

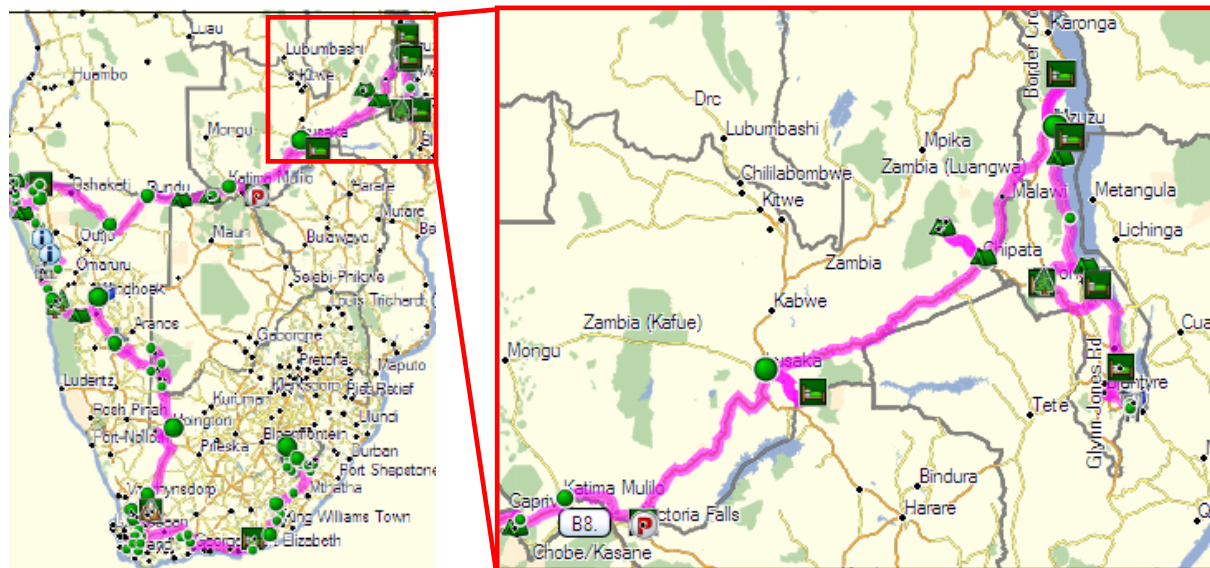
12.5.2012

Dear All,

Ages ago, when we were still residing in our hut in Maseru, we calculated the distance between Maseru and Laufenburg in Switzerland. The smart lady in the GPS told us, that we have to drive 120m, then turn left and then go on for 14356 km to reach Laufenburg. On 6th May we had our 14356 km – only it was in the border area between Zambia and Malawi. Maybe, not everything is as straight in Africa as proposed by the GPS.

At least, we passed from the Namibian desert to the Malawian humidity. Therefore no more dust - but rain. Currently we are sitting in the bar in Kande lodge at Lake Malawi. A place which is quite famous with overlanders, but definitely has seen much better days, but due to politics here it still waits to develop its full potential. For those in Maseru scratching ice from the windscreen every morning: it's 26 degrees and slightly windy.

As we came to know that a map is very useful, especially for the folks in Europe and Kirgistan who think Africa is just a big country with many Chinese migrants, here an overview as well as the continuation of our trip.



After more concentration on landscapes we thought it might be the right thing to close the Namibian chapter with some wildlife. We went to the horseshoe bend in the Caprivi Strip, where elephants are famous for blocking poor tourists from returning back to their lodges by just standing on the road and nibbling the nice leaves from the left and right side of the road. Unfortunately – fortunately there were not so many and we were back in time for our nice sundowners at the Kwando River.



In Katima Mulilo we crossed from Namibia into Zambia (Martin explained very well all the procedures in details in our last letter) and drove straight through to Livingstone. There at the Victoria Falls we had the opportunity for a nice long shower.

We crossed the so called knife edge bridge – left side x meters straight down, right side y meters straight down - and got completely soaked in the mist of the falls.



