

## Namibia 2015 – Caprivi, Kaokoland and Damaraland

About a year ago we decided to fill an important gap in our touring CV, namely Kaokoland and Damaraland, in the north-west of Namibia. This is an area of roughly the same size as the Czech Republic and Slovakia together, but with only about 30 000 inhabitants. We added Caprivi into the mix, giving us a six week trip.

On 18 April 2015 we left Durbanville and for the first ten days Swambo and I were on our own in the Caprivi, thereafter we enjoyed another ten days with the first set of friends - still in Caprivi. Then we joined up with the second set of friends, for three weeks in Kaokoland and Damaraland, and then back home. Just before the trip I swapped the MyWay roof top tent for a Howling Moon Trailer Tent - on the Bundu Basher trailer.

We spent our first night in Grunau. Second night at Oanob dam at Rehoboth, third and fourth nights at Kaisosi Lodge outside Rundu. Thereafter four nights at Kalizo Lodge, 40km east of Katima Mulilo on the Zambezi. Perfect weather, beautiful sunsets and no problems at all. Very relaxing.

On Sunday 26 April Adriaan and Hettie Scheeres joined us at Malyo Camp on the Kwando River, eastern Caprivi. A rustic and basic campsite. We went on a boat trip from Camp Kwando with marvellous bird sightings and equally marvellous photos of a Fish Eagle battling with a huge fish.



We also visited the eastern side of the river twice, crossing the bridge at Kongola and then south towards Nambwa and Horseshoe Bend. Again super raptor photos.

After four days, the four of us left for Ngepi on the Okavango River, for another four relaxing but exciting days. Superb weather and super photos, including a visit to Mahango Game Reserve.

This part of the world consists of predictable weather, elephants, hippos, buffaloes, crocodiles, a huge variety of birds, and sometimes malaria mosquitoes.

## A river taxi on the Okavango



On 4 May, we said goodbye to Adriaan and Hettie and drove to Waterberg Wilderness Lodge to leave our trailer there.

From Waterberg we drove to Kamanjab, met with Kobus and Mirna Venter in their Fortuner (yes, the Fortuner with the wine cork as a diff plug). At Kunene River Lodge, Roel de Haan joined us. He was the guide as it was his fourth Kaokoland trip. Two nights at Kunene RL, then three nights at Epupa Falls. Highly enjoyable. Then the real Kaokoland trip started.

The town of Opuwu was roughly what I had expected, except that it took some effort to locate a tap to fill our water tank. We took the road south west, direction Kaoko Otavi. After failing to find the Dorslandtrek church ruins we proceeded to the upper reaches of the Hoarisib River where we bush camped for the first time. A marvellous location. That night two elephants passed 20 metres behind our tent, without a sound.

The next day we drove passed Marble Camp (a neat community camp) over the Rooidrom Pass to the Marienfluß. The environment was bone dry. The grass plains had turned into sand plains. We stayed for two nights at Camp Syncro, which is very efficiently operated by its new owners, the young Swiss couple, Ryan and Sarah Christinger. I tried to convince them that their Rhodesian Ridgebacks did not understand Swiss German, but to no avail.

After Camp Syncro it was over the Hartmann Mountains to the Hartmanns Valley. Despite the horror stories that we had heard, the pass was actually quite manageable. It had two steep and challenging sections, but all three vehicles took it in their stride. We camped just west of the Krokodilberg. The most picturesque surroundings imaginable. Sadly, the drought made the area even more picturesque.

Now we were in one of the most remote areas of Southern Africa. If a vehicle broke down or a person got seriously injured, it would require a major logistical expedition to deal with the situation.



From Krokodilberg we drove along the Skeleton Coast Park border to Blue Drum and Orupembe and camped in the Khumib riverbed. The road surface was terrible for long stretches. I believe all the damage to our vehicles and equipment happened on that day. But that night again, we had a super bush camp. So far no cloud in sight since we left the Kunene.

From the bush camp in the Khumib we drove down the riverbed, crossed over the plains and hilly sections to the Hoarusib en route to Purros community camp where we stayed for two nights. It was on this section that we noticed the missing diff plug on the Fortuner and replaced it with a wine cork. In Purros we found diff oil at the Manchester United Trading Shop and Bar.



