

## **ZIMBABWE - AFRICA - 1995**

### **Sunday, 7/2/95:**

Countdown: After years of stop and go, plan and cancel, schedule and reschedule, Tom & Linda are one week from departure for Africa. Today we have started our anti-Malaria medication. We have already ingested and have been injected with enough chemicals to cause us to glow in the dark. But we are, we trust, safe from the bugs and germs, if not from toxicity!

L. has three questions: Are there fireflies in Africa, (and if so, are they carnivorous)? How are the stars of the Southern Hemisphere? Does the water really run the other way down the drains? All this remains to be seen.

### **Monday, 7/3/95:**

Today T. sights in his rifles. He has enough fire power to overthrow a small country if the hunting doesn't amount to much! He is taking a .30-06 bolt action rifle built by Greg Wolf, a .375 H & H Magnum bolt action rifle built by Dakota and a .416 Remington Magnum built by Frank Wells and engraved by Ken Warren. All shoot perfectly, to both T.'s delight and L.'s relief.

### **Tuesday, 7/4/95:**

With many checks and double checks and "did you pack?"s we load duffels, guns and all into the Explorer and go down to Severna Park. We will leave from there on Sunday.

### **Wednesday, 7/5/95:**

A call to US Air determines that our carry-ons will fit and our luggage will be checked straight through onto the South African Airways plane. This is much easier than having to collect them all in Miami and check them on ourselves. Another small hurdle avoided.

### **Thursday, 7/6/95:**

We pack T.'s big duffel. Using a third, "odds & ends" duffel, everything fits, even the big hiking boots, with room to spare. L. has supper with Joyce, who is trying, as always, to understand why her friend is going off to yet another remote, possibly uncomfortable and probably dangerous part of the world.

### **Friday, 7/7/95:**

"Last" this, "last" that, good-byes and requests for "an African hat" and unusual tee shirts. T. goes to breakfast with The Bunch in Annapolis and all rejoice for him as he finally realizes a life long dream.

### **Saturday, 7/8/95:**

The last things wedge themselves into the bags. Mail stopped, Linda leaves farewell messages on CompuServe for her Forum Friends there and sends E-Mail notes to others, including Susie, who will be on the list of readers of the Log. She wants L. to be a Travel Writer. L. feels that this would make the pleasure more like work. Ted Burgess calls to wish T. great luck and to tell Linda that he expects "a spectacular article" for the SCI Newsletter. She will try. We call John in Scotland to say good-bye. He admits that he will probably worry...but he is very happy for our happiness, too. This exact combination is most common among our friends!

### **Sunday, 7/9/95:**

We pop our weekly Malaria Pill and prepare for departure. B.J. arrives promptly as we finish locking the luggage. The big gun case has four key lock and a combination to protect its luxuriously padded treasures. L. suggests that we might print "coffin" on it, to discourage theft.

At BWI we check the duffels and the guns through on USAir, not to see them again until South African Airways hands them over in Cape Town. We relax in the Red Carpet Club for an hour and then proceed to Gate D-5. The flight to Miami is a little over 2 hours in a calm and quiet sky.

Miami International is large, busy and very Spanish. We make a beeline for yet another Red Carpet Club, to wait out our long layover. L. catches up on the Log, T. finds the cookies and local newspapers. These Clubs are havens indeed.

L. goes exploring and finds, at the South African Airways counter, that check-in has begun. She collects T. and the carry-ons and they begin the long march in line, to the counter at last, where passports and tickets and luggage tags from Baltimore are duly recorded and then it's on to the Gate. At last we are aboard the enormous 747-400, a plane larger than many homes. Surely this cannot fly. But certainly it will.

At 6:45pm this unlikely conveyance lifts off, en route to another continent in another hemisphere, 7 time zones away.

By a wondrous miracle there is an empty seat in our 3 seat row at the side of the plane. T. claims the aisle, L. the window and we use the center for space, a very precious commodity in coach. Dinner is late, welcome and edible. We prepare to attempt to sleep, up here in our great East-bound airborne building, sailing through the night.

### **Monday, 7/10/95:**

There is a map, projected periodically onto the movie screen in the cabin of the plane. When we left Miami, a little yellow plane was shown just departing off the coast of the US. Our mileage traveled was posted as "3 miles", with 7786 miles to go. This morning the little yellow plane is within an amazingly short distance of the coast of South Africa, we have traveled 6461 miles...and it is an eye-opening minus 70 degrees F. outside! Our big, plane-shaped building has made good progress while we slept, tried to sleep or only rested, throughout the long night.

It is now 6 am for us, but it is noon where we will shortly be. They will be serving us Brunch, for lack of a better name for it. We are given the usual papers to fill out as we await food, coffee and the start of the adventure.

At long last, we touch down in Cape Town. The passengers break into spontaneous applause, although, even as we join in we are not certain if this is for the skillful landing or just for the joy of being here at last. Probably it is both.

We begin the Baggage Thing, and also the declaration of the rifles, all long and slow. Finally we emerge into the main terminal, to see a man holding a sign: "Tom & Linda"! Our "contact" Rai! He is pleasant and enthusiastic and off we go, on an immediate and rambling tour of Cape Town, although abbreviated a little out of deference for our slightly weary state. We mount into the hills, through a very elegant

neighborhood and park at the top to look both at the lovely view and some of the remarkable diversity of flora in this very specified biological area of the world. The very first thing that meets our eye is a small yellow sign: "Beware of Snakes" and on it is a picture, absolutely unmistakable, of a Cobra. We are suitably impressed.

After a bit more touring we go to our accommodation for our stay in Cape Town, Rome Homestead, which is in a lovely area above the town and is a very old Cape Dutch house from the 1840's and restored by the present owner, whose wife and son (Elizabeth & Bill Ashwell) now run a guest house there. It is gracious and beautiful, with elegant touches but a feeling of comfortable warmth. We have tea in the small parlor and then Rall takes us on a wonderful tour of the coast, and out to Rooi Els (Red Elm), which is where he and his family have a summer home. It is a stunning drive along a coast road at the feet of some of the roughest and rockiest mountains we have ever seen. They are surprising to us as we didn't realize that this area had such grandeur and such powerful crags. And suddenly, off shore, we are saluted by Southern Right Whales, seemingly standing on their heads in the water, tails high above the sea, waving gaily. L.'s first whales ever and a fine welcome it is! We also see a Mongoose at the roadside. Since the first animal we saw while driving from the airport was an ordinary Gray Squirrel, we are much encouraged by the sight of something more exotic. (T. said that he knew we were in South Africa when he saw a roadkill and couldn't identify it!) The summer house sits on a beautiful bay and there is huge surf breaking all along the beaches and rocks. On the windowsill of the cottage is a small, dark blob: we have lots of trouble with those Baboons, says Rall!

Dinner will be at 7, so we return to Rome Homestead along the darkening roads. Another surprise is that driving here is on the "other" side of the road. We have a fine meal of Cape-style food and fall into beds early and gratefully. To our amazement, however, we have far less Jet Lag here than in Scotland. L.'s theory is that as the trip is so long, one eventually does sleep enough to help reset the bio-clock and with enough food and rest here we should feel great tomorrow.

Our room is just magnificent, with vast high ceilings and beautiful muted shades of moss and earth. There are brocaded draperies at the full height windows and a view over lush green lawns to a lovely pond where water birds are swimming. Three horses graze on the grass. We go to sleep in perfect peace, feeling well cared for and very content.

### **Tuesday, 7/11/95:**

This morning our guide will be Peter, a young associate of this little organization in charge of our lives while we are here. He will take us wherever we wish. We suggest that we would love to go up the legendary Table Mountain, weather permitting. We begin with some generalized touring. We have slept deeply and feel fresh and fine and after a delightful breakfast with Elizabeth and her son Bill, we are ready for all the sights. Our first sight is a rainbow, a very fine omen indeed! Our tour begins with the historic area of the Stellenbosch, which includes a lovely museum, made up of 4 houses of typical styles and furnishings in the history of the Cape, including the original Cape Dutch cottage with a reed thatched roof, a typical H-shaped Cape Dutch home with wonderful gables, an English Empire style home and a very Victorian house, c. 1850, which was the most oppressive of the lot. We have coffee in a small shop and drive on to the waterfront area, a reclaimed renewal project quite a bit like Harbor Place at home. Here L. finds a fine tee shirt for Lisa and we have an excellent lunch. Peter reserves space on the Cable Car which will take us to the top of Table Mountain, after ascertaining that it is indeed open. The top is often rendered inaccessible by the vagaries of weather up there. The mountain is 3567' high, which is high enough to breed its own weather, and it does. We drive to the base and begin our ascent to the Cable Car station with a little trepidation, but unwilling to miss the chance to see this much loved place. We enter the little grilled cage, along with quite a few other tourists and begin the slow, steady climb. As we rise, the sea spreads out below us and the great striated cliffs of the mountain loom ahead. At the top it seems that we can never surmount that last few feet and wedge the car into the little pier, but we do, and step out into a high, cold misty place, with the sun dancing in and out of clouds and vast and wondrous vistas on every side. We ramble over the mountain from view to view and follow a little trail to another area, admiring the wonderful sight of Cape Town below and more mountains around us. We can see the Cape of Good Hope away in the distance, where we hope to go tomorrow. This is a very wonderful place and it is no mystery that many people consider it magic and spiritually powerful and that there are very early myths and legends among the native people that involve it, including a creation myth, that claims that the Great Mother Creator, when she formed the earth, created 4 Giants to deal with the demons who beleaguered her. Only one of the Giants prevailed against the demons, and to honor him she turned him into Table Mountain. As we are walking, we see another African creature, the Hyrax. These are small, somber animals, somewhat similar to a large Groundhog, but they are, bewilderingly, related to the Elephant! Peter recalls some Japanese tourists who became quite fixated with them and were running around yelling "There's another Hylax!" We call them Hylax from then on. As we leave some little showers come dancing across the peaks and we descend to see the most brilliant rainbow we have ever seen, with every color of the spectrum clearly visible, arched right across the face of the great mountain. Peter stops the car and L. takes a photograph to remember this fine moment.

We stop for tea (Rooi Bush, a fine, natural local tea of international renown- delicious!) and then return to Rome Homestead. We are only nicely weary and have had a wonderful day, suffer no Jet Lag at all and can't wait for tomorrow!

We share dinner time with a very interesting couple whom we met yesterday, Rudy & Ora, who have come to live in Cape Town from 15 years in Hong Kong. They are staying at the Homestead until their house is ready nearby. Dinner, chicken and vegetables and lemon meringue pie is simple and delicious. We return to our room at our usual early hour, to work on this Journal and to write a few cards before bedtime.

### **Wednesday, 7/12/95:**

L. reconfirms the flight for tomorrow. We will leave at 9:40 AM for J'burg and then on to Harare in Zimbabwe.

Today Rall comes to pick us up. He will be our guide. We insist on the Cape of Good Hope, that southern-most tip of this continent which has fascinated us both since school days. We wend our way down along the road that rims False Bay, through little seaside towns, stopping at Cecil Rhode's Cottage, as Rall is 3rd generation Rhodesian and very proud of "Cecil John". We next stop at an area known for a colony of Jackass Penguins. These are small, charming penguins with voices that are not charming but they live among huge boulders along this shore. As we walk along a path toward the water, there are penguins everywhere: penguins under bushes, penguins in crevices, cracks and caves in the rocks, little groups waddling on the sand, swimming in the sea, sunning on top of the boulders. Some are very shy and some are quite unconcerned. One mom stands beside a large, fuzzy offspring beneath a bush, gazing quite benignly at us as we stare at them. It is a very strange and delightful interlude.

At last we are at the Cape Point. We cram onto a small bus with a whirling mass of small Oriental tourists and grind our way to the top. Here there is a large "failed" lighthouse which was built too high to be seen by ships! The "good" one is down at the water's edge on another small point. High on this cliff the view of the brilliant blue water and rolling surf and the mountains all around is wonderful. The wind is strong and fresh and the sky absolutely blazing with light. We have been very fortunate to see both Table Mountain and the Cape of Good Hope on

clear days, as this is often not the case.

Having expressed a wish to try the famed Rock Lobster (a large Crayfish cousin of our Maine Lobsters) we are driven up the other coast, past very elegant homes and estates, over the beautiful mountain road along the shoreline to Hout Bay. Here there is a seafood restaurant serving catches straight from the water. We order grilled Rock Lobsters. L., fully expecting instant death by lightning strike, admits that at last she has found a better tasting crustacean than the Maine Lobster. This is blatant blasphemy for a New Englander. But they have a sweet, exquisite flavor unlike anything we have had and Rall shows us how to extract hidden morsels of meat. We are sorry when it is gone. We decide that this, aside from many other wonders to be seen in South Africa, is worth a return trip!

Our next stop is at the wondrous Botanical Gardens where over 9,000 species of indigenous plants are beautifully displayed in rambling gardens. Without a doubt it would take months to see all of this properly, but certainly a full day, with sunshine, which has now dipped behind the towering cliffs of Table Mountain nearby, would be more appropriate. Here is another very good reason for a return visit. L. wishes to repack some gear and generally prepare for our trip into the bush tomorrow. This will be our last taste of civilization for awhile, so we must take advantage of the chance. We hurry home (with a stop at an enormous monument to Cecil John, high on a glorious hillside overlooking all of Cape Town) and arrive in time for tea with Elizabeth and some other guests. Then we disappear, to shower and write cards and Journals and try to regain some order amid the chaos of our gear.

Dinner is a typical Cape dish, for which Elizabeth will give L. the recipe. It is really a meatloaf with an unpronounceable name! Along with a salad it is a fine, warming meal.

Although we turn in at our usual hour, L. is assailed by a major insomnia. At last she sleeps and dreams about the Safari Camp we will see tomorrow.

#### **Thurs., 7/13/95:**

We have an early breakfast, as we have a plane to catch. We love these mornings, chatting with Bill and Elizabeth at the table. These people have become friends so quickly, with their warmth and wonderful sense of humor and we are fortunate indeed to have met them. We will certainly keep in touch. We have made tentative, mutual plans to come back in the year 2000, to renew our wedding vows in the little gazebo on the lake. It seems like just a charming idea to us all!

Rall arrives at 8:30 and we are off to the Cape Town Airport. There we encounter pleasant, vague, slow but eventually successful Bureaucracy. After much opening of the gun case, reading of serial numbers, etc., we send our luggage off to Harare, but the rifles must be collected at Johannesburg and checked through again to Harare.

The flight is smooth and short. (After the one from home, perhaps all flights will be short now!) We easily collect the rifles and find the check-in. Off they go and we hurry aboard the flight to Harare.

