

# MWAISENI KU ZAMBIA! Welcome to Zambia!

March 2020



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# Welcome to Zambia

WELCOME TO THIS VERY SPECIAL ISSUE of Park Lane Press. If you had told me eighteen months ago that we would be preparing this issue for distribution, I don't think I would have believed you – but then, that was shortly before my family and I spent a week at a Safari Lodge in the Nsefu area of Eastern Zambia, exploring the Luangwa National Park.

This experience was one of the most striking of my life. It was, however, not only the extraordinary landscape and majestic animals which left a lasting impression on me, but the people of the area we visited. The great openness, friendliness and generosity my family experienced were genuinely moving. Having been involved all my adult life with education in one capacity or another, and learning that the area's only secondary school was sharing the premises of a primary school due to lack of facilities, we began to think about what might be... and this is how the Park Lane Nsefu Co-operation Project was born.

Eighteen months later, you can read here about the progress that has already been made towards the development of the project of construction of a state secondary school with PLIS assistance in Nsefu. This co-operation between us Central Europeans and our friends in Zambia is also giving so many members of the Park Lane community unique insights and opportunities, and it is really exciting to see how co-operation with Zambia is beginning to take an important place in the life of our school both inside and outside the classroom. Examples include the IB Diploma core Creativity Action Service programmes for fundraising being undertaken by IBDP students, and the way, all year 12s studying English A learned last Autumn about the central role of Zambia's President Kaunda in the ending of Apartheid in South Africa. Future opportunities to enrich our Geography, History and Science curricula by means of our involvement with friends and partners in Nsefu will be limited only by our imaginations, and we hope that as many members of the Park Lane Community as possible will become involved in one way or another – not only contributing to the development of the Nsefu area but listening, learning and enriching our own lives too.

Jan Bébr,  
Board member,  
Park Lane International School

# Park Lane projects in Zambia

## Aims of the project

- Help with education
- Support conservation projects
- Involve our students – educational purpose

## Current plans

- Build a secondary school (block of 3 classrooms + office) on land provided by the local chief (about 1km from the primary), incl. water borehole, toilets
- Small, short term fundraising projects to support the primary schools in the NSEFU area – involve our students, raise money for example for:
  - Stationery
  - Books
  - Chairs, tables
  - Boreholes in the schools
  - Conservation projects
- Exchange projects – on an educational basis – long term, continuous project involving Park Lane and Zambian students.

If you wish to support the Zambia project, please contact Mr. Jan Čihák at [zambia@parklane-is.com](mailto:zambia@parklane-is.com)

# Between Europe and the Copperbelt



Copper smelter

Five years ago I found myself whiling away an afternoon with a Chinese colleague in a Suzhou teashop. We were working together on a teacher training initiative for the province of Jiangsu, and after a frantic first morning, we were getting to know each other a bit better over a cup of oolong. Inevitably, the “where are you from?” question came up, something I’ve always felt rather self-conscious about answering – although I don’t really understand why. You see, I was born in 1970 in the young Republic of Zambia to British parents, and held a Zambian passport until I was 16. It was only because of the strictness of Zambian law on dual nationality forced me to renounce my citizenship (I’m British through my parents); I remember my 16th birthday as a slightly sad one because of this.



A youthful Mr. Burcher with his Mum, Christmas 1970

I was eighteen months old when my Mother took me and my sister to the UK. Dad stayed in Zambia for work for several years. Apparently, on the rainy and wind-swept southern coast of England, my big sister said for a long time that “the sky was too small.” As for me, I have no memories of my own of the country where I was born – and that is why I’ve always felt it to be so irrational that Zambia means so much to me personally.

