

Namibia report March 2022.

I don't often do trip reports but thought I should in view of my participation in the last one to Uganda in 2020 B.C

Having postponed in stages since 2019 to see Namibia in March after the rain made green grass plans took firm hold in October 2021 for March 2022 when we committed to tickets. ET fly from Manchester thrice weekly via ADD to WDH and their local Manchester staff were very helpful.

A word about my equipment carried may be appropriate at this stage as various events came into play because of or in spite of what we did or did not carry. I abhor all the clutter that I see other people struggling out with and see no need to spoil a good holiday with a pile of electronics. I have pared down my needs to match this. Definitely NO mobile phone. I see no need for one at home. We were persuaded that for safety reasons we should buy one for the car 'just in case'! Mistake. It steals my units when the need for use does not arise in 90 days and currently lies in the desk draw for topping up when in touring in UK. It does NOT go long haul.

Some years ago I lost some photos so invested in a back up device. I bought at enormous expense a 'Net book' where I can load and store photos. Adequate memory until Bill Gates upgraded his Windows to use most of the memory of the Netbook before a single byte of mine was allowed in. So I invested in a 32GB micro/sd to absorb my pictures on a separate folder. That works fine. The rest of the Lenovo was made to facilitate access to the Interweb thingy at the suggestion of a 'friend. I can therefore access the web and get eMails. Oh joy of joys. Not! Who needs this stuff? Not me. So add one charger of course and two more PIA in airport security.

So Minox 10x 42 Bins and a Camera of course. I am not going for wildlife photographer of the year so over the years my old Kodak has morphed into a Minolta with 300mm to Fuji Finepix and on to my current toy of Nikon Bridge Coolpix P1000. And that adds **another** bloody Charger to the kit of course. I like taking a trail camera to see what may wander by our bed at night. Which means a sackfull of AA batteries too with which to irritate Airport Security. NO tripod if you have not guessed already. Apart from a re-chargeable torch I am good to go.

So here we are in about November 2021 'Have tickets, will travel'. A rough outline itinerary outbound from IOM on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and back 29<sup>th</sup> March. Provisional bookings of car and lodgings. Fully vaccinated and boosted. PCR test booked for 28<sup>th</sup> February. Job done? Well, not quite. Along came Covid Omicron and Namibia decided that they would only accept Test certs not older than 72 hours AND registered with some outfit called Panabios/Global Haven, Eh? Who they? Research indicated this needed an email device. OK. Luck had it that my Netbook could do that and I was taking it. BUT the 72 hour cut off made it impossible to achieve with the existing bookings. So a major re-write was called for. Bring forward flight IOM-MAN to 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, pay change fee £80, Kerching, get test at Radox on airport with 3 hour turnaround, Kerching, and result mailed to my email device. Book Hotel on Manchester for 28<sup>th</sup>. Kerching. Kerching. So far so good and I have not even left home yet. Some trip report this is turning out to be.

And so it came to pass. IOM-MAN on time. Thanks Loganair. Straight to Radox in Terminal 2. Early but absolutely no problem. The nice lady even registered us on the system as we waited. No idea what that meant but it sounded nice. Nurse chappie made me sit while he shoved sticks in my mouth and up my nostrils. He seemed happy so why should I not be? Results promised by 17.35 to my email thingy. Got free transfer to Claytons Hotel settled in, advised reception of vital email traffic requiring use of printer and advised 'all part of the service'. Out of fairness to Claytons I will not refer to the chaos at dinner as remedied on the spot. Back in room replete from grilled Sea Bass I logged on to find the two emails had arrived and we were both negative. An ever helpful lady called Kat helped this old techno phobe print the Certificates out and also save them to my 'folder'.

Then with some form of electronic sleight of hand we uploaded them to Panabios for our envisaged use in Windhoek on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March. To bed for tomorrow we fly! Or is it really that simple? Spoiler alert. The answer is 'Not Yes!'

Part two. Day two.

In planning a trip there are stages to pass before one can progress to the next. Some may be more stressful than others so it is nice to pass one pitfall/pinch point and progress to along the line towards actually getting there as planned.

Such benchmarks as,

1. Will bad weather prevent us from getting off the island for our international flights?
2. Will we get our PCR test?
3. Will it be negative?
4. Will the weather be OK in UK?
5. Will we be allowed to board the next flight?
6. Will it leave on time so we make a short (75 minute ) connection?
7. Will our luggage make it on the same flight?
8. Will Nambian Immigration stamp our Passports?
9. Will we be met on time at Windhoek?
10. Will the car be as promised?

Well after Eunice and the F word we were worried but we had reasonable weather on the day. /the Pilot could see where he was going and we got there as stated above. PCR tested negative so that was 1-3 out of the way.

4. after a peaceful night in Claytons we awoke to blue skies. Hey, don't forget this IS Manchester, England.

So having not much to do today but wait for our 18.55 flight we had a nice easy morning before taking the courtesy shuttle to Terminal 2. at 11.30 ish. We indulged in a nice slow Cafe and Ciabatta at the excellent Cafe Nero, spun it out a bit and then had a hot chocolate and Tiramisu or Belgian chocolate cake before wandering along to seek the check in Counter at 15.00 as ET had suggested that four hours would be better than three and we were happy to oblige. We had NOT done On line check in as we could not print our Boarding cards and anyway 'why should we use our stationary?' And that is when we hit "5" above on the nose. Medical checks? Pass on. BUT manual check in only for those paying J class. Us mortals had Bag drop only as check in online was mandatory? Eh? We could not do that and had not be warned it may be necessary? ET. "But surely you can do it by phone?" Me. "Er, what phone is that please?" ET. "your mobile phone of course!" Me. " we don't have one!". ET. "well in that case please go to the kiosks outside Qatars office and do kit there!" After trailing back 'there' and back I grab the attention of the lovely chap and say "They are bloody closed and the kiosks not working! What next please?" ET 'they cannot be!' Moi "well go and look for yourself!"

Later... He is back. "Hmmm. You are correct." Me. "I often am! Now what?" Get passed to lovely girl who goes off and sorts matters with another desk. ET lady. "Sorry about that. Here are your boarding cards right through to WDH. Please drop your bags at the priority desk over there." Me. "Thank you so much for helping us."

We check in and get our pre booked seats 11A and 11B all the way to WDH. BUT we now have to find the gate and this means passing the notorious hard men of Manchester Security. These guys trained as paper boys at Strangeways Prison in their school holidays. Nothing gets past them. Now things are a bit quiet but they still manage to make us queue. And after the full monty body scan it is no surprise to see our modest hand luggage come through the scanner and get switched to the 'examination' track. In the course of waiting poor Lady G gets subjected to the 'F' word by an irate lady traveller who has just had two bottles of perfume confiscated as being unwrapped. The security chap takes pity on Lady G and hands her bag without even looking inside. What a nice man! No such luck for me. He had the lot out for a dusting. He never found what he was looking for

but he got top marks for effort. He found my stash of cash, well I need readies on arrival for such purchases as fuel and booze! He found my Pack of 12 Duracell Aas and the Trail Camera. He maybe even found the toffee paper from a trip years ago but he never found what he felt I had and he never told me what it was. A sweep for drugs came up clean as it would and we were free to go to our gate. And that was when retribution was served on the F word lady. ET gate agents wanted all hand luggage weighing and as the Q reshuffled I managed to block the lady from passing the inspection. She got pulled over and her luggage surcharged.

