

Fly Africa

Part One

by Amir Hyster

Editor's Note: COPA member Amir Hyster of Australia has owned two Cirrus aircraft – a 2003 SR22 and later a 2007 SR22TN – both purchased new. The SR22TN was destroyed in a hangar fire late last year, so Amir and his wife, Tamra, took a trip to the United States to get their third Cirrus. On their way, they took a side trip for a 16-day Guided Air Safari trip to Africa by Hanks Aero Adventures. They share the first part of their experience below, and there will be other articles (besides Part Two of this article) as they travel to pick up their new airplane.



On Saturday, May 10, 2014, we arrived in South Africa and drove to Bultfontein to meet with Marcus, the owner of a C182 that we were going to entrust our lives with for the next few weeks. Having over 1,200 hours in a high-performance Cirrus, but only one hour in a Cessna 182, it was a bit of a challenge to learn the C182. Little did I know how much of a challenge – all my early days of learning basic flying skills would be put to the test.

I was required to complete an endorsement flight with Marcus prior to hiring out the Cessna. When an owner of a plane who is also an instructor jumps in the plane with you and says, “Fly by the seat of your pants,” you know you’re going to be in for a wild ride.

This Cessna was 44 years old, the door was held by a piece of wire, but the seats were new, which I figured would help with flying by the seat of my pants! Marcus started relaying the basics of the airplane. I asked if it had an autopilot and he answered, “No, it doesn’t work.” “What



The first part of the route flown by the group who took a 16-day Guided Air Safari trip by Hanks Aero Adventures.

about an altimeter?” I asked. Marcus replied, “It is six or seven notches off, so when you get the QNH (barometric pressure), just add six or seven. The endorsement was complete in one hour; Marcus said he was very happy. We landed and parked the plane at the Lanseria Airport to be ready for the start of the Air Safari.

The following day we met the other people of the travel group – Sandra and Chuck from Seattle; Jim and Juranya, along with Norman and Nan, all from Canada; Fernando from Spain; and our guide Ross, who was a local from Johannesburg.

Each couple received their “kits” during a personalized briefing of its contents, and initial concerns or questions were answered. The Hanks were very welcoming and their experience put everyone at ease very quickly.

The brief kits were amazing; the information inside was the most professionally put together flight planning we had ever seen. There was step-by-step detail of each leg of the flights, aerial photos of each strip along with information on the areas that we would be entering, expectations of customs, immigration, refuelling, deviations and alternates, and hints and stories of what to expect at each stop.

The Hanks' business is flight planning, not plane hiring. Although they own a few aircraft that they hire out for the adventure, when needed. This is a little problematic, in that, nice hire planes are not in abundance in Johannesburg. The pilots who had more experience in a Cessna 182 were prioritized with a better aircraft. Hence we received an aircraft which was, to put it mildly, a "clunker!" How much of a "clunker" would prove to be an understatement as the trip progressed.

Our first meal together was a lovely Mother's Day lunch at the very far end of the lodge, over a bridge on the river where a local hippopotamus liked to visit. This was our first hint that perhaps we were going into a wilderness that might be a little dangerous.

An ATC local named Adrian came to our lodge to brief the pilots on the procedures of the local airport around Johannesburg, and the complex airspace that we would be venturing into. Adrian explained there would be different accents that we would struggle with understanding, and some had their own special lingo. He assured us to relax and ask for instructions to be repeated if we couldn't understand.

The group from Canada and Seattle were very jet lagged, having just arrived that day, and were understandably struggling to stay focused. By the time our dinner was finished, we had all become a little more acquainted with each other, and the nerves of the imminent flying tests became the main topic of conversation.

One thing that is certain is that when you get a group of pilots together, there are no more inhibitions. The conversation and immediate interest in each other is infectious and when you have the wives and partners who equally share and love the interest together – what a magical group.

Validation Exercises, Instructor Briefing, and Pilot Certification

Breakfast was tense as the pilots were all nervous in anticipation of the requests placed on them by the examining instructors to pass the issuance of the South

African pilot's license. The issuance was for VFR only; there would be no possibility of IFR or IMC condition flying. It was mentioned that some examining instructors were requesting that the pilots put the Cessnas into a forced spin, despite this being an uncertified maneuver in this type of aircraft.

