

## **Fieldwork Siamatanga area, Southern Province, Zambia**

***12 October – 2 November 1992***

We've loaded the land rover (an old bucket of a pick up) with all sorts of camping and mapping gear until it's packed the "African Way", i.e. way too high and dangerously instable, held together with a whole lot of "leggin", the local slang for cut up inner tire tubes used for securing stuff on cars, buses and trucks. On top of all that lies our trusty unskilled employee, Envious, probably holding on for dear life, or, more probably, cosily settled for a long nap on top of the softest spot of the pile of luggage.

We set off from the Geological Survey grounds at half past one, and the first stop is, as always, Soweto market: a bustling place of commercial mayhem in Lusaka's city centre, where open air manufacturing, wholesale and retail have blended in an organic mass of colour, sound, smell, taste and vibration; a real smorgasbord of senses. We're not there to indulge our senses, we need to get a few supplies in. Raw food stuffs that can keep without refrigeration through a few weeks of mapping. My expertise of suitable local foods is rather limited, having only been in Zambia for a few months now, so Simon Chisela, my tall Zambian colleague, gets to choose. He goes for a particularly nasty smelling brand of "Kapenta" (small dried fish that one can sometimes see in European supermarkets as novelty cat-food), a 25 kg bag of imported US mealie meal (yellow ground maize, which the Zambian dislike as they are used to the home-grown white variety), a bag of brown beans, some coarse salt and a few 2.5-liter containers of nasty "consumer grade" cooking oil. The food finds its way into some nooks and crannies underneath the green tarpaulin on the back of the car, and some of it ends up behind the seat in the front cabin. Then we squeeze together into the car, and off we go. Down the heavily cratered road, southwards, round the Kafue roundabout which would even make French taxi-drivers cringe in horror, and onto the road South to Kafue. The unsettlingly deep potholes manage to immediately ram home the fact that lumbar support did not form part of the interior design of this particular version of Land Rover. The seats' back appears to consist of a contraption of aluminium bars and metal sheets, lightly covered by a "cushioning" simili-leather finish, fashioned in such a way as to invoke the maximum amount of discomfort to passengers. The top of the back support sits just below the lower part of my shoulder blades, apparently with the express purpose of inflicting horrendously painful jabs every time the car negotiates a pothole (which in the case of Zambian road conditions is very, very often). Simon, who, because of his experience in these matters, had offered me to get in first, and therefore occupies the side portion of the bench (I'll start calling it a bench, as the word seat would be unjustified), is managing to wedge himself nicely into space, by pushing hard with his feet against the footplate, and pushing with both hands against the "dashboard". He is, in short, using a technique called "opposé" applied in speleology or rock-climbing to scale narrow cracks. And me, well, I'm sitting in the middle of the car, which means that I have one of my legs to the right of the gear

shift lever, where I have to keep concentrating not to get in the way of the footwork the driver is having to do in all the decelerating - avoiding - accelerating that accompanies travel on potholed roads. This is not as easy as it sounds, as at the same time I need to avoid his elbow every time he frantically turns the steering wheel this or that way. All this time, the left leg is next to the firmly fixed right foot of Simon, who is not in a position, nor mood, to shift it anyway. For me, the "oppose" technique, so skilfully and successfully applied by Simon, seems out of the question. I just sit there, and try and "move" with the car, to minimise the risk of lacerations and critical damage. I soon start envying the lucky Envious for his comfy spot on top of the luggage in the back.

The trip to Kalomo, roughly 450 km from Lusaka, will take us all the rest of the day, and we'll probably have to spend the night in Kalomo itself, rather than set up camp the driver tells me. Our driver is Leonard N'goma. A Tonga man, so he's going home. Leonard is a typical Government driver: talkative and funny (he talks to all that moves, on or off the road), liberal with time (he's always late), and conservative with action (lazy as hell). The only thing he's paid for, and therefore does, is driving. Despite of, or because of his attributes, which appear to go with the trade, I like Leonard. He's accessible, open, and good to talk to. His posture at the steering wheel speaks of his age (Leonard is nearing his sixty). The two hands are poised on the top of the wheel, his back is bent slightly forward so that his chin is almost touching the knuckles of his hand, and his eyes seem fixed on a point straight ahead most of the time. The outside mirror that has survived the vehicle's field days, is obviously pointing the wrong way, so that all Leonard would see, if he would care to look into the mirror, would be ground screaming past the car.

We've now done about 300 kilometers, non-stop, and are some 40 kilometers short of a place called Choma. Because of our precarious position in the cabin, making it necessary for us to anticipate the jolts, jumps and battering induced by negotiating potholed road sections, Simon and I keep a keen eye out on the road. It is therefore that we are the first to spot the large brown cow shooting out of the bush to the right of the road a mere 100 meters in front of us. Almost in the same instant Leonard notices the cow too, and initiates some hefty manoeuvring, at the same time pumping the brake-pedal in an attempt to get at least some reduction in speed. A collision seems inevitable as neither the cow, nor the Landrover show signs of changing course dramatically. Simon and I brace ourselves for impact, and almost at the same instant shout "hold on!" in case Envious would still be unaware of the impending crash. Leonard, unphased by all this, has abandoned all attempts at avoiding the beast, and is simply preparing for post-collisional damage control. The car connects hard with the hind thy-bone of the cow, effectively catapulting the poor animal into a not so graceful pirouette, while the car swerves violently off the road, straight towards a bunch of smallish trees. Leonard, who must've been in many such collisions before, manages to avoid most of those, and shoots right back onto, and across the road, to connect with a few more smallish trees on the opposite side. By then, the car

has lost some momentum allowing Leonard to apply the brakes with more success now, parking on the side of the road to inspect the damage. Still pretty shocked (literally as well as figuratively speaking), we get out to see Envious scrambling off the back. He has been able to grab hold of the canvas and leggin' and is okay. The only damage to the car is on the front fender, which has been neatly pushed into the wheel. Nothing a few well-aimed kicks and blows can remedy, as Leonard demonstrates. Simon and I head back to the now unmoving brown cow, which has been flung off the road, and lies a few hundred meters back. As we approach it becomes clear that the animal still lives. It's breathing raggedly, and has a wild look in the eyes. The leg is obviously crushed, and, as is obvious from the bloody foam on the cow's mouth, some ribs have been cracked too. It's quite clear the cow won't live to see another day. My suggestion to take an axe and end the suffering of the cow is met with strong disapproval, and my Zambian colleagues are all for driving on to Choma, the nearest town, without delay to report the accident to the police. With a last glance at the suffering beast, we all get back into the car for the stretch to Choma.

The police officer looks at us blankly, and asks us whether we know the owner of the cow. The man has been giving us the impression that, if he'd find the owner, he'd be in for a lengthy "interrogation", a healthy fine, and, in general terms, an unpleasant confrontation with the law... This at first actually surprises me, as after all we were the ones who killed the cow by driving rather speedily along the road. But the officer assures me that it's the responsibility of the owner to look after his animals, so that they do not cross the roads unsupervised, as was the case for the group of cows we met. In fact, he says, the owner is now responsible for inflicting damage to Government property (the car), wasting valuable time of Government officials on duty (i.e. us), and putting unneeded strain on law enforcement resources who have to draft a police report and investigate the matter further to allow a successful prosecution of the culprit (the owner of the cow). Just as I start feeling even sorrier for the unknown owner, it transpires that the patrol car that sped to the scene of the accident has returned with a hind leg of the cow, offered by the owner of the now deceased cow as a token of good will. The gift is gratefully accepted by the officer in charge, and we find ourselves back in the car a few minutes later, with a signed police report addressed to the Director of the Geological Survey, and some 2 kilogrammes of prime beef for dinner.

With all this fuzz, it has started to get dusky, and we decide to try and still get to Kalomo, some 100 kilometers down the road. This is easier as it sounds, but the accident with the cow has also claimed the life of one of our headlamps, making the nightly trip quite stressing, especially because the stretch between Choma and Kalomo is known, so Simon tells me, for its highest density of freely wandering cows. Leonard, who apparently has killed enough cows for the day, actually takes the trip easy, and we safely arrive in Kalomo well after 22:00 hrs. Now, Kalomo is a small place, with very little to offer in terms of accommodation, restaurants and entertainment. In fact, one

of the first things we find out is that the fortnightly truck with Mosi beer hasn't arrived yet, shattering the rather optimistic prospect Simon and I had of getting a cold beer. Even if the truck would have delivered the booze, refrigeration capabilities in Kalomo would not have been of sufficient quality nor quantity to allow for "cold" beer anyway. We organised a small room in the Government guesthouse, and then set off to the one and only eating place, where we managed, after some deliberation and offering of incentives, to be served a plate of nshima (solid maize meal porridge) with some rape and a fried egg and a bottle of coke to wash it all down. It was definitely not a culinary delight, but it sure hit the spot. Lacking the prospect of a beer, we tucked in soon after the meal, and probably all dreamt of cows being run over by our Landrover.

After a restless night, not only because of the dreams but also heat, hard mattress, and imagined or real nightly visitations of invertebrate creatures and rodents, we get up at the crack of dawn to find Leonard and Envious repacking the car. Envious has apparently doctored out a way of packing the car in ergonomic fashion, the better to enjoy the remainder of the trip, which he now knows shall lead northwards into an area of the map with a suspicious absence of line features, and an area first marked "Ndundumwese Game Reserve", and further north "Kafue National Park". Simon suggests to supplement our meat supplies, consisting of the lump of cow meat we got yesterday, with some more, and to stock up on water and fuel. We therefore move to the filling station, which surprisingly is open and, more surprisingly actually has fuel, and fill up the tank and fuel containers in the back. Simon meanwhile enquires for the breakfast options in Kalomo, and is told the take away of the station, also the only take away in a radius of 100 kilometers, actually has "fresh" meatpies and "special burgers". Simon and I cautiously move to the glass "display" and "heating" cabinet, and try and establish whether the food wares are yesterday's or fresh from this morning. After a full minute of close study, Simon looks me in the eye and says

"Oh! What the hell!!", and goes ahead to order a "special burger". "Make that two, please!", I say, not wanting to look like an overly careful expatriate coward. Soon we're both munching down on a "special burger", which consists of a bun, with a tomato, onion, fried mince and an egg. A perfect breakfast, we agree. Especially as we are washing it down with an over sweetened cup of milky tea. Meanwhile Leonard and Envious have wandered over, and ordered a meat pie and a coke each.

