

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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1 – EDITORIAL

The rapidly deteriorating economic environment that exists within Zimbabwe will continue to take an increased toll on the Matobo Hills, and indeed on The Matobo Conservation Society. No doubt as more and more people struggle to make ends meet, so they will turn to the environment for survival. There must come a time, if we have not yet reached it, that the environment cannot support the population. Already in the Matopos, we see widespread stream bank cultivation, we see farming on slopes that can only encourage erosion, deforestation is accelerating, grazing lands are under increasing pressure, and water resources are increasingly unreliable. Within the National Park, poaching must be on the rise - and by poaching we include timber, grazing and other resource theft, as well as the trapping of animals and birds. The MCS can look on with despair, or endeavour to get involved and make a difference. Your committee is determined to follow this second choice. We are sure our members will join us, and we hope you will support us by volunteering for project work. 2007 is going to be tough, but also a challenge for us all.

2 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

As anticipated, fees for National Parks were increased on 1 January. We detail the charges below:

Entry	\$3,500	Resident, non-Zimbabwean	\$5,000	Non-resident	US\$15 (\$12 regional)
Car	\$500				
Eagle	\$150,000	Regional	US\$64	Tourist	US\$128 per lodge per night (4 persons)
Lodge	\$80,000	Regional	US\$55	Tourist	US\$110 per lodge per night (Standard)
Chalet	\$30,000	Regional	US\$37	Tourist	US\$ 73 per lodge per night (1 room)
Camping	\$20,000	Regional	US\$10	Tourist	US\$ 5 per person per night

All figures quoted above are Inclusive of VAT

3 – AUDITOR GENERAL REVEALS LOOTING OF FUNDS

New Zimbabwe, Wednesday January 10 HARARE

Audits have shown that Zimbabwe government's various funds are being looted, it emerged Tuesday. The audits by the Auditor General reveal irregularities on the Matopos Fund, the National Funeral Assistance Fund, the National Civil Protection Fund and the Housing and Guarantee Fund among others. The Matopos Fund was established through the Rhodes Estate Act of 1978 in accordance with the will of the late Cecil John Rhodes. The will directed that "income from the endowment is to be used primarily for preserving, protecting the burial place in the Matopos and its surroundings and that the balance of this income and any rents and profits from the estate are to be applied for the cultivation of the estate for the people of Bulawayo." The Auditor General said in connection with the Matopos Fund: "I noted with concern that there was no cash book being maintained to record income received in foreign currency. I was not able to satisfy myself as to the completeness and accuracy of revenue collected." On the Funeral Fund, the report said: "For the fourth year running, I raised my concern at unexplained debits on the Fund's bank statements. It would appear the nature of the debits had not been established."

The MCS is greatly concerned with this report and has written to the Chairman of the Matobo Committee. An answer is awaited. These funds have in the past been used to maintain, and improve facilities within the Park - and as a result, standards within the Matobo National Park have not deteriorated as they have in other places. The loss of the funds therefore could see a steady slide in standards, and may explain why the Authorities have been unable to restore water to ablution blocks at

various camping grounds. It is certainly a sad and distressing report, if true, for the Matobo National Park.

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	4 th March 2007
Venue	Mshashasha Falls / Swifts Cave
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles, but trucks preferred.
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We planned to visit the Mshashasha Falls but the drought has meant that there is not much water flowing over "The Cascades". Consequently, unless there is a dramatic change in rainfall in the next few days, the outing will change to the Swifts Cave on Sotcha Hill. This is broadly in the same area as the Falls. The walk up Sotcha is pleasant and the views wonderful - the climb into the cave itself is steep and not for the faint hearted! This large and unusual cave is located mid-way up the eastern face of Sotcha so the climb down to the cave is very steep. Please bring appropriate footwear if you intend climbing to the cave - slops or rafters are not suitable!

Sotcha is the longest single hill in the Matopos, and its summit the second highest point in the Matopos. Consequently, for those not climbing into the cave, there will be walks along the undulating dwala. Subject to time, in the afternoon we may also visit the other three caves on Sotcha.