We boarded and flew on time. We have passed stage 5 and indeed we made our short connection with ease and having had a slight hiccup when Namibian Immigration could not read our machine readable passports we got the requisite stamp enabling our stay for the next month or so. Best of all our luggage was riding the carousel as we entered the hall. AND our meet and greet from Advanced, who I had met last trip in 2019 was waiting for us outside. From landing to leaving was at most 45 minutes. We are looking at stage 10 now.

The car had two spare wheels in the back and a working fridge s after some lengthy paperwork we were good to go. Well after having had to fill with Diesel despite promises that it would be full. No matter we were on our way. After 30km of B2 tar we reached the turn off for our first stay, Dusternbruk Farm Lodge. A minor diversion for a flooded river was no problem and after sightings of Giraffe, Impala and Wildbeeste etc., plus some lovely birds, we arrived at about 16.30. We checked in to be advised that due to a staffing issue, the chef had not returned from leave, the could not feed us at our booked cottage, 'Point of View', so we could eat dinner with them and drive 11km f track in the dark. Nah. After discussions with 'the boss' Johan, who I knew quite well a compromise was reached and we did it my way. A cool box was prepared with sandwiches and a bottle of Red wine (we are low maintenance) and we would sleep in Point of View and then return to the farm for breakfast and further discussions in the morning. Job done. We set off armed with a handdrawn map of the farm to find our first bed in Namibia just as the sun was setting. And what a sunset it was. We ate and slipped into a comfy bed quite easily. Tomorrow was another day and surely things were on the up at last? Left home Monday and now Wednesday evening. Stages 1-11 complete. Today is the tomorrow that we worried about yesterday and all is well.

Part Three The day is dawning.

So far this trip has produced three Dawns for us, all different;

First of course was the surprising blue skies at Manchester Airport on Tuesday and this was followed somewhere over Africa hurtling along at 540 mph at 38,000 feet in a 787 Dreamliner. I just don't remember any dreams so must remember to take my Lariam pill soon.

Then the best Dawn of all has come to our small Cottage at Point of View where we awoke after our first night in Namibia. And we even got a Dawn Chorus even though the breeding season peak has long past here. So what? It was real enough with Red-billed Spurfowl letting the world know they had survived another night and shortly joined by multiple booms of Speckled Pigeons on the roof whilst not to be out done a Black-chested Prinia gave forth his bit from the bush outside our bedroom window.

Well it is not for us to lie abed when Africa wakes and we do have an 11km drive back to the Farmhouse for our breakfast. We were expected at 'about 08.30' so a knowing Lady G suggested we better not delay if we would be stopping as often for birds on the way as we had on the way here. (It was only 07.00 for Petes sake!! However the lady has put up with me for far too many years now not to have some experience of my driving habits. But what birder could honestly swear hand on heart that they would NOT stop for a sighting of Black Cuckoo, let alone a family of Double-banded Sandgrouse? So we had breakfast a little later at around 09.15! There was still some left!

We had full day here and really enjoyed it as we knew we would.

The Farm property extends for many miles and whilst they do offer activities such as game drives and horse riding as well as organised 'big cat' experiences with feeding of Leopard and Cheetah living in huge enclosures, we preferred to do our own thing which involved exploring the vast property. I remember when staying here on my first visit way back in 2001 I asked Johan, owner, 'how far am I

allowed to walk?’ He replied with a wry smile for which he is known “Well I should stop when you reach the ocean if I were you”

The property is home to many of the usual plains mammals and as birds are not to everyone’s taste I shall not pepper this tale with birdy photos but just show a couple of the mammals encountered which are more family friendly. There are some White Rhino out there and I did pick up spoor but not a glimpse did we see.

All in all we highly commend Dustenbrook as a good place to start or finish any trip for being truly wild and yet only 50km out of Windhoek. There is a good selection of various accommodation from camping by the river through basic cottages, nice rooms in the farmhouse and now the excellent and more remote ‘Points of view’ cottages, only 3 of them and normally fully catered but in our case adequately catered with spacious cool box that held an excellent chef prepared Chicken Salad (our choice) wine and glasses and even room for a few bottles of Windhoek just in case. No pun intended. It is good to be back.

Footnote to this section. I am writing at the last Wiffy availability so likely to go silent shortly.(Sounds of hearty cheers.)

Pt 4.

Dust to the Sea and Desert.

So we settled our account with Johan and left Dustenbruk by the same track as we gained entry to join the tar of the road to Okahandja and on to Swakopmund. On a point of order we had originally been booked in to Etusi Lodge much further on in our driving. However they messed up our booking and only confirmed one night not two which was no good. So we switched to Dusternbruk and won two plusses. One you have read about, a lovely renewal of earlier stays, and the second was we had less to drive after getting off the plane. This was a real boon as to be honest I now feel Etusi would have been a drive too long. So as we passed the Etusi turnoff on our drive today I said a silent thanks for the mess up. As it was it made a much longer drive today but we had at least got some rest, and quite few birds too. I had never driven to Swakopmund on this road and to say it was boring would be very near the mark. Km after km of boring tar with little of meaningful scenery for entertainment. We relied on dodging the occasional wide load for excitement where the escorts simply forced us over on to the grass. It broke the journey!!! Eventually we made the approaches to Swakopmund and whilst noticing the huge amount of development since my last visit I pulled over for the favourite bit of marsh where the C24 back road to Walvis left the main now multi lane highway. Instead of a simple turn the road was now a mass of link roads, western bypass etc., and I guessed we may be in trouble here. But my Garmin steered her cheerful way through the mess and a helpful looking “Bird Reserve” sign still stood. But it was the only thing that did. Gone was even the old road bridge where I have spent a happy hour or so in years gone by. All gone! Birds are quite tenacious but this proved too much even for them. Of course the river still flowed and there were pools but a lone Three-banded Plover was holding a private wake and I even missed that photo in my shocked daze. So back to our booked lodge which we left last visit ‘intact’ and free of city encroachment. What a lot of difference four years makes. Garmin still showed us driving ‘cross country’ but we were actually in Estate housing *extremis*. Happily our destination still stood at the end of the road(s) and nobody can rob them of the views over the sand dunes and mature bed of the Swakop river as it nears the sea. A warm welcome as always and as they only do B&B they kindly booked us in at “The Tug” restaurant for our evening meal. Our normal favourite “The Jetty” had been pre booked from home for our next night so it would enable us to try the “Competition”. Our room was to the expected high standard and we settled in for a quick rest and freshen up before we had the short drive into town for our evening meal, the first hot one since that we had at Claytons in Manchester on Monday and it was now Friday. The Calamari starter was good and I had a fish with a strange name similar to Kinkajou and I do hope it was fish and not the primate of the similar name. Overall the ambience was a bit robust for our taste but this is not a gourmet recommendation thread so lets get on with the trip. We are here for the birds.

And birds there were in plenty. Not so much in the grounds of the B&B a lot of which has been built upon or 'landscaped'. So no Alexandrine Parakeet or Budgies as the tree has 'gone.' But our first excursion to Walvis Lagoon gained us a few favourites as always. This is not a bird report so let me just say both species of Flamingo and several waders were a welcome sight as were flocks of Black-necked Grebes. So we had a pleasant morning despite the increased property development that has taken place everywhere. Sadly a trip to the salt lagoons was another victim of progress and yielded very little. We then drove north back to Swakopmund in the hope of a finding that those lagoons had not gone the same way. Not quite but nearly. The Saltworks lagoons were inaccessible and barren so we pressed on north to the Guano processing factory where despite closed roads and warning signs we did manage a few more birds and parked up for a while but access to the coast was gone for good. It is a retirement village!!

