

gormley-mel-2018-04-25.mp4

Mel Gormley [00:00:10] Well I first, I think I first started fishing when I was a kid. My first fishing rod was a radio aerial, off an old WWII tank. That was given to me by an old Polish soldier that was living in the UK who had been, obviously, in WWII. So that was one of his prized possessions and I ended up with it. So. We used to just go out on our bicycles, you know. Basically poach, off the local rivers where you needed permits. But of course as kids we didn't catch much with our hands. So yeah, apart from that. And then I've done a little bit of sea fishing, you know. Around the world you know, I've actually traveled quite a bit around the world. So I've done a fair bit of sea fishing. But, primarily, now, of course, we fish here in Uganda.

Mel Gormley [00:01:04] I was born in the UK and my family is actually from Ireland. Then after school I joined the military, so. And then ended up in Australia. You know backpacking through Asia. Things like that so. I haven't really spent too much time in the UK, to be honest with you.

James Thull [00:01:15] Well there's some great trout and salmon fishing in Ireland and, and, and in the UK overall.

Mel Gormley [00:01:22] Oh very much so, yeah very much so. One of my, my oldest brother is mad keen on fishing. That's pretty much his livelihood. He takes camper vans around Ireland and Scotland and wherever else. He was in Mexico recently. Yeah. So anyway, where there's something with a fin on it, we'll go and have a go and try and catch it. I'm not that bad, I have to work for a living.

Mel Gormley [00:01:48] Yeah, yeah. We caught Barramundi. We went up to the far north and, a place called Weipa. It's a little bit wild up there but we went out in a little tin boat. Caught some Barramundi and a few other bits and peices. So it was fun.

Mel Gormley [00:02:08] Yeah. Particularly, here. Because there are certain times of year we, we fish in on the Nile and Murchison Falls National Park. And that's a sponsored competition. And the money that we raise. So there are, you know, obviously private individuals and commercial companies that sponsor it. And so the money we raise goes to local schools. And also to anti-poaching units, within the National Park. So, you know. The result of that is, of course, we're given fairly, it's a privilege really. We're given very good full access to the river, where the tourists normally wouldn't be allowed to go. Beyond what they call "the tourist rock" which is right up to the foot of the falls. So it's quite wild water. And there are some very big crocodiles up there. And they, some of them, have been relocated to Murchison Falls, because they were problem crocodiles for communities outside of the parks. Some of them are man eaters, you know. And they are quite big. And so they're not real, they're not timid. So they'll, they'll watch you for a while. I mean, we've been stalked by them. They've bumped our boat. A few guys have nearly been nipped by them, you know, trying to get a lure out of a bush. Leaning off the boat, and come face to face with something that wanted to take their head off. So yeah, there's been quite a few, you know, near misses. Hopefully there'll never be anything that's too extreme otherwise the competition might well stop. And it's an annual thing. So. And it does a lot of good. So. And it's a lot of fun.

Mel Gormley [00:03:51] Yeah. The anti-poaching squad there, we, the competition provides them with motorcycles, bicycles. We build ranger stations through Uganda Conservation Foundation. And. Yeah, no, it's effective. It works. And then there's a little bit

more respect generated for the wildlife, the environment. And people have to eat so. It's better if they don't eat out of the parks.

Mel Gormley [00:04:21] I mean, the wildlife in this country was decimated during the Amin years. Decimated. I mean, by machine gun, out the back of trucks. You know it wasn't, nothing subtle about it. And even today, you know, you can buy the meat in the markets, if you know where to look. And it is a big problem, big problem. And pastoralists, of course, you know, in Queen Elizabeth [National Park] for example, they killed, I think it was eleven lions, the other week. Because the lions ate a cow. The Pastoralists poisoned the carcass. And I think, two females and a lot of cubs were killed as a result. But then of course the whole food chain, you know. Down to bugs get poisoned. So it is an issue.

