



Queensland Newsletter November Part Two

News of Members

Brian Pym contacted me to say that he is in touch with 6126 Brian Jeffreys so I expect that BJ will be contacting me some time in the future.

10552 Derek Perkins contacted me to say he is still in the Land of the Living and receiving my emails

Njuzi and the River People

Some of you, who actually read the Queensland News, have commented favourably on the project so I have great pleasure in adding the next segment of the story by Njuzi:

CHAPTER TWO

The first cold dawn of the voyage from Kariba to the Indian Ocean sent a watery light into the lower reaches of the Kariba Gorge. As the mist slowly lifted from the river, the small canoe Njuzi strained at its moorings against the power of the Zambezi. Six huddled figures stirred restlessly on the adjacent sandbank as the chill of the dawn seeped into their sleeping bags. The increased flood of water through the turbines at Kariba, the event which had precipitated us so hastily into the Zambezi, had caused the river to rise during the night. I had been left high and dry on the sandbank at dusk but with the dawn I was completely afloat in the rushing waters. Luckily my crew had sufficient foresight to anchor me securely. Makonikoni swung similarly at the end of her moorings as we waited for our crews to emerge from the warmth of their sleeping bags.

Once they had braved the cold dawn, they paused only for a brief warming session and a hurried gulp of coffee before we were boarded. We were on our way again. The gorge at this point was most impressive. The magnificent rock formations on either side bore witness to the tremendous pressures which, millions of years ago, had carved the gorge in the surrounding countryside. Great dips and holes in the stratified rock, which rose sheer from the river, induced an intimidating atmosphere, which served to emphasise the struggle with nature that was only just beginning. As the sun filtered into the gorge, the fish eagles came alive; these kings of the air in the Zambezi Valley swooped low over the water uttering their shrill seagull-like cries. The river beneath them lay calm and oily, hiding its power in the depths although the surface eddies were strong enough to tax the energies of the toiling paddlers.

About mid-morning, a headwind blew up; the water became choppy and slopped over my gunnels. Progress was slow and was not encouraged by the way in which Makonikoni stormed ahead with an air of mechanical super efficiency. In the afternoon things got worse and the choppiness increased. Mike got the fright of his life when a Hippo surfaced not more than six feet from my side. Frankly, I

don't know who got the greater shock, Mike or the Hippo, but the incident served to underline the necessity for being constantly on guard, no matter how tired the three canoeists became. Dusk had fallen by the time we struggled in to Chirundu. My passengers were wet and tired and I have little doubt that had it not been for Herbie Gibbons and his crash fitness course, we would have travelled no further than Chirundu. The planning and the four months of slogging in the gym were paying off. Tony, Dave and Mike, accompanied by Makonikoni's trio, departed in the direction of the Police Camp commanded by Inspector Eric Saul. Their mouths must have been watering at the prospects of a hot meal and cold beer.

After a rude awakening at 5.20am the next day, I was paddled into the mists and on down the river past the ruins of what had once been the thriving Chirundu Sugar Estates. The miles of irrigated fields, which had once been covered with lush sugar cane, were quickly reverting to the original bush land; surprisingly, the noise of a pump drifted out of the wasteland and it is to be hoped that all has not been completely lost of the terrific potential of the original scheme.

The warmth of the sun brought with it the enemy of a vicious headwind as on the previous day. The heavy going forced the crew to take full advantage offered by the shelter in the lee of the myriad of sandbanks but the strategy brought us into innumerable shallows and I lost count of the times when I was manhandled over the sandbars. My paint work stood up to the scraping but there would be much more of this before we reached salt water. We arrived at the confluence of the Kafue River and Makonikoni sped off into the northern channel - the more usual route for river navigators.

