

**MATOBO**



**SOCIETY**

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

### **NEWSLETTER 39 / APRIL 2003**

#### **1 – MATOBO COMMITTEE**

In the past few months, and in terms of the revised National Parks Act, the Matobo Committee was re-appointed by the Minister. Unfortunately, the MCS has only recently been able to get the details of the new committee. The new Chairman is Dr N Tabele, whilst Mr J Dick is the Bulawayo Publicity Association representative. Mr J Ndebele is also a member of the National Museums and Monuments Board, whilst Mr M Dube is the community representative. Other members include Mr E Nkomo, Mrs T Sibanda, Dr C Mukora, and Ms Sibanda. We would like to record our appreciation to the past chairman, Mr M Ndlovu.

#### **2 – MORE PARKS NEWS**

There have been changes within the local National Parks management. The new Provincial Warden is Mr David Mapungu whilst the new Warden is Mr M Gomwe. We welcome the new appointments and look forward to introducing them to our Members. Mr Morris Mutsambiwa, currently director of the Swaziland National Parks, will return home to take up the new position of the Director General of the new National Parks Authority (NPA).

Your Society attended a meeting between Bulawayo Publicity Association and National Parks where we able to represent our concerns with conservation issues within the Park, and contribute to discussion around the new Park fees. We also submitted a brief paper to the ZCT on issues affecting the Park. Whilst we may not like increased entry fees, it is acknowledged that such fees should increase in line with inflation, and that foreign visitors should pay at a rate commensurate with the region. However, in particular reference to the Matopos, is the additional picnic fees, not charged elsewhere, and the National Museum's and Monuments fee, which when all combined result in the Matopos being the most expensive park to visit, and the least visitor friendly.

Members may have noticed that the NPA intends to lease all accommodation unites to the highest bidder, as part of its focus on core business. We can expect to see the Maleme Rest Camp being snapped up - and accommodation rates then escalating. At present it is our position that entry fees are overstated, but accommodation rates understated. We will endeavour to keep you posted on developments.

#### **3 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE**

We have been unable to get a detailed update for this Newsletter on the World Heritage Application. The application is with the World Heritage Bureau, and will be considered at the June meeting.

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

The "Matopos Adventure Challenge" lived up to its name. After months of drought, the heavens opened the night before the race, and over the next twenty-four hours, some 115mm of rain fell over the race route. As a consequence, what would have been a regular race, turned into a real challenge. Roads turned to mud, streams flowed where there had been non before, cyclists were swept off low level bridges, canoes swamped, and up-ended on the lake, and hikers had to cross the flooded Mtshabezi river chest deep! Where lovely mountain views had existed the week before, only heavy grey cloud and mist existed. The winning time was 5 hours, forty-five minutes, the last competitor came in just over ten hours, after a 5:45 am start. There were 36 Competitors, coming from as far as Johannesburg, Mutare and Harare.

## **5 – MATOPOS 33 MILER**

The famous and long-standing Matopos 33 Miler race was held on 30<sup>th</sup> March. The route was altered from prior years, in that runners did not run from the National Park to Bulawayo, but instead did two circuits of the Circular Drive, and then continued to the Yacht Club for the finish. The event was well supported, given the numerous hardships, and members of the MCS volunteered to ensure that all litter was collected from around the race route after the event. The organisers had to contend with raising considerable sponsorship to meet the excessive National Park Fees.

## **6- NEXT EVENT**

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| Date    | Thursday 1 May 2003  |
| Venue   | Rhodes Summer House, Rhodes Stables, and on to the Tuli River        |
| Meet    | Cresta Churchill at 8:30am   |
| Travel  | All vehicles   |
| Details | Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat! |

We intend to visit both Rhodes' Summerhouse and Rhodes' Stables at REPS before going out beyond Fort Usher for lunch at a lovely dam on the upper Tuli River. Members will be able to carry on down the Tuli in the afternoon, or walk amongst the local dwala's. Rhodes' Summerhouse is all that remains of Rhodes' former residence at the site of what is now the Matopos Research Station. Rhodes' body rested at this site the day before his burial. The Stables, designed in England, could have been plucked straight from a farmyard in Kent or Essex! The road from the Matopos Research Station to Fort Usher is not great following Cyclone Japhat, but is passable for all vehicles. We ask those members with fuel to please assist with transport, and estimate the total distance to be 100km return.

## **7 – REPORT BACK**

On 2 March, 25 members had found enough fuel to meet and visit Hope Fountain, Old Bulawayo, and the Jesuit Mission. We were privileged to have Mike Carnegie with us - his grandfather had been an 1880 missionary at Hope Fountain, and his great grandfather an 1860 missionary at Inyathi. Lunch was held under the great Indaba tree at Old Bulawayo, and the afternoon was spent at the old Jesuit Mission. Perhaps not quite a Matopos visit, but one, which was fascinating and full of history.

## **8 – MCS GEAR**

We are pleased to advise that a new order of hats has just been received, and that these cover a range of sizes. We also have a few blue Eclipse shirts left, and some Khaki MCS shirts. These will be on sale at the next outing, but if you would like to get in ahead of the rest, you can contact the Secretary on 091 395 371, or write to the MCS address given above.

## **9 – RAINFALL**

Once again, the ink was barely dry on the Newsletter lamenting the drought and serious water problems, when the rains returned with a vengeance - and a Cyclone to boot! Rainfall was widespread - in the two weeks before the Cyclone 120mm was recorded in the Matopos, whilst the Cyclone dumped another 160mm to 220mm over four days. This unexpected bonus has filled the wetlands, streams and rivers, and changed the whole perspective of the Matopos. From a near disaster, rainfall is approaching average, though it is unlikely that we will make up the lost ground entirely. Nor will the rain have a marked impact on food production within the hills, but pastures have been restored, and drinking water replenished. Rainfall figures for the end of March are Western Matopos 425mm (17") and Eastern Matopos 526mm (21")

## **10 – LANTANA CAMARA**

Members of the Society were able to visit the South African Plant Protection Research Institute in Pretoria during March. Dr Urban met the group and introduced them to the work and methods of the Weed Control Unit, before taking the party into quarantined research units. Here the various bio-control agents are tested. As *Lantana camara* originates in Central America, insects that live on *Lantana* in that habitat are brought to South Africa for field-testing. Only those that are found to be unable to survive on indigenous plants are then considered for further development. A number of mites, larvae, worms, and fungus were shown to the team. The SA PPRI has offered to supply these agents to us, free of charge, once we have obtained the necessary permits from the Zimbabwe Government. As a consequence, we have also been in communication with the Zimbabwe Plant Protection Research Institute, in Harare.