But the stories I heard! Stories about a young and optimistic country, and the life my parents led in Kitwe, that hot and dirty Copperbelt mining town, in the middle of a vast continent, where my Father was a metallurgical engineer at the Roan Nkana smelter. Stories about the thick layers of coal dust which would settle in the course of a day over a car left parked by the railway marshalling yards, and of the long, long trains which fifty years ago still crawled all the way from the Cape, 3,000 kilometres to the south, laden with everything from washing machines to rice to cans of coke; of the frogs which would emerge by the millions of millions from the mud of the dried up dambos (marshy ponds), when the rains finally came; about spiders “the size of dinner plates” (I remain convinced that Mum was exaggerating) and the praying mantis

who lived downstairs on the reading lamp; of the driver ants (army ants) which one day marched through our house on Geddes Street; of traditional dancing on Zamart’s Half Hour each week on ZTV; of the ZamRock sound, musicians like the Ngozi Family and W.I.T.C.H., who provided the soundtrack to Copperbelt life in those days. African news in general – and Zambia in particular – was always being talked about at home, and awareness that we were born in Africa shaped my childhood, and that of my sister, in ways we didn’t really see at the time.

Remember also that the Commonwealth, the international organisation which emerged from the end of the British Empire, was a much bigger deal in the 1970s and 80s than it is now. Kenneth Kaunda – affectionately known as KK – was Zambia’s charismatic President from independence in 1964 until 1991, and a frequent guest on British radio and TV. He was – and still is – a tireless opponent of racism and injustice. The racist apartheid regime was still in power in South Africa when I left school, and Nelson Mandela still didn’t know of he would ever take that “long walk to freedom.” KK spoke out particularly loudly injustice, poverty, racism, and of course the HIV epidemic which was ravaging southern Africa. I have vivid memories of how my Mum would interrupt our homework by excitedly calling upstairs “Kids, kids! Come quickly, KK is in the radio!”

All this I told to my new Chinese friend, avoiding her eyes and feeling slightly embarrassed at my irrational pride in and affection for a country which I cannot even remember. Her response was a revelation, and somehow also a relief. “How else would you feel?” she said. “What you describe is entirely normal. It is the land where you were born, it is part of you.” It’s hard not to smile at the idea that it took a Chinese perspective on this rather unusual personal history to help me feel a bit more at ease with it.

Tim Burcher



# My journey to Zambia

## Ideas and Ideals

On the evening of October 23rd 2019, Jan Bér and I met at Prague airport to set off on our flight to Zambia. What to expect? What are the people there like? What will we achieve in just 5 days in a place as distant as Zambia?

The purpose of the journey was clear – after a year of preparatory e-mail conversations with the local NGO representative, Enrico, we wanted to see the place, to speak to the local people and representatives of the educational networks there in order to move on with a long term project decided over a year ago – building a secondary school, supporting the local primary schools, and supporting the nature conservation plans and programmes. E-mails are fine, but face to face meetings can work miracles. We wanted to leave Zambia with clear plans established and concrete steps ahead agreed. Could all this be done in just 5 days? Or were our ideas too idealistic?



## Zikomo, Zambia!

After almost 22 hours in the air and in airport lounges we landed in England from the 1930's. At least that was my impression when I saw the Mfuwe airport building – a true, vivid inheritance of the British presence in Zambia.



A driver waiting for us took us for a 1 hour ride (about 30 km on terrible or almost non-existent roads) to our accommodation – the safari camp Zikomo (“thank you” in Bemba, the local language). We were cordially welcomed by Victoria – a charming, energetic lady who runs the campsite, and whom Jan already met last year. We had a great dinner with Victoria, discussing some of our ideas and listening



to mysterious sounds of the wilderness hidden in the dark right behind our table. I tell you, going to our chalet to sleep, accompanied by one employee with a torch light and a weapon, was scary – but at the same time exciting. There were wild animals everywhere around us – ready to eat us alive anytime, but we are here in Zambia to help save them!

## One Zambia – One Nation

Zambia is a peaceful country compared to other African territories. This was one of the reasons to set up the project there – a purposeful and sustained educational policy can only succeed in relatively stable societies. Zambia became independent in 1964, and the title of this chapter has become the official land's motto. This is important to bear in mind – the long and politically difficult unification of the



multicultural and multilingual society of today's Zambia sets a solid foundation for the development of the country – and any development starts and is underlined continuously with education. The school visits throughout our stay exceeded all my expectations. I can't tell in what way, though... I saw a lot of very shabby school premises, buildings which barely held with holes instead of windows and sometimes not even that – even four crumbling walls with a straw shelter can serve as a classroom.



