, and unofficially, the US dollar is the national currency. Just make sure the bills are clean and crisp, as the locals do not like worn or torn currency and will not accept it.

I generally try and learn some of the native lan-

guage of a country before I visit. I believe it shows respect to the people and offers an open line to communicate and learn about their culture.

Zimbabwe is a different story, as they have 16 official languages. Fortunately, English is one of the main languages spoken, and the second most popular is Shona. I can speak enough Shona to get by on a hunting trip but could not order a meal in a restaurant.

As usual with any trip, the airline travel was excruciating. When you live on the Western Slope of Colorado, the motto seems to be "you can't get there from here, at least not easily."

We left Montrose on a Friday, landing in Dallas, then next flight to Los Angeles. We had to overnight in LA, to catch the international flight on Qatar the next day. That 16-hour flight landed in Doha, Qatar for a 9-hour layover.

From there it was a flight to Zambia, 10 hours, then two hours more to Harare, Zimbabwe. From there, it is a charter flight on a Cessna Caravan, to the remote concession of Desfountain Safaris on the Saave River. The charter flight is where the trip suddenly got real.

Before landing on the dirt strip that the locals affectionately referred to as a "runway," the pilot had to make a couple low passes to scare off some wildlife. There were a handful of zebra, four giraffe, and about 25 impala on the dirt track as a welcoming committee. Welcome to the African bushveld.

Before I go much farther, a few words about wildlife and hunting in Zimbabwe are in order, to clear the air about many misconcep-

tions animal rights groups deliver about the African wildlife.

Much of what we construe as fact comes from Disney and television shows such as Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom.

The safari industry brings employment, income, and food to the bush communities of rural Africa. Safari gives these wild animals value, as hunters come and pay more than \$1,200 dollars a day in daily rates, then license and fees on each game animal harvested.

For example, a male lion may run \$40,000 in fees, most of which stays in the local area.

No animal is wasted. Our camp had a processing facility where all game harvested is processed and consumed by the guests every meal. The remaining meats are given or sold very cheap to the local people, employees, and their families. Nothing goes to waste.

Safari camps hire many of the locals for year round employment for their camp maintenance, laundry people, skimmers, cooks, kitchen totos, housekeeping, trackers and more. Our camp had around 25 full-time employees and the camp even provides living quarters for their staff.

Anti-poaching is taken very serious in Zimbabwe, and the locals help very much with it. They know that poachers that illegally kill game are taking money and food directly from their family, so everyone keeps an eye out.

Desfountain Safaris hires a staff of six conservation officers to patrol the 100,000 acres of hunting land keeping poachers at bay, and protecting the very endangered rhino,

which is closed to all hunting. Because of these protections, the rhino population is improving, and we saw several during our stay.

June marks the start of the Zimbabwean winter, meaning cool nights in the 40s and daytime highs in the upper 70s. It also means there were no clouds in the sky, and rain gear was not necessary.

Everything in Africa bites, and much of the biters will send you to paradise ahead of schedule, so best keep your wits about you. The locals love the winter because the snakes and insects go into hibernation.

We saw black mambas, pythons, cobras, and a very poisonous scorpion. So much for the hibernation theory.

I had treated this trip as a once and done adventure, until I actually experienced it. This magnificent ancient land with beautiful and untouched wilderness and wildlife, baobab trees over five thousand years old, really got to me.

There is no way this is a once and done. We have the next trip there on the books already. So much for the kid's inheritance.

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The memsaab, my wife of many years, stands next to a 5,000 year old baobab tree. (Mark Rackay/ Special to the MDP)

Vault toilet upgrades scheduled for Ward Lake

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests' Grand Valley Ranger District will upgrade two vault toilets in the Ward Lake recreation area on the Grand Mesa. Replacement

of the vault toilets will begin Aug. 21.

The replacement process requires heavy equipment to be utilized. For public health and safety, the area surrounding the vault toilets will be closed for the duration of the project.

The first vault toilet, situated

at the Ward Creek parking lot, will undergo replacement. As a result, the southern end of the parking lot will be closed to public use. Access to the Ward Lake boat ramp will still be available to ensure no disruption to recreational activities on the lake.

A temporary closure of National Forest System Road (NFSR) #121.1E will be required for the second vault toilet replacement. Recreational activities are prohibited in the closure area. The public is asked to adhere to this closure and pay close attention to all signage. Travelers

and forest visitors should be alert and avoid areas where heavy equipment is working.

The project is expected to be completed by Sept. 1.

For questions or additional information, contact the Grand Valley Ranger District at 970-242-8211.