

A Jumbo Event!

Fred and Elizabeth's 3rd visit to Namibia. 5th September 2008 – 8th October 2008

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Preliminary information etc.

We had been to Namibia in 2006 and Elizabeth confessed she had enjoyed it, even Fred's habit of getting up close with wildlife and 'playing' with the Elephants. So when she suggested we return it was a simple matter of "take the previous recipe, repeat instructions and go!"

Namibia is usually two hours ahead of GMT. This year they played tricks by switching to Summer time whilst we were in flight. Light by six and dark again around seven thirty suited us fine. It was of course early summer in the Southern Hemisphere so temperatures were rising although rain was NOT expected. We timed the trip for maximum dry to see Elephants coming to water even though this meant the birds would be scarcer and a bit drab. **Entry requirements:** - Relatively straightforward. No visa required and a simple stamp at Immigration on arrival is all that is required. Other countries please Note!

Local currency is the Namibian Dollar (N\$) and is directly linked to the South African Rand (ZAR). As we could not buy N\$ we went armed with ZAR which is freely accepted everywhere. I will give prices where appropriate in N\$. Exchange Rate whilst we were there was around 14ZAR /£

Getting there, back and around. The Capital City is Windhoek and the National Airline "Air Namibia" will fly you direct from London Gatwick in 10 hours in an Ex Luft 340-300. On line booking is now available but 'non negotiable' on price. However a very nice man called Sam got us two discounted J class that did not break the Bank. We were to celebrate 45 years of Married bliss (*sic?* **Is this right? Ed.**) whilst there so why not treat the girl? We had used "Cardboard Box" for Car Hire last trip so they got the task of making ground arrangements from my Itinerary. We did the Car hire direct with Avis.co.uk. which was fine up to a point but for some weird reason they would not do bookings of more than 30 days? The car was a VW Polo classic which went well but all the "toys" were irritating in the extreme. Why don't they make a car that just does what YOU want not what **it** thinks you want. We covered 4,300km without trouble. Fill ups cost around NAM\$300 a time much like last time... Main roads are Tar with side roads being compacted gravel. Keep your speed down to 80kph on these. Really minor roads to remote Lodges etc. were a bit rutted but no trouble if you take care. It is not advisable to drive after dusk as Kudu and Warthog are often encountered in the road. They are also there during daylight but at least they see you and you see them. Traffic is very light, and we often drove for miles without seeing another vehicle. Some roads are so straight you could see them going over the horizon. Keep an eye on fuel levels. It is a big country.

Food & Drink. Being a Germanic country the local lager brewed in Windhoek is most agreeable. N\$15 for 500ml. Mineral Water N\$9, Soft drink N\$10. A reasonable bottle of Red wine was between N\$80 & N\$130 depending on the establishment. In a Supermarket the same bottle would be 20% less. Gin & tonics came out at N\$4 a shot plus the tonic. i.e. Doubles were N\$14 including tonic. We can live with that. Most meals involved meat dishes. Breakfast in the Lodges was very substantial with Yoghurt, Fruit, Cereals, and toast etc., plus Eggs as required.

Bugs, Beasts n Bowels. Hygiene standards appeared high. We relaxed the peel it, boil it or forget it rule and no adverse reactions were encountered. Similarly most tap water was potable despite remote Lodges having boreholes. Northern Namibia is Malarial so Prophylactics are advised and sleep under a net. We did not get bitten and made a decision to cease the medication early. The only snake encountered was a harmless Striped Grass-snake.

Accommodations. Good Lodgings and campsites for those who like them are available to suit all pockets. Costs have gone up since our last visit but most were very reasonable. Individual Lodges are described at the end of each daily diary... Some places included Game Drives/boat trips etc., in the daily rate, others allowed you to choose the activity or not. Most Lodges are on 220volts but with Round Pin sockets so take an adapter for your accessories. However some Lodges had clever sockets that took all sorts of plugs.