5 – REPORT BACK

On 21st January about 35 members and friends braved the grey weather to travel out to Pata and the Lumani / Ntazi valley in the eastern Matopos. The grey "guti" swirled around as we climbed to the summit of Pata, at 1,540m the highest point in the far eastern hills, and through the breaks in the cloud we enjoyed views into the valleys around Pata. Unfortunately, the weather prevented any of the distant views. After lunch we travelled down the Lumane valley to see the latest tree fern (*Cyathia dregeii*) colony, and discovered that it was growing amongst a Broad-leafed waxberry (*Myrica pilulifera*) - only the third such specimen found in the Matopos! Thereafter we followed the Ntazi River upstream and managed to find a few *Streptocarpus eylesii* amongst the rocks. The *Myrica pilulifera* has been reported authorities, including the Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee.

6 - MATOPOS A TOURIST DEVELOPMENT ZONE

Herald, Saturday January 13

Government has designated 6 tourist sites as Tourist Development Zones in order to boost the tourism industry, Environment and Tourism Minister Francis Nhema has said in a Government Gazette notice. The Zones are Midlands Province Tourism Development Zone, Rhodes-Matopos, Kariba, Zambezi Valley, Mudzi, Eastern Highlands and Lakes Chivero and Manyame. Surprisingly the Rhodes-Matopos area does not follow the boundaries of the World Heritage Site, and so excludes the far eastern Matopos (area lying east of the Mtshabezi River), which already contains rural tourism projects. Another case of bureaucrats not knowing what's on the ground! However, the inclusion of the Matobo Hills is a welcome development.

7 – RAINFALL

As at 20th February 2007, the eastern Matopos had received 425mm of rain, and the western Matopos an amount of 260mm. As can be seen the figures are not that much better than when we last reported - a very crippling drought with the almost total failure of rains in January 2007 (traditionally our wettest month) has left the hills dry, with little surface or running water. The dams at present are generally still full, but not spilling and are unlikely to survive to the next rains. The vegetation is drying out, whilst maize crops and vegetable gardens are showing clear signs of stress.

8– MATOPOS GRAND CHALLENGE ADVENTURE RACE

This premier three-day event was held on 9 – 11 February 2007 and took place through the eastern hills. Participation was lower than in previous years, and the extreme heat made the challenge particularly difficult. However, despite all the obstacles a good time was had by all. The MCS provided an information pack for the competitors giving information about sites en route.

MATOPOS ADVENTURE CHALLENGE - This one-day event is scheduled in March, and runs in the eastern Matopos. If you are interested in participating contact Des Stephens on 091 2211156

9 - INTEREST

THE CURSE OF APPROVAL; Newsweek April 10 – 17 2006

IF UNESCO DESIGNATES IT, THEY WILL COME. DOES IDENTIFYING WORLD HERITAGE SITES DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD? By Barbie Nadeau

In 1240, The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II built his military fortress, Castel del Monte, on a lonely hill in central Puglia, where he had a perfect view of approaching enemies. He probably never envisioned it would become a major destination – or that the enemies might be tourists. But these days, the old castle has been polished clean and hundreds of multicoloured Pullman buses snake up the winding roads to its grounds, now scattered with T shirt stands, Coca Cola signs and a 200 car parking lot. In fact, all over this usually desolate part of Southern Italy, tourists scurry between such stops as the conical trullo houses in Alberobello and the cave ruins of Matera in nearby Basilicata - all sites few would have heard of if not for the fact that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has christened them World Heritage destinations.

Officially, UNESCO bestows the honour on places that exemplify an area's ancestry, with the purpose of ensuring they are preserved. Unofficially, designation is a kind of fairy dust that often turns little known cultural gems into overnight tourist sensations, fostering intense competition amongst places to get listed. That is not always a good thing. "Sometimes a site becomes so attractive it becomes impossible to visit or appreciate," says Francesco Bandarin, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

"This is a big problem in generating tourist traffic". Indeed, there are growing concerns that World Heritage designation may in the end do more harm than good. Lisa Mastny, senior advisor to the World Watch Institute, says tourism is a double-edged sword for places considered of "outstanding value to humanity. It offers many impoverished communities the chance to reap financial rewards, but also threatens the very resources - human and natural - upon which the industry is ultimately built." The already popular Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza in Mexico, for example, saw a massive influx of tourists after UNESCO declared them a world Heritage Site in 1988. With more than 5000 visitors a day, the ruins have turned into a Disney-esque mecca. Worse, they are being sorely threatened by the wear and tear of relentless foot traffic, not to mention outright vandalism.

