



Bonnie and Art's African Road Trip 2021

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Some Namibian History.....	4
Botswana History.....	4
Outline of our trip	4
Arrival in Namibia	6
June 4: Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel.....	8
June 5-6: Bagatelle Kalahari Game Ranch	10
More Bagatelle Game Ranch Pictures	18
June 7-8: Sossusvlei – Dead Valley Lodge.....	23
June 8: Sossusvlei – The Desert Grace Lodge.....	34
June 9-10: Swakopmund Luxury Suites	42
More Sandwich Harbor Pictures	58
June 11: Skeleton Coast.....	61
More Skeleton Coast Pictures.....	65
June 12: Mowani Mountain Camp in Damaraland	69
More Mowani Mountain Camp Pictures	82
June 13-14: Cheetah View Lodge.....	85
More Cheetah View Lodge Pictures.....	92
June 14-15: Ongava Lodge east of Etosha Park.....	95
June 16-17: Etosha Park – Onguma Tented Camp	113
More Etosha Park Pictures.....	127
June 18-19: Shametu River Lodge.....	137
More Shametu Pictures	146
June 20-22: Chobe Game Lodge in Chobe Park.....	151
More Chobe Game Lodge Pictures	163
June 23: Planet Baobab Lodge.....	172
June 24-27: Splash Camp – Okavango Delta.....	176
More Splash Camp Pictures	198
June 28: Thamalakane River Lodge - Maun.....	215
June 29: Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel – Windhoek	216

Introduction

Every morning at about 5am I get up, make coffee, and go into my office/music room and practice my guitar while I watch the sun come up in our backyard. I've been doing this since I became able to work from home, about the last 20 years. I enjoyed watching the birds that frequented our yard and would share some of the bird behaviors I noticed with Bonnie. That led Bonnie to buy me a bird feeder one Christmas. We bought more feeders and became interested in birds. Then we stumbled upon a half-hour show on TV that discussed birding in Costa Rica at a lodge called the Selva Verde Lodge. We decided to take a trip to Costa Rica centered around birding.

We had taken several wonderful European trips before this, but we had never taken a "Nature Trip". Once we did, we were hooked. In subsequent years we took vacations to Costa Rica, again, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. Each trip was a little more "adventurous" than the previous ones, and with Brazil we began expanding our interests to the bigger animals as well as birds. We were thrilled to hunt Jaguars from a boat in a tributary of the Amazon River, many miles into the jungle. Africa seemed like the next step, so 2 years ago we planned a trip to Tanzania. The Hemingway Package, as it was called, included a private guide for 2 weeks who took us around to about 6 different lodges in or near parks and game reserves. We went with Bonnie's daughter and her husband. It was an incredibly wonderful trip. We knew we would have to go back to Africa.

But where to go in Africa? Africa is a huge continent. There are many possible trips. A friend of ours, Josanne, was friends with Laurie Marker who runs the Cheetah View Lodge in Namibia. She was hosting a fundraiser for cheetahs at Safari West in Santa Rosa and a bunch of us from Imperial Tennis Club decided to go to the fundraiser and party over the weekend. Then later Laurie came to Santa Cruz where her mother lives and Bonnie hosted a cheetah-painting, art event at her art studio. So, we had a connection to Namibia and began exploring trips to southern Africa: South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia.

One day I was telling a guy Pete at Imperial about our Tanzania trip and he told me that he had made a half-dozen trips to Africa using the tour company Namibia Tours and Safaris. His trips were similar to our Tanzanian trip. He had a private guide who took him and his party around to various African wildlife parks and reserves to hunt for game. He was very happy with the tour company, so we began looking at the various trip packages they offered. Originally, we were thinking of doing a trip similar to our Tanzanian trip but they had all kinds of trips. One type of trip that intrigued us was a self-driving trip around Namibia. They had a 19-day package of such a trip. The basic idea was to drive around Namibia from lodge to lodge. The lodges all offered various activities, including of course guided safaris around nearby parks and game reserves. One very attractive feature of this type of trip was its cost. I'm guessing that it was half or less of the cost of our Tanzanian trip. So, we could, for the same amount of money, stay twice as long! The company offered two kinds of self-driving trips. In one you stayed in rooms in the lodges and in the other you camped at the lodges. (Many of the lodges in Namibia offer both rooms and camping areas.) We chose to sleep in beds!

Any of the trip packages could be customized. The 19-day package expanded. We wanted to add lodges in Botswana. We added a couple other lodges, including Laurie's Cheetah View Lodge. And we padded the number of days at some of the lodges to space out some of the driving. It turned into a month-long

trip for a little more than the same cost as our trip to Tanzania. And it included a week in Botswana which is notoriously expensive.

Some Namibian History

In the European scramble for Africa, in 1884 the German's seized an area on the coast in what is now south west Namibia. The colony was known as "South West Africa". Later at the end of World War I, it became a territory of South Africa which was at that time under British control.

The territory of the Ovambo tribe stretched from the territory of South West Africa north to Angola. In 1960 a political organization known as SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) became a major political force against South Africa for the independence of South West Africa from South Africa. The campaign turned into all-out war in the 1980s. The South African government couldn't sustain the war against SWAPO and in 1988 agreed to the independence of South West Africa. The independent territory was renamed Namibia. In 1990, SWAPO won election and its leader Sam Nujoma became president of the then formally independent country named Namibia.

Namibia is bordered by Angola to the north, Zambia to the northeast, Botswana to the east, South Africa to the south and southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. Along the coast of Namibia, stretching from Angola to South Africa, is the Namibian desert. The treacherous coast is aptly named the Skeleton Coast because of all the ship wrecks that occurred on the reefs in the frequently occurring dense fog. The long narrow strip stretching between Angola and Botswana is called the Caprivi Strip.

About 85% of Namibians are black and 5% of European ancestry. The black majority is composed of Ovambo, Kavango, Herero, Damara, and Caprivian peoples. Afrikaners (an ethnic group in South Africa descended from Dutch settlers that speak Afrikaans, one of South Africa's most widely spoken languages) and Germans constitute 2/3 and 1/5 of the European population, respectively. The country has a young population with 40% of the population under the age of 15.

Botswana History

Botswana is inhabited by people of Tswana origin who had migrated north from the area now known as South Africa. During the 19th century Britain gained control of South Africa. Leaders of the Tswana people appealed to the British to protect them from Dutch and German settlers in South West Africa (later known as Namibia) who were pushing into and annexing more and more of the Botswana territory. After 80 years as a British protectorate, Botswana attained independence in 1966.

Outline of our trip

We would travel in Namibia and Botswana for 27 days/26 nights. We would stay in 13 different lodges. We would drive altogether around 4,540 km, about 2,300 miles. We would fly into Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, and drive clockwise around a big circle. We would first drive south from Windhoek and then west to the Namibian coast. We would then drive up the Namibian coast and then head east through Damaraland across Northern Namibia, across the Caprivi Strip, and into Botswana. We would then head

south through Botswana until the final long drive west back to Windhoek.

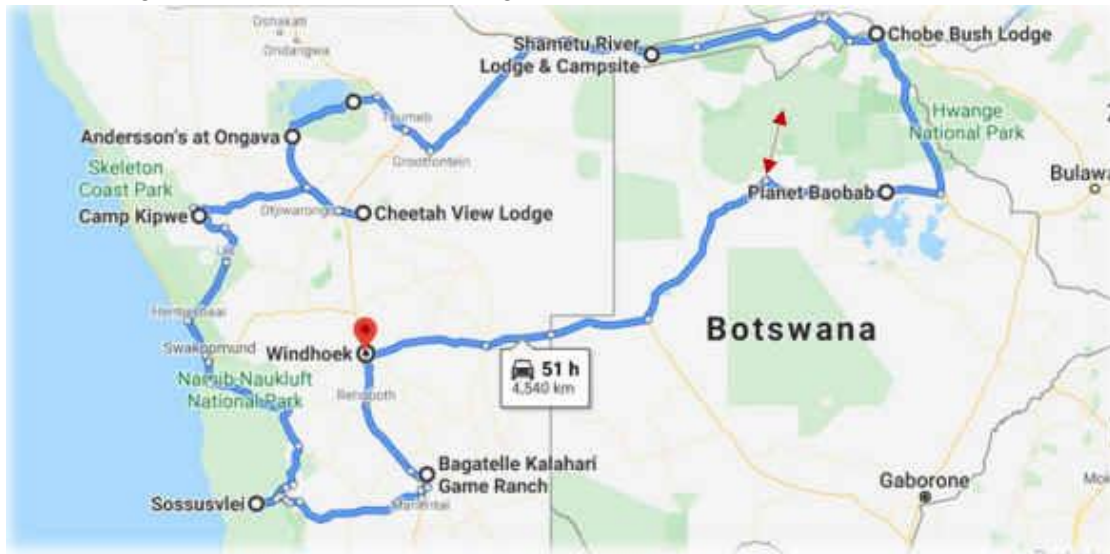


Figure 1: The route we traveled

Arrival in Namibia

We had planned and arranged our trip over a year before we left. Our down payment was made April 20, 2020 just as COVID was beginning to hit the U.S. but before anyone realized the ramifications. It was scheduled to begin in Windhoek on June 4, 2021. All through the time of COVID we wondered whether we would ever be able to make the trip as scheduled. But as luck would have it we were able to make the trip although COVID played a major role in it.

Although Bonnie and I were both fully vaccinated we were still required to show negative COVID test results 4 times during the trip. First, we needed test results to enter Namibia. Thankfully the test was valid to 7 days up to our arrival. The main issue was transiting through Germany. Up until a week and a half before we left, Germany required test results within 48 hours of arrival in Germany and they considered transiting through the airport as arrival into Germany. That meant we needed to take the test by Tues June 1. And we needed the results by check-in time at the airport because Lufthansa was required to verify the test results before letting anyone on the plane. It seemed almost impossible to take the test and get the results in time. We would be forced to take a Rapid COVID test, but there was some question whether a rapid test would be accepted by Germany. We agonized over this, looking for solutions, but then miraculously Germany changed its rules. Germany no longer required a test if you were just transiting through the airport. On Sunday May 30 we drove to the San Jose airport where PathCare had set up a testing site. The results were available on Monday May 31.

We were scheduled to fly out of SFO on June 2, 2021 on Lufthansa airlines. We were transiting through Frankfurt on our way to Windhoek International Airport (WDH) in Namibia. Each leg was 10-11 hours with a long 10-hour layover in Frankfurt. Because of the length of the stop in Frankfurt I booked a day-use room at the Hilton.

At around 3:00PM on Wed June 2 we satisfied the airline's COVID requirements and flew out of SFO and arrived in Frankfurt about 10-11 hours later. When we arrived, we began heading for our day-use room at the Hilton when we realized the hotel was just outside the airport. On their advertisement they had said that they were within walking distance of Terminal 1, at which we had arrived. I took this to imply that the hotel was inside the airport, but this turned out not to be the case. If we left the airport, we would be officially entering Germany and would therefore have to satisfy the COVID requirements for entering Germany. We were both fully vaccinated and that supposedly satisfied their COVID requirements, but we didn't want to take any chances that we couldn't get back into the airport. We asked several security officers at the airport but received differing, conflicting answers. We decided not to risk leaving the airport.

It was a long wait for our flight to leave Germany. The area around Terminal 1 was practically empty of people and there was only one bar/deli open to get food and drinks. But we made it onto our 9:00PM flight. Both legs of our flight were night flights which was nice since we could sleep through them to some extent, with help from our half-strength Ambien.

We arrived at the Windhoek airport on the morning of Friday, June 4. We were met by our Namibia Tours and Safaris representative, Carlo Basson, who drove us to our hotel, the Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel. Our vehicle was parked there. He gave us a couple of hours to rest before giving us the information we would need about our vehicle, phone, and lodges.

Our vehicle was a 4x4 Toyota Fortuner SUV. It included GPS and maximum insurance. The vehicle was monitored 24-7. They would always know our location. They also had the ability to remotely lock and disable the vehicle in case it was stolen. The main thing Carlo had to tell me was how to change the tire in case of a flat. The vehicle came with 2 spares. This was necessary for the kind of driving we would be doing, mainly on gravel roads.

We also got a cell phone with which we could make local calls in Namibia. Unfortunately, the phone was a junkie flip top phone that was extremely difficult to use. And we later learned that it didn't work in Botswana, which we would be in for half our trip! If we do this kind of trip again, I will definitely set up my iPhone to work where we are with a local sim card. Relying on the phone they gave us was a big mistake that could have been disastrous.

Another challenge was driving on the opposite side of the road. This turned out to be less of an issue than I feared it would be. After a few hours I got the hang of it. A couple of times I got confused but was able to correct things in time.

June 4: Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel

Windhoek is the capital and largest city of Namibia, with a population of less than half a million. The Hosea Kutako International airport that we flew into is about 26 miles from the city, about an hour's drive on a paved road through the desert. On the way we drove by large mansions sitting on acres of desert land. For a fraction of what such houses would cost in Europe or the U.S. the owners could view elephants and giraffes from their porches in the evenings over glasses of wine.

The AM Weinberg Boutique Hotel is one of the oldest in the city.



Figure 2: Am Weinberg Boutique hotel

The hotel itself has 3 restaurants. Across the plaza from the entrance are two additional restaurants. A German style restaurant was open for lunch, which we ate at after arriving from the airport. The restaurant was filled with local business people. We were surprised how well-dressed and modern the place and people were. This area of Namibia, at least, in no way appeared “third-world”. We were also pleasantly surprised at how cheap the food was compared to what we spend in Santa Cruz. Delicious full-plate meals were about \$10-15 U.S. dollars, including tax and tip.

It took some getting used to the difference in the Namibian dollar exchange rate. One U.S. dollar equals about 15 Namibian dollars. So how much should I tip the man who carried our luggage to our hotel room? I wasn't sure and didn't want to under tip him. So I gave him 50 Namibian dollars, about 3.50 U.S. dollars. Later I asked Carlo, our travel agent rep, what was a reasonable amount. He said about 2 or 3 Namibian dollars! He added that he would be over the next day to help me with our luggage when we checked out!

Our money was going to go far here! That night we had dinner at our hotel. Bonnie got a bottle of nice Chardonnay. I had a large beer on tap. We had an appetizer and Sliders and fries. The bill with tip came to 500 Namibian dollars, about 32 U.S. dollars!

Breakfast was included in our package. They had Eggs Benedict on the menu, which is my favorite breakfast meal. It was good, but tasted a little different than what you would get in the

States.



Figure 3: Eggs benedict for breakfast

June 5-6: Bagatelle Kalahari Game Ranch

After breakfast at the Weinberg Hotel, we began our 4-hour drive to the Bagatelle Kalahari Game Ranch situated on a private game reserve on the south western edge of the Kalahari desert. It would be my first drive in our new vehicle, driving on the opposite side of the road.

First, we needed to get some snacks and water. The vehicle came with a cooler. We stopped at the first grocery store we saw. It was a small stop-and-go sort of store. It was my first experience in a store in Namibia. I bought several liters of water, several packages of cookies, and some flavored potato chips. I didn't particularly want flavored potato chips, but there weren't any that were unflavored. This turned out to be the rule in Namibia and Botswana.

The drive was mostly over paved roads, with about 30 miles of gravel. It took me awhile to get used to driving on the opposite side of the road but it wasn't as bad as I had expected. But, since the turn signal was on the right of steering wheel and the wipers switch was on the left, I kept turning on the wind shield wipers when I tried to signal.

Rest stops existed along the paved roads every 20 kilometers or so. They were very simple, consisting of just an area to pull off from the road, with a table and occasionally a garbage can.



Figure 4: Rest stop on the way to Bagatelle

The Bagatelle Game Ranch had a greeting party of ostriches when we arrived:



Figure 5: Ostrich greeting party at Bagatelle

Our cabin was on a small dune overlooking a small waterhole. Before dinner we spent our first of many “sundowners” drinking wine watching 4 different kinds of antelope come to the waterhole or walk by our cabin: eland, sable, Oryx, and springbok. There was also a pair of

dapper looking ostriches.



Figure 6: Our cabin is on top of the dune in the back. This is the view from the parking lot. Notice the red Kalahari desert sand.

After we left for dinner we were told that two white rhinos had come to drink at the waterhole and walked near our cabin. For that reason one of the staff escorted us back to our cabin after dinner.

