

## ZAMBIA MAFINGA HILLS JULY 2007

**By Karen Hauptfleisch**

Ask 5 different people where Zambia's highest peak is and you will get 5 different answers.

In my search for the correct information the past 15 months, I have tried the following:

- Got international roaming and phoned a surveyor in Zambia
- Contacted the Surveyor General in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi
- Joined a singles website and contacted everyone on the site living in Zambia
- Searched the internet for days
- Tried to contact Ginge Fullen, the guy who climbed the highest peak in all 53 African countries
- Contacted several surveyors, pilots and possible map sources as well as anyone that's been to Zambia or Malawi recently
- Visited the High Commission of Zambia
- Visited the Surveyor General's office in Lilongwe

After some search on GoogleEarth, Jimmy Stone summarised everything as follows:

*"I found a number of high points in the Mafinga Hills in Zambia. From the different websites, we have the following points given as the highest in Zambia*

1. *Lonely planet: Mwanda Peak 2148m*
2. *Peakbagger website: Zambia high 2164m*
3. *CIA website: Mafinga hills 2301m*

*I was a bit doubtful about the CIA website, as their elevation was so much higher than the others (more than 140m). But the elevations found in GoogleEarth at the Mafinga Hills area clearly shows that the highest point in Zambia is clearly higher than the 2164 indicated by PeakBagger. And must be in the 2277 plus range.*

*The only real issue now is to go climb it. When there, one can visit all three or four high points and that way make sure you have been on the highest point in Zambia."*

Jimmy tragically passed away on 7 March 2007, so it was up to me to go and find the highest peak.



At the Mozambique border post

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June we (Frans Botha, Alan Reynolds and myself) left Pretoria at midnight in my 1300 Terios called Cutie. We traveled via Mozambique (where I got the distinct feeling that stopping South African motorists was every official in Mozambique's dream come true). When we finally entered Malawi on the 27<sup>th</sup>, we were stuck with a driver who will have nightmares about corrupt officials for life.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, we left the Chelinda camp in the Nyika Plateau at 08h30 and arrived at Chief Chambe's village in Zambia 3 hours later. The road is only for true 4X4 lovers and you have washed away bridges as an added bonus.



Another day, another bad bridge



Sunset next to Tete

The Chief (76 years) insisted on joining us, we reached Mwanda peak 3 hours later. The Chief then prayed for the wellbeing of his people (according to Clever, our guide and translator). The beacon was broken by poachers looking for the steel. We arrived back at his place by 18h00 and were invited for supper, chisembe and relish. We were also given bags filled with oranges and spinach. We arrived back at Chilinda camp at 24h00. It has been a privilege to visit Zambia's highest peak on the Nyika Plateau with the 76 year old Chief.



You definitely need a 4X4 and lots of beer for the passengers

8<sup>th</sup> of July: "Muzungus, Muzungus." The happy chanting of the friendly Malawian children followed us all the way to Chisenga where we met everyone that was someone in the tiny village. The minister, teacher, chief in charge of the dispensary, policeman, etc. They all believed that Namitowa was the highest peak in Mafinga Hills. Just before we left the Nyika Plateau the previous day we met David Foot, who was kind enough to let us borrow his topographic maps of Mafinga Hills. Al and Frans wanted chicken for supper but there was a conspiracy amongst the vegetarians and the chicken got away.



Fish on top of "Why God Why" sign on the taxi  
Don't you just love Africa?

9<sup>th</sup> of July: Surrounded by at least 20 children and carrying 50 buns bought at the bakery the previous day, we reached the pine forest by 11h00. I measured the first unnamed peak at 13h00. According to the maps, this was it. In the distance we could, however, see a peak that looked higher. (Does this sound familiar?) We set off in that direction and pitched the tent close to the only water we could find around 18h00.



