

The following morning we set off for the final part of our journey to McBrides Camp. We were pleasantly surprised at the fantastic condition of the gravel road from Mumbwa to the Kabalushi Gate into Kafue National Park. The road has recently been re-built, and all the way from Mumbwa to the McBrides turn off, which is about 9km south of the Lubungu pontoon, there is currently not a pothole or corrugation in sight, long may it last!!! The scenery is very pleasant as one approaches the national park boundary and the road meanders through rolling hills and *miombo* woodland.

Shortly after leaving the main gravel road and taking the turnoff to McBrides we became vaguely aware of some fly's which appeared to be swarming around the vehicles. Not giving this much thought, a little further on, I decided to stop and take some photos. As I exited the vehicle, I immediately came under attack! For people who haven't had the misfortune of experiencing Tsetse Flies before, it's difficult to explain just how persistent and resilient they are. They are probably best compared to horse flies on steroids! No amount of swatting will deter them, and when they bite they draw blood. If you manage to make contact with your frantic efforts to swat them away, they simply shake themselves off and come back for more!! In the few seconds that the car door was open, about 30 of the pesky little blood suckers managed to find their way into the vehicle, temporarily causing mayhem until we finally managed to eliminate most of them! At around this time Wes also came under attack as he had to answer nature's inevitable call, and rather amusingly ended up kicking both his slops into the veld in his enthusiastic and valiant defence

About 3km from McBrides camp, the vegetation changes and one emerges from the Tsetse filled *Miombos* into the more open riverine vegetation along the banks of the Kafue River. On arrival we were immediately welcomed by Charlotte and Chris McBride, and as we sat having tea and biscuits in the stunning lounge area which overlooks the Kafue River, Chris explained how the Tsetse's were actually a blessing!! It turns out that game areas such as Kafue National Park (and many other prime game areas in Africa) would not exist if it weren't for the tsetse fly, as they would have long since been lost to cattle farming! Luckily, indigenous game is resistant to the sleeping sickness that afflicts cattle and other domestic livestock.

The rustic campsite is situated about 300m from the lodge, in the shade, on the eastern bank of the Kafue River. The campsite is in an idyllic position amongst the *Machinga-chinga* trees with views over a grassy plain to the east, and the Kafue River to the west. Our camp attendant John did a sterling job of keeping the donkey stoked up to ensure a constant supply of hot water, and there are even flushing toilets!

That afternoon as we prepared a roast leg of lamb over the coals, we were able to watch bushbuck and vervet monkeys wandering through our camp, while puku and impala grazed on the plain to our east. All the while the birdsong was periodically punctuated by the grunting of one of the many hippos in the river. Later that evening we listened as a lion started roaring in the distance.



