

## JOHAN SNYMAN'S NORTH-EASTERN NAMIBIA TRIP REPORT : 5 – 13 DECEMBER 2014

### **WARNING !**

**Please do not try to emulate this trip. It was not undertaken for recreational purposes and I travelled on my own in a solo vehicle. Under normal circumstances, you will not be able to cover these distances in a day, nor is it advisable to visit the area with only one vehicle.**

### **Background**

I have to verify the location and condition of all the roads and tracks in north-eastern Namibia for the book I am writing on the region, and at the same time I'm also compiling a complete photographic record of all the roads, points of interest, and the commonly seen fauna and flora in the area. Plants also need to be visited during different seasons to enable photographs to be taken when they flower, bear fruit, etc.

A major problem is that large portions of the region is not of interest to tourists, but still need to be covered to complete the work. I have access to up-to-date maps of the proclaimed roads in the area, but up-to-date maps of the un-proclaimed roads and tracks are not available. The electronic T4A maps are not complete and some of the satellite images on Google Earth are outdated as they date back to 2004.

### **Preparations**

For this trip I would be concentrating on the very remote area to the east of the B8 highway between Grootfontein and Rundu, south of the B8 highway between Rundu and Divundu, west of the Khaudum National Park and the Nyae Nyae Pans, and north of the veterinary fence that is located south of the Nyae Nyae Pans. A substantial amount of time was spent plotting a possible route to follow. From previous visits I knew where some uncharted roads and tracks were located, but obviously did not know where they went, or whether they would be negotiable. Google Earth was not of much assistance as some of these tracks are not visible on their images. The planned route therefore had to be adaptable to accommodate new roads and tracks found along the way as well as roads and tracks that were no longer negotiable, or have ceased to exist. An added complication was the availability of fuel in the area. I made provision to refuel at 1000km intervals but would have enough fuel on board to travel for at least 1500km.

I intended to cover a distance of approximately 4000km over 9 days.

Due to ill health, my favourite travelling companion would unfortunately not be able to accompany me on this trip. I therefore elected to travel on my own as this would be a "working trip", and I would not have time to do the "tourist things" that would be required if I took a passenger, or another vehicle, along.

Travelling solo does require a bit of forward planning as you can't leave home without a back-up plan, pre-arranged back-up services and reliable means of communication. As the Landy I would be using on this trip is less than 5 years old, it is still covered by "Land Rover Assist", a safety net operated/administrated by Europe Assist in Johannesburg that promises to provide a recovery system in case of a medical emergency or mechanical problem. The problem was that I would be in a very remote area and not near any "known" roads on GPS maps. But, the people at Europe Assist rose to the challenge. I was put into contact with their local service provider for vehicle recovery and between us we sorted out the details of how they would be able to reach me in case their services were needed. For a medical emergency I had to send my co-ordinates to Europe Assist, and they would evacuate me by air. So far, so good. I could only hold thumbs that I would not need assistance.

As the vehicle is comprehensively equipped, and packed, for overland travel all I had to do was to pack my clothes, food and drink, camera equipment, laptop, GPS's and satphone.

## Friday 5 December

I left Windhoek and travelled along the B1 to Otavi, where I turned off onto the B8 to Grootfontein. In Grootfontein I filled up the Landy, and all the spare fuel containers I had with me, (300 litres in total) and from there made my way via the D2844 and D2893 to the C44. I crossed the veterinary control fence at Rooidag and then proceeded south along the fence to my overnight stop.

