

Chibembe: The Ground Zero of the Walking Safari

The documented origin of the walking safari on the east bank of the Luangwa — and the government records that place it there.

The walking safari — experiencing wildlife on foot, led by a professional guide, rather than from a vehicle or over the sights of a rifle — is one of Zambia's most distinctive contributions to the world. It was pioneered in the Luangwa Valley in the mid-twentieth century by the conservationist **Norman Carr** and his contemporaries, and it is now practised across Africa. This note sets out, from the primary record, exactly where it began.

The claim

Chibembe, on the east bank of the Luangwa River, is the ground zero of the walking safari — the crossing point and staging ground from which the tradition was pioneered, and the origin of the circuit that ran the wildlife-dense river corridor between the Chibembe pontoon and Lion Camp on the west bank. Guests arrived from the east and staged at Chibembe; the walking safari radiated out from there.

Both Chibembe and Lion Camp are named in the government record, and both belong to the founding story: **Chibembe is the origin; Lion Camp is part of the circuit it served.** Because the two sit on opposite banks of the same short stretch of river, the walking safari was, in effect, born in the corridor between them — with Chibembe as its point of arrival and departure.

The primary records

TWO GOVERNMENT ENTRIES, ONE UNBROKEN CHAIN

Most accounts of South Luangwa's safari history rest on secondary sources that assert Norman Carr pioneered the walking safari without dating or citing a document. The account here is different: it rests on the official record of the colonial-era Game and Tsetse Control Department, as compiled from those records by **W. L. Astle**, formerly Chief Wildlife Research Officer of Zambia. Two entries carry the weight.

1955 — the founding entry

1955 A Luangwa Valley Development Unit formed under the command of Ranger W.E. Poles. A seasonal pontoon crossing built across the Luangwa at Chibembe to permit access from the east. Lion Camp and viewing tracks built.

1955 entry · Luangwa Valley Development Unit · recorded in W. L. Astle's valley history (1999).

"A Luangwa Valley Development Unit formed under the command of Ranger W.E. Poles. A seasonal pontoon crossing built across the Luangwa at Chibembe to permit access from the east. Lion Camp and viewing tracks built."

VERBATIM, 1955 ENTRY

The decisive words are *viewing tracks* — infrastructure built to view wildlife, not to hunt it — at a place named **Chibembe**, by a named ranger, in a named government unit, in a year that is not approximate. The same entry names **Lion Camp**, which is why Lion Camp belongs inside the founding story rather than outside it.

1961 — the tourism link

(c) Lion camp leased to 'Luangwa Safaris', a director of this company was N.J. Carr; from this camp 'Wilderness Trails' were pioneered by Carr as a type of tourism.
1962 (a) The Conducted Hunting Scheme abolished and a concession granted to the private company, 'Luangwa Safaris'.

1961 entry · the tourism link, in the government's own words.

"Lion camp leased to 'Luangwa Safaris', a director of this company was N.J. Carr; from this camp 'Wilderness Trails' were pioneered by Carr as a type of tourism."

VERBATIM, 1961 ENTRY

Together the two entries close the chain. **1955**: the pontoon at Chibembe and Lion Camp with viewing tracks are built as one connected system. **1961**: Lion Camp is leased to Carr's company and "Wilderness Trails" — walking safaris — are pioneered "as a type of tourism." The line from Chibembe to the walking safari is not inferred; it is recorded.

"From this camp Wilderness Trails were pioneered by Carr as a type of tourism."

The full archival page

WHERE THE ENTRIES SIT IN THE RECORD

Both entries survive on a single, continuous year-by-year page of Astle's chronicle, reproduced below with the 1955 entry marked. Showing the whole page is deliberate: it demonstrates that the entries are part of an unbroken official record, not isolated fragments.

inspected by the District Commissioner, Lukhazali.

1950 Government organized a Conducted Hunting Scheme in the Eastern Province.

1951 (a) Game Reserve regulations applied for three years to an area excised from the Kunda Controlled Area, this excised area was called the Nsefu Game Reserve as it was controlled by the Kunda Native Authority and operated by the Department for the benefit of that Authority.

(b) Nsefu visitors camp was re-sited downstream from north of the Chicele stream.