As Swiss citizens need a visa for Malawi, Lusaka, the capital of Zambia was our next station. However, unfortunately the high commission moved from the old premises to new ones, neighbours at the old place did not know where they moved to and nobody at the high commission picked up the phone to give us indications... When we finally found out where they were located the embassy already was closed and the next day was the 1st May.

Hence, as Lusaka does not offer a lot of sight-seeing except the wonderful sight of queuing cars in different colours, we decided to visit the Lower Zambezi National Park at the Zimbabwean – Zambian border. Access is by pontoon over a river and across beautiful villages. We found a wonderful place to stay some kilometres outside the park just at the river front –

accommodation inside the park starts from approx. \$ 300 pp and up to 1000 – but don't worry, a small continental breakfast is included.



Visiting the park the next morning initially was a little bit disappointing. We saw leftovers of elephants everywhere but not a single one of these guys, just some other animals. Later we met an American on a safari vehicle assuring us that there really are plenty of them around and then we saw them, literally everywhere. So we learned you may need an American to see elephants.

On the way back to the camp in the afternoon we nearly drove over a leopard sleeping on the road, just 800m away from our campsite (!!!!). Did we mention that the camps are not fenced... but this was no problem, at our age leopards do no longer consider us a gourmet meal. And there were quite a number of crispy springbok in the surroundings.



Well we saw what we had to see, therefore we could easily return to Lusaka to continue our attempts to get a Malawian visa. Finally we found the embassy. A smart lady at the reception explained us that we would need all kind of documents to receive a visa and we had to pay 150 US\$ each. Then we would have to wait for 3 days and then finally we would be ready to move on. We were studying the list of docs to submit – quite impressive: the usual odd form to fill in, a certificate of residence, a certificate from the employer, proof of payment of all invoices we ever received within the last 50 years, proof of funds to finance a trip to Malawi – but no plastic money and no US Dollar notes older than 2 years and 26 days, the famous 150 US dollars each and finally Monika's grandmother in person. Well, we filled in the forms, asked friendly what else we should add to these papers and we got the friendly answer: the money. 2 hours later we had a nice sticker in the passport, left the embassy with 300 US\$ less and the right to visit Malawi.

Initially we planned to visit the north of Zambia as well. However, a still too high water level after the rains and therefore inaccessibility of certain places made us change our plans. Instead of going to the north we went to Southern Luangwa National Park in the east. This is considered as being one of the best national parks of Africa. As usual, we found the perfect camping spot next to the river – next to plenty of sleeping hippos and crocs. The guard warned us not to leave any veggies and fruits in the car, and as soon as we were settled we were visited by the first herd of curious and hungry elephants – again no fences around the camp.



The next morning we left as early as six o'clock for the park and drove around and watched the plenty of wildlife for the whole morning. The area is beautiful, lots of trees, swamps, grassland and thick forest.





In the afternoon we even went for a night game drive on one of those fancy safari cars. A car with at least 500'000 kilometres, a very hard suspension, but at least the ignition worked – last year in Botswana we met a couple in such a car amidst a pride of lions. When they wanted to back off from the hungry animals the car did not start... no idea whether the guys have ever been seen again. But today, unfortunately all the animals went sleeping, we did not see a lot.



The next morning finally the first cat - a little bit bigger than ours in Maseru and very impressive.



We could follow her for at least 2 kilometres before she disappeared in the bush.

As this was enough wildlife for us we continued our journey into Malawi. You know Martin, he likes the tiny, tiny small roads; so there was no chance of taking the main road to Lilongwe. Instead we took a detour towards a border post somewhere in the north. There, the friendly officials told us to just follow the electricity poles until we might reach the main road. At the same time we

learned that a new president took office in Malawi a few weeks ago to optimize everything her successor tried to do, that the currency was devaluated on the day of our arrival and that the availability of fuel may still be an issue – or not.

