

## How Tongabezi began

I came out to Zambia in 1986, and my excuse to come out was that I was selling Microlights, and instructing people to fly them. I had a great time flying around Zambia, but it was not going to take me far long term.

I was introduced to Will by mutual friends in 1987, and we started hatching plans to run safaris in Zambia.

The same year I came across the River Club site, then owned by a Mrs. De Necludoff. I tried buying this, with a view to Will and I developing it into a lodge. Long and protracted negotiations over 6 months fell through in the end, as Mrs. D kept changing her mind. At the same time Will and I were trying to locate the owner of the current Tongabezi site, as we wanted to purchase both properties.

We found the owner, a retired bank manager, who was living on a farm outside Lusaka, and went to see him with an offer, which he promptly accepted.

This was in 1988. It then took 18 months for us to be granted title of the land - there was an unofficial ruling in government that non Zambians could not buy land on any of Zambia's borders.

While waiting for the title transfer, we started clearing the land, put in the fence, and started putting up 5 tented chalets and digging the swimming pool.

Will was the main designer; he had a very artistic streak. One of his pet hates was straight lines and square buildings, and there are not too many of those around at Tongabezi...

We built the 5 chalets in 1990, and opened in June. The following year we decided to build a Honeymoon House, which was completed in 1991. These were followed by the Tree House, Bird House and Dog House.

We had a good market in Zimbabwe to feed off, and from 1992 through to 1999 Zim really was booming. For most of this time we were the only lodge on the Zambezi on either side, and this gave us a very competitive edge.

In 1992 we decided to build a bush camp on an island, and identified Sindabezi (we named it) as the nicest island in the area, with the best aspect, overlooking the Victoria Falls National Park in Zimbabwe. We had a bit of an issue with the international border, but have letters from both the Zimbabwean and the Zambian Surveyor Generals confirming that Sindabezi is indeed a Zambian Island.

Initially Sindabezi was very basic with sand floors in the rooms, but over the years we have gradually upgraded the rooms.

Additionally we then gained the lease for Livingstone Island in 1992, and initially had a small tented camp on the island which we mainly used for accommodation at the end of a 2 night canoeing trip. The following morning we would then walk the guests off the island. Even when we started the lunches in 1993, we would still walk the guests on and off, carrying lunch with us in cool boxes. Over the years this has been developed and we no longer offer accommodation on the island rather 5 visits a day with food and drinks supplied and prepared in a small bush kitchen.

Will died in a tragic car accident in June 1997. He was very much pivotal to the style and success of Tongabezi, and the business took a big knock in his absence.

In recent years developments are being made at Tongabezi and Sindabezi to improve the quality of the product - rooms, public areas and gardens - and of course quality of service with extensive training of all departments.

Our core emphasis from 2008 is to go as green as possible. We aim to reduce our environmental footprint through advanced grey water recycling, organic garden produce, almost 0% charcoal usage and have rebuilt Sindabezi to

Please be assured that every effort is being made to ensure 100% guest (and of course agent) satisfaction.

HISTORY BY BEN PARKER