On the other hand, I saw a lot of smiling and naturally curious children (they do not see white guys around every day) and I spoke to so many friendly and forthcoming teachers and school principals. The issues the principals have to deal with every day are always the same: lack of water, lack of staff, lack of basic stationery or classroom equipment, kids dropping education because of early pregnancy, roads which become impassable during the rainy season preventing children from attending school and many others. There are so many problems, but we need to start somewhere.

It is true though, that during one of our visits on Saturday (there is no school on Saturdays usually), we observed a class of an equivalent to our Y7 working on tablets. We were told that these had been borrowed for a month for the kids to learn how to work with electronic gadgets, but my impression was that in a place where electricity is lacking and network reception is scarce, this somehow didn't fit... There are 9 primary schools in the Nsefu area. The population is growing rapidly, but children can not really continue to study at a secondary school – there are none in the area. In fact this isn't quite true – there is one which shares the premises with the Kawaza primary school.



In the mornings, the primary children attend school and in the afternoon, the secondary students take their place. Not an ideal situation, particularly given the very different needs of both age groups.

## Building from scratch (with no scratch yet made)

On a sunny morning we went to see the ground dedicated by the local Chief to the future secondary school. Just a few meters away from the Kawaza primary premises, it was right behind a group of small, traditional huts we may call a village. As we arrived, a group of kids followed us immediately, curious and happy to have some distraction in the 40 degree heat. Compared to the usual stereotypes we hear about such places back home, these kids did not ask for anything – moreover, they happily formed a lovely, photogenic group of which Jan started taking pictures immediately. They did not look unhappy or suffering, and I got more positive about the aims we have here. With such kids, support for education must make sense.



As we neared the intended building site, I became suspicious – where is the road? Is there a borehole to provide the future school with water? I can't see where this

plot of land is supposed to be! And then, while speaking to the future secondary principal and to the representative of the local parents, I understood that things would be a bit different from what we had thought:

“Yes! We have land, provided by our local Chief. Yes! We will build a secondary school here. Yes! We are very happy about it! However... No, we do not know if there is any water available. No, we did not really think of how we are going to transport the construction material here and no, we do not really know where to start or what to do now, but hang on, WE WILL BUILD A SCHOOL!”



Together with Enrico and the local town hall representative, Steve, we sat down later and created a step by step plan. The advantage of having Enrico and Steve on board is that they know the local community and they know how to work together with them. In our western society we are used to planning, to sticking to strategies and to checking on their fulfillment. We worry about how these plans will work in a year's time, but over here in Zambia, the way people think is far more intuitive. Every day is a miracle, and, given all the circumstances, thinking beyond to a longer horizon is difficult or sometimes even impossible. This was an incredible, invaluable insight for me, enabling me to



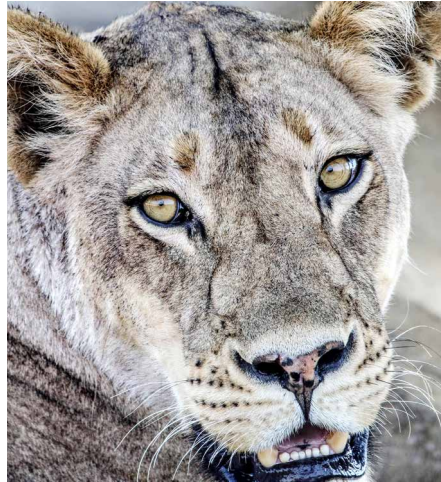
appreciate a very different culture of living, of thinking and of enjoying one's life. We left the future secondary school area with an encouraging feeling that, putting both approaches together, we must succeed!

## The call of the wild

Right from the moment we got off the plane at Mfuwe, I was surprised to see how green Zambia is – despite the hot season at the end of October when temperatures rise above 40 degrees, the Nsefu area is still bursting with life. Leaves rustle in the mild wind, the fruits of the sausage trees continue to grow, occasionally falling unexpectedly right next to you (these are eaten by the hippos wandering close to my chalet at night seeking out food after a relaxing day in the drying out river of Luangwa), the national park buzzes with mysterious sounds, especially during the night.



