

Drumbeat

Autumn 2019

Welcome to Aardvark Safaris'

Autumn 2019 Newsletter

We take great delight in assisting you with your holiday plans here at Aardvark Safaris. It is so rewarding to hear that the most intricate of safaris have run to perfection. So tell us your requirements – from travelling malaria-free to chartering private planes into the wilderness – and we will make sure every element is organised for a wonderful, hassle-free, holiday.

Summer travels for the team here include Botswana for Jess, Rosanna and Charlotte, while Namibia has also had a double hander with my 'big birthday' family trip and Becky visiting for the first time. Roxy (temporarily retired to look after her two small boys) discovered what it was like to safari in Kenya with children under six; not as mad as it seems.

We report on our findings inside as well as looking at a resurgent Malawi and an entertaining interview with one of Botswana's finest riding safari guides. Our travel doctors are back in action with suggestions for a variety of holidays, Rosanna takes a turn in the 'Ask the Expert seat' and Alice explains why Africa is the perfect destination for a sabbatical.

Thank you to everyone who dropped by our show stand this year, it's always lovely to put a face to a name. Do get in touch if we've inspired you to travel to our favourite continent – we're always delighted to talk safari.



Richard Smith



Highlights:



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REPORT BY ALICE



Here are just some reasons why you should choose Africa (and Aardvark Safaris) for this once-in-a-lifetime extravaganza.

- 18 countries to choose from, each offering something a little different
- We can include some of the planet's most iconic wildlife experiences from the wildebeest migration to gorilla tracking

Sensational sabbaticals

We've put together several, bucket-list amazing, sabbatical holidays and thought we should share how brilliantly a jaunt to Africa can activate the re-set button. Running from two weeks to two months (or more), these trips can be planned as part of a worldwide holiday or stand alone, and for couples, families or single travellers.



- The variety of activities is extraordinary. It's not just game drives; among others on offer are: walking in the South Luangwa, boating in the Okavango Delta, canoeing in Mana Pools and horse riding in the Masai Mara
- Get off the beaten track; an off grid safari is a fabulous family bonding opportunity
- Mix luxurious accommodation with the rustic simplicity of a mobile safari for an all-round experience
- Combine adrenaline packed safaris with relaxation on the beach
- If you want a challenge we can arrange trips up Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya or the Rwenzoris
- Take a conservation-focussed sabbatical with unique behind-the-scenes access at Elephant Watch Camp or Borana – brilliant for all, particularly if you are travelling as a family
- Learn a new skill. Whether photography with professionals in Botswana or scuba diving in Madagascar, there's plenty on offer
- Travel with a purpose. Give back on a project based safari where you can make a meaningful difference
- Culturally fascinating with the opportunity to glimpse into the lives of the Masai, Samburu, San, Himba and more.

Read our blog bit.ly/SensationalSabbaticals for more specific itinerary ideas





Ask the Expert

Our series of interviews with the sales team continues with Rosanna Pile from the Edinburgh office.

Q1: How did you end up in the safari business?

A: I caught the Africa bug travelling through East Africa in 2002. I subsequently worked for the Kenyan luggage company Sandstorm and was able to explore more of Kenya through work and on holiday. I have always wanted to work in African travel and can't believe my dream has come true.

Q2: What do you love most about your job?

A: Getting to know my clients and working with them to create memorable safaris full of excitement and adventure. I also love working with an incredibly knowledgeable team of experts whose years of experience is inspiring.

Q3: What would be your dream itinerary?

A: My bucket list is quite long but I would start off gorilla tracking in Rwanda, followed by a few days on safari at Sosian in Laikipia. Then to Lake Malawi and Kaya Mawa for some R&R before heading to the South African Winelands sipping delicious rosé at La Petite Ferme.

Q4: Where are you going next?

A: I am off to explore Mauritius in October. It's a great fit with a safari in Southern Africa and I've heard wonderful things so I'm looking forward to finding out what it's all about.

Q5: Your most memorable safari moment?

A: During a game drive in the Okavango Delta's Chitabe concession we thought we'd spotted movement in the undergrowth and went to explore – only to be surprised when, from a completely different direction, a leopard strode casually past. We followed until she climbed into a tree and then sat admiring her for an hour or so. By chance we had a professional photographer with us, so after a free lesson I have some wonderful pictures to remind me of the experience.

