

Dahlia Cassel

## Elephant Safari

My husband and I visited South Africa recently, to visit his ageing mother. We also hoped to see some of the country's *famous wildlife*.

On a side trip, we headed north from Johannesburg to Botswana and the Chobe National Park, home to approximately 30,000 elephants. Chobe has a river running through it, the Chobe, which supports a large variety of animals. In the two days it took to get there, we were caught in a thunderstorm like none I'd ever experienced—a lot more exciting than the drizzle/showers/rain we get here in BC.

We arrived in late afternoon and settled into our "Rondavel"—a round thatched-roof hut. Early next morning, we embarked on our first guided game-ride, looking for our favourite animal. You'd think that of 30,000 elephants, we would see at least one? None! It seems that because of the rain over the past month, the elephants had scattered, not needing to congregate around their source of water, the river.

We were very disappointed, but the locals encouraged us to try again later in the day. We did . . . No elephants. Next morning, we went out again. Still no elephants! Since each of these game rides was *three hours long*, we had already invested nine hours in our quest. (We *did* see lions, hyenas, various types of deer, mongoose, crocodiles, and hippos.)

That afternoon, in one final attempt to see an elephant, we rented a boat. Our guide took us miles up the river, to every inlet. Not one elephant in sight. After three hours, we asked him to take us back, convinced there *were* no elephants in Chobe!

Five minutes before we were to reach our lodge, just as the guide turned a bend in the river—lo and behold—we saw a family of eight elephants, including two babies, lumbering down to the river. We were excited! The guide stopped the boat, and we all sat watching them. A few minutes later, another elephant family arrived, greeting the others by rubbing trunks and showing the body language elephants exhibit when saying Hello.

Soon another family came down, and another and another. There must have been 80 elephants altogether, having a beach party—some were in the water, some played in mud pools, while others stood guard. All were having a good time. Then, the party ended as suddenly as it had begun.

The experience left us satisfied; we had seen our elephants, and we felt privileged to have witnessed the event! ▲

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