

19–29 June 2008



Africa:

Reflections of Leadership, Conservation and People

Amber Kamps, District Ranger
USDA Forest Service, Helena National Forest
Lincoln, MT



**The Third African Leadership Seminar:
People and Conservation**

The Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

Conducted on 21– 28 June 2008

Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

General Information:

Conservation in Africa is increasingly being challenged to realize concrete benefits for society. In line with this, it is now commonly acknowledged by policy-makers, practitioners and researchers that successful conservation on the continent is as much about engaging local communities, accommodating their interests, and promoting their quality of life as it is about managing conservation areas *per se*. Yet despite this widespread recognition of the fusion of people with conservation, precious little progress has been made with moving from understanding to practice. With a few isolated exceptions, the fact remains that decades of conservation in Africa have yet to produce management strategies that realize equitable and sustainable social benefits, particularly at the local level. This is untenable, and indeed poses a grave threat to conservation efforts, on a continent which is plagued by extreme socioeconomic deprivation. Inequalities between the wealthy and the poor and human wellbeing are key challenges over the next fifteen years.

Against this background, there is an urgent need to take stock and consider who has learned what so far, what still needs to be learned, and how we might better learn together. Equally important, is how we can begin to transform isolated local successes, lesson and ideas into more widely applicable and distinctly African policies and management solutions. What kinds of collaborations and partnerships might help us to achieve these ends? What training and research is necessary to facilitate a more people-centered approach to conservation in an African context?

Aims of the Seminar:

- Inform decision-makers in the Southern African conservation sector about new thinking in relation to people and conservation by promoting concerted movement towards more people-centered philosophies and methodologies;
- Encourage the development and introduction of policies and management practices which are sensitive to, and take account of, the critical nexus between local communities and conservation;
- Provide a basis for ensuring that research and professional training are responsive to the particular challenges faced by the African conservation sector; and
- Build a Southern African network for sustaining the dialogue which is initiated at the Seminar, both across international boundaries and between conservation leaders, researchers and training bodies.

19 June 2008 — *The Adventure Begins...*

Lincoln to Atlanta — Woke up at 3:00 a.m. and was on the road by 4:00 a.m. to catch the first leg of my trip in Missoula.

Scenes From Home



Daylight in the Blackfoot Valley



Lincoln Ranger District Office, Helena National Forest



A magazine from the plane seat pocket features traveling to Africa. One writer speaks to “*pushing your comfort zone.*” Is it coincidence that I’m reading this just now? I think not. He also writes,

“*...widespread in our society is a simple misunderstanding of Africa and what it has to offer. It’s more than just the Serengeti and the poor suffering from a horrible disease.*”

20 June 2008—The Joy of Flying

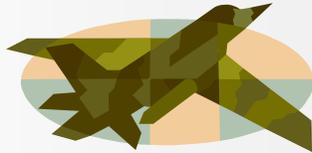
Atlanta to Johannesburg — Crazy! No time in between flights from Salt Lake City to Atlanta. I wanted to grab a sandwich and water for the trip, but no time.

I'm sitting next to a South African who just completed a Baja motorcycle race in Mexico. He is a professional with a sponsor. He proudly told me he is ranked 6th in South Africa. I can't understand him very well. Even though he speaks English, there is still a language barrier due to his accent. I remarked to him about being so famous in his country which he responded obviously proud, but I couldn't understand what he said exactly.

I didn't eat the airplane food. Since I don't know what time it is I don't know if I am hungry or not. My body rhythms are out of whack.

I'm in a middle seat which makes it difficult to get up and stretch. By mid-flight the bathroom is so gross it becomes a place to avoid. Lots of people are up and about stretching and visiting in the galley where there is a little space to move around.

Mid-flight we landed in Dakar, Senegal to refuel. In Dakar there are people who inspect the plane, every seat and each baggage. They also check our passports and boarding passes. It was not a big deal—not scary or threatening.



