

An American Computer Geek Goes To
AFRICA

A T R A V E L J O U R N A L B Y

E R I K R T R I N I D A D

OASIS S



Bats

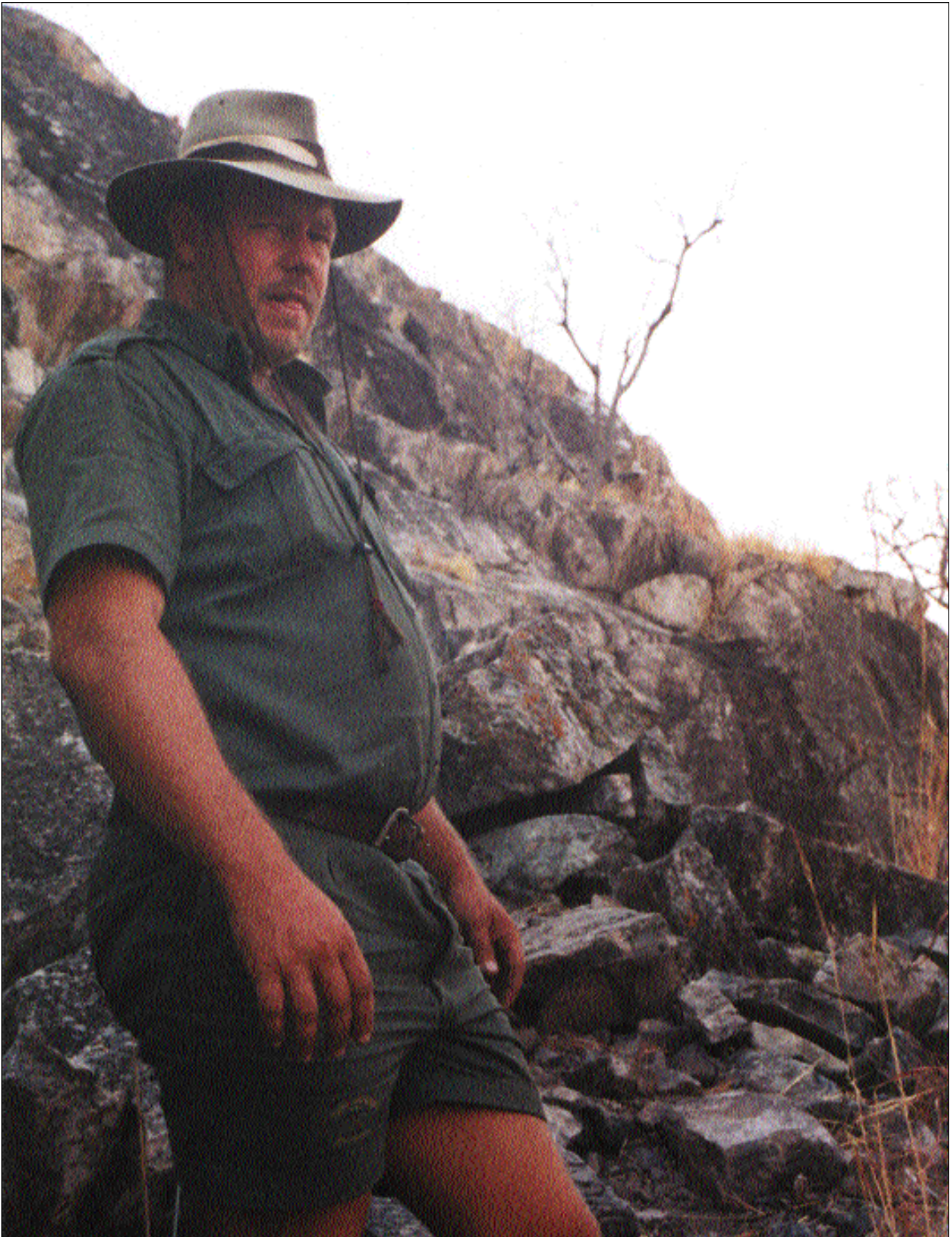
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AFARIS



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“Kalahari” Harry Steyn leads curious travelers through the African bush with his company Oasis Safaris.

OCTOBER 11, 2000, 2:33 P.M. WELL, I'M IN THE CAB TO JFK, OFF ON MY NEXT ADVENTURE: AN AFRICAN SAFARI IN BOTSWANA. Work was slow today because WCW is in Australia and we got the script early for our enhanced TV project, "iWatch Wednesday." I'm in traffic by Gramercy Park. My flight's at 6 p.m. tonight but I might as well get there early.

3:45 p.m. Well, now I'm writing at JFK's Terminal 3, Gate 5. There are a handful of people here. CNN is playing on the TV.

The cab ride was interesting. The driver was an elderly Indian man with a long white beard and a turban. He tried to have conversation, but it was hard because the only words out of his mouth were mumbled in heavily-accented bad English, interspersed with the words "That's fucked up! That's fucked up!" He ranted about driving in NYC and something about camels. I just sat in the back and nodded saying "yeah" every moment or so.

Fifty dollars later (including toll and tip), I was at the X-ray at the entrance of the terminal. There was no problem, even with all my camera equipment. There were a few people already on the check-in line, but shortly I checked in my 24 lb. big pack, and got my seat assignment, 37K.

I have to call the gallery soon. There's some unresolved problem of a fax not making it to Botswana or something, and I just have to see what's up.

As always, it really hasn't hit me that I'm going anywhere, although it's started to get to me because I'm all alone. And not just that, it's not like going to Europe or anything, because this time around the threat of a gruesome death looms. I got so many warnings and instructions: If a buffalo charges you, run like hell and climb a tree (or sidestep at the

last second). But if a lion charges you, *don't* run or you're dead. (But what if a buffalo and a lion charge at

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***But what if a
buffalo and a lion
charge at
the same time?!***

the same time?!) I should also beware of hyenas at night—a 10-year-old boy was grabbed out of his

tent in the middle of the night just a couple of months ago. I should also check my shoes for scorpions before putting them on.

The other night, Moe came over and we watched safari horror stories on Animal Planet, which showed news clippings that read "Boy Eaten by Lions" and the like. Oh man. Another guy on the show got attacked by a lion when riding a bike to a guard post in the middle of the bush at night. Mental note: *Don't ride a bike in the bush at night!*

In a superstitious way—I've been superstitious a lot lately—I feel something dreadful looming, only because at home I have no loose ends or unfinished business to take care of, and if there were any time to go with little consequences, this would be it.

I gotta pee...

4:11 p.m. All good. I just called Brian at the gallery—after peeing of course—and everything's fine. A proof of payment had to be faxed and it has. He wished me a good trip. I'll have to deliver a tube of paintings back to NYC from his brother in Johannesburg on my way back. I don't mind. I mean, I'm grateful for this trip; it's payment for a website I designed for the gallery. (www.hem-ingwayafricangallery.com) It's pretty much an even exchange of nature for

technology.

One more hour before boarding, and clear skies. We'll probably leave on time, unlike that Air France fiasco early this year going to Europe.

This is my third "adventure" vacation within two years, each on a different continent. Perhaps I'm starting a streak?

4:47 p.m. Almost time to board. I've been reading the *Let's Go* book. There are a lot of people now, mainly old white senior citizens. Weird.

5:27 p.m. Well, I'm on the plane, in a window seat overlooking the wing as usual. At the last minute, I finally got in touch with my mom at home to say goodbye. (Dad called me earlier.)

So I'm off on another adventure this time solo. I'll meet people though. I'm wearing my lucky adventure hat I've taken on every adventure since I was 16. It's a version of Indiana Jones' famous fedora.

5:37 p.m. I don't feel like reading took out my *National Geographic Traveler* magazine, but I'm not in the mood. I usually read it as an escape from the mundane, but today I'm actually going someplace new.

I'm two seats away from Nancy Pfeifer, a pretty woman who kinda looks like a cross between the actresses Elizabeth Shue and Mary McCormack. She's setting up a conference in Capetown and in Johannesburg. She's nice. It's her first time to Africa too. She isn't looking forward to the 15 hours on a plane though. "I've had worse," I told her, referring to my flight to the Philippines.

Right now, she's struggling to inflate a portable pillow.

5:58 p.m. We're taxiing. I skimmed the Jo'burg section of the *Let's Go*.

Nancy works for International House, this global housing program for grad students. She was surprised I knew where it was. (It's on Riverside Drive.) We've also realized that we'll be on the same flight back. Weird. Cool, now my reason to survive is to come full circle and meet her again. Man, I'm getting so superstitious.

The plane isn't full. Everyone has an empty seat next to them. Nancy and I have elbow room. The menu came and it was the same old thing, chicken or beef, made to sound fancy. The movies tonight will be *Frequency* and

6:13 p.m. On the runway.

South African Airways is cool; they gave us a nice pouch purse with a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb, and socks! I'm listening to jazz and Nancy is doing a crossword puzzle. Before, we were talking about malaria pills, and we're both on Larium.

"Did you get nightmares the night you took your pill?" she asked me.

"Umm...I had a dream my company was bought out by Sony," I told her. (I really did.) She told me that Larium gave her really bad nightmares and she could hardly sleep that night.

6:29 p.m. We're in the air. I have a view of Long Island, the only one I can see from my bike just two miles away. My "Destination: Cape Town" sign is lit up.

The sunset is really beautiful.

The service here is excellent. The flight attendant is really nice. The food is just okay. The service is just okay. The flight attendant is really nice. The food is just okay. The service is just okay.

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11 p.m. (EDT). We're somewhere over the Atlantic. The flight attendant is really nice. The food is just okay. The service is just okay.



October 12, 2000.

5:50 a.m. (EDT), (11:50 a.m. South African Time). Just woke up. I slept fairly well with the pillow and the sleeping mask. It's bright outside and I see land already. Couple more hours to go.

12:35 p.m. (SAT). I've arranged all my documents and am ready for now. They just served me a really watered down juice. I also used the toothbrush they gave me. It was okay. The handle's pretty short.

1:28 p.m. (SAT). We just watched some British sitcom. It was pretty funny. One of the main characters looks like Dave Price from *Good Day New York*.

We're landing in less than an hour. I'll have all afternoon and night to hang in Jo'burg. Peter, Brian's brother whom Gracia says is a "real character," is supposed to pick me up with a "Hemingway" sign. So as not to be scammed, I'll ask him what *his* name is before revealing mine.

1:45 p.m. We're landing soon. I just filled out my entry form. I'm bringing in 3,150 in South African rand.

1:52 p.m. Nancy asked me for a Tylenol, which I gladly gave because it was easily accessible to me. I asked her if she knew anything about Johannesburg and she said only that she was told it was very unsafe. I've heard the same. But yet, the lure of Kippie's "world-renowned" jazz club sticks in my head...

2:00 p.m. I see land. Looks a lot like California.



2:24 p.m.

I'm on a shuttle from the plane. Nancy and her co-worker are on the bus too. It's getting hot here!

2:34 p.m. I bid farewell to Nancy, my Fifteen Hour Friend. Now I'm on the customs line. It's pretty long. My daypack is heavy, man!

2:49 p.m. I'm in baggage claim, waiting. Nothing yet. Customs was a snap. I asked the officer about the weather and he said it's nice.

5:47 p.m. I'm fucked up! Well, I have a buzz. Here's what happened:

So I got my bag. It was on a carousel that wasn't marked for my flight, but I noticed everyone on my flight was there. In no time, I got my pack and went out the "Nothing to Declare" exit. In no time, I spotted

the "Hemingway Safaris" sign. There was no need to ask for credentials—Peter looked just like his brother in New York, only heavier and with longer hair. I couldn't tell if he was older or younger. He watched my bags as I exchanged \$70 to about 480 rand. Then we were off in his SUV.

It was hard to adjust to sitting on the left side of the car and drive on the left side of the road like in England. In less than ten minutes, we arrived at the Holiday Inn Garden Court, a nice regular American hotel near the airport. I checked in with the reservation Peter put in my name, and paid with my AmEx Blue. I guess this hotel is on my dime after all. (I wasn't sure all this time.) Peter asked me if I wanted to see the city and I said "sure," so I dropped off my bags and hopped back in his car.

We drove while Peter told me about life in Jo'burg. He told me about the car crimes with the theft and carjacking, although nothing has happened to him. In fact, I read in the *Lonely Planet* that it's legal to rig a gun or flamethrower to your car to deter crime. Mental note: *Don't steal a car here!*

Anyway, we drove down the freeway to Jo'burg. It's about as far as La Guardia is to Manhattan. Soon we were in town and it was okay. Johannesburg looks like any generic American city, only slightly more ghetto—kinda like Atlanta meets Paterson, New Jersey. We drove around. Peter offered to take me to the observation deck of one of the tall buildings, but I said it wasn't necessary. I just wanted to see the

sausage. My baked potato is huge!

A bunch of guys were singing before. Is that the African birthday song?

8:06 p.m. Damn, I'm stuffed. I'm struggling to even finish my beer. Guess a night at the local pub is out...or is it?

8:16 p.m. Another song sung. It is Spur's birthday song. They just performed for someone nearby with a cake with a sparkler in it.

8:22 p.m. Just paid the 39.95 rand bill with my AmEx with a six rand cash tip. I'm full.

8:59 p.m. I'm in the room trying to figure out flight info. All this time I thought my flight was at 10 a.m., but I see "0800" on the ticket. Perhaps Brian was confused and it *arrives* in Maun at 10. I called Johannesburg International Flight Information and my flight 0212 isn't listed and there's no answer at Air Botswana. Panic mode? Not just yet. I just wanna confirm the flight as suggested, because Gracia said they give seats away if you don't do so.

My feet stink. I need a shower. There's a flight information channel on TV, but 8 a.m. tomorrow isn't posted yet.

9:31 p.m. Just took a hot hand-held shower. Felt good.

Uh oh. Flight info on TV shows tomorrow's departures, and my supposed flight time was skipped! Panic!

9:36 p.m. Panic averted. Brian was right after all; it is a 10 a.m. flight. Air Botswana BP 0212 to Maun. My ticket must reflect the check-in time of two hours early.

Con Air is on TV now. Cricket was on before.

10:16 p.m. I've been watching *Traders*, this Canadian drama series about stock traders based in Toronto. It's old because they referred to the Y2K problem as something coming. I also saw a commercial for SABC3's premiere of the American *Survivor*. Eh, I know who wins already.

I found my itinerary printout from the travel agent, and I see the flight tomorrow to Maun from 8:00 a.m. to 9:40 a.m. A mistake? It's too early for the 10 a.m. info on the flight info channel, so I don't know. I'll just go to the airport early to be safe.

My feet still stink after my shower, so I had to rub hand sanitizer all over them.

10:40 p.m. I'm watching *Trial and Error*, that comedy with Jeff Daniels and Michael Richards. These bed sheets are too tight!

On the flight information channel, there are more reported flights departing in between the previous times. I'll just wake up early to watch the channel anyway to be safe.

October 13, 2000.

12:03 a.m. The movie was okay. I should really get some sleep, but I'm six hours behind. I'll try.

1:21 a.m. I can't sleep, and in my last night in the luxuries of civilization. I have jet lag bad, but it's a good thing I woke up—on TV, my flight is 8 am! Now I really have to get some sleep!

5:23 a.m. Ugh. I'm up. Here I go!

5:44 a.m. I'm running a little late. I packed all my valuables in my day-pack and double-locked my big pack with four locks and duct tape. Hope

that does the trick—Brian says the most thefts are on this route.

I'm leaving ten rand and change (including one American quarter) for the maid tip.

6:32 a.m. After the hotel's shuttle ride, I was a little confused with the layout of the airport, but I got to my gate with plenty of time to spare. Now I'm at an airport café, waiting with juice and coffee. The attendant is off to buy a newspaper because I had nothing smaller than a 50 rand note.

Before, I went to exchange my remaining rand and some American dollars to Botswanan pula, but the woman said that it's better to get pula in Botswana because it's cheaper there than it is here.

Whoops, I see the café guy wandering everywhere to get change for my 50. At a distance I see a South African edition of *Maxim*, and some middle-aged Asian man with tremendous mutton chop sideburns.

7:16 a.m. I tipped the café guy two rand and he was grateful. (I didn't notice anyone else tipping.) I wandered the airport. South Africa's *Maxim* is like the American version, only with different models—and interspersed articles about the political turmoil in Africa.

Oh, they just called my flight...

7:27 a.m. I wandered the shops. I read an article in a magazine about the importance of tipping (but not overtipping) on safari. I saw the *Star Wars: Episode I* video on sale at the newsstand too. I went to a music shop, some clothing shops, and an African art shop. It was tempting, but I figure I wouldn't want to lug anything right now; I'll just souvenir shop at Vic Falls. I was gonna take photos of the airport, but I don't wanna risk getting arrested like at

city to say I was there.

We drove around. He showed me places he used to live where in the 70's "you could still walk around at night." I videotaped quick snippets of the city. He told me to be careful by the window because a guy could spot the camera and reach in to get it. So I quickly put the shoulder strap around me.

We rode around and I saw the city. "It's not a city to be proud of," Peter said. I didn't think it was too bad—it's still a lot cleaner and less congested than Manila. But then again, I saw barbed wire on houses and even on apartment hi-rise terraces. I also saw tons of signs for "Offices to Let." Peter said that all the business-

park with a pub called "Mrs. Sippi's." There we each bought a round of Castle Lager—on my empty stomach—and shot the breeze.

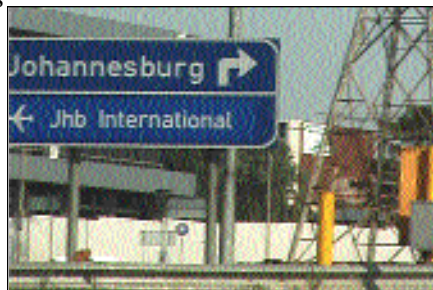
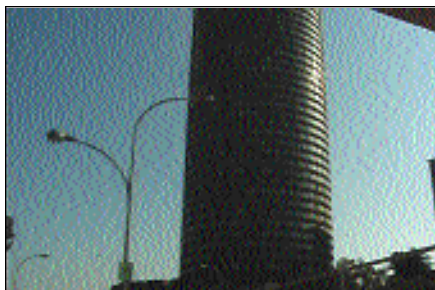
He's got two sons—sixteen and fourteen—both who live at school. His wife doesn't work—he wishes she did—but neither does he. He used to work for Upjohn Pharmaceutical, but with a merger and a motorbike accident, he got out just in time with a disability pension.

"What do you do with yourself these days then?" I asked him.

"Drink," he said with a chuckle. He continued to tell me about how good rafting is at Victoria Falls, and how his son wants to do the bungie

no boats allowed, so as not to disturb the birds. Peter tipped the armed parking guard for watching the car, and we were off to the hotel. When he dropped me off, I casually asked if I could pay him for his time and he casually said, "Please." He jokingly asked for 1000 rand, but then asked if I could pay him in US dollars because he's saving up for a big US trip. He asked for \$50, but I only had twenties, and just gave him a modest \$60. Eh, call it a tip.

I've been writing this in my room in a half-drunken stupor while watching South African TV. I'm hungry. Let me check out the steakhouse downstairs now...



Scenes from Johannesburg—or "Jo'burg" as it is more commonly called.

moved out to the 'burbs because the crime in the city is so bad. In fact, a nice cylindrical apartment tower complex is now slated to be converted to a prison.

I made small talk with Peter as much as I could. He drove me around the different sections of the city and soon I saw enough. True, nothing too spectacular. But it was weird to see one white person for every fifty black people. "Hey look, a white girl!" I'd say in my head.

On the way out to the 'burbs, I asked him if South Africa has a native beer and he proudly told me of Castle Lager, the 2000 winner of the International Brewing Awards. He asked me if I wanted to try it and I said "sure," so we were off to Kilgoolie's, this privately-owned

jump at the bridge. (There haven't been any accidents he said.)

As for safaris, he said to stay in the car and make sure I close my tent. He also told me about the boy who got taken by a hyena and eaten. Perhaps this is a single event mentioned by Brian, Peter, and Animal Planet? Or are there three boys? Hmm...

I asked Peter if there was any food South Africa was best known for and he said "steak." He mentioned that there are some places that serve mopani worms. I asked if he's tried them, and he made a face. "No, I'll stick to my steak," he said with a smile. Gracia was right. He's a real character.

We left the pub and I took some shots of the lake nearby. There are

steakhouse at the Holiday Inn. What a surprise: Madonna's "Music" is on. There's no escape from the American pop scene. Even Ricky Martin is on a steak advertisement poster here.

I just ordered the steak platter which comes with their famous "farmhouse wors." I hope that's sausage, not worms! I'm actually at a sit-in restaurant by myself (one of my pet peeves back home). I ordered a Castle like I was a local—it's a decent beer—but I'm pretty sure they know I'm not from around here; I'm neither white or black. I should have worn my Yankees hat which I brought as a conversation piece to amuse the South Africans.

7:36 p.m. Food here. "Wors" is

7:24
p.m.
I'm
in
the
Spur

Charles De Gaulle in Paris.

