

# BOTSWANA



*Dust and sand is part of the Botswana driving experience*



*Mokoro sunset on the Okavango*

## TRAVEL ADVISORY

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Geographically, Botswana has been described as a shallow, sand-filled basin. To the east the endless plain gives rise to low ranges of hills facing the Limpopo drainage system. The 'basin' slopes towards the north-east while the Makgadikgadi Pans form the lowest part of the country. The land again rises gradually to the west reaching towards the higher areas of Namibia. The arid Kalahari covers roughly two-thirds of the country consisting of vast flat sand plains which, in places, give way to huge dune-fields of various types, most of which have been stabilised by vegetation.

The most remarkable geographic feature of Botswana is the Okavango Delta in the North-west. This immense inland drainage system is formed by the Okavango River, which carries the rain waters from the Angolan highlands through the 80-kilometre panhandle in the north, fanning out into a 15 000 square-kilometre delta. To the east the Delta is connected to the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans by the Boteti River. The pans are the remnants of a giant lake which once covered most of northern Botswana.

The climate over much of the country can be described as semi-arid owing to the long periods of heat and low rainfall. The Kalahari has three seasons - the cool, dry winter from May to September, the hot dry spring of October and November, and the wet summer from the end of November to May. Winters are very pleasant with few really miserable days but the nights

can be cold with temperatures dropping to below freezing. Daytime summer temperatures average 32°C although the hottest time of the year is late spring.

Driving through much of Botswana, one is struck by the apparent uniformity of the vegetation as nine-tenths of the country is covered with savannah grasslands intermingled with either bush or trees. In the extreme north-east, in the Chobe Reserve, the country is dominated by thick deciduous forest. Huge areas of mopane forest occur in much of north-eastern and north-western Botswana. It is, however, in the Okavango Delta that the real diversity of plant life becomes apparent. Water lilies, papyrus, water figs, reeds and grasses all blend to create a lush paradise.

### FAUNA AND FLORA

Botswana is blessed with a fascinating array of animal species ranging from the glamorous 'big five' to small nocturnal creeping things. It is certainly a game-viewer's paradise with approximately 17% of the country demarcated as wildlife areas. Part of the attraction of visiting Botswana, especially the northern reserves, is that the game roams fairly freely and it is not unusual to see antelope or elephant well outside of the reserves.

Wildlife in Botswana competes heavily with cattle and it is unfortunate that the need to protect the cattle industry from foot and mouth disease has resulted in so much of the country being carved up by cattle fences. These fences have in many instances cut off the traditional



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migratory routes which the antelope and their predators have followed. Botswana has been severely criticized by many conservationists for this policy which has resulted in the loss of incalculable numbers of animals. It must, however, be remembered that Botswana was one of the first African countries to proclaim wildlife areas and to institute any kind of protective measures for its game.

The reserves and bushveld areas of Botswana are not only an animal Eden but are also home to some of the most wonderful bird species.

## ROADS

The Botswana road network consists of good quality tar, fast firm gravel or calcrete and slow thick sand, the latter being the case whenever the track leads to remote areas. Well used gravel roads are often badly corrugated.

## CURRENCY

The pula is the unit of currency in Botswana. Mastercard, American Express, Visa, and Diners Club credit cards are accepted in the main centres and in most lodges and hotels. Cash is required for fuel purchases. Banks open at 08h15 and close at 12h45 on weekdays. On Saturdays they open at 08h15 and close at 10h45.

## HEALTH

There are hospitals or clinics in all the main towns and many are manned by aid workers from various international organisations. Standards are reasonable but for complicated illnesses it is advisable to head for a city in South Africa for treatment. Bilharzia exists in many waterways in Botswana, particularly those close to settlements. Malaria is endemic especially in the north and you should consult your doctor regarding appropriate precautions. Bees are found in abundance in the Central Kalahari Reserve so anyone allergic to bee stings must be especially careful in this area. You are unlikely to see tsetse fly owing to the extensive spraying which has taken place in this area over the past decade. The tsetse fly looks very similar to a horse fly and has a painful bite. They often crowd around a vehicle in search of shade and when it is stopped, they emerge and attack the occupants. Being bitten is no guarantee that you will contract sleeping sickness, but should you return home and begin feeling feverish and off-colour be sure to mention being bitten to your doctor so that the possibility of sleeping sickness can be investigated.



*A Range Rover makes its way from Chobe in the north to the Moreme Game Reserve*

## CROSSING THE BORDER

The opening and closing times of border posts vary, but in most cases major points of entry open at 07h00 and close at 20h00. Border posts on minor routes open at 08h00 and close at 16h00.

