Part 6

You are going to read an extract from a magazine article. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A – H** the one which fits each gap (**37 – 43**). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Cowboys of Madagascar

The anthropologist Luke Freeman joins a group of young Malagasy men on the cattle trail.

As a socio-cultural anthropologist, I've lived in Madagascar for more than three years and I know the people, the language and the culture well. The cattle drives undertaken by young Malagasy men have fascinated me ever since I lived in a remote rice-farming village in the central highlands.

37 _____

This gives an indication of how much the Malagasy love cattle. They are potent symbols on the island and it is common practice for young men to trade in them prior to marriage.

To fulfil my ambition, I headed for the frontier town of Tsiroanomandidy looking for a group of drovers with whom to share life on the road. Here I met Vonjy, a young man who had spent most of his life driving cattle across the island.

38 _____

Our destination sat in the middle of nowhere, abandoned in a landscape of wide plains, where nothing grows but tall, swaying savannah grass. Undulating hills dip and rise to the horizon, the monotony broken only by the broad red scars of soil erosion. There is often no sign of life for miles. This was the land we were to cross with our herd of 52 zebu steers, the long-horned cattle found all over East Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

39 _____

Far off in the darkness glowed the orange rings of bushfires lit to burn off the old dry grass and bring forth new green shoots. Ground that seemed flat in the daylight became treacherously uneven on a moonless night. Some of us formed a line either side of our cattle as we struggled to keep the herd together, shouting warnings to the drovers behind us. On one occasion we stopped to discover that two of our steers had disappeared.

40 _____

The next morning we awoke, dew-damp, on a cloudy hilltop, not far from our destination. The cattle mooched slowly in the tall, wet grass. It was just dawn, but a woman and her daughter who had walked 16 kilometres to set up shop were already selling coffee and cakes wrapped in leaves.

Tsiroanomandidy hosts the largest cattle market in Madagascar. Every Wednesday, a huge cloud of dust hangs over the town, raised by the hundreds of cattle pressed into the wooden corrals.

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This was an easier journey, a slow wandering over the highest peaks of central Madagascar. The head drover was a laid-back languorous man who didn't raise an eyebrow when he heard I was joining his team; we nicknamed him the President. Our somewhat haphazard meanderings through the hinterland came to a sudden end when, passing through a village near Firavahana, the President found a buyer for his cattle. It would take a couple of days to sort out the paperwork, so Vonjy and I decided to leave him to it.

42 _____

From there, we got a lift 400 kilometres by road down to Madagascar's second biggest cattle market at Ambalavao, where Vonjy had more family in the trade. We joined them on another cattle drive up through the central highlands along Madagascar's main north-south road.

The highlands are the most crowded part of the island; every last hectare of land has been carved into neat rice terraces that scale the hillsides. From here, our journey took us eastwards into the forest.

43 _____

I learnt that such minor hardships were easily overcome as my body became conditioned to the rhythm of the road: walking at cattle pace, prodding and coaxing the beasts; listening to the drovers' soft talk.

If there's a lesson to be learnt from the young men with whom I travelled, it's just how simple travelling can be. Over the hundreds of kilometres I travelled with the drovers, I never heard a cross word or an argument. You don't need a whole lot to be happy on such a journey.

A To add to our woes, there was no wood nearby with which to make a fire and it was a long, slow wait for the rice to boil over smouldering dried cowpats. But we didn't dwell on our loss, accepting it in typically Malagasy fashion as the work of fate.

B Cloud hung over us all day and we used our plastic sheets as raincoats, for the drizzle was unremitting. This was perhaps the toughest bit of droving: being wet all day, sleeping in damp bedding. Even the cattle seemed depressed as they bowed their heads into the rain. But the constant rain did not dampen my enthusiasm for the droving life.

C Children clamber on the fences and point out their favourites, learning to spot strengths and weaknesses; cattle barons stand quietly eyeing up the steers and making silent calculations. We sold ours to a buyer from Antananarivo, who took them on to supply the capital's meat markets. Not wishing to take that route, Vonjy and I joined another group of drovers taking a herd of smaller cattle to the western highlands.

D We hit it off immediately, and after 20 minutes talking cattle, we took a truck to the isolated market town of Ambatomainty, where we joined some of his family, who were going to buy cattle to drive east into the highlands.

E Surrounded by curious children, we exchanged little formal speeches of farewell, reflecting on our time together, the companionship and laughter, the meals shared and the happy memories we would keep in spite of the distance that would now separate us. With a plaintive song, the drovers wished us goodbye and we left them to their trading.

F On one occasion, a politician was giving a speech in the main street when a long-distance drive passed through. The listeners' attention switched immediately to admiring the cattle and greeting the drovers; young men in rice fields downed spades and ran to the roadside; the schoolmaster let the children out of class and the boys whooped with glee and ran alongside. The politician's promises fell on deaf ears.

G The drovers knew better than to work these smaller steers too hard, and if we came across a river, we often set up camp before sunset. With the cattle grazing nearby, we slept soundly in our makeshift tents, the full moon shining brightly above.

H Ours were ultimately destined for Antananarivo, the Malagasy capital, where they would fetch roughly twice what we had paid for them. Joining up with other herds for safety, we drove them for days under a blazing sun. I'd imagined we would stop in the early evening to set up camp, but such was our hurry to make market day in Tsiroanomandidy that we often kept going well after sunset.

Turn over ►