

Bev & PC – 2012 Africa Safari 5

Ruaha

Mbeya was our first port of call in Tanzania. We camped at Utengule Lodge. The facilities are adequate, but there is very little shade – we grabbed the one level spot that did have some shade. Their food is good and they probably make the best coffee in Africa.

After the Pajero was fixed we set off for Iringa some 300kms east. The road is fine, other than the buses and heavy traffic. There is work being done on the road for the final 80kms from Iringa with a few stop/go areas. Stopped at the Old Farmhouse to buy vegetables – really good selection of young veges at very reasonable prices. In Iringa we stopped at Neema for a late lunch and to do a bit of e-mailing. Unfortunately the shop we'd used previously to stock up with other items was closed, so we headed for River Valley Campsite some 11km's east. A nice campsite with electricity – so we could get our trailer batteries and other equipment recharged.

Next morning we set off for Ruaha National Park – a 120kms away. We again tried our shop in Iringa, but it was still closed. Somebody suggested we try the centre of town – we were very low on beer and tonic for the gin. So we set off down the narrow alleys, found what looked like a promising prospect near the market. The little store had absolutely everything we needed. Looked like nothing from the outside, but inside the shelves were loaded with every imaginable item and the prices were not unreasonable.



Our retail fix having been satisfied we drove to Ruaha via the village road – and the baobab forest. In 2010 we took a wrong turn and ended up in the forest. Our photographs were nationalized in Harare, so the desire to return and recapture the memory was very strong with Bev. The road was a great deal better than when we travelled this way in 2010. You drop around 800m in altitude from Iringa (1600m) into the Ruaha valley. (not sure whether this might be down the eastern edge of the Rift Valley – needs to be researched). We bought wood along the road – very reasonable with the wood closer to the park being the best. Arrived at the park gate in just over 2.5 hours for the 120kms. Paid our \$420 for 3 days – by credit card – stopped for lunch at the bridge over the Ruaha river. There we met Will of Africa – he was on his way back from a trip to the Serrengetti with another couple from Mpumalunga. The campsite is on the banks of the Ruaha river and depending on where you end up you have great to good views from wherever you pitch your tent. This is now the largest national park in Tanzania having been recently extended. It is also a dry climate, so this time of the year most of the animals congregate around the river. So there is no great need to go for game drives. Sitting in our campsite we saw impala, giraffe, elephant, baboons, hippo, fish eagle, saddle billed stork,

fire finch, common sand piper, Egyptian geese, common bulbul, pied kingfisher, and glossy hadeda from our site. The lions roared every night – we saw a pride of 8 on a drive as well as defassa waterbuck, lesser kudu, wart hog and a leopard plus many birds.





The really nice thing about Ruaha, apart from the diverse vegetation and natural beauty, is the lack of people. On our first night in the campsite there were 5 people. Unfortunately a group of 15 Italian truck travelers invaded our space on the second and third nights. They were rather noisy and placed the rather sparse ablution facilities under some stress. A lone elephant bull came down to the water one afternoon and then walked towards our campsite, grazing. It ended up less than 30m away with a steep bank between where we were sitting and it. The Italians were there in our space taking photos a chattering away. After a while, he took a bit of exception to all the fuss, flapped his ears, grunted and the Italians scattered, except for their tour guide who clapped his hands and scared off the elephant. Bev had a full go at him – ‘this is his territory, you are a guest here, so behave properly!’ or words to that effect. The next day a troop of baboons moved through the campsite, the Italians had taken their Fiat truck (they are very passionate people) on a game drive, so the baboons had a good go at what they had left behind. I tried the clapping trick to chase them away, but they did not fall for that one. When we met them a few days later again in the Udzungwa Mountains, I told Gorgio (the leader) that

his elephant trick does not work with baboons, probably because the elephant told the baboons not to fall for such nonsense. Hopefully, he got the message.

On our last night a couple from Arrabella arrived. This is truly a mighty small world. Brian and Stella are also on a 3 month trip, but started in Namibia. They were off to Malawi after spending a few days in south eastern Tanzania. They'll then travel to Mocambique. We might even meet up with them again as Pemba and Gorongoza are also on their itinerary.



