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IMAGE EVAN NAUDÉ

In this second edition of *Routes that Rock 2023*, we take lengthy trips through regions such as the Kunene, the Khomas Highland, the Central Kalahari, Bushmanland, Namaqualand and the Great Karoo. Our GPS software indicates a distance of 8 128 km through these arid regions, but our journalists have certainly travelled far beyond that to compile these travel tales for you.

After our previous issue appeared, a reader lamented that he didn't have enough money to embark on such epic

trips, but he becomes so engrossed when reading the stories that it feels like he's joining us on a trip. As an editor, I can wholly relate to that.

I was fortunate enough to personally drive one of the delightful routes in this collection, but in my mind's eye, I'm riding shotgun with Toast Coetzer in his Subaru. I "remember" how we stopped for coffee and koeksisters, even though I wasn't actually there. I "recall" thanks to Danie Botha's engaging story the scent of fine dust kicked up by a dozen motorcycles in the Namib

Desert. I also "remember" joining Evan Naudé's tour group, how my stomach dropped when the plane made wild turns above the Okavango Delta.

I hope you enjoy the same experience, whether it occurs in your head or in reality with your own vehicle.

Travel safe and happy reading!

Cyril

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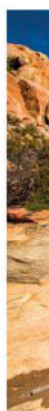
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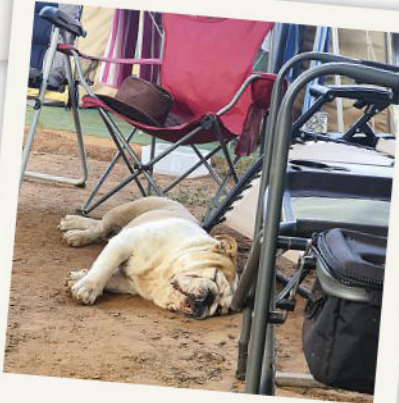
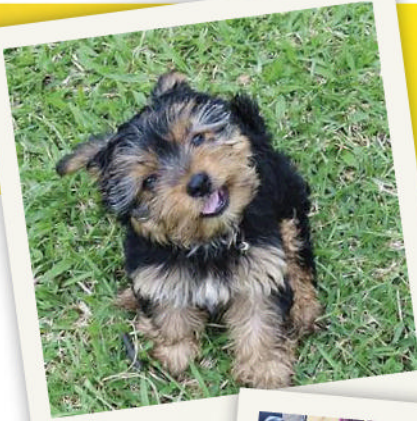


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Fancy a 900 km dirt-road trip?

When it's time to say farewell to Namibia, the long stretch of the B1 tar road is usually your destiny. But if you're not in a rush, take a detour at Rehoboth and travel this 900 km alternative over four days – it's almost entirely dirt road! – until you reach the Velloorsdrif border post south of Karasburg.

Words and photos **Toast Coetzer**



■ The C17 dune road to Koës



A mother and two toddlers paddle by on an orange kayak on the blue waters of the brimming Oanob Dam. Coming from the opposite direction is a motorboat... and when the kayak and boat pass each other, friendly waves are exchanged.

Other visitors – mostly locals, if the chatter is anything to go by – lounge on the deck of the restaurant with a beer or a milkshake, perusing the menu (hmm, the Wiener schnitzel for R130 looks good...). The Oanob Dam, named after the river it stems from, was completed in 1990 and provides water to the nearby Rehoboth. When the dam is full to the brim, you can paddle or drive a boat for almost 10 km. Namibians enjoy their time here with their fishing rods – there's carp, bream and bass – but for South Africans touring through the country, Lake Oanob Resort's lovely camping facilities are the main attraction.

That's precisely why this is the starting point for this route, as it's

a logical place to camp at the end of your Namibian tour before you head home (if you've been to Etosha, for example). Enjoy the expansive body of water in front of you, because once you leave, it's roughly 900 km before you see a substantial body of water again on your arrival at the Orange River.

This route is a dirt-road alternative to the B1. The B1 is no one's friend: long, straight, and lately, quite busy with trucks too. And you do love dirt roads, the red dunes of the Kalahari and the silhouette of a camel thorn tree, right? Well then, you're in the right spot...

Reset your odometer to 0 when you leave Lake Oanob's reception. At 3 km, you reach a crossroad but you continue straight. If you need to refuel or shop in Rehoboth, turn right at the crossroads; you can rejoin the route from the town.

It's a good dirt road – at 8 km you reach the B1. Rehoboth with its colourful houses is now to your right – drive straight over the B1 and onto the C25 tar road.

The town quickly recedes, and you enter a sandy flatland where the camel thorn trees stand tall and dense as you approach Rehoboth station (also known as Vogelpan). In autumn, you may see sacks full of pods under the trees – locals collect the nutritious camel thorn pods for animal feed during the lean months.

As you arrive at the station village (19,7 km), there's an intersection (GPS 23.31192 E17.18331) where you turn right. You're still on the C25 heading to Uhenhorst. Barely 1,5 km later, you can pull over for a view of the rust-red train bridge where the track – along with the road you're following – threads through a narrow poort. The road turns into a dirt road at 23 km, right where you cross a small bridge over a dry riverbed, and shortly thereafter, you also cross the railway track. Look both ways – trains still run here!

At 25 km, you pass a farm with the charming name Wyndraai, and at 30 km the road hops over a low dune that should leave you in no doubt:





COOL. Palm trees offer welcome shade at Kalahari Farmhouse (above and left). Visit the pretty churches at Hoachanas (opposite, above right) and Stampriet (opposite, right). On the donkey cart sits Ludwig Noeteb, Robino Hansen (6), Ramona Hansen (10) and Conradie Eiseb. The donkey was called Richelieu; the mule Leeu.



welcome to the Kalahari!

There's a windmill sporting a sociable weaver nest at 63 km; there's also a turnoff to the left for Hexenkessel Farmhouse and Campsite. "Hexenkessel" is German for "witches' cauldron" – sounds like a place where one might stir the pot...

The landscape changes here – fewer (and smaller) camel thorn trees, replaced by more shepherd's trees. Next to the road, you might see game fences – perhaps springbok, blesbok or blue wildebeest; otherwise, in the livestock farms, some goats, sheep and cattle. When the wind blows over the small pans, the mood turns slightly melancholic, with even the goats

narrowing their eyes like cowboys against the dust.

A low ridge – an offshoot of the Karubeamsberg – runs for a while to the left of the road, but soon disappears in your rear-view mirror as the C25 begins to head more southward.

At 76 km, you'll pass auction pens and then farms with names like Kameelsand, Cowdray (which also offers accommodation), Newlands and Kaukerus.

Uhlenhorst, meaning "owl's nest," appears in your windshield at 121 km. Drive slowly and take it in. Even though it's a farm, it appears on most Namibian maps. It's operated as a guest and hunting farm by the Van Niekerk

family. There's also a small church and a farmer's association meeting hall.

The C25 turns left (east) toward Derm here, but you stay on your current road – it becomes the C15. At 141 km, the Bitterwasser Lodge and Air Centre is on the right. On the northern side of the Bitterwasser Pan (you can't really see it from the road) is a runway where gliders often land. Enthusiasts from around the world come here to pit their skills against the thermals. For glider pilots in Namibia, Bitterwasser is as famous as Dubai is for Airbus pilots.

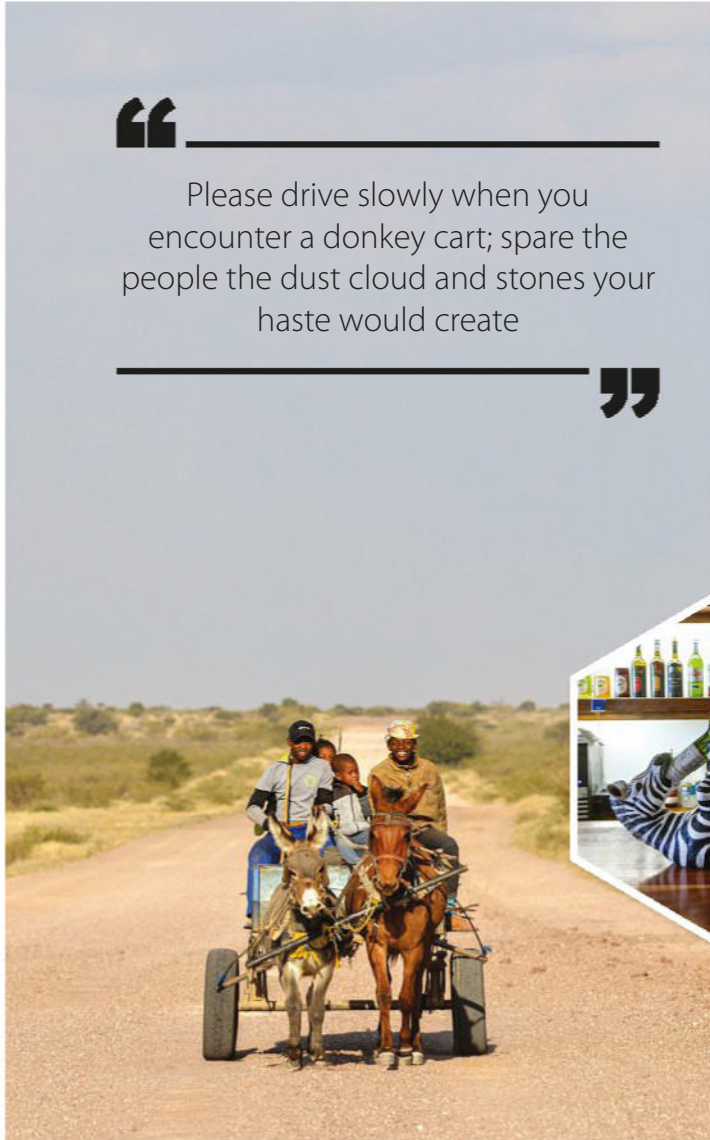
You reach the village of Hoachanas at 149 km – the seat of the Red Nation, one of the most important Nama tribes that fought over a century ago



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Please drive slowly when you encounter a donkey cart; spare the people the dust cloud and stoness your haste would create

”



against German colonial powers for their freedom. Later, when South West Africa was governed by South Africa, they were also in the trenches against apartheid legislation.

Turn right here (GPS S23.92061 E18.05497) and aim for the church spire you see: the Rhenish (Lutheran) mission church is one of the oldest churches in Namibia, built between 1857 and 1863, although the tower was only erected in 1902. Behind the church is the (now mostly dry) spring where the community settled more than three centuries ago.

Back on the C15, your next destination is now Stampriet. The road is whitish and wide, with space for two

Hiluxes to steam past each other at full speed, plus an outside lane for the donkey carts. Please drive slowly when you encounter a donkey cart; spare the people the dust cloud and stoness your haste would create. There isn't a whole lot to see along this road except the odd pale chanting goshawk on a shepherd's tree or a yellow mongoose darting across the road, but it's a stretch of road that nourishes the soul.

At 214 km, you reach Stampriet, and the road suddenly turns into tar – just before you reach a T-junction, watch for the turn-off on the left-hand side (GPS S24.34429 E18.39950) to Kalahari Farmhouse. You'll immediately see Elnatan Private School, one of the best

known private schools in Namibia, particularly among Afrikaans-speaking people. After you turn left, it's a dirt road. You'll pass the school's sports field and the farmers' association's covered auction pens and soon see the entrance gate for Kalahari Farmhouse.

Head to reception (GPS S24.33782 E18.40098) to check in – at 215 km you can stop counting your day's mileage. If you've stayed at any of the other Gondwana Collection's lodges and campsites, you'll know to expect professional service, neat facilities, and good food. The lodge section of Kalahari Farmhouse is set in a lush garden, and the campsite is about 200 m away, flanked by a row of tall palm trees. Your

campsite next to a fence comes with a braai area, light and power point.

With a bit of luck, a pearl-spotted owl might greet you at dusk. Time for a cold Tafel Radler – enjoy!

Namibia's Kalahari features three major rivers: the Nossob (farther east), the Auob (here at Stampriet), and the smaller Olifants (between the Nossob and Auob). As the dunes aren't suited to building roads for regular vehicles – they're the realm of dune buggies – the main public roads follow the courses of these usually dry rivers. On day two, you'll be following the Auob River along the C15 for a long stretch.

From the campsite, drive back to the T-junction in the town (GPS S24.34503 E18.40106) and then turn left toward Gochas. You'll almost immediately see

a petrol station and Agrimark on the right, and shortly thereafter, the Hennie Theron Sentra on the left. We stopped here for provisions – they have tasty droëwors for sale (R310/kg). They also sell *Drive & Camp* and other magazines like *Sarie*, in case a book-loving baboon nicked yours in Etosha. The Sentra is open weekdays from 07:30 to 18:30 (Saturdays until 12:30).

At 217,5 km, continue straight on the C15 – the blacktop ends here for you. (The road that turns left is the C20 to Aranos, which is tarred.) At 219,4 km, there's a camel thorn tree on the left offering good shade, in case you fancy your first cup of coffee from the Stanley flask. As you leisurely lean against the car with your cuppa, you can watch farmers heading (speeding) to town. At 221 km, the road dips down

into the course of the Auob River, and you'll soon get used to the landscape: occasionally, there are limestone cliffs where dassies scamper about, and in between, the red sands of the Kalahari dunes "flow" like syrup into the riverbed. Sometimes the road takes you a little out of the river course before dropping you back in.

You'll see farms like Osterode-North, Osterode-South, and Grunewald, and at 232 km you'll reach the Witkrans Catholic Church on the left. There are farmhouses where sometimes cypress trees and otherwise palm trees reach for the sky (Gross Nabas, Monroe, Boomplaas). Occasionally you'll see a centre pivot in a lucerne field, and here and there you'll spot cash crops like cabbage.

At the 265 km mark, there's

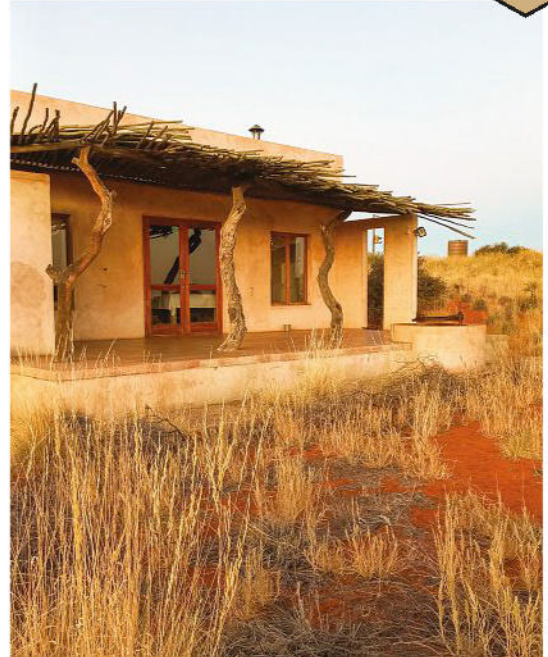




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...occasionally, there are limestone cliffs where dassies scamper about

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WATER. At Lake Oanob Resort (above and left) near Rehoboth you can choose between shaded and grassy stands right next to the water and others a bit farther away from the shore. DuneSong Breathers outside Koës offers neat self-catering houses and a bush camp with tents (you can also pitch your own).



a memorial stone along the road for 14 German Schutztruppe who were ambushed and killed here in March 1905. This southern part of the Kalahari is dotted with monuments dating back to the war against the Namas. On the farm Gross Nabas, for example, there was a fierce battle shortly after New Year in 1905 in which 22 Germans and about 70 Witbooi Namas were killed.

The Wildmoor Nature Camp is at 271 km on the right – there’s also a campsite here. Kamikaze ground

squirrels (and dassies!) sometimes shoot out unexpectedly from a hole right next to the road. You might see guineafowls, a yellow-billed hornbill, and definitely sociable weavers.

Now the Boltmans’ Kalkheuwel awaits, Mooilaagte and its Lausbergs, and the Aoub Country Lodge on the right at 285 km. You’ve nearly reached Gochas.

Turn left at 290 km onto the C18 at the crossroads (GPS S24.85968 E18.80337), as you need to head out

of the riverbed towards Gochas. You’ll briefly drive on a tar road – 750 m – before turning right into the town. Here you’ll find fuel, a shop, a liquor store and Stoney’s Country Hotel.

Have a look around and then head back to the crossroads in the river – you’ll turn left (south), still on the C15. Our odometer read 293 km back at the crossroads. You might see workers on your left busy burning mesquite trees (pesky invaders) for charcoal. It’s one of Gochas’s major exports.

At 304 km, there's another Schutztruppe monument, and 1 km later a large camel thorn tree with a picnic table on the left – stop for lunch if you like. You'll pass the farm Haruchas belonging to the Van Wyks, a well-known family around here. There's yet another Schutztruppe monument at 308 km, this time for a lone soldier who rests here forever amid the chattering of a large sociable weaver colony. Dassies also live here in holes in the ground.

Pass Sabbatsloon and Ou Murasie on the left, where "Jaco and Megan" is freshly painted on an old plough marking the farm's entrance. Then Aubes on the right, the Simons' farm. The driving is easy, but keep your eyes peeled for the odd pothole or rough patch. We drove a 2007 Subaru Forester, which easily handled the route.

Bremen, Kowes, Karneelrus, Tranendal (the Red Dune camp is here), Kennedy's Post (a farmer in the pen, lifting a hand in greeting), Steenboksvlei (a healthy green lawn, a big white dog), Vergenoeg, Eindpaal... You might see dune buggies (called *pypkarre* in these parts, they are usually home-built) casually driving on the C15 as farmers move between different camps or farms. Some of these dune buggies look Mad Max: Fury Road-ish.

At 388 km, turn right (GPS S25.49598 E19.30288) onto the C17 – the C15 now veers left towards Mata Mata, in case you want to return to SA through the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

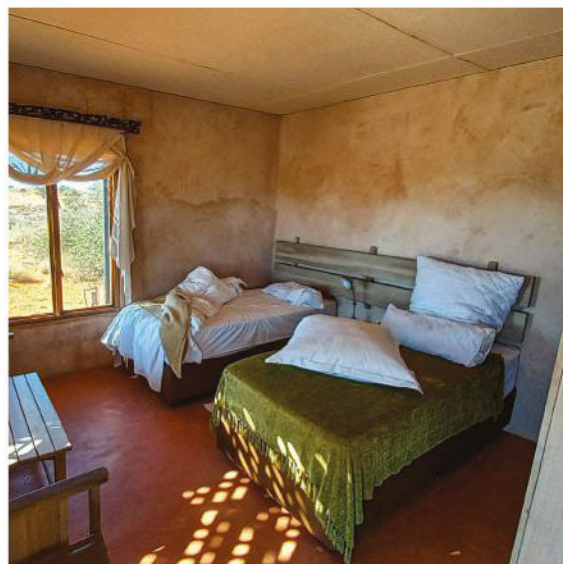
If you think the fun's over now that you're leaving the C15 behind, rest assured: the C17 from here to Koës is hands-down one of Namibia's most unique roads, as you'll soon be hopping over one dune crest after another. For now, the road runs straight along a dune corridor. Got a Dire Straits CD in your car? How about "Brothers in Arms" or something with a delay-heavy guitar looking for a resting place? Now's a good time to start playing it.

At 408 km, at the farm Wegdraai, the road turns 90° to the right and now the C17 starts hopping across the red dunes. If you've been driving leisurely, it's now late afternoon, and the light

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... you might see a small herd of springbok or a secretary bird marching away like a field marshal

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starts casting golden streaks through the grass, the camel thorns cast long shadows, and you might see a small herd of springbok or a secretary bird marching away like a field marshal.

During our visit in May 2023, the road had just been graded and was mostly so beautiful it looked as if someone had finished the edges artisanally with a trowel. However, your wheels might meet an unexpected pothole here and there – they're covered in a powdery dust and hard to spot. Be on your guard, even if Mark Knopfler's guitar has you dreaming about your first beer just now. Every dune is a blind summit; keep far left and look into the distance to see if you can spot dust coming your way.

Your dune surfing ends at 433 km, but stop at the Katzies farm's turnoff where Adrie Nell has built the so-called Dwarf's Playground over the years – low limestone formations that make for great photos just before sunset.

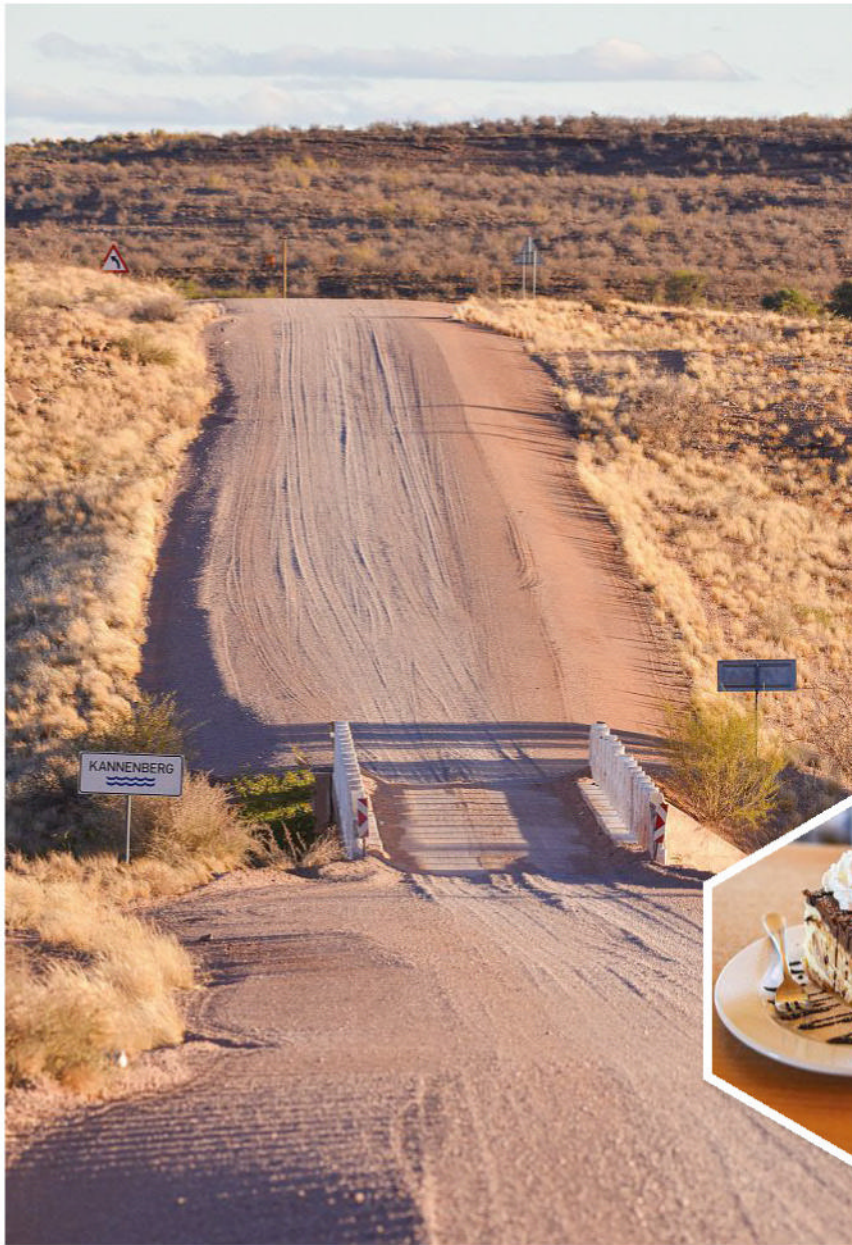
From here, you can push on to the town of Koës where there's a hotel with a camping site, but we turned right just after Katzies (GPS S25.77043 E19.20172) onto the D617 and stayed at one of our favourite spots in Namibia, DuneSong Breathers (444 km, GPS S25.69244 E19.17449). A few kilometres into the veld are beautiful cottages and a dune camp with three tents (with beds), or bring your own off-road trailer. In the latter case, you'll wake up to a white-backed vulture in a treetop and the ears of a steenbok turning your way from a distance. This is heaven on Earth.

(Pieter Nell, the owner of the farm, passed away suddenly shortly after our visit. The author would like to dedicate this article to Pieter, a great lover of the Kalahari. His wife Marianne will still operate DuneSong Breathers during the busy tourist months – bookings are essential. – Ed)

Today, you'll first retrace your steps to the C17 (453 km), where you turn right towards Koës. The town is situated in a depression – the famous Koës rally is held annually on the large pan just south of the town. At Koës (472 km), you'll see the C11 which turns left towards Aroab – that's the road you'll

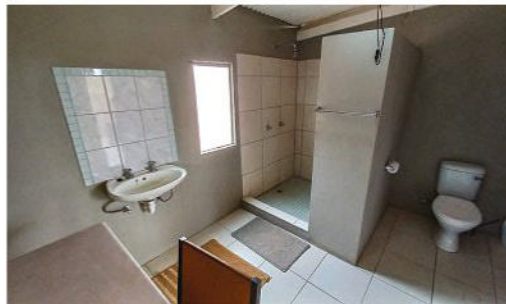
DESERT PLANET. The dune camp at DuneSong Breathers is booked exclusively for your group – but you have to stay for a minimum of two nights, which is in any case the right thing to do!