I'm on the shuttle bus to the plane. There are about ten people onboard, one of which is a middle-aged man in full safari gear, as if he's trying to simulate the ideal Hollywood safari look, with the hat and vest.

7:37 a.m. I'm in an all white, generic looking small jet with propellers, with no logo or anything, like in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Everyone had to confirm their bags outside before boarding. I'm in window seat 11F, with the whole row to myself. There are maybe twenty or so passengers on board, three of which I suspect are American. Which one(s) of these lucky passengers will I be travelling on safari with? I'm whistling the score to *Raiders* in my head now.

A flight attendant is instructing the two guys sitting in the emergency exit rows on what they have to do in an emergency.

Since this morning, I think I've playfully developed a British or South African accent.

8:30 a.m. We're at 28,000 ft. I just had breakfast: cold roast beef with a small salad. I love African red grape

juice; it's not as heavy as it is in the States.

8:43 a.m. Just filled out the entrance form. Damn, I gotta pee.

Hey, it's Friday the 13th!

9:02 a.m. We've begun our descent. The pilot says it's not as hot in Maun as he predicted earlier, but by 2 p.m., it'll be 30° Celsius.

9:14 a.m. I'm getting excited. Now I feel like I'm in Africa! Nothing but bush and small houses outside. Landing now...

9:34 a.m. I'm in Maun. No one's here to pick me up. An attendant is going to look for "Oasis Safaris" although she's never heard of them. Uh oh..

On the passport line, I only noticed one other American from Tennessee who seems like he's here on business. Everyone else was South African, Swiss, French, or English.

9:40 a.m. The woman has no info on Oasis. I have her the telephone number, and she'll call for me.

9:54 a.m. I'm waiting outside the Mack Air office where the company will pick me up from. I walked around and saw the Bushman Craft Shop too.

Man, it's hot here! This place is almost out of a movie or something, with the sandy roads, etc.

9:56 a.m. Harry's supposed to call me soon says the lady inside. I wonder what's up.

10:27 a.m. Harry called. He told me Brian told him I was on the 10 a.m. flight, so he wasn't anticipating a 9:30 a.m. pickup. Everyone else on tour is on that 10 a.m. flight. So for the meantime, I'm solo.

I left my big pack and sleeping bag at Mack Air and wandered into town. It's hot as hell, but "it's a dry heat." The air here smells like chocolate for some reason. Anyway, I walked down the sandy road like Antonio Banderas in *Desperado*. Downtown Maun is really small, almost like a small beach town down the Jersey shore with an African flair—and no beach or ocean. There are a couple of strip malls so I looked around. I found a money bureau and exchanged \$70 US and 200 rand. The nice lady from this morning said I wouldn't need my money in the delta, but I just wanted to be covered.

Anyway, I walked back here to the airport to sit for a while and use the bathroom. Sunglasses are so essential here—I'm so glad I invested in prescription sunglasses finally.

I've got an hour to kill before anyone in my group arrives, so I'll kill time.

10:52 a.m. There's that chocolate smell again. I'm under an umbrella at a picnic table across the street from the airport. I just came from the art and book store next door. It must



A herd of goats go shopping in downtown Maun.



A huge crocodile peers his eye from behind the croc pin fence.

be the one Brian told me about. I found guides written by his friend Veronica Roodt. I got map guides for Moremi and Chobe National Parks and paid in cash.

My back is killing me from this daypack. I just wanna get where I'm going so I can unpack.

Before, I saw a pack of wild goats casually walk by, like they were coming into town to shop.

11:15 a.m. I'm with Harry and his assistant Cisco in the army jeep now.

11:21 a.m. People call him "Kalahari Harry." He seems okay. We shot the breeze until he went back into the waiting room in the airport. Then I shot the breeze with Cisco, who's a Maun native. He's worked with Harry at other safari companies and is now with him at Oasis. He told me about Africa, and

rafting—you really need to know how to swim because they often flip—and about how bad Zimbabwe's president is because he "kills his own people."

More and more Americans filled the area. I even heard the Nokia cell phone ring.

12:46 p.m. I'm in a tent at the camp near the Croc Farm.

There's a big mix-up with the flights and the rest won't show up until 2 p.m. or so. So we drove to camp anyway. I saw Maun and my first glimpse of the bush. The camp is about six miles out. The road was dusty and everything you'd think it'd be. I saw goats, sheep, and donkeys. Cisco rode in the back with me. Hmm, a new friend.

In camp, I met another assistant, Monique. I got my tent and then proceeded to a spread of lunch at another

big tent. I made a sandwich. The three others are packing things, so I'll unwind finally.

This is getting exciting! I hear flies outside. I think I need my bug spray.

1:22 p.m. Out of all things to talk about during lunch with Harry and Cisco, Harry was telling me about problems on his website. Then Harry and Cisco went back to the airport, so I'm at the camp by myself. Harry said I'll be fine here, and that I should check out the store, the pool, and the croc farm itself. "Don't worry, the area is fenced."

The sun is incredibly hot and I have to use my Outdoor Research full-brimmed hat now. I figure I'll walk around and see the sights—armed with three cameras.

2:30 p.m. I'm back in my tent after hiking an hour. Man, it is hot here! I





An initial walk through the African bush reveals some interesting trees and plant life. (left, above)

gotta put on shorts...

I went to the croc pins. Even though it was fenced off, it was pretty intense. Am I expected to believe that a little bit of chicken wire and some reeds will keep out the crocs? I ventured in all alone, but really carefully. Soon I saw a bunch of crocs in the paddock, all sun-bathing. A couple had their mouths open, ready to bite.

Soon I saw other people on a walk too, and had no qualms to venture around. I got some pretty good shots with the 300-mm lens and the camcorder.

I practiced my wildlife photography on birds, crocs, and even vultures circling above me. Man, it's tough! Focusing, keeping steady, shooting at the right moment. It's a lot harder than it seems, but practice

makes perfect.

I wandered some more. Funny, in some areas of the grounds, I saw satellite dishes. Weird.

No one has arrived back yet. Harry spoke of a pool, but I haven't seen it.

3:06 p.m. I'm at the camp bar. Yes, a bar, right next to the pool and volleyball net. There are two young couples here hanging out. I just drank a bottle of juice and I have no urge to pee 'cause I'm so dehydrated.

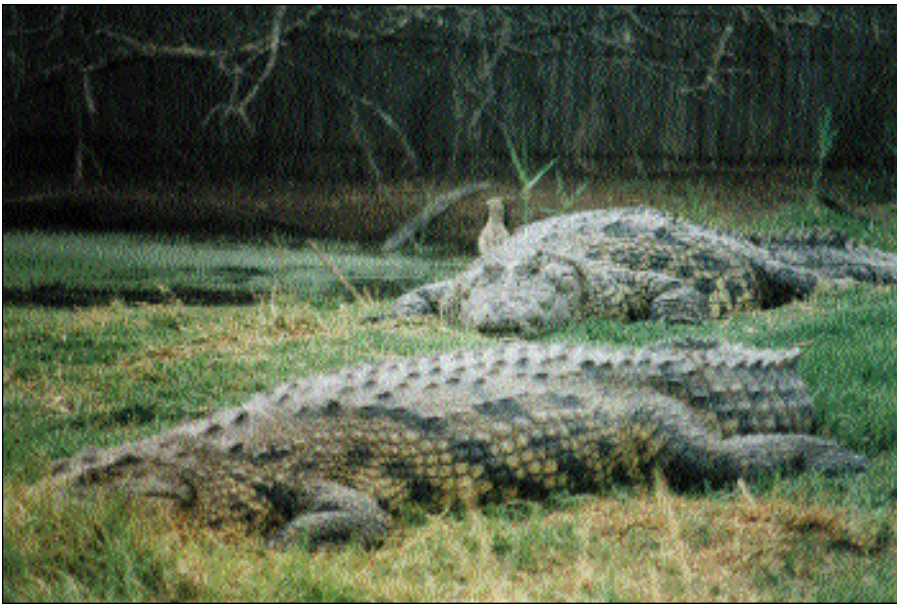


My first living quarters in the bush.

3:17 p.m. I'm back in the tent. I didn't feel like swimming because that couple was in there (it's a small pool.) So I went back to the store to get my drink rations: two one-liter bottles of water, a six-pack of Coke, and a six-pack of Castle. Plus a small water for now. Man, am I thirsty. I hardly sweat, but I'm sweating like a pig.

3:23 p.m. says my travel clock. It says it's currently 92.5°F. What should I do now? I supposed I could go back into the bush and get more SLR practice.

3:52 p.m. Man, I'm shook. I'm back near the croc pins, but this time I tried going down a narrow walkway with reed fences on both sides. Midway, I saw two HUGE crocs on both



Two crocs in the croc pins look on.

sides right up against the fences, and I wasn't about to test the strengths of the reeds. So I slowly walked back, looking back to see if they were coming, but no. Boy, am I a pussy.

4:38 p.m. I'm back at camp. Everyone is back. We're four more now with two couples from England: one middle-aged couple coming from friends in Victoria Falls, the other couple a younger one straight from the U.K. I got back in time for the briefing. Harry told us about their last trip, how twenty hyenas raided the camp one night and then a lion raided the hyenas. Lions' roars vibrated the entire camp.

He also spoke of the boy eaten by a hyena. He claims it happened at a camp near his, and he had to go out and find the body in the middle of the night. The boy's arm was eaten off, making him an amputee. He, his mother, and their guide were all Americans.

Man, I'm the only American in the group!

6:10 pm. So the older couple (I forgot everyone's names) went to the pool and I joined them. The Doors

were playing on the radio. "Funny, we're in the middle of Africa and we hear The Doors," the man said.

We shot the breeze in the pool over a round of drinks. "There aren't many Americans your age that we've seen on safari," the woman said. "Most of the Americans we see are old and doing 'the grand tour.'" The couple is two Africa buffs and have been on safari many times.

I explained my deal, how I got this trip for doing a website. They were impressed. We talked about vacation time in the U.K. and the U.S.—us Americans don't have enough time. Soon, the younger couple came from visiting the croc pins, and we all hung out. We toasted with another round of drinks and continued to converse. The younger couple hasn't been on safari; they only found out about it at some travel expo in London. The guy is originally from Hong Kong, and he looks it with his facial features.

Anyway, we watched some nearby birds and talked about *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. *Big Brother* is huge in the U.K. (it flopped in the U.S.) so much that they admitted to calling in to vote. The younger guy told me the

difference between the American *Survivor* and the British one is that in America, the greedy evil one won, while in London, the nicest guy won.

I told them about how I work with a wrestling league—they automatically assumed it was WWF—and they reminisced of their watching of British wrestling a while ago. The older man made a stink about WWF standing for "World Wildlife Foundation" not "World Wrestling Federation."

We left the pool. I went back because I forgot my towel. We're supposed to meet Harry at 7 p.m. So we're all going to shower and get ready for dinner. Cisco's sleepy.

I hope I can get everyone's names at dinner. I only remember the names "Liz" and "David," but I don't know which is which. Supposedly the older guy snores. His wife warned us. We joke about how he might be mistaken for an animal.

6:43 p.m. I'm writing this with my headlamp now. It's getting darker. I just took a shower in the ablutions block. (I forgot my towel again.) The shower was okay. It was my last shower with running water I'll have in a few days I think.

Dinner's soon, so I'll bring my camcorder and ask everyone to introduce themselves so I can get their names. Pretty good trick, eh?

8:36 p.m. I'm writing this by candlelight so as to save my battery on my "torch" [a flashlight as the Brits call it...]

Well, my plan worked. I got everyone to introduce themselves on video. The older couple is Liz and David and the younger couple is Gemma and Bob or Bobbles or something like that.

We had dinner. Monique—Harry's wife as it turns out—made cork-

screw pasta with this mushroom and bacon sauce, plus a side salad. She stayed at home in town, and Harry just brought it over.

We had dinner conversation. I listened mostly because they were talking about African politics and economics, and I'm just an ignorant young American. Harry talked about his business, how he wants to broaden his clientele in Europe, but not be too big that he can't personally guide safaris anymore. Harry's a pretty bright guy.

"Who's on Larium?" he asked us.

"I am," I said. Then he told us how Larium has hallucinogenic effects, and some people get really bad nightmares. I told them about Nancy on the plane.

We ate and shot the breeze a little while longer, but then suddenly Harry got serious. He brought out these liability forms and asked us to fill them out with emergency contacts and insurance info. He made it clear that what we're about to do can be dangerous, and that we must follow all the rules for our safety. He told us he keeps guard all night "with one ear open" and we can wake him at any time if we need anything. In an emergency, he can call in for a helicopter to take us to a hospital, but they won't admit you without insurance.

We all were in silence after his speech. "I don't want to scare you, but that incident with the boy still has me shaken up a bit," he said. It was the first incident he's seen like that since he started Oasis six years ago. In my mind I kept reminding myself "it happened because he simply didn't zip his tent closed."

Harry left us so he could sleep at home with his wife (he hardly sees her.) We are to wake at 5:30 a.m. He told us we'd have no problem in the campground, but we should look out for puff adder snakes who will bite if

you don't watch your step and accidentally step on them. A puff adder bite will swell so much that at the hospital, they have to break open your skin to get to the poison. He also told us that crocs have been known to climb the paddocks, but that would be unlikely.

So to be safe, we should just zip up and use the velcro closures tightly. Velcro supposedly works because "animals don't know what to do with velcro."

Anyway, Harry left us and we sat quietly and filled out the liability forms. David had no info with him, so he used his cell phone to call the U.K. I'm not the only techie out here in the African bush.

I'm in my tent after packing for a fast getaway in the morning, and meticulously sealing all entrances and windows to my tent. The double layer front door give me some sort of comfort.

Fireworks went off before, along with someone's radio blaring Sarah McLaughlin. David is snoring up a storm as he wife predicted. There is another big camp group nearby still talking.

It's now 9:00 p.m., and I'll turn in. This will probably be my last secure

sleep (in a bed with sheets) I'll have in a while. I hope David's snoring isn't mistaken for prey in the wild.

October 14, 2000.

5:48 a.m. I'm up and packed. I hardly slept last night. Six hour jet lag and David's snoring. It's just about day break and we're loading up the truck.

5:51 a.m. Man, I almost forgot my towel again.

6:05 a.m. I'm in the back of the truck with no doors, en route to the Moremi Game Reserve. It's quite chilly with the wind and the morning air, but I'll manage. I hooked my pack to a bungee cord so it won't fall out—the road may have asphalt, but it'll be a wild ride after that ends.

"How did you sleep last night?" I asked Liz.

"Well, I warned you about the snoring," she said. Bob and Jemma slept fine—away from David's tent.

7:06 a.m. We're stopped. There's a truck overturned from a sleepy driver, driving at night. Harry knew the



Four-Wheel Drive Sally... she so sweet... she got everything that I need...



Me at the entrance to the Moremi Game Reserve, home of the world famous Okavango Delta.

guy and offered to help. The guy's okay.

Bumpy ride now! I can't write straight!

7:17 a.m. We're within the buffalo fence now, in the wild, stopped for a coffee break. Cisco is setting things up. We saw an ostrich on the side of the road on the way in, just doing its thing.

10:28 a.m. We've stopped for firewood in the middle of nowhere. We had to be wary of scorpions and snakes. The ride here was bumpy as hell, but fairly uneventful. There was an occasional giraffe or antelope, plus some elephant tracks but no elephants. There were also lots of birds, including the one Zazu is based on from *The Lion King*. David is a big bird lover.

It's incredibly hot now. At the entrance to Moremi, we stopped to pay the fees and stretch our legs. Nearby, there was a pack of baboons.

The ride is long and, should I say, boring? Where are the animals? "Excuse me, but at what point will you show animals on your animal tour?"

10:55 a.m. We're stopped at a park station. On the way, there was a mild stench. Bob pointed out an elephant carcass in the distance, but most of the meat was already gone.

11:51 a.m. We saw impala. Harry calls them the "McDonald's of the bush" because "there are so many, and everyone eats them."

We're at our first campsite now, at the Xakanaxa campsite. It requires two people to put up a tent, but I'm solo, so Harry did the demonstration with my tent. It's fairly simple. All the tents are numbered—I'm number 26—so that no one but yourself



Don't fall sleep behind the wheel in the African bush at night! (above)

An ostrich runs away from our truck. (right)



is to blame for missing poles.

It looks okay here; it's a camping area near tall grasslands, and everyone's backside is protected by a tree. However, we did see a pack of baboons when we got here. I hope they don't try to take the land back.

It really is a team effort to get things done around here. This is roughing it. I know a bunch of people at home who wouldn't be able to do this.

Cisco is now setting up the "mess tent."

12:32 p.m. We're getting ready for lunch. Harry just told us this is the campsite where the incident with the boy happened. Hyenas have also known to bite big men too. Anyway, he showed us how it happened, how the boy's hand was eaten clean off, and then his neck. The head rolled off like a clean decapitation, and then the body was dragged out of the bush as a piece of meat.

That hyena, plus her entire pack, were all shot. Hopefully that'll help. But this area has no game, and the

hyenas are hungry for anything!

1:09 p.m. Harry went out to run an errand at the airstrip and he's not back yet. We were supposed to be on our boat by 1 p.m.

We had lunch, although I could hardly eat. My stomach was all up in knots, thinking about *being* eaten instead.

I just took a dump. The ablutions block is quite clean, but dark. I am not going there at night! I used Harry's "loo roll."

3:05 p.m. We're in a boat. I can hardly breathe; I'm so congested from the dust. Maybe I'll take Benedryl tonight—it'll make me drowsy so I can actually sleep.

Anyway, Harry did come back and we walked through the bush to the boats. It wasn't far. I thought it'd be a big boat, but it's a small motor boat for just us and a driver.

Harry explained about hippos, how they're the number one cause of



Marabou storks gather and feed their chicks. (above, right)

fatalities in Africa because they attack when you threaten their space. The problem is, they're hard to find when they're underwater. Same with crocs. He said if you're lucky, you'll spot them before they attack. *If you're lucky.* Both creatures have teeth that can take off a leg in a single bite.

3:12 p.m. Elephant sighting. We just saw three in the delta. The water isn't too deep, so they just walk right in the river.

So far we've seen elephants, antelopes, and birds. We stopped three feet away from a marabou stork's nest! In a way it's exciting, but I am way too nervous to have a good time. This is the first and last time I'm gonna do a safari like this. I get edgy playing Tomb Raider for fear of things jumping out at me-

now, I'm suddenly edgy all day, all night. Why did I have myself subject to a 24-7 life-threatening situation for 12 days? God, I'm crazy. I'm a nervous wreck! I've never been this nervous consistently in my life. I can't wait to be home.

Anyway, we're still cruising around the delta in search of game. It's hot and I think my 45 SPF melted off already. The driver is steering the boat while on the lookout for hippos.



Harry takes a dip in the Okavango.

3:42 p.m. Harry and Bob just went in the water! What about hippos and crocs?! There was a sand patch only 12" deep, so they took a dip. Supposedly, we don't have to worry about bilharzia here because the water is constantly flowing. Gemma put her feet in, but I'm way too nervous for anything like that. "Now I don't have to shower tonight," Harry said as he came back into the boat.

We're cruising along now. We saw two more elephants before. Now we're going to explore another channel.

3:54 p.m. We just spotted a rare sitatunga antelope. It was hiding in the grass. It was hard to get a picture though. Harry says that if we saw that on Day One, this will really be a good trip.





The waters of the Okavango Delta give life to various plants, from water lilies to papyrus.





Another boat cruises by on our way back to camp.

4:22 p.m. Still on the boat and I'm a little less nervous. Writing this is actually therapeutic for me. A Halls lozenge from Jemma has cleared my congestion too.

We've been cruising around. There are lots of birds here and everyone but me seems to know what species they are right off the bat. They came prepared.

A fly started to bite me before, but I shook it off. Bob got bit too. Harry said they're not tsetse, just lion and buffalo flies.

5:01 p.m. I think we're headed back soon. The ride is actually kind of nice. I freak out in slow water when there are bubbles at the surface, but it's always nothing. The guide must know what he's doing.

5:11 p.m. We just rode past three other boats. (We've been alone this whole time.) One guy had this huge camera lens, like a telescope.

We're picking up speed now. I feel a little better. Perhaps all this insecurity is caused by solitude...or is it the Larium?

5:20 p.m. We just saw a fish eagle up

close. Now we're cruising again.

5:44 p.m. We rode really fast through some tall grass, and then the cruise was over. We walked back from the boat to camp where we saw fresh elephant and leopard tracks in the camp's direction! Cisco saw nothing though. He's setting up dinner. We're all gonna shower before it gets too dark.

What time is it? I misplaced my watch. Should I go back to the shower to check? I thought I heard a wild boar lurking!

6:17 p.m. Found my watch. It was in my bag. Good. I'm never leaving this campsite until morning!

9:12 p.m. It's dark now. We sat around the campfire Cisco made and did a toast to our first night in the bush. I was still pretty nervous. Harry spoke to us as Cisco prepared a *braai*, the traditional Botswanan barbeque with sausage, pork chops, and this really good porridge with tomato and mushroom gravy.

