

# SAFARI '97 A DREAM COMES TRUE

**SAFARI!** There's magic in the name. Visions of pith helmets, hacking through thick green jungle, bearers carrying huge loads of equipment and of course the expectation of hearing Tarzan calling in the distance as he swung through the trees on vines that never broke, followed by an obedient line of running elephants who trumpeted on cue and always knew that they mustn't hurt the 'goodies'.

Evenings, when in enormous clearings in the impenetrable vegetation, the newly showered, intrepid explorers sat outside large tents in freshly ironed clean clothes, toying with gourmet meals and sipping excellent vintages from long stemmed glasses. The latter transformation miraculously took place though there was no evidence of any water – apart from the inevitable crocodile filled river in which Tarzan had done battle earlier in the day.

I grew up on Tarzan books, I read them all, and I saw all the films. I was 'there' listening to the birds, fearlessly talking to the animals – who of course understood me – and helping to keep the kingdom safe for another day.

In my ignorance. I didn't know that Tarzan did all his leaping around in a pretend jungle on a small backlot in Hollywood nor that Zimbabwe doesn't have jungle, it has bush. There are no green leaves to hack through because it only rains in summer and that's also when the grasses grow so long that it's difficult to see the animals. Therefore the best time to go on safari is between autumn and spring. I went in August, which is spring.

How did the reality – my SAVE FOUNDATION safari – compare with my long held visions? *It was magic!*

Nobody wears pith helmets any more; they're hot and uncomfortable. But you will need a hat with an all around brim, preferably very light and meshy to let the air through.

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The bearers have been replaced by excellent highly informative guides who know the common and often the Latin names of every plant, tree, bird and animal, - I lost count after seeing and identifying 25 different kinds of animals. The only thing a guide carries is a gun and they take pride in never having to use it. Guides are in the business of preservation and in sharing the joy and thrills of their fauna with those adventurous enough to come to see it. This aim is achieved when the visitors follow the very simple, specific instructions given by every guide before every outing. "In the event of anything unusual, stay absolutely still, stay absolutely quiet and do EXACTLY as I say" - We did.

drive us in our open backed truck to within a few meters of that spot. On one occasion the line divided about 40 metres before it arrived at the track. So we sat there holding our breath in fear and excitement while over two hundred elephants from huge to tiny babies padded silently by. They make no noise! How can such enormous creatures in such large numbers move through crinkley bush so quietly that you wouldn't know they were passing by if you had your eyes closed.

So many wondrous animals, here are a few of my favourite scenes.



*Rhino tracking.*



*Imire Game Park.*

I didn't need Tarzan to see lines of elephants. Every afternoon they travel to water. Long lines, two or three abreast. The guides would estimate where the line would cross the track we were on, and

The baby leopard cub about the size of a domestic cat who scuttled across the road in front of our truck to join its majestic mother who sat under a rock staring defiantly at us.

The lioness who, while feeding cubs, looked at us just long enough to decide we weren't going to do anything threatening. Then entertained us by flicking from one side to the other while her hungry babies frantically rushed over and around her trying to get back on her teats.

The graceful giraffes that have a tendency to stand facing each other so their necks form picturesque X shapes. They are so tall yet can seem to completely disappear behind the sparsest, leafless tree.

The less than beautiful warthogs that kneel down to eat.

The sable with their elegant backward curving horns.

The rock dassies who, though they don't have a trunk or big feet and who are smaller than a domestic cat, are said to be the nearest relation to the elephant. I don't think Tarzan ever knew about rock dassies.

And of course the rhinos. The black and white rhinos are completely different in size and shape but both are the same colour, grey! We also saw several orphans who are now being brought up healthily and happily by teams of concerned carers. Groups of heavily armed guards sitting in circles on the ground, keeping watch over their charges, giving silent testimony to the ever present hazard from poachers to these endangered species. One little baby rhino, only three months old. His mother is a bit old to care for him, so he is being brought up by a series of volunteers who love their job and cry when they have to leave him. He was only about forty centimeters tall but amazingly strong and like all babies, full of fun. He is what the SAVE FOUNDATION is all about.

Hippos. I'm very scared of hippos and I was glad to know that the guides have a healthy respect for them too and gave them a wide berth when we were canoeing.

Land animals don't seem to see humans in canoes as a threat, so you can get very close to them. Elephants like to go to the

water's edge and pull up soft tufts of grass growing in the shallows. It's fascinating to watch while they daintily tap the tufts against their leg to get the earth off and then give the grass a final swish in the water to clean it before popping it in their mouth. Canoeing is very peaceful and quite a different experience.

What about the accommodation? The only tent we saw was unobtrusively set up inside a beautifully crafted thatched, stone 'hut' for two. The tent was in the sleeping area – protection from mosquitoes – but the hut also had a toilet, a lovely hot shower, dressing table, reading lights, a picture window and a large basket into which we put our dirty clothes every morning. They arrived back cleaned and ironed in the evening, compliments of the management. As an added bonus, these huts were sited in the bush so that each was out of sight from the others. This, like all the other excellent camps on the safari, had a separate central dining area with gourmet meals.

Every day was full of activity. Up early in the morning – usually awakened by the

beat of a drum, breakfast, then a game drive in open truck, or a game walk, or a boat ride, or a climb to see rock paintings. Then back to camp for a delicious lunch, and a couple of hours of rest. In the afternoon another activity different from the morning.

In the evenings – just like my old Tarzan movies – our newly showered group, wearing clean, freshly ironed clothes, sat around a campfire, sipping pre-dinner drinks from long stemmed glasses before indulging in an equally delectable dinner.

The evenings flew by in the company of the fun-filled, young at heart, adventurous people who go on safaris and the thrilling tales of the guides who always joined us for dinner.

So you see, my long held safari dreams came true, it was all MAGIC!

*Marie Webster-Viola*  
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NB: We can recommend and organise personalised safaris to Zimbabwe and surrounding countries. Just give our office a ring.



*Marie & Julie Froyland with Mbizhi.*



*Lioness in Chobe National Park.*