

There is a Moment in Africa



Every moment in the wilderness is the right time and right place

The view of many who marvel at the dramatic images in books and other publications are of the opinion that you must be in the right place at the right time to see something dramatic in the wilderness. The truth is every moment in the wilderness is the right time and right place. It is us who have moved so far away from the true essence of wilderness that we consider a while without big game a waste of time.



Fever tree forest Pafuri

There is a moment in Africa

There is a moment in Africa, just after dawn, when the sky is moistened in the seasons wanting, the heat is kept at bay and the sun might break through the shallow cloud in a temporary show of intent – a guineafowl may serenade the moment or there may be silence – it is a moment in a season.

There is a moment in Africa when the heat is suffocatingly intense, the white light dulls the horizon and the sky, cicadas add their voices to the discomfort and a turtle dove may call – the shade of trees will provide some relief but a slight breeze brings the heat into the moment of succor.

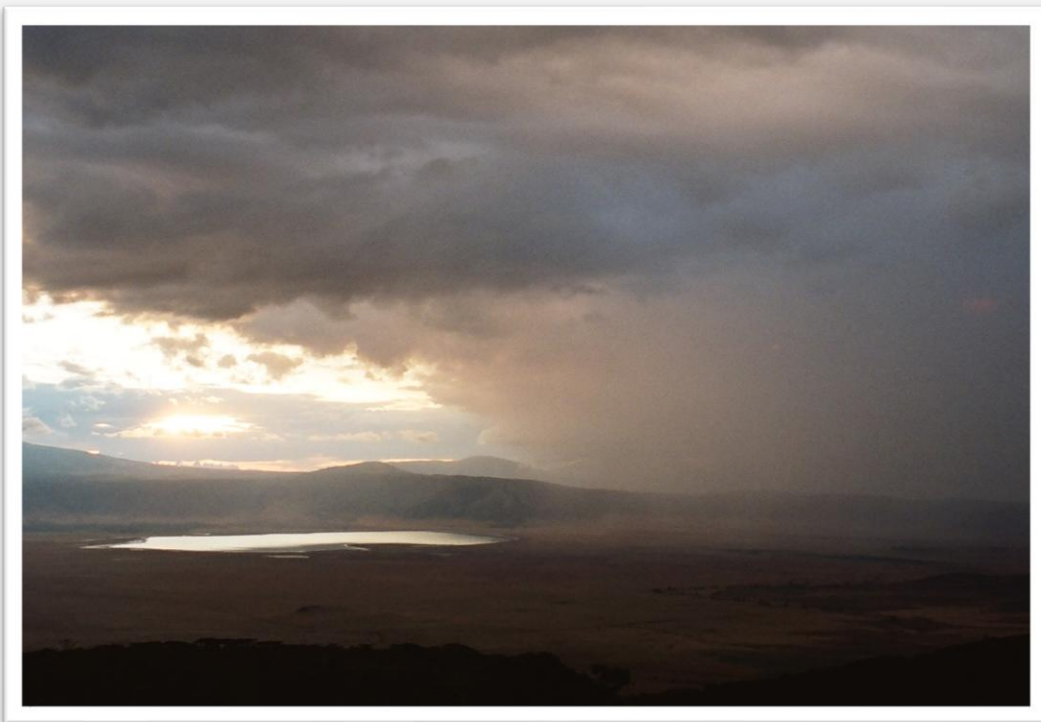
There is a moment in Africa when the heat is broken by a distant spilling, the rumble of thunder and the scented air carried on an imaginary breeze fills the soul with a feeling of freedom and exultation. It is hot but the moment is wildly inspirational.

There is a moment in Africa when a predator freezes to the awareness of its intended prey – lingering until time moves on.

There is a moment in Africa when silence permeates the being, nothing stirs, until you notice a breeze rustling the trees or a light wind brushing the dust from the earth.

There is a moment in Africa when a hyena calls across the wilderness and our ancient fears rise from the recesses of our subconscious.

There is a moment in Africa in every passing in the wilderness.



Storm over the Ngorongoro

The Searching – from the journals of Leigh Kemp: Africa Wanderer

‘So what are you actually looking for’?

I have been asked this question several times in my life, and it is usually when I am involved in some seemingly arbitrary activity such as peering into underbrush, scanning a long-dry mud-caked pool or scratching through beach detritus. My answer of ‘anything of interest’ is usually met with a grunt of annoyance and misunderstanding, a presumption of time wasting.

