

OUT OF AFRICA 8 July 2022

It is over 6 months since I last sent out an update although I have posted a few things on facebook and the odd email and whatsapp message has kept a few people up to date with what we are up to. So some of this will be a summary of that and the latest news.

Firstly, Covid numbers began to rise again in June but not markedly so like other parts of the world so we hope the numbers going down again continues. Mask wearing is still mandatory both indoors and outside despite other neighbouring countries removing the requirement. We watch with interest the case numbers and hospital pressures in NZ.

Meanwhile the tourists seem to be back in reasonable numbers with lots of camper trailers passing through from South Africa in the last few weeks. We launched our Self Drive Tours Botswana business with the website going live in March and have had a few enquiries and met our first clients up in Maun a couple of weeks ago. It's a lot of fun to be organizing holidays for others as you almost feel like you are enjoying their trip vicariously! We have since done a debrief with these clients with great feedback. Most particularly they loved the guidenotes which we customize to the particular itinerary and interests. Graeme has spent a lot of time over the last couple of years writing these and it is our point of difference so it was good to get that feedback. Some of you will have seen the coverage in the Mix section of the ODT back in April and then my spot on Radionz calling home slot with Jim Moro on Sunday mornings. If you didn't get to hear it and want to here is the link.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/2018841998/calling-home-gillian-bremner-in-botswana>

Remarkably the ODT article has recently been posted in a local publication Your Botswana

<https://yourbotswana.com/2022/04/07/kalahari-calling-swapping-dunedin-for-botswana/>

<https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/kalahari-calling-swapping-dunedin-botswana>

Both resulted in quite a bit of traffic to our website and three clients who want to come to Botswana next year. Other clients are from Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, UK and Japan

While we have had a few enquiries from South Africa none have eventuated into clients. So more marketing is required. We face the challenge of breaking into a new model of tourism here in Botswana as many tourists fly in for a safari or two paying eye watering prices and fly out again, or hire a fully equipped camping 4x4 vehicle and just do a safari circuit. But actually you can see lots of wildlife without the high cost and there are other interesting things to do in Botswana. Its easy to drive around and very safe.

The nocturnal wildlife development here at our farm continues with more animals added and development of a quarantine area and a snake pit the latest activities. The government bureaucracy is probably going to be our biggest stumbling block so we are looking at ways of showcasing the animals in a more low key way as an add on to something else so watch this space.

The snake pit requires a significant concrete walled enclosure so I was sent out to buy concrete stones used in the making of the footings. The quarry with the easiest access is about 40 mins up the road. So off I went only to find their crushing equipment to make the stones is not working and awaiting parts so the quarry is closed for an estimated 3 months. Difficult to run a business and be so dependent on the delivery of critical parts but we know the feeling everything takes a long time

and gets held up for silly reasons. Some tracking devices we've had on order from the US duly arrived in Botswana but because the package lacked an address of sender they can't process it and attempts to rectify that have failed so they will be sent back!

Anyway the concrete stones quest doesn't finish there as I returned to Palapye and tried to get some locally and after some discussion and them taking my money a rather officious woman said no we can't load your bakkie you will have to hire a truck. Next stop was a 50 min drive in a different direction and after getting lost on the way due to faulty instructions I arrived at 1.20pm on a Friday that was the last Friday of the month to be met by the security guard who said everyone knocked off at 1pm as it was pay day and to come back on Monday! Such is life here. The last Friday of every month is something else!

It's always interesting to see what is going on in NZ with the winter weather. Winter here has not followed the usual pattern as there was a cold spell in late May earlier than usual and two weeks of rather cold weather in June but not many frosts. We have enjoyed lots of sunny days in between which are the norm in winter with cooler nights and mornings till the sun rises. They always said in Dunedin you never put your winter clothes away whereas here the reverse is true you never put your summer clothes away. We had been eagerly awaiting the delivery of a small multifuel burner to install in the dining area. (it's the only spot really as the wide verandah would be problematic for the flue.) Unfortunately, the flue parts were insufficient for the job but Graeme was keen to install it anyway so the firebox is currently mounted on concrete blocks to make the flue the right length. We don't expect to have the additional parts until after the winter is over. But it has worked well and there is an abundance of firewood around. No consents required and with a concrete house with vents along the top of the wall it was an easy installation through one of them. The idea of putting it up through the roof did not appeal as the necessary flashing to stop leaks is not available.

