

'Having lions close to the stables put the horses totally on edge'

Botswana-based event rider LOUISE CARELSEN takes sporting legend Ingrid Klimke wild game spotting. An 11-hour drive to take part in the FEI World Dressage Challenge also nets the safari director a couple of red rosettes

SADLY I have a confession to make. I haven't seen much eventing action recently. This is because we have been busy with safaris but also because we have had lots of rain and the Limpopo River has been full since December last year. In simple terms this means that we can't cross it. However, the team and I have had time to practise our riding instead.

Excitement levels were high when Olympic gold medallist Ingrid Klimke and some friends accepted our invitation, in conjunction with my company Limpopo Horse Safari's German agent Pferdesafari, to join us on safari in March.

March is typically an unpredictable month weather wise so I checked the forecast like a mad person for weeks before they arrived. The news

was good — until a few days before their due date when huge rain storms were predicted all over South Africa and Botswana. For once the forecast was accurate. Damn. In fact, it was so bad that the rivers flooded, meaning that we were unable to reach Two Mashatus camp, our main base camp just 20 minutes away but on the other side of the Majale River. A swift contingency plan was needed and a new camp was hastily erected on the banks of the Limpopo River right next to the stables.

Ingrid and her friends touched down at our local airstrip in a private plane and, as luck would have it, they enjoyed seeing the Limpopo close up. They were also able to stay with our helpful neighbours at their Rock Camp Lodge for a couple of nights to replace some of the usual wilderness camps

that we would have used as we specialise in mobile safaris. There was another slight complication that left these out of use — the safari truck was stuck in a bog.

It is a real luxury when you get a group in which everyone can ride well and is able to look out for their horses. This was certainly the case with Ingrid and her eight friends. Most of them were very competent amateur riders and some were show jumping professionals.

We had much debate on which horse to put Ingrid on before I finally settled on my young event horse Foxy. I think the nicest thing a guest has ever said to me came from Ingrid when she said that she would like to event him too.

Not much re-schooling needed to be done during Ingrid's stay and we even got a few of my young horses out, which was nice as usually they go out with guides or staff several months before we allow paying guests to ride them.

Game viewing on our reserve, Mashatu, the largest private game reserve in Botswana, is good year round and this week was no exception. Ingrid and

her friends enjoyed sightings of elephants in the lush grass, cheetahs relaxing in the shade of an acacia bush and, of course, zebra, giraffe, eland, kudu and more. During some canters we were joined by zebra



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Ingrid Klimke gives Louise a lesson on her Prix St Georges hopeful Coolmore; Ingrid flies a fence while on safari; the game spotted during Ingrid's stay is as good as it ever is in this part of the world



and they brought smiles to everyone's faces.

I was lucky enough to receive a few lessons from Ingrid during her stay. I rode Coolmore, the horse I was attempting to aim at Prix St Georges level for the first time. I was nervous as all of her friends were watching too.

Ingrid had me working long and low to start with and then she helped me to get Coolmore right back on his hindquarters with a really cool exercise that involves two small circles of 10m each, changing rein in the middle and then each time you change the rein you stop, or almost stop, and then ride on. This sounds obvious but it has made a huge difference to my half-halts.

Ingrid then made me do half pirouettes really accurately before I moved on to the changes which I struggle with. They definitely got better and Ingrid even had me doing a few two-time changes by the end.

On the final night of Ingrid's stay we hired a boat — the river was still very high — to take her group to Two Mashatus camp. We arrived safely but getting back was a different matter as

the boat broke down. I was waiting on the other side of the river to collect everyone and take them to the stables before they were due to head home. It was a fraught hour as mechanic Adolf tried to fix the extremely uncooperative engine. Finally, though, it spluttered into life and we got to the local border to head back to Johannesburg by road with literally seconds to spare.

I tried my hand at pure dressage in April with Coolmore at the FEI World Dressage Challenge in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana.

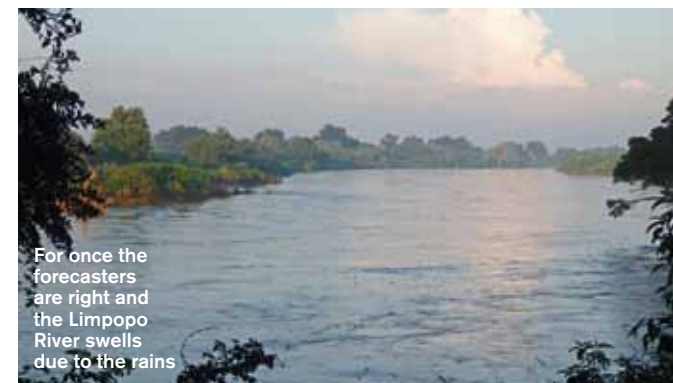
Due to all the rain the Limpopo River was still too high to cross so eventing in Johannesburg wasn't possible.

Instead I faced an 11-hour drive to Gaborone, a tiring trip as the first 50km are on the reserve's horrible dirt roads with their corrugations and small rivers that need the four-wheel drive capabilities of our big safari truck. Dodging elephants and giraffes also goes with the territory. I didn't learn how to do that when I was having driving lessons.

I had to close the safari business for the week and my parents, Louise and Randal White, came over to babysit.

The show was at a place called Lion Park. I'm sure you can guess why. It turned out that there were lions about 30m from the stables behind a fence. Our horses, who are used to real lions in the wild, just didn't understand this close proximity and were totally on edge. These were definitely not ideal conditions for a dressage show.

The big day arrived and I faced judges from the UK and Finland. We were in group 5



For once the forecasters are right and the Limpopo River swells due to the rains

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW With experienced riders in Ingrid's group there are plenty of chances for cantering; guide Mpho has a rough ride in the FEI Dressage World Challenge on the five-year-old Walker Bay; Louise and Coolmore enjoy some jumping practice



rough ride. I have owned Walker Bay for less than a year and to say he is nappy would be an understatement. He is also prone to throwing himself off cliffs backwards. This is true. He really did fall 15m off a riverbank. Scary. Despite all of this he is a talented horse but we mistimed the warm up and he was still spooking and looking at everything as he went into the arena. Mpho was eliminated in his first class for doing numerous circles. However, the pair's second ride was better. Walker was more settled and he performed a nice test so the jockey went home happy although without a rosette.


and pitted against Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Mauritius. The judges travel around to all these countries and judge everyone against each other. They keep your scores and after a few weeks at the end of their travels they add them all up. This makes for a much more interesting show as you have more people to compete against even if you can't see them.

My Prix St Georges debut went well. In practice Coolmore did his best ever four-time changes but during the actual test these went wrong. The rest was OK, though, and we scored a respectable 59%. We also recorded a 62% for the advanced test and won both classes overall.

Mpho, who has competed with me for several years, decided to use this show to bring out the green five-year-old, Walker Bay. He was in for a

Tsaone, who has only been riding for a short time, decided to bring the more experienced nine-year-old warmblood Angelo. The pair of them put up two very nice tests despite the pilot having some trouble with the sitting trot which we don't practise enough at home.

On returning back to camp the safari season was in full swing. So far it has been the year of the lions with four young ones spotted around the stables over the last four weeks. They even killed an eland just 50m from our entrance gate one morning. This makes me nervous about hacking out alone at the moment and we are all super careful about keeping our gates closed.

We are hoping to do an event in Johannesburg on 5 October. French show jumper Michel Robert is planning to join us on safari early next month, too. I can't wait. 

Ingrid and her friends cross a river BELOW Watching me watching you — a giraffe is interested in the riders

