

Fred goes to Namibia for something different. June 26th – 12th July 2019.

This trip came about when a correspondent was seeking somebody to share a car through part of North West Namibia and I volunteered to help out. The full tale is posted already but as there were no photos I thought to do this shorter report with a few snaps relative to the text but without the usual plethora of birds and perhaps give details of the route and where we stayed by way of contrast to some of my other reports...

Brief background. I had never met Daniel before but we had corresponded from time to time. He lives in Toronto and had mapped out a trip for himself which involved camping in some wilderness areas with which I was familiar. This is the route. From Windhoek (WDH) up through Damaraland to the



Kunene River on the Angolan Border along the previously forbidden D3700 to the border post and back by Etosha NP. There was a spur over to Puros and back on the D3707 gravel road.

I felt he would like to take a more scenic route to Puros

down the Haonib River bed and suggested that to him. It is more taxing and off road but I felt we could do it OK. I arranged for a Himba Guide to come with us as a precaution. So the spur to Puros now

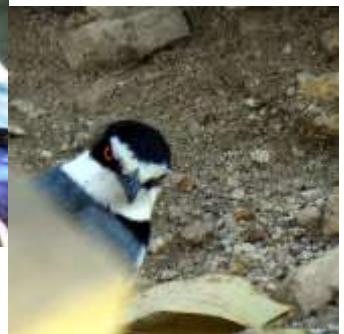


the right with our outbound route in **red** and our return as originally planned in **blue**. The new route added 60km or so to the direct route and so it was to be.

Daniel was to camp but I demurred where an alternative was possible. So after a flight from home I was in Windhoek to await Daniel's arrival the next morning following which we picked up our Hi Luxe loaded with spare tyres, a fridge and ground camping gear for two. Neither of us wanted Roof top tents. Daniel had ordered a new style tent and we collected it in Windhoek. We then left for our first stop at



Etusi Camp where we both had nice roomy fixed tents. Food was



taken *en famille* with our hosts. Camping like this I can do!

Next morning before breakfast I found the first of my special birds. Not rare but one I love to see in Namibia. **White-tailed Shrike**. I like the pose but I do have full bodied poses too. This bird has attitude.

After breakfast we loaded the car and set off on the drive north west further into Damaraland over gravel roads. We drove via several places where Elephant were known to occur but sadly saw none.

Our route took us close to Brandberg and Uis where I had not been before. I was not particularly impressed by the area and was surprised by the number of Herero and Himba women with stalls by the roadside.

We eventually arrived at our next location Madisa Camp where we were to spend two nights. Here Daniel was to try his new tent and I got a nice isolated standalone fixed tent. The place was busy at times and a bit 'overlander' in atmosphere but nice enough. We enjoyed cold beers and a pleasant dinner the first night and Daniel cooked some Kudu steaks for the second evening. G&T and Red wine was given as we had stocked up with essentials in Karibib.

Here is Daniels new tent and site:-

My more modest accommodation looked like this:-



No prizes for guessing which tent held this bed. I am not knocking camping as it can be useful and enjoyable but where an alternative is available then why struggle?

We both had cooking facilities and here is a photo of Daniel without his Chef's hat preparing our Kudu steaks on the second night while I took care of the drinks.



Two birds for a change from my tent during our stay.



On our full day in Madisa we did a longish drive around the area by first going to Khorixas for an ATM for Daniel and further supplies. We then took a drive west for some impromptu birding and searching for some elephants and whilst the former was good, we were less fortunate on the second.

Now we drove further north to enter what was called Kaokoland but is now part of Kunene region. The scenery got more and more rugged and we eventually started to find Giraffe and Springbok more frequently. We also disturbed a Ludwig's Bustard from the road which was a good sighting. By mid afternoon we had arrived at Khwarib Lodge where I had stayed before. Here is my bathroom and bed for this night.



Food was very good under the stars and the grounds are good for birds as the semi permanent Hoanib river flows by my tent.