The established daily routine. We followed our preferred format of spending time in each location in order to settle and get the feel of the place. (I hate living out of a suitcase). We therefore moved on after Breakfast in order to reach the next place around lunch time and then go wildlife viewing in the cool of 16.00 hours. We aimed for around 300km per move except for the legs up and back from Caprivi.

Kit carried. We both carried our Minox 10x42 Binoculars and Fuji Cameras with an adequate supply of rechargeable batteries together with the requisite Charger. If your camera has a Hot shoe take a Parabolic Flash for Night drives. I would think 300mm lens would cover most of what you will see unless you do birds. Game viewing at the Lodges is from Open Vehicles/Boats (or on foot) and a tripod is just an encumbrance. Try and get the animal to stand at the side so you can wind the window down when in a saloon car. As we both had cameras this was easy but slewing the car across the road did have its moments.

Books? Namibia is Southern Africa. I left "Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara" by Sinclair and Ryan at home and stuck with Newman's although this is getting dated. A good Map was invaluable as 'tourist' ones were delightfully vague. There is a good guide to Etosha showing all Waterholes etc.

Now to the trip itself:-

September 5th This was just a simple hop to Gatwick where we transferred to Air Namibia's SW386 that should have left at 21.00 but finally boarded around midnight. Glad we were in the front. A couple of drinks and dinner then to bed.

September 6th-7th We woke somewhere over Angola and noticed a lot of water in Etosha pan. Somehow the plane got to WDH within an hour of scheduled time where we learned about the time change and did not need to reset our watches. (yet) We did the Immigration bit and were re-united with our Luggage in good time but oh dear, Avis kept us waiting despite their promises of your keys within 5 mins. or £20. We had been assured that the extra days could simply be notified on pick up but no way. A whole load of new paperwork was churned out, sign here there and everywhere. Then we rejected the car for faults and had to check another one. We got going around 11.30 and headed for Windhoek and then 40km up B1 to our normal first stop at **Dusternbrook Guest Farm** in the Khomas Mountains. Nice place to relax after a long flight and do some quiet birding and animal spotting. There are also some Leopards and Cheetah in two large paddocks which you can feed. Next day we walked to the Lake about an hour away and started the tick list in earnest. Dusternbrook is good value at N\$1,952 FI per double.



September 8th We left after Breakfast for the long haul up to **Roy's Camp** which is 50km NE of Grootfontein. This was the only exception to the min 2 nights rule as it was a simple break of the journey up to Caprivi. 500km later we arrived around 14.00 after a fuel and shopping trip in Otavi. We had a beer and a decent dinner after a walk in the area. Nice rustic place which I will describe further on the way down as we stop 2 nights then.

September 9th- 11th We were on the road again with a 422km leg this time up a dead straight road to Rundu and then east to Divundu. We missed refuelling in Rundu as Divundu was 'only' 200km further on and the tank said just less than half full. Then it said "low" so we spent a time gazing at the gauge as the needle crept down and down. We knew we had the range but... The warning light flashed on as we drew into town where the first building was a nice new petrol station. Phew! Then a 20km gravel road took us south to **Mahangu Lodge** set on the bank of the Okavango in a stand of shady Jackalberry Trees. This Lodge is very nice and our Chalet well equipped with Air conditioning and usual offices. Food is taken in a large Lapa or

outside under the trees on platforms over the river. As you would expect the grounds bristle with birds and we added quite a few to the list including Black headed Oriole, Myer's Parrots, Rosy Lovebirds and Slaty Egrets. We took morning and afternoon drives into Mahangu National Park where we found many Elephant, Lion, Giraffe and Kudu plus Sable and Roan Antelope. Top birds were three Wattled Cranes, Long-toed Lapwings and a friendly Juv Bataleur that posed nicely. Altogether a nice Park and well worth a visit. Good meals and the Lodge cost N\$1,360 DBB per double. Game drives Extra. Boat trips are available.



