

# Row for Rhino - Part 3

## Zambezi Source to Sea Expedition



*Baroma Mission. I was so amazed to see Baroma it was absolutely huge and it looked completely out of place, it was built in 1860 and is now turned into a school but to give you all a good idea of what it looks like I would say it's the St Pauls Cathedral of Africa.*

*To highlight the plight of Africa's Black rhino, James Reid, Reilly Travers and James Manuel, all in their early 20s, recently completed a 2 500km Zambezi canoe trip from its source in the north western part of Zambia to the sea in Mozambique. Their journey took them through some beautiful parts of the river such as the famous Barotse flood plains, world renowned Victoria Falls, lake Kariba, lake Cabora Bassa and the middle Zambezi, through Mana Pools and the lower Zambezi national parks. The objectives of the expedition were to raise funds for various projects involving black rhino conservation in Zimbabwe, and to create awareness of the rapid decline of rhino both within Zimbabwe and across Africa. After an unplanned four-week break, our trio continue on the final leg of their journey, battling Cabora Bassa's legendary waves and finally reach the Indian Ocean.*

We resumed our trip at H-Camp situated just before Mupata Gorge. We were all very happy to be back on the water and paddling to Kanyemba. We proceeded through the Mupata Gorge which is very spectacular and where we did our own census of bushbuck - we counted over 30 individual animals in a 3km stretch! We also saw an elephant cow and her youngster and were amazed that this small animal managed to handle the steep sides of the gorge. We also had a small incident with a crocodile. Jamie was paddling off to an angle behind us and when he glanced over he saw what he reckons was 14-15 foot crocodile following us! We were not too far now from Cabora Bassa which is notorious for its crocodile problems.

We passed through Kanyemba and Zumbo border posts pretty smoothly until the Mozambican officials discovered that we were travelling by river. They were suspicious because they couldn't understand why anyone would want to do this sort of thing! We

finally allayed their fears and left Zumbo border post after six o'clock that night. We had to paddle with torches in our mouth looking for a suitable place to rest up for the night. As if we needed any reminding, we also saw a lot of crocodile eyes reflected in the torchlight! At last we found a spot in a maize patch which was ridden with hundreds of mosquitoes which were so numerous that we couldn't eat and had to take cover under our mozzi nets. We woke up to a group of young children looking at us wondering where the heck we had come from.

Later that morning we stopped at Chiwalo fishing lodge where the fishing guide gave us a run-down of the croc situation on the lake. He told us that he had shot two that had human remains in them and that 120 people had been eaten last year in this part of the lake. Great!

The wind on Cabora Bassa is legendary in that it howls down the lake and causes huge waves. The position of the lake from west to east means that wind blows straight down it from one end to another. We



*The wind on Cababora Bassa is legendary in that the waves are huge. At the click of a finger the winds howls down the lake.*



*Mawaya gave us a small 7-foot boat with a 15hp motor to tow one of the kayaks, the bigger boat towing the other two.*

had to take cover for three days on one occasion and paddle at night because the wind during the day was so extreme, I remember Reilly was in front of me, one second I saw him and the next he was gone hidden by a massive wave.

This area of the lake is inundated with Zambians trading goods for fish which they take back to sell in Lusaka. I can understand why - the fishing is amazing, the tiger take lures really hard and, in one afternoon I caught ten tiger in half-an-hour.

The landscape of the lake is very different to that of Kariba being a lot more rocky and harsh and very narrow. We met an amazing character called Mawaya Hougaard who has been living at the lake for nearly 20 years fishing for kapenta. He was very good to us and gave us more supplies and let us stay in his lodge for a few nights and then took us round the dam wall with his own car and boat. His stories were very interesting and he always had a smile on his face. Fear is not a word in his vocabulary.

