

## NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



### Zimbabwe's Greatest Treasure

3 March 2023



Dear Family and Friends

On an overcast and stormy day friends and I set out for the ancient monument. We were excited, it was a very long time since we had last seen it. We set out early, none of us sure exactly where to go but there would be signs, wouldn't there, this was Zimbabwe's greatest treasure we were going to see after all. Built over a period of three centuries, towering, hand-carved stone walls, once an ancient capital populated by 12-15,000 people, I knew this day was going to be one to remember. I had read up as much as I could and had let the ancient story seep into my heart to take me back in time. As the kilometers ticked past I tried to imagine what this land must have looked like five hundred years ago but was soon shocked back into the present when we drove through the city.

It was an hour before the banks and MTA's (Money Transfer Agencies) were due to open but already the queues were massive. People crowded the pavements, all waiting for money, not Zimbabwe money which has depreciated by 84% since January, but for real US dollar money. This has become the enduring image of Zimbabwe, men and women young and old, waiting for money to come from their family and friends scattered all over the world. The Diaspora is keeping us alive: from family there to family here, propping us up, helping us pay our bills and buy our food while our leaders grow ever richer and their opulence gets ever grander. This is 2023 and I last wrote letters like this in my book 'Millions Billions Trillions' which describes life in Zimbabwe between 2005 and 2009. Seventeen years later we are rushing headlong back to that time: queuing for money, power cuts of 18 hours a day, water that comes maybe once a week and inflation that is now 480%. ([Steve Hanke, economics Professor, Johns Hopkins University](#))

Back on our journey we saw one small sign high up at an intersection which sent us off hopefully in the right direction of the ancient monument. We were all suspicious about how easy this was going to be, only the day before we had met tourists from Holland who were lost, by nearly 100km, asking us if we knew where the ancient monument was. After dead ends, potholes, U turns and asking for directions, tempers were frayed; how could the signage to Zimbabwe's most treasured monument be so shamefully absent? Isn't this the country that our leaders say is 'open for business' and so desperate for tourists to return to?

At last we arrived at Great Zimbabwe, previously called Zimbabwe Ruins. Up and up and up we went, hundreds of stone steps, huge old trees giving shade but whose roots are clearly damaging the old stone walls, beautiful sunbirds flitting around, spectacular views across the valleys.

Narrowing walkways, towering stone walls on both sides and a sudden coolness gives you goose bumps. Stop for a minute with me, close your eyes, stretch your arms out, touch the stone walls on either side of you: can you hear the whispered footsteps of ancient stonemasons walking along these passages, can you feel the tingling of an ancient time under your fingers? A spectacular place, magnificent structures, spiritual to its core, generation after generation putting their own interpretation on it to suit their political narrative. But despite the magnificence you have to ask, who on earth sanctioned the fixing of spotlights to these ancient hand carved stone walls? Shameful not to be able to take a single photograph of the stone walls surrounding the Hill Enclosure without a shiny metal spotlight and ugly grey plastic wires in the picture. Why the spotlights aren't mounted on the ground is a mystery, this is after all a World Heritage Site.

At the end of a long day steeped in history, walking, climbing and learning I couldn't help but wonder which way next for Zimbabwe as we approach another season of electioneering. Will this Zimbabwe stand the test of time? We are a country of such beauty, with so many natural resources and so much potential but election promises only ever yield more self enrichment for leaders and their buddies. Every day we see the bad but we look for the good: a little boy dancing on the roadside, an old toothless man smiling as he tries to persuade you to buy his hand-made basket, a large-chested woman in a communal land who beams in welcome when you stop and say you are lost and then asks if you can spare a dollar so she can take her maize to the grinding mill. Aah Zimbabwe, how we love you! We live in hope for our beautiful country and knowing that you read and share these letters gives me hope, thank you!

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website. Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 23rd year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenyu (I am your friend)

Love Cathy

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All my books are now available on Amazon, Kindle and Lulu with the hardback version of my evocative Photo-books "Zimbabwe's Timeless Beauty" (the 2021 and 2022 collections) on high gloss paper available exclusively on LULU.

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