

Africa by Allan Wolman

Africa, the 'dark continent' is anything but dark - mysterious, yes, strikingly beautiful, brutal and imposing. I have been very fortunate having visited East, Central and much of South Africa. Each region is breathtaking in its beautiful abundance; from the Kalahari Desert to the open Savanna's of the Masai Mara, the floodplains of the Okavango Delta, South Luangwa Valley, the Liuwa Plain in Zambia, Serengeti, Selous and the Katavi National Park in Tanzania.

The mighty Zambezi River flowing from Angola in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east, dissects a number of countries enroute, and flows through some of the richest natural biodiversity on the continent.

Back in 1988 together with a dear friend, his two sons and my two elder boys, we embarked on our African adventure. In those days - a true adventure, canoeing down the mighty Zambezi, from the world's largest man-made lake, Kariba Dam to the border of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Other than one or two isolated safari lodges, this was a totally uninhabited stretch of river of a little over 200 miles, teeming with the wonders of wildlife, huge herds of Cape Buffalo, elephants, kudu, impala, water buck and other antelope species. In addition, predators such as lion, leopard, hyena, and jackals abounded. And then the Nile crocodiles, hippos aplenty, lining the river banks for miles and miles.

Lifelong friend Brian Malk, living in San Diego, his two sons, Simon and Andrew, joined me and my two older boys, Hilton and Michael. Our guide was Rob who ran a lodge on Kariba's Fothergill Island together with his friend Ian, a pastor. We all met up first at Kariba then made our way down to the Mana Pools National Park with 4 canoes and provisions for 8 days. We journeyed down the river on what was for us, a unique adventure.



In our canoes towards sunset

The greatest danger on the river, were loads of aggressive hippos who were capable of chomping a canoe in half with a single bite, so we kept well clear of that risk. Two people per canoe loaded with provisions, managed to master these little crafts. Our first night after a fascinating day on the river was on Chekwena Island in the middle of the Zambezi. Without tents, equipped only with mosquito nets, this being the middle of winter, this island was definitely the world headquarters for mosquitoes. As it turned out, the nets were hardly a deterrent. Camping right on the river bank, we were far too exhausted and excited to worry about crocodiles and other animals, but nevertheless, woke at the slightest noise. We soon learnt that the African nights in the bush were alive with a cacophony of sounds emanating from the nocturnal animals. Each night, sleeping, exposed to the wonders of nature under the magnificent Africa night sky was an unforgettable experience.



Our party at the lodge scanning for lion at the tail end of the trip. Brian with the binocs.

And so, each day was a new, exciting adventure – stopping for lunch and either a morning or evening swim in the crocodile infested river, by forming a ‘ring’ with the canoes for protection. Swimming and washing in the river were a sheer joy.

The eight days drifting down the Zambezi were magical, something we never tire of recalling. Our boys had such fun – fishing, cooking, washing up, camping and paddling – how marvellous, looking back on that trip –just old fashion fun and adventure without digital distractions in any form.



Hilton and Michael Wolman. Simon and Andrew Malk taking a swim in the river

In our journey along the river we never came across another human, other than one morning when we spotted a young girl sitting on the river bank with a 'pet' warthog. She was doing some wild life research, all alone, in the middle of the bush for some weeks.

As we were about to end the canoeing at the Mozambique border, we did pass a local village whose kids came out to greet us in their makeshift canoes, called Mokoros.



Exploring the bush

On returning to our starting point, an open backed truck was ready and waiting to carry the canoes, all the equipment as well as the eight of us. What an escapade this was, riding over the rough bush track with Tsetse flies attacking us for hours on end. Eventually we arrived at Chekwenya Bush Lodge opposite the island where we spent our first night. We had three days at the lodge with great walking 'safaris', tracking lion in the 'adrenaline grass". What a pleasure having a bed to sleep in, a hot shower at hand and then sitting by the fireside listening to the sounds of the bush and lions roaring close by. We all learnt invaluable lessons on the trip and acquired a deep appreciation and love of the bush. An unforgettable experience, but the adventure was not yet over.....

We had arranged for a light aircraft to fly us back to Victoria Falls, flying low over the Zambezi. Only then did we see the foreboding population of crocodiles in the river! Thankfully, we were not aware of this when taking our daily swim. We then spent a couple of days at the Victoria Falls Hotel, one of the most beautiful old-world hotels, a short walk from the majestic 'Falls' which we marvelled at.

The following morning, white-water rafting down the river on one of the best river rapids in the world was yet another exciting adventure. The adrenaline rush was amazing! Vic Falls rafting is rated as the best in the world! At the end of the rapids, there is a steep climb out of the gorge, which, was in itself more than a challenge. (Many years later on a visit to the Falls, and rafting again, many of the participants were airlifted by helicopter up those steep banks, but my boys and I did it the old way by climbing the gorge).



R-L Michael, Simon, Andrew, Hilton, Rob, guide, Brian and myself

Sadly, all the fun and adventure was over far too quickly, but left lasting memories of a wonderful undertaking. While on our adventure, my wife Jocelyn and our ten-year-old son Jonathan, travelled to the US for a family visit. The choice had been given to the older boys of a trip to the US or canoeing down the Zambezi. Ultimately there was no choice; this ‘expedition’ is still talked about today with more than just a glint in their eyes.



Me with the hat and Brian while launching the canoes, note the provisions in the canoe behind

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**Written by Allan Wolman in about 2000**

**A word about Allan:** Lived most of my life in Johannesburg, where .I owned one of the oldest travel companies in Johannesburg – Rosebank Travel. Immigrated to Israel almost 6 years ago with my wife Jocelyn

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