Johannesburg — Once at Jo-burg, which is a clean and nice airport, navigating through passport/customs was no big deal. I was greeted by a porter who helped me get to the hotel shuttle. I'm sure now, in reflection, that he saw the word "sucker" written on my forehead. First of all, I have never heard of a porter. He approached me and asked me where I was headed. I told him to a hotel, not mentioning which one. I asked him who he was and he said, "porter" along with an explanation. However, his accent was strong and I didn't understand a thing he said. It was embarrassing and I had to ask him to repeat several times. Finally I understood that he was to help me get to my final destination and he asked to carry my bags and get me to the hotel shuttle bus. I finally agreed. I was glad I had gotten help because the location of the shuttles was extremely hard to find. I didn't have small change/bills and only US dollars to give him as a tip—all I could do was a \$20 bill. Goodness. Same for another guy who helped me, but I had some time to dig and found a \$5. I've got to get some smaller bills. I wasn't prepared for this experience. A guy came up to me as I waited for the shuttle. He asked me if I was a tourist and told me I shouldn't show my wallet in the open. What are you supposed to do. What kind of city is this?

The Hotel is inside a secured gate with security officers. What is up with that? Again I ask, what kind of city is this? The room is nice. On TV is CNN with American news. If I let myself, I almost forget I'm in a foreign country.

Around 7 p.m. I called home and talked to Steve and the kids. All is well there — Steve is working, kids are playing upstairs, its mid-morning in Montana.

21 June 2008

Johannesburg to Zambia – Navigating the airport and customs again is not a problem. I even have time to sit and enjoy a small breakfast and coffee.

As I waited at the gate a man came up to me and asked if I am Amber Kamps. He introduces himself as Duncan Hay, coordinator of the seminar, and says he knew me from my picture. What picture? I never sent one, but he googled me and got one off the internet.

I was introduced to several others attending the seminar and was so happy to be tied in with them. I immediately connected with Liz from Wales and we visited until boarding the plane.

We arrived in Livingstone and were immediately transported to a lovely little place inside the city limits called Chapa Classic Lodge. Once there we were greeted by other seminar participants and had lunch together.

The seminar began with two presentations from highly placed “statesmen”. I was astounded by their passion for conservation—it was overwhelming and indescribable. Their struggles are far worse than those we face, yet they persist. They introduced the issue—should conservation pay for itself? This is one I need to ponder on. Given the context presented it seems to make sense for Africa, but I’m unsure if it would for US National Forests. This issue will be a theme for the seminar and more discussion to come in later days.

Dinner was beautifully staged outdoors under a tree whose branches forked from the base into the size of my house. The table with candles set in one long row. The setting with the night sky and warm evening was truly memorable.



22 June 2008

Lvingstone, Zambia — Interesting morning—poor coffee and corn flakes with warm milk for breakfast. This seminar is focused on providing products from the participants with real ideas and solutions to bring forward. We are going to focus on “conservation must pay” and other issues. I am surprised how all but one issue is more than a Southern Africa regional issue, but global.

Our seminar priorities to address while together, as developed by the participants are:

- Making community benefits tangible
- Sustainable financing for management agencies
- Recognize tourism is a fragile economy and a need to determine diverse means for income streams coming in for conservation rather than relying solely on tourism
- Incentives for landowners to protect public good
- Conservation includes use and management, maybe a spectrum of too
- PPC (public, private, and communities) partnerships—making them work

Seems many countries here have been applying Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) since '95 and have a lot of research too. We, the Forest Service and other natural resource/conservation entities, have much to learn from their programs.



“Awesome” was the word of the afternoon in visiting Victoria Falls. I got soaked, but it was worth it. This is one of the seven wonders of the world.