That settled, Simon and I wander over to the local butcher, which is conveniently located behind the filling station, and consists of a small thatched area where the animals get to meet their maker, and a tiny brick room with a large wooden block in the centre. We seem to be in luck, the butcher tells us, because they have only just killed their last cow three days ago. The same cow now adorns the tiny room, hanging in bits and pieces from various hooks on the ceiling and along the wall. The smell of decaying flesh is overpowering, as is the density of buzzing flies, so rather than take our time and carefully select the best pieces, we point at a large chunk of meat that hangs along the wall. The butcher moves the chunk to the wooden

block, and produces a large axe, the tool of his trade, and starts hacking the piece of beef into smaller portions. It is then that I notice we selected another hind leg. The butchers exertions lead to a cascade of sickening whacks and splintering noises, as he hacks his way through the thick femur of the cow. I make a mental note to make sure I remember to eat the stew with care later, to avoid injury from splintered bone shards.

On our way out of town, we briefly stop at the open air market to get some vegetables. As usual, the sight of a white skinned bloke in shorts, attracts a lot of attention, and seems to imperceptibly alter the going rate for most goods. I manage to get a few bags of fresh tomatoes, onions, rape and a few cabbages, and while I'm at it also buy a few loafs of bread for tomorrow morning.

The plan is to find the track north, through Ndundumwese Game Reserve, to the southernmost access gate to Kafue National Park, and then find a permanent game ranger village called "Katanda Camp". As we drive north out of Kalomo, the track soon deteriorates from relatively smooth gravel, to bumpy gravel and downright pretty awful. Our speed drops rapidly from 60 to 20 kilometers an hour, as the heat of the day sets in. The highly uncomfortable ride of yesterday is soon remembered as cosy, as our frames are feeling the full force of the tortuous ride today. Not only that, but the dust, which easily finds its way into the car through the open windows, is slowly turning our skin the colour of the road. All this discomfort is however instantly forgotten when we see the first signs of wildlife. A family of warthog are scampering for safety away from the road, with the mothers' tail sticking straight up for the kids to follow. A bit further, a group of brown red antelopes are running across the road and into the low scrubs beyond sight. Envious, who told me he never set foot outside Lusaka before, is sitting up straight on the luggage at the back, excitedly pointing at the animals. He's clearly in the best viewing spot now, I think, while I'm trying to peer through the dirty, dust covered windshield. As we move on, the animals both seem to be getting more numerous, and larger too. My first sight of a group of hartebeests, with their horns arranged on their head in form of a heart, and a single kudu, with its long corkscrew horns and large ears, have me yelling out to Leonard to stop the car for a sec. As I gingerly step out of the car to stretch my legs and look at the animals, I can hardly believe we still haven't entered the national park itself. I climb on top of the car, and as far as the eye can see there's bush. Not a hut in sight, not a single electricity pole, not anything man-made apart from the dirt track we're on. Simon is looking at the topomap and declares that we should be getting to the parks' gate any time now. Turns out he's right, and fifteen minutes later we're riding up to a wooden barrier and a few small huts. The gatekeeper has emerged from the hut, but does not seem inclined to open the gate just yet. My initial fears as to his motives disappear rapidly as it becomes clear that the man, his wife and five kids haven't seen a car in several weeks, and are quite happy with our arrival. The man is absolutely jubilant when Simon offers him one of the three newspapers we bought in Kalomo (I had been wondering why he bought all three papers, while one would have been more than enough). The

mood even got merrier when I dug out my camera for a snap of his hut and family. Then we went on to the serious business of actually signing the entry forms, stating our business, waving around official paperwork from the Ministry of Mines and the Geological Survey Department, and finally showing the man all the paperwork we had arranged from the Department of Wildlife in Lusaka before setting off. The gatekeeper then actually surprised us all by firing up a radio transmitter in his tent, and trying to call the wildlife officers at Katanda Camp, our final destination. Considerate as that was, his calls were left unanswered, but he promised us he'd continue trying to reach them to tell them we were coming. With an extra two hours to go to Katanda Camp, we said our goodbyes, and carried on along the dirt track.

The light of the day is getting that typical warm hue when we pull into Katanda Camp an hour later. Katanda Camp is really just a village, consisting of five game scouts with their direct family (wives and kids). This being Southern Province, the traditional land of the Tonga people, the men can have several wives, and soon I find out the village head and game scout leader has two young wives and 15 children. Similar numbers apply to the other game scouts, so the village counts about 100 people in total. As we sit down on small wooden stools in the "insaka" (i.e. grass thatched circular meeting place), Simon uses his Tonga to explain who we are and what we are here to do, and shows the paperwork to the head scout. As the discussion progresses, I get the distinct feeling that these guys cannot speak or understand a lot of English. This should pose no problem as Simon, as many Zambians from the "Kaunga" generation passed through primary and secondary school in all corners of Zambia, and therefore masters the main languages of the country. Just as I start feeling the discussion is reaching a conclusion, Simon stands up and the game scout/village head, who Simon tells me listens to the name "Boston", motions me to come along. Simon tells me they'll show us the place where another geologist, some ten years ago, used to camp. I ask Boston whether that guy was called Garcia, a name I came across while reading internal reports back at the Survey, and he beams a "yes" back at me.

"He liked our women too much", he confides in me. I interpret that one sentence as a warning to me to stay off his women, making me feel a tad uncomfortable. "We're here to look at your rocks, not women", I answer. He laughs, which I take as a good sign. We're walking away from the village along a small path, obviously worn smooth by extensive use, and gently leading down to the Sichifulo River, which is visible as a line of greenery in an otherwise parched yellow terrain. Before the patch plunges down to the riverbed, there's a flat-lying area with two make-shift "goals" on the left, and a similar flat area, minus goals, to the right. "Garcia used to be camped just here" Boston says. "This may be a good place for your camp". Simon wanders across and looks approvingly, and then gestures towards Leonard, who lagged a bit behind and is only just catching up with us, asking what he thinks. Leonard, in his typical way, just says: "OK, that's fine". He then turns around, and goes to fetch the car and Envious. While Leonard disappears in the direction of the village, Simon and I go down to the river, where Boston

wants to show us the supply of drinking water. The river, I am surprised to see, has been reduced to a bunch of stagnant muddy pools during the dry season, the largest of which is the main drinking water supply for the village. This muddy pool is fenced by an acacia barrier, and we are shown how the villagers are using the filtering action of the river sand to get relatively clean water. A small circular pit has been dug, some meters away from the stagnant pool, into the river sand, into which water filters from the pool. A small tin cup, floating in that pit, is used to carefully scoop the water into containers. This, it seems, will be our only source of drinking water for the next weeks; a prospect that makes my intestines cramp in anticipation.

Back up, the car has arrived and a rudimentary camp is being set up. Four heavy green canvas tents will be erected, one for each of us, in a circle around a central cleared area, where Envious has started putting together a small fire. I gingerly start figuring out just how the tents are constructed, when a villager named Lazarous comes to give me a hand. The tents are the most basic kind of model available, the kind of thing a two-year-old kid would draw when asked "draw me a tent". A canvas groundsheet, two tent poles and a horizontal bar over which the heavy canvas is draped. The entire structure is secured to the ground with heavy raffia rope and metal pegs. Because the structure is not entirely impervious to nightly slithery visitors, small camp beds are also constructed, so that we don't have to sleep on the bare floor. By the time Lazarous and I have finished setting up my tent, Envious has put a three-legged pot with some of the "drinking water" on the fire, and is busy unpacking some of our food supplies into Leonard's tent. From a look at the villagers' faces, I gather that they've not seen so much food in while, and feel sorry for them. Before we left Lusaka, I had been reading in the papers about the pending food shortages in Zambia, with Southern Province one of the worst hit areas. The rainy season had not been all that good this year, which, coupled with poor farming policy, had led to some of the worst crops in several decades. As I start helping unloading the rest of the car into Leonard's tent, the wives of Boston have walked over from the village with a 5 litre container of local brew, and several hand-carved small wooden stools. The stools, I am told, are fashioned in the typical Tonga style, and are only 25-30 cm high. We're all invited to sit in the shade of the nearest tree, a barren mango tree, and some plastic cups are fished out of our cutlery box. As the only "wasungu" (white man) in the company, I get to drink the first cup, which is not such a good thing as I don't know really whether there's a special way of drinking the stuff. The cup which is handed to me is filled to the brim with a yellow-grey, lumpy substance that has a rank-sour smell. Everyone looks expectantly at me, and I have, not for the first time, the feeling that I'm actually partly seen as first-class entertainment to these people. Not only do they not see wasungu that often, but seeing one that will drink local brew is even more of a treat. I get over my impulse to decline the drink, thinking they'd not accept my refusal too easily, and ask Simon: "Am I expected to drink a sip and pass this on, or should I finish it?". Simon tells me either is fine, but that it's good stuff and that I should try and drink the entire cup. I take one last look around me, set the cup to my mouth

and start swallowing the brew. I can't say it's the best pint of beer I've ever tasted, but then again, my expectation weren't that high. The rank-sour smell translates, without too much surprise, in a sour taste. The lumpy bits turn out to be agglutinated coarse ground yellow maize, making this brew something of a mix between food and drink. Simon, who has swallowed his cup while I was analysing the aftertaste in my mouth, explains that this "beer", which the locals call "Mkoyo" or "Seven Days", is made by boiling a porridge of maize and water, with added sugar and a tree root called "Mkoyo". This is cooled down and placed in a calabash, sealed with goatskin, and buried in a shallow pit. As the name suggests, fermentation is allowed for seven days, resulting in an alcoholic "beer" much like the cup I just finished. He says that the beer we just had is actually only a "three days", which they dug up prematurely to at least have something to drink and celebrate our arrival. I thank Boston and his mates, and am promptly offered another cup, which I drink, and which, unfortunately tastes just the same as the first one. As I finish the cup I do realise that I may actually get used to this, and even start liking it. Because the fermentation is incomplete, the beer has a lingering sweet undertone which I actually like. Boston seems to have noticed that too, and says to me he'll ask his wife to brew me some more for tomorrow. I thank him, and he just grins at me. I think I like him, this down to Earth welcoming game scout.

