



## Mathews Safaris News Update

14 November Sept 2003

*Dear all,*

I know it is not quite time yet for our end of year news but there has been so much going on that I thought that a brief update might be in order. November finds us shaking off the rains and easing into the scorching days and cool nights of equatorial spring. The rains, albeit brief, were extremely powerful this year, effectively dampening down the dust and bringing to life a



Sand River Welcome

vast carpet of green. Thankfully, the heavens held on just long enough for our honeymooning guests from New York City to make their escape. Steady rain beating down on the steep roof of our old stone cottage flavored our evenings as we sat before the fire and reflected on our Sand River adventures and longed to be back in the bush.

Sand River was the setting for some of the greatest fun I've had in years. The river (more sand than water) runs along the eastern divide between Serengeti and the Masai Mara and defines the border between Kenya and Tanzania. We had gambled that a

camp there would be an ideal base for intercepting the great migration as it turned back south in search of the short grasses of Ndutu. Our private camp, tucked amongst thick fig trees and wispy palms in our own peaceful valley, proved to be the perfect base from which to visit countless wildebeests, elephants and some of the grandest black-maned lions I've seen in years. It also transpired that Sand River was the perfect place for magical candlelit dinners, sleepy afternoons and lots of laughter.

The most memorable dinner featured our guests under a lone tree on the plains, ostrich fillet on the grill and a brace of lions in the bush. Earlier that day, while on a gamedrive, they mentioned how they would love to have a romantic dinner and they pointed out a tree which struck their fancy. So, we sent them off on long game walk that afternoon with Glenn Mathews and the rangers as the rest of us slipped around the other side of the hill with a Land Rover laden with tables, chairs, linen table cloths



Curious Local

etc. Dinner for two was set under the lone acacia tree on the plains and our guests popped out of the bush at sunset to find candlelight, hors d'oeuvres and two chefs roasting ostrich fillets over an open fire. They settled in nicely, sampling the cheese, salmon and champagne, while we excused ourselves and retreated to a nearby hilltop, leaving the chefs and the armed rangers behind to look after the lovebirds. The plan was give them some privacy and then return to collect the them later in the evening. A few hours passed and Glenn and Jared were sitting on

the roof of the Range Rover taking in the stars and watching the glow of the cooking fire in the distance when the voice of Happy (our sous chef) crackled in over the radio. It appeared that the lovely couple and a pair of lions had chosen the same spot for dinner.

Glenn and Jared drove down from the hilltop and, as we arrived, the headlamps illuminated two huge black maned lions who had been fighting all day over a particularly good-looking lioness- and two nicely dressed Americans sipping at their drinks. Both lions let loose a thunderous cavalcade of roars to greet the Range Rover and dessert was subsequently postponed so that the honeymooners could get a closer look. Glenn and the guests tracked the brothers with the Range Rover while the staff packed up, having made the decision to serve the banana fritters back in camp. The lions put on quite a show and they were truly magnificent with thick black manes and the scars demonstrate their sibling rivalry.



Shadow of Our Balloon at Sunrise

Later on, the Range Rover returned to camp while the staff lingered with the lions until they got bashful and

slunk off into the bushes. Great stories were to be told that night around the fire.

Sand River sprung other treats on us as well including elephant families taking their daily baths in the springs by camp and masses of plains game sprinkling the hillsides. And the wildebeests were truly clueless this year leading our pilot to re-name them "bewilderbeasts". To this day, the migration has not really left the Mara. They just keep crossing and re-crossing the river in total confusion.

The only drawback of our remote location was that we did not have a suitable airstrip close to camp and Rory (our pilot) was suffering severe separation anxiety from being too far from his Cessna. He gets this way when he is more than 2 inches from the cockpit. His girlfriend is very understanding. Nevertheless, he and the guests got airborne several times for magical flights over the reserve and the surrounding area in search of stampeding wildebeests and hungry cats. The plane featured highly during the rest of the safari as well and some wonderful flights were had through the Rift Valley and down to white sands of the Indian Ocean.

