This Beautiful Land is an Enticing Venue for the First Ever SABISA/AWCI Joint Convention

By Dee Hamilton

When you spell it Afrika, as many residents of that Dark Continent do, it sounds even better.

The cool, clear air rushed against my face and tugged at my hair. The sunlight was warm on my nose and cheeks. The country was wide, open, with great trees scattered here and there, the African sky a high, bright blue.

I felt a rush of sheer joy. Excitement mixed with that rare and sudden feeling of being at the exact center of a terrific experience.

The right time, the right place, the right sun, the right air—and the right me. I haven’t felt that way in years.

Savuti South in Botswana, in Southern Central Africa, is a lovely safari camp, and I knew it would be.

Set on a rise overlooking a dry river channel, Savuti camp is both shady and sunny, graced with large lace-like trees, clean, fine sand underfoot and a rudimentary lawn around an open mess tent.

The fire circle was under a huge tree on the edge of the ravine, and our tents, with their sheltering reed roofs, were tucked in among trees and bushes.

It was love at first sight.

These African days had a pattern. The drums sounded at 7 a.m., then tea and coffee around the fire until breakfast. African breakfasts are hearty. Canned fruit juice, a great pot of hot oatmeal, cold cereal, thick slabs of toasted homemade bread, butter in pots, jams, and lemon curd—then comes the Main Course. Poached, fried or scrambled eggs, strips of thick bacon, a banger—that English short, fat sausage—hot canned tomatoes or

February 1986/Construction Dimensions 41
“While we always stayed out until well after sunset, and sometimes onto full dark, our game keepers never turned on the Land Cruisers’ headlights. They were each as perfectly attuned to this exotic land as the animals they cherished.”

baked beans, all washed down with pots of tea or coffee. Those English bangers require a lot of loving, anywhere.

The country around Savuti South camp has, in May and June, a certain wide-open innocence, not unlike Hieronymus Bosch and his Garden of Earthly Delights. Thousands of animals of every shape and size are always visible, each following a migratory pattern of its own. Constantly moving, they crossed one another’s paths, each species following its own distant destination.

As always in Africa, the hunter and the hunted are a part of this constant tapestry of animal movement, making a curiously harmonious flow of wild animals.

Tssessbe grazed with the wildebeast, the always-lovely Impala danced and leapt, and families of Wart Hogs raised pencil thin tails, at right angles to their bodies, and scuttled off into the bush with a flying whisk at the end of each upraised tail.

Mongooses darted from cover to cover, zebras shy and spooky, kicked at one another and then wildly thundered off in a sudden, self-induced panic.

Fish eagles, each shiny black, brown and startling white, seemed almost to pose on the stark, dead tree branches.

At noon, at a waterhole, elephants come in to drink and bathe, enormous bodies moving with silken grace, always curious, but sometimes testy, if you get too close.

Occasionally, an elephant suddenly makes a mock charge—before deciding we are not worth the trouble. I relax; the gametracker worry about all that. There are worse ways to go.

A lunch at Savuti South camp also meant Baby Hughie, who dropped by every noon for a drink of water. Baby Hughie, a baby no longer, is a full grown wild elephant who has a deep attachment to the camp’s hose and sprinkler.

Some days, he drifts in twice, sometimes even more often. Some nights, he simply rambles around through the camp.

When he comes in to drink, he goes
to the sprinkler—one of those little round kind, at the end of a hose—and picks it up with a wonderfully facile trunk. If there is an actual spray of water coming out, fine and good, he then sticks the whole thing in his mouth.

If not, he twines the hose around his trunk, then swings the sprinkler back and forth to notify everyone the thing isn’t working, and a staff member hurries over and turns on the faucet. When the beautiful water comes out, Hughie is happy. When there is a kink in the hose, the Ranger flips the hose from his end and Hughie flips from his, until the kink is gone and service is resumed.

The camp staff reminds us, again and again, this is a wild animal. Watch, but don’t try to get friendly!

In the afternoons, we each go separate ways, some to a tent to nap, some for long, leisurely showers-out of an overhead gasoline can. One fellow sits under the big tree, in a light breeze, book in hand. I sit in a camp chair in front of my tent, gazing over the quiet landscape, thinking of everything—and nothing. The whole world drowses.

The animals do also—after all, there is a long night coming.

At 4 o’clock, we gather for daily afternoon tea, and a sweet. I think fleetingly of gathering pounds, and dismiss that thought, instantly.

---

Details Finalized for SABISA-AWCI Joint Convention in South Africa

Final plans have been completed for one of the most exciting conventions in AWCI’s 69 year history. The dates are August 18-September 8, 1986, and the site is South Africa!

The first few days will be spent in Johannesburg, touring Inter-Bou ‘86, the largest construction exposition in the Southern Hemisphere. At the most recent Inter-Bou in 1984, just under 40,000 visitors attended this week-long event. And an even larger attendance is virtually guaranteed in 1986!

Participants will depart Johannesburg’s Sandton Sun Hotel early on Thursday, August 14 for the famous Sun City Casino-Resort. However, on route we have planned a special excursion to Gold Reef City, a brand new tourist destination opening in 1986 to commemorate Johannesburg’s 100th anniversary. Gold Reef City is an entire village which recreates the rip-roaring days of early Johannesburg as a bustling, bawdy pioneer town.

Following your visit to Gold Reef City, you will continue on to Sun City, Bophuthatswana for the SABISA-AWCI program. The South African Building Interior Systems Association is AWCI’s “Sister Association” in the Republic of South Africa. Contractors from Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada, the U.S. and Australia will make this meeting truly a major international event.

