

Augrabies & Kgalagadi Trip Report 6th – 12th June 2010 by Nakkiran & Michelle

After 3 months of preparation, we finally departed for what was going to be our first real overlanding trip. The itinerary was as follows: Augrabies, Kgalagadi, Windhoek, Etosha, Henties Bay, Sesriem, Noordewoer and then back home. However, this did not quite happen as planned – more on that later.

Day 0: Gordon's Bay to Springbok

After some last minute preparation – awning was only fitted the day before we left, - and packing, we left Gordon's Bay at 0930 and cruised on the R44 & R46 towards the N7. We stopped in Riebeek Casteel for a breakfast break @ Cafe Felix, which is quite a swanky place. Joined the N7 for the very long and boring drive to Springbok, and realised that the landy was very back heavy. It probably would have been better to mount our RTT in the front of the landy - one of the many lessons learned for our next trip in 2011. We reached our B&B in Springbok late in the afternoon, got some dinner at Nandos and it was an early night in.

Day 1 & 2: Springbok to Augrabies Falls National Park

After shopping for 2 pillows, some last minute groceries and filling up, we were on our way to Augrabies Falls National Park. A long & boring drive on the N14 later, we arrived at Augrabies in early afternoon. Took a walk to the viewpoints, and then it was fun and games setting up camp – our very first time ever with our current setup.



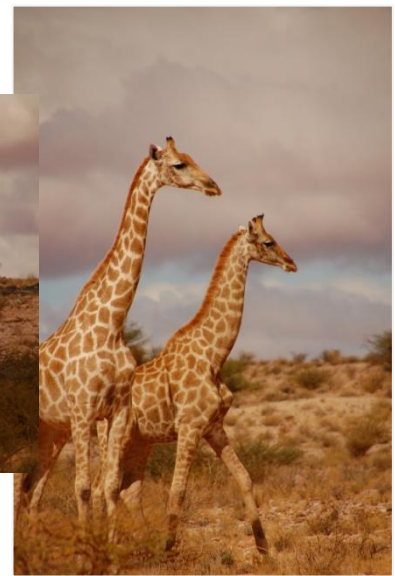
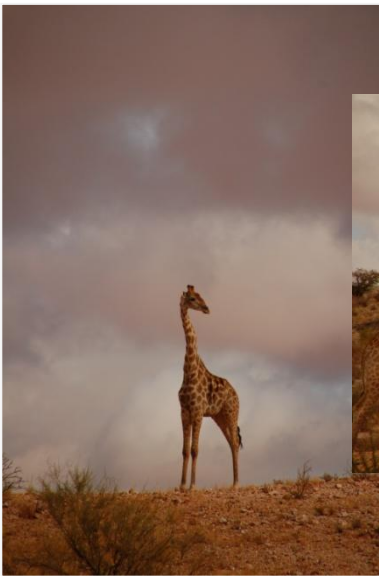
The campsite gets visited by baboons in the afternoon, so we had to keep things locked up at all times. A nice braai and a few drinks later, it was time for bed.

Woke up the next morning, had some breakfast and then decided to go on a drive around the park, which meant packing up the RTT – our 2nd time ever doing it and we are getting more efficient at it!

Drove to the Moon Rock and attempted a hike to the top until a spell of freezing rain made us turn back – who says it doesn't rain in the Kalahari in winter? And we would see plenty more rain on the last part of our journey!



We then spotted a family of giraffes, and proceeded to stalk them. Turns out the park is filled with giraffes! Also saw some ostriches, gemsbok, eland & lots of dassies.



We stopped at the aptly named Echo Corner and proceeded to, well, echo a bit 😊



When we got back to the campsite we were approached by an Australian couple whose car had been taken over by a troop of baboons. I drove around to their vehicle to try and scare them off, but they were having none of that. They eventually moved off when some bikers arrived and setup camp next to the Aussies. The Aussies lurked for a while, and then it was dinner & bedtime.

Day 3: Augrabies Falls NP to Kgalagadi TNP

Got up at 0730, packed up and left ANP. Having realised that it was MUCH colder than we anticipated, we stopped in Upington and bought 2 extra blankets from PEP Stores. Two sarmies from the Wimpy and a tank full of diesel later, we were on our way to the KTNP. We arrived at Twee Rivieren in the afternoon, checked in and found out that we had messed up our bookings. Somehow we had missed the fact that one cannot drive from Twee to Gharagab in one day! The SANParks lady informed us that it was possible, but we would have to leave Twee as soon as the gates opened and should not waste time along the way. After sorting out immigration and police checks, we made our way to the campsite, setup camp and enjoyed a drink in the afternoon sun surrounded by playful meerkats and birds.



At SWAMBO's request, hand- and footprint were duly etched into the Kalahari sand ☺



Packet-pasta dinner later, and the Aussies rocked up for a lurk. We broke out the Robertson box wine - thanks to Tony Weaver for the suggestion - and indeed, by glass #3, it was John Platter 4 stars! It was off to bed early, since the next day was going to be a rough one.

