



## MICAIA Blog

## Golden opportunities for porters in the Chimanimani Mountains

Friday, July 31, 2009, 01:08 PM  
Posted by Administrator

Milagre, Andrew and I went hiking for three days in the Chimanimani Mountains that run along the border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe in Manica Province – where Andrew and Milagre work with MICAIA. As I am working on the management plan of the Chimanimani national reserve, I was looking for sites that we could use for ecological monitoring. Of course I also wanted to get to know a part of the reserve I hadn't yet visited. Milagre and Andrew were keen to see any part of the highlands, as they plan to establish a tourist camp in Nhabawa, a village right at the base of the Chimanimani Mountains, close to Mt Binga (at 2436 m Mozambique's highest peak).

The Chimanimani Mountains are world renown for their biodiversity and their many endemic species, but locally they are even better known for the gold. Thousands of miners are panning in the streams, trying their luck, and in doing so are slowly but surely destroying the riverine vegetation. The activity is of course illegal, but so far the authorities have not been able to come up with an effective strategy for controlling it.

We went up with Robert and Paulo, two young men of Nhabawa village. They guided us, and helped carrying our loads. Just before leaving, Chief Nhabawa told us that they had decided that the fee for porters is 450 Metical per day (or about 17 USD). We had a fantastic hike: one of the endemic Aloes was in bloom and we saw the Malachite Sunbird feasting on it. In the vast rocky plateau the rock formations are stunning, and so are the views; at one point we crested a ridge and saw in all its glory the spectacular waterfall of the Muvumodzi. Soon after, we noticed that we were been spied on by some klipspringers.



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On the third day of our hike, as we returned to the village, we were caught up by a group of ladies who had gone up the mountain for trading with the gold miners. The ladies stopped to talk. They had managed to sell, they told us, a gallon of maize flour for 120 Meticaïs, while down in the village it is only worth 12 Meticaïs. That's a huge profit margin, I thought, hard to beat anywhere in the world. So if any tourist thinks that the fee for guiding is high, they should make this calculation: if a porter can carry a load of 20 kg of flour worth 48 Meticaïs in the village, she or he will be able to sell that for about 480 Meticaïs to the gold panners, making a gross profit of 420 Meticaïs. So yes, the villagers of Nhabawa are right, if we want the tourism investment to compete with the illegal gold business, we'll have to pay 450 Meticaïs to the porters.

Stefaan Dondeyne

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