

BOOK NOTES

Guest writers coming to DIVA

DIVA's New Poetry Series features guest writers Jared Stanley, David Abel and Cecilia Hagen at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday.

The series is hosted by Tim Shaner and meets at DIVA, 280 W. Broadway.

Stanley is the author of "The Weeds," "Book Made of Forest" and four chapbooks, including "How the Desert Did Me In." He is a member of the art collective Unmanned Minerals and a co-editor of Mrs. Maybe. He lives in Reno, Nev.

Abel's three new books are "Float," a full-length collection of collage texts (Chax Press); "Tether," a chapbook of poems (Bare Bone Books); and "Carrier," a sequence of "hyper-graphic" visual works (c.l.).

Hagen is the author of "Entering" (Airlie Press, 2011) and of two chapbooks, "Fringe Living" (26 Books Press) and "Among Others" (Traprock Books).

Her poetry, reviews and nonfiction have been published by Rolling Stone, Prairie Schooner, Poet & Critic, Northwest Review, Caffeine Destiny, Blood Orange Review, Cream City Review and many other publications.

Walking the walk on safari in Zambia

Seeing animals on foot is a more natural way of experiencing wild Africa

By ANNE COOKE McClatchy-Tribune News Service

MFUWE, Zambia — We're nodding off in our tent, pitched under a tree, when the crunching and gnashing begin.

It's the hippos again, a half-dozen massive beasts climbing up from the Luangwa River for their nightly feed. During September, a hot, dry month here at Zebra Plains Camp, in northeast Zambia, the tree's foot-long fruit hang low, an irresistible meal for diners with gaping jaws and fist-size grinders.

Silence falls as the hippos lumber away. For a moment we doze — well wine and dined after a long day tramping through the bush. Then the bushes rustle and the elephants arrive, treading gently to avoid our plastic ground cloth and canvas patio chairs. Amazed at how quietly those huge feet step, we peer out through our screened windows, spotting a shifting shadow reaching for the top branches.

I fall asleep wondering who decided to pitch the tent under a sausage tree. Intentional, perhaps, or a prank, to give the dudes a thrill? But Garth Hovell, manager at Zebra Plains, a walking safari camp in the most remote sector of the South Luangwa National Park, shakes his head. "No way," he says. With 20 years' of bush experience, Hovell, head naturalist for Sanctuary Retreats' five Zambian lodges, says that here in the bush, where we're the intruders, safety is Rule One.



STEVE HAGGERTY/McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Thornicroft giraffes munch on leaves in Zambia.

The Luangwa River, pristine and undammed, is the reason we — and the wildlife — are here at Zebra Plains, near the national park's northern border.

From elephants to antelope, lions to leopards and crocodiles to hippos, all flourish within this vast wildlife refuge.

Like them, your feet will be the only transport available during your stay at Zebra Plains, a reminder that hiking boots are in order. Except for the three-hour drive from the Mfuwe airport — and the return when you leave — walking will take you across the plains, along the river bank and to the campfire for appetizers and a sundowner.

Walking-only safari camps, like Zebra Plains, are probably this decade's biggest news in African safaris — and ironically, the oldest. The first Europeans to venture deep into the Dark Continent — glory-seeking adventurers, greedy miners and relentless missionar-

ies — expected to walk. Even after trucks and jeeps arrived, hunters and photographers bunked in tents, stalked their quarry on foot and thrilled to the charge of angry lions.

The first guest-organized walking camp was founded south of Zebra Plains in 1961 by Norman Carr, a former ranger and lifelong environmentalist. Since then, hard-core walking camps have become Zambia's signature.

Most safari lodges are commercial enterprises, of course, relying on a half-dozen off-road vehicles and guides who radio big animal sightings from guide to guide.

"That's not Zebra Plains," said Hovell. "We're designed for people who've been on safari before but are tired of sitting in a vehicle. Curious people who want to get away from exhaust fumes and down on the ground."

As in all game lodges, our days began at 6 a.m. while the

air was cool and the animals active. On day one we headed for a distant loop of the Chibembe River, led by Mathews, the camp's armed guard, rifle loaded and at the ready. Guide Rabson Banda, walking shotgun, kept us bunched up tight. Predators like to pick on stragglers, he told us with a grin.

Here and there groups of tiny puku grazed calmly, lifting their heads to watch us pass. Three giraffe and sable antelope were more wary, moving into a grove of mopane trees. After an hour walking, stopping to identify plants and tell-tale spoor, Mathews and Hovell pulled up short and bent over to inspect a lion track. With a zing of fear, we stood still and peered left and right until Hovell spied two lionesses at 50 yards, half hidden in deep grass. For a long minute they stared at us, unmoving, and then they were gone, fleeing the other way.

Each day followed a similar pattern. Morning game drives lasted from 6-11 a.m. followed by lunch and down time for a shower, journal notations or photo downloads. From 4-6 p.m., we set out again, now searching for the elephant family approaching the river, or to watch the hippos grunt and growl, jockeying for position.

At twilight we gathered around the campfire for a glass of wine, some surprisingly appealing dishes and an evening of stories and stars. Escorted back to our tent by a game-wise guide with a flashlight (sometimes Isaac our porter and guard, and sometimes Milemia or Rabson) — we took a warm shower, crawled under the mosquito netting onto a first-class mattress and fell asleep to the hippo chorus.

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