Sun City is a self-contained oasis of unequalled excitement. Whether your preference is for the high life of fine dining and top-name entertainment, the sunshine world of sport and activity, or the wild-life world of the African bush, you’ll find it waiting for you.

Highlighting the convention is a special exposition in which major North American, European and South African manufacturers and distributors will show you all that the industry has to offer. Also in store are several educational sessions and all the great social events you’ve come to associate with any AWCI meeting. Famed surgeon Dr. Christian Barnard will deliver the keynote address at the final night banquet.

While some convention attendees will then leave for New York, for others the excitement will be just beginning! Participants can choose from two optional post-conference events: a tour to Cape Town aboard the magnificent Blue Train, or an exciting safari to Chobe National Game Preserve.

Both optional events will also be offered just prior to the convention, so you could combine all three into a three week vacation that you and your spouse will remember with a special fondness for the rest of your lives. Contact AWCI at (202) 783-2924 if you would like more information on this fantastic trip.
As nightfall comes, we head for our places in the Land Cruisers. Each passenger has a particular seat; mine was riding shotgun, above and behind the driver, on the right hand side, and so we head out into the slanting late afternoon light to find adventure.

Each vehicle travels alone, although occasionally we can see each other at a distance. If there is a great find, and the vehicles are fairly close together, one will radio another to describe the position of the sighting.

That was the case with the leopard. We were hurtling along in a cold, late dusk, heading back for camp when the gamekeeper suddenly stood on the brakes, shifted into reverse and whispered, excitedly, “Leopard!”

All five of us stood up, straining to see. He backed slowly, stopped, and there, ears pricked forward, between two bushes, sat a leopard, looking straight at us.

The headlights were turned on, and there he was, clearly. Equally suddenly, he was gone, melted away into the bushes.

With great caution, the driver inched the Land Cruiser around a clump of foliage—and out into a clearing strolled our leopard, not thirty feet away.

He gave us one glance, and then ignored us. He lay down, full length on his side facing us, twitched his long, lovely tail and yawned an enormous, pink, perfect yawn.

Nobody dared breathe. As the dusk deepened, he looked increasingly mysterious. The driver whispered into his transmitter and, shortly, a second vehicle came creeping up. That did it. The leopard had granted enough favors. With a bored glance and a flick of his tail, he was gone, like a ghost.

While we always stayed out until well after sunset, and sometimes onto full dark, our game keepers and drivers never turned on the Land Cruisers’ headlights. They were each as perfectly attuned to this exotic land as the
animals they cherish.
Back at Savuta Camp, we gathered around the fire ring, sun-browned faces glowing, under a glittering roof of African stars which seemed poised just above the treetops.
Rangers cautioned us — once our preparations for the night were completed—to return to our tents, zip up, and Stay Put!
With a small, white enamel potty handy in each tent just in case, my cot
was drowsy and warm, and I quickly drifted off to sleep nightly.

One night, a sound awakened me instantly, a guttural “Chunh, chunh, chunh,” with the sound of breathing close outside my tent. A twig crackled. I held very still, not really frightened, but with a strong desire to be quiet and invisible.

The presence moved on and, in the distance, I could hear the hyenas calling.

A pale orange dawn brought a wild cacophony of bird calls. When I went outside, there was lion spoor beside my tent.

One late afternoon we visited Allen’s Camp. The proprietress, a large, deeply tanned former Rhodesian woman in a khaki bush dress, came out to greet us. As I shook her hand, I told her how beautiful I found this land, and all it’s creatures.

She gripped my hand with both of hers, and said, fiercely, “Ah, it’s the last little bit of loveliness in this poor old world. They shan’t take it away. They simply shall not!”

Our last night at Savuti South brought a festive dinner and, at the fire ring, our Gamekeeper played his “Night Noises” recording. Loud.

What a response! Cries and calls of all sorts answered back from out of the dark, and then he shone a powerful light across the ravine. They they were:
a large band of hyenas, eyes gleaming, circling, sniffing, wondering at our own island of light in the African darkness. It was the baboons who came in the next day, all in strict pecking order. First, the young ones, some just babies, to drink at the camp bird bath. Then, the adolescents and the lower middle class and, finally, the big shots arrived, strutting in to drink, one at a time. Finally, the whole troop had ap-
peared and, as visitors, took over the camp. They drank, preened, quarreled, fiddled with tent zippers, scurried up tent poles and made themselves at home. One of the reasons our own tents, and the dining tent, always had reed roofs is the baboons love canvas tops. They make great trampolines.

On our way out, we suddenly turned up four lionesses, and a half grown cub, in a nearby dry marsh, and we came very close. One lioness turned onto her back, front paws limp on her chest, stuck both back feet straight up into the air, curled her head into the grass—and took a little cat nap.

We watched them for a long time, until they stirred, sent silent signals to each other, rose, stretched and padded away, with ears pricked up towards red lechwe antelope grazing in a nearby meadow.

We went on to the lovely Khwai River Lodge, and then in to the lush water world of the Okavango Delta, and finally to San-ta-wani, where the hippos play daily.

Now reentry begins. Back into the real Peninsula world? First, a small plane from San-ta-wani to Maun, a larger plane to Gabarone, the capitol of Botswana. Another to Johannesburg in South Africa. Customs, passports, people, luggage, curio shops.

The magic dims a little.

I am not the same person who left the Peninsula only a few weeks ago. Best of all, my spirit is refreshed and invigorated.

I have seen first hand the beautiful order of nature, and I am reassured by the perfect logic.

Dung beetle, elephant, mongoose, leopard, impala, each in its place in some overall plan, all in perfect, irrefutable harmony. The great pulse and rhythm of nature remains, undisturbed by man.

I also found a last, little bit of loveliness under the skies of Africa. In so doing, I also found peace within myself.