CUPPA. At the Moertoe Coffee Shop in Koës owner Frieda Barnard bakes a mean cheesecake (opposite). The campsite at Oas Guest Farm is next to the farm yard (right) – your hosts are Mantie and Pinnie Oberholzer.



come back to, but first take a tour around the town of Koës. There's a shop or two, and you can fill up your tank. Alternatively, head straight for Moertoe Coffee Shop (GPS S25.93168 E19.12100) in Rivier Street. Follow the signs or head to the white water tower you'll see on the northern side of town – that's where you'll find Moertoe.

Here you meet Frieda Barnard. Our advice would be to immediately order a slice of cheesecake (R50). Moertoe is open every day from 07:30 to 19:00. She also makes meals but do call ahead (00 264 81 804 2363) if you're showing up with a group of people. A ham, cheese and tomato toastie costs R50

and spare ribs with chips is R100.

We drove a total of 6 km around the town and were back at 478 km at the turnoff, where you now turn right (GPS S25.92179 E19.13237) onto the C11 towards Aroab.

The road is fairly rough with loose stones for several kilometres, but by 506 km, near the turn-offs to the farms Ebenezer and Zandvliet, the white road widens and the surface improves. The Kalahari's red dunes are to your left, and later you drive over their toes while the landscape occasionally shows a pan to your right, including Aninuis Pan and Gammib se Pan.

At 538 km, the C11 turns almost 90°

to the right and you soon pass the De Rust homestead and then over the edge of Gaibis se Pan. Stop around 556 km at the three windmills for a photo – the sociable weaver nests make them look like scarecrows. The road later bends slightly right and then seven beautiful dunes await you – stay far left over the blind rises for safety reasons.

Near Witpan, a few more sets of dunes start appearing – enjoy them, as these are some of the last. At 612 km, you descend a hill, and Aroab's buildings appear in the distance like toys scattered on a porch. You reach the town at 616 km – turn right (GPS S26.79685 E19.65315) and drive until

Where we stayed

Lake Oanob Resort

Contact ☎ 00 264 62 52 2370

📧 oanob.com.na

Price Camping from R110 pp for a stand without shade to R180 pp if you're by the water with shade and grass (off-season price). Power points are available. Self-catering chalets from R2 070 pn for two.

Kalahari Farmhouse

Contact ☎ 00 264 61 42 7200

📧 gondwana-collection.com

Price Camping R259 pp and cottages from R1 769 pp sharing (breakfast included).

DuneSong Breathers

Contact ☎ 00 264 81 777 6333

(Marianne) 📧 dunesong.net

Price A minimum of two nights' stay is required here. Camping costs R175 pp with your own tent (maximum 12 people and three vehicles; you book the dune camp exclusively) or R275 pp in their tents (you sleep on a bed). Hot water, power points (solar) and firewood are available. The cottages cost R700 pp sharing.

Oas Guest Farm

Contact ☎ 00 264 81 284 9934 (Mantie, WhatsApp only) 📧 oasstaal@iway.na

Price Camping costs R100 pp – there is a shower with hot water (the “donkey” is stoked for you) and a flushing toilet, but no electrical points (you can charge devices like phones at the farm house). Your first bundle of firewood is free. Rooms cost R350 pp (R150 for children under 16).

you see the Puma petrol station on the left. There's also a shop in case you need something.

Otherwise, continue straight out of the town for 1 km and then turn left (GPS S26.80051 E19.64017) onto the C11 toward Karasburg. You'll see dunes again, but they're not as large as those near Koës, and they're more covered with grass and shrubs. Sometimes you descend low passes, cross rivers (like the Kannenberg), and the veld is almost devoid of trees. If this were a piece of art – which it is! – you could describe it as “mixed media”.

You're overnighing at Oas Guest Farm, tucked into the rugged foothills of the Great Karas Mountains. But you still have a fair distance to cover!

At 658 km, you pass by the farm Vredeshoop, which is marked on most road maps. (If you were to turn right here, you would end up on the B1, somewhere south of Keetmanshoop.) At 684 km, you cross the Back River,

which also marks the boundary for the Karasburg district. The isolated mountain you see to your left is Sambokberg, and to your right are the Great Karas Mountains. Occasionally, you'll spot majestic quiver trees lining the slopes.

The gravel road surface here is better than most tarred roads, and on the straight stretches, you easily cruise at 100 km/h. Just watch out for reckless small wildlife like ground squirrels.

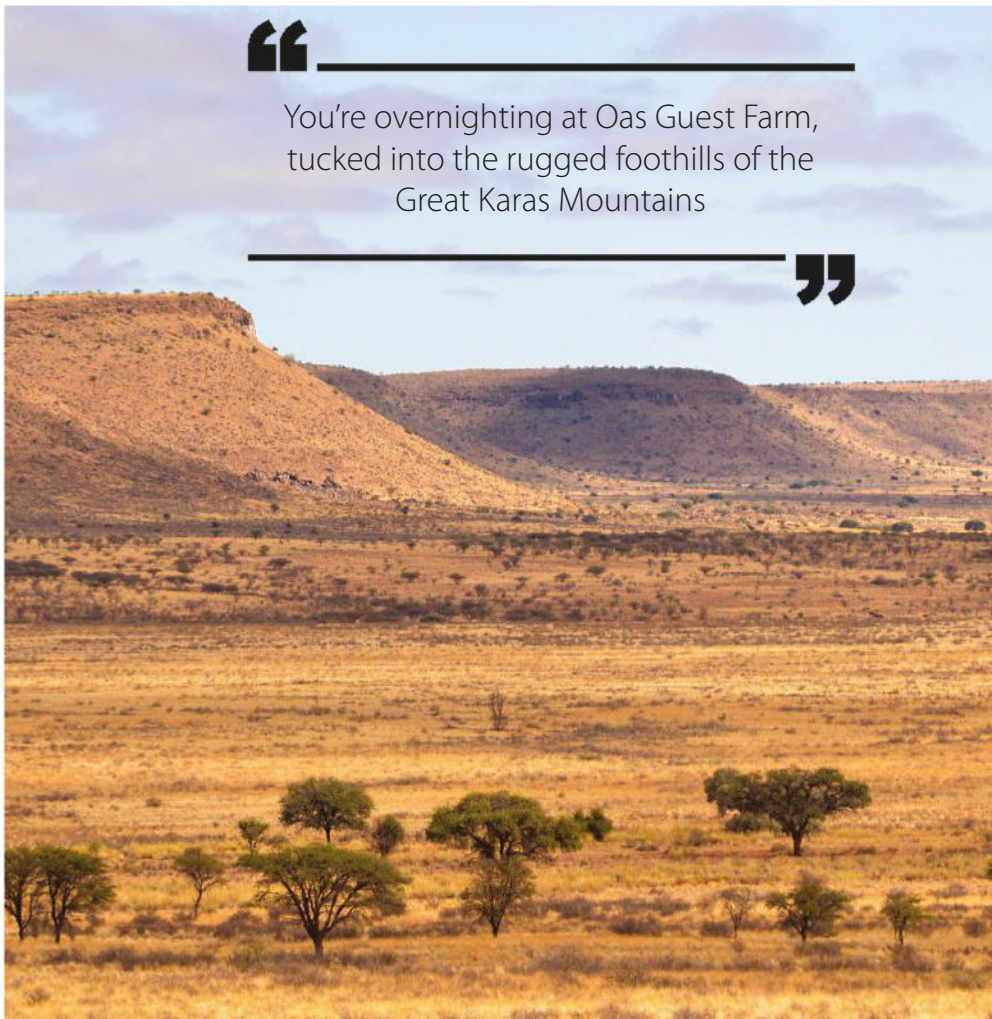
The turn-off to the right (GPS S27.51162 E19.19831) for Oas is at 723 km, and then you drive 3 km on a farm road until you reach the farmstead (GPS S27.49459 E19.21396), where the owners, Pinnie and Mantie Oberholzer, await you.

Their campsite has moved since our last visit and is now closer to the yard – small livestock like boer goats or Van Rooy sheep lazily wandering by your tent in the morning adds to the rustic atmosphere. The farm has some serious

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You're overnighing at Oas Guest Farm, tucked into the rugged foothills of the Great Karas Mountains

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4x4 trails, and Mantie showed us the view over a canyon in the Kongnai River, a tributary of the Back River, north of the farmstead, the following morning. One of the 4x4 routes takes you down into this canyon where you can have a braai next to a river pool.

Mantie's veteran Hilux, known as the Blou Pou (blue bustard) has seen years of hard use when he used to catch game for people– it doesn't even have a hood anymore! "So I can see if anything is squirting out," he says nonchalantly.

The last day of your epic gravel adventure takes you from Oas to Karasburg and then to the Velloorsdrif border post by the Orange River. Head back to the C11 and turn right towards Karasburg. For the next 7 km, scan the camp on the right – Pinnie and Mantie's four camels graze here.

You drive past quiver trees and camel thorn trees, past farms named

Stinkdoring and Duurdrift, over the Kainab River (758 km) and through cute koppies (782 km). The final stretch to Karasburg becomes monotonous – you reach the town at 809 km at the T-junction with the B3. Turn left here (GPS S28.00339 E18.74415), and you're almost instantly in the town centre with its shops and petrol stations.

The B3 turns left a little later; and a block farther, look out for your right turn at the corner where there's a Bank Windhoek – it's the C10; the sign also says Warmbad / Velloorsdrif among other names. In the residential area, you'll see many gardens featuring fat old quiver trees.

At 812 km, you reach a crossroad – turn left here (GPS S28.03449 E18.75291) towards Velloorsdrif. (Straight ahead takes you to Warmbad, and if you turn right, you can go to Noordoewer if you'd prefer to cross the border there.)

You're back on a wide dirt road, and you slowly but surely descend as

you head south towards the Orange River. This is gently undulating country, passing farms like Heimat and Gross Aub, occasionally observed by a common jackal buzzard or a pale chanting goshawk.

The border post (at 916 km) is beautifully situated between mountains that will remind you of the Richtersveld. As soon as you see it, pull over and enjoy the view before you check in at the (very quiet) border post to have your passport stamped.

Did you miss the B1 route? Didn't think so. And with this marathon off-road route under your belt, you'll have plenty of fodder for campfire chats when the talk turns to epic road trips...

Ready for a few hundred more kilometres of dirt road? Luck is on your side – flip to page 62 for a route that starts at Onseepkans and goes over the Verneukpan almost to Three Sisters!



BYE. When you drive from Oas Guest Farm to Karasburg, look out for their four camels in a camp by the roadside. This route ends at Velloorsdrif border post (right).



Along the edge of the desert

This route of nearly 400 km takes you on an unorthodox series of Namibian back roads from Solitaire to the Erongo Mountain. Always aiming northwards, you keep the sunset – and the Namib Desert – to your left. On the way you'll see plenty of gemsbok but also some of the region's quirkier inhabitants, like Namaqua chameleons.

Words and photos **Toast Coetzer**





Solitaire is a small but pivotal place in the Namib Desert's tourism infrastructure. If you're limping in here with a flat tyre, Patat Katamelo and his colleagues will sort you out in no time. Tank running on empty? Johannes Swartbooi will top it up, with a smile. Haven't seen a good coffee since Swakop? Nico Mangudu will brew you one to put the hair back on your chest. And if you're hungry, head straight for Café van der Lee where a slice of apfelstrudel awaits.

Most visitors who have driven the long desert road between Walvis Bay and Sesriem will be familiar with Solitaire. In a way, Solitaire is just like Doha's international airport: there is a constant movement of people arriving and departing, only they don't hop into Boeings but rather Hiluxes and Rangers. It's great to park off at Solitaire for a couple of hours and do some people

watching. First, you'll see a plume of dust in the distance, approaching on the C14. Then it will slow down, a weary indicator will belatedly tick on and a bakkie, SUV or bus full of tourists will pull in. The passengers will disembark with stiff legs, stretch, and look around in amazement, as if they just arrived on the moon and are now surprised to find other people there.

For our route, Solitaire is a key logistical point because you must fill up here and buy provisions – meat, wood, ice, beer. For the first two days you'll drive from Solitaire to Donkerhuk West guest farm and from there further north to Karibib and Omandumba Guestfarm in the Erongo Mountain on the third day.

At times you'll follow the main tourist routes, but mostly you will drive along quiet backroads. This makes it a route for connoisseurs who have seen much of Namibia already but may never have



driven this particular stretch. And isn't that what travel is all about, to always discover new places?

Although you can't overnight at Solitaire, you'll have more solitude at Bushman's Desert Camp (34,6 km north of Solitaire). Remember to zero your odometer as you leave Solitaire and get onto the C14 towards Walvis. Our visit in May 2022 came short on the heels of an unusual rainy season for the Namib – the grass stood so high that you could hardly see the legs of a gemsbok as it sailed through the golden sea of grass. The grass also attracted thousands of seedeaters, like red-billed quelea, while a minor locust plague meant the crows had a feast.

Other, more inconspicuous birds to look out for by the roadside include the very well camouflaged Karoo korhaan. If you see a korhaan suddenly fly up from the grass – straight up, like a helicopter – while cackling loudly, it's probably a male northern black korhaan advertising to any females in the area. Besides gemsbok, scan the veld for springbok and Hartmann's mountain zebra, but also stay alert for ground squirrels and yellow mongoose dashing across the road.

About 10 km from Solitaire, you'll pass the turnoff to the D1275 (which goes inland via Spreetshoogte Pass) but stay on the C14. At 15 km, you reach a farmhouse on the left, with two colourful smaller houses on the right. Stop here (GPS S23.79096 E15.91923) and look to the west where you'll see a picturesque camel thorn tree standing all by itself. A couple of kilometres later, you'll drive alongside Saagberg (Saw Mountain, 1 414 m) to the west, which even looks a bit like a ragged saw blade.

Soon after you drive over a low rise (28,8 km), you'll see a sparse stand of camel thorns to the left (GPS S23.68431 E15.87008). Stop here and scan the area for a pair of lappet-faced vultures that sometimes nest in one of the trees.

At 32,3 km there is a turnoff to the right where you can drive 100 m to where a large poison euphorbia,



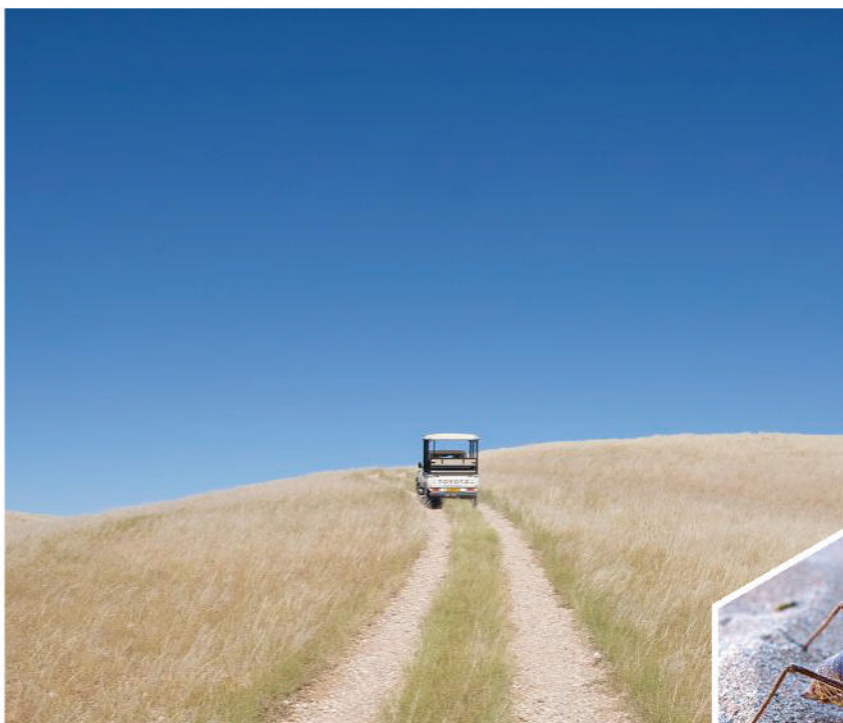


SNUG IN A COAST. Jeremy and Diana Kirkwood of Mtunzini, KZN, camped at Bushman's Desert Camp with their VW California Coast (left). On this desert farm you can explore the Melkstraat 4x4 trail.



NICO MANGUDU OF SOLITAIRE.





HEAVEN. On Boesman and Yuri Davids' farm you can drive along twin-tracks or hike through the veld. Boesman and Yuri Davids and their kids, Laila (9) and Rainy (7).



Euphorbia virosa, can be seen (S23.65330 E15.85639).

The turn-off to Bushman's Desert Camp / Sossus on Foot (the latter being the walking safari business run by Boesman Davids) is to the right at 34,6 km (GPS S23.62679 E15.84046). The four pairs of shoes hanging from the sign belong to Boesman, his wife Yuri and their two daughters. From here it is 3 km to the farmstead. The farm is called Cha-ré and they have very neat chalets but also camping facilities – three sites suitable for bigger groups, two for smaller groups and three bush sites farther away from the farmstead.

Boesman is well-known for his walking tours in the dunes. If you have time, join him or one of his guides for a walk – you'll learn more about the Namib's smaller inhabitants, like the toktokkie, wedge-snouted lizard and wheel spider. There is also a new 4x4 trail (R300 per vehicle) on the farm. It's called Melkstraat because the trail was initially marked out using empty milk bottles. The route is an easy two-hour excursion which traverses low hills and then descends into the Ubib River (which is a tributary of the Gaub, in turn a tributary of the Kuiseb). You'll see an old silt dam in the river as well

as some huge wild fig trees. During our visit there were also hundreds of grey-backed sparrow-lark and common buttonquail, which flew up from the grass as we drove.

It's still very wild here: during the recent (very long) drought, a honey badger killed and ate the family's beloved dog, Kettie, while they were away. The drought was finally broken in 2022, when even the small Spaarwater River on Cha-ré flowed for the first time since the 1950s!

Because this is Namibia, you'll also know that the people are often the real attraction. To enjoy coffee and a rusk



“ Pause here and take it all in
– you’re in the middle of nowhere ”



SOLO VOYAGE. As soon as you turn off the C14 (this image, Kuiseb Pass) the vast, quiet plains of the Namib-Naukluft National Park lie before you.

on the stoep with Boesman and Yuri is pure gold. While you keep an eye on the waterhole in front of their house – maybe the Namaqua sandgrouse will flurry down for a drink – listen to the stories of these special people who seem to be so in touch with the natural world. (It is said that Boesman only ever wears shoes when he visits Yuri’s family in Japan.)

On the second day of this route you initially stick to the main gravel road (C14) to Walvis Bay. At 45,6 km you pass the turnoff to Rostock Ritz (another good overnight option) to the right while

the Namib-Naukluft National Park is your constant companion to the left.

You’re at the edge of the desert here, with dunes visible at times to the west, but mountains rising from the desert flats to the north and east as you drive. At 51,8 km you can take that been-there-done-that photo at the sign indicating the Tropic of Capricorn and a kilometre later you start descending into the Gaub Pass. Slow down, because many corners are blind. Once you cross the bridge over the Gaub River, there is a picnic table to your left – if you’re lucky the overhead cliff might cast a shadow while you chomp your

sarmie. A little farther (75 km) you pass the turnoff to the C26 which leads to Windhoek via the Gamsberg Pass. But stay on the C14 – soon a sign announces that you’ve entered the Swakopmund District (nope, you can’t see the sea from here...). From this point (86,5 km) the road becomes tar for two kilometres as you drop down into the Kuiseb Canyon (88 km).

You cross the Kuiseb River via a narrow bridge (91,5 km) and then its shorter tributary, the Paradys River, shortly after via a low-water crossing – between these two points, the road is tarred again.

Once you've shaken off the constrictive coils of the Kuiseb Canyon you burst into the wide-open horizons of the Namib-Naukluft National Park. You finally leave the C14 at 111,6 km and turn right onto the D1998 (GPS S23.31176 E15.59936). Chances are that you won't see any other cars for the next stretch as this is a part of our route which takes you at a right angle to the usual inland-coast tourist routes. Please note: like the C14, the D1998 is a public road and therefore you may drive here without a park permit. However, you may not turn off onto any other park roads – stick to the D1998.

The landscape around you provides an immense sense of space and distance. Heat waves make 'pools' over the harsh gravel plains. But don't think there's nothing here! You might see springbok, gemsbok, zebra or ostrich – some lucky people have even come across cheetah on this road.

If Bushman and Yuri would've taught you anything, it would be to pay attention to the small things. Drive slowly and stop if you see a dried-out banana in the road – it could very well be a Namaqua chameleon! These kings of camo can grow up to 25 cm long, should you bump into the Lood de Jager among them.

Like any other fully licensed chameleon, they can change colour. Not so much green (because there is not so much green around here...) but early in the morning they'll be dark brown and then gradually lighten as the sun gets brighter and they need to reflect more light to stay cool. They eat anything from beetles and locusts to plant material.

At 139,3 km you reach the D1982 – turn right (east) towards Windhoek. Now you leave the park, but you can still see animals as there are game farms here. You mostly drive through a farm called Ruimte, and a big power line runs parallel to the road, which falls into a brief rhythm of ups and downs with some gnarly dips – don't drive too fast. At 151,2 km you turn left (north, GPS S23.05777 E15.71667) onto the D1985, which is a much smaller road and probably only driven occasionally

by the local farmers. It's sandy in places but there are also a few exposed rocky sections. The all-wheel drive Subaru Forester we drove easily dealt with the Liquorice Allsorts road conditions. You'll now begin to see granite koppies which will remind you of Spitzkoppe – more trees dot the veld as you start edging away from the Namib.

At 174 km you reach a T-junction with the C28 where you turn right (east). Pause here and take it all in – you're in the middle of nowhere: Swakopmund lies 128 km to the west, and Windhoek 189 km to the east!

At a farm called Zu Klein you drive through a dry riverbed and at 188 km you reach your destination for the day, Donkerhuk West. This 7 600 ha farm is owned by the Moldzio family but managed by Christiaan Baas, who you'll meet at the farmstead which doubles as reception.

Donkerhuk lends its name to an interesting geological feature called the Donkerhuk granite batholith. A batholith is a dome-shaped mass of igneous rock (of volcanic origin) which is mostly hidden underground. The Witwatersberg at Donkerhuk West is part of this formation that protrudes above the ground – the scale of the batholith is incredible as it stretches for about 200 km (25-50 km wide, 1 km deep) from near Karibib all the way to Homeb at the Kuiseb River.

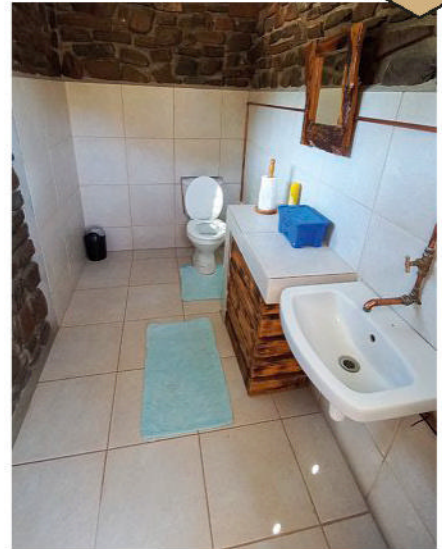
The turnoff is to the left (GPS S22.77575 E15.78619) and a short drive leads you to the farmstead. Another couple of kilometres along sandy jeep tracks takes you to the campsites: Andi's Camp (up to 20 people) and Duiker's Den (eight people) are booked exclusively. If you are travelling light, book into the Barbarossa Tented Camp which has three units. The campsites and the tented camp are spread out between camel thorn trees at the base of the Witwatersberg (1 861 m).

Donkerhuk West seems to be the kind of place where Namibians go on holiday – but I'm afraid their secret is out now! It's clear that Christiaan and his team keep the facilities spick and span, and the fact that you can hike, mountain bike or drive your 4x4-vehicle (R60 per

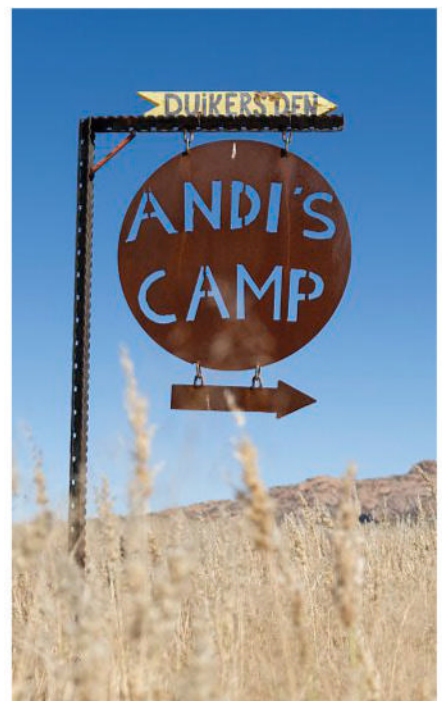


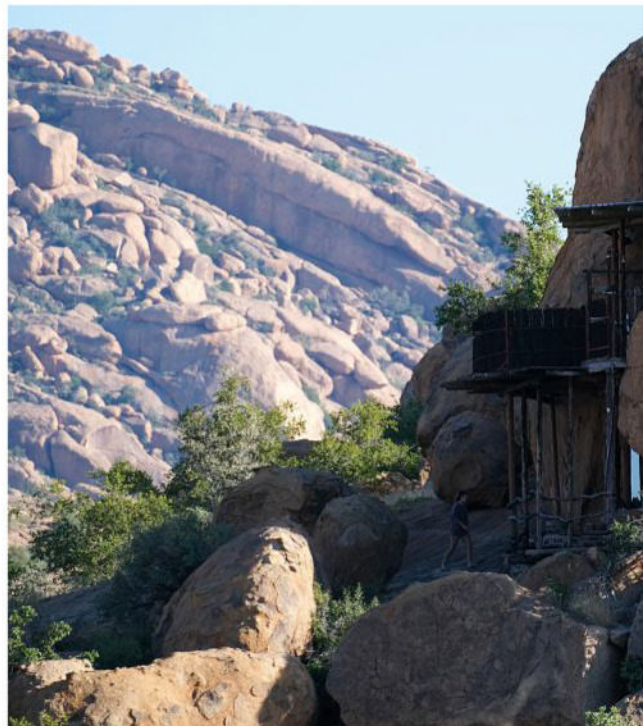
BEST BEDS. At Donkerhuk West's Barbarossa Tented Camp you'll find luxury tents (below) where you can spend the night and enjoy hotel-quality amenities such as the bathroom (opposite page) and outdoor kitchen (above).





