



WILDFOTO

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PhotoMail is an occasional picture newsletter for those with an interest in photography, nature and the environment, travel, Africa, Zambia, African life and happening things. And especially for those who just like looking at pictures.

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The Story Behind the Pictures: "256 Shades of Grey"

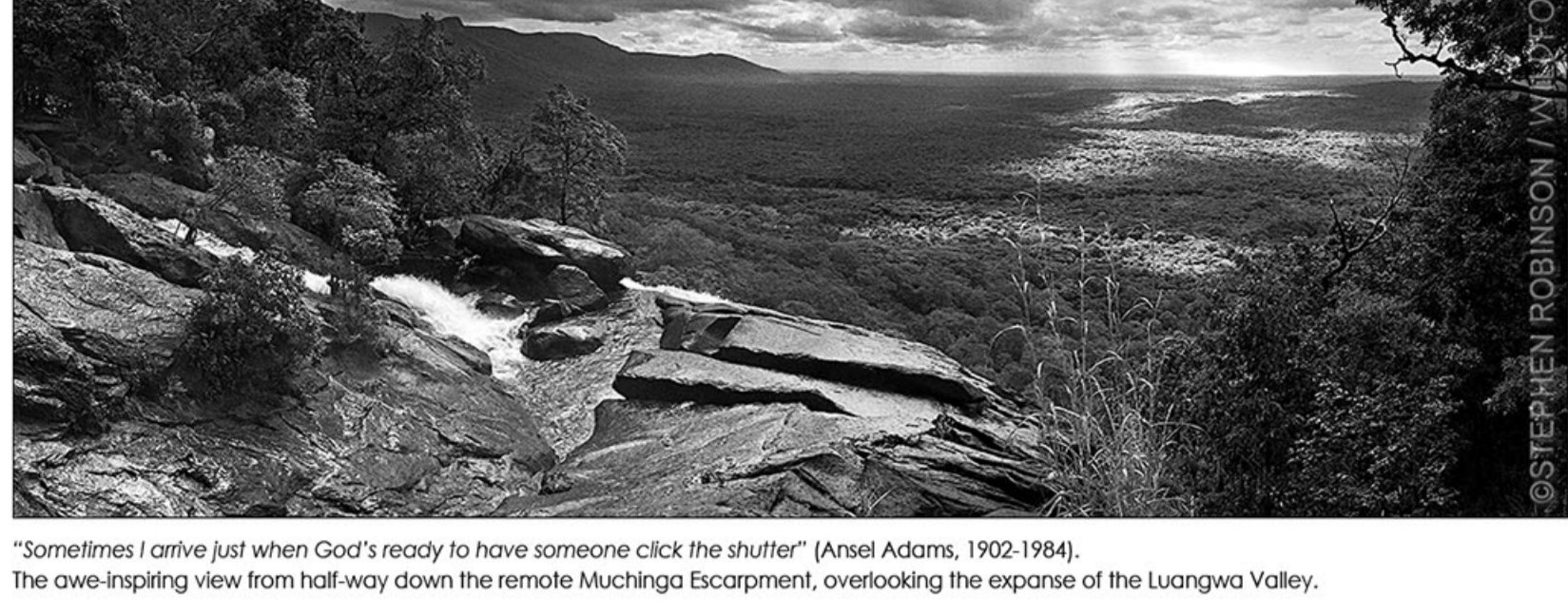
In this PhotoMail, no, not anything to do with a raunchy novel. Two hundred and fifty-six (256) is the number of shades of grey you are using on your screen to look at these black & white (monochrome) photographs.

Black & white is very much "the photographer's photograph". Many call it photography in its purest form. On your screen, the 16 million-plus shades present in a colour photograph are distilled down to, at most, just 256 tones of grey. The distraction of colour is removed, and laid bare are the light & shadow, form & texture, and tonal contrasts of the subject. We are left, for better or for worse, with the photographer's interpretation of the core subject. Colour may give us something approaching reality, black & white interprets it.