1954 (a) Fauna Conservation Ordinance approved, gazetted in 1957. Existing Controlled areas redefined as First or Second Class Hunting Areas, and a category of Private Game Area defined. The hunting quotas for residents within a First Class CHA was now controlled by the Department.

(b) The application of Nsefu Game Reserve regulations extended for 10 years

(c) Chilongozi camp opened, for the first year only the revenue from this was paid to the Kunda Native Treasury.

1955 A Luangwa Valley Development Unit formed under the command of Ranger W.E. Poles. A seasonal pontoon crossing built across the Luangwa at Chibembe to permit access from the east. Lion Camp and viewing tracks built.

1956 A second Luangwa pontoon installed near the Lusangazi river and access tracks built.

1957 Big Lagoon and Chilongozi camps opened, the latter replacing a temporary camp.

1958 (a) A seasonal pontoon installed at Kakumbi.

(b) Staff retrenchments because of financial stringencies.

1959 The track from Jumbe to Kakumbi upgraded.

1960 (a) The Luangwa Development Unit disbanded.

(b) A unified Luangwa Command formed under a Warden, replacing the Provincial based administration.

(c) Old Mfuwe camp opened.

1961 (a) A Ranger's camp built on the lip of the Muching's east of Kanona and occupied until 1963.

(b) An air-strip built in the reserve on the left bank of the Mushilashi river.

(c) Lion camp leased to 'Luangwa Safaris', a director of this company was N.J. Carr; from this camp 'Wilderness Trails' were pioneered by Carr as a type of tourism.

1962 (a) The Conducted Hunting Scheme abolished and a concession granted to the private company, 'Luangwa Safaris'.

(b) Mfuwe camp leased to 'Luangwa Safaris'.

1962-63 Trials began on meat production from wildlife. Buffalo, hippo and elephant were culled in different areas in the Eastern Province.

1964 (a) National Independence achieved.

(b) Meat production trials in the Reserve.

(c) Concern expressed about habitat degradation in the Reserve, the causes for habitat changes became a source of controversy

1965 (a) Nsefu Camp taken over by Government.

(b) The Warden's rest house, the 'Mushroom', began to be used as a Presidential camp.

(c) Surveys commenced on habitat types within the Reserve and on the status of large mammal populations

(d) Elephant, buffalo, hippo culled in the Reserve, meat processed through an abattoir, built at Kakumbi, and trucked to the Copperbelt.

1966 (a) Nsefu Reserve declared a Game Reserve, this legalised its status.

(b) Zambia Airways commence scheduled flights to the South Reserve airstrip.

(c) Mfuwe Lodge opened and leased by Luangwa safaris, Mfuwe camp taken over as a staff complex by the Department. Lion camp taken over and run by Government.

1967 (a) Luamfwa camp opened, initially as a non-catering camp until 1971.

(b) Proposals made for an aid project which became known as the Luangwa Valley Conservation

W. L. Astle, *A History of Wildlife Conservation and Management in the mid-Luangwa Valley, Zambia* (1999) – the 1955 Chibembe entry arrowed; the 1961 Lion Camp / Wilderness Trails entry lower on the same page.

How Chibembe and Lion Camp relate

ONE CORRIDOR, TWO BANKS

Lion Camp is named in the 1955 record and is the specific camp named in the 1961 tourism entry, so it is genuinely part of the founding story. The distinction is one of role. Chibembe is the **arrival point and staging ground**: the east-bank crossing where the road ended and the safari began, the hub the circuit radiated from. Lion Camp is the **west-bank destination** the pontoon made reachable — the camp named in the lease that first carried the "type of tourism" language.

So the two are not competing claims. They are the two ends of a single corridor of the most wildlife-dense river frontage in Africa, and the walking safari was pioneered across it — with Chibembe as its origin.