September 12th- 18th Yes! A whole seven days at the next place. Read on. A shorter drive of 263km took us along nice tar that runs through Caprivi National Park where the road signs warn of 80kph Elephants. We ticked Ostrich, Ground Hornbill and 3 Martial Eagles amongst the avifauna but of Pachyderms we drew a blank. At Kongola we passed another check point and crossed the Kwando river. From now on it would be downstream all the way to the Indian Ocean via the Chobe and Zambezi. Now that is a great idea for a trip. Any volunteers? Turning right after Kongola we had 30km of Gravel and shortly after entering Mudumu National Park we turned off for the 5 km to **Lianshulu Lodge**. This was our main destination and the place that Elizabeth had decreed we should spend our Anniversary well clear of surprise parties etc. The daily routine was morning game drives, lunch, then afternoon cruise on the Kwando for sundowners. As there is a limit to how many ways to go on any river we were able to vary the afternoon occasionally with another afternoon drive. After settling in we went to lunch and 'had' to share a table with a couple from Johannesburg. Then I introduced Elizabeth to Tom and Rhoda who had last shared a meal with us on Honeymoon 45 years ago. They had been married the same day and we had kept in touch and, as Elizabeth remarked when recovering from the shock, "I had done it again!" On the day we went off on a private drive and had a bush picnic



a la Redford and Streep, except there were four of us. They had forgotten the Champagne but we did have sparkling Mineral Water. At dinner that night we had the private area upstairs overlooking the river. We had a very nice meal and got looked after very well indeed. The Staff did a great job and the mission was successful. There are ninety years of marriage in these pictures. The routine continued throughout our stay here although sadly Tom and Rhoda could not stay the whole time. Our timing for the Elephants was perfect and each day saw more and more of them coming into the Park and heading for the river to bathe, drink, roll in the mud, have a dust bath and generally do what Elephant do. We had very many close encounters and a very enjoyable time. We also saw many Roan and Sable Antelope, Hippo in the river (and on the lawn outside our chalet) as well as many birds of course. Carmine BeeEaters were arriving and we found a huge new colony just up river from camp. There was also a family of four Giant Kingfishers just downstream and regularly seen from the boat. I also got to see my first Fulleborne's Longclaw. Lianshulu is quite upmarket and the Chalets are quite large with Verandas overlooking the river from where you could see Elephants swimming the river from Botswana. The chalets are all very well appointed with His and Her Washbasins (why?) a large Bathroom with proper bath and an outside shower too. Accommodation costs N\$3,950 per double room fully inclusive. Top end but very nice.

September 19th- 20th Now we had to retrace our steps back down to Roy's Camp. A drive of 650km. This time we knew the fuel contents and had the range for Divundu. We did our bit for community relations by giving a couple of lifts. N.B. Be very selective with this and 'pick' your 'guests' carefully. We got to Roy's on schedule and checked in to Shed 3 for the next two nights. We like Roy's for its very friendly laid back style. Most furniture is recycled from odd bits of 'rubbish' found lying around. Camp is quite a rustic place with a small Pool and a small waterhole where Kudu, Eland etc., come down to drink. Nice birds too. There are marked and unmarked walks in the surrounding woods to get some exercise after car sitting. Cooking is well presented and wholesome with Game on offer. A



modest wine list and they make an excellent G&T. DBB was N\$820 for the two of us. Quite a change from Lianshulu. We rested here in the sunshine and indulged in a few walks.