The next morning we did one of the lodge activities: feeding the cheetahs. We fed six. Four we watched being fed, as the cheetahs came running to bowls of food held by Goran their handler. Two were tame enough that we could help hold the bowls and pet them while they ate. The cheetahs here are orphans whose mothers died before they could learn to hunt on their own. They are kept in large fenced areas of several acres each pair. The pairs are related so they won't

attempt to mate, which is illegal in Namibia.



Figure 7: Goran feeding a cheetah



Figure 8: Bonnie feeding a cheetah



Figure 9: Art feeding a cheetah

It was colder than we expected. The seasons in the southern hemisphere are the opposite of what we have in the U.S. We were traveling in the beginning of the winter season and we were in the desert. We hoped it would be warmer elsewhere, but this turned out to be a false hope. In the morning I wore 2 shirts and my down jacket and I was still not warm.

The desert is gorgeous. Because of a lot of rain earlier in the year there was short gray grass over the desert red clay. The next day we would be heading to Sousevlei in another desert, the Namibian Desert, where the desert dunes stretch to the ocean along the Skeleton Coast, a famous surfing area.

The afternoon game drive at Bagatelle Game Ranch reserve was spectacular. We explored a section of the private reserve which covers 10,000 hectares (1 hectare equals about 2.5 acres). During the previous 7 years the Kalahari Desert suffered a severe drought. Over 45% of the animals in the Bagatelle Ranch's private animal reserve had died. This year the rain finally came more than quadrupling last year's rain. The normally red desert clay had a grass covering for the first time in years.

The highlight was a close up viewing of the two white rhinos on the reserve. Our guide drove within a few feet of them. This may seem dangerous, but animals in game reserves get used to safari vehicles and come to ignore them. The guides driving the vehicles also come to

understand the animals' behavior. They can tell when an animal is disturbed by something the vehicle is doing and back away from the animal. You may be puzzled why these so-called white rhinos are not really white. And in fact white rhinos are the same color as black rhinos. They differ from black rhinos in having a wider mouth. (The original name "wide rhino" was mistranslated as "white rhino.")



Figure 10: White rhino at Bagatelle



Figure 11: White rhinos at Bagatelle



Figure 12: White rhinos at Bagatelle

In the Bagatelle Game Ranch reserve we also saw a couple of giraffes, a small herd of wildebeests, a herd of springbok antelope that we raced in our vehicle, bat-eared foxes, a couple of other kinds of antelope, and some wild horses.

We finished with sundowners on one of the desert dunes. We drank wine while watching the sun go down.



Figure 13: Sundowners at Bagatelle

The next day we would leave for Sousevlei which has one of the highest sand dunes in the world. It takes an hour to walk to the top.

We have been told that Americans are rare in Namibia, not surprisingly given that it takes 33 hours to get there. It's brutal but well worth the effort. Europeans have a straight 11 hour shot directly south and don't even change time zones. Bonnie and I were both suffering severe jet lag. We were sleeping in 2 hour spurts.

More Bagatelle Game Ranch Pictures



Figure 14: Roan antelope



Figure 15: Wildebeest in foreground. Giraffes in background.



Figure 16: White rhinos



Figure 17: White rhinos



Figure 18: White rhino



Figure 19: White rhino



Figure 20: Gemsbok and wildebeest



Figure 21: Gemsbok close up



Figure 22: Zebras

June 7-8: Sossusvlei – Dead Valley Lodge

After breakfast at the Bagatelle Kalahari Game Ranch we drove west towards the coast. The landscape changed every 100km or so.



Figure 23: Paved road leaving Bagatelle for Sossusvlei

We left the Kalahari desert and entered the Namib desert. The first thing that struck me was how similar was the color of the sand in the two deserts. Both had the same color of red. Later I found out this was no accident. Millions of years ago sand flowed from the Kalahari desert into an ancient river that ran to the ocean. The sand then washed back up onto the shore eventually forming the Namib desert. The Namib desert exists on a narrow strip of land stretching along the coast across Namibia from South Africa north to Angola.

The Dead Valley Lodge is situated just inside the park, which is a big advantage because you can drive to the park attractions before the park opens to the general public. Tourists staying outside the park have to wait until 8am to get into the park. This allows you to beat the crowds to the park attractions. However, in these COVID times there were no crowds. Still it did enable us to

get to the dunes in time for the sunrise.



Figure 24: View from Dead Valley Lodge Parking Area

Not long after arriving at the lodge we went on our first excursion: Sundowners. Our guide drove us to a spot where we could hike up into some boulders for a wide open view of the desert and watch the sun set over a glass of wine. Since there were so few people staying at the lodge, we had our first of many private excursions, for the cost of a group excursion. While we were waiting for the sun to set, our guide pointed to the so-called “fairy circles” in the desert sands below, a scientifically unexplained phenomenon. All over some parts of the desert there are small circles drawn into the ground. Nobody knows how the circles got there. There are many theories. Some people believe that aliens have created them. Personally I think the aliens have

better things to do. The sunset was beautiful.

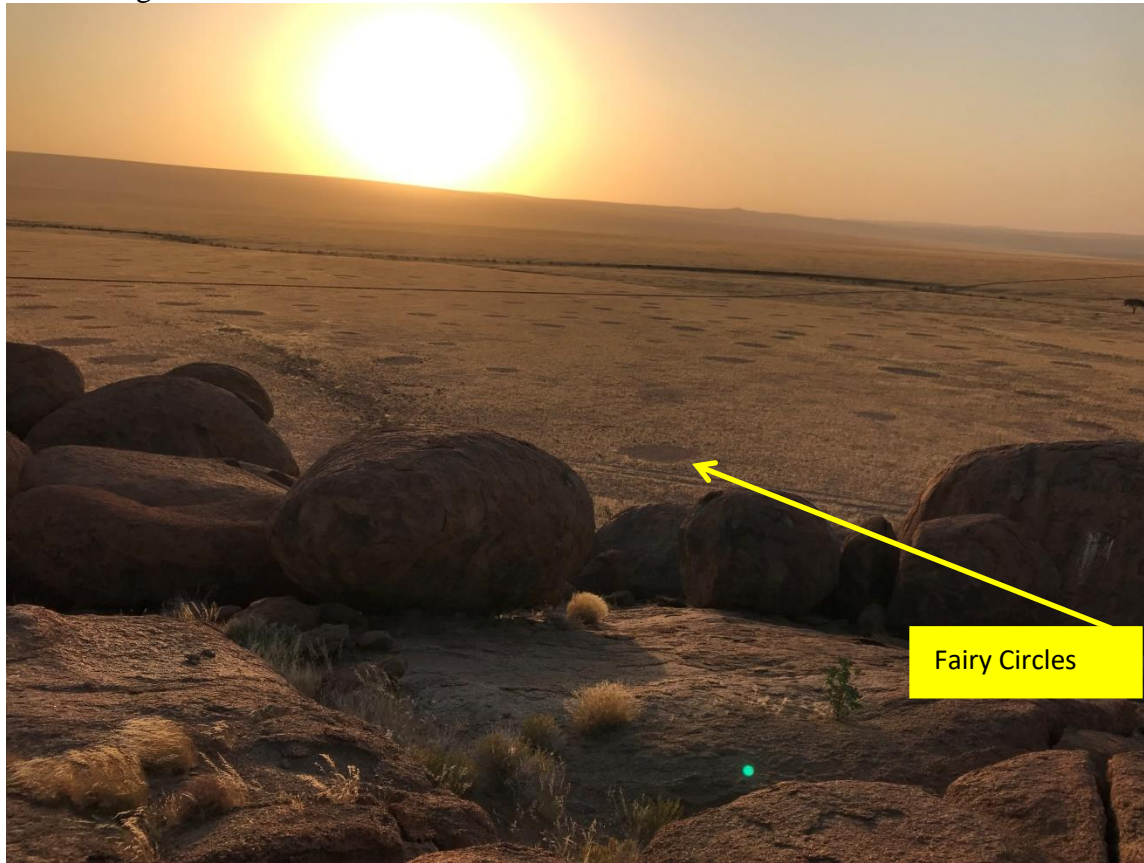


Figure 25: Sundowners at Sousevlei



Figure 26: Bonnie with our guide

Fairy Circles



Figure 27: Art with our guide

Sousevlei is the main tourist attraction in Namibia. Hundreds of fine red sand dunes stretch dozens of feet into the sky forming a thin “U”. At the inside point of the “U” is a small lake. The dunes have sharp edges that give them incredible shapes.

For dinner that night they had a buffet. We had several kinds of meat to choose from which they cooked to order, including fish, Oryx antelope, spring bok antelope, beef steak, crocodile, and wildebeest. I chose the wildebeest which was very tasty but, not surprisingly, a little on the tough side. I think Bonnie had the fish. The rest of the buffet included delicious soup, an array of baked breads, salad, vegetables, and desert.

During dinner we met another couple, Benno and Julie, who we would meet again two more times. Benno was apparently writing a travel guide and owned a small African tour company. Julie writes on a blog site. They planned to drive around Namibia for several months.

We started our excursion to the dunes the next morning before dawn stopping first at Dune 45, named that way because it is 45 kilometers from the opening of the park. It was the first dune the public was allowed to climb. It is a difficult climb. Bonnie with our guide Philip made it about 40-50% of the way up to the top. I made it about 70-80%. You walk up on the edge with the dune falling steeply on each side. When we stopped we sat down to watch the sun rise, an

incredibly beautiful sight.



Figure 28: Guide helping Bonnie climb Dune 45

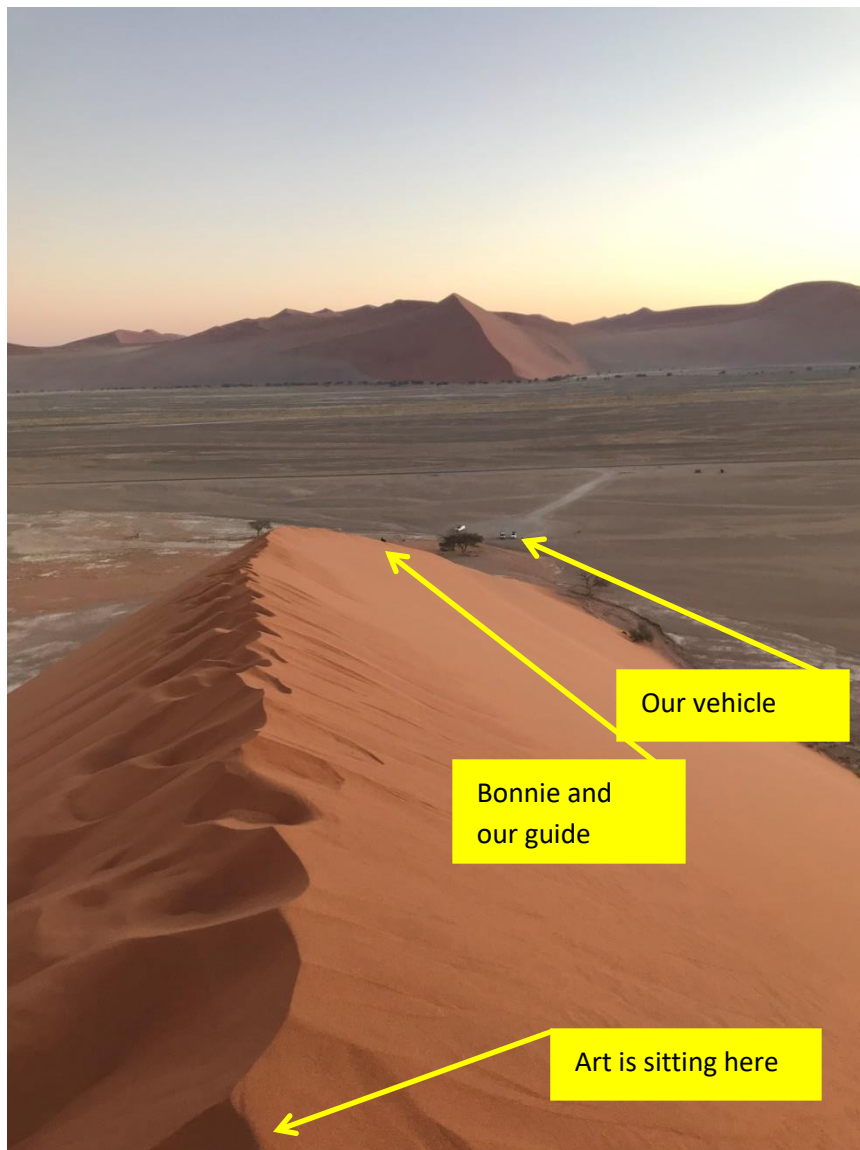


Figure 29: Art looking down from where he's sitting on Dune 45

The highest dune is Big Daddy which takes an hour or more to climb. The second highest is Big Mamma.



Figure 30: Big Mamma



Figure 31: Big Daddy

After climbing down Dune 45, we drove to the lake and picnic area at end of the “U” to have breakfast. According to our guide, this area would normally be swarming with tourists but today

there were only 2 or 3 other people around.



Figure 32: Breakfast at Sousevlei

Lastly we drove back a ways to the area near where Big Daddy is located. There is a short walk from the parking area to the Petrified Forest: a small forest of trees that have petrified.



Figure 33: Path to the Petrified Forest



Figure 34: Petrified trees with Big Daddy in the background

The dunes were created by strong winds blowing east from the ocean, blowing against strong winds blowing west from inland. The sand was pushed upward forming the dunes. Why don't the dunes just blow down? Over time they developed a base of petrified sand.

June 8: Sossusvlei – The Desert Grace Lodge

Originally, when we booked our trip over a year ago we tried to book two nights at the Dead Valley Lodge, but that lodge and all the other lodges inside the park were at the time, pre-COVID, booked full. So our travel agent booked us into the Desert Grace Lodge in the Namib desert about 25 miles outside the Namib park on our way to our next destination, Swakopmund.



Figure 35: Road on the way to Desert Grace lodge

When we turned off onto the private road to the Desert Grace we were wondering what we were in for. The lodge is about 15 miles into the desert from the main road (which is gravel). The road to the lodge was so bad it would have been impassable without 4-wheel drive, which fortunately we had. Even so I was struggling to drive it. There was a big pile of gravel down the middle of the road with not much room to drive on either side. What kind of place was this we were going to? We found out when we finally almost reached the lodge that the road was in the process of being graded. And later, sometime after we arrived, the manager told me that although the hotel owners wanted to install a better road but they were prevented from doing so by the government

because the area was considered a protected area.



Figure 36: Road to Desert Grace. They were busy grading it when we came in.

The lodge was described in our itinerary as “quirky but elegant”. We certainly saw that it was “quirky”. There was a stop on the way with a sign that read “Have a cold drink and take a desert

picture”. Nearby was a refrigerator standing alone on the desert ground!



Figure 37: Rest stop on the way to the Desert Grace

When we finally arrived to the hotel we found that there were actually quite a few guests, many more than were at the Dead Valley lodge. And the lodge itself was indeed elegant. The rooms were gigantic with everything you could possibly want including your own individual small

pool.



Figure 38: Finally arriving at the lodge

The lodge was built using desert materials. The rooms stretched out into the desert along a cement walkway from the main area.



Figure 39: Rooms at the Desert Grace

Dinner at the lodge was luxurious. There were four separate staging areas. Stage 1: Homemade breads, salads, and soups; Stage 2: Create your own pizza; Stage 3: Steaks; Stage 4: Homemade

ice cream for desert. All the food tasted delicious.



Figure 40: Dinner lounge

Here's a picture of the bar.



Figure 41: Bar at the Desert Grace

They have a number of activities at the lodge, including desert walks and nature drives through the desert, but we decided we wouldn't see anything there that we wouldn't see later on our trip. And we didn't have much time there. But all in all it turned out to be really quite an amazing place which we were glad to experience. Their vision was a "luxurious eco lodge". The hotel was built from the sand of the desert. The manager was a passionate advocate of nature promotion and protection. Many of these kinds of operations we have discovered are labors of love and it's always a pleasure to share in them.

Here is a view of the desert from back patio.



Figure 42: View of the desert from the Desert Grace

Here is another view of the lodge from the front.



Figure 43: View of the Desert Grace from the front

June 9-10: Swakopmund Luxury Suites

We left the Dessert Grace Lodge early the next day after a very nice breakfast. We had them pack lunches for us as we had a full day of driving and there would be no places to stop for food or gas. Today it was all about the drive. We drove through multiple mountain passes and desert landscapes. It really is difficult to describe how amazing it was. At times you felt like you were on the moon or Mars.