We preferred the friendlier southern route and entered the backwaters opposite the junction and a different world. The vegetation was much lusher than on the Zambezi itself; we threaded our way through reeds and rushes disturbing the teeming wildlife as we did so. The quiet sanctuary was a paradise for Dave and his cameras, although his time was limited. The channel we had taken varied between deep narrow stretches and parts where the water no longer flowed and had almost dried up. I was subjected to being hauled along the sandy river bed, sometimes lifted over dry sand and then dropped back into deeper water. For three hours this process went on until at last sweeping through some reeds and over a small cataract, we reached the flowing water that took us back to the main Zambezi.

As we left the backwaters and joined the powerful current of the main stream, Makonikoni shot across the mouth of the channel in front of us. A few hundred yards down the river, we found the launch's crew lazing on a sandbank awaiting our arrival. The reunion was a chance for a respite from the toil of paddling. Tony and Peter decided to use the break to replenish the larder and sped off in Makonikoni. I rested quietly while Mike and Dave walked off with cameras at the ready until Mike returned unexpectedly and shattered the peace by shooting at a snake which he had almost stepped on. The brilliantly-coloured serpent slid into the water and tried to curl around the outrigger. Even a canoe's skin can crawl! Mike's aim wasn't good enough to hit the snake, but at least he missed me. Shots from the river indicated that Tony and Peter had bagged a whole flock of duck. They returned with a single bird and the excuse that a second success had dived into the river and had been taken by a crocodile. We had seen several of the latter in the vicinity.

The hard going of the morning and the necessary rest at midday meant that we would not reach the scheduled camp at Mana Pools by nightfall. It was decided to call a halt for the day some eleven miles from the intended destination and as soon as we landed, Peter charged off into the bush after guinea fowl and, half an hour later, returned triumphant. The others had in the meantime built a good fire and the guinea fowl was soon grilling away merrily. The bird was cut up and left boiling on the fire for breakfast the next day. The six mariners were remarkably cheerful that night. Many were the yarns told around the campfire and it was clear to me, from my dispassionate viewpoint on the beach, that George was becoming the real character of the trip. He was 63 if he was a day, but was as sprightly as a chicken and always the first with an offer of help to gather firewood, lend a hand with the cooking or perform any of the less glamorous chores. Not the least of his ambitions was to secure an all-over tan; it's anyone's guess to whom he intended displaying his prize. Or perhaps he merely wanted to dry his clothes thoroughly after a wet passage in the launch.

The moon bathed the river with silver as the two crews settled down for the night. Hippo grunted as they grazed on a sandbank opposite the camp and an orchestra of softer sounds played from the darkness. It was all very peaceful and beautiful and, apart from Makonikoni's engine, which had forced Peter to pursue his duty of escort in leaps and bounds, and the wretched strong south-easterly wind, everything seemed to be going well. Despite the excitement and hard work of the previous day, everyone was up with the dawn and we were under way just after 7am. The inevitable wind came up an hour later and the hard slog began. If the two paddlers stopped their efforts, even the estimated five knot current in the right direction was negated by the wind on the surface. Although they had known of this difficulty, it was obvious that its continuing presence was causing some disappointment to the three canoeists. The miles to Mana Pools were uneventful apart from the snorts and yawns of the Hippo and Crocs at our passage.

When I was thankfully paddled into the harbour at the game camp, a very pleasant surprise greeted us in the form of Dave's wife, Anne, and their two children. With a foresight which was greatly appreciated, she had prepared a magnificently cooked lunch and the six sailors were all feeling on top of the world after having satisfied their appetites. It had been mentioned that we were to stay a couple of days at the camp where it was hoped that Cliff Freeman, the warden, would have time to show the voyagers around and give Dave the opportunity for some game photography. It was not to be. Cliff was inundated by hordes of "Rhodes and Founders" (Rhodesian Public Holiday) visitors and barely had time to say hello. It was a blow which resolved itself into an afternoon of domesticity - washing and drying clothes - a chore which had become a feature of the journey. The following dawn confirmed the resolve to be away from the over-populated tourist resort as soon as possible and, after saying their farewells to Anne and the boys; I was boarded and steered for the next port of call, Chikwenya Island.

