

**CHRIS SMITH  
FELLOW 2006**

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**Living Outside  
Reality**

*My time in Madagascar: 2006*





I have taught other people to kayak almost since the day, barely in my teens, I acquired the skills to look after myself on the water. I currently coach water sports professionally but I have never wavered from the belief that to effectively teach something one must have a passion for that thing.

This fellowship has been an expression of my passion for kayaking, and so with renewed zest I happily and gratefully present my report, which started off so long ago with the simple aim, on the back of a beer mat, to explore the rivers of Madagascar.

With thanks,

Chris Smith



*Madagascar;  
a land once covered  
in rainforest and  
biodiversity, flora  
and fauna flung on its  
own evolutionary track as  
our dynamic earth, once whole,  
split and separated and created  
what we now see as continents, and  
in the case of Madagascar, islands.*

*Now known as the Red Island, this title not only  
describes the vast and barren landscape one sees  
as ones plane flies over the central highlands  
to land in Antananarivo, Madagascar's polluted  
capital, but also tells a tale of destruction and  
deforestation. The eastern escarpment drops  
steeply towards the Indian Ocean and still retains  
a modicum of its former forests, here the rivers  
run crystal clear and National Parks struggle  
to save the remaining trees and the wildlife  
within. On the west, stunning landscapes  
in the form of huge hills devoid of life  
and yet startlingly beautiful, battered  
by yearly rains which wash the surface  
earth into huge rivers to be swept into  
the surrounding seas; Red Rivers on a  
Red Island. Madagascar is a shrinking  
island, quite literally being flushed away.*

*As a foreigner the solutions are all so  
simple, but there is a harsh reality behind  
the environmentalism; families are starving,  
poverty is rife, political struggles have  
crippled the once respectable colonial  
economy, warring factions destroyed  
the infrastructure. And so they  
burn the grasslands and destroy  
the forests, always living in the  
present no thought for the  
future, because after all, the  
Zebu herds must eat and  
be eaten.*



## Contents

Thanks to...	page 4
Prologue	page 5
<u>56 Days in Madagascar</u>	page 6
The Hard Bit	page 7
The Important Bit	page 9
The Paddling Bit	page 15
<u>The River Report</u>	page 22
<u>Media and Dissemination</u>	page 31
<u>Appendices</u>	page 33
Google Earth	page 34
The Flow and the Fall	page 35



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Pyranha is a British Kayak manufacturer based in Runcorn who lent their years of knowledge and expertise in the form of advice and a seriously river-worthy kayak, the Burn.

Gilles Gautier went above and beyond in his support and encouragement while I was in the country, his help proved invaluable.

Ali Mckerrow, Charlie Mott, Dan Peel, Frazer Pearce and Matt Simpson formed, with me, the first British paddling team to adventure Madagascar. Without this team my exploration would have been severely reduced. I thank them and their club ([www.thepoly.co.uk](http://www.thepoly.co.uk)).

I must also thank my partner and friend Joanne Mackin who provides a constant backboard for me to bounce wild ideas off, without her rock-like solidity I know I would often crumble.



*The Red Island*



## Prologue

Ever since I did a primary school project on the country around 15 years ago Madagascar has been a dream destination of mine. When I discovered there was potential white water exploration in Madagascar it seemed a natural progression to adapt my original dream to encompass my favourite sport. So this was my simple aim at every stage of my application to the WCMT, to explore the rivers of Madagascar.

From the beginning I felt as though my plans were slightly different to the norm, I remember phoning up the ever-helpful Judith Barber and asking, slightly concerned, what I was to do with 3 itinerary sheets when I could barely fill half of them. I knew my arrival and departure dates, and later when I had confirmed a paddling team, I also knew their arrival and departure dates. The very essence of my wish to go to Madagascar was based on the fact that only one serious white water kayak team had ever been there before and it was a huge island with lots of rivers, this did not lend itself to an itinerary. I was therefore pleased when Judith informed me that they understood this and whatever information I possessed would be adequate.

Everything was new, unexpected, and educational. Everything I did was motivated towards my generalised aim but at times I blundered along hap hazardously trusting to serendipity and optimism, while at other times I had specific focus and felt like a well-aimed arrow. I hope that the following report is written in a style that reflects the nature of my fellowship. I often stray into the realms of anecdotal and perhaps colloquial language in an attempt to bring something of my roller coaster type adventure and its amazing rhythm into the text. I hope you, as readers, can understand that to express myself any other way would be an insult and grave contradiction to the life I lived in the beautiful and crazy world that is Madagascar.

Enjoy.



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## 56 Days in Madagascar

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*It wasn't enough.*

*The following section is split into 3 parts; The Hard Bit describes getting to Madagascar, The Important Bit deals with the research I carried out whilst in Madagascar, and finally The Paddling Bit explains some of my kayaking adventures.*

*Various diary, email and article extracts appear throughout with a scattering of photographs.*



## © The Hard Bit

I had decided early on that I would never make a mistake; lessons would be learnt, alternative solutions would be discovered, I would happily be corrected in the name of education and experience. A wrong turn would always be one step closer to the right turn; this was after all an exploratory adventure. A positive psychology that was tested to the limits before I had even left the country.

### 20<sup>th</sup> July

I remember the beads of sweat slowly running the length of my nose as I hoisted my kayak onto the scales in Heathrow airport for a second time; struggling to hold the kayak in place without making it look as if I was taking a good third of its weight in an attempt to convince the attendant that it was lighter than it looked. I was pulling all the strings and still battling. This was a bad start, what sort of a kayak explorer will I be without a kayak? Trust me when I tell you that it was a close and costly thing, I didn't actually have to bribe anyone but I was convinced that the covert 'sur-charges' from Air France bordered on criminal. This said, after my lengthy and heated debate I was simply relieved to know that my kayak would indeed be allowed to travel with me.

*Lesson 1: Air France is not a kayak-friendly airline.*

### 21<sup>st</sup> July

It is a terrifying experience to land at night in an unknown, foreign speaking, third world country on your own. I lie, I was not alone. I had a 2½m lump of plastic to drag around with me, it's worse than a child; firstly its size is considerably greater and secondly it has no concept of independent action. And so with two rucksacks, two paddles and my kayak in tow I stagger through visa-control, customs and a plethora of taxi-touts and presumably (if the travel guide is to be believed) pick pockets. I brandish the phrase 'no entiendo' as my shield before quickly realising Spanish won't help and switch to my crash course in French; 'j'n comprend pa'.

Imagine my relief, if you can, when in perfect English a tall and smiling, trusty looking Frenchman states that I must be Chris and that his car is waiting.

Meet Gilles Gautier. He is the living legend of outdoor pursuits in Madagascar. He has been involved in rafting, climbing, windsurfing, base jumping, mountain biking, canyoning, trekking and much more. In his younger days he was a climbing pioneer but in his current role I like to think of him as a facilitator; he now helps others to push the boundaries of exploration and adventure-sport and I was lucky enough to be invited into his home to live and use as a base for the duration of my stay.

*Lesson 2: The French should not be judged by their corporations.*

My first task was to find my feet in this remote and hectic country and its culture. Madagascar's busy capital, Antananarivo (locally Tana), proved to be my first Madagascan exploration:

### 22<sup>nd</sup> July

I have a feeling of complete loss, almost pre-emptive failure. Here I am with a vague plan to explore the rivers of Madagascar. Miles from home with a poor grasp of the French language. I am at a loss – I can't even point to Tana.



