

## Namibia. A full calendar month in South West Afrika.

Fred's first visit. November 17<sup>th</sup> to December 17<sup>th</sup>.

Solo tour and 14 days at Cheetah Conservation Fund.

I had never been to Namibia and so booked a place with Earthwatch for two weeks at The Cheetah Conservation Funds HQ in Otjiwarango. Of course it made sense, to me, to utilise the travel to see a bit more of the country whilst there. I initially tried 'Sunvil' to book the private part but sadly they lost the plot somewhere so I booked with Oryx Tours based in Windhoek and made the right call.

"The Plan" was for me to fly out 14 days or so ahead of the CCF project and take myself on a self-drive trip to Etosha but stopping off on the way up and back at likely places. I chose to fly with Air Namibia, the national airline, which operated via Frankfurt (FRA) out of Heathrow.

So the day arrives. **17<sup>th</sup> November** and I am at LHR and boarding the 747 for the overnight flight to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia where we landed on time next morning at 9.00. I had booked an Avis car and this was ready for me so after paperwork I was in the car and heading for Windhoek to meet up with Alyson the Oryx representative who had handled my ground arrangements very well. Changed some T/Cheques for Nam\$\$ (linked to the Rand) and set off



north to my first destination. Dusternbrook Guest Farm about 40km from Windhoek and then about another 20km of dusty track to the lodge. Check in to my nice bungalow. Very hot outside.

Basically my time here was spent on game drives, in lodge vehicle, entering large enclosures by open cruisers to watch the evening feed



of Leopards and Cheetah which were easy to photograph.

'Spare' time was spent just walking the huge farm. I asked Johan, the owner, how far I could walk and he smiled and replied. "Stop when you get to the coast!" **20<sup>th</sup> November.** After two very pleasant nights with some lovely animals I packed the car and headed further north. My



booked destination was Waterberg Plateau where I was promised some exciting trips on the top of this large 'rock' to view Rhino and other wildlife that lived up there in some sort of Conan Doyle's 'lost world'.

I got there in good time and checked in to my nice bungalow and asked to book a game drive. I was amazed to hear that the vehicle was broken and had been for some months. This was no good to me so I climbed to the top to the locked gate. Nice view. Then

back down for a nice dinner in the lovely restaurant but I am leaving tomorrow. I had seen a small sign back on the main road for 'Otjiwa Guest Farm' so decided I would see if they had a room and stay there. They did so I stayed and spent my time there instead. Meals were very good and there was lots of wildlife around. I even got to meet up with their White Rhinos on a



game walk. The owners were a tad concerned at me walking around as they feared I may get lost but the trails were quite clear and the rhinos were quite relaxed at my presence. Lots of other creatures and it was a shame I could only stay the one night here.

**22<sup>nd</sup> November.** It was time to be off north again to Etosha National Park which after refuelling in Otjiwarongo I entered from the east at Von Lindquist gate after a very pleasant drive through nice scenery. I had a 'cottage' in Namutoni where I arrived at around 14.00. I checked out the small waterhole which was visited throughout the day by lots of large mammals and some beautiful

Blue Cranes. The restaurant was OK but only just as it got very crowded with large tour groups



who robbed the food supplies for their own use later. I had three nights here and they were very enjoyable as I took several drives north to Adoni plains and developed a special liking for Tsumcor Waterhole which despite

being 'artificial' was proving very attractive to many elephants. I supposed I got a little too relaxed and must have nodded off to sleep one afternoon as I woke with a start to find the sun



had gone in and the car was rocking to and fro! A large ellie was scratching his bum on my poor little car. Then he walked off to tell his mate all about it. I bet they had a good laugh!

On one trip up to Adoni plains I was treated to a veritable Tower of giraffe right across the horizon. As there were no trees around I did wonder what they found to eat without having to bend their legs to reach the ground.

**25<sup>th</sup>- 27<sup>th</sup>. November** After my three nights at Namutoni I moved off west to my next stop at Halali Camp without seeing very much at all. I suppose the

rains had created puddles in the bush so the wildlife had no need to come to the main waterholes. My first visits to Halali waterhole in light and dark drew blanks apart from an Owl. Next morning started off quiet with mainly birds at the waterhole but as I turned back for camp I had one 'moment' I will never forget. On a straight bit of track there was a large bull elephant calmly strolling towards me and, with thick bush either side, there was no way for either of us to turn away. A small car was following him and I hoped they did not push too hard. Fortunately





they hung back and let him come on at his own pace so I just sat tight with my hand on the ignition

All went off well and I am sure he winked as he went by almost within touching distance. What a well-mannered chap and we could all breathe out again. I was too busy for a photo and of course it would have been spoiled by 'shake'. I indulged in a photo of a nice male lion I came



across just as it started to rain. The evening session at the waterhole was spoiled by noisy drinkers and I took an early dinner. Guess what? They turned up there as well and cleared the tables like a bunch of locusts. I think they were camping and taking all this food to stock up. Bloody cheek. I had an early night ready for the trip to my last camp in the morning.

**27th – 29th November.** I was now entering my last three days in Etosha and despite have halted for many "Rhino shaped and coloured rocks" I had yet to find a real one close enough for a nice photograph and it may

have been easier to look for Lord Lucan. My route took me passed a few likely spots such as Reitfontein and the main loops around Charitsaub, Salvadora and Sueda with plenty of Springbok and gazelles etc. but no large mammals at all. In parts, the bush was so thick it was hard to see far but I carried on scanning as best as I could. Then, suddenly, there was a large Rhino just 50 feet to my right. I switched off the engine although 'experts' say you should not and he moved along feeding as he came.

