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PhotoMail is an occasional picture newsletter for those with an interest in photography, nature and the environment, travel, Zambia, Zambian life and happening things
 And especially for those who just like looking at pictures
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The Story Behind the Pictures: ZAMBIA'S HIDDEN TREASURE



Avumba Menda Falls

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There are some places in Zambia that the public and tourists are not allowed to access, visit and explore freely. One example is the Kafue Gorge, where what would otherwise be very easy access from Lusaka is restricted by ZESCO, apparently on the basis that it is a "security area" - the site of a major hydro power generation installation. That installation is now undergoing a major expansion, by way of the Lower Kafue Gorge Project by ZESCO and Sino Hydro, a Chinese company.

You don't have to look very closely at the map to see that the Kafue Gorge is dramatic and so must have some spectacular scenery and nature. I went there recently with cataractophile explorer and Zambia expert Ise Mwanza, professional nature artist Quentin Allen, and seasoned Zambia traveller & guide Timmy Mutukwa. We wanted to explore and record the lower gorge & river, and the Avumba Menda waterfall, before the new hydro project takes its toll - radically altering the river habitat and destroying the Avumba Menda Falls. This was made possible only by Ise's determination and persuasion in getting ZESCO management to allow us access through the 'security' area. After explanations, ZESCO was very helpful in giving permission and efficient in putting the right pieces of paper at the numerous security points to help get us in. Thank you ZESCO!



Lower Kafue Gorge

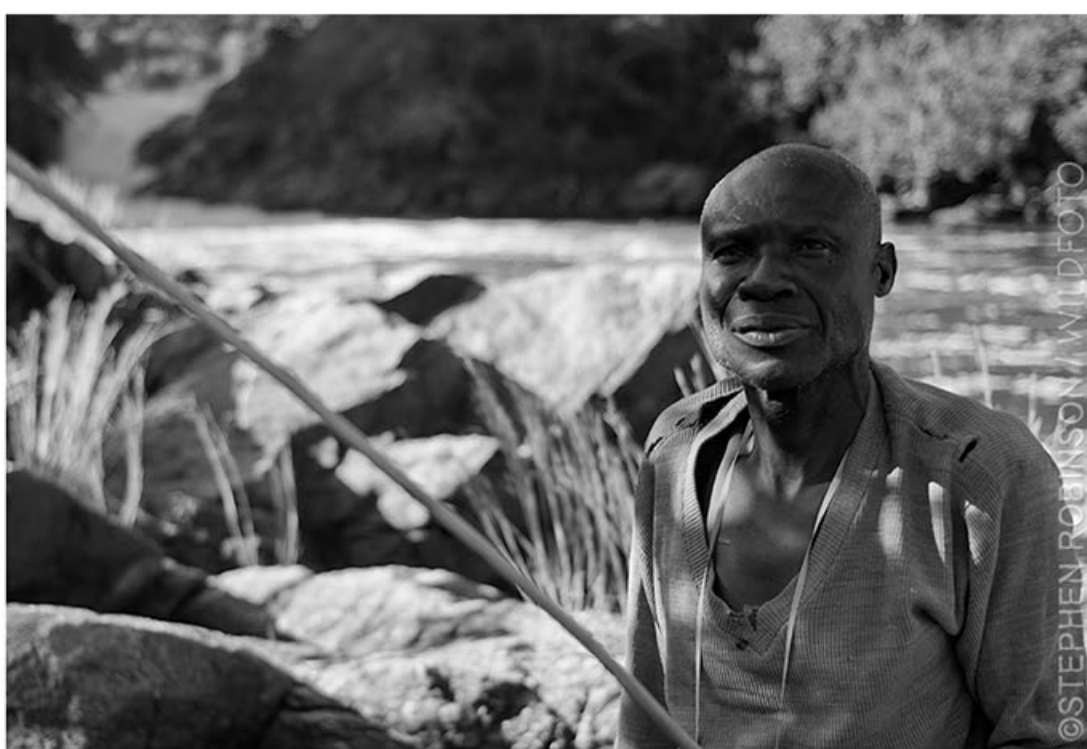
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Rapids below Avumba Menda

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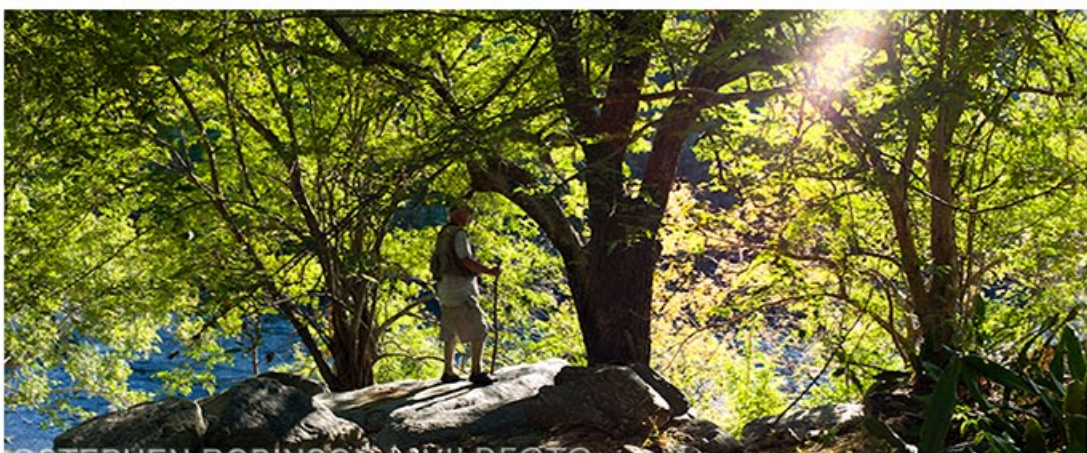
But once seen, one has to ask - why are such spectacular natural treasures kept hidden by restricting easy access? Such hydro projects have a hugely negative impact on the natural environment and the people who live so directly off that environment. But, if we have to have them, why can't we have the 'upside' as well - by allowing and even encouraging free access and use of the dam lake and river resources for those interested in nature, hiking, birding, camping, sailing, white water sports, sport fishing? Perhaps they may even add to tourism and some jobs for those displaced. Zambia does not exactly seem to be in danger of invasion, war or terrorist sabotage, and generation of hydro power is not exactly a Zambian secret that we need to stop others stealing.