Now it was the day for our trip along the Hoanib river bed so after breakfast we packed up the car, checked it over carefully as we were heading for some very remote country where we would be very far from help, and set off for Sesfontein where I had arranged to meet Robbin, our help for the day. We made a couple of purchases, I had forgotten to pack a torch and we needed some more bottled water, after which we set off on the Puros road west to where the river trail left. The trail was very rutted and care was needed to keep the ground clearance needed. We met a convoy of five 4WD coming out of the river bed where they had obviously camped overnight and when we reached the control gate we paid our N\$100 for the necessary Conservancy permit before dropping down and reaching the dry river bed. We encountered several giraffe and lots of Springbok plus a large flock of Ostrich but no Elephants. The track was somewhat drier than I had experienced in 2016 and we made good progress on the lace work pattern of other folk's tyre tracks. Despite the drought that has afflicted Namibia this year there was plenty of high reed beds that could hide Elephants and Lions quite easily so water was not far below the surface. We made several excursions to likely spots but not one elephant did we find until we reached Amspoort Gorge where we found two browsing on the Anna trees.



We stopped for a while to watch them pull off branches and crunch them up but were careful to keep a distance and not harass them in any way as they are not as tolerant of disturbance as some elephants when tourists are more frequent such as in Etosha. After a while we



left them in peace and shortly after followed our route out of the gorge. The river still heads west but enters the Skeleton Coast Park which is currently off limits to tourists. Our track now headed more north over the very remote and desolate Goanis plains where the only wildlife encountered was a solitary Ludwig's Bustard. The track was quite feint but with Gladys Garmin and Robbin we found our way easily enough. Nevertheless it was a relief when after some two hours or so we could see the mountains of the Puros Conservancy on the horizon. As we got closer we saw fresh Rhino prints crossing the track but despite scanning the whole area we could not find it. Then we descended into the Puros gorge where the Huarusib River flows. This river was running well and our route needed care when crossing the water as some 'holes' were bonnet deep although the bed was relatively solid so we never looked like sticking. Just as we were leaving the gorge for the more open and wider area we met



up with two more elephant. One went into cover but the other just ambled along our track quite unconcerned. Nevertheless we gave him a wide berth just to be sure. Elephant have right of way at all times. Having negotiated the moving roadblock and taken a few photos we entered Puros and took Robbin to his home and family with grateful thanks for his company. We then made our way to our next base in the Puros Community Camp ground for the next two nights.

This was situated in part of the old river bed in a lovely grove of trees and was a well laid out with a cooking and fire area on a slight rise and ablutions hidden in a nearby bush so it was not all hardship Here there was no more room alternative for me so we pitched both tents and settled in to prepare the evening meal while I prepared two G&Ts. That's what the fridge was for really.

Our camp site as quite large. This is my tent with the Hi Luxe in the background and shot of Daniel's tent with him in the background contemplating lighting the camp fire.



The final picture is the fireplace with a Cape Glossy Starling watching how it was done.

Our Puros camp was fine but was also our introduction to the southern African multi vehicle convoy camping where about 5 -7 vehicles all turn up with one booking and circle their wagons and light fires a though still voortrekking the wilderness as pioneers. Just swapped their Outspan Oxen for Toyotas!

One advantage of our tents, which were warm and comfortable, is that we could leave with the Hi Luxe for shopping (Daniel seemed to be always shopping and looking for ATMs) or Game drives as we could leave our tents and pitch and just drive off whereas the 'trekkers' had to strike camp if they wished to do this. Our trips were down the gorge again until we felt the water depth was getting too much for comfort and up into the mountains along some very rough and narrow tracks. I wished that I had recorded where we went last time instead of relying on memory although I think we went to the same places mostly but everywhere looked so similar it was hard to tell. We found no rhino at all



despite the many footprints and middens. The gorge contained lots of waterbirds from storks and herons to small waders such as this Three-banded Plover. Elsewhere the dry river bed contained Impala and Springbok and Giraffe but

searching for Elephant was a disappointing 'dip!' Back at camp we had good cuisine, partial leftovers of the Kudu and lots of pot cooked veggies. Daniel had got the fire going so I contributed by burning the huge branch that that Starling was perched on in the picture above. All very cosy under the stars. All that was missing was the Scoutmaster to lead us in singing "Ging gan gooli". Not!



It was now time to head back to Khowarib on the more 'direct' D3707 as planned so we struck camp and moved out through Puros and picked up the track homewards. It was quite



remote along the Gomatum river but the surface was not bad and as we approached Tokamas we encountered more giraffe and even a vehicle coming the other way which was a bigger rarity.

