JOHAN SNYMAN’S KAOKOLAND TRIP DIARY : MARCH 2010

WARNING!

Please do not try to emulate this trip. This was not for holiday, or sightseeing, purposes and was undertaken with a solo vehicle. Under normal circumstances, you will not be able to cover these distances, nor is it advisable to visit the area with only one vehicle.

BACKGROUND

I first visited the Kaokoland in May 2003, and have been back a number of times since then. During our visits I kept meticulous records of our experiences and have also built up a database of approximately 19 000 photographs and several hours of video footage. I have also written a number of short articles about the area and have helped numerous people to plan visits to the area.

About 3 years ago, I started putting all the information I had together in one document and then started to expand it into a comprehensive guide of the area that now contains approximately 28 000 words and 400 photographs on 160 A4 pages. However, to complete it I had to visit the area again to gather the information on the few roads and tracks I have not driven on, and the few places of interest I have not been to. Time was a problem though …..

Then the possibility of a change in my personal circumstances loomed on the horizon and I started preparing for the trip. Because it would probably have to be undertaken on very short notice, I initially decided to undertake it on my own, but in the end an ex-colleague indicated that he would like to accompany me.

Final confirmation that the trip was a go was received on 3 March, and we departed on Monday 15 March 2010.

PREPARATIONS

Preparation is the key to the success of a trip of this nature.

As we would be travelling on our own in a very remote area, a considerable amount of time was spent in preparing the vehicle and our equipment for this trip. We carried a comprehensive set of tools, recovery equipment and some basic spare parts for the vehicle.

As the northern regions of Namibia falls within a high risk malaria area we used Mefliam (generic equivalent of Larium) as malaria prophylactic and sprayed our tents with Peripel 55® – a treatment that repels biting insects like mosquitoes. We also carried a comprehensive 1st Aid kit with enough supplies to treat emergencies for a number of days, if needed.
THE TOUR

Day 1 : Monday 15 March
We left Stellenbosch at 04h00 and we travelled via Klipheuwel and Malmesbury to the N7 and from there tackled the long haul north. I had a hard time driving, as my back was killing me after participating in my 18th Cape Argus Pick and Pay Cycle Tour the previous day, without any real training beforehand. We passed through both border posts at Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer without incident and, after refuelling the vehicle, continued to Keetmanshoop where we camped at Lafenis, next to the Engen Garage.

Total distance for the day was 1038km (all of it on tar) and our travelling time 13½ hours.

Day 2 : Tuesday 16 March
We made an early start as I had some business to attend to in Windhoek and then made our way along the B1 to Otjiwarongo, where we stayed in one of the houses at the Acacia Lodge.

Total distance for the day was 787km (all of it on tar) and our travelling time 10½ hours.
Day 3 : Wednesday 17 March
We made our way along the C38 to Outjo and from there via the C40 to Kamanjab. The local population were busy harvesting Mopane caterpillars along the C40 and this was an interesting sight to see. These caterpillars form an important source of protein in their diet. The worms are caught and cleaned by hand, before they are cooked and dried for later use.

In Kamanjab we had a look at the facilities of several campsites for future reference before making our way via the C35 and C41 to Opuwo.

It was our intention to locate the D3720 and follow it in a north-easterly direction towards an extinct volcano (Etoto). This is a new road that has made its appearance on the 2008/09 edition of the Namibian Roads Authority (NRA) Map of Namibia. The coordinates of the “road”, which was clearly visible on Google Earth, were determined, and a route plotted along it. It was easy enough to find, but it runs beneath, and alongside, and overhead power line, and according to the locals it is only used by the people of Nampower to inspect their infrastructure. They knew of no other similar roads in the vicinity, so I can only assume that we were on the correct road. This was an extremely difficult track to follow, with huge erosion gullies and some small river crossings. We got stuck twice – the 1st time in an erosion gully and the 2nd in a small river with extremely slippery clay slopes. Fortunately there were conveniently located trees on both occasions, and it was not a major problem to recover the vehicle with the winch.
We eventually had to abandon the attempt, and turn around, when the road went through a gorge with very deep erosion gullies that would be impossible to attempt with only one vehicle.

We returned to Opuwo, where we pitched camp at the Opuwo Country Lodge.

Total distance for the day was 576km (510km on tar and 66km on gravel) and our travelling time 12 hours.

Day 4 : Thursday 18 March
We made our way back along the C41 to the C35, and travelled north towards Ruacana. We made a detour along the D3640, another new road on the NRA Map, to Etoto. The old D3640 is a sandy track but a new road has also been built to replace it, and it is located some distance from the old one. There is not much to see at Etoto ..........
From there we made our way to Ruacana, and what a sight awaited us! The Kunene was in flood and the earth trembled as a result of the volume of water spilling over the Falls. Here we also encountered the only other (2) tourist vehicles on our trip through the area.

From Ruacana we made our way along the D3700 to Swartbooisdrift. With the Kunene being in flood, large portions of the road was flooded and we had to drive on several bypasses.
From Swartbooisdrift we made our way via the D3701 and D3702 to the old SADF military base at Ehomba, which is now used as a school, before continuing along the D3701 to Otjivize and the C43 to Opuwo, where we camped at the Lodge once again.