Victoria Falls

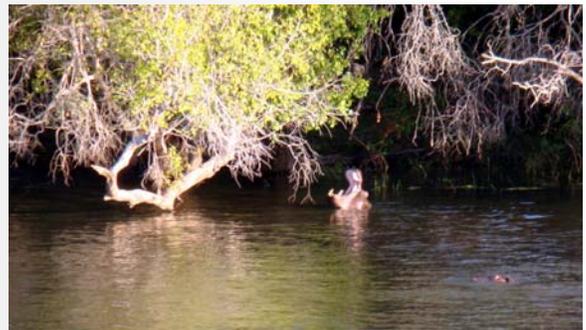




We then took a trip on the Zambezi River on a river boat where we were addressed by the Minister of Tourism, Environment, and Natural Resources for the Zambian government. I sat next to the Director of Natural Resources who I could not understand very well and did a lot of smiling and laughing. He commented about our chief being a female and how interesting that is to him.

On the river we saw hippos — lots of hippos. Also saw a crocodile and a bush buck.

Hippos are quite aggressive while in the water and will turn over a boat if they get close. They are also known to kill people on shore.





Dinner was at an African restaurant with dark lighting and dancers. Good food and atmosphere.



23 June 2008

Lvingstone, Zambia to Chobe National Park, Botswana — Woke up and exercised early. They eat “English breakfast” here with cereal first (corn flakes and warm whole milk) and then a full breakfast. Toast too, but white bread.

After presentations this morning we headed off to Botswana. We drove through the countryside and saw several villages as we passed. These villages look poor and are just like you see on TV and imagine in your mind when you think of Africa.



At the border we had to get our passport stamped, which was located in a small building in the most round about way to get to amongst other dilapidated buildings which I have no idea what are used for. If it wasn't daylight, this place would be frightening. People everywhere including children. Trash is littered everywhere. It's so strange to be in the minority racially, its not a negative but it is obvious to me for the first time in my life. I'm treated differently, but am being stared at unlike I'm used to.

We were delivered across the border by boats across the Zambezi River. On the Botswana side same thing, people everywhere. There were cargo/semi-trucks backed up for 5 miles or more. Locals say it can take up to two weeks to get transport on the ferry across the border. These are veins in African society where AIDS is prevalent both drivers and the women who entertain the drivers bring AIDS back to their communities.



We drove forever and I was so hungry for lunch. However, we got into animals right away. Our transport was Peter, his staff with Safari and Guide Services, and three open sided land rovers.

Amazing—elephants, giraffe, kudu, and impala. Chobe National Park apparently is more rich with animals than even the locals are used to. I feel we are getting the royal treatment. The camp is so nice, much like our outfitter camps in the Scapegoat Wilderness. The bed I'm sleeping in is so cozy and comfortable I just melted in it. I want to take it home with me.



Can't walk far from camp, only to the bathroom. The guide has instructed us to go to the bathroom in pairs, especially at night with "torches" (that's what they call flashlights). Although we are out in the open bush, I feel claustrophobic.



I really love the sleekness and coloring of the impala. They have beautiful eyes. Also, I didn't know how much I liked giraffes.



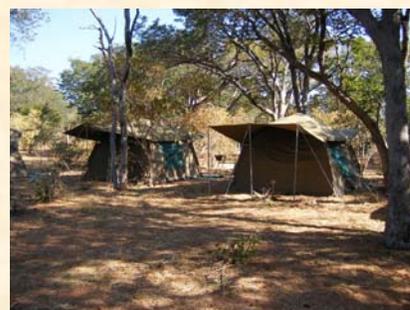
24 June 2008

Chobe National Park— I forgot till I went to bed that I was to give my presentation the next day so I laid awake preparing my presentation in my head. The bush was particularly noisy with animal sounds making me wonder what is out there. There was a huge elephant trumpet in the middle of the night. So loud and so close that it was all I could do to not sit up in my bed and shriek. But, I was confident in the abilities of our guides who would ensure the elephants wouldn't come into camp and flatten me and my tent.