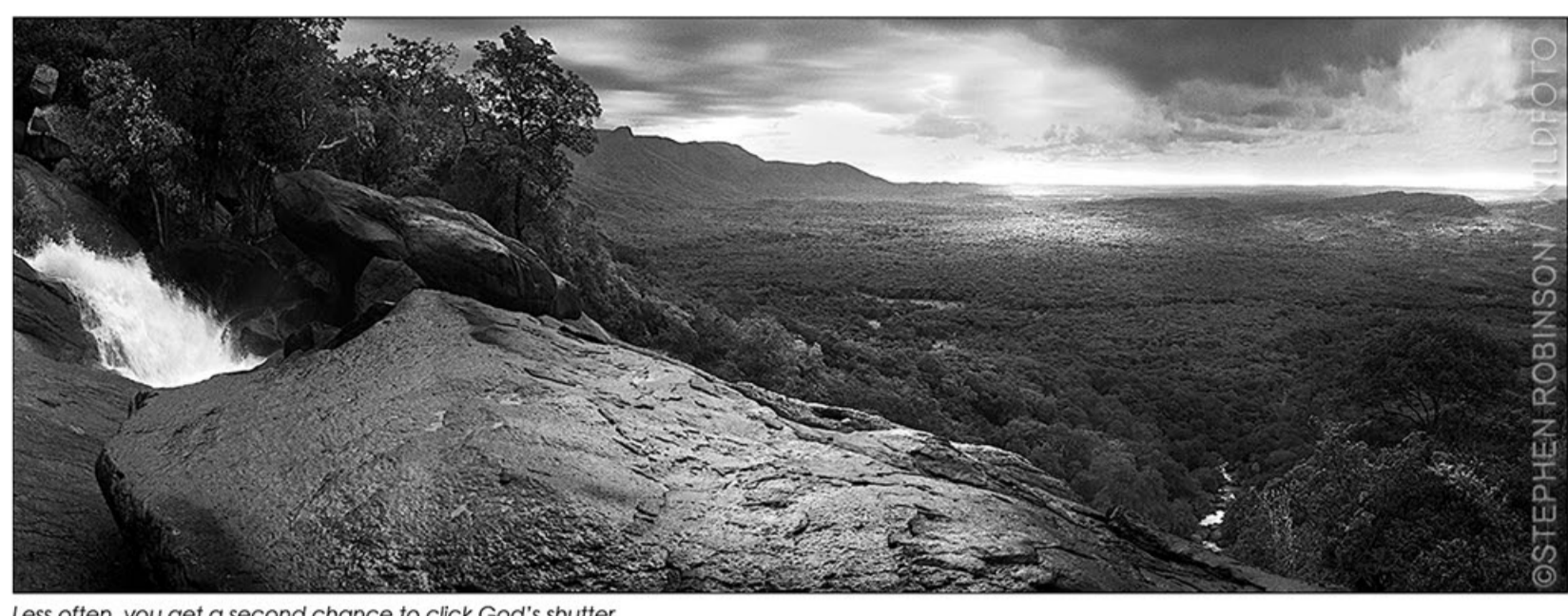
And so the Landscape in black & white is both the most absorbing subject/medium combination in photography, and perhaps the most difficult. To do it in black & white, you have to "think it" in black & white. Getting the photographic idea on to film (or digital sensor) at the location is fundamental - starting with pre-visualising the final result (the print) and working out how to record what you need for that final result.

One of the greatest landscape photographers of all time, the American Ansel Adams (1902-1984), worked only in black & white and once said: "Landscape photography is the supreme test of the photographer, and often the supreme disappointment". Yes, the disappointments are many.