Mel Gormley [00:05:14] I have been here 23 years, and back then, you could go out and you could catch, you know 50, 60, 70 kilos of fish. Without too much trouble at all, Nile Perch. And, and it was fairly frequent. You could, you could take a lot of fish. Obviously, you don't really want to eat or keep a fish that big, because they have a lot of natural mercury accumulated in them. So, personally, I'm not really into eating fish like that. The small pound fish are nice. But yeah, you could you, could catch them, you know, on trawling, obviously, behind a boat, as a rule. And just with [unintelligible] or whatever, depending on the depth you wanted to fish at, there's quite a good bit of structure out there. It's a very shallow lake. And it's not that old. When the... You know, when the earth's crust moved, the exit from the lake, which as we know it now, some people call it the source of the Nile, it's obviously open to debate but, you know. Which goes out of the north of the lake, that used to be over to the west. And so this, this was a valley, you know. In real terms, not too long ago. It's just filled up sort of. The biggest depth I've seen here, I think is 90 feet, on a fish finder. So it's not, obviously I haven't been out to the middle of it, but it's basically a valley. So there's a good bit of structure around the edges. And that's normally where we fish. We tend not to go out and fish in the open water. In the past, you know, there'd be, you'd find five kilometres of net, or long line out there. But the president of the country, maybe 18 months ago, decided to clamp down on basically what is illegal, illegal fishing, illegal net sizes. And that's made a massive difference, because we don't see that much in the way of netting out on the lake. Comparatively speaking, as we used to. And it's made a massive difference. We can now catch, you know two kilo perch, let's say one and a half kilo, two kilo perch, off the rocks. Whereas, you know, for the last 20 years that's, that's gone down. And now it's coming back. In a very short period of time. So. And there are, you know, there is a fish industry here, obviously, with regards to exports. You know, you can buy Ugandan Tilapia in the States, or in the UK, or wherever. And, and perch as well. And the fish factories themselves have a legal limit, with regards to filleting fish, that they won't take below. So however many inches, there is in that. In competition, we use 24 inches. You know, catch and release. So we run competitions out of our local sailing club here in Entebbe. Which are getting sponsored. And then normally what happens with the fish, because it's not catch and release, as a rule they bring them onto the beach. We then give that fish to the local orphanage, so the kids get to eat it. But usually nothing over, you know, if you've got a 40 kilo fish, you know. That used to be that used to be the case but not anymore. So now you're getting sort of eight, nine kilo fish are winning the competition as the biggest fish, so. You know. But it's coming back. And that's the main thing. Because the lake basically, has been raped. You know, it's just been used up. And it's good that the government has decided to actually do something about it. For the future generations, if nothing else. Because it was just getting to the point where there was no fish. And, of course, then the price of fish goes up. And then the local people can't afford to buy it. So, you know, it's so it's a lose-lose situation really, in that aspect. So yeah. But it's hopefully if it's kept up, you know, the breeding grounds for tilapia, for

example, can, can be reestablished. Because they're normally inshore around the rocks. The big little little troughs in the ground. And even if you walk by them on the beach, you know, they'll nip you on the ankle. Which is quite an unusual thing, but that's what they'll do. Because they're just being protective of their nest area so. Of course there's a lot of cichlids in the lake, but again with the introduction of the perch, in the '50s or so, by the British. You know the perch, obviously being a top predator, cleaned out a lot of the lake. With regards to species that couldn't defend themselves against them. So. But they're still there.

Mel Gormley [00:09:54] I would say, today, no. Because there's you know there are obviously safari companies, like myself, who can arrange fishing trips on the lake. And some, some companies you know they do it on a daily basis. As you'll find out this afternoon when you go. But it's, it's private commercial stuff. It's not, it's not linked in with, you know, any kind of a program to sustain the, you know, the fish factories obviously they're in business to export fish. So they're quite active I think. Policy wise, with government trying to protect the resource, there are obviously NGOs and what have you, around. Watching lake levels, lake pollution. We've got a, you know, quite a thriving farming industry here. Greenhouse based. So they're exporting cuttings and, not so much roses because of the climate, but cuttings certainly, to Europe. And of course they have to be certified in Europe, in order to be allowed to import their plants so their whole water purification systems, dumping rubbish into the lake, all that kind of thing is regularly tested. If they're found to be on the wrong side of it, then their exports are banned. So that's good, as well, obviously. Because it reduces the pollution of the lake. But, you know, here we've got a lot of wetlands. But over the years, you know, certain people have filled them in. Because it's free land, if you like, and they just back fill it, and that of course is filtration. You know, so that's a huge part of the ecosystem, and you know. It's. We do have an environmental management authority that's supposed to take care of that kind of thing. And in their own way maybe they're doin the work, but people still fill it in anyway.