Q6: Favourite country?

A: I will always have a soft spot for Kenya where my adventures began. That said I was completely bowled over by Botswana and the contrasting landscapes of the Okavango Delta and Makgadikgadi Pans. The

camp there are stunning, and with few other tourists it feels like the wilderness is yours alone.

Q7: What's your favourite animal?

A: I just love the way giraffes move gracefully through the open plains. They look like they are galloping in slow motion; so elegant and poised. Plus who wouldn't want eyelashes like theirs?

Q8: What's your sundowner choice?

A: G&T or a cold Tusker beer. Or if I fancy something refreshing during the day a Malawian shandy hits the spot (ginger beer, lemonade, bitters and orange juice).

Q9: Favourite safari activity?

A: A game drive at sun rise; watching the plains come alive, listening to the animal and bird dawn chorus, and inhaling the smells of a new day is really magical.

Q10: Most precious piece of safari kit?

A: My binoculars – oh and a good sports bra for the bouncy roads.

Q11: What do you like most about being on safari?

A: Switching off from the modern world and reconnecting with nature. Safaris can be exhilarating and action packed yet they can also be peaceful and thought provoking. The anxieties of day to day life just melt away.





Botswana's best

Three of the Aardvark Safaris' team have been to Botswana in the last few months; Charlotte revisiting old haunts and Jess and Rosanna on busy educational trips. With around 30 camps visited and superb wildlife sightings – including aardvarks for Jess and Charlotte – we're looking forward to inspiring you with the pristine beauty and remote wilderness of one of Africa's most rewarding safari destinations. Here's a round-up of our highlights.

Mokoro trips in the Delta: Rosanna

Mokoros, the original form of transport around the Okavango Delta, are canoes crafted from tree trunks. Today, more commonly made from fibre glass, they are used for boating safaris and make an attractive alternative to a traditional safari vehicle. You sit securely in a legless chair while your guide stands at the back 'poling' silently through the water. Gliding through the channels as they open into lagoons adorned with papyrus and waterlilies you'll get to spot tiny frogs and numerous birds. Slipping quietly past elephant splashing in the shallows, en-route to our sundowner, was the perfect ending to this wonderful experience.

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Quad biking & meerkats in the Makgadikgadi Pans: Jess

The wilds of the Makgadikgadi Pans form a startling contrast to the Okavango Delta's verdant wetlands. All three of us spent some time in the 'pans' and each could write pages. You can walk with San bushmen (fascinating), explore by vehicle, horse, bicycle and on foot. Quadbiking way out onto the pans, where the horizon is so unobstructed that you can see the curvature of the earth is extraordinary. Wait for darkness to descend and the planetarium of stars is unbelievable. We were all charmed by the

meerkats and a morning walk with them is a delight. They take no notice of humans, except as useful temporary parts of the scenery, as ideal observation posts for the one on predator-spotting duty. Read more here bit.ly/KalahariLegend



Wild dog in the Linyanti Reserve: Rosanna

Angola's rains don't just feed the Okavango Delta they also supply permanent water for the Linyanti and Chobe rivers of northern Botswana. Linyanti Wildlife Reserve, on the southern banks of the Linyanti River, is a 1,250 sq km protected sanctuary, wonderfully underused and bursting with wildlife. It's one of the best places in Botswana to see wild dog, with current estimates suggesting a population of around 6,000 across the continent. The handful of camps in the reserve will often know dogs' favourite hunting grounds or where they're denning, so if these endangered animals are on your 'to see' list then you should add a few days in Linyanti to your safari holiday.

Riding safaris: Jess

Cross Africa's wilderness on horseback and you become a living part of the landscape. For any reasonably competent rider (you do need to be secure at all paces), with an interest in the natural world, who enjoys the odd shot of adrenaline, a riding safari is a dream come true. Each riding safari is different and varies with the seasons. In the Okavango Delta you might be galloping alongside giraffe across flat open grasslands one month, and swimming with your horse through lily strewn waters the next. Down in the Tuli block, jumping logs and ditches is more the order of the day. Horses being horses, the unexpected is always on the menu and it's good to remember that a well-timed francolin alarm call can cause more of an issue than a buffalo appearing around the side of a bush. My recent riding highlights include watching, though the pricked ears of my horse, a breeding herd of elephant and the moment our guide stopped mid-sentence and took off at a gallop towards the bushes where, following the direction he was pointing, we saw the flash of a leopard tail disappearing into the thicket.