When we arrive, Dave Joubert is waving from the balcony. The entry is very slow, more showing of passports and various gun-related papers. At last we are "in" Zimbabwe. Then the news: no rifles. They have not come with us on the plane. They may arrive on a later flight. After some phone calls and much discussion, Dave states that we will do best to stay over in Harare, at the renowned Meikles Hotel, the Charter plane is dismissed and rescheduled for early morning (if the rifles do arrive this evening) and we pile all of our gear, which we are grateful to have received in tact, into a small cab and go into town with Dave. He gets out at the SAA office to continue his "Kicking of Ass", to use his term. The hotel is grand and welcoming, even although we are in khakis and boots and less than elegant. Here they are accustomed to such dress, having catered to the Safari trade and world commerce for many generations. We are very fortunate to get one last double room this late in the day. As L. is reserving the room, she turns to see T. standing amid a welter of black duffels and carry-ons and surrounded by a small army of little green men, porters in their spiffy uniforms, all beaming up at him. It is a wonderful sight. (Later, when we have learned the currency, it becomes clear why they are beaming: T. has tipped them according to our currency standard. We believe they have all retired tonight!) Our room is comfortable and the view out over a little park, with its fountain and flower markets, is pretty. This is a larger city than we had imagined and attractive. Dave grew up here, too and is fond of it and familiar with it, which is helpful now.

He arrives, however, with the news that the gun case has gone, sent out on some plane, perhaps Air Zimbabwe, and hopefully to Harare! We cannot know until this evening. Dave books a room at Meikles too and we prepare to go for some supper, apprehensive but hopeful. One way or another, T. will have a safari. Of that, we are certain.

The three of us go down to the coffee shop for supper, as we are dressed so casually. We have tasty Zim steak and veggies and revive considerably. Dave has arranged for his personal rifle to be shipped up from Bulawayo for T. to use...just in case. We have extra insurance on T.'s guns, but they are beautiful and special to him, so we will not lightly let them go. We return to our rooms, where L. works on the Journal and Dave, down the hall in his room, begins again to track our wandering weaponry.

At 7:30pm Dave calls. The rifles have not arrived. This means another day and night in the hotel, waiting for Dave's own rifle to come from Bulawayo and/or ours to arrive from...we know not where. We are frustrated, sad and concerned, but grateful for a comfortable place to stay and that we, unlike another couple we encountered at the airport, did receive all the rest of our luggage. They, with a formal banquet to attend tonight, have nothing, as every one of their bags had gone somewhere else.

L. reserves the room for an additional night and we prepare for bed, longing to be in the Bush, missing the peaceful silence of Rome Home-stead, but trying to adjust to this rude slap from reality.

#### **Friday, 7/14/94:**

Having slept only fitfully, we awake and welcome the complimentary coffee delivered to our room. Our various adapters and plugs will not work in the exotic outlets here, so our favorite tradition, coffee from our own traveling Coffee Kit when we awake, cannot be followed. Thank goodness they have offered!

We wander down to breakfast in the elegant Mirabelle Room. L., looking out the tall windows at the park across the street, the fountains and the flower markets, is reminded, oddly, of Boyelston St. in Boston, looking at the Common!

After breakfast we purchase postcards, stamps, a small polished soapstone frog mascot. T. changes a little money (the exchange rate here is

an amazing 8.43 Zim dollars to 1 US dollar!) and L. calls Dave's room. He meets us in the lobby and we begin to formulate the plans for overcoming our bad fortune. Back in our room, Dave dictates and L. writes a letter to the Customs Officer, a note to the SAA Rep. We will leave tomorrow morning, with or without the guns, which now appear to have been sent to some other city. There is a slight chance that they could arrive today. Either way, it will be SAA's responsibility to deliver them to our Camp. Meanwhile we will spend this day in Harare and make the best of the situation.

Objectively speaking, if staying in this elegant old hotel, with its shining brass, bouquets of fresh flowers on every table and smiling uniformed staff is "roughing it", we could do much worse! Sitting in the lobby, writing cards, the ears are filled with strange, soft dialects and languages. There is a white Rolls Royce parked beneath the portico. A young man is constructing an enormous floral creation near us, there are little groups of men quite obviously "doing deals" on couches here and there and there is much brisk and bustling life, music and smiles. One can see wondrous "types", International Wheeler Dealers, Spooks, the odd terrorist. Sidney Greenstreet might just have left the lobby. The women are often sophisticated and much bejeweled. Were it not for the delay in going to Camp and the concern for the rifles, we would be perfectly content to be here! It is one of the great old hotels, truly a crossroads of the world. T. says that anything imaginable can be bought or sold or arranged here, and is! We would not have chosen this detour, but it most certainly is a fascinating experience, unlike any we have had before.

At lunch, L. orders a Zimbabwean dish, Sadza with Nyama, which really is the local version of grits (cornmeal) with meat in a sauce. There are greens and turnips with it. It is very good! If we have such things in Camp we'll eat well!

Dave goes off to the airport to continue his pursuit of the wandering weapons and we go to our room to rest. Our short night's sleep is crossing our eyes. L. looks in the local phone directory. She finds several computer dealers. "Probably wood-burning" says T. "Mopani" says L.

After a refreshing nap, L. leaves T. to read peacefully in the room and goes exploring around the hotel and the courtyard. There is a huge staff here, as help is very cheap and plentiful. There are people everywhere, always busy, polishing, scrubbing, dusting, arranging flowers, plumping pillows and dashing about. The oddest thing is that around any corner there may suddenly be a tall, silent man in the beautiful forest green uniform of the hotel, but with additional elaborate gold braid, just standing, waiting, by a door. His sole function seems to be to open that door, should you wish to enter or exit. He gives a small salute, a quiet "Yes, Madame" and a little smile.

Dave drops more papers by the room after dinner. All the gun permits must be filled out again, in triplicate! But his own rifle has arrived and we will go to Camp tomorrow, very early, by chartered plane. We shower and pack as much as possible. The hour of 5 AM comes quickly indeed.

#### **Sat., 7/15/95:**

Our wakeup call is at 5 AM and our coffee arrives at 5:15. At 6 AM we are in the lobby, checking out and waiting for Dave. When he comes into view, he is carrying a gun case. We are happy to see it, but L. proposes a song, based on an old standard, "...though your case is lovely, it's the wrong case." But T. is very grateful for a weapon, which means the difference, he says, between a Game Viewing Safari and a Hunting Safari.

Cramming all into a taxi, we are off to meet our charter. He turns up promptly, a pleasant young man with a small Cessna. Everything fits into the plane and in we go and off to Camp, at long, long last.

As we begin our progress to the North and West, Harare appears spread out across the landscape for quite a while. Then, further to the west, the land, brown, gray and dusty green, becomes wilder. There are habitations and dirt tracks. There are some small lakes and rivers. To the East and North low brown mountains stretch away in a broad range. We fly for a little over an hour, crossing the Great Dyke, a low ridge of hills, that runs the length of the country and is mined extensively for semi-precious stones and some metals. About an hour out there are suddenly no signs of man. The land is rolling, brown, speckled with dusty gray green trees and low shrubs. There are green patches and strips indicating springs, but this part of the world is in serious drought and there are dry river beds where there should be running water.

Then, below, "Chewore International", a smooth dirt air strip on the face of the red-brown earth. Down we go, to a perfect landing. We are greeted by two men, waiting near a Toyota Land Cruiser which is outfitted for life in the bush. We meet Rob, the young blond Camp Manager and Martin, the #2 Tracker. All of our gear is soon in the Toyota and we are on our way along a track, wending our way between the Mopani trees and myriad shrubs, over hilly ground. We roll up and down, over small dry stream beds and past hummocks and hills. There are tracks and droppings everywhere, none of them familiar. To see so many animal signs and be unable to identify them is a new and strange sensation for us. We are so used to knowing, without thinking, what we are seeing, that we are humbled at once. Here, we are completely dependent upon the knowledge of our guides and trackers, of Rob and Dave. All are local to Zimbabwe and Rob and Martin to this very area. No one can know this place better.

As we bounce along, Hornbills fly away in small groups. Other birds, smaller and unknown and brightly colored, are all about. We dip down a final slope, past the skinning shed and some small huts and approach our Camp. The first sight is of a little "patio" and behind it a two storied little building made of tree trunks and branches and with a green, translucent roof, which will be thatched soon. The lower floor is the dining room and the upper a parlor where ice and drinks are kept and there are soft chairs and a couch, a coffee table in the center and a battery-powered light which is charged by the generator during the day when not in use. Above this area is a line of three large green tents. One will be ours. When we enter, we see two cots, a wicker table and two chairs, a rack for luggage and a hanging bar for clothes. Beyond is an actual bathroom! The sink has no mixer, but L. has brought her famous "Magic Hose" rig, late of the Scottish trip and it fits the fixtures perfectly. There is a very nice shower also, in a stall. There is a remarkable little toilet, which, in a brave attempt at domesticity, is bedecked in ruffles and frills. L. cannot suppress her mirth, while Rob grins a little nervously. All this is much more than we had imagined. We are very happy.

We have Brunch, as we had little breakfast and it is almost lunchtime. It is wonderful to be eating here, in the back of beyond, and Meikles would be hurt to know how glad we are to be here and not there. Then we have a nap, with a gentle breeze whispering through the screened windows of the tent and unfamiliar bird calls around us.

It is time for T. to meet and try the gun that will be his to use during our time here. It is Dave's own personal rifle, a Winchester Model 70, in .375 Holland & Holland Magnum. It has a custom Bishop stock and a 2 to 7 power Leupold scope. There is a small sighting range up behind the Camp. T. sits at the bench rest, takes aim and puts 2 perfect shots into the target. Dave chortles happily. All will be well!

At about 2 pm we have tea and then load the guns, canteens and odd gear into the Star of the Camp, a monster truck which Dave bought from the Dutch Army when they cut back after the end of the Cold War. It is called a DAF. It has a twin, broken down, parked on a track in the bush. Our monster is named Brutus and its ailing sibling is called Bert. L. loads all of her cameras, hoping to begin a photographic record of The Adventure. Dave is driving, T. perched high on the spotting seat behind, surrounded by Simon, the Head Tracker, Martin, #2 Tracker and the Govt. Scout, who must accompany all hunters into the bush. We picked him up on the way into Camp and he will stay with us until we depart. All are beaming merrily. L. sits next to Dave, feet braced against the massive dash, and away we grind, up and down the dirt tracks, off on the start of the Safari.

Before long we begin to see animal life. A tiny antelope, the smallest in Africa, bounces off. This is a Grysbuck. A fine Impala ram goes by. There are Kudu, Wart Hogs, Baboons in a troop racing up a cliff, many tracks of Buffalo and of Lion and Hyena. But it is the Elephants who steal the show. We see them from the truck and then, when we begin to hike into the bush, leaving the truck on the road, they are everywhere! There are family groups, with cows and their young calves and several bulls of all sizes. There are so many, and they are so involved in the intimate business of Elephant life, that it begins to be a little surrealistic. L. imagines that soon George Page will pop out from behind a Mopani tree and begin his commentary in that calm, smooth voice. Then, as we approach a spring, wherein, Dave tells us, dwells a large Croc, who grabs the odd antelope who comes to drink, suddenly and without much warning, the herd of Elephants we are following turns and begins to make a charge. The bull is flapping huge ears and he is very vocal and the family is all surging with him...toward us! L., who has been filming him on video, turns off the camera and joins in the retreat, all of us, so abruptly, no longer the hunters but ingloriously reduced to a little herd of very ordinary mammals, slotted into the great chain of life that is Africa. We are thus made aware, very early in this trip, of our place in the scheme of things.

When the charge is over and we can once again observe him, the young bull (about 6 years old, Martin says) begins to feed on high branches. He reaches his trunk far into the leaves above his head and strips off his meal. Then, finishing, he gently and casually lowers his trunk and drapes it artfully over one tusk. This, to us, seems to be the ultimate in Elephant Cool.

Over all, in this one afternoon, we will have walked several brisk miles and seen over 100 Elephants. Our "training" at home has paid off wonderfully, as we feel just fine, but nothing in our lives could prepare us for the sight of all of these great gray beasts, going about their lives, here in their land. T. says "This is not the Petting Zoo!" and L. says "I don't think it's Kansas, either!"

We return to the truck and begin our drive to Camp. We see Elephants before our eyes. The evening light is a silvery blue and there is a soft sunset spreading over the distant lavender mountains. Africa is showing us her loveliest face, here in the place we have waited so long to see.

Dinner is about 7:30pm, after tea in the "Parlor". L. writes the Journal and T. and Dave and Rob chat by the Mopani wood fire. The small tree frogs sing softly. This place is quiet, but it is never silent. A little campfire glows on the hill, where some of the Camp staff is cooking their meal. This is like our dreams, but it is real. It is Africa.

Just before bed, we are given a terrible serenade: a small troop of Hyenas start to feed nearby, chortling and shrieking and uttering low, guttural grunts. Welcome to our first night in Africa!

#### **Sun., 7/16/95:**

We have slept quite well. We have an hour to get ready, in the big, cold, green tent. We will get up at 5am, as a rule and have breakfast in the dining room at about 6am. Our aim is to be in the truck and on the track by about 6:30am. (Once again, we are grateful that we both are "morning people".) We have some cereal, fruit and coffee and head off to find a Buffalo cow to use as Lion and Leopard bait. The sunrise is rose and lavender. An Owl is calling. The air is cold and so clear and fresh that it seems like crystal.

Along the track we stop, dismount, shed our jackets and head out into the bush. We are following sign of Buffalo. Today we see no Elephants, as they prefer an area with more water. We begin to walk at a little before 7 AM and 2 hours later Tom and Simon and Dave begin a long stalk. There are several groups of Buffalo and always there are eyes, watching each other, watching the hunters. L. walks, crouches, sits and waits with Martin and Mfuma, the Govt. Stalker. The sight of the three of them, lined up along a log, sharing a Power Bar and chatting in an English/African dialect mix, would likely be startling to someone passing by. It is a long morning, but at about 11:30 AM L. sees T. raise the rifle, rest it on the forked shooting stick and he fires! Then we begin the most feared activity in this land, the search for the Buffalo who may not be dead. The men fan out over the dry brown earth, looking for spoor and a blood trail. There it is! And we all follow the glowing red droplets shining on the fallen leaves of Winter. The trail is clear, then it is lost. Mfuma loads his vicious looking automatic rifle and L. stays close to him. It will be his job to protect her, if... And then Dave sits and fires two rounds into the fallen animal, who can now be seen amid the tangled vines and bushes. She is really almost dead, but the Buffalo has an almost magical ability to function even when mortally wounded and the saying "More people are killed by dead animals" applies particularly to them.

We go to see her, a fine cow, who has given her life to help T. achieve his dreams of Lions and Leopards. She will help to feed us in Camp, too.

Dave goes with Simon and Martin and we sit with Mfuma to wait for their return. Mfuma says he has been a Scout for 15 years. He lives in Harare but loves this bush. We all agree that it is far better here than in any city.

