

## The Elephant Killing Fields of Zimbabwe

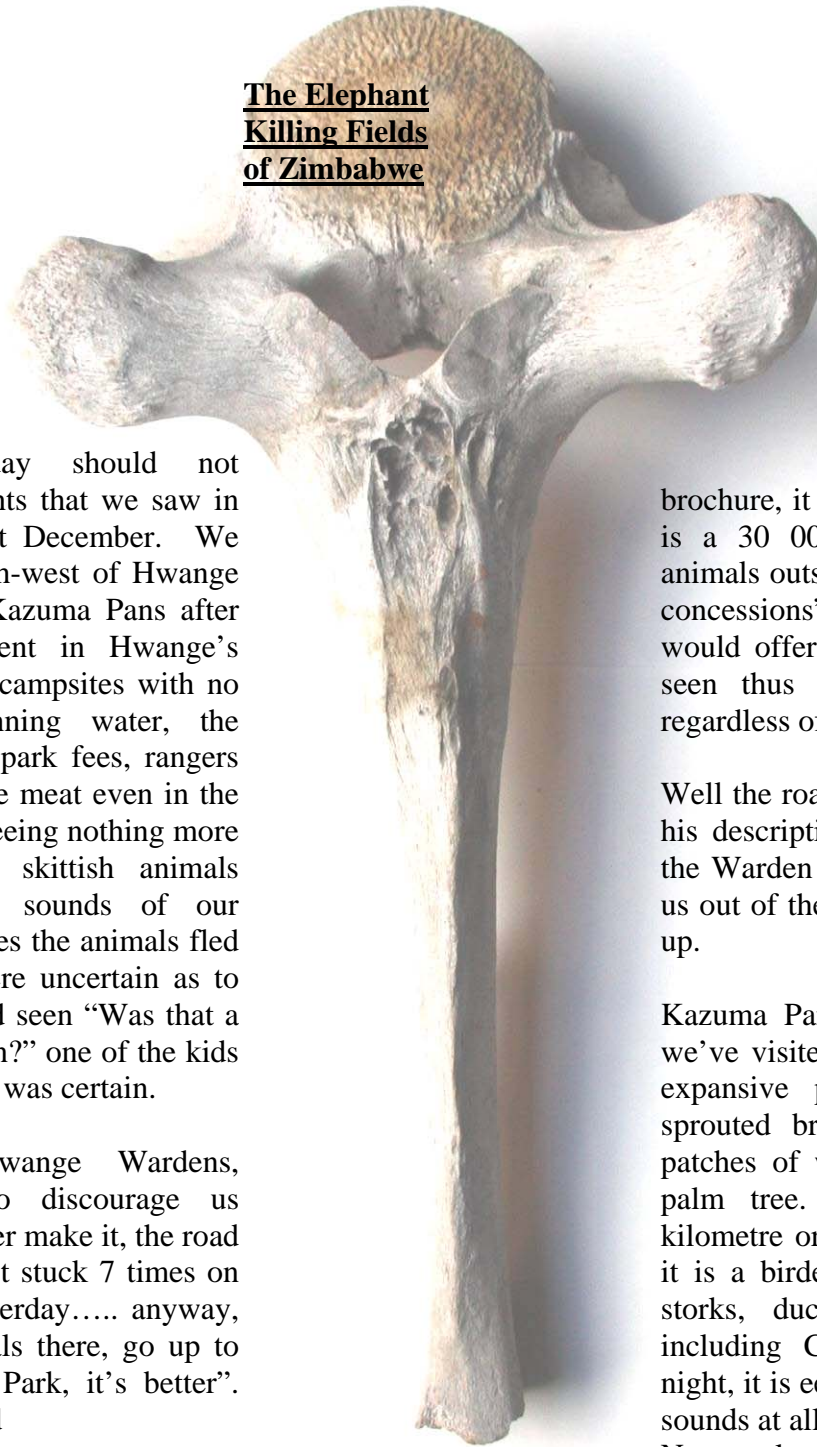
A family holiday should not encompass the sights that we saw in Zimbabwe this last December. We decided to go north-west of Hwange National Park to Kazuma Pans after bitter disappointment in Hwange's poorly maintained campsites with no electricity or running water, the relative exorbitant park fees, rangers openly drying game meat even in the public toilets and seeing nothing more than a few very skittish animals fleeing from the sounds of our vehicles. Sometimes the animals fled so fast that we were uncertain as to what it was we had seen "Was that a cheetah or a baboon?" one of the kids would ask. No one was certain.

One of the Hwange Wardens, however, tried to discourage us saying "You'll never make it, the road is treacherous, I got stuck 7 times on that road only yesterday..... anyway, there are no animals there, go up to Zambezi National Park, it's better". According to an old

brochure, it states that "Kazuma Pans is a 30 000 hectare sanctuary for animals outside of the private hunting concessions" and so we thought it would offer more than what we had seen thus far and decided to go regardless of his warning.

Well the road to Kazuma fell short of his description. We wondered what the Warden was trying to do – chase us out of the area or cover something up.

Kazuma Pans is like no other park we've visited in Africa with massive expansive pans filled with newly sprouted bright green grasses with patches of water and the occasional palm tree. One can see for a kilometre or two across the pans and it is a birders paradise with various storks, ducks and birds of prey including Crested Eagles. Yet at night, it is eerily silent with no animal sounds at all, except for the rain frogs. No people and strangely no animals. We felt like the last people on earth.



We decided to drive across the pans to other side on a morning game drive. The only significant sighting was a herd of some 400 buffalo grazing on the pan but as we approached they took fright and they heavily galloped off with their little tails curled up.