Harry spoke about his philosophies on safaris. "For a first safari,

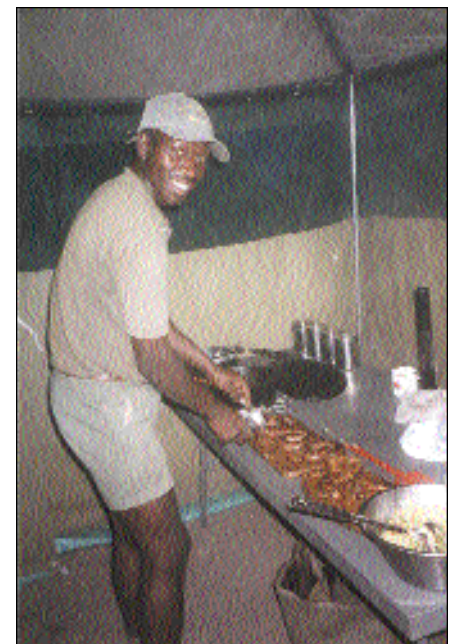
you must experience it this way, camping out in the bush, so you know what Africa is all about, about conserving water and things like that," he said. "Being able to come face to face with the animals, that's the magic of Botswana."

Magic my ass.

Anyway, he continued about his adventures in Europe—it's just like when Crocodile Dundee went to New York—and about his relationships, how he's married to Monique after a five-year hiatus. He's a pretty interesting guy.

I went into the mess tent and had small talk with Liz. I told her about how paranoid I've become, and she said I'll be fine. She's been camping out in the bush twice before, and spoke like it was no big deal. "If a lion or hyena comes, just stay in your tent," she said with great confidence. "It's things like this that don't scare me, but I could never go bungee jumping." I told her I'm the opposite and that I'm planning to do the jump at Vic Falls.

Anyway, we had our *braai*. It was really good. I had a Castle and a cup of red Cape wine from Harry's bag o' wine, and it really relaxed my



Cisco prepares a braai, a traditional southern African barbecue.



An elephant cools itself from the hot African sun in a relaxing mud bath.

nerves. “Beer’s about the only thing that’ll keep your sanity in the bush,” he said once.

As for the wine, David and Liz were commenting on the wine bag, how Harry could have put wine in a bag to hide the label and price. “We won’t complain about the wine. If we were French, we’d complain.” Ah, everyone hates the French.

The boar sound before wasn’t a boar, but a hippo. As we ate, the sound got closer like it was right in camp behind our canvas wall. Everyone assured me it was no big deal—hippos only attack if you get in their way to the water. “If you get in a hippo’s path, you’ve got a serious problem,” Harry said.

We ate and talked. Harry told us about rafting and bungee jumping—he did it once, but never again. He also told us about previous safari

trips he’s done. One was with a female journalist who ran out stark naked to Harry’s tent when an elephant was hovering over hers. He told us another story about this one obnoxious guy who got on everyone’s nerves. When his tentmate sneaked some chicken bones under his tent, about fifty hyenas were all trying to dig under the tent at night. The obnoxious guy ran out screaming, tripping on his sleeping bag on his way to the truck. Nothing gruesome happened in the end, but Harry got a laugh out of it.

Harry also spoke of hyena problems—nothing gruesome—just how they always try to take his equipment away. Once they got a way with his passport, money belt, and some expensive pots and pans.

I’m back in my tent after peeing outside in the bush. I put my tripod

inside at the entrance of my tent as some sort of a deterrent. My mesh door is zipped, as well as my canvas one. The double doors give me comfort, especially since I saw the teeth of the mesh door’s zipper come apart twice already. I’m not as nervous as before. Liz’s confident words really helped. (So does the wine and beer.) It’s just like that time I went camping in high school, and animals intruded our camp then—not a huge deal.

There’s a fly in my headlamp. I’ll have to spray it out soon. I hear Jemma and Bob packing and David’s already snoring up a storm all the way on the other side of camp. Will he be mistaken for a lion? Harry says when a lion comes, don’t worry, you’ll know by it’s deep breathing.

October 15, 2000.

5:20 a.m. Night One in the wild is over, and I slept surprisingly well. There wasn't too much noise last night, only a small insect or animal burrowing underneath my tent, all the frogs and crickets, the hippo, and David's snoring of course. None of it bothered me. I kept waiting for a lion or hyena, turning my camcorder on to record the noise, but nothing.

I think I hear two hippos outside. Bob and Jemma are taking down their tent. I gotta pee.

6:18 a.m. We're almost all packed and ready to go. I had bread with this Bovril meat jam, a coffee, and a juicy pear. Harry deconstructed my tent to save time.

David said they heard lions and elephants moving (and farting) last night. At about 4 a.m. or so, David felt a weight on this side outside the tent, as his body was leaned up against the canvas. He looked out the mesh, and was face to face with a leopard! He didn't freak out and just waved hello. "The wildlife here is so friendly," he said.

6:59 a.m. We're about to leave.



Zazu—a red-billed hornbill—stops for a visit as we fill up at South Gate.

"Participation is key," says the Oasis Safaris' brochure. True. Today, we all helped pack the truck. I helped Harry rig the roof with ropes.

It's a lot warmer now than it was this time yesterday. Cisco is putting the fire out now.

9:23 a.m. We drove passed the elephant carcass on our way out. "That's the smell of Africa. I'm going to make a perfume and sell it overseas," Harry joked.

We're back by South Gate to fill up and stretch our legs. The baboons are still here. On our way here, we saw elephants! Two of them were taking mud baths. We also saw some lion tracks, but no lions. And oh yeah, more birds.

Harry explained that David's encounter with the leopard was probably due to his snoring which is similar to the mating call of a leopard.

10:20 a.m. We've stopped for firewood, being wary of scorpions and fresh elephant droppings. Damn it's HOT!

10:36 p.m. We're off again. I put on my shorts. It's so bright outside

without my shades, no wonder why the ND filter on my camcorder goes off all the time!

11:01 a.m. We're at our new campsite for the next three days. It's not on the map, but it's near the North Gate. It's hotter than I've ever felt, but at least it's not humid.

11:15 a.m. We're setting up. There are two jackals at a distance.

11:33 a.m. Tent all set up. I have no buddy, so Harry helped, then Jemma, then David. This campsite looks a lot more like *The Lion King* than our last place.

1:02 p.m. It's siesta time. I'm not going to sleep though. Liz pointed out that if you sleep now, you won't sleep tonight and you'll just be up worried about animals.

We're all pretty much settled in now. We had a sandwich lunch of pastrami, ham, this Greek "seed bread" that's good and lasts for ten days, and our usual bottled condiments. I'm really liking "Peri Peri" sauce. Today I used hot chutney—it's not that hot—and chili garlic paste (a little hotter.)

Harry told us about his childhood, getting beat in school by his teacher regularly. He dropped out, joined the South African army for three years, then worked as a mechanic before the safari biz.

Harry told me not to leave a soda can open too long unattended because there are honeybees around.



Assorted condiments line the table at every meal.



A dirt road leads us to our next campsite.





Even in the bush, you can take a shower.

If you swallow a bee, you'll have to be flown out or Harry'll have to cut your throat open so you can breathe. I drank my Coke with caution as Harry continued his stories, including the time he met General Schwartzkopf while on a hunting safari. His party had to pay a million and a half dollars in hunting and park fees!

It's way too hot for a game drive,

or to do anything really. Thus, mid-day siesta. I helped Cisco and Bob set up the outhouse. They're hooking up the "bush shower" now. Jemma is reading the first Harry Potter book of all things. Liz and David are bird watching or something. Man, those two really love birds. I'm in my tent, relaxing, writing. Harry's off somewhere to run an errand.

We were all talking in the main tent before. They were noticing how clean my hat was, so right then and there, I threw it on the ground and stomped on it. (I accidentally got it dirty on the inside.) "Okay, *now* you're a bushman," Liz said.

I'll sort out my things now...

2:04 p.m. It's 97°F right now, and that's in the shade. I miss home. I wish I could call up Risa right now. I should have brought a book or something as a temporary escape during siesta. All I have are travel books about the area, and I'm already here.

I've been trying to translate my *American English* to *English English* lately.

- *Loo roll* = toilet paper
- *Torch* = flashlight

When conversing, I always try to think of centigrade instead of fahrenheit, as well as the metric system.

It's Sunday right now, but days mean nothing in the bush.

2:47 p.m. I brought my digital clock/thermometer out in the sun. In the sun, it's 55°C/130°F! Yes, the hottest I'll probably be in my life.

Cisco was amazed with my little digital clock/thermometer. "What is that?" he asked. I was confused.

"It's just a clock and thermometer I got at a local camping store," I told him, thinking nothing of it.

"You can't get anything like that here," he said.

So I just took my first "bush shower." It's essentially this heavy nylon bag with a shower head and valve underneath it, suspended by a pulley on a branch. Man, that was the best shower of my life right now. Nice and cool. I even peed in the shower, on the ground. I hope nobody notices.

3:14 p.m. I'm with the English, so it's Tea Time. "Tea or coffee," but I passed. It's way too hot for that. "I'm English, so I'll have tea," Liz said. Harry said it'll be even hotter in Savuti.

Harry suggested someone take a day-to-day photo of me to show my progress. I'm now shirtless and sockless.

3:30 p.m. Time for a game drive...

8:50 p.m. Only the 2 1/2 cups of wine are keeping me calm, as I sit by myself in my tent. There are two lions lurking on both sides of camp (we hear them), a hippo, and a herd of buffalo at the nearby public campsite. And as if those weren't enough, Harry told us of the dangers of scorpions in the area that are deadly. Liz was stung by one once—but survived after an agonizing 48 hours—simply because she didn't check her shoes when living in a house in Zambia. Scorpions also usually hide underneath tents, so be careful when you take them down.

Anyway, it's been a while since I wrote. Here's what happened:

We went on our first real afternoon game drive. In no time from our camp, we saw game right away. Impala, giraffes, buffalo, zebras, birds—all free. It's pretty amazing. You can't do this at the zoo.

We rode around the Khwai Circle, an area near the Khwai River. Brian was right: the reserve *is* scattered with many trucks and SUVs on safari, although it's still a hell of a lot more wild and real than the safari drive at Great Adventure.

A photographic safari is like an actual hunt. You still have to go out and look for your "trophies." We kept on asking other groups where to find good stuff, and there was a rumor of a pride of lions. After rid-



I begin to shed my layers—both literally and figuratively—as time goes on.

ing a long time in the open grasslands, Harry found them. They were all sleeping under the shade of a tree. Whenever one would lift her head up, she'd just fall down, really lazily. They were pretty well hidden; we wouldn't have found them without Harry's trained eye. They're so well camouflaged with just eight inches of dry grass, just by lying down. You can imagine how invisible they are at ground level.

Watching the pride got boring after a while—I read that watching lions sleeping is like watching paint

dry—so we trekked on. Soon we ran into an SUV with a pretty blonde guide guiding three Italians. Their car's steering went out, and soon we were heavy four more people, plus some coolers from their truck. We left the truck out there in the wild; they'll get help in the morning.

We rode around. We saw more game, including a herd of elephants. Soon we were back near the "crocinfested" River Khwai, where there was an SUV parked with people getting out for a picture of the beautiful African sunset. Bob and Jemma



A lioness watches over her sleeping pride.





Zebras graze in the lush grasslands near the Okavango Swamps. (above)

Two buffalos watch us photographers from behind a bush. (below)





A group of waterbucks walks by. (above)

A lone elephant poses for a picture. (below)





An lone antelope grabs a drink under the majestic African sunset.





A stranded Italian group hitches a ride from Sally.



Henry, Bob and Jemma's posh friend, drops a hello during his cocktails at sunset.

thought they recognized one and called for him. "Henry!"

Yes, by coincidence, it was someone they knew from England. Small world. Henry walked over with a beer poured into a fancy glass with his newlywed wife. "Where are you staying?" he asked.

"Campsite Number Three," Jemma answered. "And you, some posh lodge?" Henry did look rather posh.

"We're staying at his parents' house. It's a sort of wedding gift," the wifey said. Yes, these two were posh English out on a "holiday safari." Anyway, the two couples arranged to meet at our campsite tomorrow during siesta.

The sun was setting fast, so we head out. We got some good pictures of the African sunset. We rode through the river as a family of crocs swam passed. We made it to the crowded public campsite where a huge herd of hundreds of buffalo was nearby. We dropped off our newly found Italian friends and head back to our camp. Cisco prepared an excellent chicken stew with rice and sweet corn in a squash husk on the side. Tasted like chicken adobo actually. For dessert, we had fruit cocktail and custard. I had wine to calm me down after talk of scorpions.

Dinner conversation was okay. Harry told us more about his inter-

esting life. Once he actually chased a lion. Animal Planet's "Croc Hunter" is nothing compared to this guy! This guy *chased* a lion. "It's rare you see a lion run from a human. I had to take advantage," he said.

He told us more about the night the boy got eaten by a hyena. Because no guns are allowed in the reserve, he had to throw batteries at the animal just to get the boy's body back. He hopes one day guns will be allowed, just for cases like this.

We all talked. David, a freelance accountant/bookkeeper, sort of poked fun at me because us Americans only get ten days vacation while the British get at least twenty. Jemma, an accountant for Disney International based in London, has 23 days! Damn, the U.S. is so stupid. Anyway, we talked more with Harry, and it's weird—sometimes Harry is as raw as the Croc Hunter, but other times, he talks about dialing into a server at Gaborone to get internet access. "Do you have a website Harry? Because I know this guy in New York who will do it if you just take him on one of your trips," Liz joked.

David asked me if I'm freaked out by the safari, and they all laugh when I tell them "only the wine is keeping me calm." He told me that the first time is always the most

nerve-racking, but in the end, you actually look back and have a lot of fun, taking with you memories that last a lifetime. "You're actually pretty calm for a person on his first safari," Liz told me. I am?

Dinner went well, and I didn't even mind the tons of praying mantises at the table or the field mice scurrying around our feet. After dinner, I cautiously walked back to my tent, looking for anything, but there was nothing. I rolled up my windows although I don't think anyone else has. I'm not that confident yet; I didn't drink *that* much wine.

I'm tired and sleepy and that's a good thing. We wake at 5:30 tomorrow for a morning game drive. David is snoring up a storm again. The lions should be on their way to that herd of buffalo through our camp tonight...

October 16, 2000.

5:10 a.m. I'm up. I can hear Cisco outside pouring water. I actually slept quite well last night, despite the fact that I occasionally did hear rustling near my tent and hyenas and lions not too far away.

I gotta pee...

5:47 a.m. "Beautiful time of day,

isn't it?" Liz said as we breakfasted at dawn. Yes, beautiful. African sunrises are almost as beautiful as African sunsets. We ate toasted seed bread with peanut butter and Harry's favorite, fig jam.

"You call yourself an American, and you don't have peanut butter?" David asked me, not realizing I already had some.

"I'm already beyond that stage," I told him.

9:54 a.m. We're back at the public campsite after driving around. There are vervet monkeys invading—and fighting amongst each other—at someone's campsite. There are baboons nearby too. I saw two having sex, but I didn't have my camera ready in time. Damn. Also, there are mongooses nearby.

10:00 a.m. Off we go again on our game drive...

them at times!

Lions are very gentle-looking and you can clearly see their family-like behavior. It was kinda like watching *The Lion King*, only for real. We even saw little Simba and Nala cubs playing. Mufasa just walks around watching over the pride—unless he stops to take a shit and piss.

Soon, there were about three or four trucks following the pride along with us, until all the lions just found



The Bridge Over the River Khwai—not the one in the movie—at dawn.

Harry said two big male lions came by our camp last night. He wants to go search for them on our morning game drive. Predators like lions are on the hunt in the early morning.

5:59 a.m. We're stopped. I'm hooking up my tripod rig on the truck. Harry is asking a fellow guide where to find the lions.

Off we go!

10:16 a.m. Oops, we just went back to our camp. I guess we're already done with our morning game drive. Cisco is making lunch.

This morning's game drive was nice. We hunted down a lion by following its tracks and asking around the North Gate on the other side of the Bridge Over The River Khwai. Less than an hour later, we found a whole pride, complete with a male. We were only ten feet away from

some shade and went to sleep. At one point, the male stood guard, and it made for great pictures.

We drove around the reserve in search for more game: water buffalo, impala, zebras, warthogs, a giraffe, a jackal, and more birds. We also saw a group of wild dogs. They sleep as much as lions. So far, I've almost seen all the animals in *The Lion King* already.

After about three hours of driving,



A caravan of zebras walks by.





The Lion King stares back at me.



Lionesses and cubs follow the king to a new resting place.





Wild dogs wake up and take dumps.





The Lion King stands guard as his pride takes a nap.

you begin to see the same things again, and it's not as exciting anymore. It's not like a zoo where animals are presented in front of you. Most of the time you don't see any animals and it actually gets kind of boring. I mean, my attention span is short—I did seven European cities in seven days, with no time to be bored! I almost fell asleep in the back. I didn't though; I didn't wanna miss any good photo ops.

It's pretty awkward trying to shoot video and film on two different cameras. I tried to point the camcorder first, hit Record, and then pick up my Canon SLR. It doesn't always work right.

Anyway, we're back at camp until 3 p.m. or so. It's starting to get really hot. It's 40°C/104°F in my tent (in the sun) right now, and it's only 10:37 a.m. It's Monday morning at

home now. Risa must be getting ready for work.

10:52 a.m. I think Jemma is doing a journal too.

12:29 p.m. Cisco made a bean and corned beef hash thing, so now I'm taking a dump in the bush toilet, a wooden chair with a whole in it with a hole dug out right below. At least there's a toilet seat on the chair. To show that the toilet is occupied, you take the shovel with you to alert that



The Lion King takes a dump.

you're there. To "flush," you don't flush anything, you just kick some dirt over your "number two" (as Harry calls it) so there are no flies or stench. It's actually not bad.

Harry just entertained us around the table some more. He told us about his clientele, about how he'll never do business with the French or Italians because they are the worst and never cooperate.

Then he told us of his drinking games. He's insane when he gets drunk apparently. He told us of "The Dance of the Flaming Asshole," this drinking game where you have to chug a whole beer faster than a flame going towards your ass with a strand of toilet paper as a fuse. (You get to put the fuse out if you drink the whole beer in time, but no one ever gets passed half a can before their ass cheeks are singed.) "I tell



Let's get ready to rumble with the WMWF—the World Monkey Wrestling Federation.

you, toilet paper burns really fast,” Harry said.

Harry told us of the Maun sports bar where they have theme parties once a year. At the beach theme party, Harry was so drunk, he danced with a mannequin that fell apart. At the Mexican theme party, he brought in a donkey, wrestled it to the ground to get it inside, and when it started shitting, he threw shit around like hand grenades. Yeah, Harry's a character. Supposedly all that is behind him now.

2:15 p.m. Jemma and Bob's friends have arrived. God, I'm surrounded by the English. A driver from their lodge drove them here and dropped them off—with an offering of a caseful of ice cold beer and chilled wine.

I am alienated from this crowd.

I'm the least conversationalist and I feel I have to participate like it counts towards your grade in a school class. I guess on safari, you shouldn't get too involved with the creatures you're observing. Ah, the English, such interesting creatures! All three British couples seem to be living that “Talented Mr. Ripley” lifestyle, only wandering around to every outpost in *Africa* instead of *Italy*.

Henry and his wife—I forget her



A vervet monkey sneaks around someone else's campsite.

name—are more posh, even bringing glasses to drink. “Glasses in my camp?” Harry joked. Anyway, Henry would say things like “Fab” and “Brilliant” and other stereotypical posh British sayings. Meanwhile, a vervet monkey kept trying to steal our garbage.

It's time for a shower now, then a game drive. We'll be heavy by two posh English socialites.

2:50 p.m. Just took my day's shower. Really refreshing. The socialites are still talking—mainly about how annoying Americans are—although I'm “unusual” because I'm pretty quiet. I admitted to them that it was my 26th birthday in two days. Harry says we should take a photo of me stark naked near a big pile of elephant dung.



Hake fish bake on our campfire.

It's so hot now, my clock/thermometer LCD screen crystals melted. It's all black, but hopefully it'll come back. At last check it was 147°F in the sun, but at least it's dry and it's breezy. Savuti is supposed to be hotter than this?

We all talked around the table about television. Harry gets everything with his satellite dish, even *South Park*. Liz watches *Frasier* quite often. And everyone loves *The Simpsons*.

9:37 p.m. We've all just turned in after a dinner of hake fish Cisco prepared. (Really good.) There is no moon out tonight and I can see all the stars. It's beautiful! More stars than I've ever seen anywhere else. "The sky's a lot bigger out here," Liz said. It's like when Simba looked up at the sky—only nothing spells out "SEX" here.

I'm feeling more and more comfortable with the safari mates. Tonight we talked about child discipline—hitting is a must—snowboarding, sandboarding in Namibia, and the Coney Island Polar Bear Club. It was good.

Anyway, this afternoon we went on our afternoon game drive. We went with the posh English couple—they both come from wealthy families. Henry kinda reminds me of Hugh Grant playing a spoiled millionaire playboy role or something.

