Maloutswa Hide, Mapungubwe National Park – Access for Guests with Mobility Challenges

From an access for people with mobility challenges perspective Mapungubwe has many outstanding facilities. Both main camps have accessible accommodation, while the confluence viewing decks and the tree-top boardwalk and hide are of particular appeal because of universal accessibility. The interpretive centre should when complete become a similar accessible feature. Mapungubwe Hill remains inaccessible due to its extreme topography but Maloutswa Hide in the park’s western section can easily be modified to accommodate all visitors regardless of their physical capabilities. This hide is one of the most outstanding wildlife viewing positions in all of SANParks and as a human construction should be altered to be fully universally accessible.

In its current state the hide can only be considered partially accessible. In the dry season a wheelchair user can make their way along the path fairly easily as along most of the walkway the surface is firm and even. Thorns do accumulate along the path and thus there is a risk of punctures. However the hide is in a floodplain and in the rainy season the pathway becomes very muddy in places, so much so that a wheelchair user cannot progress without significant assistance. This presence of mud is also an unpleasant for non-wheelchair users.

At one point in the access walkway the path crosses a small non-perennial stream. Here a bridge has been made out of latté poles. While not impossible to pass unaided, this structure is not ideal for wheelchair passage being crude and bumpy.

I have discussed the matter with the park’s technical manager and would like to suggest that the entire access walkway to the hide is fitted with a steel mesh boardwalk similar to what has been used in the floodplain at Nysvley Nature Reserve (as shown below). This surface is smooth, even and firm easy to maintain and is flood and fire resistant. Furthermore it can easily be swept periodically to remove the threat of thorns.
As one approaches the hide one gets to a concrete and stone ramp which leads into the boarded structure of the hide. No change would be required to this part of the structure as it is wheelchair compatible.

Inside the hide the viewing slots are too high for comfortable use by wheelchair users and young children. It is recommended that at least one and preferably more of the viewing slots are modified to be in keeping with the accompanying guidelines on accessible hides so that all people can enjoy the splendour of this hide.