Mel Gormley [00:11:54] Well. The the bulk of my client base, is from North America. Probably 80 plus percent of my clients. But generally speaking as a company, we don't... If a client wants to go fishing, we'll organize it. I don't use my own boats. I only use them for myself. Just to get away. But as a rule, if somebody wants to go fishing, we'll do it. But it's not really something we market. Primarily, in the last few years because there's very little fish, you know. You don't want disappointed clients. Particularly here in Lake Victoria. The Nile, different story. But then you, it's, it's, it's not technical fishing, but you've got to know what you're doing. You know, there is a there is a way of catching fish on the line. Obviously, a lot of turbulent water. A lot of potential for wildlife damage to yourself. And you know. It's, it's a, it's a rough place to fish. But it's superb, obviously, and people do it, obviously. You, you the Uganda Wildlife Authority do sell permits. So myself, and a lot of my friends have got annual permits. Money of which, of course, goes towards whatever UWA choose to use it for. Conversation, conservation rather. Primary goal. But, you know. It's 50 bucks for an annual-- no 350 bucks I think-- for an annual permit, so it's not going to go very far. And then a daily permit, I think, is 50 dollars for you know, average tourists will pay 50 bucks for a day on the river. Just as a permit. And then obviously, then you can use a company there who's got a concession in the park. To, to take you out fishing, cause they've got all the gear. The boats, the guides, and they know all the spots. So. But it's, it's a lot of fun. You know, whenever we get a chance to go on the river, it's. You know, we actually keep a boat up there. So you know if you get a chance. Just pop on, go out for an afternoon, or something it's nice.

Mel Gormley [00:13:54] We have, you know, as a private company we're registered by our ministry. And we, you know, we're a full member of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators. And the idea would be that that association would be used as a platform for any concerns that the private sector might have, and use that as a conduit to government. And that does work. You know, I was the chairman of it, for several years. And, you know, we managed to sit once a month with the Uganda Wildlife Authority and, you know, discuss tariffs and, you know, the death of lions, for example, as I stated earlier, you know, by pastoralists. You know, so there is a, there is a degree of cooperation between the public sector and the private sector. It's just obviously all voluntary so it's just a matter of how much effort and time certain individuals want to put into that. Instead of just wearing the badge, you know, you want to actually achieve something at the end of the day. On behalf of, not only your members, but the country as a whole and, you know, the future of the country really.

Mel Gormley [00:15:09] Well Tony, a friend of mine, caught a hippo one day. And that was quite amusing. We were again, we were up Murchison Falls. And what we tend to do is, we'll pull up on a sandbar on the side of the river. With the boat. And then obviously have a little scout around make sure there's nothing lying in the grass ready to eat us or stamp on us because, obviously, elephants also stand there. You're going to be a little bit careful about what you do. Adds to the adventure. But then we were out on this bank. And I was at one end, and he was at the other end. And I think I had a fish on, I had a, what did I have on? I had a catfish on. And so I was busy with that and the next thing, I heard over my shoulder this squeal from my fishing buddy. His rod was bent over, and he was obviously in a bit of a state. Shouting his head off. And he didn't have his knife on his belt. And something in the water was stripping his line at a rapid rate. The next thing, a hippo popped up. And was just charging away from him. And it had his lure stuck in his butt. But he didn't have a knife on him, and he couldn't let go of the rod because it was pulling so hard. So I had to run over and just cut his line for him. And I think I lost my catfish as well.

James Thull [00:16:26] I've heard hippo can be quite dangerous.

Mel Gormley [00:16:28] Oh yeah, yeah, no, they kill a lot of people. Kill a lot of people. But, you know, it's, it's again, it's just a matter of you know understanding where you are, in the environment. And what's there and respecting it. I'm not being silly. You know you don't get between them and the water. Between them and their young, or whatever it may be. And you always give them right of way, obviously. Be it with a boat, or if you're on shore. You know, we, we do scramble through the bushes or the rocks to get to some nice spots to where we can throw in a line where we can't take the boats, but again, you're walking on hippo trails. So you have to again, understand where you are. And the potential.

Mel Gormley [00:17:15] Yeah, enjoy it. Because that's what it's all about isn't it, at the end of the day? Enjoy it. Appreciate it for what it is. And do whatever you can to maintain it. You know, whether that's at a political level or a personal level, or whatever it might be. And from a financial point of view, you know, you find something to invest in that, that is actually worthy, then, then why not? Because you know it's, it is a finite resource. The UK obviously has had issues with regards to commercial fleets poaching their waters and, you know, Icelandics years ago. So it's a, you know. And it is, the land's being used up so. You know, be it for biofuels or whatever it might be, and you know fish is a resource that the world could use. Be it fresh, dry, whatever it might be, you know. So it would be silly not to protect it. And do whatever anybody can to maintain it for the future.