Figure 44: Desert terrain on way to Swakopmund

Our itinerary described 2 routes. We chose the longer alternate route through the Ganab picnic site and Hotsas watering hole. This turned out to be a mistake. First, it cost us 350 Namibian dollars (about 25 U.S. dollars). When we arrived at the Ganab picnic site we wondered what was the point? What we had seen earlier was so much more spectacular. And the road to the

waterhole was brutal. It was very, very slow driving. We were bounced around in what the locals call an “African massage” for 30 minutes. Oh well it was all just part of the adventure!



Figure 45: Ganab waterhole

We finally arrived at our hotel in Swakopmund. While Bonnie checked us in, I stayed with the vehicle. An African vendor came up to me selling cherry tomato sized nuts with animal carvings on their surfaces, which are really interesting. I agreed to buy 5 of them for 500 Namibian dollars (about 30 dollars). Just as I was counting out the money Bonnie and the hotel receptionist came down to the car to help with the luggage. The receptionist began yelling at the African vendor for trying to rip me off. I broke off the sale but agreed on 250 Namibian dollars. It was very nice of her to help me. It's all a learning experience, including the experience of bargaining with the

natives.



Figure 46: Animal Carvings on Nuts

That evening we went to a popular restaurant near to the hotel. We both ordered lobster with fries and a drink. We each got six small lobster halves, which were very tasty, but didn't come with any dipping butter! The bill including tip for the two of us came to 540 Namibian dollars or about 35 U.S. dollars.

Our travel agency had booked an excursion to Sandwich Harbor for the next morning. We thought this was going to be a cruise around the harbor at Swakopmund, and didn't think it would be anything special. While we were waiting for the tour guide to pick us up at 7:30am we mentioned our cruise to the hotel receptionist and she said "Oh there is much better excursion you really should do." This confirmed our really low expectations. But when the guide showed up it turned out to be the very excursion she had been recommending! And what an excursion it turned out to be!

It wasn't a cruise as we had assumed it would be by its name but rather a drive to an area where the dunes meet the ocean, an area called Sandwich Harbor.

We first drove south from Swakopmund to Walvis Bay. Walvis Bay is known for its wetlands with a huge numbers of birds both native and migratory. At this time of year there are hundreds of greater and lesser pink flamingos and other shore birds including avocets, terns, sandpipers, and pelicans. At other times of the year there are tens of thousands. Running nearby we spotted a black-backed jackal hunting the birds they feast on here. The jackals are known for their skill at catching birds. They rush the birds and leap up to grab them out of the air



Figure 47: Walvis Bay wetlands



Figure 48: Pink flamingos at Walvis Bay wetlands

On the way we also passed the largest salt mine in all of Africa, supplying 60% of the salt in Africa. There were huge piles of salt and large salt-drying and processing areas.



Figure 49: Salt mining at Walvis Bay

Then things got really interesting! The dunes started along the shore. At high tide the water washes up against them. Now there was room, about 40-50 feet, for our Toyota Land Cruiser to drive on the sand between the dunes and the ocean. Given COVID we were again on a private

tour. And the area was deserted. We ran into just one other party.



Figure 50: Driving along the shore to Sandwich Harbor



Figure 51: Black-backed jackal guarding the entrance



Figure 52: Bonnie with our guide

As we proceeded down the shore we came across a couple of small houses that existed there until 1968 when the ocean rose higher. One house was almost totally buried under the sand. Only a few broken walls remained of the others. Parts of other houses only reveal themselves at low

tide.



Figure 53: Remains of a house along the shore at Walvis Bay

We continued to drive until we reached Sandwich Harbor which is small wetlands area where the dunes fully meet the ocean and you can drive no further along the ocean. You are sandwiched

between the ocean and dunes.



Figure 54: View of Sandwich Harbor from the dunes

But at that point we didn't just turn around and drive back! We turned sharply and drove right up onto the dunes themselves. We drove along a very specific path into the dunes that our guide had mapped out and tested the previous day. Over this section of the dunes it was crucial not to wander left or right because the areas on either side were quicksand. Our guide pointed out a large hole in the sand where a jeep had driven off and sunk several feet into the sand. It was a big job to tow it out!

I asked him how you can tell what's quicksand and what isn't? The sand all looked pretty much the same to me. He said that sand with small grooves in it from the wind is relatively solid. Sand that is completely un-grooved is the quicksand. Good to know. I would have guessed the opposite!

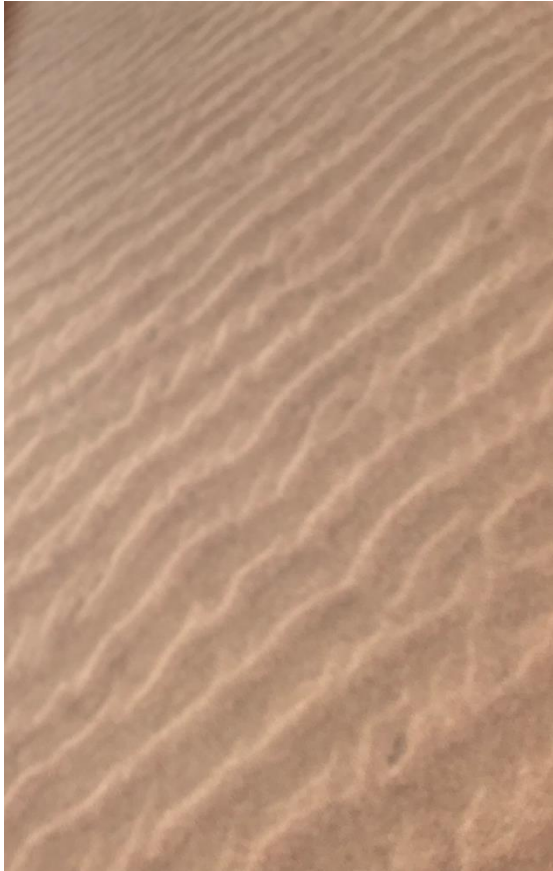


Figure 55: Small grooves indicating solid sand

We stopped at a spot some distance into the dunes and got out of the vehicle. Our guide began to search in the sand for holes and tracks of one of “The Little Five”. People go to Africa to see “The Big Five”: Lions, elephants, buffalos, leopards, rhinos, but none of them are in this area. But some of the “Little Five” are. He eventually found a hole and began digging. He dug up a Palmato gecko, a beautiful little guy. Later he looked for a snake, but couldn’t find one.



Figure 56: Digging for the Palmato gecko



Figure 57: Close-up of the Palmato gecko

Next our driver drove us up and down the steep dunes. It was very exciting (though not scary) to drive almost straight down and then to gather speed to drive almost straight up the next one. What an experience!



Figure 58: Driving the dunes

Finally, we had a champagne lunch in the dunes near a small wet spot where water came up from an underground spring.



Figure 59: Lunch in the dunes

After lunch we drove back stopping on the way to watch the black-backed jackals. We also stopped to pick up the few soda cans we ran across. Our guide told us that it is part of the requirements of his license that he pick up litter when he runs across it during his tours.

Later in the afternoon after we returned from our tour of Sandwich Harbor we walked around the area of Swakopmund near our hotel. There was a small, but modern, outdoor mall nearby. There were several crafts stores and art galleries. We stopped in a wine store to get a nice bottle of champagne. It was for one of the few R&R stops we had planned before we left. The plan was to spend one relaxing afternoon at Mowani listening to music and enjoying the views from our bungalow, which we anticipated would be spectacular. I had purchased a small speaker from Amazon that connects to my iPad to provide the music.

More Sandwich Harbor Pictures



Figure 60: House remains



Figure 61: The dunes



Figure 62: The dunes



Figure 63: The dunes



Figure 64: The dunes

June 11: Skeleton Coast

Our next lodge was the Mowani Mountain Camp in Damaraland. Again we had two options on driving there. The shortest route involved cutting away from the Skeleton Coast and driving diagonally north and inland to Mowani. The second option was to drive north along the Skeleton Coast, through the Skeleton Coast park, and then drive east and inland to Mowani. We chose the second route, which turned out to be very, very long.

After getting away from Swakopmund we left paved roads entirely, although the roads were well graded for the most part. When we chose this route we were envisioning that it would be something like driving the coast highway through the Big Sur area. But that wasn't the case. The road was set back about a half mile from the water and there was dense fog over the water almost the whole time we were driving it. Fortunately the fog didn't reach as far as the road, which is probably why it was set back so far. Driving a gravel road in fog would be very dangerous.

I can't say the landscape along the Skeleton Coast is beautiful. But it is impressive in its desolation. We might have seen 3 or 4 vehicles during the drive. There were no people, even around the small tables topped with semi-precious stones for sale by vendors nowhere to be seen. The only time we saw anyone was when we turned off the main road to visit the site of one of the old wrecked ships. When we arrived at the view point, there were a half-dozen people trying to sell souvenirs. We felt a little nervous about engaging the vendors in such a desolate spot and, after snapping a few pictures, quickly drove back out to the main road.

It would take us about seven hours to get to Mowani. We tried to get an early start. Up at 6:30; breakfast at 7. But I wanted to exchange some U.S. dollars before we left the city and the banks didn't open till 8:30. So we checked out of our hotel and waited until the banks opened. At 8:30, after waiting in line at the teller window for 10 minutes, I was told that the money exchange window didn't open until 9:30, but that I could exchange money at 9:00 at the bank across the street. So we waited awhile longer. In the meantime, Bonnie went into a large grocery store nearby to get water, and snacks. At 9:00, I went into the bank across the street. But I was told, their IT was down, so they couldn't complete any computer-related transactions! We left for our drive without ever exchanging any money. As the locals say: "TIA": "This is Africa!"

It's interesting how parking works in the cities. There are no parking meters and nowhere are you required to pay for parking. And there are plenty of places to park, especially now with COVID. Swakopmund is literally deserted of tourists. But you can't just park and leave your car unattended. There is a strong possibility of its being broken into or stolen. What's the solution? Everywhere there is parking there are (mostly) young men standing around, identifiable from their colored vests. Their job is to guard the cars parked in their area. No one is required to pay for the service, but it is customary to pay them 5-10 Namibian dollars when you leave. That's about 30-60 cents. The system works! Lots of young men have jobs.

It was a long drive through many different kinds of very desolate areas, areas that changed every 100k or so (60 miles). Pictures won't do justice to the scenery. The Skeleton Coast is well known to surfers. It has one of the longest breaking waves in the world. But it is very shallow and requires great skill. The name comes from the many ship wrecks that happened near the coast because of the dense fog and shallowness.

After several hours of driving up the coast, we entered the Skeleton Coast Park. There was no fee for entering the park, but all people were required to register with the park attendants. As is very common in Namibia, the attendants were living on the park grounds. Their job probably ran for a specific length of time, perhaps two weeks or a month, and then they would return home, which was probably far from where they worked.



Figure 65: Entrance to Skeleton Coast park



Figure 66: Skeleton Coast park regulations

At one point the fog cleared enough to reveal one of the many ship wrecks along the coast.



Figure 67: Ship wreck along Skeleton Coast

For a couple of brief periods during our drive through the park, the fog cleared enough for a glimpse of the water and shoreline.



Figure 68: Shoreline in Skeleton Coast Park

More Skeleton Coast Pictures



Figure 69: Road after we turned east from the coast



Figure 70: Skeleton Coast desert landscape



Figure 71: Road just after leaving Swakopmund going North along the coast



Figure 72: Road from Skeleton Coast



Figure 73: More gravel road

June 12: Mowani Mountain Camp in Damaraland

Once we turned east from the Skeleton Coast, the scenery changed. We could view for miles over the vast desert landscape. The dirt was reddish and there were few plants of any kind. Mountains began to appear.



Figure 74: Desert landscape on way to Mowani



Figure 75: Road to Mowani

We arrived at our tent bungalow at Mowani Mountain Camp around 5 and exhausted we sat down on our deck to view the desert through the giant boulders framing it. Gorgeous!



Figure 76: Back of our room along the path going to it



Figure 77: View from our bungalow at Mowani into the desert

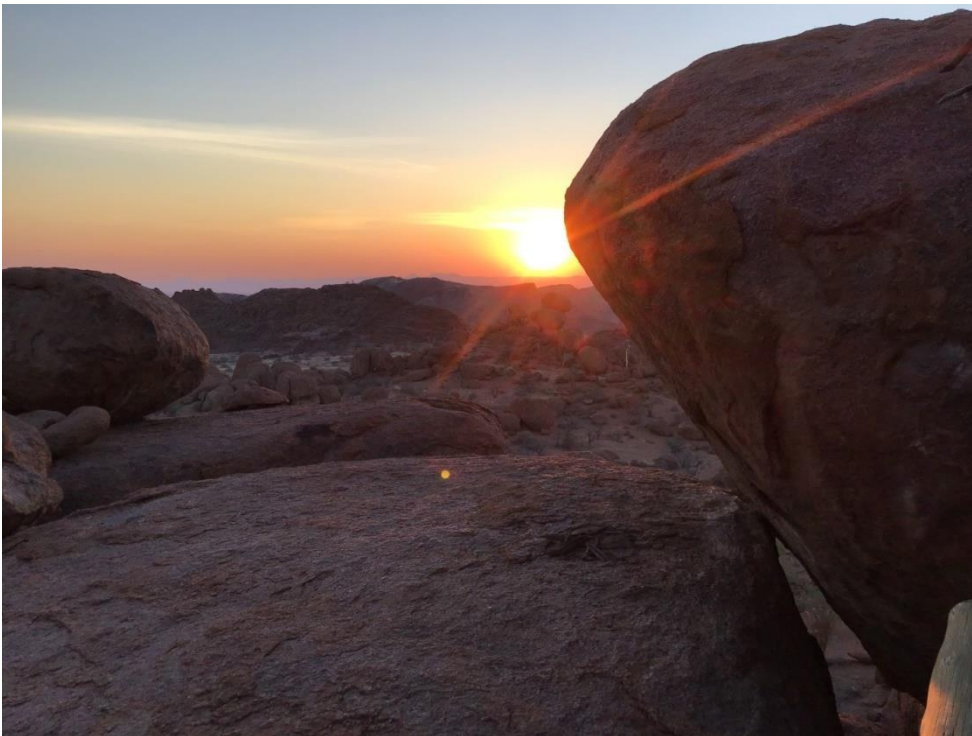


Figure 78: Sunset from our deck

Awhile later we walked over to the lodge view point where people were huddling to watch the sunset and have a drink before dinner.



Tomorrow we get up early for the camp nature drive. Our mission is to search for desert-adapted elephants in the area. Our guide would be Rosie, who is very proud to be one of the first female guides in Namibia.

Mowani Mountain Camp is situated in an area of giant boulders. The bungalows are built within nests of these boulders. From our deck and bed we look through to the vast desert and purple mountains in the distance.

We rose at 5:45AM, had breakfast at 6:30AM, and then left on our nature drive. The primary mission was to hunt for the desert-adapted elephants. There are several adaptations. Their feet are slightly larger so that they can walk more easily on the soft sand. Their legs are also a bit longer which gives them longer strides. Desert elephants have to travel farther for food than elephants in other areas. It is always fascinating to watch elephants walk. They appear to be walking slowly but they move rapidly because of their very long strides. The eating behavior of desert-adapted elephants is also different. Elephants outside the desert tend to demolish all the food in a tree or bush before moving on. Desert elephants eat smaller portions from individual plants before moving on to the next so that the plants stay healthy and food producing for the next time they walk by.

We were lucky this day in our hunt for the elephants. Rosie our guide quickly spotted fresh elephant poop. Their tracks were also clearly visible in the dirt. Their track consists of a large oval with a small indentation on one side where their front toe strikes. The side with the toe print indicates the direction the elephants are moving. Then it is just a matter of following their tracks.



Figure 79: Desert elephant tracks

Their tracks led over a hill so we drove around to the other side and there they were! There were eight in the herd. A large male which had mated with one of the females and continued to hang around led the way. Two large females were in the rear. Between them were a variety of elephants of different ages and sizes.



Figure 80: Desert-adapted elephants have larger feet



Figure 81: Elephant walking towards our vehicle



Figure 82: Desert elephant

Elephants are constantly on the move. Our guide would drive some distance in front of their path and park. Then we would watch and take pictures as they moved towards our safari vehicle. Frequently they moved within a couple of feet of us. The big male on one occasion slapped our hood in greeting as he passed by our front hood. The elephants were completely calm the whole time. After moving ahead of them several times and repeating this we stopped some distance from them and had coffee and cookies with the elephants.