Green desert in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve: Rosanna

Almost plum in the middle of the country, the Central Kalahari Reserve is a vast place of wild and mysterious beauty. One of the lesser known parks – although Deception Valley might ring a bell as the setting for Cry of the Kalahari, an epic account of life here in the 1970s written by American zoologists Mark and Delia Owens – it doesn't feature so regularly on our itineraries, which is a shame. Visit during or just after the summer rains and the northern grasslands are full of wildlife including huge herds of springbok and gemsbok along with wildebeest, eland and giraffe – all followed by lion, cheetah and leopard. Excellent bird life is a notable feature too. Journalist Mike Unwin has recently travelled to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve with us – keep an eye out for his piece in The Telegraph this autumn.



Mobile safaris: Charlotte

Somehow, Botswana lends itself to 'a mobile' – I think it's the variety of ways to get around, be it by vehicle, boat, mokoro, foot and even horse. Having recently returned from the Okavango Delta and a carbon copy (although this time with friends rather than as an educational) of my first ever mobile safari 18 years ago, I'm even more convinced that if you like adventure, want to see wildlife without anyone else, appreciate being off grid for a few days and enjoy the simply priceless luxury of space to yourself, then you must add a mobile camping safari in Botswana to your bucket list. Read more here bit.ly/MobileSafariMagic

REPORT BY FRANCIS

Resurgent Malawi

Malawi has a tremendous amount to offer, from exquisite lakeshore beaches and remote wildlife reserves to towering mountains and grassy highland plateaus. With significant investment from African Parks and the Malawi Government over the last 15 years or so its wildlife areas are starting to rival those of neighbouring Zambia. So much so that Robin Pope Safaris (one of our regular 'go-tos') has opened two stunning safari camps to complement its lakeshore lodge. It's easy to fill two weeks here with amazing variety, great value and a lot of fun. Here are some of our highlights.



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Liwonde National Park:

With assistance from African Parks over the last few years, this once lawless and snare-riddled park has been transformed into a remarkable wildlife haven. Cheetah and lion have been reintroduced, and over 300 elephants have been translocated to reduce pressure on the natural habitat. Today, it's a first class safari location teeming with wildlife which, with the Shire River flowing along its western border, offers superb river based elephant, crocodile and hippo viewing. With only a handful of safari camps it's a peaceful spot too. Along with boating safaris visitors can enjoy exploration on foot or in 4x4s.

Majete Wildlife Reserve: Another to have benefitted from African Parks' input, this previously near empty forest has been turned into a flourishing wildlife destination with thriving animal populations and plentiful birdlife. Black rhino, elephant and lion have all been reintroduced in the last 15 years, with cheetah the most recent to be reinstated. Truly off the beaten track – only three camps, one of those Robin Pope's new Mkulumadzi Lodge – wildlife connoisseurs will enjoy remarkable sightings in near isolation on foot and on game drives.

Lake Malawi: 360 miles from tip to toe, Lake Malawi's warm fresh waters are home to over 700 fish species – more than any other lake on earth. It's Africa's third largest lake and is a paradise for kayaking, diving, snorkelling, wind and kite surfing, sailing and water-skiing. Clear water, generally calm weather and a number of gorgeous places to stay all add to the appeal. Families are particularly well catered for and the delightful local people add to the fun of a beach holiday here. Among our much-loved accommodation choices is quirky Mumbo Island, entirely off grid with a Robinson Crusoe atmosphere of rustic charm. Or, for a more sophisticated air head to Pumulani, a stylish spot nestled into the hills at the southern end of the lake. Then there is Kaya Mawa, set on an island in the middle of the lake, which easily lives up to its reputation as one of Africa's best beach lodges.