Long after dark we reached Mzuzu, the third largest town in Malawi. This was our most expensive hotel and the room resembled a time long gone by. Some 20 years ago, in Bangladesh we were staying in a guesthouse with similar turquoise walls, plain neon lights, furniture where you could still see the carpenter's axe and a concrete floor telling you the adventures of the last 20 guests in the room.



Malawi is famous for its scarcity of fuel and the next morning we were busy trying to find additional diesel enabling us to cover a wider area to travel around. Finally, after long discussions with the head of the local fuel depot, we could find an additional 20 litres. The other petrol stations looked like under siege with long, long queues. Already, before arriving in Malawi, we had to calculate how far we could reach with

our two tanks before refuelling in the first town in Mozambique. The itinerary was quite plain from north to south with very few major detours.

As our tank was full, we now could proceed towards Livingstonia in the north. We very much enjoyed the drive: huge forests, everything green and very little traffic. However, the road up the rift valley escarpment to Livingstonia is not easy at all: very steep with lots of rocks in the middle of the road.



On top we found a nice place with another loo and shower with a view. All visitors are advised to keep the alcohol consumption within the limit of the unfenced platforms! The cliff just drops 200 m. Due to the cold weather and rain we opted this time for a chalet.



The next morning we walked up to the village of Livingstonia, an old Scottish mission station. Due to the prevailing Malaria around Lake Malawi, the missionaries in the last century moved up to this place on the escarpment: Lots of old historic buildings and an interesting museum with pictures out of this time.



Well, we had to move on: less than 7 months left and still not reached the DRC. We had to drive down the Escarpment again - towards Lake Malawi. Since we drove up, the road has not really improved. On the way our car started to demonstrate that our treatment is not too appreciated. As we ignored it, it began to protest more seriously with heavy noise. Finally we found a broken pipe keeping the rear wheel in its position. Slowly we moved on, accompanied by the continuous protest of the ill treated wheel. Back to the tarmac, we stated that also the brake pipe was broken (we still have 3 other wheels to brake as long some break fluid remains) and driving resembled to navigating a small boat in a medium hurricane. Nevertheless, we managed to drive 20 km to a small village with one of these specialised workshops repairing all makes of cars. The guys removed all broken parts and carefully put them in the sand. The broken pipe had to be reinforced before welding: they cut a piece of pipe out of an old bike frame and forced it with a hammer in our broken pipe. Then some welding, some more hammering and bending – and the masterpiece was ready to be built in. It really was a masterpiece. Slightly similar procedures with the broken break pipe: A new one was found within no time. The required length was measured; finally it was cut, formed, hammered and bended until it perfectly fitted into the whole system. To avoid any leakage a lot of threat was used and the whole lot was fixed. And really the brake works again. So we went back on the

road. The pipe was now replaced in Lilongwe by an original piece - one without bicycle frame and welding, the break pipe we try to leave for the road worthiness inspection in Switzerland.



27.5.2012

We followed the shores of Lake Malawi – Nkhata Bay, Kande, Senga Bay, passing thru Lilongwe to finally reach Cape Maclear: very much the odd tourist circuit in Malawi. Good for relaxing, nice snorkelling in blue water and huge swarms of fish and plenty of fish dishes to eat. On the way in Kante, we started editing this edition of the newsletter, inspired by the waves of the lake and the reality of tourist's life in Malawi.





Currently we're in Mulanje, near the border to Mozambique, but still on the very same edition on inspiring jealousy.

Lilongwe was quite impressive. Don't think it is a big city or a very busy place. Also, it's not really the place where you would go for a shopping splurge – they still are waiting for the Sandton Mall and New York's 5th Avenue to be developed. Nevertheless, after half an hour driving thru this proud capital, you really feel at home – you know every road, every shop and even you may know the offer of each of them. Reflecting this, we might easily not find our way in Maseru anymore, getting confused by the Kingsway or getting completely lost between the shelves of Pioneer's Pick'nPay.