I feared my presentation would fall flat because what I deal with in collaboration and issues are beyond where Africans are at—a different level on Maslow's hierarchy. Sure enough my presentation went over well. What was surprising was the standing ovation I received afterward. People said it was inspiring and brought out leadership/human side of conservation. I never in my wildest dreams would have imagined myself speaking in the middle of the African bush about winter travel planning collaboration, the Children's Forest, and community relationships in resource management. I passed out pictures I had printed to help those visualize the setting that I work in because there was no electricity for a powerpoint. I didn't come home with any pictures as participants asked to keep them. They were intrigued with the pictures of snow, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, wildlife, and landscapes.



I'm quite addicted to their "biscuit" or "rusk". Its really good with coffee. In fact, it's the only way to get the coffee down. Coffee everywhere I've been in Africa so far is instant with chicory root.



We had a leisurely lunch and then a game drive. The drive was great with animals—so many species and so many numbers. It's nothing to look out at a landscape and see impalas in the foreground, giraffes in the middle ground, and elephants in the background—all within a sight distance of three or four miles.

There are deep sandy soils here. It's a wonder anything grows. The camp with our impacts is just decimated.

24 June 2008, con't

The “man of the bush” as I call him, Peter our guide (standing), is a living/breathing relic of the bush. He is so passionate about the animals and the land. He is almost completely in-sync with nature.



Peter visited with us about his philosophy on the elephant numbers in Botswana. People and government feel the population is too large as they are killing trees creating some areas of devastation and dust bowls. Human and elephant conflicts are also quite high. I haven't seen it look so bad in places we've visited but I know my eye is different than those locally. One answer is the culling of the elephants, yet the logistics of this is unbelievable. These animals are so large and prescribing 1000/year to cull is unreal to me. Peter doesn't think culling is the answer. He feels the population will balance themselves naturally when it is time for the numbers to drop. He also thinks the elephants have a natural migration pattern they aren't using anymore. Angola has habitat, yet unused. Peter feels governments could create a protected corridor to allow passage and this is the best way to alleviate the elephant population problem.

Thing is, there may be limited scientific evidence there is a population problem. It appears the government does not know a current population estimate nor an idea of carrying capacity or historic range/population levels. After a heavy discussion I think we all agreed there was a lot of data gaps, more scientific research was needed, and too much unknown to make a decision as big as culling 1000 per year.



24 June 2008, con't



Last night in the bush there had been a lion close by. There are also hyenas near too. People say to me, “Did you hear the such and such?”. I just laugh—like I’m supposed to know the sounds of the bush.

Ahhh, there is nothing like taking a bucket shower in the bush, with just a tarp wall between you and the wild animals.

I think there is something to be said about being able to say you’ve camped in the African bush. Most people who come here don’t experience the bush in this way. I’m glad to have had this opportunity.

Conversations around the fire have been fun. People are fascinated by me talking about my job, especially having been a firefighter.

I’ve tried to draw out and spend some quality one-on-one time with everyone. It hasn’t been easy given the quiet nature of a few. Peter seeks me out to visit. We have good chats about comparisons between the bush and the “Bob”, the African honey badger and our badger, and many other things.

25 June 2008

We went for a game drive at daylight. One group saw a leopard in a tree and got photographs, but not my group. I was so bummed. There isn't hardly any animal activity at daylight which is so opposite our world. Its like its too cold and too early for anything to be out yet..

This afternoon's presentations were eye opening on HIV/AIDS. What a perspective this gives to the priorities of these countries. This information and situation for me to comprehend is just mind blowing.

How is conservation to succeed given the socio-economic issues on this continent? Given this info, really makes it clear that conservation must pay here. Again, the US has it easier because we are not at this point, yet. I think this is the biggest take home message professionally—we should be thankful that although management conditions are challenging, it could be so much worse.



26 June 2008

This morning I facilitated a session on the role of research and education in conservation. Now I can say I've given a presentation and facilitated a meeting in the African wilderness.