We have made an effort to get away for the odd weekend the last few months so have been down to Gabs in April to enjoy an event called Taste of Africa which was held in a stadium and showcased local food, music and African attire worn by the attendees. The food on sale was good, the wide range of musical performers from Botswana and surrounding countries was excellent and seeing the attendees in their African attire up dancing to the music was great. And yes we wore our African attire and featured in the event facebook pages. The event was marred a little by unseasonal heavy showers (the rainy season is usually well past by then) but everyone was undeterred.

We spent a weekend up at Orapa about 3 hours from here where the diamond mining town is gated and you need a permit to enter. We stayed at a campsite just outside and visited the diamond mine museum and the game park. The late Dr Adrian Gale was the General Manager of the Orapa, Letlhakane and Damtshaa mines. He realized that one day the diamonds would be mined out, leaving the Boteti Region with few alternative economic opportunities and potentially several ghost towns. He was instrumental in conceiving and promoting Debswana's 'Orapa Today, Boteti Tomorrow' (OTBT) programme to ensure that something of lasting value will be left behind. The game park is now 22,000 hectares and has a wide range of game excluding elephants. It is very easy to drive around in a 2x4 car and the highlight for us was a family of rhino really close up.

We didn't get a chance to do all we wanted up that way so another weekend was spent checking out the less known pans and a fossil site, both an easy drive off the main road.

A weekend in the other direction off to the east to the Tuli block was well worth the drive. We camped by the Limpopo looking across to South Africa and going to sleep listening to the snorting of hippos in the river nearby. The next day we were rewarded as we drove from our campsite along a

nearby track to a water hole where we found a sizeable herd of elephants drinking and bathing. It was wonderful to see the really young in amongst them and it was a very orderly affair as they all took turns to drink and bathe. There were many animals to see just as we drove along the road with giraffe, hyena and springhares amongst them.

We have finally got our bikes out of the container and sent them off to be puncture proofed and have tried them out on the tracks close by. There are a few sandy patches so we'll try out the more formed roads next. This is the best time of year to do it as not too hot.

Inflation/rising costs seems to be a problem everywhere and Botswana is experiencing it too. While flour hasn't gone up in price much pasta based goods that are imported have doubled in price and fuel has risen by 50% in the last 5 months. Supply chains are often a problem here but even more so now. Graeme earlier wrote a detailed example of the vegetable supplies being cut off over night. The Government announced on Jan 1st that there would be restrictions on importation of vegetables that Botswana could grow. (A policy decision to make Botswana more self reliant following the pandemic impact on supply chains) So overnight there were 17 vegetable items that were no longer imported including garlic, onions, and ginger. So for months there were none with a small black market emerging and it has taken some time for farmers to gear up and diversify the products that they grow. Fortunately the mainstay of tomatoes and green pepper have been in reasonable supply but supermarket shelves are often lacking in vegetable variety. Our neighbour has decided to branch into growing herbs for the local supermarkets. Those that are on sale there now are limp and not at all appealing. I am very grateful to have a good range of herbs in my garden. And you can grow them all year round so basil, coriander and mint along with thyme and parsley are in good supply here in my garden. We have a developing orchard with guava, pomegranate, apple, banana, passionfruit, orange, lemon, mango, peach and pawpaw. The pawpaw and peach are the only ones looking to fruit this year.

The latest addition to our homegrown endeavours is a hive complete with bees that I picked up this morning. Our gardener has done a course in bee keeping and Graeme has some knowledge from his father's activities.

Time to get on so until the next update take care everyone



From the top: Bame with our newly acquired bees, the makeshift firebox installation, camping by the Limpopo





