

## 4<sup>th</sup> Report from Africa

### Zimbabwe - 22-26 November 2010

After a reasonably comfortable night on a large sofa in the Nairobi Airport lounge en route from Entebbe, Uganda to Harare I caught an early flight which arrived at Harare at 10 am where I was met by Lin Goncalves, a member of the Harare Committee (Council) for the Zimbabwe National Trust. She drove me to her and her husband, Jean's wonderful house on the edge of the capital.

A shower, short rest and a cup of coffee set me up for a visit to her office where I met Jean and their two staff – they run a travel company.

Lunch with Lin and Jean was followed by a visit to the new Chairman, Tim Tanser's home where I met the members of the ZNT Council. Tim has recently taken over from Bob Stumbles who died, tragically, earlier in the year.



*With members of the Council for the ZNT*

I gave a short presentation on INTO and what my rôle was; this was followed by a Question and Answer session.

After dinner with Lin and Jean I had an early night to be ready for the journey to the Eastern Highlands and La Rochelle the next morning.

The first thing that struck me about Harare was its apparent sophistication by comparison to both Addis Ababa and Kampala. Large well spaced houses in the suburbs and well stocked supermarkets selling all the normal foodstuffs. There is clearly a sense of optimism that the worst of the economic gloom is over now that the US\$ is the country's currency. But what torment they have gone through. As recently as 2 years ago when bank notes were being printed as if there was no tomorrow, inflation had reached unimaginable figures. I was shown a chart with the comparative amounts of money required to buy a loaf of bread, starting at 1 Zim\$ in 2005 and rising to 20 billion Zim\$ by 2008!

Inflation, I was told, was increasing so fast in 2008 that a builder's quote lasted for a day and if you went out for a drink you bought two pints of beer at the same time in case the price had gone up by the time you were ready for the second!

The 3 hour journey to La Rochelle was also a poignant reminder of the main reason for this inflation – the 'land reform' measures. Occasionally there were fenced off farms where white Rhodesians were still in residence but these were very, very few and far between. Where they had previously existed the land had, for the most part, reverted to scrub and bush and the fences removed and sold!

In the course of a few short years the country has ceased to be the 'bread basket of Africa' and now is importing most of its food from neighbouring countries. Another election in the early part of next year does not augur well for Zimbabwe's immediate prospects of a productive future.

It is worth highlighting the situation because it has seriously affected the Zimbabwe National Trust (and many other organisations no doubt). This immediately became apparent at La Rochelle where the property has been allowed, perforce, to stagnate. Built in the early 50's for Sir Stephen and Lady Courtauld, the house, now a hotel, has the faded elegance of a bygone era. It is in desperate need of repair and maintenance, but what with? The wonderful grounds and garden, known for the collection of orchids, azaleas and exotic trees, where once there were 55 gardeners, now has just 6. In all the circumstances they are doing a fair job but the buildings and water features need attention and the display of orchids could be substantially improved given the funding.

After a tour of the property we went in to Mutare to meet the local Committee and view some other Courtauld buildings including an art-deco theatre. I gave the committee my initial reactions based on what I had seen

I have since sent a separate report on La Rochelle with recommendations to the Harare and Mutare Committees.



*La Rochelle: members of the Mutare Committee in the foreground and orchid below*



After dinner and a comfortable night in the hotel, Lin and Jean Goncalves, John Hyslop (Harare Council member) and I walked around the grounds for one and a half hours before breakfast and then drove on to the Rhodes Museum at Nyanga. This was created in the old stable block of Lord Cecil Rhodes' house, also now a hotel.

Once again the museum had a somewhat jaded feel to it but the recent curatorial appointment of Edmore, a young and very enthusiastic graduate, trained at the National Art Gallery in Johannesburg, should pay dividends

In the afternoon, on our way to World's View, a countryside property in the mountains north of Nyanga, we witnessed the distressing site of a Wildebeest limping away from the remainder of the herd after we heard two shots being fired by a National Park Ranger who we could see through binoculars. We drove back to their office and confronted the head ranger who informed us that they were allocated 2 Wildebeest per year to cull. It seemed a shame to carry out this task in full view of road users and we said so!

Worlds View is just that! A magnificent land- and cloudscape awaited us after we had made the long journey to the summit, stretching for miles into the distance.

These three properties that we had seen, and a fourth, a hilltop close to Mutare, are all under the ZNT's control and now looked after by the Mutare Committee.

After a night at the Rhodes Hotel we returned to Harare for a final dinner at Lin and Jean's with the Harare Committee at which I gave my thoughts on the visits and thanked them all, and in particular Lin and Jean, for the warmth of their welcome and hospitality



*Wildebeest near Nyanga and below the World's View*