Just before leaving, Dave had managed to exercise his camera on two elephant that were enjoying a hearty breakfast on the island opposite Mana Pools. There was less wind than on previous days and good progress was made. A spasmodic breeze did little to improve the rough water of the earlier voyage and I was soon rather wet inside. Tony, Dave and Mike were very conscious of the alien bank but on one occasion a solitary Hippo decided we were worth closer investigation

and we were forced to leave the friendly shore in something of a hurry. On a deserted stretch of river this wouldn't have concerned the crew but on this particular section there was a hunting camp on the north bank. A large number of Africans watched our progress and, their number, and the fact that there were several new buildings in the camp, decided Mike, who was steering me at the time, to keep well clear of the north bank. This wasn't to be the case as it was too shallow on the friendly side of the river and the Hippo's threatening moves towards me resulted in a change of course which brought us right under the eyes of the watchers. On the way we passed a camp occupied by members of the South African Police who were assisting the Rhodesians defending their northern border. The South Africans provided a cup of tea and gave the canoeists a tangled skein net to assist those catching fish.

Chikwenya Island is renowned as a game paradise and we were to stay there for two days. Just before I was beached on the sandy shore, a motorboat sped upriver threatening to capsize me with her wash. The three occupants waved cheerfully, innocent of the upset they had nearly caused. Since the island itself was so popular with the local wildlife, it was thought safer to make camp on the south bank of the river. It was something of a hike in the soft coarse sand from the shore to the camp, but the elephant droppings and spoor indicated that gatecrashers could be expected if camp was made at the riverside. Makonikoni and I were left to fend for ourselves while our crews lugged their gear to the relative safety of a fallen tree.

Left peaceably on the glistening sand, I only heard second-hand reports about the incidents of the afternoon's game viewing on the island. I heard them talking of how they had tried to get close to a herd of buffalo. Dave had been walking on the top of a bank beside a dried-up stream, while Peter and Tony walked abreast of him but actually in the riverbed. Dave was in thick grass when suddenly a buffalo, which had sprung up in front of him, jumped into the dried watercourse and landed no more than 15 feet in front of Peter. Luckily the buffalo was as surprised as the men but apparently it is the lone buffalo which is the most likely to turn nasty for no reason.

On their return from the island, Tony hoisted my sail for the first time and the addition was a great success. As the sail had only been completed the weekend before departure, this was the first try out in these conditions. With favourable winds, it seemed that my passage to the ocean would be speeded up. The following day was spent in more game-viewing and a minor overhaul for me. At the same time Mike stayed behind to try and unravel the skein net and, while he was so occupied, an elephant came onto the beach and slowly walked towards the river where I and Makonikoni were parked. Mike was so engrossed that he didn't hear a thing until the elephant was only about 5 metres away, when he looked up and saw the animal, dropped the net and ran away from the approaching creature as fast as he could. I think he probably broke the world record for 100 metres; however, on looking back, he saw that the elephant was not at all concerned with his flight and seeing me had taken a step to the side and entered the water next to me to have a bath. Mike dashed to the camp to grab his camera and returned to the river to take shots of the bather but sadly these never materialised as the camera and film were ruined by exposure to water and melted cheese later in the expedition.

There were several close encounters with elephant but the conclusion regarding other species of game was that while the island patently abounded in wildlife, the

grass was so thick that viewing was restricted until the animals gave away their concealment.

Although I had survived the journey thus far with one minor scar and a number of scratches, my clinging friend, the outrigger, had been less fortunate; on close inspection it was found that he was taking water in his outer hull so out came the fibreglass and Tony got cracking with repairs. The speeding launch which we had seen the previous day pulled into the bay while Tony was thus engaged. Mike recognised the occupants as old farming friends from Sinoia, Piet Hougaard and Harry Grossberg; the new faces were very welcome, even more so when Piet produced cold beer from his boat after a whole day's fishing. Dave discovered that he too had met Piet during his earlier days in the Force and there was much telling of tales until the sun dropped over the horizon. Before departing, Piet invited everyone to join him at the "old G" fishing camp the next evening.