The pilots all set off to the airport and the partners all set off for a fun day of exploring. Reconvening back at the lodge that afternoon, all the pilots passed with flying colors. The only pilot asked to do the spin maneuver was me, and I refused to perform a dangerous unnecessary operation in an aircraft that was, at best, not certified and added with the age and inaccuracy of the avionics fulfilling this requirement would be a suicide mission. The examining instructor did not gladly take my answer. After lecturing the young instructor about being responsible and to act by the rules, he relented and we continued the testing; I received the five-year CAA license.

The pilots were all relieved and still very jet lagged, a great combination of being tired and exhilarated. The group chatted on through the evening and enjoyed a great dinner together.

Nick and Christina put on a lovely lunch the next day, and we listened intently to a long briefing of the trip, what to expect, how to act, and what to say and not say. We were informed of the importance to look like a crew and act like a crew. Uniforms in check and stripes in place, we would be flying into countries that know respect by the stripes on your shoulder. We arrived back at the lodge to have our dinner and with much anticipation, we all retired early to rise fresh to start the trip of our lives.

Lanseria Airport to Gaborone (ELT 1.3); Gaborone to Kalahari Plains (ELT 1.9)

We all met in the breakfast room at the lodge at 7:30 a.m., dressed smartly in full pilot's uniforms. The atmosphere was set for a crew flying perhaps an Airbus 380, alas we had to settle for a group of antiquated Cessnas, but at least we looked good.



Amir and Tamra dressed in their pilot gear and posing with their loaner C182.



An aerial view of the Cessnas parked at Kalahari.

We filled out our forms, cleared immigration and customs, said our goodbyes to the Hanks (feeling a little like “don’t let go of our hands”), boarded our planes and taxied to the runway for the first flight of our trip. It was a beautiful clear morning – perfect for flying.

It was a pleasure to get in the air with Adrian at the tower; his instructions were clear and concise. We moved through the procedures of the local airspace as briefed and took off from Lanseria at 4,000 feet, being a hot day, density



One of the airplanes landing at Kalahari in very hot and dry conditions.

altitude was 6,500 feet, requiring a gentle rotation at 65 mph and employing ground effect to initiate the climb to 7,500 feet. As we approached 6,500 feet, the attitude indicator started to drop to the right, but we were flying straight and level. It was soon clear that the instrument had a very big problem, as it completely collapsed. We continued on as the visibility was good, and let’s face it, we are now bush pilots, right? This was clearly what Marcus meant by “fly by the seat of your pants.”

We reached Gaborone, Botswana, which was our first try at putting our crew uniforms into practice. We passed

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A cheetah resting among the yellow grasses of the Kalahari Plains.



through immigration and customs without any problems. We started the engines and again proceeded through the challenging high density departure, headed out to the first destination, Kalahari Plains, with its own private strip. The flight was in very hot conditions, despite the fact that it was mid-winter there. With moderate turbulence and hot engine temperatures, it required a constant watch of speed, angle of attack and over banking.

We arrived first and watched Chuck come in next with his "best landing ever." Our guides were awaiting our arrival and greeted us all by name with a cool wet towel and a big cold drink, as we were very dehydrated from the flights. It was hot and very dry there. We were given drinking flasks to use while at the resort; the reason soon became very evident.

Suffering dehydration with a headache approaching, we jumped into the land cruisers and arrived at the resort to a welcoming committee of singing and dancing staff. Each introduced themselves, and we learned just how difficult it is to pronounce their names using the "Kalahari" click.

The camp sat at the edge of a large open desert area, with the lounge, dining, and outdoor fire pit and pool overlooking a savanna. There was a small water hole in the distance. The ambience was remote living with tents that were also lined up over the field, so while you were in your tent, you could look over the savanna. There were many animals that grazed there

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and we could hear the lions calling at dusk and dawn. You get the feeling of being the only people in the wild inside your tent, which is luxuriously appointed and very comfortable. At night, the temperature dropped to below 10° C – such a dramatic difference from the days at 30° C. The staff put hot water bottles inside our bed at night to keep everyone cozy warm.

