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Barry Shenton (30 April 1929 - 21 March 2007)



Barry Shenton was born on the 30th April 1929 in Eshowe, Zululand. His father John Lindsay Shenton, "Shen" had moved to South Africa from Leicester, UK as a baby with his grandparents in search of a new life in the gold reefs of Johannesburg in 1894. "Shen" worked as a mining engineer up to the Great War. He rose to the rank of captain and came back from service in Europe (one of the 3 surviving officers of 150 in Delville Wood) to a cattle/cotton farm. Barry's mother Pat was a strong-willed Scot of third generation South Africa. By 1936 the cotton had done well but the cattle had been decimated by Nagana, the often fatal tsetse disease so Shen joined the Parks Board and the family moved to Hluhluwe game reserve where Shen headed the Tsetse Control Department for Mukuzi, Umfolozi and Hluhluwe. The conflict between game and livestock escalated because of Nagana and at one time the Parks Board were given orders to shoot all game to prevent further spread. Barry and his younger brother Bob who joined the Tsetse Control Unit and became good hunters until Shen organized six Martins bombers to spray DDT up to the boundaries of the reserves and this ended the tsetse conflict.

In 1948 the family moved north to Northern Rhodesia where they started farming eggs, citrus and maize on a piece of virgin land in Mazabuka. Times were tough so Barry joined the Northern Rhodesian Game Department on the 19th June 1950. His first posting was to Lundazi where he joined Bert Schultz as the first two professional hunters in the newly formed Government Conducted Hunting Scheme in the Luangwa Valley. He was based at the "Castle" which was built and run by the DC Errol Button and was responsible for elephant control on crop raiders in Eastern province in the rainy season. Fluent in Zulu, he now learnt ChiNyanja and over the next five

years was a full time ranger opening up the west bank of the Luangwa game reserve to tourism. In 1952 Barry blazed the boundaries of the area to which Game Reserve regulations would be applied in Chief Nsefu's area and he established a Game Guards Training Camp at Milyoti. Profits from commercial hunting in Chief Nsefu's area were given to the chief to develop his area – this is the earliest of this form of community based project in its kind, a system not unlike today's Community Resource Boards. He built the first permanent camp in South Luangwa, "Nsefu", and today the camp remains almost unchanged under the management of Robin Pope Safaris. Nsefu survived the floods this year, for the 57th time while many other newer structures have been washed away over the years, a testimony to the quality of service offered by those early government workers. The Nsefu Game Reserve was declared on the 5th of May 1966 which is of enormous historical significance, being the first area where wildlife viewing was established on the initiative of a local chief as a source of revenue.

Over the next few years Barry was posted to Kabompo, Kasempa and he built the Nyika Rest Camp on the 8000ft Nyika plateau.

In late 1958, the council gave the Game Department just eleven months to open up Kafue National Park to tourism, failing which the area would lose its status and be re-settled. Norman Carr selected Barry and Johnny Uys to help him and between April and September 1958 Barry had built 900km of roads from Dundamedzi in the South to the Busanga plains in the North and the two men had built 6 camps -Moshi, Ntemwa, Nanzila, Chunga, Lufupa and Kafwala. Roads were surveyed on foot and cleared behind by hand to then be smoothed with a railway line triangle pulled behind a Landrover. Bridges were built with rock and concrete around 44-gallon drum forms, all carted by an old three ton Morris truck via Namwala. The Morris chassis eventually broke, and it was repaired with a mopane pole wrapped with wet buffalo hide - good enough to finish the job. By the end of 1959, the game department had won its challenge, and Africa's biggest National Park at the time was open to visitors. Barry's parents Pat and Shen ran Ngoma Lodge, the original hotel in the area built by the first Warden Len Vaughan. During this time Norman Carr had two lion cubs to care for, and once they were weaned from bottle milk, they were moved to Ngoma where Barry and Johnny Uys took care of them as they learnt to hunt and fend for themselves. The story of these two lions, Big Boy and Little Boy, is written in Norman Carr's book, "Return to the Wild".

In early 1961 Barry, Howard Alker, Johnny Uys and Bill Bainbridge transported and relocated the first six rhino from Natal to Mosi O Tunya National Park. The rhino thrived until the last was poached in the mid 1980's.



Barry (at Rhino crate) offloading white rhino at Mosi O Tunya



Barry (front left) with his colleagues from the Northern Rhodesia Game Department, 1961

One of the visitors in the dry season of 1961 was a pretty Swedish nurse who had settled at a mission hospital in eastern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and escorted her visiting parents to KNP in an old Morris minor they had bought for the journey. The car developed a problem and Barry took four days to fix it, by which time he had proposed her for marriage and Marianne, who loved the bush, moved to Kafue to join him and became his lifelong partner. Their first son Rolf was born in 1963, followed by Derek. Barry was dedicated to duty, efficiency and discipline and was promoted to Warden of KNP in 1964 to 1966. In 1967- 1968 he was transferred to Livingstone to be Warden of Southern Province, responsible for Mosi Oa tunya Np, Lochinvar and Blue Lagoon until 1968. Marianne worked as a nurse at the "Non Fee Paying" section of Batoka Hospital. In 1969 Barry was transferred to headquarters in Chilanga where his daughter Allison was born. And in 1970 his last posting in the Game Department was at Kasama, as Warden of Northern Province.

By 1970, Zambians were ready to take over the Game Department, and Barry retired to manage brother Bob's farm in Mazabuka where he farmed potatoes, tomatoes and maize and cattle. In 1975, his youngest son Clive was born. In 1982, Barry finally managed to buy his own farm in Mkushi and again adjusted quickly to the new environment. He proved, at 53, that one is never too old to start a new life and became one of Zambia's biggest seed growers, both in soya and maize. Barry diversified whenever opportunities arose, and ran a borehole drilling rig, contract harvested maize, and built Kaingo Lodge under Shenton Safaris in South Luangwa National Park in 1992 with his son, Derek. In 1994, when the Great North Road was almost impassable, he began his last major project: The Forest Inn. The well-appointed, peaceful Forest Inn has become the place to stay for almost all visitors to Mkushi.

Barry slipped quietly away on the 21st of March in his bed surrounded by his wife and children, surely a satisfied man, having beaten all his life's challenges, including a first cancer fifteen years ago. Youngest son, Clive will continue managing the farm and the Forest Inn. His children and grandchildren have continued his sense of nation building, social conscience and sustainable resource management.

Written by Rolf and Ali Shenton

Hard Years, Soft Tears

(Written by Derek Shenton 23.3.07 in memory of Barry Shenton)

I'll hear you in the birds that sing,

In the waters of the stream

I'll see you in the grass that bends

In the storm that growls

I'll feel you in the earth in my hands

In the toil of the land

When I focus on the wild things of nature

A lion, a buffalo, a giant elephant bull

A saddle billed stork, a huge fig tree

I'll celebrate them as I celebrate you

Hard years, hard tears have fallen,

Washing these memories through

Hard years, soft tears;

Soft tears



Barry and his granddaughter Kalai amongst the Soyas on his farm - Feb 2007

info@kaingo.com

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- [What Our Guests Say](#)
- [What the Press Say](#)
- [Community Support](#)

- [Kaingo](#)
- [Mwamba](#)

- [General Information](#)
- [Getting Here](#)
- [South Luangwa](#)

- [Safari Activities](#)
- [Seasonal Calendar](#)
- [Special Occasions](#)
- [Wildlife Gallery & E-cards](#)

- [Overview](#)
- [Hippo](#)
- [Elephant](#)
- [Carminie](#)
- [Mwamba's Last Waterhole](#)

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