### 23<sup>rd</sup> July

Tana assaults the senses; you can see the smog, smell the fumes, feel the grime on your skin and dust in your eyes, honking horns and old engines deafen. You can actually taste the foul air.

I walk from my new home to Tana and home again, it is about 20km in total. All to avoid haggling with taxi drivers, which, I am told, will be difficult due to the colour of my skin, my non-mastery of the French language and my lack of knowledge of local prices.

### 26<sup>th</sup> July

To breathe in Tana is a somewhat daunting task if one has any wish to breathe a useful percentage of oxygen.

*Lesson 3: Don't judge a country by its cities.*

*\*\*\* This was not a new lesson; I have loved the mountains of England and would not taint their beauty with the busy streets of Manchester. It is however an important lesson to remember \*\*\**



*The ever hectic capital city of Antananarivo*

And so the hard bit is over, I am in Madagascar and the island awaits my exploratory whims. This was a pretty continuous revelation for me; I was always happy and shocked when I realised where I was.



## 🕒 The Important Bit

I name this section for the constant reminders I had to force upon myself; if I had trusted the local tattooist I would have branded the phrase, *matropmi si hcraeser*, upon my forehead so the mirror could provide a daily reminder; research is important.

The more I researched and discovered on paper and in maps, the more I realised how much there was to explore and how much I wanted to be exploring it. However my aim was to work towards creating a 3 week paddling itinerary so when the Poly Paddling Team<sup>1</sup> arrived we could put my plans to action.

My research stage can be categorised as follows:

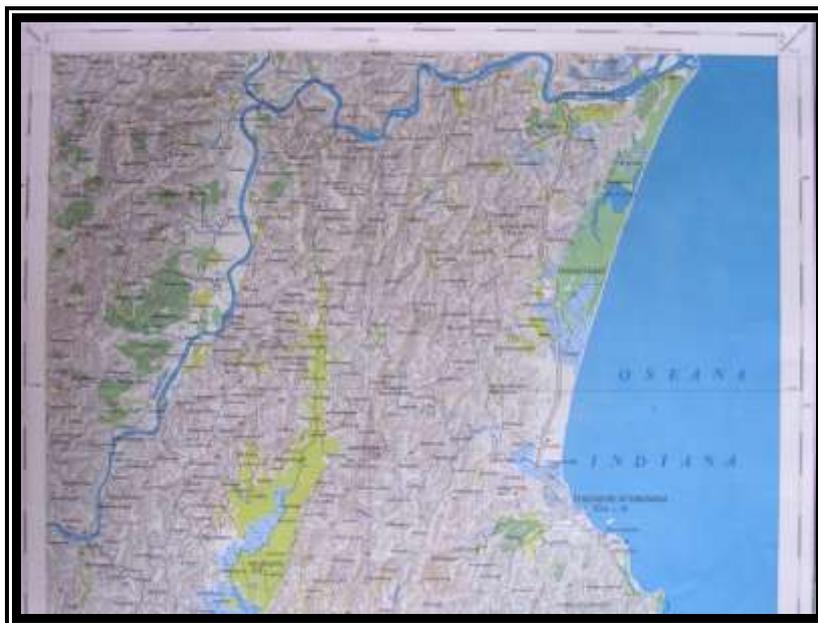
- ~ Maps
- ~ Local Knowledge
- ~ Self Discovery

### 🌊 Maps

#### Email to WCMT 24<sup>th</sup> July

I am realising that 6 months is not enough to learn a language (and only their 2<sup>nd</sup> one at that) however those months of study have enabled me, finally, to locate and purchase maps of a reasonable scale and detail. All along I have said that this is the key to this exploration and adventure and thus armed I have discovered that there are a plethora of rivers and waterways and a distinct lack of roads and general infrastructure – I am unperturbed, these are virgin rivers to a man with a kayak.

I shall stop rambling, these maps have evaded me for a long time and I am suitably excited by our eventual meeting.



*Map of the Mangory, this was 1:100,000 and the main blue line was one river I researched.*

<sup>1</sup> The Poly Paddling Team are a group of paddlers who I met in England and we decided to join forces, I could provide 5 weeks of research and they could provide a paddling team to try it on. [www.thepoly.co.uk](http://www.thepoly.co.uk)



The maps were wondrous creations dating back to the 1950-60's when French-Colonial Madagascar still existed; Madagascar only gained full independence in 1960. Countries change with time; if I were to buy a 1960's OS map in Britain I would not expect it to be accurate today. The interesting difference between Madagascar and Britain is that in Britain I would expect a modern map to be riddled with extra roads and evidence of increased suburbia. The modern Madagascan map would show a severe decrease in its levels of infrastructure. It would highlight roads which are no longer passable as, without their regular maintenance, yearly monsoons quickly eroded them away. Many bridges would be marked as ruins because the opposition Government of 2002 tried to win power by destroying supply routes to the Capital – bridges were an obvious target. Heavy and continued deforestation will have further reduced the remaining rainforests while the national parks have defined borders to protect what is left. Modern Madagascar is therefore extremely misrepresented on a 45yr old map.

Problems our Team discovered when using out-dated Maps

1. We told our driver to meet us at a specific bridge in 3 days, we were very definite that there was only one bridge and that is where he should be. Luckily our driver had initiative because the bridge wasn't there anymore, it had been duly replaced →→→→→→→→



2. I used the maps to find rivers which had a feasible place to launch and, after a reasonable distance, a place to egress. I am quoted for saying, "This 20km tributary will lead us straight to the River Ikopa, the map shows a steady gradient over a reasonable distance so as long as it doesn't all drop at the same time it'll be fine..." The following picture is of the tributary losing its entire gradient at the same time!



3. The maps did not give any indication of road conditions, and even if they had they would have been inaccurate after 45 years. This led to times where it took our driver almost as long to drive from the get on to the get off as it took us to paddle. In the case of the Matsiatra gorge – 3 days. This was simply because the road was in such a state of disrepair.

*Lesson 4: Written information is only valid the moment it is written – proceed with due caution.*



A final note and praise to the wanders of modern technology: Google Earth is great! I am sure that satellite resolution is improving all the time; soon it will be a truly invaluable tool for trip planning and exploration. [See Appendix 1]

## Local Knowledge

### Conversation 21<sup>st</sup> July avec Gilles Gautier

“So crocodiles” I say

“Ah yes, crocodiles”, he smiles, “Madagascar’s only serious predator”.

This doesn’t make me feel better; I have an inexplicable fear of large waterborne creatures. Throw in teeth, large snappy jaws and an appearance that makes one shiver at its prehistoric magnificence and you can be left with only one thought: terror.

“They are very curious creatures, I have known them come right up to the raft and when satisfied, disappear”. This does not seem to bother him, he continues more reassuringly.

“They are also very cautious, decades of hunting have left them with an inbuilt caution”, then, like a roller coaster, “however I have seen them bite a paddle in half when they decided too. It left the paddler quite shocked and pale for a long time.”

I don’t think I am reassured; apparently there have been no reports of crocs ever attacking rafts, pirouques or kayaks.

I foolishly ask, “What about swimmers?”

“No, no, no”, he tuts, “You don’t want to swim.”

