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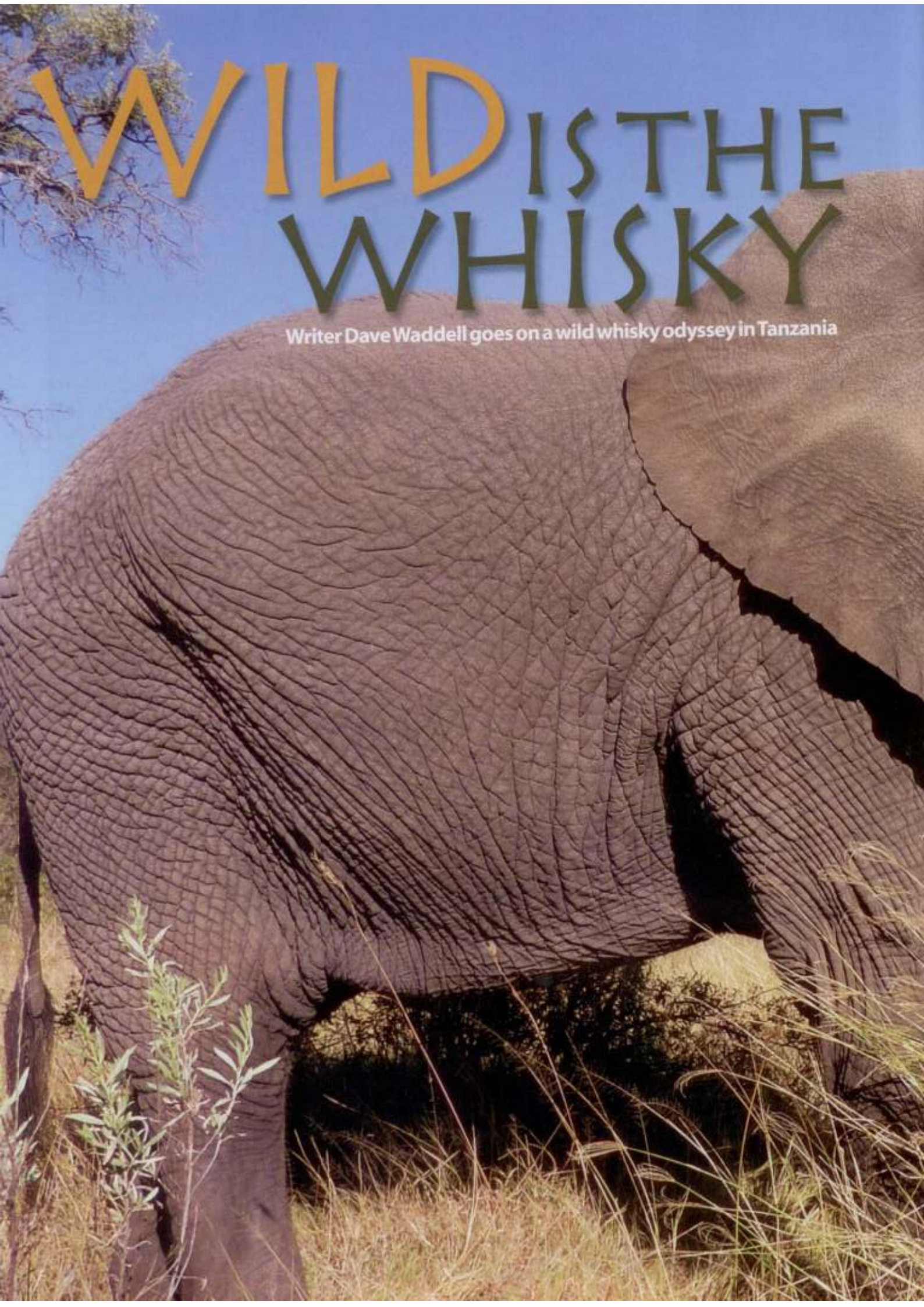
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WILD IS THE WHISKY

Writer Dave Waddell goes on a wild whisky odyssey in Tanzania





Will Jones is one of life's most naturally modest men: "But I know nothing about whisky." It is only through others, and after hours spent in the company of his most affable family, that you'll discover this wonderfully unassuming African travel expert has guided Ralph Lauren and family to Kenya; that back in the 1990s he singlehandedly built Ethiopia's first viable ecotourist camp; or that he once helped Mark Roosevelt recreate his great grandfather's trip to Katavi, a fly camp adventure through a wilderness that makes the Masai Mara feel like a zoo. Once described by Lucia Van Der Post as having "walked almost every inch of the corner of Africa that he specialises in", and yet welcomed every year into the cities and homes of a client list that reads like a roster of America's Who's Who. Jones is, let me say, a rare bird. The bloke next door who, unbeknown to you, because he never mentions it, lives the dream wildly.

whisky and africa

Which is why, when I first suggested he take me and a bunch of whiskies on safari to Tanzania, I thought his claim further evidence of a man genuinely at odds with the idea of self-aggrandisement. I think of whisky and the wilds as natural bedfellows. Hemmingway, James Bruce, Thesiger, these guys knew Africa; they knew their whisky, some wouldn't start the day without it. Surely Jones knows this. I thought he was joking. He wasn't. Then it got worse: "I'm not sure I even like the stuff." This said, the thought of smuggling five bottles: a Whyte and Mackay 30 Years Old, a 10 Years Old Pike Creek, a 2011 bottling of Midleton Very Rare, the new Yamazaki Mizunara and a William Larue Weller 2010 release, through Kilimanjaro Airport piqued his sense of adventure. Esteemed readers will have noted both the origins and gold top calibre of my almost illegal cargo; quite a loss should it take the fancy of some eagle eyed customs official. Jones was suddenly interested. We might get caught. Game on.