As it is Winter here, the land is dressed in every shade of copper and gold and rust and old brass. The fallen leaves are red and russet and brown and many trees keep their leaves, so there is every shade of green. There is a wonderful smell of dry leaves and clean earth. The overall impression is of a soft-washed, water colored golden world. The dust is ever-present and softens all the hues.

The Sausage Tree is a marvel, with pendulous seed pods that are about three feet long and, in fact, might be thought to look like weird, pale-buff sausages. The Baboons love to eat them and thus the Leopards frequent the tree as they, in turn, love to eat Baboons.

Dave returns with the truck, howling and grinding its way across any obstacle. There is a great busyness about skinning and gutting and quartering the animal and loading it into the back. Then we all ride to Camp, where we deposit the cow at the skinning shed to be prepared for bait and we go to have lunch, a rest, the ritual cup of tea on awakening and then we will go to hang the bait.

We dine on an excellent Quiche and salad. The air, whispering through the tent, is as soft as silk when we lie down to rest after lunch.

At 3 PM we are called and after tea we depart. We have gone only a few miles along the track when two Impala rams bound across in front

of us. L. takes a quick picture. Dave says "Get the gun!" He and Tom and Simon are off, slipping up to a small clump of trees about 50 yards away. T. rests the rifle against a tree and sights. The gun speaks...and Dave pounds T. on the back with glee. He has taken a very fine trophy Impala, at 200 yards, with no warning, no preparation and with this borrowed rifle. There is great rejoicing. L. takes videos and stills for the album and we escort the Impala to the truck with ceremony.

High on the spotting seat the faces are especially merry. We go on our way, rejoicing, to hang the bait. When we reach a small stream there is agreement that this would be a likely spot either for Leopard or Lion. A quarter of the Buffalo is carried to the stream and hoisted up to a tree limb by a chain. Leafy branches are placed all over the top, to disguise it from the Vultures. Since the cats do not have very keen noses, a portion of the entrails is dragged along the ground, all around the area and bits of the browse from the stomach is scattered over all. This "sets the table" for the feast. This bait will be checked periodically to determine when the cats are eating and that will establish the hunting schedule. Another quarter is hung in a similar manner farther down the little side track, but this time it is in a small tree that is deeply scarred and scored by the huge claws of a Lion! (It reminds us of the Bear Trees in the Virginia mountains, where each bear tries to reach higher than his fellows to leave his mark...but much deeper and higher!) This seems a very likely spot.

As we head back to Camp, dusk is falling. The warm evening light slants across the land and the very air turns a glowing gold. The sky is pale teal and rose gold and crimson. We are escorted by bats and owls and by things we cannot see. We are dazzled and happy. And a nice, hot shower awaits us.

To imagine our bathroom area in the tent, remove the outside wall of your bathroom but leave the roof on it. Replace the wall with a very thin screen of bamboo strips, reaching just to eye level. Place this area up against a wooded hillside in the African bush. The potential for surprises is terrific. L. feels certain that, should she look up to see eyes looking back from the hill, she would flee, quivering and keening, straight out the opposite wall of the tent. So far, this is only theory. But when night falls, the stars are so spectacular, so burning and brilliant and the milky way so deep and blazing with light and when we wake, the moon is dappling the leaves on the hill and the little tree frogs are very softly trilling...who wants walls?

### **Mon. 7/17/95:**

What a fine night's sleep! During the very small hours, though, the Hyenas start their mad laughter. The sound is a valid voice of the bush, but it chills the very soul in the dark, strange night.

L.'s H.POB530 computer spends parts of its days here, "feeding" in the kitchen, from the generator that runs the various functions of the Camp. It takes turns with the Sony video camera's batteries. This system works well and when we come in from hunting L. tries, valiantly, to keep up with her journal. The logistics are awful, as so much is happening and there is little time. She types in the upstairs parlor, at the dining table before and after meals and by the Mopani wood fire on the little patio. She types in the tent and considers taking the computer in the truck, but the wild jolting and slamming about would certainly shorten its life. (It is shortening our spines, too!)

The "wake up call" here is the sound of quietly hurrying footsteps and a soft "Knock-knock", murmured outside the flap of the tent, since one cannot tap on a tent! When we open the flap, there is a man from the kitchen, holding a tray with our mugs and a pot of fresh hot coffee! T. says "Wow! Coffee in bed, in Africa!" Indeed, it is an amazing luxury.

The first order of business today is to hang another bait. This leaves one more in the truck and it is beginning to develop a distinct...personality. If the weather was really hot, instead of a lovely, low-humidity, low 80's, it would have become an unwelcome passenger. As it is, we will not miss it when it goes.

Bait hung by another spring, we forge on, farther out into the Chewore Hunting Area. We check springs and various grazing areas. No sign of activity this morning, so we park near a large dry river bed, with only a few springs running in it and begin a long, hard pull up onto the high hills above the river. This is the driest area in the world, it seems, absolutely desiccated. The Mopani wood is analogous to our Ironwood and here on the sun-baked heights it rings like glass when we kick pieces of it. Dave hopes to find animals up here in the noonday heat. We find only the heat. The animals are not in residence. A troupe of Baboons does announce us, with hoots and grunts and much loping about.

We rest in a patch of rare shade awhile and then return to the vehicle and enjoy a picnic lunch of remaining quiche, curried meat pies, salad. Then we settle onto foam pads for a couple of peaceful hours, napping and bird-watching.

We are privileged to see a pair of large Olive Bee Eaters, a bird much revered but infrequently seen, working the air over a small spring pool. They are snatching large insects from mid-flight and slapping them on a rock or branch to kill them. They are large, gloriously green birds with a crimson throat patch and a rakish black eye stripe. They are really beautiful. We have also seen a large group of Ground Hornbills, which are as large as a Vulture and reputed to be good luck. The common Hornbill, of which the Red, the Yellow and the Gray billed, among others, are local, are fine cartoon birds! They are skinny and angular and fly somewhat erratically, in bursts. They remind us a little of airborne Road Runners.

Brutus the Monster Truck is phenomenal! It often negotiates a vertical drop into and out of a stream bed or crevasse while tilting to one side, as it is turning a sharp corner! It has two auxiliary wheels, which we thought to be spare tires, mounted high on the sides of the chassis, which are used to raise the whole massive affair up and over anything. We got over an impassable rock obstruction that way. It is a true wonder and a vital link to life here. It helps, however, to have someone as powerful as Dave driving it, as the Dutch Army did not indulge in such luxuries as power steering! It has a different "song" for every maneuver, a sweet little Tweedle Tweedle for gentle slopes, a metallic scream for hard drops and climbs, many crashes and clashes for the rocky tracks. It feels invincible. (How did that other one get broken?)

We encounter the small road crew who are building (chopping and hacking) the road (track) that we are using through the bush. Four small men, camped on a lovely wooded flat overlooking a big spring. They have been laboring for 2 weeks out there. They are almost finished. A tough life, but this time of year, less brutal. They say they have seen a Lion in the area. They stay close to their Camp in the evening.

The late-day activity starts with the discovery of Sable tracks in the sandy earth. We begin a stalk, but he has been spooked by the truck. We diverge and begin a very hard climb onto the high hills again, but steeper, and later in the day. We have a tough time of this one, blowing like steam engines. Dave explains that, although we are both unusually fit, we have come from a warm (hot) moist climate, at sea level and here we are in a high, dry, much cooler climate. The humidity is perhaps 10 percent and with the drought it is even drier than normal. Hence, our muscles are tense and our lungs are begging for moisture. He says that we will adjust in a few days. We do hope!

The end result of our climb is that T. goes with Dave and Simon, into a deep valley, after a pair of "Duggaboys", which is the local term for old bachelor bull Buffaloes who live away from the herd now. They have been displaced by the younger guys. They are the trophy animals. L. sits on a log with Martin and Mfuma again and we discuss African words for the animals, the cost of wrist watches and what T. did for a living before he retired. The sheer linguistic challenge of explaining "real-estate appraisals" to people with neither is more exhausting than the climb up here!

L: Mfuma, have you ever shot anything with that automatic?

M: Yes I have.

L: What?

M: Poachers.

L: Good for you! Did you kill them?

M: Yes I killed them!

L: Fine! What were they doing?

M: They were trying to kill an elephant. It lived I think.

L: Where was it shot?

M: In the butt I think. It went away.

L: Mad, too I'll bet!

M: I believe so, yes!

But in this place, the truth is as ephemeral, and as hard to catch, as the smoke from a fire.

We await a shot in the valley, but the bulls, old and wise, have outwitted the hunters. We must return another day for those big fellows.

Another bait (the last!) is hung by the nearby spring and then we begin the lovely semi-dark drive to Camp, with little bats and big Night Jars flashing and flapping around our ears and in the black dark beneath a bush, eyes the color and intensity of a ruby laser, a small cat, Dave says.

### **Tues., 7/18/95:**

This Camp is designed to weed out the wimps and the wusses. One arises in the cold dark tent and goes to wash in the bathroom...outside! This is a character building test of moral fiber and fortitude. So far, we pass muster.

This is the dread "low day", common to very strenuous weeks of activity, when the brain refuses to communicate with the body and fatigue and a vague confusion color the world. We wobble into the Brutus after breakfast and ride a short way down the road. Suddenly, Martin spots some Buffalo high up on a mountain to the left. Ahh well, 'fraid you'll need your oxygen today, says Dave. And away we go, hiking into the hills and then beginning our upward stalk. We go without thinking about the pains and aches and residual fatigue. We go on and up and up and we detour around two Elephants, silently browsing beneath a small tree. They could spook the bulls. In Scotland the hazard to stalking was Sika Deer and Sheep; here it is Elephants!

We progress over several little mountains, up and up and up we go, into the bright African sky that is blazing with ice-white light so intense that surely we must part it when we walk and shatter it when we hurry. And all at once, L. breaks through "The Wall", and now nothing hurts, everything is working perfectly, she could go anywhere and no height is too high, no distance too great. We are both flooded with adrenaline and endorphins. We could go forever! We will recall this feeling with pleasure.

We will both remember this day, also, for the terrible tracking time: T. sits to shoot at Dave's instruction, using a solid although he would have chosen a Nosler Partition. He fires and the bull shudders and then bursts into flight along with his herd-mates. And we begin to follow. At first the blood trail is very sparse. At last, Simon and Martin, who is working with him today (to his absolute delight, as he seems to love tracking animals more than life) find a few tiny drops. L. and Mfuma are instructed to follow "Thirty feet behind, and be careful!" The wounded bull is the terror of Africa and this one has a dangerous advantage in these rocky, steep hills and deep, tangled brush. We follow him, follow his very slight sign, up and down these blazing heights for over 6 hours. Three times he has waited for us beneath a tree, leaving a heavier spattering of blood. He stood into the wind, hoping to ambush us. He moved on each time before we came to him. The situation was very dangerous and we were ready to flee or to shoot, depending. The silent stalk, tiptoeing along the steep tracks and trails and through old and overgrown fields that reminded L. of abandoned orchards, whispering, listening, was tense and memorable. We have been tested on the dry, dusty hills of Africa and we have passed the test. We will not forget this day...for many reasons.

T. theorizes that although he aimed for the shoulder he must have hit a little low and caused a muscle wound. Eventually we saw by the tracks that the bull had joined another herd and we were unable to follow him further. Dave is certain that T.'s bull will recover well, as he kept moving and did not make a final stand, as a badly wounded animal will always do.

At one point, creeping along the mountain track, trying to be silent and invisible, L. hears a terrible groan. "Listen! There he is!!" "Oh no" says Mfuma, behind her, "That was my stomach!". They both dissolve in nervous giggles. On this dangerous day, Mfuma has lost the clip from his rifle. It is now an Automatic Club. Probably safer that way!, says Dave.

We head for one of the springs, oases in the dry and dusty land, to have a late lunch and a rest. We stop along the way so that Dave can check out a herd of Buffalo, on the chance that "our" bull might be among them. They move off, however, and once more we are defeated. Lunch beneath tall green trees is cooling and welcome. The adrenaline is draining away and we are enervated. We fall sound asleep on the mats afterwards. We wake a little stiff but much revived.

The afternoon includes a brief stalk of some elusive Impala and driving along the twisted network of little tracks and roads.

The Boabab Tree is a distinctive presence in the bush. Each one seems to have a clear personality and style all its own. Some look like giant Hydras. Some are mottled and bent and the trunk of others is so massive that it would take time to walk around it all the way. Most are various shades of gray but some seem to be blushing. They can look like concrete or like the leg of an Elephant. There are fewer of them than of the Mopani and some others, but they are wonderful. L. takes many "portraits" of them. She is also amazed by the huge cactus tree, the Euphorbia, which is not originally indigenous to this area but are quite amazing. They look as though someone has given them a flat-top haircut.

For dinner tonight we have fillets of Madame Buffalo. It is absolute delicious, tender and tasty. She is doing many favors for us, both bait and food-wise.

We are very tired and a little subdued. In all his many years of hunting, T. has never lost an animal. But we will be back at it tomorrow, ready to go.

### **Wed., 7/19/95:**

All of our hard traveling, in the thundering monster Brutus and afoot, is bringing some benefits and taking some tolls. "I feel like Arnold Schwarzenager below the waist and Methuselah above!" says L.

This day begins on a milder note. Some mornings are very chilly and that first step out into the bathroom is penance for sins unknown. Today is not as cold and will probably be pretty hot out in the bush, too. We check the first bait and there is no action. At the second bait though, a leopard has been feeding. At the third spring a large leopard, the one that Dave was hoping for, was on the bait sometime during the night or morning. Dave will set a tiny timer, which the cat will trip and which will give us some general idea of the time of day or night to expect him. It will at least give us a fighting chance. A blind will be erected today at this place.

After this very hopeful interlude we start off in our little parade, Simon, carrying "Madopa", which is the name the men have given Dave's rifle that T. is using. It means "To pick up something", as every time Dave shoots it they have to go and pick up an animal he has dispatched! Then comes Dave, also armed, T., L., Martin with the now familiar blue day-pack with spare water to fill the canteens and some coffee in a thermos for L., and Mfuma, carrying his automatic rifle. However, there have been some subtle shifts in the structure and now, at the first sign of tracking, Martin joins Simon at the front. Sometimes Mfuma, tiring of bringing up the rear, joins them too, but he is not really much a part of this working unit, being a Government Official and not as skilled in bushcraft, either.

It seems that we are participating in the most ancient of rituals and the most essential of quests. We are marching in a small band, moving across the grasslands and through the forest. The men fan out when the trail is faint or lost; we re-form in a line as straight as an arrow when it is found again. We are the hunters and we could as easily be the hunted, for here we are not at the top of the chain. These men seem very close and attuned to their ancestral roots and skills, but are we not all the distant children of the first wild, wandering hunters? Our legs carry us over this unfamiliar ground as naturally as over our native soil. To see our well worn, favorite hiking boots treading this brown, dry sandy earth amid these golden grasses is both new and old. We are constantly saying "We are really here!"