After tea we headed to Ksane at the Botswana border to Namibia and Impillia Island. We had to take boats to the Island to the posh lodge we stayed at. The lodge was just like a dream vacation spot—a place to slow-down and drink it all in, yet get utterly spoiled. Unfortunately we didn't get to do that as we were so busy.



After eating lunch we went on a tour of the Island. It's quaint and so are the people. My initial reaction after visiting one village was how sad. They are so poor and live in the dirt. The ground is somewhat littered with garbage. Their living quarters are mud, wood, and thatch huts. When we arrived the children were playing a game with empty crushed pop cans and a lid off a metal toilet. The women gathered around and laid out baskets, jewelry, and wooden animals. Once they did, the children all joined them and everyone was quiet. Some individuals in our group spoke the native tribal language and conversed. A little girl wiggled/danced around. She couldn't keep her skirt down and I noticed she didn't have any underwear on. A little boy beside me was so cute. I had to talk to him and asked him his name. He answered me even though I don't know what he said. Then I asked him how old he was and he replied, "Five.". I told him I had a little girl who was five. He said a few other things, but I didn't understand.

26 June 2008, con't

So these people live a simple life. They grow all their own food—fruit, veggies, grain/corn, have goats and cows, and fish regularly. They may be poor, but not hungry. No one looked malnourished here.

The lodges on the island employ many natives, which is how the villagers have money for other things they need. This lodge alone employs 40. Our lodge guide, Anton, speaks fluent English and was born and raised on the island. He is strapping, well dressed, and you'd never believe he lives in a village such as these.

We visited the island clinic, which is huge. It is bigger than the one in Lincoln, Montana by far. Today was the day islanders are to go in for weekly check-ups and tests. This is for HIV/AIDS.

Next was their school. The headmaster came out to visit. School is kindergarten through 7th grade and has a total of 218 students. I thought this was a lot of school aged children for a total island population of 800.



26 June 2008, con't

Its been bothering me since I got here so I finally asked a black native Namibian in our seminar, “How does it make you feel knowing and seeing your countrymen living like this, so poor?”. She said she doesn't think of it like that. She doesn't consider them poor because they have plenty to eat. She said the country subsidizes for boats, tractors, and other things they need. She said its not that hard for the men to get jobs if they have initiative. So rural communities she says are doing well and these people are better off here. Where her concern lies is when they move to the city and try to make it or just poor families growing up there. They are going hungry and struggling for survival. The government doesn't help them in the cities. I find this response very interesting.

The government does provide a lot in Africa, which isn't good from my standpoint, but I understand why.



The day ended with some seminar work, supper, and drinks. We all are sure enjoying the food here, too much! We figure it costs \$300 USD per night per person to stay here which includes food, guided fishing trips, and boat rides .

We are staying in “tents” yet they are on concrete foundations and completely enclosed. It feels like a cottage or cabin. There is no electricity here or on the entire island so everything is run off battery and generators (which you never hear). The owners and managers are very good about special touches. Service here is exceptional. It's been fun and a nice way to end the trip.

27 June 2008

Today we did a lot of work in the a.m. We refined the top issues to take from the seminar and assign action items to.

I was able to make a phone call to Steve last night, my first real phone call since I left Johannesburg. I haven't had cell coverage in Zambia, Botswana, or in Namibia. I've had to borrow others cell phones just to text a message to Steve to let him know I'm still alive every third day. Everything there is going great. I knew they'd be great and Steve did too. That's what we as parents want, kids who are independent and can be without their parents for a period of time.

This afternoon we jumped on to the lodge's river boat. It was like being on a yacht. Lunch was spectacular and dessert too. I really like butternut squash, who knew? I really like maize meal too, but we haven't had that since we left Zambia.

The boat trip was social and festive. A little cold too with the wind on us. So I must have stayed in one spot for several hours soaking in the sun, views, and wildlife.

The owner of the lodge visited with us for an hour or so about the conservancy, challenges on the border, need for a National Park on the Namibia side, community service, and making a business in tourism here.