Visas are not required for citizens of the Republic of South Africa and other Commonwealth countries. Your local Botswanan consular office will advise you on visa requirements for other passport holders.

Each person entering Botswana from the South African Common Customs Area can legally take in:

- six cans of carbonated beverage;
- one litre of beer or spirits;
- one litre of wine;
- 200 cigarettes.

It is important that you declare all new items such as foodstuffs, drinks and cigarettes and, as long as you are within the stated limits, you will not be required to pay duty. Fuel is not taxable if it is carried in auxiliary tanks. Permits to transport meat are no longer required, so transporting meat sufficient for personal consumption is no longer a hassle.

## DOCUMENTS/ESSENTIALS

It is your responsibility to prove that the vehicle you are driving is not stolen. The following documents are mandatory:

- Vehicle registration papers
- A valid driver's license
- Vehicle police clearance certificate

## ARMS

Hunting rifles are the only firearms that can be imported into Botswana. They must be accompanied by import permits obtainable from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, PO Box 131, Gaborone, or the Central Arms Registry, PO Box 516, Gaborone.

## MAPS

Maps of Botswana can be obtained from the Automobile Association, while topographical maps are available from the Department of Surveys and Lands, Private Bag 0037, Gaborone. Excellent touring maps of Botswana and large-scale, highly detailed regional maps with GPS coordinates (Veronica Roodt Shell Maps) are available by mail-order from the Continental 4xForum, tel 021 785 5752.

## PARKS, BOOKINGS AND TOURIST INFORMATION

In the past, when the Botswana Department of Wildlife offered access to their reserves at low prices, South African 4x4s arrived in their hundreds, stripping the landscape of firewood and regrettably leaving behind a serious litter problem. In January 1989 the government raised the prices to figures which, even by world standards, were very high. At first this had the effect of limiting the numbers of foreign visitors in their own vehicles and only the few who could afford it visited the reserves. Now, it seems, everybody in a 4x4 can afford the high prices and the reserves are becoming crowded once again. Another price hike was due in early 2000 to treble the entrance fees to non-residents. At the time of printing (mid 2000) no such increases had been implemented.

Parks and Reserves Reservation Office in Gaborone handles bookings and visitors' enquiries. Any visitor wishing to be

accommodated in the public camping sites in the Kutse Game Reserve, Central Kalahari Game Reserve and Gemsbok National Park (Mabuasehube and Two Rivers) MUST make advanced reservations through:

Parks and Reserves Reservations Office (Gaborone), PO Box 131, Gaborone, Botswana, Tel: (267) 58 0774 Fax: (267) 58 0775 e-mail: DWNPBOTS@GLOBAL.BW

The office is situated in the Government Enclave of Gaborone, off Khama Crescent, opposite the western end of Queens Road.

This office handles enquiries regarding the northern parks: Chobe, Moremi, Nxai Pan and Makgadikgadi. Similarly, the Parks and Reserves Reservations Office in Maun will be able to deal with enquiries for the central and southern parks.



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# CENTRAL AND WESTERN BOTSWANA ISOLATION TRAIL

## Ghanzi District and Ngamiland

### STATUS

Driving skills required: ★★★  
Overlanding skills required: ★★★★★  
Non-guided

### THE ROUTE

Makalamabedi (starting point)  
Central Kalahari Game Reserve –  
Deception Valley  
Maun  
Lake Ngami  
Aha Hills and Drotsky's Cave  
Tsodilo Hills  
Shakawe  
Katima Mulilo (optional)

### SUMMARY

For those who love the bush and more particularly the Kalahari, this trail is a special privilege. It is a combination of sand, heat, encounters with wild animals, sunsets and peace, all orchestrated to provide the enterprising traveller with an unparalleled view of this splendid thirland. This adventurous route requires self-sufficiency and reliable vehicles able to carry a load over difficult conditions. The rewards of isolation and the opportunity to revel in the tranquillity of the Kalahari are the main reasons for tackling this exciting trail.

The route follows the roads and tracks away from the main tourist areas in Botswana by starting in the enigmatic Central Kalahari Game Reserve. From there it travels in a north-westerly direction to the far western edge of Botswana, close to the border with Namibia, only to swing back skirting the western Okavango Delta and up to Shakawe in northern Botswana. Here the mighty Okavango River enters the 80-kilometre long panhandle, feeding the Delta its life-giving water.