Day 4: Twee Rivieren to Gharagab

Got up at 0600 the next morning. It was FREEZING cold, but we had no choice, since we had to be on the road by 0730. By 0645 – still in the dark - we were all packed up, much to the astonishment of the rest of the campsite, who woke up at first light to find us on our way! And so started a very loooooong drive to Gharagab. We saw plenty of game in the early morning, and thanks to SWAMBO, we even spotted a cheetah being stalked by a jackal not far from Twee. We also woke up a jackal, and came across a very old wildebeest at one of the picnic spots, not to mention the ubiquitous gemsbok all over the park:



A little while later, we stopped at another picnic spot, and spotted a couple of German tourists who were feeding a jackal – I promptly told them off, and they pretended not to understand English. This jackal had obviously been fed before as it was strolling in the crowded picnic site without any concerns about the people around.

We carried on to Nossob where we filled up and had some lunch while waiting for the shop to open. It paid off since we scored a bottle of Zonnenbloem Pinotage while browsing in the shop. We set off on the last part of the trip to Gharagab, reassured by the SANParks official that it would only take about 3-4hours to get there – jah, right! Very badly corrugated roads and an extremely badly corrugated track to Gharagab meant we only reached the wilderness camp at 1745 – the SANParks official in charge was even radioing Nossob to find out if we were still coming through!

By that time we were exhausted and quickly unloaded the fridge and essentials from the landy. After dinner, we enjoyed a hot and salty shower, and looked forward to sleeping in actual beds – not that there's anything wrong about the tent, but in sub-zero temperatures, we were not happy campers!

Day 5: Ghagarab Wilderness Camp

We woke up fairly late and proceeded to do absolutely nothing for the whole day! We sat on the deck and watched the activities at the watering hole – a few jackals, lots of birds, a gemsbok or two.



We had a long chat with Oliver - the caretaker at the camp – a very friendly and helpful man who informed us there were lions at the watering hole the previous night. We were obviously enjoying our beds too much to notice 😊

We lit a big fire at sunset and then the action started – a pack of 5 hyenas arrived at the waterhole and after filling up they came up to the campsite for a lurk. They were not in the least fazed by the braai fires, nor by our presence. Needless to say, camera flashes were going off all over the place, and our neighbour even had to throw a piece of wood at one of the hyenas who took quite a liking to his BFG AT's!



Day 6: Ghagarab Wilderness Camp to Mata-Mata Rest Camp

The next morning we packed up the landy, cleaned the cabin and hit the track on our way to Mata-Mata rest camp. Another long drive, with lots of gemsbok and wildebeest and the other usual suspects, we arrived at Mata-Mata in the early afternoon. After setting up camp, we enjoyed a drink and watched a hyena cruising the camp fence for scraps – again this animal had obviously been fed by people before!





We hit the tent at around 2000, and experienced what is undoubtedly the coldest night ever, even sleeping in our clothes with socks and beanies on!

Day 7: Mata-Mata Rest Camp to Windhoek (well, not quite)

When we woke up at 0700 the next morning, it was -5C – as indicated by the transfer case oil temp. We sure felt it, and decided there and then that winter camping was out of the picture for us! After packing up, we went to the border post to cross into Namibia... where I was promptly refused entry because the official insisted I needed a visa! Even the previous stamps in my passport from our Jan 2009 trip to the Fish River Canyon did not deter him, and we had no option but to abort the trip. Of course, this being a Sunday, and his phone line not working, we could not contact the Namibian High Commission to confirm that I did not require a visa for Namibia (another lesson learnt).

So we had no option but to head back to Twee Rivieren, since Mata-Mata was fully booked. In fact, the whole park was fully booked and we had to leave and head back to Upington. We phoned NWR to inform them of the situation and were pleasantly surprised when Zandry from the CTN office told us he would postpone our Etosha & Sesriem bookings until we could make other arrangements - a big #brandplus to NWR! We then decided to head back to Upington and go visit friends in Port Nolloth for a couple of days before heading back home.

All in all, a wonderful trip, except for the disappointment of not making it to Etosha, but we're going there in May 2011 having learnt more valuable lessons about overlanding!

Vehicle

2010 LR Defender 90 Puma, with long range tank, Bullbar, Hannibal roofrack, Hannibal RTT, jerrycan, extra spare wheel, Genesys dual battery system, Madman EMS, Garmin Quest II GPS

Trip figures

Total distance covered: 4785km

Total fuel used: 535l

Avg consumption on tar: 13.7l/100km

Avg consumption in the park: 10.3l/100km

Total avg consumption: 11.18l/100km

No. of problems with the landy: **ZERO**

Lessons learnt

1. Winter camping is not for us! Any winter trips will be done in chalets, cabins, etc., while camping trips will be done in summer, autumn & spring.
2. Take a 220v fridge cable and rollout extension cord. Most campsites have power and you save the battery while camping in one spot for a few days.
3. The rear windows on a landy are useless. We will be replacing these with gullwing ones, probably Frontrunner. Coupled with this arrangement, we will switch to using stackable ammo boxes for packing, which will make accessing stuff easier.
4. There is also a lot of space wasted just below the roof. I will get ExpeditionGear to build a rollcage-type arrangement at the back and will use this to secure bulky but light items such as sleeping bags, pillows, blankets, etc
5. Use rechargeable LED lanterns instead of gas lamps.
6. You really DONT need to pack everything for a 3-week trip. Pack the bare essentials for a couple of days and resupply along the way.
7. The RTT must move from the back to the front of the landy for more even weight distribution
8. You can drive from Twee Rivieren to Gharagab in one day, but DONT!

More Pictures

<http://picasaweb.google.com/n.sunassee/>

<http://www.facebook.com/nakkiran>

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Overland and ZA-Lro lists, and the Landyonline forums who are always providing advice and information!