*A local welcome on the Mangoro River; a picture may tell a thousand words but it can never capture the screaming, shouting, cheering welcome that I received off this Madagascan crowd.*



*Lesson 5: Don’t swim with crocodiles, nb. This is a very important lesson of a strictly academic nature.*

I picked up many tip bits of knowledge of Gilles and his crack team of porters and guides. I learnt how to recognise and remove the common foot dwelling parasite which is found mainly in local villages and especially around pigs. While not overly dangerous it is important to remove the egg sack without bursting it to avoid infection and to carefully avoid having any of the little biters crawl under nails where they are notoriously difficult and painful to remove. I learnt about some local *fadys*; these are localised superstitions which seem to govern the Malagasy people on a daily basis. Usefully I discovered pork is taboo on many Madagascan Rivers, often requiring the costly sacrifice



of a Zebu to appease their ancestors and restore the balance. While localised dialects make learning Malagasy difficult at best (even Gilles porters sometime struggled with communicating with fellow Malagasy from different regions), I did learn some useful greetings for the different areas, and this often seemed to turn a suspicious glare into a welcoming grin and waving hand.

*Lesson 6: Don't walk barefooted through pig owning villages, nb. Although this should also be academic, the lesson is not easily forgotten after practical involvement.*

### Wed 26<sup>th</sup> July

I am learning the most French yet through Gilles' 6 year old son, Philippe. I think the break through came yesterday when we looked at all the pictures in a wildlife book and discussed in French which ones we would eat and which we wouldn't.

*"J' déteste le serpent" etc...*

Then today I returned from Tana with a picture of a chameleon and now I have a French-speaking friend. Unfortunately I think he thinks I understand more than I do!



⚡ **Self Discovery:** *when the maps have been studied and the locals squeezed dry of information there is really only one choice left.*

The public transport system was exciting and intimidating.

### Sat 29<sup>th</sup> July

The Trip was interesting from the start. The start happened to be a bus station and I use the ambiguity of interesting to mean scary. Before our car had even pulled up on the road side men had appeared and were removing the kayaks, seemingly aggressive words were exchanged. My kayak nearly went through a passing cars windscreen as a random Madagascan struggling to balance it on his head.

Crowded is a suitable description for this bus stop, Merchants, perhaps hawkers is better, of all kinds instantly plague; oranges, bread, cakes, biscuits, chocolate, rice, beans and nuts. This is just the food. Intermingled were pink Barbie diaries, a multitude of sunglasses, batteries, head lamps, calculators, cameras, pen and paper and a million other things shoved through the window of my taxi-bousé, trapped by touters. The kayaks had long gone, along with the paddles – presumably/hopefully tied to the roof along with the ducks. Another angry exchange regarding money, apparently the kayaks require a premium, I think however that it is more likely to be my skin colour as I hand money across to my Malagasy friend and guide.

*Lesson 7: Maybe National Rail isn't so bad.*

\*

When one takes the above experience and adds to it the over crowded, mechanically unsound, slow, uncomfortable and unreliable nature of the taxi-bousse, one seeks an alternative. I unfortunately sought an alternative which also turned out to be slow, mechanically unsound and uncomfortable. It was however extremely flexible which suited my purposes as the local transport system did not



seem to be geared up to explore potential white water rivers; they had the mis-guided aims of transporting people between towns, markets and other populated areas.

I introduce the trail bike; I called her Bertha because she reminded me of, and acted like, an ox. I hope you will let the insult to ox's pass:



I borrowed Bertha, who happened to be a Chinese import of reputable (?) make: Yamalo, for just over a week. I had spent a lot of time looking at maps and doing general study based research, this bike offered me a chance to get out there and see a bit of Madagascar, to follow up leads from books and verify the reliability of map-suggested roads, bridges and rivers. I was suitably excited.

*Lesson 8: Do as the locals do, if you don't fancy the taxi-bousse then take a Zebu.*

**Follows an extract from my magazine article for Canoe Focus, after much thought I decided these words summarised and best captured the adventure:**

"I borrowed a trail bike and scared myself silly. My intention was to follow up leads from maps, books and hearsay. Discover if roads to get-ons actually existed, whether a scenic waterfall was the next perfect drop and if bridges mapped in 1962 had been destroyed in the recent political struggles. A travel guide spoke of a "beautiful waterfall walk" and so I drove for 3hrs on rutted roads, walked a further 3hrs in blistering heat and arrived at what turned out to be a splattering trickle. Beautiful, no doubt, however the average British drainpipe holds more volume. The return journey was equally arduous, all in the name of exploration I would often console myself.

The bike ride was exciting; I got a puncture, shredded the inner tube, fixed the break cable with a piece of string, the stand with yet more string, ran out of petrol twice (for the sole reason that my tank wasn't big enough to get me from one petrol station to the next) and had cog and chain relationship issues, I accidentally wheeled off the back and another time fell off sideways on a rutted trail when the chain jumped suicidally off the cogs. As I say it was quite exciting but it did allow me to explore parts of Madagascar which would've been difficult, if not impossible, by *taxi-bousse* (the local, crowded, duck-sharing public transport system).

On this bike-trip I went to Ranomafana to explore the River Namarona. Ranomafana is well known in Madagascar for its National Park which is one of the numerous protected areas in Madagascar. The Golden Lemur is endemic to this area alone and we were lucky enough to see this species, while being one of 57 known Lemur species, it is made special by its very recent discovery in 1986. The River Namarona runs through this National Park and boasts some fairly spectacular waterfalls which I decided to inspect. In hindsight there should have been more doubts in my mind as I descended a set of ladders to the base of the gorge, access ladders to a barrage below. From here I set off upstream, leaping from boulder to boulder,



feeling quite goat like as I avoided the hugest spider webs I hope ever to see, they soon become my nemesis and I reluctantly employed a stick; in my gorge-induced temporary madness I imagined hordes of them ganging together and seeking retribution.



*Myself and my trusty sticks.*



*My Namoronan Nemesis*

I started off keeping my feet strictly dry, but before long one section required a small amount of wading, sticking to the shallows and thrusting leeches and crocodiles from my mind I continued upstream. A successful but difficult cliff face traverse followed by much jungle bashing and spider avoidance left me in a position where I realised the return journey would be difficult. I soldiered on. I tackled a second tricky traverse; my feet relying on submerged holds, fingers on tiny crimps, momentarily I was distracted by small green and black frogs frolicking between my laces. I fell hard and landed deep, head going under. I only thought of one thing, crocodiles: I swam with Olympic speed and dragged myself onto a mid-river tree, caught my breath and realised I would have to enter the water again to reach the bank. My nerves would not stand hanging around and so back into the fire I leapt – a final burst of front crawl, a scramble on to the bank and there I lay, heedless of the land based abilities of crocodiles. Other than this the inspection went well – the falls were very serious falls; steep and technical.



When I had completely gone beyond the point of no return I scared the hell out of a sunbathing French biological research student who kindly pointed me toward the Park Research station with a trail back to the main road. Thank the river gods...”

***Extract from:  
Canoe Focus Article  
Publication Date  
December 2007***

*Falls on the River Namorona: Ranomafana*

*Lesson 9: Though spelt similarly and on a global scale geographically close, Yamalo is no substitute for Yamaha.*

***\*\*\*The Big Lesson\*\*\****

*Lesson 10: Research is Important*



## 🌐 The Paddling Bit

This can be broken into three main sections:

- ~ The paddling I did with the locals
- ~ An expedition I joined with the British Geological Society
- ~ My three weeks with the Poly Boys

### 🌊 [Paddling] With the locals...

I had the opportunity to paddle some easier rivers with some members of Gilles raft-guide team. They had not kayaked before but were enthusiastic to learn, in return for my coaching I would be able to experience the local way of river-travel.