Figure 83: Close-up of desert elephant larger feet, for traveling on sand



Figure 84: Desert elephant

The drought is still continuing here in Northern Namibia. All the smaller game animals like the antelope have died out. The lions that had been here feeding on the antelope had started to hunt peoples' goats and pets and even tried to attack a few people. Our guide Rosie told us how they had killed her beloved dog, leaving just the dog's head on the ground which they won't eat. Because of this wildlife officials moved all the lions south near Windhoek. All the lions were collared so they can track them. They darted (tranquilized) the lions and then moved them.

We were lucky today! Sometimes the elephants are nowhere to be found or they are many miles away or they are up on a hill where you can't get close to them. When you are able to see them up close it is very special.

We didn't sign up for the afternoon nature drive in order to spend the later afternoon and early evening before dinner relaxing in our room, listening to music from the portable speaker I brought with us, and drinking champagne.

The next morning before leaving for our next lodge, we went on a tour with Rosie to a few points of interest in the area. We first visited Burnt Mountain which is a black hill of solidified lava.



Figure 85: Burnt Mountain

Next we went to view the Organ Pipes, a series of dolerite pipes that resemble organ pipes. There is also a petrified forest in the area, but we decided it was a little too far away and would take too long.



Figure 86: Organ Pipes



Figure 87: Organ Pipes

The highlight of the tour was Twyfelfontein where among the red sandstone boulders is an impressive collection of petroglyphs. (“Twyfelfontein” means “uncertain spring”. The original settlers came here because of the spring water source, but the spring proved “uncertain”, sometimes providing water, sometimes not.) Around 2,500 ancient rock paintings and engravings feature animals, tracks, and various abstract symbols. Archaeological evidence suggests that the hunter/gatherers who created the petroglyphs lived here about 7,000 years ago. Normally the Twyfelfontein Park would be swarming with visitors.

This day we were the only visitors.



Figure 88: Rosie explaining the petroglyphs



Figure 89: Animal figures

More Mowani Mountain Camp Pictures



Figure 90: Road to Mowani



Figure 91: Close up of desert elephant feet



Figure 92: Mowani desert landscape



Figure 93: Petroglyphs

June 13-14: Cheetah View Lodge

The Cheetah View Lodge is run by the CCF (Cheetah Conservation Fund) organization headed by Laurie Marker. We know Laurie, who is friends with others we know, from a fund raiser we attended a few years ago at Safari West in Santa Rosa. Her mother lives in Santa Cruz, where she frequently visits. Twice she came at Halloween and enjoyed the downtown activities with Bonnie and other friends. On one occasion she came to Bonnie's art studio for a day of painting a picture of a cheetah.

The CCF mission is to conserve and increase the number of cheetahs in the world. It supports a number of operations at its lodge. Their first mission is to rescue cheetahs that are unlikely to survive in the wild. Some of these cheetahs have been injured. Others are orphaned cheetahs whose mothers were killed before they could teach them to hunt. There are 37 rescued cheetahs. Only 5 will be able to return to the wild after they recover from their injuries. The others will have to live out their lives here, not a bad life for a cheetah.

Another operation going on at the lodge is breeding and training large farm-protecting dogs to be sold at nominal fees to farmers. The dogs prevent wild cheetahs and other predators from hunting their farm animals. The farmers won't feel the need to kill the cheetahs in order to protect their animals.



Figure 94: Bowls of food to be fed to cheetahs

Because of COVID we were the only people staying at the lodge and we were put us in their nicest room suite just below the restaurant. We have three activities prescheduled here. Shortly after arriving we had our first (we had reached the lodge about 15 minutes before its start). We watched the handlers feed the cheetahs. The cheetahs are brought into small pens for feeding. One-to-two kilos of donkey meat are put in bowls for them to eat. The food is put in bowls because the cheetahs like their food clean of dirt and gravel.

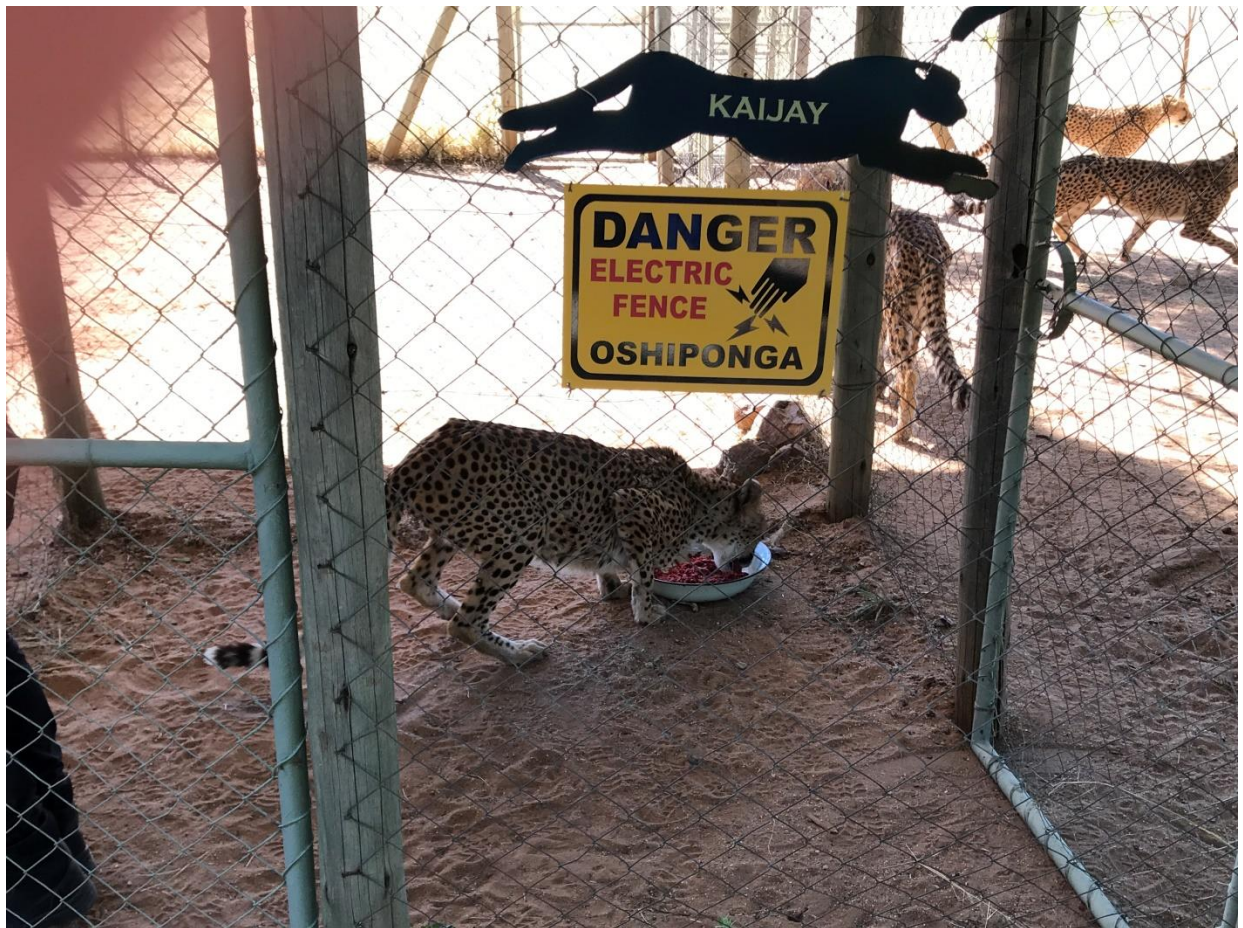


Figure 95: Watching the cheetahs get fed

Later we toured around one of the five hectare pens the cheetahs are kept in to view them in their own environment.



Figure 96: Cheetah resting

At the end of our tour we stopped at the lodge's dog training area. The trainer introduced us to some of their dogs and discussed what they're doing with them.



Figure 97: The trainer with one of his dogs

In the afternoon's activity we watched several of the cheetahs get exercised by chasing small cloth toys dragged around a track on a moving line. The cheetahs were given treats when they were able to catch the toys.



Figure 98: Cheetah chasing a toy around the track

Later in the evening about 5:00 pm we had an unscheduled activity. We were sent for by Laurie Marker to come to the fenced yard of her house at the lodge to view her baby cheetah, named “Baby”, while it played in the yard.



Figure 99: Laurie with "Baby"

Later we had a delicious beef steak dinner with Laurie and her partner Bruce in the lodge restaurant above our suite. It's always very special to meet up with people you know on these trips. The beef filet was as good any I've ever eaten.



Figure 100: Dinner with Lauri and Peter

The next morning Bonnie and I both woke up early at 6am. We are finally completely over the jet lag and sleeping well. I am now sleeping through the night, something I can rarely do at home.

Namibia is just now beginning to experience their second (or is it their first?) wave of COVID. The hospitals are filling up. But last night we all had dinner without masks, and hugged afterwards, since we were all vaccinated and no one else was staying here at the lodge. We have heard that the country is going to implement new restrictions, including a lockdown of Windhoek. Hopefully, these new restrictions would not affect the rest of our trip and we would be able to get back into Windhoek to fly home. But we didn't need to worry about that then.

More Cheetah View Lodge Pictures



Figure 101: Feeding the cheetahs

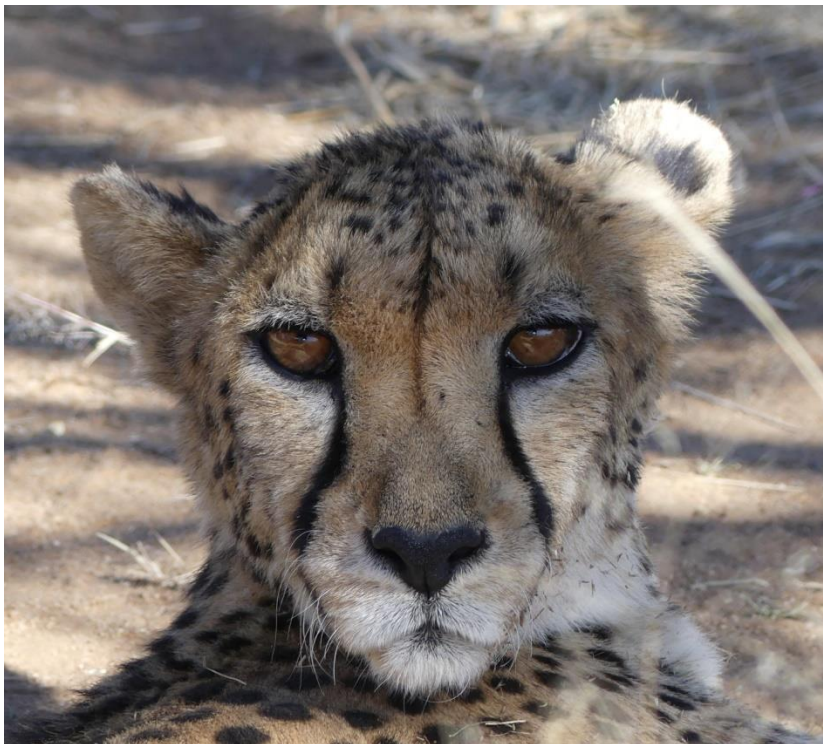


Figure 102: Cheetah close up

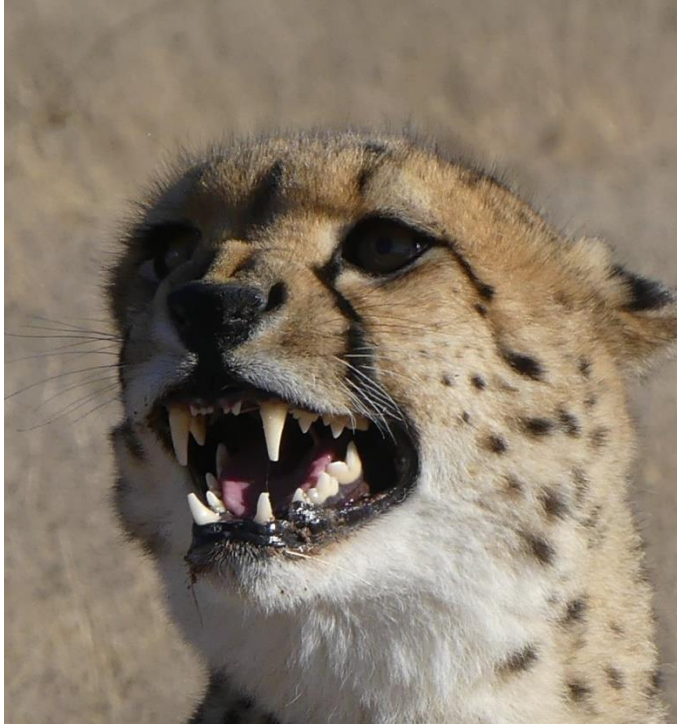


Figure 103: "Hello."

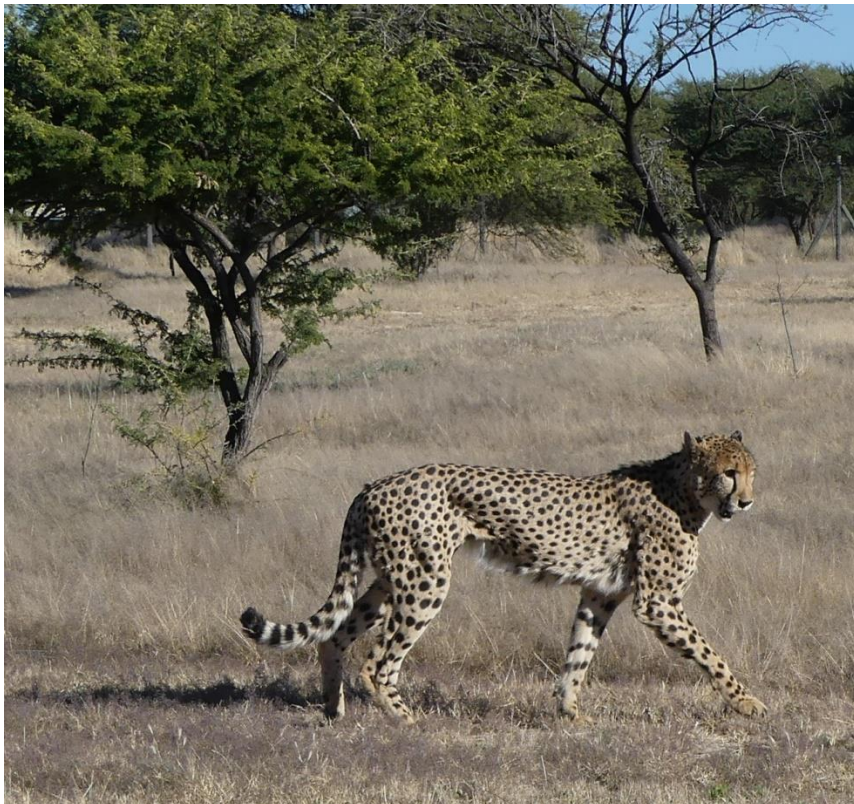


Figure 104: Cheetah in its fenced territory

June 14-15: Ongava Lodge east of Etosha Park

The Ongava Lodge sits in a private game reserve just outside of the west side of Etosha Park. Since Etosha park is fenced animals in Etosha cannot travel into the private reserve and vice versa, unless elephants have destroyed a section of the fence. Etosha is the premium game reserve in Namibia. It has all the animals. There is in the park an estimated 250 lions, 300 rhinos, 2500 giraffes, 6000 zebras and more than 2000 elephants. Springbok antelope are especially numerous; at least 20 000 of them roam the park. Below is a map of Etosha park. The large blue area is not a lake filled with water, but a lake bed, mostly dry. It consists of a very large flat area called a “pan”.



Figure 105: Etosha park waterholes

Game viewing in Etosha is centered around the many waterholes that exist in the park. Major waterholes have roads (all gravel) leading to them. We had decided before our trip that we wouldn't need to hire guides to take us around Etosha. We had planned to drive ourselves around to selected waterholes, many of them recommended by our tour company.

It was a relatively short three hour drive from the Cheetah View Lodge to the Ongava Lodge. But since we had a tour at the Cheetah View Lodge in the morning we didn't arrive at Ongava Lodge until the late afternoon, but still in time for a late lunch. When we arrived we were told

we had a safari in the Ongava private game reserve scheduled late in the afternoon and running into sundowners.

The Ongava Lodge overlooks a waterhole with a hidden walkway down to a Hide from which you can view the animals close up. Just after we arrived eight elephants came down to the waterhole and we went down to the Hide and watched. I was so enthralled that I forgot to take pictures but Bonnie took a lot of nice ones. These elephants were new to the reserve having recently broken through the fence from Etosha.