The camp purifies salty ground water for washing; all drinking water is then put through a second process of filtration and sterilizing. Our drinking flasks needed to be

The camp at Shindi was surrounded on both sides by waterways where hippos liked to congregate.

filled at the main area of the camp and carried throughout the camp and safaris, as it was the only source of drinkable water.

Our first safari experience was prior to dinner after we had freshened up and went out in the vehicles. We could tell it was a very harsh environment. We viewed cheetahs in the most beautiful setting of the Kalahari Plains in bloom. Small birds were in abundance, flocks of small finches, canaries and native species moving from bush to bush ►



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The landing strip at Shindi.

against the perfect blue skies and the yellow grasses. The sunsets were red and spectacular. We learned of the hunting techniques of the Kalahari Bushmen, and how they found water and made fire.

Dinner at camp was a feast of the best home cooking. The cook was amazing throughout our stay, catering to our various needs and wants. Nothing was too much for the staff, who were friendly and attentive at all times. We enjoyed each night sitting with them and discussing the safari of the day, asking more questions about the unique animals that we had seen during our trips. Godfrey, one of our guides, entertained us around the camp fire with stories of olden times.

Kalahari Plains to Maun (ELT 0.9); Maun to Shindi (ELT 0.5)

The departure to Maun was early morning when the air was still cold, so less density altitude problems. The flight to Shindi was more difficult; we were at MTOW, with airport elevation of 4,000 feet and 33° C – now that was

Witnessing their first lion kill while in Shindi.





Flying over the Okavango Delta to Shindi where there was an abundance of water, pleasant days and milder nights.

a challenge. Maun is one of the busiest general aviation airports in the world, with ten pumping stations for avgas lined up along the taxiway. You taxi in and fill up, much like you would for your car, then taxi out to the runway. The fueling stations all work continuously with a line of airplanes waiting.

The next stop was to the base camp, Shindi, in the Okavango Delta. Where the Kalahari Plains were hot and dry and very cold at night, the Delta was an abundance of water, pleasant days and milder nights. The accommodation at the resort was also in tents, although the bathroom was built in hardwood. The tents also looked out over open areas, but were more shaded with trees. The camp was surrounded on both sides by waterways, which meant that the local hippopotamuses would move through the camp at night and surprise you when you least expected it. For one of the couples, the encounter was very frightening with a narrow escape, as these animals can be deadly.

We were lucky to experience a rare sighting of a lion kill and our first sighting of a leopard, that checked off three of the big five there. Again the guides were very experienced in the safari and made sure that each guest saw as many animals as possible, getting up close and personal. By that time in the trip, we were eating five times a day and not exercising at all, so a request for a nature walk, although very dangerous, was provided by our experienced guides.

Part Two of Air Safari will be featured in the next issue of Cirrus Pilot. **GOPA**

About the Author: Amir and Tamra Hyster are semi-retired "SKlers" (Spending the Kids Inheritance) who live in Sydney, Australia; they have three grown children. Amir has a PPL with IFR ratings on single engine; he learned to fly 13 years ago with his daughter, Jessica, which started as a hobby and grew into a passion. He currently owns and flies an SR22T and has a position for the Cirrus Jet. The Hysters have flown around Australia several times, and in Europe, the Caribbean and United States.

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Part Two

by AMIR HYSTER

EDITOR'S NOTE: The last issue of Cirrus Pilot featured part one of COPA member Amir Hyster and his wife, Tamra, on a 16-day Guided Air Safari trip through Africa in a "not so great" Cessna. Amir has owned two Cirrus aircraft – a 2003 SR22 and later a 2007 SR22TN – both purchased new. The SR22TN was destroyed in a hangar fire in late 2013, so Amir and Tamra took a trip to the United States to pick up their third Cirrus. On their way, they took a side trip to Africa. Below you'll experience the rest of their adventures on safari as they head to Kasane from Shindi.

Shindi to Kasane (ELT 1.3), Kasane to Victoria Falls (ELT 1)

We all flew within a few minutes of each other, keeping close contact as we were all at 7,500 feet. We could see Jim flying directly in front of us, so we confirmed with him that he was at 7,500 feet and three minutes ahead. Our altimeter was showing 9,200 feet, even when allowing for the six or seven QNH deviation error from the gauge.