First up was a two day descent of the Andromba; a *taxi-bousee* deposited us at the side of the road, about 2 hours drive south of Tana. A short walk over a field brought us to the river and already gathering crowd.

I tried my best to teach Joe to paddle, we spoke a cross of English and French, both understanding enough of the other to get by, as well as learning many new words Joe learnt to paddle very quickly and he was very determined to improve.

While I may have been the leader on the river, my Madagascan companion Joe took confident charge when it was time to find a place to sleep and eat. We had not brought stove, food, tents or any of the other items you would assume to take on an overnight expedition. The most important thing I had taken was a friend who could speak Malagasy. At first the villagers were timid and reserved, presumably shocked by our arrival – we were quite a change from their monotonous lifestyles. Slowly they began to relax, laugh and, after tentative touching, happily helped to carry our boats to their patch of 8-10 houses which they called their village. First we sought le Président, this was usually an old man who was thought to be wise and therefore in charge of the village, we had to seek permission to stay the night. Fortunately hospitality is part of the Madagascan culture.

*Lesson 11: Local Madagascan hospitality is far better than its local rum which wilts the tongue and waters the eyes.*

### Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July

We were shown our room, an upstairs floor in a clay house where straw mats had been laid. A fire in the adjoining room, no such things as doors, heated rocks for our warmth if required. The stairs were precariously narrow; the ceilings and doorways low; tiny windows admitted modicums of light. By most standards it would be no more than an unstructurally sound wreck, but it was warm and it was dry and it was these peoples home. It was certainly warmer than the star lit sky which was spectacular that night. The Milky Way stood opposite a bright and proud crescent moon amongst a splendid backdrop of galactic glory. I stood before bed for a long time in silent admiration; free from the pollution of Tana, this was the first of many nights of foreign stars to my Northern eyes.

\*



The second river I paddled was with Joe and Oliver, Joe had quickly picked up his skills on the Andromba and thought the best way to pass them on to Oliver was to shout at him a lot and show off his own skills; it appeared to me to be the Malagasy way.

Together the three of us paddled for two days and two nights on the Upper section of the Ikopa; this river starts clear and small but I knew from my other research that this calm river would turn into a raging western wonder after it had passed Northerly through Tana and headed North and West towards the Mozambique channel.

*From Left to Right: Joe, Oliver, Chris: River Ikopa*



This river inspired some feelings of conflict between Madagascar and Britain [see Appendix 2] and allowed me to further experience the kindly nature of what was quickly becoming a very impressive nation of people.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> August**

I didn't have much of a clue what was going on in-between the brief updates from Joe. A chicken was pointed out: 5000AR for one and 8000AR for another larger one – apparently expensive but then we were still close to Tana. I had never felt so directly part of the supply chain. A coffee, heavily sugared to cover a burnt taste, appeared for our consumption. Rice was sifted and thrown, water fetched, a chicken somewhere, secretly slaughtered. There was a certain fear of me shown by the children, I don't know what they were thinking but I was constantly watched, I decided to play up to the stares and juggled pinecones to their amusement. I shall take my juggling balls on future trips.

### **☞ [Paddling] With the British Geological Society...**

This was an interesting opportunity which turned into an interesting adventure.

### **Sun 20<sup>th</sup> August**

I am to safety boat for a BGS expedition, our planned early start has been delayed by lack of transport, I hope this doesn't mean I will run of time as I need to be back in Tana to meet the Poly Boys and the timing is tight.

\*

The BGS are surveying Madagascar under contract to produce information which will allow mining companies to ascertain whether there is potential to exploit Madagascar's natural resources. They



were rafting larger rivers and taking sediment samples of the tributaries as part of their preliminary investigation. I managed to tag onto one of their trips under the guise of ‘safety kayaker’; my role was to scout ahead and ensure the river was safe and navigable. In return I was looked after as if I was a geologist; this meant rum and dessert with the evening meal, prepared and carried by a team of porters who followed the raft trip by foot.

It was a perfect opportunity for me to see another section of river which had shown promise on the maps.

The interesting part of this trip revolves around the timing, I was nearing the end of my 5 weeks alone and the Poly Boys Team was due to be met in Tana. The BGS expedition was to take around 10days but there was a half way pull-out where a vehicle was to meet myself and the sediment samples, this pull-out was a 3hr walk from the river and was timed perfectly to allow me to return to Tana in time.



*Myself and Max*

*A Local Boy*

In short the descent took longer than expected as the raft had to portage many white water sections (from what I saw myself this section shows potential for a white water kayak team, unfortunately I was forced to portage a number of promising gorges with the raft team). Things were still looking ok for my Tana meeting, though time was becoming slightly tight. However on the eve of the pull-out the chief Geologist, on his satellite phone, discovered that there would be no vehicle. The vehicle in question had been crashed into a ditch that day and the spare vehicle had burnt out its clutch attempting to rescue the first. Disaster sprung to mind.

I had to get to Tana.

I walked with two porters carrying my kayak to the meeting place; local intelligence suggested that there may have been another vehicle and that this was my only chance of getting to Tana in 24hrs. The walk started at 6am. I arrived at the village at around 9:30am; this was by far my most intimidating Madagascan experience. The entire population of this relatively large village descended and surround me, in rural Madagascar even French is a novelty and so tens and tens of jabbering locals scared me somewhat. Eventually I found the president and we spoke in broken French, the idea of a car was comical. The nearest car was a 10hr walk away, as was the nearest phone. I am wearing sandals. Without much option I continue on my way, probably leaving the village around 11am with a new set of freshly, and I think badly, negotiated porters.



I am not capable of explaining the next 14hrs and 70odd Km's. I do remember that while I walked I constructed the most beautifully worded epic novella; however those poetic words are lost in delirium. I passed through many stages of endurance, passed and surpassed my most optimistic belief of my own capabilities and still walked on. Nothing can do justice to that walk, my sandals fell apart at some point and I walked barefooted. It went dark at some point and we relied on the dull moon. Brief rests, snippets of exhausted sleep and the ever-so painful continuation as stiff legs re-warmed. I have no idea how my porters walked with my boat but I do know that these guys are conditioned to that sort of thing and even they came close to crumbling. It was a crazy day. We arrived at the dead of night; I lay in the deserted town square happy to simply collapse and sleep but I was rudely awoken by a random man. I told him I must wake and get a bus to Tana in the morning, it was very important. He took me to his house and gave me a mattress on his floor. I woke to find that I had been found by and slept in the *taxi-bousse* mans back room. I smiled and *taxi-boused* it back to Tana.

*Lesson 12: An old army adage, look after your feet and your feet will look after you: this should include not walking ridiculous distances in shoddy sandals.*

\*

### Monday 27<sup>th</sup> August

It's been 5 weeks and I have learnt a lot (esp. these last 24hrs) on my own in Madagascar and I think this must be one of the many aims of the WCMT; to give people the opportunity to gain learning experiences so that they can bring those lessons back with them and take them through life. I have learnt about reaching my personal limits and pushing beyond them, I have learnt how to deal with situations when there is no one else to turn too and most importantly I have seen how impoverished people can find joy in the simple things that, when there is nothing else, really matter.

