

# DO-IT-YOURSELF African Adventure

On a Jeep  
Safari Through  
Southern Africa



by Richard Truesdell

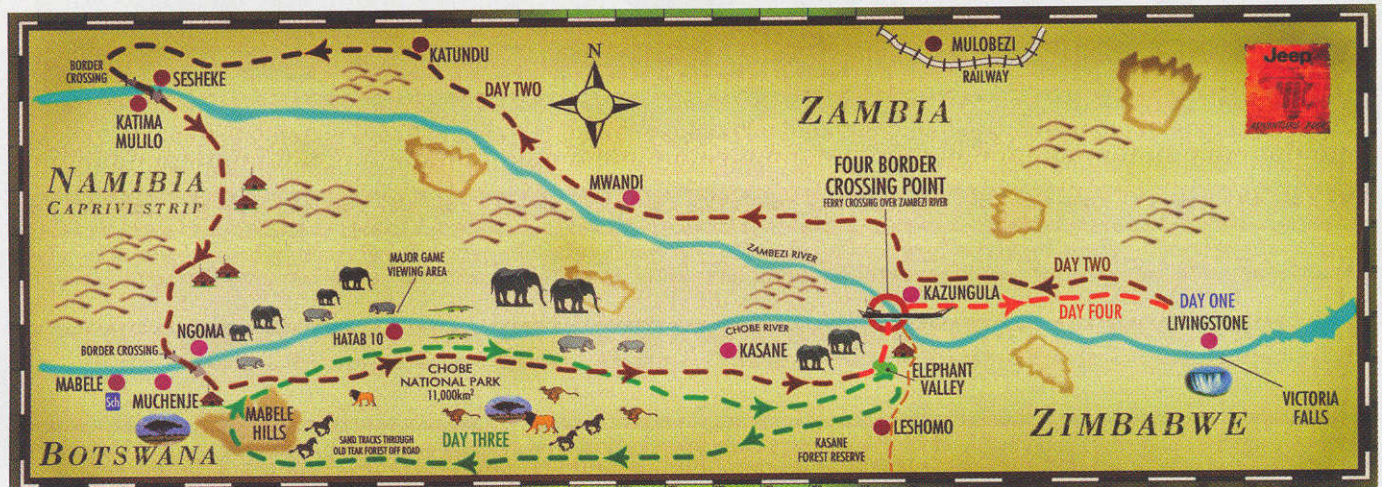
**T**he watering hole was on the unmarked border between Botswana and neighboring Zimbabwe—about 100 yards from where we were eating dinner. For a long time, there was no activity. Then, suddenly, the silence was broken when a herd of elephants came

tromping in through the trees, the light of the near-full moon illuminating the scene.

We were staying at the Elephant Valley Lodge in the Lesoma Valley in the Kasane Forest Reserve bordering the famed Chobe National Park, on day two of our African adventure. We drove a 2005 Jeep Liberty (still called the Cherokee in overseas markets)—the

new Renegade and the 2.8-liter four-cylinder common-rail direct-injection turbodiesel (CRD), now available for the first time in North America.

Since its inception, the Liberty has been available overseas with turbodiesel power, essential for success in the European SUV marketplace where fuel costs between \$4 and \$5 a gallon. Jeep's new direct-injection turbodiesel offers



an electronically controlled, variable-geometry turbocharger, central to its outstanding efficiency, featuring moveable vanes that allow it to act like a small turbocharger at lower speeds, while at higher speeds these vanes adjust, giving it the efficiency of a larger unit. The engine serves up class-leading low-end torque (295 pound-feet) while those who commute great distances will appreciate its fuel economy (22 city/27 highway). On our trip, our CRD averaged more than 21 mpg, most of which was off-pavement.

Beyond the improvement in fuel economy, the CRD offers Liberty owners two major advantages. The excellent low-end torque provides increased capability off-road, while the wide powerband gives the Liberty excellent towing capabilities: 5000 pounds when equipped with the optional 545RFE five-speed automatic transmission. This refined engine casts aside preconceived ideas about diesel noise, vibration, and smell.

### On the Ground in Southern Africa

Our African adventure started at the Royal Livingstone Hotel in the former British colonial enclave of Livingstone, Zambia.

The guides, many with extensive Paris-to-Dakar Rally experience, packed high-powered rifles and would secure a safety perimeter at each planned stop. Some of the areas we'd visit would be inhabited by dangerous predators like lions, cheetahs, and spotted hyenas.

Our 12-Liberty caravan, backed by several support vehicles, set off for Botswana early on day two, crossing parts of Namibia over recently hard-surfaced roads. By midday, as we traversed the famed Caprivi Strip, the springtime temperatures were well over 100 degrees. We reached our destination, the Elephant Valley Lodge, as the sunlight faded over the horizon.

Day three would turn out to be the highlight of our trip, compressing a week's worth of adventure into a span of barely less than 12 hours. We started with a challenging off-road section, where we put the CRD's torque to the test on a particularly difficult trail through ancient teak forests. Before lunch, we visited the town of Mabele, where we were greeted by schoolchildren, who were happy to ditch the classroom to sing and dance for us. Jeep had painted the town's day-care center and installed windows in the school buildings. This is the Jeep tradition, stretching all the way back to World War Two

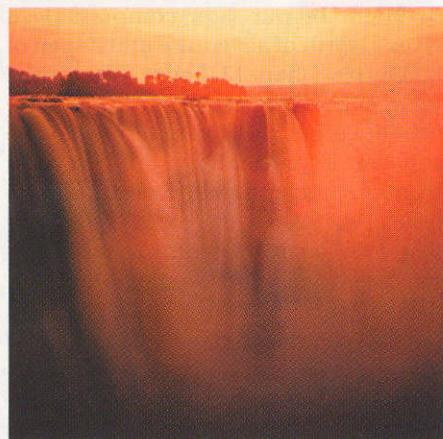




when young GIs handed candy bars to hungry children in occupied Germany. One of our local guides, a young man named Reggie, told us he'd graduated from this school.

Departing Mabele, we stopped on a bluff overlooking the Chobe River to watch a large herd of impalas having lunch along the side of the road. The wildlife we saw in the 11,000-square-kilometer Chobe National Park surprised even our guides, who'd shepherded three groups previously along this route. Elephants, giraffes, impalas, and even a lonely jackal came within reach of our caravan as we traveled a 10-mile stretch before sundown.

It was almost time to depart for the airport in Livingstone for the hour-long flight back to Johannesburg, but our hosts had a surprise for us—a 30-minute helicopter flight over Victoria Falls. From 2000 feet above the falls and flying through the gorge, we felt the same sense of wonder that English explorer David Livingstone must have felt when he stumbled across what we now call one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. **tr**





## Doing It Yourself

**T**o find out more about an African safari, [go2africa.com](http://go2africa.com) is a good place to start. Click on the African Safari Planner link from the homepage, and you'll be presented with a wealth of choices.

For the lowest airfares to Johannesburg, the main international gateway into the region, look at the three big U.S.-based travel sites, Travelocity, Expedia, and our personal favorite, Orbitz. Be sure to investigate air and land packages on all three sites; sometimes they're almost as inexpensive as the airfare alone.

If you want to rent a Jeep or other four-wheel-drive vehicle while in Southern Africa, your best bet will be to call Hertz, Avis, or Budget directly, all of which have affiliates in Johannesburg. Expect to pay at least \$500 per week for a basic 4WD-equipped vehicle with air-conditioning. Be sure to check with the rental agency for any off-road use restrictions that might be in place.—R.T.