

NORTHERN CAPE - August 2007

The trip was a last minute decision made after the collapse of my participation in a Makgadikgadi trip put together by Peter Tiedt. We didn't have a fixed plan and left home armed only with 1 reservation (the guesthouse at Klein Pella for night 1), telephone numbers of all accommodation listed on T4A Pro North & Western Cape, and a decision to "wing it" based on local information once we were in the region.

Our steed was the newish Hilux D/C 4.0 V6 towing the Afrispor on it's maiden trip. The Hilux is still relatively unequipped with the only additions being auxillary batteries and a customised tow bar to raise departure angle and tow ball height. I use a tonneau cover rather than a canopy and this, I am sure, added a little to my fuel consumption figures.

Day 1

With small kids on hand we wanted to leave JHB early so that we could kill much of the 1080km to Klein Pella during their sleep time. 2:30am it was when we drove out the gate and we managed to reach Vryburg before there were stirrings from the back seat. Decided on brunch at the Wimpy in Upington as the Spur wouldn't let us in 5 minutes before opening time.

The tow ball on the Hilux is high and the Afrispor towed perfectly level without any sway. Further into the day we encountered a headwind which pushed the fuel consumption up to 20.4l/100km compared to the 17.1l/100km earlier on. Not too bad I thought, seeing as though we'd maintained 110 – 120km/h on the open road. Easy driving along the N14 and the 35km of good gravel road to Klein Pella was a bit more sandy than usual but nothing requiring 4 wheel drive.

The drive took us 12 hours 10 min with 3 stops. Overnight was in the guesthouse at a total cost of R780-00 including dinner and breakfast and a few drinks from the honesty bar. The rooms won't win any design awards but are neat, clean, large and very comfy. Meals are an "eat as much as you can" buffet style, good boerekos event, ending with coffee and rusks.



Day 2

Elize had put us in touch with a few folk in Springbok so we chatted there for a short while where it was recommended that the Kamieskroon area had excellent flower bloomings at the time. It's a short 70km to the town and the Verbe camp was the better option seeing as though Cosy Mountain was occupied. It's not much of a camp ground but has a few trees, power points and the ablutions were clean with hot water. Cost per night was R75- each for three of us and R70- for our 4 year old. A little steep for what was offered we thought, but it's their peak season with little else during the rest of the year, so understandable I suppose.

It was overcast with an intermittent drizzle and in early evening and an icy wind brewed. I had hesitated in buying the side panels for the Howling Moon trailer tent, but was very grateful we had. We created a warm cocoon within but I was disappointed that there were no ties to hold the panels onto the poles. The wind got progressively worse during the night and the noise from buffeting of these panels was an irritation; but the tent as a whole faired well in what became incredibly bad winds between 2 and 5am.



Day 3

Local advice again steered us to Skilpad just inside the Namaqua National park and we saw nice bloomings along the way. The coffee shop there provided a few mid-morning nibbles and soon we continued down to Soebatsfontein, Wallekraal, Hondeklipbaai and Spoegrivier. It's a really nice drive with great scenery. Flowers were there but not in the abundance that we had expected to see. One of the park rangers explained that greater splendour had occurred around 2 days earlier. Still, we weren't disappointed. Hondeklipbaai wasn't inspiring (that's for the heads up Hennie)

That night Verbe escaped the winds but temperatures plummeted and early morning presented a thin layer of ice over the entire tent roof, cars and the like.

Days 4 & 5

Early morning coffee was scuppered by jellied gas in the jets of the stove. Replacements clogged immediately and blowing didn't clean. Our friendly 110 Def with Desert Wolf neighbour was kind enough to boil up a kettle for us without too many jibes at my Toy ☺.

We took an Eastern loop back onto the N7 just outside Springbok which was also nice but not as rewarding as the previous day. The local gas centre had no jets in stock but one of their guys used Nitrogen to blow the old ones clean and this lasted the rest of our trip.

Not wanting to head back to Kamies, Phillip Sprules' (Dec '05) trip report sent us north to Vioolsdrift and Fiddler's Creek. Nice spot (we tried for site 3 but Maudie wasn't chuffed when I suggested removing the fence to get the trailer in). Site 1 though was great, private and close enough to the river bank, it even had a little bar fridge in the kitchen corner. Although close to the pub area, there was very little noise despite 2 overland trucks (with relevant "kids") in camp.

Sun was out, weather was warm but next day had an on/off light drizzle which lasted into the next morning. We took a drive westward through the farmlands to Nababiep – farmers take dust control seriously here – climbed the cliff, and spent a generally lazy day around camp.

On return to camp I found the one Engel wasn't running on the 12v power source. After chasing the circuit for over half an hour I realised that my Multimeter's battery was kaput thereby giving me bad readings. Problem was the gold coated fuse in the amplifier type housing. From vibration, the gold plating had rubbed off and the fuse wasn't making proper contact in the housing. Replacement fuse sorted things out quickly enough thereafter.

Cost was a very reasonable R25- pppn (no charge for my youngest), and a small pile of firewood was also included. Fuel was available at the Engen 2km from camp but no unleaded. Fiddlers gets a big thumbs up from me – (watch this space©)



Day 6

The goal for the day was Ramansdrift. We took the Namakwa Eco Trail but missed the deviation first time and ended up being chased out of Swartkop Mine. Found the right one and eventually got to within 800 meters of the site but couldn't get the trailer through. The four litre motor came into it's own in the powder soft sand that had us axle deep in places and she pushed and pulled the Afrispoor for over an hour for the last 500 meters but with rain clouds closing in and no backup vehicle in case of the worst, we backed out. The alternate site was crappy so back onto the trail we continued ending back at Klein Pella – this time the camp site. I must mention though, that this was the first time I had found it necessary to use the full grunt of the Toy motor and was impressed more than I can imagine. I hadn't expected the

sand to be as bad as it was. When we turned around I had to push the trailer up a 45° incline of powdered sand with little grip. I'm still amazed that she found the guts she did.

The camp site here was clean with green grass, hot water, shady trees and it we debated long the next morning whether we should stay another day.

They brought us a wheel barrow of fire wood and next morning presented us with a grand bill of R100- all included. Too little we thought so splashed a few rands into the hands of the staff.



Day 7

We did a detour off the main road into Augrabies falls where we had lunch. Water levels are obviously low so they weren't as spectacular as otherwise would be the case. The monkeys around the restaurant area are the most bold I have ever encountered.

In hindsight we should have stayed at the camp there but we decided to reach Red Sands and pitch there for 2 nights. Red Sands was neat, but the name says it all - not one blade of grass around the site! Found the ablutions not able to keep up with the number of visitors in camp.

R60- per adult R40- per kid per night

Highlights

Our time on the Orange

Lows

We thought we were going into the prime flower blooming but this wasn't the case

Lessons Learnt

Add a spare battery for the Multimeter to my toolbox.