An aerial view of Victoria Falls, often referred to as "smoke that thunders."



A pride of lions at Limpopo Valley.

We progressed on, keeping a good visual on Norm to our right and one minute behind us. When flying in close proximity to each other without accurate avionics gauges, our only means of safety was communication and precise position reporting. We were vectored onto the airstrip of Kasane by ATC. The flight was in hazy conditions and very hot turbulent air. We were warned to ensure that when we filled out the customs forms when entering Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, that we declare all of our electrical goods and equipment as the customs there would try to claim duty on the value of any goods that were not declared. We gave the list of all the aircraft equipment including our personal camera, laptops, phones, etc. Sure enough, the customs officer was very interested in the list and circled items that were of high value and double checked verbally the amounts with us.

We were also pre-warned about the refuelling antics at this airport. Their trick is to say the credit card facility doesn't work and they want you to pay cash. We were on to them from the start and demanded they plug in their machine as we refused to pay cash. These operators needed to be watched and double-checked on everything, as they added a few extra zeros to a credit card transaction resulting in one person's card being charged way over the amount. They rectified the error and processed a credit, but this caused a lot of stress for the credit card holder.

We couldn't wait to get going to see the aerial view of the falls! After we cleared Botswana Customs, Zimbabwe immigration and tower, we took off for a very quick flight of about 20 minutes. We proceeded on, and in the distance we could see what looked like a bush fire smoke cloud,

but it was a water cloud formed from the water spray of the falls. As we came closer, the visual of the falls was just awesome. As we looked down, with the plane following the flow of the water, we had the feeling that we were about to drop over the edge of the falls along with the mass volume of water! The power and force of nature was spectacular. No wonder they call the falls *smoke that thunders*.

We called ATC to ask for clearance to enter the falls circuit, and it was granted at 6,000 feet. Being a little cheeky, we asked if we could orbit at a lower altitude and were instantly denied. Here we were, floating above the wildest force of nature as if in our own bubble, viewing one of the eight wonders of the natural world. We were the only aircraft orbiting the falls. With an inaccurate altimeter, we gauged a rough estimate of our true altitude.

The sprint to the airport was very short, we overpassed our hotel and could see the prime location we were about to enter. At the hotel, after a lengthy negotiation on getting the best possible room, we had a view to the falls from our window. The hotel was a majestic colonial classic; the memorabilia on the walls was a remembrance of a life that only the rich English could have enjoyed. The walls were also appointed with once magnificent animal's mounted heads and skins.

We spent the next day at the falls, getting the feel on the ground of the mighty force of raw nature and the pounding sound of the water cascading to the canyon below. It was hard to concede that the water flowed like that every day of the year, day and night, continuously without ever drying – it was truly amazing.

We were absolutely soaked from head to foot in the after spray and natural rain cycle that was created by the falls. Once we moved away into the heat of the day, we dried within minutes. The town of Victoria Falls is small and very touristy with shops just for the passing trade. We were relentlessly hounded by locals trying to sell us small trinkets, but the most interesting was the old currency of Zimbabwe. We were astounded by the \$10 billion notes, which was a result of Zimbabwe's inflation just a few years ago. Today, only U.S. dollars are accepted; Zimbabwe no longer has its own currency.

Victoria Falls to Francistown (ELT 1.9), Francistown to Limpopo Valley (ELT 1.1)

We gathered in immigration and customs at the Victoria Falls airport awaiting the staff to start their day. It was evident the officer was keen to try to catch something, but he could see we were well briefed on their tricks, so after only a few questions he let us pass without further enquiry.

We couldn't resist flying back over the falls to see it once more from the air, we then continued on to Francistown despite them not having us on radar; we couldn't even get a response on the radio. We entered Botswana immigration and customs without any incident. This is where we said farewell to Fernando and bid him a great trip to Namibia, where he would fly solo. We started our engines and asked for clearance from the tower, but they refused because they couldn't find our flight plan. This had been a minor issue on a few of our flights; it is a good practice to ensure you have the reference numbers of any flights

handy, as this helps the controllers to find the paperwork. We proceeded with Ross, our trusty guide, to the tower and the problem was soon sorted.