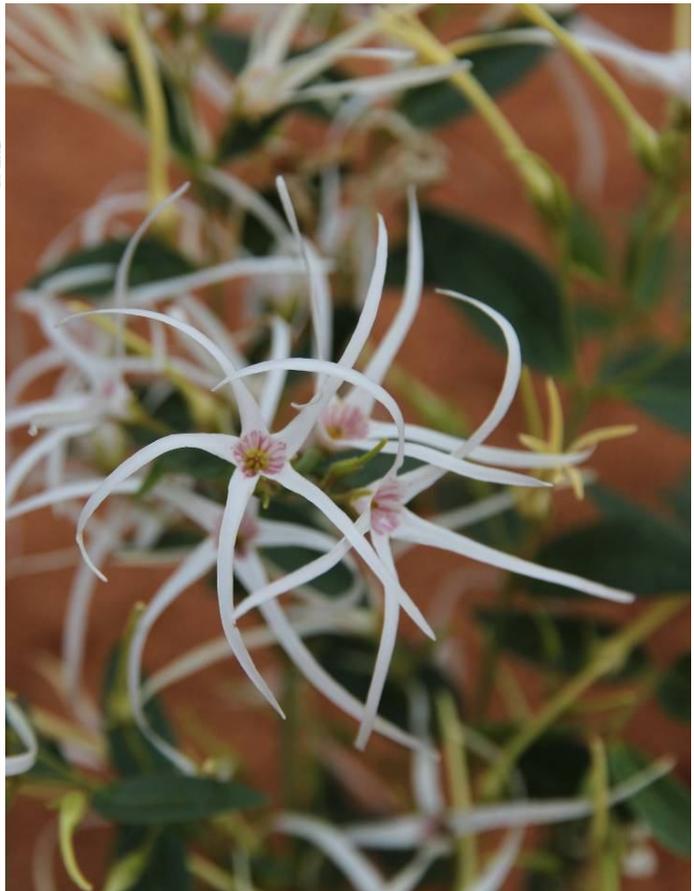


Total distance for the day was 610km (481km on tar and 129km on gravel and sand) and my travelling time was 7¾ hours. (Moving time and average = 6h39min and 91.7km/h)

**Saturday 6 December**

After a very quiet night during which a few drops of rain fell as well, I made an early start and travelled along the veterinary fence. I could not find the track heading north that I intended to follow, so adapted my route by following the next one north, and then tried to locate the track from the C44 side instead. However, this track could not be found and I retraced my steps to the veterinary fence again.

I made my camp alongside a dry omuramba for the night.





Total distance for the day was 253km (all of it on sand) and my travelling time was 12½ hours. (Moving time and average = 11h06min and 22.8km/h)

## Sunday 7 December

After another very quiet night during which a few drops of rain fell again, I made an early start and travelled along the veterinary fence on what would prove to be a very arduous day.

The track was very overgrown, and even non-existent, in some sections. Elephants have flattened the fence in places and the track was strewn with torn-off branches and pushed-over trees. Most of this had to be removed to make the track passable. Burrowing animals, such as moles and ant-eaters, have made massive excavations in the sand. Driving conditions were therefore difficult and slow. Along the way I became aware of a knocking sound underneath the left-rear of the Landy, and upon investigation found that the one end of the rear sway-bar had come undone. One of the bolts attaching it to the rear axle was gone and as I did not have a spare one, I set about removing the complete sway-bar. I also discovered that the loose end of the sway-bar caused damage to the brake pipe leading to the left rear wheel. The pipe was pinched, but fortunately no leaking brake fluid was to be seen. A short while later the tyre monitor system warned me that I had a left-rear puncture. The cause was a short piece of fencing wire, and I repaired the puncture without removing the wheel from the vehicle.

As a result of the above, I was now half a day behind on programme. I made my camp alongside the track for the night and slept like a log.





Total distance for the day was 113km (all of it on sand) and my travelling time was 12¼ hours. (Moving time and average = 9h44min and 11.6km/h)

### Monday 8 December

After another very quiet night, I made an early start and travelled along some tracks with plenty signs of elephant activity. Immediately after driving over a branch of a fallen tree, the Landies' ABS warning light came on and I crawled underneath the vehicle to see if any brake pipes had been damaged. I could find no damage, but after this incident, the traction control did not work either. I eventually reached the C44 and made my way to the Mangetti Dune village, and from there to the campsite at the Grashoek Traditional San village. Here I spent some time removing grass from the radiators and inspecting all the wheels and brake pipes.

As a result of this, I fell a bit further behind on my programme.