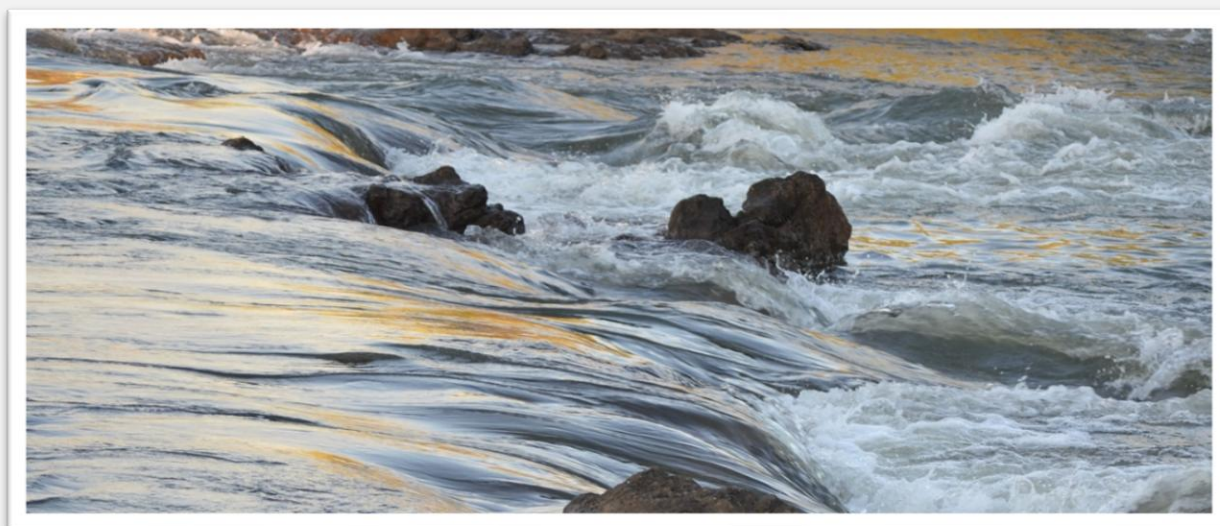
So what is this anything of interest I am always looking for? There are those who know what it is, and the question does not need to be asked.

It is not a case of searching for anything in particular – it is merely an interest in well ... all things. I have discovered that in the searching for specific things much is overlooked, and the mind becomes possessed and unable to be in touch with the world around.

Have I always found something in my searching? Again, it is not a question of finding but rather of the experience of looking, an experience of being – and in this experience is the finding.

So, to go back to the opening question of what it is that I am looking for?

I have selected some of my writings taken from my notes, journals and articles to explain my answer.



The River – Zambezi evening

Blood and waiting

A kill
Sight
Scent
From nowhere
The sky is dotted
Squabble
Screech
A hyena
Stops the squabbling
Hunched
Waiting
Until the hyena is done

10.30 am: The hyena dragged the bloodied carcass into the water,
out of reach of the screeching and squabbling vultures, now sitting
hunched, draped on the branches of a dead tree
12.45: Lechwe graze peacefully near the bloodstains

Life in Death



The hours beyond midnight in less than an hour

02.25am Silence from the farthest point
audible in its intensity

a moment of realignment

a solitary voice stutters
and falls silent

04.25am a hint of a breeze
born in an icy scream
freezes the stars
in the predawn sky

04.42am silence
insect
bird
and myself
pull toward the warmth
of our survival

04.47am the silence is broken
by the breeze
whispering to the palms
a chill voice
telling of the dawn

04.55am a leopard coughs
shattering the sky

05.01am '..... shooting and killing a three year old child. Authorities
have denied the shooting.....'

05.06am a lion roars
beyond the dark
beyond the chill
and is quiet

imagined
was it a rumour

quiet
except for the breeze
blowing into the mind
and the death of a child
in a distant land

The Promise

The African dry season is unrelenting, affecting all in its grip, a time when the wilderness breathes in shallow gasps to preserve its soul.

Sun rise skies smudged by an angry brush
Lighting a weary earth for the coming pain
When the wilderness withdraws in a hush
And denizens grow weaker at each refrain

But this time when the skies are burning
In heat and smoke from a season's lust
Comes an anticipation and deep yearning
Carried on a wispy breeze scented in dust

Then on an evening the day's anger eases
And a delicate breeze caresses the senses
A distant rumble flirts, taunts and teases
And creatures dare to drop their defences

Even in this season of extremes there is hope, a promise.

Beyond October

Vultures rise and fall,
Cherishing the season
Celebrating the victims
Cumulus armies march across the sky,
disintegrating in the face of the enemy
Fish eagles arrogantly challenge the heat,
Starlings break the silence

The time is breath-gasping still,
save for the shadows creeping swiftly to their conclusion
It is beyond October and the rains have stayed away,
heavily pregnant females wait their time,
added expectation to their burden

Then on a day the time is now,
Thunder rolls across the wilderness
but the promise spills a distance from the want
and the frustrations rise at the fulfillment in another place,
Appeased only by the scented air carried on the evening

Beauty of the Time and Place

The air is scented in desperation, dust, and heat,
The scorching days trap every creature in a grip of despair,
saved only by the hope that it will end, the season will change.
Creatures move to seek solace in meager pickings of shade ...

