

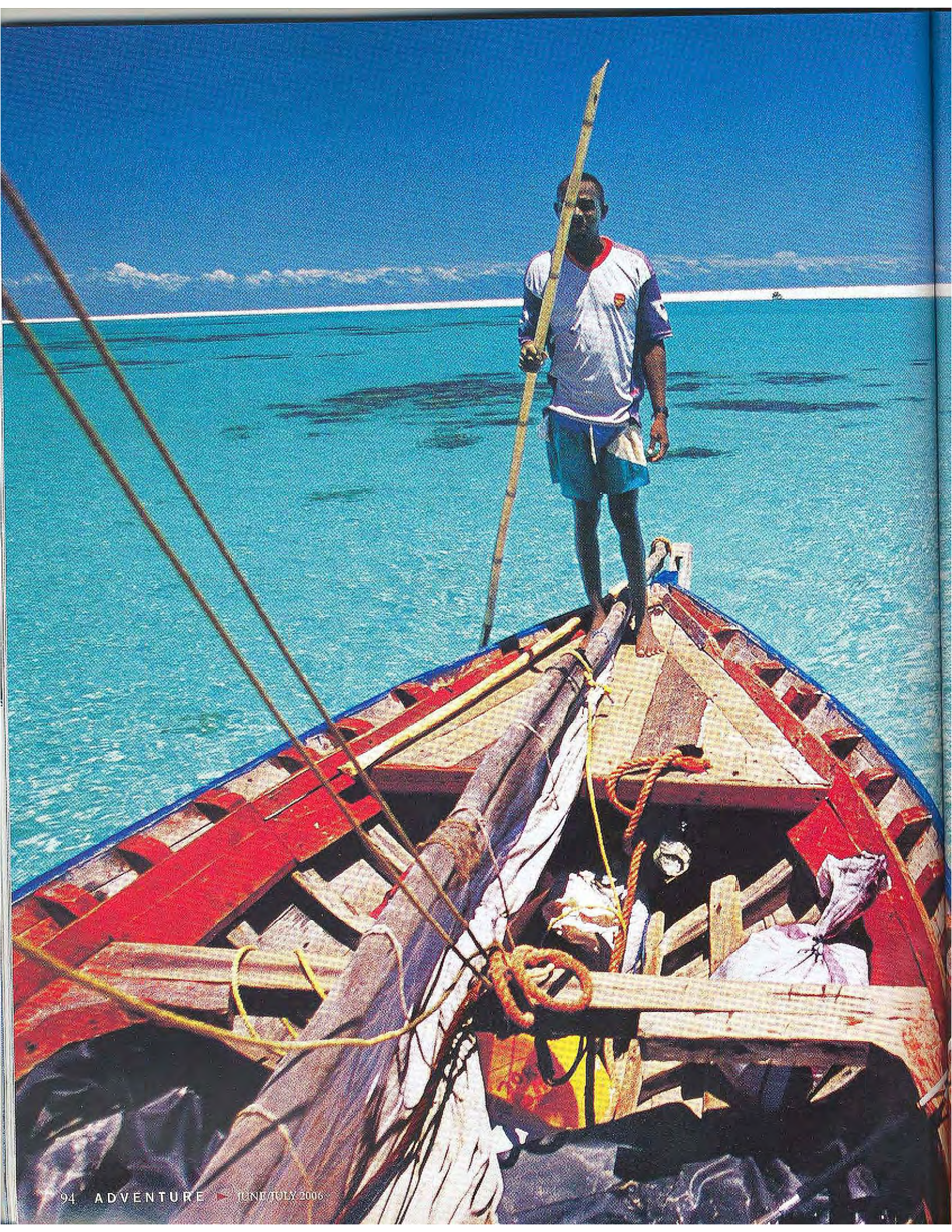
Mozambique Rising

BY PAUL KVINTA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL KERRISON

After 15 years of hellish civil war, Mozambique is fast becoming the Cinderella of African adventure travel—with a world-renowned game park, sublime diving, and a coastline second to none. But can this fledgling hot spot handle its growing pains?

EAST (AFRICA) MEETS WEST: A dhow captain and a kayaker make way for each other in Mozambique's Quirimbas Archipelago, near Medjumbe Island. The Quirimbas, 27 paddle-perfect islands, are just one of the formerly war-torn nation's emerging destinations.



It's hard to tell if the elephant is just furious at us—we are hovering a bit close—or if she's terrified because of what happened the last time helicopters thundered across this floodplain. She's spinning round and round in a swirling cloud of dirt, her eyes locked on us, her ears flaring, her young ones huddled behind. She curls her trunk and delivers what looks like a mighty trumpet blast, but the sound is lost to our roaring chopper blades. She's certainly old enough

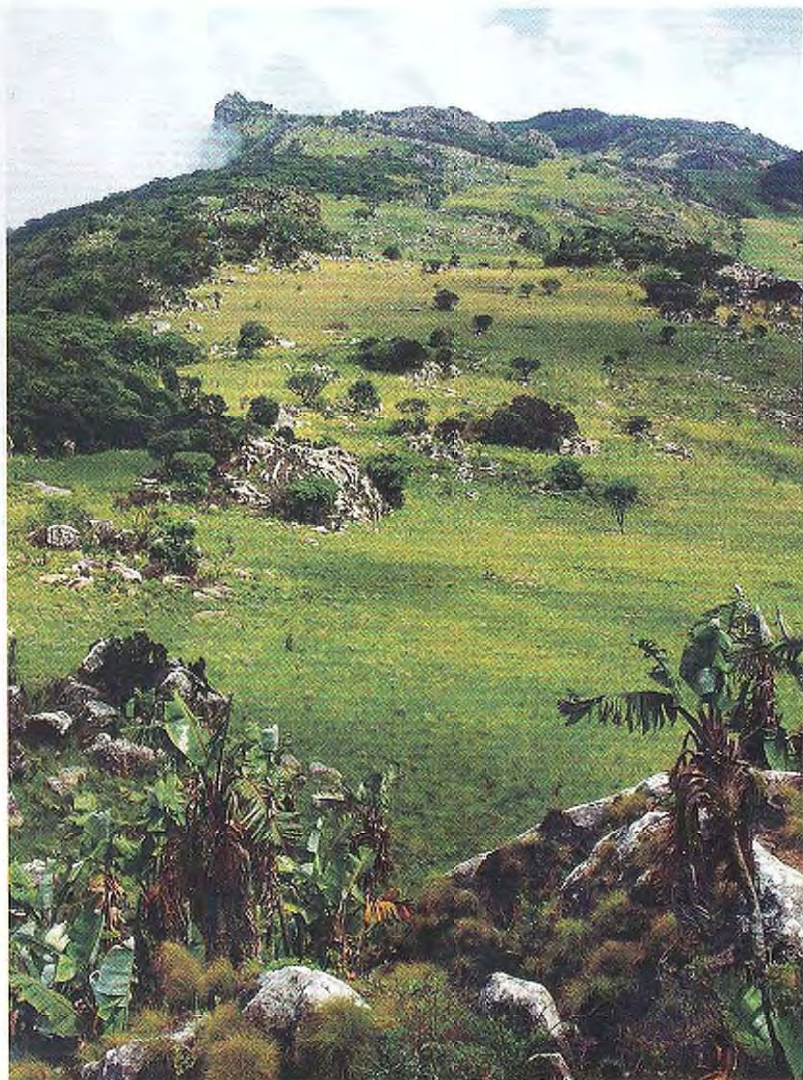
to remember the grisly events that happened here two decades ago, back when rebels and government troops took turns overrunning this park and aircraft swooped down fast and low, guns blazing, making the land red with the blood of thousands of elephants, buffalo, and wildebeests. Gorongosa National Park, once among Africa's finest game reserves, became the world's largest slaughterhouse. When Mozambique's civil war ended in 1992, one jaded ecologist concluded that, in part, "the war ended because the wildlife ended." The fighters just ran out of meat.

