Let me return with the final installment of our travelogue. (I bet you could see the subject title for this part coming, given the previous two.)

When we last conversed, we were heading out of Zambia on our DC-4. Our flight to Botswana brought us across the broad arid plain of the Kalahari Desert. Now the Kalahari Desert is a worthwhile destination in its own right, but we were headed to something even more unusual - the delta of the Okavango River. The Okavango River, which originates in central Africa, used to flow south and east to the Indian Ocean. Used to is a geologic term here, as the last time water from the Okavango directly entered the Indian Ocean was 10,000 years ago. A rather large earthquake (which you may remember from the discussion of Victoria Falls) isolated the river from its eastern escape, forcing the river to flow south. The southward flow took the river directly into the Kalahari Desert. A bit of a geographic battle ensued: Would the river be able to bisect the desert before the desert consumed the entire flow of the river? It sounds a bit like an episode of Planet Earth. Well, our episode would reveal that the desert won easily. As a result, the Okavango River is unusual in that it does not terminate in a body of water, but rather disappears amidst the sands of the Kalahari. In so doing it forms one of the largest oases in the world, the 6,000 square mile Okavango delta. A surprising place in which you can find crocodiles in the desert.

Our DC-4 is headed to Maun, gateway to the delta. As we fly over Maun before landing, we see mostly traditional, circular homes scattered across the desert plain. Looking around the city, I feel I am literally in an outpost and could come across Han Solo at any moment. If an alien of strange design wanted to blend in anywhere on earth, Maun might be a good bet.

Our destination is not Maun, but rather Moremi Camp, located within the heart of the delta. As the DC-4 is much too large to land at the bush landing strip near the camp, we transfer to small aircraft for the flight. Each seat pocket on our plane comes with a folder that is remarkably well done. Rather than the content free writing that is the hallmark of in-flight magazines, I can actually read about the airplanes and pilots that work for the "Maun Air Service". Our pilot is a wily veteran of 21 years (that is years of age, not experience) who's nickname is "Turbo". On our short flight of about 40 minutes, we do not get to experience how he got his nickname, but we do fly so low to the ground that we can act as informal game spotters. We see crocodiles in ponds and elephants moving through the trees. We touch down on the earthen strip and jump into jeeps. The Land Rovers of Mala Mala have been replaced with Land Cruisers (of Toyota heritage) that have been modified to have similar seating configurations (the only real difference is we have a surrey style roof).

A 30 minute drive brings us to Moremi Camp, a small private holding in the middle of a national park. As the private holding is really the footprint of the camp, we will share the road with other national park visitors and keep on the roads at all times. The camp is a tent camp, which is much more luxurious than it sounds. We sleep in large tents on raised platforms. The tents look like something straight out of the "African adventure" exhibit at the zoo. Ours has a writing table, beds and a closet with a bathroom/shower just outside (but on the platform). As the ranger shows us our tent, he mentions that you must keep on the platform after dark. "If you have any problems, just use the air horn and we will
remarkably the trumpeting giraffes. Australia through. away. (remember land that do does but and instructions with a ranking of the land side of the camp is a "fence" that is designed to keep out two animals - elephants and giraffes. Hence the fence consists of wire strung around on poles, but the lowest strand is some 7 feet off the ground. That way all the other animals can move right through. Now, you may be asking "Why do you need to keep out giraffes?" (If you are asking, "Why do you need to keep out elephants?" you need to go back one square in the game of life.) I think they simply strung up the fence for elephants and it happens to exclude our ever tall friends.

But why not just put up regular fences? Hippos. They want to move from the reeds to the meadows (remember their nocturnal feeding habits) and they will become agitated if you try and block their path with a fence. I can just imagine a male hippo blasting out of the reeds and running into a fence and thinking "Who put this ruddy thing up?" Of course, the next stage would involve the hippo destroying the fence and, most likely, a good bit of the camp in revenge.

Because we entered the camp after dark, (the entrance was beautifully lit by a circle of torches) we did not have a game drive that evening. As a ranger was guiding us back to our tent (Julia and I were remarkably lucky, in both camps we ended up with the "end unit" and so had the most animal sightings from our lodging) we heard a lot of crashing just outside the fence area. A group of elephants moving through. "Well, I'm glad it's just elephants" I thought. As it turns out, I was greatly mistaken in my ranking of the relative dangers of African animals. We bid our ranger good night as we listened to the elephants crashing through and, apparently, scolding one of their herd with a series of very shrill trumpeting sounds. Just as Julia headed across the platform to the bath, I heard a low pitched growl. At this point, I thought "Gee, that sounds remarkably like the LIONS we heard at Mala Mala". What is more, the growl appears to be coming from UNDER OUR TENT. Now, I wished I had paid a bit more attention to the air horn discussion. Not wanting to foolishly panic, I got out the air horn and read the instructions (along with the camp safety instructions). Just in case.