ROCK & CAMEL. The Duiker's Den campsite at Donkerhuk West has clean toilets and the hot water in the showers is heated by a wood-fired donkey. Local stone was used in the construction and camel thorn trees provide shade.







person) along a network of farm tracks mean that there is plenty to do for a multi-day stay.

You might see game like klipspringer, kudu and red hartebeest, while you're sure to hear a black-backed jackal yelp at night – and scan the sand for tracks in morning, maybe a leopard soft-footed by while you dreamt of the Proteas scoring 400 runs in a first innings.

Birders will delight in finding charismatic species like martial eagle, Verreaux's eagle, violet-backed starling, kori bustard and Monteiro's hornbill. When around the campfire, listen out for barn owl, spotted eagle-owl and pearl-spotted owlet.

The vegetation offers more variety and you can look out for trees like wild fig, buffalo thorn and wild ebony, while succulents such as quiver trees and Windhoek aloes are present – ask Christiaan where to find them.

On the third and final day of this route, you leave Donkerhuk West and turn left. Follow the C28 until you reach the turnoff to the left for the C32 (200 km, GPS S22.78396 E15.88611) to Karibib. At first you drive through pretty koppies – still part of the Witwatersberg – before the landscape opens as you start descending towards the Tsaobis River (227,7 km), which is a tributary of the Swakop. The road surface here was decent, but after the rainy season it might be washed away in places if the grader hasn't passed through here recently. It is also not fenced, so be alert for horses and livestock like cattle, boer goats and fat-tailed sheep crossing the road.

The next shallow, wide valley you descend into is the Swakop River (242,5 km), which you cross at a narrow bridge. In the distance you'll see the Otjipatera Mountains south of Karibib. These mountains are full of marble mines and as you get closer you might spot the white blemishes where the otherwise baked brown hills have been sliced open. It's weird to think that a slab of marble cut from these lonely hills will become a kitchen counter-top

for someone in the US, China or Italy.

At 277 km, you reach a turnoff to the left for Etusis Game Lodge, but if you want to overnight here, take note that their campsite is nowhere near the lodge – the turnoff is just a touch farther along on the right (GPS S22.09872 E15.83734).

Once you've wriggled through the mountains, you'll be in Karibib soon enough – you enter the town via a backroad (294,2 km). Make your way to the main road (the B2) where you'll find petrol stations and shops if you need to replenish supplies. Leave someone at the car if you go shopping – theft from tourist vehicles is commonplace in most Namibian towns.

From Karibib you'll now see Erongo Mountain (highest point: 2 319 m) to the north – tonight's campsite is at Omandumba Guestfarm on the northern tip of this huge massif.

You have two route options from here, and they're virtually equidistant, so it's much of a muchness. We took the eastern route to Omandumba and then drove the western route the next day, which brought us back to Usakos – this way we got to experience both routes.

The western route from Karibib to Omandumba is 101 km long. You first take the B2 tar road to Usakos and then the D1935 gravel road (which later becomes the D2306). A highlight of this route is the Khan River (GPS S21.91618 E15.57380) at Goabeb – here you'll see enormous camel thorn trees. As you progress further northwards you also see both Spitzkoppe and Brandberg off to the west.

The eastern route from Karibib to Omandumba is 107 km long. Get on the C33 tar road and head towards Omaruru – you turn left onto the D2315 gravel road just before you reach Omaruru. You soon reach a gate (GPS S21.45055 E15.87700) which marks the boundary of the Erongo Conservancy. The D2315 now runs parallel to the Omaruru River for a while. The Erongo Conservancy (more accurately, the Erongo Mountain Nature Sanctuary) came into being in 2000 when 30

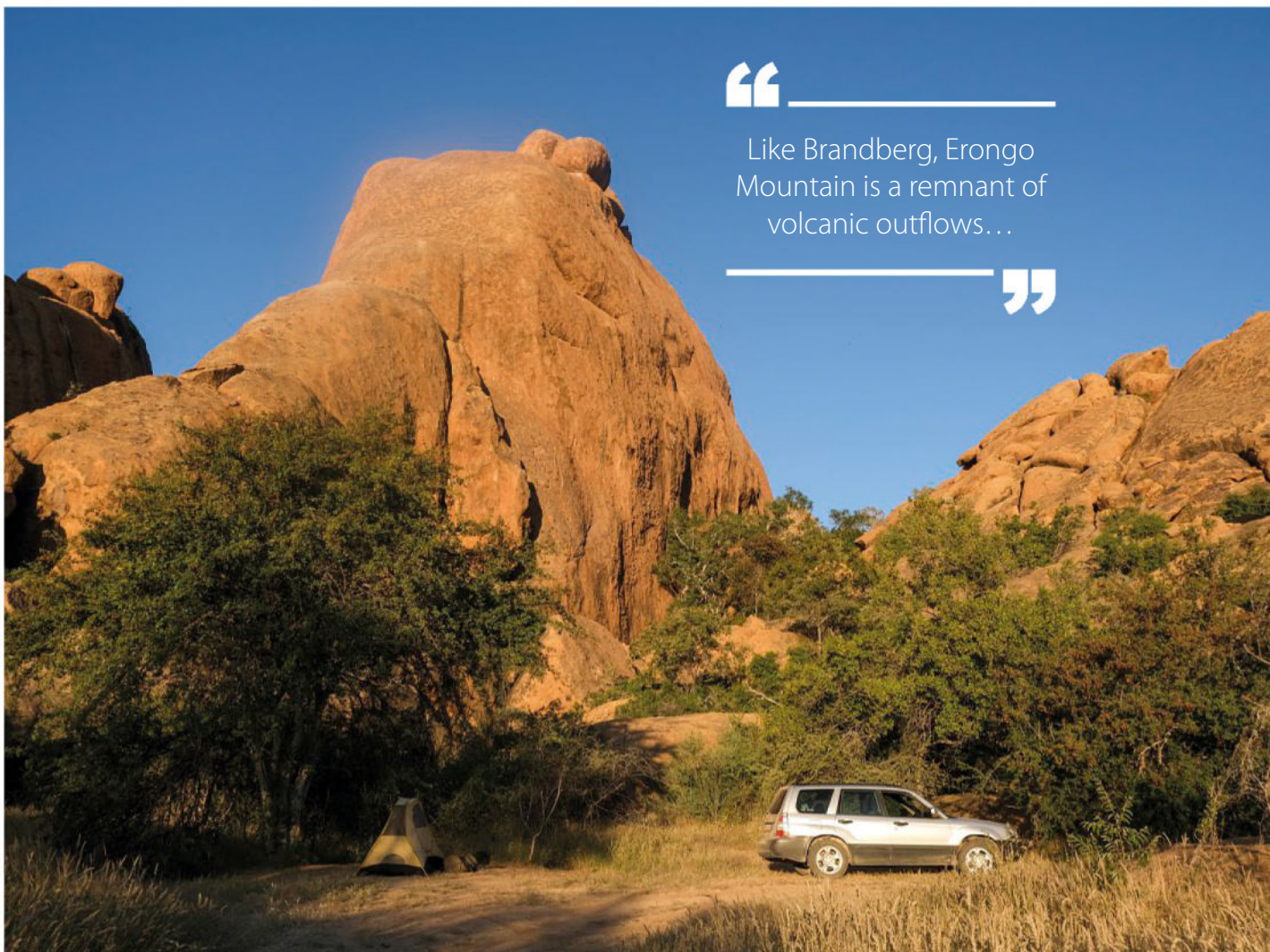


INTO THE FOLD. At Omandumba Guestfarm's Three Elephants Campsite you sleep between two monolithic granitic intrusions. The Cave Campsite is wedged tightly between the rocks at the foot of Erongo Mountain.

“

Like Brandberg, Erongo Mountain is a remnant of volcanic outflows...

”





Where we stayed

Bushman's Desert Camp

Contact 00 264 81 294 3755

(Boesman) 📧sossusft@afol.com.na

Price R180 pp for camping, and from R900 pp in the spacious chalets.

Donkerhuk West

Contact 00 264 81 217 5757

(Christiaan) 📧donkerhuk.com.na

Price From R180 pp for camping, and from R500 pp sharing in the tented camp (breakfast available).

Omandumba Guestfarm

Contact 00 264 81 217 0879 (Harald/Deike) 📧omandumba.de

Price R200 pp for camping, and from R1 535 pp sharing in the bungalows (breakfast and dinner included).



landowners dropped the fences between them and created a refuge for wildlife. Black-faced impala, endemic to Namibia, and black rhino were brought in, among other species.

Omandumba Guestfarm (GPS S21.52565 E15.56838) is on the left of the D2315, and once you've checked in at the main farmstead you drive a few more kilometres along a jeep track to the campsites. It's an incredible drive as you find yourself drawn into the spectacular landscape of round granite boulders and weathered rock faces until you eventually come right up to it – and this is where your campsite is!

Like Brandberg, Erongo Mountain is

a remnant of volcanic outflows which date to 130 million years ago when Africa and South America separated during a period of continental break-up. The dramatic landscape that was left behind by that violent activity has created many opportunities for landscape photographers – pretty much anywhere you point your camera, a great photo awaits!

The Erongo was a home to the early San people, who left behind many rock art sites. Some of the more unusual paintings you can see at Omandumba include a hunting scene, a swarm of bees, San carrying baskets on their heads, and a giraffe standing next

to a quiver tree.

Although there are neat rooms too, the campsites are what you're here for. The five stands are situated well apart from one another, and you'll hardly be aware of your neighbours.

Where to next? The Erongo serves as a springboard into Damaraland via Brandberg to the northwest, or you can simply return to Usakos and then turn to the coast where you can be sure that an eisbein with your name on it awaits in one of Swakopmund's fine restaurants. Or, if you really must, you can start heading home via Windhoek.

But first, stay right where you are... 📍

Roll with it!

The recipe: gather a group of adventurous motorcycle riders, buy a bunch of off-road motorcycles and set off on an unforgettable journey through exotic places. After the trip, the motorcycles are then handed over to nature conservation. This, in a nutshell, is Rally for Rangers, which landed in Africa for the first time in July 2023.

Words and photos **Danie Botha**





The story of the Rally for Rangers project began a decade ago in Mongolia, near the Russian border, when American Robert “Mac” McIntosh, a former national park ranger, volunteered with the Mongol Eco Center.

The centre was conducting a workshop in the Hovsgolmeer National Park and Mac was there to assist with planning. While the session was underway, the park's chief ranger, Enkhtaivan (try pronouncing that name after a few beers!), received a call. An illegal camp had been discovered in the park, and he had to rush to investigate. They suspected it was a poacher's camp.

Enkhtaivan hopped on his motorcycle but barely moved a metre before it spluttered to a halt. It was kaput, and Mac realised Enkhtaivan and his team of wildlife rangers struggled to do their job. They simply couldn't reach the problems to sort them out.



“

The desert lions that kill large herds of goats remain
a point of contention

”



That's when an idea struck him: he would buy a brand-new motorcycle, ride it through Mongolia, and give it to Enkhtaivan at the end of his trip. He told American Wesley Thornberry and his Mongolian wife, Ono Batkhuu (who works at the centre), about his plan. Thornberry thought it was a good idea and pitched it to a few friends: "Come on, who's riding along?"

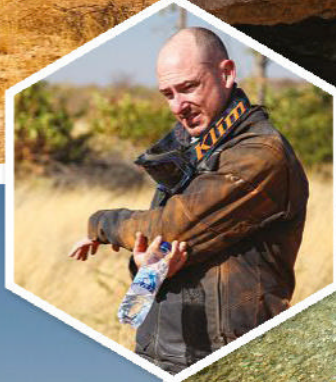
And that's how the Rally for Rangers project saw the light of day. Since then, the project has donated more than 160

motorcycles to nature conservators all around the world. Rally for Rangers has already made deep tracks in Mongolia, Argentina, Nepal, Bhutan and Peru.

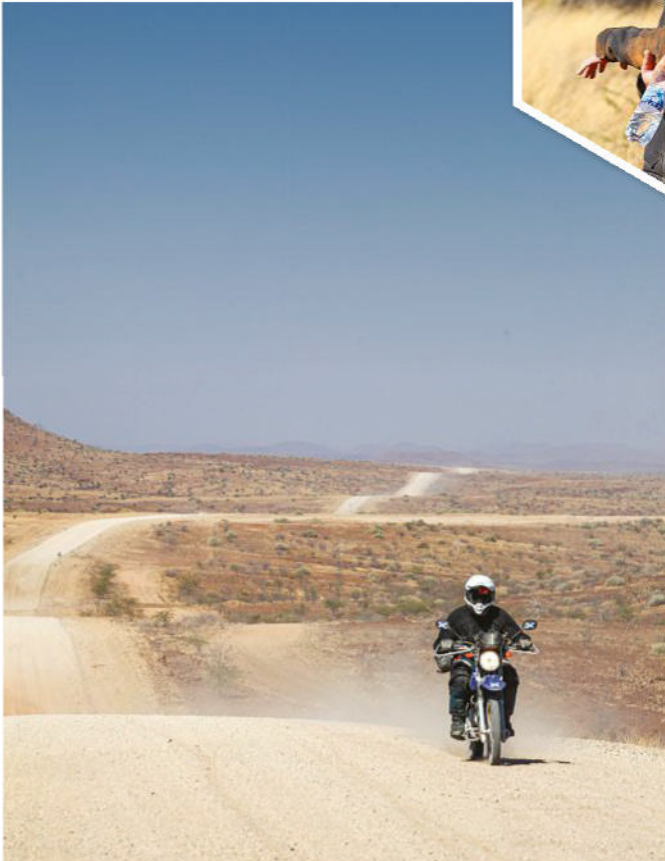
Wesley and Ono travel the world, and long ago discovered the unique charms of Africa's natural beauty, wildlife and people. The idea for an African version had taken root some time ago. But to get such a project off the ground, you need the patience of Job and good connections... and plenty of "hold my

beer while I catch my breath" moments.

The first step is to find wildlife rangers who could be the recipients of the motorcycles. Apparently, no one in South Africa is interested in receiving 15 motorcycles as a gift. The Kruger said no thanks. Mabuasehube says the lions would see a ranger on a motorcycle as a snack – the park had apparently started using quad motorcycles some time ago, but a male lion quickly decided the man on the motorcycle looked tasty. Fortunately,



RECHARGE. The pool below the Ongongo Waterfall was a favourite among the weary adventure riders, especially those who frequently came off their bikes and ate some dust.



the ranger escaped, but the park had to literally build cages on all the motorcycles to keep the rangers safe.

After numerous calls, emails and visits over several months, Wesley and Ono found no local park that would benefit from 15 motorcycles.

Then, at the start of 2022, a connection of a connection told them about the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) project in Namibia. John Kasaona is the head of the IRDNC, and

before long, the three were discussing the details of the project.

In short, the IRDNC works to uplift the community in the remote northwest of Namibia by involving them in the conservation process, so they can also benefit from the country's natural resources. Instead of shooting a rhino and selling its horn for immediate profit, the idea is to get the community involved in preserving the rhino, so they can benefit from the rhino's presence in the long run – like tourism. This also

applies to the unique desert lions and elephants of the area.

The desert lions that kill large herds of goats remain a point of contention. It's understandable that a farmer who loses 30 goats in one night would have a negative view of lions.

Part of IRDNC's focus is to better manage the relationship between wild animals and people – previously farmers took the law into their own hands, poisoning lions or shooting elephants. If the IRDNC's community

rangers can better monitor the lions' movements and warn local communities in advance, the conflict situation can largely be avoided.

According to John, the plan was to buy donkeys for his rangers so they could cover more ground. But then the Rally for Rangers motorcycle plan came to his attention.

After months of administration, kicking down doors, a recce to test the route, and meeting stakeholders, a group of international adventurers landed in Windhoek in July 2023.

One of the major challenges was to get special permission from Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism to go through the Skeleton Coast National Park – motorcycles are usually not allowed there. Rally for Rangers pledged to donate one of the motorcycles to the ministry – thus building a long-term bridge with them.

Ultimately, a diverse group of people, including a slew of business owners, a brewer, an engineer working at SpaceX, a couple of computer geeks, a professional adventurer and a robotics engineer prepared themselves for the approximately 2 500 km ahead.

At the Midgard Lodge, 15 brand-new Yamaha AG125 motorcycles awaited the group: stickers were applied, cellphone charging equipment installed, and the suspension adjusted.

Rally for Rangers Namibia kicked off with a short leg – to the Ombe Guestfarm near Hochfeld. The route avoids tarred roads as much as possible, sticking to dirt roads.

The first day's 160 km went without major issues, but a flat tyre and another one later on had the logistics team holding their breath. They had a box full of spare inner tubes, but this trend could become a significant issue.

The next day, the group departed Ombe for 230 km to the Okonjima game reserve near Otjiwarongo, where the adventurers encountered their first rhino. More flat tyres followed...

And one of the less experienced riders took a hard fall when hitting a patch of soft sand. The paramedic did

“

The route avoids tarred roads as much as possible, sticking to dirt roads

”

SAND MONSTER. Adventure riders are familiar with their arch nemesis, the sand monster. Experienced riders have learned how to tame the creature (above), but many still fear the unpredictable nature of the surface. Whatever the skill levels, everyone was equally charmed by the friendly locals.





his thing, and soon the young American was back in the saddle – bruises and all.

After a lovely camp at Okonjima, the group took the back roads to the Etotongwe Lodge near Outjo. There were more flat tyres on this leg 200 km, but luckily no one fell.

The third day's leg was a long one: a whole 250 km to the Hoada campsite. The environment now had fewer people and more animals – and more sand and stones. The flat tyre trend continued – the Yamaha AG125's standard off-road tyre was clearly not up to Namibia's thorns and stones.

The Yamaha Windhoek team waited

at Hoada to give the motorcycles their 1 000 km service. Luckily, they remembered to bring extra inner tubes.

Now the group was truly in the bundus. The next leg of 180 km went to the Ongongo Waterfall campsite, where a swim in the pool below the waterfall is a must. It was a relatively calm day with the usual number of flat tyres.

It wasn't until Palmwag that the Yamahas' were refueled, meaning they get about 30 km per litre of fuel. With the 11 l in the tank, the range was 330 km – not bad at all.

By this time, more riders had bitten the dust. There was clearly a big

difference between experienced riders and those who had never ridden on anything other than blacktop before. The organisers decided to avoid a detour, and the group aimed straight for Purros... from there, the real tough riding in the Skeleton Coast National Park would begin.

Purros is simply an incredible place: mountains, sand dunes, elephants, giraffes... too beautiful for words.

One of the American guests, 75-year-old Mike Emrich, brought a heavy bag full of notebooks and pens with him from America. The organisers arranged for the group to visit a school in Purros,

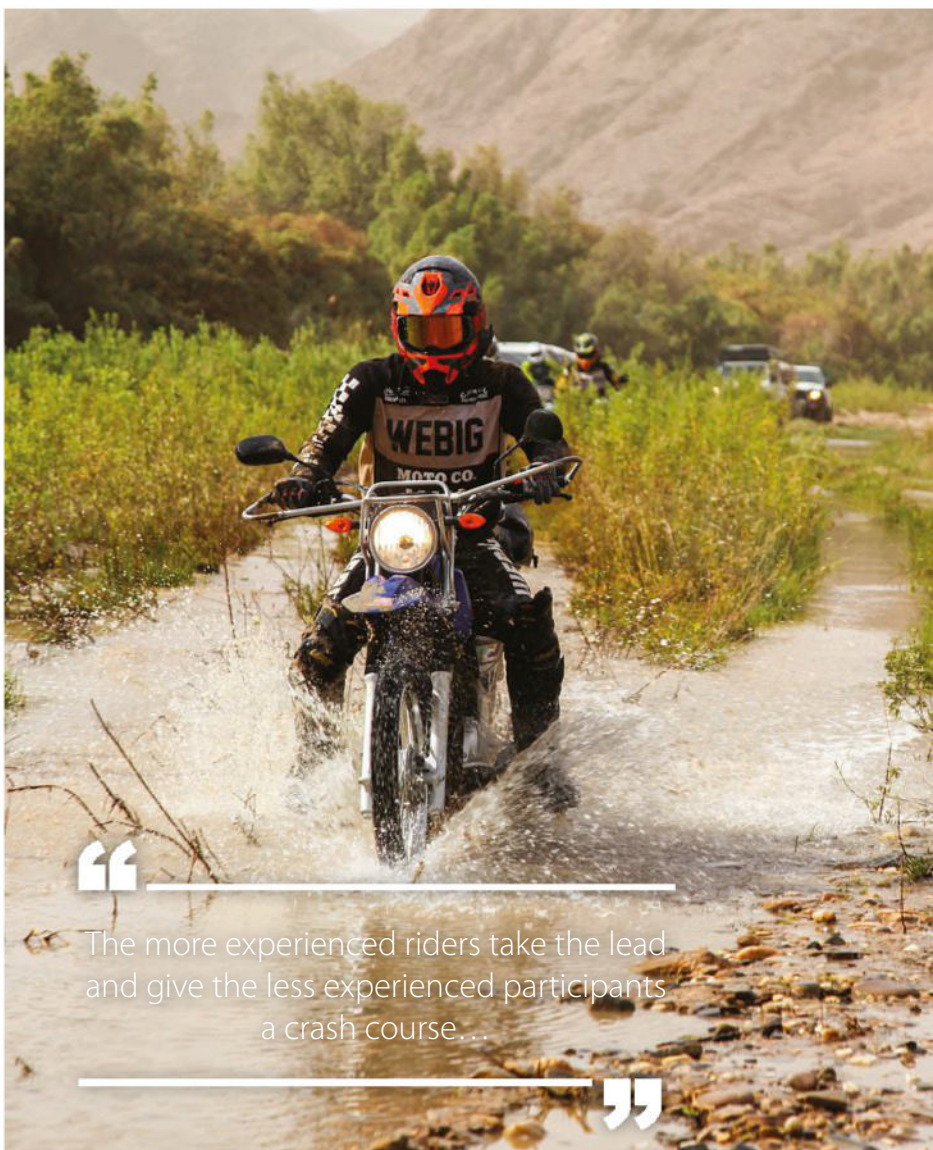
and Mike distributed all the books to the children. It was a special moment that had some of the American guests shedding a tear.

The rest of the day sees the group spending time in the Purros area – getting accustomed to the extremely challenging riding conditions. The more experienced riders take the lead and give the less experienced participants a crash course on how to ride in sand without breaking your neck.

Eventually, the group sets off towards Skeleton Coast. The convoy heads through a valley filled with sand,

water, rocks and wild animals – a few of the riders' faces get unintentionally introduced to the sand. One newby rider falls at least eight times. One of the Yamaha's clutches starts to malfunction, and it takes about two hours to get it running again – just about. By lunchtime, the group has barely covered 10 km. And then, shortly after lunch, disaster strikes: the axle of one of the logistics trailers literally breaks off from the truck bed. Meanwhile, the motorcycle with the struggling clutch also isn't cooperating.

The group is still nowhere near Skeleton Coast.



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The more experienced riders take the lead and give the less experienced participants a crash course...

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While the mechanically inclined members of the group try to patch up the trailer and make temporary repairs, a strategy meeting is held. The axle on one trailer had already cracked a few days earlier, and the clutch of the bakkie towing it had taken a hit in the deep sand (the driver had not engaged the full-wheel drive). The broken axle on the other trailer can be temporarily repaired, but the brutal Skeleton Coast is bound to give them more problems. One Yamaha's clutch is completely gone. And a number of the riders are bruised and battered.

The decision is made: turn back to

Purros now, before the problems in Skeleton Coast National Park worsen. One of the local guides estimates that the difficulty level for the road ahead would be about 80% more than what they had already experienced.

A little disheartened, the convoy turns around. At least the Purros Bush Lodge is available, and the guides have whipped up an incredible cod dinner.