Total distance for the day was 468km (102km on tar and 366km on gravel) and our travelling time 11 hours.

**Day 5 : Friday 19 March**
We travelled along the C41 until we turned south on the D3709 and continued on it to the C35. We then retraced our tracks until we reached the D3708 which took us via Rusplaas, and its Dorslandtrekker graves and –memorial, to the D3710 near Ombombo Village, from where we travelled north on the D3710 towards the C41 and Opuwo.
From Opuwo we drove west on the D3703 to Etanga and then north to Otjitanda where we pitched our tents next to the road for the night.

Total distance for the day was 385km (52km on tar and 333km on gravel) and our travelling time 11½ hours.

**Day 6 : Saturday 20 March**
We retraced our steps to Etanga and then turned west and south towards Rooidrom Pass via Otjihaa and the Otjiha Plains. We traversed Rooidrom Pass in both directions and spent the night at the House on the Hill self-catering house near the marble mine.
Total distance for the day was 193km (all of it on gravel and sand) and our travelling time 10½ hours.

**Day 7 : Sunday 21 March**
We first visited the marble mine before we retraced our route across the Otjiha plains and then proceeded to Orupembe.
From Orupembe we drove on the D3707 towards Opuwu with the intention of reaching the Hoarusib River, and driving down it to Puros. However, this was not to be. After the recent flooding of the river, a large volume of sand has been washed away leaving a riverbed strewn with large boulders, making progress extremely slow and difficult. The wet sand was fairly hard, and easy to drive on. Except for one place, where we bogged down unto the Landie’s chassis and it took some time to extricate ourselves out of that mess. The going became progressively more difficult and after 18km’s it became impossible to proceed, and we were forced to turn back to the D3707, where we pitched camp for the night.
Total distance for the day was 216km (all of it on gravel and sand) and our travelling time 11 hours.

Day 8: Monday 22 March
We proceeded along the D3707 to Kaoko Otavi where we visited the graves of some Dorslandtrekkers as well as the ruins on a church they had built (unfortunately not much remaining to be seen) before proceeding on the D3705 and C43 to Opuwu to refuel the Landie.

We returned to Kaoko Otavi to find the D3705 leading to Sesfontein. This road is indicated on the maps of the late Jan Joubert and is indicated to be an easy drive. However, the NRA has removed it from their maps – with good reason it seems ........

Locating the track was simple enough and the going was easy – as indicated on the map of the late Jan Joubert. But then we reached Robbie’s Pass, approximately 47km after leaving Kaoko Otavi, and everything changed. The track has been extensively damaged by flood water and the going became extremely difficult. We encountered some kids on their way to the next village where they were attending school, and they were a great help in moving rocks and filling in holes. Fortunately, our Defender has excellent approach-, departure- and break over angles as well as good ground clearance where it matters and we were able to continue. The next 5km was easily the most difficult track I have yet negotiated, and I was utterly exhausted when I completed it. (I doubt if a LDV type 4x4 or vehicles such as Discovery’s, Pajero’s etc will be able to negotiate it at present unless a lot of work is done beforehand) From there the going was easy again and we eventually reached the D3707 which we followed to Sesfontein and then to Ongongo, where we pitched camp for the night at the Warmquelle campsite.
Total distance for the day was 319km (all of it on gravel and sand) and our travelling time 12¾ hours.

**Day 9 : Tuesday 23 March**
We returned to Sesfontein to explore the area around the old German Fort and to look at the old irrigation ditches and the graves of some German soldiers.
We returned to Ongongo, from where we drove along the Otjisakumuka 4x4 route until it joined the C35. Large portions of this route have been cleared by the NRA in preparation for upgrading work. Parts of this route is covered with fine dust, similar to that found in the Khowarib Schlucht, and promises to be extremely difficult to drive on when wet.

And that was the end of the roads and tracks that I needed to travel on and it was time to tackle the long road home. We followed the C35 to Kamanjab, the C40 to Outjo and the C38 to Otjiwarongo, where we slept at the Out of Africa Lodge.
Total distance for the day was 513km (330km on tar and 183km on gravel and sand) and our travelling time 10 hours.

**Day 10 : Wednesday 24 March**  
We continued south along the B1, and spent the night at the Noordoewer Bed and Breakfast.

Total distance for the day was 1081km (all of it on tar) and our travelling time 11 hours.
Day 11 : Thursday 25 March

It was time to bid Namibia farewell, we crossed the border without incident and continued south along the N7 to Malmesbury and then home via Klipheuwel.

Total distance for the day was 702km (all of it on tar) and our travelling time 7½ hours.

CONCLUSION

This has been a hard, yet memorable, trip to a spectacular part of Namibia. As it was near the end of the rainy season, the countryside was covered in green. We drove a total distance of 6275km in the 11 days, of which 4602km was on tarred roads and 1676km on gravel roads and rocky- and sandy tracks.

This was my 51st trip to Namibia since 1994 and of these 25 had been undertaken in our faithful Landy, which we have owned since new and now has 252181 problem free and funtastic kilometres on its odometer. Its average fuel consumption for this trip was 8.19km/l diesel.