We are on the trail of a herd of Sable who have frequented this area. We strike out across the dry and dusty open land, following the beautiful, heart-shaped tracks of these striking black and white animals with the scimitar horns. But as we march along, we raise a small herd of Buffalo, who go trotting off into a small draw. We sit to let them settle again, planning to digress to follow them and try for a Sable later. As we wait, we are picked up by a bird, a Forked Tailed Drongo. His kind is numerous here, an elegant jet-black fellow, about the size of our Cardinal. He is perky and vibrant and follows herds of animals, picking up the insects disturbed in the grass as they move along. When we start to walk again, our own little Herd Bird is escorting us, flying just ahead and perching on any handy bush or tree, launching onto the wind to hover and dive upon insects often invisible to our eyes. He has no fear of us at all and probably has never seen a human being. Dave says he is a youngster. He stays with us all the rest of the morning.

The Buffaloes are just not to be found and so we return to the trail of the Sable. This time the single track of a large, lone bull is found and off we go, Herd Bird in attendance, to try to find this fellow. We are walking slowly and our minds are wandering a little in the warm morning when in a flash, with no warning, Simon points and hisses, Dave grabs T. and places the rifle into his hands and the shooting stick under the barrel, L. and Martin and Mfuma fall into a crouch and peer through the grass at a large, Sable bull, looking alert and a little bewildered, probably having heard some small sound from us. He is standing about 45 yards away. T. sights and shoots in less than 5 seconds and the Sable falls at once, taken with one perfect shot through the shoulder. Bedlam erupts! There is laughter and cheering and back-slapping and grinning and general rejoicing all around. Then we all hurry to see the animal who has brought renewed pleasure to T.'s hunting life.

The caping and quartering is done right there. First we do The Photographs. Dave is skilled at setting up nice photos and even L. agrees to be in one with T. this time. Then we sit aside as Simon and Martin begin their work. Simon is as skilled as any surgeon and soon the work is done. Once again the meat will be used for bait and the men will have the heart and liver for lunch today.

Watching Simon and Martin tracking game is a pleasure and a delight. Watching Simon is actually like watching a kind of magic. Simon is a small, slender man of middle age. He has a reserve and a dignity and a quick, bright smile. He walks across his native soil with a balletic grace and gazes with an almost tender regard upon the messages it sends him. He moves softly, with small, economical gestures and speaks in quiet murmurs. He sees the stories of the passing animals, their lives unfold for him. Generations of the trackers of game walk behind him. Dave says "It borders on the Occult, sometimes" and we love to watch him. He seems to see animals to his left while looking to his right! He and Dave and the other men communicate by tiny bird-calls and hand signals, as stalking is done in as much silence as possible. We are reminded often of our elderly friend, William Dyer who works a similar magic in his home mountains of Virginia. He has taught L. so much and now she can see and identify several of the tracks and scats around us here. At first they were all unfamiliar and strange. William's coaching has helped to shorten our learning curve. L. has a little mental vision of William and Simon, side by side, tracking through the African bush...or the Blue Ridge Mountains!

We leave the men at the third spring to begin building the Leopard blind and return to the Camp for lunch.

T. goes out again after lunch but L. stays in Camp to read, write and wash away some of that red dust. No animals are taken this afternoon.

Our dinner is steak (beef), grilled on the open Mopani wood fire. We have a lovely trifle for desert. L.'s motto for this Camp, given the level of exercise (many hard, often vertical, miles hiking, per day) and the quality and quantity of food, is: "Get Fit and Fat With Dave & Rob".

Each evening, right around 8pm as we finish dinner, the Hyenas send in a singer. It is a small after-dinner entertainment. After a few giggles among the group, one guy starts his "song", a series of ascending notes followed by a series of descending notes, and ending with some hoots. But tonight, as Rob says, this fellow has got it all backwards, and after a few false starts, he grunts and withdraws, probably blushing.

### **Thurs., 7/20/95:**

The night was mild enough to leave a flap partially open at one of the big screened windows of the tent. A glowing triangle of African moonlight wanders across the walls and floor, deep in the wee small hours.

Toward morning there is often a bird, who seems to say: "Too low, the Mo-pa-ni", over and over, before first light, in a deep, resonant voice. Rob says, no, it is saying "I am a-Red-Eyed-Dove". OhhhhKay!

This morning there is much sign of activity on all of the first three springs, with a surprise in store for us, too: after the men check the first spring and find some sign of feeding there, we drive on to the second. T., L. and Mfuma wait in the truck; we watch Dave, Simon and Martin slip silently to the edge of the little cliff, from which they can observe the bait, suspended in a tree, up on the far side of the spring. Suddenly, their body language changes, they are alert, excited, grinning! They return purposefully and pleased: they have seen a Leopard! He went up into the tree with the bait and down again when he saw them. He is a large male. A blind will be built here today, too. We go to the third spring and L. sees the blind that was built yesterday. It looks efficient, nestled against a small bank, with about an 80 yard shot to the bait. There is a thick wall of green branches and a small window wall of thatch containing two ports, through which T. & Dave will watch...and shoot. There is more feeding sign here this morning, too.

We start back to Camp, to instruct Rob to build a blind at the second spring. On the way a little herd of Zebra, the first we have seen, stops us for a while. The hunting party marches off in pursuit, briefly, but the wind interferes. They return. Onward, to the Camp.

Along with Rob and a work party in the Toyota, we return to the spring and Dave supervises the beginning of building the blind. While here, the men find clear sign of 4 Leopards, a female, two young cubs and the large male. All have been feeding at the bait! This bodes well for T.'s hopes.

We are off again, to walk another area, away from the springs, to avoid disturbing the quarry. We go to the same lovely valley, the Mukango Flood Plain, that we walked the very first day. It has large springs (including the one with the Croc in residence) and a marvelous variety of terrain, deep sand, dark mounds of sandstone, high cliffs with caves that are homes to Baboons, open Savannah and deep wooded groves. The bird life is wonderful here: we see a pair of Sparrow Hawks, many of which, in Africa, are larger than ours at home, Shrikes, Chats, Little Olive Bee Eaters, many Drongos, and a Bataleur Eagle, a remarkable and reputedly very lucky bird. Perhaps it will deliver a Leopard. Along the way L. also sights a tiny Spotted Owl, perched sleepily on a branch of a low tree, blinking. We hike over this lovely area, and where we saw 100 Elephants there are absolutely none. They have simply evaporated. Dave says they must have been having a meeting that first day. L. says they were there to welcome us!

We sight no game but enjoy our brisk hike and today lunch is in Camp again. At 3pm T. and Dave will go to the blind at the third Spring, to wait for the large gentleman who has fed there for two days now. The timer, tripped by the strong winds of yesterday, has not helped us, but they have estimated that he feeds at dusk.

And so, following lunch, off they go, along with Simon and Martin and Mfuma, as L. films their departure. This is one of the most complex and thrilling and dangerous hunts, the hunt for the Leopard. The killing and hanging and tending of baits, the very precise construction of blinds in the perfect place and of the right materials, the timing of the placement of the hunter in the blind and, above all, the terrible risk attendant to finding a fallen animal, all are a part of the art and science and the mystique of hunting the Leopard. Simon bears the scars on his body of ambush by a wounded Leopard, who lay in wait all night and sprang upon him, biting his foot, face and arm. He was a most fortunate man. Many do not survive such attacks.

L. reorganizes the luggage, which is topsy-turvy from living straight out of the duffels and listens to the BBC on the little short wave radio. She also films around the Camp, as we will treasure this record later, but she finds that talking to a camera is just too strange and really prefers her beloved old Minolta 35mm to this "new-fangled gadget", the Sony Video Camera.

The hunters return at 6:30 PM, weary and Leopard-less. There was no sign of Mr. Leopard tonight. In the morning they will go to the new blind at the second spring. T. says that the ground gets very hard and uncomfortable after 3 hours and L. suspects that she has the better deal this time. She does not feel deprived.

We are now seeing our first Tsetse flies. At first there were none, but warmer temperatures have brought them out. Rob has suggested that the best way to deal with them in a blind, when all must be silent and still, is to pick them up as they imbed their stinger into your flesh, pull off one wing and tell them to walk home. Tonight, in the blind, T. does just that! Quick study, this man! (Here, the name Tsetse is pronounced with the first "e" short and the second long.)

This evening there is no after dinner song, but later in the night the "hoarse" Hyena tries to serenade us. They have heard him here before. His voice is awful, scratchy and monotone, more of a mournful moan. Only the very last sound, a tiny ascending note, hints at music, Hyena-style. Who would have imagined that these much reviled animals would have distinct personalities even sight unseen and such an antic, eccentric charm? But we have no real desire to meet them.

#### **Fri., 7/21/95:**

This is a Leopard hunting morning. T. must be ready to go at 4:40am. We arise at 4am in the black pre-dawn world, with those unbelievable stars of the Southern Hemisphere burning above us and a waning moon low in the sky. There is coffee in a carafe on our table and L. pours a cup but T., off to the very Spartan life of a Leopard blind, without bathroom privileges, declines. L. walks to the truck with him and sees them off into the darkness. She collects an orange from the fruit bowl in the dining room and goes back to the tent again.

She has a nice 2 hours or so to read and putter before the truck returns. The hunters recount that while they were on the blind at the second spring the Leopard was feeding at the third spring. Another miss, but they feel confident of tomorrow's success. They will go out earlier in the morning, to be there when he feeds.

After breakfast we are off to try for an "easy" Buffalo, says Dave,...as though there were such a thing on this earth! But all things being relative, Dave thinks they will be in the area where the Sable was, a less strenuous walk. When we reach the area we begin the stalk. It soon becomes apparent that these wily beasts have pulled one of their favorite tricks, drawing us upwind and then doubling back downwind and, scenting us, they have run away. Too smart by half, and this, along with their ferocious life-force, makes them one of the ultimate game animals.

After a bit of casting about, Dave parks T., L. and Mfuma in a shaded spot and goes off with Martin and Simon to locate more Buffs. We doze beneath a spiny bush, listening to myriad bird calls and the breeze in the tall grass. We wait for about 3 hours. Somehow this long, warm, absolutely peaceful interlude seems to bond us more deeply with this place. All of the senses become stilled, sensitive, tuned to the tempo of the earth. Each bird song is heard clearly, each little breeze is felt keenly. We are comfortable. All at once, Simon is there. His only comment on his long walk is a small "wheew" and a finger wiped across his brow. He speaks little English but is very eloquent. Mfuma says, We thought you went to Zambia! We follow Simon across the dusty grassland, passing close to the place where the Sable fell. We meet Dave, waiting for us. He takes T. and Simon away and L. waits once again with Martin and Mfuma. We sit on a log, in the hot African afternoon, waiting for that shot, those sounds, that herald the successful hunt. L. thinks of the long, long stalk on that other day and says a vague prayer, to the effect that a quick kill would be welcome.

The shot! Another! One after another, 7 shots ring out and the Buffalo gives that bellow of rage and finality that means his death is near. The three creep very carefully toward the sound of the hunters' shots, away from the Buffalo's raging. Suddenly, the air is rent by a sound never heard in this African bushland, a real Rebel Yell. T. is celebrating his kill. L. knows that this will be a fine trophy. That yell is usually reserved for the best of the best! As the fallen animal comes into view, it seems to be a low, black building, there among the grasses. It is immense. And the horns and the boss, which are the aspects determining trophy status, are absolutely marvelous. T. has taken a prize, the Buffalo of his hunter's dreams.

It turns out that Dave and the men have walked over 8 miles to find this bull, who was resting with another, smaller male. This fellow is a Duggaboy, still prime but older and no longer with the herd. His massive head and neck are deeply scarred and his ears are tattered and torn. One huge horn is battered from combat. His skin is leather and rubber, the most amazing armor. He weighs, Dave estimates, about 1600 lbs and is the largest Buffalo shot in Dave's Camp for a long while, perhaps ever. He tells T. that it would make the record book. T. replies that the main thing is that it will be in our own book. There is great joy and L. films and snaps everyone together and separately. In an interesting moment, Simon climbs up upon the back of the massive beast. T. & L. have always decried hunters who sit, disrespectfully, upon their fallen prey. Somehow, when Simon climbs upon his back, the Buffalo is not dishonored. It is a simple celebration of game well tracked and well taken.

The shot was about 85 yards and the Buffalo was staring right at T., who says that those eyes, seen through the scope of the rifle, were an intensely chilling sight. As he describes it, goose bumps rise on his arms! The very first shot rocked him back, quite a blow, considering the great bulk and power of the animal. It was a head-on shot, very difficult, into the chest, which penetrated both lungs and actually killed him almost at once. This is remarkable in Buffalo hunting. The remaining shots are known, among the old African hands, as Paying the Insurance. Now Dave's insistence on the solid cartridge is clarified, as the entrance and exit of the bullet and the internal effects, are profound and immediate. Dave says that both Simon's bushcraft and T.'s shooting have been absolutely superb. Simon was alerted by some tiny sign, the behavior of a bird, the movement of the grasses, perhaps a tiny primal nudge and found the bull in unlikely circumstances and against high odds. T. is tired from early mornings in the blind, long hard hikes and unfamiliar schedules but he has hung in there and has worked hard for a truly exceptional trophy. Dave's tracking skills are no less exceptional than Simon's and his mighty effort in tracking this trophy animal over a long, hard morning was the deciding factor in the success of the hunt. Everyone is proud and happy. The enormous job of halving and loading the great carcass into the truck seems less like work than it might have done. The ride back to Camp is accompanied by many smiles.

The area where T. has taken his Sable and his Buffalo, and may take his Leopard, should be named for him, Dave says. It could also be named the Dust Bowl. We need several showers, surely, to undo the effects of another day there. But nothing ever feels as good as getting really clean after getting really dirty and the shower here is a marvel of high pressure and hot water. It is gravity-feed, straight down the hillside behind the tents and has better pressure than ours at home.

Added to our small number in Camp now is a Swedish professional photographer, Gerald Berg, who will film a promotional movie for Dave's operation. He had done one for a previous Camp. Dave says "He's a sweetie", and he is. He is a rather short, stocky man of middle age, with a severe burr cut and a wonderfully kind and enthusiastic expression and demeanor. He immediately adds pleasant variety to the mix. He has a quick sense of humor and some considerable experiences in his history, having photographed wildlife and related subjects all over the world. He will go to the Ranch also.

Each evening at about 6:50pm, Dave gets on the radio. This is traditional in all remote camps and is often known as The Children's' Hour. Tonight he returns from his session with stunning news: T.'s rifles have been found! We are astonished and relieved. We had begun to adjust to their possible loss. Dave was beginning to put serious pressure on the airline. The faceless "George" has come through. Our joy in this day is complete.