Returning to the camp with cold beers and a large bream, the party were rather shattered to find that the large Egyptian Goose, which Tony had secured earlier in the day and which had been wrapped in tin foil beneath the ashes of the fire, was now so much charcoal. The fish was doubly welcome and was added to by one of Peter's excellent stews from the provisions he had picked up at Mana Pools. Over the meal a discussion was held and it was decided, on Piet Hougaard's advice, to stay at Chikwenya for another day before paddling the few miles down to his fishing camp for the evening.

Although they had enjoyed a relaxing day, the day before, the travellers were reluctant to stir from their sleeping bags the next morning. It had been a very cold night, 44 degrees F (6.6 Celsius) and a most unpleasant one for me. Two elephants decided on a midnight swim among our moorings and thank goodness they weren't tempted to use either Makonikoni or myself as spring-boards. All we got was a thorough soaking before the two giants made for the island. The morning was spent on further attempts at game photography and Dave was marooned by the others on the old Mohammed - Mountain principle. His vigil near the river bed was rewarded after several hours when he was visited by a family of elephant; two of these, who seemed to be inseparable companions, had lost a right and left tusk respectively. It was almost as though the pair had some sort of agreement between them.

Early in the afternoon Makonikoni and I were boarded and we set out for the camp down the river to keep the date with Piet Hougaard. When we arrived we found that he had a beautifully organised camp laid out under a huge acacia thorn. Beds for eleven people ranged down one side of the clearing and there was a well-appointed kitchen being run by Piet's employees from his farm. Mike and Tony opted for the luxury of hot baths while the others contented themselves with the roaring fire. Although only Piet's servants were in occupation, they had been well briefed and everything was laid on.

When Piet and Harry arrived with their families after another day of hectic fishing, the six members of our party were lounging in comfort. Harry was pleased with himself having caught two Vundu weighing 36 and 38 lbs each. That evening was a real social occasion. After a huge meal of beans, vegetable soup and fish hash, the talking went on well into the night.

One of Piet's yarns was about Chirundu Bill, a massive elephant which had become a legend in the Valley. The Tusker had been shot near B Camp in 1951 by old Pop du Toit, after many other hunters had tried and failed to bring down

the old bull. Pop himself was another legendary figure and he had died on the day we left Kariba. At his request, his ashes had been scattered at the place where he had shot his old adversary.

The next morning was the coldest yet with the mercury down to 42 degrees (5.5C). Steaming hot coffee woke the travellers at 6.15am and we were away from the camp by 7am after much well-wishing from Piet, Harry and their families.

The river was placid and I was pushed along at a healthy rate. We reached H Camp and everyone went ashore to see if they could scrounge a cup of tea. The only occupants of the camp were the staffs who were busily engaged in cutting up tons of buffalo meat. No tea was forthcoming so we moved on. Late in the morning, Dave photographed a Nyala antelope conversing across a spruit with a Baboon. Dave was the one who identified the Nyala and I heard him say that they were rarely found at this altitude - the plains of Natal were their more natural habitat. It seemed to be a fine specimen to me and quite happy in its present surroundings.

The river was narrowing; rocks stuck out from the bank making small rapids close to the shore. The water seemed very clear and blue and in contrast the vegetation was greener than I had seen since leaving Kariba. The current was swifter and a feeling of contentment filled me as I forged through the water with the rhythmical strokes of the paddlers creating an atmosphere of real progress at long last. We passed more Hippos that grunted with disapproval and then ignored us. The Crocs seemed less timid and I kept a wary eye on the very large specimens which lay motionless on the Zambian bank. We rounded a bend in the river and saw our destination - the mouth of the Chewore River. I was swung into a sandbank beside some huge rocks which formed a safe natural anchorage. I was unloaded and my crew set up their camp just over the rise of the sand where they too would be sheltered from the wind. The sun went down in a blaze of red and gold to be followed some hours later by a silver line that crept up the river towards me. We lay there bathed in the cold white light of the moon, and on land the sailors lounge contentedly around a small fire, talking long into the night while the sounds of the African night fill the air. Baboons bark on the far bank, an owl screeches and the waters of the mighty river chuckle past the rocks.