After the welcome break and beverages, the guys from the village leave us, as it's now become quite dark. Envious, who has not partaken in our drinking but has been slaving away at the campfire, actually starts filling up plates with Nsima (the thick maize porridge that is the staple food of the Zambians), rape (vegetables) and a beef stew cooked, I assume, from the chunk donated to us by the police in Choma. We're all hungry, and attack the plates like there's no tomorrow. Everyone is very tired, and one after another Simon, Leonard and Envious retire for the night. I put on a kettle with water from the containers, and make myself a sweet milky tea to wash it all down. As I sit beneath the three, sipping the tea and listening to the silence that has descended on the village and the camp, I feel great. This is the life. This is what it's all about. I look up at the sky, and marvel at it. One cannot get a better place to look at the Milky Way, which stretches from horizon to horizon here. The quiet that has descended on the village, camp and National Park soon gets to me as well. I take one last look at the magnificent canopy of stars, put the empty cup in a small wash basin and get into my tent too. We've got a long day ahead of us tomorrow.

I can hear the village and camp wake up long before I do. It all starts at the crack of dawn with the crowing of the cocks, soon followed by the barking of dogs, and finally the clanging of pots and pans as the women walk along the path next to our camp and descend to the waterhole to fetch water for the morning wash and breakfast. It only takes a few more minutes for me to start feeling that I may be setting a wrong example if I don't get up this instant. I put on my shorts and a T-shirt and open the zip of the tent to take a look. Envious has kindled a fire and is busy boiling water for breakfast. Simon is tying his shoe-laces in front of his tent and Leonard is washing his face using

a small basin of what is obviously warm water. I step out of the tent, say "morning guys!", stretch myself, and walk to the fire to get warm. The kettle with water has been joined by a blackened pot with more water in, to which Envious is adding a few handfuls of mealie meal. "Porridge?" I ask, and Envious just say "No! Nshima", and points to the pot of beef stew that sits next to the fire. I look incredulously at Simon, who has meanwhile joined us next to the fire, and he explains that we're going to eat a "big" breakfast because we'll be on the road the whole day and will only eat again in the evening. I decide to start off with a cup of tea instead and see if I can build up for a breakfast that actually consists of rich beef stew and nshima at this time of the day. I get up and decide to go and fill up a small washing basin from the well down at the river. I join two women with unsettlingly big empty tin buckets in their hand and greet them with the phrase I heard Simon utter yesterday when we greeted the game scouts: "Mwasiavuti". The women bend through the knees and give me a few handclaps saying "Kabutu...kabutu...", and walk on, down to the river and into the enclosure around the well. The well looks pretty much the same I remember it from yesterday, a brown-coloured shallow pond of water, with a small circular hole dug a few meters away, where the two women have now kneeled down to start filling their pots. They gesture at me to join them, pointing at the basin and saying in Tonga what surely must mean "come here young man, let us fill up your washing basin". I kneel next to the pit and start scooping out water to fill the basin together with the now giggling women. Simon has meanwhile joined me and says: "You know why they are laughing Bert?". "They think it's funny that a man is doing the work of a woman". He then turns to the women and says something in Tonga that makes them laugh even more. "What did you say to them just now?" I ask.

"Oh...nothing. Nothing.". As I make my way up the bank, balancing the sloshing basin full of water so as to waste as little as possible, one of the women has started lifting the filled over-sized bucket onto her head, helped by the other women, and start ambling up the bank after me. As I look back I cannot help but be amazed at the combination of sheer strength and elegance of these women. I look like a bloody Neanderthal in comparison to those women, clumsily holding the small washing basin in both hands trying not to spill any water, while these women easily carry five times that amount of water on their heads without spilling a single drop. As I veer off to my tent and look over my shoulder, the women have taken up a steady stately pace in the direction of the village some 500 meters away. Envious is meanwhile laying the last hands on his nshima, and has put the of with beef stew on the fire. I settle down next to the tent and have a fast cat-wash, and put on my long trousers and boots. By the time I'm clean and dressed, four steaming plates of beef stew and nshima are waiting to be consumed. Envious and Leonard have tucked in already and I join them, looking warily at the large helping of yellow nshima I've been allocated. The thought that this may be some sort of elaborately designed test of endurance to see how "the white fella' is gonna stomach nshima", again springs to mind, but a quick glance at the other plates soon kills it forever. Simon notices my hesitant composure and repeats: "we'll be out all day, eat up!". So I do, eat up, as much as I can

conceivably manage this time of day. The stew tastes okay, but the nshima is just way too much, so I finish the meat, and about half of the maize paste, hoping that'll keep the hunger away for long enough. As I dip the last bit of gravy off the plate with a ball of nshima, Lazarous and Boston turn up, all dressed up in paramilitary outfit with their hunting rifles. "Morning, Sir", they beam, as they visibly enjoy the sight of a wasungu eating nshima using his hands (the African way of eating the stuff). "Hi, eh...mwashyavuti!", I reply, anxious to demonstrate my new-found lingual skills. "Kabutu...kabutu!" comes the surprised and even more beaming reply. "You can speak Tonga, Sir?". To which I reply "No, no, not really, but I'm learning!". Despite this downturn, they keep beaming their lovely white-toothed smiles, which I find in stark contrast with their paramilitary outfit. I never thought I'd actually be able to genuinely like anyone dressed in combat fatigues, carrying nasty looking guns, and generally looking like on-the-loose guerrilla-warfare-raping-pillaging soldiers, but I instantly like these characters and their honest, open, beaming, white-toothed smiles.

Ten minutes later we are sitting in our trusted Landrover, with Lazarous and Boston settled in the back, negotiating our way to the village. We stop in the middle of the village, and Boston gets out and disappears in a hut. Simon and I get out of the car to take a look and are basically greeted and surrounded by the entire village population of kids and women. Meanwhile Boston has appeared from the hut with a large tusk of an elephant. For a moment I think that this may be one of his sidelines to make money, but he explains that this is an elephant tusk they confiscated from an abandoned poachers camp a few weeks back. It turns out they confiscated more than just a tusk, as more tusks and also some hides are piled up in the back of the car. We are apparently meant to bring that stuff with us to Mulanga Camp. I ask Simon whether they'd terribly mind if I'd take a picture, which results a minute later in the spontaneous formation of an orderly group photo arrangement in front of Boston's hut, with kids in front, women behind in the middle and the five game scouts along the sides, toting guns, elephant tusks and looking great. I take one picture, and then put the camera on self-timer on the roof of the car for an all-inclusive picture of the village and the team from Lusaka. This event, I can immediately see, will be remembered in the village for generations to come as one of the highlights of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Katanda Camp. We leave the village in high spirits, with the beaming Boston and Lazarous in the back, following a dirt track that'll lead us to Mulanga Camp, the main game-scout camp in control of anti-poaching and park management in the area. Along the road, we see all sorts of antelopes and warthogs, which haven't stopped fascinating me, but which are largely ignored by the Zambians. The landscape slowly changes from low scrubland vegetation interspersed with grassland savannah, to largely savannah with isolated acacia trees that have been cleanly eaten from underneath, defining the horizontal threshold of browsing herbivores in the park. About two hours later, a dense cluster of trees and a conspicuous antenna mast betrays the position of Mulanga Camp. Contrary to my expectation, the Camp is no larger than Katanda, but it does sport two concrete and tin-roofed buildings and a

small lake with fresh water. The officer in charge, Mr. Chanda, greets us coldly and with a professional air, and takes his time to read the documents we were supplied by the Wildlife Authority, Geological Survey and Ministry of Mines in Lusaka. He finally prepares us a small handwritten statement authorising our stay at Katanda, and offering any assistance to our work by the Game Scouts. He further adds that he must insist that we "employ" at least one armed scout to accompany us on our traverses, in case we should stumble on wild carnivorous animals, or worse, poachers. He delivers the poacher warning with deliberate emphasis, and adds that southern Kafue N.P. has a significant problem with poaching, and that we should take due care when traversing the bush. It is then that I realise that a short article I had read about a month ago, about a shootout between a group of poachers and local wildlife officers somewhere in Kafue National Park, may have actually been in this very area. I exchange looks with Simon, and then ask Mr. Chanda whether anything specific has happened not long ago. His answer is direct and to the point: "Yes, only a month ago we caught three poachers and killed two in a shooting incident just 40 kilometers south of here. Phasion, the brother of Boston here, got killed in that incident", he says, nodding in the direction of the door. As he says these last words, I feel a shiver run down my spine. I turn around and look at Boston outside the door. He stands there, talking to Lazarous, and apparently missed our conversation altogether. "So, how many people were involved in the shooting?", I ask. "Three of our officers from Katanda against 12 poachers. They were lucky the poachers only had two guns, but unlucky that the poachers saw them first. I don't think Phasion knew what hit him. He died on the spot. One of the guns was a bush gun, the other was a Kalashnikov semi-automatic. We recovered the guns and a lot of meat, skins and tusks and captured three of the poachers the day after". "Does this sort of thing happen a lot here?", Simon asks. "Not often. But it happens once in a while, although mostly there's no shooting. They normally just run.". "Are you sure it's alright for us to go mapping in there then?" I ask. "Yes, sure it's OK. As long as you take along a game scout". As he says that, Mr. Chanda stands up and walks out of the door. We follow him and outside, hear him talk in Tonga to Boston and Lazarous, presumably spelling out his orders. "Ah!", Mr Chanda says, "you took along the rest of the confiscated trophies, I see". So it turns out the stuff in the back of the car was actually recovered from the poachers that actually killed Kosmos' son a few weeks back.

The temperature has noticeably gone up now, as the sun is getting higher in the clear blue sky. Mr Chanda says he wants to show us Matanga pool, the circular pond we noticed when arriving. The mango tree, which we are standing below, casts a welcome shadow bringing the heat down to manageable proportion, but as soon as we leave its embrace, we all start to sweat like Turks in their bath. Chanda tells us that Matanga refers to a story about a British pioneer, who together with his assistant, got killed by an elephant in the 1920s. Local people still believe that the elephant had actually been possessed by the evil spirit of a deceased local witch-doctor. As he tells his story I can't but help look around to see if there may be an elephant in

the vicinity, possessed or not, but all I see as we approach the small lake are a tribe of baboons on the other side.