*The La Hacienda Hotel, Mumbwa*



*The access road through the Miombo woodland to McBrides Camp*



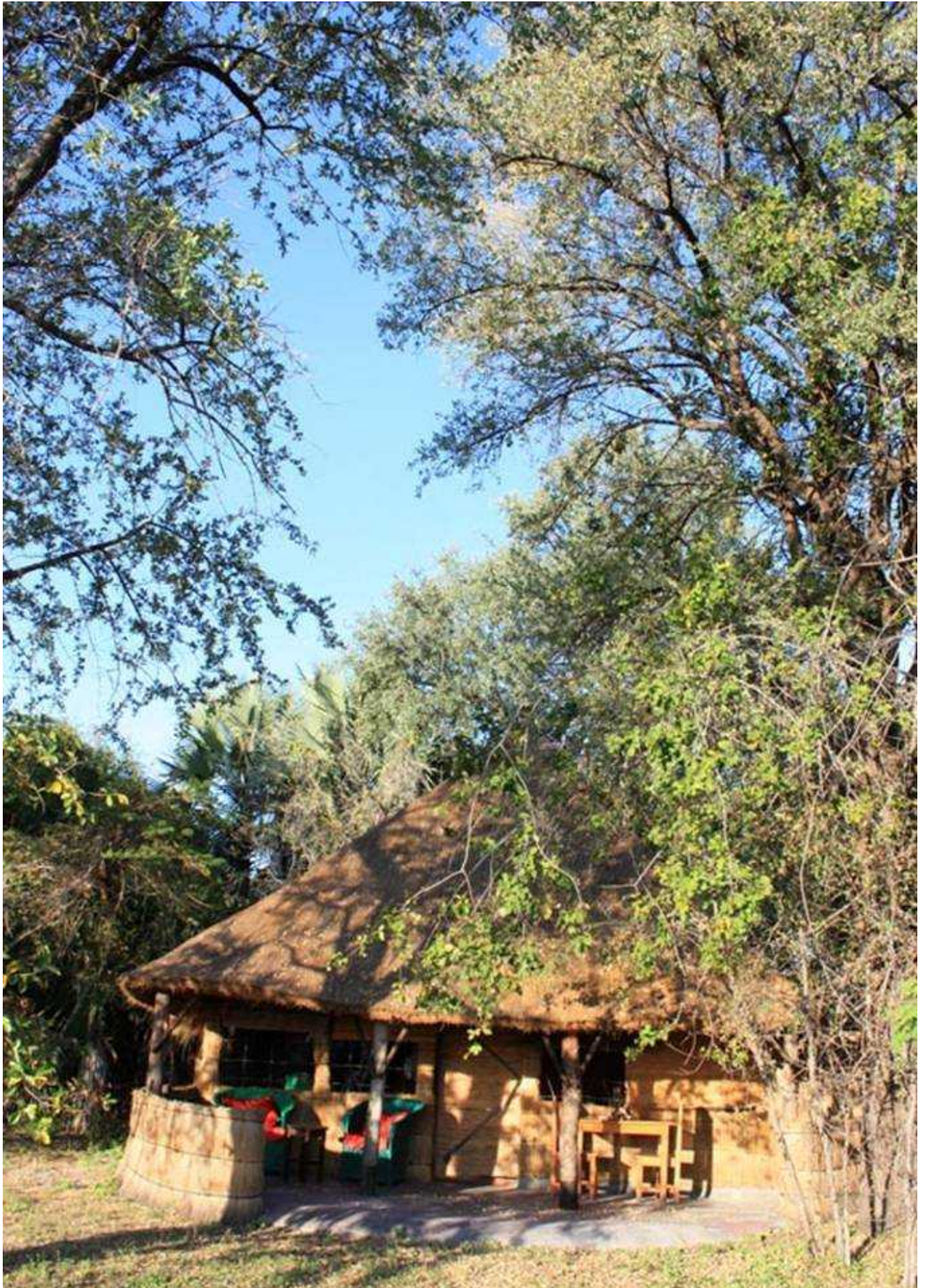
*Enroute to Mcbrides Camp*



*The stunning view over the Kafue River from the lounge area at McBrides Camp.*



*Lunch overlooking the Kafue River, at our campsite at McBrides Camp.*



*One of the eco friendly, bio-degradable chalets at McBrides Camp.*

Having listened to lion roars through much of the night, we arose before sunset and walked in the pre-dawn twilight over to the main lodge at 05h45 to begin our game walk at 06h00. Enroute we had to carefully circumnavigate a hippo grazing on the riverbank. We set off in the direction of the lion roars, ably led by Chris and his tracker Masangu, and were also accompanied by Charlotte and John, who is the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) officer at McBrides. Tracking is quite difficult in this area of Kafue, as the ground is hard and the grass long, so Chris and Masangu guided us towards the lion by following the sound of the roaring, as well as any sounds of alarm calls of other animals. Chris and Charlotte concluded that we were probably tracking a large lioness who they have named *Cineca* who had recently been spotted several times in the company of a much younger lioness. Unfortunately the roaring stopped fairly early that morning, and although at one point we must have been very close, and saw fresh spoor is an area where two minutes previously we had heard puku alarm calls, *Cineca* and her companion were in a shy mood, and we were not able to catch sight of them. The absolute freedom of walking through virgin bush, with no specific route and following nothing other than animal sounds is an indescribably exhilarating experience. I began to realize just how much one misses out on when game viewing from a vehicle, as you are so isolated from your surroundings. When walking in the bush every sense gets used, you are constantly scanning for interesting sights, listening to the bird, insect and animal sounds, and smelling the various animal and vegetation scents.

During the course of the day it somehow transpired that we shared with Chris an appreciation of the humour of Peter Sellers, so that afternoon we were summoned to the lounge area so Chris could share some of his favourite clips with us. It was a slightly surreal experience watching the antics of Chief Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther*, in the middle of the central African bush, which in a way made it doubly amusing!

That evening we ventured out on a night drive, and although we saw no predators the density of puku and impala was quite impressive. There is definitely plenty of food around! We saw a number of hippo grazing quite some distance from the river and were also lucky to have a good sightings of a porcupine and a genet.

