

## Namibia & Botswana - September 2010

Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> September 2010	to Manchester (T3), Heathrow (T5) and Johannesburg	Quiet morning with packing all done, an early lunch and to the airport. Comfortable flight to Heathrow. After tea and a snack, together with a relax, on to the long flight and comfortable seats. Dinner and then we slept (for both of us several hours), breakfast and early arrival.
Friday 17 <sup>th</sup>	Johannesburg (Oliver Tambo, T A) Johannesburg - Windhoek (Namibia) Windhoek Country Club	At Jo'Burg we found a nice cafe overlooking the planes with comfortable chairs, and we were allowed to sit there after a cup of coffee until we were ready to have a quick wander around the shops and board the next flight to Windhoek. Another comfortable flight with delicious breakfast/lunch. Met at Windhoek by Sense of Africa rep (2 other passengers) and a long drive to deliver them before we reached our hotel. A large room at the front, but not much view. We just fell into bed to catch up on sleep! Wandered round the grounds, pool, edge of golf course and 'lazy river', watching birds and enjoying the heat. Rearranged the packing, drinks on the terrace and a large buffet dinner. Bed early.
Saturday 18 <sup>th</sup>	to Etosha National Park	Early breakfast, and the Etosha Shuttle at 8, driven by Linnet We were the only passengers. After about an hour we had to turn back to pick up Brigitte in the centre of Windhoek, so we did have a drive round. Continued the 5 hour journey with 2 stops for coffee and snacks, Arrived at Etosha Safari Lodge (warm welcome) and shown to our chalet (no. 1, the nearest). All the chalets are arranged along the hill both sides of the main buildings on the top of the hill looking northwards towards the national park about 10 km away, the ground beneath looks stoney and barren, though there is bird song all around. After a short walk to see the other chalets, drinks overlooking the valley, dinner on the terrace - Oryx steak. Rodney our guide introduced himself, and we arranged a whole day safari drive starting at 7 the next morning.
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Etosha National Park</b>	<b>Whole day Safari excursion.</b> We were joined by 2 young people from Luxemburg. A cold drive to the Etosha National Park, then the rest of the day spent touring round, bumping along the rough roads, watching wildlife, many gathered together at the various waterholes that we visited. We saw birds, ostrich, lots of Birchell's zebras, a blue wildebeest, lots of springbok, impala, oryx, kudu, warthog, a spotted hyena (somewhat unusual) and then in the trees, 2 enormous elephants. One must always stay in the vehicle while driving in the park, so a stop for 2 hours at the gated lodge in the park for lunch (toastie and beer) was a welcome chance to stretch our legs - it was very hot - we did visit the waterhole there and admired an elephant and a huge Sociable weavers' nest. After lunch more exciting drives around encountering many more animals, and a great excitement when we saw a leopard asleep in a tree. Lots more elephants, giraffes, but no lions or rhinos, even after a detour and a long fast drive back to the entrance to be in time before it shut. We arrived back at the lodge 12 hours after we set out, very happy after a splendid day.
Monday 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Etosha National Park</b>	As we were by ourselves today we had the choice of what to do, and decided to take another whole day excursion! (perhaps getting back a little earlier). It was a cloudy day and bitterly cold (at least not what we had expected), and despite wearing our anoraks and wrapping ourselves in the blankets that Rodney had provided we were still cold. The sun finally came through about midday and it rapidly warmed up. Saw Kori bustards today and an ostrich family with 7 young, then at a waterhole just before we were off for lunch, the elephants started arriving. Several groups emerged out of the trees and stood round and in the water. The other animals were very circumspect. In the end there were more than 50 elephants. After lunch we returned to the same waterhole for a rest watching the elephants. Finally after a different route through a more remote part of the park, we stopped at the first waterhole, and there were the lions. We could see 2 females and a cub sitting in the grass - a fitting end to the day. We did get back earlier but it was only by an hour! Another absolutely splendid day.

Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Etosha to Windhoek Country Club	Peter was not feeling too well so we stayed in this morning, reading and sleeping. We had to move to another room but all the staff were so friendly and helpful and produced bowls of soup for our lunch. Linnet arrived about 2:30 and we set off again back to Windhoek. Stopped en route to visit a crocodile farm but we were too late to have tea there. The huge crocodiles that are only used for breeding were really rather horrid, and the large swarming numbers of 1 year olds and 5 year olds were equally horrible - an interesting visit. At the Country Club this time we had a room overlooking the gardens, delightful. A small dinner at the Chinese Restaurant in the hotel with Peter feeling much better.
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup>	To Namib Naukluft Lodge for Sossusvlei	Quiet morning enjoying the hotel and our nice room. At 12 we ordered lunch (2 toasties) but when they came we found that we each had two large sandwiches salad and chips. We ate one and a bit and packed up the rest for emergencies. At 2 we were picked up by the Sossusvlei shuttle and set off with 2 Australians, Brian and Margot, on the journey south. The Roads were very rough and we bounced about, often feeling quite hot in the sunshine. The scenery is spectacular, through the mountains and over the Spreetshoogte Pass, a very steep road with several hairpins bends to rival anything in the Alps, and the road was only gravel. Arrived at the lodge after about 5 hours. A series of rooms with large windows looking out onto the desert. We set off for a short walk before dinner but were driven back by a few flies. Dinner was a barbeque within a circular wall with fixed tables. We sat with Brian and Margot and found that he was a metallurgist and connected to the Australian Universities, so we had a lot to talk about. The stars were bright but we couldn't follow any of the constellations as it was full moon.
Thursday	<b>Sossusvlei</b>	An early start at 5 this morning, a small breakfast (I ate sandwiches from yesterday) before we set off in a small viewing bus. There were 8 of us, Brian and Margot, 2 doctors from Edinburg (Mary and Scott) and 2 from Sidney (Ann and Geoff); these 4 had all been to a conference. Everyone was very friendly and we got on splendidly together. We drove off west for a couple of hours before arriving at the gate to the Namib Naukluft Park. Arriving early we were able to appreciate the shadows and shapes of the sand dunes through which we were travelling. After another couple of hours we arrived at Dune 45, sadly in a cold seamist, and proceeded to climb the ridge - a steep path in soft sand. Halfway up the mist cleared and I managed to get up and join the others looking at the vista around us. We took a route down the side, Margot and I started off sliding on our bottoms, but Mary and Geoff persuaded me, with their help, to walk/run down. Peter joined the line and we all were soon safely on level ground. At Sossusvlei a 4 x 4 shuttle took passengers on to the end of the road at the Dead Vlei (our bus was 4 x 4 so we could travel on). At the end under a camel-thorn tree we had breakfast. A walk to the Dead Vlei sometimes through thick sand and uphill, and we reached where the 'river' finally dies into the sand. We returned to our lodge, stopping en route at the Sesriem Canyon - a long hole in the ground. We looked down but didn't follow the path to the bottom, instead going home for a late lunch and a rest. After tea we went out on a 'Sundowner Drive' around the estate, stopping at col overlooking the desert plains to the west for the sunset. With a drink in our hands, it was a magical experience, made even more so when we turned round to go home and noticed the moon rising in the east. We even saw a bat-eared fox and a glimpse of an aardwolf rushing across the road in the dark. Dinner that night was a casserole of oryx - delicious!
Friday 24 <sup>th</sup>	Namib Naukluft Lodge to Windhoek Country Club	The 4 of us left after breakfast for the drive back to Windhoek - a different route over the Remhoogte Pass, not so spectacular as the one coming. A dusty, bumpy ride but soon onto a made road and back for the last visit to the Windhoek Country Club. Another nice room, where we ordered only 1 toastie, had a rest, packed up again, and Peter went swimming. We had a Chinese dinner and went to bed early.
Saturday 25 <sup>th</sup>	Windhoek to Johannesburg, then Maun in Botswana.	Up at 4 this morning for an early flight to Jo'Burg. The transport to the airport was very smooth and we had soon booked our luggage through to Maun. We sat

	<p><i>air transfer</i> to Savute Safari Lodge in Chobe National Park</p>	<p>eating some of the breakfast supplied by the hotel before we went through to the departure gate. <b>A fare well to Namibia</b> - a lovely holiday here, enjoyed every minute, but such a lot still to see. I wonder if we will be able to come back again!</p> <p>At Jo'Burg we sat in the same cafe before the flight to Botswana. Arrived in Maun to be greeted by Martin our pilot for the onward flight, a 50 minute flight in a small single engine Cessena plane. When our baggage was squashed into the back of the cabin, and us too, we set off. That really was a fantastic experience, flying over the Okavango Delta to Chobe National Park. The views were lovely, and losing height at the end of the flight we were able to see elephants sheltering beneath the trees. We were met by John in a safari wagon, and after a short discussion, he continued with our baggage to the lodge and we were transferred to Harrison and joined the safari drive. The 3 other occupants were Germans from Siegen and were happy to be able to converse with us in German. The drive was different from those in Namibia in that the terrain was loose sand, so instead of being bounced about, we lurched from side to side. We saw several 'new' birds, all now ticked off in the book, and then the lions. A lioness strolled out and then sat where we could see her well. At 6: 30 we swayed into the lodge. We have a large chalet with picture windows all along one side onto a veranda. Just beneath us is the water hole, with, I believe, 5 elephant and another 6 in the river behind. An unnerving experience to go to the bathroom and to have a shower to be overlooked by elephants! We were collected for pre-dinner drinks and met the managers, Kim and Shane, staff and other guests. Everyone very friendly and helpful. Dinner was served overlooking the river on a large shaded terrace; it was a splendid meal.</p>
<p>Sunday 26<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Savute Safari Lodge</p>	<p>Up at 6, breakfast (we were allowed to walk to the dining room alone as it was now getting light), and off with Harrison on a safari drive. I had mentioned that I wanted to see a cheetah, so we set off looking. Harrison was following the footprints. Cheetahs don't stick to the paths but cross, they also hunt during the day when lions and leopards are resting. We were finally rewarded when we spotted the cheetah under a tree waiting. Back to the lodge for an early lunch on the terrace and a rest in the heat of the day. Tea and cakes were at 3 and we were soon off again and found the leopard. It was very close to us, hunting along the edge of the trees, and at one point it even crossed just in front of our vehicle. His hunt for impala was unsuccessful this time. Later we crossed the river drove down the other side, more birds etc. Home at 6:30 after a superb day out. Dinner now to look forward to!!</p>
<p>Monday 27<sup>th</sup></p>	<p><i>air transfer</i> <b>Camp Okavango on the Delta</b></p>	<p>Up at 6 again as we had decided to go on another drive this morning with Harrison. I love just sitting looking out at the desert around us. One sees all sorts of animals and birds. This morning the highlight was a herd of African buffalo, all trying to hide in the bushes so that they couldn't be photographed, and the Secretary bird. The German party had left and were driving their own car northwards. We were joined by 2 Australians, Michael and Susan who would be going on with us this afternoon. Back for lunch, a quick shower and we were ready for another flight. Martin met us at the airstrip for the first flight to Moremi for Michael and Susan. We managed to all get in the plane, and our baggage. Peter and I had the last flight to ourselves, 10 minutes of delight flying over the delta. And so to Camp Okavango. We were met by a welcoming party and walked along the pavers to the camp, not too far but it really was hot! Shown to our tent - well you could hardly call it a tent. It was set under a permanent roof, and the floor extended round a tree for our terrace. Picture windows with screens at the front and a permanent bathroom at the back completed our abode. We had arrived in time for tea and cakes, and then we were off again, this time on foot (it was a little cooler) back to the airstrip to look at the vegetation, and the birds both on the ground and on the reeds of the delta. Our guide was Obed, but for the next trip we were propelled by Johnson in a small 2 man canoe with him poling us along from the back. It was so peaceful and quiet. The highlight was seeing tiny reed frogs clutching the reeds. We saw 2 Painted reed frogs and several others all only about 1" long. Along a narrow channel in the reeds, we met up with the others and were poled back to</p>