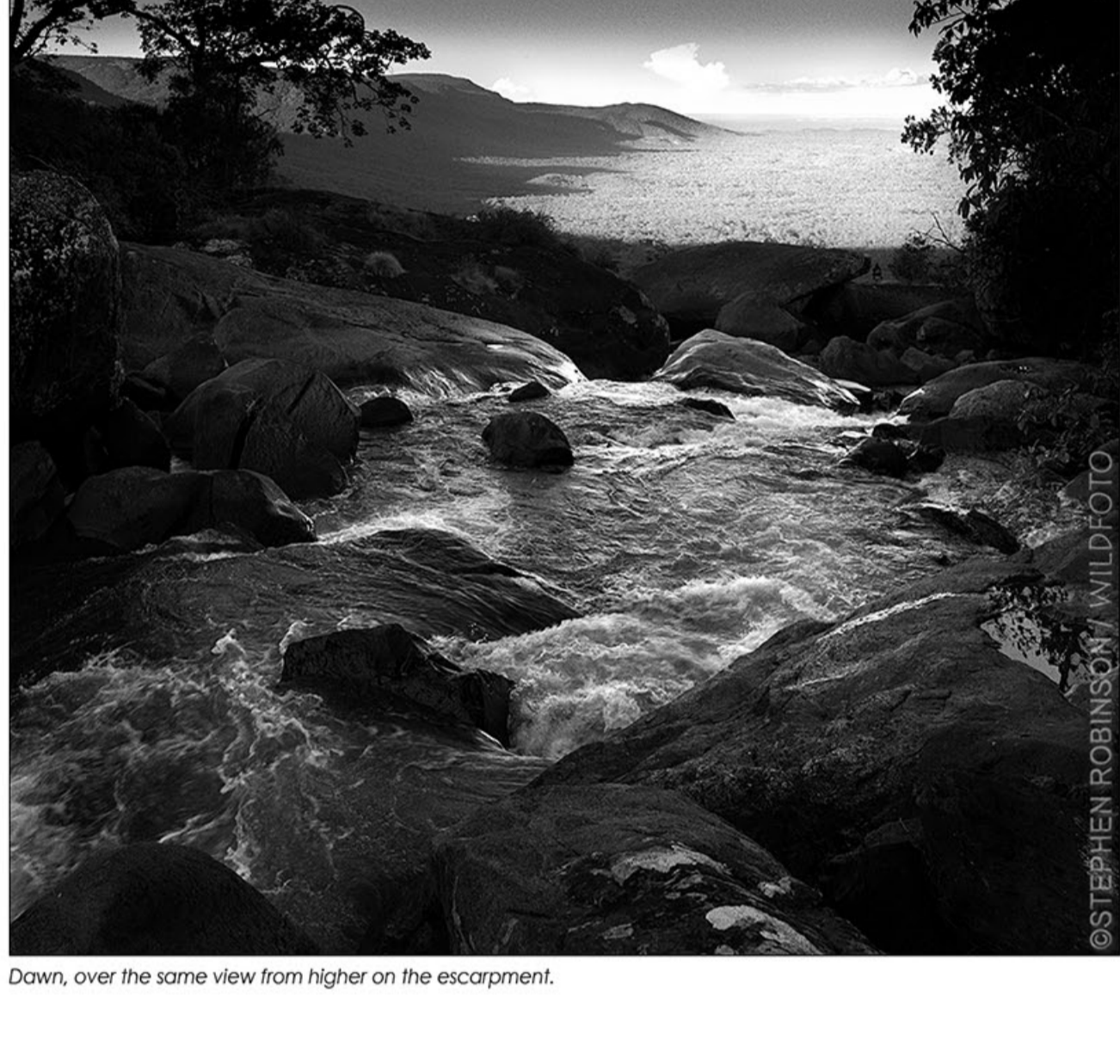
I've returned to doing more black & white work of Nature subjects. The photographs below include some landscapes from a short trip last month to Northern Zambia. I've missed out the disappointments.