We shouldn't be seeing elephants at all, really, or any animals for that matter. But here they are, the survivors, the offspring of survivors, and not just a few of them. A second group of elephants emerges from the patchy forest of fever trees, then another group, and still another, until some 25 jumbos are conferencing beneath us. "Wow!" exclaims Greg Carr, 46, who's sitting next to me in the helicopter. "The elephants are doing so well!"

The action gets even better closer to the Urema River. We sweep low over the muddy water, and Dave Falkner, the wildlife conservationist in Carr's employ, launches into a rapid-fire, stream-of-consciousness commentary: "That's a herd of waterbuck running to your left, Greg. Hippos down there too, disappearing into the water. Crocs all along the bank here; that's a huge croc in the water."

"Wow! Wow!" responds Carr, channeling his inner five-year-old.

ELEPHANTS ON PARADE: Two hundred fifty pachyderms survived Mozambique's civil war and remain inside Gorongosa National Park (right). Above: The view along the western ridge of 6,112-foot Mount Gorongosa, which lies just outside the park.



"Flock of storks there, some baboons to the right. Those are herons. This river is seething with crocs, the biggest crocs you'll ever see."

"Oooooo! Wouldn't want to be down there, Dave!"

"No, you wouldn't, Greg. Monster waterbuck over there, huge horns on that guy, now those are warthogs."

"I love the warthogs! The little ones are so cute!"

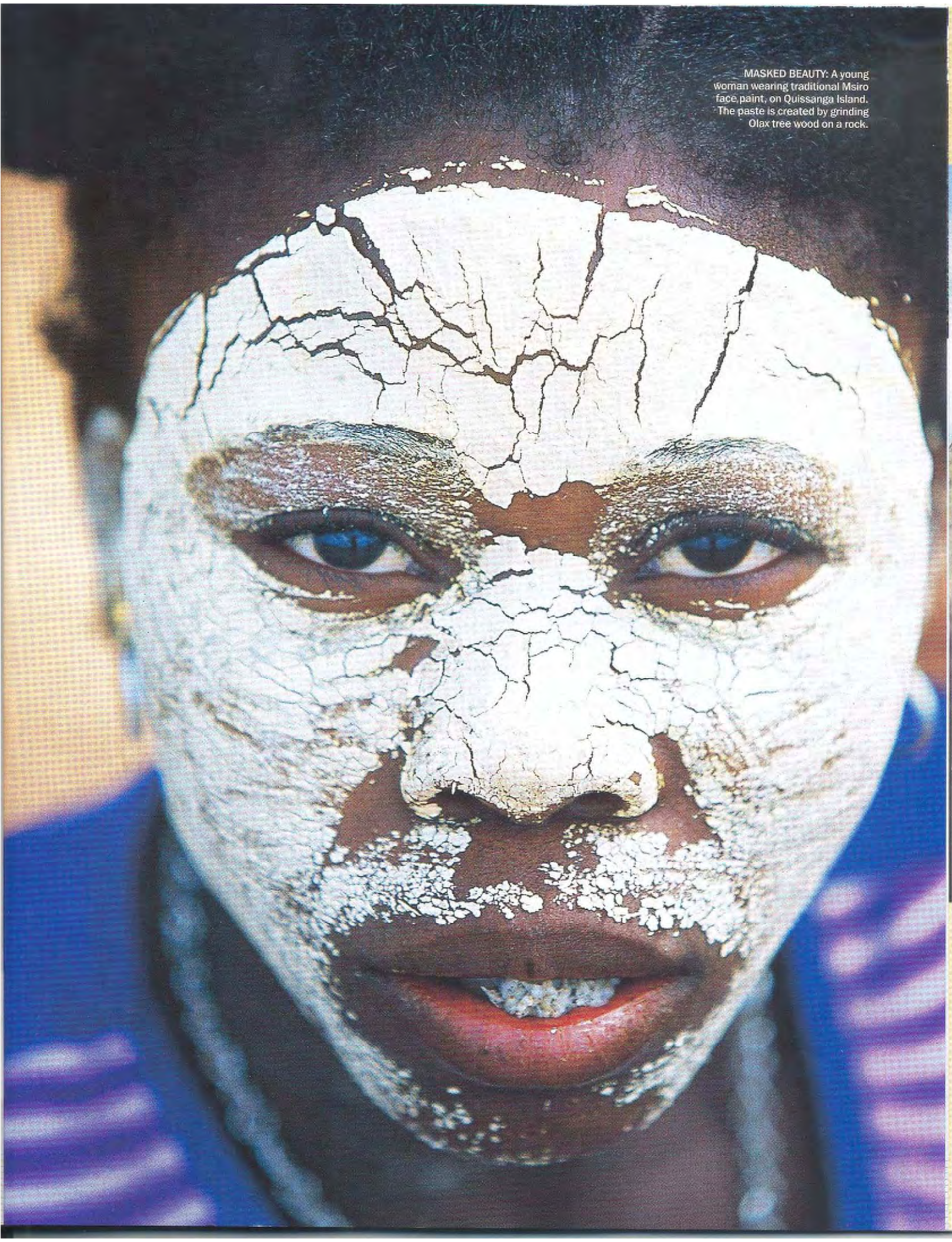
Considering the task at hand, Carr's giddiness is completely excusable. If the man is going to restore Gorongosa to its prewar status as a premier African game park, it helps to have plenty of starter animals. He's pumped. But species conservation is just the beginning. A multimillionaire businessman and philanthropist from Idaho, Carr is funding a project worthy of FDR's New Deal. By reviving Gorongosa, he hopes to tackle everything from removing land mines and building lodges to providing health

care, education, and jobs to hundreds, possibly thousands of local people. He thinks the million-acre park can train a new generation of Mozambican scientists and environmentalists. Hell, if the locals embrace the progressive lifestyle changes that Carr reckons come with ecotourism, he even believes his project will help ameliorate the nation's skyrocketing AIDS crisis.