We came across an elephant skull and skeleton that had been blached white in the scorching sun. The magnitude of the skull, the length of a rib and size of the femur bones was astounding and something none of us, especially the children, had ever seen close up before. Maybe this sighting was rather unusual. Don't elephants cover up their dead?

We continued down the road, but within a short period you could smell the sweet stench of a carcass. Another elephant. This time it was more recent with most of the skin still intact, but again no tusks. The positioning of the twisted body looked peculiar with its head wrenched away from its body, its mouth gaping open as if calling out in pain. It was horrific and the children became quiet as the adults looked knowingly at each other. This elephant did not die naturally. For then we saw the bullet hole in this once majestic giant.



It was time to move on. As we turned the next corner, we all gasped as before us is a scene from "The Killing Fields". In this green field of bush with young sprouting Mopani trees were twenty plus elephant carcasses and bones scattered everywhere. Lots of bones. Carcasses with beautiful yellow butterflies sitting on them. Added to the sweet decaying smell was an oily odour. The bones are blackened as if they have been burnt with diesel. Perhaps it is to discourage scavengers or else to hide the evidence. That distinct smell haunted us all for days after. Just how many dead elephants were there in this field? Who did this? The children stayed in the cars looking forlorn with tears falling and only a few of us had the courage to walk through the field.



I had mistakenly taken a tail for an infant's trunk. Where were the babies as there was no evidence of them? What had happened here? Were only the adult elephants taken out and the remainder of the herd fled? Who did this? Who would allow this to happen?



This killing field is no more than a few hundred metres from Kazuma Hunting Lodge. Kazuma Hunting Lodge? But there is not supposed to be any hunting in Kazuma. Well that's changed. The Lodge was unoccupied as the hunting season is over for the year. In the middle of the lodge is a thatched structure incorporating the reception, lounge and bar with two elephant skulls at the entrance.

Behind the bar, we found the visitors book. The vast majority are Americans boasting of their successes:

*“Shot the big four in 10 days”*

*“An 80 pounder on the first day”*

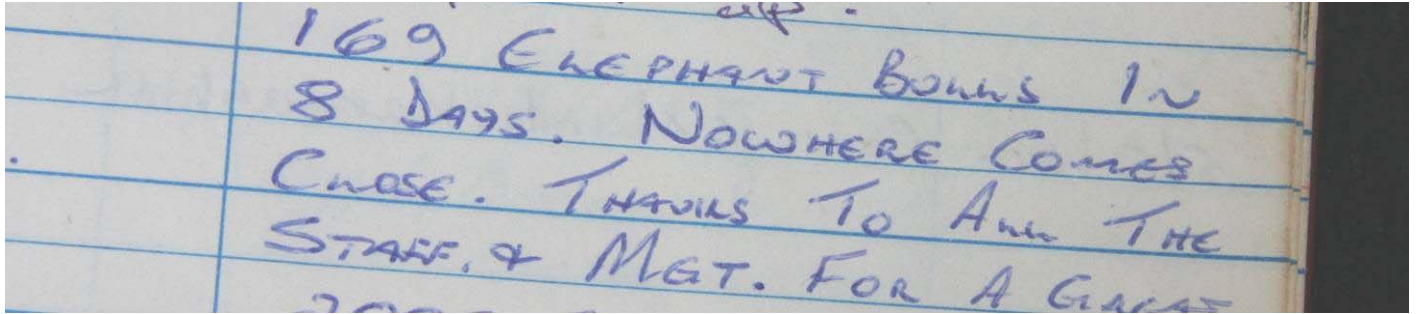
*“We came to the place of the elephants. Secured a 65 pounder, 43” sable and a 7’ 6” leopard was the icing on the cake. Hope to be back soon”.*

*“Meals prepared from our game were superb... We wish we could bring all our new friends home with us. I guess we will have to be happy with Jim’s leopard, eland, kudu, sable, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, hyena and baboon”.*

The last recorded hunt was in August 2007 with three hunters from Utah, Minneapolis and San Diego.

I feel deeply saddened at the trophy hunters’ brazen bragging and their evident lack of understanding, but it was this entry that turned my sadness to rage:

*“169 elephants in 8 days. Nowhere comes close”.*



Not a wonder then that we did not see any game and the few buffalos ran away.

Rob and Barry Styles of Buffalo Range Safaris are frequently mentioned as the professional hunters. The brothers have been linked with Mugabe cronies and it appears that the Zimbabwe Government has sanctioned these activities for financial gain from the American trophy hunters' fees as they plunder the last remaining game from Zimbabwe's national parks.

Zimbabwe has long had game watchers and game hunters together in the same vicinity. However, the game hunters have now claimed this land and game watchers are no longer welcome. This is not "the place of the elephants" for we never saw a single live elephant. It is an elephant graveyard. We won't be back soon.

I guess the game is over.

Insightful websites:

[www.zctf.mweb.co.zw](http://www.zctf.mweb.co.zw)

[www.safaritalk.net](http://www.safaritalk.net)

[www.swradioafrica.com/pages/shoot-to-kill.htm](http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/shoot-to-kill.htm)

[www.newsweek.com/id/47302](http://www.newsweek.com/id/47302)

Sara Webster



## The Killing Fields of Zimbabwe

Once proud Jumbos trod this land  
And we mere people hand in hand  
Lived in Harmony and Peace  
To make a land that we did lease  
From Mother Nature, we signed the line  
With future good, life was benign  
But then Dark Forces brooded fast  
To prove that nothing good can last  
And now with all so broke and bent  
We'll wonder where all wildlife went  
They could not run nor emigrate  
So they are killed by men I hate  
These rich men come to bribe to kill  
Oh when will God have had his fill!

Of them

And us

Chris Higginson