So back to the Desert Breeze for a freshener before our date with our car minder, Mateus, whilst dining in 'The Jetty'. Along the jetty were more Bank Cormorants roosting than we had seen all day. The meal was excellent and I sampled the trio of Oysters for my starter and an excellent Springbok loin for mains, washed down with a nice Shiraz and we had still room for Cape Malva as dessert. As the Bill came to less than N\$200 than The Tug the previous night "The Jetty" gets my vote on ambience alone but it is close.

Another excellent sleep and breakfast and it was time to leave for Cape Cross, one of our shorter segments to drive.

Desert Breeze was good despite the ongoing 'development' so highly likely we will be back. Shame about the Parakeets.

Part 5.

Cross at the Cape.

A easy ride is promised today for our next sector up towards the Skeleton Coast for an overnight at Cape Cross Lodge with a courtesy call at the infamous Fur Seal colony. Famous for the historic connection being where Portugese navigators first landed and marked the cape with a large cross, infamous for the reported offensive smell of the 90,000 Fur Seals that call the place home. It honestly does pong a bit but not really as breathcatchingly offensive that some allege. The large colony also suffers a cull now and then as the fishermen feel there are too many for sustainable fish stocks. OK. How about catch quotas or does the market for seal fur come into play? Answers on a post card please but not to me.

The road up has of course been modernised, perhaps to help speed the fish lorries to market?? Smooth tar to Henties Bay with parking lots at intervals to accommodate sport fishing as well as to view the wreck of Zeila of Hangana lying just off the beach and now home to a large colony of seabirds.

Follow the signs here until GPS maps are updated for the new road layout until passed the turn off for Uis and inland. Our road was eventually good gravel as before if a little tedious but easy to drive and the kms racked up. We took the turn off to the NWR NP that protects the seal colony, Nam\$350. After a few minutes we dropped back to the clean picnic site just to watch birds for a while as it may have been too early to access our booked room at the nearby Lodge.

There is not much else up here on the coast but the accommodation is fairly priced and it does provide a handy stopover if taking the coast road into the far north west via the Skeleton Coast NP.

All rooms have a sea view and balcony and the wine list at dinner is quite commendable.

After check in was completed we took a leisurely stroll along the beach tracks keeping a look out for Jackals and shorebirds of which there are several.

Dinner was a quiet as there were only two other diners tonight. Monday. The menu was thick pea soup followed by chicken schnitzel. I had 'marine steak' which I imagined would be er, marine? Wrong, it was beef topped by calamari. One lives and learns by travelling. The wine was an excellent Shiraz.

All in all it was an enjoyable stopover and did not disappoint as a worthy stopover involving a gentle drive of just over 100.km. Tomorrow would be another day and as we now re-enter the Wiffy blackhole you may have to be patient for a full account on 'taking the rough with the smooth.

## 6. Taking the rough with the smooth.

First of all an apology for not being able to include small maplets of each days drive embedded in the contemporaneous report. Partly my fault but mainly Bill Gates'. Microsofts last 'update', the one that gobbled up all the original 32GB purchased memory on this device as mentioned in part one also blew out my 'Mapsource'. I had not noticed of course until needed but am now unable to remedy this whilst abroad. I will append a small map of the whole trip here and leave it for now at that but there will no doubt be some interesting diversions coming along that could illustrate a drive better. (Don't forget that I am writing this stuff in arrears with a fair modicum of 'hindsight'.

Today's drive was to be quite long at just under 400km and observers may have noticed we had not refuelled the beast since topping off in Windhoek prior to leaving for the trip. So perhaps a word here about how we plan logistics such as fuel. Not to be to everyone's taste or plan but it works for us. We hire a Toyota Hi Luxe diesel with two connected fuel tanks. They may both be 80litres each or perhaps 80 & 60, I forget, and it does vary between vehicle models. Either way it matters not, our plan would be the same. The fuel gauge will register 'full' until the first tank is drained when it will slowly drop by recording the assumed contents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tank. So what we do is keep the 2<sup>nd</sup> tank as our reserve and fill up once the gauge starts to move. A lifelong distrust of anything to do with auto electrics and gauges and needles in particular has habituated me to do mental calculations of consumption figures and use the electrical gizmo to simply confirm my guesstimate. As these Hi luxe seem to do around 12km per litre, or so it has seemed after a few hires, my figure work tells me the first tank will empty at about 960km and start the needle on its downward journey. Simple! Just zero the 'trip' at each top up and start looking for fuel when the trip reads 900km OR the needle twitches which ever is the sooner. We will go with that and it works well for me even though it goes against 'wise' advice in Namibia to never pass a fuel station.

So today's run of 400km with the trip on around 600km says we will easily reach Palmwag some 300 km distant. And so it does turn out as we will see.

(Too much technical stuff here, get on with the tale!)

Now to the drive itself with our route continuing up the Skeleton Coast almost to Terrance Bay before turning east for 100km with another 150 or so km to run.

This coastal road is not 'gravel' or tar but very smooth 'salt', which when wet can be a bit tricky but it rarely rains up here. So the driving is delightful, smooth and quiet and if only Advanced had not fitted a roof rack and created annoying wind noise the trip would be even quieter. We stopped at the famous 'skull and crossbones' gates to Skeleton Coast National Park for our transit permit, free, as the only halt to the drive. Both the Ugab and Huab mouths had suffered in the floods reaching the sea and care was needed here but that apart our drive was as good as it gets. We even detoured to the Huabmond lagoon as it is sometimes a good spot for lion but all we found was a nice blue lagoon, itself a rarity, populated by a pair of White-breasted Cormorant. So on we went until turning off the salt smooth road to head east on the C39 and the road became decidedly rougher. After some jarring moments we eventually arrived at the exit gate of Springbokwasser and checked out of the NP, now over a deteriorating road. National Roads authority really have their work cut out with all the damage the otherwise much welcome heavy rains have caused throughout the country. Some of the drainage dips were more than just a slight hollow and needed real care and sharp eyes to prevent a very rough ride. It did not get any better as we turned north onto the C43 when as if planned the fuel gauge came to life more or less as planned. 80 litres gone with 40km to run. The road continued much the same but now we started to see wildlife, such as Giraffe, Zebra and Springbok up here as we border the Palmwag Conservancy. Turning through the Vet fence at Palmwag the fuel station is just on our left where we uploaded 84 litres for a distance run of 1122km. My light right foot had worked well.

Now all that remained of our drive was the last 83km up to our night stop at the excellent Khowarib Lodge but not before spotting a magnificent Kudu bull just off the road to our right and he posed for a photo too.

We know Khowarib Lodge quite well and were made welcome with a cold drink and towel and shown to our tent by the infant Hoanib river for our one night stay. Dinner was good and taken under the stars although I do wonder why chefs take the trouble to feast one's eyes but then the wait staff make you eat it in the bloody dark??

I will do a full report (groans) later as we return here for a long stay after the next chapter which may well get the name 'the road to Hell may be paved with good intentions, but some of the others are NOT paved at all!'

Part 7.

The unpaved roads to nowhere.

We had a delicious dinner and retired to our "Tent" no. 3 for a good nights rest prior to our drive to Purros. I had done this before and was relatively confident of the road.