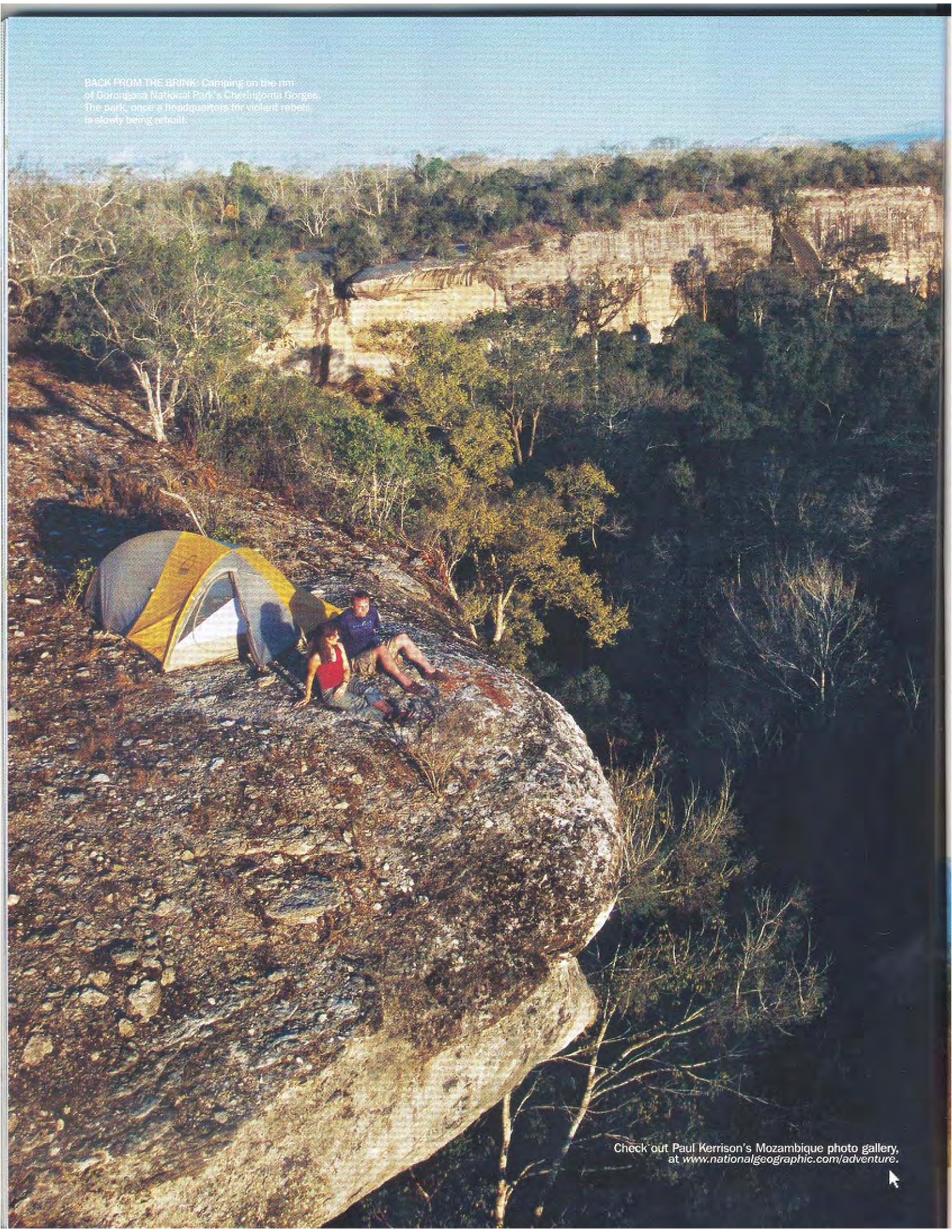
These are grand ambitions, certainly, but hardly unheard of in the new Mozambique.



MASKED BEAUTY: A young woman wearing traditional Msiro face paint, on Quissanga Island. The paste is created by grinding Olax tree wood on a rock.



BACK FROM THE BRINK: Camping on the rim of Gorongosa National Park's Cheringoma Gorges. The park, once a headquarters for violent rebels, is slowly being rebuilt.



Check out Paul Kerrison's Mozambique photo gallery, at www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure.

Blessed with extraordinary wildlife, jungle-covered mountains, and the finest beaches in Africa, the country is attempting to resurrect itself through ecotourism—Carr's initiative being simply the most far-reaching of several projects under way. Already, backpackers, scuba divers, bird-watchers, and sportfishermen are showing up, particularly from neighboring South Africa, but also, increasingly, from Europe and the United States.

For me, Gorongosa was just one stop on a mad-dash road trip across the whole of Mozambique last fall, a harried bid to witness a resurrection in progress. I was traveling with kayaking outfitter and photographer Paul Kerrison, 36, who in 2003 was a member of the only team ever to paddle Mozambique's entire 1,563-mile coastline. By the time we'd reached Gorongosa, in central Mozambique, we'd already hammered out a thousand dusty miles from our starting point in Johannesburg, South Africa. We'd passed cell towers rising over mud villages and SUVs sharing the road with rickety bicycles. In the cities, gourmet restaurants were popping up all over; in the country, desperate villagers were setting uncontrolled blazes to scare up bush meat. Change was coming quickly to this southeast African nation—tradition giving way to modernity, and not always gracefully.

We conclude our helicopter tour with a visit to Mount Gorongosa, a misty, rain forest-covered massif just outside the park's northwest boundary. The rivers that provide the park's lifeblood originate here, so Carr has been scrambling to secure governmental protection for the 6,112-foot mountain. We cruise past a 500-foot, stair-stepping waterfall, a cascade our host has never seen before. "Wow!" he says. "One of the hiking trails has to come through here, Dave."

We land and are greeted by several men dressed in rags who seem bewildered by our presence but thrilled to guide us to the falls. Carr is ecstatic. "See," he says, slapping one man on the shoulder as we admire the powerful white churn. "This guy's already got a future in tourism!" When we return to the helicopter, a crowd has gathered and there's eager chatter. After some pleasantries, we board the aircraft and slowly pull away from the awestruck faces. Carr is talking excitedly about plans for the mountain, but after we achieve a certain altitude, after we gain some perspective, he becomes quiet. Below us is something extraordinary. Whole swaths of Mount Gorongosa are on fire, orange flames dancing across the jungle and licking the sky, angry black smoke billowing. Tiny people stand on the ground they're clearing, watching the inferno. Finally,

In the cities, gourmet restaurants were popping up all over; in the country, desperate villagers were setting uncontrolled blazes to scare up bush meat.



Carr speaks up. "We've got an urgent situation here," he says. "I have to give these guys jobs. Soon. Whatever they want."

