



AN ADVENTURE WITH CAMELS

Jeremy Wyatt shares his experience of walking 120 kilometres with Grevy's Zebra Warriors Harugurah and Petro and their new camels

Day One

After spending the evening making final preparations for the route and having a fitful sleep in Grevy's Zebra Trust's new camp situated in the heart of West Gate Conservancy, we rose just before dawn and started to prepare the camels for the walk. It took an hour on this first occasion. A task that would take a little more than 10 minutes a couple of days later!

We started walking just after 7 am and it was already getting quite hot. The day's walk was directly towards the Matthews Range about 35 kilometres north of the GZT base. We encountered warthog, gerenuk and ostrich with evidence of Grevy's zebra tracks along the way. We also crossed the 'great elephant corridor' that runs from Laikipia through to Somalia.

Our lunch stop was under a big rock that had obviously been used by Samburu for generations. In no time Petro



had made some hot, sweet tea which replenished us after the morning's first 17 kilometres. Later that afternoon we reached a village and joined the women and children at their well to top up our own supplies and let the camels drink as we knew we would not find another source of water for at least 50 kilometres.

That night we made camp under a beautiful acacia tree at the foot of the Matthews range, sleeping in the open under the African night sky. As there was no moon, the stars were sublime.

Day Two

We rose at 5 am just as the slight crescent moon was rising with shooting stars seeming to come from all directions and started walking just before the light began to show itself across the horizon. It was getting hotter and the bush was changing dramatically by the hour. We saw gerenuk, warthog, silver backed jackals, ostrich and plenty of elephant spoor. As the heat increased, evidence of animal life reduced, although around lunchtime we did see a woodpecker frantically beating its beak

against an unsuspecting tree and an eagle and its kill in an acacia tree.

As we continued into the desert environment, we followed both lion and leopard spoor for a while before

IN THIS ISSUE:

An Adventure with Camels

2016 Great Grevy's Rally!

Zebra People - A Photo Exhibition

Grevy's Zebra Warriors Embark on the first Camel Patrol

The Grevy's Zebra Trust (GZT) is a Kenyan not-for-profit organisation, founded in 2007.

Our mission is to conserve the endangered Grevy's zebra and its fragile habitat in partnership with communities.

We work in Samburu, Marsabit and Isiolo Counties in Northern Kenya covering an area of over 10,000 km².



eventually changing tack and heading north with the ever present Matthews Range now fading away and merging with the Ndoto hills in the far distance.

We were aiming to get close to Soit Eltinga, but as the sun was just about to set, we made camp among the acacia scrub and released the camels to graze on what they could find and filled our stomachs again before collapsing by the camp fire. This was to be our longest day, covering 37 kilometres in just over 10 hours.

Day Three

Turned out to be another epic day! By 7 am it was hot. Hotter than yesterday. Initially following the A2, we eventually reached Soit Eltinga. Here we found water and filled our supplies and took a refreshing wash.

As we entered the village I met an intrigued looking Samburu woman. After the usual greetings of 'sopa oleng', she figured out we were going from Laikipia to Laisamis by foot and found it most amusing. Leaving Soit Eltinga, we cut into the desert scrub at around 10.30 heading 'as the crow flies' towards our eventual destination. The heat was intense as we spent the rest of the day pushing through the semi desert shrubland thick with Acacia-Commiphora. The commiphora tree trunks were spattered with spikes all the way up and the thorns are between

6 to 12 inches in length. I have never seen bush quite like it.

On the way we saw a few gerenuk, yellow-necked spur fowl, helmeted guinea fowl and hares. At times the scrub became thicker and the camels would get their loads attached to thick 'wait a bit' acacia bush and the continuously unforgiving Commiphora.

As the sun set there was an amazing pink hue that bleached the western sky. These skies seen through the thick dark thorn trees and with total silence all around you were an incredible sight to behold. More hyena again throughout the night, but also a faint call of a lion somewhere in the far

distance, which somehow brings your dreams back to reality.

Day Four

Another early start and wondering how far until we get to the next village and source of water, we set off. Eventually we came across the A2 again. It appeared I was a strange sight for the drivers and passengers of the occasional vehicle as they craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the mzungu with the camels. I laughed at myself as on the first day 'Petro the Samburu' and 'Harugurah the Rendille' wondered 'if I had such a nice car why would I want to walk to Laisamis'?

