

Mirrabac Moments

Travel Highlights 2003

International

- First-time visit to South Africa's Richtersveld National Park .
- Leopard lounging at Goas waterhole in Namibia's Etosha National Park.
- Unprecedented volume of wildlife at Kruger National Park.



The weird Halfman tree

Domestic

- We've travelled to a new address this year. Please note the new contact numbers:

Ph: (09) 413 7399

Fax: (09) 413 7391

Travel Plans 2004

- South America
- Easter Island
- South Africa
- Namibia

Spotting the Elusive Mirrabac

If you've been on a wildlife safari you'll be familiar with the protocols of game-spotting. Even when you're at the ready, there's no time to waste in case the sighted quarry, often well camouflaged in its surroundings, changes pose or disappears altogether. So 'spotters' language is short, sharp and to the point: "Fish eagle"... "elephants"... "lion, two o'clock". For the uninitiated, the time reference indicates the general direction of the animal or bird.

The protocols served us well again during this year's 'Wild on Wildlife' adventure as we spotted all the African animals and birds you could hope for – all, that is, except the elusive Mirrabac. There we were in Kruger National Park, watching the hippos wallowing about in Sunset Pool and munching their way through the topping of



Hippo grazing at Sunset Pool, Kruger National Park

luxuriant water lettuce . Binoculars roved curiously, cameras clicked cheerfully and we sat contently, enjoying the scene.

As the grinning gluttons chowed their way closer and closer, the van's wing mirror impeded camera angles. Lapsing into RBA protocol-speak I instructed the front-seat passenger, "mirror back," meaning "flip the mirror

back out of the way."

Instantly, seven pairs of eyes scanned the area, cameras and binoculars on alert. "Where?... What colour?... Which direction?...Animal or bird?" The elusive 'mirrabac' was nowhere to be found but left us a laughing anyway!

Thanks, Team, for providing the name of the revamped Newsletter.

Dreams and Aspirations

All good travellers have them – dreams of places yet to be explored and adventures yet to be had. As RBA plans future adventures we'd like to know how we can best keep you up to date, and also what new destinations might interest you, so maybe we can combine your aspirations with ours. If you've got a travel 'wish list' or other feedback, do take time to complete and return the enclosed survey form. No 'genie in the

bottle' promises here, but you never know what you might get if you ask for it!

Deserts, Diamonds and Abandoned Dreams

"Travelling around Namibia is like turning the pages of Earth's history. Relentless erosion over many millions of years has gnawed away at ancient mountain chains leaving spectacular escarpments to stand like richly bedecked sentinels above flattened plains where no-

madic herds of zebra, oryx and springbok roam. Wherever you go, you're not far from desert-like landscape. And as the sun's heat spills down on hot winter days, it's hard to imagine that this was once a land of lakes and glaciers. But it was....

Read the full article in the Spring issue of Destinations magazine, available at your local bookshop or library. Copy by Maureen McDonald, images by Rob Bickford.

Listening to the Rhythm of the Falling Rain

That's what the wildlife in Etosha National Park are doing at the moment. The park looked drier than usual this year and, although that didn't effect our game viewing, it seemed a good thirst-quencher might be in order for the landscape and vegetation. So it was pleasing to read on-line that heavy rains have been falling in the park over the past few days. So far Namutoni has recorded 54.5 mm while Halali took a 23mm downpour in one day. Prospects are good for the country to get a thorough soaking this summer. When that happens the arid landscape springs to life - which means it should be picture-perfect for next year's trips!

That should keep the Minister of Environment and Tourism happy on both sides of his portfolio as more and more tourists are arriving each year. In 2002, 899,984 foreigners and 16 RBA travellers from New Zealand visited the country. And the final number for 2003 (20 with RBA!) is expected to be even higher.

As you will appreciate if you were one of those visitors, nature, the landscape and wildlife are voted as the big draw-cards.

Rob Bickford Adventures

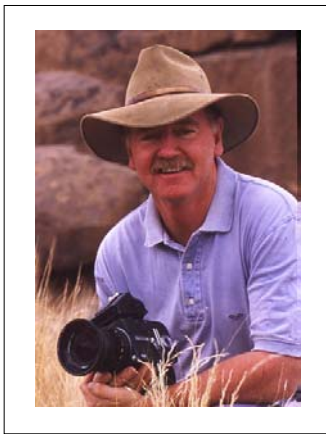
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Life's an Adventure

Coming to a Store Near You...

...if you happen to be in Southern Africa, that is. Rob's long-held dream of publishing a photographic record of his journeys in Namibia will be fulfilled in the New Year when the book project we are currently working on is completed. With thousands of images to choose from, selecting just a hundred or so to represent Namibia as seen on a Rob Bickford Adventure has been a considerable challenge. The book is aimed at the Namibian tourist market so probably won't appear in New Zealand bookshops but you won't miss out. They'll be available directly from Rob.



Rob Bickford

On your marks...get set...

- Bookings are now open for all 2004 trips. This year's regular African safaris were fully booked so if you're contemplating an African adventure in 2004, some words of advice from past travellers: "What are you waiting for? Just do it!"
- The annual 'Get-Together' for all have-beens, wannabes and may-wannabe adventurers will be on Sunday, 1 February 2004. Details of time and venue will be confirmed in the New Year.
- Rob Bickford's (long-awaited!) first photographic publication will be launched in March (see above). Return the survey form to ensure you receive your invitation to this event. Superb voices will be welcome to sing for their supper, everyone else will be invited to pay.

Lucky for Some

If you're based in or around Auckland, Rob's 5-week photographic course 'Capturing the Scene' will be offered again at Westlake College starting on Tuesday, 17 February, 2004. The course focuses on how to improve your landscape and wildlife shots using composition and lighting so it's especially useful for travellers. But you don't have to be travelling far from home to learn about taking great images. If you're interested in booking for this course, contact comed@westlake.school.nz or phone (09) 410 5617.

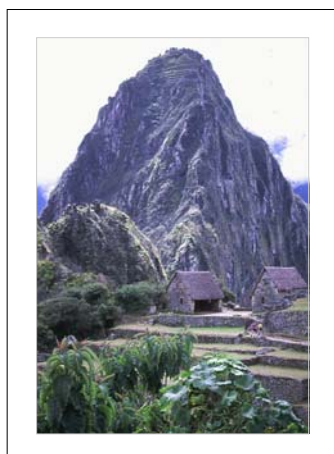
Destinations 2004

Full details and itineraries for all next year's trips are now ready and waiting for you to check them out on the website www.rob-bickford.co.nz

Briefly...

South America

We're taking in Peru, Bolivia and Easter Island. All the mainland highlights are there - Cusco, Machu Pichu, Lake Titicaca with its intriguing islands, La Paz and Santiago. We explore Easter Island on the homeward leg. To keep costs down, Galapagos is not included but will return as a specific, stand-alone destination in the near future.



Wannapichu peak, Machu Pichu

Southern Africa

The order of the Southern Africa camping safaris has been changed to help the farmers who yearn to see the wildlife but can't get away in the spring. 'Wild on Wildlife'

will now hit the road in June before the Namibian safaris. A further juggling of the itineraries means all three safaris now include the option of visiting Capetown, a very popular stop for everyone on previous trips.

Namibia - Non-camping

There's a chalet/lodge trip departing in April for those who are out of touch with a sleeping bag.

Turkey

Turkey is not on the menu for 2004 but may be dished up again in 2005, depending on the situation in this region.