But this amazing richness doesn't come without problems for the local inhabitants. Our sometimes romantic view of African landscapes full of lions, elephants and other exotic species cools somewhat in the face of reality. The Zambians in this area often see the national park as enemy. Elephants ravage their crops and may threaten people in the village; Lions attack people on the paths through forests. We heard a story that just recently the lions attacked a man cycling home – he could only be identified by the piece of leg which was found. Although it is true that we did not see many wild animals outside the park (how do these animals know they should not leave the park?), they naturally leave the area reserved for them by humans



at times, and the clash with the local communities can be often disastrous. It's the old story of the competition of humans vs. nature, but nobody's winning. Perhaps there is a way to coexist peacefully. Another big issue is poaching. You may sometimes see poachers during safari rides as they appear in the bushes. They mostly hunt elephants for their tusks but they also hunt other animals. It seems the business (although illegal) is still quite lucrative and despite the approach of the local rangers protecting the park (shoot on sight), the poachers still take the risk.



## Learning to know the unknown

The middle and older generations of Zambians are rather reluctant to save this

natural richness. Everyday, ordinary life brings day to day problems such as lack of water or caring for a small field in an attempt to produce enough food to eat. Many other problems remain hidden to us, visitors. I understand that long term plans, plans without an immediate and obvious payback, may be difficult to promote in this area.

However, there are anti-poaching and conservation clubs in the schools we visited. Children learn about nature and about the importance of conservation. Step by step they come to understand how important it is for their homeland to save the inheritance of their ancestors. One of the primary teachers, Faston, told me that the children are quite excited about this, and they take part in these clubs voluntarily, actively and with enthusiasm.

Victoria supports this, and lets children from the local villages to go on a safari ride on some Saturday and Sunday mornings for free. The irony is that these children live right next to the park but most of them have never seen any of the animals. It is too dangerous to go on their own, and a safari ride is far beyond what their families can afford.



During the safari tour we went on with children from the Kawaza primary, I saw how unaware of their surroundings the local children could be. The guide provided them with an engaging 4 hour tour was accompanied by frequent stops and explanations. The children were all absorbing the information about their surroundings with joy and focus, pointing at each wild animal they saw with curiosity and respect while chatting endlessly in their mother tongue. It is just a pity that these lovely kids were too shy to speak to either of us more, even though they learn

English at school. By the way, never wear beige shorts when going on Safari – after a day or two my only shorts were covered with a brown dust I could not get rid of. It is interesting to mention though, that all the kids clothes were clean and spotless even after a 4 hour dusty safari ride. Another miracle...



It all reinforced my conviction that learning is most efficient when gained through personal experience. Once again, Comenius and Rousseau were right! Victoria and her colleagues also trial new projects such as beehives preventing elephants from entering the village. A group of women sew clothes in a workshop, therefore they have income to support their families and the outcome of the sales further subsidises the nature conservation projects.

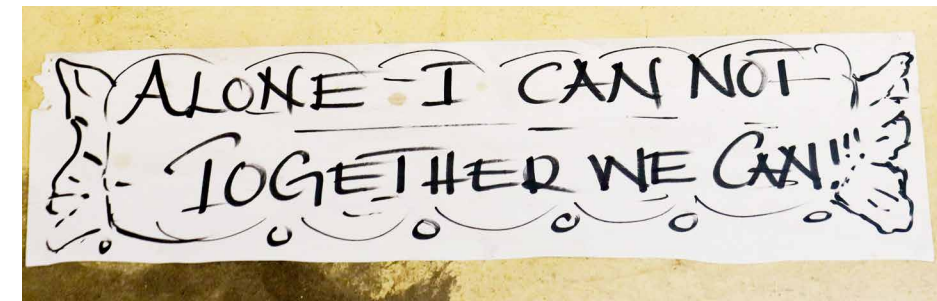


All these ideas are basic, but there is something to build on already. More importantly, these projects involve local people and they can see the benefit in their own lives. It is a long road ahead, but the starting gun has already fired. As we ate dinner every evening, we talked about all this frequently. We



started thinking about how to connect our students with the pupils there: how to exchange ideas about nature conservation, about what we do here in the Czech Republic, and what the Zambian children think about it, what they do at a local level. As our stay neared its end, we became ever more firmly convinced that future cooperation between our school on the one hand, and those in Nsefu on the other, should be based on exchanging ideas, setting up parallel projects, discussing results and planning further. In a word – a conversation.

