

Hippo

I went to a suitable African river, me in a kayak, and Mark the cameraman in an inflatable boat, to get close to hippos in the wild. Our first hippo was floating languidly in a dark green pool with fast flowing water running through it. We spent most of the day watching. Whenever we got close he'd just duck his head underwater and disappear for half an hour. He was about as frightening as pocket fluff.

We were all feeling a bit deflated. I did my last piece to camera, turned the kayak around, and then stopped dead. There was another hippo right in front of us. He had come downstream, and found us blocking the way to his feeding grounds.

We weren't all that concerned, but then he dropped silently beneath the water. He was out of my view, but his vast bulk was still visible to the rest of the crew who'd taken up position on the bank. James started commentating: 'OK Steve, he's just in front of you, maybe 30 metres or so... Er, OK, so he's starting to head your way now... Oooh, he's moving quite fast, 20 metres... hang on, 10 metres... 5... GO GO GO he's right there!

Absolute total panic. The people on land were screaming, the camera boat guys were pulling their boat out of the water as the hippo came within metres of them, and I paddled off as fast as I could. It was terrifying, we couldn't see anything, but the guys on the side were yelling like we are about to get attacked (and having watched the footage back it looks like we nearly were).

I paddled full steam up to the bank. James grabbed the front of my boat, and I honestly believe he could have dragged me - still in the boat - all the way back to Cape Town and onto a plane home. Despite his 10 years in the natural history unit, producing gripping programs like Big Cat Diary, he said candidly that it was the scariest moment of his career.

From Steve Backshall's Deadly 60 by Steve Backshall

Steve Backshall - Hippo Questions

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1. Read the extract by Steve Backshall. Mark any vocabulary or phrases that you are not sure about. Try to find out what these mean.
2. Which words and phrases do they use to make their situation seem dangerous?
3. How does Steve describe his own response? What picture does this give you of him?
4. What is your response to this Adventure Travel Writing? Does it make you want to read more? Does it make you want to have similar adventures? Explain your answer.

*Can you make a cartoon of Steve meeting the hippo?
Read through the text again to see what details to include.*

Answers Steve Backshall - Hippo Questions

1. Read the extract by Steve Backshall. Mark any vocabulary or phrases that you are not sure about. Try to find out what these mean.

Answers may vary

2. Which words and phrases do they use to make their situation seem dangerous?

Ellipses (...), 'err', 'ooh', 'GO GO GO' help to build the tension to show the crew were getting worried. He also describes their emotions, 'Absolute total panic. The people on land were screaming' to show that the situation had become dangerous.

3. How does Steve describe his own response? What picture does this give you of him?

Steve just 'paddled off as fast as he could' this shows that he managed to stay very calm despite the terrifying and dangerous situation. This tells me that he's not someone who gets easily scared.

4. What is your response to this Adventure Travel Writing? Does it make you want to read more? Does it make you want to have similar adventures? Explain your answer.

Answers may vary but remember to explain your answers!

Can you make a cartoon of Steve meeting the hippo?

Read through the text again to see what details to include.

Bournemouth

By the time I reached the East Cliff, a neighbourhood of medium-sized hotels perched high above a black sea, I was soaked through and muttering.

The one thing to be said for Bournemouth is that you are certainly spoiled for choice with hotels. Among the many gleaming palaces of comfort that lined every street for blocks around, I selected an establishment on a side-street for no reason other than that I rather liked its sign: neat capitals in pink neon glowing beckoningly through the slicing rain.

I stepped inside, shedding water, and could see at a glance it was a good choice – clean, nicely old-fashioned, attractively priced at £26 B & B according to a notice on the wall, and with the kind of smothering warmth that makes your glasses steam and brings on sneezing fits. I decanted several ounces of water from my sleeve and asked for a single room for two nights.

‘Is it raining out?’ the reception girl asked brightly as I filled in the registration card between sneezes and pauses to wipe water from my face with the back of my arm.

‘No, my ship sank and I had to swim the last seven miles.’

‘Oh, yes?’ she went on in a manner that made me suspect she was not attending my words closely.

‘And will you be dining with us tonight, Mr –’ she glanced at my water-smearred card ‘– Mr Brylcreem?’

I considered the alternative – a long slog through stair-rods of rain – and felt inclined to stay in. Besides, between her cheerily bean-sized brain and my smeared scrawl, there was every chance they would charge the meal to another room. I said I’d eat in, accepted a key and drippingly found my way to my room.

Bill Bryson - Notes From A Small Island: Journey Through Britain

Bill Bryson – Bournemouth Questions

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1. Find out the meaning of these words:

- establishment
- neon
- gleaming
- beckoningly
- decanted
- slog

2. How can you tell what mood Bill Bryson is in at the start of the extract?

3. Why does he choose to go into this particular hotel?

4. What does the phrase 'gleaming palaces of comfort' mean? Why do you think he uses this phrase?

5. There are at least five phrases in this extract where Bill reminds us how wet he is. Find as many as you can. Why do you think he keeps reminding us of this?

6. Can you find an example of sarcasm in this writing?

7. In the last paragraph, why does Bill say that he will stay at this hotel?

8. What do you think about this style of travel writing?

*Can you make a cartoon of Bill's arrival at the hotel?
Read through the text again to see what details to include. Use
speech bubbles for Bill and the receptionist.*

Answers Bill Bryson – Bournemouth Questions

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1. Find out the meaning of these words:

- Establishment : *the action of establishing something or being established.*
- Neon: *fluorescent lighting or signs using neon or another gas.*
- Gleaming: *(of a smooth surface) reflecting light, typically because very clean or polished.*
- Beckoningly: *make a gesture to encourage someone to approach or follow.*
- Decanted: *gradually pour from one container into another, typically in order to separate out sediment.*
- slog: *walk or move with difficulty or effort.*

2. How can you tell what mood Bill Bryson is in at the start of the extract?

Bill Bryson is not in a good mood as he says, 'I was soaked through and muttering.'

3. Why does he choose to go into this particular hotel?

He chose this particular hotel as he liked the sign as it had, 'neat capitals in pink neon glowing beckoningly through the slicing rain.'

4. What does the phrase 'gleaming palaces of comfort' mean? Why do you think he uses this phrase?

'Gleaming palaces of comfort' means that light was coming out from them making them inviting and seem like they would offer comfort from the rain.

5. There are at least five phrases in this extract where Bill reminds us how wet he is. Find as many as you can. Why do you think he keeps reminding us of this?

*Soaked through
shedding water*

*decanted several ounces of water from my sleeve
pauses to wipe water from my face
drippingly*

*He keeps reminding us as he really was very wet and unhappy
about being so wet.*

6. Can you find an example of sarcasm in this writing?

'No, my ship sank and I had to swim the last seven miles.'

7. In the last paragraph, why does Bill say that he will stay at this hotel?

He stays at this hotel as he doesn't want to go back out into the rain to find another and he hopes that he won't get charged for his meal as they won't be able to read his room number.

8. What do you think about this style of travel writing?

Answers may vary but remember to explain your answers!

Can you make a cartoon of Bill's arrival at the hotel?

Read through the text again to see what details to include. Use speech bubbles for Bill and the receptionist.