

FROM SUFFOLK TO
ZAMBIA

Julie Croucher from Travel with Jules left her heart in Africa whilst working in Zambia

Having travelled across Africa working in all countries from Ethiopia to South Africa, I was glad to accept a posting to manage a safari camp in the wilds of Zambia and ‘stay put’ for a while!

Zambia remains (and I hope will for a long time yet) a haven for wildlife and is a relatively untouched part of Africa. Thankfully here, you won’t be surrounded by stripy mini buses and hordes of tourists! On the contrary, you are likely to be alone in the bush, just you and your guide, enjoying the peace and pink skies...oh, the pink skies!

I was talking last week to a colleague who still works in Zambia, at a trade show in

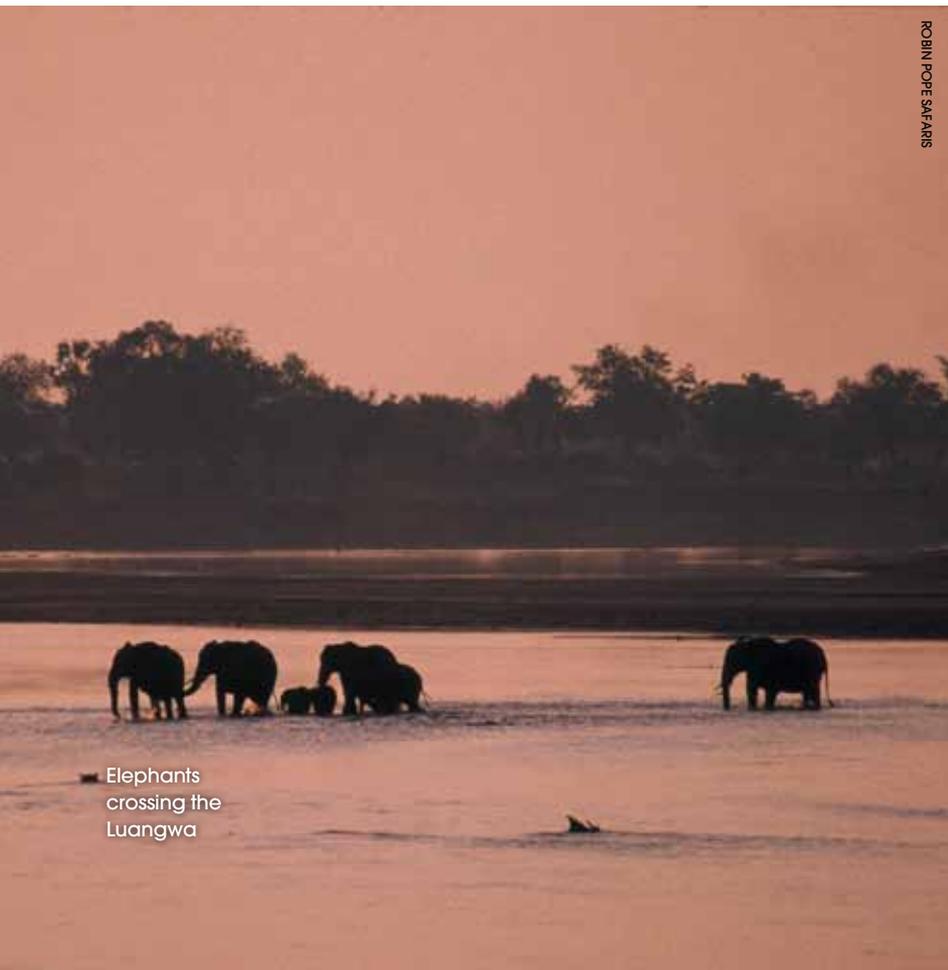
London, about his camps in Kafue National Park and we discussed how everyone thinks you are mad talking about pink skies, but Zambia truly does have the most amazing skies I’ve not experienced anywhere else.

For me, waking each day in my thatched hut on the side of the Luangwa River and watching the world wake up in front of me is a memory that will stay with me forever. As I sipped my coffee a pink haze broke the horizon and low mist lifted from the water, birds skimming the surface for their breakfast, elephants drinking from the river bank and the laughing snorts of the hippos ‘wheeze-honk’ echoed through the valley.



©CHONGWE RIVER CAMP

Chongwe River Camp in Zambia



Elephants crossing the Luangwa

ROBIN POPE SAFARIS

Zambia is the birth place of walking safaris in Africa and the families of those great pioneers still run safari camps and walking safaris in Zambia to this day. South Luangwa National Park is home to some of the highest concentration of hippos and the most leopards per km in Africa (night drives are a great way to see these big cats and other nocturnal wildlife).

For me, it’s the elephants who were the true characters of life in the Luangwa Valley. Each day in camp it was a battle with the animals as to who would get breakfast first, constantly chasing baboons from the dustbins, evacuating snakes from the store room, running the gauntlet of hippos on the lawn whilst taking food from the kitchen to the restaurant and most of all checking that there wasn’t a pachyderm road



block on the way back to my chalet at the end of the night!

A particularly mischievous young male elephant (known as Stumpy as he had lost the end of his tail) used to hang around the Marula trees between the main area of our safari lodge and my house. In the dark it was hard to make out the difference between a large tree and Stumpy ‘hiding’ behind it. He never tired of making me jump by trumpeting loudly as I walked closer!

Towards the end of the dry season temperatures in the Luangwa Valley soar to well over 40C in the shade and tempers become frayed (in both staff and animals!) as water becomes scarce.

This lack of water poses another problem in the life of a safari camp with primitive plumbing systems. One morning I stepped into my



African Lion cub, Zambia

ROBIN POPE SAFARIS

shower and found that it was dark and I couldn’t see what I was doing. There was also no water coming out of the shower. Then I looked through the small porthole window to see a massive eye with it’s beautiful eyelashes peering in at me – the shadow (and water thief) was an elephant who had dug up the pipes to get a drink and was watching me!

Sundowners are a big deal on safari in Africa and Zambia has some of the best sunset spots in the world. Imagine, you have spent the afternoon on a bush walk, slowly exploring the ebony groves (which are like a scene from Bambi with antelope and butterflies grazing in the shade), observing giraffe as they feed from the Acacia trees or watching ‘fishing parties’ of colourful storks and wading birds in a lagoon, before turning the corner to find drinks set up on the riverbank with snacks. What better way to see the sun say goodnight on another day in Africa, than to watch that ‘pink sky’ with a G&T in your hand!

I left Zambia a long time ago now and love my life in rural Suffolk (which has similarities to Africa), but a piece of me will always be on safari. **R**

Julie Croucher is the owner and director of Travel With Jules based in Easton, Suffolk. If her story has inspired a safari trip of your own, give her a call on 01728 748209. travelwithjules.co.uk