Figure 106: Ongava waterhole



Figure 107: Path down to Ongava Blind (aka “Hide”)

We were originally booked into the Ongava Tented Camp which is owned by the same people and is also within the Ongava Reserve. According to the manager at Ongava lodge, the Tented Camp is much nicer. But because of COVID they were forced to consolidate what few clients they had into just one of their lodges.

During lunch our waiter relayed to us all kinds of information about the animals that came to waterhole. I learned later why he knew so much. Two of the waiters at the lodge usually work as guides, in addition to the man now working as the guide. Since there were barely enough clients to support a single guide, they trained the other two guides to serve as waiters. This way they could retain their most skilled workers for when tourism returned back to normal.

After lunch we were taken to our room. It was a very nice room that had a nice view of the waterhole, but when we got there it had a terrible smell of sewage. The manager apologized and took us to a nearby room, which unfortunately didn't have a view of the waterhole. Moreover, after they left we discovered that the room had no power. But they promised to fix that.

Later after lunch, around 4:30PM we left on our sundowner's safari. We saw kudu, springbok, Oryx, and impala antelope. We also saw about ten white rhinos. The reserve is full of white rhinos. The guide said there were too many rhinos. We also saw our first snake eagle of the trip, a fabulous eagle that looks a little like a bald eagle. We would see many more of them in the days ahead.



Figure 108: White rhinos in the Ongava Reserve



Figure 109: Elephant in Ongava Reserve

That night at dinner, the manager came by and again apologized for the room issues. She said they would like to comp us a sundowner's safari the next day in compensation. We thanked her, but turned it down. We planned to go into Etosha Park the next day touring the various waterholes in the park and didn't think we would be up for another safari after we got back. When we returned to our room after dinner, there was a bottle of champagne sitting in ice on the table. It was too late to open it then, but we looked forward to it when we returned the next day after touring Etosha.

The next day we spent most of the day driving around Etosha Park. We didn't get back to the lodge until about 4:00PM, ready to open our bottle of champagne. The animals in Etosha gather at the watering holes, and with our map we drove around to about 10 of them. Some were a bust. Others had lots of animals. We still hadn't seen any lions or leopards. The lions we didn't care about that much at the time. (This would change later when we experienced them at Chobe and Splash Camp.) During the day all they do is sleep. But we would have loved to see a leopard. And we very much hoped at some point to see wild dogs and honey badgers both of which were in the park.



Figure 110: Variety of animals at the water hole



Figure 111: Animals at the water hole



Figure 112: Antelope around a small waterhole in Etosha Park



Figure 113: Elephant at waterhole in Etosha Park



Figure 114: Zebras



Figure 115: Following an elephant on the road in Etosha Park

At the park we saw lots of zebras and antelopes, including a lot on elands, which are the largest

antelope. (They are also great eating. I had a nice eland steak the previous night.)



Figure 116: Ostriches in Etosha Park

The other animals we always love to see are giraffes and we also saw a lot of them.



Figure 117: Animals at a waterhole in Etosha Park

The most exciting animals we saw were the elephants. In fact just as I was turning into our lodge road after leaving Etosha, I almost ran into three of them on the road. We followed them for a while as they walked up the road in front of us before finally turning off.



Figure 118: Elephants in the road back to Ongava Lodge

After returning to the Ongava Lodge we opened our bottle of champagne and drank a glass before going down to the blind to watch the sunset over the Lodge waterhole. As dusk neared a swarm of thousands of birds (red billed Quelea) descended on the waterhole, flying around just over the water. A few of them flew too close to the water and were grabbed by the terrapin, a type of turtle that inhabits the waterhole. The terrapin pulled the birds under water to drown them and then eat them.



Figure 119: Flock of red-billed Quelea flying around the waterhole at Ongava

As we were sitting in the blind waiting for the Rhinos to come down to the waterhole, which they did regularly at that time, we thought of our champagne back in our room, but I didn't want to miss anything by going back for it. No worries. Our waiter overheard us talking and volunteered to go back and get it

for us! Such luxury!



Figure 120: Champaign while we watch the waterhole

The Champaign was just in time for the rhinos.



Figure 121: Rhinos at the Ongava waterhole

June 16-17: Etosha Park – Onguma Tented Camp

After checking out of Ongava Lodge we spent the day driving through Etosha Park on our way to Onguma Tented Camp, which is located on the east side of Etosha Park just outside the park. Like Ongava Lodge it is in its own private reserve, the Onguma Reserve. We had a number of firsts that day. We saw our first lions, a male and female walking on the road in front of us. They moved off to sleep under a bush.

The lions we saw were walking on one of the roads off the main road leading to a waterhole. They were a male female pair. They were walking towards us on the road, a rare vehicle on the far side of them also watching them, before the lions turned off into the brush before reaching us. They lay down in the brush to rest, barely visible.



Figure 122: Lions in the road in front of us



Figure 123: Lions walking off the road



Figure 124: Zebras watching the lions

That day we had our first two mishaps on the trip. Both turned out OK but could have been much worse. The first occurred when we were changing drivers. Bonnie had been driving while I was trying to get the audio connected from my iPhone to the car. I finally got it working. But while we were changing places Bonnie slipped on some loose gravel and took a hard fall. Luckily she was not too seriously hurt, but she received a huge, painful bruise on her hip and a cut on her elbow. The bruise bothered her for the rest of the trip and for months later.

The second mishap was a flat tire. Almost all the roads we were driving on were gravel. Some were very challenging for someone, like me, not accustomed to driving on gravel. I came quickly upon a deep pothole in the road. I swerved around it with my front wheels, but the left rear tire hit it hard. I didn't realize I had a flat until I began smelling burnt rubber and could see black smoke coming from around the wheel. I couldn't feel that the tire was flat because the gravel roads are by nature bumpy. By the time I realized I had a flat, the tire was already totally destroyed. I wondered at the time what we would get charged for replacing the tire. The tires were big heavy duty tires. Later I learned that the tire was covered by the full insurance we had on the vehicle. Thankfully our vehicle had two spares. So we still had another spare in case of another flat.

We stopped in the road and I pulled out the spare. Fortunately the road was pretty flat, so there didn't appear to be much danger of the car slipping off the jack. (One of my big fears!) Then, amazingly though we had not seen another car for hours, one came along just as I pulled out the spare. It was three Germans. One of the men asked if he could help me and then proceeded to take over. He changed the tire in about 15 minutes. The spare needed a little more air so he pulled out a portable air compressor from his car, connected it to the battery, and pumped the spare up to its correct pressure. He turned out he is a professional car mechanic who owned his own shop in Germany. Could we have been luckier? He was the first of many "angels" we met on the trip who would save us from predicaments we ran into. We were immensely grateful and gave him a bottle of wine in thanks. But this was a heads up. I needed to drive more carefully.

We are now down to one spare and changing a flat won't be so easy next time.



Figure 125: “Angel” changing our flat tire for us



Figure 126: Germans who helped us change the flat

Eventually we made it to Onguma Tented Camp. As was becoming the norm, we didn't check in until late in the afternoon, about 3:30PM or 4:00PM.

The next morning, we had a wake-up shout from outside our room at 6AM, breakfast at 6:30AM, then a tour into Etosha Park when it opened at 7AM. It was cold and windy in the open safari vehicle but ponchos were provided. Our guide was Abram (initial "A" is soft). After the difficult drive and flat tire yesterday, it was a welcome relief to be driven and Abram did a wonderful job of explaining how the park environment all worked.

We passed a pair of black-backed jackals on the way in.



Figure 127: Black-backed jackals in east Etosha Park

We stopped at one of the smaller park pans. A pan is just a large flat surface that typically was a lake or sea bed in ancient times. This pan, named Fisher's Pan, had water in it collected during the recent rainy season. Pink flamingos were walking around in the shallow water. They are never found in deep water because their feet aren't webbed. Each year they fly here from Walvis Bay on the coast to breed on an island in the pan that is protected somewhat from predators

because of its surrounding water.



Figure 128: Pink flamencos on Etosha pan

On the dry part of the pan we saw a herd of wildebeests. One baby was nursing. One wildebeest was tagged so that park officials could track the movements of the herd through the park. The park which is huge, the size of a small state, is completely fenced, so all the animals will remain in the park, except for some predators that find holes in the fence or the elephants that break through it. One of many of the small birds near the side of the road were lilac breasted rollers,

which are beautiful colorful birds of green, purple, lilac, and nine other colors.



Figure 129: Lilac-breasted roller

Of course we passed many small herds of antelope, including kudu, eland, impala, and springbok.

We stopped at the Klein Okevi waterhole and sat for a while. While we were watching the herd of wildebeests that we had seen earlier came, jumped into the water, drank and cooled, and then just as quickly left. Animals don't linger at the waterholes, since it is a dangerous place to hang out.



Figure 130: Wildebeests at east Etosha waterhole

We also came across many giraffes as we toured around the park. But the highlight was coming across two bull elephants about two kilometers from the waterhole. They were walking on the same path they always take to the waterhole, so our guide moved our vehicle some distance in

front of the elephants right in their way so they would be forced to walk right by us.



Figure 131: In the path of a bull elephant



Figure 132: Bull elephant moving around our vehicle

Then we drove back to the waterhole to wait for them to arrive, which they did about 10 minutes later.



Figure 133: Bull elephants arriving at the waterhole

We came across our first banded mongoose.



Figure 134: Banded mongoose crossing the road

Back at the lodge we enjoyed the view from our room. Our room overlooked a waterhole, which during our stay was frequently visited by antelopes, zebras, and giraffes.



Figure 135: Giraffes visiting the waterhole in front of our room



Figure 136: Enjoying a glass of wine on our deck at sunset



Figure 137: Room at Onguma, looking out to waterhole

More Etosha Park Pictures

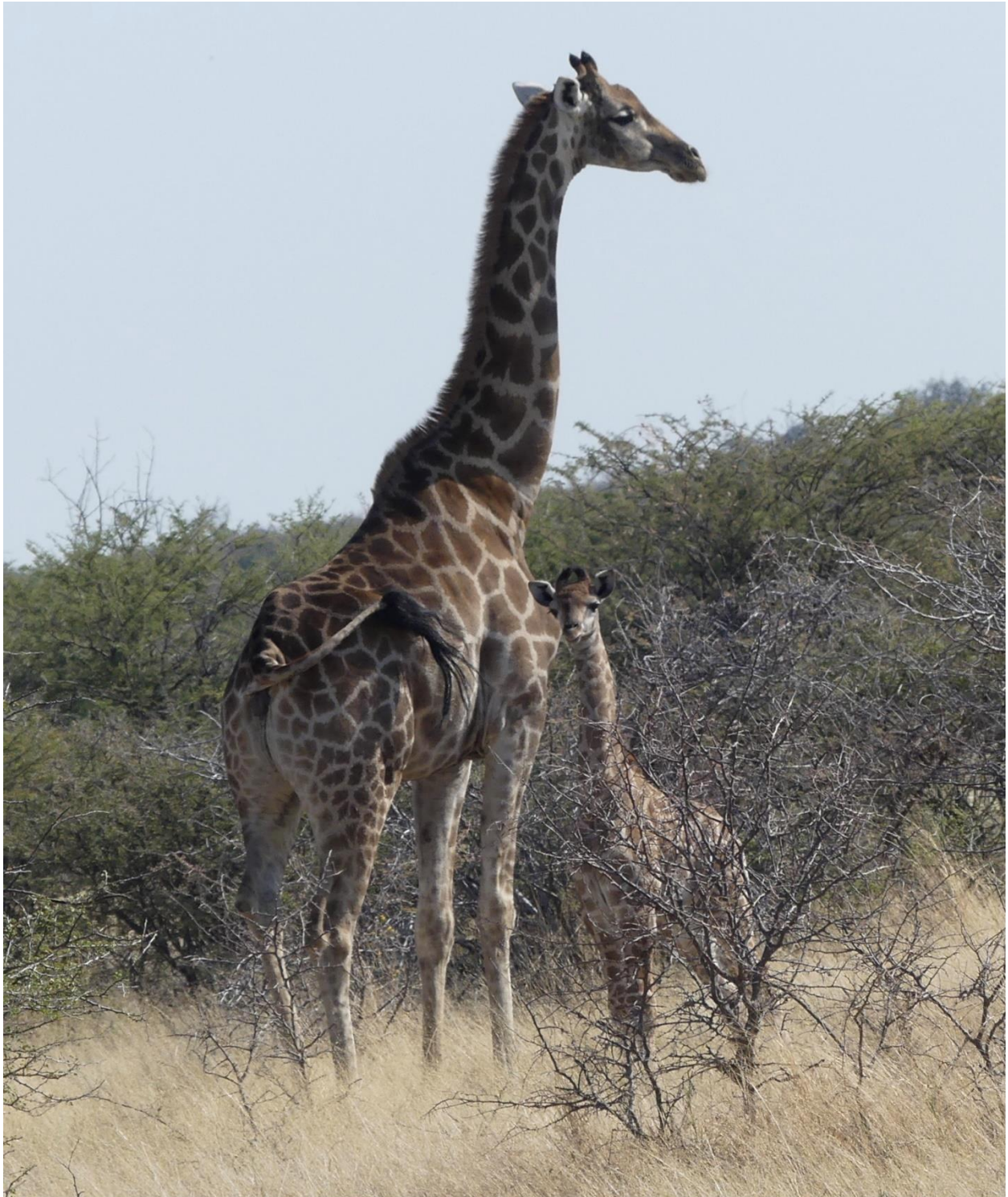


Figure 138: Giraffe with baby



Figure 139: Giraffe face close-up



Figure 140: Zebras and ostrich walking in front of giraffe



Figure 141: Giraffes at waterhole



Figure 142: Giraffes

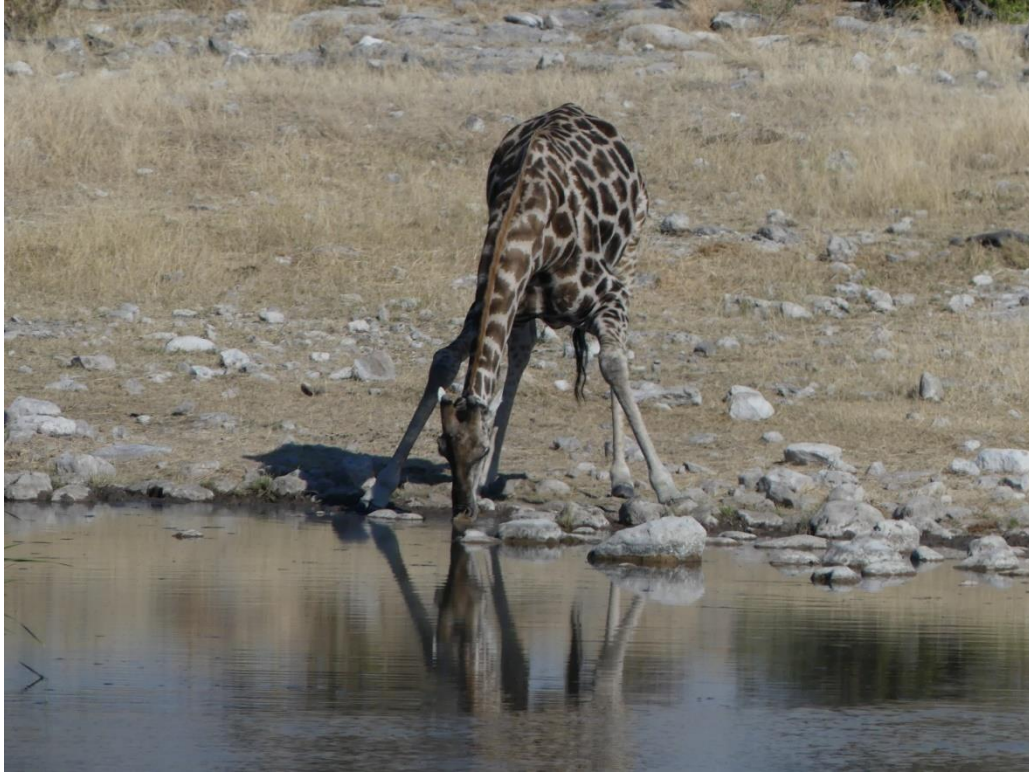


Figure 143: Giraffe drinking water



Figure 144: Elephants at waterhole



Figure 145: Elephants at waterhole



Figure 146: Elephants in the road



Figure 147: Elephant close-up



Figure 148: Elephant close-up



Figure 149: Elephant with broken tusks



Figure 150: Springbok



Figure 151: Kudu antelope



Figure 152: Kudu



Figure 153: Hartbeest antelope



Figure 154: Ostrich, Zebra, Springbok at waterhole



Figure 155: Banded mongoose

June 18-19: Shametu River Lodge

Our drive from Onguma Lodge in Etosha to the Shametu River Lodge in the Caprivi Strip was a long 620k (375 miles) drive but thankfully all paved (“tarred”, as the locals say). But we had two additional tasks. We had to stop in the town of Tsumed to get a COVID test for our trip across the border into Botswana on the 19th and we had to buy another spare tire.