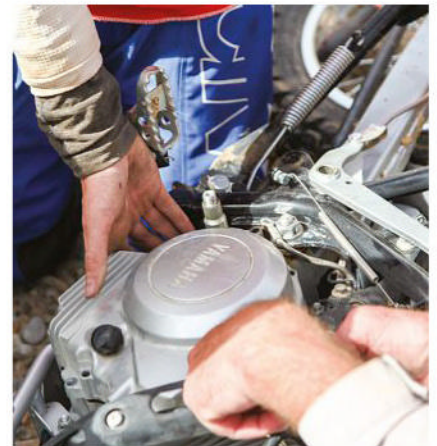
The focus now shifted from Skeleton Coast National Park to the official handover of the motorcycles at the Twyfelfontein Lodge.

After a night at the Palmwag Lodge campsite, the subdued group of riders

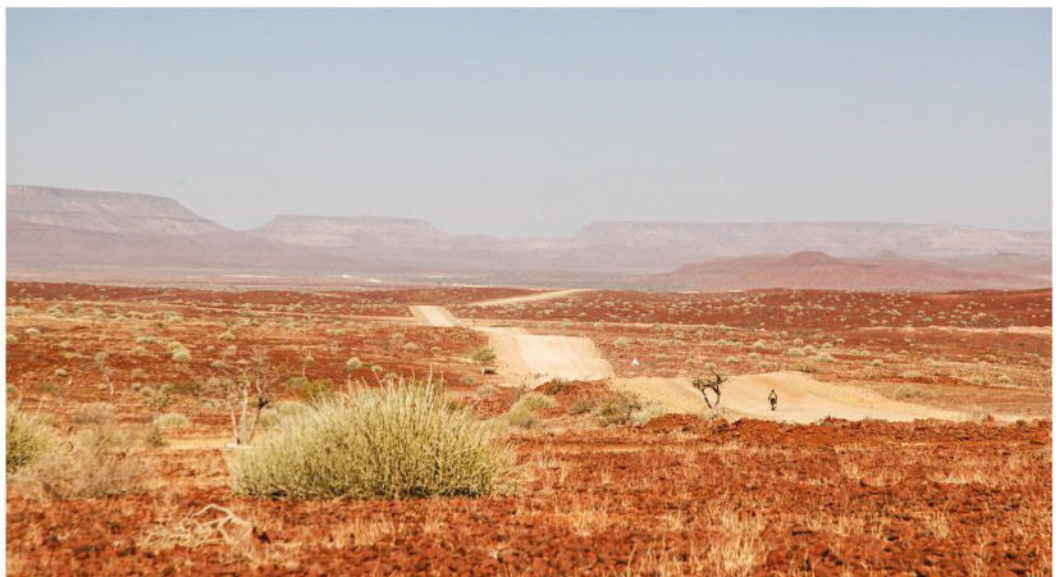
arrive at the Twyfelfontein oasis.

There, motorcycles are washed, clothes are laundered, beer is drunk. And there are so many stories to tell.

Finally, the big day arrives—it's time to hand over 15 (well, 14) Yamaha AG125s to the IRDNC community rangers. Speeches are made, songs are sung, dances are danced, and finally, the adventurers hand over their motorcycles one by one to the wardens. It's an emotional experience for many of the adventurers. Impromptu riding lessons are offered. Rangers go along as passengers. Jokes are shared. Grateful hugs too.



OUCH! Some say that if you crash with a superbike the odds are 50/50 that you'll die, but crashing an adventure bike is 100% guaranteed to result in a bruise (above left) and often nothing worse. Adventure bikers require at least some mechanical knowledge to fix broken bits on the go (above right).





The next day, the international adventurers are taken back to the Midgard Lodge by bus where they go on a wildlife ride for the last time.

Now, only time will tell how the IRDNC will deploy the motorcycles and camping equipment.

As Ono Makhtuu of the ecology centre says: "If John and his organisation can prove that the motorcycles make a significant difference in Kaokoland, then we have achieved our goal. We hope and trust it will."

John Kasaone sums it up: "The Namibian government has given the community the mandate to manage natural resources and environmental matters. The motorcycles will enable our community wardens to reach remote areas where endangered species are found, and to manage the process better. It will definitely make a big difference."

The 2023 Rally for Rangers Namibia was not without its growing pains. And there were plenty of bruises. But ultimately, it's about the impact of the project. And the motorcycles will make a difference.

And that is precisely what Mac had in mind when he donated the first motorcycle to Enkhtaivan in Mongolia a decade ago.



GOOD WORK. The riders relinquished their bikes which were gratefully received by the local rangers. It was a bittersweet farewell for most of them.

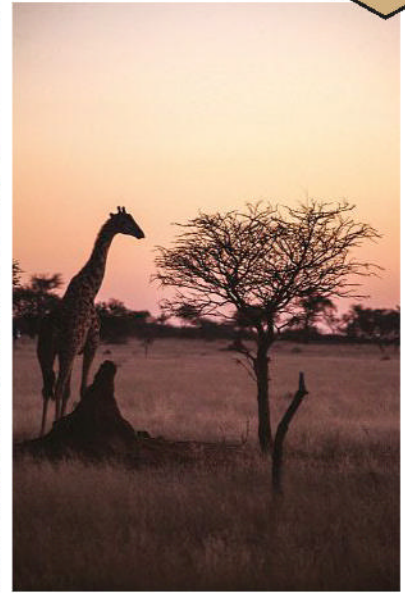


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But ultimately, it's about the impact of the project. And the motorcycles will make a difference

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I ALSO WANT TO GO!

Can I do it alone? You can, but it's much better to tackle the experience with someone, just in case something goes wrong. (And it probably will!)

How long is it? The alternative route the Rally for Rangers convoy rode was about 2 000 km long. If you're in a sturdy 4x4 vehicle, you can breeze through it quite quickly. The 125 cc motorcycles kept a top speed of around 80 km/h, and the group spent 10 days on the route, with plenty of stops in between. It's much better to take it slow... then you can at least smell the flowers along the way.

What should I drive? A rugged 4x4 vehicle, one that will cope with Kaokoland's thorns and rocks.

How much fuel should I take along? Enough for a range of about 1 000 km. There is a fuel station at Palmwag where you can use a card, but it's not a given that there will be fuel – sometimes the tanks run dry. There's another at Sesfontein that only accepts cash.

What emergency equipment to pack? Tyre-repair essentials are very important. It's a good idea to bring along an extra tyre

or two (without a rim). A satellite phone can come in handy if things go south.

Can I tow? If you don't really have to, then don't. The corrugated road between Palmwag and Purros shook a Jurgens XT140 to pieces. A second trailer's axle literally broke off the box. Kaokoland is no friend to trailers. A caravan dealer from Pretoria says that they regularly have to head to Kaokoland to fetch a broken trailer. It's a harsh, harsh place.

Good resources You can follow the road with Google Maps and Tracks4Africa, but if you want to discover the best roads and routes, rather talk to a local guide. You will be safer and get to the most beautiful places. For this route, speak to Jimmy or Hein from Wild Skeleton Coast Adventure Tours. skeletoncoast.wild-exp.com

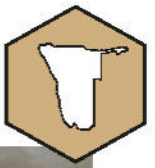
Emergency numbers In Kaokoland, it's important to have the contact details at hand for all the places where you plan to stay. Also confirm that you're on the way (as far as signal allows). If you then get lost, someone will raise the alarm. A satellite phone is also essential. Visit rallyforrangers.org and irdnc.org.na

Have you ever seen the rain?

So, you've been to southern Namibia, but have you ever visited when it rains? That's when the world turns into a lush grassland with an abundance of animals and muddy dirt roads. Pack an umbrella and enjoy the show!

Words and photos **Evan Naudé**





It's muggy as you crawl into your tent on the banks of the Orange River. It had been a long day, and you fall asleep quickly, only to be awakened an hour or so later by a rumble. At first, you're confused, but then realise it's the wind coming from the east. You emerge sleepily from the tent and make sure the tent pegs are secure – just in time, as moments later, a storm blows through the camp. Very soon, fat raindrops strum against the tent, while it seems as if someone is taking pictures outside while lightning bolts flash one after

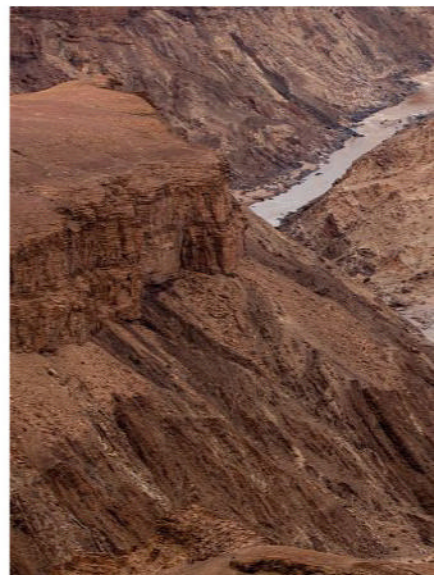
the other. Deafening thunder follows, and you fold your pillow over your head in an attempt to muffle the sounds from above.

Tonight is your final night of a week-long trip through the south of Namibia, and every day brought the rain. Usually, when describing this country to someone, the words “rain showers”, “thunderstorms”, and “floods” don't come to mind first. Namibia is, after all, known as a desert country, although it usually does rain in late summer. And, when the weather conditions are perfect, you get proper rain. And that's the

reason for your visit: to see how the rain transforms Namibia's arid desert into a lush oasis.

During a good rainy season, Namibia's landscape (and its gravel roads) undergo quite a transformation. Plains of sand turn into grasslands, dirt roads become mud roads, and the lushness attracts wildlife from all over. Even if you've been to Namibia before, it's so worth experiencing this metamorphosis as you'll be hard pressed to recognise the usually arid landscape. And do come here in your off-road vehicle – you'll need it!





FOLLOW THE WATER. Earlier this year, the Naute Dam (above) overflowed, and even the Fish River (right) came down. In the afternoons, you'll probably experience thunderstorms (bottom) and see a completely different side of the Namib Desert.

We kept a close eye on the weather forecast since December the previous year, and when it started raining in January, we knew it would be a good season. By mid-February, our bags were packed, and we were ready to hit the long road north from Cape Town.

We discovered at the Vioolsdrift border post they'd shut the C13 gravel road that runs along the Orange River between Aussenkehr and Sendelingsdrif because of flood damage. The river came down strongly from the east – you probably remember the thundering waters of the Augrabies Falls on the news – and the Fish River also came down, from the north,

and fed even more water into the Orange, so much so that the mighty Orange flooded its banks deep into the Richtersveld.

Our destination for the night is the Canyon Roadhouse campsite. We're in a hurry and take the B1 to Grünau and from there the C12 and D601 to the Roadhouse. Next to the road grasshoppers and other fat bugs flutter back and forth in the tall, green grass, and pregnant dark blue clouds hover above. There has obviously been rain here already, and it looks as though more is on the way.

The air is sultry, and after our camp goes up, we go looking for refreshments

in the restaurant. It's not long before drops dance on the corrugated-iron roof and a strong wind blows the windows shut. We run back to our stand – just in time to grab the tent, which flutters like a kite on its last peg. Luckily, there's a canopy erected for overlanders at a nearby campsite, and we pitch the tent under that – on dry ground this time. A braai is out of the question, so we have dinner at the restaurant while the rain pours down outside. And when it was time for bed, it's to the wonderful sound of rain on a corrugated-iron roof.

We leave in the dark the next morning to catch the sunrise from the



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We watch the sky change into shades of orange and pink before the first rays of the sun illuminate the canyon

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Fish River Canyon lookout. A special spectacle, not only for the photo opportunities but because it's empty for now, and we can experience the vastness of the canyon without the hordes of visitors who'll be arriving later in the day. We watch the sky change into shades of orange and pink before the first rays of the sun illuminate the canyon piece by piece. And then, far below, we see something we've never witnessed before: the Fish

River gushes, strong and full, through the canyon's twists and turns. Good heavens, there's proper rain this year!

We continue north on the C12. At the Holoog Bridge, we cross the Gaab River flowing strongly, then have a look at the Naute Dam – also full to the brim. We cross the Löwen River before joining the B4 near Seeheim. Here, we turn left, towards Aus, and cross the Fish River flowing strongly under the bridge.





We pass Aus and aim for Lüderitz on the coast. At the Gaub plains, renowned for the wild horses that roam here, it's clear where the rain stopped: these plains are as bare and dry as ever. It's only the next day, after taking pictures at Kolmanskop and shooting back past Aus on our way north, that we find greenery again. We have always found the wide open spaces on either side of the C13 between Aus and Helmeringhausen beautiful, but with the green carpet now covering the earth, they are beyond beautiful.

About 50 km before we get to Helmeringhausen, we turn north on the D707, and find ourselves approaching a dark grey wall. Before long, we're right in the middle of a storm – and the dirt road, which is

normally a bit rutted out and bumpy, is now a mud bath. We happily engage the Fortuner's four-wheel drive and smile – these conditions are what makes driving a dirt road so exciting.

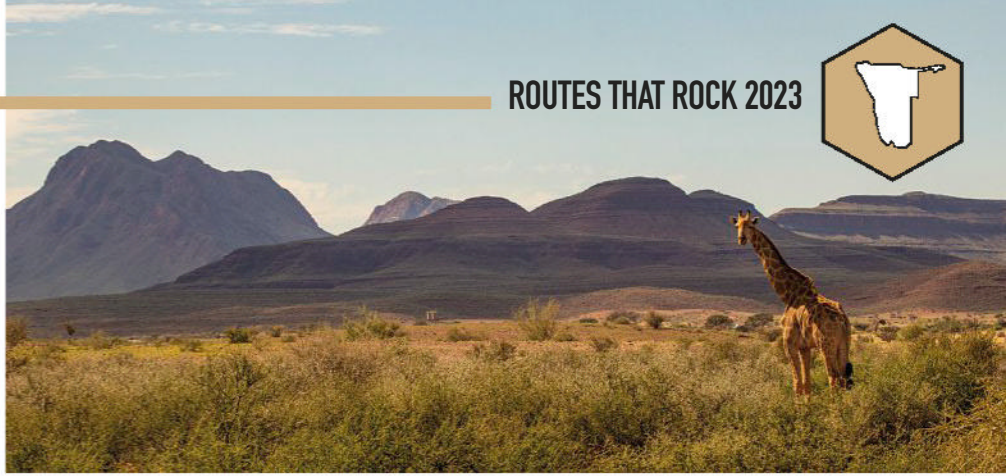
Late afternoon, we stop at Kronenhof Lodge, which is approximately 30 km from Duwisib Castle.

"Our world is now unbelievably beautiful," says Tjaard Venter, the owner, as we go for a drive around the farm. "You came at the right time. We had lovely rain, and there's more on the way." As we photograph their campsite, a rainbow appears. And later, standing on the lodge's verandah, two more appear far out among the pillows of clouds.

We take our time on the C27 the next morning. In our opinion, this is



BRING YOUR CAMERA. Namibia transforms when it rains, so you can take beautiful photos of well-known sights like the dunes at Sossusvlei, numerous mountain passes, rainbows in the desert, and even water in Sesriem Canyon.



Watch the weather

There were exceptionally good rains in Namibia (and other parts of southern Africa) this past summer because of the La Niña weather cycle. When there's a large-scale cooling of sea temperatures over the central parts of the Pacific Ocean, it creates La Niña (Spanish for "little girl"). La Niña is the opposite of the El Niño cycle, which occurs when sea temperatures warm up. Both cycles have an impact on weather conditions worldwide. So, if you see La Niña in the weather forecast, you know Namibia is going get soaked.

Usually, we see La Niña conditions every three to seven years, but in 2021 and 2022, the cycle brought heavy rains to southern Africa. If you want to chase the rain in Namibia next year, block out your

calendar between January and March. The landscape changes, and when the water dries up, the green disappears again. Plan your trip for around two to three weeks after a good rainfall.

Add extra days to your itinerary, because the roads – yes, even the blacktops – are often damaged and low-water bridges may be impassable. They're usually repaired quickly, but you may have a bit or take a long detour.

Finally: listen to what the locals advise, because they know the roads well. Call your overnight accommodation in advance, especially if you have to travel on a dirt road to get to it, to hear what the road conditions are. There are also several online forums and Facebook pages including "Reën in Namibië" – excellent sources of up-to-date information.





POINT AND SHOOT. Almost every farmstead in Namibia has a wreck of an old car, like this one at Roosivlei, that's just lying around. If you like taking photos they're excellent subjects, especially when thunderstorms provide a dramatic backdrop in the afternoons.

the country's most beautiful stretch of road. You should stop often to take pics and simply appreciate the views. In the NamibRand Nature Reserve, we count two herds of gemsbok of almost a hundred. A springbok sprawls lazily on a grassy plain that's usually pure dust, while a zebra grazes in the background. On one side, two ostriches give chase to their eight offspring.

It's once again muggy as we pitch our tent at Sesriem. We watch a wave of rain go by behind the Elim dune, and when we drive into the park to visit Sossusvlei, the raindrops patter on the windows. Twice, we encounter huge puddles in the road – and the dunes on both sides are soaking wet. The water and shadows on the dunes create beautiful patterns, and the

photographer in you will rejoice at the unique photo opportunities. Once at Sossusvlei, we're really amped – the vlei is full. It's a spectacle one rarely sees, and we feel privileged to experience it.

Before carrying on our tour the next morning, we make a detour to the Sesriem Canyon. It's underwater, so



we can't explore it. A photograph or two later, we're back on the road with Solitaire in our sights. Along the way, we see more herds of gemsbok and springbok and take photos of well-known vistas that are now almost unrecognisably green. At Solitaire, we stalk Cape ground squirrels standing in purple wildflowers, their cheeks stuffed with grass.

You have to get to Windhoek – it's where you'll turn around on this trip. From Solitaire, we drive up the escarpment on the Spreetshoogte Pass. It's Namibia's steepest pass – you climb more than 1 000 m in just 4 km. Fortunately, there's paving on the steepest sections and sharpest turns, otherwise We would have struggled getting to the top in this weather –

even with four-wheel drive.

Once in Windhoek, we decide to travel back along the Namib Desert again, rather than by the B1 highway. We want to experience more rainy weather. Plus, there are still some roads we haven't been on before. Leave the city in your rear-view mirror, taking the Kuiperberg Pass and then the C26 through the Khomas Hochland to

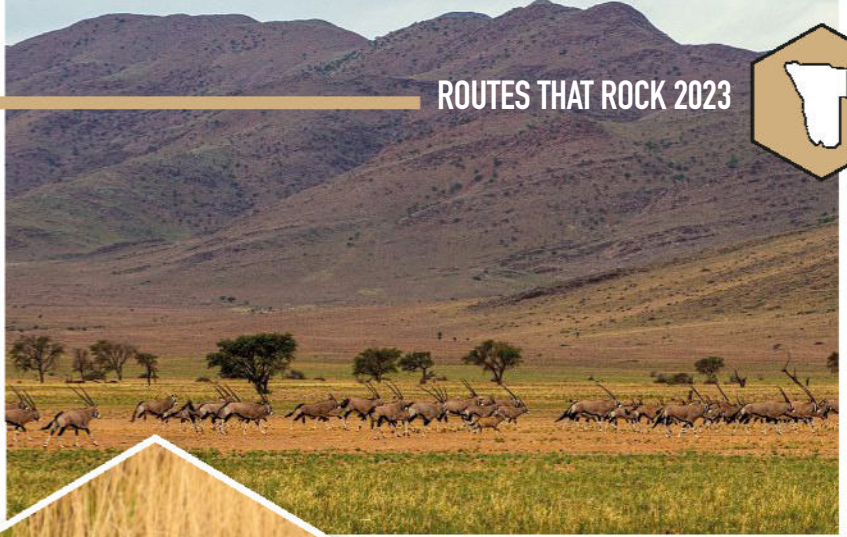
the Gamsberg Pass. At 1 850 m, this is Namibia's highest pass, and its views of the surrounding seemingly infinite mountains are spectacular.

You'll be glad if you chose a campsite right at the bottom of the pass as your overnight stop – the drive down the pass takes much longer than you'd expect. Water flows down the mountain and across the road. In parts, deep dongas have appeared on the dirt road's shoulder, and we have to aim carefully to get past them. The lower you progress down the pass, the more water crossings you'll encounter. We had to get out more than once to look at the road ahead. Luckily, we spotted the tracks of a vehicle that had recently gone through, because if we had to figure out the line of each water crossing on our own, it would be a very long day. We count at least a dozen water crossings within an hour.

"You came through at just the right time. Yesterday, no one could get through, and I had to help two bakkies get out of that river," German Fug from the Rooisand Desert Ranch tells us when we check in for the evening. "And if it carries on raining, the road will soon get even worse!" There's more rain and thunder when we go to bed, but we're not complaining – the sound of

RESPIRE FROM ABOVE. Not only does the rain add an interesting twist to the dirt roads, it also allows for an abundance of plant and animal life in the otherwise dry Namib Desert area.





The southern route

Namibia's summer rains don't occur only in the south. The whole country has been getting good rains for the past two years, but the farther north you travel off road, the wilder it gets. This year, the Damaraland and Kaokoland rivers flooded, and a few roads were impassable for days. (Travel with an experienced guide and in a convoy.) The south is more accessible and enchanting when wet. Choose dirt roads where possible – these are not only the most beautiful routes but also the most exciting in your off-roader.

We recommend the D316 past Ai-Ais and the D324 (rather than the B1 through

Grünau) once you've crossed the border at Vioolsdrift and heading for the Fish River Canyon. Keep north on the C12, and take a look at the Naute Dam on the D545 – it's not every day you'll see a full dam in Namibia. There's also the Neckertal Dam – the country's biggest – next to the B4. From there, you could take a shortcut on the C14 to Helmeringhausen, but you'll reap greater rewards by going via Aus on the C13. That way, you can also take the D707, a beautiful detour around the Tiras Mountains, before travelling north on the C27. This road takes you through the NamibRand Nature Reserve – a stunning

place after rain – to Sesriem. Don't miss the sodden dunes and pools of water in Sossusvlei and the Sesriem Canyon.

From Sesriem, there are several options to get to the north of the country. Heading to Swakopmund? Stick to the coast on the C19 and C14 (do check first in case the Gaub and Kuisebri rivers have flooded). In the other direction, the C19 or C14 are good options to Maltahöhe and Mariental, but you'll skip some beautiful mountain passes in the Khomas Hochland. The Remhoogte (D1261), Spreetshoogte (D1275), and Gamsberg (C26) all belong on your list.

water and the smell of rain in the air are such novel experiences for us in these parts.

Early the next morning, we head off. We want to reach a friend's farm outside Helmeringhausen by the evening, and it's a 450 km drive. We keep west on the C26 and then turn south on the C14. When we cross the Gaub River, there's a stack of driftwood piled higher than a car's roof washed up against the low-water bridge. We wouldn't have been able to pass a day or two earlier.

On the other side of Solitaire, we again have to drive around pools of water in the road.

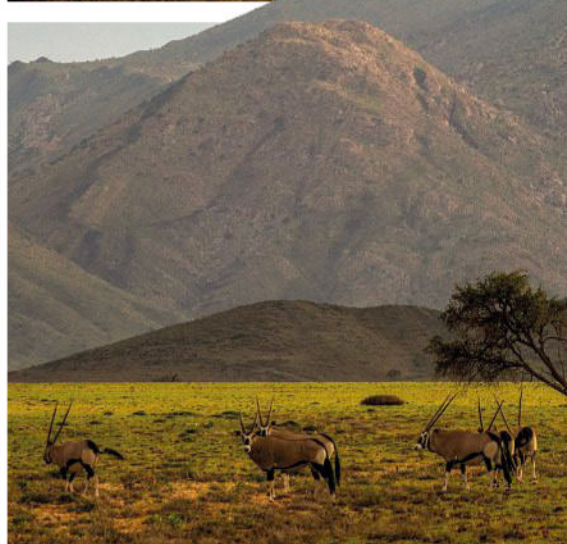
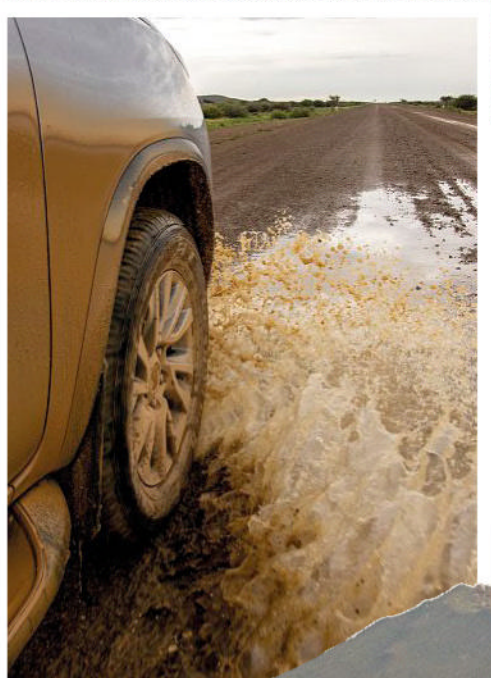
Along the C27, we watch a plane land at the luxurious Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, and we wonder what the valley looks like from above. It's raining again when we finally arrive at the farm Kosos outside Helmeringhausen in the late afternoon. "It's just water, water,

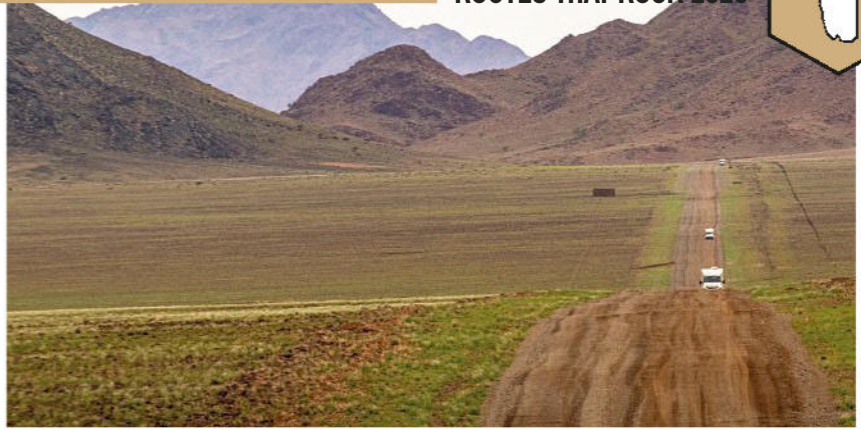
water," says Boeta de Klerk when we ask him about the rain.