## Green light from Zambia



On the return flight, short periods dozing and the breaks for meals were interspersed with discussion of the intense and vivid experience of the last few days. I didn't quite understand how Jan was able to spend almost the entire flight to Dubai editing the photos he had taken by their hundreds during the trip. I felt worn

out myself, exhausted, and I was trying to somehow make sense of my ideas and experience while not falling asleep on my neighbour's shoulder.

The flights take about 22 hours – less than a day to move to a completely different world, to leave a place where nature still exists in its wildness and savagery. It is only 22 hours on the plane to leave the real jungle and to go back to the concrete jungle of the modern Europe. However, Zambia, the people and the environment there have become much closer to me than just a documentary on National Geographic, accidentally spotted when switching from one TV channel to another. After the journey I started feeling that our plans for Zambia made sense as they are now based in reality, from our first hand experience.

We had plenty of notes, pictures and new contacts established. The immediate future steps were agreed and as we arrived back home, we started a working group with teachers preparing new projects you may read about in this special Park Lane Press issue. Some minor but very important projects involving the Park Lane children (beading club under the leadership of our enthusiastic colleague Iveta Slavětinská) have already generated some financial results during the Park Lane Winter market.

And at the beginning of December we received an acknowledgement letter

from the Zambian Ministry of General Education confirming that the building of the secondary school in Nsefu may begin and promising further support with our initiative. What a wonderful conclusion enabling new beginnings!

Jan Čihák

# Conservation, education, finances



## Projects already underway

### Construction of the secondary school

Park Lane International School has initiated the construction of a secondary school. This project was triggered by the lack of premises for the secondary students, who continue to study in the Kawaza primary school.

A company has been hired in Nsefu to dig the borehole which is a prerequisite for any construction to begin. The soil is quite sandy there and there is only one company in the area which can work in such conditions.

The funding for this project has already been allocated. It is a long term plan which should be completed successfully ended with the opening of a newly built secondary school in 2021/22.

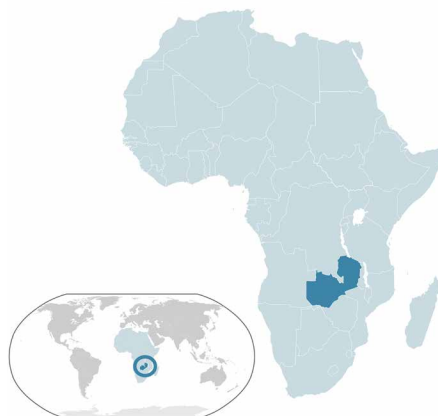
### Fundraising projects to support the primary schools in the area

The children in the Nsefu primary schools lack basic equipment such as pens, pencils, rulers, paper and other stationery. There have already been some minor projects which addressed these needs.

- In December 2018 a group of KS4 students ran a Winter market stall

selling chilli. This was PLIS's first-ever little Zambia project which, along with the hot wine stall, raised about 14 000 CZK.

- Students from KS3 spent almost every lunchtime for a few weeks before this year's Park Lane Winter market crafting wonderful earrings and bracelets, being supported by Mrs. Slavětinská. These were sold at the Winter market and, along with the stall selling wine (Wine for Zambia), a hot wine stall and the bottle raffle we have raised about 33 000 CZK this year.



## Educational exchange and promotion of Zambia in our school

We are aware that, apart from financial support the most valuable for both our students and students in Zambia is some sort of educational exchange. This is not primarily a physical exchange of students visiting each other's countries – it would be too naive to believe that such an exchange would be possible at the current time.

We would prefer to focus on various educational projects which could promote remote collaboration between our and the Zambian students.