We left Francistown first and arrived at Mashatu strip of Limpopo Valley. We weren't sure what the holdup was with the rest of our group as we had not heard from them on the radio the entire way. To make things worse, when we called in to the Limpopo Valley camp on the given frequency to announce our arrival, we never received a response back. By this time, we seriously doubted that our radio comms were working! Later we found out that their radio had been broken for several months.

We arrived at our resort to a warm welcome by the manager and were very quickly checked in and given a lovely room. We joined the rest of the resort for a nice afternoon tea with fresh fruit, sandwiches and cakes. We still had not heard from our friends and were now starting to get a little worried, until we heard that one of the Cessnas was just flying in, nearly two hours later.

We headed out on the afternoon safari at Limpopo Valley. Within minutes we spotted two cheetahs running and the guides informed us there should be three, as these are well known brothers who usually hunt together. We sat with the two cheetahs that had broken off from their brother and they started to call him. In the distance, we could hear an elephant getting very upset. We drove to the noise and found the other cheetah cowering away from the elephant who was most distressed by a freshly killed kudu (a type of antelope). We drove right in the middle of this confrontation



A leopard at Limpopo Valley.



The electric fence surrounding the aircraft at Mala.

and the elephant started to storm the land rover, as we were between the cheetah and the elephant. It was quite frightening and disturbing to be staring at a very distressed, angry elephant who seemed to be looking us right in the eye. In that look, you could feel how upset she was, but fortunately for us and the cheetah, she decided to move on.

For the next two hours, we watched the cheetah eat so much that he was unable to move. Then about 15 minutes before the sun set, he called for the other two. They came very quickly and managed to just pull the carcass and have a few licks before a hyena suddenly appeared and was growling; they rapidly scattered. The hyena was joined by another and they ripped the carcass apart. Where the cheetah took hours to consume a small part of the kudo, the hyenas with their strong jaws make very short work of the task gulping down huge chunks of meat. The sound of crunching bones was nerve wracking.

We watched this frenzy for some time shining the torches on the animals; they were not disturbed one bit by our presence. Young baby hyenas also came to feast. Within an hour, there was nothing left to see of the kill. We rode back to camp in time for dinner and met up with the rest of our flying buddies, who were very upset that we saw such an amazing kill. As we had captured all of it on film and photo, we were able to put together a slide show

for them. They had been held up at Francistown because Jim's Cessna took a long time to start; the starter motor is the suspected cause.

We spent the next few nights at this lovely resort retreat, well-appointed with spacious villas in a village type atmosphere. The food was excellent with fresh salads, healthy vegetables and home-style main dishes; once again we ate too much.

The next day, we came across a female cheetah with a kill. We moved on to see a pride of 10 or more lions that all seemed to be related as they were young adults, both male and female. They slowly woke up and became active, walking very close to the truck and playing with each other. We spotted a leopard and followed the magnificent animal for some time, until it decided to climb a tree and give us a great photo opportunity – what a poser, just like a model.

Limpopo Valley to Polokwane (ELT 0.9), Polokwane to Mala Mala (ELT 1.2)

Each night and morning our guide, Ross, briefed the group on weather and conditions for the next flight. The flight over the escarpment into South Africa required fine weather as none of the pilots were allowed to fly IFR or in IMC conditions under their South African license, nor was the 40-year-old C182 certified or capable of IFR flying. The weather was showing fog at ground and the decision was made to fly later in the day.

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The quiet shy nature of the rhino in Mala.

For us, it was mostly worrying about the lack of reliable instruments to gauge the attitude or altitude. If clouds were encountered, we wouldn't be in a position to go further. The escarpment is over 7,000 feet and then drops to 1,000 feet,

creating strong downdrafts and turbulence if the wind is over 20 knots. We all departed Limpopo Valley at 12:30 p.m., after clearing customs and immigration at the small airport. It was the easiest custom clearance we had on the trip.