The following morning, we aim for the border. The C14 dirt road to Bethanie is wet, slippery stuff, and the sticky mud collects under the Fortuner's wheel arches. On the C12 on the way to Grünau, we spot a utility pole in tatters – it was probably struck by lightning.

That afternoon, we wash the Fortuner's rear in the Amanzi Trails campsite so the number plate will at least be visible. Here, too, the Orange flooded its banks and washed away half of the camp, so we can't pitch our tent right next to the water as we had hoped to do.

This is also where we encounter rain for the last time on the trip. We pack away the wet tent and head home. On arrival, we shake it out and smile at the wet droplets landing on my veranda. A little bit of Namibian summer rain made it all the way to the Cape.





THERE'S A STORM BREWING. This is a Namibia without dirt, heat or drought. Instead, you'll find wet, often muddy roads (above and left), overflowing rain gauges (inset), large herds of gemsbok (bottom), and even utility poles shattered by lightning (far left).

Campsites with a view

Be prepared to get wet if you want to camp in Namibia's summer rainy season, but the rewards are great. The south is full of campsites with beautiful views – they become even more spectacular during a thunderstorm. Here is a list of the campsites with the very best views.

Mount D'Urban

C14

Each of the 10 stands at the foot of the mountain of the same name has its own bathroom, canopy, and braai area. The sunset from your camp chair or one of the lookout points near the camp is exceptional.

Contact ☎ 00 264 81 547 3532 or

📧 mountdurban.com.na

Namtib

D707

There's a reason why this campsite is a firm favourite among 4x4 travellers: from the camp you can watch gemsbok graze on the plains with the dunes of the Namib Desert far in the background. Pure bliss.

Contact ☎ 00 2646 368 3055 or

📧 namtib.net

Landsberg

C27

This campsite is quite secluded, but definitely worth the 25 km drive if you want peace and quiet. What's more, the stands are large and new, each with its own bathroom and a neat, covered veranda. And you have a view of

a watering hole with the Tiras Mountain in the background.

Contact ☎ 00264 83 783 7037 or

📧 farmlandsberg.com

NamibRand Family Hideout

C27

Each of the three private camps (own ablutions and solar power) has its own amazing views of the Namib Desert's dunes. Photographers love camping here, so you can rest assured there's remarkable scenery.

Contact ☎ 00 2646 122 6803 or

📧 nrhideout.com

At Kronenhof

C27

At Kronenhof's four campsites (each with a private bathroom) are far apart and overlook a mountainous landscape that stretches in all directions. Set up camp and watch the thunderstorms in the afternoon.

Contact ☎ 00 264 83 700 0077 or

📧 kronenhof.com.na

Namib's Valley of a Thousand Hills

C26

As soon as you arrive at the lodge, you see how it got its name. From the guest farm's highest hill, you look out over a landscape dotted with mountains. It's a fantastic location for a campsite – all the more so when the summer rains bring colour to the world.

Contact ☎ 00 2646 125 0725 or

📧 namibsvally.com



Meandering through Botswana



Take two parts unspoilt Botswana, one part Namibia and a dash of Zimbabwe and you've got yourself a proper African adventure. We put this recipe to the test.

Words and pictures **Evan Naudé**

You flip through the TV channels in the restaurant, Granny's Kitchen, next to the Tapiwa Shell fuel station in Letlhakane. There are hundreds, but the only one that works is a programme where a teacher is presenting a biology lesson. We take a seat and concede to learning about enzymes. At least there is air-conditioning here, because outside Botswana's heat wraps around you like a wool blanket.

It is one of the less-exciting moments

for a traveller, like waiting at an airport or border post. A kind of travel limbo. At least we know it won't last long, since we're here waiting for the rest of the tour group. One by one the rest of our fellow travellers start to arrive.

While our tour leader, Petri Cronje, greets everyone, a neatly dressed man approaches us. "Are you the guys from the magazine?" he asks and introduces him-self as Tipson Mahube. His business card reads Chairman, and it seems like he owns this place. "Tell your readers

we have 50 ppm diesel here, the only one in town," he says. Tipson points to the vehicles in the parking lot and tells us which ones he has driven, mostly on trips to South Africa. Now he helps other travellers, especially those on their way to Kubu Island, with accommodation and a place to eat at Granny's, next to the fuel station.

We say goodbye to Tipson as the rest of the group is ready to depart and we're eager to get started and to leave civilisation behind.



FIRST LIGHT. The iconic baobab trees of Kubu Island are most magnificent when the sun rises over the Makgadikgadi.

From Letlhakane we drive north for 35 km on a tar road. Just past the offices for Kubu Island this road turns to gravel and eventually jeep track. We head north on this track for 45 km through grass fields, over a section of the Ntswetwe Pan and eventually reach Kubu Island on the Sowa Pan.

Kubu Island is a strange, almost mystical place. The word means “hippopotamus” in Tswana, which doesn’t seem to make sense when you arrive on this rocky outcrop in the dry season, surrounded by seemingly endless salt pans. That is until you consider that these pans are actually covered with water in the rainy season and this rocky outcrop with its giant baobab trees, is the only thing that manages to keep its head above

the water, just like a hippo.

The lack of water is something you need to keep in mind if you plan to overnight here – you need to bring enough to cook, drink and wash with. There are only a handful of long drop toilets here, which we recommend you visit before the sun heats them up.

The simplicity of the camp facilities actually contributes to Kubu Island’s appeal, since it gives you a taste of the inhospitable environment. In a place like this, you simply must stick your toes in the dust, feel the sun gnaw at your skin and watch how the colossal baobabs point their crooked fingers towards the Milky Way at night. What you must not do, is play loud music from your vehicle in the camp site. Like our neighbours did that night...

From Kubu Island our convoy heads in a north-westerly direction for about 100 km over the Makgadikgadi pans to Gweta, from where we can take the A3 tar road west towards Maun. It is a slow and hot 100 km in sandy jeep tracks through golden-coloured grasslands and across the lily-white salt pans.

Here and there we see the twin lines of tyre prints swerving off the main track to carve a brown circle in the salt crust. “It’s the guys that do donuts,” says Petri with a shake of his head. Besides the fact that, for environmental reasons, you’re not allowed to stray from the main route, it is also a gamble in a heavy overlanding vehicle. “These pans might look hard, but it’s just the main route that is compacted,” explains Petri. “You’ll think you’re driving along

nicely and the next thing you know you sink down to your axles in the mud."

We push on to Gweta and make good progress on the tar road to Maun. Our next destination is on the banks of the Boteti River, about 30 km before the town. The green grass, shade and swimming pool at the Drifters Maun Lodge are a welcome relief after the dusty dryness of Kubu. To me, it always feels strange to swim in a pool right next to a beautiful river, but like almost every resort on a river bank in Botswana, the rivers are the territory of crocodiles and hippos. Besides, the swimming pool is closer to the bar.

The next morning five members of our tour group head to Maun's airport for a flight over the Okavango Delta in a Cessna. We have clocked a fair amount of air mileage, but this small aeroplane is a first for us. "It is a bit bumpy," Petri tells me, "and you might get nauseous. One of our previous clients filled a record of four sick bags!" Well gee, thanks, that doesn't reassure us at all!

You get in the front of the cramped plane and sit nearly shoulder to shoulder with George Teessen, the pilot and owner of Air Shakawe. With the four other passengers seated behind you, the whole plane is full. After a few bumps at take-off, however, your apprehension dissolves and you stare in awe at the landscape, a mere 150 m below us. It's like a scene from a National Geographic movie with large herds of animals grazing on the vast flood plains, blissfully unaware of our presence above. An hour flies by (excuse the pun) and we turn back towards Maun for a bumpy touch-down.

George tells us he is originally from Bapsfontein, but has been working in Botswana for the past eight years.

"These days people call us bush pilots, and let me tell you the name fits on a hot day. You sweat so much in that plane that you start to smell like you're from the bush," he laughs.

We ask him about the life of a pilot in this part of the world. "Our best days are when you get to see four of the Big Five from the air in one day," he says. "It's only leopards that can be tough to spot." But there are also days that are less

than great, no matter how experienced you are. "If we have bad weather it gets rough up there. In heavy turbulence you shake so much that I've had a few hard knocks against the head in the past. And when someone who's had some pungent food gets sick, that aeroplane suddenly gets really small."

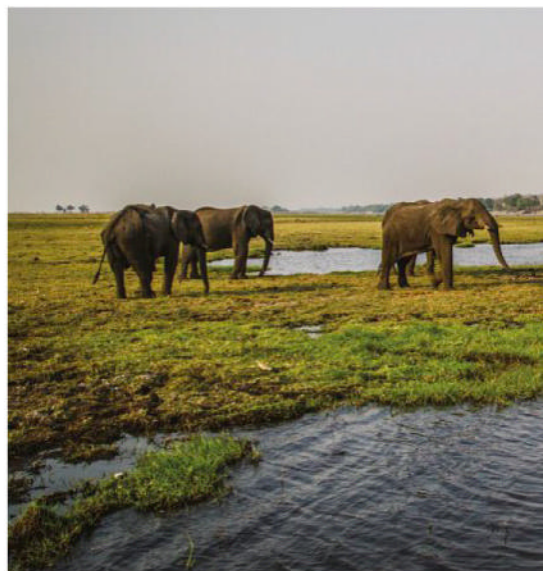
We head back to join the rest of the group, fill up our vehicles and do a bit of shopping before bidding Maun farewell. Make your way south-west on the A3 for just under 100 km to Sehithwa, where we turn north onto the A35 tar road. About 270 km later we arrive at Shakawe River Lodge where we will be staying for the next two nights.

After a long day's driving the camp site on the bank of the Okavango River is a welcome haven to relax at for the rest of the afternoon. In any case, there are some guys in our group that need to get plenty of rest for a fishing trip at dawn the next day.

"This is a spinner," says Theo O'Neil, one of the eager fishermen in our group, the following day as he shows us a lure. "But for tiger fish I'm going to try a Rapala," he says and produces a brightly coloured lure. We are in time to catch the tail-end of the annual barbel run – the ideal time to fish for tigers.

The barbel are after smaller species, such as tilapia, that breed here at this time of year. They swim upstream and hit the water between the reeds with their tails to drive the shoals of smaller fish out. The opportunistic tiger fish are never far behind them, so we keep an eye out for movement in the water or gatherings of white egrets. It takes more than two hours for us to get our first bite and even then it's almost by accident. "Hey!" shouts Connie Gibson suddenly. While the rest of the group were busy casting and reeling lines, she had taken a break and got lucky while dangling a line in the water.

"I was just sitting, chatting away, when I felt something tug!" she laughs, with the first fish of the day on a hook. It seems the catch opens the gates, because not long after, Theo pulls a bright tiger fish with some impressive teeth from the water – followed by





PERFECT PEACE. A boat ride at sunset on the Chobe River (above) is the best way to view game on Sedudu Island.



NOCTURNAL (inset). For birders there is plenty to see on a boat trip on the Okavango, like this juvenile fish owl.



another a bit farther downriver.

However, all the fish have to be released, and later it's only photographs that serve as proof of the day's success when we get back to camp.

From Shakawe we depart for the Namibian border post Mohembo. It's a short distance of about 55 km to our next campsite, so we make a stop at Tsodilo Hills. This Unesco World Heritage Site is Botswana's highest point and has more than 4 500 Bushmen drawings, but there are two in particular that'll puzzle you.

Our guide shows us a drawing of a whale and next to it, one of a penguin. The nearest ocean is 1 000 km away, so the ancient artist had to walk quite a distance. That, or some poor penguin got horribly lost.

Beyond the border we enter the Mahongo section of the Bwabwata National Park in Namibia's Zambezi region. Before long we arrive at Ngepi Camp on the banks of the Okavango River. The campsite has the relaxed atmosphere of a backpackers, but with a touch of luxury in their bush huts and treehouses. Spoil yourself by staying in one of the treehouses for at least one night, and wake up to the sound of hippos beneath you in the river and buffalo grazing on the opposite bank.

Ngepi is also the ideal place from which to explore the surrounding parts of Bwabwata and the nearby Popa Waterfall. Almost directly opposite

Ngepi are the ruins of Buffalo, the base of the 32 Battalion during the Angolan Bush War. As I walk among the fallen structures, I try to imagine what it must have taken to live in a place like this. That is, until I almost walk right into a sleeping wild dog and we both take off with our tails between our legs.

If the attractions around Ngepi aren't exciting enough for you, you can take a dip in the crocodile and hippo cage, a floating box in the Okavango where you can swim safely. Make sure you also do the toilet tour. Each ablution is unique: Amongst others there is the three-storey high Poop-a-falls, the lovely view from the King's Throne and the Boskak, which is pretty self-explanatory. We spend three days at Ngepi before we continue east to Kasane in Botswana.

Our first impression of Kasane is that it is precisely the kind of place that an uninformed American might imagine when people talk of "wild Africa". Those kinds of people seem to think we all ride elephants to work. In Kasane, however, it seems totally possible!

The town lies between the Chobe River and Chobe National Park, which has one of the largest animal populations on the continent. So seeing wild animals in town is a common occurrence. Those that drop by during the night, like elephants, leave their mark all over town. We see flattened fences, bent lamp posts and later that evening we can hear them pushing over

trees just outside our camp site.

The next day we depart for the Kazungula region for a visit to Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. It's September, the dry season here, so we don't get to see the postcard image of a mass of water tumbling over the 1,7 km long ravine. But less water also means less spray in the air, so the expanse of the falls is clearly visible. Even though the place is crawling with tourists, it's well worth a visit. You can walk back to town, but in the heat we decide to take a taxi instead. We walk to the parking lot opposite the exit where a row of taxis are parked.

"Let's see what we can negotiate," says Petri and gives you a lesson in bargaining tactics. "Ten dollars is the standard price," says one of the men near the vehicles. "No sir," says Petri and the price drops to \$9. The negotiations continue back and forth until the man says his absolute lowest price is \$6, but even that is not acceptable for Petri and we start walking away. We haven't even taken two steps before we are called back and get into a taxi for \$5. "My name is Austin Ndlovu, I can be your driver for the whole day," says our driver and asks where we would like to go.

Petri wants to know what this service would cost us and the driver answers with his own strategy: "You're the boss, you tell me!"

"How does \$6 sound?" says Petri. Austin's eyes meet his in the rear view mirror and with a shake of his head he



SALTY SURFACE. In the dry season the Makgadikgadi pans seem like an endless salt flat, but be careful – the crust often hides soft mud underneath.



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Kasane is that it is precisely the kind of place that an uninformed American might imagine when people talk of “wild Africa”

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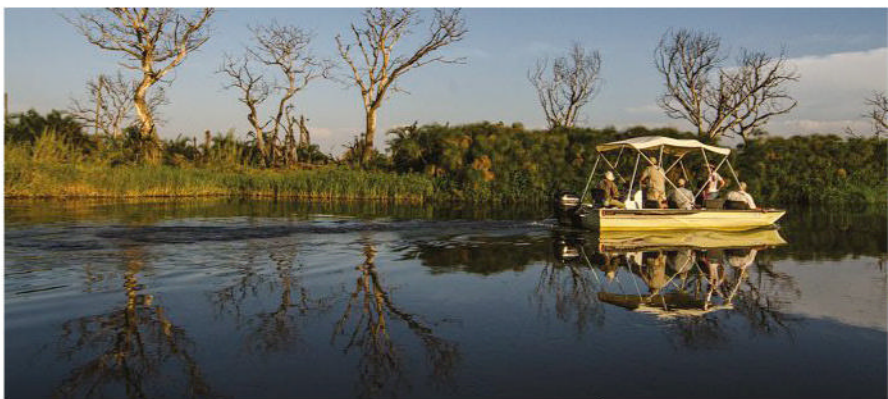
TIGER'S TEETH. Theo O'Neil proudly displays a perfect specimen of a brightly coloured tiger fish he caught in the Okavango River.

says: "Sir, then you are not a good boss!"

In the end we decide Austin's chauffeur service would burn a hole in our pockets, so after he drops us off we explore the town on foot. You quickly learn Austin is not the only opportunist trying to squeeze an extra dollar from us. Every other person on the street is a pedlar trying to sell you a curio of some sort, or who offers to be your "tour guide" for a fee. If they get really annoying, you can ask one of the tourism officers in their bright neon bibs to sort them out. We evade them in the craft market until our bus returns to take us back to Kasane.

Later that day we go on a sunset cruise on the Chobe River. We can't think of a better way to end off a trip through Botswana. For more than three hours we blissfully drift around Sedudu Island and stare in awe at the diverse wildlife around us.

Hippos snooze in the water, elephants graze on the shore within a couple of meters of the boat and the bird watchers among us are having a ball. You take a sip of your beer as you watch the sun slowly stain the horizon a deep red, and you think about that limbo feeling you had on your first day in the country. We wouldn't mind staying in limbo for a while on this river.



“

Later that day we go on a sunset cruise on the Chobe River. We can't think of a better way to end off a trip

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LIKE AN EAGLE. A flight over the Okavango Delta in a light aircraft gives you the chance to observe wildlife from a unique vantage.



I want to go too!

What did you drive? Everyone in our convoy drove 4x4 vehicles, but apart from Kubu Island and the Makgadikgadi pans, the route is mostly good tar road.

Which travel documents do I need?

As a South African you only need your passport to enter Botswana, Namibia or Zimbabwe, but for certain foreigners, visas are compulsory.

Is fuel readily available? Yes. You can fill up with petrol and diesel in Letlhakane, Maun, Shakawe, Katima Mulilo, Kasane and Nata. There are also supermarkets, butcheries and mechanics in all of these towns.

Where can I sleep? A room in **Granny's Lodge** in Letlhakane varies from P570 to P795 (about R750-R1 000) per night, depending on its size.

Contact ☎ +267 297 8246.

To camp on one of **Kubu Island's** 14 camp sites will cost P155.60 (about R200) per person per night. There are only a handful of long drop toilets here and no water or showers. You need to bring your own drinking water and braai wood and you are responsible for removing your own rubbish.

Visit 🌐 www.kubuisland.com

The **Drifters Maun Lodge** offers camping at R100 per person per night or accommodation in a tent with a bed for R595 per person or R990 for two sharing. Call the lodge on ☎ +267 7230 4472 or the South African booking office on 011 888 1160, 📧 drifters@drifters.co.za or 🌐 www.drifters.co.za.

Ngepi Camp in Namibia's Zambezi region gives you the option to camp (N\$140 per person per night) or sleep in a bush hut (N\$770 per person sharing, N\$1 155 single) or a treehouse (N\$880 per person sharing, N\$1 320 single). The bush huts and treehouses include breakfast. Ngepi has a bar and meals are available.

Contact ☎ +264 66 259 903, 📧 bookings@ngepicamp.com or 🌐 www.ngepicamp.com.

At **Thebe River Safaris** in Kasane it costs P1 005 per night for a double room and P1 281,50 for a family room with space for four people. It costs P105 per person per night to camp. There are power outlets, braai facilities, clean ablutions with hot showers, a bar, restaurant and a pool.

Contact: ☎ +267 625 099

From Onseepkans to Verneukpan... and beyond!

This three-day route sends you on a dusty stretch across the Bushmanland plains to the remarkable Verneukpan, finally spitting you out 670 km later near Three Sisters in the Karoo. When you arrive, your fingers are still a tad sticky from the koeksisters you bought in Pofadder – but you're a new person!

Words and photos **Toast Coetzer**





On the deck of the Red Rock River Camp, you can grab a front-row seat to the show: in this case, the soothing waters of the Orange River and its bustling birdlife. Bring your binoculars and see if you can spot the Orange River white-eye amid the riverine bushes. You won't easily miss the Goliath heron; it's probably standing downstream and fishing before it gets too dark.

Your hosts are Roché Schoeman and Adelaine Breedts – you'll probably meet them again around the campfire tonight. They offer rowing tours and angling expeditions (yellowfish!) on this beautiful stretch of the river.

The route starts close to the Onseepkans border post in the Northern Cape – it links up with the Namibian route detailed on page 8. The landscape is one of contrasts. Right next to the water, vineyards lie in neat green blocks, but as soon as you drive away

from the river, you enter a mountain desert where your ice cream has to be consumed in 30 seconds flat.

When you say goodbye to Adelaine and Roché at Red Rock River Camp, reset your odometer to 0. Within 500 m, you reach the Affieplaas butchery and kitchen where you can buy groceries and meat. They are open weekdays from 08:30 to 17:00 (Saturdays until 13:00). Just past Affieplaas is the border post where you turn right (GPS S28.73978 E19.30360) onto the R385 dirt road that takes you in a few long, straight shots to Pofadder. The R385 is always heavily corrugated; don't try to talk and eat at the same time while driving, or you'll end up biting your tongue.

At 7 km, there's a road that turns left – it's a shortcut to the N14 if you're aiming for Kakamas. Keep going straight, but pause to check out the ancient road sign on the right-hand side of the road. Besides the fact that it

still says "South West Africa" instead of "Namibia", there is interesting graffiti scratched into it by guys who were waiting for a lift. A regular destination was "Mas toe," meaning Kakamas. One unfortunate man was on his way to Upington for a court case on 10 May 1991... all of this info you'll find scratched into the green road sign. It's like a Facebook wall, one with surprisingly few expletives...

At 24 km is the farm Coboop, where a quiver tree forest stretches for almost 8 km on both sides of the road.

At 51 km, you reach the N14 tar road east of Pofadder. You've climbed about 600 m since you left the river this morning. Turn right (GPS S29.12522 E19.40051) and drive 250 m into the town until you see the KKK petrol station on your right. Fill up here and don't miss the Local is Lekker



home industry. During our visit, the koeksisters had just come out of the oil, and they were super fresh – restrain yourself or you'll finish off four right then and there!

The owner, Mercia Miller, and her team, Danielle Matthys and Shaif Bock, are second to none. You can buy pickles, jams, pies (R30 for larger pies and R8 for hand pies), banana bread and pasta salads. The best part? Their business hours are from 05:00 to 20:00 – yes, you read that right! Mercia's husband Stanley usually takes the early shift.

You won't see another shop for almost two days, so rather buy too much than too little. Especially those koeksisters.

From the KLK, follow the N14 westward for 100 m and turn left onto Voortrekker Street. Drive past a car wash called Die Honger and the Niemoller shop, Sassa office, Pofadder Hotel, Standard Bank, PEP, Oppiestoep takeaways, Agrimark, and others until you run out of street and the town. Turn left (GPS S29.13287 E19.39654) at the T-junction. You're now back on the R358 dirt road, and you're entering the real Bushmanland. Tonight you'll sleep at Verneukpan, but it'll take you all day to get there.

This is a day of isolation: the mobile signal disappears completely, and between Pofadder and the R27 tar road, we didn't see a single vehicle.

Of course, it's never truly empty here. Bushmanland simply asks you to try a little harder. A short distance outside the town, we saw something stir. It was a quartet of Karoo korhaans, which are, predictably, grey and extremely difficult to spot. Yet, they're beautiful birds – stop and slowly roll down your window. Make the effort. They trust their camouflage so much that they'll probably let you watch them for a while before they get nervous and stealthily mince off.

At 73,5 km, you pass the farm Witkoppies where the red Kalahari sand is visible on the hill. To the right, there are cattle pens with a small building against which someone has painted a quiver tree. At 79 km, you come to the farm Houmoed on your

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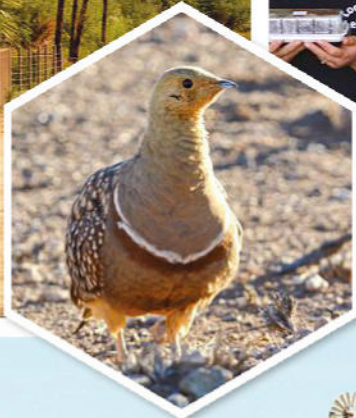
Of course, it's never truly empty here.
Bushmanland simply asks you to
try a little harder

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FARM LIFE. At Affieplaas (above) in Onseepkans you can stock up on meat and general provisions while Local is Lekker in Pofadder is perfect for padkos like koeksisters. You might meet the team: Danielle Matthys, Mercia Miller en Shaif Bock (group photo, right). Watch out for Namaqua sandgrouse (centre) by the roadside.





right; here you turn left (GPS S29.31453 E19.54672). The sign points to Kenhardt – if you continue straight on the R358, Bitterfontein is a day's journey away.

