

## **Kgalagadi and Mabuasehube: April 2009.**

### **Background**

A group of us have traditionally gone on a boy's weekend once a year. It was decided last year to do something different this year and head into the Kalahari Desert. This obviously required more time than your average long-weekend, so it was decided to extend the trip. The dates of the tour were arranged to include both long-weekends at the end of April and early May. I would do the planning, as I had ventured into the area before.

### **Participants**

Rob Harvey and James Wilson	Land Cruiser 80	Petrol
John Hooper and Paul de Ruyter	Land Cruiser 79	Diesel

### **The Tour**

#### **Day 1: Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April – Kuruman to Rooiputs**

James and I arrived from Durban the previous evening. John and Paul left Joburg at around 3am, hoping to make Kuruman by 9am. The Durbanites had been advised the previous evening by the locals (at the local) to purchase their meat at Angus Butchery, which was duly done. I must recommend them on not only on their excellent meat, but service as well. It's not often someone physically runs around to get you what you require. After meeting up with John and Paul we were on the road by 10:15. We chose to do the Vanzylsrus road into the Park because it's more scenic than the Upington road, and it's a great chance to open the windows and start absorbing the Kalahari air. The road is tarred from Hotazel to Sonstraal, leaving about 55km of gravel before Vanzyls. Tyre pressures were duly dropped – no it's not Joost in the Kalahari, but John doing his best impression.



“Joost” deflating his tyres

We stopped at Vanzylsrus for the obligatory photo next to the town sign, and a beer at the revamped hotel.



Paul, James and John



Rob, John and James

The trip from Vanzyls to Twee Rivieren was fairly uneventful, bar a quick stop to get wood from Pieta's Place in Askham. The fun and games started at Twee Rivieren when one of our party announced that his passport had expired. Some sweet-talking (and downright lying) got him through on the premise that we were to exit via Twee Rivieren.

The gravel road from Samevloeing to Kij Kij is closed for repairs at the moment, so Rooiputs campers have to travel along a tweespoor on the Eastern bank of the Nossob river to get to the camp, which is only suitable for 4x4's. It is, however, a great route to travel as you drive in amongst the wildlife and literally trip over animals all the time. We arrived at Rooiputs #6 at about 5pm and set up camp.



Rooiputs at sundown

It was a great feeling to be back in the Kalahari again. John hadn't been for 15 odd years and Paul and James had never been, so there was much excitement. Club steaks with butternut and potatoes were demolished for dinner. A couple of brandy and cokes were quaffed while we watched the stars and listened for the night sounds. Although ablution facilities were on offer there was no water in camp.



Rooiputs #6 at first light

### **Day 2: Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April – Rooiputs to Polentswa**

The lions moved in quietly overnight, but at around 4am decided to let loose the gods of thunder. We got out of bed at 6:30 and drove down to the waterhole. The five of them were camped right there (GPSr readings had them at about 500m from our campsite). One of the males and a female were caught up in their own world, and put on an impressive show for the campers.



The great advantage of staying at Rooiputs with the road closed, is that it now becomes your private stretch of reserve. Under normal circumstances we would have had half of Twee Rivieren at the sighting in no time, but on this day there were only the Rooiputs faithful to witness this spectacle.

We packed up and left Rooiputs at around 9am. North of Rooiputs you drive along the normal gravel road until Kij Kij, which is where you meet the “public” again. The Park had a lot of rain in late summer this year and the vegetation looks stunning. The grass had begun to turn brown, but all the bushes and trees were bursting green. One thing that stuck me on the drive north was the number of gemsbok in the riverbed. They were by far the most numerous of the antelope seen, way outstripping both springbok and wildebeest. So it wasn’t really a surprise when we came across this chap in the middle of the road near Dikbaardskolk.



He had been pulled down by two male lions, which were lying up in the shade just off the road.

We took a quick lunch break at Nossob and headed north. At Bedinkt we noticed some gemsbok (what else) staring intently in front of them, but due to the high grass, we couldn't see a thing until we came round the corner and discovered these young turks.



We arrived at Polentswa #1 in the mid afternoon and decided to have a beer or two before unpacking. It's a great site at the bottom of the dune that overlooks the pan, but as with Rooiputs there are facilities, but no water.



**Day 3: Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April – Polentswa**

We decided to head up to Union's End. The grass north of Nossob was very high which made viewing tough, even in a high vehicle. General game was easy to spot, but it was the small stuff we were missing. After duly signing the register at Union's End we had brunch at the picnic spot.



Our official photographer at Union's End, wondering which way to Home Affairs to renew his passport.

We were extremely lucky to watch a cheetah stalk a pair of springbok whilst we were eating brunch, but he had to abandon the hunt when the springbok went out of range.



Sundowners at Polentswa

The sunsets kept on getting better due to cloud build up, so it was decided to chill out in camp for the late afternoon.

#### **Day 4: Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April – Polentswa to Matopi**

On our way down to Nossob to refuel we bumped into the young turks lying right next to the road. It always amazes me how relaxed Kalahari lions are around vehicles.