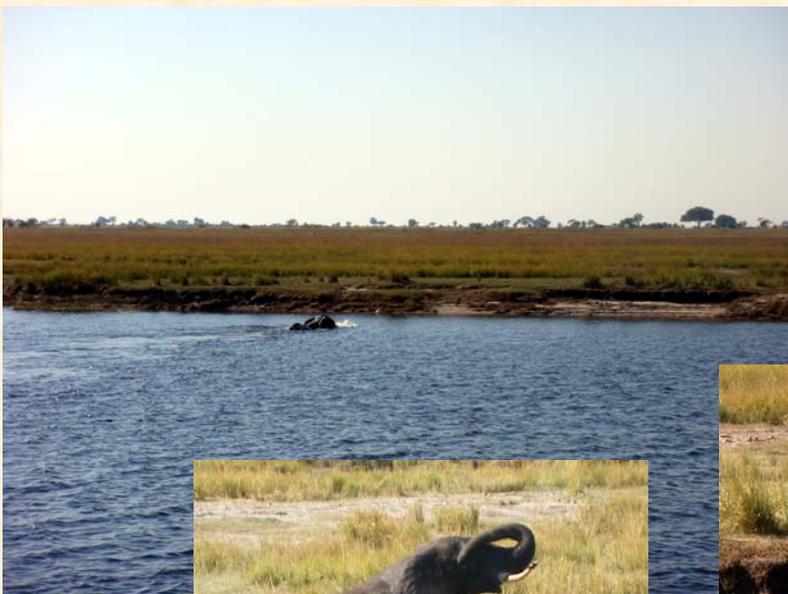


27 June 2008, con't



We saw a single female lion on a small island, which I was fascinated with.

On a hillside within the National Park we actually saw a pride of lions. A rare thing to see. Also saw huge alligators, hippos, an elephant swim the river, and elephants hanging out at a salt lick. Exceptional game viewing.



What a way to spend my last night in Africa—truly spectacular and inspiring. We ended the evening with another walk on the island—Liz and I power walked and had a nice visit. Duncan and Rob wrapped up our seminar before supper tonight and then we all enjoyed the evening of drinks and amazing food, even though not one of us was hungry.

28 June 2008

Off and running by 7:30 a.m. from the lodge. Today is interesting as we have to stop at customs so many times: Impallia Island, Botswana twice, and Zambia twice.

After getting through security and customs I enjoyed several hours of shopping and walking at the Jo-Burg airport. On the flight home I fly to Paris with a layover and then straight to Salt Lake City.

Flying Air France was another cultural experience. The first drink service didn't offer coffee, just alcohol and cold drinks. I think the stewardess sassed me about ordering coffee. I'm unsure because I couldn't understand her English with such a strong French accent. The in-flight supper was OK, but what was interesting was a huge basket of bread they carried around to pass out. They offered bread with every meal, yogurt too. A French thing.

Flying over Paris was nice. There are great mountains in France. Paris has country sides with obvious villages scattered about. Getting closer to Paris I could see the architecture within the villages—just like you see in the movies. We didn't fly over the city. Overall, Paris was either overcast and grey or was polluted—not pretty from a distance.

The airport is modern, but ugly. No real eatery anywhere except small offerings of bread and coffee to buy. Otherwise there were a lot of very expensive shops, but I visited each one even though they were all high end and with ridiculous merchandise I couldn't imagine anyone buying. I can say I've been shopping in Paris now.

I made time to wash up and change clothes too. Downed three cups of coffee which I had to pay for with my credit card because I didn't have any euros. I have no idea how much I paid for each cup. It will be interesting to find out when the bill comes.

On the flight from Paris to Salt Lake City every one of the 6 stewards/ess were at least over 60 years of age. I've never seen anything like it. It's great and refreshing.

Our flight path allowed us to pass over the top of both Iceland and Greenland. A rare opportunity and we had nice views of both.