After a good breakfast we loaded the truck and were on the road by 09.00 with a relatively short, 120km or so, drive along the road to Sesfontein, the back of beyond, and onward to Purros, a small village on the banks of the ephemeral river Hoarusib. I am minded of the saying about 'posh' riverside houses that in summer the river is at the bottom of the garden and in winter the garden is at the bottom of the river. More or less the reverse for Purros except they don't have gardens hereabouts and the seasons are reversed. But you get the idea?

The road to Sesfontein was good and Gladys Garmin announced that Purros was 'only' just over 100km hence. So after clearing the sprawl of Sesfontein we continued along the D3707 and slowly picked our way inland as the road swung away from the Hoanib valley to climb the range over to a tributary of the Hoarusib named we believe 'Gannamud, later Gannadam. All was well although the road was badly broken up and not what I had remembered at all. No matter there were no turn offs and despite being slow going the way was clear enough on the ground and we did have "Gladys" to cheer us along. It was just that the scenery was not what I had remembered. There were rough bits and rougher bits but nothing that the HiLuxe could not cope with. Sometimes rocky and sometimes smooth packed sand as we rolled along and over quite beautiful smooth uplands. There were even herds of Springbok to watch us roll by. We saw nor passed a single other vehicle and at one point were heartened by a sign board advertising our next stop as 58km to go. Nice indeed.

Now this is where I really need the 'snail trail' to show our actual route taken on the ground but sadly that will have to wait my return home to access the programme. I have saved the GPX files from Gladys so it should be OK. I do hope so as it must make fascinating reading. At about half way point we ran into a problem. The tracks was so braided by others it was hard going knowing which was the correct track. We followed several only to find them reversing back from a large dry river bed. No doubt the Gannadam but where the heck did the road go? Gladys kept yelling such helpful words as 'make a U turn now' (as if I was going to plunge down a steep river bank of soft looking sand) or 'take a sharp turn right to regain the D3707' when the turn simply did not exist or disappeared just as promptly. There simply was not a clear track. After about 20 minutes of toing and froing I returned to a few small huts I had passed just as this debacle commenced. After some chat to a young man that neither of us really understood he agreed to get in the car, show us the next five kms provided I would then return him to where we were now. And so we did. Hard left round his house onto a feint mark in the sand, left a bit, right a bit, left again around that rock/tree or whatever 'landmark' existed, into this smaller riverbed and straight across and out the other side. Up a steep track, rutted brown soil so looks good to remember when solo, and eventually we were on a made up gravel track when my saviour, Pia?, said we can stop. He then set me the memory test to regain his house. He said I was almost right but I know I got 101% as I did find his house again. A well earned tip changed hands Elizabeth regained the front pax seat and was told to follow the snail trail Garmin had so thoughtfully painted on screen. I deleted the track to Purros for clarity for the purposes of regaining our route. And so with a little help from Elizabeth and Gladys we got back on our route once more and headed for

Purros again. Pia had told me the village was Tomakos which I had heard about from Dr. Flip Standers 'desert Lion' Blog. I never thought I would have further cause to remember it.

And once again we headed for Purros where after further bumpy but clear tracks I saw the village in the distance before me. Past the school I stopped to check which may be the better track over the happily almost dry Hoarsusib to our Lodge when a Land Cruiser drew next to me and said "Okahingo Elephant Lodge?" Follow me. I think I could have done this bit as I know the village, when dry, but it was a great gesture by the Lodge management nevertheless. So after a few weaves and swerves we crossed the sandy river bed and eventually arrived at our destination for the next three nights.

Settled into our room after signing 'indemnities' etc., and indulging a nice cold drink.

I will review our stay here as a separate 'chapter' next time as game drives are involved, with a bit of birding of course but here are a couple of photos from our 'balcony' to brighten this bald and dry narrative a bit.

## **8. Purros and Okahirongo Elephant Lodge for three nights.**

I had booked the trip out here based on fond memories from two previous visits. A real outpost village with birds and ellies and even rhino. The two visits had both involved 'camping', the first with Elizabeth along and the 2<sup>nd</sup> just Daniel Bme for company. I am not too keen on small tents but will endure should the need arise. I do not care for all the cleaning up and other chores that others seem to feel adds an edge to their fun. Oh and so much better if inconsiderate sod's sorry, fellow campers', roll up to the next pitched with their unruly brood and, oh joy of joys, 'Dad' feels it his bounden duty once the chores are done, or left to the women in the party, to get out his bloody GITTAR and entertain us all with a few chords. I don't have any use for **chords** but could find a good use for strong Cord if I had some and there was handy tree with a strong branch at just the right height nearby. Coupled with that allergy we are now approaching an age when pulling down or up ones nether garments calls for a more vertical posture than possible in such small places. Heaven knows what goes on when folks are daft enough to try all this whilst balanced on the roof of their truck and then have to negotiate a ladder that would fail Health and Safety rules in any civilised workplace. And of course I am given to understand that ladies must engage a multitude of zips, hooks and buttons etc., before they can make an appearance. Then of course is the ever present problem of normal bodily functions. Where **does** one go at any age let alone ours when often the only bottle I take into a tent will have been pre-filled in Scotland or Ireland and not by me.

So we took the plunge, no pun but they do have a horizon pool, and paid for one of the ten rooms in the Okahirongo Elephant Lodge which looked good to us. Our plan was for me to drive around doing our own game drives but with the rain the Gorge was too wet even for 'organised' entry let alone this poor novice who will face elephant but not getting stuck in wet sand. Ah well, get your hand down Fred, at least the booze is complimentary so the budget will find relief there. So morning Game drives with the lodge were booked as being the only guests I was sure of not having to share. AND they packed a cool box with booze and even water. Win win!

So as dawn broke I was in one of those Land Cruiser thingies with multi (happily empty) seats and we took off for the wilds of the Hoarusib valley. Itself an adventure with water in the river which made for some unusual groupings for 'Desert adapted' giraffe. Sadly of elephants we found only footprints and droppings despite my driver 'Whani', really breaking sweat from time to time. He even did birds and had me out of the truck seeking obscure birds in obscure thorn bushes. He even had a call for Ruppell's Bustard (Koorhan) which got the males to adopt a striking pose for my camera. He did not have one for elephant which could have been fun. And so back to the lodge as I did not rate our chances on afternoon drives very highly and Springbok and Ostriches regularly paraded by the lodge plus other smaller birds of little interest on this page.

Dinners were excellent with a slight Italianate touch but when I mentioned this skill I was proudly told that the Chef was a pure bred Himba lady. And the 'pure' was heavily emphasised too by our Ovambo waitress.

Next morning the process was repeated but we took a different direction, indeed, on the road I had so recently enjoyed from Tomakas. We met more giraffe and springbok etc., and then fresh ellie spoor.



We turned off the 'main road' for the infant river bed and found a small family group of elephant browsing the tamarisk and got good views. However the views were not evidently good enough for me as Wahni back tracked, crossed the river and then after some heroic cross country travel we got back to a place where we could overlook the elephant who were browsing and moving in our direction. In all we counted seven animals in the group, including an impressive Bull tagging along with them. So we left then in peace after some photos and much enjoyable watching. The lone bull watched us carefully as we left via a piece of his territory. Mission accomplished. Back to the Lodge, I was memorising the route carefully as I had to remember it for leaving tomorrow. Dinner was again most enjoyable and the wine most palatable. Sleep as never so sound.