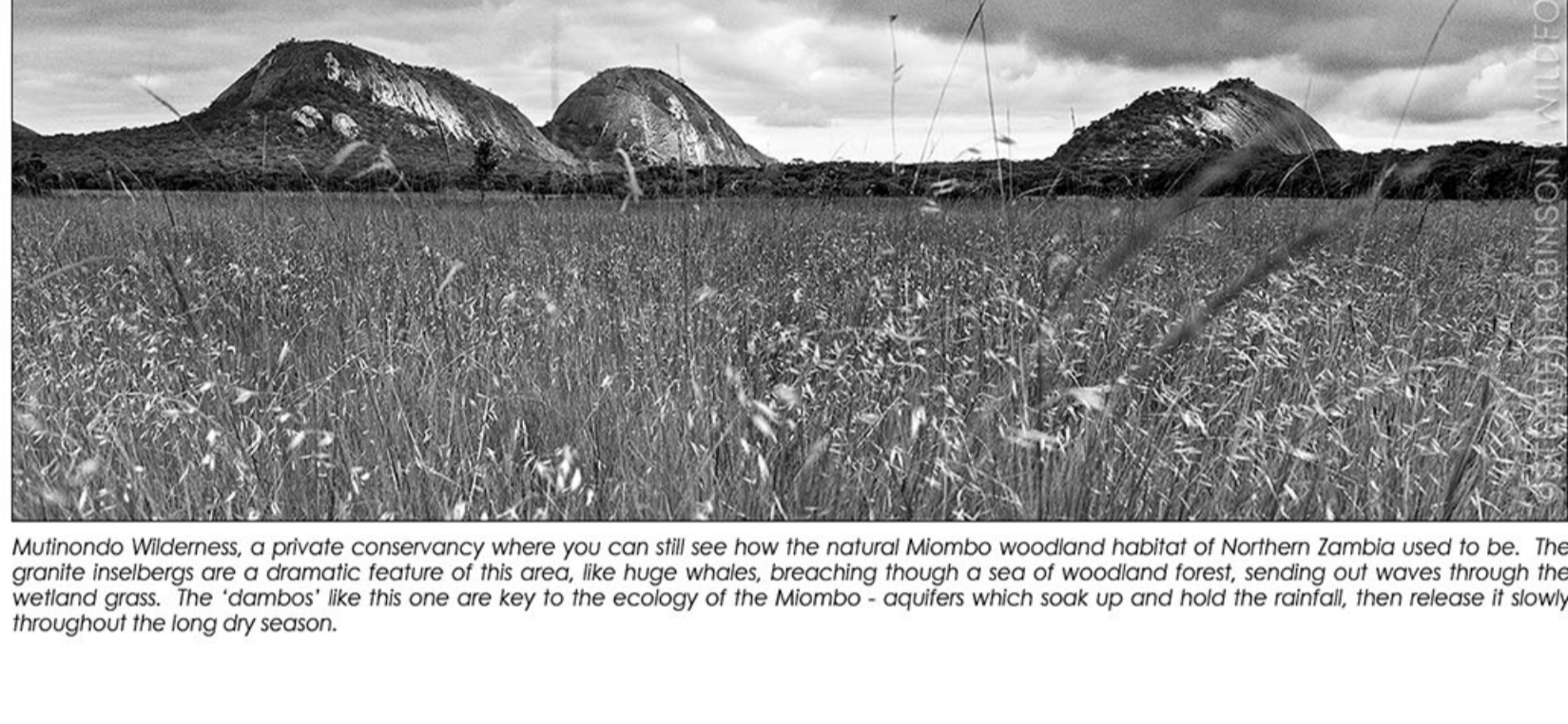
"Sometimes I arrive just when God's ready to have someone click the shutter" (Ansel Adams, 1902-1984).
 The awe-inspiring view from half-way down the remote Muchinga Escarpment, overlooking the expanse of the Luangwa Valley.



Less often, you get a second chance to click God's shutter. Ansel Adams also said: "A good photograph is knowing where to stand". Taking lots of time to try different camera positions well ahead of the arrival of the hoped-for light is a good routine to get into. Once you've done that, you can only wait... and wait.



