



Gavin Blair Safaris

Adventures Through Africa

January 2010 Newsletter

Gavin Blair Safaris

Private Bag K19
Kasane

Botswana

Fax +44 (0) 870 831 0552

info@gavinblairsafaris.com

Latest safari news from Gavin and Marjorie

Its true - the historic Savuti Channel is flowing once again after nearly 30 years!



Anyone who has ever been on a good safari itinerary in Botswana will have spent time in Savuti, and so will be familiar with the history of the so called "Stolen River", memorably documented in the wildlife film by Dereck and Beverly Joubert for National Geographic. But to fill in for those who have never been fortunate enough to safari in the Savuti area of the Chobe National Park, and to jog the memories of those who have, the brief history goes like so....



Gavin Blair Safaris

Adventures Through Africa

January 2010 Newsletter

The first written record of the Savuti Channel dates to the early 1800's when the waters of the channel fed into the Savuti Marsh, creating a second inland delta for Botswana. Wildlife abounded, but when Livingstone passed through the area in June 1851 the marsh was in regress, so by the time Chapman ventured into the area in 1853 the Savuti "Marsh" was dry, as was the channel, leaving a dry sandy riverbed snaking away to the west. A short lived spurt of life-giving water gave the area a brief return to its wetter past, occurring roughly between 1874 and 1879, as recorded by Selous's two transits through the area, but by somewhere around 1880 the Savuti Channel, and as such the Savuti "Marsh" had dried up completely. It was only in 1958 that the channel sprung back to life, flooding the now treed "marsh" to reclaim its rightful description. Over the preceding 78 dry years the vegetation had slowly adapted to the dryer situation, and marsh grasses had given way to coarser rank grassland, followed by shrubs and small trees until a wooded landscape prevailed. With the new influx of water, the bushes, grasses and softwood trees were soon covered and were to eventually rot away, while the hardwood slow growing Leadwoods, and some of the large Acacia species suffered the ignominious fate of being drowned, and the largest specimens were immortalised by the fact their wood was so hard and resistant to the wet rot due to a combination of a number of factors, and so remained, with their bare limbs poking out above the water in both the winding channel, and as bold sentinels dotted across the now wet marshland.

If one looks at aerial / satellite views of the Savuti drainage system, tell-tale signs show up prehistoric "fossilised" channels, hinting at a long history of there being intermittent wet and dry periods. So once again in 1966 the waters receded back along the channel, giving early safari operators a hint of the wide reaching changes the whole ecosystem would experience if the area were once again robbed of the life-giving water - but the flow of water returned strongly in 1967 and the wildlife in the area rebounded with a vengeance, to make Savuti one of the top wildlife safari destinations in Southern Africa, all be it not an easy destination to reach, so making the area that much more special to all who trod in the area. Huge herds of buffalo and a plethora of antelope and bird species abounded, which in turn lead to an explosion of predators that led to Savuti gaining a reputation for being an exciting lion and hyena action destination. The wealth of wildlife attracted the film crews, so putting the Joubert's in the right place to document the next big event - the drying up of the channel and the marsh once again in 1981 - "The Stolen River".



Gavin Blair Safaris

Adventures Through Africa

January 2010 Newsletter

Savuti's wildlife managed to hang in over the next 30 years, but the water had completely gone, seemingly for good. The vegetation crumbled and gradually blew away in the hot dry winds, until the vast herds of buffalo, zebra, wildebeest and other smaller antelope were forced to become seasonal migrants in order to survive. The numbers of animals dwindled year after year, causing Savuti's shine to dull in the glaring sun and hot windy dry seasons - so it is with a huge cry of joy that in January 2010 we greeted the return of the Savuti Channel and its bountiful waters, and rejoice as the shine returns to one of Southern Africa's wildlife destination gems. Aside from the historic nature of the event, the water is of course a godsend for the elephants and other wildlife of the area, who for far too long now have had to endure the neglect and complacency of those who were given the responsibility to provide life-giving water to these magnificent animals during the many dry years - may the waters continue to flow long and deep!



Until next month...

Gavin & Marjorie
www.gavinblairsafaris.com