We drove and drove in search of game. After a while, it all becomes

the same, and it's all a big blur. Henry's posh wife—I forget her name—said that she read that after you've seen Africa's "Big Five," the only exciting thing left is birds. Hence, David and Liz's fascinations with them. (They lived in Zambia for fifteen years managing a lodge, and are probably too familiar with big game.) I started paying more attention to birds. The yellowbilled and redbilled hornbills (Zazu) are everywhere. I hear the Rowan Atkinson verse of "I Just Can't Wait To Be King" in my head every time I see one.

Aside from birds, I realized that I wasn't just interested in wild animals, but something just as foreign to me: the English. Sure you see them on TV and in movies, but being

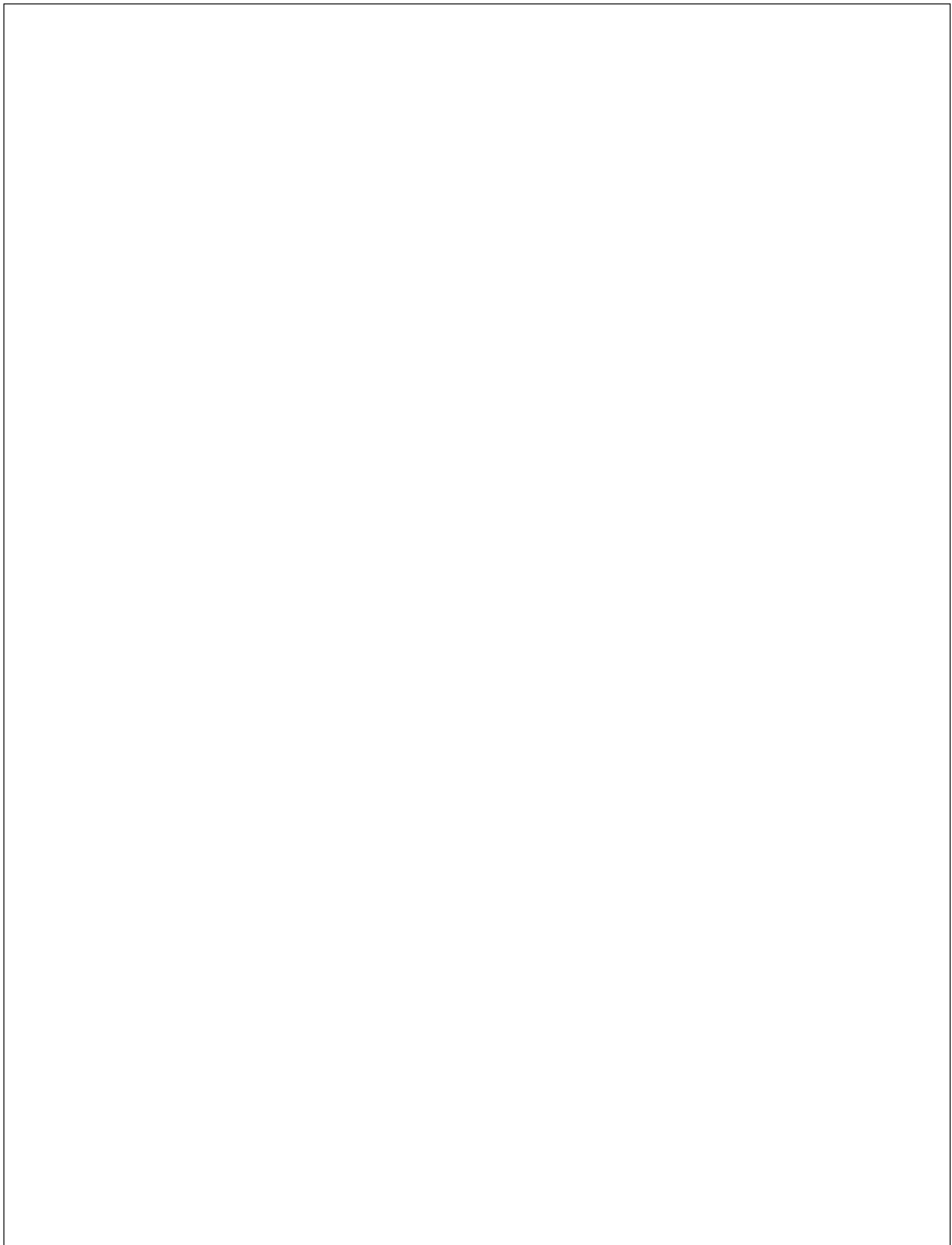
in their social environment is a whole new world. Posh Henry would always use words like "Fab!" and "Brilliant!" I thought that was only in the movies or *Monty Python*.

We found another pride of lions, all lazily sleeping in the shade. Yes, when they sleep, it's like watching paint dry. After a while, a jeep pulled up and it was Henry's parents picking them up. They said their good-byes and jumped on board.

We drove more, seeing the usual things: warthogs, wildebeests, zebras, impala, giraffes, etc. We made it out to the hippo pools where there is an overlook tower to see the hippos swim around. We didn't stay long because Harry noticed the left front tire was losing air and he didn't want to change a tire in the dark.



David takes my photo by the abandoned termite mound near our mess tent.



Termite mounds erupt from the ground in random places.



A warthog kneels down for his meal.



A tall giraffe walks by.



"In the [grasslands], the mighty [grasslands], the lions sleeps [today]..."

We zoomed back to camp like a roller coaster—it seemed rather long. Midway, David said the tire was getting worse, so we stopped in the middle of the bush to change it. Bob and I helped with that massive tire. Then we were off, out during a beautiful African sunset. We ran into Harry's Somali filmmaker friend. He told us that wild dogs were wandering around our campsite. We got back to camp where Cisco had dinner ready. Harry ate after us as he was trying to repair the tire.

I'm beginning to feel that I should always travel with someone. Solo isn't emotionally healthy, at least in my tent. But I like my company. I like having our own campsite away from the public ones. Harry said you can never sleep there because those damn South Africans stay up drinking and being loud until four in the morning.

Time to turn in. There goes David's snoring again. I'm sleeping in my underwear tonight. I wonder how Alan is doing with my apartment, housesitting.

October 17, 2000.

5:29 a.m. Slept really good last night. It's a lot chillier today than yesterday. No noise last night—must be because of the lack of moonlight.

Time to get up! It's a beautiful morning. Harry's off to get some sil-



Filmmaker Abdi Jama drops by to help us with our tire.

icone gel for the tire tube patch. (His was all dried up last night.)

6:15 a.m. Jemma said that David's snoring is just a normal part of the night noise now. "What's that? It's a David," she said.

"I'm big, so I'll take that abuse," David joked.

The Somali filmmaker guy is here with his electric air pump to help us with our tire. (Liz mistook him for being Indian.) He's a special guy—he lives in a tent in the park, and his life is dedicated to filming and studying wildlife in his specially-rigged filming jeep. He gets flats everyday, so of course he had everything for a quick patch.

6:26 a.m. They are still fixing the spare tire. The Somali told us how he witnessed an elephant's birth yesterday. The baby struggled to get up.



Wading birds search for food in the Okavango Delta.





A family of waterbucks poses for a family picture.



He couldn't move into position to film it because the truck engine would have spooked the mother away, leaving the baby stranded for lion food. So he just observed, and couldn't seem happier.

6:42 a.m. The tire tube was put in the wrong way, so we have to redo it now.

6:47 a.m. The tire is filling now. I told the Somalian I'm from New York City. He said he's lived all over the US for nineteen years. He asked me about the election and wonders why Bush is still doing well in the polls after his father brought the economy so down.

7:07 a.m. Still filling the tire—the electric pump broke a fuse. I tried to fix the fuse, but the actual pump is broken. Abdi—that's the Somalian's name—is clueless to auto mechanics.

Abdi is a cool guy. He said I might have seen him on TV on a National Geographic special or on the Discovery Channel, narrating shots of wildlife. He's lived all over the



A giraffe skull lays in the grass near the road.

world in search of adventure. He asked me if there was a way to set up a wireless webcam via satellite so he can transmit images "to the heavens" and over the net. He was happy to find out I'm a net guy. I told him

I'll look around for him. We exchanged e-mail addresses. Perhaps I have business in the bush? I think that'd be cool, even if it didn't pay.

11:53 a.m. It's siesta time for the day. I'm shirtless in my tent with the door zipped and velcro'd shut. Harry says it only takes a small hole for a scorpion to get in. I haven't seen one scorpion yet.

Anyway, I don't know if meeting Abdi this morning broke my homesickness—he's lived in the US for nineteen years and we had a common bond (he's heard of Rutgers)—but I'm really liking it here. As I've said before, it usually takes me five days into a vacation for it to actually sink in. I really began to love the beauty this land has, and it made me smile. How cool would it be if I actually pursued helping Abdi organize webcams in the reserve? I'd be one step closer than everyone who's said, "I wish I wasn't in this cubicle; my dream is to just be a photographer for *National Geographic*." I'll actually have the opportunity to do



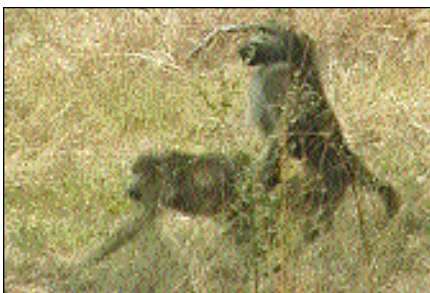
Two aggressive male baboons go at it.

something like that. Funny where the internet takes people. It brought me here—physically, not virtually.

Anyway, our morning drive was nice. I began to appreciate nature's beauty with "Can You Feel The Love Tonight?" in my head (the movie version, not Elton's.) We saw a giraffe skull, a hippo out of water at a distance, a crocodile, and more birds. We stopped for firewood in the middle of the bush where there was this troupe of baboons. They came in all sizes from babies to big aggressive males. We stopped and watched them fight, play, climb, and have sex. (I got it on tape this time.)

We drove not much down the road when I saw something hidden under a tree. "Leopard! Leopard!" I shouted. Harry stopped the truck ten feet away from it and we took pictures. Lots of pictures.

"It doesn't matter if your camera is



Baboons do it like they do on the Discovery Channel.

focused, just shoot it," Harry said. I read that leopards are very rare to see on safari because they're so elusive. Harry said that maybe only one out of ten groups ever gets to see one. He himself hasn't seen one in over six months.

"I can't believe we almost drove right passed it," Liz said. "And it's all thanks to Erik. I guess we all owe you one."

"Erik, I guess we owe you a beer," Harry added. For some people, it's a once in a lifetime experience.

Harry's taken people who've been on safari up to four times before, before ever seeing a leopard.

"I believe that's my second leopard already," David said. Oh, the English.

The leopard got up and walked away, so we were off again. On the way, we ran into a jeep that was trying to find the truck with the broken steering. (We passed it this morning; it's been there a while.) Luckily, Harry knew where it was and told them what direction to go in. It's a good thing you're only allowed to drive on designated trails or else no one would ever know how to get anywhere.

We drove more. We saw a flock of vultures circling something in the distance. At the river, we saw pied wagtails hover over the water like hummingbirds before diving in for a catch.

We arrived back at camp where



My keen eyes spot a leopard (no pun intended) near the side of the road. The leopard smiled back.



A male kudu smiles for the camera. (above)

A longtailed starling perches on a branch. (below)





A lone wildebeest walks by.

Cisco was preparing eggs and hot dogs for brunch. We sat around, and Harry was reiterating how lucky we were to see a leopard. I could get used to the bush scene.

Cisco saw some people going into the river and Harry immediately assumed they were South African. He really can't stand South Africans—so much that he's doing his best to get Botswanan citizenship. (He was born in Mafikeng, a town on the border of South African and Botswana.) He said all South African men are stubborn and cocky and they always have to outdo each other. I told him about Brian, how he's difficult to work with as he didn't really want a website until the women in his life pushed him. He only recently showed interest in the site because of competition. "Yeah, he sounded like a true South African [on the phone]," Harry said.

Anyway, we all went to the river to see what was going on. The people by the river looked like locals and no one was eaten alive by crocs.

12:31 p.m. I gotta take a dump. Jemma and Bob are laying outside and David is doing his bird checklist. Man, does he love birds.

12:39 p.m. I'm taking a dump. The seat's never cold out here in the bush. Our hole is getting more full and I can actually see my pile of shit underneath me. "It's a good thing we're leaving soon. Our hole's almost full," Jemma said before.

1:42 p.m. I just woke up from a short nap. I didn't want to fall asleep on this afternoon's game drive, although everyone is guilty of it. It's not as hot out today. Only about 119°F. There is a breeze which is

nice, but it blows dust everywhere.

2:22 p.m. David's in the shower and we're all around the table reading guidebooks. I got a couple of shots of Harry's truck "Sally." He got the name from *When Harry Met Sally...* Funny.

2:53 p.m. Just took my day's shower and cut my filthy toenails. We were all talking before about how bad it's gotten with lawyers in America. Harry says they're just as bad in South Africa, ripping people off with contracts when they know they can't read or write.

3:26 p.m. We're getting ready for our game drive. Everyone is trying out everyone else's binoculars.

9:13 p.m. I'm in my tent. It's 27.5°C/87.5°F. We're all turning in



A vulture keeps a lookout at its nest.

now; we wake at 4:30 tomorrow in order to make good time to Savuti before it gets way too hot.

Today's afternoon game drive was nice. We saw more of the same for a while. Actually, there weren't many animals out, but soon we saw a croc on land in the distance. We drove near it and Harry jumped out and began to chase it. The croc ran away. This guy is *crazy*.

We drove around some more and

saw birds and another croc, but hardly any mammals. I wanted to get a good picture of a hornbill (Zazu) to show off its flying. (Disney really got it down pat the way it flies.) However, every time I saw one in view, my camera wasn't ready, or the car shook, or I was out of focus, or whatever. It really started to piss me off, like I wasn't meant to photograph a Zazu-bird.

Soon we found a hippo in water, not far from our truck. I shot it as it

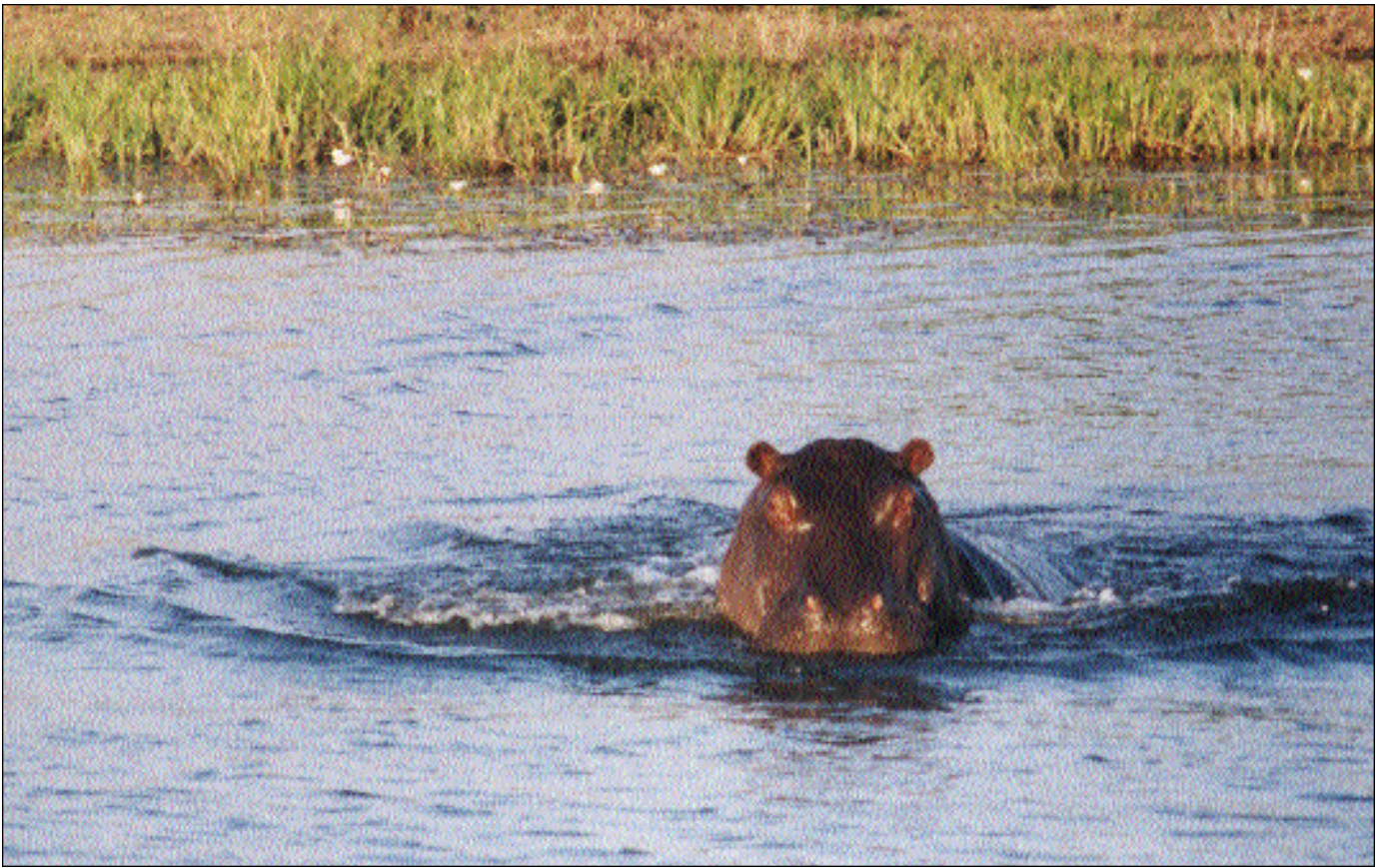
loafed around in the water. It's really annoying trying to be both a videographer and a photographer at the same time. A couple of times I missed good shot opportunities futzing around with the other camera. It's getting really annoying, but alas, I'm here solo.

Not far from the hippo, we ran into Abdi again in his truck. Man, that guy is happy all the time. He's so enthusiastic about his work, even after living four years in a wildlife park. He was glad to hear we saw a leopard. In all his daily driving around the bush, he hasn't seen one himself in two months. I guess we really are lucky to have seen it.

We drove around some more, and found some vultures. Mostly, all the animals were all off somewhere. I don't know where. So I sat in the back thinking how annoying the English are. I'm like Kevin Kline in *A Fish Called Wanda*: "Oh you English think you're *so* superior, don't you..." "They all go around with those phony accents." True, to an American, they just sound like they're putting the accent on for show, just to seem more pompous, with their gin and tonics, and twenty-day holidays. I'll be sure to watch the movie when I get back.

We drove as the sunset. There's no sunset more beautiful than Africa's, but it sets really fast. Then we made it back to camp where Cisco already took the mess tent down. He was preparing Oasis Safaris-style lasagna, with cheddar, ziti, and ground beef layered in a pot after pre-cooking and putting in the "oven" (hot coals above and beneath the iron cauldron). It's pretty good.

We talked. Harry told us about this fiasco with the BBC when he had to tour them around the bush. He had to cater to a whole crew for *Vets in the Wild*, this reality-based series that follows the lives of college vet stu-



A hippo pops its head out of water to see what's going on. (above)

The African sky blesses us with another beautiful sunset. (below)





Jemma, Bob, and Cisco stretch their legs at the Moremi North Gate. (above)

The bones of animals are on display at Moremi's North Gate. (below)

dents through their lives. To make a long story short, he never wants to see the BBC again.

We all talked some more, this time about snakes. They can be under your tent without you knowing, although they can't do anything from down there. Harry also stressed his "eat all your food" policy. He doesn't want waste; all extra food has to be burned to avoid scavengers in the night.

We talked for a while longer. I looked up at the sky without the mess tent over us. It's so amazing, the night sky here. There are so many stars without distractions of city lights or pollution, that it does almost look like a flat ceiling with shining spots on it.

Well, Harry will wake up at 4 a.m. tomorrow and will wake us at 4:30. "How should I wake you up?" he asked us.

"You can sing me 'Happy Birthday,'" I said.

**October 18, 2000
(My 26th birthday.)**

4:10 a.m. I'm up. I hear Cisco folding his tent up. It was pretty uneventful last night. There was hardly any noise. David's snoring's been suppressed because it's so dry out here that his sinuses dried up.

4:30 a.m. Jemma and Bob have woken up. They wished me Happy Birthday. It's so early, it's not even the 18th in the States just yet.

I was the first one besides Cisco and Harry to be up and about. Thought I'd get a head start over the Brits.

4:37 a.m. I'm all packed up and



ready for breakfast. Cisco is at the fire making toast. It's still dark outside and the stars are still out. I hear the flute score of *The Lion King* in



I sport antelope horns near the “Bridge Over The River Khwai.”



A male elephant relieves himself with his “fifth leg.”

my head—as well as hippo and bird-calls from a distance. The moon is still out—the same moon shining over Risa back home.

5:06 a.m. I'm helping Harry with the tents. We had to keep a watch out for scorpions and puff adders underneath. All we found were tons of termites.

David and Liz have wished me a Happy Birthday as well.