Gerold is exhausted from his long trip from Sweden to the Camp and we are also, from the waning adrenaline high of the Buffalo bull. Dave, feeling the effects of the "easy" Buffalo hunt, 8 very hard miles of stalking plus the mileage from and to the truck, retires when we do. We also face another very early morning when T. and Dave will go to the blind at the third spring. Bedtime is even earlier than usual tonight.

#### **Sat., 7/22/95:**

At 4:30am they are away. Gerold is riding with them, to wait in the truck with the men, hoping to film a Leopard. T.'s Buffalo yesterday has given the Camp a major PR. boost already and will almost certainly be in the promotional film. A fine Leopard would be most welcome too!

But at 9am they return, defeated. They must try again tonight. And so T. & L. declare this a Day Off and after a late breakfast, including sautéed Kudu liver (delicious!) they gather up some magazines and books and go up into the lounge to read and chat until lunch.

After lunch and a little nap the hunters depart. L. spends a fine afternoon talking with Gerold about so many things. He is a very vital voice, with his films, for good game management, conservation and sportsmanship. They have many interests and basic philosophies in common. The time passes very pleasantly. But as dusk deepens, everyone's thoughts turn to the hunters in the blind at the third spring.

But no Leopard shows himself until it is too dark to shoot. And so, after a fine meal of leg of Impala with a wonderful lemon meringue pie for desert, we retire. Another early day tomorrow: the Leopards are ruling our days now.

We had supposed that salads and fresh fruit might be missing from our diets in Camp. We were wrong: there is fruit in a bowl at all times and cut-up fruits to put on the cereal each morning. There is tossed salad at almost every lunch and dinner. Along with the wonderful game meat and fabulous deserts, we are more than nourished, we are positively spoiled.

Each night a small wave of light brown bats sweeps through the dining room, over and over, picking the insects from the two rechargeable lights in the ceiling. They whisk around our ears and right across the table at eye level. They are wonderful aerialist acrobats and exterminators. Some of the insects here are more alarming than the animals and L. welcomes the bats. If we hadn't already admired them we would soon learn to. The wasps are over 3 inches long, black and articulated, with a bass voice, there is something even longer, mud-brown and malevolent that flies at night, and a beetle of gargantuan proportions lumbered, on foot, through the dining room tonight...but even the bats left him alone!

### **Sun., 7/23/95:**

In the early hours the most musical Hyena of all, a veritable Pavorotti of the bush, bursts into a jubilant song. His is the night music of this Camp...and he is very close!

Sitting on the "front porch" of the tent, really the forward edge of the slab upon which it is set, L. can watch the Camp come alive in the morning. At 6am there is a sweet stillness over the earth. The little tree frogs are going to sleep and the birds are only beginning to stir. The light is a most delicate rose and one last star is winking. Then there is a small sound from the kitchen area and a fire is lit. The three young men who are the "housekeepers", under the supervision of Nichol, the excellent cook, begin to sweep. They sweep the dining room, the patio, the lounge and even the paths to the tents. They gather fire wood, light a fire in the pit on the patio and set the breakfast table. There is quiet chattering from the kitchen. As the light rises there is a sense of life returning. It is the African version of a morning scenario that we have witnessed in many other Camps. It is one of L.'s most treasured times, always.

This morning it was the whole Leopard family, munching away, in the darkness before dawn. They left with the light. T. says it is very frustrating to hear them over there, so near, but unavailable. Pretty smart animals...!

After breakfast we head out for Zebra and also to give Gerold a chance to shoot some film. Our little band is thus increased by one. He perches up on the bench and Mfuma rides standing behind it today.

There is a grand and distant mountain, which peers at us from the horizon as we drive along the tracks of the area. Its name is Chirambkadoma, but is known locally simply as Kadoma. It rises high above its lowly fellows, away to the West and is perfectly flat on top. Rob, who has climbed it recently, says that it really is as flat as a table up there and that a herd of Buffalo spends each night on the summit. It seems to be observing us and L. salutes it when we round a bend and see it there again.

Not far along the road we are presented with a beautiful bull Elephant. He mills about in the brush for a moment and then proceeds to cross our road, slowly and majestically, a camera-ready, picture perfect Jumbo. He really is grand and Gerold rushes out and along the road to film. L. gets a wonderful video of Gerold filming with the giant beast crossing before him. Everyone is pleased. The bull is 20+ years old, with fine tusks. L. says, Dave, you certainly arranged that well! Yeah, says Dave, just glad he showed up on time!

We stop by the second spring to have the men cover the bait with chicken wire, to slow down the feeding family, hopefully keeping them there until light. We see the origin of that spring, a life-source, welling up out of the earth, pure and clear. The temperature seems to be that of springs all over the world, a strange and comforting constant. It tastes exquisitely sweet and bright. It has painted the stones at its source in brilliant orange tones with its concentrated minerals.

At length, Zebra tracks are spotted and we disembark to follow them. We walk for about 2 hours but they elude us. We drive on, Gerold filming scenery, wondrous birds all around us. A flight of Meyers Parrots, with the most amazing, deep, blazing iridescent teal-blue back feathers, flash by. The Brown Snake Eagle is hunting. We retire to a cool spot near another spring and drink cold sodas and water from the cooler chest in the truck and rest awhile. Then we return to Camp for lunch. This is L.'s last hunt with T., as tomorrow she will stay in Camp and prepare for our departure.

There are two more hunters in Camp now, Charlie and Neal, from Pennsylvania. They have been at the Ranch where we will go soon. Their 2 Professional Hunters, Denis and Brin, are here now also. We have a lunch unique to us, spaghetti with Buffalo-meat sauce. It is wonderful. L. is convinced that Buffalo is one of the most versatile and delicious meats she has had.

It is very hot today, although the humidity is low enough to keep us functioning well. A rest in the tent is welcome. T. will be in that blind again this evening.

When he and Dave and the men depart, L. chats with Gerold and Rob a little while and goes for a cool, refreshing shower. Rivers of dust wash away with the running water. Each evening one of the staff lights a wood fire in the tall, skinny version of a Rhodesian Boiler which stands waiting up behind the tents. It feeds gallons of heated spring water to the showers. The water is still warm enough for a shower on these hot afternoons even before the boiler is lit.

Once again, Mr. Leopard has fed just after dark. Dave shone a light on him and he only glanced at it and kept on feeding! That is arrogance, says Dave. And he is huge, perhaps 7 feet in length. Perhaps tomorrow night...

The dinner table is extended to seat all of us. Up again at 4am, so T. & L. excuse themselves right after the meal.

### **Mon., 7/24/95:**

This is T.'s last morning chance for the Leopard. He will hunt at the second spring where the family is feeding. This morning L. watches the 2 new hunters readying their gear and leaving for their day's hunt, along with the usual Camp bustle. They go off in 2 separate Toyota Land Cruisers, each with PH.'s and trackers and Govt. Game Scouts. It looks like a small army deploying on maneuvers. When they have gone, peace descends. And tomorrow we will go to Victoria Falls and then, on Tuesday, to the Ranch.

Five minutes! That's all they needed, but the male of the Leopard family left just before the light. Tonight....?

This day is for packing. We will take only carry-on bags and a daypack to Victoria Falls and Dave will bring our duffels to the Ranch with him on the 26th. We should all arrive at about the same time. The laundry, which is done every day in Camp, will be done once more for us. L. hopes to film the ironing, which is done with a coal-burning iron.

About the time we have the packing more or less under control, Dave suggests that T. should go along with him to the baits, to set up a brace for the rifle at each blind. This will help T., in the low-light situations, to take aim at the target. The hewing and placement of a forked bracing stick at each site turns out to be precision work, done by Dave, Simon and Martin, who then instruct T. in the proper use of this tool. It is nice for L., who had not expected to have another ride into the bush or to see the springs again.

While we are at the blind, a family of Wart Hogs scurries by. When they hurry they appear to have been goosed and seem to run almost vertically, with tails straight up in the air. What they lack in beauty they certainly make up in personality!

These are the names of the springs:

The first spring, where there is bait but no blind, is Chichara.

The second spring, where the family feeds, is Nyakwashu.

The third spring, where the lone male feeds, is Kamururu.

A small group of Kudu cows bounds gracefully before us across the road. They have huge ears like a Mule Deer but move more like White Tails. We hope to see many more Kudu at the Ranch, including a good bull for T.

We have lunch in Camp and take the afternoon for naps, reading, catching up the Journal and quiet conversation, in the big green tent. A tiny, bright-eyed lizard is hunting insects for us all over the walls and ceiling.

L. finds Victor ironing in the kitchen area. He wields the big, cumbersome coal-iron expertly, doing up our shirts, trousers and even our underwear, just beautifully. Hot coals are placed in a reservoir in the iron and these heat the metal of the plate. T. remembers seeing one used as a boy but L. has seen them only in antique shops. Having laundry done each day, and done so well, is a rare treat indeed.

The evening hunt is not successful. "Jaws", as Dave calls him, simply does not appear. The theory among some is that he sees this bait as his personal dining room and is so confident that it will be there...and so stuffed...that he feels no pressure to feed regularly. Whatever the reason, tomorrow morning will be T.'s last chance for his Leopard and he will hunt at the second spring.

Tonight L. sleeps so soundly that she hears nothing, but T. says that the Singers gave a little farewell concert.

#### **Tues., 7/25/95:**

One last 4am rising. L. will organize everything while the hunters try once more. She packs for one night at the Victoria Falls Hotel in the carry-ons and loads and locks up the big duffels. As she washes in the little outdoor bathroom an Arachnid Sylvester Stallone hauls himself up on the reed fence and peers in! L. suspects that this will not happen at the hotel. She swings a towel at him and goes to join Gerold and the hunters from Pennsylvania for breakfast. At 6am everyone falls silent and waits, listening for the shot at the second spring down the sandy track. There is only the Red Eyed Dove and the swish of a broom. And then L. hears the song of Brutus, Tweedle, tweedle, shriek, groan, crash!, as it lumbers down the hill into camp. The hunters recount a tale of small but definitive errors, a sound caused by a boot scraping stone, a branch falling over the shooting port, that lost them the Leopard at the bait. And so we must assume that T. is not to have a Leopard on this trip. We say, Next time, next time...and rush to get T. changed for travel, fed and us on the road to the Chewore International Airport, where it all began.

We ride in the Toyota, bidding a fond farewell to Brutus the Monster Truck. Rob drives with L. beside him and Dave rides with T. up on the spotting bench behind. On the way we see two Elephants and a delightful flock of Crowned Guinea Fowl who wander around in the road for the video camera. When we arrive, L., looking at the sandy soil, sees the tracks of: Sable, Impala, Buffalo and Elephant and Zebra. Now they are as familiar as the tracks of the animals in the Maryland and Virginia mountains and represent a wonderful adventure in this fascinating place.

Waiting, some thoughts occur: Hunting Buffalo involves getting there; hunting Leopard means being there. Each species has its style, which dictates the style of the hunt. The hunt for Sable is gentle and relaxing, while the hunt for Buffalo is intense and thrilling. The hunt for the elusive Zebra is an almost abstract game, with the wind writing the rules, while the Impala presents itself readily to many. The Kudu is a shy and worthy quarry, but the Leopard, above all, is the King of this sport and he follows his own script, despite the best laid plans and the most elegant preparations that man can devise.

The little Piper flutters onto the dirt runway. Scott, the pilot, says, I saw your gun-case in Bulawayo! Hugs and kisses, good-bye Rob, see you in 2 or 3 years perhaps; good-bye Dave, see you at the Ranch tomorrow.

The flight takes just 2 hours and is interesting, with views of the large lake, Kariba and mountains and gorges along the Zambesi River. Then the distant spray of the Falls can be seen. Scott obtains permission to fly near and soon we are privileged to see this Wonder of the World, boiling and smoking below us, with its mighty white water rapids racing away downstream.

We land at the attractive Victoria Falls Airport and catch a cab into town, to our hotel. As we enter the gates of the venerable Victoria Falls Hotel, it becomes clear that we will not be roughing it, although the transition from the quiet and seclusion of the bush is profound. It is a gracious and lovely hotel, originally built by the Railroad in the early 1900's, very British and elegant, with beautifully maintained grounds bright with flowers and cooled by pools and fountains. The Doorman and staff are uniformed and charming and we are welcomed most pleasantly with fresh fruit juice and smiles. Our room looks out onto one of the lovely courtyards, with lily ponds in bloom and palms and lush shade trees and green, green grass. No dust! We are soothed but somewhat overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of civilization, however elegant. Lunch is a glorious Buffet on the terrace and then we strike out for the Falls. It is a short walk for two people who have been hiking as we have been and soon, before and below us, is the most wondrous explosion of water and sound and light and swirling mists and spray that we have ever seen. The immensity and the power awe us and the ground actually trembles under our feet with the force of this primal power. Rainbows blaze over the gorge everywhere and the air is so cooled and so filled with flying mists that our parched skins and lungs soak up this blessed moisture and we breathe deeply and are refreshed. It is a thrilling and remarkable place, this home of the Thunder That Smokes, as the native people once called the Falls. We linger at the railings overlooking the gorge and leave almost reverently. We hope to come back tomorrow morning to see it in the early light.

Our room is a welcome refuge. L. finds that she can easily charge the computer here and we have a TV, ice water, a glorious bathroom, sans

"visitors" and every comfort we could desire.

Why are we listening for the generator to start up over by the kitchen, the swish of a broom, the sound of laughter, the call of a Red Eyed Dove?

We indulge in one of the finer pleasures, afternoon tea on the terrace, and write the rest of our cards. Men are working everywhere, watering and tending the lawns and gardens and lighting the fire pits for the evening barbecue. The only intrusion is the constant drone of helicopters and small planes carrying sightseers over the Falls. We find this very annoying in this otherwise idyllic setting and especially as we have heard no loud sounds for so long. We visit the hotel shop and buy tee shirts for kids at home and one small, carved and painted Crowned Guinea Fowl, to remember our "farewell flock".

Since we are dressed in our Safari gear, clean and pressed though it may be, we feel a little under-dressed for this 5 star milieu. L. develops one of her mini-Mitty scenarios: we are free-lance International Correspondents, on special assignment, with computer and cameras, just in from the bush for a little R & R. Using the computer on the terrace must surely reinforce this image. Do we imagine it, or are people looking at us with a certain guarded respect?

L. tries out this "real" bathroom and finds that the shower, even although it is gold-colored and gorgeous, has nowhere near the stupendous pressure of the one in the big green tent! But the Terrycloth robe on the door is so heavy and thick and white that she feels very pampered and extra clean.