### In hindsight...

*One thing I remember for sure is that I was really looking forward to the arrival of the Poly Boys, both from excitement for the start of the 'real' paddling, and for the companionship of English speaking paddlers. Luck was again with me as the team were not only great paddlers but also great people.*



Frazer

Dan

Matt

Ali

Charlie

### 🌀 The Poly Boys...

We had successes; the *Ikopa* is a large volume river running north of *Antananarivo*, in 2003 The Young Guns paddled a one day 'road-side' section of this river. With similar gradient and volume upstream we had high hopes for similar rapids and were far from disappointed. Within a day of the Poly Boys landing we were trekking, floating and dragging our way down a small and empty tributary of the *Ikopa*. Beautiful sunshine, luminescent green frogs, 15kms and a long slog later, found us descending an incredible set of rocky slides and falls. The entire tributary appeared to



drop in one impressive gut lurching go, after which we found ourselves floating down the more voluptuous *Ikopa*, eagerly searching for our first campsite.

This river ticked a lot of boxes; world class, Zambezi style white water; definite portages, tummy fluttering moments and fantastic read and run big volume lines; our first crocodile sighting; a gigantic horde of bats circling over an enormous 100m wide cascading torrent before swooping back to their cliff top tree to hang peacefully; locals either running in fright or cheering in delight, spearing fish, paddling dugouts (*pirogues*) and panning for gold. It was a first descent experience which a book would fail to do justice to, let alone 2 paragraphs. Absolutely incredible.

\*

Next we travelled south to the *Namarona*; the river I had inspected previously. I had great hopes for this river; it had reasonable access roads, the distance was feasible and my gradient charts were hopeful.



This was the river I had raved about in my notes and emails home and so I was bitterly disappointed when the entire gradient of the first section of the river even disappeared underground through siphons and sieves for a good 500m. At the time it felt as if I had wasted so much time and effort on a poor section of river but looking back it seems more inevitable than not when searching out new runs. It was a group decision to cut our losses and go explore the *Matsiatra Gorge*, west of *Fianaratsoa*, a river known for its crocodiles.

There was however still 2 days downstream which we did not paddle and in the back of my mind I know I'll always wonder whether those 60km could harbour some of the best white water in Madagascar.

The *Ikopa* won on quality of white water, but for a complete sense of isolation and remoteness this gorge trumps hands down. The roads were so unroadworthy that I'll happily classify the expedition as starting from when we left *Fianaratsoa* – Madagascar's 2<sup>nd</sup> main city. It effectively took us two days to travel the last 60km to the river and we had to camp out in the middle of an amazing and barren landscape when, after crossing numerous decaying bridges, we came across one that had decayed that bit too far and lay shattered in the river bed. We spent 3 days on this river while our driver spent three days doing the shuttle: I think we got the best deal.



Lower volume in nature than the *Ikopa*, we discovered narrow and, in places, creek channels weaving through a fairly consistent gradient. The hills steepened and the gawking villagers lessened, both enhancing a growing sense of entering the unknown. I don't know if the feeling of being the first can ever be recreated, I certainly felt that by paddling this river I had stolen something from it that could never be regained. We had absolutely no knowledge apart from what



we could glean from a 50 year old map; this led to maximum levels of anticipation on entering the gorge. On leaving it and looking back at what we had conquered I experienced relief of euphoric proportions, and then later a huge sense of achievement. From here we were amazed and grateful to find our driver had found us, and were happy to simply rest on the long drive back North to paddle a Young Gun repeat and indulge in the beautiful coastline of the Indian Ocean before returning to reality.

\*

It turned out we needed that rest for our adventures to come.

One of the beautiful things about paddling in a place where hardly anyone has paddled before is that there is no such thing as failure. It can all be justified in the name of exploration. So when you get on a 20km section of the *Sahatandra* at 2pm and it gets dark before the get out then you've not made a mistake, you've merely learnt an important exploratory lesson. It is however hard to keep this in mind when you've walked for 2hrs in darkness along a railroad, crossed precarious viaducts, dived into thorny bushes in blind (literally) panic as a train lights the way, only to watch it trundle past at walking pace; discovered that 1962 colonial maps are unreliable, and then walked another 2hrs following dubiously, yet accurately (well done Ali), interpreted local directions. "Tactical retreat", said Frazer. "It was only a 4hr walk", said I. "You didn't break your toe on the first river!" said Charlie. It was a long night.



\*

Time is an interesting paradox, whatever they tell you it is far from constant. As soon as you realise you don't have much left it disappears all the faster. My final days in Madagascar were like this. I had been living outside of reality and suddenly it wanted to catch up with me, I felt accelerated home. I experienced paradise on the Indian Ocean; our stay in *Mahambo* was short but could be a story in itself, and then before I knew it I was watching my last Madagascan sunset, saying goodbye to my surrogate family. We were eating our last meal and raising our glasses for our final toast;

"To adventure and exploration."

And afterwards, to reality.

\*

### **Facts**

*We travelled to Madagascar like so many before, to explore the unexplored and discover the undiscovered. Unlike so many before us we went in search of white water instead of wildlife and carried paddles in place of binoculars. In total we ran about 150km of new stuff and 50km of repeats on various sections of white water, covering:*



- The *Ikopa* (3 new days plus a 1 day repeat of the young guns Dynasty section)
- The *Namarona* (1 day)
- The *Matsiatra* gorge (3 days)
- The *Sahatandra* (young gun repeat – 1 day)).
- Plus a couple of days surfing and a few other inspections.



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## The River Report

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*“2 months is a joke, 2 years wouldn’t be enough – I had never imagined so much virgin white water left in the world. I am not talking insanity falls here, just days and days of paddling for all abilities – this however is part of the beauty and the problem. Most of the paddling is for days and days, the road infrastructure is poor and finding a put in and a take out within a reasonable distance of each other can be hard. This is improving; everywhere I went there seemed to be hordes of Malagasy working on improving roads so this and more people thinking about Madagascar as a white water destination will combine to make more rivers known and accessible.”*



### ⚓ Time to go

Madagascar is pretty much an open book, when you go is only restricted by what you want to do:

- ~ The general dry season runs from March to September – the weather is pleasant, there is little rain and the crocs are more docile in the relatively cooler temperatures. Here the runs on the larger rivers are good and access to remoter areas is greatly increased (dust as opposed to mud).
- ~ November sees the start of rain. Although rivers run, this month see an increase in crocodile activity as they are often agitated by the change in season. This does not rule November out just highlights the care required and rivers selected.
- ~ The rainy season is December to March, road conditions deteriorate and a 4x4 is more likely to be required. Big volume rivers such as the Ikopa are likely to be too big but the many smaller runs open up. I can see this becoming the season of steep creeking in Madagascar. That said the Italians organised an extremely successful intermediate Xmas trip, so successful they returned in Xmas 2006.

### ⚓ Getting there

Being an Island you're fairly limited here – I flew with Air France but was seriously done over when it came to my kayak so basically don't fly AirFance.

I suggest you follow the Poly Boys option and fly MadaAir from Paris, making your own way to Paris (budget airlines etc.)

### ⚓ Maps

Stanfords claim to stock the series of maps which split Madagascar into 12 sections and are 1:500 000. These maps are better for road navigation than a national map and mark the rivers in reasonable detail. Depending on your chosen rivers you have ; 5 (Maintirano) ; 6 (Toamasina) ; 7 (Morondava) ; 8 (Antananarivo) ; 9 (Toliara) and 10 (Fianarantsoa).

