



Remote River Expeditions



MADAGASCAR 2007

Quest to Find Madagascar's Biggest Baobab

March 16 – April 06, 2007

A River and Forest Journey with Dr. Jim Bond

Highlights

- Discover and investigate the fascinating and unique xerophytic flora of SW Madagascar
- Descent by dug-out canoe of the remote Mangoky River and its gorge (5 days)
- Exploring on foot to map, measure, sketch and paint the beautiful baobab trees
- Strong emphasis on interaction – traveling, working and staying with friendly, local people
- Challenging trek across the spiny Mikea Forest by foot and ox-cart – by moonlight (3 days)
- Relax, swim, sail & snorkel in the warm Indian Ocean

Expedition Outline



Madagascar is renowned for its natural history and rich biodiversity. An island-continent, separated from Africa for over 175 million years, it has to a large extent followed its own ecological journey. While some groups of animals and plants are notably absent, others, such as chameleons, lemurs, palms and euphorbias, appear to have gone wild, evolving into a wide range of bizarre and exotic forms, to fill the gaps. Out of 12,000 plant species found on the island, 10,000 are endemic, or found nowhere else. Perhaps the most spectacular of all are the magnificent baobab trees (*Adansonia* species) – just one of a surprising number of swollen trunked or ‘bottle’ trees found in the dry forests of the south, west and north of the island, which have all evolved to cope with a relatively long dry season. Africa and Australia have only one species of baobab apiece, but Madagascar boasts no less than six of its own.

On this expedition we shall be exploring the southern range of the tallest and arguably the most beautiful baobab species of all, *Adansonia grandidieri*, or ‘*renala*’ in Malagasy, (literally: ‘mother of the forest’). Our (loose) goal is to find – and paint - the biggest *renala* in Madagascar.

The previous record holder gave its name to a village, Tsiarimpioke, which means: ‘no breathing in’. The story goes that the King of the Sakalava once issued a challenge for anyone to walk or run, while whistling, right around the base of huge tree without pausing for breath. No one was able to do it.



Sadly, this tree died 80 years ago, when the mighty Mangoky River, by which it stood, changed course. The forest by Tsiarimpioke is still full of baobabs. In fact, due to its relative inaccessibility, this is one of the most intact baobab forests left in Madagascar, yet it is still largely unknown and unmapped.



To get there, we plan to paddle and drift down the remote, middle section of the Mangoky (Madagascar's longest river) in a combination of traditional, dugout canoes (*pirogues*) and inflatable rafts. We will pass through quite wild and uninhabited terrain and a spectacular sandstone gorge. Emerging from the gorge,

we make a base camp for a few days, to explore the nearby baobab forests on foot. The second part of the trip involves traveling by land (ox-cart then truck), to trek across the spiny Mikea Forest, ending up beside the Indian Ocean at the village of Andavadoaka for some well-earned rest and relaxation. Finally, we return to Toliara by truck.



We will have spent three weeks, mostly well off the beaten track, and getting a far greater depth of insight into one particularly fascinating corner of Madagascar, its people and its trees, than most visitors to the island can ever imagine. We will also have contributed to ongoing research on the baobabs and ethnography of the region, and hopefully had a lot of fun into the bargain.



Remote River Expeditions

MADAGASCAR 2007

Baobab Quest Madagascar A River and Forest Journey on the Great Red Island March – April 2007

Day 0

Depart Paris, London, Johannesburg for Antananarivo

Day 1

Antananarivo Toliara

Arrive Antananarivo and take connecting flight to Toliara, in the Southwest, where we meet our expedition leaders, Gary Lemmer and Jim Bond. Check in to hotel for two nights, relax, lunch, siesta. Afternoon visit to the Toliara Museum and meet the Malagasy members of the expedition. Opportunity to go to ATM / change money and explore the town. (L,D)

Day 2 – 3

Toliara on the Mozambique Channel

Early morning visit to the Arboretum d'Antsokay, a showcase of plants endemic to the southwest of Madagascar, set up by the late Swiss botanist, Herman Petignat. Lunch, siesta and swim at Melody Beach, followed by drive to Tropic of Capricorn and late afternoon stroll among the moringas and other lime-loving plants. Watch the sun go down over the Indian Ocean, before returning to our hotel in Toliara for the night. (B,L,D)

Day 4

Toliara Sakaraha Beroroha

Early morning departure from Toliara to Sakaraha, passing by Zombitse National Park to see *Adansonia za*. Turn off the main road and take the long, rough road north toward Beroroha. Depending on the condition of the road we may make a 4x4 camp en route to the River or camp on the banks of the Mangoky River. Meet our *piroguiers* for the trip downriver. (B,L,D)