Within 1 km, unexpectedly, there's a picnic table under a battling mesquite tree. Your view: an old concrete dam, stone kraal and Houmoed's hill to the north. If you picnic here, you're probably the only person to do so in a year. A good reason to do it.

This road is a forgotten piece of South Africa. Every single road sign is so old it belongs in a museum. Not all the farms have name signs, but we looked at a 1:50 000 government map,

and you pass farms with names like Gannapoort, Lovedale, Quaggamaag, Nuwedam, Hartebeesvlei and, around 130 km, Vaalkop. The latter's entrance is adorned with aloes, cacti, old enamel dishes, the wreck of a 1968 Valiant station wagon, a couple of shot Vespas and an ornamental pink wind pump with "Immanuel – God is met ons" painted on the tail. A pack of friendly dogs came to bark at the fence for us.

Just past Vaalkop, the road veers to the left, and a bit farther along (at 134 km) there's an abandoned house on the right where someone has painted on the wall in Afrikaans: "The farm's name

is Kraandraai. It's me, Kobie Spaneberg, trespassing will be prosecuted." And then, next to it on the wall: "Very sorry for the handwriting. Good luck," followed by a little heart. Cryptic!

A pied crow on a telephone pole, a white-tailed mongoose scurrying across the road, and then you drive under an Eskom high-voltage line (136 km). You reach a crossroad at 139 km where you continue straight (left goes to Kakamas; right to Loeriesfontein) toward Kenhardt. Someone has painted little alien faces on the road sign, and you realise you do feel somewhat like a awkward

visitor from outer space.

At 142 km, someone has placed a hand-painted sign in the field that warns, again in Afrikaans: “You steal my sheep, I will catch you.”

You’ll see many a *kol* (swirl) and a *vloer* (floor) in this section of the Bushmanland – these aren’t exactly pans, but places where the water will run and sometimes pool when it does rain. You drive past Loogkolk se Vloer and then Sandkolk se Vloer.

If you’ve been using Google Maps, the voice on your phone will, at 177 km at the farm Groenrivier, ask you to turn right, but you can’t drive there. Keep going straight, over Jagkolkvloer to the farm Leidammetjies (192 km) where you turn right (GPS S29.55466 E20.60169).

This is a back road of a back road of a back road. It’s considerably

narrower and there are stretches of corrugation; drive slowly. You drive past Drieboomlaagte, Blouvlei and Moutonsvlei, and later reach the Sishen-Saldanha railway line (214 km) which you cross over using – surprise! – a bridge. Koppiesvlei of Frans and Maggie van Niekerk lies just a little along, and later Kosie and Hanlie Zandberg’s farm Gannakom. Eventually, at 244 km, you reach the R27. Turn right (GPS S29.85956 E20.73598) toward Brandvlei and drive 4 km until you turn left (GPS S29.89302 E20.71658) where the sign announces Karooboomdam / Swartbos / Bloubos. Kareeboomdam is the guest farm where you’ll be spending the night.

This is again a narrow dirt road. At 271 km, turn right at the T-junction (GPS S29.95727 E20.92269) – there’s

a sign saying “Wild Camping Reception”. Kareeboomdam’s main building is 2 km farther, but the owners won’t necessarily be there to check you in. You need to book in advance to stay at Verneukpan Wild Camping, and then receive directions to the campsite via WhatsApp. If you’ve ordered wood, you’ll find it at a predetermined spot next to the main building. There is a staff member somewhere around, but during our visit, we didn’t meet anyone.

Verneukpan Wild Camping is relatively new – it’s not the same place as the more well-known Verneukpan campsite on the eastern side of the pan. Follow the instructions in the WhatsApp message and drive a couple of kilometres from the main building through a gate or two and then you’re on the pan – the westernmost point of





Verneukpan. There are no amenities; drive out onto the pan and choose your spot. Bring your own water and take all your rubbish with you when you leave.

Verneukpan is all about silence and isolation, and it's entirely fitting that you've seen almost no people on your way here. Tonight, it's just you, your campfire and the stars. Possibly a jackal for company. A bit of me-time.

The following morning, retrace your steps back to the public road near the Kareeboomdam farmhouse and turn left (south). Your odometer should now be at around 283 km. Today, you drive through the tiny hamlet of Swartkop toward Carnarvon and then to the Soutpoort campsite north of Loxton.

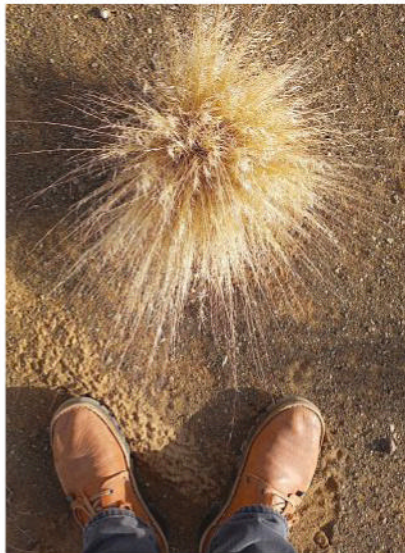
The road first heads south and then turns 90° east – shortly thereafter,

as the road twists, you pass by the Kareeboomleegte farmhouse. You then reach Swartkop (315 km) where some of the houses are still plastered with mud. There's a little church and shop, but no fuel. Turn right (GPS S30.13476 E21.05870) at three dead blue gum trees before you reach the shop – there's no road sign, but this is the road to Carnarvon.

The route follows the course of Bloubosleegte for a short while, passing by farms like Kameelboomputs and Jan Louwskolk (336 km). At the latter's yard, you drive right past an exceptional stone kraal – stop and see how large some of the building blocks are! At 348 km, you reach a T-junction with the R357 – turn left (GPS S30.38944 E21.02161) and drive east toward Vanwyksvlei. At 363 km, there's a bridge

over the Hartogskloof River (when it has water, it flows north, toward Verneukpan). To the left are dilapidated cement picnic tables and even a braai spot. There's no shade here, but if you want to braai, go ahead!

The landscape starts to change here – more hills and ridges appear. At 376 km, you must turn right (GPS S30.40719 E21.28959), and now you head south again to Carnarvon. Ground squirrels, pied crows, greater kestrels, pale chanting goshawks, mongoose, sheep – these are the only animals you see. Just when you think the landscape is untouched by civilisation, a bunch of white dishes appear in the distance like giant mushrooms. This is the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project's MeerKAT radio satellite site.



PAN-ORAMIC. Red Rock River Camp (opposite page) is perfectly situated on the banks of the Orange River. With luck you'll see the rare striped kingfisher here. At Verneukpan Wild Camping (this page) there is considerably less water, but it makes up for it in serenity.



Essentially, this Karoo installation collaborates with a SKA site in Australia, helping scientists peer into the farthest corners of the universe. Strange, right? That humanity looks outward from this middle-of-nowhere place searching for another middle-of-nowhere place even more distant!

At 390 km, you reach an unmanned office and gate that you simply drive through – you remain on a public road. Signs have recently been put up saying “Meerkat National Park”. This new park isn’t for tourists, but SanParks manages the environmental care of this 1 350 km² piece of land purchased when the SKA project moved in.

A bit farther, you’ll see the dishes standing to the right of a prominent mountain called Losberg.

In line with the dishes, your tyres suddenly meet blacktop at 414 km; keep going, but you’ll see the turnoff to the right – there’s security here. The tar road was built to make the SKA project more accessible for staff. Your car is going to be shocked after all the rough gravel road you’ve driven since Pofadder. You also see other people and cars again. (After leaving Verneukpan this morning, we’ve only seen two cars until now.)

The tar road winds through Willem Meintjies Kloof, where karee trees abound, and then uphill through the short Konkaspoort Pass. At 477 km, you pass Klerefontein, which serves as a base for the SKA project.

You reach the R63 tar road (481 km) and turn left here (GPS S30.99437 E22.01164) toward Carnarvon. (About 5 km along, you pass the turnoff to the Sandrivier Guest Farm, in case the sun has already disappeared.) Refuel in Carnarvon and buy something for the pantry. The KVB shop at the Quest petrol station sells, among other items, braai meat and sheepskin slippers.

From Carnarvon, follow the R63 south toward Loxton until you find the turnoff for Soutpoort (541 km) – turn right (GPS S31.34538 E22.30044) and follow the farm road for 2 km. We were in a 2007 Subaru Forester, and it handled the road quite well.

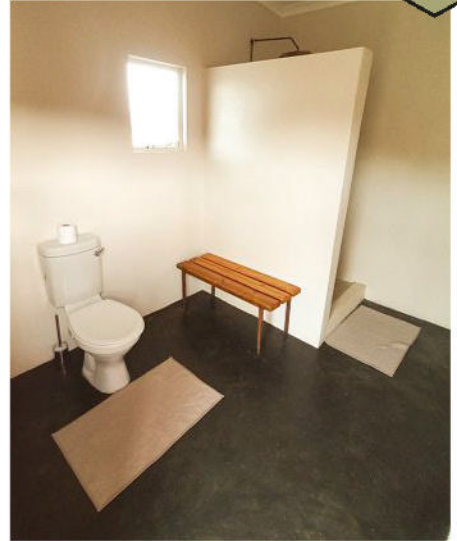
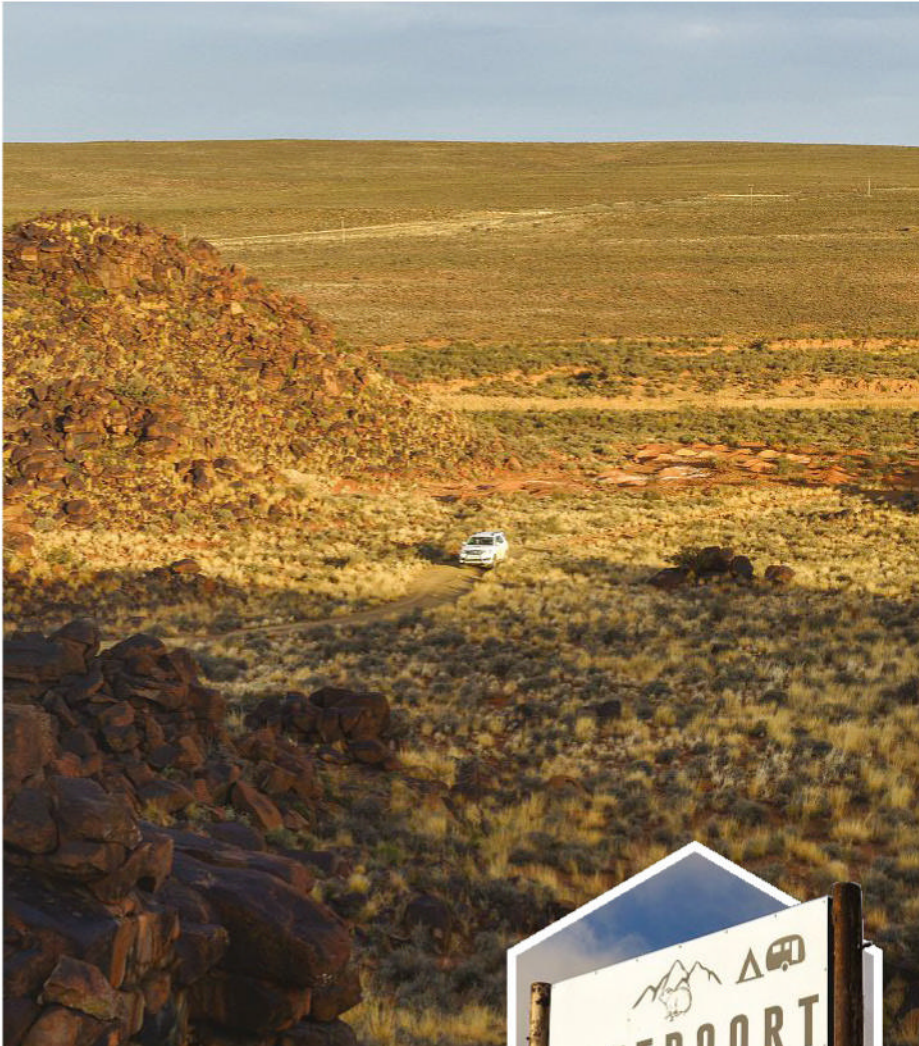
Soutpoort’s two campsites are laid out among picturesque koppies and

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Soutpoort’s two campsites are laid out among picturesque koppies...

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UNWIND. Each campsite at Soutpoort near Loxton has an undercover area for your tent or car, and the bathroom has a hot water shower and flush toilet. Go take a dip in the plunge pool when it's hot!





OUTBACK. From Verneukpan, it's gravel all the way until you reach the turnoff to SKA's "satellite dishes" when you hit a tar road to Carnarvon (right). Near Verneukpan you'll see this small church (far right) in the tiny settlement of Swartkop.



are out of sight from each other. Each has a shelter for your tent or vehicle, plus a bathroom with a flush toilet and shower. One of the sites has a power point (solar). There's also a little plunge pool where you can cool off in the heat of the day with a Savanna, overlooking the small Soutpoort River valley.

Soutpoort is one of the best new campsites in the Karoo.

The final day of this route takes you to Loxton, and from there, a back road to the N12 near Three Sisters. First drive the 2 km back to the R63 and then turn right toward Loxton, about 16 km ahead. You can also refuel here. Turn right (GPS S31.42768 E22.35014) into the town, drive 400 m and then turn left – continue straight on for 400 m until you reach the Dutch Reformed Church.

Just to the left of the church is Loxton Lekker, a charming eatery and meeting spot for locals and tourists alike.

Manie and Hester Esterhuizen are the couple running the show. Order a the "Big Omelette" (five eggs...) for R85, lamb pie for R50 or something sweet like the chocolate cake at R35 per slice. The coffee and milkshakes are also top-notch. There are baked goods for sale, as well as local garlic or gifts including crocheted blankets. Loxton Lekker is open weekdays from 08:00 to 17:00 (Saturdays until 13:00).

Once you've soaked up Loxton, head south from the church circle (toward Beaufort West) using Jooste Street, which later becomes the R381. About 800 m from the church, already out of town, look out for the turn-off to the left (GPS S31.48523 E22.35008). Now

you're back on the kind of dirt road you want to be on! Your odometer should read 543 km. The road winds through classic Karoo landscape, more varied than on the first two days of your trip. It's a koppie-studded world; within the first few kilometres, Rooikop and Jooskop lie to your left, and at 552 km the formation to the right of the road is called Die Preekstoel (the pulpit). Just past Erasmuskraal, you'll pass through a little drift (there might be water) in the Brak River.

Our visit in June 2023 was after a good rainy season, and there were some flood-damaged sections, but that only adds to the backroad fun!

Pass by Altona's beautiful homestead. The prominent hill to the right of the road is called Wildehondskop, at close to 1 500 m it's almost 1 200 km higher



above sea level than where your trip began at Onseepkans.

At 590 km, slow down – the road descends deceptively until you drive through a poort. This is presumably Bokpoort, although it's not named as such on any maps. The poort cuts through a ridge called Kwaggashoogte which otherwise blocks your way like the Great Wall of China. Just past it, the road veers northeast past Slypfontein and then more east to Liebenbergs Dam (612 km). Stop here and use your binoculars to look for South African shelduck, pied avocet, and black-winged stilt near the large dam. Elsewhere, we saw speckled pigeon and Namaqua sandgrouse, and sometimes a steenbok.

At 615 km, you'll reach a T-junction where you turn right (GPS S31.54965 E22.82775) – the sign says Wagenaarskraal (Victoria West lies to the left).

You'll pass another farm with a large dam, Middeldam, then Bonnievale and Van der Waltspoort, where you pass through the farmyard with its stately buildings – to the right, you'll also see a dam wall built in the poort. Just after the dam wall, keep straight (left); don't take the turning to the right. The farm Wagenaarskraal is at 650 km, surrounded by beautiful trees, where there is a T-junction – turn left (GPS S31.80948 E22.81079) in the direction of Victoria West (Beaufort West is to the right if you want to reach the N1 main route that way).

A mere 4 km later, turn right (GPS S31.78816 E22.83918) at the fork (the left goes to Victoria West). Soon you'll cross the Soutrivier and its dense reeds on a long cement low-water bridge.

Just before the dirt road meets the tarmac of the N12, there's a drift that was full of water during our visit – and deeper than expected! At 673 km, you'll hit the N12 – turn right toward the N1, which you reach at 684 km.

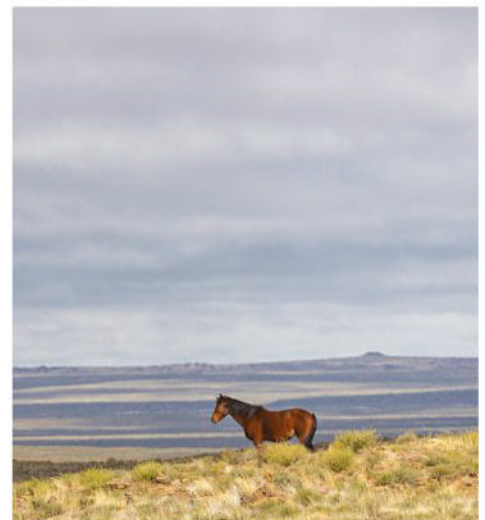
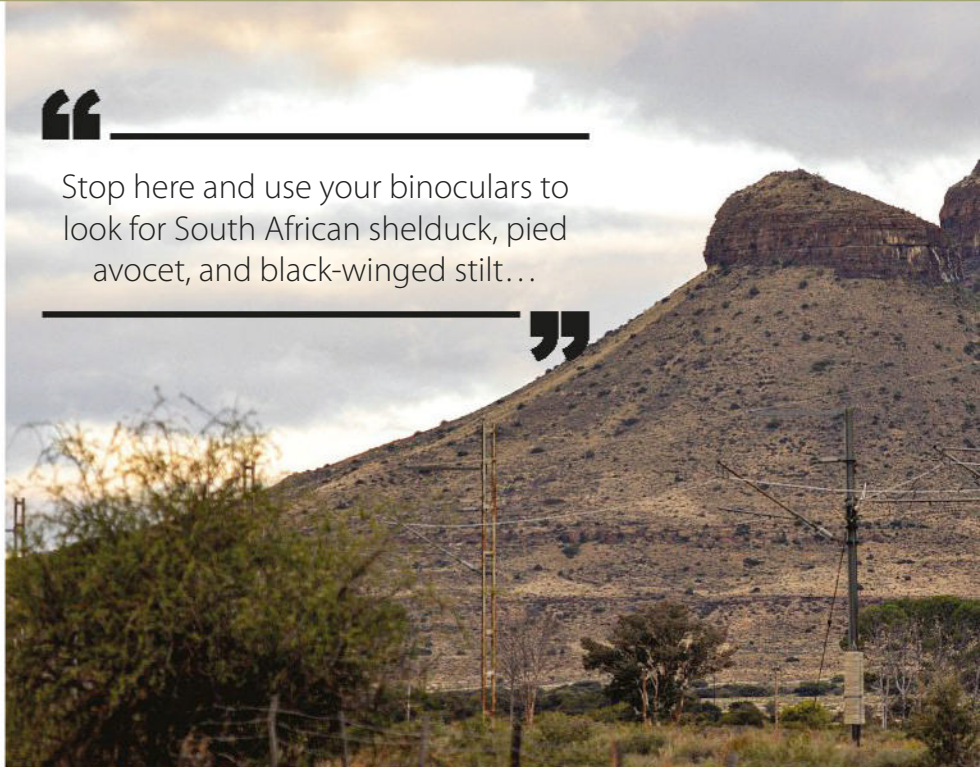
The fun is over for now! The Shell Ultra City at Three Sisters is just to the right, and the Three Sisters guest farm just to the left.

How do you feel now? Karoo'd out? Or up for another go?

“

Stop here and use your binoculars to look for South African shelduck, pied avocet, and black-winged stilt...

”





LOCAL. Loxton Lekker is a lekker place indeed! Owners Manie and Hester Esterhuizen (right) and barista Nicolas de Bruin (below) will make sure you don't go hungry or thirsty.



Where we stayed

Red Rock River Camp

Contact 📞 083 660 7798 (Adelaine)

📧 redrockrivercamp.co.za

Price R200 pp for camping – luxuries including hot showers included. A day's rowing on the Orange River starts from R750 pp.

Price R75 pppn for camping plus R200 per vehicle. This is a bush camp with no water or amenities.

Soutpoort

Contact 📞 072 623 7926 (send a WhatsApp to Melissa)

📧 thirionm@gmail.com

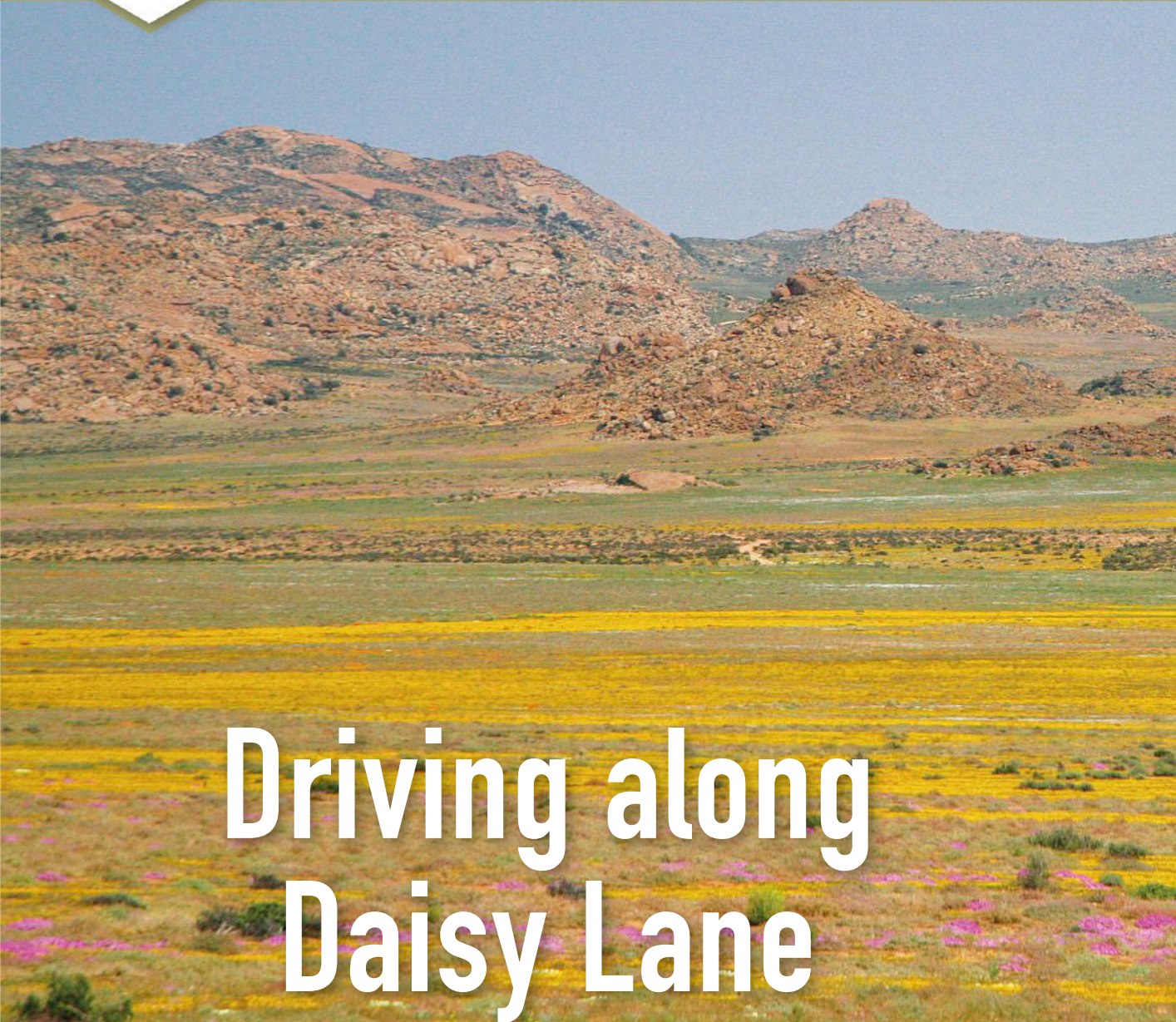
Price R400 per stand for four (then R90 pp) and R200 per caravan or off-road trailer.

Verneukpan Wild Camping

Contact 📞 083 227 2239 (Carol)

📧 verneukpancamping.co.za





Driving along Daisy Lane

Namaqualand's flower season occurs from July to October – peaking in late August to early September – so you'd better hurry if you want to book a camping spot for this year's spectacle.

Join us on a leisurely drive from Kakamas to Nieuwoudtville in search of the perfect floral show.

Words and pictures **Cyril Klopfer**

The N14 barrels headlong through the Green Kalahari, barely changing its heading. Quiver trees hold vigil on pale yellow grasslands while hot tar hums under your rig's tyres as you cross ephemeral rivers. Signs stating their peculiar names flash by: Hartbees, Yas se Laagte, Kaboep...

Snow white daisies rise out of the red sand, as if they're grateful for the recent rains.

Yesterday you drove nearly 900 km from Gauteng to Kakamas in the Northern Cape. It was quite a trek and no wonder you checked in at the



Kakamas Hotel rather than pitch a tent.