Now we were back at Khowarib for another night as a start point for our push north to the Kunene River. I was once more on familiar territory so no need to show the tent I had so here is a photo of



Daniel keeping watch for wild animals by the camp fire.

Next day after a good breakfast we set off for Epupa Falls on the Kunene River which borders Angola. I had driven this way previously so knew the route and we made good time with Daniel driving. Long and dusty over the previously notorious Joubert Pass until we passed through the lonely outpost of Opuwo when we then encountered more mountains and began to follow river valleys and more scrubby trees. We arrived at Epupa Falls and checked in to our huts with little difficulty. Nice huts on stilts so you could park your car underneath. It was whilst lifting out our cases that I

commented on a strong smell of gas and discovered the tap of the Camping Cylinder had shaken loose. That was soon fixed. Daniel was not camping here and had the adjacent 'hut' to me. They were a bit 'rustic' but the bed was soft and clean and the electric worked on Solar power. The huts overlooked the top of the falls and there was a



large flap that lifted up to give good views over the river. The camp was fine and has quite a history as related to us by the owner/builder Koos Verwey when he joined us at dinner in the evening. We were treated to some photographs of the big flood in 2018 when everywhere was under water. Whilst Daniel went off to view the falls I did some impromptu birding and managed to find Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Wire-tailed Swallows and the restricted range Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush. I had seen this species before so not a "Lifer" but something to look out for nevertheless.



Next morning we set off along the previously 'off limits' riverside track D3700 as it has been "worked on" and is not so bad as it used to be. Not so good for the "Have a go heroes" but a boon to the local population.

The going was good and very scenic in parts as we followed the course of the "Palm fringed" Kunene as it wound its way to the Atlantic

although we of course were heading upstream the 95km km to our next stop at the lovely Kunene River Lodge where two treats waited me. The Lodge is built out over the river in places and suffered badly in the floods but is now back to normal in more ways than one. It is famous for two birds in particular. It was the first (only) site where the lovely Cinderella Waxbill was found to be breeding in Namibia and the rare Angola Cave Chat can be found in the hills nearby. Kunene River Lodge is therefore deservedly popular with birders.



Dry season is best for both birds as the Cindy' vanishes at the first drop of rain and the access tracks to the hills for the Cave Chat become impassable. The area as you would expect contains many other species of bird as we were about to find out.

Daniel found himself a nice place to erect his tent and I got myself a very nice bungalow similar to the one I had had on our earlier stay. I had not done all my camping yet so a bit of comfort never goes amiss. I settled in and had a look around the grounds for Giant Kingfishers by the river and Yellow bellied Greenbulls, Bare-faced Spurfowl and "afer"



Babblers and the localised Hartlaub's race of Red necked Spurfowl that

frequent the area around the Lodge but of course as the afternoon cooled I was drawn to the 'garden' area where the Cinderellas come to feed and drink. I was doubly pleased to see the resident proprietor, Pete Morgan, also looking and together we soon located our target.

First a single bird and then several others flew in and our cameras got busy even though clear views in the vegetation were not easy. When are Waxbills really easy? I started this post by promising not to overdo the birds but who can resist these? A lifer for me so that only leaves the Angolan Cave Chat for next time. Daniel suggested we go on the



sundowner cruise which normally does not thrill me but when I learned that Pete was going to drive the boat I jumped aboard. And so it proved as we came upon bird after bird. From Darters to Dikkops. This boat was very well thought out. It even had handy holders cut in the Gunwhales that nicely fit a can of



Windhoek Draught. So we proceeded upstream until our way was barred by some small rapids and falls when we turned and moored on the Angolan Bank for a leisurely sundowner or two. Then we headed back to the lodge with Freckled Nightjars swooping for the insects in the dusk and with the highlight being (for Pete and I) very clear sightings of a White-backed

Night Heron that distribution maps do not show as being here. I did get



some very noisy photos but a promise is a promise. No more birds. So here is the sunset instead.

Back to the lodge in the dark and a very nice dinner of T-Bone steak the leftovers of which would be the basis of our picnic box next day when we drove down to enter Etosha after having found an ATM in Ruacane.