Available at [www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk) or FTM (Rue DAMA-NTSOHA RJB B.P. 323 Ambanidia – Antananarivo. E-mail [ftm@bow.dts.mg](mailto:ftm@bow.dts.mg)).

Also from FTM are maps usually of 1:100 000 and sometimes 1:50 000. Since a lot of the rivers are multiday these become extremely helpful. Though a little old they are reasonable at 3-4 euros each.

### ⚓ Logistics: There are 3 choices here:

- ~ Firstly you paddle the rivers mentioned here. While great fun this would be a small injustice to the vast potential that is Madagascar
- ~ Secondly you plan to spend part of your trip in recce mode; where by you arrive and purchase maps and work out which rivers work and then go find out. In the spirit of exploration this is a good option.
- ~ Thirdly and finally you call on the aid of Gilles Gautier, a Frenchman living in Madagascar with a vast knowledge and passion for adventure. He has organised trips for a successful intermediate Italian group, worked out an itinerary to keep the



Young Guns happy and rafted/recced a large amount of rivers. Not to mention the help I received. From an all out supported trip, to navigation, to guiding and tackling the language issues, I am sure in some way Gilles will be able to enhance your trip.

One thing for certain is that you can't expect to turn up, hire a car, load the boats and go paddle some rivers (not yet anyway). Madagascar is new to the world of WW Kayaking and while there is vast amounts of potential the road network is poor, navigation difficult and rivers long. For your trip to be a success you need to plan carefully.

### 🌐 **Andromba**

I paddled a 2day section of this river which is just south of Tana and runs north. It was described to me as pretty flat with portages. The first day paddling offered a good slide with more water, a narrow chute which I portaged and some rocky grade 3. As a kayaker the WW wasn't enough to justify the amount of flat. The second day had some beautiful class 3/4 mini gorge sections but needed more water to make them worthwhile and an exciting two tier 8m drop ('Boof and Burn') which I was forced to paddle by the sheer peer pressure of an incredible number of locals ! There was a long paddle out. Generally more water was needed.



*A first descent on the Andromba:  
'Boof and Burn'*



*The more tranquil Andromba*

### 🌐 **Upper Ikopa**

Starting from the lake (Southeast of Tana) the Ikopa begins clear and deep through rush lined banks and rice paddies and is a long way from the raging torrent that it will become. We spent 2days on the river and pulled out early; unfortunately missing a good km or so of class 3-5 water. Previous to this was a good slide and a 300m section of multiple and exciting channels. There was again however a lot of flat water slogging.

The river can be paddled most of the way to Tana. It is only pollution that forces the eventual take out.

### 🌐 **Onive**

There are two main falls at the end of the road (4x4) which heads SE out of Ambatolampy on the RN7. The Onive for its majority is flat, then you reach a feasible if not challenging lead in –



unfortunately it's leading you to a constriction, some unseen underwater hell and the appearance of the water some 10m below.

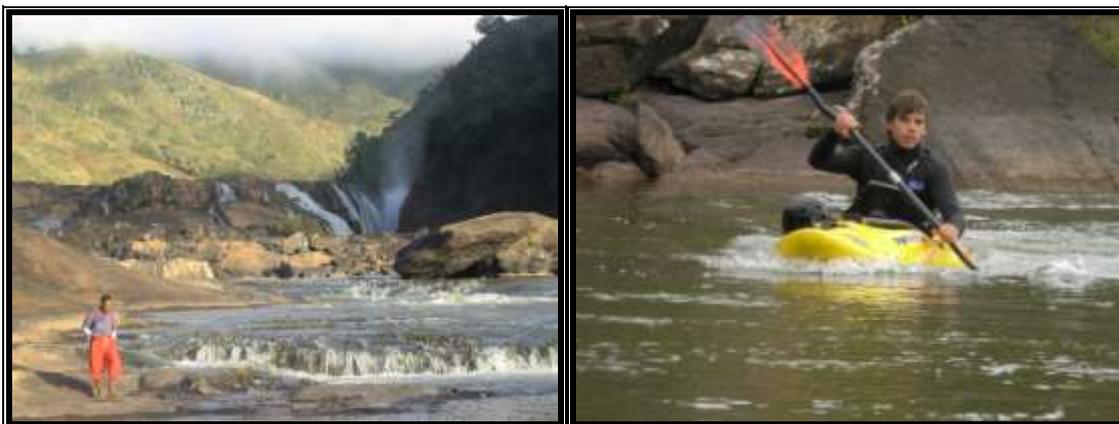
The 2<sup>nd</sup> drop I am sure will one day be paddled but hopefully only when Madagascar has developed better emergency services. Its pretty much a straight drop, the ideal landing is quite large and very central, the ideal lead in is blocked by a quite large and central boulder. Either side of this lands you on rocks and the water is moving very fast...



*The Impressive Onive Falls (2<sup>nd</sup> Drop)*

**© Mangoro** (*Map 8 and then R49 (1:100000)*)

Madagascar is currently being subject to a major geological study and I was fortunate enough to tag onto a BGS raft trip on this substantial river. I only had 5 days but the river has many more to offer than that. I believe this to be a worthy section for future teams to attempt.



*Theo and the Falls*

*-River Mangoro-*

*Chris: A flatter section*

The previous year witnessed Gilles raft team descend from RN2 to Antandrokomby, experiencing and portaging much white water. It sounds as if this section would also be worth a kayak exploration.

**Antandrokomby – Maromitety : ( 30km; drops approx 200m)**



The access to this section is difficult, a road runs south off RN2 from Moramanga; the Mangoro runs to the west of this road and various tracks lead to it. It is a 1 day walk in which is helped by cheap and willing porters.

📍 **Namorona** (*Map 10 and then P53 and Q53 (1:100000)*)

Ranomafana Research Stn – Barrage :( 2.5km; drops at least 150m). There are 3 main drops which are runnable but you'd probably only *see* run on an extreme DVD. There is a 4th large drop with no line, a gorge and a serious 5. Then a runnable but hard and steep section to the barrage.



*All big and serious but nothing to make them unrunnable...*

Barrage – Ranomafana Town :( 2.5km)

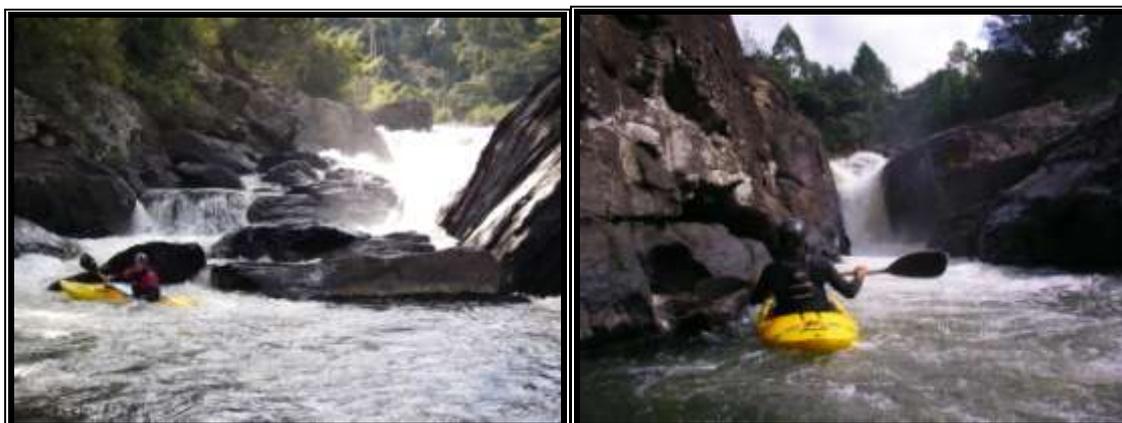
Take out at footbridge in the town of Ranomafana.