		the airstrip against the setting sun for Sundowner drinks. We were escorted back to our tent and were soon waiting to be taken back for dinner. We realised the necessity to be escorted when later that evening, our guide's lamp picked out a snake across the path. It was a venomous olive grass snake. Dinner was taken at a large table and was quite up to standard, a small starter and a selection of dishes offered at the buffet.
Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup>	Camp Okavango	Up early (as usual) and off with Obed to the motorboats. There were 6 in our group, two more Australians, Vicky and Adam, and 2 Germans. For about 30 minutes we motored along the channel in the high reeds until we arrived at an island and set out on foot to explore. Obed explained about the termite mounds, and led us across the grassland to view the elephants in the trees beyond. We were with them now, but luckily they took no notice. It was a nice change to be on foot, we were out about 2 hours before tramping back to the boat and back to camp for lunch. The Guidebook warns about tramping in the bush, but the animals we saw were not interested in us and it seemed quite safe. After a rest during the hot part of the day, we set off on a cruise to look at birds and anything else we could see in the water. A Malachite kingfisher was a great splash of colour and a snake and a small crocodile were seen. But then Obed got a message, and we set off at great speed along the winding channel (as good as any water ride at Alton Towers) to view an elephant in the channel. It had walked in to eat some reeds and was blocking the route ahead. We sat watching it, but had to keep running the engine to stop getting too close. The elephant wallowed around, sometimes swimming and sometimes walking on the river bed. In the end he got tired of us in his way and making a noise and came purposefully towards us, bellowing at us. We retreated hastily and the elephant found a place where he could get out, and left us. It must be admitted that we were rather shaken by this episode, but it was only later that we realised the danger that we had been in when our motor stopped and, with a flat battery, couldn't be started again. We were rescued but were late by then and had to hurry back to the camp without seeing the hippo round the next corner - so ended the cruise! Lots more guests had arrived while we had been out, so there was lots of lively talk at dinner.
Wednesday 29 <sup>th</sup>	<i>air transfer</i> to Maun Johannesburg - Heathrow (T5)	Not wishing to miss any opportunity, we set out again after breakfast to visit another island for a walk. Watched a water buck and looked at the herd of elephants with several young, not too far away from us. Saw several 'new' birds and a Giant Eagle Owl, a fitting last encounter. We had lunch, finished the packing, had a shower and were ready to go off to the airstrip for the beginning of the journey home. A slightly bigger plane arrived (a 10 seater) and we were happy to meet Michael and Susan again, and tell them how much we had enjoyed Camp Okavango. The flight was just as exciting, but we were soon in Maun and really on our way home. Not much more to relate, sat in the same cafe in Johannesburg and felt a little sad that our holiday was over, but also quite looking forward to returning home.
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup>	Heathrow (T5) - Manchester (T3) Manchester to <b>Home</b>	Slept a little on the night flight, and arrived safely at Heathrow. Smooth flight to Manchester, our bags, having been sent though from Maun, arrived promptly and we were soon on our way to pick up the car and drive home. A lovely sunny day welcomed us back.

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