Soon after, we're on our way out of the camp, back to Katanda, with Boston and Lazarous chatting in the back of the car. Simon tells me that we'll have pay them a thousand kwacha each per day for accompanying us, but that it's OK, as we carried a bit of money for just that kind of thing. A thousand kwacha, I think, say, oh..., 3USD, to risk your life and accompany a musungu in poacher infested country. Not something to smile about. But one look back at the two fellows in the back convinces me that it must be a heck of a good deal, as I'm greeted by the two sets of sparkling white teeth and a thumbs up gesture. They're happy as punch! Seems the death of ones brother is not something to brood upon too long. I guess that Africans can handle death much more efficiently then we, musungus, do. Maybe it is because they deal with it a lot more often than we, and have learned not to be too affected by the loss of a close relative.

It's 19:00 and dark when we arrive back at Katanda Camp, and dinner is served: Nshima, impala meat and cabbage. The impala meat had apparently been exchanged for a bit of cooking oil with one of the gamescouts. It smelled a bit "off", and Simon said that this could be expected as it had been dried straight after shooting the animal some weeks ago. All the same, hungry as I am, I dig in with a lot of bravado, and must admit that after getting used to the sharp taste, I actually like it. We finish the day with a nice cup of milky sweet tea, which makes my eyelids grow heavier, and soon we're all snoring away in our tents.

In the morning I notice that changes have been made to the camp yesterday. There's now a pit-latrine, fenced off with a grass fence, and also a makeshift shower. The shower is also fenced off with grass, and consists of a large green drum with "BP OIL" stencilled on in yellow letters, supported on two large forked branches that have been stuck in the ground. Between the two forked pillars, the ground is covered by a "floor" consisting of smooth, straight sticks, arranged in parallel rows on top of three slightly thicker straight branches, making a suspended floor raised about 5 cm above the ground. A showerhead has been craftily screwed right in the middle of the drum, while on the other side, a hatch has been chiselled out, into which warm water is decanted. I notice that one of the pillars actually has steps carved out to allow someone to easily access the hatch to fill up the drum. Not that I have to care about all that, because the drum has been filled with warm water before I woke up. I'm having a nice short shower and feel great. Breakfast is served as well, and, as before, consists of a nearly indigestible (at least at this time of the day) mountain of nshima, with beans and leftover Impala stew. While I bravely try and get my appetite up, I notice that they have been building a small open air kitchen as well. There's a table which is way too high to be of any practical use, which I realise a bit later is actually a rack to dry the dishes and keep pots, pans and plates as far away from ants and animals as possible. There's also what appears to be a small grass cabinet, which,

upon closer inspection appears to have a double wall, in-filled with blocks charcoal. Envious explains that this is a "Tonga Fridge", and that it can keep things relatively cold. I notice that the charcoal is often being sprinkled with water, and guess that the evaporation of that water draws some heat from whatever is in the cabinet, thereby keeping it well below ambient temperature outside.

Halfway through my heavy breakfast, which I am now trying to swallow bit by bit down in between gulps of sweet and milky tea, Boston and Lazarous show up, grinning, and all dressed up in combat outfit, guns'n all. Simon has meanwhile dragged out a cardboard tube full of topo-maps, and is figuring out where we are. With the arrival of the armed escort, he start asking questions about the region, in particular a set of named rivers on the map, probably about 10 kilometers to the east of our camp. I move closer, as he points out the streams, and try and get a bit of an idea of what Simon has in store for us today. He turns to me and suggests we'll be doing a quick reconnaissance traverse, to try and get a feel of the terrain. The scouts are pointing out a track we can use that'll take us east, and we can walk upstream one of the rivers and then make our way back to the camp on foot. I go and get my stuff from the tent and pack my 600 ml water bottle and two desiccated oranges we had bought along the way two days ago. Five minutes later we're in the car and on our way to the starting point of our first traverse. The track turns out to be a wide footpath, that negotiates itself through the terrain, which consists of wide patches of high grass, sometimes burnt down during the annual "burn", and areas of relatively dense low bushes speckled with small trees they call "mopane". Leonard now needs to call into play his skills as an off-road driver, which, considering we are equipped with a ca. 20-year-old landrover with cranky gearbox, are taxed to the limit. The 4WD mechanism is controlled through a set of vertically mounted push-rods, one yellow and another red, that protrude from the floor, and which, even in a Landrover in mint condition, are prone to unexpected bouts of non-cooperation. The attitude Leonard adopts is to violently push or kick the damn things, which is a surprisingly successful approach. As I again have been allocated the center seat, these violent motions happen ominously close to my personal push-rod, which makes the otherwise uncomfortable ride even less comfortable, if that would at all be possible. Luckily it's only 10 kilometers or so, a distance we cover in less than 30 minutes. We've arrived at a location which Simon points out on the map, is along the banks of a small stream. As I look around and fail to locate the "stream", I ask him whether he's sure. He just looks back and points out some subtle things on the map and in the terrain that convince him he is. Most of these "landmarks", consist of barely perceptible slopes and a nearly invisible stream, so I'm left with the nagging idea that he's got it wrong anyway, although I keep that thought to myself. I get out my compass and get a few bearings to try and get a bit of an idea of where the camp should be, and look at the sun so I'll be able to keep this general direction in mind. I get back to Simon and he suggests we'll follow the stream up for kilometers until we meet the junction, follow the larger stream for a few kilometers, and then branch off and traverse the open

country to a parallel stream that leads to the large river (Sichifulo) and finally the camp. I agree, and together with the two scouts, we move off along the "stream". The riverbed we are following is too small to have a permanent bed, and basically consists of a wide grassy area that holds moisture marginally longer than the surrounding higher country. These features are called dambos and in places, the water has carved some gully-like features, finally convincing me that these indeed turn into a river during the wet season. It's along these carved out portions, or higher up on the low hills on either side of the dambo, that we sometimes stumble on rocky outcrop, and when that happens, we both take our time to look at the outcrop, take a few samples, and make some measurements. As the morning winds on, temperatures rise perceptibly until our first priority at outcrops becomes to find a shadow somewhere and cool off a bit. The heat is especially vicious when we cross recently burnt areas black with ash with not a shady spot in sight. Not only that, but the ash is fine and soon covers all of us from top to toe, especially where we are sweating, which is pretty much all over. Before long I've exhausted my limited supply of water, and am building up a massive thirst. I'm not the only one who ran out of water though, and I'm sure as hell not going to be the first to whinge about it. We carry on like this for several hours more, getting increasingly tired, dehydrated, and overheated. When we get to the point from which we are to go cross-country to intersect with the parallel stream, Simon suggests to cut straight to the camp instead. We all heartily agree, and start walking along the right direction. The walking is easier now, as the scouts have taken to following a path they know will lead to Sichifulo, and from there to Katanda Camp. Simon and I have given up all pretence by now that we are still mapping and simply walk behind the scouts, who have picked up pace to a normal walking pace. After about an hour of brisk walking, we stop briefly under a small tree with some minimal shade to look at the map. We are at this stage not too sure as to where we are exactly, but a quick calculation shows that it'll be at least another eight kilometers to the camp. As we reach this conclusion, my heart sinks; no water and eight more kilometers to go in the blistering heat. It's only 14:00hrs, and the heat of the day will not go down for another two hours, so there's nothing for it but to get going. We all trundle on, and I rapidly descend into automatic mode, one foot in front of the other, trying to keep up and not slow the group down. The dehydration gets worse and worse and I constantly think about drinks. It starts with imagining how great it would be to have an ice cold coke, fanta, sprite and the like, but this rapidly declines to how great it would be to have a glass of water,...,how great it would be to have a muddy cup of water,...shit I'm thirsty. So it is true what I read in a comic when I was a kid, that dehydration leads to hallucinations. I actually start seeing all sorts of lakes, puddles, huts, bars etc...and all those visions are shattered when we get closer and turn out to be nothing at all. I also start getting urges to stop and take a leak, but when I try, the only thing that comes out are a few drops of super concentrated bright yellow urea. This goes on for a few hours, and as we take another break, Simon and the scouts, who also start getting dehydrated look worried. As Simon takes out the map, and tries to figure out where we are, Boston is suggesting we detour via a small village along the

banks of the Sichifulo, which is a lot closer than the camp from where we are. He says we can drink some water there and then push on for the final stretch. When I ask him how far the village is, and how far the camp is, he says the village is very near, and that we should go there to get water. The word water invokes all sorts of hallucinatory responses in my brain, and I blurt "let's go to that village and get water". We strike out along a different direction now, cutting through the bush rather than following some sort of path, and at this stage we are totally relying on Boston and Lazarous to get us there. How they know where we are going is a total mystery to me, as there are no visible landmarks as far as I can make out, but I am way beyond caring now. We just follow "on automatic" and hope they know what they are doing. About an hour of suffering later we reach the village, which consists of only a couple of huts, and something that looks suspiciously like a well. I do a few mumbled greeting (my mouth is so dry now that mumbling is all I can do), and collapse in the shade alongside one of the huts. Moments later I am given a large plastic green cup filled with muddy water from the well, and I cast all caution to the side and pour it down in one big swig. This is heaven! Better than a cold beer, better than ice cold coke...absolute heaven. There's only one cup, so I have to wait for the others to have their cup of water, and am then offered a second one. This time I take a bit more time to actually finish it, and actually taste the water, which has a distinctly earthy fragrance to it. I pass on the empty cup and already feel 200% better than when we first walked into the village a few minutes ago. I get up and take in my surroundings. The village consists of two huts, which upon closer inspection are actually one hut and one kitchen. A few meters off is the well, which consists of a round hole in the ground that descends for tens of meters, and above which a wooden contraption has been constructed with a rope and bucket tied on. An old man, is at this moment actually lowering the bucket into the well to get some more water. From the hut, an old woman is staring at me, and as I look across, disappears shyly into the darkness of the hut. So, there are only this couple living here it seems. The old man gives me another cup, and then disappears in the hut only to reemerge with a reed bowl full of groundnuts. I go and join Simon and Lazarous, who are sitting in the shade next to the hut, and soon we are all nibbling nuts. After a while Boston gets up and tells us to wait here (as if we would go anywhere), and marches off. About an hour later, after another three cups of foul water and as we are finishing the groundnuts, we hear the sound of a car approaching from the direction Boston disappeared. It turns out he walked all the way to Katanda to fetch Leonard so we could be picked up. Boston gets out of the car and is carrying a 5 l container of Mkoyo which he gives to the old man. We all get up, thank the old man and are soon back in the camp which, as it turns out, was only about four kilometers along the path. I dump my stuff in the tent and then spend the next hour or so sitting next to the fire, where Envious is cooking our dinner, first drinking salted water, and then sweet milky tea, one cup after another, until I'm sure I've replaced all fluids lost during the day and actually have to go and take a leak. It's amazing how much one can drink when dehydrated. Having sorted that out, I get into the shower, wash off all soot, and emerge a new man ready for a new challenge. I've learnt a valuable

lesson today: that life needs water, and plenty of it! I promise myself to carry at least five litres of water tomorrow and avoid another dehydration adventure. Dinner is served and again consists of nshima, but now with the beef. I add a lot of salt (part of my rehydration strategy) and eat like a wolf. After food, I sit there, again watching the brightly visible milky way, and have all but forgotten the suffering of the day. Tomorrow's another day, and I'm looking forward to it.