Adventure, I will learn, is in Jones's blood. His father worked with the Red Cross during the Biafran War (the civil war which took place in Nigeria, July 1967 to January 1970). He grew up in six different African countries, west and east. New and 'meaningful adventure' is what Jones is about. He can't help it. Sub-Saharan Africa is his home. He loves all of it, the urban, the rural, the wild. Ninety per cent of the world's genetic variance is here. It is older, deeper and more complex than anywhere else on earth. Europe by comparison is a theme park, America as old as Angel Delight. It is our past and our future and Jones knows it.

An environmental scientist by training, he followed in his father's footsteps, first

Sub-Saharan Africa is his home. He loves all of it.

volunteering with a charity in Ethiopia, before going on to guide and manage lodges there and in Kenya's Laikipia, after which he set up Journeys by Design, a specialist tour operator, its modus operandi the very wild, its philosophy very much in line with the likes of Richard Leakey or Sertse Khama, for whom high end, low impact tourism has always been a no brainer conservation-wise. "Our itineraries," says Jones, "soft or extreme are largely about encouraging tourism as an income generating tool for local conservation





and development initiatives. It's not the answer, but it's a step in the right direction."

Meaning that while I may have slipped the net at Kilimanjaro Airport, bag intact, inordinately pleased with myself, the scent of Jacaranda heavy on the air, our visit is not, repeat not, about some jumped up Pom (yes the name applies here in Africa too) and his five bottles of whisky. Jones is after adventure, something new, untouched. Hence the speed and weight of the itinerary: one night in Arusha, staging post to Mount Kilimanjaro, and then we're off to Tsetse fly heavy south Tarangire, to a dry river in Lake Manyara, to the Serengeti's Lamai Wedge, to the south, to the Rufiji River in wild, wild Selous, before rounding it all off in Zanzibar. The sky is a vast inverted bowl. The land is endless, and yellow, and utterly dry. Jones is going to work me to the bone, whisky or not.





I'm overplaying it, the adventure bit. While we will indeed spend a couple of nights bunking down on the edge of either a dry river bed or overlooking a swelling Mara River in a couple of two man tents, the night filled with the coughs of lord knows what, we will also, for a good stretch of the trip, be cocooned in the lap of luxury, bush style. We will, on one memorable occasion, walk the sands of the Selous, the lake and river banks populated by crocodile, hippo and elephant, then on others we will be staying in the sort of tented accommodation that in design, look and layers of comfort makes a mockery of the word canvas. For every nyama choma

rest. Soft adventure, really. A working holiday. No sleeping with lions; not this time.

Even so travelling like this, fast, long distances, by foot, car and plane, has many advantages, not least the fact that it makes enormous space for converting the nonbeliever. The days may be packed, but the evenings will be long and leisurely. We will manage, over the course of a fortnight, to fit in three heavy duty tastings, plus countless off the hoof drams, toasts and whatnot. Onsea House, in the company weirdly enough of an alcohol advocate from Washington DC and a Bristol based honeymooning couple, is where we'll set the

ball in motion. An evening or two later, in the lee of the Rift Valley's western wall, we'll take the opportunity to stage a most meaningful comparison between

We will manage to fit in three heavy duty tasting, plus countless off the hoof drams

bar frequented, every Tusker drunk, we will enjoy the pleasure of silver service, cellars that would happily go toe to toe with anything you might find in Cape Town, kitchens that'd water the mouth of a Parisian. Onsea House. Chem Chem. Lamai Serengeti. Beho Beho. Kilindi. Here, I will eat and drink and rest and eat and drink and

the Japanese and the Irish; the former, a synesthetic wonder, merging beautifully with the falling sun, the latter perfectly suited to pudding by candlelight. One night, the sweet smell of carrion blowing in off the river, we will repeatedly dissect the peppery slap and stroke that is Bourbon, its deep Proustian powers causing Jones to



INFO

Dave Waddell's trip to Tanzania was organised by Africa specialist, **Journeys by Design**
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For a two week private safari through the wilds of Tanzania costs start from UK £5,200/ US \$8,300 per person excluding international flights. Mainland Tanzania safaris can be combined with the island of Zanzibar to end.

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remember suddenly and most vividly a pair of elbow length satin gloves, as worn 20 years ago by the next door German au pair. Even better, on another occasion, the Serengeti laid out before us, we will watch as Richard Paterson's 30 Years Old turns a dye-in-the-wool single malt drinker inside out. Just a shot, in real time, over lunch. "That," he will say, eyes zapped, "is an exceptional whisky." In Zanzibar, on our second last day, the rye will prove so popular we will only leave without it.

Which, dear friends, is exactly what happened. Conclusions: one, whisky and the wild are indeed bedfellows; two, blend or not, if it's great, people like it short; and three, Will Jones has two new adventures, a secret beach and now drinks the drink of gods. No joke. ■