The Lodge was lovely and whilst pricey on my budget I feel it was certainly value for money and if one must use lodge vehicles for Game drives on some occasions then they were not outrageously expensive and the quality of guiding was excellent.

Ten rooms/bungalows plus a 'Presidential Suite' all provided for by wonderful local staff with excellent cuisine throughout including breakfast. A pool and lots of user friendly public areas for leisure away from your room. We would be happy to be asked back.

### **Part 9. Return to the Khowarib.**

The day dawned fine, well it would do that in the desert.

We were packed and breakfasted in good time and ready to discover if I, and Gladys, could remember the correct route back over the river Hoarusib and, more importantly, over the road section that had caused the involuntary diversion on the way here. So we traced our memorised tracks back to Puros, remembering the 'fields' of golden Morning Glory on the way to the river bed.

Having crossed over and passed the school we were waved down by Wahni, who may have been keeping a careful eye on our progress, and asked if we would mind giving lift to a young lady who was needing to get to Sesfontein to study. Of course we agreed and after reshuffling the rear seats she climbed aboard and we set off east up the valley that led to D3707. I recalled this from our game drive the previous day and suggested we may encounter elephant. And as if on cue who should loom into view but the large bull of yesterday. He approached the road quite boldly so as we were not sure of his character or how comfortable our young lady guest would be up too close to him, we simply took some decent photographs and moved off to let him cross to where he wanted to be.

Our guest was non committal but did say that lion were also frequently encountered but we never saw any.

And somehow the return drive seemed less forbidding than it had three days ago and we approached the 'detour' with confidence. Sure enough Elizabeth called out where our track left the road and with a bit of memory and luck Garmin led us safely back through Tomakos and eventually onto the ephemeral vestiges of D3707 and our road back to Sesfontein. Some of the scenery was truly beautiful with strong renders of my native uplands and every bit as green after the welcome rainfall here.

As we descended the 'trickier' parts of the descent from what must be a 'pass' over these mountains the road did improve and we shortly thereafter reached Sesfontein where our lady guest wished to be set down. Following this we just headed south to re-join the C39(?) to cross the infant Hoanib before taking our left turn into Khowarib Schlucht and our Lodge for the next two nights. This time we were allocated '14' which was slightly larger. A very nice tent on stilts with a platform overlooking if not actually over the infant river Hoanib on its exit from Khowarib Schlucht towards Sesfontein and on down to Ampoorts Gorge and eventually the South Atlantic via the 'forbidden' Skeleton Coast National Park. I have driven the river route as far as Ampoort twice previously as a more scenic route to Puros but would not tackle it this year in such conditions.

We were to be in Khowarib Lodge for two nights as I had intended to explore the start of the Khowarib trail as our next destination lay only 50km or so in that direction and if accessible, it is not, would have saved a 200 km drive around.

We did try on the morning but after only a couple of km the 'trail' fell off a cliff into the river and we did not attempt the descent in fear of not being able to get back up again. So after a short drive into Warmquelle to check the river crossing we returned to the Lodge and I took up station in the environs

of the excellent swimming pool which was in midst of luxuriant vegetation with the promise of good birding. The promise was fulfilled as my other report will reveal.

Meals as always are taken in the open air restaurant and the standard is good. And so to bed for a good start tomorrow. It was blowing up a bit and there was thunder rumbling around with rain falling to the east. Indeed in the early hours the sound of 'rain' became more even and a glance from our balcony showed the noise was not rain drumming the roof but the 'infant' Hoanib coming down in full spate about 5 metres away, (below).

It was still rushing down when it grew light and so we packed up ready to tackle the road to Palmwag once more and on to our next stop.

Khowarib Lodge is a beautiful place with about 20 'tents' as well as an associated campsite nearby. The tents are spacious but not large and fully equipped with modern facilities including the recent trend for open air washing basins, showers and W.C. There is a swimming pool and a good bar area and restaurant. One of our favourite stops to break the journey north south to Puros or Epupa falls on the Angolan border.

Part 10.

Khowarib to Hobatere.

Time to move on to our next stop for which we harboured very mixed feelings indeed. We knew and loved Hobatere Lodge having stayed there several times in the past when owned and managed by Louise and Steve Braine and their growing family. It was a 'must visit' place for us on every trip. Sadly our booking in 2008 was cancelled when, for reasons that are not clear even after ten or more years, the concession held for 25 years was removed by the Namibian Government and the lodge was taken over by 'local community' operators and the Braine family left for Swakopmund. We had declined to return as we had too many good memories of the place under the Braine family to risk disappointment by comparison.

But we felt the time was ripe to return if only to try the 'new' tree house as we had really enjoyed the old one. This is very rustic and located some km from the main lodge where food comes from the cool box we take in with us.

So we booked three nights with the final one in the tree house and all seemed well. Sadly just weeks before our departure we received a mail saying the Tree House had sustained rain damage and our booking was transferred to the main lodge. No refund offered but my protests gleaned a response that we could be credited with 'free' game drives. I don't do shared game drives, I self drive. This was not a good omen and even I could not imagine running up a Bar bill to exceed the amount of our credit with them. Get on with the tale....

A glance at the map shows that Khowarib Lodge and Hobatere are only about 50km apart as the Pied Crow flies and the area does have several trails crossing the area. However it was not allowed to enter Hobatere concession by the 'back door' and the amount of recent rain would have made the idea folly in any event so we faced the long way around. 278 km as opposed to maybe 50km. Two options:- North via Opuwo and nice tar for much of the drive or south back to Palmwag and over Grootberg pass to Kamanjab on gravel before 50km or so of tarred C35 to the gates for the 16km private track to Hobatere. We opted for the latter as more scenic and interesting.

See map and the blue line of our track. That thin red line would have been handy if a road but it is the Vet Fence for disease control that transects the width of Namibia.

So off we went with some concerns about Hobatere undiminished. I knew the way and the drive was easy enough and was pleased to find that last night's heavy rain had not disturbed the road that much. We made good time to Palmwag, relatively speaking for gravel covering the 76km in an hour and twenty minutes. We drove a further 119km to Kamanjab and a decision to top off the tanks as the next available fuel would be in Okaukuejo in Etosha in 6 days time. This was not a fun experience as whilst we have often taken on fuel here the place was overrun by touts and would be windscreen cleaners. We managed to take on fuel and repel most boarders but still managed to get into a small

disagreement with the chap who had cleaned all our glass without being asked. But being the answer to the world's poverty is not one of my functions and I declined his entries by suggesting he may like to ask drivers before performing a task in future. Anyway enough of that. We departed more or less full of fuel, our second uplift of the trip, and set off up the tar road for the next 60km to Hobatere Gate where we turned off for the last 16km to the Lodge. The track which I have done previously in normal saloons had deteriorated markedly and in places I was concerned for even the higher ground clearance of the Hi Luxe. Parts had eroded into the small river and needed great care. But the wildlife was visible with giraffe, zebra and impala in addition to many birds.

On arrival we found reception and for the first time in the trip had our temperatures checked and recorded at check in. It was apparent that they had only a few guests and this was borne out at dinner each day where we dined with only one other couple per evening. This presented a solution to the refund problem as if no other guests then why not take a couple of night drives of which I have fond memories. We were surprised to learn that we could not self drive around the concession in daylight which we had planned to do as before and the two hides where we had watched daily elephants bathing and even lions were defunct. Such a shame. The hide/platform by the swimming pool still existed but due to a new Lapa being built nearby the ellies don't come any more. I can't say that I blame them. The other distant hide, in view but needing to drive there was totally defunct although there are evidently plans to build a new one.