Right on top of Jan Joubertkoppie, at the viewpoint, we were fortunate enough to meet John Kasaona, the conservancy pioneer of Kaokoland and Damaraland.

Starting a camp fire with elephant dung at Purros. Very smelly.



The sign in the community campsite at Purros.



From Purros we travelled down the river bed. The Landcruiser got seriously stuck in the mud at a bend in the river and only the kinetic strap from a friendly Samaritan (Geoff Hubbard), who was following us in a two car convoy, saved the day.

Then another memorable bush camp in the Obiasriver (a tributary of the Hoanib), before one of the highlights of the entire trip, namely a lion sighting in the Hoanib. It was a young male who had caught a gemsbok the day before. The fuel pumps at Sesfontein were dry. Although we had by then travelled about 900 km since the last refuelling, our stocks were still good. We made it to Palmwag quite easily, and spent two nights there.

From Palmwag to the Rhino Camp on the banks of the Ugabriver, we followed the Huabriverbed for quite some distance, before turning into the plains. The track became progressively rougher.

In the Ugab riverbed we found lion tracks again and were told that they had visited the waterhole at the camp the night before we arrived. In the Ugab we also found an injured and very weak brown snake eagle in a pool of water. Sadly it died that night.



At the Rhino Camp we met two young German travellers in their aging Land Rover Defender with two “coffins” on the roof. We always look out for German tourists from Düsseldorf, after all, it is “our city” in Germany. But they seem to be very scarce. This time we were lucky. Magnus and Stefan were from Düsseldorf. We braaied together (barbequed ☺), and when we left the Rhino Camp we travelled together towards Uis.



From the Rhino Camp we drove via the Mesem Crater to Uis and camped in the town for one night. The next day we experienced the umpteenth day of beautiful scenery, driving along the D1930, later turning into the Omaruru riverbed. After about 25km we turned south-west to Spitzkoppe.

We stayed two nights at the community camp at Spitzkoppe. Although this is probably the best managed community camp in the Kaokoland and Damaraland, the other two, Rhino Camp and Purros, were also perfect for our purposes. The same could be said of our four bush camps. Magnificent settings.

At Spitzkoppe, we split up. The two of us drove back to Waterberg to pick up the trailer and from there we tackled the 1800km to the Cape, arriving home on 27 May 2015, very grateful for the privilege and for such a safe trip. The total distance travelled was 9732 kilometer.

This is definitely one of the top trips that one can undertake in Southern Africa. I think we have covered Kaokoland reasonably well. But there is still a lot to discover in Damaraland.

I am really glad that we did not take the trailer into Kaokoland. I can understand that some people would want to take trailers. For me it was not worth the risk. The corrugations and rough passages are hard on equipment. A trailer with a broken chassis, suspension or A-frame is not a joke. The main lessons for me as far as the equipment is concerned:

- Service and check everything thoroughly beforehand, with durability and robustness in mind.
- If it is not fastened with a nylock nut, or a good split washer, it WILL rattle loose on the corrugations.
- Radio equipment must be properly installed or packed in foam. If carried in a container without protection it will suffer wear and tear or even structural damage.
- Radio communications from Kaokoland to SA is severely influenced by the mountainous terrain, as well as the valleys where one would normally camp. If in doubt take a satellite phone.
- Take a supply of engine oil and transmission oil.
- A fuel supply of 180 to 200 liters should do the trick. Take lots of cash. Credit cards are being phased out at fuel stations.
- Take spare bolts and nuts of all sizes.
- Handing out gifts to the local people (Himbas) remains a debatable topic. We took exercise books and pencils for the children. It was always welcomed.
- Replace the 7 year old auxiliary battery in your vehicle BEFORE the trip, even if it still works ok. I did not follow this good advice.
- A 100w solar panel was adequate for the 40l Engel fridge for two people. In addition we took a Coleman Extreme cooler box, which is really worth its weight in gold.
- Thick wet towels draped over the fridge and the cool box help a lot in the heat. The temperature ranged from 35 to 45 degrees, EVERY day.
- The Land Rover Defender collected its own body weight in dust (but I have a plan for that).

Until next time

**Douw and Nelleke Krüger**