There are already some seeds planted in the IBDP Global Perspectives – in which Zambia is being used as a case study on development – and in IB English, in which students have already read Chinua Achebe's 1975 landmark anthology, 'Poems of Black Africa', and studied three speeches by Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first President. Rich opportunities for collaboration in other subjects are already under discussion, however this is of course more of a long run initiative.

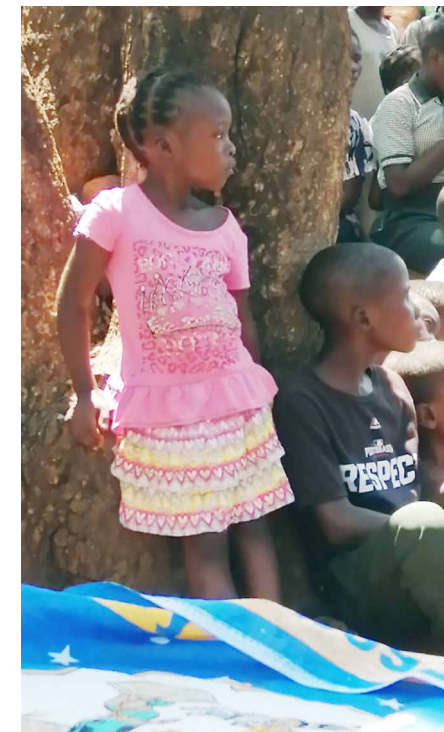
We are also privileged to have a former Czech ambassador to Zambia, Mr. Olša, as member of the Park Lane community on the parental side. Mr. Olša is willing to come to our school and provide the school community with more overview of Zambia from his rich experience. This is another solid foundation for the future project to build on.

These are just some ideas and we are open to more suggestions from any member of the Park Lane community – students, teachers or parents. We will inform the school community about any upcoming projects or events related via our usual communication channels, such as Secondary updates or the next regular Park Lane Press issue.

## Future fundraising plans

The future plans for short term fundraising projects include Mr. Goodman's project of Bicycles for Humanity – a group of students would lead the drive for collecting donated second-hand bikes. Perhaps we could cycle the lion trail (or somewhere else) to raise the money to ship them to Zambia or to support the purchase of bicycles directly in Zambia. This can be planned for the summer or autumn term of 2020.

Mrs Goodman suggested making a variety of simple clothing items (e.g. skirts, aprons) out of African materials or materials with typically African colours and patterns. The aprons are particularly easy and students who are keen on sewing would definitely enjoy this. Adding to this, students could try printmaking on the fabric along with Mrs. Garner to create the fabric rather than buying it. Our art studios in Pohádka are perfectly ready for this. The clothes made could be offered for sale at the International Day in May 2020.



Another excellent idea comes from our music teacher, Mrs. Bartošová – a concert – possibly on the school's premises or elsewhere. This could be a great event given the high number of school bands in KS3-KS5. There should be as many bands and classes involved as possible; it would be the same type of an evening as the Sound of Park Lane but promoted as an event for possible sponsors. An open-air festival The Sound for Zambia, as we may call it, should take place in the spring or summer of 2020.

There are also 2 more excellent ideas from Mrs. McGuinness that the projects above could subsidise:

**Menstrual cups** – it is well known that due to lack of feminine hygiene products many girls are forced to miss school each month to deal with their period. Any money raised could provide either a regular supply of pads and tampons or a menstrual cup. This is costly initially, but can last up to 10 years if used properly, and is much cheaper and more reliable in the long run.

**Solar lamps** – An inexpensive solar lamp can provide light for studying in an area with no mains electricity. It can also supply power to charge mobile phones not only for the student but for other people in the village. This service could even bring the student a small income.

Jan Čihák



**Any money raised through these or other projects would be sent to Zambia, and our local collaborators Enrico and Steve can make sure that this money is used efficiently and transparently.**

**If you are interested in any of the suggestions above, please do let us know your ideas of your own involvement – or let us know any further ideas on other fundraising or educational projects you may have!**

**If you wish to support the Zambia project, please contact Mr. Jan Čihák at [zambia@parklane-is.com](mailto:zambia@parklane-is.com)**

# YOU CAN HELP

**PARKLANE**  
International School

Support the education of Zambian children.