A little too stressed by the walls and the humanity around us to manage very much social life, we opt for the Native Dance Ceremony right in our own hotel, which turns out to be a wonderful show, with drums and dancers and fine singing and fascinating costumes, in a setting replicating a Native village. Our porter when we arrived, whose name is Robert and who looked too frail and elderly to do much more than smile, is in the show, playing a very spirited drum! We are impressed.

We eat dinner on the lower terrace where a big barbecue buffet is served. It seems natural to be dining under those burning stars, in the soft breeze. Even the smoke from the pits is welcome. L. wonders if the bats at camp are flying through the dining room just now.

We call B.J. from the room and, failing to reach him, prepare to sleep in a room tonight, with soft beds and rich drapes and without the wild wanton singing from a nearby hill.

#### **Wed., 7/26/96:**

We accept our Complimentary Coffee at 6:30am and have some hopes of going to see the Falls in the morning light. However, we find that to breakfast on the terrace in the soft, cool air, with early sunlight slanting across the lawns and lighting up the flowering bushes and to linger there with coffee, reading and working on the Journal, is so welcome to our weary bodies, that we cannot manage a trek to the Gorge. The very early, long days have finally caught up with us a bit, in spite of our very best intentions. We laze around until we must leave for the airport at 10:30am. Sprinklers are sweeping over the green grass and making little local rainbows. We settle for those and make tentative plans to return. Robert, the porter, who has really warmed to L., begs us to return and to stay "... perhaps a month?" We agree that this would be a lovely place to spend a prolonged vacation. There are so many small, elegant touches here, in the tradition of the grand old hotels, such as a lovely "Reading Room", all tall windows and white wicker and dark green drapes, a "Bridge Room" for those evening card games, afternoon tea with exquisite pastries and, of course, those great white clouds of robes, that we feel transported to a gentler time of prolonged Grand Tours and extended, leisurely holidays in restful and sybaritic settings. At Meikles, L. could see Hemingway hanging out in the lobby, being a Guy for his entourage. Here, she can envision her old favorite, Henry James, taking tea on the terrace and discoursing, preciously and at length, on the mores and manners of the times. The contrast to Camp is lovely and laughable and we have enjoyed it immensely. And there were no "visitors" in the bathroom.

Our plane leaves at noon. We collect our tickets at the desk at the airport and depart on the next phase of our adventure.

We are met at the airport in Bulawayo by Kevin from the Ranch. The drive takes about an hour, over a tiny, one lane more-or-less black-topped road. When two cars approach from opposite directions, both must move aside and run with two wheels on the road and two on the dusty, rocky shoulder, sort of a game of African Chicken. This explains the chips and cracks on the windshield of the van and is extremely exciting for the passenger in the back, as all this takes place on the "wrong" side of the road at high speed. L. suppresses an occasional spontaneous squeak.

When we arrive at the lodge on what is variously known as The Ranch, The Farm and The Estate, the heart of Dave's Bembesi Safari Company, we find a pleasing sight: the clustered buildings are low and made of beautiful local stone, with weather-darkened thatched roofs and wide windows opening on a little lake. Our room is spare and charming, with bundles of silky white mosquito netting tied up in bouquets over the beds, small tables and a little desk. There is sand colored carpeting on the floor and a fine old trunk in front of a big window-wall. The bed-spreads are forest green and the drapes at the windows are thick natural cotton. We have an additional pair of bunk beds in a corner, which we immediately appropriate for storage of gear. There is a bathroom, with a tub and shower. The lovely vary-colored stones of the building are also the inner walls and they are of warm, russet and sandy tones. The ceiling is the gold of the unweathered thatch. The windows overlook the lawns and the lake, and a pair of Saddle Billed Storks is wading slowly, with measured steps and bowed heads, fishing along the shore. It is far more comfortable and sophisticated than we had really expected, although Dave had told us it would be! Our 8 days here will be wonderful, we feel certain. L.'s adapters work easily to charge all the batteries and we are given lunch in a remarkable oval building, open to the sweet air, with the soft golden thatch of the ceiling lighting the room. As we eat, a big Fish Eagle patrols the lake, looking for his lunch. We sit for awhile in the lounge, which is a round stone building with thatched roof and walls made entirely of windows. From here, the life of the lake is wonderfully visible. Then, as we are preparing to rest in our room, Kevin brings T.'s long lost, much lamented rifles. T. falls on his knees to open the big, black case, a little fearful and very excited. They are in perfect condition. They have had a little holiday in Bulawayo, just sleeping in the locked case, in the dark. We are very relieved, to put it very conservatively.

We find some music on short wave and L., who is experiencing a severe Bach deficit, listens with pleasure as the sun sets over the little lake.

A fragrant fire is lit in the big round lounge and the windows over the lake go black. We sit down to dinner in here tonight, with Kevin joining us and just as we begin to eat, the sound of a vehicle approaching: they are here! Dave and Gerold, travel weary but looking great. We have missed them. We had a lot of "togetherness" at Camp and suddenly a part of our "family" was missing. Dave goes off to his home nearby and

Gerold sits down to eat with us. They had a 10+ hour drive today. We have had an much easier journey on Air Zimbabwe.

After dinner, Kevin takes us in the Toyota Hunting Car, which will be our mode of transportation for our stay here, up to Dave's house to use the phone. His home is a large enclave up the road. It seems like a little world apart, within its walls and gates, with magnificent trees and gardens. His two joyous Staffordshire Terriers rush to greet us with raucous barking and many kisses. We reach B.J. this time, 7 hours earlier in his day than we are in ours, and hear that all is well at home and tell him about T.'s wonderful trophies. He is thrilled for his Dad. We return, riding under those burning stars, in the open vehicle. L. makes a wish on a shooting star, for good hunting for T. this week.

Some interesting sounds are issuing from the marsh out front as we prepare for bed. And there is a familiar voice: The Red Eyed Dove!

#### **Thurs., 7/27/95:**

Our first night at the Ranch is peaceful and restful, but we are still on Leopard Time, waking a 4am! We do manage to sleep again until the alarm at 5am. We are washing in a "real" bathroom here, but to make us feel right at home, several large legs and an eye appear, peeking out from behind the mirror on the wall: another muscular spider, another "visitor", but here, we are the visitors and he is the resident. L. blows on his feet and he shoots back behind the mirror. As long as he is this shy, we can coexist. Later, high on the walls of the bedroom we can observe a smaller version and also, to our alarm, The Mother of All Spiders, hunting. We suppose that the little one catches insects and the large one is after birds and small mammals.

We have found a nice FM station, Zimbabwe Radio One, with great classic pop tunes, news and features. It wakes us gently and intelligently.

Gerold is sleeping in, so we breakfast with Kevin in the lounge. As we walk out to the truck to load T.'s gear, here is Simon, who came with Dave and Gerold! He is a welcome sight, with his sweet smile for us this morning. T. will be in good hands with Simon tracking for him once again. As Dave is busy until lunchtime, Kevin and T. go off in the Toyota, to sight in T.'s rifles and scout for some game. Kevin is a Professional Hunter as well as Wildlife Manager for the Farm. L. attempts to bring some order to the duffels, which arrived last night with Dave and Gerold. She takes a little walk down the road with Gerold when he arises. There are myriad tracks in the red dust of the road: Kudu, Impala, Warthog, a small cat, even a possible Porcupine. Then she sits in the sun on boulders on the shore, watching the Storks stiling the shallows and a flock of Egyptian Geese flying low down the length of the lake. The Fish Eagle is perched on a dead tree, drowsing, and elegant Plovers with beautiful, subtle markings are drilling the rich dark mud.

Whoever thinks God has no sense of humor has never seen these Saddle Billed Storks. They have a large white body, with a black back, tail and head. They have a startled yellow eye and a large oval disk of brilliant gold, the "saddle", between their eyes and extending down their beak several inches. This beak is long and black at the top but the lower half is scarlet. They have a red patch on each cheek and wonderful red elbows and feet, on black legs! They are a marvel of design, a tribute to their Creator's color sense...and to His gentle sense of whimsy.

Our friend Bill Strawberry, having been to Africa several times, has given us some very useful tips. He and his family are now at Chewore, in fact, on their own Safari. When one suggestion in particular turns out to be most helpful, L., meaning to say kudos, says, "I must give Bill some extra Kudos." Won't he be surprised!

In time for lunch, T. & Kevin return. They have seen some animals and T. almost had a shot at a nice Waterbuck, but two Impalas spooked the quarry. These honey-gold animals are everywhere! They also saw Bush Buck, Duiker, Kudu, including a glimpse of a fine male, and many Wart Hogs.

We have a lunch in the beautiful open dining room, with a delicious chicken casserole from Peter, the cook. The woman working here is Ronna, who is Simon's wife. The young man who helps them is named Kumbulani, (which is a the phonetic spelling of his name.) All are kind and quiet and warm.

At about 3pm L. joins T., Kevin and Simon in the Toyota and we go off into a very different kind of country. Instead of the stony hills and winding tracks of Chewore, we are on straighter dirt and grass tracks, some actually quite smooth. In place of the massive Boababs and Euphorbias and Mopanis, we are surrounded, in this area, primarily by scrub brush and bushes and the botanical predator of Africa, the dread Wait-a-Bit thorns and their cousins. There are areas of smooth grassy meadows and some very rocky places also. The land is primarily flat, although some hills can be seen around us and the dust is fine and often red. There is severe drought here also and the land is parched, with only occasional green areas, mostly where there is irrigation. We walk at one point in a dead zone of terrible thistles, brown and sere and covered with thorny seed pods. They are oddly threatening.

We hike to a low ground-blind, following the tracks of Kudu and of Eland. We settle onto the sand within a circle of branches and look out across a soft golden meadow carpeted with silky grasses and with some tall green trees at the outer fringes. There is a stark silver dead tree at one corner. The shade trees' leaves have turned bronze. It is a lovely place to contemplate as the sun begins to set. It is about 5pm. As the tops of the trees turn warm gold, a fantastic parade begins: several Wildebeests, great galumphing gray and black creatures, begin to file across the meadow in ones and twos, heading toward a water hole nearby. One of them is a spectacular bull, really a Presence, an above average Wildebeest, says Kevin, but T. has no wish to shoot one and so we watch him stroll by. They are odd and erratic, spooking and running around one moment and standing, staring into space the next. They are fringed and bearded and have a long and lugubrious face. We assume that their mothers love them. Then, from stage left, 3 pretty Eland cows, pale tan with black trimming at their elbows, rump and tail-tip, trip delicately through the grass. We wait now for their bull. We wait in vain, for he does not come.

We ride to the lodge in the deepening night, startling several Duikers and rabbits and watching the stars. The riding here is so gentle, in the relatively quiet and smaller Toyota on the sand and grass tracks. The contrasts between the style of hunting here and in Chewore suggests a new slogan: "The hunting is easy when you go with Bembesi."

Dave and his wife, Midge join us for dinner. We have Kudu fillets and they are absolutely marvelous, with a rich, dark gravy with mushrooms, and fresh vegetables.

Tomorrow Kevin will take us out again, as Dave is busy with his many doings here in his home territory.

#### **Fri., 7/28/95:**

We rise at 5am and at 5:30am there is a real knock on our door and Ronna brings a tray with morning coffee.

On Radio One this morning we are given a little Scottish tune, complete with pipes, The Mull of Kintyre. Our thoughts turn to our friend, John Hunt, no doubt wondering, there in his little house near Loch Ness, how his wandering friends are faring. He would be so proud of Tom!

We all meet in the morning for breakfast at 6am, in the lounge, where a fire is lit and we can watch the lake waking up beyond the glass walls. We are a small group, only T., L., Gerold and Kevin, but very compatible and companionable. We depart at 6:30am in the Toyota, T., L., Kevin and Simon.

This morning Gerold goes off with another Tracker and guide, as today he will hunt as well as photograph and we head out to look for various Antelope. The more we see of this area, the more we are astonished by the enormous bio-diversity here. The Farm is some 80,000 acres and there are five different and distinct ecological systems within its boundaries. There are places where the sand is bright red and the rocks are red and deep green; there are dry rivers where the stones are shining and coal black, others where they are Elephant gray with no smooth planes, only sharp, hard edges. We drive through high golden grass and through grass the color of pewter. There is a Mopani flat where L. finds a big Sand Snail shell, which Kevin says he has found only in that region. We see a large, spreading tree in one zone that we have seen nowhere else and find some fine hills, with big outcrops of rock, which remind us of Chewore. The landscape is constantly changing. We are introduced, often all too up-close-and-personal, to several varieties of thorn: the small, malevolent, Wait-a-Bit, hooked and barbed, the longer and dangerous stainless steel kind, that actually flats tires and a longer, softer thorn, bone white, on a bush with delicate green leaves. We all bear the wounds that these predators inflict. But L. wonders, if a thorn bush catches an animal, what does it do with it? Is there something, deep within the bush, waiting for lunch or dinner? Does she hear a little sigh as she pulls free of yet another one...?

We hike across the dry sand, avoiding thorns. We are a very small parade now, as no Govt. Game Scout is needed on private lands and Martin did not come to with Simon. Here, it is Simon, Kevin, T. and L., following and photographing as we go. A Wart Hog is given a reprieve when T.'s shot just misses him. Onward. We hear Gerold's sighting-in shot and then, later, another shot. Perhaps, we hope, he has gotten an animal. Then, as we are walking, Simon and Kevin spot a small herd of Impala and although T. has taken one at Chewore, they urge him to fire. He does so, and when we go to see the animal, it is clear why they have done so: it is a magnificent, record trophy, with sweeping horns, recurving and whorled, tapering to gleaming points at the tips. It was a perfect one shot kill, which penetrated the heart and dropped him at once. T. is astonished and thrilled, as he had not realized how fine an Impala he had taken, seeing it through the grass. But Kevin and Simon had known and had wanted T. to have this beautiful trophy. L. had been taping when T. fired the fired and the camera flew up and settled back down again, even though he is only using his .375. What would happen with his .416? T. actually longs to use his 30.06 but Simon insists that he carry the .375 in case of Kudu or Waterbuck. They now have a little running joke between them. The pleasure of having his own weapons again brightens T.'s days here.

We deliver the Impala to the skinning shed, where he is duly admired by all. Then we are off on a drive and even to climb a hill! Our Chewore-conditioned legs respond willingly to this familiar challenge and soon we can see a broad, grassy plane, with scattered trees and brush and with herds of Impala and the ubiquitous Wart Hogs and monkeys. It is the quintessential African scene. We are enchanted. But walking along on the rocky slope, L. is attacked by a thorn bush, which picks her small camera right out of its pouch on her belt and sends it swinging by its lanyard from a branch. Was that a chuckle...? Later, a Tsessebe bull, the swiftest Antelope in Africa, proves that he deserves this title, following his female up over a stream bank into view and then vanishing in a flash.