No more growling. No other signs of rustling coming from under our tent. Good. I put the air horn away. What did I hear you wonder? The elephants. Apparently, when digesting they often make these rumbles. Of course, this was not the best night time story at Moremi Camp. (What makes camping in the tents so special, as opposed to the luxury dwellings of Mala Mala, is that you can hear the animals quite clearly as they go about their night time activities.) Another part of our group was awakened later that night by the raucous chattering of the baboons followed by the start of a rain shower. Except it wasn't raining on anyone else's tent. I think you get my drift here. Luckily their tent did not leak.

The next morning at breakfast, I sat with the rangers. All of them had grown up in Botswana and shared
the same tribal affiliation. While their tribe had lived in the delta for many years, the tribe was originally from the north. They had been chased out of their more fertile region and into the delta, which was previously inhabited only by the river bushmen. One of the rangers had a family linkage with the river bushmen and could communicate with them. Ah ha! I had found someone who could speak in a click language, which you may remember is a language among the original inhabitants of the Kalahari desert and other parts of Southern Africa. (The Zulu and Shangan, together with most of the other tribes of Southern Africa, arrived after the bushmen. Only the bushmen have clicks in their language.) It was fascinating listening to the click language. Even something as simple as counting from 1 to 10 sounded like nothing I had ever heard before.

As we left camp in our jeep, we slowed to look down at the road. "Leopard tracks" our ranger informs us. We are all very excited, we might see another leopard. One of our fellow travelers, on noting that the tracks are leading out of our camp and are fresh remarks "You people are excited? Don't you realize this means we had a leopard in our camp last night?" I should note that he is an attorney.

In contrast to Mala Mala, at Moremi camp we spotted far more young animals. As we came across a giraffe and her calf, they turned and ran across the meadow. I remember being told how special it is to see a giraffe run, and having watched them, I agree. I had been told it was remarkable to see an animal so tall moving gracefully at speed. I realize that height was indeed a factor, but perhaps not in the way it seems at first. Take a close look the next time you see a giraffe running. Unlike virtually every other animal, they run by moving their legs in tandem on one side at a time. This creates a most unusual gait.

While Fausto was not available for my questions on running styles, he did figure in prominently on the "Tale of the Termites". All over the terrain of both Mala Mala and Moremi Camp were very large termite mounds. They take on these weird shapes and form the base of activity for many others. Trees and shrubs often grow out of abandoned mounds (indeed, this was the only thing that seemed to stop our leopard mad driver back in Mala Mala, he ran into the remains of an old mound and it brought us to a sudden halt, unlike, say the trees he ran over). Hyenas build their nests on top and cheetah use them to survey their hunting grounds. (Cheetah, unlike lions and leopards, hunt during the day, so you can spot them atop the mounds if you have a careful eye. This diurnal hunting pattern also takes away the camouflage of night, hence their need for speed.)

Now I simply had to know a bit about the termites. They are such interesting creatures that each ranger had quite a bit to say about them, although I gather hardly anyone ever asks. As some of the information the rangers gave conflicted, I went to Fausto, our roving expert, for final clarification. The termites build their large mounds to regulate the temperature of their colony. As he was telling me how the workers open and close the millions of holes in the mound depending on the weather, we approached a large mound. (And these mounds are huge, often standing 7 to 10 feet high.) With his knife he began to chip off a bit of the dirt on the outside of the mound. Holes quickly became apparent, followed shortly thereafter by irritated termites, coming to close up the holes. I had the image of a grouchy innkeeper, shutting the door for the umpteenth time after a rude guest had left it open. When showing me one of the worker termites who had become attached to his hand he remarked "They have
rather large pincers. In fact, I'm feeling the pincers right now." I helped unclaw the termite from his hand, which was left with two small bite marks. Hmm. I thought back to an old story I had read about one tribe leaving an enemy tied down by a termite mound.

But we have only begun the tale. Why are the termites so fussy about temperature? Because they are farmers. That is right, they grow their own food. They do consume dead trees, but they digest the tree bark not so much for nutrition as for mulch for their garden. They also gather spores and raise fungus in an underground chamber. The termites have specialized roles. The workers who build the mound, gather the wood mulch and spores and tend to the garden. The soldiers who bite the hands of intruders. And of course, the queen. The queen produces all the workers and soldiers. When the time is right, the queen produces winged termites. These termites are of both sexes, unlike the workers and soldiers. Every year, at roughly the same time, all the queens produce winged termites. These winged termites head to the top of the mound where they lift off in paired bliss for a flight to a new home (and construction of a new mound). Now, these winged termites are exceptionally high in protein and they come out around the same time each year. This termite hatch is looked for by all the predators, including the tribal peoples. When these guys get ready for launch, hyenas, jackals, cats, and people converge to eat as many as they can. (Now the local tribes don't eat them straight, they collect them in a bucket, take the wings off back home and fry them.) For those lucky couples who do make it through the feeding gauntlet, they settle down, loose those wings and begin to tunnel for a new home. After quite a bit of work the king, perhaps not so aptly named, mates with his queen and is quickly disposed of, as she has no further need of him. Well well.