We'll definitely be camping on this trip, but that comfy hotel room allowed you to charge your camera's batteries (and your own) and format its memory cards in preparation for what is to come. The hotel's restaurant served slow-roasted lamb tails (R69 per serving), a Karoo delicacy known as skaapstertjies that probably wrought havoc with your cholesterol, but so be it, they were delicious and you're on holiday.

And now we're on our way to Namaqualand. The first town after Kakamas is Pofadder where the wildflowers on the side of the road are

increasing in number. It's time to dig out your wildflower guide book because you're itching to know what species they are.

The petals of one specimen are golden yellow with black spots in a ring near the centre. Your guide book identifies it as *Gazania lichtensteinii*, or botterblom (butter flower) in the common vernacular. Next to it is a type of succulent; it has pale yellow flowers with delicate strands for petals. You flip through your book until you find it: *Malephora crassa*, or golden fingers. The common names are adorable!

As we approach Springbok you notice green and gold stinkskaapbos,

meaning stinky sheep bush (or *Tripteris oppositifolia*) while maiden's quiver trees (*Aloe ramosissima*) shyly peek over ridges as we pass by.

On the outskirts of the Northern Cape's largest town we turn left onto the R355 regional road and follow the signs to the Goegab Nature Reserve. We go into more detail on page 86 in a short feature called *Get yourself toe Goegap!* Here we'll summarise as follows: after paying R300 per vehicle and R30 per occupant, you get to drive up to five circular trails varying from dead easy (the Ribbokkop route) to mildly challenging (the Bloumyn route). You'll need four-wheel drive if you want to see

the entire reserve, or a diff locker and good ground clearance at the very least, and it is unlikely that your vehicle will get scratched, but the Bloumyn route might bend your bakkie's side steps if you kept them fitted.

After exploring Goegab thoroughly – it requires several hours – it's time to set up camp for the night. Leave Goegab Nature Reserve as you entered it and make your way to the Springbok town centre. There are a couple of supermarkets if you need to restock on provisions.

Continue along Springbok's main thoroughfare called Voortrekker Road until you reach a large sign outside of town for Namastat Lodge & Caravan Park – you can't miss it.

Namastat has 25 stands, one ablution block, and half a dozen self-catering chalets. There are patches of grass but you'll likely camp on hard sand in the

shadow of a karee tree. Each stand has electricity (regular domestic sockets), tap water and a built-up braai.

Good morning! Today we join the N7 highway and stay on it for exactly 8 km until we reach a turn-off marked as Hondeklipbaai and Soebatsfontein. The coordinates are S29.76767 E17.83499 if you're unsure.

A gravel road now leads us first to the Nantes Pass followed by the Messelpad Pass. Near the summit of the latter pass, at an altitude of 400 m, you'll see a lay-by on the side of the road. Here are its coordinates: S29.89931 E17.66145.

Below you, on the banks of a dry Buffels River, are the remains of an old jail. A twin track leads down to it, but the trail is severely eroded and too challenging for most SUVs. You can, however, walk the 500 m to the ruin.

The prison dates back to 1869

when it held convict labourers, and these convicts were used to build the passes that brought you here. Locals tell of a German overseer who was so feared by the labourers that they wouldn't dare to defy him. One day the stern overseer's spouse arrived at Hondeklipbaai by ship. A runner was sent ahead to announce the surprise visit. The German – who had since taken a Nama mistress – drew his revolver and put a bullet in his own head. As the dead man slowly toppled from his horse, the convicts fled into the surrounding veld. It is said that those who weren't recaptured, eventually settled in the nearby town of Soebatsfontein.

We couldn't confirm whether this story is true or not, but it is delightful to listen when locals share this yarn laced with their typical Namaqua humour.

The next mountain pass is the



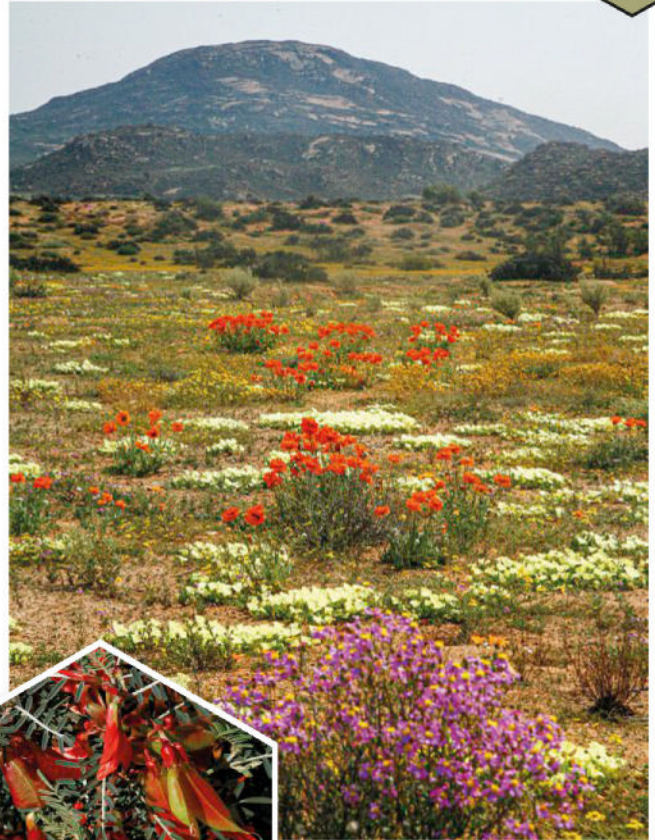


Wildeperdehoek Pass with its dramatic views over an immense coastal plain. Pay attention to the innumerable spots in the veld, each measuring approximately 20 meters across. Locals call these spots heuweltjies (or kraaltjies), and they are the aftermath of termite activity that occurred between 4 000 and 30 000 years ago. A termite species called *Microhodotermes viator* built huge mounds and by doing so changed the pH level in the soil. The mounds have since weathered away, but where they once stood, different plant varieties grow within the circles than in the surrounding veld.

At the bottom of Wildeperdehoek Pass is a junction for Soebatsfontein, Koiingnaas and Hondeklipbaai – we’re taking the road to Soebatsfontein.

Once in Soebatsfontein you can ask the locals where the western entrance to the Namaqua National Park is, but there are road signs directing you to it.

The gate is often left unattended, even during flower season, and you’re free to let yourself in – just remember to draw the gate closed behind you. We are now driving through the highest section of the park called the Roof of the Namaqualand and before long we’re surrounded by a field of cheerful orange daisies!



LESSERTIA FRUTESCENS
CANCER BUSH

“
It’s time to dig out your
wildflower guide book
because you’re itching to
know what species they are
”



BACK HOME. What does a camper bakkie (above) and a tortoise have in common? They both carry their house on their back. Goegap Nature Reserve is a remarkable place with stunning vistas around every corner.

This is the Skilpad section of the national park and it is a Mecca for flower photographers. Its fame is due in no small part to Colla Swart (born in 1930) and her Canadian friend, Freeman Patterson. The duo hosted photography workshops in Colla's hometown of Kamieskroon during the eighties, and they soon became known around the world.

Tannie Colla no longer lives in Kamieskroon, however, and the last we heard she moved to Piketberg where she lives with her son and daughter-in-law. Freeman returned to Canada in the late eighties where he continues to be a celebrated photographer.

Out of the big three flower destinations; Goegab, Skilpad and Nieuwoudtville (we're still heading towards the latter), Skilpad was the least impressive during our visit. It remains a bucket list destination, though, and is by no means a waste of time.

Stop at reception and belatedly obtain your permit – R50 per person during our visit. We now leave the park by the main gate and make our way to Kamieskroon.

Here you'll find two camping options: the first is at the back of the Kamieskroon Hotel on the outskirts of town and the other is Verbe Caravan Park within the town itself. Verbe is the more popular of the two and during our visit it was chock full of motorhomes, caravans and off-road trailers sporting number plates from across the country.

On this trip we're going to skip Kamieskroon's campsites and make our way to Leliefontein and Gamoep – the turn-off to these towns is near the hotel.

The gravel road crawls up the Kamieshoogte Pass and offers a striking view of the Crown of Kamieskroon –

a twisty rock that resembles a soft serve ice cream atop a conical mountain.

Follow the gravel road over the aptly named Draaiklip Pass onto the village of Leliefontein. Despite the promising name, there aren't many flowers here and so we continue on to the Groenkloof Pass and eventually join the R355 regional road. Turn right at the Platbakkies Guest Farm and follow the broad gravel road for 33 km until it ends in the R358 regional road. Look for a road sign and follow its directions to Kliprand.

Kliprand is a picturesque hamlet in a kloof. Whitewashed houses are dotted throughout the shallow valley which is covered in seasonal wildflowers. You won't find casual tourists making frivolous TikTok videos and taking selfies here. Only true enthusiasts know about this hidden gem. You may get a knowing wink from a passer-by and perhaps a tip-off on where to take the perfect picture.

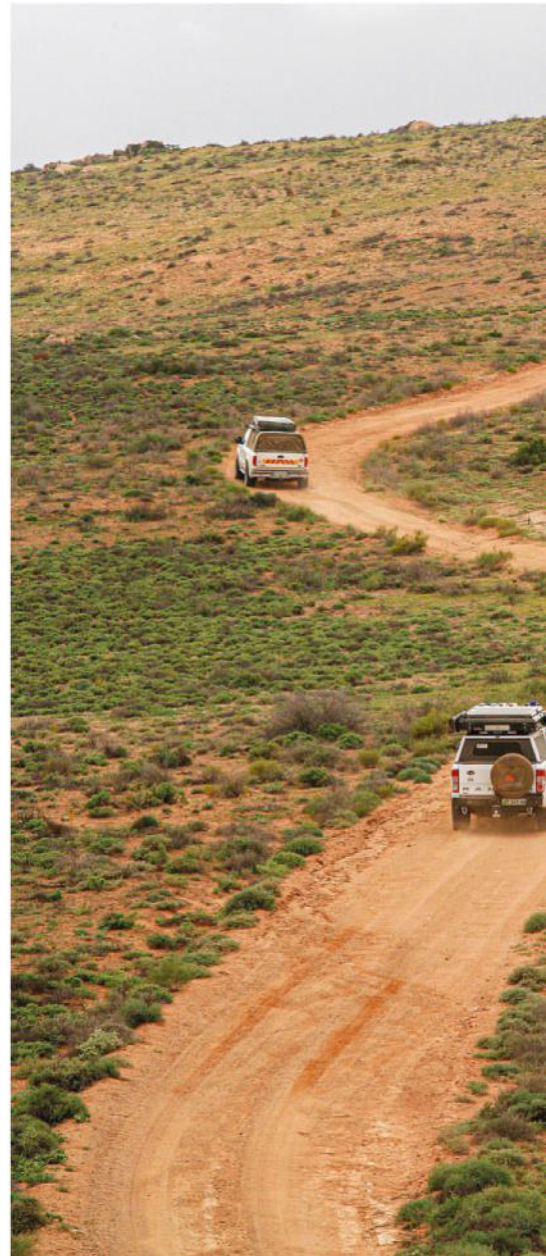
Be on the lookout for cancer bush (*Lessertia frutescens*), in bloom from June to December, of which Kliprand has many. This remarkable plant has several medicinal uses. The Khoisan people use it to treat wounds and fevers. Trek Boers used it to soothe stomach cramps and period pains. More recently experiments were done using the plant as a possible cure for cancer – hence the name – with promising results. Trials are also being conducted to test its efficacy as an immunity booster against tuberculosis and HIV/Aids.

Eight kilometres outside Kliprand we turn left, back on the R355, heading toward Loeriesfontein. The R355 eventually terminates in the tarred R357 where we turn right toward Nieuwoudtville.

“

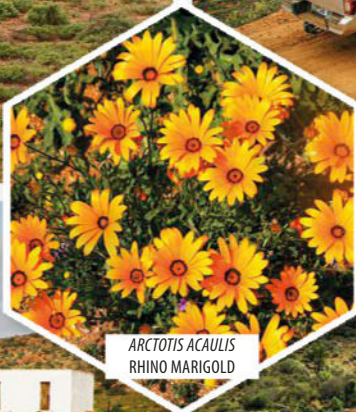
You won't find casual tourists making frivolous TikTok videos and taking selfies here. Only true enthusiasts know about this hidden gem

”





COUNTRY ROADS. We love gravel roads because they lead to great places; like quirky Soebatsfontein (above), the impressive Wildeperdehoek Pass (below) and picturesque Kliprand (bottom left) where whitewashed houses are dotted throughout fields of gold.



ARCTOTIS ACAULIS
RHINO MARIGOLD



We are now in a region called the Knersvlakte. According to local lore the name is derived from the crunching sound of ox wagon wheels on the quarts-covered plains.

Drive over Koopmanskloof se Hoogte, a minor pass, until you reach the signage for Kuboesberg Game Farm (S31.24356 E19.20119), our destination for the day. The dirt road closely follows a river and after 19 km we'll reach the gate to the farm.

Carl van Heerden and Rose-Mare Venter are our hosts for the evening, and the couple will pull out all the stops to make your stay a memorable one. At the main lodge you'll find a big-screen TV, WiFi, pool table, pizza oven and a shop where you can buy sweets

such as fudge and date balls (R25 per packet), and many more things besides.

Despite the excellent company and entertainment options, we opt for the quiet of Kudu Camp deep within the folds of the Bokkeveld Mountains. Here is a neat face-brick structure with a shower, flushing toilet, basin with a vanity and an outdoor kitchen. Hot water is provided by a wood-fired boiler.

When the embers in the fire pit begin to dwindle, look up and regard the multitude of stars. Tonight we'll sleep like a log.

Farewells are seldom cheerful and it feels particularly sad when Carl and Rose-Mare sees you off. But we've got places to go and things to see. Return

to the R357 but this time we head away from Nieuwoudtville towards a place called Karooboom Kolk. After just 2 km on the R357 we turn left at a sign for Gannabos Quiver Tree Forest on the Rondekop road.

There are many places in both South Africa and Namibia that claim to have the largest or densest quiver tree forest, but Gannabos' forest is quite remarkable. The quiver trees (*Aloidendron dichotomum*) are so abundant here that they almost appear to have been planted by Sappi for future harvesting.

Continue along the Rondekop road, over the Hantamsrivier Pass and around two low mountains called Brandkop and Klipkoppies. We are now

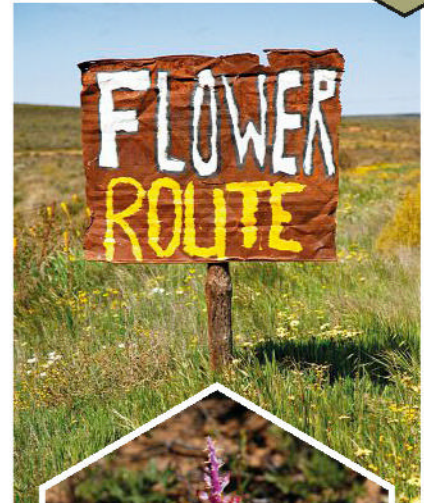




“

You can barely see the soil below the vast field of gold. If you crouch down and brush the daisies aside you'll discover purple felicias (*Felicia australis*) and snowy witeendekos (white duck food, or *Cotula nudicaulis*) competing against the deluge of *Asteracea*

”



LACHENALIA MUTABILIS
BONTVIOOLTJIE

I also want to go!

Can I travel solo? Yes, even the back roads are fairly busy (given their remoteness) this time of year because people come from afar.

How long? The route as we describe it here is 900 km in length and requires at least three days to experience just a bit of the Namaqualand.

What type of vehicle? The roads are quite good, but occasionally, like at Goegab, you'll need to engage four-wheel drive.

How much fuel? The longest distance between fuel stops is 300 km (Kamieskroon to Nieuwoudtville).

Can my dog join me? Goegap Nature Reserve and Namaqualand National Park unfortunately don't allow pets.

What emergency equipment? Always a tyre repair kit, and maybe a tow rope and jumper leads.

May I ride my motorcycle? Indeed! Namaqua National Park will allow touring motorcycles such as a GS, but not scramblers and quads.



approaching Nieuwoudtville, but before we reach the town centre we pay a visit to the municipal wildflower reserve.

It's is time to pull out your guide book again because you'll be referencing it until the pages turn dog-eared. The reserve's low-lying part is covered in jackal daisies (*Osteospermum pinnatum*) that resemble freshly fallen snow. But look closer, there are also white Namaqualand daisies (*Dimorphotheca sinuata*) and ox-eye daisies (*Dimorphotheca nudicaulis*) sprinkled in the mix.

The prettiest flowers, in our opinion,

grow on the rocky ridges in the upper parts of the reserve. Here you'll find the brightly coloured bontviooltjies (*Lachenalia mutabilis*) with their bulbils ranging in colour from violet, yellow to red, all on the same pedicel. You'll also find the endemic rooikatstert (*Bulbinella latifolia* var. *doleritica*) which can be mistaken for the more common geelkatstert. Your guide book explains that the *doleritica* variant has a reddish stem and typically a reddish flower as well, caused by the red doleritic clay of the Bokkeveld Plateau near Nieuwoudtville.

And look at that! *Trachyandra*

falcata, or veldkool, is an edible plant and therefore a special find if you're a forager. Be careful not to tread on that red cup-and-saucer (*Androcymbium latifolium*)!

It is easy to lose track of time in the wildflower reserve, but there're lots more to see around town. Drive down the town's main road, Voortrekker Street, and be sure to buy freshly grilled askoek with cheese and apricot jam filling. The main road's name changes to Oorlogskloof Road on the outskirts of town which leads to Clanwilliam, although we're not going that far.

Roughly 12 km outside





DROSANTHEMUM LATIPETALUM
KAROODOUVYGIE

Nieuwoudtville we come to the Matjiesfontein farm stall. There are crowds here, the parking lot is bursting at the seams and yet a driver manages to squeeze in his bus full of tourists as well. You can sit down for tripe and coffee (R60 per plate during our visit), but if the heaving mass of tourists is too much to handle, we advise you to grab a permit (R25) and head out to the flowers.

Matjiesfontein has, without a doubt, the most flowers in Nieuwoudtville. You can barely see the soil below the vast field of gold. If you crouch down

and brush the daisies aside you'll discover purple felicias (*Felicia australis*) and snowy witeendekos (*Cotula nudicaulis*) competing against the deluge of *Asteracea*.

Bakkies with open canopies are parked together, their occupants lifting out picnic baskets and setting up tables among the flowers. Girls pose for pictures. Everyone is happy.

Our final destination for this tour lies farther down the road. The Oorlogskloof road forks 7 km after Matjiesfontein. We're taking the road to the right, the Moedverloor

ENDINGS. The route ends on a high note in Nieuwoudtville. Here you'll see masses of flowers and the Oorlogskloof Canyon (top middle). Do take a walk among the flowers, but try not to tread on them and spoil the spectacle for others.

Where we stayed

Kakamas Hotel

Contact 📞 054 431 0976

✉️ book@kakamashotel.co.za

🌐 kakamashotel.co.za

Cost R1 005 pppn (breakfast included)

Namastat Caravan Park

Contact 📞 027 718 1832

✉️ book@namastatlodge.co.za

🌐 namastatlodge.co.za

Cost R250 per stand (2 persons) and R50 thereafter

Kuboesberg Game Farm

Contact 📞 087 808 8854

✉️ carl@telkomsa.net

🌐 niewoudtville.com/kuboesberg

Cost R185 pppn

Papkuilsfontein Guest Farm

Contact 📞 072 555 1416

✉️ info@papkuilsfontein.com

🌐 papkuilsfontein.com

Cost R200 pppn





KUBOESBERG. A journalist reclines in his camping chair contemplating the ways to convince his editor that he can't come in to the office on Monday. The assignment among the lovely flowers requires a few more days.

road. After 2 km you'll encounter the entrance to Papkuilsfontein Guest Farm.

The flowers on this farm aren't as overwhelming as that of Matjiesfontein. Instead, the flowers seem more natural, growing mainly on the centre-divide of

twin track roads and on ploughed fields. Fynbos such as wagon trees (*Protea nitida*) en sugarbush (*Protea repens*) adorn the campsite.

Take one last drive along Papkuilsfontein's 4x4 trail to the edge

of the Oorlogskloof Canyon. After this final thrill we return to the campsite to settle in. Each stand has its own private bathroom with an outside kitchen.

Have a look at the pictures you took earlier while your campfire crackles cheerily. Are you sure you identified that plant correctly? Didn't you perhaps confuse a kleinganskos (*Cotula barbata*) with a kleinperdekaroo (*Oedera genistifolia*). They look nearly identical.

But does it really matter in the end? Beautiful is beautiful no matter how you labelled it. You've just spent three days in a vast garden, after all.

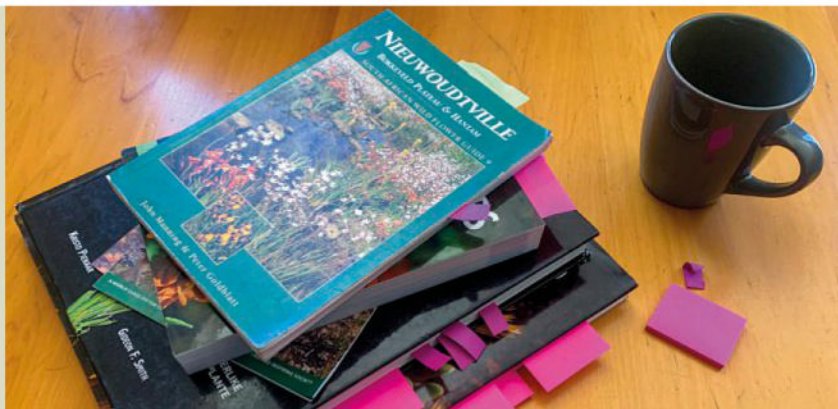
A neighbour walks past your campsite and randomly mentions that he saw koekemakranka (*Gethyllis campanulata*) near the Hantam Botanical Gardens earlier today. You've never seen one of those! You'll simply have to stay another day or perhaps return next year. So many jewels await you in the Namaqualand.

BOOK SMARTS

You probably noticed that we used two naming conventions when referring to a flower: the common vernacular and the botanical name. One isn't superior to the other and they both serve important purposes. Vernacular names are often in Afrikaans because the first European explorers and migrant farmers were Dutch – and the Dutch names were later taken into Afrikaans. There are, however, also vernacular names in English and Zulu, to use just two examples, although you'll have a hard time finding these flowers in the Namaqualand.

Every vernacular name carries with it a cultural component. It may suggest what the plant was used for or what it reminded its name giver of. Common names can be imprecise, though, because there are more than one type of magrietjie, lily and umdubu.

As adorable and informative as vernacular names may be, botanists also have to rely on scientific names to accurately identify a species. The first part of a botanical name is traditionally taken from Greek. It is the name of the genus to which the plant belongs and it serves



much the same purpose as a person's surname. The second part of a botanical name is typically Latin and it is equal to a person's given name. And like given names, there can be two of these to signify a variant of a known species.

Let's use *Bulbinella latifolia* var. *doleritica* as an example. *Bulbinella* is the genus, or 'surname', *latifolia* is particular to the species, or 'given name', and *doleritica* is the variant, or 'second name'. The common vernacular, Rooikatstert, would be equal to a nickname. In human terms it could be expressed as Smith, Richard William, with the nickname being Dick, or Bill.

Since there are nearly 20 000 distinct

species of flowers in South Africa, nobody can be expected to identify them all – few actual botanists could manage such a feat. A good guide book like the ones shown on the adjacent page will go a long way to teach you how to distinguish between the 10 main flower families, for example daisies, ericas and orchids.

It also helps to know that certain flowering plants will only grow in certain regions. You'll never be stuck telling creeping sage (*Salvia repens*) and wild sage (*Salvia disermas*) apart because they won't grow in each other's respective biomes.

So, if you were wondering if we at *Drive & Camp* were some kind of plant geniuses,



we're not! Here are some of the books that made us sound so clever.

***Namaqualand: a succulent desert* by R Cowling and S Pierce, Fernwood Press**

It's a sizable coffee table book that won't fit in your bakkie's cubby hole. It also won't help much to identify a wildflower. What it does offer is plenty of knowledge pertaining to the region, the first European botanists and the legacy of the Namas.

***Nieuwoudville, Bokkeveld plateau & Hantam* by JC Manning and P Goldblatt, Botanical Society of South Africa**

This guide book is no longer in print, and it is worth its weight in gold if you can track down a copy. It has a sharp focus on the type of flowering plants found around Nieuwoudville. Although it doesn't contain each and every Namaqua flowering plant, it does a good job of getting you started.