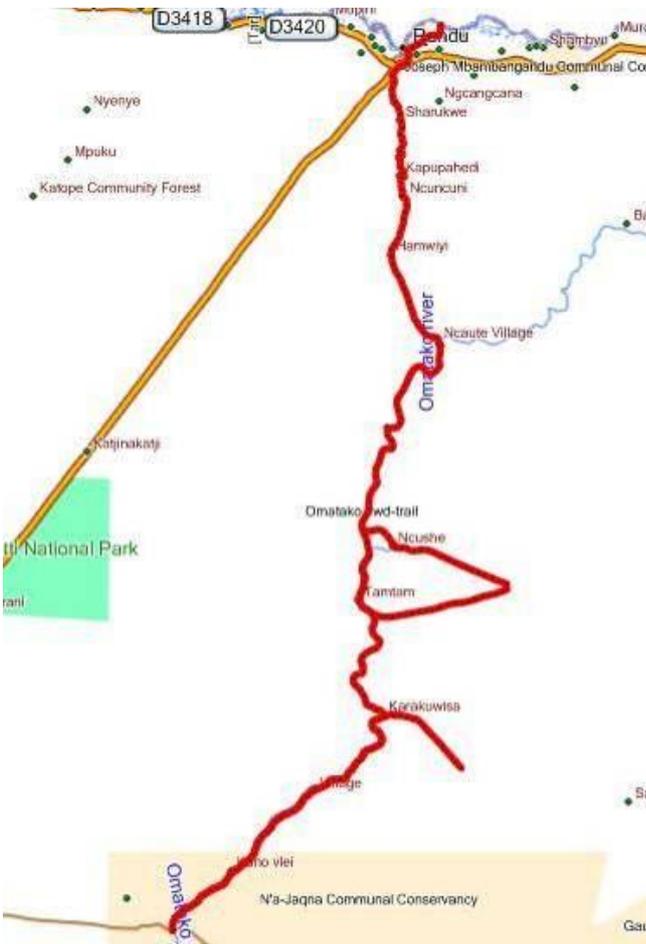


Total distance for the day was 315km (106km on tar and 209km on sand and gravel) and my travelling time was 9½ hours. (Moving time and average = 7h27min and 42.3km/h)

### **Wednesday 10 December**

It was still drizzling as I prepared to leave. I followed the D3425, the Omatako Omaramba track and the D3308 to the C44 and then retraced my steps to the Karakuwisa settlement from where I followed a track heading east. Small-scale farmers were cultivating lands according to age-old traditional methods i.e. an area was cleared by slashing and burning it, ploughing it with animal drawn implements, and planting the seed by hand.

I managed to make up some lost time and made my camp on the track for the night.







Total distance for the day was 385km (7km on tar and 378km on sand and gravel) and my travelling time was 12 hours. (Moving time and average = 9h53min and 39.0km/h)

### Thursday 11 December

After a very quiet night I made an early start and travelled along some tracks with thick, loose sand until I reached the D3312. From there I travelled to the C44 and Tsumkwe. I arrived there at sunset and decided to make up some more lost time by driving on the D3315, with its loose sand, to the Sikereti campsite in the Khaudum National Park. I encountered one elephant in the dark along the way and saw a lot of sand grouse and night jars. I arrived at Sikereti at 20h30 and there was no one else in the campsite. I was now almost back on programme.







Total distance for the day was 372km (all of it on gravel and sand) and my travelling time was 13¼ hours. (Moving time and average = 11h03min and 33.7km/h)

### Friday 12 December

I made an early start and logged some tracks on the border of the Khadum as well as ones inside the Park. As a result of the recent rain, the area was very green with lots of flowering plants to be seen. It started raining quite heavily during the afternoon while I was negotiating a fairly overgrown track. The elephants were very active in the area with some large trees that have been pushed over. As it was impossible to drive around some of them, they had to be winched out of the way and this was labour intensive work for a single person. I reached the Xaudum Omuramba the afternoon and travelled west in it and set up my camp for the night outside the Park.







Total distance for the day was 303km (all of it on sand) and my travelling time was 12½ hours. (Moving time and average = 10h42min and 28.3km/h)

### **Saturday 13 December**

It was very hot and quiet during the night and I rose before sunrise and started driving as soon as it was light enough to see. Approximately 100m from my campsite there was a bend in the river and as I arrived there I encountered a pride of 7 lions. From there it was an uneventful drive until I reached the B8 near Rundu at 15h30 and it was mission accomplished. By this time it was raining heavily again and I decided to head for home. I drove in the rain until Okahandja (70km from home) and arrived home at 23h07. I made up a full day in the process and this would now give me a full day to unpack, repack and check the vehicle before the next trip that would start on Monday, 15 December.





Total distance for the day was 995km (717km on tar and 278km on sand and gravel) and my travelling time was 17 hours. (Moving time and average = 14h56min and 66.6km/h)

**Conclusion**

This has been a very demanding, yet memorable, trip to an interesting part of Namibia that does not see many tourists, and I now have enough data and photographs to keep me busy for a few weeks.

I drove a total distance of 3677km during the 9 days, of which 1311km was on tarred roads and 2366km on gravel and sand roads and tracks. The overall fuel consumption for the trip was 6.67km/l.

I'm already planning the next trip.....😊

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