

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY'S HISTORICAL SERIES. EPISODE 3: THE MANA POOLS/SAPI/CHEWORE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

SEPTEMBER 2021

In 2022, The Zambezi Society (Zamsoc) celebrates 40 years of conserving the precious wilderness and wildlife resources of the Zambezi River.

As a lead-up to this important milestone in our history, our series of historical features highlights significant events and conservation achievements that we're proud of, spanning the four decades since the Society's formation in 1982. We are sharing these on our Social Media Instagram and Facebook platforms, with videos on You Tube, on our website and in a special Historical Series of Bulletin mailouts.

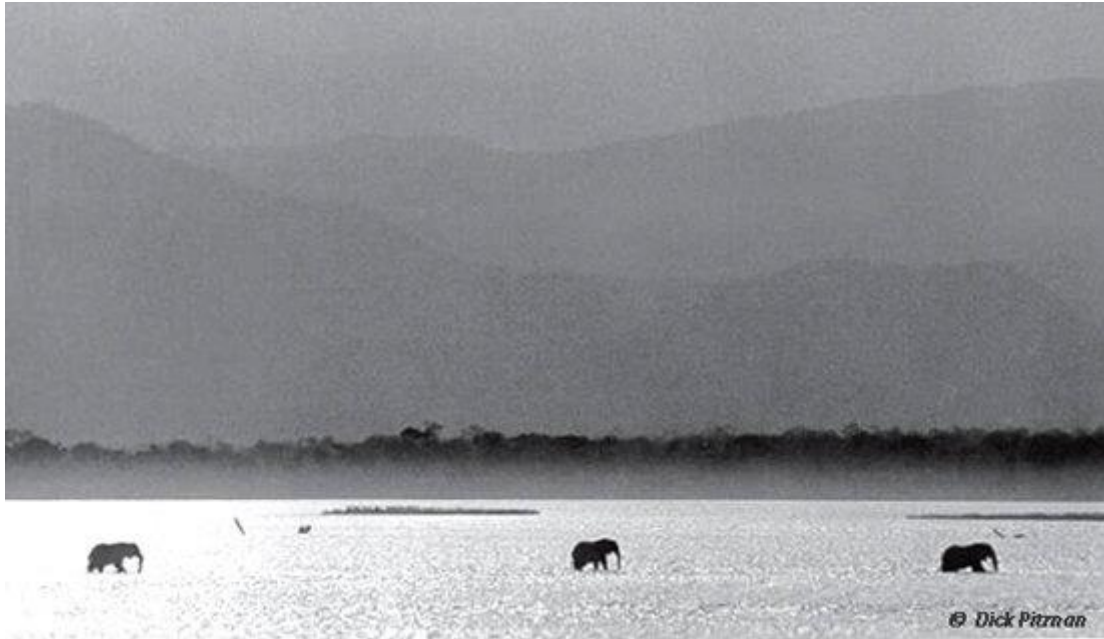
EPISODE 3: THE MANA/SAPI/CHEWORE WORLD HERITAGE SITE



Map showing the extent and location of the Mana Pools/Sapi/Chewore World Heritage Site

In the wake of the Mupata Gorge dam controversy (that would have flooded a large section of the Zambezi Valley including Mana Pools), the newly-founded Zambezi Society was focused strongly on advocacy designed to avert this, or any other, future threat to the biological integrity of Mana Pools and the Middle Zambezi Valley. A decade previously, in 1972, the World Heritage Convention had established the World Heritage Site mechanism, a listing of areas considered to be of global conservation importance because of their outstanding natural values. The Society therefore approached Zimbabwe's then Department of National Parks to draft a suitable application, and a Zambezi Society team led by Raoul du Toit and Robyn Haney wrote the proposed application, which included the Mana Pools National Park and the adjacent Sapi and Chewore Safari Areas.

The application was approved and submitted to UNESCO by the Department. In 1984, UNESCO granted World Heritage Site status for this section of the Zambezi Valley - a combined area of 676,600 ha (6,766 sq kms) which included Mana Pools National Park, Sapi Safari Area and Chewore Safari Area to be known, collectively as the Mana Pools/Sapi/Chewore World Heritage Site.



Historical image of The Zambezi River at Mana Pools taken in the early 1980s at the time of the application to UNESCO for World Heritage Site status

At that time, the area was a refuge for the black rhinoceros and other animal, plant and bird species which were already becoming endangered in Africa. This proved to be one of the major criteria for the success of the World Heritage Site application. Other criteria were: the outstanding wildlife spectacle of a large number of animals congregating annually in the riparian parkland along the Zambezi River; the ecological importance of seasonal movements of large mammals within the valley; and the geologically-interesting shifting sandbank environment which presents a good example of erosion and deposition by a large seasonal river (despite changes in river flow due to the Kariba Dam), and includes a clear pattern of plant succession on its alluvial deposits.

World Heritage Site listings are subjected to regular reviews, and although the subsequent local extinction of black rhinoceros represented a serious threat, the area's other biological and geological values have enabled the Middle Zambezi Valley to retain its World Heritage listing to the present day.

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