*We didn't get chance to explore this section....*

Tropique Village – Road Bridge S. of Ifanadiana :( 23km; drops approx 150m).

Put on at nasty roadside slot just after Tropique Village about 9km out of Ranomafana – you can paddle from Ranomafana but it is more or less flat.

We paddled this section in a day but discovered many 'river obstructions' and not a lot of worth while rapids.

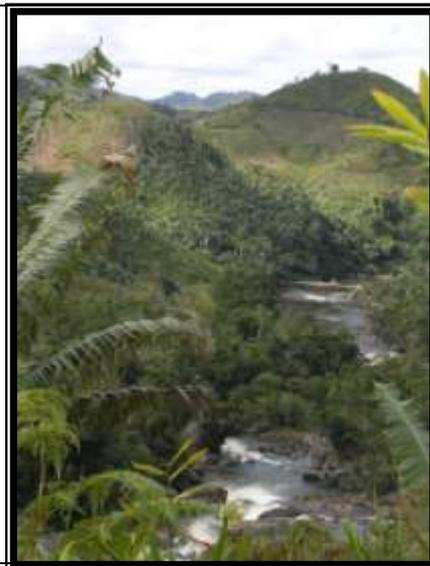


*Rapids on the Namorona*



Road Bridge S. of Ifanadiana - RN12 Road Bridge N. of Manakara  
: ( 72km; drops approx 400m)

We didn't paddle this section so it is difficult to know whether to judge it by the poor upper section or hope for better rapids downstream.



*This is a view of the lower section of the Namorona taken on my recce – the rapids look promising but bank inspection is always flawed and we didn't explore by kayak.*

📍 **Maningory** (Map 6 and then T43, U43 and V43 (1:100000))

Lake Farihy Alaotra – Ampasina :( 135km; drops approx 750m)

Start at the NE of the Lake where RN44 crosses the start of the Maningory. This is a long and remote river with serious potential for large vertical drops in gorges. River finished at the road bridge nr. Ampasina. It is possible to split the run at Anjahambe at the end of RN22.

We didn't paddle this section. It will be remote and wild and there could be a characteristic 'shelf' in the bed rock associated with the eastern running rivers which would suggest a big drop, possibly in a very remote gorge. A committing but potentially amazing section. *The last 30km are bigger volume grade 3 and have been rafted – a sizeable amount of flat by all accounts.*

📍 **Izafo** (Map 6 and then V43 (1:100000))

Maromitety – Antsikafoka :( 24km; drops approx 90m).

Put on at road bridge nr. Maromitety on RN22, river runs east and road side for most of its length and finishes at a road bridge.

Possibly a day section but certainly not a winter section – we looked at this river and it was very empty. With rain in the spring months though it could be enjoyable and impressive.

*Nb. Mahambo has beautiful beaches and good surf.*



*Matt in the Surf at Mahambo*



*Mahambo Paradise*



© **Ikopa (North of Tana)** (Map 5 and 6 and then M42, N42, N43, N44 and (1:100000))

These two rivers are access tributaries to the Ikopa:

**River Manankazo** : ( 25km, drops 100m and enters the Ikopa)

The river can be accessed off the road which runs N from Ankazobe (RN4) nr Kiangara.



*Charlie on the Mamokomita*

**River Mamokomita** : ( 22.5km, drops 180m and enters the Ikopa)

The river can be accessed off the main RN4 south of Andriba.

**Manankazo – Mamokomita section**: (55km; drops approx 250m)

This section involves paddling the Manankazo to access the Ikopa and then continuing onto the next section.

We didn't paddle this section but from all we've seen of the Ikopa it promises to hold some fantastic big volume white water rapids – definitely needs to be done.

**Mamokita – Antanimbary** : ( 60km; drops approx 300m)

This section involves paddling the Mamokita to access the Ikopa. The Ikopa comes within easy egress distance of the road nr. the town of Antanimbary on RN4.

We paddled this section and were incredibly impressed. It took us 1 day to paddle/walk down the tributary and then 2 long days to paddle the Ikopa section. A definite Madagascan classic. Grade 1-6, lots of 4 and 5.



*Ikopa: 'Weapons of Mass Destruction'*



*Amazing Ikopa 'Bat' Falls*



The Young Gun Section: (15-20km; drops approx 150m)

Put on when RN4 comes close to the river nr. Antanimbary. Take off at the road bridge W of RN4 and south of Maevatanana.



This section was slightly harder than the upper section but had so much amazing white water that, as a one day road access section, it can only become a major must-do Madagascan run.

Nb. Impressive rapids on the 'Red River' the Betsiboka can be seen from the RN4 road bridge east of Maevatanana.

@ **Upper Sahatandra** (Map 8 and then S47, T47 and U47 and T46 and U46)

Perinet – Anivorano section: (110km; drops approx 933m)

The Sahatandra turns into the Vohitra about 40km from Perinet, both rivers are of a similar volume and so the Upper Vohitra should be a good descent but access is currently difficult.

This whole section has been paddled by the Young Guns. There are at least 2 serious gorges and the Chutes de Korma (significant enough to be noted by the French in 1962). We repeated the first 20odd km but it went dark as the gradient started to improve and the Chutes de Korma section began.





📍 **Matsiatra Gorge** (Map 7 and 9 and then maps 052 and M52)

Ambalamarina – Andranomavo section: (60km (very rough) drops approx 250m)

A river known for its crocodiles and apparently downstream (a drift towards Fitampito) offers guaranteed crocodile paddling. We saw more than enough in the gorge though – one huge beastie bursting from the bank and two slightly smaller ones who disappeared stealthily from the bank when they saw us. An ankle biter (1m ish) followed us curiously for a while.



This is a truly impressive multi-day gorge paddle with extremely difficult road access. Paddling was varied but there was plenty of chutes and slides of a runnable grade 4-5 nature. Some portages and some flats.

**Gondwana Explorations ([www.madamax.com](http://www.madamax.com))**

Gilles Gautier has much information on his website about the rivers of Madagascar. Although aimed towards rafting and expedition style rivers this is definitely a good place to begin. One place of note which I regret not visiting is the Chutes of Lilly:

📍 **Lilly (avec le Chutes)**

The Lilly by all accounts is destined to become a classic run of Madagascar, easy logistics, intermediate style paddling, spectacular falls which are easily portaged (or run). Best in the high waters of Dec-April but navigable year round.

Nb – there are 3 chutes, only the first has been run and that was by diverting the flow of the Lilly in the dry month of October. I'm sure this is well known: YGP Dynasty and Kayak Session #13 The Red Island both provide a lot of inspiration for Madagascar.



