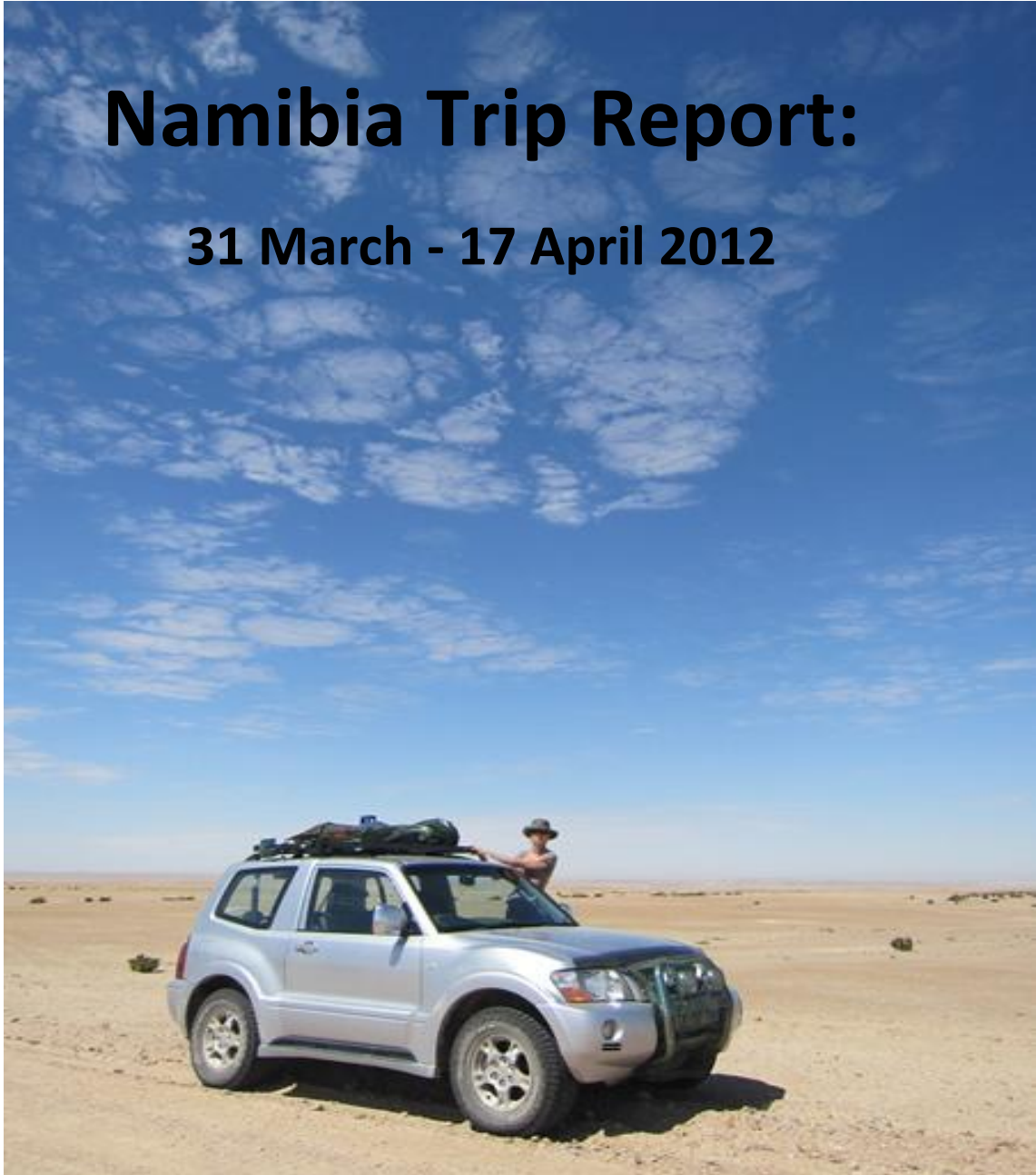


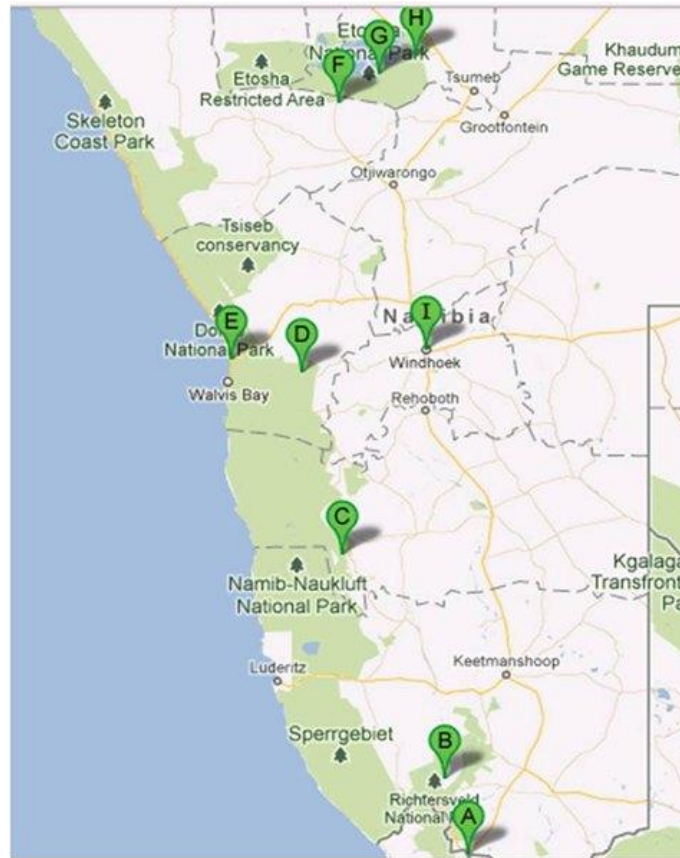
# Namibia Trip Report:

31 March - 17 April 2012



For the last 3 years my girlfriend (now fiancée) has been telling me how amazing German Easters are so this year it was decided that we would visit her parents in Namibia for an education on how it's meant to be done... Our trip was divided into three broad areas - a week in the south, Easter in Swakopmund and then some time in Etosha. Our itinerary included:

Day 1: Cape Town - Orange River	Day 11: Etosha Safari Camp
Day 2: Vioolsdrif - Fish River Canyon	Day 12: Etosha Safari Camp - Halali
Day 3: Fish River Canyon - Sossusvlei	Day 13: Halali - Namutoni
Day 4: Sossusvlei	Day 14: Namutoni
Day 5: Sossusvlei - Tinkas / Bloedkoppe	Day 15: Namutoni - Windhoek
Day 6: Bloedkoppe - Swakopmund	Day 16: Windhoek
Day 7-9: Swakopmund	Day 17: Windhoek - Cape Town
Day 10: Swakopmund - Etosha Safari Camp	



We completed the trip in my 3.2 did SWB. The backseats were removed for extra packing space and we fitted a Fronrunner roof rack to carry some of the lighter items (tent, table, gas bottle and two chairs). The paj performed flawlessly. We completed 5736kms in total and averaged 9.6L/100km, even with the roof rack. Our worst consumption figure was 10.65L/100km and best 8.42L/100km - it's amazing what consumption figures you can get when idling through a national park! I do however have a feeling that the odometer over-reads slightly. An added bonus was that diesel was significantly cheaper in Nam. At Vioolsdrif, just across the border, diesel was R10:55/litre when it was R11:15/litre in Cape Town. Our cheapest refill was R10:10/litre at a co-op in Bethanie!

The aim of the trip was to recharge the batteries, see some great sights, enjoy some camping and squeeze in some birding when possible. I apologise to any non-birders reading this report – I may get a bit carried away talking about birds at times...

#### **DAY 1: CAPE TOWN - VIOOLSDRIF**

We left Cape Town at about 7am and took a relaxed drive north. Not keen on pitching a tent on our first day we decided to overnight at the Aquacade self-catering chalets on the RSA side of the Orange River. The accommodation was fairly basic, but very comfortable and at R225 pppn it was worth it.



*Orange River accommodation at Aquacade*

**DAY 2: VIOOLSDRIF - FISH RIVER CANYON**

En route to Fish River we left the tar for the first time via the D316. I deflated tyres to 1.8 and left it in 4H for the rest of the week...what a pleasure. Nothing beats the open spaces and big skies of Namibia.



