

## FOREWORD

*Peter Overton*

It is ten years since the Biosearch Nyika project was first mooted and agreement with the Director of National Parks and Wildlife obtained for our exploration of the remoter parts of the Nyika National Park. Over this period the teams have focused mainly on the northern part of the park where patrolling has been very limited and our gathering of intelligence has been most helpful to the Nyika management.

In 2004 we undertook the most challenging expedition to date, launched from the extreme north of the park at Uledi, a four-hour drive from Thazima. The team's first challenge was to cross the unbridged North Rukuru River with all their supplies. They then had to climb up the western escarpment of the Mpanda ridge to a point on the Mpero River, where they set up a base camp, from which to launch out on their surveys. The greatest achievement was to climb both Mpanda and Kawozya and discover the remote Bleak House, now derelict but offering stunning views over Lake Malawi and far beyond. At this point they could certainly claim to be in remote country since this old site is much talked about but very rarely seen by visitors. We have yet to have clear information about who built it, when and why. Perhaps it was a holiday 'retreat' for Livingstonia or a staging post for missionaries who conducted business on the west of the Nyika National Park and into Zambia



In many ways this expedition was the pinnacle of logistical achievement. It was with some trepidation, after a comprehensive recce in 2003, that we decided to go for it. Manuel Gondwe, who was based at Uledi, deserves special mention for his contribution, making the adventurous 2004 expedition possible and showing exceptional responsibility and reliability both on the recce and the expedition itself. We are grateful that we were provided with so many support scouts this year. In the unlikely event of an emergency it would have stretched all our human resources to get someone out from such an

isolated place as the Mpanda–Kawozya ridge. The team, with their popular and experienced leader Quincy, relished the challenge. They have contributed valuable information about the far north of the park, its plants and its animals and also the considerable extent of poaching in the area.

Every visit to Nyika has involved substantial fund-raising by our teams and each time we have been able to make some contribution to the equipment of the scouts in the park, to enable them to do their jobs more effectively. The long-running funding problems, which have left Nyika with a severe shortage of manpower, are beyond our reach. However, it is very encouraging to hear of co-operative developments with the Zambian authorities and other Malawian Parks, which may increase the number of patrolling scouts. We feel that the provision of excellent, sturdy and waterproof binoculars provided through a grant from the British High Commission in Lilongwe, were well-received and should be of great



assistance in improving the effectiveness of the staff that are available.

It is the contrast with their normal lives, which is one of the major attractions for our teams to visit Nyika. Apart from the excellent and necessary support and protection that the game scouts afford us in the bush, they give the team members some flavour of what it is like to live in these difficult conditions, day in and day out, and how it impacts on their families. The team also picks up bush skills of which they are very proud. The dry and largely wind-free climate, apart from the occasional exciting whirlwind generated by the heat of the day, is an added contrast to conditions more familiar to those based in the United Kingdom.



It seems that in the remotest areas one cannot escape football. Laura's description of the great Uledi cup final is a worthy contribution to the report. We would like to thank members of that community for assisting us with getting our supplies and equipment up the mountain but not for the thorough thrashing that they gave their visitors at the match!

At the end of the expedition the team enjoyed two nights at the lakeshore near Chinteche. They always seem to relish this finale of luxury after an exhausting period in the bush on simple rations and



it is generally considered to be safer to bring them here after rather than before the expedition. The proximity of Nyika National Park, despite its remoteness, to the wonderful resource of the lake means that there is an added advantage to visitors to make the effort to travel north in Malawi. The cleaner and healthier climate is also a huge attraction for those wishing to spend longer enjoying the considerable wildlife attractions of the park, even

though large mammal populations are not high. Nyika remains a superb location for wildlife research and for wilderness trekking and can certainly accommodate many more visitors (on foot) without visible evidence of their presence.

We feel that our series of expeditions have been both unique and successful over the years. We have always received great support from the Parks staff and there has been a genuine feeling of mutual benefit at the end of each expedition.

The full report is available on request and includes sections on Botany, Large Mammal status and Poaching Activity in the Nyika National Park.

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