This time we are well prepared. I carry a small backpack with a container of 2 litres of water and have a 600ml thermos flask hanging on my shoulder with hot and sweet milky tea. Simon is carrying about the same amount of water, and as a precaution, we stash another 5 litres of water in the back of the car. Before we set off, we have our regular nshima breakfast, but I also drink some extra cups of tea and a few glasses of water, just to make sure my body is fully saturated and will not need water in the first couple of hours. The traverse we planned will basically follow another couple of streams running roughly parallel to the one we mapped yesterday. Leonard will drop us off further down the track we used yesterday, and then basically drive back to where we were dropped yesterday, where hopefully we'll meet him at the end of the day. Just before we leave, one of the women of the village is walking in the camp and offers me a 2.5l container filled with sweet mkoyo beer. Boston tells me that they are worried about me after yesterday's miscalculation, and that the mkoyo will give me extra strength during the day. I thank the lady and put the container in my rucksack next to the water bottle.

About an hour later we get dropped along the stream, again a dry-looking dambo, and have to spend a few minutes getting our bearings and plotting our position on the map. My little plan of drinking a lot in the morning to avoid having to drink in the first hours is already falling apart, as I'm bursting for a piss, and feel as thirsty as a camel. And we haven't even started walking yet. After a few kilometers following the invisible riverbed, the dambo actually narrows down and becomes a recognisable dry riverbed. No water in sight, but it's clear that at least at some times of the year it holds water. As we start following the riverbed itself, instead of walking along the banks in the grass, it becomes quite clear that this area of the park, which seemed relatively lifeless, must actually be crawling with it. The dry bed is crisscrossed with all sorts of animal tracks, ranging from small bird tracks to enormous circular elephant footprints. Certain areas, often shady spots, are literally covered by small droppings of antelopes. Boston tells me these are actually impala "toilets". We also see some more impressive droppings of elephant, which consist of clusters of small football-sized brownish grassy balls, often disturbed and scattered open by, Boston tells me, baboons and dung beetles. I'm pleased to note that of all these droppings, only the antelope type are looking relatively fresh, while the large elephant dung appears to be totally desiccated and old. Despite the tell-tale signs of animals, nothing is seen all morning, apart from a few baboons, way off in the distance. We stop for a short break at a large outcrop of granite boulders and flat whaleback

exposure, when suddenly, as I walk around looking at the rock, a 1.5-m-long lizard shoots in front of me, scampering over the flat rocky outcrop, and straight in the direction of Simon who's just hunched down to study the rocks. As Simon gets up, with a panic-stricken look on his face, the lizard sees him and changes direction, running straight under a small crevice in the rocks. Keeping my eyes firmly fixed on where the lizard disappeared, I walk over to where Simon still stand motionless, and ask him "What on Earth was that?". Without shifting his gaze away from the crevice, he says "A water monitor. Or monitor lizard". "I think it's called Nabulwe, in Tonga language". "The Lozi actually eat these." He goes on, "They eat crocodile as well!". "What? This nabulwe thing can eat crocodile?" I ask, incredulously. "No! No! The Lozi people of the western province eat crocodile". "But, yes, a water monitor can be dangerous!". "They're known to eat crocodile eggs, and they can kill and eat a dog". "Was this a big one?", I ask. "No, I don't think so!", Simon says, still keeping a wary eye on the crevice. "Not that big! But it's the biggest I've seen so far!". After that encounter, I keep a close eye on possible hiding places of these lizards, and give them a wide berth were possible. I wouldn't want to be in the way of one of those monsters again. As we carry on along the riverbed, signs of a teeming wildlife are increasing, with more and more numerous "antelope toilets", game tracks which Boston identifies as to be made by kudu, hartebeest, impala, puku, warthog, porcupine, genet and civet cat and a few other small carnivorous night stalkers I forgot the name of. The various spoor seem to be largely following the river bed, which, although it remains dry, starts showing increasing signs of recently dried up patches. And sure enough, a bit further downstream we find an area of damp river sand in the shadow of a large overgrowing tree, literally covered with thousands of small white butterflies. The day has grown even hotter by now, and we collectively decide that this is a great spot for another short break and picnic, and we all sit down in the sand, next to the damp patch. Here, the air has an overpowering smell of game, and, even though there's no animal in sight (apart from the butterflies), I get the feeling that there must be a large herd of buffalo or something watching us from between the dense shrub on the sides of the river. I dig out the container of mkoyo beer, take a few mouthfuls of the brew and pass it on to my companions. This beer is a great idea, I think, as I sit there, chewing the lumpy bits of congealed maize. The mkoyo they prepared for us in the village is of the extra thick kind, more food than beverage, and has quite a lot of sugar in it, making it an energy drink rather than something to get drunk on. The bottle passes around about three times before its empty, and we all take a few swigs of water to wash away the grainy bits. Simon is looking intently at the map and points at the location he thinks we are. We plan to carry on for another 2-3 km, when, just before the river makes a large hairpin turn, we should be able to cut across to follow a smaller stream back in the direction of the car. It's around noon now, and soon we'll have the hottest, and therefore most taxing part of the day. As we map on, the rising heat makes us look for shelter at every turn, and I lose more and more interest in actually standing on the often flat and open outcrops of rock to document the geology. I try and do my work from the slightly more bearable environment of the shady riverbanks, and make my

observations in the middle of the now wide riverbed as short and efficient as possible. The flat granite outcrops are radiating the soaked up day heat with uncompromising brutality, and it takes physical effort to move into these natural solar ovens and do the work. I have now started to take swigs from my water bottle nearly continuously and need more frequent breathing pauses in the shade. The problem is that, as the sun has now climbed straight above us, most trees don't really cast any useable shade anymore. To make things even more interesting, the river is now traversing a flat-lying area which has only recently been burnt in a bush fire. The ground is literally covered with dark grey and black ash and most scrubs are leafless and blackened by soot. In a way this is quite good country to make progress on foot, but on the other hand, the soaring temperatures don't really lend themselves to a brisk walking pace. So we get out of the riverbed and walk through the black landscape under the hot mid-day sun. The ash and soot is very light and soon covers our skin in a thin layer of sticky black. After brief consultation of the map we collectively decide that we should head straight back to the car, looking out for outcrop along the way. Boston, who seems to instinctively know the direction back to the car, takes the lead and start powering on. We soon hit onto a small footpath, which I at first mistake to be man-made, but turns out to be a conveniently positioned animal path. Suddenly Boston stops and intently looks at the ground. There are a few tufts of hair at his feet, which he identifies to have belonged to a baboon. He looks around for more clues, and then turns around and says: "I think a baboon got killed by a leopard here. Maybe last night!". He points at a faded imprint in the sand, and a few other plucks of hair, some with a bit of dark brown blood on. "So, there are leopard here?" I ask. He just nods and says: "Oh yes! There are lots of leopards in this part of the park". After that, I sort of lost my interest in the rocks and outcrop, which have become scarce anyway, out of the river. We walk on, only occasionally stopping for a small rocky outcrop, and reach the car, and Leonard, around 15:00 hrs. Leonard, the good man, has a 5 litre container of water in the back of the car, which basically gets consumed practically immediately between us.

After we get back in the camp, we all have a cold shower, and Simon and I spend the time before dinner plotting up our data on a clean map we keep in the camp just for that purpose. Tomorrow, Simon suggests, we'll do the next stream up, and we'll try and be back by three so that we can radio in to the Survey Department in Lusaka to report on our camp. We've dragged along a bulky and heavy shortwave transmitter and tens of meters of naked copper wire that Envious by now has strung between two large trees on either side of the camp, which will act as some sort of primitive aerial antenna. The terminal hangs a meter above the ground near where Leonard has parked the Landrover, and it is obviously the plan to connect the radio to the cars battery when the time comes. A daily time slot between 15:00 and 15:30 has apparently been allocated to the Ministry of Mines for routine communication.

Food this time consists of nshima and a chicken that Envious has obtained from a villager through an exchange operation involving some batteries and a

couple of wax candles. The chicken is one of those the Congolese would call "poulet trotinette", loosely translated as "pedalling chicken", and has been on the fire for at least 4 hours to get soft. Even after this rather lengthy stewing operation, the meat is still tough, but I must admit, also tasty. I've been given the tender and meaty bits (a wing and a drumstick), but Simon has been less fortunate and ends up with a chicken foot and a neck. He's astonishing me by actually crunching his way through all that, and leaving nothing, nothing at all behind on his plate. "You should try the feet!", he says, "they're good stuff!". With that I suddenly end up with the other foot on my plate. I break a small part off the thing and pop it in my mouth. It's bony, but easily grinds down into a grisly pulp, which I manage to swallow. I offer the rest of the foot to Leonard who greedily takes it and starts munching away. The vegetables consist of a green-white creamy paste which Envious tells me is made of dried beans leaves, mixed with ground nuts and a bit of cooking oil. This is Zambian bush food at its best. The meal is capped off with a couple of nice cups of tea as we all stay seated around the wood fire until sleep overtakes us and we slowly, one by one, disappear in our tents.