This is getting rather wordy so I will just describe our Rondavel with photos and start a new 'page' for our activities and daily routine with more photos of what we saw.

Hobatere.

A previously enjoyable place but sadly the takeover in 2011 does not appear to have been of benefit. The new Lapa building whilst splendidly done is too close to the viewing platform and swimming pool and wildlife simply don't come that close to human presence. The viewing platform still exists but there is nothing to view other than distant bush and birds. Despite this we did sit there sporadically and did observe passing elephants on two occasions. On the last sighting I commandeered a vehicle and driver and insisted we go over and get a closer look.

On arrival we watched him splashing about in the old waterhole but was advised by my driver that this chap was known to be short tempered and he was not keen to get too close to him.

Similarly the old more distant hide, where for safety reasons one had to ask for a car and not walk due to lions present, is still there but seems to be a generator house and not in use as a hide for the adjacent waterhole where close views of game including the resident lion pride could be obtained. I understand that there are plans for a new hide but currently they are 'just plans'.

More of concern to me was the ban on self driven own car game drives in the concession which had been permitted in the previous ownership. But given the state of some of these tracks, post rains, this restriction may have been a blessing in disguise as we discovered on the two game drives in lodge vehicles we did. This restriction did hamper us and our daylight excursions were confined to the track to and from the main gate which did yield a few mammals such as Black-faced Impala and Hartmann's Zebra as well as many tracks in the sandy soil and a few birds such as this Hoopoe and Chestnut Weavers.

But it was my 'free' night drives where the excitement peaked. The tracks were rough but we managed sightings of giraffe, White-tailed Mongoose, Black-backed Jackals, one of which yielded a surprise sighting of Spotted Dikkop and many Flap-necked Chameleons which I was told were sleeping so proving difficult to get photos of their heads. One night we found a delightful African Scops Owl but the star of the evening was a Caracal which whilst difficult to 'extract' from the dense cover did provide a useful photo of this elusive cat.

Overall we did enjoy our visit to Hobatere despite the changes noted and obvious disappointment of not having the Tree House as booked. Whether or not I would have enjoyed it as much had it been busier with more guests I really do not know.

Hobatere and into Etosha.

We now must leave Hobatere and take the 16km track with which we have grown very familiar back to the tar road and enter Etosha NP via Galton Gate. This was a very short transfer day of only 120 km so we had plenty of time to stop and stare and smell the roses.

Entry proceedings was very quiet indeed and the friendly gate staff had time to chat with us. Quite a change from the normal busy days of the past. We timed our entry carefully as we knew that this would count towards our exit time in six days time. OK. So we cheated a little bit to make sure we had time in hand later.

We immediately noticed the improved surface from the corrugations of the past so our eyeballs got some relief and could be used to see wildlife. We got our first Etosha bird when a Red-crested Bustard stood and posed for us. We also saw a large chameleon crossing the road but when I backed up to have a closer look it had vanished. Blimey those normally slow pedantic climbers can put in a lightning spurt when the need arises.

We made two diversions from the main track to visit two usually productive waterholes, Rateldrai and Klip pan. The former was virtually empty, nay it WAS empty, but the drive to Klip pan was an eye opener indeed. Not so much for wildlife but the amount of water standing where previously no water had been. Indeed one large lake contained dead trees so they must have drowned in the flood. Sadly it was just too far from the track to be accessible for viewing but further on lay another expanse of water where none had existed on previous visits and this was full of water birds in the form of Abdim's Storks and many egrets etc., As an aside these storks follow rains and on our next visit there they had moved on. This flood yielded many sightings of birds and it was fascinating to see how the storks in particular used passing zebras to disturb insects from the grass for them to feast upon. Green grass in Etosha?? Whatever next?

Klip pan itself was surrounded by greenery with Red Hartebeest and Kudu indulging in the feast whilst nesting Stilts and Avocets were on the pool margins along with the ubiquitous Egyptian Geese. We checked in to Dolomite Camp at around 2 pm and for those that do not know this camp a short description may prove helpful. The camp consists of about twenty 'safari tents' on platforms built in a line along a hill which provides splendid views over the plain below. There is also a bar, swimming pool and two restaurants plus reception buildings at various levels. One gains access from the car park via golf carts/quad bike things which are (or more accurately should be! TIA!) available on demand. It can be quite a walk from the far tents 13, 14 & 15, to even reach the restaurant and guess what? We got allocated 15. It is not recommended to walk these paths after dark so you are reliant on your booked buggy coming on time. Whilst the place had few guests this buggy business did become a 'bit of an issue' and at one point I had to make a point by requesting we be allocated a closer tent but as it still would not solve the transport problem we decided to stay put as our tent was very nice and the shuttle service improved from then on.

Tent 15 looked out to the north east over the vast park dotted with acacia and whilst distant we could observe elephant, giraffe as well as lion from our balcony. We awoke to Lion roars two mornings. The birding was terrific as well. Rock Martins actually roosted in our thatched roof and the wooded slopes yielded many worthwhile sightings.

Meals were very good although the menu choice was restricted and the staff were extremely friendly throughout our three night stay despite coming under pressure one evening when a bus load of tourists arrived. The game viewing was not too bad but we failed to connect with any Rhino at all. There is no camp gate as such but game driving before sunrise and after sunset was discouraged. We could have driven miles and miles but as the nearest fuel was well over 100km east, at Okaukuejo, and there was no guarantee they would have any when we got there, we confined our drives to the local area which was no hardship to us. Indeed the only real problem, shuttles, had been resolved and we really

enjoyed being somewhat lazy on our balcony, glass in hand, or indulging in early morning and late afternoon drives. Apologies to non birders if the accompanying photographs are more birdy than usual but who could not love that Rock Kestrel in the tree next door?

To Halali.

After our three nights at Dolomite camp we now move on to Halali, our favourite camp in the park. We endure the corrugations of the main track which got bad after Olifantsrus and had been diverted in parts to protect it. We did see a small pride of lion resting up a short distance from the track where work men were re-surfacing nearby but it was not clear if they were to help or just supervise.

This was the sole wildlife of note on the long drive to Okaukuejo Resort where we called for an ice cream and more water. This is not our favourite place as it can get hectically busy in season and the behaviour of some visitors can be found wanting. So we continued our drive east to Halali and called first at Neubrownie waterhole where to our surprise we again encountered a huge flock of Abdim's Storks jostling for position with Springbok, Wildebeeste and Zebra. From there to a disappointingly empty Gemsbokvlaat and on to Oliphantsbad waterholes. Again the wildlife was notable by its absence. We never saw a single elephant. We knew it would be quiet but this verged on the moribund. As we proceeded over the Salvadori plain we picked up a few interesting birds such as the delightful Blue Cranes. Some of these carried radio tags and one had a readable leg ring. NAT. We found out later that this bird was only 2 years old and was consorting with a much older female. A stop at Rietfontein yielded some falcons including Lanner, Red-necked and a single female Red-footed plus a very pale TawnyEagle to boost our raptor count. The waterhole itself was quiet apart from a few Kudu and a solitary wildebeeste.

And so on to Halali where check in was swift and efficient as we picked up the key to Bush Chalet 57. This was nicely located in a quiet area and on internal inspection was well up to our expectations.