5:44 a.m. Beautiful sunrise out here. We're just about ready to leave. The gate opens at six o'clock.

6:19 a.m. We're waiting by the North Gate (near the Bridge Over the River Khwai) for the gatekeeper to open the park door. There are sounds of a tribal ceremony in the distance. Liz said it's because it's my birthday. David says it's a "Let's eat Erik" ceremony. Fuck you, you pompous British son of a bitch!

6:45 a.m. At the shop, we bought ice cold Cokes and juices.

2:30 p.m. I've been riding in the truck all day and it's too hard to write when bouncing up and down. I just quickly jot notes from time to time to keep my memory fresh.

So we were at the shop, just outside Moremi. Harry woke up the

shopkeeper so we could give her some business. Two kids, a girl and a small boy looked on. I had no immediate cash on me—my wallet was in the trailer—but Liz got me some juices. "It's your birthday," she said. We all got a round of ice cold Cokes. It was like drinking a Coke for the first time it was so good.

"It's the 18th in the States now." David said. So they all sang me "Happy Birthday." I got it on tape. Harry shook my hand. "Happy Birthday, mate," he said. He said he spends all his birthdays out in the bush. (July 23rd is in the high season.)

We drove the long six hours to Savuti through the more open Kalahari semi-desert. We saw a couple of jackals in a field. We saw a huge bull elephant taking a piss. Man, his penis was so big, it's like a fifth leg. I took a photo.

We made a quick pit stop at the Masabe gate where we saw hyena tracks in the sand. We drove on with lots of wind blowing in our face. This stretch of land is very flat and barren. We stopped for a while for firewood, selecting red woods over yellow because they burn better, like coals. I was cautious for snakes and scorpions, but nothing.

We drove on. We saw a couple of SUVs going in the other direction. There was so much dust blowing on us that Harry said, "We're trying to

make a white man out of Cisco."

Around 11 or so, we hit Savuti, an area that is reminiscent of the Serengeti, with more green grass. There were groups of elephants, wildebeests, and antelope, all doing nothing but gather around trees for shade. Cisco had the water supply drained as we drove because supposedly the water is so much better at Savuti.

At the Savuti gate, we stopped a while as Harry paid our park fees. Cisco met a friend from another safari group. He was telling us the water is so much better in Savuti, that he bottles it here and brings it back to Maun. Cisco filled our tanks with Savuti water and we emptied and refilled our drinking bottles. "We're in the middle of the desert and we're throwing away water?" I questioned. But the water *does* taste a little better and it's a lot clearer.

I set up my thermometer for a while, and before noon, it was already 130°F. We stopped by the ablutions block and dropped people off while me and Bob tagged along with Harry to run an errand. I began riding with one leg out on the ladder, leaning out while holding the posts tightly. It's kind of fun and a new way to see things.

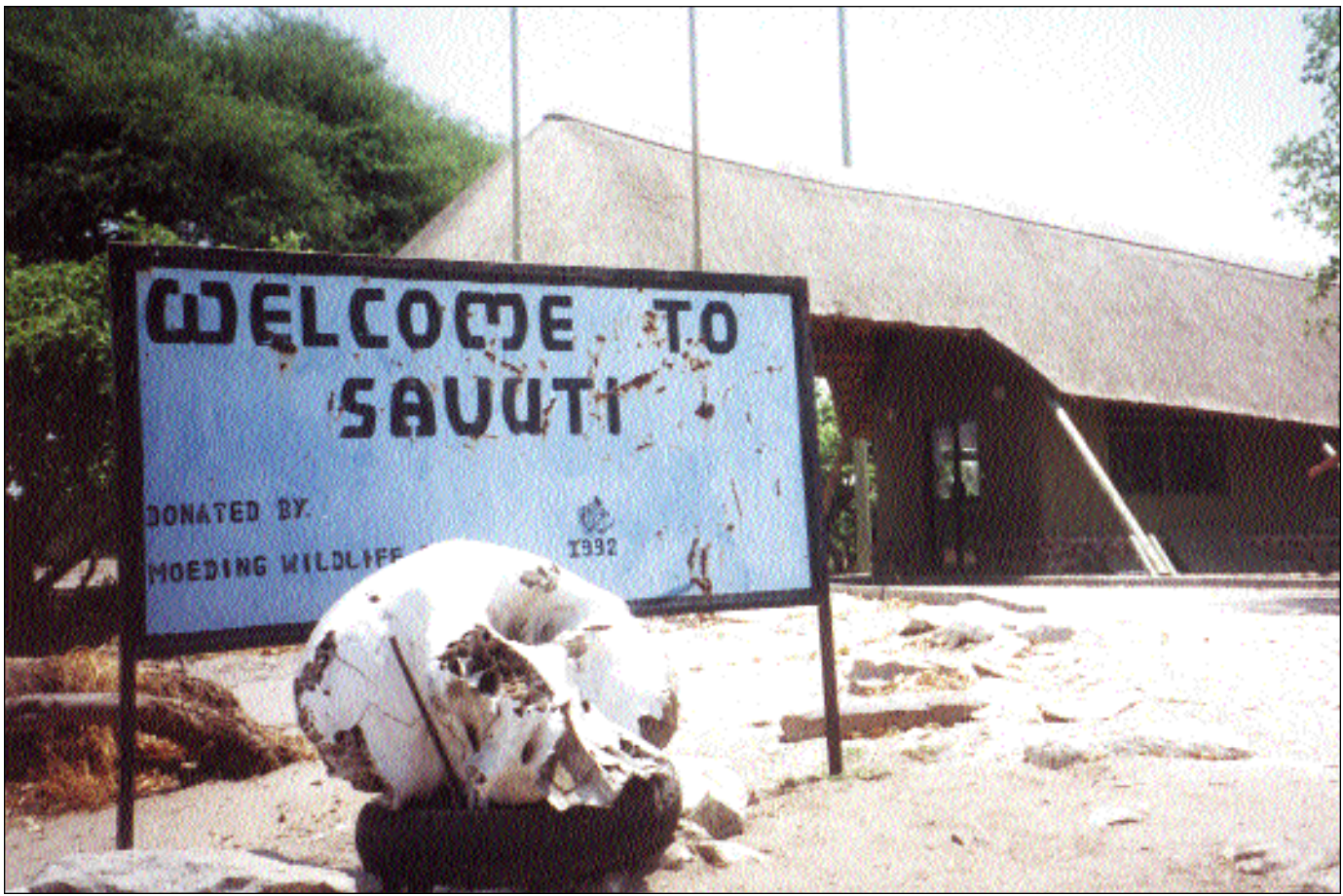
We set up camp not far away. There were five elephants walking nearby. My thermometer read over 141°F on my birthday. I say "over"



A boy observes us at the general store outside Moremi.



Village huts stand just outside of Moremi.



Savuti greets us with a big elephant skull.

because the thermometer starts crapping out at 141. Hottest birthday yet.

We ate sandwiches again. Harry was talking about other safari groups and how his is better because you get the most for your money. I asked him if “Hakuna Matata” really meant what Disney said, and he said it is. Jemma said in some places where Swahili is spoken, they say it all the time.

Cisco and Bob set up the “loo” and I christened it with a dump. Then I took a shower and now I’m writing this. Harry went out with Bob to get more water because, lo and behold, there is a shortage of water in the park because the pumps aren’t working or something. I knew we shouldn’t have dumped our water!

Tonight should be exciting. Savuti campsites are always visited by hyenas, as early as 7 p.m. according to

Cisco. He used to feed them leftovers until the incident with the boy. I’m actually not that freaked out about hyenas anymore; I’m actually looking forward to it—I haven’t seen one yet—provided they don’t eat me alive.

3:17 p.m. Oh, almost forgot to take my Lariam. Hope I don’t have night-



At 141°F, it’s my hottest birthday yet.

mares tonight.

We’re still waiting for Harry and Bob.

3:47 p.m. Harry and Bob came back. They took all the remaining water in the reserve. All the other campers will suffer. Today’s shower might be our last before Kasane.

I’m drinking ice cold peach nectar juice at tea time. Man, juice—what a birthday treat! I haven’t had juice in about a week now...

4:35 p.m. Damn, a roll of film ripped in my camera. I don’t know what I lost. Damn. I think it might have been the Khwai River Bridge pictures. Damn, I’m pissed.

9:42 p.m. My birthday is coming to a close and I’m in my tent waiting for the supposed nightly hyena raid.



We set up our tents under cover of shade to keep out of the hot Savuti sun. (above)

Another Zazu stops by to say hello. (below)





On my hottest and driest birthday, a bottle of juice is the greatest gift ever.

Anyway, we went on our game drive in Savuti today. In no time, we found a herd of elephants, about six or so of all different ages. They were all traveling along their way and we

got really close to them. Soon, the mother started charging us in a rage! “Oh shit!” I said as I was videotaping. It wasn’t a mock charge either; she meant business. She got really

close, but Harry jetted away in time. The women were really freaked out—especially Jemma—but I felt excited and thrilled. I had complete faith in Harry. He said once an elephant charged him from the front, and the only thing to do is go into first gear and charge back. Backing up would only show weakness and be more dangerous.

We drove around some more. There wasn’t much to see. Harry stopped to show us hyena turds. Perfectly white—almost like hard bulbs of garlic—because of all the calcium in their heavy bone diet.

We drove around some more and found three cute jackals, just moping around. One was eating elephant dung. Then it got together with another jackal and it looked like they were kissing or something. Jackal porn in the middle of the bush.



Elephants walk through the grass of Savuti...until we get too close, and one storms our truck to protect the rest.



A lone jackal scavenges through a pile of elephant dug... (above)

...only to kiss another jackal shortly after. (below)





As the sun begins to set, silhouettes of trees rise above the horizon in the flat barren grasslands of Savuti.



Jemma and Bob watch the sun set over cocktails.

We stopped the truck in the middle of the bush as the beautiful African sunset was upon us. We had cocktails of beer and gin and tonics, as we used my tripod to get group photos with the plains and sunset as a backdrop. Everyone toasted me Happy Birthday and David even had some bags of peanuts from his flight. I showed everyone my trick of crushing cans, in which you stand on one with one foot and tap it with your finger to crush it down.

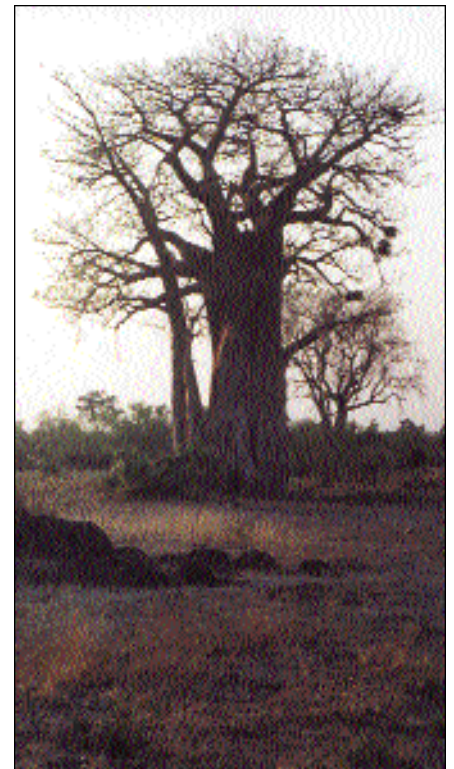
It was a very nice and beautiful birthday—once in a lifetime I guess. First almost being mauled by an elephant, then this. “I’m amazed at how so little people are around in an area of so much space,” Liz said. We were the only ones around.

We drove back to camp, anticipating hyenas, but nothing. Cisco made beef stroganoff with rice instead of noodles. Pretty good. I had some wine in addition to the two beers at

cocktails, and was feeling quite buzzed. I was on lookout for hyenas the whole time. No hyenas, but we all freaked out when an elephant came walking by. We ran for cover, but Harry chased it away with his torch.

We ate and drank. We talked about soccer and the Olympics and rugby. Cisco loves soccer, but Harry thinks it’s for pussies. I was nodding off from my buzz, but was still on the lookout. Nothing. Eventually we all turned in. Bob saw some eyes before, but they were low and probably just jackals. A few minutes ago he said he saw a hyena in our mess tent, but I saw nothing. I wonder what will happen next. Harry says they always come, and perhaps they’re making rounds with the other campsites first. 10:10 now, time to turn in...

Oh man, I’m 26 years old now.



A baobab tree—or “upside down tree”—towers over the other trees.

October 19, 2000.

5:15 a.m. Nothing happened last night. There was some howling, but it didn't last long. Harry said your chances of dying are greater in the cities than they are in the bush.

Man, it's such a peaceful morning. I'm really getting used to this.

5:55 a.m. Breakfast at dawn. Toast and coffee. The howling last night was of hyenas. Cisco said he saw four or five. Damn, I missed them.

We're all talking about *The Lion King* now. (Jemma works for Disney International Television.) We're also talking about golf.

I should start every morning like this...

6:01 a.m. We're feeding the birds toast crumbs. Yellow and red hornbills are battling it out with a franklin. The francolin is losing.

11:59 a.m. I just videotaped the thermometer going as high as 149°F during our brunch of bread and this sloppy joe-type thing that was pretty good. I'm taking a dump now however. There are flies all around me.

This morning's game drive was nice. It was chilly though; I had to use a blanket. As the sun rose, we saw a baobab tree, the "upside down tree." We saw an elephant skeleton and a male impala chasing other impala. We drove through the Savuti "marsh." Well, it used to be your typical marsh until global water

shifting dried it up.

We drove in search of game. In the road, there was a big cobra snake, but it slithered away. We saw a bat-eared fox in the distance, and an elephant herd at a watering hole very very close. (No charges this time.)

We, along with two other trucks, spotted a lion in the distance and drove over to the bush he was hiding in. He was hard to find, so we kept on going back and forth to see it. After a while, Harry realized the

danger of cornering a lion, and we drove away.

We drove and drove and drove. Jemma and I were diligently looking for a cheetah (which is as rare as a leopard), but no avail. We did find mongooses, a black korhaan, and a steenbok (a small antelope). We got the munchies and went to our bowl of fruit. Bob threw out some bad pears onto the ground. "In ten years, there'll be a pear orchard here," David said.



149° is the hottest I've ever been in.



In the bush, the seat of the toilet—or as the Brits say, "loo"—is always down.



A herd of elephants gather around the local water hole to grab a drink.

We drove some more, and we found another herd of elephants at another waterhole. Soon, it got too hot and the animals were retreating for the shade. We saw a lone elephant leaning against a tree with his legs crossed, just chillin’.

Back at camp, we relaxed around the table. Harry noticed two elephants nearby, so we all very quietly went near them. Both of them were lying down in the shade. Yes, the day is hot.

I’m in my tent for a long siesta. We won’t go on game drive until 4:30 today. I think I’ll take a nap so I can stay up for the hyenas tonight. Tonight is our last night in the wild.

3:21 p.m. Almost time for my shower. I took a nap before and it sure felt good. No cars, no doorbells, no footsteps from people upstairs. Wow.

I woke up and hung out with Harry, Liz, and David. They were talking about the safari business. (David and Liz used to manage a lodge in Zambia for fifteen years.) Basically, Harry is in a Catch-22 sit-

uation where the Botswanan Minister of Tourism is making mobile safaris suffer with license costs and other fees. The minister wants more locals involved in mobile safaris, but Harry believes



A flock of guinea fowl also convene at the water hole for a drink.



A herd of elephants hangs out by the water hole.





Harry leads the five of us up the side of one Savuti's rocky hills.

you must know more than the bush and survival skills—you need to know how to communicate with your clients on world issues. “What kind of guide are you if you don’t even know a man landed on the moon?” he said. He’s training his “son” Cisco—he calls Cisco “my son” all the time—to communicate better. I think he’s doing quite well actually.

We talked about websites and search engines and internet advertising. I’ll be sure to link him wherever I can. “If I just had ten Americans a year, I’d do well,” Harry said. “Just two more people on each safari, and I’ll do well.” He’s struggling with only five people per safari with all the recent fee hikes. I told him my parents might be interested.

I got up and took my empty juice bottle and filled it with sand. I’ll take the Kalahari Desert home with my in a bottle.

Well, time for my shower...

3:59 p.m. There were tons of bees hovering near the shower, but it didn’t worry me. The elephants nearby are awake now, but they’re just staying in the shade. Everyone is lounging around the mess tent, looking at a paradise flycatcher nearby.

10:20 p.m. We’re hunting hyenas for photographs in our tents now. I’ll update later.

10:27 p.m. My video camera is propped up on the tripod pointed at the campfire. Huge hyenas have come by already...

So early today, we went on our afternoon game drive. Before we went, David was teaching me from his big bird book. I got the name of some of the birds unknown to me. Eh, the British ain’t bad after all.

We went to the water pump to fill



Bushmen paintings can be found in hidden areas.

up (they were finally working) and then set off through the bush. This time, we stopped by the side of the road near one of the big mounds and did a bit of rock scrambling. Liz and David didn’t make it all the way up, and Jemma and Bob did so slowly. With all my equipment strapped on and hanging off my neck, I zipped up with Harry—I’ve done worse in

the States. Harry knew of some bushmen paintings to show us that aren’t on the map. He made a quick lecture about them and we got some shots of the gorgeous grasslands. You could see all the way to the curve of the earth.

We scrambled down and drove on. We saw more elephants—Savuti is loaded with them—and found another



An elephant grabs a quick snack of grass.



The sun begins to set below the beautiful landscape of Savuti.

er big male lion in the distance. We drove to a water hole where we thought we'd see more elephants, but it was dry and there was nothing but guinea fowl. It did provide for some good sunset photos though.

We drove to a nice open area with elephants in the distance and had our sunset cocktails. I took some timered photos of myself with my HyperTV company T-shirt on. The guys back at the office will get a kick out of it.

On the way back to camp, I told everyone about my four years of

photography and such. We were getting really friendly and they told me to drop a line if ever I was in the UK, and I reciprocated the offer. We got back to camp where Cisco had already taken down the main tent and was already preparing Spaghetti Bolognese.

We sat and ate. Cisco's a really great chef. We all talked about things while waiting for hyenas. Cisco opened up and told us his big one-time drinking and (legal) prostitution story in Zambia at the age of sixteen. He seems so mature, yet

innocent, I would have never known. It was in this conversation that I also learned of the legality of multiple wives.

As soon as we walked back to our tents, the hyenas began to show. You can see their yellow eyes glowing in the distance. They're big like ugly spotted bears! It *is* pretty thrilling. As long as they can't get into tents (and I trust Harry that they won't), I'm actually not that scared like I was just five days ago.

Time to turn in. We wake at 4:30 tomorrow.



Hyenas finally show themselves as they invade our camp during our final night in the wild.

October 20, 2000.

4:45 p.m. I'm up.

5:10 a.m. Still dark. I'm having coffee. I'll pack my tent soon.

5:47 a.m. We're just about all packed up and ready to go. Sunrise is upon us and we can finally see without flashlights/torches.

8:22 a.m. We're at another gate. Harry is signing us out of the park. There are flies all around me.

The ride here was chilly. We got some decent speed because it was a straightaway. Despite the bumpy ride, I managed to take a short nap under a blanket.

2:47 p.m. So we drove to Kasane. It was chilly so I wrapped a blanket around me. We drove and drove, passing impalas and giraffes. With the sun and the wind, my lips were chapped more than they've ever been.

The desert turned into forest, the Chobe Forest Reserve. We took a short break near a big tree that looked like it could be a climbing wall. I would have climbed it, but there was a big hole in it where Harry said a black mamba snake could live.

Anyway, we drove on through "Heartbreak Ridge," a road so sandy and inclined, people's hearts are broken when trying to drive it. The ride got bumpier and bumpier, and the sand got redder and redder. Soon, we saw the figure of a man in the road in the distance. Upon passing him, we were in a village called Kacheckabwe, filled with huts and other buildings, and people. We drove through Kavimba where we began to see the Chobe River, and continued onto Mabele where we stopped at a general store for drinks and snacks. It was a small store in



Harry, David, and Liz grab a snack at the Mabele General Store. (above)
Cisco smiles from Sally's front passenger seat. (below)



the middle of a village and suddenly I felt like I was in some *National Geographic* anthropology special. My cash was in the trailer, so David spotted me for a cold apple nectar and some Vaseline Lip Ice for my severely chapped lips. Damn, it felt good to put that on. Harry said that putting on Lip Ice is as addictive as smoking cigarettes, and I can see why.

Not far from Mabele, we hit the tarred roads again, and we gradually came back into civilization. The ride was smooth, so I took a nap, but was awoken when we stopped to see a herd of elephants cross the road. We cut the herd short, so we were surrounded, but only one of them charged—a mock charge though.

We drove on some more. We stopped to refuel with the tanks in the back. At exactly noon, we pulled into a store in the town of Kasane to

get some fresh vegetables for lunch. Kasane is reminiscent of a small remote town in the Philippines, only a lot more dry. We drove through town. At one point there were shacks on one side of the street with a nice ritzy golf course on the other. Go fig.

