

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 35 / MARCH 2002

1 – NATIONAL PARKS INCREASE FEES

Statutory Instrument 1/2002 gazetted new park entry fees and other charges. The entry fee per person has increased to \$50 per person. There is still no charge for light vehicles, and this includes light trucks, 4X4's and any vehicle with a seating capacity below five persons. The rate of increases was modest given the high inflation situation in the country, and we are grateful for that.

The MCS was however shocked to see that a new fee of \$20,000 has been gazetted for the Matopos 33 Miler Marathon. This charge is quite unjustified, and would in fact result in the cancellation of the race. As the organisers of the event, which has been going for the past forty years, do not want to see the event cancelled, alternative arrangements will be made - and the race will go on! Consequently, Parks will lose both the new fee and the entry fees previously collected.

2 – ECLIPSE

Preparations for the eclipse on 4 December are well advanced. The Bulawayo Publicity Association is leading the arrangements, and both the MCS and WEZ are actively involved. National Parks have established their own planning committee, which has included representation from the MCS as well. We recommend that members DO NOT travel into the Park to view the eclipse for two reasons:

Only a small part of the western section of the Park will offer totality, and this will be very much on the edge of the zone of totality, thereby offering only a very brief period of darkness. One must be in the zone of totality to experience the real wonder of the event and being positioned at the centre is obviously the best position. This centre area lies south of the Park itself, between Kezi and Maphisa, or at Plumtree.

Large numbers of persons descending on the Park can potentially cause untold damage to the fragile environment. This should be avoided at all costs.

The Park will be offering exclusive campsites for the period of the eclipse. Booking at Maleme has not yet opened, but does so later this month.

3 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE

The management plan has been further scrutinised and amended, following an extension of the deadline by UNESCO. Your committee has continued to be involved with this exercise, and we'll keep you posted on developments. Outreach to traditional leaders as well as with the Rural District Councils continues, and the concept is receiving greater support from the local communities at present.

4 – BROCHURES

The committee has had the Matopos Introduction, the Rock Art and the Bird Checklist brochures printed. A suitable container has been acquired and following some artwork still to be done, these items will be on sale at the main entrance to the National Park (Sandy Spruit gate).

5 – RAINFALL

After our excellent start to the season, and following our last newsletter, the rain all but disappeared from the skies. From above average at Christmas, we are now at less than 50% of normal, with no hope of any further rainfall now. Coupled with the long dry spell was intense heat with three months of temperatures above 30C. The veldt is showing signs of stress, though the grass and tree cover is good following the earlier rains. It is unlikely that any rivers will be flowing six months from now though! Rainfall from the western Matopos stands at 462.5mm (18,5"), and from the Eastern Hills at 562mm (22,5").

6– ADDRESSES

Please let Mrs Mary Friend have your physical address for delivery of newsletters etc, as the latest postal increases will require us to use alternatives to the postal service.

7- NEXT EVENT

Date	Wednesday 1st May 2002
Venue	The Farmhouse
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

The Farmhouse, owned by John Burton, is located along the Kezi Road, just before one passes into the Matopos National Park. Consequently, it is accessible by all members, and we have chosen the 1st May so that those involved with regular Sunday activities will be able to attend. The Lodge itself is presently closed, but we will be able to picnic on the lawns and enjoy walks in the area. It is not far from Bambata Cave.

8 – REPORT BACK

A total of sixty members and friends took part in the last outing to Tshagula Cave. By all accounts the visit was a success, though the climb into the cave proved a little too daunting for some members after a detour was made to look at an interesting Fig tree. The cave is particularly high, and whilst there were some fine paintings there is not a great deal of artwork. An easier exit was used!

Following lunch, the group set off on an interesting and easy walk along rolling dwalas, admiring the scenery. A waypoint was reached, and some members used this opportunity to turn back. The remainder continued with the objective of climbing Madombo hill, a magnificent dwala rising 250m from the Maleme valley. However only 13 members made the summit after a taxing climb, and finally returned to camp at 6:00pm. They were rewarded with wonderful views from the summit.

The outing proved to have something for everyone, more leisurely walks for those who hoped for a relaxing day, and heavy climbing for the younger set. The area is often referred to as “The Land of the Giants” due to the existence of some of the largest hills in the Matopos being found here – starting with the 350m high Silozwe.

9– NEW ORCHID SPECIES

Three new orchid species were reported in the last Newsletter. These were all found on the farm Besna Kobila in November and December last year, and are as follows - *Eulophia Coeloglossa*, *Eulophia Milnei* and *Satyrium buchananii*. *E. Milnei* was first recorded in 1946 in Marondera, 1959 in Chimanimani and in 1961 at Besna Kobila, but not recorded there since then.

10 - MATABELELAND TREE SOCIETY

The Zimbabwe Tree Society was hosted by the Mat'land Branch on Besna Kobila Farm, in the eastern Matopos over Easter. 15 members spent 5 days examining the plant life of the area, in particular the wetlands (vleis) and the tremendous variety of tree species. A number of interesting plants were located – at this stage it is too early to advise of any new finds, and whilst this is unlikely, the exercise did again demonstrate the botanical richness of this area. Use was made of work carried out in the late 1950's by a Mr O B Miller, whose records are on computer at the National Herbarium.

11 – MEMBERSHIP

Numbers have been maintained, despite the general exodus of Zimbabweans to greener pastures. The committee will be chasing up on outstanding subscriptions, and removing from the membership lists those who are in arrears. This may result in a net loss of members in the short term. In order to maintain momentum however, we need now, more than ever to recruit new members, individuals and corporate.

12 – FAREWELL

Mrs Paddy Vickery has sadly left us to live in the United Kingdom. A regular attendee at our outings, she could always be countered upon to provide some fascinating historical footnote to the areas visited. She was our guest speaker in 1993 at the AGM. She will be sorely missed, but we wish her well.

13 – COMMENT

Let us have your comments on the Newsletter, our social outings etc. Are we meeting the needs of the Society? Your committee would value comment and the Newsletter should be a two-way means of communication.