A kitchen, lounge area and of course netted bedroom and a spacious and well furnished bathroom. There was Air conditioning too and a Brai outside on the private patio.

Meals are taken in a semi open restaurant, similar to an oversized pergola, close to the swimming pool. The surrounding camp area was very green from the recent rain and had a nice village atmosphere. I put out my Trail Camera but nothing was caught in its beam on all three nights it was deployed. There is an excellent waterhole in the camp/resort which is very active after dark. We watched a rhino come to drink on the first night and on the second were entertained by a large herd of elephant and two spotted hyena.

Our daily routine was to leave camp as the gates opened at 06.50 and make a circular game drive to the plains of the west along the two Chudop loops and on to Sueda, Salvadori to return via Rietfontein. Chudop has been historically good for Foxes and Yellow Mongoose but with the longer grasses they could have been only feet away and still been invisible. A bit disappointing overall but we knew what we were letting ourselves in for when booking March. One highlight was discovering a large flock of Amur Falcons all feeding around the plains and resting in trees. In the good light it was possible to position the car for some nice views of these lovely birds. Our afternoon drives, following a midday rest period, were to the east but even our favourite waterhole of Goas failed to deliver the usual bathing herds of elephant. And our attempt to visit Noniams waterhole was an object lesson in 4WD driving in deep mud only to find the waterhole itself overgrown with shrubs. We did however manage to find a White Rhino closer to Halali but the views were quite obscured by shrubs to such an extent that I was quite pleased to have spotted it at all.

But we do enjoy Halali as an ideal place for a few days when in Etosha, with many birds actually in camp such as Hornbills, Cuckoos and Wood-Hoopoes in the surrounding trees. One afternoon we were well entertained by the efforts of a Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk) that was making determined attacks on the local striped squirrels without much success. But it did yield some nice photographs.

Next stop a hidden gem.

We had enjoyed our stay at Halali despite a shortfall in our quota of large mammals and cats but it was time to leave with the accent on time. Our entry time at Galton had been slightly adjusted but we

still needed to get to Von Lindquist Gate by 09.59 or risk being charged for another 24 hours. We had 82km of park to cross so there was no loiter time. Google said 90 minutes but we all know how ambitious that will be even on a non stop run and who can do that in Etosha? We had originally planned to visit Fisher's Pan on the run east before exiting but time restraints made that impractical. So having loaded the car, cleaned and locked the Chalet, handed back the key and had breakfast we exited the camp gate as it opened at 7.00.

We just kept to the main tracks and headed east at a comfortable game viewing speed. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there were no distracting sightings during the drive apart from a couple of Spotted Hyenas returning from their late night excursions. A recent revised road layout even detoured Namutoni Camp and we then had some nice tar for the first time for a week or so. Exit formalities at the gate some minutes before ten o'clock and the open road beckoned. A relatively short drive of 280km lay ahead so now we could slow down as we were not due to be at the next meeting place until 14.00 to meet. So there was absolutely no excuse for me to be waved down by a very nice policeman who told me he was running a 'speed awareness' operation and I was speeding. Oops! He seemed a nice chap, very well spoken, and I offered no resistance other than to say I had lifted my foot as I saw the '60' sign and was decelerating but just not braking hard for safety reasons due to the downhill slope of the road. Driving licence produced and all was in order. I politely asked 'what next Officer?' "Was he going to throw this elderly tourist in Gaol or accept my sincere apology and send me on my way remorseful but with good memories of Namibia?" He smiled and chose the latter saying I was forgiven and we were sent on our way. Phew!! We were still ahead of schedule so I pulled in to a roadside picnic spot and got out the rented Satellite phone we had rented, for the first and only time, and after fathoming out how it operated I phoned Kate at Turnstone check the entry track to Mundulea and to advise our E.T.A when we would meet our host Brno. We still had time to kill so we then pulled into the usual fuel and supermarket in Otavi to buy a sandwich or something and then found somewhere quiet to eat it. Then we set off to find the turn off for the D road which was where the instructions said it would be. There was some very muddy patches following recent rains so we took it extremely carefully and eventually reached the gate to Mundulea. Still early so we indulged in a bit of birding.

The attached 'map' does not show the whole route there. The D road is clear enough and we were waiting at the gate just where the final track hooks south which is where Brno found us. He unlocked both gates and instructed me drive on and he would follow to the Farmhouse which he did. Our trail stops at the farm as we then transferred into Brno's ancient but reliable Land Rover for the final drive to the Bush Camp.

Mundulea Camp is named after a local purple flower in the legume family and lies in a very secluded stand of trees that is almost invisible from any distance. The four guest tents are each secluded from each other and connected by paths to the main dining and cooking Lapa. The tents are on a large plinth, and are not lavishly furnished but more than adequate. All lights are solar powered and hot water is provided by a Donkey Stove or, as East Africans call it, a Kampala boiler. There is a comfortable bed with duvets as it can get cold I am told, and a wardrobe and two chairs. The 'bathroom' is out is the fresh air at the rear and contains the usual fittings such as washbasin, Shower stall and WC. Who needs more? The whole set up is lovely and private. Meals are cooked on a wood stove in the Lapa and rely heavily on the use of Potje and pans. They were excellent. Local wildlife could be seen at a salt lick and waterhole either from the Lapa or from two rustic hides. A fine Kudu bull regarded us as we ate our first meal in this lovely haven whilst African Paradise Flycatchers hawked insects along the pathways..

Activities are mainly guided walks with Brno or short drives around the property for birds and mammal watching at dambos and clearings in the bush.

The property was purchased by Brno as a private wildlife reserve and there are large herds of Eland, Kudu and Black-faced Impala plus Giraffe and smaller mammals such as Damara Dik Dik and porcupines etc.,

I set up my trail camera to see what came after dark after which we discovered that sleep quality was superb and awoke refreshed the next morning. After breakfast Brno led us off on a walk into the bush

where we saw quite a few mammals and birds. We stopped at the foot of a large rocky outcrop to watch three Hawk eagles hunting as well as seek out Damara Rockjumpers which we saw but failed to photograph. As well as pointing out birds Brno explained the history of the reserve as well as his plans for the future. There was certainly a lot of wildlife around as my trail camera had almost exhausted the 8 batteries the first evening on multiple shots of visiting animals from giraffe, to oryx and impala. Hoped for small nocturnals did not get a look in at all. Next time I will try another location or bring two cameras..

Next morning we awoke to heavy and steady rain which killed off any hope of another walk but after lunch we did take a game drive for a couple of hours and sat by another dambo where giraffe, wildebeeste, impala came down to drink whilst Little Grebes and even a Dwarf Bittern were observed.

I really cannot praise the place enough. It contained much that I really like about small camps such as isolation and solitude and yet still provided all the comforts of home such as running water and good food. We will be back soon I am sure.

Home away from home.

We had no need to rush away from the idyllic Mondulea as our drive to the next lodge was not far at all. Barely 100km. After a leisurely breakfast and a last walk up to the 'mountain', Brno took us back to our car and we said our farewells under the gaze of yet another Great Spotted Cuckoo in the farm garden. 16km of gravel track, and a 100 metres of gooey mud where the Hi Luxe had to be prevented from going axle deep following the invisible rutted tracks of a larger vehicle that lay below the liquid surface, and we gained the main B1 tar road once more. This road is dead straight and smooth so I do not know what sort of spectacle our very muddy 'farm' truck must have made for the other drivers in their shiny and newly washed vehicles. Having then reached our very familiar turn off we left the tar and had another 18km of gravel road which, whilst still wet from yesterday's rain, was not as bad as the last one.