Kevin is new to Dave's Farm, having been here about 4 months. His title is Wildlife Manager which, of course, includes Professional Hunter, engineer, mechanic and magician, among other duties! Poaching is an ongoing and serious problem here, as everywhere and he has a rotating staff of Guards stationed around the Farm. He is young, genuine and ingenuous, sweet tempered and unfailingly good natured. His coloring is almost Irish, with very dark hair and lashes. He is just Simon's size and they ghost through the bush, talking softly in the mixture of languages that make up most of the communications here, debating options and making quick, skilled decisions. He was born in Bulawayo and his accent is that of this region, with broadened "a"s and foreshortened "e"s; thus, his favorite expression becomes "Awe, fawntawstic!" and Zebra is always "Zehbra", while the Saddlebilled Stork wears a "seddle" here. Despite being afflicted with an awful allergy that causes him to sneeze and wheeze and snifle constantly, he works tirelessly and enthusiastically, both on the hunt and at the lodge. We are happy to have him managing us, as well as the wildlife, while we are here.

We opt to return to the lodge for lunch and a rest. In fact, we have a scrub, trying out the shower in a tub large enough to swim laps in, and we feel clean and fresh and ready to resume the hunt.

We go back to the pretty golden meadow, hoping for that Eland buck. T. has even begun to consider the King of the Wildebeests, to L.'s amusement. L. rides up on the Spotting Bench with Simon here, as T. can get out of the Toyota more easily from the seat than from the Bench. L. and Simon chat about the game and the area and share her binoculars. She finds him good company and is awed by his game-spotting skills. These animals are perfectly adapted to their habitat, with colors that match all the earth and grass and brush. She can find quite a few, but Simon see them everywhere and seems to have eyes all around his head! On the way we see many Duikers, Steinbucks, some Jackals, always Wart Hogs and Impalas, a few Kudu cows, generic African monkeys, and a variety of birds. There are some familiar faces, even the gorgeous Meyers Parrots and the Forked Tailed Drongo, our Herd Bird friend. We finally meet the famous Go Away Bird, which has an eerie voice, like a small person crying "Go Away". They often alert the animals to hunters with this call.

The meadow has only the Eland cows tonight. Even the King has gone. We walk back to the truck, toward a deep crimson sunset, in the gathering darkness, escorted by one little bat. It is cool and quiet and our feet on the thick powdered sand of the road make no sound. We are a very small herd of animals again, dwarfed by the immensity of the African sky, returning to shelter as the night comes on. As we drive away in the darkness, several large, pale Hares run before us down the road and a Spotted Genet slips over a log and into the underbrush.

When we reach the lodge we find a happy Gerold, who has had good hunting. He has taken a nice Reedbuck, which Kevin says is the most delicious Antelope of all and a Wart Hog, which he describes a "a medium Wart Hog". He was driven on his hunt by Conner, an elderly Head Tracker, whose driving skills have left Gerold in a slightly jangled condition, both laughing and shaking his head. But he was too kind to insist that he drive himself, so his day has been a serio-comic mixture of good hunting and bad driving and he fears for the health of the old Jeep they were using!

Our beds are welcome. L. puffs the spider back behind the mirror one more time and we fall asleep very quickly, to the sound of a single night bird down by the lake.

**Sat. 7/29/95:**

This morning L. decides to stay at the lodge. She is behind on the Journal and on 3 articles she had planned to write and her spine is complaining about the Toyota. Time for a break. She films the departing hunters and some of the early morning sounds and sights over the lake and then takes another pot of coffee to the room and settles down to write on the little computer, which has fed comfortably from the wall socket, on "real" electricity instead of from a generator. It is peaceful and calm. Ronna is doing the housekeeping, bustling about in Gerold's room and in ours, gathering up the laundry, the morning coffee trays, making the beds and vacuuming the carpets. The time passes serenely and L. is at peace

At about noon, Gerold returns. He had ended up hunting with Conner again, but this time Gerold drove! He has a lovely Steen Buck and a nice Impala. L. Takes photos and settles down to await T. and to hear his news of the morning's hunt.

At noon, Dave arrives, just as Gerold and L. are attacking peanuts and chips, to ward off starvation, in the lounge. Dave is intense and excited about T.'s Impala. It is, in everyone's opinion, the best Impala ever taken here. In fact, he says, anyone familiar with Impala from this region will be apt to think T. a liar, as it is much more like those from Kenya, where they are usually larger by far, than any in Zimbabwe. Dave is really amazed by it. L. says perhaps we should get some sort of Certificate, to prove its provenance!

Dave is pale and ill, the nasty flu that had been afflicting him at the beginning of our time at Chewore having returned. L. assures him that we are very happy in Kevin's care and we "fire" him, temporarily. He agrees that he should not hunt today and probably not tomorrow, which is certainly wise. He goes off home, riding a red motor bike of great character and Gerold and L. gratefully accept lunch from Peter, even although T. has not yet returned. Perhaps he is on to something wonderful! Just as we finish lunch and go to the rooms to rest, we hear the Toyota returning: success! In the very back, huge, gray, warty and mud-caked, but possessed of marvelous ivory tusks and all of T.'s fond attention at this moment, is a massive, male Wart Hog. T. has taken him with the .375, with one shot. He ran about 30 yards and fell dead. His mother most likely loved him. Perhaps his family, too. T. is very proud of him. L. is guardedly impressed. Simon is grinning and Kevin is beaming. Such are the things that gladden hunters' hearts.

During the morning, in fact at 7:30am, T. had also taken a rarely-seen Bush Pig. A small parade of these animals crossed a dry river bed as the hunters were sneaking along and T. picked off the last one, which was a decent trophy. Any Bush Pig is considered an accomplishment, as they are so seldom seen.

During their travels in the car, Kevin suddenly stopped driving and he and Simon ran off into the bush a little way. When they returned, they explained that they had seen a huge Python slipping into its hole. T. did not see this fellow. L., when she hears of it, expresses a hope to see it soon. Simon points to his thigh to describe it!

After T. has some lunch, he and L. go for a rest. L. sleeps soundly for 20 minutes, her Magic 20 Minute Special, but T.'s head is spinning with Wart Hogs, Bush Pigs and other lovely sights. L. thinks that sort of mental vision would keep her awake too.

At 4pm we climb aboard the truck for a little late hunting. Very early on we spot 2 Kudu bulls, very nice ones, bouncing across a field. L. waits in the truck to lend less noise to the mix and T. and Kevin and Simon go after them. The wind, so often the enemy, turns, and the Kudu get the scent of man and flee across the sand. We drive on and park at length to begin a stalk. We are near the mountain whose name is Intabkaykhonjwa, which means "Hill You Must Not Point At". When indicating this mountain, one must gesture with the thumb, never the pointing finger! The tales of those who have mocked this mountain are chilling. It is considered the home of one of the three gods of the area. We are not inclined to doubt such myths and legends. They are always rooted in powerful and ancient beliefs. We climb its smaller brother and find, on the low summit, a woodland so similar to our own Maryland mountains that we are startled. The dramatic difference is in the view across the sandy valley to the low hills beyond, where herds of pale Impala are pouring across the slopes like little rivers of honey in the warmed-gold setting sun.

These same lovely little animals are spooking any Kudu, with this bouncing and gamboling over the hills. We must return to the truck. On the way we find the long tip of a Kudu horn and take it along as a souvenir of this area. Perhaps T. will have a full pair to go with it soon.

We have an earlier evening of it so we change into sweats and go to the lounge to chat and drink water to re-hydrate our dusty bodies. This has become one of the rituals of life in this country, starting at Chewore. Just as we four sit down to dinner, Dave and Midge come in with their son and his friend. They join us and we learn more about the history of this area and also some more about the superstitions that still drive much of the population.

**Sun. 7/30/95:**

The bathroom spider, Albert, is by now a nervous wreck. He leaps for the safety of the mirror whenever we so much as walk into the room. He will not miss us when we leave. When L. trims her hair within a foot of his home, she surprises herself by her total unconcern... which assuredly is not shared by Albert.

We get off about 6:30am, a bit sleepy from our later than usual night and this morning is really chilly: sweaters and jackets, for the first time. There are the usual morning Impalas, various Wart Hog Families, many early birds. At about 7:30am we park and begin to walk. We are looking for the elusive Kudu once again, T.'s dream for many years. L. feels certain that he will have one before we leave.

Kevin and Simon stop: pointing, they show T. some Kudus. They set the sticks, hand him his rifle! He sights, readjusts the sticks, sights again... and fires. There is a great upheaval in the thick brush ahead. L. sees a flash of black and gray and an animal is running to the right, unsteadily.

We begin the tracking. In the slanted morning sunlight the droplets of blood are as brilliant as jewels. The Kudu's tracks and the blood-trail are clear on the red sand. We follow easily. The thorns here are anxious to slow us, to hold us back. We are all adding our blood to the day. The trail fades, strengthens again; all at once, ahead in the thick undergrowth, there is a movement and that black and gray fur! It is gone in a moment and Kevin and Simon are gone too, running to intercept the fleeing animal. We stay where we are, as we do not feel up to a high speed chase over the thorny sand. We pace and sit and stand, L. follows some more blood trail and then tracks Simon and Kevin for a little while, but we must stay in place so that they can easily find us again.

After about 30 minutes we hear a shot, then another; we know that the Kudu will have fallen. We wait. Then they are coming through the thorn trees and the grasses, thumbs up, smiling. They have completed T.'s good work.

They tell us that they tracked him as he ran, even with an injured leg, across the sand and up onto the side of a distant hill. Finally, as he came down again, Kevin got a shot at him and then shot again. Then Simon ran to him and, with his knife, ended his life. This has been a cooperative Kudu. Everyone is very pleased.

They lead us over the sand, through the thorns, to the fallen Kudu. He is very large, very old, nearing the natural end of his days and a marvelous embodiment of T.'s African dreams. We all admire him and L. does the photos and the video while T. glows. His shot was a long one, 140+ yards through grass and it struck the animal in the chest as he was facing T. Part of the bullet, breaking away, also injured his foreleg. Kevin's shots put him down and Simon ended all of his troubles with his knife. His teeth are loose and some of his hair is rubbed away with the wear and tear of his long life but to T. he is beautiful, as he has wished for this animal from about the age of 8.

He is far too large to load into the truck without help and so we go to the Compound, where there is the skinning shed, a small store, various dwelling huts and other buildings associated with the Farm. Here Simon and Kevin collect 4 men, among them one of the Skinners who has been admiring T.'s trophies and one of the Policemen, the guards who keep watch for poachers and other thieves. Another is a gardener and the 4th, one of Simon's younger brothers, works with the cows. Off we all go, amid much chattering, across the sandy bush, in sight of the Magic Mountain. Simon says we will go down the Impala Road, which today has become the Kudu Road. T. tends to shoot his animals within certain boundaries and these two have been taken along the same track. To reach the exact spot, however, the men must clear and hack the thorn bush. Finally the Toyota is backed up to the Kudu and he is loaded aboard with much straining. These are very large animals, heavier than many Elk. His horns spiral up in two great twisted spires. His ears are enormous and his eyes were sharp. They are very difficult animals to shoot and T. can be proud of his skill.

We take the Kudu to the skinning shed and leave him in the care of the men there. Our little improvised crew departs and we go back to the lodge early, to rest and have lunch and a shower and a nap. Now we will relax, play, only hunt if something really exciting goes by. T. has taken the trophies that he primarily wanted and each is a superb example of its kind. All are very mature animals with little time left on earth in this hard land and each will grace our home and fill his dreaming for all the rest of his life.

L. has found another Sand Snail shell, as large as a Conch from the sea. These, some stones, bits of bark and wood, are her most precious "souvenirs", as always, far more than anything we could buy. These are a part of the soul of this place, as they are of any area where they are found.

Gerold is ill, possibly with the flu that is everywhere, including in the Joubert household, Dave and Midge's father both being sick as well as Ronna, Simon's wife. We hope to avoid it. L. gets Gerold some hot tea and some cold water and he elects to stay in bed. We go off with Kevin and Simon, to "play", and to hunt if something really wonderful presents itself. First we want to see the Python, which all agree is massive. When we reach the den, which is in an old Wart Hog hole (Probably ate all the pigs and then moved in, says L.) she is just disappearing down the huge hole. Her tail is enormous. L. is very impressed. Simon says that we must come back and sneak up to see it and L. could take a picture of him, catching it by the tale as it slides into the hole. Sounds good to her!

We are now eager to see the large free-standing rock that is a part of the Great Dyke that runs across the country of Zimbabwe. Indeed, it is a wonderful sight, rusty red and wearing stunted trees and bright green lichen on its Eastern side. Leopards have been shot in the area and there are certainly snakes, Mambas, Adders and such, on those stony flanks.

We wander over the Farm and through another one nearby, one with some running water from an irrigation dam on the Bembesi River. This is such a rare sight in this dry land now that L. takes a video. Dave may have to lose half his Alfalfa crop to save his lake, which is used for irrigation too. It has dropped daily from this use, but now he will stop drawing on it and try to save some of the water for the Otters and Geese and for the Fish Eagle and his dinner.

On our perambulations over the area, Simon and L., up on the spotting bench in the Toyota, have worked out a sort of clipped and abbreviated form of conversation. It is pretty well stripped of delicate nuances and proper grammatical considerations, but it includes plenty of humor and it seems to work. They have discussed a vast variety of subjects, including all kinds of snakes and their young (e.g.: eggs Vs live), all of the indigenous animals and their habits, diet and activities during the day, local flora (e.g.: a tree whose sap will "break your eyes" if it gets into them) families (e.g.: he says his father had 9 wives, 43 sons and 18 daughters, and thus he has family absolutely everywhere he goes! He is, however, the only member of his family working in the Safari business. He and Ronna have four children.

We have a quiet and relaxed dinner and evening. Gerold comes to the table but retires very early, feeling feverish. This flu, which has come to Zimbabwe with the World Cup Soccer Team, is bad. It has closed entire schools around the country.

#### **Mon., 7/31/95:**

This morning we will make an excursion to Bulawayo, for some shopping and sightseeing. Kevin will drive us in the van, which will seem positively civilized.

After breakfast, Gerold, who is feeling "chust fahrrr" this morning, decides to do a little taped interview with T., for use on the promotional video. L. holds the auxiliary mike and T. wears a little clip-on mike, "just like Good Morning America". They run through it twice, commenting on food, staff, accommodations, trophies... maybe T. will be an International Star!

At 8:30am we join Kevin in the van. Simon rides with us as far as the tarred road. (Two lane roads are called Wide Tarred roads. This road is an "Other" kind.) We head toward Bulawayo, playing African Chicken with an assortment of trucks, busses and cars. In about an hour we are in the city. It is quite good sized, bustling and busy. We begin at a branch Bank in an hotel, where we must change some money and cash Travelers' Checks. Then we are off to a lovely shop, InDuNa Arts, for gift and souvenir shopping. We have a wonderful time, choosing small items for us and for friends and family. Then Kevin drops us at the wonderful Natural History Museum. Here we find so many of the wonders we have already seen and so many that we hope one day to see, both among the animals and birds, the insects and flora and a marvelous history section, with artifacts and photos, of the Native peoples and the settlers of this country. We spend almost 2 hours here, until we meet Kevin at 1pm. On the way out the door, L. spots an entire room that she did not see, Geology! T. says, Next time! Off we go to lunch.