The biggest problem is that there is virtually no money attached to World Heritage status. After places win the designation - a laborious bureaucratic process that takes nearly five years from the time they are nominated - they are left on their own financially. Funds are available from the World Heritage Trust in the form of loans, or through private organizations like Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation. But competition is fierce, in the 27 years since UNESCO designated the first 12 World Heritage Sites, the list has grown to 812 today. Under smart Government management, some of the increase in tourist dollars is invested in preserving the sites --as in Rome, where visitor's entrance fees go directly to maintenance.

But Rome is an anomaly. The majority of World Heritage Sites are in developing countries, often besieged by corruption, civil strife and extreme poverty. Furthermore, natural or man-made disasters can thwart even the best-laid plans. The Iranian government, for instance, was unable to recover from the earthquakes that destroyed the cultural heritage site of Bam last year. Australia's Great Barrier Reef and Nepal's Mount Everest, both World Heritage Sites, are considered endangered due to climatic change, which cannot be reversed by single governments.

There is growing awareness that assigning UNESCO designation is worthless - or worse, counterproductive - without some kind of follow up preservation program. "In the early days, there wasn't much attention given to what would happen once these sites became World Heritage" says Joseph King, director of the sites unit at the International Centre for the study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. (ICCROM) based in Rome.

Slowly that's changing. In sub Saharan Africa, a 12 year training program called Africa 2009 is currently underway to teach locals not only how to preserve their immovable cultural heritage, but how

to use it for economic development. In Eastern Europe, where tourism is a relatively new commodity, cities are looking for help in figuring out where to draw the line between preserving historical centres and fostering urban development. Tomas Hajek, director of Czech National Monument Protection Office, favours allocating one specific district as a commercial centre and concentrating all new buildings there. "Prague will lose its magic if we allow tall modern buildings to blot the skyline" he says. "Being included in the UNESCO list is a safeguard for protecting our heritage – although there is very strong pressure from developers.

For its part, UNESCO is trying its best to turn all 812 sites into exemplary models of preservation. The irony, of course, is that it needs tourism to do it. It has recently teamed with companies like Expedia and Jet Tours in an attempt to market World Heritage site tours, and, more important, to teach tourists to be responsible when visiting these places. It has also worked with ICCROM and other agencies to lobby guidebook editors such as Michelin and Lonely Planet to include an instruction page for visiting heritage sites. Among the obvious tips they want to promote: "Don't remove any artefacts" and "Don't mock the locals". "It's important for the tourist to understand that these sites have been there a long long time says ICCROM's King. And with some effort, they will remain for a long time to come.

10 – INTEREST

VICTORIA FALLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE UPDATE

LUSAKA - Zambia vetoed a 200 million dollar project Wednesday for a South African firm to build a hotel and golf course inside a national park near Victoria Falls after fierce opposition by environmentalists. The Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) said the development of the controversial country club would have had far reaching environmental consequences if allowed to proceed. "ECZ has, however, rejected the construction of the golf course and the 450 villas," said the council's spokesman Justin Mukosa. "This is in view of the fact that the park is too small to accommodate these facilities without disturbing the ecological balance of the area," Mukosa said.

Environmentalists and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) had threatened to launch an international campaign against Zambia if the project was allowed to go ahead as it would have affected the natural heritage of the Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe, which shares the border and the falls with Zambia, had also rejected the proposed project saying it would affect its tourism industry if allowed.

However, the ECZ has allowed a South African firm, Legacy Holdings, to build two five-star hotels within the park along the Zambezi river but under strict conditions. "The building on the site shall not exceed the tree tops and shall not be visible from afar," Mukosa said, adding that fencing will also be prohibited to allow free movements of elephants. He said the two hotels should be located in the north of the park because the southern area is "ecologically sensitive" and supports a major animal corridor that link the park to wildlife areas in neighbouring Botswana and Zimbabwe. "This area allocated for development is situated in a critical animal corridor that provides the only formally protected natural faunal link and will need to be preserved to the maintain the integrity of the park," Mukosa said.

ECZ is an environmental law-enforcing agency that is mandated to either certify or reject any proposed development taking into account the environmental effect. The Zambian government had been under pressure from the both local and international conservation organisations who wanted the proposed project to be stopped and re-located to an area outside the game park.

11 – CALENDAR 2007

Please find below our calendar of events for the remainder of 2007. Whilst we will endeavour to keep to this schedule, but the Committee reserves the right to make amendments should the need arise.

17 June	Malindidzimu (World's View)
26 August	TBA
25 November	Annual General Meeting, Gordon Park