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## Media and Dissemination

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*“Our aspirations are our possibilities”*

Robert Browning

*My general aim was to explore the rivers of Madagascar, by remaining flexible I was able to capitalise on opportunities as they arrived. My planning revolved around ideas; the more ideas I had the more likely I was to see the opportunities when they came along.*

*Some opportunities came along; sometimes I had to create my own. One lesson which really hit me was back in England: Media is all about creating your own opportunities, making your voice heard and really shouting to get your word out there.*



### **Written Media:**

UK Rivers Guide Book – this is the largest online paddling community in Britain and has an active membership base. A report similar to the ‘Paddling Report’ section will appear in their ‘Trip Report’ section which a link to the fuller report. I have posted on the forum a number of times and there seems to be a lot of interest in what I was up to in Madagascar.

Canoe Focus – this is a kayaking magazine with a reader base of over 30,000. The editor thanked me for my article and photographs but apologised for the length of time till publication. It is scheduled for December 2007. The article is written from my perspective of my entire time in Madagascar.

Paddles Magazine – this is another UK based paddling magazine with a smaller but more specialised white water readership, we have an article ready for this magazine which is written about the Ikopa first descent. It is more of a ‘team’ article and should target a different type of paddler.

The Flow and the Fall – this is a work in progress which I hope to get published in a Sunday newspaper over the next couple of months. It deals with the sharp contrast between Madagascan and Salfordian youths.

[www.thewhitebits.co.uk](http://www.thewhitebits.co.uk) – I have learnt how to create a website and now have a live version, this is also a work in progress as I learn how to design and implement more features. All my written media and photos will be available on this website.

Southport Visiter – this is my local newspaper from my home town, they interviewed me and wrote an article which was published before Christmas 2006.

I aim to present a very short summary of my time to Madagascar to the Bradt Travel guide which published regularly updated guides for travel in Madagascar.

### **Spoken Media:**

The Tyne Tour is a huge annual paddling event in Hexham, a talk on Madagascan paddling was presented by Matt Simpson.

Gene17, a large coaching company, hold an annual paddling fest at the Dart Country Park. We were invited to talk about our trip to Madagascar. Frazer Pearce took the lead and 4 of us travelled with him in support.

A third talk is scheduled to take place in Nottingham.

### **Video Media:**

The video footage I took is impressive and I have learnt to use some video editing software on some smaller projects. Many people are eagerly awaiting a short movie because video often speaks louder than words, however video editing is massively time consuming and so it is still a currently unfinished project.



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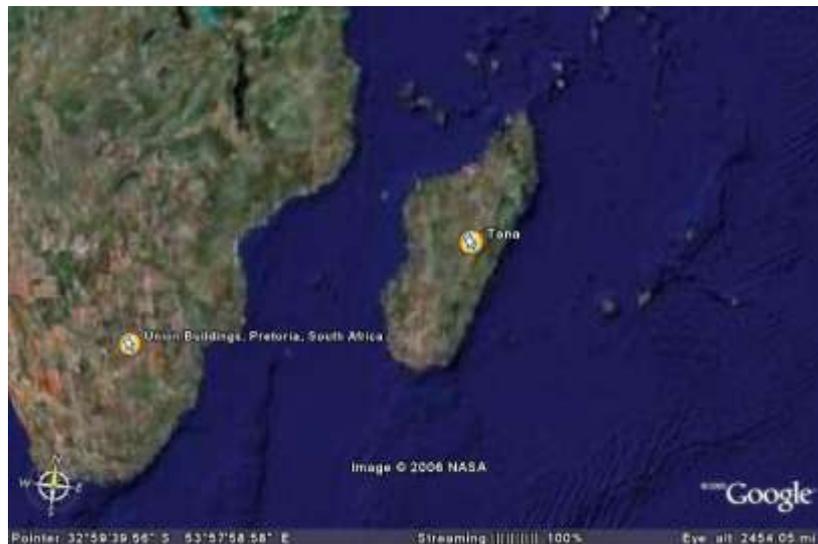
## Appendices

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## APPENDIX 1

### GOOGLE EARTH



*Satellite imagery seems to be continually improving, while the freeware version of Google Earth is not currently a high enough resolution to accurately survey rivers, I am sure it is not far away from the day that such resources will become an invaluable method of exploration research.*



## APPENDIX 2

### The Flow and the Fall

In the setting of open minded comparison I would like to lay out my thoughts as I drifted down the Ikopa River, weaving its way through the highlands of Central Madagascar. Although small at present, easily a stones throw in width, this River would soon become huge and powerful and unforgiving in its onward rush. It struck me as ironic to know that on one hand we can see this power, this gathering of force and presence, but on the other we always know that the River is inevitably travelling 'down hill'.

And so I looked at Madagascar and I thought of Britain, and loving my kayak in both countries this seemed to be where my mind meandered.

I am in Salford Quays and I am teaching a group of children the infuriating art of kayaking in a straight line, the session is mixed with games and so fun is had by all, it's a relaxed learning environment. I am a fan of challenges but I often find that it is I who am challenged when I set them ; cries of 'I can't' are the child's secret language for 'I wont try' for saying you can't is far easier than finding out if you can. And it is an art of persuasion to remove this negative assumption, to encourage participation and to achieve results.

I am back on the Ikopa and about 50m behind me I can hear the splashes of my Malagashy companion, I am impressed, but in comparison I am astonished. J'ne pu pa has not left his lips once or I'm sure even entered his mind. We have been kayaking since morning, it is almost time to stop for lunch; first he struggled in circles but I could see his quiet determination to fight the antics of his craft, within an hour we had encountered and overcome some small sections of white water, I had seen him understand and apply concepts which I would not even consider teaching a first time British paddler. Now he could've been doing it for years. So naturally gifted I thought, what luck, but later I discovered this was not luck, this was the result of being challenged since birth, challenged in the basics of eating, sleeping, living. To be challenged in something he could enjoy was no challenge at all and it was often expressed that he was très content. I can and I will easily prevail.

The river banks were mainly rice paddies in this part of Madagascar, Zebu grazed under the watchful eye of children, women washed clothes and carried water and men and women alike could be seen labouring everywhere.

Back in Salford Quays I have had to end the session early, we had temporally abandoned the learning for the sure winner of a water fight. Though each year there seems to be a smaller proportion of children who can grasp the concept of how to splash with a paddle, they still enjoyed trying which is good to see. A stone bounced off the front of my kayak, I groaned inside and looked, without surprise, to see a group of youths collecting stones from a flower bed and launching these deadly missiles in our direction. In our game we had, perhaps foolishly, floated within stones throw of the side, these other children for reasons I am yet to comprehend derived satisfaction from the disruption and possibility of harm they may cause. I struggle to think of them as little more than horrid animals for this is how they act. This is not an isolated case, nor an isolated group, they come sometimes in hordes to disturb and destroy. It is like a plague.

We have approached a village, a horde of children run to the banks, they laugh and they wave and they smile. We are obviously no longer in Salford. They shout greetings and run alongside the



river, excited by your presence. They are all bare foot, they are all dressed in barely more than rags, I have no doubt that they spend a majority of their time working and hungry. These people have reason to be bitter by Western standards, they have reason to be angry at the white man and his leisure, but that is western thinking and an attitude which does not exist here. No stones are thrown; I can paddle under a bridge without fear of spittle raining down on me. They make me ashamed of my 'own' back home – if they are the product of a modern society then I propose simplicity can be the only future.

It's amazing where a wandering mind can take you on a wandering river, its amazing that we often look at these people with sympathy and sorrow. I do not feel the better person and I worry where this comparison will take us. Are we, like the river, powerful and great but nearly run our course?