*Our first gravel on the D316*



*Approaching Fish River Canyon*



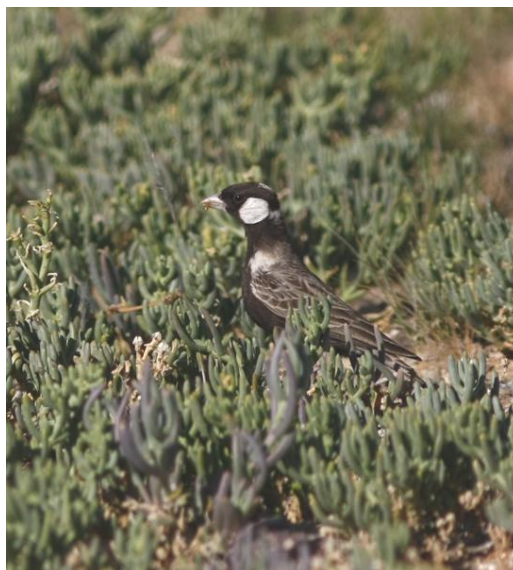
*Fish River Canyon*

The Fish River Canyon was superb and after soaking it up for a couple of hours we headed to the Gondwana Private Nature Reserve to do their "4x4" trail. I'm not up to speed on trail ratings, but this route could be completed in a 2x4 with careful driving. We were happy with this – this was an overlanding trip – any 4x4 trails were a bonus!



***Gondwana Nature Reserve "4x4" Trail***

The veld on the trail was incredible - all the recent rain meant my seed net was put through its paces as we drove through kms and kms of grassland. We encountered good numbers of Springbok on the trail, and literally 1000s and 1000s of Grey-backed Sparrowlarks.

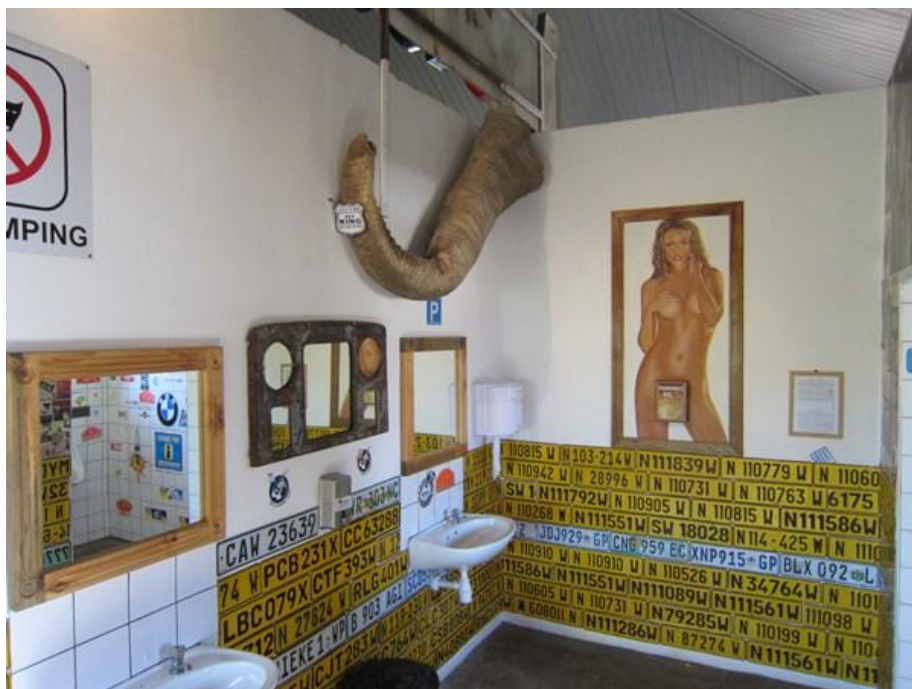


***There were 1000s of Grey-backed Sparrowlarks in this area***



*Nice view point towards the end of the trail...*

We camped at the Canon Road Lodge (part of the Gondwana Collection), a rather interesting place. When I say interesting, I mean "good" interesting. The place is decorated like an old road house - their reception and restaurant is filled with old Ford and other motoring relics. Even the toilets are interesting... ☺



*Men's bathroom at Canon Road Lodge...interesting!*



*Loads of interesting car memorabilia...*



*It has a nice campsite too...*

### DAY 3: FISH RIVER CANYON - SOSSUSVLEI

The majority of this day was spent driving to Sossusvlei via Seeheim, Goageb, Helmeringhausen and Betta. Again, the veld en route was incredible. The area is just covered in a sea of grass at the moment. The highlight of this drive was most definitely the section through the Namib Rand Reserve. This is a private nature reserve that was just teeming with Oryx, Springbok and Zebra and we also lucked upon a feeding party of Fat-eared Boxes being followed by a Yellow Mongoose. For the birders, we notched up plenty of Ludwig's Bustards, Ruppell's Korhaans, Northern Black Korhaans and Black-eared Sparrowlarks. Here's a pic of me trying to photograph a rather tame Ruppell's Korhaan. [Mental note - put on shoes before walking in veld...]



