

Part two

The Ultimate 18-day Safari

Words and pictures by Patrick Cruywagen



In last month's issue we took you through the first nine days of this adventure. After passing the halfway mark, we head south through Namibia, taking in some must-see attractions.

DAY 10

Okaukuejo to Opuwo – 420 km

While driving along the network of dirt roads that lie to the south of the park, we encountered a herd of cattle being shepherded into one of the fields. We stopped to chat to Boet Burger and his son Kobus, who had with them a very sick and pregnant cow on the back of a trailer. Bertus' girlfriend is a vet so she had a look at it. Once back in the vehicle she told us that that cow was not going to make it. There is a downside of farming next to a park and the Burgers told us how up to 30 of their livestock are taken each year by hyena, cheetah, lion and leopard.

We got off the tar C5, which runs along the western side of Etosha, and found ourselves on a truly lovely road. There were a number of puddles and also butterflies in their millions, and we had an interesting encounter with some traditionally-dressed Herero women who were busy sewing using an old Singer machine – just like my gran had.

DAY 11

Opuwo to Palmwag – 250 km

Opuwo is like being on the set of *Star Wars*. You have what seems like a normal town, except there are a number of red people living with what we perceive as normal people who look like us. The red people are the Himba of course, and it was weird for me to see them in a Western type of environment. We headed out of the town and spent the morning in an authentic Himba village to experience real Himba traditions. Once this was over, dozens of the ladies tried to sell us some crafts, and believe me when I say they know all about inflation and weren't willing to budge with prices.

With lovely green scenery about, we took our time heading south and spotted a number of animals along the way, such as the Hartman's mountain zebra and many giraffe. About 10 km from Palmwag we spotted a ▶





Top Damaraland offers some of the most beautiful dirt tracks in all of Namibia. Middle Himba craft prices have gone up dramatically in recent times. You can thank the foreign tourists for that. Bottom We spotted this beauty only a few metres from the road, less than 10 km from Palmwag.

leopard right next to the road. He was only about ten metres from us and stood up nicely in the windswept grey grass while I fired off several frames. He was a real poser – this was the highlight of the trip for me so far.

DAY 12

Palmwag to Swakopmund – 430 km

Just after leaving Palmwag we saw a man in the middle of the road making wild flapping gestures with his arms alongside his head. He was trying to look like an elephant. About 400 metres to our right was a small herd of the famous desert elephant. Normally one has to go off the main roads into the heart of Damaraland to see them, but we were lucky this time.

As we headed west towards the coast we could see a massive bank of mist ahead; gone were the green plains with springbok everywhere. We had now entered the Skeleton Coast Park and Namibia was dishing up a whole new world. A stark flat world with a



gale force wind made a lunch stop impossible, unless you wanted sand in your sarmie. Our plan was to camp at Mile 108, but the weather said no and so we pushed towards Swakopmund, stopping at Cape Cross to look at the seal reserve. While some might find them cute, I'll always remember the smell and the sand fleas that attacked my bare feet.

DAY 13

Day of leisure in Swakopmund

I could lie and tell you I went to the museum and the Crystal Gallery, went quad biking on the dunes, enjoyed an aeroplane flight along the coast to Sossusvlei and strolled along the promenade, but I won't. I'd done all that on previous visits, so I was rather going to try and live a day in the life of a local. I joined the three lovely Norwegian ladies I'd met the night before to soak up the last of the summer rays on the beach. To finish off the day I headed just out of town and lay on a dune to watch the sunset, before turning around and watching the moonrise. The Namibian desert is a special place.

DAY 14

Swakopmund to Sesriem – 360 km

Once heading inland again, you realise you're in desert country. The road to Solitaire is pure magic with beautiful mountain vistas and winding mountain passes such as the Kuiseb and the Gaub Pass, where we had our lunch stop. Even here the place was still looking green and Bertus commented how he'd never ever seen Namibia like this.

Upon our arrival at Sesriem we heard that the wind would be too strong for the hot air balloon safari in the morning – what a massive disappointment! Just before the end of the day I walked down into the Sesriem Canyon, where water was in abundance. One of the rocks was shaped like a huge head of a big man, so I took a picture of it. ▶



Top The Fronrunner roofrack makes for a great game viewing platform! Middle This Swakopmund resident doesn't need a 4x4 to reach his favourite angling spots. Bottom Bertus does his "Where's Willie?" impersonation.

DAY 15

Sesriem to Bethesda Farm – 200 km

Sossusvlei is one of southern Africa's absolutely-must-see spots. Our car was right in the front of the line when the gate opened at 05h15. Sossusvlei is massive and I didn't know where the best place would be for sunrise, so I was running around like a headless chicken. "I need an extra day here," I thought to myself. I can only describe watching the sunrise at Sossusvlei as a spiritual experience of sorts. The dull dawn colours are replaced by dramatic red and dark black shadows; it is a place transformed.