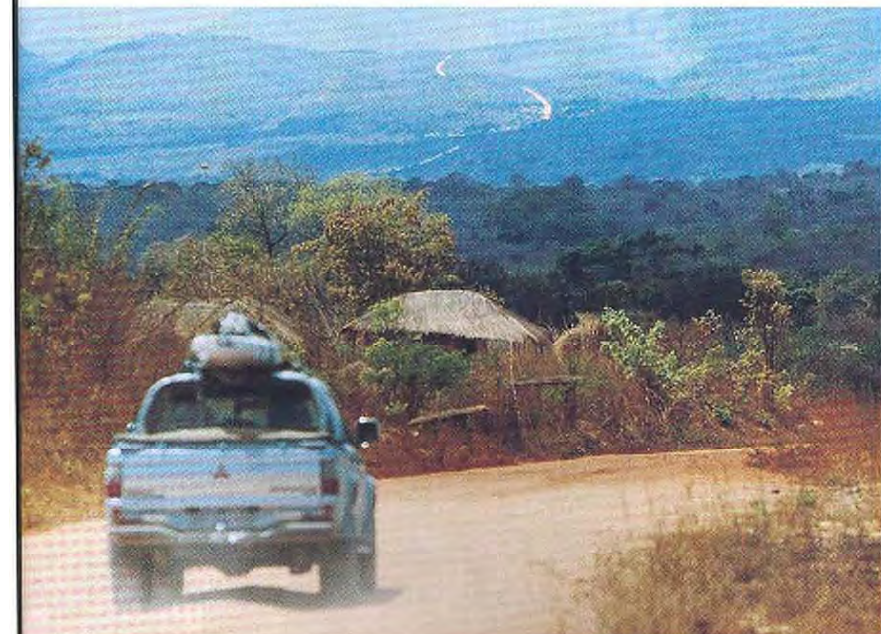


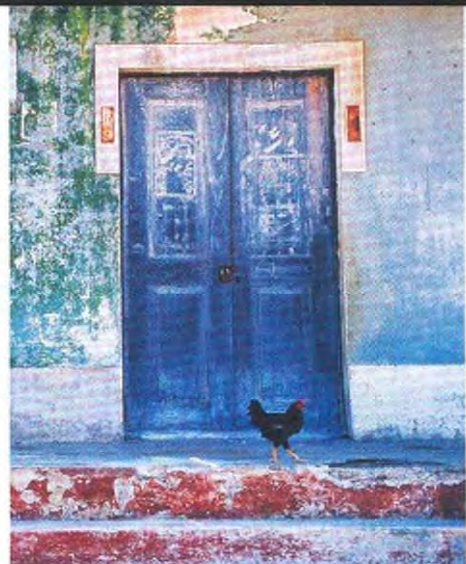
Kerrison and I hadn't planned to lounge around the set of Mozambique's hit reality-TV show *Fama*, or "fame," but here we are, poolside at a downtown hotel in the country's southerly capital, Maputo. While we enjoy brunch, producer types in blazers and dark glasses huddle over scripts. Their assistants in red *Fama* T-shirts dart around with clipboards and cell phones. And in a small sound studio off the pool, a young woman in headphones belts out lyrics, giving it her best Whitney Houston—eyes shut, arms extended, voice quivering. *Fama* has riveted Mozambique for two months now, we're told, and as best we can determine, the show is basically *American Idol* meets *My Fair Lady*. Would-be pop stars are plucked from villages across Mozambique, relocated to the big city, and trained in Saccharine Singing 101, all in pursuit of that sweet but elusive goal: fame.

Sipping his espresso, Kerrison is dumbstruck. "I can't believe how much this country has changed," he says. After all, it hasn't been that long since Mozambicans stopped killing each other. Until 1992 the government was battling the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), a rebel group that a U.S. State Department official once accused of perpetuating "one of the most brutal holocausts against ordinary human beings since World War II." RENAMO emerged in 1976, a year after Mozambique gained independence from its Portuguese colonizers and found itself in the unfortunate position of sharing a border with apartheid South Africa. That country's policy of destabilizing its newly independent neighbors included backing thuggish rebels like RENAMO. At least a million people died in the ensuing war and more than five million were displaced. Mozambicans didn't need reality TV back then. They had all the reality they could handle.

The changes that most strike Kerrison today are the ones he has witnessed since his first visit to Mozambique, the kayaking expedition two years ago. About twice the size of California, Mozambique shares a mountainous western border with Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Swaziland and then flattens into an acacia-studded plain that gives way to one of the most stunning tropical coastlines anywhere. Kerrison's

THE LONG AND DUSTY ROAD: Cruising a dirt highway through Nampula Province (left). Top, from left: Greg Carr (left), an American philanthropist, stands with a Mount Gorongosa villager, examining a waterfall; a bushbuck on Quilála Island.





A COCK-AND-BOAT STORY This page, clockwise from left: A rowboat in the shade on Macaloé Island; the vibrant main drag on Ibo Island; the author shares Oreos with a family near Alto Molócué.

four-man team spent four months paddling this coast north to south, dodging boat-wrecking waves and catching fish to survive. Up north they encountered fishing communities in which the kids had apparently never come face-to-face with white people. "They'd come running as soon as they saw us," he says. "We were the biggest show in town."

This time around, in Maputo at least, Kerrison sees plenty that's new to him: construction crews scaffolding their way up tall buildings, Mercedes-Benzes cruising the boulevards, businessmen lingering in the restaurants along

"Pemba?" he snarls. "You might make it by Christmas. Have you seen the roads up there? It's not a matter of missing the potholes, it's knowing which ones to hit."

Avenida Julius Nyerere. At the upscale Polana Shopping Center, roving bands of teenage girls in stylish tops and low-slung jeans yak on cell phones. Mozambican mall rats. The country has truly arrived.

Carlos dos Santos, Mozambique's former ambassador to the UN and the man now tasked with luring foreign investment, tells me that "tourism is increasing every year. Now we have five-star hotels on the coast." This surge was evident. At the Lebombo border post, waiting to enter Mozambique, we'd seen scads of vacation-minded South Africans, some in tour groups, some hauling fishing boats.

But booming tourism doesn't mean there aren't challenges. Dos Santos is the first to admit that Mozambique continues to have serious problems. Life expectancy hovers around age 40. HIV infection is rampant—16 percent of adults have it—and the country has become a pipeline for illegal drugs flowing from Asia to South Africa. Still, dos Santos remains upbeat. "We're working with international organizations to fight AIDS," he says. "The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is building a malaria research facility near Maputo. Mozambique is on the right course."

Kerrison definitely thinks so. A globe-trotting redhead from Australia, my travel partner has done everything from teaching rock climbing in Ireland to leading kayaking trips in Venezuela. Now he wants to pioneer paddling trips in Mozambique's far north, and he's hankering to do some reconnaissance in the turquoise waters of the Quirimbas Archipelago. But before we reach that tropical paradise, we have a 1,500-mile country to traverse.

