Weekly Register-Call

COLORADO'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED SINCE 1862 IN GILPIN COUNTY

NEWSPAPER OF RECORD FOR GILPIN COUNTY, BLACK HAWK, AND CENTRAL CITY • THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2011 • 75 CENTS

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- Central City Council plans for a busy and festive summer. **CITY p3**
- Crime Stoppers recognizes citizens, officers, and businesses. **PROTECTION p6**
- Wastewater treatment engineering firm replaced in Nederland. **CITY p7**
- Scott Reuman blends science and art beyond tradition. **CULTURE p12**
- Nederland considers bike sharing program and flower adoption. **CITY p17**
- Pee Wee Wrestling mania comes to Gilpin Elementary. **SPORTS p18**

DAVE GIBSON

Hot air ballooning should be on your list of things to do in your lifetime. Our photographer takes you along over the African plains. **p13**

A different perspective from a hot air balloon

The African photo safari continues

by Dave Gibson

If it was possible to have a bad afternoon after seven days in the Masai Mara, I was having one. Even though I witnessed one of the most incredible things that I had ever seen that very morning, since then my expensive camera long lens seized up and was unable to focus. When I sprayed lens cleaner onto the jammed barrel and slid the zoom, the cleaner turned the ten years of dust to red mud which oozed out all over the place. If that weren't enough, an infection suddenly developed in the mistreated area of my gums – this after spending five thousand dollars over the past four years and undergoing three dental surgery procedures. The camp "daktari" prescribed a general antibiotic which helped temporarily, though I later learned I was allergic to the medicine as it made me sick. His $11 "tent call" was far more reasonable than what my Boulder, Colorado dentist charges! Still feeling fairly good at that time, general staff member Jackson took me on a behind-the-scenes tour of Camp Kichwa Tembo in search of more monkeys. The heartbeat of the camp, the 100 or so people who live and work there, were going about their daily tasks. The camp featured barrack style tents, a soccer field, a church, a fire pit for burning camp trash, and a fenced garden. One man's full-time job was to keep the monkeys out of the garden. Fortunately for him, monkeys are diurnal and he only needed to keep watch during daylight hours. After lunch I settled in for a nice nap only to be interrupted by screaming kids. I marched directly to the office being as polite as I could, but undoubtedly somewhat groggy and grumpy, and asked to be moved to another tent. With the camp 80% empty, James, one of the many managers, accommodated my request immediately solving one of my problems.

That evening after another superb meal, I was told that tomorrow morning I was being treated to a $450 balloon ride. Taken aback, I countered that I was perfectly happy taking pictures of the balloons from the ground and didn't deserve such a magnanimous offer. After pressing further for the motivation behind the gift, it was explained that I was considered special as I had taught James how to play backgammon the night before. I graciously accepted the gift and thanked the presenter repeatedly. Upon further reflection, I decided that it had much more to do with my relocation of quarters than me being all that special! Regardless of the reason, it righted my outlook and made me feel like a king. Kichwa Tembo exhibited once again why in my opinion it is the best safari camp in all of Africa.

After tossing stones under the Land Rover to drive out dozing warthogs, our driver shuttled us to the launch site. Still dark, the yellow and red striped balloon was laying on its side attached to a 14 person wicker basket. Assistants held the bottom of the balloon open to accommodate the hot air being forced into it by an odd looking little man with a shaven head in a captain's shirt, who was controlling the massive propane burners. As it neared full inflation, passengers climbed aboard each sitting horizontally with backs parallel to the ground. I was instructed to grab the straps at my feet as the basket which was being held by eight people slowly tilted upright. For a few seconds I had visions of being Neil Armstrong blasting off to the moon. With a few more tugs of the propane release cord, the spotters stepped back and out of sight. Though we experienced no feeling of movement, when allowed to stand up we were already 60 feet above the earth with a waving ground crew below providing the send-off!

A cheetah sat 200 yards from where we began as we drifted across the Masai plain. Someone asked where we were going, to which the pilot serenely replied "Wherever the wind takes us." Dotted with huge, overgrown termite mounds and zig-zagging game trails, we saw giraffe, waterbuck, impala, and elephant. To our northwest, the Oloololo Escarpment predominantly rose, reflecting the light of the golden sunrise. A sweaty 350 pound Soviet man and his 300 pound son rode in my quarter of the basket. They had driven from Nairobi in a hired mini-van with bad shocks and a nearly blind driver. The son's handshake was like a vice and they reminded me of two Russian bears. My bad fortune reversal continued as the father, situated next to me, had applied a generous masking dose of aftershave that day to conteract the sweat stench. Skimming the treetops by only a few feet, we passed a white-backed vulture. Crossing the Mara River from my lofty vantage, I observed two hippos surging upstream. The captain's job was a warm one, standing directly under the propane burners close to the 12 foot long flames. I commented that I knew then why he cut his hair short which drew a group laugh. Not missing a beat, he wryly returned volley with "I am trying to grow it long," resulting in even louder laughter. The hour went by quickly and we landed softly on the emerald carpet of the savanna without incident.

Of course no hot air balloon ride would be complete without a champagne breakfast. A meticulously set table overflowing with fresh fruit had been prepared for us in the middle of nowhere. The cork was popped, to much fanfare, and a toast was made commemorating our journey. Complimenting the sausage, bacon, biscuits, tea, juices, and waffles, a chef prepared omelets to order. My hefty co-passenger joked that he was on a diet and only ate some light-colored cheese. More chuckles ensued, followed by a rehashing of a unique shared experience, followed with stories of past safaris. I said my goodbyes and complimented the captain on his expert command. With the day still young, my guide Daniel and I motored away on our morning game drive. "Asante sana" James and Kichwa Tembo!

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