The 1.1 km walk to Deadvlei is a must. Those dead trees have to be the most photographed trees in the world. Here I met Sasha Jancic, a most interesting fellow from America who asked me to take a picture of him jumping off the



Sunrise is the best time to shoot at Sossusvlei, the gate opens about one hour before sunrise. Get there early to avoid the crowds.

trees. He then did the same for me. He said he has pics of himself jumping off things all over the world, and he was

now biking through Africa. Gotta love the characters one meets along the way – they are the spice of travel. ▶





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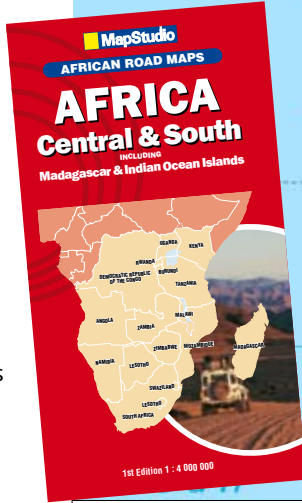
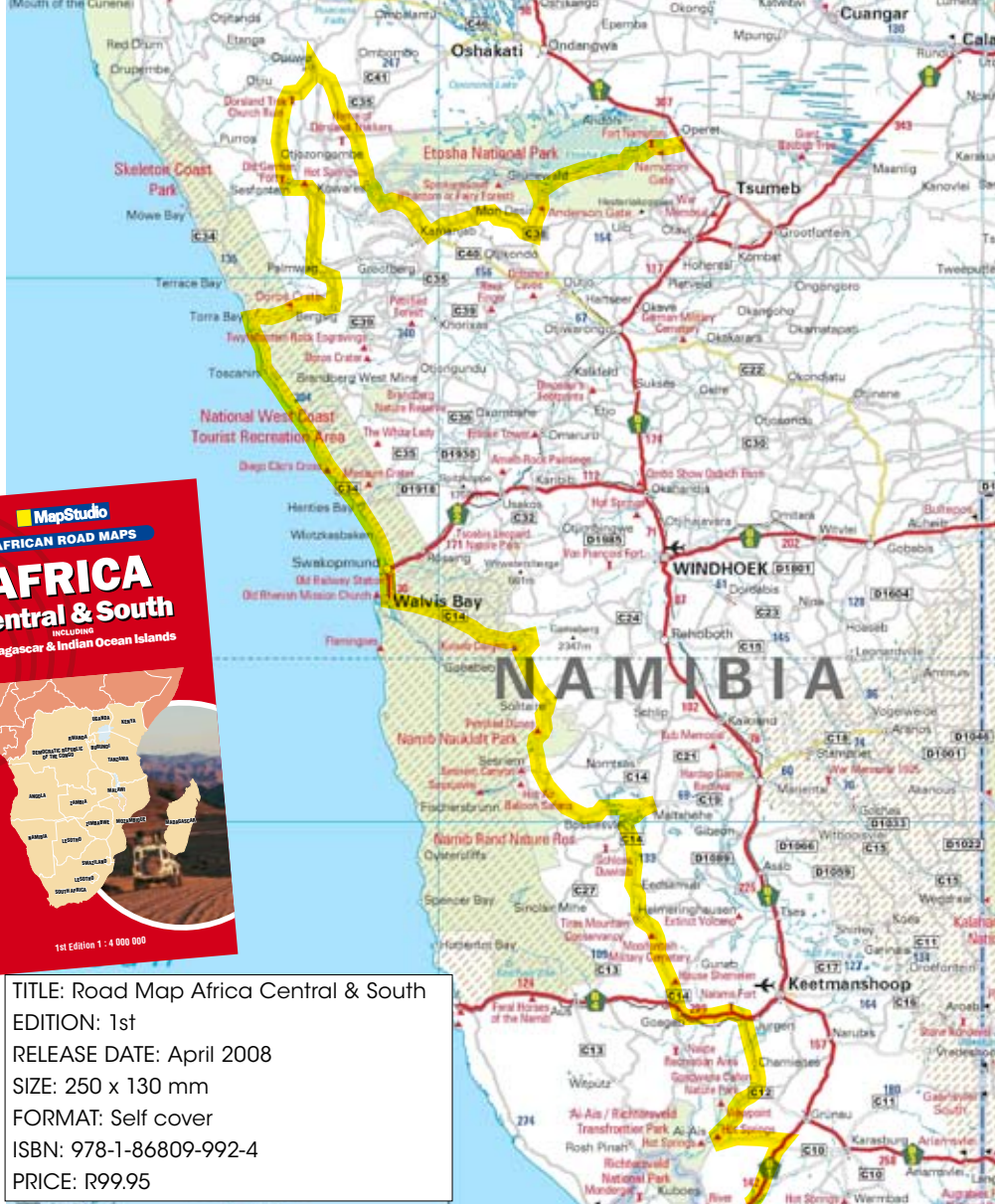
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DAY 16

Bethesda to Fish River Canyon – 500 km
A long day's drive today, but once our convoy stopped at the viewpoint just past Hobas, we knew the drive was well worth it. In front of us lay the world famous Fish River Canyon. I had to sit down while trying to take in what has to be one of the best views in Africa. The canyon is 160 km in length and at places reaches a depth of about 550 metres. As we still had to drive to Canyon Lodge, we didn't have any time to go down and explore the Canyon. The Fish River Canyon hike has just shifted up a few notches on my things-to-do-in-Africa list. One great thing about the lodge is its bar with its interesting assortment of trinkets and pieces of vehicles.



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DAY 17

Fish River Canyon to Springbok – 350 km
As I had a whole day to do a relatively short drive, I went via Ai-Ais, the ending point of the famous hike down the canyon. It was way too hot to get into the hot springs, so I took a short hike into the canyon. It was

we knew the drive was well worth it



a roughly two-hour drive to the tar B1 and then only another 100 km to the border. Once your 4x4 hits the tar and you are less than 1 000 km from home, it starts to feel like your trip is over.

DAY 18

Springbok to Cape Town – 547 km
This was a short half-day's drive and towards the end of it I started to make out the shape of my beloved mountain. We'd been gone for 18 days and covered almost 6 000 km – had this been the ultimate safari? Even if not, it still rated as one of the most memorable. ■

The Fish River Canyon is a must-see if you're in the area.

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