



PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 17 / MARCH 1998

1 - COMMITTEE REPORT

We have pleasure in announcing that MRS BARBARA MUTCHETHERE has both joined our Society, and taken up the post of Treasurer. So now, three-quarters of the way through the term, we have a full executive - and importantly, will get our accounts right up to date. We are aware that some deposits have not been receipted, but these will now be rectified. Please note that in some cases receipts were attached to cheques - but not all banks return the cheques to their customers! We take this opportunity to welcome Barbara to the team, and hope to soon meet her and her family at our next social event.

2 - ENTUMBANE

For some years now the Society has been pressing The National Museums and Monuments to take steps to preserve the relics of King Mzilikazi, buried in caves around the King's tomb. It goes without saying that such an exercise is culturally, if not physically, delicate, but in recent correspondence from the NMM's we have been advised that NMM's "are making necessary arrangements to redress the situation as soon as we can." We certainly hope that that this is a sincere commitment by NMM's to preserve these important relics.

3 - FEES

Letters have been written to both the Minister of Mines and Tourism (Dept. of National Parks and Wildlife Management) and the Minister of Home Affairs (National Monuments and Museums) regarding the present fee situation in the Matobo National Park. We have yet to receive a reply from either Ministry. It is outrageous that the Matobo National Park should be the most expensive to visit in the country, and that this is being further exaggerated by recent bans, and fee hikes for professional guides walking in the park.

The unsightly blue canvas tents, erected by NMM's to protect their staff collecting fees, apart from being unsightly and hardly conducive to creating a wilderness experience, are so unnecessary if fees could only be collected at the point of entry into the park. Both the local Parks administration and that of the NMM's have agreed on a single fee collected at the first point of entry - but 'head office' in Harare is the obstacle. We are continuing to press for a satisfactory resolution of this wrangle.

On a more positive note, Parks are completing work on new entry gate-houses at Whitewaters & Arboretum - so here at least the existing tin shacks will disappear to give way to respectable and appropriate points of entry.

The Society marks with regret the passing of MR JEFF ARCHER and MRS GERTIE SCOTT. Whilst neither person was a member of our society, both enjoyed a deep love for the 'old hills', and contributed to the general knowledge and conservation of the Matopos.

The Chairman, Committee and Members convey their sincere condolences to the Archer and Scott families on their sad loss

4 – NEXT EVENT

WHAT	Social trip to NTEMA DAM, Matopo Communal Land
WHEN	Sunday 4 April 1998
MEET	at Churchill Arms Hotel 09:00am for 09: 15am departure
WHO	All members and friends
WHAT	Bring own lunch, deck chairs, drinks. Don't forget your hat!
WHY	To visit a new feature in the hills.

All vehicles will be able to access the site

This is a newly constructed dam (built by the Catholic Development Agency to provide for irrigation and water security in the area) is located along the foot of Ntunja hill, just off the Old Gwanda Road. The dam, completed last year, has been full for some time, and is a most attractive body of water. The river downstream of the dam is equally attractive, and for those eager to walk, the area will be most pleasing. In addition, we plan to visit Ntunja cave, the longest cave in the hills, and the first to be examined by archaeologists. The views from the top of Ntunja are excellent, as it is one of the highest points in the Matopos, and is easily reached.

5- REPORT BACK

The last social visit was to Emadwaleni Village, on 25 January. 32 members and friends risked the wet weather, and as so often the case with the Matopos, were rewarded with an outstanding day in the hills. We were met by Mr Mark Ncube, and ushered to a covered area for tea. The party then split into two – the more energetic following Mark to the top of a ridge to admire the expansive view of the Hove valley, dominated to the west by the magnificent Mt Njelele, and then catching up with the remainder of the group en route to a pretty water fall. Of interest was the fact that the falls themselves were through a dolerite dyke, and therefore comprised black polished rock - which of course was a little tricky when wet! We were shown into a magical cavern above the falls, before returning for lunch.

After lunch, we were taken to the Orphanage located near Whitewaters. Most children here lost their parents through AIDS but the care, and general appearance of the centre is a credit to the managers, and assurance as to the well-being of the children.

6 - RAIN!

Whilst February had good rains that saw the Mtshabezi dam continue to gain water (now some 1,8m from spilling) and both the Mtshashasha and Lumane falls come cascading down, the rainfall position is generally poor, with the western part of the hills recording approximately 80% of normal rainfall, whilst the eastern hills have received between 60% and 80%. Fortunately, good rains last year has meant that the veld in the Matopos is looking particularly good, and surface water is generally plentiful.

7 - LUMANE TREE FERNS

The tree ferns growing in the Lumane valley have been visited recently. A quick census of the plants suggested a decline in the population, but a more detailed count is required before we can comment further on this matter. The condition of the plants seen was excellent, and there was no apparent stress which would account for the fewer numbers, so perhaps it was the count that was at fault. The trees planted by the society were on the whole doing very well and it would seem that there have only been a few plants lost in the year since they were planted.

However, our plans to have the area protected have again become bogged down in bureaucracy.

We have been advised that as the tree ferns are already protected in terms of the Parks and Wildlife Act, it is not necessary to have the area protected. It would seem that the point has been missed. Whilst the tree ferns are protected, the trees and environment upon which they depend are not protected, and the tree ferns are dying, not from direct interference, but because of the environmental degradation, which includes destruction of the protective forest canopy, and cultivation right up to the edge of the gully, and well within the NRB 30m restriction! This is the reason why the area around the tree ferns must be protected. We soldier on!