Within 25 kilometres we reached a bridge that straddled an enormous lugga. It was here, while crossing this beautiful lugga, that I learnt the journey was to end. The camels needed to rest and here the bushes and trees were perfect for them to refuel on before they continued to Laisamis. To celebrate, we invested in some fresh goat meat, rice and 2 Tuskers each. Once in hand, we found a great camp site where we set a camp fire and relaxed. As my Kiswahili is poor and their English non-existent, we managed to get by communicating about the necessary along the way, but this evening, maybe loosened by the beers, we managed almost continuous



conversation and joking around for the rest of the evening.

I have great respect for Petro and Harugurah and it appeared the feeling was mutual. We worked well together as a team and covered over 120 kilometres in 4 days. Taking into account the extreme heat and the thick bush that we covered, we felt we had done well.

Last, but not least, are the camels

– Deki and Gabrei. I didn't mention them much, but they made an incredible impression on me. They are very kind creatures and show great intelligence, enormous resilience and were patient and tolerant to our demands. I will never forget lying in the middle of nowhere, under the stars and falling asleep with two camels a few feet away contently chewing the cud. In fact, I will never forget the entire adventure. ♦



ZEBRA PEOPLE

An exhibition of photographs by Mia Collis and the Zebra People in collaboration with Grevy's Zebra Trust at the National Museum of Kenya, starting 7 February 2016.



JOIN US FOR THE 2016 GREAT GREVY'S RALLY!

The Grevy's Zebra Trust, Kenya Wildlife Service, Laikipia Wildlife Forum, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Marwell Wildlife, Northern Rangelands Trust, and Princeton University have come together to initiate the Great Grevy's Rally, the first-ever national census of the Grevy's zebra that will be undertaken together with citizen scientists.

The event will coincide with World Zebra Day and will be held Saturday and Sunday, January 30 and 31, 2016. On those two days, conservancy managers, community members, tourism operators and members of the public are invited to become conservation scientists by counting and photographing all Grevy's zebra

observed throughout their habitat in Laikipia, Isiolo, Samburu and Marsabit Counties.

New software technology allows each photograph to be read and individual patterns recognized with the same assurance as a fingerprint. In addition to the total population size, we need to know the health of the populations observed by understanding their demographic profile. Both age and sex structure indicate whether the population has the potential to increase or decrease, and we will also identify and confirm key breeding areas for Grevy's zebra.

The Great Grevy's Rally presents a unique opportunity to engage the



public as citizen scientists in research that contributes to the conservation of one of Kenya's most endangered species. Our aim is to attract Kenyans from all over the country and it is hoped that these efforts will increase environmental awareness with regard to national conservation issues, endangered species and the Grevy's zebra as an iconic animal which is an integral part of Kenya's natural heritage.

Register your team on the GGR website:

www.greatgrevysrally.com ♦

GREVY'S ZEBRA WARRIORS EMBARK ON THE FIRST CAMEL PATROL



Photo by Lmedimi: "Harugurah was pointing in the direction where I should look for Grevy's zebra and take pictures as they often pass there."

The Grevy's Zebra Warriors set out on their first camel patrol on 27 September 2015. The camels enabled the Warriors to access remote areas in the lava plateaus of Laisamis where the Grevy's zebra were suspected to disperse to during the dry season. On their first day, the Warriors recorded 76 Grevy's zebra and they had GPS-enabled cameras to capture their sightings.



28 Grevy's zebra walking across the lava plateau



Photo by Dominic: "Another warrior and I were lying in a bush which we knew lay along a Grevy's zebra corridor. We lay in wait to capture a Grevy's close up. I took the picture at an angle as I was lying on the ground."



Ruserus crater captured by Leparleni

The Grevy's Zebra Warriors feel empowered to conserve the Grevy's zebra and their habitat by using their cameras to document their work and by reaching remote areas with the help of the camels. The Warriors work together to photograph and learn new ways to take pictures from each other, thus creating a strong team bond. They now have a powerful new medium to share their voice and their stories. ♦

ASANTE

Asante means thank you in Kiswahili.

We greatly appreciate the generous support of all our donors. Please click [here](#) for a full listing.

HOW TO HELP

You can help us in making a difference to the future of Grevy's zebra in the following ways:

1. Financial support to our conservation, research and education programs. **DONATE HERE** through the Wildlife Conservation Network (www.wildnet.org)
2. Spread the word and raise local and global awareness about Grevy's zebra
3. Earn your stripes! Send us your Grevy's zebra photos for the national stripe-ID database by capturing the right-hand side of the zebra

If you are interested in any of the above opportunities please email us at conservation@grevyszebratrust.org

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Photos by: Grevy's Zebra Warriors, Mia Collis, Nelson Guda and Jeremy Wyatt