CHAPTER THREE

I knew that we would be staying at Chewore for the whole of the next day and I could appreciate the reason for my crew deciding to do so. The day had been a long one and we all needed the rest before the last long paddle in Rhodesian waters. The moonlight cast shadows of rocks on the ruffled surface of the river beside me and the shadows became the writhing dancers of the VaGawa people as Tony and Dave told the others of their expedition to gain audience to the VaGawa's god, Chimombe.

The tribe had once lived just across the Zambezi opposite the Chewore mouth. They had crossed the river and centred their lives on the Chewore. In recent years they had again moved south of the Escarpment to the area north of Karoi. Although the manner of their dress has changed with this contact with civilisation, they have retained their culture and beliefs with a tenacity which sets them apart from other tribes of the Valley. Tony and Dave considered

themselves most fortunate in being permitted to see Chimombe and to have been present at the ceremony conducted prior to their audience with the god.

Few white men have had this privilege and fewer still have been permitted to photograph the ceremony¹. I listened while Tony and Dave told how Noel Pickard of Karoi, a friend of Chimombe's people, had taken the pair to the kraal of Chief Chundu.

There, at four o'clock in the morning, they had been told to wait in the bitter cold. Drums had pounded and the dancers had chanted to assist Mbayiwa, the Spirit Medium of Chimombe, who lay motionless before them waiting for a spiritual union with the god.

Just before dawn, Chief Chundu had invited the three men to go down the hill to the clearing where a fire cast an eerie light on the dancers. They had taken off their shoes and socks and sat on the edge of the circle of earth, which had been pounded smooth and hard by dancers of the past, where they waited. A woman, the spirit medium for other ancestral deities of the tribe, gyrated before a line of tribeswomen who swayed and stamped their feet in time with the thudding of the drums. For two hours the intruders sat watching, unable to resist the supernatural atmosphere and reverence of the ceremony.

The woman was replaced by a young boy, who, only three months before, had been found to have the gift of possession by the spirits. This was the first time he had taken part in the ceremony.

After the lesser mediums had danced themselves almost into a state of exhaustion, a silence fell on the gathering. All eyes were focused on the small pole and dagga hut on the other side of the clearing. A small figure emerged from the shelter. With ochred face, a headdress of porcupine quills, a black cloth over one shoulder and a skirt of white and blue striped material about his waist and supporting himself on an ornately-carved staff, the figure advanced on the semi-circle of women. This was Mbayiwa.

He growled as he moved and one look at his eyes was sufficient to banish thought of mere theatrics, his eyes were those of a man possessed. Softly the drums began again their insistent throbbing. As they got louder, Mbayiwa started to dance. The drums quickened and the feet of the medium moved faster and faster until the dust rose in clouds and his garments stood out from his body. He paused suddenly and threw a searching glance in the direction of the three white men, and then he returned to the wild frenzy of the dance; after he had contorted for half an hour, he stopped for the second time; a throaty, supernatural growl emerged from deep within his chest,

This was the voice of Chimombe.

Mbayiwa moved to the edge of the circle and removed his headdress, He placed it in a basket and then, half-lying and half-crouching, he rested upon the needle-sharp quills; this was the signal for the trio to approach the medium. Nyahonda, the High Priest of Chimombe advanced towards the visitors and asked Noel what he required? "Tell Chimombe that these men are my friends and come only to see the great god, they mean no harm to him or his people," Nyahonda relayed the greeting to Mbayiwa who asked in turn if the "respects" had been paid. A bundle of black cloth, white cloth and beads was passed to the medium who fingered the goods deep in thought. He plunged his hand into the basket on which he sat and brought forth a small wooden bowl: "It would be better if we see each other" he intoned. Dave and Tony fumbled in their clothes for some silver coins. Satisfied by the further offerings, Mbayiwa gave permission for the

god to be seen and, more important as far as the visitors were concerned, for photographs of Chimombe to be taken.