The next morning we are woken up very early by Boston because a small boy has fallen ill in the village and needs to be taken to the nearest health center, which turns out to be Mulunga Camp. We get Leonard to have a fast breakfast while I go to the village with Boston to see the child. We stop at the entrance of one of the huts, and Boston gestures me forward. Once inside, my eyes need a bit of time to adjust, and I can just make out a mattress against the far wall, onto which the mother of the boy is sitting with the three year old sick son on her lap. I crouch down and smile at the women, but she is intently looking at the boy's upturned face. His eyes are half open, and as far as I can make out in this light, glazed over. He is trembling in waves, and I can see his breath is belaboured. One hand sticks out of the chitenje in which he is wrapped, and as I take it in my hand, it is immediately clear that the boy is running an extremely high fever. "We'll take him to Mulunga, but I've got some medicine he can already take here. Just as long as you tell the nurse or doctor in Mulunga what he's been given!", I say to Boston. I slowly get up and go outside, where in the meantime the sun has started to rise. Boston is standing next to me, and says: "I think it's cerebral malaria.". All I can say to that is "maybe", as I've no experience with the number one killer of Africa. "I've got some strong stuff to bring his fever down. That's all I can do for him. You just take him to the doctor as soon as you can, we'll just go mapping without you guys today!". With that, we walk back to the camp where I dig up my stash of pain killers and give Kosmos a few pills. Kosmos and Lazarous then get in the car with Leonard and drive off to the village to pick up the boy and his mother. Simon and Envious have meanwhile cooked the regular solid breakfast and filled the water bottles, and we all sit down around the fire to eat. The sight of the sick boy and his worried mother have taken my already marginal morning appetite way down, so I only manage to eat a bit of nshima with sugar this time, and leave the additional relish of kapenta, a dish of deep fried small dried fish, aside. Simon suggest we walk along the main Sichifulo river, and map out a section of about 8 kilometers

along that and then just walk back to the camp. Without the car to take us anywhere, and considering the fact we'll have to walk by ourselves, without armed game scouts, the idea of not straying too far from the camp sounds like a good plan, so I agree. We pack our usual supply of water containers, and I carry a plastic bag of nshima with the remaining kapenta by way of a lunch-experiment. As we start off the traverse, passing by the village water supply next to the camp, I notice that one of the women is actually standing in the water and feeling with her hands in the mud around her feet. Closer inspection actually shows that while she is feeling around she actually shuffles around as well. Simon, who has also noticed her, is asking her what she's doing. She looks up and answers him with a shrill voice, and she carries on doing whatever she is doing. Simon says: "she's looking for bubble fish in the mud". "Bubble fish ? What is bubble fish". Simon explains that it's a sort of fish that can survive dry periods by burying in the mud and sleeping. Just as he is elaborating on how bad they taste because of their muddy habits, the woman gives a loud shriek and her hands come up from the mud with a large (30 cm) dark brown fish, which is trashing violently in an attempt to escape. The woman, who obviously knows from experience that the fish will slip through her fingers if she stays where she is, has now changed from her shuffling gait to a full on run in the direction to the banks, all the time shrieking and shouting in excitement of her catch. Once she reached the shore, she drops the fish and stamps on its head a couple of times until she's sure the creature is immobilised enough. It's a big brown-black fish with large whiskers and beady eyes, which doesn't look very appetising at all, but judging from the way it was trashing, there must be lots of good meat on it that, even if it tastes like mud as Simon asserts, must have some nutritional value. The woman sure looks pleased enough. We leave the happy woman and dead fish behind and start following the riverbed away from the camp. Almost immediately we find the loose sand disturbed by vague, but disconcertingly large footprints. On harder patches of soil we can make out the circular shape of elephant tracks. Three of them, by the looks of it, and apparently they must've passed near the village not so long ago to get water from the waterhole just next to our camp. The droppings we find a bit further down are still damp. From the way clumps of dried mud are arranged around the circular prints, Simon and I both decide that the three animals probably moved in the same direction we are following and must, by inference, be somewhere in front of us. This realisation, together with the fact the tracks are obviously relatively fresh, makes the dense woodland and shrubs that grow along the banks suddenly seem oppressive. Rather than look for rocks in the riverbed, we both find ourselves looking more at the ominous shadowy and overgrown banks, expecting at any moment a bunch of mad elephants to trash through on an intercept course. The feeling passes only when we see the tracks go out of the riverbed and wander off along a wide animal path, away from the river.

After that we make some good progress and map out a quite interesting section of a series of large, excellently exposed continuous outcrops. The only sign of life we still see as the heat of the day makes itself felt are a bunch of

baboons on one of those outcrops, who clearly are not too impressed with our sudden appearance in their territory. Seeing those animals makes me think automatically about the piece of skin we found yesterday, which Kosmos said was from a baboon, probably surprised by a leopard. Maybe it was one of this group that got to be a leopard's dinner yesterday? On one of the next outcrops, Simon and I are intently mapping out sections, and slowly drift apart, losing track of each other. The next moment I look around, Simon is nowhere to be seen. Ah, well, he won't be far, I think, and carry on mapping. About half an hour later I decide I've recorded enough information, pick up my bag, and start walking towards where I think I last saw Simon. As I turn the corner, there is still no sign of him. Maybe he's mapped along further down, I think, and carry on towards the next turn. Again nothing! I'm starting to get worried now, because I haven't got a map, and frankly start doubting which way the camp is. I turn around and start walking briskly back to where I started off, meanwhile shouting "Simon", in the hope he can hear me. Once back where I stopped mapping earlier, I decide to check out further down, but again find nothing. Shit! This is starting to get serious. I get out of the riverbed, hoping that maybe I'll be able to see further, and that my shouting will carry further, and start walking along the river. It's only another half hour later that I finally pick up the distant shouting from Simon. I'm so relieved to have finally heard something, and at the same time worried enough to lose the sound and be lost again, that I actually start half running towards where I thought I heard Simon's voice. About another half hour later we finally find each other and both start laughing out loud about our stupidity. By looking at the map, which Simon had all along, and a bit of inference, we try and reconstruct where I've walked, and I am absolutely amazed at the random directions I must've walked in to try and find Simon. I make a mental note to always look at my compass and get a few directions to remote landmarks, so that I know at all times, at least vaguely, in which direction the camp is. It's around two in the afternoon by now, and after the frantic search, and with the palpable heat of the day, we decide to make our way back to the camp. Simon, who still has the map, takes the lead, and I have nothing to do but keep up with him as he walks briskly and decisively in front of me. About an hour and several kilometers later Simon suddenly shouts "snake", and freezes. I run towards him, and can just make out a large flat head, about a meter off the ground, about three meters in front of Simon. With my arrival the large snake reconsiders its course of action, which I have to assume was to attack Simon, and slithers quickly away in the undergrowth. Simon is visibly shaken and asks me "have you seen it?", knowing fully well I was standing almost next to him when the snake fled. "Yeah. I saw it. What kind of snake was it, you think?". "Spitting Cobra", Simon says. "Are they deadly?", I ask. "They can be deadly. But mostly they spit at the eyes and can make you blind", comes the answer. After that, I take the lead, and we get to the camp without further incident.

At the camp, Leonard is back, and he has bad news. The sick boy has passed away at the health centre. It was a cerebral malaria, as suspected, but too far gone to be treatable. The boy had been critically dehydrated from ongoing

diarrhoea to start with, and should have been treated at least a few weeks earlier. The burial will be tomorrow morning. Simon and I walk to the village and find Boston sitting in the insaka with several other men. There really isn't that much one can say in a case like this, and the only thing we can do is offer our assistance. Boston tells us that maybe we can assist by offering a bit of food for the funeral. Funerals in Zambia actually refer to the family get-together at the deceased house the evening before burial. Mostly relatives show up in the evening, and some of them keep the mourning family company through the night, the men mostly softly talking and sleeping outside around a fire, while the women loudly weep, sing and sleep inside the house. All those mourners have to be fed, which makes funerals in Zambia an expensive occasion.

That night, we prepare all the beef we still had from Kalomo, and a good helping of kapenta, with a large pot of nshima, and go to the funeral house to talk with the villagers and offer some food. A Zambian funeral is very intense. The singing and wailing of the women in the house affects us all. Men do not cry, but most sit staring at the flames with nothing much to say. Boston joins us and starts talking about the family that lost the child. It is only then that I realise that it's in fact the family of his brother who himself got killed by the poachers not long ago. Shit! What this women must be going through! First losing her husband, and now her three year old son. I ask Boston whether she has other children, and luckily the answer is yes. She's got a daughter of six and a son of thirteen. Boston then surprises me by saying that she's taken care off as she had become his third wife after the death of his brother. The Tonga of Zambia are known for their polygamous relationships, so this statement should not have shocked me the way it did, but "inheriting" a brothers wife is another thing again. Once the surprise has subsided I do have to admit that she's probably lucky to have Boston as a husband. He's a great man with a deep sense of duty and a great sense of humour. Women could do a lot worse in the bush, I think.

A bit later I leave the funeral party and slowly walk back to the camp in the dark. The night is quiet outside the village, and the stars are out in big numbers. The night breeze stirs up the air and carries with it the smell of dry grass, earth and wild animals. I hear the occasional "whoop" of a distant hyena calling his mates over the plains as I get into my sleeping bag and am again filled with an "I'm not exactly at home" feeling.

It's another beautiful morning to herald another extremely hot and dusty day. Simon and I are planning a traverse beyond what we already mapped, and, as Boston asserts, beyond the reach of the car. We'll follow the track we've used before, but then will have to try and cross a third stream and carve our way through the bush for a few kilometers to get dropped as close as possible a fourth stream. Apparently it's been a while since Boston, or any of the other scouts, have been to the area, as it's simply too remote for them to get to. Boston seems quite keen to look at the area to see if there's been some poaching activity lately. Poachers normally stick to small sheltered camps