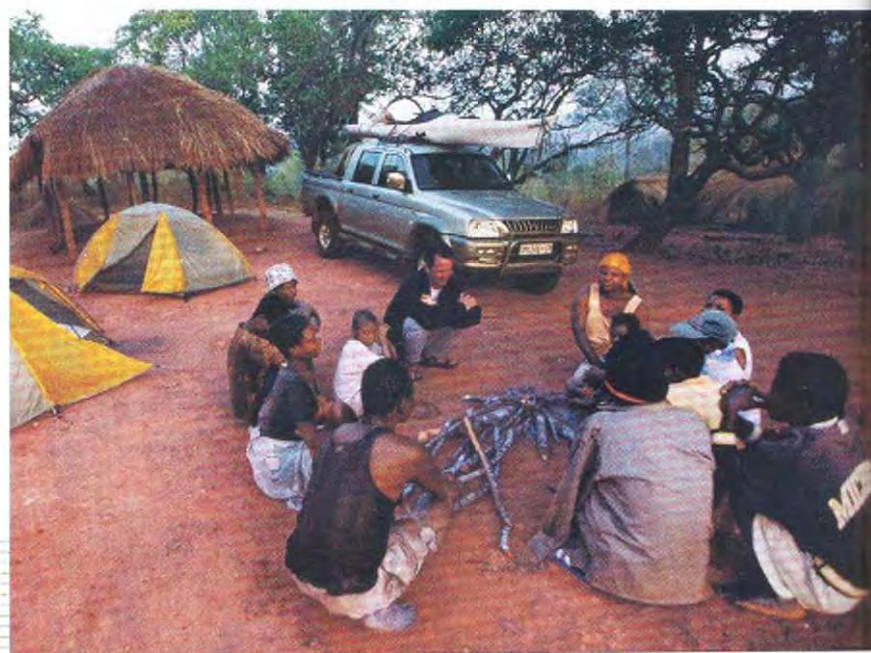
The EN1 highway out of Maputo is smooth and fast, and when we finally escape the city we make good time, flying past red termite hills and scrub African prairie, drawing stares from almost everyone—shoeless kids playing soccer in dusty schoolyards, statuesque women in bright fabrics strolling with tubs of water on their heads. It's hard to be inconspicuous in a "shiny new leisure-mobile," as Kerrison calls our as-yet unsullied silver 4x4 truck with a gleaming white kayak on top.

As we zip northward, the highway is like a drive-through supermarket. Vendors lean into the road from its shoulder, trying to entice us with baskets of cashews, fistfuls of shrimp, and live guinea fowl. I see one guy in the distance gripping something by the tail, and as we zoom past I catch a blurred glimpse of his tasty wares: a three-foot-long, wriggling cane rat, its legs flailing frantically in midair.

By dark we make it as far as Xai-Xai Beach, on the southern coast, 131 miles northeast of Maputo, and grab a seaside cabin at a no-frills place called Xai-Xai Caravan Park. At the open-air bar the only guy drinking is a grizzled, white commercial fisherman named Mark, a local, originally from South Africa. He's missing his left thumb. Anchor-line accident. We nurse 80-cent beers and explain that we're headed ultimately to Pemba, gateway to the Quirimbas. He thinks we're insane. "Pemba?" he snarls. "You might make it by Christmas. Have you seen the roads up there? It's not a matter of missing the potholes, it's knowing which ones to hit."



Maybe it's because whale sharks are huge, slow, and harmless, but the urge to grab hold of one and ride feels almost primal. I'm certainly feeling it now. We're off Tofo Beach, one of southern Mozambique's finest stretches of coast, and I'm





BAREFOOT IN THE QUIRIMBAS: The author arrives with his kayak at Matemo Island, home to the Matemo Island Resort. Below: Snorkelers search for whale sharks off Tofo Beach.

snorkeling alongside a graceful 30-footer, a nuclear sub of a shark, its dorsal fin within grabbing distance. I have only to reach out and . . . “No teasing, taking, or touching!” The ironclad directive of Joan Bestler, our dive master, reverberates in my head. Alas, it’s sound advice. I check my wavering hand and resolve simply to admire this giant: the iridescent white spots lining its back; its massive tail swaying to and fro; its four-foot-wide mouth inhaling Sam’s Club portions of plankton. We swim together for a while, and when I can no longer keep pace, I stop kicking and watch the behemoth fade silently into the deep, blue Indian Ocean.

Nobody knows exactly why whale sharks congregate in a few special spots around the globe—places such as Australia’s Ningaloo Reef, Belize’s Gladden Spit, and here, off Tofo Beach—but they do, in great numbers. And more than

anything, it’s these biblically proportioned fish that are rapidly transforming Tofo Beach from a ramshackle fishing community into a checklist destination for the international diving set. Not that the newfound notoriety is noticeable, given the mellow vibe of the place. An idyllic crescent of white sand flanked by shaggy pine trees and modest rental bungalows, Tofo is the kind of place where improvisational drum circles materialize behind the dunes, and where backpackers mysteriously contract what’s known as the “Tofo virus.”

“People come to visit, and they never leave,” says Bestler, a German who suffers from the condition herself. “I came for two months, now I’ve been here a year.” Development is flourishing. South African-owned beach homes are springing up north and south of town, and tourist lodges have multiplied from just four a year ago to nine now, with ten more planned. “We’re getting divers from Germany, Holland, the U.K.,” says John Pears, Bestler’s boss and the co-owner of Tofo Scuba. “It’s snowballing.”

At Manta Reef, one of a handful of vibrant reefs off Tofo, we don our scuba gear and roll backward off the boat, dropping 80 feet in search of the site’s namesake ray, the other mammoth species divers come here to see. We (Continued on page 108)

ADVENTURE GUIDE: Mozambique

There are plenty of easy-access options for visiting Mozambique that don’t require an epic cross-country drive, but if you want to see it all in one trip, you’ll have to hit the road.

XAI-XAI AND TOFO BEACHES: From **Zongoene Lodge** (\$119; www.zongoene.html), south of the town of Xai-Xai, you can access exceptional bird-watching and a 100-year-old lighthouse. The reefs off Tofo host swarms of whale sharks and manta rays. **Tofo Scuba’s** two-hour snorkeling trips to Manta Reef (\$46, including equipment; www.tofoscuba.co.za) are your best bet for spotting them. With seven acres of upscale digs, **Casa Barry** (\$196; www.casabarry.com) is an ideal Tofo base camp.

GORONGOSA NATIONAL PARK: Trade the surf for savanna at million-acre Gorongosa (www.gorongosa.net). Rooms at **Chitengo Camp** (\$24), which has basic amenities, can be arranged upon arrival at the park.

ISLAND-HOPPING: The **Dhow Safari Company** runs whale-watching trips from Mozambique

Island (\$35; +258-661-0027). **Jakera Adventures’** custom trips with photographer Paul Kerrison let you design your own paddle through the Quirimbas Archipelago (\$5,000 for two weeks, including meals, lodging, and equipment; www.adventure-kayaking.com). Alternatively, rent a villa at 87-acre **Quilalea Island Resort** (\$425, including meals and activities; www.quilalea.com) and explore uninhabited neighboring islands.

GETTING THERE: **South African Airways** flies direct from New York City to Johannesburg (\$1,783; www.flysaa.com). Connect to Chimoio, for Gorongosa, or to Pemba, the gateway to the Quirimbas, via Maputo on **Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique** (www.lam.co.mz).

ROAD TRIP: To follow the author’s exploration of Mozambique’s



landscapes (see red line on map) on your own, rent a car at **Johannesburg International Airport** (\$56 a day; www.avis.co.za), then cross into Mozambique at the Lebombo border post, about 250 miles east of the airport. Driving in Mozambique should

be approached with extreme caution. The UN continues to warn of land mines throughout the interior, so stick to major thoroughfares. Stow a spare tire and rim in the trunk.