Now, when I think of dangerous land animals in Africa, I think of the big cats first. I realize a lone bull elephant would be dangerous, but the herds of elephant seem relatively benign. Not to the experienced rangers. They tend to think of elephants as among the most dangerous, if not the most dangerous, of the land animals. Just like the hippos, the African elephants sit atop the predator chain. Even prides of lion tend not to have a go at elephants, because their odds of success are not all that great and they could very well be trampled or gored. It seems that hippos and elephants occupy similar niches in Africa, one on the water and one on land. They are large herbivores that reduce vegetation (elephants are the principle destroyers of trees and hippos are the main uprooters of reeds and water vegetation) and have no real predators. We relied heavily on hippos, as their movement kept the waterways of the delta navigable.

Which brings us to our boat travels through the delta. The delta is not heavily forested, but rather consists of open waterways surrounded by reeds and small hillocks. The trees that grow on the hillocks have an interesting life cycle. As they grow they deplete the water table and mineral salts leach in. These salts kill the trees. Without competition from the established trees, smaller saplings take root. At the same time, the delta replenishes the water table, beginning the cycle anew. So each of these hillocks has a number of generations of tree life. The reeds and desert sands also do a remarkable job of filtering the water. Looking down through the clear water, it was hard to believe we were at the tail waters of a river.
One of our final drives brought out a particularly humorous moment. As our group was too large for Moremi Camp alone, we had been split into adjoining camps. Among the group on our camp was another family with an 11 year old girl (Louisa) and her thirteen year old female cousin. Now, Louisa has a sparkling personality while her older cousin is a bit quieter. I soon noticed that Louisa was often sitting with Greg with the cousin behind. Another important fact is that she had suddenly become particularly fond of a pair of sunglasses, in which she looked as cute as a button. As this behavior went on with her cousin getting less and less attention from both Louisa and Greg, matters came to a head. We were driving in a jeep one morning with Louisa and Greg chatting away. The cousin and I were seated in the row behind them. As we came around a bend, we saw several zebra with a calf.

Louisa: "Oh look Greg, a zebra with two calfs." (one of the zebra was rather small)

Cousin (leaning forward so that she is almost between Greg and Louisa):
"Oh no Louisa, there is only one calf there. Why, you're not wearing your glasses! I'm going to have to make sure you wear your PRESCRIPTION GLASSES the next time we come out!"

We left Moremi Camp and flew to Pretoria, where we boarded a train to Cape Town. Not just any train. This train is run by the same fellow who owns the DC-4, so all the rail cars date from the early 20th century. Of course they have been refurbished, so the travel is quite nice. As we traced our way west across the northern ring of South Africa, we traveled through the old provinces of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. These are Afrikaans strongholds, which is revealed in the place names and the frequency with which Afrikaans is spoken. We had only two stops as we traveled along this tableland, spotted with low lying termite mounds. (These termites are a different species and have much lower mounds. Many of the mounds have an entrance carved into them, so I thought they were the dens of some other animal. No, the entrances are simply where the anteaters enter and exit their termite diners.) We came across a shallow lake that is home to a large number of flamingos. As the train passes very close to the lake, our approach caused them to take flight. What a sight, seeing this broad swath of orange and pink separate the deep blue of the lake from the light blue of the sky.

We had a scheduled stop at Kimberly, home of de Beers diamond mines. I figured that this was simply going to be a stop with a few stores. Boy, was I wrong, The government has invested quite a bit of money to construct a fascinating museum about all things diamond. The origin of Kimberly's name is rather boring, as it was named for a visiting British Lord. Yet he is immortalized to geologists as the mineral that contains diamonds is named Kimberlite. Kimberlite is named for the town, not the other way around. I had thought that diamonds were formed from the heat and pressure applied over long periods of time to primordial swamps and that they were eventually brought to the earth's surface through tectonic activity. In fact, I could swear I saw a movie depicting this origin at some point in my youth. But no matter, it is not correct.

