

Botswana - November 2014

Flying into Maun is always exciting - the Kalahari desert stretches for miles and miles below, then suddenly there is the Boteti River, a narrow strip of green in the desert, before Maun appears, the dusty hub of the Okavango, alive with safari comings and goings.

David Foot meets me at Maun airport and we set off driving south to the Kalahari desert's Magadikgadi Pans (pronounce it *Ma-kad-i-kad-i*). This is an amazing area - and it feels wonderful to be back - many years ago I ran horses at Jack's Camp, a few miles from Camp Kalahari where David and his company Ride Botswana now have their desert base so it is a real blast from the past for me.



I'm glad to see nothing much has changed although there does seem to be more wildlife in the area nowadays. This is probably because rains have been good for several years - David's house is on the river in Maun and he says it has been full of water constantly whereas previously it often dried out.

In the December to April wet season, game is even more predominant in the Magadikgadi as it is home to the biggest migration in southern Africa when thousands and thousands of zebra and wildebeest trek across the plains drawn to the rain-filled pans and the grass the rain suddenly produces. An amazing sight I remember well (March and April are usually top months) - although we get rave reports from those who ride in the Kalahari with David year round. He's an extremely experienced and knowledgeable guide, always great company and there are enough unique and fascinating aspects to the Magadikadi to make it an incredibly special place for a safari at any time. (If time allows you can also combine it with the Okavango Delta - exactly as I am doing now, so read on...!)

My next stop is **Motswiri Camp**, in the Selinda Reserve, north-eastern corner of the Okavango and about a 40 minute flight from Maun.



This is a beautiful little camp in a lovely remote spot and its speciality is variety - fantastic walking, boats, canoes and great riding too. It is just a shame I'm not here longer as there are so many ways to explore and so much I would like to do.

I spend most of my short stay riding with and Johnno, who we've known a long time and is as fun and easy going as ever, and Carmen, who has Motswiri's horse-side immaculately under control (and horses in immaculate condition). Both are well travelled with experience from all over Africa and it is good to see them bringing all that knowledge with them to Motswiri. The camp staff are wonderful too - you really get the feeling that everything is easy to arrange and nothing is too much trouble.

Motswiri is on the banks of the Selinda spillway in an area where (as in most of the Delta) terrain and vegetation varies with the seasons. November is probably the hottest month but wildlife has been fantastic over the last few weeks, with wild dog often passing through camp, four cheetah spotted the day before I arrived and lion on the airstrip just before we flew in! We have some super rides - fun canters with zebra and an exciting elephant encounter on the edge of an open pan, the horses quietly munching grass as the great beast ambles past.

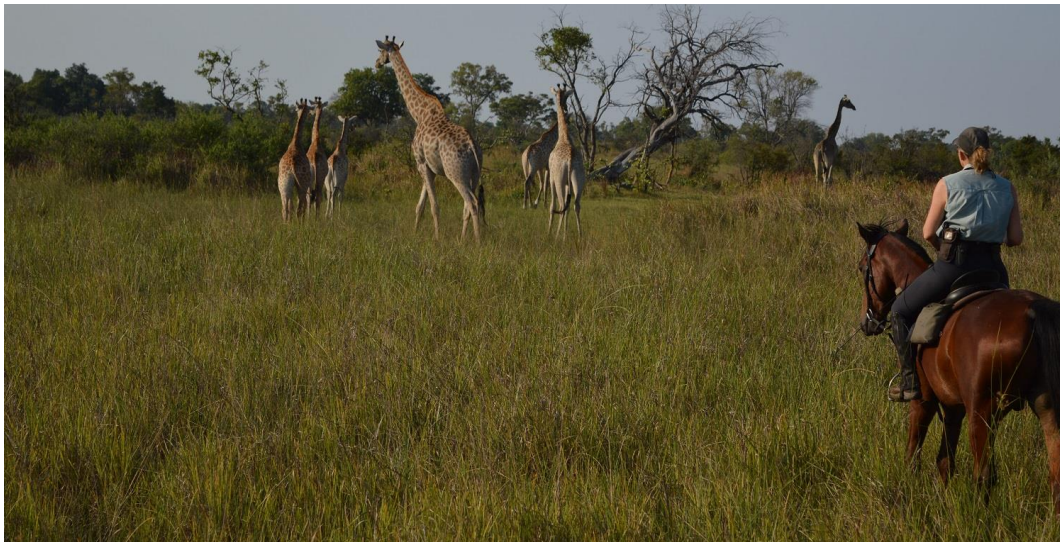


Midday and it is over 40C - time to cool off in the camp pool, before lunch, a snooze and afternoon drive to the fly camp. I come away thinking how perfect Motswiri is for families or for anyone who would like a mixture of activities - though if you just want to ride you can as much as you like.

On to **Kujwana Camp**, home to PJ and Barney's **Okavango Horse Safaris** - in the south west of the Delta. The journey from Selinda across the centre of the Delta is quite an adventure.

First a little Cessna takes me to Pom Pom airstrip where Person, Kujwana's fabulous camp manager of many years - I remember meeting him here in 1995 - is waiting for me and we drive a short distance to the river. Here we board a canoe and paddle across to the far side where another 4x4 is waiting. Skirting lagoons, crossing open grassy plains, following the shores of palm islands and sandy tracks through mopane scrub - we drive for miles. We see no-one - just elephant, giraffe, buffalo, all sorts of antelope and birds of every shape and colour. It reminds me just what an extraordinary privilege any visit to the Delta is.

Finally we arrive at Kujwana, the base for the OHS team headed by PJ and Barney who pioneered riding in the Delta. Barney's 70 or so horses (even she has almost lost count!) graze out on the flood plain during the day and are housed in four massive barns at night. I've ridden with Barney several times before and within the first few minutes of today's evening ride, we are cantering with giraffe. Later on Rodgers and Tabu, excellent trackers, take us quietly into the midst of a herd of elephant. My horse is a dream, one of Barney's homebreds, light, lively, full of beans - and gosh there are a lot of horses here - something for everyone.



After some lovely riding, a visit to Moklowane (OHS's tree house camp used as a second base on pretty much all their safaris) and a few good dinners catching up with PJ, it is time to move on again and I'm off on another drive and Cessna hop to **Macatoo, African Horseback Safaris** lovely camp a little further northwest, in another superbly wild area.



My tent at Macatoo is big enough for a family of 5, cool and breezy even in the heat which is building up for a storm. A dip in the pool before riding helps too.

Again plenty of horses at Macatoo with some big Shire and Percheron crosses brought in over the last couple of years to carry the well-built. John is enthusiastically installing solar power to the camp and so we ride out with Bongwe, long time guide at Macatoo, and Gareth, who recently moved here from OHS. We find a hyena den complete with cubs, a young bull elephant and a pool full of grunting hippos. Supper is a surprise pizza in the bush, cooked in an excavated termite mound. There is always something fun and exciting here.



A few more lovely rides to explore, a bit of time to relax in the camp and to see the Tree House camp (not in action during the wet season). Then off again.

The eight days have flown past and too quickly I am flying back to Maun. Note to self - don't leave it so long to the next visit. And stay longer!