NEED TO KNOW: A visa is required for entry into Mozambique (www.embamoc-usa.org). Malaria risk is high—check the CDC site (www.cdc.gov) for recommended anti-malarials. *Mozambique: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Bradt, \$19) is an excellent guidebook. Credit cards are rarely accepted outside of major hotels and restaurants; ATMs are hard to find outside of cities. Always keep some emergency cash on hand—merchants will often accept U.S. dollars and South African rand. —Kasey Cordell

NIGHT RANGERS

(Continued from page 107)

Mountain biking at night seems risky. My Night Sky Team education, however, has been emboldening. "The limits of your perception are expanded at night because they have to be," Duriscoe said earlier. "You fine-tune your senses, adapt your eyes, listen for sounds." Moore says that if you don't go exploring at night, you're seriously missing out. "Most people do all of their outdoor activities during the summer, during the day. That's only one-eighth of the year."

Tonight we're going to tackle the Thunder Mountain Trail, an eight-mile, 1,200-vertical-foot singletrack descent into Red Canyon. Mountain biking is illegal in Bryce but not in Red Canyon, which is situated on national forest land adjacent to the national park with nearly identical scenery. After fueling up on grilled cheese sandwiches and coffee, we depart at 10 p.m., leaving one car at the bottom of the trail and taking the second to the top.

The trail snakes between dark columns of ponderosa pine, and the forest floor is dappled with moonlight. I focus on the white stripe of the trail, which stands out from the darker manzanita around it. When a shadow falls on a curve, I'm forced to guess the exact arc, steering by feel rather than by sight. Expanded perception indeed: Our headlamps are off. Riding at night is far more thrilling than it ever could be during the day.

A few miles of steady climbing carries us out of the forest and into open red-rock terrain. The towering hoodoos that are the visual signature of Bryce look especially phantasmagorical, with some surfaces bright in the lunar light and others deep in shadow. They look like blobs of clay that have been squeezed by the fists of giants. The sky is dark, but like at Great Sand Dunes and Chaco, it's not light-pollution free. From a high saddle Moore points out a local inn whose unshielded light fixtures cast a small but annoying glare for miles across the landscape.

From the apex of the trail, we begin the descent. Along a high, rolling ridgeline. Between rock towers. Down a set of steep switchbacks, with my hands gripping the brakes so tightly that the tires are virtually motionless. Then the grade becomes milder, the turns longer. Riding atop a fin with slopes on either side dropping away steeply, we sweep past hundreds of hoodoos bunched in the canyon below. With tops lit by the moon and bottoms lost in blackness, they appear to be floating in midair.

After leaving Moore, Duriscoe and I complete the journey west to Death Valley. At Duriscoe's house we throw brats on the grill and brew the trip's final pot of coffee. We still have one last leg to drive. His mother-in-law and wife are incredulous.

"You should be going to sleep!" says his mother-in-law.

"Don't hit any coyotes!" says his wife.

An hour later we've left the asphalt and are charging up a dirt road through creosote, brittle brush, and yucca. The rented jeep bucks and slides; water explodes upward as we lurch through massive puddles left by a recent rainstorm.

Later, after golf, we head a couple of miles farther down the valley. This part of the playa is called the Racetrack, and Duriscoe wanted to come here even if it took all day and half of the night. Which, of course, it did. The Racetrack is perhaps his favorite place in the entire world. Monitoring has shown that it has one of the darkest skies in the lower 48. Not at this very moment, though. While the moon has set, its glow will still brighten much of the sky for another hour or so. "It's starting to get dark," Duriscoe says as we walk without headlamps out onto the Racetrack.

The place is named for its curious collection of rocks that do something rocks simply shouldn't do: move. Several hundred yards out, I find a track gouged into the playa. It continues straight for dozens of yards, cuts right, and then left. At the end I find a large, toaster-oven-size rock. Death Valley's geologists theorize that after rainstorms, when the playa is slick, winds blow the rocks around like hockey pucks on ice, but the explanation seems suspect. To me, alone under starlight, these animate rocks may as well be UFOs.

"Almost dark," Duriscoe says, looking upward. He stretches out on the playa for a more restive view of the heavens. Earlier Duriscoe explained that the night sky isn't just nice to have. He is convinced that humanity needs it. "Against the background of the universe, your whole earthly existence is put into perspective," he said. "Seeing the stars forces cultures to think about grander issues than just what's in front of their faces."

While Duriscoe relaxes, I take a few pictures. The sky is jet-black from horizon to horizon—not a single sign of artificial light—and the stars grow increasingly brilliant. The difference between the sky over a city and this one is the difference between a Christmas tree farm and an old-growth forest. The Milky Way is intricate, filamentary, and three-dimensional; so bright that when I wave my hand over the playa, I see a shadow. The Zodiacal Band—dust particles illuminated by the sun—arcs delicately through Leo. The Big Dipper is almost lost amid all of the glittering jewelry.

An hour goes by. It isn't long until dawn. Duriscoe gets up, wanders over, and smiles. "Now it's dark," he says. ▲

MOZAMBIQUE RISING

(Continued from page 102)

stake out a "cleaning station" Bestler knows of near some purple soft corals and orange vase sponges, a place where mantas swoop in to have parasites removed by fastidious butterfly fish. We don't wait long. From the murky blue beyond our visibility an enormous manta emerges suddenly, a slow-flapping creature with a 12-foot wingspan, straight out of science fiction. The thing is headed right for us, but at the last second it peels away, revealing a snowy white underside and evenly spaced gills, its long tail carving a graceful arc behind it. Another manta follows, and still more after that.

As I ponder the sight, Bestler, without warning, swims straight into the cleaning station, something she'd warned us not to do. There, she struggles to free a knotted mass of fishing line that's tangled in the coral. Later, she explains: "I wanted to get the line, as much as possible, but I didn't want to scare the mantas. So I finally just cut it. This fishing, it's a problem." A huge problem.

As the economy of Tofo Beach shifts to tourism, relations between fishermen and the mostly expat-owned dive-related businesses are tense. Fishermen continue to snag groupers, turtles—all the stuff divers want to see. "They're catching mantas," fumes Pears. "They're finning whale sharks." Compounding the problem, about 200 Taiwanese long-lining and shark-finning boats are ravaging the territorial waters off southeastern Africa, according to a 2005 Indian Ocean Tuna Commission report. Long-liners have been known to shoot at divers who are spotted cutting fishing lines. The Mozambican navy, a mighty two boats, remains too feeble to stop them.

In response, the diving community is organizing an association to negotiate with fishermen and educate locals. Success will probably depend on people like Carlos Macuaua, who is training to become the first Mozambican diving instructor in the country. Macuaua grew up in a village near Tofo. "When I first saw a dive boat here, I went to see how many fish they had caught," he tells me. "But there were no fish. There were no lines, no spearguns. I didn't understand. Why were they going out?" Intrigued, he learned to dive, and Pears hired him. Now he often finds himself in the uncomfortable space between the new Mozambique and the old. "Local people ask me, 'Why do you dive? It's for white people. What do you do down there?'" I tell them it's like a park, but it's underwater. The villagers need to be educated. I think it is possible. I believe in them."