Deception Valley in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was made famous by Mark and Delia Owens, a young American couple who spent seven years living in this inhospitable environment. During this time they studied the lion and brown hyena found in the reserve. They tell the fascinating and moving story of their research and the hardships they faced, including living under canvas in the searing heat

with little financial support, in their book 'Cry of the Kalahari' (Fontana, 1984). Reading this delightful story, which has become part of the folklore of the Central Kalahari, is a must if you are planning to visit the Reserve as it will greatly enrich your appreciation of the area.

Following the Central Kalahari, the trail takes you up the western edge of the Okavango Delta to Shakawe. En route to Shakawe you will pass Lake Ngami, the Aha Hills and Drotsky's Cave, all challenging and rewarding destinations.

One of the highlights of this trail is a visit to the mystical Tsodilo Hills where you will see some of the most impressive Bushman art to be found anywhere. Finally, Shakawe represents a welcome break from roughing it in the bush as camping facilities, water, and the opportunity of some good fishing bring this trail to a close.

From Shakawe, the Okavango, Moremi and Chobe Trail can be followed. You can start this trail at Kasane in northern Botswana which is reached by driving into Namibia, along the Caprivi Strip to Katima Mulilo and then on to Kasane. Alternatively you can enter Namibia and travel westwards towards Kaudom Game Reserve or Etosha National Park.

### DIFFICULTY AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Wilderness safari experience is essential for anyone heading off into these remote areas of Botswana where an accident, breakdown or illness can have serious consequences.

Well-equipped tool and first-aid kits must be carried and it is important that someone in your party understands the mechanics of the vehicles and is able to undertake fairly extensive repairs, as you will be far from help in the event of a breakdown. Each vehicle should carry a stock of vital spares. You will need to be totally self-sufficient, carrying food, water and fuel for the entire trip. The main challenges include wild animals, heavy sand and navigation. Driving challenges you can expect to encounter include very heavy sand on narrow single-lane tracks. Oncoming vehicles can pose a problem as, in some parts, the sand is too thick and the tracks too deep to allow steering control.

Your vehicle must be in good working order before attempting this trail. Make sure that your vehicle's suspension can take the weight of the extra water and fuel you will need to carry.

### NUMBER OF VEHICLES REQUIRED

A minimum of two reliable vehicles equipped to carry a heavy load are required. Ideally one vehicle should be fitted with a winch. A high-lift

jack and a spade are also essential. Sand ladders are not essential but will aid in the event of bogging down.

### RECOMMENDED TIME OF YEAR

The cooler months between March and August are the best times to visit these Kalahari areas. The summer months are hot with temperatures often well into the forties. October is the hottest month of the year during which the Central Kalahari Reserve in particular is unbearable for all but the strongest.

**MINIMUM TIME REQUIRED** Three weeks to complete the full trail. Trail could be reduced to two weeks.

## THE TRAIL

The trail begins in the dusty little town of Makalamabedi, which is located south-east of Maun on the southern side of the Boteti River.

### THE CENTRAL KALAHARI RESERVE

To the credit of the Botswana government, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was proclaimed not only for the preservation of wildlife, but also as a refuge and hunting grounds for the San Bushmen. When the reserve was proclaimed an estimated 8 000 San lived in the reserve in the traditional hunter-gatherer way of life. During lean times, the number reduced to less than 800. Today, very few still live in their traditional way. Most have moved closer to the towns leaving the 51 800 square kilometre Central Kalahari Game Reserve as a wildlife sanctuary. For this reason the reserve opened to tourists as late as 1990.

The Central Kalahari has all the ingredients which make the Kalahari a wonderful, awe-inspiring place, with the added advantage of being extremely remote. Large concentrations of game can be found in the reserve, but timing is critical as only during periods when surface water is available does the game remain in the vicinity. The absence of large herds of animals in no way detracts from the majesty of this isolated corner of the earth and therefore should not influence your decision to visit this reserve.

The most popular parts of the reserve are the far north including Deception and the far south where travellers enter via the Khutis Reserve.

### DECEPTION VALLEY

Deception Valley can be described as a long pan-like valley floor which winds its way be-

tween rows of dunes covered with dense thorn scrub. 'Tree islands' of sundry shapes and sizes, ranging from occasional thick groves to scattered single acacia, beautify the valley floor. We visited the area in March and, while camped under what Mark and Delia Owens marked on the map in their book as Tree Island, painted a water-colour of the lone acacia standing guard over our camp. The midday temperatures reached 42°C and the wind was so dry that the colours dried on the palette before we could apply them to the paper.