The lion were quiet that night, so we made a decision to rather go for an early morning river cruise on Chris's new pride and joy named "Fin foot". This was also an amazing experience, since once the boat has been manoeuvred into the main channel the flow is sufficient for the engines to be switched off allowing you to silently drift down the river. The lions were obviously gleefully watching our departure and once we had reached a safe distance, about 15 minutes after departing, we heard the most incredible cacophony of lion roars back in the direction of the camp! After a brief debate on whether to return to camp we decided to continue, as the sun was up and the lions would almost inevitably stop roaring in the near future. For the next 45min they continued to taunt us! At one point we heard the rasping cough of a leopard not far from the river bank, and then another lion started roaring roughly opposite where we were, but some distance inland. We immediately beached the boat, and set off in the direction of the new roars. Somewhat predictably, as soon as we started walking the lion stopped roaring, but Masangu reckoned he had the location pinpointed and after about 45min we emerged on the edge

of a grassy plain with a large termite mound about 100m ahead of us. We carefully skirted around the mound to see if the lion was perhaps lying on the opposite side, but as we could see nothing we moved in closer to check for spoor on the bare earth around the base of the mound. Sure enough we found very fresh lion spoor! I must say that Masangu's bush craft is astounding. We must have walked at least 5km from the boat, and with the aid of nothing other than the sound of the initial roaring, he was able to lead us to the exact spot where the lion had been. Remarkable! Due to the hardness of the ground it was difficult to tell definitively in which direction the lion had moved off, so Chris decided to have a go with his lion roar impersonations, in the hope that if the lion was still close by, he would answer. It is certainly the mark of a man who has spent the last 40 years undertaking lion research, that if you close your eyes you would not know whether it was Chris "roaring" or a lion! Apparently even the lions find it difficult to distinguish as this technique does sometimes work, however we didn't get lucky that day. We continued our walk, and although we again found fresh lion spoor, it petered too quickly for us to be able to follow it. We saw quite a few buck on the remainder of our walk, including a rare blue duiker sighting, and at one point followed a honey guide until it led us to a bee hive. I was again astounded by Masangu's navigational skills as after a 9 – 10km circular walk we appeared back on the river bank within about 100m of where we left the boat. To put this in perspective, we started from a random location a number of kilometres downstream of the camp, he does not carry a gps, there are no paths, and the land is flat so there are no landmarks to orientate oneself by. Very impressive stuff!

As we chugged slowly back up the river to Camp, we listened intently as Chris recounted a number of his very amusing tales. Later we read in the guest book how someone had commented that just meeting Chris was an experience in itself; we couldn't agree more! At one point we passed a large bull elephant peacefully grazing on the western bank of the river.

That night we again had lion roaring from various directions around us, at some points sounding quite close by. We again rose before dawn, and as Chris and Masangu determined that the closest pride were roaring on the opposite bank of the river we set off in the soft pre dawn lighting, in a small boat to the opposite side of the river. Unfortunately we were again unlucky with the lion stopping roaring soon after we started walking. We did a lovely 5 hour walk, with Masangu again impressing us with his navigational skills, and again leading us to fresh lion spoor. Despite missing the lion, the bush walks were all magical experiences. This is the African bush as it should be, completely wild and unspoilt. Walking on the western river bank, the closest vehicle track is over 100km away. There is plenty of game, but since they are completely un-habituated to humans, you have to work a little harder for your sightings than in some other game areas. This ultimately makes each sighting all the more rewarding though. Among some of the interesting sightings that we had not previously seen, were Lichtenstein's hartebeest, and the Kafue sub-species of water buck (distinguished by the solid white patch on the rump rather than the ring on other water buck) and the Zambian sub species of bush buck.

All too soon our time at McBrides Camp was at an end, and we packed up on our final morning with lion roaring very close by. We were dearly tempted to stay, but as we were aiming to head all the way back to Livingstone by that evening, we had to hit the road. Later Charlotte emailed us to say that as they watched us driving away, they were willing us to turn back for something, as the lion walked through the campsite that we had just left. Oh well, we didn't get lucky during

this stay so we certainly have an excuse to return, not that we need any encouragement! To anyone planning a trip to Kafue, I can't recommend McBrides camp highly enough. Chris and Charlotte are fantastic hosts, with a wealth of interesting information about the bush. Our time at McBrides was both a pleasure and a tremendous privilege! As we crossed the airstrip on our exit from McBrides, Wes's Patrol reached the milestone of 350 000 (trouble free) km!



*Spiders web in the early morning light on one of our bush walks.*



*Tracking lion, on a game walk from McBrides Camp.*



*Traversing Miombo woodland on a game walk from McBrides Camp.*



*X-rated? A very amusing & opportunistic shot taken by Wes on one of our bush walks!!! Photo courtesy of Wesley Scott.*



*Tea with the “Great White Hunter”! Wes listens as Chris recounts one of his many amusing tales of the African Bush, while floating down the Kafue River on “Fin Foot”.*



*McBrides Camp, nestled unobtrusively on the banks of the Kafue River.*



*A photo to demonstrate the height of the grass in some areas of Kafue!*



*Wes looking somewhat bleary eyed as we cross the Kafue River at sunrise to begin a game walk.*



*Miles of Smiles! The proud owner stands by, at the moment the “Wee Beasty” clocked over to 350 000 (trouble free) km, on the exit from McBrides Camp!*