Nearly 500 spine-throttling miles to the north and a world away from the beach, Greg Carr is saying the same thing. He believes in

the local people, absolutely, but that doesn't make rebirthing Gorongosa National Park any easier. "This is modernity meeting traditional culture," he says, as we boulder-hop through the spectacular limestone Cheringoma Gorges, in the northeast corner of the park, the morning after my helicopter tour. "You've got to bridge the two cultures. You've got to create a situation where both sides win."

About 20,000 people live along the park's borders and another 3,000 live high on Mount Gorongosa, which if Carr has his way will soon be protected like the park. Deforestation and poaching are problems here, as poor villagers set fires both to clear land for agriculture and to catch animals drawn to the new growth that sprouts through the ashes. Many of the infernos are fueled by tall grasses no longer kept in check by the park's ungulates—the war and its aftermath killed most of them. More big burns mean the few remaining ungulates are more likely to be poached, and more poaching means larger fuel loads and bigger burns. The cycle couldn't be more vicious.

Carr and I shimmy onto a 50-foot bluff overlooking a hidden pool, a tranquil remnant of the rainy season, when water courses through this giant labyrinth of limestone alleys and floods the park. "Isn't this

magnificent?" he says. "Most people don't know these gorges exist."

As founder of Harvard University's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Carr came to Mozambique in 2002 looking for a socio-economic project to adopt. Instead, he selected a game park after identifying tourism as Mozambique's most promising engine for development. He knew a revitalized Gorongosa could attract tourists. Before the war, visitors flocked here not only to marvel at one of the largest concentrations of animals on the continent (then, about 13,300 buffalo, 7,000 wildebeests, 3,500 hippos, 3,300 zebras, 2,500 elephants, and 250 lions), but to enjoy an incredibly diverse wilderness landscape—a park with sweeping savannas, dense hardwood forests, soggy wetlands, rushing rivers, shrouded jungles, and soaring mountains.

Carr plans to link these ecosystems together with a network of trails, lodges, and campsites. "People will camp at that waterfall on the mountain," he says. "Then they'll hike to the top and stay in a tree house. They'll go down for a game drive on the floodplain, stay in a houseboat on the lake, and end up here [at the gorges]. Then they'll go to Kruger [National Park, in South Africa] and think, Man, this is boring." Operations will be run primarily

by locals. They'll guide safaris, staff the lodges, and run antipoaching patrols. And local communities will receive 20 percent of park revenue. "It can be a source of pride for them," he says, "and for all of Mozambique. It can be their Kilimanjaro."

Gorongosa is actually open for business already, albeit on a less grand scale. Since we've arrived, a steady trickle of visitors has been renting the restored bungalows at Chitengo base camp—next to the original-but-completely-bombed-out park lodge and the disabled water tower with the gaping bazooka hole. They've been going on game drives and discussing critter sightings at the restaurant. Tonight Kerrison and I forgo the comfy digs at Chitengo for tents on what our park guides call the "Lion Plain," a nearby clearing dotted with palm trees next to a watering hole. The place is hopping. In two hours we successfully spotlight two nyalas and three oribi (both are types of antelope), a whining bush baby (a squirrel-size primate), and one very large porcupine. Later, after settling around the fire, we hear a low, unmistakable grumble. We hop into the truck to investigate, and soon we have a wandering lioness in our spotlight, a gal with attitude who refuses even to acknowledge us. She leads us in a circle and before we know it,

* Set on a blackwater lake in the Amazon rainforest, Ecuador's Napo Wildlife Center is co-owned by the Achuar native community and Tropical Nature, an environmental non-profit. Guests enjoy wildlife excursions, an artisanal workshop, views from a 120-foot tower, and cocktails and camaraderie at the end of the day.



she's waltzing right through our camp and vanishing just beyond the tents.

Uh-oh.

Right about then, Dave Falkner drives up with a machine gun. "Got my AK," he says, grinning. "We're good." Falkner's camping with us tonight, and he's happy about the lion. As far as he's concerned, the more the merrier. As Gorongosa's wildlife conservationist, he is charged with restoring game populations, and while many park species need bolstering with herds obtained from neighboring countries, predators don't. "They'll return naturally," he says, "once we build the prey base." A prey base consists of zebras, wildebeests, and buffalo. To guard these nascent herds against poachers, Falkner is constructing a game fence around a 15,320-acre sanctuary inside the park. The animals will be protected there until progress has been made in educating the locals.

Part of that educational process involves convincing people that with the park they have a future. This is why, on our last day, we attend the big soccer game between Gorongosa and Nhambita, a nearby village in an area with a 26 percent HIV/AIDS infection rate. "People don't have anything to do and that's a big problem," Carr says. "They don't plan for the

future because they don't have a future. They poach because they're living day to day. We're talking about a whole lifestyle change. These soccer games, for example, they give people something to do each Saturday afternoon."

Everyone loves soccer, but there was no organized league, so Carr is buying uniforms for the 15 communities that border the park. The Gorongosa Lions, mostly Carr's staff, don their snazzy black-and-yellow jerseys, and everyone piles into trucks. "It's an away game," Carr says, excitedly. "First game of the season." In Nhambita, the village headman thanks Carr profusely and presents him with two live chickens. The game begins, and play goes back and forth until suddenly a Nhambita forward jukes two defenders and slides the ball past the diving Gorongosa goalie. The entire village erupts in wild celebration, everyone storming the field, screaming and dancing. Play is stopped for ten minutes. It's like they've won the World Cup.



"Ooof!" Kerrison yelps, maneuvering the truck through another sinister pothole. The only thing the rapidly degenerating EN1 has more of are bicycles; they've been multiplying like rabbits ever since we ferried across the mighty Zambezi

River into northern Mozambique. Kerrison is dodging them left and right, swerving, fishtailing, working the horn, making the bikes scatter. We're outside of Mocuba, windows down, CD player cranked, dust flying. It's 105 degrees, but Kerrison couldn't be happier.

"The north is like a whole other country," he hollers over the music. "It's wilder up here. I love it!" Gone are the private vehicles and white South Africans. We're flying past *chapas* (a kind of rough-and-ready bus) stuffed with locals, piled high with boxes, baskets, and buckets. We pass bombed-out bridges and schoolkids by the dozen. We're giving rides to people, making friends. Ryan needs a lift into town to buy flour? No problem! Manino and his two flat tires? Hop on! And the cops, they're relaxing under cartoonish baobab trees—the African version of doughnut shops—all dolled up in crisp uniforms with shiny white motorcycles, smiling and waving. Kerrison can't believe it. "They stopped us every time two years ago," he says. "They searched us thoroughly. It was a fund-raiser." Not anymore.