along some of the streams, and judging by the way Boston discusses our planned traverse with Lazarous, streams just like the one we plan to map along. The ride down does indeed turn quite adventurous after we pass the stream we mapped a few days ago. The path, which was barely to be called a road before the stream, has now changed into a winding and overgrown footpath, finding its way through increasingly denser shrub and low woodland. Leonard is forced to once in a while leave the path altogether, in order to avoid some more robust looking trees. All the same, we seem to be bashing down quite a few arm-thick low trees as we go, and as the path winds on, find ourselves increasingly in the bush, rather than on the path itself. In fact, there comes a time when I haven't seen any sign of a path for a few minutes, and Leonard seems to be steering according to some shouted instructions from the two men in the back of the car. A bit further down, where the undergrowth has reduced visibility to nearly zero and the terrain seems to slowly descend towards what I hope is the stream we're after, Lazarous actually climbs out, and starts walking in front to guide the way. Despite this, the car soon manages to hit a semi-hidden, and hopefully abandoned burrow of a warthog, and we all have to get out to help dig out the car and shove branches under the wheel. A few more of those set-backs finally convince us all that we'd better park the car just here and start walking instead. As is customary, by the time this happens, the temperature of the day has reached its uncomfortable zone, and we all stand around panting, sweating, and probably thinking "what the fuck are we doing all this for". We check whether Leonard has thought about bringing along enough water to stay with the car (he has), drink a few swigs each of one of the containers of brew that Boston's wife prepared for us, and off we go. We soon find the stream we were looking for, and start mapping along it. This is a minor stream according to the map, and as a result we see no water anywhere. The lack of water in this stream at this time of the year also means that there's not that much game around either, and the only thing we see along the way is a tortoise lying in the shade of a tree. There are plenty of skeletal remains of game all over the place, and we find a skeleton of an elephant (minus tusks), a skull of a male kudu with magnificent 1-m-long corkscrew horns, and several skins of snakes. Boston has been insisting that he and Lazarous would take the lead, and the reason suddenly gets clear as we stumble on the remains of a poachers' camp. There's a few wooden racks and an old black-stained round patch of ground where they kept a fire. We also find several bones and skulls, and the place is littered with rusty old tin cans. Boston and Lazarous take some time looking around and are probably trying to figure out whether these poachers may be coming back in the future. I'm sure they are marking down the location in their minds for future spot checks when the opportunity arrives. By the time it gets to 14:00 hours, and the heat becomes barely manageable, we head back towards the car in a straight line (these game scouts seem to have an in-built natural compass) and find Leonard hiding from the heat by lying under the car. Before we get in the car, we empty the second container of brew and talk about the poacher camp. Apparently, Boston and Lazarous were half expecting to find something like that, which is why they took the lead. I can't help but thinking about that

fatal shoot-out these guys had only a few weeks back, probably in very similar circumstances. I guess we were lucky that the camp we found was abandoned, and not swarming with AK47-toting poachers, intent to kill. The ride back takes another hour or so, but at least Leonard avoids the warthog burrow, and we don't get stuck anywhere.

Back at the camp I have a shower to get all the sweat and dust off, and as I finish, find Simon and Leonard tinkering with the shortwave radio transmitter. Simon is trying to raise whoever is in charge of the radio at the Geological Survey in Lusaka to let them know how we are doing, and to find out if there is news from Lusaka. Soon enough, the high-pitched and distorted voice of Philippe, my Belgian colleague at the Survey, comes online. At first I have a bit of trouble understanding the strongly deformed voice, but I can make out the words "break in" and "police". It takes a bit of time before I start to understand that there has been a break in at my flat in Lusaka, and that nearly all my stuff, which wasn't a lot to start with anyway, has been stolen last night. The police hasn't been at the place yet, but I'll be required to make a statement as soon as I can. For now, the survey apparently asked one of the night watches, normally employed to look after the offices at night, to sleep at my place to avoid any further looting. The back door apparently has been bashed in, and until the survey manages to get that repaired, the place is pretty much up for grabs. I ask Philippe to try and look into replacing the door ASAP, as I'll make my way back into Lusaka tomorrow to report the incident to police, asses the damage, and I'm privately thinking, get a few ice-cold beers down my throat. Philippe signs off with the more happy news that my dog, an Alsatian named "Queen", has delivered five healthy puppies, and that they are being kept nicely by the night guard assigned to my, I imagine, now empty house. As the radio crackles off, I already start thinking about how we are going to organise my trip back to Lusaka. Simon suggest that we all take a day off tomorrow, so that we can all go to Kalomo, where I can take a bus to Lusaka, and where they can have a few drinks and a good time, get a few supplies, and then drive back to the camp. Simon says he doesn't mind doing a bit of mapping on his own for a few days, while I sort out the issue in Lusaka. We agree that he'll switch on the radio every day so that I can let him know from the transmitter at the Survey in Lusaka when I'll be travelling back to Kalomo, so they can come and pick me up.

The evening meal consists this time of some more bush meat that Envious has been able to secure. The stuff has been stewing for about an hour on the fire and smells, let's be honest, a bit off. Envious says that it was dried meat, supposed to be warthog, and that he exchanged it for a few handfuls of kapenta. When I ask how old he thinks it may have been, I just get a blank stare. When meat is dried in the bush, Simon tells me, it can be kept for weeks, even months, without turning bad. The smells emanating from the pot do make me think that these particular morsels of bush meat may have been a bit over matured. All the same, I'm hungry enough for anything, and kind of look forward to tasting my first warthog meat, dried, old rotten or not. The dish comes, of course, with the usual big nshima, but this time, Envious has also made a decent amount of rape, a bitter-tangy green vegetable dish popular in Zambia, and one of my favourites to boot. When the plates are served, we all soon have interest only for the food, and, apart from the strong smell, I must say that the warthog stew tastes alright. The meat has a "porky" texture and taste to it, but then again has this typical strong flavour reminiscent of venison. The aroma heightens this bush flavour extensively and takes a lot of getting used to, but altogether the dish is great. Especially with the extra double helping of vegetables. As always, a big lump of nshima in the stomach immediately requires the entire body system to concentrate on digestion only, leaving all ancillary functions trickling on at a bare minimum maintenance level. We all fall quiet, drink tea (part of the daily rehydration process) and one by one go off to bed. As I lay down, I start thinking about what may have been stolen, and soon decide that whatever was taken will easily be replaced. Rather than feeling anxious about the theft, I feel quite excited to see my five new puppies and Queen. I can't wait to see them.

In the morning we do a short traverse to finish up a section of the map, and we're back at the camp by 14:00 hrs. Rather than have another camp meal, we get my stuff together and set off for Kalomo by 15:00 hrs. We reach Kalomo just before sundown, and immediately get some well deserved cool cokes and a meal of meat pies, samoosas, sausages and whatever other stuff they sell at the local fuel station, and then hit a local noisy bar for a few bottles of ice-cold Mosi. I cannot explain just how wonderful a mere icy drink can be after a week of warm muddy water, mkoyo, tea and other "uncool" beverages. In the bar, Simon started talking to some "official" looking guys who turn out to be road-traffic officers, and who happen to have a spare room in the office which we can use (we're all government employees anyway). We drive the car across, unload our sleeping gear, and hit the town again. My stamina dwindles quite fast, and I finally find my own way back to the room to fall in a dreamless sleep.

The morning after, Simon and Ngoma spin all sorts of stories of their further adventures in Kalomo after my "disappearance", which make me glad I didn't stay up. At 6:30 we're already waiting for the bus to Lusaka. Breakfast consists of leftover junk food at the food stall, washed down with milky sweet tea. I'm not the only one waiting for a ride. My fellow passengers are mostly comprised of elderly people and baskets of chickens. When the bus finally

arrives after 8, the elderly people shuffle inside the bus, while the chickens, boxes, bicycles and bags go on the roof. I get a place in the privileged front seat position, smack in between a fat smelly woman, and a drooling toothless old man. Luckily the rancid aroma of sweat is balanced nicely by the big smelly bag of kapenta at my feet. Despite the discomfort of my position, one look back into the main section of the bus convinces me that I am the lucky one. People there are squeezed tighter than a tin of sardines. When we finally set off, I wave to Simon and Ngoma outside, who seem to be really enjoying themselves at the sight of me in the bus. "See you in a few days!" I shout.

The trip to Lusaka is by no means an uninterrupted one. The bus stops all over the place to let people off or pick them up. Even though the carrying capacity of the bus, as stated on the front door, is 54 people, I have the distinct feeling that at no time did it carry anything less than 70. The official stops are characterised by a flood of salesmen that swarm the windows to sell all sorts of edible stuff, while the unofficial (bush) stops are the perfect place for all sorts of pit stops. Whenever the bus stops, kids get passes through from the back of the bus to the front door to be helped outside for a wee by the fat lady next to me who has obviously, by virtue of her position, been promoted to pee-assistant. Grown ups also get up for a piss, but cause an even greater commotion as they find them selves a way through the bus to get to the door and freedom beyond. I am lucky, sitting in front, right next to a door, but only use this to my advantage once over the entire trip to get a sausage when the bus stops at a filling station. Along the road, the bus gets pulled over no less than three times by the police, whose complaints about the overloading of the bus get answered by slipping a few banknotes into their hand. The 400-km-long trip takes the bus 9 hours, but at least I make it.

### **Three days later**

Dealing with a break-in in Zambia involves quite a lot of tedious running around to get the situation back to normal. At my house the door and fence were broken, and the guy who I had left to take care of the house was very frightened (probably thinking I'd suspect him of orchestrating the entire thing). It took a bit of running around to get the door and fence fixed, and to get the Geological Survey to install burglar bars on all doors and windows. Luckily, the houseboy soon realised that I wasn't going to try and pursue the matter, having only lost some minor, easily replaced things. In all truth, I just wanted to get back to the field as quickly as possible. Lusaka, needless to say, does offer facilities unlike those found at Katanda Camp, so yes, I did go out the three nights I was there. The luxury of cool beer and good meals really is something only appreciated after having spent a few weeks without it!

To make sure I'd get an early bus at the main bus station in Lusaka, I had slept with friends nearby, got up early, and walked into the station at the crack of dawn. I found the bus to Livingstone quite quickly, all the time brushing off the throngs of people making a living out of "guiding" people and

"carrying" their luggage. I had no luggage, and needed no guiding, making my brusque refusal to be helped all the more palatable. The bus was nearly empty as I took a cramped seat in the back, but filled up quite quickly to about 200% of its recommended maximum capacity, and we were on our way to Mazabuka around 7 in the morning. As expected, the bus did make all sorts of unexpected stops to try and cram a few more people and luggage in, but we were at least moving in the right direction. Not for long though! A flat tyre just after Mazabuka saw us stranded for half an hour, but it was a welcome pit-stop as the infectious enthusiasm to urinate clearly demonstrated. I'm sure that years after the event a good forensic scientist would be able to trace the exact spot of our pit-stop by analysing for nitrate and urea levels in the topsoil! Our relief to be back on the road lasted exactly 10 minutes, after which the spare tyre that was put on also succumbed to the hard work. After a bit of discussion, the bus driver had the decency to let us know that it would take at least a few hours to get it all fixed (a tyre had to be taken back to Mazabuka for repair), and that he'd gladly pay back half of the fare to those that wished to try and proceed by hitching rides. I was one of those, thinking that a trip in the back of a pick-up would probably be more comfortable anyway. 15 of us got picked up quite quickly, and assaulted the fully loaded pickup. Unfortunately for me, the damn car only went as far as Choma, leaving a good 60 kilometers to go to reach Kalomo. I was the only one in need to move on to Kalomo, and apparently, the only one in the whole of Zambia that needed to get to Kalomo. In the next two hours, not a single car passed, until I struck lucky and found a truck that would leave for Kalomo. The driver explained that today was a very special public holiday, explaining the total lack of transport. Apparently the only bus from Lusaka to Livingstone was that piece of rusty shit with flat tyres that I had so gladly turned my back on just a few hours ago. The truck was already carrying a full load of kapenta (my favourite bush meal, remember) and about 10 other poor buggers in need to get to Livingstone during this very special festive day. The truck pelted down the tarmac and deposited us, dusty fellows, in Kalomo about 50 minutes later.