September 21st-25th. No more long drives as we now drive about 300km up to Etosha National Park. We enter by the Von Lindquist Gate and get our pass. We sighted animals almost immediately. Giraffe, Black-faced Impala as well as Spotted Dikkop and Double Banded Coursers. We turned up from Namutoni camp and circled Fischer's Pan where there was lots of game. We were heading for Tsumcor Waterhole which Fred likes for its Ellies. We were just approaching the turn off when a Female walked onto the road so we stopped and waited. The herd was about 20 strong including little ones and one by one they came towards us with some passing very close indeed. A great introduction to Etosha's relaxed Elephant people. We went on to the Waterhole but apart from a few Oryx etc., there was not much happening. Then suddenly the drinking birds flew up in alarm and a small falcon whizzed by. It settled just behind us and was seen to be a nice male Red-footed Falcon. We then drove back through Namutoni and out along the Pan to our stop in Halali. The Pan held water and we had Giraffe, Zebra in view most of the time. There were quite a few Ellies too. Once at Halali we checked into our Bush Chalet that was to be home for 3 nights. After dinner in the Restaurant we used to visit the floodlit Waterhole where Rhino regularly appear. (Usually 20.30) A daylight visit revealed a Pair of Eagle Owls with chick nesting in a nearby Tree. We like Halali Camp for being central as this enables to head out in either direction for variety. We were disappointed with "Rhino drive" this trip but did manage to find one asleep under an Acacia in the heat of one afternoon. The only cats seen this visit were Lion. The Bird list was growing with such things as Goshawks, Kestrels etc. We also felt brave (bored) enough to tackle the various LBJs and added Spike-Heeled and Rufous-naped Larks to the list. Our Bush Chalet cost N\$1,500 and dinner in the Restaurant was fixed at N\$150 for a substantial Buffet. We then moved on to Okauhuejo Camp which was not so nice despite its high reputation. We found the staff unhelpful to say the least. On the way we ticked Burchell's Courser and a very friendly Secretary bird.



The highlights of this area are the White Elephants at Newbrowni where their regular bathing picks up the



white mud of the Pan. Elizabeth got this nice snap of a Bull with a Zebra together. Other Mammals around included the ubiquitous Jackal, Ground Squirrels, some delightful Yellow Mongoose and a pair of Bat-Eared Foxes. As far as we are concerned Okauhuejo's redemption comes from its Waterhole where on one evening we had 3 White and four Black

Rhino all present at the same time. Lots of Giraffe and Elephant also kept coming and going. The Waterhole has seating arranged around it, behind a discrete fence, so you just sit there and watch events unfold before you. Prices are the same at all Etosha Camps both for the Bush Chalets and in the Restaurant. There are some quite upmarket chalets nearer to the waterhole but the others are quite adequate with Air Conditioning, Nets and H&C water.



September 26th – 28th. We left Etosha slightly disappointed at not finding Cheetah or Leopard or indeed many daylight sightings of Rhino but it is not a Zoo. We also felt September was too busy for us and lots of cars racing around in dust clouds did not help. We now drove into Damarland and to a Lodge we had not tried but which came highly recommended. Huab Lodge is a private project by some concerned wilderness lovers endeavouring to re-establish safe areas for the Desert Elephant from overgrazed farmland. The turn off for Huab lies halfway between Khorixas and Kamanjab after which there are another 35km of dirt road. The lodge/camp lies next to the bed of the Huab river which whilst appearing

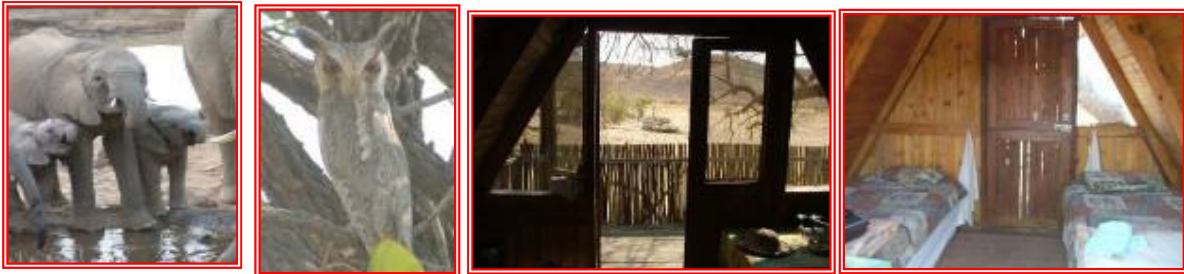


dry on the surface actually has permanent water under the sand. As a result it is made much use of by various animals with many Kudu and Oryx always in sight. Elephant migrate up and down this valley but sadly all we found during our visit were footprints and dung. Bird life included Verreaux's Black Eagle, several Owls and African Hawk Eagle with the latter having raised a chick just by the camp this year. They posed for my nonexistent camera during our first morning walk but when I came back suitably equipped they turned shy and left. Daily