The chain of custodianship

1955 TO TODAY, UNBROKEN

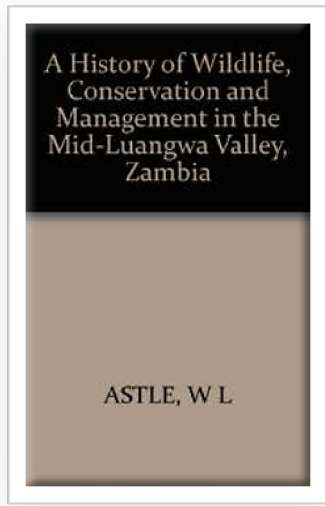
1955	The Luangwa Valley Development Unit, under Ranger W. E. Poles, builds the Chibembe pontoon on the east bank and Lion Camp with viewing tracks on the west bank — one connected system.
1961	Lion Camp is leased to Luangwa Safaris, directed by N. J. Carr. Wilderness Trails — walking safaris — are pioneered as a type of tourism , served from the Chibembe crossing.
1968	Carr builds and names a camp Chibembe — the name arriving last, formalising what the ground had been since 1955. (The 1968 founding date is recorded in Alistair Tough's biography of Carr.)
1979	The Chibembe operation passes to new operators, and over subsequent decades the site's founding significance becomes largely unmarked.
2023	Chibembe Wildlife Reserve is established on the same ground, acquired from Wilderness Trails Limited — the corporate successor to Carr's original operation — restoring the founding ground to continuous, documented custodianship.

That custodianship is direct. Chibembe Wildlife Reserve was acquired from Wilderness Trails Limited, the corporate successor to Norman Carr's original walking-safari operation — so the founding ground today sits in the hands of the line that began the tradition, rather than a party that simply acquired nearby land.

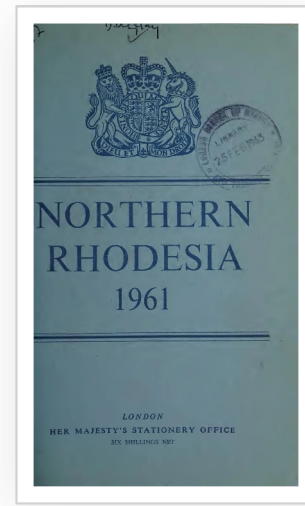
Chibembe is not a camp that became significant. It is a place that was always significant — and eventually got a name.

Sources & attribution

WHO RECORDED IT, AND WHERE IT CAME FROM



Astle (1999) – the source chronicle.



Northern Rhodesia Annual Report (HMSO) – corroborating record.

The entries were compiled by **W. L. Astle** from the official government record kept by rangers and administrators across decades: *A History of Wildlife Conservation and Management in the mid-Luangwa Valley, Zambia* (British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, 1999). It is corroborated by the **Northern Rhodesia Annual Reports of the Department of Game and Tsetse Control** (His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London), which record the broader 1955 development programme and the Lion Camp station.

Astle served the Northern Rhodesian and Zambian governments from **1959 to 1973**. Originally an Agricultural Officer, he transferred in 1965 to the then Department of Game and Fisheries as a Biologist and spent the next six years in the Luangwa Valley; for his final two years in government service he was **Chief Wildlife Research Officer** at the department's headquarters. He returned to the valley from 1986 to 1992 as a University Research Fellow. His account is therefore that of a career government scientist working from the official record — not a secondhand history.

In short: the source is a government official recording events year by year from the official record. The Astle history is not available online but is held in library collections internationally, so the reference can be independently located and verified by anyone who wishes to do so.

Biography & memoir

The government record is corroborated by the biographical and first-hand literature. Norman Carr's life and career — including the founding of **Chibembe Safari Camp in 1968**, the date carried here — are set out in **Alistair Tough, *Norman Carr: Pioneer of Community-based Wildlife Conservation***. Carr's own memoirs, *The White Impala* and

Return to the Wild, give his first-hand account of the early walking safaris and the conservation philosophy behind them. Independent corroboration also appears in Dalal-Clayton & Child, *Lessons from Luangwa* (IIED, 2003), which records that Carr “set up pioneering walking and photographic tours in the Luangwa Valley.”

Prepared by Safari Heritage Group · South Luangwa, Zambia · 2026. Primary sources on file: Astle (1999); Northern Rhodesia Annual Reports, Department of Game & Tsetse Control (archive references b31409830-b31409921); Tough, *Norman Carr: Pioneer of Community-based Wildlife Conservation*; Carr, *The White Impala & Return to the Wild*; Dalal-Clayton & Child, *Lessons from Luangwa* (IIED, 2003). This note may be shared in full.