Simon stormed towards the truck, just as I was jumping down to the ground, and almost hugged me (obviously thought better of that). They had been waiting for me since around lunch time, and had almost given up hope altogether. We celebrated our reunion with about 5 bottles of Mosi in the local pub, after which we staggered into the still battered Landrover and drove to Katanda camp in the dark. The booze and tediously long trip from Lusaka meant that, despite the rough road, I slept most of the way to the camp and also immediately retired to my tent upon arrival. Everyone in the village was asleep anyway.

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October 1992

After a good night sleep, we collectively decide that we'd going to plot out our data collected so far. By lunchtime we've finished all that, and have planned out the next three days of traverses. We also discussed a bit the geology of

the region, showing each other our samples, to make sure we're on the same wavelength. In the afternoon, I take a walk around the camp with my binoculars in the hope of seeing some wildlife. All I see are lots of spoor, and a few birds, among which some marabou storks. The sky has been turning a bit ominous over the course of the afternoon, and there's a small drizzle of rain falling as I get back to camp. I find the village and camp deserted, and everyone gathered around the waterhole. Three women are actually standing in the water, feeling around. "They're looking for bubble fish", Simon says. "They normally start coming out at first rain!". No sooner has Simon explained all this to me as one of the women yelps and they the other two frantically start feeling around to get the fish. Get it they do! Suddenly one of the women gets a hold of a slippery thing and throws it on the mud around the pool. Immediately some kids converge onto the now flapping fish to give it a few well-aimed blows to the head. The village chief immediately grabs the poor animal to show me and pose for a photo: the first bubble fish of the season!



Meanwhile, everyone is convinced that there's a lot of food in that pool, and have joined the chase. The next 30 minutes could be accurately described as the pogrom of the Katanda bubblefish. The catching methods varied from one person to another, but all hunters had a lot of fun. Because the fish were very slippery, some women were stuffing them in their shirt, running as fast as

they could out of the mud pool, to then drop it on the dry ground for it to be clubbed to death. Near the end, the hunt turned into a bit of a playful fight, with people trying to push each other over in the mud. I'm sure this day will be remembered as the best day of the year for the village. Needless to say that that evening we had bubblefish and nshima for dinner.

In the morning, a guy from the village has passed through to try and sell us a goat. He didn't bring it along, but we notionally agreed to buy it when he'd bring it in. The traverse took us through dusty dry plains and low forest, and we saw not a single animal. What I did see was the rise and fall of a small whirlwind (a dust devil). There was a loud crack, and suddenly there it was; a five meter tall whirl wind that at first stayed stationary, but then slowly moved away from me. In the evening, Simon told me that these whirlwinds are often very small, but that a 5-m tall one is large enough to throw around dogs or children! Simon also told me he has lost his only hammer, and that tomorrow's traverse should perhaps start off where he finished, in the hope to find it back. The guy with the goat does not show up, and Simon thinks that he was just trying to get our money. So we eat the now dried bubble fish and nshima, and go to sleep.

The next day, we all appear to have diarrhoea. Not surprising given the poor state of our only waterhole after the bubble fish hunt. My consignment of mkoyo arrives and we decide to take that along for the traverse. After a breakfast of rice (to try and stop the diarrhoea), we get dropped close to the endpoint of Simon's traverse, and find his hammer on one of the last outcrops. We then move along the river for further mapping and I find several tortoise shells in the small dry creeks that give out in the main (dry) stream. As during all the previous days, we see no wild life other than a few birds and plenty of tracks. When we finally reach the car, we share the 2.5 liters of mkoyo and make our way back to camp, where Boston has prepared some cookies using soy meal, mealy meal and sugar. The goat has arrived after all, and we'll be dining on goat meat tonight! Because we need to be keeping the meat in edible order, we will eat the soft and fatty stuff first, i.e. the stomach and lungs...yum! After dinner, Ngoma and Boston are cleaning the intestines of the goat, stuffing it with other sorts of internal bits and pieces to make a delicious sort of small sausages for breakfast tomorrow. I take a small wooden stool that one of the villagers has left next to the fire, and sit down some 100 meters away in the total darkness with my binoculars and walkman, to wait for the rise of the moon. Under the deafening tones of "Joy Division", I watch that celestial body as it climbs the dark night sky, and can't think of a better time in life.

Breakfast is a lot better than I anticipate. The offal sausages actually taste great, and I even go for seconds. Boston has added a small box of curry powder, and the dish is positively delightful once you forget that you're actually eating something that once processed goat shit. With a full stomach we set off for the day. We're mapping further and further away from the camp, and have to spend 90 minutes in the car to get dropped off today. By

the time we get where we want to start, the day has hotted up to almost unbearable levels again. Luckily, the same woman from the village has dropped two 2.5 l containers of Mkoyo this morning, and we take along one of these on our traverse. Along the way, I see a sleeping owl on a tree, several tortoises, and a few rabbits, and that's all. Near the end of the traverse I do find a small skull of a baboon, but it's too far gone to be useful as a souvenir. I did pick up a few quills of a porcupine!

Back at the camp, we notice that the drinking hole has shrunk quite a lot, and the village chief also expresses his worries at the late rain. If no rain will fall for another two weeks, he says, the pool will be totally dry, and they'll be forced to walk to the nearest other pool, which is 10 kilometers away! Dinner comprises goat meat and cabbage, and the chief is invited to join us. Later that evening the Mkoyo lady delivers another bottle of drink, which I gratefully accept again. Simon does insist that he thinks she's just being friendly and that there's nothing to worry about.

That night, as if the prayers of the chief have been answered, it rains a bit. It is nothing much, but at least something, giving a bit of hope to the people here.

Next day's traverse is planned along a small, in places densely overgrown stream. I take along one game scout, and a guy from the village who wants to carry my pack. We move along slowly, as we have to always find a way through the dense growth, never straying too far away from the stream where most outcrops are. This time, we do see a few animals, including a mongoose, and a few tortoises. The most interesting animal is a small snake that slithers out of my way not a meter away. The game scout, who was directly behind me, says that it's a sand snake (muswema in Tonga language). Where before I wanted to walk first to be the first to see animals, I let him take the lead for the remainder of the traverse. We arrive at the end point, a small village, before the car or Simon are there, and get invited to sit under the only large tree with the village head, Mr. Lilanda. He proudly tells us that it is his village, and when I ask how many people live here, he proudly says, myself, my eight wives, and my 45 children. He proudly goes on to say that he cultivates groundnuts, that his motorcycle is out of action through lack of fuel, and that we are lucky to find him here, as he has just returned from a business trip to Choma on his bicycle. He then introduces me to five of his eight wives (the other three are still out in the fields) and all of his children that are around. One of them is instructed to sing, dance and count all the way up to ten, as he tells me, full of pride, that he has taken it upon himself to educate his children. After all the introductions and the small show, the talk moves on to the wildlife in the region. I exclaim that I am disappointed that there is hardly anything to see around here. Mr. Lilanda is a bit surprised and says that not only two weeks ago he saw four lions when he went to chop wood. He goes on to say that I should not go anywhere near big rivers, like the Sichifulo River, as there are big crocodiles in it. He lost his dog a few months ago when it went a bit too close, he says. When I tell him about my encounter with the Muswema snake, he says that there are many snakes around, and that the most common around here is the Black Mamba.

When I say "isn't that a dangerous one?", he says that it's the most aggressive, venomous and agile snake in Africa, and that if I see one, I should run like hell! A bit later Simon arrives, as does the car, and we get a second show from Mr. Lilanda's children. Simon tells me he also saw a snake on his walk, which Mr. Lilanda identifies as a spitting cobra based on its behaviour (it raised its head, rather than attack Simon). As we bid Mr. Lilanda farewell, it starts to drizzle again, and in the car Simon suggests that we plot up what we got, and prepare to leave for Lusaka before the rains really start, and the roads get unpassable.

The next day, it looks like Simon is right! It rained heavily last evening, and it looks like raining again through the day. We manage to plot up our data, and Ngoma and Boston set about setting up some "flying ant" tramps. Simon tells me that at first rains there'll be lots of flying ants, especially with the full moon, and that they are great to eat! Late in the afternoon it does start. First there's a few flying big-bodied termites, but their number gradually increases until the sky is filled with the buggers. They have a heavy body that hangs down as they fly, until they drop to the floor out of sheer exhaustion and their wings fall off. The traps of Ngoma and Boston are simply buckets and basins of water, with a light shining on it, and it seems that the insects get attracted to that and fall into it. By the end of the evening we have several bucket loads of the wingless flying ants, which Ngoma roasts on the fire. They taste like roasted groundnuts, but have a distinctly "insecty" taste as well. Everyone around the fire really laughs when they see me eat the things. We seem to have a lot more people around the fire tonight, as they know that it'll be our last evening together. Most discussions are in Tonga, and by 22:00 I retire to sleep.

The next morning, we are busy breaking up camp, getting a bit of help from some of the villagers. Ngoma and Boston also buy a whole bunch of live chickens, as they are noticeably cheaper here than in Lusaka. They get carried in large baskets woven from stripped bark, and will end up on top of our luggage at the back. A bit later, the women of the Mkoyo passes through with her friend, and wants to sing me a song. When her friend refuses to sing along, she abandons her performance and simply shakes my hand to thank me. I dash into my tent to give them each a bar of soap that I have left. They leave the camp beaming and laughing. A bit later, I make my way to the village with Simon to take my last pictures. This is another event that will be engraved into those people's minds forever, I guess from the reactions I get when I get out my camera. After three pictures I take myself, I get the village head to actually take one with me in it (see below). It's slightly out of focus, and poorly centered, but here we go:



Before we drive off, I still buy some small wooden stools (I get the one I mostly used along the fire for free from the village head) and some small baskets from some women, and off we go, to Kalomo.

And so it was, my first field season as a mapping geologist! My first season of many!

Bert De Waele©  
July 2007