After just a few days, the titbblers, ground scraper thrushes and scalyfeathered finches became remarkably tame and were quite happy to hop around our feet. To our delight we were also visited by a crimson bou bou which must be one of the most dramatic Kalahari birds with its startling red and black plumage that stands out boldly against the parched grey backdrop.

At the time of our visit, Botswana and the subcontinent was in the grip of a severe drought. Life in the reserve, already difficult for the remaining animals, had become intolerable. We were very conscious that we were the intruders and we made every effort to minimise the effect of our presence on the wildlife. This was brought home to us poignantly on a late afternoon game drive as we approached a small clump of trees where a herd of springbok were grazing. Two young jackals saw us and took fright. They sprinted away across the open pan, and ran for what must have been almost half a kilometre. It occurred to us that this run must have wasted valuable energy as there was little to eat and no standing water anywhere. The Central Kalahari Reserve, while a special destination, will not welcome you benevolently and you will always feel a stranger here. This sense of remoteness and 'un-belonging' is what makes it so enticing.

A map is available from the game scout's camp highlighting the major land-marks, the road which runs the length of Deception Valley and a number of existing tracks through the reserve that can be used for game drives. There are no vehicle tracks other than the few that have been created by the Owens and the game scouts. Please keep it that way. Too many wilderness destinations have already been marred by vehicle tracks. Throughout Namibia, the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans to Baine's Baobabs, in fact everywhere where the rules governing visitors and their vehicles are slack, the land is scarred by vehicle tracks. This is not yet so in Deception Valley. Keep it that way by sticking to the existing tracks.

## CAMPING IN THE CENTRAL KALAHARI RESERVE

There are several official camping sites in the reserve although none are equipped with facilities, and visitors tend just to choose a nice place and settle down for the night. Do not make new tracks when choosing a place to camp.

## THE ROUTE TO THE CENTRAL KALAHARI RESERVE

Makalamabedi is 60 kilometres east of Maun and about 20 kilometres south of the main Nata-Maun road. The turn-off is signposted. From Makalamabedi take the southern cut-line which runs in a straight line for some 70 kilometres alongside a cattle fence. As you reach the northern edge of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve you will come upon a T-junction and the first buildings seen for some time. Turn left. A gate-keeper lives here and will open the gate for you. The gate, which is to your right, may be opened if there is no one in attendance.

The track continues in a straight line and runs alongside the reserve boundary. The entrance to the reserve will appear on your right and is well signposted. The game scout camp where you will be charged an entrance and camping fee, is inside the park, not at the main gate entrance. This is probably due to the lack of an underground water source at the entrance point. Ask the park rangers for maps and bird checklists.

The development of the area in recent years has been fairly intense so these directions may have become slightly outdated. If you are in doubt ask one of the locals.

## GPS CO-ORDINATES – CENTRAL KALAHARI

Should you wish to continue southwards into the depths of the central Kalahari, see the GPS co-ordinates table at the end of this trail. These GPS co-ordinates, recorded by the Botswana Defence Force, were kindly supplied by Richard Giller of the Safari Off-Road Driving Centre.

## MAUN

After your sojourn into the Central Kalahari Reserve make your way to Maun, the shortest route being via Makalamabedi. Maun is the principal tourist centre for the Ngamiland region

including the Okavango Delta. Restock your food, water, drinks and fuel in Maun before heading off into the wilderness once again. Maun, and all it offers in the way of shops, facilities and accommodation is discussed in detail in the Okavango, Moreme trail in this chapter.

## LAKE NGAMI

With Maun behind you, the trail heads off towards the erstwhile great Lake Ngami. I had long been seduced by the idea of visiting Lake Ngami but, after many years of travel in Botswana, had not yet been in a position to do so. I had read about a broad, shallow lake teeming with fish and dense populations of pelicans and flamingos. In 1988 I organised my first expedition there and as I had been warned, Lake Ngami was not what I expected it to be. In 1849, David Livingstone lovingly described the lake as 'a fine looking sheet of water', but that year it was dry. Livingstone's water had nourished a sea of yellow flowers which were covered with millions of giant black crickets.