We pulled into a private campsite overlooking the Chobe River that Harry had reservations for. We set up camp. Nearby, a herd of cattle walked by. It's really scenic here, but Cisco says to watch out for our belongings because Namibians have been known to come across the river at night and loot the tents.

Today is our "vacation from our vacation." No game drives today. We're just going to kick back at camp. We all went in the swimming pool and man, did we need that. I didn't even care that it was dirty and green; neither did anyone else. It was cool and that was enough. We

sat around the pool with beers and gin and tonics. I tried one and they're quite good. "This is the life," Harry said.

I joked about being a hippopotamus. "Don't get in the way of a camper on his way to the swimming pool."

"Yes, it's very dangerous," Liz said. We hung around the pool a while, talking about computer servers and corporate dress codes. Then we had lunch under our mess tent. Cisco was joking about Mike Tyson. Soon we realized the left front tire of the truck was completely flat, down to the axle. Harry's fixing it while we all relax. This is the life.

5:22 p.m. So Harry called home to have his wife e-mail reservations for bungee jumping and rafting. Then I took a nap and a short shower. (I



Why did the elephants cross the road? To get to the other side. Really.



Our campground in Kasane bordered a cattle pasture near the Chobe River. (above)

Everyone pitches in to pitch the mess tent. (below)





*“This is the life,” Harry says as he lounges out in the pool with David and Liz. (above)
I take a self-portrait from the front seat as we drive around town. (below)*

accidentally used the women’s shower and ran into Liz changing her clothes. Whoops!)

Harry brought David, Liz, and I into town. He had to run some errands for the truck, so the three of us went shopping. We went to a “bottle store” to get cold drinks. I got more peach juices, and the two Brits got more gin for their tonics. We all got cold water. What a difference the cold makes.

We went to the grocery store and got some chips to munch on. We all got some postcards, and I took the tab for that to pay David back. I got a postcard with a baby monkey on it.

We went back to the truck and ran a couple more quick errands with Harry. There was a warthog wandering around town that found it’s way to the store. I sat shotgun on the way back to camp where Cisco was making a beef curry stew. I just took some self photos near the river. I’m drinking a gin and tonic. Guess I’m getting more English.



8:50 p.m. I’m beat. It’s been a really long day.

So we had dinner. Cisco made beef curry and rice. We sat around and talked. We’re surrounded by other campers. Some are playing American pop songs. There’s just no escape.

Cisco was amazed to hear that Stevie Wonder is blind and can still play music. He’s only heard rumors of a blind musician, and he thought I was pulling his leg when I told him about Stevie Wonder. And then I told him about Ray Charles. He was amazed. It’s funny to hear him get surprised about common knowledge in the Western World.

I thought I saw a hyena sneak in, but it was only James, the hyena-colored camp dog. I think I’ll turn in. Harry’s drinking it up with all his safari guide buddies at the camp bar and we would join him, but we’re way too tired, waking at 4 a.m. this morning. Perhaps tomorrow on our last night in tents. Tonight we have to be wary of Namibian thieves—I can hear village drums just across the river—and crocs that can crawl out of the river and next to our tents!

There is a mosi (mosquito) on my head lamp now, creating a fist-sized bug shadow. Freaky.

October 21, 2000.

5:25 a.m. Time for breakfast. I slept okay. I actually woke up a lot earlier to take a piss.

5:52 a.m. We're sitting around, eating a light breakfast. The sun is rising. Most of the other campers are sleeping after a night of partying. Harry told us an elephant walked behind our camp last night, but none of us were awake to see it.

11:32 a.m. I'm in the loo, doing Number Two...

This morning's game drive—our last of the game drives—was quite eventful. We drove into Chobe National Park in search of game along the Caprivi Strip. We ran into Veronica Roodt, Harry and Brian's friend, who wrote all the Shell road maps of the area. (She's probably



An adult and baby baboon lounge around in the sun.

friends with all the guides.)

We followed the road along side the Chobe River where we saw crocodiles and hippos, two of which looked like they were kissing. Harry

offered free beers for the one who spots a cheetah, but we could find nothing. Instead, we saw baboon families with their cute babies. We saw a pride of lions and some impala



Harry calls impala the "McDonald's of the bush" because they are so many, and everyone eats them.



Everyone dropped what they were doing to help a couple in a camper stuck in the loose sand.

nearby, but nothing happened.

The sand changes from black and white sand to red sand within the park, and Harry stopped so I could get a bottle of red. "Red sand is true Kalahari sand," he told me.

Soon we saw a hired camper stuck in the sand. The tires were halfway stuck in the loose sand. Harry offered to help the couple, and soon we were all out pushing as Harry tried to pull it with Sally. We all caused a scene, and soon other trucks were pulling over to help. The camper got deeper and deeper so we had to get more people and a shovel. Soon it was out of the loose patch. "Erik, are you sure you don't want any more sand?" David joked as he emptied his shoes.

We drove on and Bob spotted a sleeping elephant on the side of the

road. We watched it a while but then it woke up to stretch. It was really difficult to shoot both film and video, and I'm not sure if I got good shots. Later on, we saw a group of mongooses, standing like meerkats. Again, I couldn't quite pull off shooting both video and film, and I was getting really pissed. I should have just stuck to 35-mm film, but alas, my friends at home want to see all the action as if they were here with me.

We finished our last game drive and went back into town. At the Savas grocery store, David and Liz continued their diligent birdwatching. Man, they do love birds.

We drove back to camp. Most of the campers were gone already. Cisco made us eggs and hot dogs. He told us he saw some Namibians

in a mokoro boat nearby, but they were only fishing.

Well, it's the hottest part of the day now. Think I'll do a handwash so it'll dry quick in the hot sun. Then, that pool will be a callin'...

2:32 p.m. So I did a handwash, although my clothes are still pretty dirty. Then I head for the pool. David had his binoculars with him in the pool, looking for more birds. Liz sat outside while Bob and Jemma were poolside, each with a Harry Potter book. Harry came by for a while. He told us we're all booked at Victoria Falls, including my jump. I have to share a room with Harry because the hotel is booked solid.

Cisco joined us in the pool and we had a chat. He was telling us about all the fatalities that have occurred



A lone elephant takes a nap under the sun.

on safari—most of them caused by people who simply didn't follow the precautions. In one incident—when Cisco saw his first and only death in person at the age of sixteen—a woman went wading in the river (when she should have avoided it) and was split in two by a single hippo bite.

Another incident involved a mokoro poler who got pulled in by a croc when he went under to fetch a client's sunglasses that fell in. His leg was trapped by the crocodile's jaw, and he asked the clients for a knife. They didn't have one, and so he got pulled in and they never saw him come out. They had to cautiously paddle with their hands just to escape.

Once a man was mauled by a buffalo because he went wandering in the bush in attempts to get a sunrise photo. Then there's the hyena incident with the boy. Cisco said he heard five minutes of screaming that night, and then nothing but crying. He was scared that whole night.

Jemma and Bob left the pool and it was just me and Cisco. He was telling me about world history and such, a lot of it over my head because I'm an American who doesn't keep up with that stuff. Cisco's a pretty well-read guy.

I just took a shower in the ablutions block where ants kept trying to

crawl up my wet legs. We're all getting ready for our boat cruise now, putting all our drinks in the cool box.

3:35 p.m. I'm on a boat cruise on the Chobe River for a three hour tour, a three hour tour. It's beautiful out here. There are fishermen and kids along the river bank.



A group of mongooses stand up and look around.



A group of hippos swim around in the river to cool off. (above)

A crocodile at the edge of the river gets ready for his next meal. (below)





Two elephants work their way over to the edge of the river.





Alert the media: a group of elephants cross the Chobe River. (above)

Half-immersed elephants make two-tone pachyderms. (below)

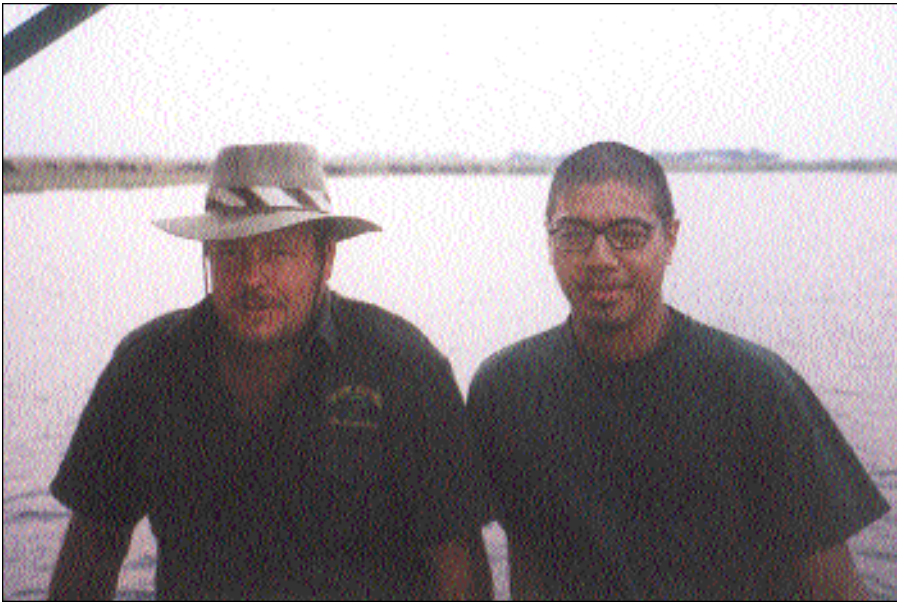




Drowned buffalo corpses are scattered over a small island in the Caprivi Strip. (above)

Four big birds fly overhead. (below)





Harry and I cruise down the Chobe River.

5:57 p.m. I'm lounging on the boat on the way back out, sipping on a gin and tonic. I'm slightly pissed. This is the last vacation I take where I try and be videographer and photographer at the same time. A lot of

good photographs (my first priority) suffered because I was futzing around with the video camera. And a lot of times there is nothing on the video camera because I'm busy taking snapshots. I can't do the job of

two people.

Anyway, we saw hippos fairly close to the boat, as well as crocs. I missed an open-mouth photograph because I was busy playing videographer. We saw birds and baboons too, but the highlight of the cruise was the crossing of the elephants. A whole media frenzy materialized as about six boats loaded with touring paparazzi (including a boatful of Japanese tourists) were there to cover the event. I swear you'd think Princess Di came back to life. And of course, during the entire Crossing of the Elephants, David was interested in the birds behind the elephants.

We cruised on, passing an island of buffalo carcasses that were drowned in the river and pulled out by the Botswanan wildlife crew. The sun began to set, and we cruised back, seeing more animals including birds and a whole herd of grazing living buffalo.



Dozens of buffalo graze the grass along the Chobe River.

Harry and I had a talk. He asked me about my camcorder and such, and asked if I could do a short edit that he can play at travel shows. I said I'd gladly do it; I'm even considering making a website chronicle of this entire trip. He even said he'd give me a ten percent finders fee for every guy I refer to him. "I really need to get into the American market," he said. I said I'd try my best. I'm definitely going to give good word to Brian back in New York. This was truly a great safari so far.

I had Jemma take a photo of me and Harry with our last Botswanan sunset. Hopefully some buffalo made it into the shot as well.

6:50 p.m. We're back at camp. Cisco is making "Chicken in the Hole," a recipe in which he takes a whole chicken (from the grocer) and bakes it underground, above and beneath hot wood coals. He's also making some cream and potato side dish. This will be our final dinner in a camp, our final dinner by Cisco, our final dinner in Botswana.

11:44 p.m. All is quiet in camp tonight. I just woke up after a short nap. I was too tipsy to write before.

Before dinner, David and Liz went off to the bar while I hung out with Jemma, Bob, and Cisco as he prepared dinner. I've gotten quite used to them and they're all nice people. Cisco finished cooking so I went off to the bar to get the other three. To my surprise, I heard English spoken with an American accent! There were four Americans playing the card game "Asshole." They're from Washington D.C. and have been in Africa for three weeks already. Tomorrow, they're headed for Vic Falls as well, and I might even see them at the Vic Falls Bridge.

At dinner, we sat around and ate as

we talked about the cost efficiency of a full day of rafting (\$75 US) versus the cost efficiency of a five-second bungee jump (\$90 US). Harry and Liz argued that the bungee is a rip off when you put in cost efficiency terms, but I say, if you're jumping off a bridge, the least you could pay to save your life is a measly ninety bucks. Besides, when else will I get to do this? I haven't gone bungee jumping before, and if I do it, it might as well be at Victoria Falls, the tallest commercial jump in the world.

Dinner was excellent. Cisco's Chickens in the Holes were very good, tender and tasty. His creamy potatoes and onions on the side were good too. I was drinking more wine and beer and was really catching a strong buzz. I went to the loo to sober up with a piss. There was a small frog with me in the stall, but I didn't freak out like I did in the Philippines.

We sat around our table for our last night and played cards. Despite my exhaustion and half-drunken stupor, I managed to win a couple of hands.

It's 12:09 a.m. on Sunday now. I'm continuing writing this in my tent after taking a quick dump in the ablutions facility. In the stall with

me, there was a big African spider, but it didn't bother me.

Well, time for some rest. I jump off a bridge in less than twelve hours. I'm starting to get the butterflies...

October 22, 2000.

5:51 a.m. We don't leave until 8 a.m. today, so I'm just sitting in my tent, enjoying the serenity of my last morning outdoors in Africa. Dawn in just as beautiful as sunset.

6:28 a.m. I'm all pretty much packed up, after a cold shower on a chilly morning. The others are getting packed as well. We don't have to pack our tents. Cisco is preparing breakfast, but I'll pass—I'll be dangling upside-down in about five hours.

7:27 a.m. I switched hats to my New York Yankees baseball cap. Now we're filling out these comment sheets Harry gave us. I gave him all good marks. It's about half an hour before we go to Vic Falls, across the border in Zimbabwe. The bungee awaits...



Cisco and I bid farewell.

8:13 a.m. Well, we said our good-byes to Cisco, each giving him a tip. I have him the suggested 50 pula. I was going to give him my digital clock/thermometer because he was so amazed by it and you can't get that in Africa, but I didn't feel like it at the last minute.

Now we're in the van, en route to the Zimbabwean border. We'll have to show our passports and fill out immigration forms. "Are you ready for the bungee?" Harry asked me.

"I think so," I told him. Eh, it won't be so bad. I've noticed that much more people survive the jump than camping out in the bush.

9:00 a.m. We're driving in Zimbabwe now. We had to go through two gates—a Botswanan

exit and a Zim entry. I had to pay \$30 for an entry visa. I paid in pula.

"It might not be a good idea to video the border," David said. I put my camera away.

9:07 a.m. Still driving. I taught Jemma how to use the camcorder. It's very easy. She's going to tape my jump. I think I might buy the official video too. I know I'll regret it later if I don't buy in now, no matter what the cost.

10:00 a.m. We're at Mopapoma in Victoria Falls. This place is beautiful, almost too luxurious for what we've been accustomed to: *clean* swimming pool, kitchens, living rooms, and dining rooms—all with a tastefully done African décor.

We all got ready to go into town. Everyone will cheer me on during my jump.

10:30 a.m. We're in the shuttle to town now...

2:45 p.m. So the shuttle took us to the customs building at the Zimbabwe/Zambia border. We told the officer I was jumping and the rest were just tagging along to watch. "I'll put five for exiting, and four to come back," The officer joked.

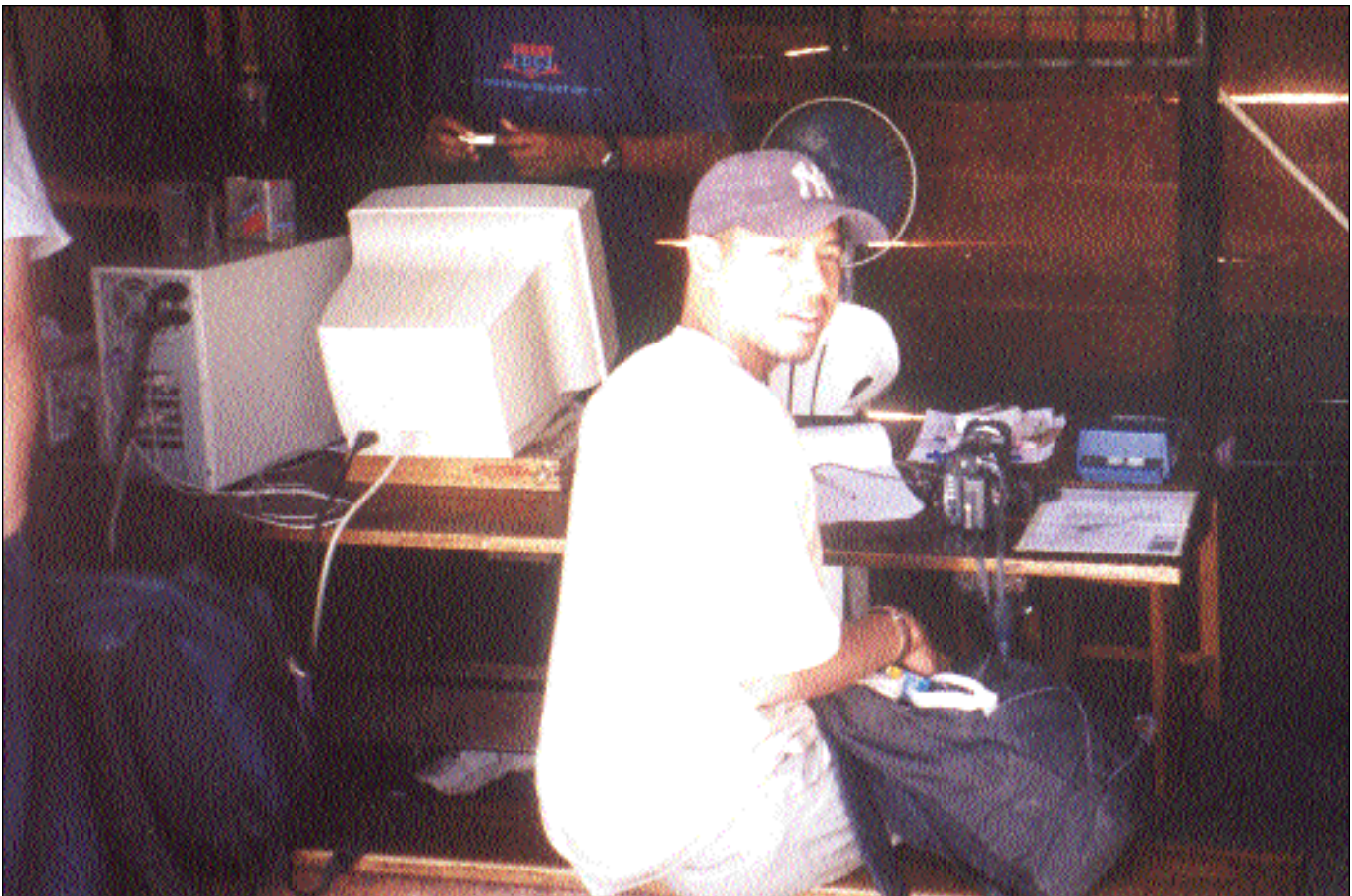
It was a decent walk through "no man's land" to the bridge. Along the way, there were kid peddlers trying to sell us bracelets. We got to the jump site and there were a fair amount of people around. Jemma



The Mopapoma bed and breakfast brings us back into civilization.



A walk down the Victoria Falls bridge gives me a first glance at the depth of the gorge.



In no time, I am registered to bungee jump and harnessed in.

went with me to the Zambian side to register. There was a sole Japanese guy there, signing up. He was slated to go right away, but he told the guy to postpone it another forty minutes so he could get a drink. The guy told me later that the Japanese guy was there yesterday, but chickened out then too.

I registered, signed my life away on the indemnity form, and weighed in at 64 kg. I wasn't nervous at all. I thought of the jump to be as scary, but as safe as any roller coaster because all the math and physics has been calculated out. That's what bungee jumping is: a straight-down roller coaster ride with only one hill.

Back at the jump site, I strapped in. Everyone was watching over as the instructor put the harness on me. (It's actually just a redundant safety measure; you are really only attached by your feet.) Jemma was taping me and there were two other



It's a long way to the bottom as I look down of the ledge. (above)

The Brits tag along to cheer me on. (below)





I take a swan dive on the tallest commercial bungee jump in the world.



I frantically take photos as I hang upside down, bouncing up and down the gorge.