*Photographing Ruppell's Korhaan in the Namib Rand Private Nature Reserve*



*Namib Rand Reserve...a shot through a rather dirty windscreen...*



*Namib Rand Private Nature Reserve*



***Northern Black Korhaan***



***Bat-eared Fox***



***Lark-like Bunting***



***Ruppell's Korhaan***

After a long day of driving we eventually arrived at Sesriem where we stayed at the very comfortable Sossus Oasis Campsite. Each campsite includes its own covered area, kitchen, bathroom, lighting and electricity..."Rolls Royce" camping...it also has a nice swimming pool.



***Sossus Oasis Campsite...plush!***

## DAY 4: SOSSUSVLEI

I've never considered Sossusvlei a must-visit area, but after having visited it I'm now sold. My fiancée's sister is working at a lodge in the area so we were first at the Sossus gate with our pre-bought permits... Instead of rushing to the vlei we took a relaxed drive and enjoyed the light and scenery on the way in.



*Hot air balloons over Sossusvlei*



*Dune 45...*

Dead vlei wasn't so dead this year as there was a fair bit of water around. We did all the the normal touristy things - climbed Big Daddy and took heaps of photos! By midday we had seen enough red sand so we headed back to the campsite and relaxed by the very clean, Sossus Oasis Pool. It must also be said that the new Engen garage next to the Sossus Oasis campsite (the garage and campsite are owned by the same people) is well stocked and they accept credit cards for fuel.



*Dead vlei*



*Nice pool at Sossus Oasis...*

There's only so much pool-lounging one can do so when things cooled down a bit (temperatures were hovering around 35 degrees C at midday) we did a quick swing past Sesriem Canyon (it was full of water so we couldn't walk far). We also popped back into Sossusvlei for 60 minutes to look for Burchell's Courser, a very special plover-like bird that inhabits the driest and most uninhabitable areas of western South Africa and southern Namibia. We weren't disappointed as not only did we see this beast, but in fact we notched up 12 sightings - yes 12!!! Other birds of note were plenty of Bradfield's Swift around Sesriem Canyon (they likely breed here?) and a dark phase Booted Eagle.



***Burchell's Courser***



***Booted Eagle (pale phase)***



***Red-headed Finch***



***Ruppell's Korhaan***

#### **DAY 5: SOSSUSVLEI - BLOEDKOPPE**

After two nights of "Rolls Royce" camping we were finally going to rough it at Bloed Koppe in the northern section of the Namib Naukluft park. Our drive up north was again phenomenal! We made a mandatory stop at Solitaire for some apple pie and then pushed north via the Gaub and Kuiseb Rivers.



*Solitaire Apple Pie...*



*View site above the Kuiseb River*



*Crossing the Tropic of Capricorn*

#### **Gravel Roads in Namibia**

A side note regarding the condition of the roads. All the gravel roads we travelled in Namibia were great except for the C14 north from Solitaire towards Walvis - this section was very corrugated! We averaged about 80 km/h on most gravel, and even then we had to take evasive action on certain sections that had washed away. There was one occasion where, travelling at about 70 km/h, we summated a rise to find very little of the road left! There was little one could do, but keep the steering wheel straight and hang one!! The paj didn't miss a beat, but it was rather scary! It always amazes me when travelling on gravel when people pass you at speeds over 120 km/h! On our trip, a Porsche Cayenne was a frequent offender, and (unfortunately) a LWB Pajero driver told me proudly that he like to drive at 140 km on gravel.... some people's children...!

Anyway, back to our route. Definitely one of the highlights of the entire trip was the camping at Bloed Koppe, a remote camping area in the northern section of the Namib Naukluft. We only saw one other car the entire day and the scenery was spectacular!



*En route to Bloed Koppe*



*Spectacular Hoodia in the Namib Naukluft National Park*



***Bloed Koppe***



***Bloed Koppe Camping site***



Funny story. The rock we decided to camp under was massive and upon inspection it was discovered that only a very small proportion of its entire surface area was keeping it in place... We decided to move our tent a few metres in case it decided it was tired if its current position 😊 it's probably been perched there for a few million years, but we didn't want to tempt fate...! From Bloed Koppe we made our way to Swakopmund via the Welwitschia Plains and Moon Landscape.