The best of the rest:

For those wanting something a little different we've tried these too: Superb walking on the Nyika Plateau where the plains are home to a variety of antelope species. The tea estates around Mount Mulanje provide an interesting diversion for an afternoon – excellent walking here too. Riders, both cyclists and horse, will enjoy the delightful contrasts on offer in Malawi, with plenty of options for a relaxed morning's outing. Let us know if you would like more information.

How young is too young for safari?



'They'll never remember it' were Dad's parting words, as my husband and I set off for the airport. He was referring to my boys Jasper and Dudley who, at four and one, have just joined us on a trip to Kenya...

We're often asked about the best age to take children on safari. Realistically it is probably six (as I was) plus, but it's down to personal choice. I have family living in Kenya too so this was part safari, part family catch up.

We spent the first few days in Nairobi, not a regular choice, but it was brilliant to acclimatise everyone.

Among highlights were visiting Dololo, our adopted elephant at the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage. The kids loved getting so close and Dololo lifting his trunk to us – with a particular fascination for a mesmerised Dudley – was extraordinary. The Giraffe Centre was fun too, all of us feeding the giraffes and both boys in awe of these beautiful creatures. We were staying with family but I'd jump at the chance to stay at Giraffe Manor one day.

Nairobi National Park was a novel experience and the perfect introduction for what was to come. Considering it's in the middle of the city it's great. We barely saw another vehicle and although lion proved elusive we managed to spot buffalo a-plenty and several rhino.

Sosian was an absolute highpoint and exceeded all expectations on the wildlife front. The lodge is charming; it doesn't have a five star atmosphere, more a wonderfully inclusive, relaxed feel. The pool area is perfect with a canopy for 'shade bathing' or loungers for the sun-worshippers. The staff were great with the children, taking it in turns to keep the boys entertained so we could linger over lunch.

We did a gentle bush walk – with Dudley in the back pack – looking at birds, trees and poo along with elephants and giraffe in the distance. Jasper thoroughly enjoyed it and was keen to pocket elephant and giraffe poo as souvenirs. On game drives we saw more elephant, lion, leopard, reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra, white-tailed mongoose, so many birds and a striped hyena.

With the boys' supper sent out to meet us there was no rush to get back from sundowners. One evening we were greeted by a fully stocked bar and fire pit, the second was spent by the dam where Jasper tried his hand fishing for tilapia. Dudley was happy



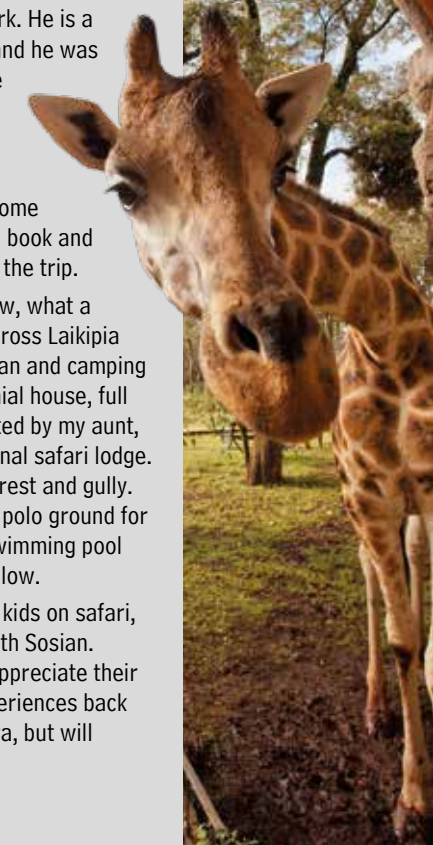
eating grit and staring at the hippos. It was very, very cool.

I am fully aware that Dudley won't remember it, but I will never forget his little face peering out of the window seeing his first rhino in Nairobi National Park. He is a chatty little urchin and he was stunned into silence by this magnificent pair, and that was very special to see.

Jasper, too, was captivated. He has a keen interest in birds at home and that extended to Africa. He loved identifying them in his bird book and was very particular about the binoculars he'd been given before the trip.