This drive was fine. The next part of D3700 I had driven before and then we only had the long drive on the now tarred C35 to the Vet Fence, hence the cooked meat in our picnic, and into Etosha via the Galton Gate. We routed via Dolomite Camp in the hope of some wildlife encounters but things were

very quiet and apart from a few Zebras, Oryx and Springbok we saw very little apart from a distant view of four Elephant at a distant Fountain.

Our overnight was booked into Olifantsrus Camp where there is no accommodation so it was Camping for me again. Our site was fine but the whole place was very crowded. Wilderness camping this certainly is not. Sun canopy, Water point, Electric hook up and a concrete fireplace and BBQ set the tone. This is so not what I think of as camping. More like some seaside venue in high summer with feral kids running wild. Ho hum. Calm down! The one redeeming feature was a walkway to a raised platform overlooking a waterhole frequented by Elephants and other mammals. For dinner we had the rest of the food



(feral kids) -> brought down from Kunene and the usual G&T and red

wine before retiring into our tents for a disturbed sleep. Next morning we had a prepared breakfast at the kiosk to save our own chores before striking camp for the long and bumpy ride to our next and final stop in Etosha at Okaukuejo. Half way there I diverted up to two normally productive waterholes at Adamax and Okendeka but sadly drew blanks on the whole

route. However it did pass time before we were due to check in at Okaukuejo where Daniel got his pitch number and I got a nice room after some negotiation. We adjourned to the famous waterhole where we watch a nice family of Elephants cooling off in the heat of the day. Later in the afternoon I drove to Newbrownii and found some more Elephant drinking including a very young baby which I think looks nice in Monochrome for a change. After a while they wandered on their way so we resumed our drive and on a fateful impulse I took the turn up to Gemboksvlakte to seek Blue Cranes, a dip, and knowing that the occasional Rhino could be found. Dipped on the first but struck gold on the second as we came upon a female making her way through open ground. Guessing where she was heading I took a parallel course stopping for the odd photograph now and again as she converged with our track until we met at



the crossroads and she went to drink at the fountain as I had guessed. She has to be worth two portraits. One trotting along and one posing nicely for me. We had around 50 minutes in her company but she showed no signs of leaving so we went back to the Camp well pleased with our outing.

The next day was a full day in Etosha but despite searching high and low we found no cats for Daniel



although we did have further sightings of Rhino and a crazy encounter with a large bull elephant that we did get a little too close to for comfort that racked up our adrenalin count. No photos as we would have needed a wide angle lens. So here are a couple of portraits of Steinbuk and Black-faced Impala to fill the page.



Back at the Camp we spent some time down at the waterhole which was as good a place as any to finish off the beer supply while watching a robust pushing match between two Elephants before they moved off and allowed three giraffe to approach and drink against the setting sun and make a decent photo opportunity.



Next morning was our last and as a final throw of the dice I drove Daniel up to Ondeka again in the hope of finding him some lions. I can take or leave these cats but I

appreciate how much they mean to others so was rather pleased when I spied a suggestive bump on a dune top which on closer examination revealed a male lion who eventually graced us, there were other cars around, by raising his maned head and providing a decent portrait for our efforts.

And that was the end of Etosha. Birds? Of course I saw birds but I am trying to avoid boring folks with more. There are plenty of them on the Gallery section for anybody.

Daniel now drove the long tar roads through Outjo and Otjiwarango with few stops until the turn off at Waterburg for our last night in Namibia. We had both braced ourselves to have to share a room due to capacity problems but by a system of smoke and mirrors I was able to snag one for myself at the last minute so I quickly moved my case across to the new tent before anyone could change the position. Our tents were really nice inside and



out and set back from the main lodge in woodland with views over to the Waterberg Plateau. We partook of no activities as we both needed to spruce up for the journey home tomorrow and to repack our cases to restore some order

into the chaos of the last two weeks travelling. Speaking for myself of course. Meals were taken *en famille* after a pre-prandial session round the fireplace to get to know both our fellow guests and our hosts. The grounds contained many birds including Grenadiers and two species of Sunbird plus the lovely Pirit Batis, an example of which breaks my resolve.

Next morning we drove down to Windhoek to hand back our car which had performed well with not so much as a puncture or a hint of getting stuck for 3500km. From there we got the usual lift to the airport and caught our flights home with KLM via Amsterdam.

A smooth ending to a smooth trip.