One of those living off the river

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So ZESCO, how about it? You could even raise your popularity profile by giving a bit back, and at no cost to you.



The Kafue Gorge sides are steep, in places even vertical. Getting close to the river involves silly climbs down any available gully. On the way down, you wonder "is this worth it?". Then you come across a scene like this and there's just no doubt.



Quentin's paint box. He's quick. Dip, squiggle, paint. Dip, squiggle, paint. Dip, squiggle...



Mr Zambia (Quentin Allen) at work. There is nobody on this planet who knows and has travelled Zambia as extensively as Quentin. He recently spent a full year exploring some of the most remote parts on foot. Notably, he sketches and paints only from work done "in-situ", making copious sketches and notes every day.



Timmy Mutukwa, the most Zambia-travelled Zambian in the country. No matter where he is in the bush, he always gets his Times delivered.

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PHOTOGRAPHER FOR HIRE

Stephen Robinson is a photographer operating from his Zambia base. He undertakes photo assignment work in the corporate, industrial, mining, donor-aid project and environmental fields, including the production of photo based communications, advertising and promotional media.

This commercial work supports his nature photography speciality, including landscape, environment, conservation and wildlife work - and including his well-known panoramic photography project and exhibitions on the remote landscape, peoples and environment of Zambia.

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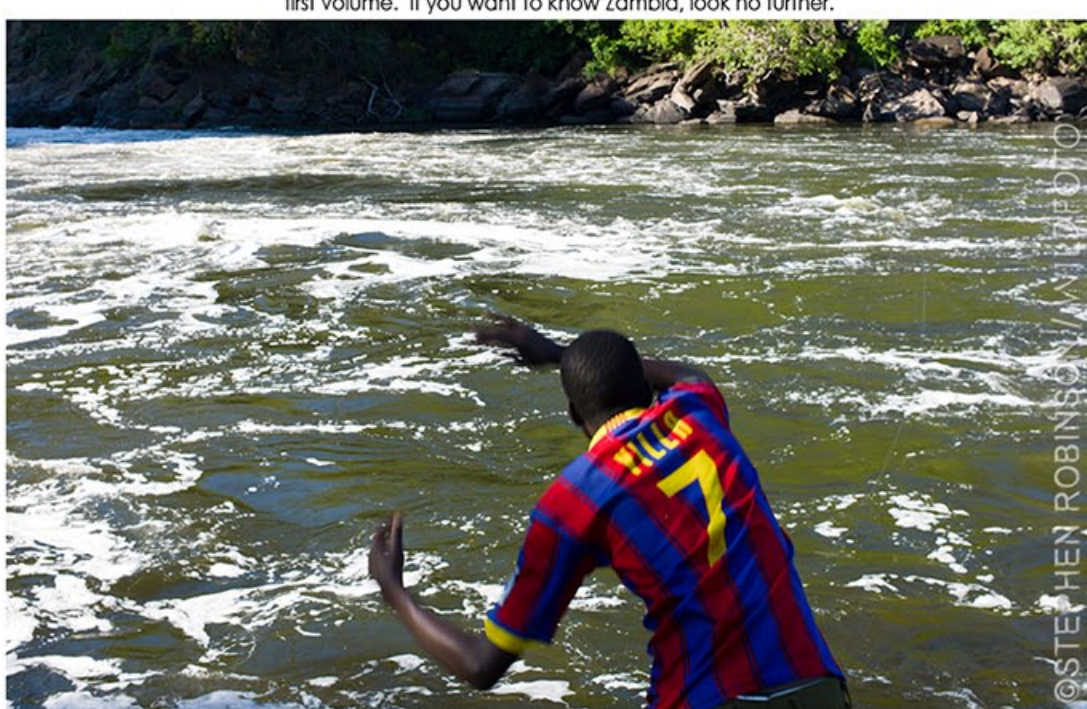
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Quentin with Ise Mwanza - another passionate Zambia traveller and Zambia expert. Ise and Quentin are currently updating their second volume of "Guide to Little Known Waterfalls of Zambia" - to add a further 200 falls to the 150 included in their first volume. If you want to know Zambia, look no further.



FC Barcelona enjoying some subsistence fishing in the Kafue Gorge.

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NEXT PhotoMail ISSUE

Some pictures, and the story behind them, from travels further afield

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