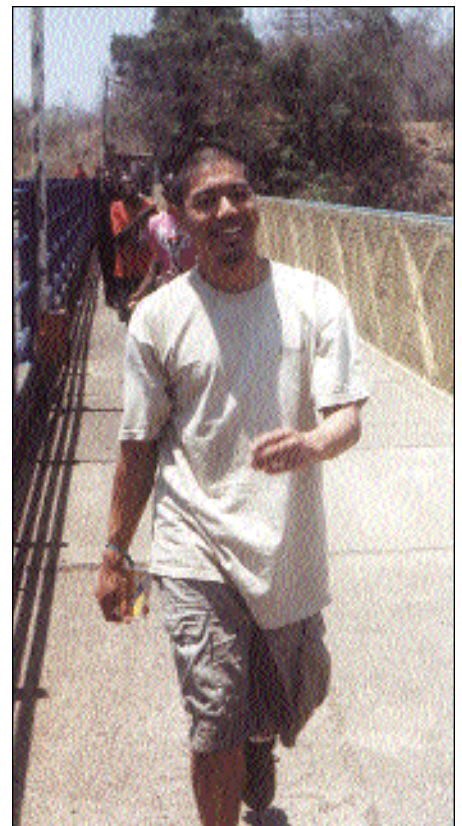
guys with cameras. Before my jump, to keep my word to the Fish Crew, I said, "To all my friends in Teaneck, I wanna say 'Fish!'" I strapped a camera to my wrist and took some pictures like a Japanese tourist. Then the countdown: "Five, four, three, two, one, BUNGIE!" And I jumped as far as I could and took the dive, arms spread out. I screamed the whole way down, the way Bruce Willis did in the first *Die Hard*.

It wasn't that bad. It was actually really exhilarating, like life just came back to me. I felt so alive! I thought the recoil would jerk me back too abruptly, but the elastic cord made it pretty smooth.

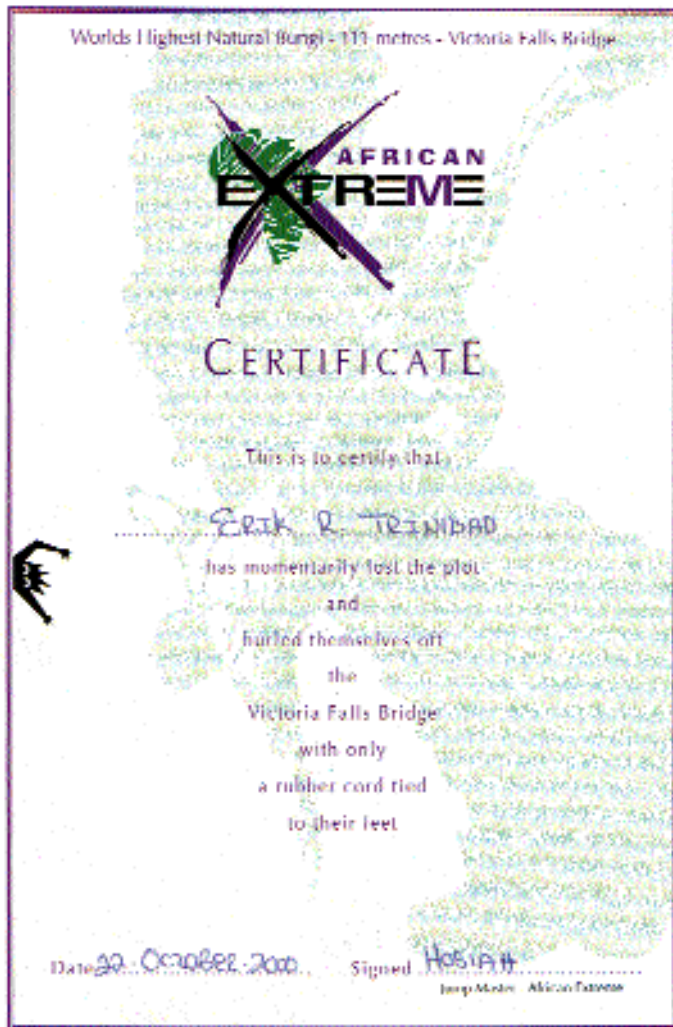
So I dangled there for a while taking as many photos as I could. I used up a whole roll! Soon, a guy got lowered down to hoist me up. Once back on my feet, I was lead through a maze of walkways under the



I am reeled back to the bridge like a fish out of water.



Everything's AOK as I get back on my feet.



African Extreme gives me a cheesy certificate for jumping off the bridge. (left)

bridge until I was back on dry land. Back at the jump site, the guy there told me I was “quite a good leaper.”

Then I went to the debriefing where I got a certificate (valid for a second free jump) and bought my digital photos on disk—they still use 3.5” floppies(!)—and my video. It was fifty American bucks, but worth it, even though I have to convert it from PAL to NTSC later. I also bought a Coke.

We walked back through No Man’s Land, and Bob’s sandal straps ripped. So I gave him the rubber band I used to strap my camera to my wrist, and it worked like a charm.

A quick run through customs and we split up. David and Liz have been to Vic Falls many times before and didn’t need to go into the Vic Falls Park. The rest of us did go, after changing our pula, US dollars, and UK pounds to Zim dollars. Changing 110 pula and \$110 US, I had a huge wad of 100 Zim dollar notes, exploding out of my wallet.

“What’s this ‘fish’ business?” Jemma asked as I waited on line. I told her it was an inside joke I have with my friends at home from the movie *Half-Baked*. (“What up, Fish?!”)

In the park, I walked with Jemma and Bob—and four monkeys—down the pathways overlooking all parts of the falls. Beautiful. Soon we ran into the Japanese guy from the bridge. He finally made his jump. [Later on, David told me he saw the Japanese guy’s jump. He clenched the rails for his life, and didn’t leap at all; he kind of just let himself fall over.] We also noticed some people across the gorge, lounging over the cliffs.



Zimbabwe is the third African nation I’ve been to.



A rainbow appears in the mist of Victoria Falls.

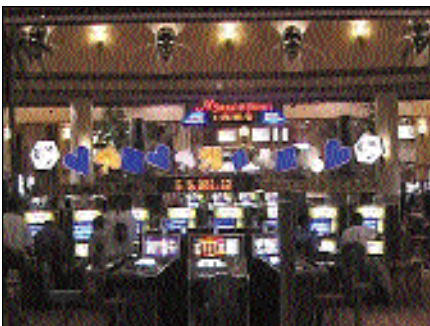


The water of the Zambezi plummets over Victoria Falls.



Once out of the park gates, we were hounded by about ten peddlers, all trying to sell us wooden sculptures. They were relentless. We kept on declining, but Jemma gave into a small teakwood elephant at 50 Zim dollars. As we got closer to downtown, more and more peddlers gave up, but there was this one guy trying to sell us a wooden hippo. At the beginning of the long walkway, the price was 300 Zim dollars, but by the time we were at the downtown area, he was like, “Okay, 20 Zim dollars...10 Zim dollars...” I should have gotten it by then, but I didn’t. It was too hot and I needed a drink bad.

I went on my own to the Kingdom, this fancy schmancy hotel from Sun International (who also did Atlantis in the Bahamas), where we were all



The Kingdom provides a little Las Vegas in the heart of Africa.

supposed to meet eventually. I saw Liz and David there. I went inside and heard the familiar sounds of a casino. Yes, a casino in the middle of Africa. In fact, Kingdom was almost like Trump’s Taj Mahal or any casino resort in Atlantic City.

I found Busta’s, a fast food place where I got a burger and chips with a Coke and a liter of water. Soon, I was back in a shuttle with Liz and David waiting for Jemma and Bob. Soon we were all reunited and went back to the lodge. Harry was sleeping on the other bed in our room.

We took a dip in the pool—a much cleaner pool—and then we got ready for our sunset cruise. I took a shower despite the low water pressure in our bathroom, and now we’re waiting for the shuttle. Harry, Jemma, Liz, and I are sitting around the back patio, talking about our trip. “I can’t imagine doing the safari the other way around,” I said. They all agreed. You really need to rough it first before going back to civilization.

October 23, 2000.

5:20 a.m. I’m up already. Last night I was too busy—and too drunk—to write. Anyway, let me continue where I left off.

So we went off in the shuttle. We stopped at the Sprayview Hotel where we picked up a European couple—I pinned them for Italian—and then off to this very upscale hotel resort called Elephant Hills. There we waited a long time for an elderly American couple to arrive. When they finally did, they apologized for the delay, but their voucher had the wrong departure time on it.

So we all went on our sunset booze cruise. It was very nice. There were hot and cold finger foods, beer, wine, and champagne. Jemma and I had champagne, while the rest had soft drinks, beer, or red wine.

To “balance the boat,” David had to sit in front. I sat with him for a while as we cruised along. He told me how the boat we were on was almost exactly the same kind he had when he did sunset cruises at his Zambian lodge. “I really miss this feeling where you just sit at the front of the boat and just sit and watch the world go by,” he said. “It’s so peaceful.” Yes he was right. It was very soothing and almost hypnotic. I just sat there and watched the world go by. David of course, was with his binocs searching for birds.

We cruised along, drinking and eating. On top of three glasses of champagne, I tried Zambezi, the



David lies back watches the world go by.



The sun shines down on the calm waters of the Zambezi.



A group of hippos come out of the river.

local Zimbabwean beer. It was okay. David and I started chatting with the American couple. It's nice to hear the familiar accent when you've heard nothing but South African and British accents all week.

Anyway, Herb and Ginny lived in "Boston or Alabama, depending on what week it is." Ginny was a social psychology professor at Auburn. So we got to talking. Herb was quizzing us on the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. (Victoria Falls, the Amazon, the Nile, Yosemite, Mt. Everest, the Grand Canyon, and the Northern Lights.)

Ginny told us how they saw a bungee jumper around eleven o'clock that morning, and we figured it was me that they saw. "This guy bungies and comes back fine, and I go and break my arm climbing the stairs," Ginny said. (She was in an arm sling.)

We cruised along with other boats, seeing birds, elephants, and hippos. There was a family of hippos coming out of the water with their baby hippo. The sun set beautifully down the Zambezi's horizon.

game pate and the game steak (kudu), then I made a phone call to Risa. It was great to hear her voice. She was doing okay and was so overjoyed from hearing from me, she was crying. "If I survive rafting tomorrow, and I probably will, I'll see you on Wednesday!" I told her. Then I paid the front desk 8752 Zim dollars.

Back at the table, we were eating and talking over a bottle of Hippo Creek red wine. A piano player was playing familiar classical tunes nearby. Over the terrace there was an elephant having dinner as well. Everyone in the restaurant got up and watched. It was pretty funny.

By the time we finished dinner—the kudu steak was good by the way—I was very buzzed and just wanted to sleep. The shuttle was to pick us up at the Kingdom, so we crossed the street. I fell asleep on the bench, but Bob woke me up to tell me I could buy sandals for rafting at a store inside. I went in and got a pair of "Rapid 9" brand sandals for about \$8 US. Not bad. (I'll be putting them on in a couple of minutes.)



Dinner at Ilala Lodge's Palm Restaurant brings us back to fine dining.

It was nice to sleep in a bed for a change. I got to my room and Harry was already asleep. I jumped right into bed and passed out. I was awakened in the middle of the night by mosquito bites, so I woke and put on my bug spray. Damn, the one night I don't use the spray, I get bites. (I figured I'd be okay in a lodge, but I guess not.) I hope I don't get malaria for this!

Well, my last full day in Africa has begun. I gotta take a serious dump.

7:20 a.m. We just had a beautiful breakfast of eggs, ham, beans, tomatoes, and toast. It was weird being served food at breakfast. Liz excused herself and David said, "Let's see how long it takes before she realizes I still have the [bedroom] key." She took 25 seconds.

Now, Jemma, Bob, and I are waiting for our ride from the rafting people. We'll be rafting all day. Harry, David, and Liz are going to Elephant Hills for a game of golf. I have my passport—we're starting in Zambia—sandals, sunblock, and sunglasses with the elastic supports. We're doing a hold-on rafting trip where everyone just holds on while a lone ironman rows the boat. I thought it would be a cop out to go rafting without rowing, but Harry said, "I promise you, holding on...it's a lot of work." We'll see. I'm gonna ask the rowman if I can row for a rapid.

7:48 a.m. There is some discrepancy with the pickup, so we just took the



van with David and Liz into town. We're waiting at the Bundu rafting office, right next door to an internet café. As much as I'd like to check my e-mail, I will resist. I've gotten this far already.

There was a shady guy just outside who approached me. "You are from the States?" he asked. I guess I reeked American or something.

"Yes," I said.

"What part of the US?"

"New York."

"Ah, New York. That is the capitol?"

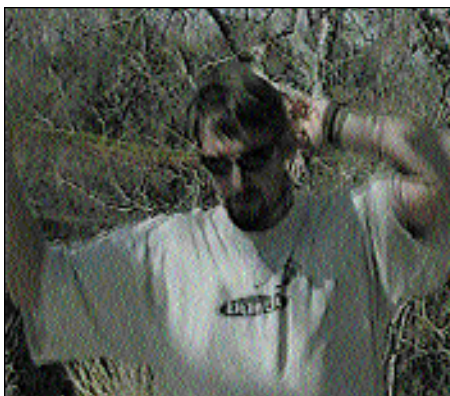
"No, the capitol is Washington."

I knew he was getting friendly and there was gonna be some sort of catch. Then he said, "So, are you with a guide?" I pointed to Harry inside. "Oh, okay. I will be seeing you." And he left.

Still waiting. Bob and Jemma are looking at brochures. Harry isn't golfing right away I guess; he's here talking to the rafting guy. If I recall correctly, I think that *Reading Rainbow* did a segment on the show where Le Var Burton was here, rafting down the Zambezi.

9:59 p.m. I'm in bed with ice all around my knee. I'm in extreme pain as I twisted my knee on today's rafting trip. A lot has happened since my last entry, but right now, I just want to sleep. I took notes of the day's highlights anyway.

Oh, when does the hurting stop?



October 24, 2000.

6:08 a.m. My knee's a little better. I'm still sleepy though. Today is my last day in Africa. I leave for the airport at noon. So much has happened yesterday, but quite honestly, I don't feel like writing. I'm just not in the mood. I figure I have a seventeen-hour flight back home to write about everything.

11:08 a.m. Okay, I have time to kill before my transport to the Vic Falls Airport. So I'm sitting in Mopapoma's lounge area. David and Liz are taking one last dip in the pool.

So where were we? Oh yes, yesterday morning. So we were at the Bundu office waiting for our ride, and finally a big truck with about 25 people in the tow were there. We hopped on, where I heard many different accents. There was this group of six American Bohemian-types there. They were those cliquy Bohemian adventure types that I can't really relate to. One of them looked like Erik Brynildsen from Rutgers, only with Matt Damon's asshole smile. I didn't feel obligated to talk to them (they were all into each other), the same way I don't talk to people I used to go to high school with even if I never talked to them back then. Weird. Anyway, there were other Americans, plus British, Swiss, and Australians.

We rode to the border and all jumped out to get our passports val-



Adventure enthusiasts from around the globe learn safety procedures from the guide of Bundu Adventures.



An army of rafters descend down the gorge.

idated in single file. Harry came along too, although he was just going into Zambia for business. Then we all hopped back into the truck, drove over the same bridge I bungied off the day before, and we were suddenly in Zambia at a second immigrations office, jumping out and getting our passports stamped all over again. Then we rode about a mile into Zambia where we were dropped off at the starting point.

An Australian guide gave us a briefing over coffees and teas. He explained all the safety precautions and rules. "If you fall into the river, don't panic." Panicking will only make it worse.

Then he told us about how boring it is to just hold on to the raft without rowing, but it was our choice. "Is there anyone here who would rather not row?" No one raised his/her hands, except for Jemma. "I'd rather

not row," she said.

"You'll be the mascot of your raft then," he said.

We put our valuables in the safebox. I locked my shoulder pack with a three-number combination luggage lock just to be safe. Soon we were put into groups. It was me, Jemma, and Bob grouped with two Polish girls, Anna and Joanna. We all put on our life vests and helmets as the video guy took shots of us.

We all trekked down with our oars down the gorge, through the jungle. (The mist of the falls provides for jungle vegetation.) Our raft leader was "Fast Eddie" who was also the day's group leader. (They all rotate.) We were in the "A Team," the raft with the big oars carrying all the emergency supplies, always going last in our queue of four rafts. Shortly, we were also joined by Martin, a younger guy who was a

rafting guide trainee. We all hopped in the raft where we had a lesson of what to do in certain situations. Fast Eddie explained all the commands he'd be yelling at us during the trip and how to act accordingly. Forward. Back paddle. Left turn. Right turn. Hard forward. Relax. Get Down. Then we all jumped in the river to practice bringing people back into the raft. Soon we were off on our first rapid. "Hard forward! Hard forward!" Fast Eddie yelled at us. Man, rafting is hard work!

Soon we were rolling down the river, going down rapid, then calm water, then rapid, then calm water. It was soon becoming one of the most thrilling experiences of my life.

11:57 a.m. now. Transport coming soon. I'll continue later...

12:53 p.m. I'm waiting in the airport



“Fast” Eddie leads the “A Team” raft. (above)

When “Fast” Eddie yells “Get Down!” you duck down into the raft and hang on for your life. (below)





Our group of rafts navigate our way through the mighty Zambezi River.





Joanna and Anna take a break from their joking and laughing to take a swim in the river.

now with the rest of the British crew. They're all writing postcards while I continue to write this.

Where were we? Rafting. So we were rafting down the mighty Zambezi River. At Rapid 5, we were instructed to "Get down!" The water was rough and my body flew up, as my hands were clenching the ropes. As I bounced back down, I twisted my knee. I didn't think anything of it at the time. I thought it would just wear off, but the pain lingered. It wasn't so bad because of the cold water though.

Eddie told us about this one time when a bunch of Japanese businessmen who couldn't speak English (or Afrikaans for that matter) came to raft—all in their suits and ties. Eddie got so fed up with them, he made sure they flipped the raft at every rapid. The businessmen got out at the halfway point and called it a day.

We continued down the rapids. Eddie, being the group leader, played it safe on the rapids, avoiding all the tough areas. The other guides were more daring though, flipping the rafts over. I wish I was in those rafts.

There were interspersed periods of calm water where Eddie said we could just jump in and swim. So we did. It was way too hot anyway. The secondary memo pad I brought to take notes got drenched even though I stuck it in a Ziploc bag.

I got to know our Polish companions better. Joanna and Anna were the best of friends—they joked they were married to each other—and were wandering Africa for three weeks. They were going from place to place asking Polish missionaries if they could stay at the missions. They haven't paid for accommodations in three weeks! Man, I gotta see if I can swing that deal. Anyway,

Joanna and Anna were both 26 too, working office jobs in Poland. They were always joking and laughing the way I do with Terence.

At Rapid 9, everyone got out to walk around the rapids. No commercial rafting company does Rapid 9 because the water is so shallow that anyone who would fall out would definitely be met by sharp rocks. So we walked around and suddenly the brand of my new sandals made sense: "Rapid 9."

As we walked, I got pretty chummy with the Poles. They told me how they both just cut their hair short in the spirit (and high temperature) of Africa. I think Jon Caramanica was right about the British, how they are all proper and polite like in the movies. I could open up to any other nationality with ease except the Brits.

After Rapid 10, a guy in a kayak went around with a big Tupperware

bowl full of small sandwiches. After lunch, the camera guy went around to interview people, but the bastard skipped me. "You forgot one more!" Jemma yelled, but he was already jumping into another raft. Oh well. I would have probably said something stupid anyway.

We cruised along with the current as the calm waters took us on a relaxing midday stroll. People just laid out to sunbathe. "It's like our midday siesta," I said to Jemma and Bob. "All Bob needs is his Harry Potter book."

I got to talking with the Poles. Anna reminded me of some underclassman in high school, and Joanna had a pretty cute face. We were all talking about traveling and such. Anna was in New York just three

weeks ago. Surprisingly, she even knew about Hoboken and its Cadillac Bar! Joanna was well-traveled as well. I told her I was in the Philippines last year, and she said she went there as well. Joanna and I were hitting it off pretty well, and Jemma said, "Um, Erik, you might want to look at what's coming up." There was a big rapid, sloping downward like a little waterfall, and we quickly held on. I should have paid more attention, but it was funny nonetheless.

At Rapid 11 or 12, our raft took a jump and everyone toppled out. I was thrown up and bumped Bob out of the raft and into the river. It was just me, Martin, and Eddie in the raft, rowing to get to the other to get in the raft. I pulled Jemma in with

my bum knee. "I really thought I was going to die," she said. But she was fine. Soon we were all back in the raft to safety.

We continued down the river with its rapids and calm water periods. Jemma rowed too to be part of the action. Along the edge of the river, there was an occasional small croc. At one point, Martin was training by rowing four rafts tied together in a train. Then he let me try. Man, what a workout. I kept on veering the wrong way and had to keep adjusting it by paddling the other way.

1:39 p.m. We're behind the security gates now in Vic Falls Airport. The Brits have ordered food at the bar, even if they will be boarding in about ten minutes.



Rapid No. 6, "The Devil's Toilet Bowl," tips over one of our rafts.



Raft guide trainee Martin rows the oars, pulling four rafts tied together like a train... (above)

...and then lets me try. (below)



So at Rapid 18 or so, there was no around it, but everyone in every raft fell out. I became a “long swimmer”—someone separated from the raft by a long way—and like a Japanese tourist, I just let the rapids take me down the current while I took pictures with my waterproof camera. It was pretty funny—everyone was swimming towards the raft for their lives, and I just floated away taking pictures. I was so far away that I had to be picked up by another raft. I was transferred to my raft shortly thereafter in the calm water. “I saw you taking pictures in the rapids,” Eddie told me.

