

C1 Advanced

- Gapped text -

YOU ARE GOING TO READ AN EXTRACT FROM A MAGAZINE ARTICLE. SIX PARAGRAPHS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE EXTRACT. CHOOSE FROM THE PARAGRAPHS A - G THE ONE WHICH FITS EACH GAP (7 - 12). THERE IS ONE EXTRA PARAGRAPH WHICH YOU DO NOT NEED TO USE.

'They say this is a good test of a relationship,' said Tim as he handed me the paddle. I wasn't sure that such a tough challenge was what was needed on a honeymoon, but it was too late to go back. My wife, Leigh, and I were standing with our guide, Tim Came, on the banks of the Zambezi near the Zambia/Botswana border. This was to be the highlight of our honeymoon: a safari downriver, ending at the point where David Livingstone first saw the Victoria Falls.

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Neither of us had any canoeing experience. Tentatively we set off downstream, paddling with more enthusiasm than expertise. Soon we heard the first distant rumblings of what seemed like thunder. 'Is that Victoria Falls?' we inquired naïvely. 'No,' said Tim dismissively. 'That's our first rapid.' Easy, we thought. Wrong!

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The canoe plotted a crazed path as we careered from side to side, our best efforts seeming only to add to our plight. This was the first of many rapids, all relatively minor, all enjoyably challenging for tourists like us.

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The overnight stops would mean mooring at a deserted island in the middle of the river, where Tim's willing support team would be waiting, having erected a camp and got the water warm for our bucket showers. As the ice slowly melted in the drinks, restaurant-quality food would appear from a cooker using hot coals. Then people would begin to relax, and the day's stories would take on epic proportions.

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One morning, Tim decided to count the number of hippos we saw, in an attempt to gauge the population in this part of the river. Most of the wildlife keeps a cautious distance, and we were assured that, safe in our canoe, any potential threats would be more scared of us than we were of them - but we had been warned to give these river giants a wide berth. They'd normally stay in mid-stream, watching us with some suspicion, and greeting our departure with a cacophony of grunts.

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Tim yelled 'Paddle!' and over the next 100 metres an Olympic runner would have struggled to keep up with us. The hippo gave up the chase, and although Tim said he was just a youngster showing off, our opinion was that he had honeymooners on the menu. That would certainly be the way we told the story by the time we got home.

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At some times of the year, you can even enjoy a natural jacuzzi in one of the rock pools beside the falls. No permanent structures are allowed on the island - everything has to be removed when you leave. The travel brochures say it's the world's most exclusive picnic spot. It's certainly the ideal place to wind down after a near miss with a hippo.

A Luckily we could make our mistakes in privacy as, apart from Tim and another couple, for two days we were alone. Our only other company was the array of bird and animal life. The paddling was fairly gentle and when we got tired, Tim would lead us to the shore and open a cool-box containing a picnic lunch.

B If that was the scariest moment, the most romantic was undoubtedly our final night's campsite. Livingstone Island is perched literally on top of Victoria Falls. The safari company we were with have exclusive access to it: it's just you, a sheer drop of a few hundred metres and the continual roar as millions of litres of water pour over the edge.

C There was plenty of passing traffic to observe on land as well - giraffes, hippos, elephants and warthogs, while eagles soared overhead. We even spotted two rare white rhinos - sadly shorn of their horns in an attempt to stop poaching. We paddled closer to get a better look.

D We had a 4-metre aluminium canoe to ourselves. It was a small craft for such a mighty river, but quite big enough to house the odd domestic dispute. Couples had, it seemed, ended similar trips arguing rather than paddling. But it wasn't just newlyweds at risk. Tim assured us that a group of comedians from North America had failed to see the funny side too.

E But number 150 had other ideas. As we hugged the bank he dropped under the water. We expected him to re-surface in the same spot, as the others had done. Instead, there was a sudden roar and he emerged lunging towards the canoe.

F Over the next hour or so the noise grew to terrifying dimensions. By the time we edged around the bend to confront it, we were convinced we would be faced with mountains of white water. Instead, despite all the sound and fury, the Zambezi seemed only slightly ruffled by a line of small rocks.

G When we'd all heard enough, we slept under canvas, right next to the river bank. Fortunately, we picked a time of year largely free of mosquitoes, so our nets and various lotions remained unused. The sounds of unseen animals were our nightly lullaby.