We arrived at the wall where the town of Songo is situated, here Mawaya met us and took us round the wall. Due to the severe steep slopes of the Cababora Bassa gorge we had a 100km detour to transport our kayaks back upstream so we could resume our journey from below the wall. The water in the gorge is extremely turbulent and very deep. We had a few dramas on the way up. Mawaya gave us a small 7-foot boat with a 15hp motor to tow one of the kayaks, the bigger boat towing the other two. The water was so turbulent that the smaller boat lost its motor and began to sink. Fortunately we arrived in time to save it and the kayak. The second mishap happened when the steering cable broke which necessitated our having to use a steel arm to swivel the engine, a difficult procedure because a 150hp Yamaha is a big engine and not easy to control when under power. Again, we had some amazing fishing in the gorge and all three of us caught an 8kg tigerfish - all in the space of ten minutes.

Once through the gorge we were on the final leg of our journey, all our hard work was coming to an end. The last major town we had to pass was Tete and we had been warned not to drink the water there. This was confirmed when we met government workers testing the water and they advised us that the water was not safe to drink. The river here widens so much that one would expect the river to slow down considerably, but it is an illusion and still flows reasonably fast.

Just before we reached Tete we had been told about a noteworthy mission called Baroma. It was striking - absolutely enormous looking completely out of place. It was built in 1860 and has now been converted into a school. I would describe it as Africa's version of St. Pauls Cathedral.

The section of Zambezi below the gorge was the most disturbing in that we had ten different incidents involving crocodiles. I am not sure if it was because of the time of year but most days crocodiles would simply come off the bank and come straight for us. On one occasion I was paddling with Reilly behind me and he just started yelling for me to paddle. I looked around to see the head of a crocodile



*The upper reaches of the lake are inundated with Zambians trading goods for fish which they take back to sell in Lusaka. I can understand why - the fishing is amazing, the tiger take lures really hard and, in one afternoon I caught ten tiger in half-an-hour.*



*Below the gorge we had numerous encounters with crocodiles. Here we were forced to take shelter in a grassy river verge. The croc problem became so bad we rigged the kayaks in such a way as to enlarge our profile.*



*These large makoros ply the river daily - I am amazed at how much weight they can carry.*



Its total length is 3.2km and was built by the Portuguese for rail traffic. Along the way we noticed many forts and cannons from old Portuguese days. We also saw the grave of Mary Moffat which is on the banks of the Zambezi. She was the wife of the great explorer, David Livingstone. The river here is about 3km wide, heavily braided and extremely dirty. The town of Marramou is the last town before the beginning of Zambezi delta and is home to an old sugar company called Sena Sugar which has only very recently started up again. From Marramou it is 80km to the sea, a stretch which took us two days to complete. We had thought that the delta would be extremely difficult to navigate but this proved to be incorrect and only took us half a day to get to the ocean. The delta is amazing - 60km from the mouth you can see the tide start taking effect on river levels. The bird life is prolific - we saw skimmers, flamingos and pelicans. Also of interest, was an old trading steam boat that the British used to go up to lake Malawi with.

The most exciting moment was upon us when at last we saw the wide expanse of the Indian Ocean. It was a great feeling and we paddled on as fast as we could. On the 24 October we finally entered the Indian ocean; I took a sip of the water and - yes - it was salty...

***We had conquered the Zambezi.  
We were overjoyed, it was a great feeling.***

***If anyone is interested in finding out more information, or would like to submit donations, or offer assistance to this worthwhile cause, contact James e-mail:stuart@bh.co.zw***

coming straight for me! I paddled frenziedly for land, trying my hardest to get out of harm's way, and then they backed off and went after Reilly who shouted at them and slapped the water with his paddle. This seemed to work. Once on land we discussed what had just happened. He said he saw two crocs coming after me, although I remember seeing only one. This is only one of the events involving crocodiles in our last nine days. It became so bad that we made huge flags which we hoped would change our profile to resemble vessels more substantial than kayaks - but it did not stop the crocs coming after us. I suspect that they are very territorial, possibly nesting, and were more interested in moving us out of their area than adding us to their menu.

We passed the longest bridge in Africa called the Dona Anna.

*When we saw the wide expanse of the Indian Ocean it was such a good feeling and we paddled on as fast as we could - we all just wanted to finish the trip and get to the sea.*



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