A glorious orange-and-purple sunset. We're somewhere between Mocuba and the next sizable town to the north, Alto Molócuè, and we see the first of many stunning granite monoliths that will mark the northern landscape for the rest

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Equator



MOZAMBIQUE RISING

of our trip, domes and spires that will cause Kerrison to gape and utter things like "This could be one of the world's great climbing destinations." But for now we're just looking for a place to sleep. We pull into a hamlet off the road and chat with a man named Antonio Mario. Sure, we can crash here. Do we have any cigarettes? Kerrison gives him one, I fork over two dollars for firewood, and soon Mario's 13-member family is studying our every move. I feel uneasy with my fancy tent, my fancy headlamp, and my heaping plate of pasta, in front of children who have virtually nothing. Later we pass out Oreos, sit around the fire and laugh with the kids, and then finally Mario wishes us good night, and he and his family disappear inside a mud hut.

The next morning I suggest to Kerrison that we pay the family more, but he says the two dollars, cigarettes, and Oreos are plenty. I say that's ridiculous, he says I'm ridiculous, and then we're both fuming. He gives the family a tub of peanut butter and we hit the road. "You can't blow things out of proportion," he steams. "You don't just want to give out lots of stuff, make them associate white people with handouts." We'd already experienced the apparent effects of this kind of generosity several times, people approaching us with a line Kerrison says he never heard two years ago: "Hello. I speak English. Give me money."

"I'm really angry right now," he growls.

"That makes two of us," I growl back.

We drive to Alto Molócuè in silence.



The Quirimbas are sprinkled like confetti along Mozambique's far northern coast, 27 white-sand islands in baby blue water, stretching from the mainland city of Pemba to the Tanzanian border. Kerrison organizes boat rides for us and our kayaks to the center of the archipelago. Whenever we explain our mission to curious Mozambicans, we're confronted with near aggressive incredulity, as though we're insulting common sense.

"Wait a minute," demands a woman at Matemo Island Resort, one of several stops en route to Medjumbe Island, our starting point. "You're doing what?" We're paddling 35 miles south from Medjumbe to Ibo via Macaloé, Rolas, and Matemo Islands. "You're going in those little boats?" Yes. "That's a lot of water. What do you do when the sea gets rough?"

"That's when it gets fun," Kerrison says, devilishly. She throws up her hands. "You're crazy."

It's a peculiar response, considering the country's rich seafaring tradition. A few days earlier, we'd seen that tradition on Mozambique Island, about 140 miles south of Pemba. The surreal outpost of decaying 400-year-old Portuguese architecture (much of

which is being restored by expatriates) is still home to a fishing fleet of graceful, triangular-masted dhows, the signature vessel of Arabic traders when they ruled the East African coast before the Europeans. I'd spent one morning watching boatbuilders on the beach, hammering and caulking, and another sailing with the Dhow Safari Company, spotting migrating humpbacks.

Now, with 2,386 miles on the truck's odometer, we're itching to become mariners ourselves, and Kerrison is fantasizing particularly about Medjumbe, his favorite island from his previous trip. "It's idyllic," he says. "There's a lagoon surrounding it and a spit extending out a few hundred meters. I caught 50 fish on that spit." For some final comfort before the paddling begins, we stay on Quilálea, one of two small-scale luxury resort islands in the Quirimbas, which Kerrison envisions as a fabulous spot to end his tours. "This place is great," he says. "But I wouldn't want resorts all over the place. That would ruin things."

As we motor through the islands, however, we hear rumors of plans for at least ten more resorts, mostly small places for high-dollar clients, including one on Medjumbe. When we finally arrive on that tiny island, we're shocked. The place is a full-on construction zone, a bulldozer rumbling one way, workers scurrying another, rubbish blowing down the beach. Kerrison wanders about in a daze. "There were rolling dunes over there," he says, pointing. "They're gone. There's a landing strip. It's like a big scar." As we look for a place to camp, Kerrison swings back and forth between sober rationalizations ("It has to be this way, right? If you want tourism, this is part of it") and emotional confessions ("I didn't think it would impact me this much"). We have no choice but to pitch tents next to a pile of lumber and some barrels.

In the morning Kerrison takes his fly rod and begins casting off the south side of the spit, which curves and tapers out from Medjumbe like the wriggling tail of a stingray. It's early yet, so there's no hammering or pounding. The tide is breaking both ways over the spit, kicking up spray. A lonely coconut sits in the sand, near a few wading birds, and over Kerrison's shoulder Quissanga Island glows in the early morning light. For a brief moment I sense what this place must have been like before the heavy machinery arrived. Better still, in the span of 15 minutes, my guide lands four pompano, improving his mood significantly. "Fly-fishing paradise!" he exclaims.

We set a GPS course for Macaloé Island and paddle south. We can't see the island, but it's out there, 12 miles away. I'm grateful for the strong northeast wind, but after we pop beyond the protective reef, the swells begin heaving.

One moment I can see Kerrison's red hair and white boat, the next moment I can't, as walls of water tower around me, my fate firmly in the grip of the Indian Ocean. Up, down; Kerrison, no Kerrison. I paddle like hell, and two hours later I can just make out the trees of Macaloé. I paddle some more, and by mid-afternoon we've landed on an untouched beach with pillowy dunes and swaying Casuarina trees. There's a fishing village around the corner, Kerrison says. He remembers one woman who makes great *pão*, Portuguese bread. Excellent! He'll go buy some, I'll stay with the gear. What an island! But he returns with a guy who calls himself a cop. Apparently everyone's been kicked off Macaloé because—you guessed it—a resort is coming. "That woman who made the *pão*, there's a lock and chain across her front door," Kerrison says. The cop and his partner, Macaloé's only residents, are charged with keeping riffraff off the island. He orders us to leave. We offer him dinner. He changes his mind.

And so it goes.

Fortunately for Kerrison, he has 27 islands to consider for his tours, and due to extreme tidal changes and access difficulties, many will never become resorts. We paddle for three more days, and I see why, resorts or not, Kerrison is so psyched about the sea kayaking. On glass-calm mornings we spot giant clams and orange pincushion stars 40 feet down. Trevalies slash up the surface in feeding frenzies, and a shark darts beneath my bow. We pass lone fishermen steering outrigger dugouts and lobstermen diving with crude masks and snorkels. At sunset, elegant dhows sail by in the soft red light, like pieces of inspirational calendar art. On Rolas Island we're mobbed by friendly villagers who explain that we've missed Matemo Island Resort. It's one island over, they tell us, and we can get beer there. And on Ibo we explore Portuguese ruins from the 1700s and examine centuries-old potsherds exposed on the reef at low tide.

When we're done with it all, when we're back on the road and grinding those 1,900 miles back to Johannesburg, one image stays with me: Conzales Bank, a beer-commercial-perfect dollop of sand in the shimmering sea. When we arrived, it was the size of a basketball court and shrinking fast. There was no vegetation, no people—just teeny ghost crabs building itty-bitty pyramids. We spent two hours there, me with my snorkel, Kerrison with his fly rod. Soon, with the tide, Conzales would be gone completely, but in time it would reemerge. Like Mozambique. "Can you believe this place?" Kerrison wondered aloud, standing ankle deep in the frothy surf, casting into the sublime turquoise lagoon. "It's definitely making it onto any trips that I run." ▲