We nipped across to Suyian where my cousin is working and wow, what a beautiful spot. We enjoyed sundowners with expansive views across Laikipia and towards the snow-capped peaks of Mount Kenya. After Suyian and camping on Lake Naivasha, we arrived at Deloraine. This wonderful colonial house, full of mementos from its rich history is very close to my heart. Hosted by my aunt, Cindy Voorspuys, it offers something a bit different to the traditional safari lodge. We took beautiful morning rides to the mountain, through the forest and gully. The horses are so well schooled and there's a jumping field and polo ground for keen riders. There are interesting bird walks, a croquet lawn, swimming pool and tennis court. Wherever you go, a cooler box and mini bar follow.

So, a most exceptional holiday. It is never too early to take your kids on safari, provided you chose the right place, and we most certainly did with Sosian. Two weeks was perfect; enough time for the children to really appreciate their adventures and at the end Jasper couldn't wait to share his experiences back home. Next time we will have to do the coast and the Masai Mara, but will definitely spend a few more days at Sosian.



REPORT BY RICHARD

“This road goes all the way north to the Kunene River, our border with Angola”

said our driver from Shipwreck Lodge. It wasn't a road as you and I define them, but a track along the beach marked by poles with floats at the top. You could drive to the Kunene, but few do and it's whale bones that litter your route rather than other people or vehicles.

I was in Namibia on a two week holiday with my wife and children who are now 16 and 20. While I've been to this beautiful country a fair few times, this was a first visit for the rest of the family. At this point we were a week in and on the most remote section of the trip so far.

Washed-up at Shipwreck Lodge



Whether you arrive at the Mowe Bay pick up point by vehicle or plane, your drive north along the coast feels genuinely like travelling to the middle of nowhere. Timbuktu might be used as shorthand for somewhere inaccessible, but after a long day on salt, gravel and sand roads, Shipwreck Lodge gives it a good shot at taking the title.

This is the only luxury lodge on Namibia's Skeleton Coast, whose beaches have seen the end of countless ships washed onto unforgiving rocks in the fog that blankets the shoreline. The fog is present most mornings, making this one of the few places in Namibia with stoves in each of the wreck-styled cabins which, spread along the dune resemble a listing flotilla against the skyline. It also meant I was pleased to have packed my woolly hat, despite the warm summer in England and 30+ degrees across most of the rest of the country.

The cooler mornings meant later starts than at our previous lodges, but we still had masses of time to enjoy quad biking on the dunes, visit shipwrecks and hear stories of their demise, and drive along the bed of the ephemeral Hoarusib River to see oryx, springbok and a canyon formed of clay deposits.

It's an incredible area and a stunning lodge with a well drilled team and superb food. I'd decided I liked it within ten minutes of arriving, but left proclaiming it to be 'my new favourite.'





Straight from the horse's mouth

With his unrivalled knowledge of the Okavango Delta and keen sense of humour, guests sharing a riding safari with Wabongwa 'Bongwe' Makate, head guide at African Horseback Safaris, are in for a real treat. He took a few minutes out of the day job to chat to Alice about his life on horseback in Botswana.

Q: How did you become a riding safari guide?

A: I had a passion for wildlife from my earliest memories and was an active member of the school wildlife club. I learned to ride on a donkey and progressed onto horses working cattle with them. I spent a few years at a livery stables where I realised that although I loved the horses, I really wanted to spend more time learning about Botswana's wildlife. Becoming a safari guide seemed like the obvious route, and being able to guide from horseback was the clincher. I've been at African Horseback since 1999, becoming head guide in 2004.

Q: What makes the perfect lead safari horse?

A: The perfect lead horse has to be brave, independent, clever with his feet, spirited, and kind to his guide.

Q: Which is your favourite safari horse

A: Damara, a handsome liver chestnut with the most comfortable spook. He would leap sideways but always keep going forwards. Quick with his feet he would get us out of trouble even over the roughest of ground. I learned to always listen to him; when he put his nose on the ground and snorted there were invariably lions close by.

Q: What makes riding in the Okavango Delta unique?

A: It's so diverse. The environment and wildlife habits change as the flood arrives and recedes. With free animal movement you never know whether you will be seeing a huge herd of buffalo or leopard in a tree. The sandy going allows for long canters and depending on the flood you may be splashing through water at fetlock height or swimming with your horse from island to island.

Q: Your most memorable safari moment?