And so we arrived at the gates of one of our favourite lodges. No visit to Namibia by us is complete without a few days here. Built by and named after a prominent local business man, Dr. Frans Indongo this will be our sixth stay here and naturally the 'welcome home' was effusive.

The Lodge is part of a larger private game reserve created as an indulgence by Dr. Indongo to be both home for him and a collection of wildlife. There are 14 en suite private chalets grouped around the main 'Lapa' building that contains bar, restaurant, public lounge and large open deck overlooking the main wildlife reserve where many antelopes of several species can be observed. Many are native species, such as Sable, Roan and Impala but there are some 'exotics' too like Bontibok. Most of these come to the newly created illuminated waterhole just a few metres from the viewing deck towards sundown. There are other large enclosures, Namibia is very strict on the permitted area per mammal, containing White Rhino and other wildlife which can be visited on game drives offered by the lodge. Other activities are on offer for longer staying guests such as 3 unescorted hiking trails over the property towards the line of rocky outcrops to the north.

Here one can wander freely among game animals and view both them and the prolific birdlife on foot armed only with a camera or binoculars in good clean air with only the smell of the bush in your nostrils.

Meals are usually three course set menus served at your table by friendly staff. Very much meat based but veggie options are available. Indeed due to low guest numbers on one evening we were 'indulged' by being asked to suggest our own menu and chose fish which made a nice change. It was served accompanied by the Managers personal choice of her favourite white wine from a very comprehensive wine list.

We used our time here just to relax and the only exertions were our usual walks on the property and a couple of short drives over the dirt roads towards the Waterberg massif to the south.

We also took advantage of the Wifi to reserve our seating on the planes home which in itself was an interesting exercise in a British Bank's attempts to deal in Namibian dollars to a merchant based in Addis Ababa.

As our plane leaves WDH at 14.30 and we had the car to return first it was necessary to leave quite early next morning so settled our account the previous evening and true to form an early breakfast was readily provided.

As always we really enjoyed our stay at Frans Indongo Lodge and are always sad when the time comes to say good bye and Auf Weidersehn. But one thing is certain we plan to see them again when we return to Namibia.

The next post will be the final one for this trip and will comprise of the short account of our drive down to Windhoek and a summary of the logistics and statistics of the trip overall.

The final curtain. Homeward bound.

As stated we needed an early start from Frans Indongo Lodge in order drive 310 km to Windhoek to hand back the car and still make an 11.30 check in at the Airport.

So it was 'early doors' for a 6.30 breakfast with the car packed and rolling at 06.47. The drive down was trouble free and we had fuel for the whole trip and some to spare. We could return it empty but I did not want to sweat on an empty gauge as we got close to Windhoek. I took the view that better leave some unused fuel, N\$17 per litre, than risk running out. Just not worth the hassle.

And so after a trouble and worry free drive we found ourselves on schedule for a 10.00 arrival as we headed down the Windhoek Western bypass with 10km to go. Oh dear. There were road works just where we needed to turnoff on B1 south and we missed the signs. Bu55er! So we went on new road that has not yet made it onto Traks mapping and took the next exit. Did a smart loop around a new estate and picked up B1 south again and got to Advanced Depot at 10.07. A swift handover, all of 15 minutes at most, the car was dirty but unbroken, a cup of coffee, cases into the shuttle minibus and off to the airport.

Check In was no problem although having printed out our boarding cards at FI.Lodge it was a minor irritation to get new cardboard ones. Through Security and Immigration and a two hour wait for boarding. That's why we carry a paperback book in hand luggage, innit! Boarded and away on time. Land ADD and repeat. Well, not quite. A bus ride and more security. Why? We were all queuing nicely at the appointed time and gate and they spun us a Gate change. The Tel Aviv plane was broken so the Israel bound pax stole ours and we could use theirs when it was fixed in 50 minutes. And another bus ride.

And northward bound about 50 minutes late. No sweat the driver man blew some 'pocket change' on extra fuel for extra speed and we made our technical stop in Brussels just 10 minutes late. Good eh? Nope! After offloading about half the Pax the 'body count' did not match. Either someone had got off that should not have done or somebody was still on board that should have got off. After several recounts it still did not match so all boarding cards were examined and still no change. Logic dictated that it must have been somebody who got off that should not have done so why not just leave him/her to the joys of Brussels?? Come on, when was the last time or first time you heard of Airlines using logic? At one stage I honestly thought they were going to turf us all off and start again. But eventually the doors were closed and we were off on our last leg to sunny Manchester. Coincidentally 50 minutes late once more!! Conspiracy theorists would have a field day if they knew! And so we landed and joy of joys, we had another bus ride to reach the terminal. As ET are on the ground here for the best part of 12 hours I can understand them not using up a gate and we were in no rush. Even the later arrival had not put our onward connection with Loganair at risk but it was still a relief when our two cases came up the carousel after Border Force condescended to let us into UK with almost a smile.

So a schlepp from T2 to T3, by grabbing a free trolley (the tight Ba\$tarads at MAN charge a quid but I know where the spares live) and a trouble free check in with two hours to spare before our 10.50 flight home to Isle of Man and only the overwhelming pleasure of 'Security' to face in between. And whilst they were on top of their form we got through relatively easily despite them being treated to body scans of me as my mother knew me. Some folks would pay for that treat I am sure but many



would not. Off at 10.50 and down on time. Handed over our 'Approved resident' forms so we could be allowed back in to join the 70,000 other drunks that cling to this rock in the Irish Sea. Our luggage appeared on the small carousel and we loaded it onto a **Free** trolley and out the door where Alan from Airport Secure Parking was waiting to re unite us with our car that had been left in his care for a month.

The drive home was occasionally punctuated by swear words as I tried to remember the column stalks for wipers and indicators were now reversed again from those on the Toyota of the last month. Stopped at the corner shop for Milk, Bread and Eggs (and other essentials) and home. Supper was Scrambled Egg on nice fresh crusty bread (something we sorely missed in Namibia) a glass or two of Red wine and an early night.

The trip was done.

Some details for anyone interested.

**Flights** were with

Loganair IOM-MAN-IOM. Trouble free.

Ethiopian. MAN-ADD-WDH-ADD-MAN. Not without its moments but it went well enough.

**Car Hire.** Toyota Hi Luxe. 2.6 diesel Double Cab with reserve tank, fridge and two spare tyres, with a crappy canopy over the load bay and a fuel tank with a permanent air lock. Supplied by Advanced Car Hire, Palladian Street, WDH. No mileage charge and N\$45,000 XS. (N\$45,000 at risk versus Zero XS which would cost N\$8120 extra so no contest from me?) I do have annual Worldwide XS cover for that if needed.

We drove 3282km and used 270 litres of diesel costing about N\$17 per litre.

No punctures and the engine ran without a pause.

**Lodges** (Already reviewed above.)

Must return to...Mundulea and of course Frans Indongo.

O be avoided as Never again? Never say never.

**Ground agent for Etosha bookings.** Info-namibia. Treasure Hunt Design and travel. They did the few small jobs entrusted to them very well indeed.

Avifauna Checklist. 190 species. 4 new to my Namibian list.

BY scores. 167. Species.

Photographs taken 2489.

Where next?

The Isle of Mull and the Outer Hebrides in five weeks time.