

**MATOBO**



**SOCIETY**

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

### NEWSLETTER 38 / JANUARY 2003

#### **1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The AGM of the Society was held on the afternoon Saturday 9th November at Camp Dwala. The AGM was preceded by a presentation by the Matopo Mission Primary School Conservation Club. The enthusiasm of the children, who had earlier been taken on a conservation field trip on the farm, was infectious, and we hope that this will be translated into real activity in the area. Thirty-five members, and four guests attended the AGM. After the AGM members were able to enjoy a late afternoon walk, enjoying the botanical richness and fine views in the area. A number of members stayed on for the social braai, and a few stayed overnight.

There were no new members elected onto the committee, which was disappointing. The new Committee is therefore Roy Stephens (Chairman) Iain Sheasby (Vice-Chairman), Allison Moon (Secretary), Barbara Muचेcheterе (Treasurer), Gavin Stephens, Mike Phillipson, Flora Sibindi and Bobby Hogan.

#### **2 – PARK ENTRY FEES SHOCK!**

With effect from 31 January 2003, entry fees into the Matopos National Park have increased by a staggering 900%. It is shocking that a government body can make such an increase barely two months after a government-imposed price freeze - and that the rate of increase outstrips the already high inflation rate. Foreign rates remain unchanged. For our members, the new domestic rates are as follows:

	New	Foreign	Previous	
Entry	Z\$500	US\$15	Z\$50	Payable per entry / re-entry on the same day
Car	Z\$500	US\$5	Z\$nil	

SADC Citizens now pay 50% of the foreign rate

Zimbabwe children U/12 are free

The discrimination vis-à-vis Nyanga National Park and the Matopos remains in so far as foreign visitors are concerned, with the former charging US\$10. The increase in accommodation rates has been less dramatic, and again we are of the opinion that these rates are undervalued.

Your committee will lodge a protest with the DNPWM and the Ministry, but expect such letter to be ignored. The issue will also be on the agenda of a planned meeting with the Matobo Committee.

#### **3 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE**

The ICOMOS representative, Mrs J Deacon from South Africa, visited Bulawayo and the Matopos from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October. Dr Peter Mundy accompanied Mrs Deacon during much of her time here, and Governor Stephen Nkomo, also gave much of his time to be with her. Mrs Deacon had a hectic schedule, and whilst she cannot comment on her visit, we believe that the visit was a success. The World Heritage Bureau meets in June 2003, and at that forum, the submission will either be approved (and World Heritage Status conferred on the Matobo Hills) or rejected.

#### **4 – MATOBO HILLS ECO-CHALLENGE**

The “Matopos Adventure Challenge” is due to be run again in the Eastern Matopos on 22 February. The event is now included on the National Athletics Calendar. Any members wishing to get more information should contact the Secretary.

#### **5 – RAINFALL**

The rainfall position, half way through the season, is disastrous. The eastern Matopos, at 185mm (7,4”) is not only well below average, but also well behind the levels at the same time last year. The western

Matopos at 180mm (7,2") has likewise not enjoyed much rain, with only one shower above 50mm. There is no running water in the hills, and little surface water left, other than dams, so the scene is set for a disaster in both the National Park, and in the communal lands.

## **6- NEXT EVENT**

Date	2 March 2003
Venue	Hope Fountain, Old Bulawayo and the Jesuit Mission
Meet	Burnside BP Service Station, at 8:30am
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

The Committee is well aware of the severe fuel crises, and consequently the outing on 2 March is about as close to Bulawayo as we can go, about 15km from Burnside. We hope that members will be able to find the fuel to join us. Whilst Hope Fountain (permission being finalised), Old Bulawayo and the Jesuit Mission are not strictly within the Matopos, the latter two sites do fall within the World Heritage Site, and are closely linked to the history of Bulawayo and the Matopos. After lunch, members will be free to travel home, or those with fuel can continue along the Criterion Rd towards the Umzingwane River.

## **7 – REPORT BACK**

Some 173 members of the society travelled out to Antelope Dam in the early hours of 4 December to witness the total solar eclipse. A total of 714 persons attended the outing, making it our largest event to date! Unfortunately our "exclusive" arrangement with the Matobo Rural District Council was not as exclusive as we believed it to be, with tour operators, members of the public, and even the Minister of Tourism, Mr Nhema descending on the west bank of Antelope Dam. As a result, some members were misdirected - and probably joined other groups! However, we were still able to enjoy the wonderful spectacle in perfect conditions.

We record our appreciation to Mr J Knight, former director of the Southern African Astronomical Society, for giving a talk to our members, and also our appreciation to those members who travelled out the day before to prepare for the event, and manned the entrance gate.

A few eclipse shirts (sky blue with the MCS logo) remain for sale; please contact the Secretary.

## **8 – ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ACT (Chapter 20:27)**

*This act provides for the sustainable management of natural resources and protection of the environment, the prevention of pollution and environmental degradation, the preparation of a National Environmental Plan and other plans for the management and protection of the environment, the establishment of an Environmental Management Agency and an Environment Fund, and repeals a number of existing acts (including the Natural Resources Act) so as to provide a single all encompassing act for the management of our environment.*

This is a positive development, and one which has been a long time in coming. However, it remains to be seen if the political will exists to actually enforce the act, and do something real about the state of our environment. Given the history of the past three years, we can only hope!

## **9 – MATOPOS 33 MILER MARATHON**

After the cancellation last year, we understand that the race will be run on 30<sup>th</sup> March through the National Park, subject to the impact of the new fees. We certainly hope that this takes place.,

## **10 – APPRECIATION**

At the AGM, Mrs Mary Friend stood down after a number of years on the committee. Mary will be remembered for her proof reading, and distribution of Newsletters and the organisation of our outings. Mary's enthusiasm at meetings will be missed - though she will still be present at our Society events. The MCS records its appreciation to Mary.

At the same time Derek Derby stood down after many years as our Membership Secretary. Derek has generously hosted the meetings of the MCS for the past two years, and was also a regular at our field trips. Derek will likewise be missed and his contribution is noted.

Carol Davies stood down after two years on the committee. Carol played an important liaison role with the Bulawayo Publicity especially in the build up to the Eclipse this year. We thank Carol for her contribution.