***Welwitschia Plains***

## **DAYS 7 – 9: SWAKOPMUND**

After a week of camping we welcomed some creature comforts in Swakopmund where we spent a few nights with my Fiancée's parents. In-between consuming chocolate I managed to spend some time birding at Walvis Bay and we also enjoyed a chartered boat trip from Walvis Bay, which was surprisingly very enjoyable. The tour operator (Catamaran Charters) has habituated a few select Cape Fur Seals and other animals, which is quite fun. The seals jump on the moving boat and waddle along the deck for a feed, while the tour guide was able to whistle up Great White Pelicans a Sub-Antarctic Skua and a Cape Cormorant to be hand-fed. We also encountered a Sun Fish (Mola Mola) and a quick glimpse of some Heaviside's Dolphins.



***Cape Fur Seal***



***Great White Pelican***



***Damara Tern***



***Ruddy Turnstone***



***Sanderling***



***Sun Fish***

## DAY 10 – 15: ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

From Swakopmund we continued north to Etosha National Park, one of my favourite places in Namibia. We spent our first two nights camping just outside Andersson Gate at Etosha Safari Camp (part of the Gondwana Collection), one night camping at Halali and two nights camping at Namutoni.



***Etosha Safari Camp – Nice soft grass for camping...***



***Halali Camping – Nice waterhole, but noisy neighbours...***

Etosha was superb – we saw just about everything, bar Leopard. Rather than bore you with a day-to-day summary I'll list the highlights and some photos...

- Encountering 2 Black Rhino (horns intact) between Andersson gate and Okaukeujo after only 10 minutes in the park
- Encountering 4 Cheetah between Andersson gate and Okaukeujo after only 30 minutes in the park
- Many lion encounters around Okondeka and between Andersson Gate and Okaukeujo
- The 100s of Pink-billed Larks on the Okondeka loop drive
- Watching a family of elephant play in a water hole for about an hour
- Seeing 3 Black Rhino (horns intact) at the Halali camp waterhole
- The 10+ encounters with Damara Dikdik on dik dik drive – such a great little antelope
- Hearing lion call just outside Namutoni camp at night
- The great owling in Halali – we had Scops (perched during the day – ask the security guards where they roost), Pearlspotted Owlet and Barn Owl all in the camp.
- And many many more great wildlife experiences....



***Black Rhino***



***Burchell's Zebra***



***Spotted Hyena***



*Lion*



*Damara Dikdik*



*Black-chested Prinia*



*Blue Crane*



*Chat Flycatcher*



*Double-banded Sandgrouse*



*Kori Bustard*



*Lesser Moorhen*



*Dusky Lark*



*Secretarybird*



*Pink-billed Lark*



***Double-banded Courser***

Ok, enough birds...

I don't like to be negative, but I feel something needs to be said about Etosha's issues.

- They have opened an over-landers bar at Halali so until 10pm at night you may have 20+ over-landers getting pissed and listening to loud music.... Do we go to Etosha to listen to this? I think not. Over-landers were in our bad books after Halali and we were rather disheartened when we saw 5 overlanding trucks pull into the Namutoni campsite... Luckily they redeemed themselves – they didn't make a peep and were in bed before us!
- The state of the picnic sights throughout Etosha are in a state of disrepair. The fences were non-existent in some cases and the toilets left much to be desired. There aren't many places in Etosha to get out of your car and when you do the facilities are shocking. This was a real disappointment.
- Namibia Wildlife have just about removed all of the self-catering accommodation throughout the park and made the pricing prohibitively expensive for locals and SADC residents. This has placed increased pressure on the campsites and a lot of the accommodation was empty when we were there. One can't help but think that the management running Etosha are clueless...

Despite these issues, Etosha is still a fantastic national park and we'll definitely be back.

After Etosha it was back to reality as we made our way south and homewards. We decided to have the paj's wheels balanced and aligned before we made the 2000km trip home because after almost 3000 kms of rough roads they needed some TLC. It seems that the wheel businesses between Etosha and Windhoek aren't that keen to make money because none of them could help us. They either didn't offer alignment or their alignment technician weren't around... Anyway, we got it sorted at TWT in Windhoek and I'm glad we did because the caster, camber and toe were way out! All-in-all it was a fantastic trip – if you've managed to read this far, well done, and thanks for reading!

David Winter