Maybe it's because the bottle throwing brigade haven't got there yet. If this chap makes it, he's going to be a moneer – he really was big for a sub-adult.

Filling up with fuel and ice at Nossob was effortless. They used to have a limit on the amount of fuel you could purchase at one time, but have done away with it since they got their satellite link for the videocam at the hide and now have outside comm's.

Travelling from Nossob to Mabua you may only take the lower road or Boso trail. This is an extremely beautiful 200 km drive. We split the drive in two, staying at Matopi #2 campsite, which I would recommend. 30km/h was a comfortable pace for us on the move, but you tend to stop a lot for the sights and sounds, so your average travelling speed will be closer to 20km/h, hence a 10 hour day doing the trail in one hit. The Boso trail is single lane and for the first thirty kilometres from Nossob consists of driving over smallish dunes, followed by acacia woodland, interspersed with small pans.



But watch out for oncoming traffic. “Serge Damseaux”, in a rental, going like the clappers, was coming the other way as we crested a dune and had to bail off the track, narrowly missing two camelthorns. He clearly didn’t learn his lesson because he had a road rage incident with Paul and John, who were a couple of clicks behind us, as well. Idiot!

That incident didn’t detract from a wonderful day and we rolled into Matopi #2 at about 4pm. The feeling of isolation is amazing, and was one of the highlights of my trip. The campsite is nothing more than a sign nailed to a tree and a cement disc for your braai. No ablutions and no water – perfect. By now we had eased into the sundowner routine, so camp was quickly erected and the last rays admired.



Matopi #2 campsite



View from the campsite

## **Day 5: 29<sup>th</sup> April – Matopi to Mabuasehube Pan**

As good as we were getting on the sundowner routine so we were at getting up late. Waking up was not the problem, the birds saw to that; it was the getting out of bed bit that was bamboozling us. But there's no rush when you're at Matopi and only have 125km's to travel in the day. Lions were roaring in the distance and a scrub hare decided it was safer in camp than out. Not that we could concur - it all looked the same to us, but he was the resident so we didn't argue. We packed up and got going by 8:30, stopping and exploring at each opportunity along the way.



Checking out one of the pans en route.

As a courtesy we checked in at the main gate, but didn't really need to do so. I had discovered that I was low on oil and only had one pint spare, so I asked one of the staff to get me some if anyone was going to Tshabong and handed over P100. He was very happy to do this, as a DWNP truck was leaving for Tshabong the next day. All smiles, we headed for our campsite at Mabua Pan #1.

We really liked Mabua 1. Granted there are no facilities, or even an A-frame, but you are perched on a calcrete cliff overlooking the pan with decent shade in camp. The big

bonus is that you overlook the waterhole if you walk about 30m to the edge of the cliff.



Mabua 1 campsite – notice how the tents are further apart compared to the beginning of the trip, we had a snorer in our midst.

### **Day 6 & 7 – Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> & Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May – Mabua Pan #1**

Mabua is very different in character to the South African side of KTP. The vegetation is sandy bushveld, dotted with lovely large pans, and given all the rain they'd had the grass was high and the bush thick. The cats evaded us, even by call, but we had great sightings of brown hyena at the waterhole at night and a porcupine that wouldn't get off the road between Khiding and Mpaya. General game was good, particularly around the pans, and we had good raptor sightings – vultures and martial eagles especially.



A bruised sky to the south of Mabua pan

During our trip we had noticed thundershowers threatening more and more every day. On two occasions we had very brief downpours (one sent us scurrying for the vehicle, like a bunch of sissies, only to get out three minutes later). Temperatures throughout the trip were fantastic, nights got down to about 10 and days up to 30 degrees.

### **Day 8: Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May – Mabua Pan to Home**

With regimental precision and heavy hearts we pack up and leave the main gate by 8:30am. We decide that we had all better go through one border post together in case there's a snag with the passport issue, so McCarthy's Rest it is. The road south to Tshabong is typical sandy cut line for about 50km's. One needs to watch out where they are grading, as the going becomes very soft, and where they are dumping calcrete to upgrade the road. It's about a 10km section. They are doing this in a south to north direction. The last 50km's to Tshabong is good gravel which was despatched at 70km/h. We meet up with the DWNP truck who has my engine oil and exchange pleasantries. We breeze through both border posts, "forgetting" to check a certain individual back into the country and make Kuruman before 2pm for lunch and good-

byes. The group splits here, James and I will detour via Joburg to drop Paul off, and then head back to Durban, and John will head back to Cape Town, which all goes off smoothly.

### **Highlights**

- Each and every campsite – they were all amazing in their own right.
- The great laughs around the campfire with your mates.
- The sense of really being in the middle of nowhere

### **Lowlights**

- Our wannabe rally driver “Serge”. But he really was a very small blight on a fantastic trip.

### **For the Record**

We did 3731 km's and averaged 5.7km/l (or 17.6l/100km) in my Land Cruiser 80 GXL petrol.

Total camping and park fees came to P1368 for 7 nights, which equated to R425pp.

Thanks to our sponsors Oude Molen for the brandy and L R Foam for the mattresses.

Without your support the nights wouldn't have been as comfortable.