On approach to the escarpment, the clouds were appearing to be at LSA (Lowest Safe Altitude). We maneuvered around a break and increased altitude until we were just under the cloud layer. The altimeter was reading 9,000 feet, but that couldn't be right; we remained at that level as we passed through the mountainous range that rose up from nowhere and fell away just as suddenly to the vast flat plains of South Africa. We were the first to land at Mala Mala, and the guides were there to meet us and place electric fencing around the airplanes. This seemed very strange to us, but the guides informed us that hyenas would eat anything! There once was a plane that had the tail eaten and a few tires had been gnawed.

This resort was the most luxurious so far, it was an old hunting lodge privately owned by the Rattray Group, bordering the Sabi Sands and Kruger National Park. The main room was most impressive, with the skins of cheetahs and a large lion on the walls. The owner, Mr. Rattray, told us about how the lion had become a wall hanging many years ago. The cheetahs were there because one was a victim of snakebite and the other lost a fight with a porcupine.

The rooms were very spacious with his and hers bathrooms, and a sitting area outside overlooking the river that flowed through the resort. We needed to stay within the balcony of the room, as the area was not fenced and animals could roam freely. We viewed elephants and water buffalo from the rooms, leaving only the elusive rhino to see to make the tick of the big five.

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Our safari from the resort was very different from the other game reserves we had encountered. The ranger's training in environmental issues was very evident in their approach to tracking and following animals and the care for their welfare and personal space. We finally tracked

The group, with their guides, having cocktails at sunset in Mala Mala.

the rhino and were given a nice show of their quiet shy nature. We were told of the antics of poachers who seek the rhino's horn and were sickened to learn the tactics

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Flying solo doesn't mean you fly alone.



they use. In South Africa, they have passed a law of shoot to kill poachers and a few have already lost their lives to this illegal and sickening act. With a rhino horn fetching upwards of \$80,000 USD, the rangers had their work cut out for them. We had finally checked off all of the big five. We skipped the last safari of the trip as we ashamedly wanted to sleep in, but the others participated and were excited to come back and brag that they saw all big five in one day! Mala Mala really has everything!

Mr. and Mrs. Rattray were warm hosts; their care and attention to detail made every guest feel special. Mr. Rattray told interesting stories from his many years in Africa. We were very honored to have them come out to the airstrip to wave goodbye.

Mala Mala to Lanseria (ELT 1.9)

We flew back over the escarpment and encountered an RV7 that flew very close to us. When I saw it approaching directly towards me from three o'clock, I instructed him to immediately break to his left which he did. He was so close, we could see his ZS numbers! Apart from that, it was an uneventful flight in clear conditions and spectacular views back to Lanseria Airport.

On the final night of the trip we were back in Lanseria. We met up with the Hanks again, and had a wonderful farewell dinner at the Sun Casino complex of Johannesburg. We relayed all of our exciting adventures to the Hanks, who of course already knew everything as they had been in constant contact with Ross and were our ground crew at all times, giving weather reports, filing flight plans, ensuring our accommodations were ready and our ground transportation was on time. They did a fabulous job; a lot of the work was done without our knowledge, which made our trip effortless.

SAFARI PARTICULARS

ELT – Estimated Leg Time

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Total Distance en route | 1429 nm |
| Estimated Flight Time | 13.9 hours |
| Estimated Hobbs Time | 16.1 hours |

AIRCRAFT PARTICULARS

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| Type | C182 |
| Fuel Capacity | 75 U.S. Gallons |
| Fuel Burn | 50 LPH/13 GPH |
| Endurance | 5 hours, 30 mins |

During our final day before leaving on commercial flights to all parts of the world, we lingered together at breakfast for many hours as none of us wanted to leave. We all enjoyed each other's company so much. With swapping of numbers and addresses, we knew we would all catch up for another flying adventure in some other part of the world. ⊕

Amir and Tamra Hyster are semi-retired "SKlers" (Spending the Kids Inheritance) who live in Sydney, Australia; they have three grown children. Amir has a PPL with IFR ratings on single engine; he learned to fly 13 years ago with his daughter, Jessica, which started as a hobby and grew into a passion. He currently owns and flies an SR22T and has a position for the Cirrus jet. The Hysters have flown around Australia several times, and in Europe, the Caribbean and United States.

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