We go to a very nice, large restaurant, which Kevin's girl friend, Amanda, has chosen for us. She joins us soon and we four have a delightful lunch, chatting and laughing. She is adorable and we think they are the perfect couple. The time passes quickly and pleasantly.

We zip back to the lodge, along a Wide Tarrad road which becomes an Other on the far side of the Airport. We admire purchases and rest and read. T. is also still thinking, happily, about his Kudu.

Dinner tonight is Gerold's Reed Buck and it easily lives up to its reputation as arguably the best tasting Antelope in Africa. Peter's wonderful rich sauce adds to its savor. We even have a trifle for desert. Ahh yes, roughing it in the bush!

### **Tues., 8/1/95:**

August in this part of the world is chilly and clear, very unlike our humid, fetid fug at home. T. will go with Dave this morning and L. stays at the Lodge to shower and write and be lazy.

After noon, home are the hunters. They have seen quite a bit of game, but T. is looking, in a relaxed way, for a Water Buck, a Reed Buck, an exceptional Eland or even, he admits, The King of The Wildebeests. There is no pressure at all now and he goes for the pleasure of going, of seeing the animals, for the possibilities. Dave stays for lunch and then we go to rest. L., still feeling less than powerful, takes another nap. Then Kevin drives us, with Gerold, to Dave's home (known as The Top House) and he takes us to see Operation Ostrich: Dave studied Ostrich culture for about 5 years, watching the field develop and now he has begun a large project, raising them for meat and skins. He has huge computerized incubators in a new building. We see eggs, just collected, waiting to be incubated, eggs in the incubators and walk around some of the pens. The birds are now mating and dance and dip and clap their beaks. One male, very proud and elegant in his breeding plumage, inflates his big throat and begins his song, a deep, resonant hooting, probably very attractive to his ladies. The big Stud, the star, is named Lord Nelson, as he has only one of the big, beautiful brown eyes these birds usually have. He had to be swatted with a board when he attacked a man who was trying to collect an egg. This is not an easy business venture, but Dave foresees a fine return for his investment within a year or so. It has been a very interesting thing to see.

We drop Gerold by the Lodge and go hunting. There are Kudu cows and Wart Hogs, a few Impala, but no enticing game presents itself, so we actually end up walking home, as we have tracked closer to the Lodge than to the truck. Kevin goes off to collect the Toyota later.

We often encounter the Go Away Bird. Most of these monochrome gray fellows seem to say "G'waaaaay" in a petulant, whining little voice, but today we actually hear one who clearly enunciates "Go A-Way!". Very surprising!

Later, Gerold and T. chat about hunting dogs, which T. has had and which Gerold has now, and loves. We sit in the lounge, by the fire, L. working on the Journal, Kevin listening and smiling, T. & Gerold talk and tell stories, as we wait for dinner. In their tales, the subject of Raccoons comes up. Gerold says that in Sweden they are known as Washing Bears. A nice, descriptive name, as they are a member of that family and always like to wash their food!

Dave and Midge join us for dinner, which is a mix of beef, pork and sausages grilled on an open fire. Wonderful! T. is very pleased to see an apple pie for desert.

Tonight L. takes a flash portrait of Albert, as he happens to be out from behind the mirror, hunting on the wall. When the flash goes off, he bounces up and rockets back behind the mirror, no doubt seeing spots before his eyes...all of them! Poor Albert. How glad he will be to see us leave on Friday.

### **Wed., 8/2/95:**

Kumbulani, the young man who helps around the kitchen, has given us 3 delightful little drawings of a Kudu, some Buffaloes, Sable, some folks in the Safari Car, with camera! They are charming. We all encourage him to keep drawing and painting, as he really is talented. He draws in pencil or pen and colors the sketches by some means. He is a very shy young man who suddenly lights up with a bright smile. When he finds several of us in the Lounge before breakfast, he says, Good Mornings!, which seems a nicely economical way to greet us all at once!

T. goes out with Dave and Simon again this morning and Gerold drives away with Conner and Alexander in the green Jeep with Kevin riding along today. L. photographs the exodus. Ronna comes in to clean and make beds and to collect the laundry, which is done at The Top House. Midge's mother usually brings it down later in the day. L. is going to have to wait a long time for someone again to collect our soiled clothes in the morning and bring them back, all washed and pressed, each night...probably as long as it takes us to get back to Africa!

Around 10am, L. takes a walk. As she leaves the room, she encounters a visitor to the grounds, one of the Donkeys who come over from the neighboring farm to graze on the grass that is always greener next door. She takes its picture, receiving a chilly look and a hasty exit in return. After a little stroll down the road and some photos for the album, she settles to write in the lovely outdoor dining room. Here Kumbulani brings her tea and cookies. There is the very real possibility of becoming totally spoiled and of finding re-entry into "real" life even more difficult than usual after a vacation!

When all the hunters return they are without game but they have seen several nice specimens. T. says, Gerold, I saw your Kudu this morning. It was a fine bull. But unfortunately, Gerold did not see him.

It is Kevin who comes to get us in the Toyota and we go our favorite night-spot, the water hole where we saw the King of the Wildebeests. This lovely area is known as Kalahari Sand. The ground is covered, not by the coarse red sands of much of this part of the country but by a pale, dust-fine sand, too fine to use for building, difficult to drive on and to walk in, but the largest trees grow here and soft, short pale gold grass. We four just fit nicely into the little ground-blind and, in silence, we watch the Eland cows pace quietly to water and some Duiker and Guinea Fowl are strolling about. No King tonight and no Eland bull, but it is the last time we will see this beautiful place, at least until we return to Africa. Around 5pm we slip into jackets as one small chilly breeze has a last laugh with the leaves around us. The ride to the Lodge through the darkness is as magical as ever. We feel no hint of fear now, but only pleasure in the blazing stars and the little bats that flicker by.

We find a victorious Gerold when we arrive at the Lodge: he has gotten his Kudu, a nice one, after a fine hunt. We all rejoice, as we have been talking about and wishing for his success. He has certainly recovered from his flu in style! Amid hugs and handshakes he beams and bounces with pleasure. As we sit in the lounge before dinner, he shows us his rifle. On the grip cap is a simple silver disk and on it are engraved the names of his beloved hunting dogs from years gone by. They have passed on, but, as Gerold says, They are still with me you know. We are deeply touched and moved by this sweet sentiment.

On the way to the blind we stopped by Ms. Python's hole to try to get a picture. She was not in evidence, but another one has left its spoor in the red dust further along the track. Later, L., pointing to a tire mark on the road, says, Hey Simon, look! Python with tread., and gets to hear Simon giggle out loud!

Simon refers to L. as Madame and to T. as Umdala. These are terms of respect and sound quite pleasant and complimentary to our ears.

L.'s observation about Kevin's Irish-ness is accurate: his name is Oldreive and indeed, he is Irish. He says, however, that his two brothers are blond. His folks live in Durban, S.A. and he was raised there and so he also speaks Afrikaans.

Dave comes by as we eat dinner and destroys us with tales of Giraffe hunting and working as a movie extra for the filming of a dreadful film shot in Zimbabwe in the 70's, The Voortrekkers. We must get the Video! Tomorrow, Gerold will interview Dave for the promotional video.

Last day tomorrow. Light hunting, packing, the familiar routine of wrapping up a fantastic adventure. We will be happy to see our home and our friends and family: we will deeply miss so many people and things here. That is exactly as it should be.

#### **Thurs., 8/3/95:**

This will be the last hunting morning. L. feels just fine again and plans to go along. We get a good start at 6:30am. We will try to find that Water Buck for T. today. Very soon, there they are! A small herd of Water Buck, near the road. T. dismounts with Kevin and Simon. They sneak along the track, set up, T. sights, fires...away go the Water Buck. After much scouting about and searching the area, it is determined that he has missed. Simon is fully vindicated: that shot was with the 30.06!

Onward. All of the animals seem to be out to say good-bye to us this morning. We drive over the familiar tracks and trails, salute the Magic Mountain and his companion hills, go at length to a water hole. We see Gerold departing the scene with Conner and Alexander. We settle into the grass among some big gray sun-warmed stones and watch the water. In about an hour some delicate little Impala females dance down to the pool, spook and whisk away. We choose to leave, also. We have packing to do now.

We pay one more call on Ms. Python. She is not receiving today. L. bids her farewell any way, tells Simon to watch out for her. Think how big she will be in 2 or 3 years when we hope to return.

We have just time for tea and cookies with Gerold when lunch is served. Dave and Gerold do their interview and then join us at the table in the outdoor dining room. We have watched the lake slowly rising this week, as the irrigation has been curtailed. Now the water is near the boats on the shore and the little local Impala herd across the lake has less far to walk for their drink at noon each day. It is not deep but it is much longer and wider and prettier now. And what a view at lunch!

After our meal, T. and Kevin join Gerold in his room for a grand gun cleaning party and L. packs everything not needed before we go. We have collected several beautiful stones, 2 perfect, big, pale cream Sand Snail shells, a bit of bark from the King's ground-blind, some bone chips, a shard of very old pottery, and the feathers of a Helmeted Guinea Fowl. All these treasures have presented themselves while we were walking over the land, sitting in the blind, riding in the trucks. They are more precious to us than the lovely souvenirs we have bought, as such things always are. They will join our other found treasures on a shelf at home. They are the soul of this place.

Packing accomplished and guns cleaned and locked into the big case again, we close the drapes and L. showers and scrubs. The red sand rushes away down the drain in rivulets, but we suspect that it will always be in our clothes, in our duffels, little puffs appearing suddenly at odd moments. Certainly all the cameras will be going to the shop to be cleaned. L. can hear the sand and dust scraping now, when she opens a lens cover. Our outer jackets and boots are deeply permeated with the red and gray and buff-toned sands of Africa, and we do not mind at all!

Dinner is quiet, with just Kevin, Gerold, T. & L., and we talk about the past 8 days and about Chewore, too, with fond delight. We have enjoyed Gerold's company during our Safari immensely and Kevin has been a wonderful P.H. and companion, too.

Albert does not wait anymore to be pinched or puffed at. He withdraws the minute we enter the bathroom. Poor, shattered Arachnid. Can he hang on 'til we go?

#### **Fri., 7/4/95:**

We get up as usual, at 5am, but today we will say farewell to Gerold and later to Africa.

We sit with Kevin and Gerold as they have breakfast and prepare to drive into Bulawayo. Gerold's plane leaves this morning. He will have a very long layover in Harare and we urge him to take a day room or at least a corner in the lobby at Meikle's to pass the time in comfort. ("Go watch the International spies and general intrigue!") We will not see Kevin again before we leave either, so we bid him a very fond good-bye as we have come to love his good spirit and cheerful demeanor and his fine skills in the bush. We think Dave is very fortunate to have him here, as he is very organized and dependable and a wonderful people-person, too.

We go to our room to finish packing, do some writing and reading. Midge will collect us at 9am to drive us into town, where we will stop at Dave's office to complete the paperwork necessary for shipping the trophies and write checks for everything. L. suspects that she might just stop by In Du Na Arts too, Might have missed some little thing...

While we are listening to Zimbabwe Radio One (FM 88.5) for the last time, Simon comes by to say good-bye. He is going off to town. We really want so much to tell him how wonderful we think he is, with the sharpest eyes and the keenest instincts we have ever seen. T. gives him a good folding knife and we try our best to convey to him our gratitude and regard. We can only hope that he really understands. We have been most fortunate to have his expert assistance. Undoubtedly it made a great difference to T.'s enormous success in the field.

Then, here is Ronna, to collect our coffee tray. L. presents her with a Panama straw hat that had come over in the luggage but which had been replaced by a neat Bembesi Safari Co. hat on the very first day at Chewore. And this pleasant woman, who speaks almost no English at all and has communicated almost entirely in sign language and smiles, stands beaming before the mirror in her snazzy new hat and proudly proclaims: "Now I am a cowboy!" ! We are speechless and can only dissolve in laughter. We think this has been exactly the right gift.

Midge and her mother come to collect us. It is 9am. For the last time we drive down the red dust road away from the Lodge. Good-bye and thank you for a wonderful time! Hope to see you in two or three years. Good-bye, Albert! Hope you recover...

Into Bulawayo, to Dave's office. We settle up with Dave, write checks, try to do civilized things. L. wanders down the street to In Du Na Arts for some odds and ends to take home. We read and rest and remember. At length, Dave drives us to the airport. We plan the time to be there ahead of the Victoria Falls plane, the very one we flew in on 8 days ago, which packs the small airport with bodies and luggage. We check in and have a snack. Time to go. Hugs, thank you Dave, see you in Annapolis in January, see you in Reno, too! Bring Midge!

And we are flying off, leaving the thorns, the Hornbills, the Hyenas, Ms. Python in her lair, many wonderful people, many wonderful sights.

We are taking away the most amazing memories. We have had a remarkable adventure.

L. had left home with 3 specific questions:

1: Are there Fire Flies in Africa (and are they carnivorous)?

A: Yes, there are. No, they are not!

2: Does the water really go the "other way" down the drain?

A: Yes. And the little Dust Devils spin the "other way", too. And, the toilet!

3: How does the sky look in the Southern Hemisphere?

A: Absolutely spectacular. The clearest, purest air, the most brilliantly burning stars, and you can see the whole moon, in outline, even when it is new.

Thank you, Africa. We'll be back!

Addendum:

Air Zimbabwe carried us quickly to Johannesburg; South African Airline's plane was over two hours late leaving Johannesburg; we stopped in the Cape Verde Islands to re-fuel and take on a new crew; L. was invited into the cockpit to see the Workings of the huge Boeing 747-400. Our seats, (Row 14, J & K) are upstairs, right by the door to the cockpit. L. had no idea, before this trip, that any plane ever even had an upstairs! Eventually, we arrived in NY, at JFK Airport and waited again, as our plane to BWI was also late. We finally arrive, hours late, weary, but still speaking! B.J. is there to meet us and he has even turned on the air conditioners at the house, a life-saving act of kindness. Look: everyone is driving on the right side of the road!

We have had a major adventure, made new friends, fulfilled our personal goals (A fine hunt for T., Video, stills and a Journal for L.) seen some magnificent animals and country and expanded our horizons, geographically, spiritually, intellectually and physically! We are pleased with ourselves and proud of each other.

We are enormously grateful to have been able to go and we are very happy to be home, safely, once again.

Linda A. Worthington  
Saturday, August 5, 1995  
Severna Park, Maryland