“Yeah. I wasn’t panicked at all,” I said. Eh, you can do anything after you bungee jump.

At Rapid 21, the last rapid of the day, Fast Eddie said that it was only a Class One rapid and we could swim it. So we all jumped out, held hands across the Zambezi, and let

the rapid take us. Soon we were all separated by a whirlpool and Joanna and I were taken away from everyone else. I tried to swim as best I could with my bum knee, but Joanna kept kicking me in the head with her swimming. Eddie grabbed her and I was on my own, but it was okay.

At the end of our journey, we rowed the rafts to shore. My knee really started to hurt outside the river and it got a lot worse going up the rickety 800 or so steps up the gorge. In the beginning of the day I thought I’d be able to zip up the gorge at the end of the day, but that wasn’t the case. It took me a while, holding my helmet and vest, and I had to keep stopping for rest. My knee was really killing me. There were a bunch of young porters just running up and down the gorge with bare feet. They must have done three or four roundtrips during one rafter’s one-way trip.

At the top, there was a tent with food and drinks, and I sat with my new Polish friends. I had a Coke and a Mosi, Zambia’s beer, named after mosquitoes of all things. I had a ham sandwich, chicken, and some cole slaw. The view of the gorge was breathtaking. And an ice cold beer on my knee felt a little better.

The safeboxes were there and I noticed my lock wasn’t connected to both zipper latches and that the combo was put in. Bastards! The Lonely Planet warned about this. I guess the culprit knew exactly how long I’d be gone and had the time to try out all the combinations. I wasn’t sure exactly if any Zim dollars were missing—I should have kept track, but it was too big a wad—but at least my passport and credit card were there. And when traveling abroad, that’s the only thing that matters I guess.

We hopped back in the truck, rid-



My raftmates swim back to the raft after being thrown out, while I calmly get taken away by the strong currents, taking pictures the whole time.

ing through traditional African villages, waving at all the people as they waved back at us. The ride was very bumpy—like we were on a game drive again—and it didn't really help my knee. At the campsite for the video showing, I had to limp all the way to a chair.

We sat and watched the video. The editing was pretty decent given the time. It even had a soundtrack by Moby, Blur, and other groups. The video was mainly catered to the six American bohemian types; they got the most fun out of it. I wasn't even in the highlights. "Our guide wasn't crazy enough," Anna said.

The cost of the video was \$55 (US), but I felt obligated to buy it. Everything else on this trip is on video and I didn't want to have a gap in the middle. I told everyone in my group I'd post it on my website.

It was time to go and we bid farewell to Anna and Joanna. They gave me the African handshake. They were wondering what I was doing that night and I told them we had reservations for the Boma restaurant in Vic Falls. I felt like inviting them or hanging out with them, but they were staying in Livingstone, Zambia and the border post isn't open all night. I could really see how Risa's friend Amol could travel alone and end up tagging along with other travelers. I wish I could have spent more time with them, but instead we just swapped e-mail addresses and I told them to look me up in New York. "Do you have any more vacation time?" Anna asked me. I told her we only get 10-15 days in America. "Oh, that's right, you have to maintain your 'strong American economy,'" she joked.

2:25 p.m. I just bid farewell to the Brits. I told them to drop me a line if they're ever in New York. They said

the same to me for the UK. I kissed Liz and Jemma goodbye and shook Bob and David's hands. I told them I'd probably see them waiting in the Jo'burg airport. (They're going to Jo'burg via Maun, while I fly direct.) From there, Jemma and Bob are going to Capetown to go shark-cage diving. David and Liz will be driving around South Africa with friends through Kruger National Park. They are, as they say, "Africa buffs." As for me, I don't have enough vacation time as the Europeans, but at least I'll be home for Halloween in New York.

So where was I? Oh, I said farewell to the Poles as they went off to Livingstone. The rest of us hopped back in the big truck and head for the border posts. We did the two gates, getting our passports stamped again. I limped the whole way. We made a couple of stops along our way, dropping off people at different places, and finally the three of us were back at Mopapoma with only fifteen minutes before we were to leave for our farewell dinner. I checked my bags and it appeared as if someone tried to jimmy open one of my combo luggage locks! (I

locked both packs with luggage locks and chained them to the bed with my cable lock.) Bastards! Twice in one day. But I don't think anything was missing.

2:44 p.m. I'm on British Airways, Flt. 6282 headed for Jo'burg now. The couple I met in the waiting room is across the aisle and I'm sitting near a blonde who's here with her family I believe. They were carrying tennis rackets, so they must have stayed somewhere fancy.

So, nothing was missing in my bags at Mopapoma. I took a quick hand-held shower—there still wasn't any hot water—and quickly dressed up in my linen pants and button down shirt the housekeepers washed and ironed for me. It was the fanciest I dressed in a long time.

My knee was killing me, but I managed to limp to the van. It took us to The Boma, this African eating experience restaurant. David forgot our prepaid voucher, but we sorted everything out. Soon we were in this heavily interior-designed place with straw roofs, plants, and African furniture. There were mock craftsmen making crafts in the center. The



We all dine at Boma for our farewell African dinner.



Boma's selection of meats include those from animals we saw on safari.

whole experience seemed very commercial, like an African theme restaurant where they bombard you with all things traditionally African. It was kinda like a luau at a fancy commercial hotel in Hawaii I assume—they even had people come out to do traditional dances in traditional attire.

The meal began with a traditional Boma cocktail, then a starter of our choice. I got the smoked buffalo. Then there was a massive buffet serving the very animals we saw on safari—kudu, warthog, ostrich—plus the regular pork, beef, and chicken. You pick out your food and they put it on the grill and cook it for you. Nearby there were side dishes, including peanut butter rice and mopani worms. They were a lot smaller than what I saw on MTV's *pre-Real World/Road Rules Challenge*. I took three; they didn't look too bad with all the sauce. Jemma tried it first and didn't mind it too much, and as for me, I quite liked them. They tasted like soft shell crabs.

The rest of the food was excellent, especially the warthog. It's like a super lean, super tender pork. We all

sat around for our final toast with a Zambian red wine. What a fitting end to our journey.

Dancers came out, as well as a mock fortune teller. Jemma and Bob went in a room with him. According to him, Jemma will "have as many children as she wants and will do a man's job." "That guy's full of shit," Harry said. According to the fortune teller, he'd have ten kids by now. Amusing nonetheless.

A woman also came around with certificates. "Have you tried the

mopani worms?" she asked me.

"Yes, I liked them. I had three," I told her. And she wrote me out a certificate stating that I bravely ate a worm. Theme restaurant fluff. Like I said, nice, but a little too commercial, especially for a place like Africa. Singers came around the tables singing something about "Boma keeps away starvation"—a tourist couple was very amused—as well as "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

"Don't lions hunt at night and sleep in the day?" I questioned.

"Yeah, and they don't live in the jungle either," Jemma added. Yes, we were a bit wiser about the animals.

3:22 p.m. We're taking off now.

So we left Boma and went back to Mopapoma. My knee was still hurting put some ice in a bag for me. David gave me some ibuprofen. Harry joked around with his knife. "Okay, the doctor's here, let's cut that thing open." Then Harry and I went back to our room and got ready for bed. I tied the ice bag around my knee with a towel.

So there I was, on my last night in Africa, sitting in bed in my under-



Dancers perform traditional African dances as people eat at The Boma.



The downtown commercial district of Victoria Falls contains many quaint shops.

wear with a towel wrapped around my left knee, sitting across from Harry in his underwear, smoking a cigarette. I sat and contemplated writing in my journal, but I was way too tired. It sucks that this last part of the story isn't as linear as the beginning.

I woke up with a soaked towel around my knee. It felt a little better. I packed all my things in my bags really tight, including my video camera. As I was locking my bags, another lock sprung open like the first. Perhaps no one jimmed my lock the day before after all. Blame Eagle Creek travel supplies I guess. Cheap shits. Come to think of it, my Eagle Creek money belt also dislodged twice on the trip. Luckily I caught it in time.

I put on the same clothes as last

night—I'm still wearing them now as I write on the plane. I figure it's the outfit I ride into New York with, I might as well keep on the pants. I was squishing my bags in the room and suddenly Harry comes in to say goodbye. It was pretty anti-climactic since he was in a hurry. (His ride was there.) I shook his hand and wished him goodbye. I guess he'll read all my thanks in the comment sheet I filled out for him. I told him I'd give good word in New York and that I may send my parents next on safari.

My knee was a little better and I walked to breakfast. We sat around and exchanged e-mail addresses and my URLs. Then we waited around for our transfer into town. The shuttle was late and David and Liz missed their 8 a.m. balloon ride. Not to worry, there was no one else wait-

ing and they ended up getting thirty minutes in the air with a view of the falls instead of the regular fifteen.

3:40 p.m. Snack time on British Airways. I'm starved. I didn't expect food on this 1 hr. 40 min. flight.

Anyway, so they all went up in a balloon. I limped around town. It was hot and I regretted wearing pants. I was all alone and peddlers with their kids approached me. People would mistake me for Japanese and say "*Konishiwa*," but I ignored them.

I went to the Air Botswana office and tried to confirm my British Airways flight, but they directed me to the British Airways office which happened to be next to the Shoestrings Hostel where I was to

pick up the NTSC rafting video. On the way, a guy on the street asked me if I wanted some marijuana or if I wanted to exchange money. I ignored him as many people have warned me about the guys who do currency exchange on the street.

I confirmed my flight at the British Airways office, then went to Shoestrings, a hostel with a big “12” painted on the gate. I felt very overdressed. Everyone else was in sandals and shorts. I asked the young barkeep if the videos arrived, but I was fifteen minutes too early anyway. I ordered a Fanta Orange and sat around waiting. It was ten past nine and I gave up to go shopping. I told the barkeep I’d be back.

I got some postcards at a local bookstore and then browsed through the nice area with the green awnings and security guards pacing around. There wasn’t anything interesting,

so I walked down to the Elephants Walk shopping area where I ran into David and Liz. They warned me about going past the Elephants Walk where all the street vendors were. They said I’d be bombarded with offers and have to haggle. “I don’t quite like haggling,” David said once before. “It’s so un-British.”

At Elephants Walk I walked past a street musician and looked around. In the back area of the complex was a lone craft vendor. I haggled down a group of five small verdite animals (for my little cousins) from 6000 to 3600 Zim dollars (if I remember correctly.)

I got a juice at a restaurant and ran into Bob and Jemma who just came from the craft street market. “Be prepared for your speech,” Jemma warned.

So I went to the market and it wasn’t that bad. I thought it would be

like the walk from the park into town with the dozen persistent peddlers, but it wasn’t half as bad. Sure you get hassled, but they don’t follow you when you simply walk five feet away to the next vendor. (That vendor now hassles you.) I haggled pretty well. They start with a price, and you quote half, and they make it 75% or so. You bring multiple items in the mix and then try to roughly get about 60% for each. They say the 70% amount and you pretend you’re not interested, and then they give you your price. Deal. It’s amazing how relatively cheap the crafts are. Brian sells this same stuff for hundreds of US dollars in New York and must make a fortune.

I got a hornbill statue. (I said I wanted to take one home with me.) I got another for Risa, and five charm necklaces made from buffalo horns for the guys. I was looking for fish



A street vendor sells me some small verdite statues.



There is more than one opportunity to buy shona sculpture on the street in Victoria Falls.



for them, but there was nothing. It was already past ten and I had to get back to Shoestrings to get the rafting video and then back to the Kingdom for our 10:30 ride back to the bed and breakfast. So with my bum knee, I walked back. I got some speed, but it hurt the whole way.

At Shoestrings, the barkeep gave me my video. I was hot and sweaty and asked for a Coke as well. "This guy's desperate," a guy at the bar said. I explained how I'm wearing pants because I'm leaving for New York where it could be snowing already. "Oh, so about this time next week, you'll have a major flu," he told me.

I rushed down to the Kingdom. It was already past 10:30 and I was hoping to get my parents some T-shirts. At the front of the entrance, I saw David and Liz but Jemma and Bob were inside wandering around. I went in to get some T-shirts. I tried to be quick but they didn't have any large sizes in the ones I was looking at. David came in to find me. "Are you aware that the transport is here? We're all waiting outside," he said. I told him I thought they were waiting around for the transport. Anyway, I got two shirts and head on out, passed the casino once more.

Back at Mopapoma, I sat around to relax my knee where I began writing this long journal entry. David and Liz had their last minute swim, then we all settled the bill and checked out. I tipped the housekeeper about 250 Zim dollars. I hope that was enough as that was all I had to spare with some emergency cash left over. I'm not too good at currency conversion in my head. (Everything in town is in US dollars anyway because the Zim dollar fluctuates too much.)

We rode about fifteen minutes to the airport. There were other craft stands along the way where Liz said

I could have gotten crafts for even cheaper. Man, Brian's a crook in a way, inflating cheap roadside African crafts and selling them in an organized gallery in New York.

4:22 p.m. We're beginning descent into Jo'burg now.

So at the Vic Falls airport—slightly bigger than Maun's but no JFK—we checked in and waited. I was still writing this same lengthy series of journal entries where I began updating as we went along in two timelines. The others got postcards and sent them off. Then we went through the X-rays—they had to check my day pack full of cameras twice—and then we sat in the bar. I didn't eat. They all had lunch with their "crisps" and "chips." Soon they were called to board and we said our goodbyes.

I sat with this couple I swear was American, but only the wife was. The husband works for Deloitte and Touche in Peru and she just sits in the house and literally does nothing with all the maids around. Soon it was our time to board. We confirmed our baggage outside, then hopped on the plane.

That pretty much brings us to NOW. I've pretty much been writing for the past five hours now. We'll be landing soon in Johannesburg. I should be seeing the same people I met on my way here, Peter and Nancy. Poetic, I guess. Perhaps I'll have the same cabbie in New York as well. Or maybe I'll try and call my parents for a ride. My knee is still hurting.

5:48 p.m. I'm waiting by Gate 24 in Jo'burg Airport now. So I went through customs on arrival and it was cake. I got my bag and baggage claim with no problem. As soon as I

got out of the gate, Peter was already there waiting for me. He had with him two packages wrapped in cardboard and tape. I thought the paintings were going to be rolled up, but they were in frames with glass. We tried to figure a way to put the smaller package in my bag, but it was too full, so I rigged the smaller one to the bigger one and stuck it on my cart. We tried to get it on as a carry-on, but the attendant said all boxes must be checked in. Peter told me to make sure they put "fragile" stickers on it.

At check-in, they did put four or so stickers on both sides of the package. There was a sign on the counter which cautioned people to be wary of packages you didn't pack yourself, and to admit it if that is the case. I was going to fess up, but I figured I'd trust the guy who sent me to Africa for free. But now I worry...are these paintings? Or will I be busted for drugs or terrorism? How well do I really know these guys? Damn.

I went back to Peter. "Tell Brian he owes you one," he said. And we shook hands goodbye. He was worried about the glass in the frame and told me to make sure they put the package away. I tried to get to it, but a guy lead me right to the checkpoint. I asked another guy there if it would make it onboard, and he said it'd be fine. Man, I hope they X-ray it before it goes onboard. And I hope it *is* paintings.

I filled out the departure form and had a chat with the customs officer. "When are you coming back to Africa?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. I really don't. But I would definitely come back later on in life. It isn't as "wild" as many Americans think. I'd really want to try sand surfing in Namibia or shark-cage diving in Capetown.

My knee was really hurting—I think it gets worse during long peri-

ods of rest—so I called Dad’s cell phone on a pay phone. He was glad to hear from me. I told him about my swollen knee, and he said he’d pick me up tomorrow morning at JFK. Excellent.

I limped back here, by Gate 24. I wonder where Nancy is...

7:16 p.m. Almost time to go. There are a lot of people here now.

7:50 p.m. On the plane now. I’ve been reading the journal thus far. Man, I’ve been through a lot! No Nancy yet. Perhaps she’s on some other flight.

8:15 p.m. The destination says “Sal.” Am I on the right flight? It’s very empty. I have the whole row to myself.

8:16 p.m. I just asked the woman in front of me if I’m on the right flight. She’s going to New York too. She wasn’t aware of any stopovers either.

8:21 p.m. After three pages for the attendant, he finally gave me a bag of ice for my knee. I strapped it on with the duct tape I brought in my carry-on. You never know when duct tape will come in handy.

9:02 p.m. This plane is so empty, I have the row to myself. I’ve elevated my knee. I just had a bottle of litchi juice and a small bottle of Cape Soleil red wine. The Warner Bros. cartoon *Tazmania* is on the screens.

2:05 a.m., Sal Time. What the hell is

Sal? Anyway, I had the chicken with my juice and wine. I accidentally spilled wine over my linen jeans.

I brought the arm rests up and lounged out like I was in a bed. And I slept. I must have slept a good six or seven hours. Amazing. I stretched out my knee and it hurts even more. Guess I should have it checked out.

We’re now descending into Sol now for a crew change. I just woke up to go to the bathroom, limping all

Has this trip changed my life as Gracia said it would? Well, yes. I came in as a nervous wreck, but gradually my nerves hardened as the days went by. In a couple of days, I had nerves of steel, so much in fact, that I jumped off a bridge with no qualms.

the way. Then I saw a familiar face. “Nancy?” I said.

“Erik?” she responded. Yes, it was Nancy, the New Yorker I came in with, and on the way back as well. She remembered me. We talked a little. She said she saw all of Africa’s “Big Five,” except a leopard. I told her about my knee and she said, “Well, at least it happened at the end of your trip.”

She went off to talk to a co-worker and I went to the lavatory. But

yes, my journey has come full circle.

2:22 a.m. Oh, Sal is one of the Cape Verde Islands. We’ll be stopped here for an hour to refuel. We’re not supposed to get off the plane.

3:31 a.m. We’re about to take off now. I’ve been reading the journal thus far. Man, I wrote a lot on this trip.

3:53 a.m. Well, I’m off to New York now, drinking a cup of coffee. Back to the bright lights, big city, with cell phones and the internet. Has this trip changed my life as Gracia said it would? Well, yes. I came in as a nervous wreck, but gradually my nerves hardened as the days went by. In a couple of days, I had nerves of steel, so much in fact, that I jumped off a bridge with no qualms.

Just like going to Europe, those travel guides in bookstores make you more paranoid than you need to be. I came in with fear of animals and mosquitoes and infectious diseases, but the trip was very well-organized and had enough safety measures to keep you sane. Sure you’re out there in the wild, but there are designated places to camp, just as if you were camping out in Yellowstone or something. It’s true, the only way one should see the African bush for the first time is this way, where you can come face to face with animals and can appreciate the nature. I believe Harry called it the “Magic of Botswana.” He’s right. It really is a special experience

when you're a part of the action. I've seen all the animals in *The Lion King* up close. I've encountered so many creatures—hippos, crocs, lions, elephants, hyenas, birds, and insects—but most significantly, people. I came in with *A Fish Called Wanda*'s Otto's attitude about the English, but they grew on me. The English—amazing creatures.

Where to for my next adventure, I don't know. Perhaps I'll try to step on every continent for real, while others just dream about it? Australia next? South America? (I could visit Jackie or see Macchu Picchu.) Or perhaps another whirlwind tour of Europe? I now have contacts in London and Poland, and perhaps I could give them a visit? Who knows?

My knee is killing me and I think it's swollen even more. I think I'll have one of David's ibuprofen pills.

4:19 a.m., EDT. Still have about three hours to go. I took another long nap. (Everyone is lounging in his/her own row.) I just walked from the toilet and my knee is much better, although it still hurts. Perhaps it's just the ibuprofen kicking in.

5:42 a.m., EDT. I'm watching some British movie called *Me Myself I*, about some successful thirtysomething woman who wants to get married and have kids, only she gets hit by a car and dreams she does, and realizes she doesn't want that life. The movie's not even over and I already know what'll happen.

The breakfast service is coming soon. I'm starved.

6:37 a.m. Almost there. I just filled out the customs forms. I'm gonna try to play ignorant if they discover I'm bringing in African soil (the Kalahari sand.) "Oh, sand is soil?!" I'll argue if the occasion calls for it.

8:07 a.m. We arrived at JFK and the weather report was on TV. It was so weird to hear American English again. It's 53°F outside. Quite a leap from 149°.

Customs was a snap as always. My Yankees hat was a good idea. "Yankees fan, are you?" the officer asked.

"Yup. How are they doing?" I asked.

"They're up two games, but they lost last night at Shea." Then he

stamped my declaration. "Welcome home."

At baggage claim, I ran into Nancy again. She was with her husband. We talked a short bit but soon my bags arrived and I said goodbye to both of them. There was no problem at the next checkpoint. The guy assumed paintings were in the package I had. I confirmed it.

I called my producer Biola at the office. It's "iWatch Wednesday" and I figured she'd be there, but I got her voice mail. I called in sick, explaining my rafting injury. Perhaps I'll be at work tomorrow? My knees are almost fully healed...I think?

Now I'm waiting for my dad at JFK. Terminal 3, Area A. Ugh, I really don't wanna go to work tomorrow. It'll be enough work answering two weeks worth of e-mails...