Days 5 -8

Mangoky River

Paddle and drift downriver for about five days, camping on sandy riverbanks. We pass through quite wild and unspoiled terrain and a spectacular sandstone gorge. Along the way we will keep our eyes peeled for wildlife, including birds, chameleons, crocodiles and with any luck, lemurs. We shall also be looking out for the first (highest upriver) baobabs, the position of which we shall record by GPS. Emerging from the gorge, the Mangoky valley opens out temporarily and we shall look for a suitable place for a base camp – perhaps near the hot springs at Andranomafana (‘place of hot water’), not far from Tsiarimpioke. (B,L,D)

Days 9 -11

Base Camp Mangoky River

From our base camp, we plan to spend some time exploring both sides of the river and two side valleys on foot. Working closely with guides and schoolchildren from nearby villages, we hope to visit, photograph, sketch, paint, plot, measure the circumferences of, and record traditional stories about the baobabs in the area. A primary aim of the trip is to promote the conservation value and significance of the Mangoky baobab forest *at the local level*, in addition to the data we shall be gathering for ANGAP¹, WWF Madagascar, CEDRATOM etc. (B.L.D)

Day 12

Lac Ihoty Andranondhoke

Leaving the Mangoky, we now travel overland, first by ox-cart until we rendezvous with our truck again. We skirt Lac Ihoty, Madagascar’s largest lake and a seasonal feeding ground for hundreds of migrating lesser flamingos, and on to camp beside the friendly village of Andranondhoke (‘place with water where the egrets were’). (B,L,D)

Day 13

Andranondhoke

Explore on foot another baobab forest - and perhaps measure another contender for the crown of biggest baobab at nearby Marolinta (‘many leeches’). Afternoon rest under shady tamarind trees before our trek across the Mikea Forest. (B,L,D)

Day 14 – 16

Lac Mafay, Antsonobe and Ankindranoka

Set off at night when the moon rises, for a challenging, three-day trek, across the spiny forest, home to the Mikea, a semi-nomadic, forest people². We aim to be mostly walking by the light of the full moon to avoid the heat of the day; our luggage will be transported by ox-cart.

Day 17 – 19

Andavadoaka

Finally, a few days’ well-deserved rest and relaxation, based at a simple hotel at the Vezo coastal fishing village of Andavadoaka (‘place with the hole in the rock’). Nearby is a unique population of weirdly stunted, patterned and wonderfully grotesque-looking *renala*. For those who are ‘baobab-ed out’ by this stage, there are plenty of other options, such as swimming, sailing in outrigger sailing pirogues to Nosy Ve, a nearby island, and snorkelling or diving on the reef.

¹ Association National de Gestion des Aires Protégées

² The Mikea have said they do not wish to be regarded as a ‘tourist attraction’. RRE, an operator committed to responsible tourism, is sensitive to the need to not promote them as such. Any encounters we have with the Mikea will be strictly on their terms.

Day 20

**Madiorano
Toilara**

Drive back south by truck (6-8 hours) to Madiorano, a small, quiet Vezo village, 35km north of Toliara. Stay the night at Chez Bernard, simple bungalows by the beach.

Day 21

**Toliara,
Antananarivo and
homeward bound
flights**

Early morning visit to PK32 and Reniala Community Forest Reserve at Mangily - to see the type specimens of *Adansonia rubrostipa* (*syn. fony*) baobabs, en route to Toliara. Lunch and connecting flights from Toliara to Antananarivo, and on (overnight) to Paris...

ARE INCLUDED IN YOUR SAFARI:

- Domestic airfare in Madagascar
- All transfers and services as above
- All accommodations & meals as indicated
- Local English speaking naturalist guide
- All government and hotel taxes.
- Porterage

- All park fees and admissions

ARE NOT INCLUDED:

- International airfare
- International departure tax
- Diving gear at Andavadoaka
- Drinks, tips, laundry and all items of a personal nature

- All items not specifically included

Land Cost per person TBA

Minimum group size: 6 members

OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO MORONDAVA

Day 18 or 19

Transfer from Andavadoaka to Morombe airport for Twin Otter flights to Toliara or Morondava
- To Toliara: Wednesdays, 14.40h
- To Morondava: Thursdays, 10.10h

Day 21

Or: transfer to Toliara airport for flight to Morondava

For More Information: www.chezmaggie.com

jim.bond@zen.co.uk
gary@remoterivers.com