Me, Alan and the kids on top of the mountain

10<sup>th</sup> of July: After 4 hours of hiking, we were back where we started. Disorientated by the mist, we almost climbed the wrong peak. Patches of dense vegetation turned out to be very challenging and the lack of water was becoming a problem so we headed back. We reached the pine plantation by 17h00 and I had to do without a bath since we couldn't spare 20 drops of water.

11<sup>th</sup> of July: Al and myself set off to measure Namitowa hill believing that it was the peak mentioned in Peakbaggers. Once again the mist came rolling in and by 12h00 we have measured Namitowa hill. (A lovely hill with a breathtaking view). We discovered that the peak mentioned in Peakbagger's was 700m away. With no water left, we decided to go down to the village and return the next day.

12<sup>th</sup> of July: After studying the maps again we decided to go to Zambia and climb the 7547 feet peak indicated on the map. The Trade Commissioner of Zambia in Pretoria had given me a letter to give to his brother in which he requested Mr Kaumba to assist us on Mafinga Hill and it was close to where Jimmy thought the highest peak was. We went through a small border post. The Zambian side was closed but we were told that it would be no problem. We could have our passports stamped in Isoko.

Our nightmare in Zambia had just begun! At Tendere village I gave the letter to Mr. Kaumba and we were instructed by the Counselor to first go to Isoko to have our passports stamped before climbing the mountain. 6 hours of potholes, petrol fumes and dust followed. Our passports were stamped, we were told to have the vehicle papers sorted



Measuring what could be the highest peak

in Kapiri Moshi and I was given the Minister of Lands' phone number. Apparently he could tell me where the highest peak in Zambia was. I was put on hold three times and was then informed by the expert himself that the highest peak in Mafinga Hills was where the contour lines were the thickest on the map. I checked the date to see if it was not April fool's day and then went looking for my sense of humour. Finally arriving back in Tendere, Al and Frans had a very athletic chicken for supper.

13<sup>th</sup> of July: After meeting the Chief and all the important people around the mountain we started our hike at 09h00. 12 Hours and at least 30km later we were back at the vehicle. The descent in the dark was hectic but we achieved what we came to do. We had measured all the peaks Jimmy had thought were possibilities plus the 7500 feet peak on the map. The mystery surrounding the unnamed hill in Mafinga Hills has been solved.

Conclusion:

1. Mwanda is the highest peak in Zambia on the Nyika Plateau
2. The hill mentioned in Peakbagger is behind Namitowa hill and is not the highest in Mafinga Hills.
3. CIA website: They were referring to the 7500 feet peak called Mafinga West. This is the highest peak in Zambia that's not on the border.
4. The highest peak in Zambia is on the watershed and is higher than 7547 feet.

Decision: I need to start dating guys who work for the CIA. They must have access to topographic maps.



Some serious bundu bashing

..... the next morning we left early and 60 hours of constant praying that we would not be asked for the Third Party Insurance, we had not obtained as we had entered Zambia through an unmanned border post on a weekend, followed. In Mfika the policeman's face lit up when we informed him that we didn't have Third Party Insurance. The fact that Frans accidentally almost ran over him when he tried to park the car didn't help our case and two very long hours followed. We were told to pay a ZK 375 000 fine. The fact that we didn't get a letter from the authority explaining the situation didn't help. Neither did the fact that it was Saturday and that we didn't have Zambian Kwachas with us because the bank in Isoko didn't exchange money. Luckily we were informed by the Commissioner in Isoko that he would notify the authorities on the Monday. We just had to be patient.

Just before we took out the stove to cook some pasta, Frans was given his passport and drivers license back and we were instructed to go.



We refused to pay any bribes, and waited for 3 hours before they gave up and let us go.

The vehicles paperwork was finally sorted out in Kapiri Moshi but because it was a weekend, we were still stuck without the third party insurance. It was a big relief when we finally crossed the Zambian border early Monday morning.

To me, mountains are holy places and I think the highest peak in Zambia deserves a name. A name given by the locals. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of people that have been to the highest peak.