It took a while to find where to get the COVID test. The address the travel agent gave us was incorrect. It referred to a building that didn't even exist. We eventually found the place by just asking a series of people that we ran into. We again learned just how helpful the African's are. They would stop what they were doing and even walk us part of the way to where they thought the testing might be. It turned out that the testing was being done in a tent set up outside the hospital in town.

There was a long line and it moved slowly. A single nurse both had to enter the patient's information, take payment, and then administer the test. 10-15 minutes per person. It took us about an hour and a half to get to the front. The line was long because Namibia was just then experiencing a second COVID wave. The capital, Windhoek, where we would fly out from had just been put into lockdown. We were not sure how that would affect our flight home.

Fortunately we had driven by the Dunlop tire store while we were looking for the COVID testing site. Carlo, our travel agent, had called ahead to arrange the purchase. I paid for it but would be reimbursed when we returned to Windhoek. The cost of the tire was included in the insurance that came with the car rental. They fixed the tire in no time and we were on our way.

TSMBER TYRES 2000

TYREDO-NAMIBIA (PTY) LTD
KINDERS & BULLDOG STREET

P.O.BOX 278 TSWANE

Telephone:

(067) 22 1095

Fax No.

(067) 22 2673

Tel/Fax

0015364-01-05

Specializing In:

- * Passenger Tyres
- * Car / SUV Tyres
- * Commercial Tyres
- * Engineering Tyres
- * Truck Retreads
- * Alloy Rims / Wheels
- * Tyre Management
- 24 Hour Road Assistance
- * Wheel Alignment

CASH SALES TSUMBEI

AFRICA TYRES & SAFARIES CC

BOX 1990

S-WAPOUND

NAMIBIA

Tax Invoice No.: RI00Z9222

Referring Inv No. N/A

Invoice Date: 18/06/2001

Invoice Number: 8001

Order Number: N 24045 S

E-mail :

Date(s)	Qty	Price	Disc %	VAT	EX.VAT
G112912750J - 265HVR37 DLP ATIG LZR	1.00	2,869.56		430.43	2,869.56
BAL.-CH. BALANCING - COMMERCIAL / JOL	1.00	34.78		5.22	34.78
S6255SS - VALVE T/L TR414 RUBBER (PIUO)	1.00	8.70		1.30	8.70

Comments

S/PONT

PAID	
<input type="checkbox"/> EFT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CASH <input type="checkbox"/> CARD

Bank Windhoek

Tyredo NM Tsombe

MIIOOOOXXXXX/BS5
Device ID

00685
TX03
ETL9A0G3

AUTH
201 IH 040CZ
4d6e9f71c-d6ab-4af7-e5cc-a755
ad49
*****3530
VISA Net On Us
VISA CREDIT I
VIF AD000B3001010
Q21-CF-B8

BTACH SEQ
DISCARD DISC
DISCARD DISC

*****3530

VISA NET ON US

VISA CREDIT I

VIF AD000B3001010

Q21-CF-B8

*****3530

VISA NET ON US

VISA CREDIT I

VIF AD000B3001010

Q21-CF-B8

*****3530

VISA NET ON US

VISA CREDIT I

VIF AD000B3001010

Tel no :

Reg No : N 24045 S

KM's : N/A

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Banking Details:

Bank Name :- BANK WINDHOEK KLUUB Branch

Account no: 800 140 3063

Branch name: CHOCOE

Branch (-482.172)

Please Send Remittance to :

Fax : (061) 262-294 or email: delibona@tyredoni.com.na

Subtotal (Exclusive)

2,913.04

Discount

Vat

436.96

Total

3,350.00

Sales Person : STEFANUS GAGGEN

Cell no : 0817178736

List of branches:

Tyreo 2000

Windhoek:

Tel (067) 267-825

fax (061) 260-807

Tyreo 2000

Okavango:

Tel (067) 303-983

Fax (067) 303-941

Tyreo 2000

Swakopmund:

Tel (064) 486-352

Fax (064) 404-854

Tyreo 2000

Keetmanshoop:

Tel (083) 224-784

Fax (083) 225-780

WINTERKLEIN METAL BACKEN

Fax (064) 294-795

Tyreo 2000

Ohakwate:

Tel (065) 221-353

Fax (065) 221-757

Tyreo 2000

Grootefontein:

Tel (067) 242-626

Fax (067) 242-799

Tyreo 2000

Figure 156: Tire repair receipt

The drive went smoothly, but we had to drive carefully in the Caprivi Strip. The Caprivi Strip is a narrow strip of Namibian land that stretches east along the northeast corner of Namibia. To its north is Angola and Zambia. To its south is Botswana. It is the most populated area of Namibia. Lots of people, cattle, and goats live along the road. Later I heard that 60% of the population of Namibia is in the Caprivi Strip. Apart from Windhoek and Swakopmund and the few small towns that we had driven through, these were the first African's we had seen.

The people live in small structures built on small square parcels of land. These parcels were generally fenced and included several structures for living as well as some additional structures for handling animals and crops. The "houses" were built out of many different types of materials. Rondovals are circular shaped structures with thatched roofs. The walls were often made of sticks with mud. There were also block structures sometimes with metal roofs. Very few if any of the houses had windows.

The Shametu River Lodge is built along the Okavango River. It includes both rooms and camping. Only a few people were staying there, all Namibian tourists, and most who were staying there were camping. That evening after we arrived, we sat by the fire watching the sunset, having drinks and chatting with Namibians from Walvis Bay who were camping there. They seemed to be friends with the owners, who were two brothers. All originally came from South Africa before moving to Namibia.



Figure 157: Shametu lodge viewed from Okavango river

The next day the lodge totally emptied out. We were the only people staying in the lodge part, although there were still a few people camping. During the day they sat around the pool area drinking and playing.

We went on an early game drive in Bwabwata Park nearby, although the lodge staff called it Buffalo Park. We didn't see many big animals, elephants or any of the cats, which do exist there.



Figure 158: Lion tracks in Buffalo park

We were able to see a number of Cape buffalo and we saw about six hippos grazing in the northern grassy, lake area. The other part of the park we drove through was thick, brushy forest. While driving through that area we spotted lion tracks and elephant poop, but didn't see the animals making the tracks.

As usual we saw lots of antelope, including three new kinds: Waterbuck, Lechwe, and Tsessebe. There were also lots of eland and impala.



Figure 159: Marshy area along the river, antelope grazing in the distance

We also saw our first monkeys, Vervet monkeys, which we had seen before in Tanzania. Most interesting in the park were the birds, including fish eagles, snake eagles, short tail eagles, African kingfishers, ospreys, goshawks, and a variety of smaller birds.

In the late afternoon we had a short river cruise on the river. There were dozens of hippos resting on one side of the river islands and lots of Nile crocodiles. They mostly stay out of the water which is cold in the winter.

Our guide, Frankie, who looks about 21, told us two crocodile stories. The first was about his 7 year old sister who he said was sitting in a few inches from the water next to her brothers who were fishing. A crocodile suddenly swallowed her whole and disappeared under the water. The second story was about some boys who were jumping off a boat into the river from a boat Frankie was piloting. One of the boys jumped right into the mouth of a 15-foot crocodile. Frankie claimed he rammed the crocodile with his boat and the crocodile released the boy unharmed! I was a little skeptical about the truth of these stories. I later relayed these stories to our guide in Splash Camp. He too thought these stories were probably just yarns, maybe to try

for a bigger tip.



Figure 160: Our river cruise guide and pilot, Frankie



Figure 161: Art and Bonnie relaxing on the cruise



Figure 162: Hippo resting on river island



Figure 163: Nile crocodile along the shore



Figure 164: Island river stop

Two brothers had built the lodge here about six years ago. After our boat ride I went down and had a beer and chatted with them. And later while we ate dinner one of the brothers came down and chatted with us for almost the whole time we were eating. It was fun and very interesting to hear all the stories about living and managing a lodge in Africa. He spent a lot of time talking about how lazy and stupid the African workers are. He clearly had a racist streak, but it did give us a glimpse into how things get done in Namibia.

About 10:30PM that night after we had gone to sleep my cell phone rang dinged with text messages. Our COVID test results were in, and were negative. Just in time as we needed them the next day to cross the border into Botswana.

But there was no Wi-Fi out in the rooms and we were unable to open our email for the COVID results until morning. The next morning we went down for breakfast and checked our email. The email with my results had come in, but Bonnie's hadn't. Oh well, I would just have to go on without her. (Ha. Ha. Of course I would never do that!). What to do? Of course this would have to happen on a Sunday. I tried calling Path Care, but wasn't able to get through to them. Supposedly there was an app I could use to get the results. I was eventually able to download it, but I wasn't able to get it to work.

I then called our travel agent, Ashlee, to see what she could do. She was working on it, but she worked on it but was having the same problems we were. We sat around the lodge waiting for Ashlee to get back to us. The owners didn't have a problem with us checking out a little late, since the lodge was so empty.

I had worried that something like this might happen. I saw two possible problems. Would the results come in on time? And if they did, would we get the results by email? It seemed so easy for a typo to occur since we just handed them a piece of paper with the email address hand-printed on it. Presumably that's just what did happen.

Awhile later we finally got a call from Ashlee that she had gotten through to Path Care and that she was forwarding Bonnie's COVID report to us. The problem seemed to be resolved, but then we discovered that the Wi-Fi had gone down! We were unable to download the email with Bonnie's results. We hung around some more waiting for the Wi-Fi to come back up. I finally asked one of the owners whether we could expect the Wi-Fi to come back on soon. That's when he told us it usually doesn't come back on for the whole day. He could have told us that sooner. We couldn't wait any longer. The Botswana border closes at 6PM. We didn't want to arrive there right at 6PM. As it was it looked like we wouldn't make it to the border until after 4:30PM, which was already getting a little too close for comfort. It can take up to an hour to get through the border crossing.

The problem then was: Where could we find Wi-Fi to download our emails? There were no towns between the Lodge and the border, which was 450K away (about 280 miles). There was only one service station stop about half way there. The Lodge owners suggested stopping at a lodge they knew of on the way. But it was about 20 minutes off the main road. It would take us an hour to get there, get our email, and then drive back to the main road. And that's assuming their Wi-Fi was working and that they would let us use it.

We had to start driving and take our chances on finding something. We stopped at the service station, we got gas, and I asked the attendant if there was anywhere I could get Wi-Fi to download our email? He pointed to small store behind the station. The owner was kind enough to let me use his personal Wi-Fi to download the emails and he refused to take any payment for it. We were good to go! Another example of how helpful the Namibians were to us. Absolutely heartwarming! Angel #2!

We made it to the border a little before 5PM. It took about an hour to get through it, but we did manage to get through it. As usual it was very difficult figuring out just what they wanted us to do. Interestingly Botswana gave us another rapid COVID test to check the results of our first

COVID test.



Figure 165: Vehicle information required crossing the border

More Shametu Pictures



Figure 166: African hoopoe



Figure 167: Fish eagle

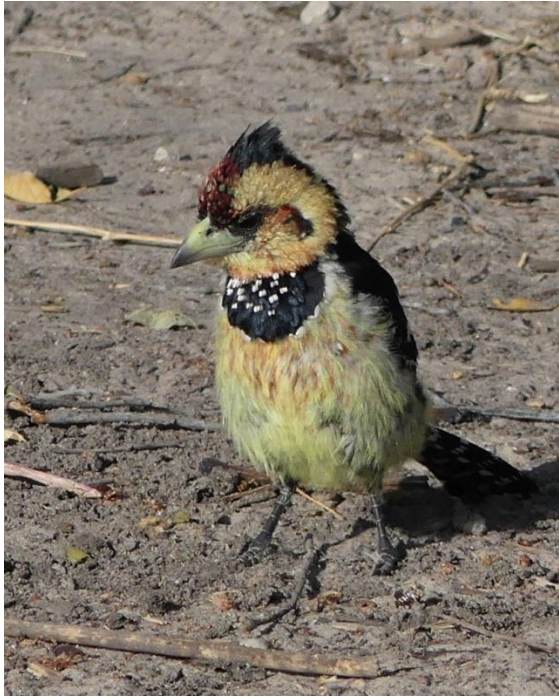


Figure 168: Crested barbet



Figure 169: White-fronted bee-eater



Figure 170: Vervet monkeys



Figure 171: Nile crocodiles sunning themselves



Figure 172: Nile crocodile close-up



Figure 173: Our room at Shamet viewed from the river

June 20-22: Chobe Game Lodge in Chobe Park

Finally we were through the border and made the turn off the main road to our next lodge, Chobe Game lodge. We were by this time completely exhausted and it was just starting to get a little dark. We thought our adventures were over. According to our GPS the lodge was only 6.5K from the main road. We should be there in a half-hour. But it didn't quite turn out that way.



Figure 174: Baboon greeting party as we entered Botswana

First we had to get through the Chobe Park entrance. There were papers to fill out. But that didn't take long. The lodge was inside the park, so would be driving on park roads. There were several roads going in several different directions with no signs that were readable. Fortunately we had GPS and our travel agency had programmed the route to the lodge into the GPS even

over these private roads.



Figure 175: Chobe Park road

The road started out OK, but it kept getting sandier as we drove along the river further into the park. I wasn't sure we were going the right way. I just blindly followed the GPS. In retrospect that was a big mistake. The GPS took me down a road that dipped down and then back up. At the bottom the sand got very deep. Of course I got stuck in the sand! (I'm Art and this is what I do!)

By then it was really starting to get dark. I tried to phone the lodge but there was no phone service. What to do? We could not leave the vehicle and walk to the lodge which was only a couple of kilometers away. There are lions around! You never leave your vehicle, especially at night. It looked like we might have to spend the night in our vehicle. Although maybe the lodge would know we were on the way since we had checked in at the gate. When we didn't arrive, they would hopefully send someone out to look for us.

We hadn't eaten since breakfast. We should have had Shametu fix us a lunch but we had been in a hurry to leave. All we had in the car were potato chips and cookies. So we opened a bottle of wine and some potato chips.

Then an amazing thing happened. After about 15 minutes of sitting and drinking, not one, not two, but four safari vehicles showed up all at once. Their passengers had been getting tours of the park. The safaris were over since it was getting dark and the vehicles were driving back out of the park. The vehicles were all on a road that ran parallel to the road we were stuck on, bypassing the dip into the deep sand. I wish I had known!

I yelled “Help!” The male passengers poured out of the vehicles. The driver of one of the vehicles went into our vehicle and began driving it out of the sand while the rest of us pushed. (Angels #3!) We were on our way!

But again the GPS led us astray and I drove right past the lodge and began heading deep into the park. Fortunately we came upon another safari vehicle, this one from the lodge. They led us the lodge. (Angel #4.)

And what a lodge it was. Possibly the most luxurious I’ve ever been in. And all inclusive: drinks, activities, laundry, everything.



Figure 176: Our room at Chobe Game Lodge



Figure 177: Bathroom in our room at Chobe



Figure 178: Sitting area at Chobe

Our stay at the lodge included game drives and river cruises. For these our guide was Anastasia (Anna). Our waiter for all our meals during our stay was Junior. I like having the same person

the whole time, since you get a chance to get to know them. Anna lives in the South. She works 13 days on and 13 days off, which is good because she lives a thousand kilometers from the lodge.

The next morning we had our first game drive in Chobe Park. Since the lodge is in the park the game drive starts as soon as you get in your safari vehicle. Chobe Park is a little over 11,000 square kilometers. Unlike Etosha Park it is unfenced, so the animals can come and go. It is bordered on the west side by the Chobe river. The river also forms the border between Namibia and Botswana.