Mbayiwa stayed at the foot of the hill, not being permitted to cast his eyes upon the god. Nyahonda led the party over the hill to another small clearing in which stood a small hut, The custodian opened the door of the hut and ceremoniously produced elephant tusks, bundles of cloth and the remains of an old twelve-bore shotgun, Finally he disappeared inside the hut and emerged carrying the small, eroded piece of metal which is Chimombe. The god was planted in the hard ground and the High Priest sat before the deity. Behind him, the tribes' people sat in silence. After Dave had photographed the totem, Nyahonda returned Chimombe and his treasures to the hut. Noel, Tony and Dave proffered their thanks to the High Priest and left the kraal.

On their way back, Dave had asked Noel "Where had Chimombe had come from"? Noel replied that there were many legends surrounding the custom, but the generally-held belief of the VaGawa was as follows:

Many years ago the Matabele had been envious of the wealth of the VaGawa. Chimombe was then their chief and the tribe had become rich as they worked the silver mines of Monamatapa in the hills flanking the Mpata Gorge downstream from the confluence of the Chewore and the Zambezi. The Matabele sent an impi to conquer the VaGawa and to capture the mine. In the battle which ensued, the invaders were beaten and the few survivors among them, rather than return to their homes with the shame of defeat, walked eastwards where they became the VaDoma people, known as those who walk with eyes downcast in memory of their dishonour.

The Matabele king had sent a second impi to avenge the first, and also a beautiful maiden. She was left at a water hole where she was found by Chimombe's people and taken to their chief. He much admired her and took her for his wife. As they lay together during the night, the girl drew a knife from her clothes and plunged it into the neck of Chimombe. As the blood gushed forth, there was a great storm and the river came down in flood submerging the whole area. When the waters eventually receded, those of Chimombe's people who had escaped drowning returned to find that at the place of their Chief's slaying lay a figure of iron which spoke to Mbayiwa saying that it was Chimombe and henceforth it would guide the VaGawa through the medium."

This was the story that drifted across the sandbank and, as I looked around at the moon-bathed wilderness and listened to the sounds of the night, I could not dismiss the legend. Soon after the sun had risen the next day, I heard the sounds of the six men rekindling the fire of the previous night. They spent a long time over their coffee, a small piece of cheese and a biscuit, and by the time they had finished their sparse meal, the day was already getting hot. The party split up. Mike stayed at my side, unpacking and then re-packing my rear compartment until he had obtained all he needed for a morning's fishing. I was grateful to see the last of the worms presented by Piet Hougaard, which had been littering my otherwise tidy floorboards.

Peter and George Begg set off for a walk up the dry bed of the Chewore. The remaining three, Dave, Tony and Arthur, set off downstream. By midday, the others had returned to congratulate Mike on his catch of a few small bream, the largest of which must have weighed at least half a pound. Arthur was so taken with Mike's success that he joined him - and neither of the two had as much as a

bite after that. Peter and George reported that they had sighted several small buck on their trip but only the spoor of larger species of game.

Dave, Tony and Arthur had spent the greater part of the morning mesmerised by a pool containing five Crocs. They returned firmly convinced that the loathsome creatures could sense the presence of man, no matter how quietly they maintained their vigil, the Crocs had stayed just under the water close to where they had been sunning themselves before being disturbed by the trio.

The rest of the day was spent in similar quiet relaxation and maintenance of me and Makonikoni.

Nature turned spiteful the next morning as I was being packed before our departure from Chewore. Clouds hung low in the sky and the wind was whipping the Zambezi into waves which rolled upstream. With everyone aboard, my first few yards into the river showed that the day's travel was not going to be an easy one. The waves broke over my bow but were fortunately deflected from Dave and his precious equipment by his canopy. Tony wasn't as lucky in the middle compartment, which was lower in the water. His position next to the outrigger, which was also breaking the waves, meant that water was almost continually slopping into his compartment and Mike in the stern fared almost as badly. The two of them had to spend their rest periods baling for all they were worth.