The aforementioned rains made quite an impression over the weeks after our guests departed leaving us chilled, grumpy and struggling with cabin fever. A friend provided an interesting cure, a full moon jaunt 5,000 feet down to the warm, dry, floor of Great Rift Valley. Fraser, the instigator of the journey, is a longtime buddy of Jared's and leader of a project to save the last remaining white rhinoceros in Northern Congo (there are about 30 left in the remote, poacher infested, bush along the Sudanese border). His family lives in Nairobi and he wanted to do something special for his daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday before flying back to Congo with a planeload of guard uniforms and tents. The master plan was to camp in the open on a bluff overlooking the valley and the great soda lakes of Magadi and Natron. I must admit to being skeptical at first since I've become used to "camping" in Mathews Safaris style and my old bones don't like sleeping on rocks. However, I had forgotten the unearthly beauty of the valley and how the full moon can set the sands alight. It truly is an amazing place. Our convoy of three vehicles trundled over the edge of the escarpment and down the 200 kilometers from Nairobi to disgorge an extraordinary array of teenagers, coolers and camp chairs at the cliff's edge. The air was so clear that flamingos glowed iridescent along the shoreline and the volcanic cones of Mt Shompoli and Lengai were etched perfectly upon the horizon. Potjie pots (heavy south African cauldrons with stubby feet) burbled away through the evening yielding chops and steaks at an astounding rate. Daytime was spent in the shade along the river's edge, relaxing, splashing about and keeping score on the pitched water-fights. A good time was had by all and

the teenagers slept nearly all the way back over the Ngong hills and into the leafy suburbs of Nairobi. It always astounds me how such a ethereal and detached a place can be found so close to a modern city of 3 million people. That's Africa for you... contrasts and contradictions.

Otherwise, my "free" time has been monopolized by administrative tasks, marketing, and my work tracking elephant movements and killings. Last month I put a lot of effort into preparing satellite maps for a special lecture at the Royal Geographical Society in London. It is hoped that events such as these will help to raise awareness and provide additional support for the



Rory And His Airwing

maintenance of elephant migration routes. A brief diversion from office work was provided by an opportunity to visit old friends of mine from the Queen's Company of the Grenadiers Guards (the guys with the bear hats outside of Buckingham palace). They were on their annual visit to Kenya to conduct desert and high altitude training when they expressed an interest in spending a Sunday aloft with Mathews Air Safaris. Rory leapt at the chance and we had a grand time showing the young officers around the game ranches of the high plateau and the shoulder of Mt

Kenya. Sadly, the plane was needed back in Nairobi on Monday and we were forced to forego our invitation for the Beating of the Retreat - a bugle and trumpet laden (not to mention Gin soaked) fete for the officers and visiting dignitaries. Jared's further education on British culture will have to wait for another day...

Well, that's all the news for now as we get to work preparing for our next adventure. Special invitations are still available for the big February Safari (Manyara, Ngorongoro, Masai Mara, and Samburu) if you know anyone interested in escaping the snow and politics. Meanwhile Jared is busy designing our first gourmet safari for those who want to improve on their cooking while traveling to exotic locations. Basically, the concept will be to conduct a cooking course based on menus which make the best of the raw ingredients found in Kenya and some alternative (bush) cooking techniques as well. The trip would feature guest chefs from 5 star restaurant and lots of excellent game viewing. Bush segments would be at the luxury level with a large open air kitchen built for the cooking classes. Preliminary plans include an exciting coast segment where we will take over an entire mansion on the beach and concoct wonderful things from the day's catch. The focus will be on fun and confidence building so that people will have the courage to experiment. I would meet groups in Rochester and lead them to Kenya with a stop to explore the culinary side of London or Cape Town on their way (depending on the routes). Good wine tasting down on the cape. Yum!

I hope that you are keeping happy and, if we don't hear from you, have a great Thanksgiving.

All the best,

Clair Mathews

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