Summary of Thoughts – 29 June 2008

Now that I'm back, here are a few thoughts that I feel summarize my trip:

- Overall, African resource professionals are ahead of the Forest Service in their ways of organizing conservation on private land and management of wildlife. Examples include: CBNRM, conservancies, and National Parks/Wildlife Reserves that allow for villages to reside within.
- Some countries are quite advanced in their thinking/planning in climate change. The Minister from the Zambian government told us to not re-write the book as they already have addressed this issue and have a plan. I brought back their report on this matter to review.
- They are asking the right questions about the future of conservation, particularly given the continents issues in socio-economics, global tourism, uses to be allowed within conservation areas, how conservation should pay for itself, research needs, and the importance of conservation education.
- The African resource professionals I worked with are very well educated, passionate, and creative thinkers. Politicians, policy makers, decision makers, and communities don't always have a good grasp of resource management issues; but do have a basic level of understanding and the context to put it in.
- It appears to me Africans have a deep culture of family, yet these families are being ripped apart by the 30% of the population with HIV/AIDS infection.
- Despite other places in Africa, this zone can produce crops, timber, and wildlife.
- Corruption is far reaching. Generally this is apparent in business, mining, and politics.
- Zimbabwe is a tremendous stress on the zone and possibly the continent. South Africa too is having political problems resulting in social tension (they have a name for it, "xenophobia"). This will likely get worse.
- We take food security for granted in the US. In Africa it is a rural and growing urban problem with infrastructure not keeping up and urban poverty increasing.

And personally?

- I feel like I hit the jackpot, 7 days on the continent and hit one of, if not the richest transfrontier zone in terms of diversity and sites to behold.
- A well organized trip with real issues to resolve and report back to various governments.
- The seminar provided a lot of opportunities for me as a representative of the Forest Service to share experiences and knowledge. This was rewarding.
- A few years ago Joel Holtrip addressed the Region 1 Rangers about his perspective of what leadership qualities Rangers need to have. One of these items was to have a global perspective and understand the world context which we work in. I don't think I truly came into this broader perspective until now.
- I'm glad I went, yet I don't feel I need to go again. This trip was fulfilling in so many ways.
- How many people can say they tent camped in the African bush? Or say they saw a pride of lions? Oh yeah!
- Leaders are the voice of the disempowered. This is a huge responsibility and its being passionate/compassionate/dispassionate. If we care about people and give them room to grow, all will succeed.

Summary of Thoughts 29 June 2008

What will I share with my children?

- My photos and what I learned about the various animals
- How poor people are in other parts of the world, how they live
- School I visited and in some areas kids only have the option to go to school through the 7th grade like the five year old little boy in the village I visited
- What camping out in the bush was like sleeping with lions, leopards, and hyenas nearby
- The photos I shared with seminar participants of them and our home and the response people gave me about how beautiful my children are
- Giraffes were my favorite animal
- Names of the countries I visited
- Generalizations about HIV/AIDS as I share with them the red/white bracelets that were given to us made by the Zulu women for AIDS awareness. Day orphanages where children go to during the day, yet go home at night to no adults in the household.
- What we ate and how different that is from us
- Stress with them whenever the moment arises about how fortunate we are to live where we do, have a nice home and school, and how important our family is.
- What it is to be a leader and why this is important.



Take Home Message: Social health is Essential to Conservation

Facts:

- 50% of South Africans live with less than \$1 per day
- Food security globally is not about lack of supply but lack of availability to access
- Worldwide there is declining levels of malnourishment, including now the US.

The effects to conservation is that conservation is secondary to the social health issues. Funding won't be available for conservation until there are improvements. Given this, conservation must pay for itself. In fact given this context, this pushes conservationists to show/realize how conservation leads to poverty alleviation and social health. One example is empowering people in business which leads to social empowerment and capacity building in business knowledge and skills.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” Nelson Mandela

If education is an investment in the future and conservation is an investment in a more sustainable future, then the amount we are willing to invest is a reflection of our recognition of this.