activities were normally a morning walk before breakfast and then a sun downer drive about 15.30. NO night drives which was a pity. We had three days in this beautiful rugged area and whilst mammal numbers are not huge it was interesting enough and more than compensated for by our excellent hosts, Kathy and Jacob “Yab”. The Lodge consisted of the usual open sided Lapa and several quite spacious bungalows with private sitting out Veranda. Electricity is by solar panels. The food was of a very high standard and there is a tradition of formal presentation of wines at dinner. No idea on costs of extras as it was fully inclusive at N\$3,700 per night. Maybe slightly expensive given the lack of game but we could not fault the service, accommodation or food.



September 29th – October 2nd. After regaining the ‘main’ road we turned north to one of our favourites, Hobatere Lodge which lies about 80km north of Kamanjab. This is very competently run by Louise and Steve Braine. Steve is a birder of some repute and they are both excellent friendly hosts. Activities are morning walks, with armed guide (Martin or sometimes Steve) and as many Game drives as you wish with the benefit of an evening drive after dinner for the nocturnal creatures. There is a large hide at a waterhole, to which you must be driven due to the presence of Lion, and another waterhole right by the fence which is fed by the overflow from the swimming pool. There was so much activity at this waterhole that in four days we took one walk, one game drive and two night drives. We were simply content to sit and watch the many Elephants coming and going. Lions too were quite visible and vocal from time to time. I could fill this page with Elephant pictures but will settle for one plus one of a very nice White-faced Scops Owl. The other



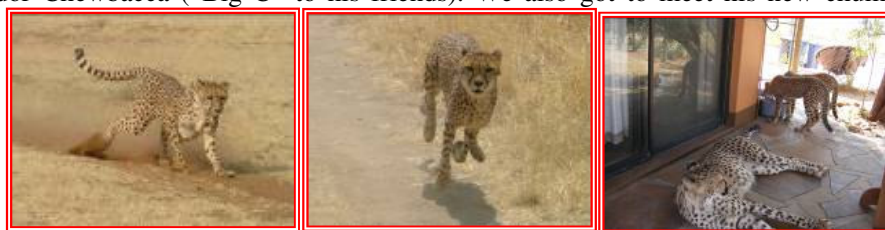
pictures are of the inside of a rustic Tree House about 30 minutes from main camp where we spent one most interesting night. Elephants during daylight and Lions in the Dark. Fantastic and a must. Dinner B&B here are a very reasonable N\$1,500 and this has to be good value. We are going back.

October 3rd-6th. All too soon it was time to leave Hobatere and head down to Frans Indongo Lodge near Otjiwarongo where we were to spend our last four nights. DBB is N\$1,100 here and the cooking is faultless. Arriving in time for a light lunch we were made very welcome by Astrid, Alf and John. There had been further changes since our last visit with a larger sun deck and sitting area added to the Restaurant Lapa. Our cottage was one of the new ones with all mod cons overlooking the



Game reserve so you could sit outside and watch Wildebeest, Roan and Sable Antelope coming to drink. The Lodge grounds were jumping with birds including Short-toed Rock Thrush, Pied Barbets and even a friendly Cardinal Woodpecker. We did several walks on the Farm but our main purpose for coming was our ‘regular’ visit to Cheetah Conservation Fund where again we were made very welcome. We met lots of spotty cats both sprinting to a lure and chasing the car. No visit here is complete without meeting Ambassador Chewbacca (“Big C” to his friends). We also got to meet his new chum

“Little C”, who we had met last time as a small cub together with two young twins. A rather purrfect finale to our month in Namibia.



October 7th After a final excellent breakfast we set off on the last 345 km to the Airport. We had a brief shopping stop in Windhoek and a light lunch in the Kalahari Sands before returning the Car to Avis and checking in for the flight home. The flight left on time and we easily made our connection home the next day after the usual scrum at Gatwick.