The first diamonds were found in alluvial deposits in India. Later, others were found in the rivers of Brazil. It was only with the discovery of diamonds in a vein in Kimberly that geologists figured out that diamonds are volcanic in origin. Moreover, not all volcanos produce diamonds (as you could guess from
a trip to Hawaii) as it depends on the construct of the chambers through which the magma travels to the surface. In brief, the chamber for the volcano must travel to quite some depth to be able to create diamonds, so only a few volcanos are diamond producers. In fact, there are no such volcanos in South America, which makes the presence of diamonds in Brazil a useful piece of evidence when determining the shape of early landforms. Diamonds do have an appropriate name, as the word diamond is derived from a Greek word for invincible.

As we drove around Kimberly, a not very impressive town, it was hard to imagine the de Beers directors flying in for their meetings to discuss their world cartel in diamonds. I was also surprised to learn that there have never been any de Beers in the diamond business. It turns out that Cecil Rhodes (of the scholarship and Rhodesia) purchased the de Beers farm, on which sat a vast diamond mine. The de Beers took the money (of course unaware of the diamond mine), purchased another farm and their descendants continue to farm in the area. You could just imagine the discussions in that household as matters unfolded.

As our train rumbled out of Kimberly, we came across groups of ostrich racing across the landscape. As night approached, the tablelands turned up into small ridges and by morning we were descending through a series of canyons as we approached Cape Town.

Cape Town has a long and fascinating history as a port of call. Just to the south is the Cape of Good Hope, which is not the southern tip of the African continent. Rather Cape Agulhas has this distinction and so it is at this point that the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean meet the cooler waters of the Atlantic. Even more embarrassingly, the Cape of Good Hope is not the southernmost point of the peninsula that houses Cape Town. The southern tip of the peninsula is Cape Point. But all this geographic carping probably misses the point that the sailors felt they had rounded Africa when they passed the Cape of Good Hope. (As you would guess, traveling by sail from Cape Town, the southern extremity does appear to be the Cape of Good Hope.) As we drove around the cape we saw some spectacularly beautiful vistas and then found our way to the nesting areas of the African penguin. The penguins had many youngsters around and we were able to observe lots of different behavior patterns. As you know from bird stories (and they do seem to be big right now in young adult literature) there is little in the way of polite sharing when siblings are looking for food.

Our final adventure took us to Robben Island. Robben Island has long served as a prison, dating back to the 17th century, but gained its fame (or infamy) as the prison that held Nelson Mandela. We took the ferry to the island and quickly boarded a bus for a tour of the island and prison. Despite the fact that Robben is Afrikaans for seal, we did not see any on our journey there. We did, however, see a large number of African penguins, which seem to have colonized parts of the old prison. Our tour guide was an older South African of Indian descent, who was also a member of the African National Congress. He was a marvelous raconteur who relayed the history of the island with the gravity of one who had a role in the ANC and knew Mandela in that capacity together with a marvelous sense of humor. As we crowd onto the bus, some are forced to stand and he remarks
"In Af-rick-uh my friends, we say the bus is never full." A bit later on, he is explaining the effects of tuberculosis, as in an earlier period the island served as a point of quarantine. When he comes to a medical point he thinks he might be corrected on, he asks

"Is anyone here a medical doctor?" One gentleman raises his hand, thinking that he will be called upon to clarify any misunderstandings on this point. "Do you what we say in Af-rick-uh about fish, my friend?" (looking directly at the self-identified medical doctor) When no response comes forth, he continues "We say the fish that does not open its mouth will never be caught. So now my friend, when anyone has any question about medicine or any other point regarding health, they will turn to you." This seems decidedly less appealing than simply weighing in on one point of fact in the narrative, so our medical doctor decides to completely yield the floor.

We travel to the lime quarry where Mandela worked. In an effort to demoralize him, the guards would require his group to quarry lime during the day. In the evening, the lime was put back, as it was not being quarried for any use. Thus they were trapped in this netherworld of an unending task, with no tangible gain. In response, Mandela organized classes for the inmates and encouraged the guards to join them. He and several others, taught themselves Afrikaans, so that they could address the prison commander in his native language. Needless to say this behavior in such a brutal environment eventually impressed even his captors, whose respect he gained. On Mandela's release, the prison guards applauded him as he walked to freedom.

Once we left South Africa's answer to Bill Cosby, we walked on foot through the prison block that housed Mandela. Our guide was another former prisoner and ANC member who served time for blowing up a government building and killing one night watchman. As he simply and plainly stated his crime, it was all a bit surreal. As was the treatment of prisoners. Even here, apartheid was in full force as Indian prisoners were given better food rations than black prisoners.

Our journey back included a stop in a township, where we witnessed one of the training programs (this one in pottery) designed to reduce unemployment. Perhaps most surprisingly, some wealthy township members have chosen to build nice homes in the township rather than move to another area.

Before we left, we had the chance to take in all of Cape Town from the top of Table mountain. Greg put it so well:

"Dad, this was the trip of two lifetimes!"