Bonnie and I have learned that what matters is not how many animals you see or what animals you see, but rather how well you see them and what they are doing when you do see them. In Tanzania we saw a lot of lions, but they were always just sleeping, except on one occasion when they were fornicating, over and over again. Today at Chobe we saw two male lions up close. One walked right towards us until he was only 6 or 7 feet away. We heard one of them howling for the females in his pride. Animal viewing doesn't get much better than that, although we hadn't been to Splash Camp yet!



Figure 179: Lion walking by our vehicle in Chobe Park



Figure 180: Male lion viewed through binoculars



Figure 181: Lion close-up

Another highlight was a very large troop of baboons crossing the road in front of us. We have seen tons of impala on our trip but today we saw the largest herd, 100 at least. In general, herds of impala consist of a single male and the rest are his females. The male for this herd must be something special!



Figure 182: Large impala herd grazing

I was wondering where the giraffes and elephants were. Anna said the elephants only show up near the river in the afternoon. We hadn't seen a single giraffe all morning but then suddenly

there they were! For the next several kilometers we saw at least 40.



Figure 183: Giraffes in Chobe Park

The food here at the lodge is very good, maybe the best we've had on our trip. As in the other lodges we are just about the only people staying here. The chef came by our table. He told us he had been to Santa Cruz. He had been working as a chef at Disneyland in Los Angeles until

COVID hit and Disneyland closed.



Figure 184: Lantern-lit dinner at Chobe

The river cruise began in a leisurely way at 3PM. We cruised down the left bank of the Chobe River. The boat was quiet with its electric motor and the sun was out. We were finally warm and I stripped off my jacket and my long sleeve shirt. Anna was piloting the boat.

She pointed out some crocodiles and the many shore birds such as herons, egrets, whistling ducks, etc. The fish eagles were in the trees. They look a bit like bald eagles. They have a white head but the whiteness extends further down. Kingfishers were hovering over the water hunting for fish.

Then things got interesting when she spotted elephants coming down to drink at a small beach down river. We quickly rushed to the scene. Coming down to the water were, I counted, 26 elephants of all ages and sexes. They were drinking water and then eating the sand, which contains salt minerals that helps with their digestion. It was incredible to view the action from the river. The elephants would run down to the water and then back up to the shore with their

trunks waving.



Figure 185: Elephants coming down to the Chobe River for water and minerals

After about 45 minutes the elephants began leaving, but not before they pooped. The guinea fowl, dozens of them, then rushed down to feast on the unprocessed food in the poop. Anna

explained that elephants only process about 40% of the food they eat.



Figure 186: Elephants at the Chobe river

Next we went downstream to a wide open grassy area. It was beginning to get dark as the sun began setting. The sun was directly ahead us with the river flowing down from it. Suppose the sun was at 12:00PM. The open grassy fields stretched from 10AM to 5PM. From 2PM to 5PM I counted about 25 elephants grazing in the field. About six giraffes were grazing with them. In

front of them in the water were half dozen hippos eating the grass reeds.



Figure 187: Sunset over Chobe River

From 10AM to 2PM there were a dozen giraffes grazing against the setting sun. Sprinkled among them were impalas. In front of them in the water were about 25 hippos, a couple of which came out of the water to eat and then return to the water. This was the kind of absolutely beautiful, awesome sight that you feel blessed to be able to experience. Then at one point all the giraffes began running towards 10AM. What was scaring them? We couldn't see. Then we heard the roar of a lion behind us, about 6AM. Our guide thought it probably came from one of the lions we had seen earlier on the morning safari.

On our second full day at the lodge we had two game drives. We didn't see any *new* animals. We only saw one female lion as it walked into the grass. The afternoon drive had the largest numbers of animals. We easily saw a hundred elephants and sixty giraffes.

More Chobe Game Lodge Pictures

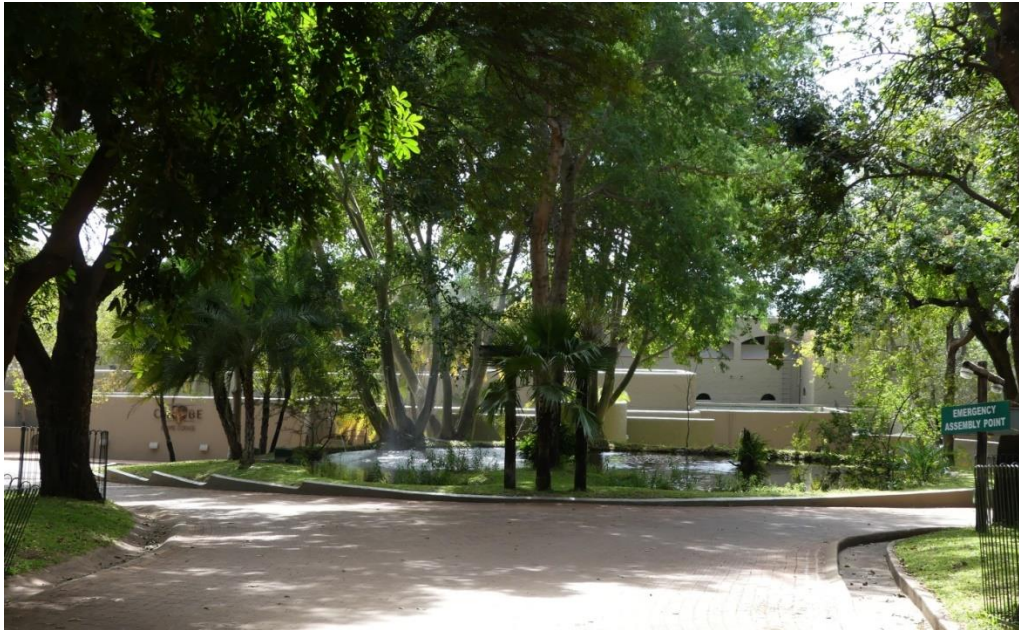


Figure 188: Entrance to Chobe



Figure 189: Glass of wine at Chobe



Figure 190: Lounge at Chobe



Figure 191: Sitting area in our room with bedroom behind



Figure 192: Lion in Chobe Game Reserve



Figure 193: White-fronted bee-eater



Figure 194: White-backed vulture



Figure 195: Magpie shrike



Figure 196: Fish eagle



Figure 197: Elephant eating minerals for digestion



Figure 198: Giraffes running from danger



Figure 199: Hippo eating river reeds



Figure 200: Drinking giraffe behind Cape buffalos



Figure 201: Close-up of Cape buffalo



Figure 202: Vervet monkeys grooming



Figure 203: Mother and baby Vervet monkeys



Figure 204: Giraffes from behind

June 23: Planet Baobab Lodge

We left early the next morning because we had another long drive, this time to the quirky Planet Baobab Lodge, which is basically just a stop-over lodge on our way to the Maun airport from which we fly into Splash Camp. It is difficult to leave the Chobe lodge with its incredible quality and service. We enjoyed getting to know Anna our private guide for our stay and Junior our private waiter for the stay. We also met another American couple from Bakersfield. They also had their own private guide and waiter. We hope to keep in contact with them after we get back home. They were having a very different adventure. They flew from lodge to lodge. Today they were flying to Victoria Falls, a 20 minute flight from Chobe Lodge.

I was worried about getting stuck in the sand again during the 6.5k drive out from Chobe Lodge to the main, tarred road. At Anna's urging, I talked to the lodge concierge about my concern. She agreed to provide us with an escort to lead us out of the park, and there was no charge. Anna led the way in the safari vehicle she had used for tours. Two other guys from the lodge went with her, I guess to help push if I got stuck again in the sand. One of them we discovered later was Luis the chef.

I'm sure I would never have made it out of the park on my own and could easily have gotten lost. There are roads going every which way. Even following Anna, it was white knuckle time for most of the way as I struggled to keep the car moving in a straight line in the sand. But I managed to do it, to our great relief!

But our driving adventure that day wasn't over. We drove a short distance to Kasane, a town that borders three countries: Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. We first stopped at a bank ATM to get some Pula, the currency of Botswana. I struggled to even do that! Finally I called over one of the bank security guards to help me, as I made several mistakes trying to figure out how the ATM machine worked. I can't wait to see the fees I racked up in the process. I tipped the guard fifty Namibian dollars (about \$3).

Then we went over to gas station near the bank. Five attendants descended on us, checking the oil, pumping the gas, washing the windows. I impatiently watched as the guy pumping the gas took 10 minutes filling the tank. It would be literally impossible to have gotten any more gas into the tank. He proudly showed me how full he had gotten it. (I was surprised there was a button on the tank that the attendant could press to release air from the tank, which allowed more gas to be put into the tank. Such features are important when gas stations are sometimes hundreds of mile apart.) Then the team began washing the dust off various parts of the car. Enough! I generously tipped them about 25 Pula, about three dollars. The standard tip is about 5-10 Pula. But why not, everybody is struggling here with the COVID wipeout of tourists.

Then, while I was working to get the GPS going, I made a wrong turn leaving the station. I turned left instead of right. The GPS, now going, started telling me to make a U turn, but that wasn't possible. We were already on a bridge crossing over the Zambezi River to Zambia. I wasn't able to make a U-turn on the bridge because of a barrier between the lanes. We were driving across the border into Zambia and we could not avoid it. But we were lucky again, or as

Bonnie came to put it, “The angels were watching over us again.”



Figure 205: Heading over the river into Zambia

We had four checkpoints to get through: The Botswana checkpoint leaving Botswana, the Zambia checkpoint entering Zambia, the Zambia checkpoint leaving Zambia, and finally the Botswana checkpoint re-entering Botswana. At the initial Botswana checkpoint, the guard who met us told us to keep saying to everyone we met: “We are lost and trying to get back to Botswana!” (Reminding me of the old commercial, “I fell down and I can’t get up!”). Amazingly, following the guard’s advice, we were able to avoid any paperwork as we navigated through each of the four border checkpoints. But at each crossing we had to get out of the vehicle and get sprayed, step into the disinfectant solution for Hoof and Mouth disease, and drive through a disinfectant solution.

We were finally on the tarred road heading for our next lodge!

The next mishap occurred when the speed limit suddenly changed from 120 kmh to 80 kmh. I slowed but there was a taxi in front of me who slowed way down, way below the speed limit. Annoyed, I decided to pass him. As I passed him I looked over to him, and he signaled me to slow down. Too late! I was caught in a speed trap! There was a guy filming vehicles as they approached the trap. A police officer standing near signaled me to pull over.

When I got out of our vehicle the “film director” took me frame-by-frame through his movie. It showed my changing speeds as I sped up and passed the taxi. He pointed out how my max speed hit 94 KMH, about 7 MPH over the speed limit. At home I don’t even consider that speeding!

The officer then called me over to his car. I worried that this might be “Mexico” and I was in for a shakedown. Nope, it was all by the book. The officer showed me a chart that listed fines for each speed. The fine for 94 in an 80 zone was 380 Pula (about \$40). He then did some paperwork. He informed me that his credit card processing equipment wasn’t working and that I would need to pay cash. (Of course it didn’t work!) How fortunate I had just gotten Pula from the ATM. I’m not sure what would have happened if I didn’t have any Pula. I had Namibian dollars, but would he take them? I gave him 400 dollar Pula, since all the ATM gave me were 100 dollar bills Pula. He said (of course!) that he didn’t have any change. I told him the extra 20 Pula was a tip. He thanked me.

The story was so hilarious, at least to me, that it was worth \$40 for the entertainment! It also gave me bragging rights with my retired police officer, son-in-law who got a speeding ticket on Hwy 17 taking us to the airport. His ticket will cost 10 times more than mine or traffic school!

The rest of our drive to Planet Baobab was thankfully uneventful. It was late afternoon when we arrived, too late for lunch, which was included in our stay. They nicely agreed to substitute pack lunches for us the next day for our drive to the Maun airport for our flight into Splash Camp.



Figure 206: Our room at Planet Baobab Lodge

I don't remember much about the dinner at Baobab, which was included, other than that it was good.

June 24-27: Splash Camp – Okavango Delta

We left our quirky Planet Boabob Lodge early to get to the Maun airport where we were to meet a rep from Safari Destinations who would take us to a place to get the COVID test we needed to get back into Namibia at the end of our stay at Splash Camp. But the rep never showed. After waiting 20 minutes we decided to call them but their number wasn't given in our book. Next I tried to call our travel agent but I discovered my phone didn't work in Botswana, just Namibia. Finally, I thought to search on our GPS for the location of Safari Destinations and thankfully they were in the system.

We were led to the CT Diagnostics Clinic. This time there was no line. Cost was the same as PathCare, \$1700 for the two of us, but these were Pula not RAND. The former are 10 to the U.S. dollar, the latter are 14.

At 3PM we flew into the Delta landing on a gravel airstrip, a 30 minute flight. From the windows we could view the flat, marshy land below that is mostly flooded in the summer, rainy season. Now in the winter, dry season, it is mostly dry with lots of waterholes.



Figure 207: Leaving for Splash Camp from Maun Airport



Figure 208: Okavango Delta viewed from the plane

We landed at the Splash Camp airstrip.



Figure 209: Splash Camp airstrip



Figure 210: Plane landing at the airstrip



Figure 211: Airstrip lounge

With us on the plane were a family of Indian Americans from Colorado. They had flown from the U.S. through Frankfurt but on to Cape Town, a 40 hour flight altogether. They will be our safari partners for the duration of our stay at Splash Camp. They had never been on safari before, and it was a whole new experience for them. They descended from India. Very nice family. The husband Sri is a doctor, who worked when he was younger at the White House, where he met Nelson Mandela, which is the inspiration behind their trip. He is married to a woman born in the U.S. of Indian descent, named Shika. They have two teenagers named Sam and Kareena.



Figure 212: Safari companions at Splash Camp

Since it was late afternoon when we arrived and we were some distance from the lodge, we began our first safari on the way, a combination sundowners and night safari. The drive is primarily through sandy soil of the type I got stuck in. There were no restrictions about going off road, as there were in the parks. Our guides were Josiah and Taps. Josiah drives and provides commentary. Taps sits on a chair attached to the front bumper. He is the tracker and game

spotter.



Figure 213: Taps the tracker as we go over a bridge

We came to a herd of elephants. Josiah followed them for a while off road. The family was blown away, having never seen anything like it. I didn't bother taking pictures, but just enjoyed the experience. We also came across the usual suspects, antelope, giraffes, zebras, and many birds. As the sun went down, we stopped for drinks. The largest full moon I have ever seen appeared just above the horizon. After it turned dark we heard a hyena calling. Awhile later Taps pulled out a spot light, and we watched a group of four Spotted Hyenas running nearby. We

followed them until they disappeared in the brush. Seeing the hyenas was special!



Figure 214: Bonnie and Art holding up the moon at sunset



Figure 215: Sunset at Splash Camp

Our room is very nice, but rustic with screened windows. All night long we heard the lions roaring. There is no phone or Wi-Fi here. And it is very cold when the sun is down.

The next morning Joshua came by at 5:45AM for our wakeup call since the camp has no Wi-Fi or phone service so all communication must be direct. Then they returned at 6:15AM to escort us from our room to the continental breakfast by the fire. A half hour later we were out on our game drive. Here too it was very cold until the sun came up, so of course it was very cold in the open safari vehicles. In addition to our layers and jackets, they provided ponchos and hot water

bottles to warm our laps and hands. That certainly helped but we were still cold.



Figure 216: Waterhole on morning game drive

We began searching for the three lions that had been heard roaring all night. It didn't take long to find the first one. He was slowly walking in direction of a tower of giraffes (that's what they call a group of giraffes) and we followed him, watching and taking pictures and videos, for 20

minutes. We left and then found the second one and did the same.



Figure 217: Male lion at Splash Camp



Figure 218: Male lion at Splash Camp

Awhile later we met up with another safari vehicle. The family with us left in the vehicle to go to the airstrip. A nurse was flying in to give them COVID tests they needed for their flight to Victoria Falls in Zambia.

Bonnie and I continued on our own with the Taps our tracker and Josiah our guide. Taps spotted tracks in the sand of two female lions (mother and daughter) along with the daughter's three cubs, two males and a female). We set out to find them. But then we got sidetracked when Taps spotted cheetah tracks. We followed the cheetah tracks for about 30 minutes but were never able to find him.

We went back to looking for the female lions and their cubs. It wasn't easy but we eventually found them. After taking many pictures we heard a troop of baboons moving nearby. The mother lion got up and began walking towards them. The tall grass obscured her. Suddenly we heard the baboons screeching and moments later the mother lion came back with a baboon in her mouth.



Figure 219: Grandmother, mother, with three cubs

She placed her kill down for the cubs to eat. She growled at the other female lion (her mother) when her mother tried to eat from the kill. We watched the youngsters go at it, growling and bloody, no longer looking so adorable.