The river was narrowing; rocky shelves stuck out into the water from both banks. Between the rocks and below the steep banks, which clearly showed the high water mark, bright green grass blazed unnaturally. The trees lining the top of the banks gave an impression that the river was in a deep cutting. We reached the confluence of the Mwanza where Makonikoni and I were pulled into the side. We had only travelled about five miles but tea was brewed while we waited for better light conditions for Dave's photography before entering the Mpata Gorge. I was apprehensive, to say the least, about what lay ahead. Makonikoni had told me fearsome stories of whirlpools and currents which taxed the capabilities even of motorised craft. At midday we set off again and were soon able to see the hills rising steeply on either side. The black rocks climbed domineeringly from the river. We had arrived at the entrance to the ill-famed gorge. Perhaps it was the stories I had been told which unsettled me, or perhaps the fact that Tony was now steering me all the time with his feet, or even that my crew were wearing life-jackets, but whatever it was, I couldn't escape an uneasy feeling.

Although the wind blew steadily across the surface of the river, the water was smooth, oily and black. The walls of the gorge were grotesque after years of erosion, twisted into weird shapes which could easily allow the imagination to run riot. Of all the intimidating aspects of the place, the uncanny silence was the thing I disliked most. We had no sooner started into the smooth but ominous water than my bow was pulled to starboard by an unseen eddy. At first my paddlers fought with all their strength but they could make no real progress. Helpless in the grip of the hidden force, the men relaxed and allowed the current to inflict its will. My fears rose again as I was swung towards the rocks at the river's edge but at the last moment the same current held me away from the sheer bank; suddenly I was spun completely about and three paddles knifed into the water to propel me backwards into the main stream. Turned in the right direction again, we carried on.

Rocks sprung from the water in tall columns. On one occasion, five of them stood like sentinels in a straight line between the two banks. We negotiated the

obstacles safely and I breathed yet another sigh of relief. After five miles of heart-stopping progress down the gorge, the river spread itself into two small bays on either bank. We headed towards the southerly one where a pile of rocks shaped in the form of a baboon's head stood guard over the small sandy beach beyond.

My crew was tired that evening and Peter's black tin box must have been an encouragement to them. In no time flat one of Peter's special hashes had found its way from the treasure chest into a pot on the fire. His announcement of "sadza" (mealie meal porridge) on the menu was cheered, but the resultant porridge was as quickly acclaimed as uneatable in its existing form and was returned to the fire to be made into biscuits. Night descended and still there were few sounds to disturb the prehistoric silence of the gorge.

Dawn showed not a cloud in sight and I had hopes of a speedy departure from this disquieting stretch of river. It was not to be. After about an hour on the river, the clouds came up and brought with them the same strong headwind. The remaining twelve miles of the gorge took four hours to accomplish before I was thankfully paddled into more open country. Before leaving the Mpata Gorge proper, we rounded a bend and saw Makonikoni pulled into the bank. Peter yelled that an Elephant had just trundled off into the bush which prompted Dave to leap barefoot to the bank and disappear with cameras swinging wildly; thirty minutes later he returned, muttering uncomplimentary things about Elephant, thorn bush and unprotected feet. Two miles further on, we reached the dry mouth of the Tunsu River. Again we stopped and, leaving Mike behind, the other five set off to locate a mud hole in the dry river-bed which was said to contain a dead rhino. They returned hot, tired and thirsty three hours later to find a brew of tea waiting. No mud hole or rhino had been found but they appeared to have been compensated in their disappointment by the discovery of a tree which had been struck by lightning, a few Kudu and a small black "snake" on which Tony had nearly stepped before it vanished so quickly that no one was sure that it was a snake at all. Kanyemba was the destination for the night and 15 miles remained to be covered. There were no pauses in the rest of the journey and with all hands to the paddles, I skimmed across the water. The river was still slightly choppy but the wind had dropped considerably. We passed through the "Gates" marking the end of the Mpata Gorge - great mounds of rock which descend like gigantic steps from the hills on either side of the river. Kraals made their appearance on the north bank and, after ducking round a large sandbank which forced us almost on to the Zambian bank, we came to Kapsuku - a hill of rust-red rock rearing like a crown from the surrounding hills. Aloes and baobab trees clung to the side of the landmark, the former bravely flowering to lend contrast to the red wall behind.