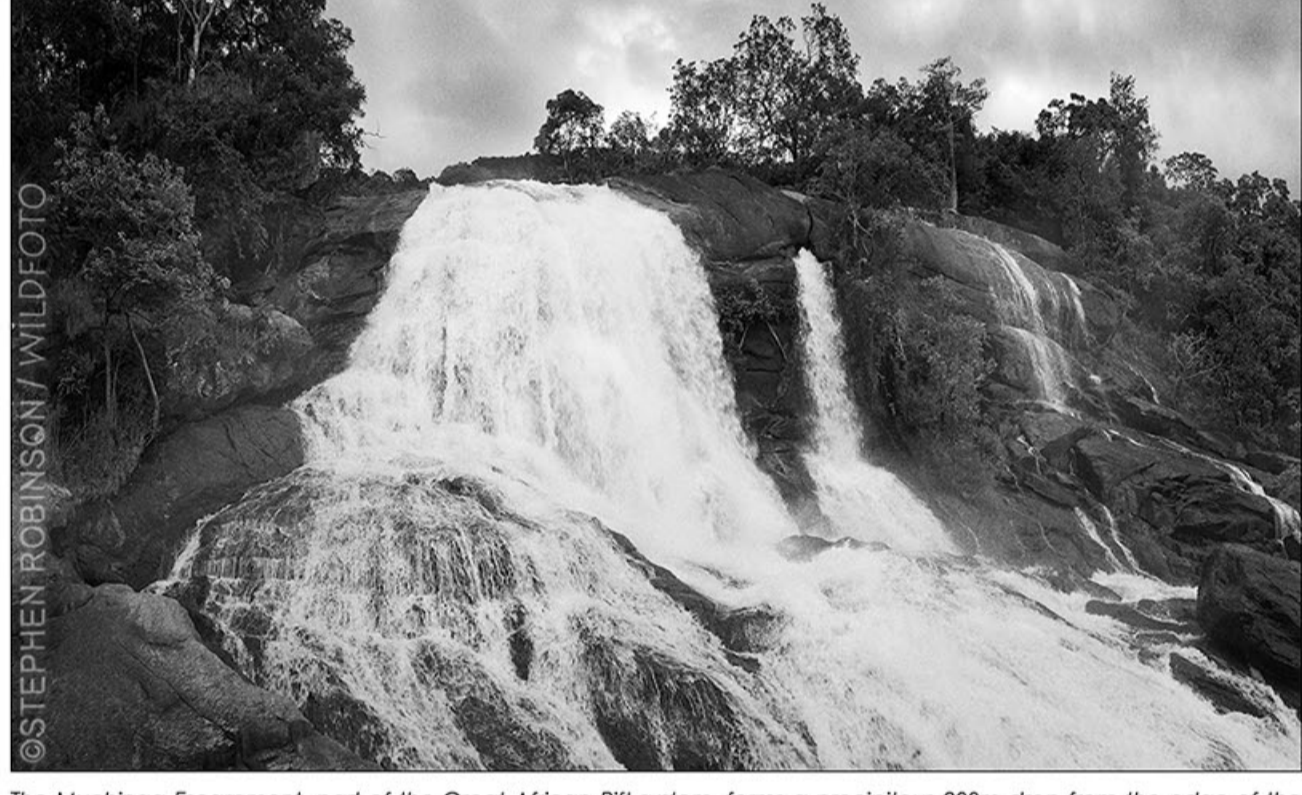
Down, over the same view from higher on the escarpment.



Mulinondo Wilderness, a private conservancy where you can still see how the natural Miombo woodland habitat of Northern Zambia used to be. The granite inselbergs are a dramatic feature of this area, like huge whales, breaching through a sea of woodland forest, sending out waves through the wetland grass. The 'dambos' like this one are key to the ecology of the Miombo - aquifers which soak up and hold the rainfall, then release it slowly throughout the long dry season.



Mulinondo Wilderness



The Muchinga Escarpment, part of the Great African Rift system, forms a precipitous 800m drop from the edge of the Central African Plateau down into the Luangwa Valley. Many rivers tumble over the escarpment's edge, forming series of dramatic waterfalls.



Slash & burn deforestation in Eastern Zambia. Without the 'distraction' of colour, the black & white photograph's ability to concentrate the eye on the core of the subject can help get the message across.



"You gotta taste the Light...when you see light like this, trust me, it's like a strawberry sundae with sprinkles" (Joe McNally, American photographer & writer). This shot of the Boiling Pot below Victoria Falls just needed some planning. I had been there the day before, but arriving just too late to get some black & white film into the camera and capture the drama of the sun slipping behind the gorge wall. So, unusually, it was just a case of returning the next day to get the shot. The conditions in the Victoria Falls & Batoka Gorge region are quite predictable and so it's a great place to practice your landscape photography skills. But the constantly changing light makes for different shots, every day, every hour, even every minute.

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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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