A: Not every piece of animal behaviour is written in a book. I was fascinated to see a bull elephant chase a pride of lion off a buffalo kill. The elephant returned to the dead buffalo and tried to get it onto its feet by putting its tusks under the body and levering it up. It was heart breaking to watch.

Q: What do you do on your day off?

A: Days off don't really happen. When I'm on leave, I like to spend time with my family and at my farm. There's always a long list of things to do, but if I can, I like to sneak a few hours' fishing.

Q: Your favourite wildlife to see on horseback?

A: Picking a favourite is hard but in terms of predators it would have to be wild dogs. Their skill as coordinated hunters and their pack mentality is a joy to watch.

Q: Essential piece of kit?

A: My rifle, it's my last resort but it could save my life.

Q: Your strangest wildlife interaction?

A: I am known for my ability to mimic animal calls. One evening after all the guests had gone to bed I heard a lion calling a short distance from camp. I decided to answer him. Little did I realise that I must sound just like a very attractive female... shortly afterwards he was patrolling around my tent looking for the lioness who had obviously suggested that she might be interested in him! I am now super careful about when and where I decide to roar.

Q: Can you multitask?

A: Everyone knows that men can't multitask. But I am pretty good at plumbing and electrics and no one can knock my beans on toast.



Beach update

As well as amazing safaris, we also arrange equally fabulous beach holidays. The exotic islands and beaches along the African coast and scattered through the Indian Ocean are among the best

in the world, offering everything from five star luxury to desert island escapism. Direct flights to Mauritius, Maldives and (most recently) to the Seychelles make these easy options for a week's fly and flop. Madagascar and Mozambique's remote sandy beaches require slightly longer journeys but, in our view, are well worth the effort. **Ask for a copy of our Beach Retreats brochure for all the information.**

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We're a family of five with teenage children. We like adventure, all horse ride, and love the idea of combining areas without taking light aircraft flights in between. What do you suggest?

Lucinda answers: I'd recommend Kenya and specifically the Laikipia region with excellent wildlife and great variety. Safari at Laikipia Wilderness, a classic tented camp with an array of activities

and plenty of wildlife. Travel to your next spot on a camel assisted walking safari. You'll explore by day with Samburu guides and camp in a new site each night. Then quadbike or horse ride to Borana Lodge where wildlife can be spotted by bike, vehicle, horse or on foot. If I can persuade you to fly, a few days on the Kenyan coast would be the perfect end – the teenagers will love it and it's a chance to relax and reflect on your adventures.



We've travelled extensively in Africa and like to get off the beaten track. Luxury is not important – it's more about the overall experience.

Becky answers: For something different swap the well-trodden tracks of Tanzania's northern plains for Mahale and Katavi – two treasures way out to the west. Katavi is rarely visited by humans but has huge populations of elephant, buffalo, hippo, crocodile and giraffe. Even more remote, Mahale's forested mountains are home to chimpanzees (that you can track) and barely another human soul. Elsewhere, visiting the semi-arid Kalahari Desert in Botswana between November and April is under the radar for many, but this is when rain turns the landscape a glorious green, sparking an influx of migrant birds and Africa's second-largest wildebeest and zebra migration.

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Q: Cape Town seems to have a different weather pattern to the rest of Africa. How can we do a safari and visit Cape Town without getting wet in one place or the other?

Travel Doctor.

Richard answers: Both Cape Town and the more northerly safari areas in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana enjoy good weather between March and May, and again in September and October. A direct flight between Maun in Botswana and Cape Town makes that combination of 'safari and sophistication' particularly easy.

Q: Is it possible to see the "big 5" but not be in a busy part of Africa?

Alice answers: Yes definitely, you just need to dodge the crowds without avoiding the animals. The Kruger, Masai Mara, Ngorongoro Crater, Okavango Delta and the Serengeti are famous (and busy) because they show wildlife at its best. Rather than avoid safaris here we suggest ways to enjoy them in relative peace. Staying in secluded camps on private land adjacent to the busy parks works perfectly, you dip in and out of the big name wildlife areas, retreating to tranquillity when you wish. Boundaries are rarely fenced so the wildlife wanders in and out at will. You'll often find more activities – walking and night drives – available on private concessions too.