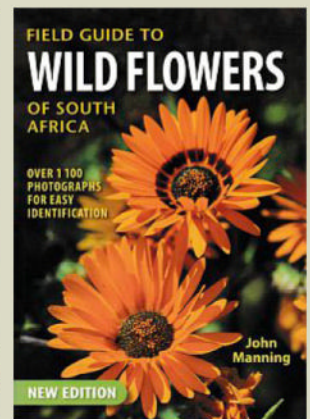
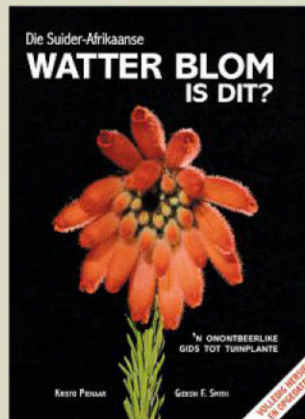
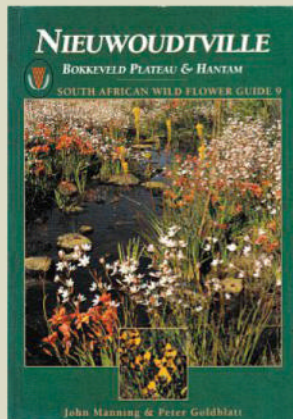
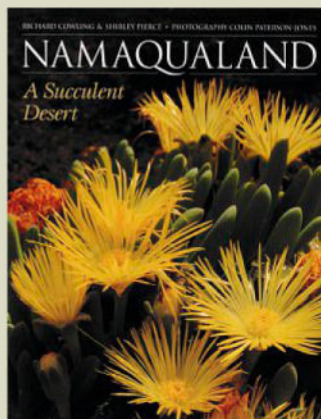
***Watter blom is dit?* by K Pienaar and GF Smith, Penguin Random House**

You know it's a good flower guide if Kristo Pienaar's name is on the cover! This is another huge coffee table book, but if you purchased bulbs and seeds and plan to

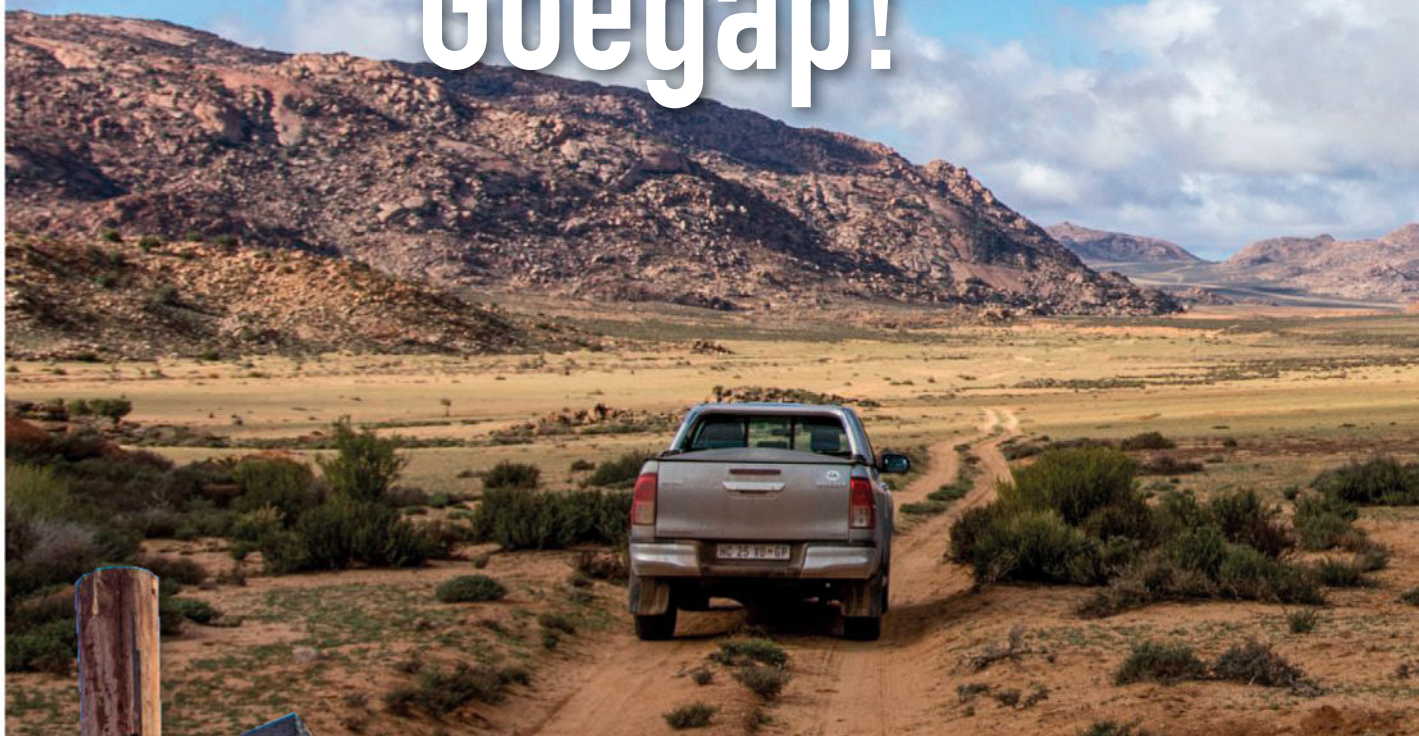
raise your own piece of Namaqualand in your suburban garden, then this book is essential reading. We have an Afrikaans copy, but it's also available in English under the title *What flower is that?*

***Field guide to wild flowers of South Africa* by JC Manning, Struik Publishers**

Like Doc Pienaar, John Manning is one of the most respected research botanists in South Africa. In this guide book John doesn't focus on Namaqualand alone – he specialises in iris and hyacinth families – but you can use it to identify wildflowers across the country.



Get yourself to Goegap!



The Goegap Nature Reserve outside Springbok is one of the best flower destinations during spring. But there is also an excellent 4x4 trail where you can play with your off-road vehicle all year round.

Words and photos **Evan Naudé**

Once a year, Namaqualand throws a colourful floral display that attracts visitors like swarms of bees. And then, when the flowers fade, the tourists also disappear like the morning mist. It is therefore easy to overlook this region at other times of the year when you rush through on your way to Namibia.

Namaqualand is, however, a place where you need to take your time and take a closer look at the landscape. Then you start to see its unique

features. The 4x4 trail in the Goegap Nature Reserve outside Springbok is a great example of this: it is one of the best flower-viewing trails, but also an excellent route throughout the year. Especially if you want to avoid the flurry of tourists.

Once through the park gate, drive 4 km along the tar road to the tourism building and look for the signs indicating the “Tourist Route” to the right. Turn off onto the dirt road and switch





LAND OF THE NAMA. Goegap's three circular routes are lovely no matter what time of the year you visit. It leads you to places in Namaqualand that few people get to see.

over into 4x4 mode – not only to make your ride easier, but also to protect the route against unnecessary damage and erosion. Follow the road past the picnic sites and across a wide plain until you find a sign indicating the 4x4 trail to the left. Follow this road to a T-junction with a sign for Tierkloof to the left and Klip Pass to the right.

From here, the route (about 60 km in total) is divided into three loops. So, you can choose whether to do all three or just certain sections of the route. The first loop lies in the eastern corner of the park and includes the steep Witsand Pass, which has a difficulty rating of 3. You drive over the Klip Pass (which, as the name suggests in Afrikaans, is littered with rocks) and follow the trail over a beautiful open grassland to a fork in the road. Keep right here. The trail turns north with a loop and brings you down the Witsand Pass and finally back to the Klip Pass.

Here, you can choose to turn right for the loop over the Rooiberg and past the Witsand hut in the north of the park. On the far side of the hut, you take the Klip trail down to a T-junction where you turn right in the direction of Tierkloof. Keep straight and the trail takes you up the west side of the Carolusberg. At



“

It is one of the best flower-viewing trails, but also an excellent route throughout the year. Especially if you want to avoid the flurry of tourists

”



ROCK ON. There are approximately 60 km worth of routes in the park. All offer magnificent views of the Namaqua landscape with its geological oddities.





the top is a road to the right leading to Bloumyn. This is the toughest piece of trail on the whole route and in places you have to pick your line over the rocks with great care.

When you arrive at a massive rocky ridge, the turnoff on the left leads to an abandoned mine shaft, but it's a nasty piece of road and the park rates it as a 4. You can, however, walk the remaining 200 m if you are concerned

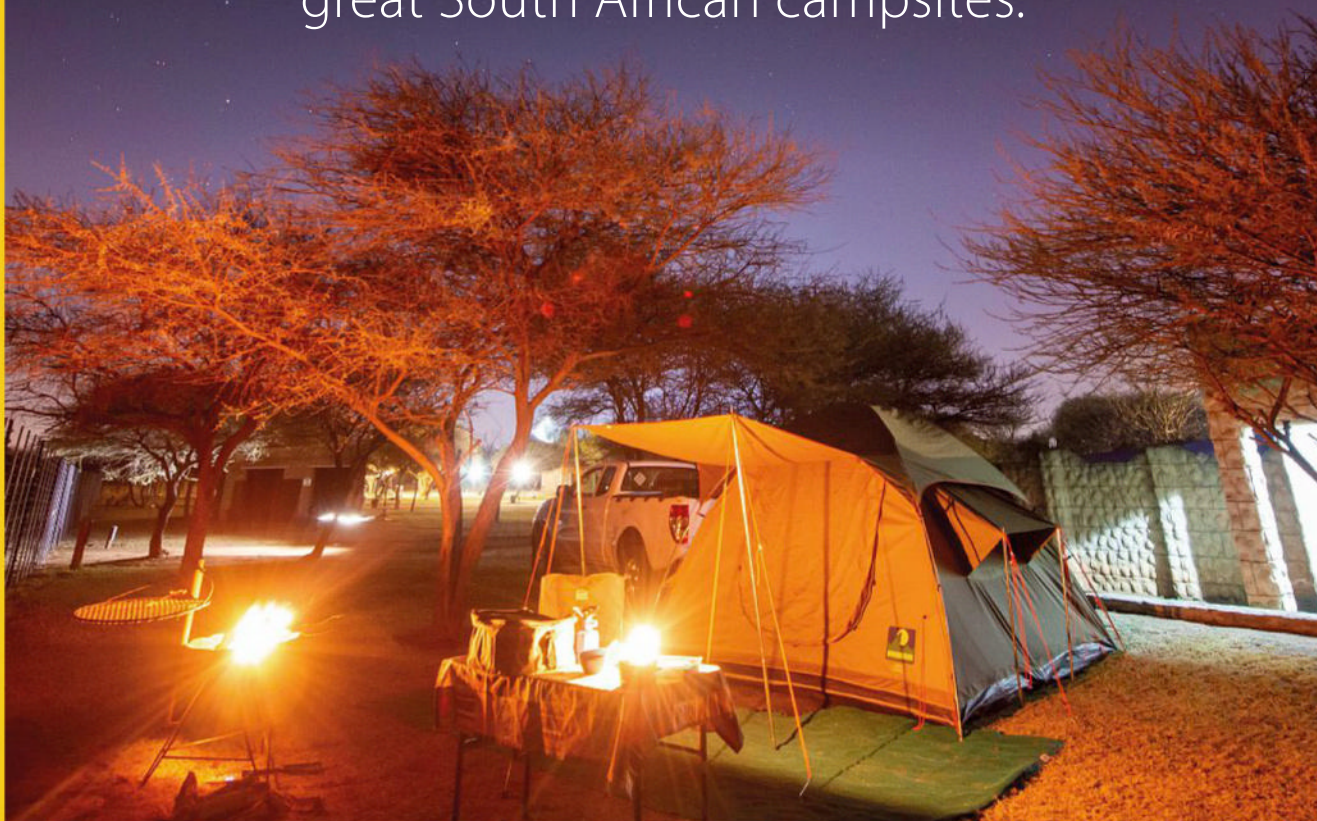
for your vehicle. It is not called Bloumyn for nothing – the rocks around the shaft are blue due to the copper content.

At the bottom of the rocky outcrop, follow the road further into Tierkloof where you reach a T-junction again. To the left lies Slangwater and Sebrawater in the northwestern corner of the park, and if you turn right, you take a short cut back to the end of the route at reception.



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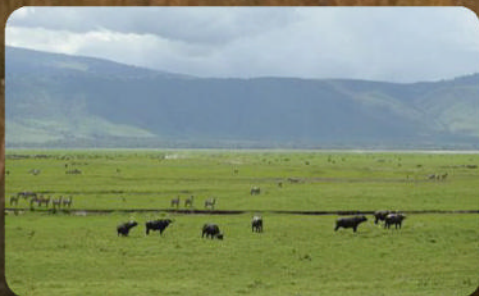
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route**

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The Kalahari Red Dune Route 4x4 experience is an adventurous and thrilling journey through the famous Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. This route offers a unique opportunity to explore the captivating desert landscapes, red sand dunes, and the rich wildlife that inhabits this incredible region.

The route covers approximately 600 kilometres (tarred road included) and is designed for experienced off-road enthusiasts who are eager to test their driving skills and enjoy the challenges of driving in sandy terrain on different farms. It takes you through remote and untouched parts of the Kalahari, offering a truly authentic African wilderness experience.

During the journey, you will tackle steep dune ascents and descents, navigate through narrow sandy tracks. The thrilling experience will be balanced by mesmerizing panoramic views of the desert, endless stretches of red sand dunes, salt pans and sightings of unique wildlife such as ostriches, springboks, oryx, sable, buffalo, zebra, eland etc.

The route is self-guided, meaning participants are responsible for their own navigation, camping gear, and provisions. Luxury Lodges are also an option for those wanting something more comfortable. It is advisable to travel in a well-equipped 4x4 vehicle, preferably with off-road modifications such as high clearance and all-terrain tyres. It is also essential to carry enough water, food, fuel and spare parts, as services and amenities along the route are limited.

The best time to embark on the Kalahari Red Dune Route 4x4 experience is during the cooler months, from April to October, to avoid extreme heat. The route can take around 6 days to complete, depending on the pace and stops you choose.

Overall, the Kalahari Red Dune Route 4x4 experience is an unforgettable adventure that offers a unique blend of off-road driving, wildlife spotting and breathtaking scenery. It provides an opportunity to connect with nature in one of Africa's most captivating and remote wilderness areas.

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www.kalahariredduneroute.co.za



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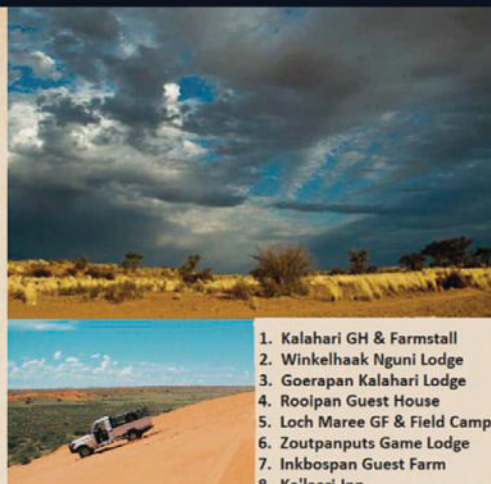
Embark on scenic walking trails that wind their way through the enchanting desert landscape. Immerse yourself in nature and discover the unique flora and fauna that call this arid environment home.

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KALAHARI RED DUNE ROUTE



1. Kalahari GH & Farmstall
2. Winkelhaak Nguni Lodge
3. Goerapan Kalahari Lodge
4. Rooipan Guest House
5. Loch Maree GF & Field Camp
6. Zoutpanputs Game Lodge
7. Inkbospan Guest Farm
8. Ka'laari-Inn
9. Koppieskraal Camel Farm
10. Klipkolk Lodge
11. Duinebesie Guest Rooms
12. Kalahari Info, BB & Tented Camp
13. Rea Farmstead
14. Kalahari Trails NR & Meer-
kat Sanctuary
15. Rooiduin Guest Farm
16. Kgalagadi Lifestyle Lodge
17. Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
18. Ixau Lodge
19. Molopo Kalahari Lodge
20. Khomani San Info Centre
21. Vinkie's Kalahari Experience
22. Boesmansrus Grasshuts
23. Aunt Koera's Farm Kitchen
24. Erin Game Ranch
25. Dreghorn Kalahari Game Farm
26. Askham Trading Post/supplies
27. Kalahari Meat / butchery
28. Diamond T Coffee Shop (I)
29. Kaap Agri (fuel/gas/supplies)
30. Kalahari Sands Guest House
31. Thirstland Trails
32. Hartsplek
33. Kameelboomkoelte
34. Gemsbokkie SC
35. Vischgat Game Farm
36. Kalahari Farmstead
& Cottage
37. Van Zylsrus Hotel
38. Kgalagadi GH
39. Kalahari Erfenis &
Kalahari Cottage



Askham & Andriesvale insert map
with route participants and new road



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Web: kameelboomkoelte.co.za

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Email: magda.wessels47@gmail.com

Web: kgalagadilodge.co.za

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Email: info@vanzylsrushotel.com

Web: vanzylsrushotel.com

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Email: gemsbokkie@gmail.com

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Tel: 082 543 4226 / 083 448 0832

Email: jeannej@alsgroup.co.za / kassiej@alsgroup.co.za

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Email: lkoppieskraal@gmail.com

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Email: raatsbarbara99@gmail.com

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Email: kalaharimeat.askham@gmail.com

Web: facebook.com/KalahariMeat



N.C. FAMOUS

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Tshahitsi
LODGE

Discover the ultimate oasis at Tshahitsi Lifestyle Lodge, nestled in the heart of Upington, Northern Cape. As the ideal halfway stop between Johannesburg and Cape Town, and the gateway to the Kalahari, our luxurious lodge welcomes travellers to unwind amidst breathtaking natural beauty.

Experience serene comfort at Tshahitsi.
054 333 1126 | ncfamouslodges.com



RED-OX
STEAKHOUSE

Savor the finest flavors of Upington at Red Ox Steakhouse. Our restaurant is a culinary gem where passion for exceptional cuisine meets warm hospitality. Indulge in mouthwatering steaks, gourmet dishes, and a diverse wine selection, all within a cozy, inviting ambience. A dining experience that's truly unforgettable awaits at Red Ox Steakhouse.

060 329 3806 | ncfamouslodges.com



KALAHARI LIFESTYLE LODGE
5 STAR VILLAS & CAMPING

In Upington, and will boast a 5-star luxury caravan park and villas. Whether passing through, coming on holiday, or looking for a base to explore the surrounding area's our caravan park is the perfect place for you to stay. Each of our stands will have its own kitchenette and full bathroom, offering you the best of both worlds, a world class camping experience combined with the ultimate in privacy and convenience.

054 333 1126 | ncfamouslodges.com



Molopo
KALAHARI LODGE

Experience the untouched beauty of the Kalahari at Molopo Kalahari Lodge. Nestled amidst pristine wilderness, our lodge offers a tranquil escape. Relax in comfortable upgraded chalets, villas, tented chalets & upgraded camping, savor authentic cuisine at our **NEW Molopo Red-Ox Steakhouse in 2024**, and embark on thrilling safaris. Immerse yourself in nature's wonders and create unforgettable memories at Molopo Kalahari Lodge.

We offer 30% discount for Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park visitors for the night before OR the night after your park visit.

054 511 0008 | ncfamouslodges.com



Letsatsi
LIFESTYLE LODGE
WEDDING VENUE

Nestled in the heart of Vanrhynsdorp, Letsatsi Wedding Venue and Lifestyle Lodge is a hidden gem for travelers seeking a serene escape. With its stunning wedding facilities, cozy accommodations, and proximity to the region's natural wonders, it's an ideal destination for weddings and leisurely getaways, offering a harmonious blend of charm and relaxation.

027 219 2828 | ncfamouslodges.com

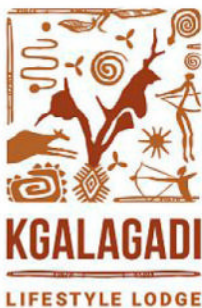


REMHOOGTE
VILLAS

Remhoogte Villas, located in Vanrhynsdorp, epitomize opulent relaxation. These luxurious villas offer a haven of tranquility in the heart of nature's beauty. With lavish amenities, breathtaking views, and easy access to local attractions, it's the ultimate choice for discerning travelers seeking an unforgettable retreat in this picturesque region.

027 219 2828 | ncfamouslodges.com

HEAD OFFICE 054 333 1126



Where rugged terrain & luxury meet

Brand new luxury Villa

KGALAGADI LIFESTYLE LODGE OFFERS THE FOLLOWING FACILITIES ON-SITE:

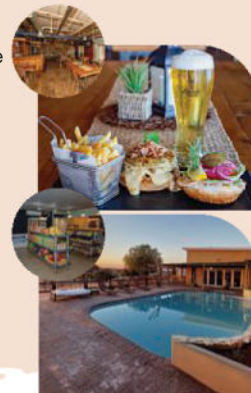
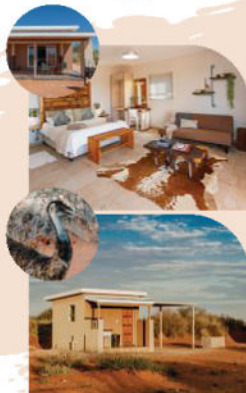
- Black Mane Butcher & Grill restaurant, voted as the best food in the whole Kalahari (Hospitality Marketing Inc)
- Supermarket/gift shop
- Butchery
- Swimming pool
- Wine Boutique and bottle store
- Oryx 4x4 car rental
- Hiking trails
- Self-drive game drives
- Game viewing
- Landing strip
- Offsite catering
- Year-end functions

CHALETS

Kgalagadi Lifestyle Lodge is a firm favourite amongst local and international travellers alike. Only 5 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park entrance, the lodge is a luxurious, one-stop destination in the Kalahari where desert haven meets modern wilderness.

4 STAR CAMPING

33 strategically placed chalets. 15 x 4-star campsites, each with its own ablution.



www.kgalagadi-lodge.co.za



Email: info@kgalagadi-lodge.co.za



Tel: 054 325 0935 | 054 050 1302 | 083 225 0331



IDEAL STOPOVER ON THE WAY TO THE **KGALAGADI NATIONAL PARK** AND **BOTSWANA** AS WELL AS FOR THOSE ON THEIR WAY TO **KLEIN JAN**.

Choice of accommodation: spacious luxury room, safari self-catering units and our 6 luxury camping sites. Field guide hike, field breakfast, game drives, cheese platters and picnic baskets, as well as stylish, authentic Kalahari sit-down meals while the Kalahari sun is setting.

Tel: 053 741 1455 | 073 178 8156
E-mail: kalahari.cottage@vodamail.co.za
www.kalahari-erfenis.co.za



LOCH MAREE- GUEST FARM

**Phone: +27 82 3511 834
or +27 82 492 3469**
E-mail: lochmaree01@gmail.com
www.lochmareeguestfarm.co.za

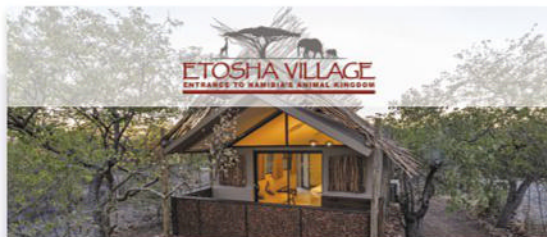
95 KM FROM THE KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK.
Choose between the fully equipped field camp (accommodates 14), or the camping grounds at the field and bush camp. The family suite is suitable for a family or a group of 6 who are looking for a more comfortable stay (fully equipped kitchenette). Activities include game-viewing (self drive) – pack a basket for a sundowner at the lookout point with Kalahari dunes on the one side and a surprisingly white saltpan on the other!

Kalahari Sands Guesthuis

70 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park on the R360 from Upington. One-, two- and three-bedroom freestanding self-catering units varying from well-equipped to luxury. Airconditioning, TV's, braai and fully equipped for self-catering. Meals can be supplied on request. Pet friendly, laundry on request.

Tel 082 371 4549 Hanneljie Van Der Westhuizen
kalaharisandsguesthouse

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS in Namibia - Book online with Promo code: GO for discounted rates!



Affordable comfort at the Andersson entrance
to Etosha near Okaukuejo

www.etosha-village.com



Experience true hospitality at the
entrance gate to Sesriem and Sossusvlei

www.sossusvleilodge.com



Self-catering excellence
close to the entrance to Sossusvlei

www.desertquivercamp.com



Comfortable self-catering only 5km from the
entrance to the Namib Naukluft Park

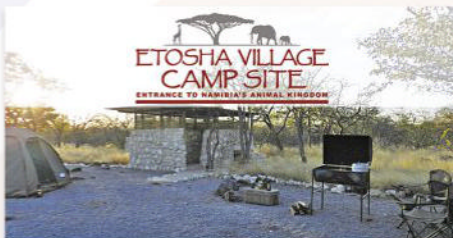
www.desertcamp.com

CAMPING OPTIONS just outside the National Parks in Namibia



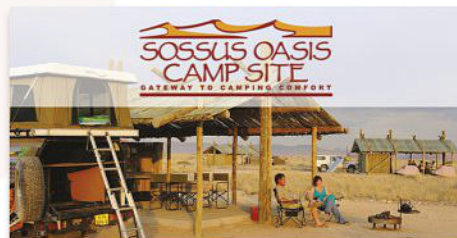
Camping with private facilities only 6.5km
from the Okaukuejo entrance to Etosha

www.etosha-tradingpost.com



Exclusive campsite nestled in a
Mopani forest adjacent to Etosha

www.etosha-village.com/camping.html



Camping under star-studded skies at
the entrance gate to Sossusvlei

www.sossus-oasis.com

FUEL & SHOPS just outside the National Parks in Namibia



Ideal stop to refuel, refresh and stock up on
supplies a mere 6.5km from Etosha

www.etosha-tradingpost.com



Refresh, refuel and reconnect at this oasis
in the heart of the Namib Desert

www.sossus-oasis.com