As the days wear on there comes a moment when the harsh white light is darkened,
even for the briefest moment, but it is a change so dramatic that it smashes the senses.
An itinerant cloud has crossed the sun before melting into the heat ...
With the coming days these moments become more regular and will linger

Then on a day the sky will be pasted in cloud and the relief is immediate. Any time now!
There is a renewed reason in the wilderness, touches of green will decorate the [trees], and
the denizens may begin to give birth ... but there is still the heat

There will still be the heat, blinding, burning, and the air will still be scented in dust,
but there is a change, subtle in its progression, for now there is a promise in the air.
It is a promise sent in sporadic shadows, staying longer with time.

Then on a day the breeze will carry the sound of a distant rumble
and the air may be tinged in a damp whisper
and all wilderness creatures will know that the time is near.

The Dead Mouse

A mouse lay side-up in the fresh green of the new season. I stopped and bent down to have
a closer look. There were no tracks to mark its path so I figured it could have been dropped
there by a predatory bird.

I was trying to work out what had happened. There were no visible signs of any drama, no
tracks, no wounds and certainly no sign of conflict. I could find no marks on its body.

‘What are you doing’?
‘Just wondering what happened to the mouse’.
‘It is dead, so what’?

The new grass signalled the keeping of the promise of the seasons, but the mouse had not
benefitted from the new season of plenty. Had the season of plenty maybe provided too
much, and the mouse succumbed to excess?

‘Come on we don’t have time for this’.

It was a poignant scene.

The elephant had been reduced to a belly-swollen behemoth, the bile-inducing stench invading the being. Sluggish, glistening blue flies reveled, celebrating the heat and stench.

The Fly of my Travails

The heat is suffocating, Kalahari-summer suffocating, with little succor in the patchy shade of the apple-leaf scrub. Heat-scrambled thoughts pass from the scavenging activity at the four day old elephant carcass to idyllic beach resorts and back to the elephant carcass each time the hot breeze carries the stench across to where I am seeking out some sort of relief.

The persistence of a bloated blue fly, seeking out the moisture of my facial orifices, adds to the physical discomfort and each time the scent of the carcass is blown into my sensory orbit the fly appears, daring me to ponder where it has been.

The heat is all consuming, and the breeze has no relieving impact on my space, instead blowing foul-scented air across my being, with the fly adding a soullessly monotonous drone. Scene-stealing in its monotony!

The time wears on but the heat persists, as does the irritation of the fly.

Physical rest eludes me, kept at bay by the heat and the exertions of the fly. In my discomfort, however, is rest for my soul, and in the rest the contentment that the wilderness provides

A passing moment

A moment, unnoticed in the happening
passing back to dust, unnoticed, but by a mere echo
in the shadow of the passing



Essays of a season

Rumours of a season: A shadow, brief but dramatic, fights the sun, then gives way. More clouds appear, momentarily, and give way to the heat, and with the moment is a release, a release of an emotion, pent up, rising with the seasons advance. The sky is still dusted, gentle, beautiful in the evening light and thick with expectation at the change.

A day of change: Mingled black and white, brushed in pastel, echo in the morning light. The intensity of the heat, dulled by a subtle change, is the edge where two seasons meet. Later when the breeze has lost its anger, its piercing resistance sends a message of want in a moist whisper, a promise, anticipation, until it finds its anger again. But it has shown a wanting. It is time to wait.

Moon rising: Itinerant solos herald the slow rising and deepening shadows but beyond the sounds in the distant night the silence is absolute. With the rising light there is darkening, beyond our vision, controlled by the distant silence.

Death of the wanting: A teasing, a brief intoxicated flirtation, before the heat takes back the wanting. The season has sobered, and the frustration begins to rise again. A breeze carries the scent of the flirtation, a brief, beautiful moment of madness.

Before the rains: A moist awakening, anticipation of a change, and the season is wanting, yearning for a release. The air is still. The senses heighten, soaring in the expectant silence and soon the heat will reclaim her aloofness and the frustration will grow.

December 15: There has been consummation, a taste of an affair, but now the season is caught between two uncertain lovers. The heat is forcing its independence, showing a selfish side, insecure in the loss of independence and control. The clouds attempt an embrace, a reconciliation, but the heat resists, pushing the touch aside. Soon the memory of the consummation will prevail, and the storms will resume into a season of plenty.

From the journals of Leigh Kemp: African Wanderer