He got so close that I could hear his teeth crunching the twigs he was eating. "Eating twigs!!!"

Oh heck, this is a Black Rhino and they are said to be more temperamental. He eventually came to the road and trotted



happily over to continue his breakfast.

Eventually just as he was about to disappear another car came along

and as he was almost hidden I nipped out of my car to point him out for them. After a while I moved on to new territory and approached Nebrownii where a brief stop produced some 'white' elephants and lots of gazelles and zebra. Checked in to Okaukuejo for my final three nights. Dinner and the famous waterhole as again spoiled by Lager Louts. The following mornings drive was quiet at the start but a highlight was spotting a flick of ears and tail and I had found my first African Wildcat



in daylight. I watched as it stretched and walked by and suddenly pounced on some small prey. Very nice!

Later in this drive I spotted dirt being kicked up out of a hole and was pleased when a Honey Badger popped its head up for a breather. An afternoon drive to Olifants Bad which sadly produced little more than one hartebeeste and an ostrich skinny dipping. As I drove back over



the Gemsbokvlakte I watched as an enormous storm blew in. The rain was very heavy and the track ran like a river as I drove carefully back to camp. Namibia might be a dry country but what rain they do get is very spectacular when it arrives. My final day was quite quiet but overall I had had a productive first visit so was not complaining. Etosha is a lovely place and I will hopefully be back to see more of this country. To bed after

the usual chaotic scenes in the restaurant.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November.** A long drive today so up early and out the camp gate at 6.20 where I am asked if I can give a Security Guard a lift to the main gate. As he is going to Otjiwarongo and I pass nearby I can take him all the way home so he gets a 200km ride right to his front door to start his leave. I made good time to Karibib and picked up my track for the final 60km to my next base, Tsaobis Leopard Park set in mountains rather like Scotland or Greece. After I was shown into my nice bungalow, complete with fridge and three piece suite, I had a light lunch as I am not self-catering although the room does have cooking facilities. My two days here were quite relaxing as I took myself off for some walks as well as helped the ‘help’ with



the rescue animals. They had a few cheetah and 3 leopards one of who was very friendly. Indeed as we finished feeding him I was ‘invited’ into the enclosure to meet him. I was warned he may ‘nip’ my fingers but happily all I got was a lovely rasping tongue on my arms as he rubbed himself against my legs. At dinner we were joined by “Tigger” an ex orphan Aardwolf, now independent but who still calls each night for his tin of food.



**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December – 16<sup>th</sup>. Cheetah Conservation Fund Otjiwarongo.**

Having driven down to Windhoek and handed back a slightly muddy car to Avis I was taken to the Kalahari Sands where I was eventually picked up by Bonnie from CCF and after picking up others we drive up to the CCF base at Eland’s Joy. I can condense this 14 day attachment easily as the daily routine was much the same. We had a pleasant first evening with Dr. Laurie Marker in her home as an ice-breaker and introduction to the work of the fund and what we could expect to be asked to do during our stay. Some building of “Warthog doors” in the enclosure fences to let the piggies come and go without digging tunnels which then let in/out other not so welcome users. The library needed a complete re-organisation and of course we had to feed and muck out the Cheetahs undergoing “rehab”. Some are stock killers and will



never go back into the wild but others hopefully will. One of my tasks is to feed three cheetah with food laced with either sweetcorn, millet or nothing. Then next morning to gather the scats for analysis for stress hormones with the ingredients identifying which cat done which scat. Simples! There was also a captured leopard for re-homing which also became my responsibility



as evidently I had been identified as trustworthy not to be stupid and take risks. He was quite dangerous but with care he soon adapted to being calm in my presence. Of course we always had a safety gate firmly in place and all was OK.

We also got to go out into the farm on night drives and to exercise the cheetah on lures from time to time. When we took Chewbacca he rode in the back of the Isuzu with us and it was quite something to have a large cat leaning on my shoulder from the back seat. Spare time, if any, was spent birding. We cooked meals for everyone on a rota system and all took their turns.

We had a 'resident'

Black-tailed Tree Rat in the communal canteen and from time to time it appeared on the curtain rails to watch proceedings. Christened by me "Roland" and fed on cooked spaghetti he soon become tame enough to take food from my hand. Quite cute. My other activity was to help Mattie, a Namibian student to lay out small mammal traps in order to assess the smaller mammals that lived on the farm. This would be used in an overall plan as an indicator of the ecological health of the area.



We caught lots of small mammals such as gerbils, pouched mice and kangaroo rats that otherwise folks rarely and briefly see and it was nice to meet them and handle them for closer looks. We also had a weekend off when we went up to Etosha for a nightstay in Halali which was fun for me but I am not sure some others were overly

impressed. I did at last see a Rhino at the waterhole



and despite the poor light managed a shot. I also got a nice view of a friendly Etosha elephant. And was the end of my trip to Namibia. We were all taken back to Windhoek to make our flights home.



Next morning I arrived in Frankfurt to snow and then flew on to LHR and eventually the IOM.



Last photo of a captured female cheetah and cubs in quarantine.