For the afternoon activity we all decided on a river cruise and sundowners followed by a night safari. The river cruise was on one of the three tributaries of the Okavango River that run across the Delta. The locals call these canals. The cruise itself was relaxing and pretty. There were a few nice birds. We also saw at one point three lions that seemed to be planning on crossing over from the other side of the river to our side, the side the lodge is on. There were two females and a juvenile male. Our guide said that they would regret coming over to this side because they would be coming into the territory of a male coalition of five male lions that claim the territory.



Figure 220 : Okavango river canal cruise

When we returned to the shore just after sundown there was a table sitting in the field near our vehicle set up as a bar, with drinks and snacks for our sundowners. Someone must have driven from the lodge (about 30 minutes away) to set it up. They were nowhere to be seen when we

arrived.



Figure 221: Sundowners after our cruise

After our sundowners we left the canal for our night game drive and trip back to the lodge. On the way we stopped to take pictures of the full moon rising out of the fields. I've never watched a moon rising before. It was amazingly beautiful.

I can't remember much about the animals we saw coming back. I do remember we saw two small cats called a bush baby, but it was too dark to get pictures.

The next day we all opted out of the Makuro canoe activity in favor of two more game drives. Our mission in the morning drive was to see cheetahs. We knew there was at least one male around because he was seen by an Australian couple coming in from the airstrip to the lodge.

Our guide spotted the tracks of the cheetah awhile into the drive. The tracker Taps and guide Joshua followed them until they lost them. The cheetah, as Joshua put it, "cheated us." Later we tried to pick up the tracks of the cheetah but instead came across the tracks of the two female lions with their cubs. We followed their tracks for about 20 minutes until we came upon them all lying down in the grass. After a few minutes they got up and began moving. We followed them

for a while, but then left them. Our mission was to see cheetahs!



Figure 222: Mother, grandmother, with cubs



Figure 223: Lions on the move

We again picked up the tracks of the male cheetah, but again lost it. On the way we came across a pair of Secretary Birds walking in the grass. They are amazing birds. They are large birds,

about 2 feet tall that walk upright in the grass. They are named for the crown like feathers sticking up from the top of their heads. The feathers reminded the person who named them of secretaries who stuck their pens in their hair. They are predator birds who eat snakes and small rodents.

Another interesting bird we saw was the ground hornbill, a new bird for Bonnie and me.

After losing the cheetah again our guide at one point turned off the engine to see if we could hear the cheetah calling. We didn't, but he heard something else: Wild dogs! Wild dogs were on our animal bucket list. They were endangered until recently but have recently recovered somewhat and are now considered "unusual". Wild dogs were not in Tanzania and we had never seen them before. They don't bark, but instead make high pitched yells.



Figure 224: Wild dog

The dogs move fast. Our guide radioed to the other two vehicles in the area and the chase was on. After maybe 10 minutes we came upon them. There were 5 of them moving constantly

through the brush. Our guide continued following them as we shot pictures and videos.



Figure 225: Wild dogs

Among the dogs there was one with an injury. They were very playful with each other, as dogs are. The injured dog was, as Josiah put it, an “outsider”, that is, a dog from another pack. Josiah called him a “lost dog”. The dogs are not territorial so multiple packs can coexist in the same area. Dogs sometimes get separated from their packs and temporarily or permanently start hunting with other packs.

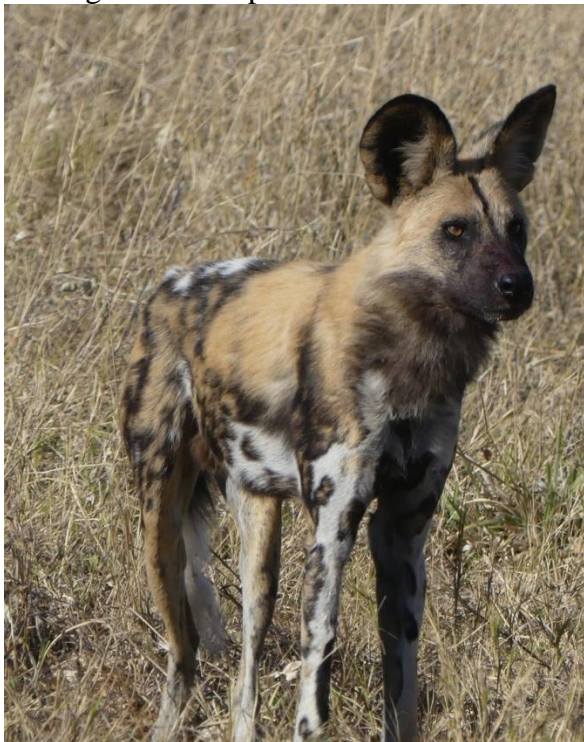


Figure 226: Wild dog close-up

Our mission to find cheetahs had to wait for our next game drive!

On our afternoon safari Josiah first spotted a herd of elephants heading to a waterhole. The elephants, dozens of them, come out in the afternoon to graze. Josiah drove to the waterhole and parked and we waited and watched for the elephants to arrive.

Afterwards we again left to look for the cheetah. There were elephants everywhere. Josiah says he has been charged by elephants more times than by any other animal. Several times elephants trumpeted and flapped their ears as we got near them. We spotted a wild dog, by itself walking in the grass. Then we saw a hyena following it, presumably to steal any game the dogs might bring down. We followed the dog and hyena around for a while and then left to look for the cheetah. Interestingly, the dog kept yelling into the ground. They do this because the sound bounces off the ground and travels farther. We eventually found the territorial cheetah resting near a tree. His stomach was full from a recent kill. He appeared to have an injury but we couldn't see it very well. We took pictures. Mission accomplished!



Figure 227: Male cheetah

We wondered around for a while until sunset and then stopped for sundowners. Our Indian family friends were leaving the next day, but we had one more day here. They have been great

fun to hang with. The husband is a surgeon who performs ablation surgeries like the one I had years ago. His wife is a doctor working with liver transplants. It is fun to listen to their family humor and chatter.

On the way back it was already pitch black. Taps used the bright spot light to search for animals. He only flashed the lights on nocturnal animals, ignoring non-nocturnal animals like elephants. On the way back he spotted a scrub hare, 2 servals, an African wild cat, several spring hares, and a small spotted genet.

Then we came across a male lion eating a kill of a Cape buffalo. All of the five male lions in the territory were there. But most of the time only one was feeding at a time. The others slept nearby. Apparently the kill had occurred many hours ago. The lions were now inside the kill pulling and chewing on the intestines. A gross, smelly, but fascinating sight.

The next morning we started the morning game drive by going to see how the five male lions were doing on the buffalo carcass. When we arrived one is still busy eating. The carcass smelled as bad or worse than before. The rest of the lions were sleeping nearby.

We left the carcass. We came across two spotted hyenas and began following them, but we quickly lost them. At the waterholes we saw dozens of yellow billed pelicans and Malibu storks. We also saw a handful of saddle back storks with their beautiful bright red bills.

Zebras were grazing in the grass. The zebra is the national animal of Botswana. One of them had a terrible gash on its neck, probably from a fight with another male.

We came across two female lions resting in the grass. These were different from the two with the cubs. A group of female lions is called a “pride”. A group of male lions is called a “coalition”.

Then Taps spotted the tracks of the male cheetah that owns the territory stretching from the lodge to the river. Eventually we found him resting in the shade of a tree. After a while he got up and began moving. As he moved he began yelping loudly. Josiah said that a female cheetah must have entered his territory and left her mark on a tree indicating that she was ready to mate. He was trying to find her and was calling out to her. At one point he climbed on the trunk of a fallen

tree continuing to call for the female. Then he came down and lied down to rest.



Figure 228: Cheetah up a fallen tree

We finally left the cheetah for tea time. The family we had been riding with left for the airstrip in a vehicle that met us.



Figure 229: Indian family getting ready to leave Splash Camp

After teatime we left to search for the two lionesses with their cubs. Then we headed back to the lodge. On the way we went through a large herd of over 22 elephants.



Figure 230: Driving through an elephant herd at Splash Camp

During the evening game drive we saw just the usual suspects of zebras, elephants, giraffes, and antelope, but nothing new. Sundowners was nice, as always. The wine really hit the spot. All we saw afterwards on our night drive going back to the lodge was a young hyena, a spring hare, and a bush baby with its giant eyes. Pictures in the dark are worthless.

The next day was our last day. We had time for one more game drive in the morning and then at 1:30PM we would be driven 30 minutes to the airstrip to fly out. Just before the wake-up call,

around 5:00AM, I heard what I learned later was a leopard followed by a jackal coming through our camp. During the morning game drive three vehicles went in search of the leopard. We were not allowed to go because a maximum of three vehicles are allowed. Bonnie and I weren't happy since it was the one animal we still haven't seen this trip. But the other parties failed to find the leopard. We were secretly a little happy about that.

Of course we paid another visit to the lion buffalo kill site. The lions were gone and there wasn't much left of the buffalo. A black-backed jackal was picking at the remains.



Figure 231: Black-backed jackal picking at the lion kill remains

It was very cold on the morning game drive. Bonnie was not looking happy. We begin driving around not seeing much, a few giraffes, a side-striped jackal pair and a pond full of pelicans. Bonnie was getting grouchy: "What are we doing just driving around?"

We come across a Steenbok antelope. It is the smallest antelope in Botswana, a little bigger than a dik-dik.

We began searching for the male cheetah whose path we crossed but we finally gave up and headed to a spot for tea time. But on the way we just stumbled upon the male cheetah. He was just sleeping so we took a few pictures and continued on our path to teatime. But then two honey

badgers crossed in front of us! They were on our bucket list of animals that we wanted to see. There are lots of them around but it is very rare to see them, especially during the day.

Then a female cheetah with three cubs was spotted by one of the other trackers who radioed to us. This was a different female from the one the male cheetah was chasing. This female was hunting with her 3 cubs following behind. Cheetahs hunt differently than the lions who leave their cubs hidden behind when they go out to hunt. Baby cheetahs hunt along with their mothers. And this is why it's devastating when a mother cheetah with cubs is killed. The baby cheetahs will never learn to hunt and will eventually die of starvation.

When we arrived the mother was hunting a nearby male impala. She was sneaking up on it and getting very close. The cubs were following behind. But then a group of magpie shrikes flew in and began raising an alarm. The impala ran off, saved by the magpies.

We followed the cheetah and her cubs for maybe 30 minutes until she went into a wooded area our vehicle couldn't access. As Josiah put it: "Game over!" But it was thrilling while it lasted.



Figure 232: Following the mother cheetah and her cubs as she hunted

After stopping for tea time we drove back to camp. Bonnie and I went back to our room to pack up and get ready to leave. After lunch Josiah and Tops drove us back to the airstrip for our short

flight back to Maun.



Figure 233: Our plane back to Maun arriving at Splash Camp airstrip

This time when we arrived Safari Destinations was there to meet us. And they also delivered our COVID results to us. Although we had our own vehicle, they also insisted on leading us to the nearby Thamalakane lodge where we would spend our last night before our very long drive across the border and back to Windhoek for our flight home.

More Splash Camp Pictures



Figure 234: View of the Delta from the plane



Figure 235: Josiah, our guide, and Taps, our tracker



Figure 236: Art and Bonnie in the safari vehicle



Figure 237: On the hunt



Figure 238: Bonnie enjoying a glass of wine after river cruise



Figure 239: Grey heron (left) with sacred Ibis (right)



Figure 240: Saddle-billed stork



Figure 241: Yellow-billed stork



Figure 242: White-backed vulture



Figure 243: Elephants



Figure 244: Young elephant



Figure 245: Spotted hyenas seen during night safari



Figure 246: Spotted hyena



Figure 247: Wild dog



Figure 248: Hippo grazing



Figure 249: Zebra walking under giraffe



Figure 250: Kudu



Figure 251: Kudu



Figure 252: Male cheetah



Figure 253: Male cheetah close-up



Figure 254: Mother cheetah hunting with cubs



Figure 255: Mother cheetah and cub



Figure 256: Mother Cheetah with three cubs



Figure 257: Baby cheetah



Figure 258: Mother lion (left), grandmother lion (middle), and baby lions (right)



Figure 259: Mother, grandmother, and cubs



Figure 260: Baby lion close-up



Figure 261: Male lion



Figure 262: Male lion



Figure 263: Male lion close-up



Figure 264: Lions eating Cape buffalo



Figure 265: Lions eating Cape buffalo



Figure 266: Lion eating Cape buffalo

June 28: Thamalakane River Lodge - Maun

The Thamalakane River Lodge was very nice. At sundown we shared a bottle of wine we had bought weeks ago in Swakopmund but never had a chance to drink. We listened to the hippos in the river and watched two elephants walk across the horizon on the other side of the river. Later when we chatted with the lodge manager we found out this was a very rare viewing of elephants. They hadn't been seen from the lodge for a couple of years.

That night at dinner there was a table with about 16 people of all ages, presumably several families travelling together. It didn't appear to be a tour group. One of the younger boys was wearing a sweatshirt from Santa Cruz. After we finished eating I went over to the boy and said I liked his sweatshirt and that we were from Santa Cruz! They immediately welcomed us over to join them. It turned out that they were South Africans who had driven out of the country just before it went into COVID lockdown. They hadn't yet decided on which lodges they would visit. They had just hit the road.

June 29: Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel – Windhoek

The next morning at the Thamalakane Lodge we got up early, while it was still dark. We needed to get a very early start because it would be a very long drive back to Windhoek. Our travel package estimated it would take us about 9 hours. Our route followed the southern border of the Kalahari desert. We would need to cross the border from Botswana back into Namibia.

Getting through the border took about an hour. There were four separate buildings we had to stop at to fill out forms and show our COVID results. The difficulty was that we were never sure what they wanted us to do and they would get very frustrated with us dumb Americans for not understanding what they wanted. But it all eventually got done.

There were several military checkpoints we had to get through to get into Windhoek. We weren't sure what they were checking for and they never told us. But later Carlo, our liaison to our travel agency and the man who would take back our vehicle and take us to the airport, said that they were preventing locals from coming into Windhoek because of COVID. Windhoek was on lockdown. Fortunately, the lockdown didn't apply to foreign visitors.

It was 4:00PM when we got to our hotel, a little over 10 hours of non-stop driving. We were scheduled to get our COVID test at the hotel when we arrived in order to get the results in time for our flight back home the next day, but we were too late. The last test given at the hotel was at 2:00PM. There was no way we would have ever made that deadline. This was one of the very few mistakes our travel agency had made. All the mistakes had to do with satisfying COVID requirements so we can't really blame them. The hotel manager called around but the earliest we could get a test was not until 7:00AM the next morning, the day of our flight.

The next morning we got a call from the desk a little before 7AM. The nurse was here. We got the tests from a very sweet young man, Michael. He assured us we would get the results in time for our 6:45PM flight. He marked the results as urgent. I was dubious. The results were guaranteed between 7 and 14 hours. We had to have the results in 7 hours or we would have a decision to make: Do we go to the airport, which was an hour away from our hotel, and just hope that the results come in in time and that we can somehow download the results to our phone? Or do we just stay another night at the hotel and go through the process of rescheduling our flight?

On what we hoped would be our last night in Namibia we had splurged on a nice meal at a steakhouse next to the hotel. It was our last chance to taste the wonderful Namibian beef. Two delicious steaks with baked potatoes, drinks, and tip: About \$70! The restaurant was filled with mostly young African women dressed in fine, elegant tight dresses. Wow did they look nice! I counted only two African men in the restaurant with their dates. The women were all having great times, taking pictures of themselves in their outfits, drinking, and laughing loudly.

The next morning we had breakfast and then went back to the room to wait for our COVID results. About noon we got a call from the desk telling us we had to check out of the room. We moved into the hotel courtyard to wait. At almost exactly seven hours from when we took our tests, the results came in! The gods were again smiling upon us.

Before we left we gave two young ladies who worked in the restaurant COVID masks that Bonnie had made and brought with us to hand out as gifts. They were absolutely thrilled to get them.



Figure 267: Namibian waitress on the left modeling Bonnie's COVID mask

The trip back home was long but uneventful. The only noteworthy incident was after we arrived at SFO and were waiting for Mandy and Marc to pick us up. They didn't show up! I called them. It turned out that we had given them the wrong day. Fortunately, or unfortunately for them, they were in Oakland watching an A's baseball game and the game had only just started. But they graciously insisted on leaving their game and picking us up.

What a trip!