Some four miles from Kanyemba, the gurgling of another boat announced the arrival of the police launch from the station and Patrol Officer MacNamara was sighted behind a creaming bow wave. Less than an hour later I was moored at the jetty below the camp. I settled down for a peaceful night with the comfortable feeling of civilisation close at hand. Makonikoni wasn't as fortunate. Six reasonably-dressed gentlemen, smelling strangely of scented soap, descended on the launch, bent on a night of merrymaking. I was told the full story of the night's adventure by a bruised Makonikoni the next day. With Peter at the wheel and Tony holding a torch while the other four crouched out of the wind, my companion had been raced through the sandbanks towards Zumbo, the border

town on the Zambezi for Mozambique. The mad progress had continued, quite literally, to the riverbank below the town. It was only the mud and tall grass which prevented a more damaging arrival and Makonikoni told me how she had been cross-eyed at the rocky slabs six feet on either side of the point at which she grounded.

The two crews had abandoned the launch in a rush to sample the local ale. It was several hours later when they returned having obviously found the right place and talking loudly about a "session", which the local Chief of Police had interrupted, until he discovered that the rowdy visitors were policemen - at which stage he joined in the proceedings. The return trip for Makonikoni had been as eventful as the outward journey. At full throttle she had encountered a sandbank. Indignantly she told me of the way in which she had been drunkenly manhandled back into the water and then, with more than a trace of self-satisfaction, she related how her last drop of fuel had been used when still one and a half miles from Kanyemba. Paddles had taken her to the bank where, with a contented sigh, she had been able to recover from her mishandling; her six passengers had been punished for their sins by being forced to struggle up the bank and then stumble, cursing and arguing, all the way back to the camp.

I watched from the jetty the next day as my crew wasted away the morning by sending letters and radios and doing other small, unimportant jobs. One amusing incident which had me bobbing in the water with laughter was when I overheard that the Member in Charge of Kanyemba, Section Officer Keith Jarrett, was off on a spell of leave and Patrol Officer MacNamara was in charge. That wasn't the amusing part. Keith had gone on a fishing trip - to Lake McIlwaine near Salisbury!

The Rhodesian section of the expedition had now been completed, logs written up and letters for the family given to MacNamara. Makonikoni's duties as the escort had now been completed. At noon we took our departure from Kanyemba, the last outpost of civilisation in Rhodesian waters. The river was rough and a strong headwind was again with us. It was fortunate that we were going no further than Zumbo. We edged past the site of the original Kanyemba Police camp before inching our way downstream and across to the far bank while trying to keep my bow into the waves as much as possible. The Zambian post at Feira was very close to the north bank. Originally a Portuguese trading post, from which slaves were collected by 17th Century traders, the name of the small town actually means "market". We crossed the Luangwa River and finally drew into the bank just below Zumbo. Makonikoni and I were abandoned once again while our crews sought out more of the previous evening's fare. Hearing later that their earlier visit had eaten the town out of bread, I wondered how long it would be before the Manica Brewery representative called to replenish his stocks in the place.

It was 2.30pm on July 15 when the revellers finally found their way back to the water. I could understand the way in which they had lingered over their glasses for Peter, George and Arthur climbed aboard Makonikoni and, for the last time, I heard the engine splutter into life. It was a strange feeling to watch the little launch slowly making its way up the river towards Kanyemba.

We were alone. No longer did I have a companion to whom I could pour out my troubles. Dave, Tony and Mike were henceforth dependent on the meagre supplies I could carry for them over the next seven hundred miles. There was an awfully long way to go.

Best wishes Mike Edden
ADMINISTRATOR