After all those lazy days on the beach and the adventures in Malawi's capital we needed a little bit a work-out for our muscles. There is a famous mountain called Mulanje in the south-eastern corner of Malawi near the Mozambique border. It mainly is famous for being a very, very steep granite Inselberg, with its highest peak slightly over 3000m and plenty of tea plantations at its bottom.



We opted for a three day hike up the mountain plateau with Edwin, our guide, and two porters for all our stuff – plenty of warm clothes, cooking utensils and food and 2 bottles of rare, but rotten South African grapes called wine. The plan was to overnight in 2 different mountain huts. The hike to the plateau – 4 hours straight up -



really was steep and we both, but especially Monika, were suffering. That's why the photos below mainly show Martin in compliance with the Human Rights Act.



On top we continued along the edge and along the plateau for another 2 hours. A few days later and remembering that time, it was definitely worth the effort, even if Monika had a slightly different opinion at the very moment. The view up here absolutely was breathtaking and the landscape, the trees and flowers are fantastic. We enjoyed it so much that we walked afterwards to the "one-million-dollar-view-point" you can see below at the right side.



We were the only hikers in the area and had the hut all for us. The guard prepared us hot water for washing and a nice fire for warming up – very comfortable.

Food was more or less "out of the tin" and the odd pasta pack, but at least the wine was good...



The next day was another 5 hour hike to the next hut on the other side of the plateau. However, we realized it is not really what you normally consider a

plateau. On Mulanje a plateau means that the starting and the final point of your trek are about the same altitude. Unfortunately, it does not consider high ridges and deep valleys in between. So the path goes up and down all the way, across grass plains, rocks and wonderful forests with just a handful of the famous Mulanje cedars left. Unfortunately a lot of poaching is going on.



After 700 m straight up and 699m straight down we finally reached our next hut. It was built just at the bottom of the highest peak of Mulanje, Mt. Sepitwa, a peak normally wrapped in clouds. The hut not as comfortable as the one the night before – 4 thin mattresses to sleep for the first four hikers that arrived, the others would have to stay on the wooden floor. A fireplace in the middle of the only room and all covered with ashes of the 200 previous fires.



The night, even with our famous ice breaker sleeping bags, was very cold and the next morning we realized that there was frost outside. However, a warm cup of coffee and the warm sun did wonders...





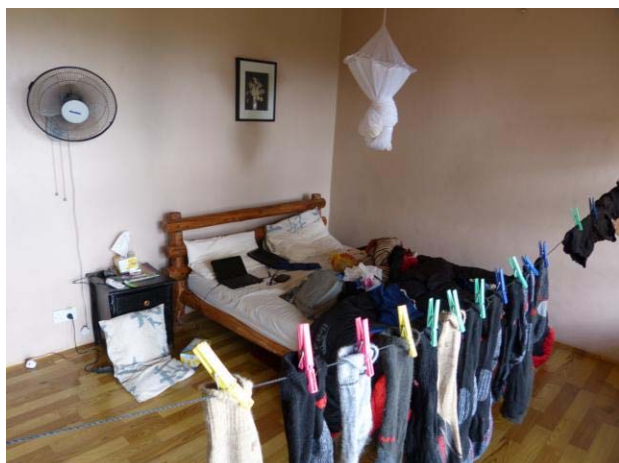
This was the last day of our hike and, as we went up, we had to go down – straight as the inverse, but probably a little bit less strenuous.



We arrived at the bottom of Mulanje in the afternoon, tired and with somehow shaky knees, but completely satisfied and happy with what we have done.



28.5.2012



Yesterday we spent the day with relaxing and washing all our dirty clothes.

Currently we are finalising this important document in a rather filthy hotel room in Gurue – sorry, no picture. Probably you may ask the question where the hell is Gurue – it is not that you have slept during your

geographic lesson at school – even if it was definitely boring - Even your beloved teacher would not know where is Gurue. On this and other adventures we will report in our next edition of Be Jealous – as usual politically incorrect but not completely wrong.

Cheers

Monika & Martin