Once we had turned off the main road, we found ourselves travelling on a narrow track between dense thorn bush. A cart pulled by two donkeys appeared in front of us. Because finding reverse gear on a vehicle is a little easier than on a donkey cart we gave right of way and had to reverse about half a kilometre to let them pass. Later, after hours of wandering around without finding the lake, Bob, who was to become our guide, unexpectedly appeared out of the bush and offered his services. Without Bob we would not have realised that the yellow flowers were once part of the lake bed. After giving us a guided tour, Bob invited us to stay at his home. Fifty metres from his family kraal, under a huge Jackalberry tree, we set up camp. He introduced us to his family who collectively brought us a large bucket of water and a bundle of firewood.

The following morning we gave Bob a lift to Sehithwa, and he directed us along a short cut through dense thorn scrub. No wonder there are so many tracks in the area. Fortunately though, most of them lead to the Lake.

There is evidence that Lake Ngami once covered 1800 square kilometres but, even in the



time of Livingstone, it had already shrunk to under 800 square kilometres. Now it is less than 250 square kilometres. The reasons for the lake's diminishing size are not clearly understood. The lake is fed by the Thaoge River, the source of which is the overflow from the tectonically unstable Okavango Delta, flowing into the western side of the lake. It is believed that over the past 1000 years the earth's crust has tilted just enough to divert waters that would have flowed down the Thaoge to some other course. When the rains in Angola, which feed the Okavango, have been exceptionally good, water still finds its way down the Thaoge and into the lake. It is at these times that Lake Ngami is at its most impressive and the water can reach a depth of up to two metres. During these times the fish, especially barbel, miraculously appear bringing thousands of aquatic birds with them. Unless you are lucky, Lake Ngami represents an interesting interlude on this trail but by no means a highlight. If you have time constraints, you may wish to pass it altogether.

#### THE ROUTE TO LAKE NGAMI

Head out of Maun in a westerly direction along the main road. Lake Ngami is 90 kilometres from Maun along a tarred road. About 65 kilometres from Maun you will come to the village of Toteng which offers a choice of two routes that will take you to the lake. You can either turn left at Toteng along a road which crosses the lake river, or you can continue past Toteng. Regardless of which route you choose to take, you must travel for about 15 kilometres from Toteng before you follow any of the many tracks you will find leading towards the lake. You will soon discover that there are a multitude of tracks heading in all directions around Lake Ngami which can be confusing. You will therefore need a good sense of direction and a bit of common sense to aid you in your navigation.

If you chose the left turn at Toteng, you must take a track to the right which will lead you to the southern shores. If you elect to continue straight, you must take a track to the left. This will lead you to a place on the northern shores of the lake. The network of tracks around the lake is complicated but, with perseverance, you will find the shore. In places the bush is thick and thorny, so fold in your wing mirrors. During rain these tracks get muddy, so be sure to have debogging equipment on hand. Finding a local to guide you to the lake's shore is a good idea, as one can become lost in the thick thorn scrub.



*There are no designated camping sites in the Lake Ngami area, so find a tree and settle down. If you can find a headman, it is good manners to ask permission. An answer in the positive is often accompanied with a bucket of cold fresh water and children to watch you set up camp*

#### MAUN – SHAKAWE

The road from Maun is tarred all the way to Shakawe so, unlike during the 1980s when the route, especially during the wet season, could take two days of driving through sand and mud, it is now less than a day's drive. The main road is fairly uninteresting and at no time does it feel like one is travelling close to the waters of the Okavango. En route we will move off the beaten track and visit the Aha Hills, Drotsky's Cave and Tsodilo Hills.

#### AHA HILLS

This is one of the remotest parts of Botswana accessible by vehicle. The hills, close to the western border with Namibia, lie in a huge sea of sand dunes (the largest in the Kalahari) which stretch across this section of the Kalahari deep into Namibia.

Initially, you are unlikely to recognise these as dunes as they are totally overgrown with grass and trees. However, the thick sand you will need to plough through and the heavy fuel consumption you will suffer along the track to Aha Hills will soon convince you of their presence.

Your first glimpse of the Aha Hills will come after cresting a particularly high dune from where you will see the hills away towards the west. Before reaching Aha Hills you will, however, need to cross one more very distinctive feature – the huge, dry valley of the ancient Kwihabe River. The sheer expanse of this valley, which must have carried an enormous volume of water at some time in the distant past, seems incongruous in an area with such low, erratic rainfall.



The Aha Hills form a dolomite, limestone and marble plateau some 245 square kilometres in extent from where you can view the never-ending Kalahari bushveld stretched out in all directions. This is a wonderful place to relax, knowing that you and your party are alone in one of the most isolated, untouched wilderness areas in the world. The only sounds you will hear come from the birds, insects and barking geckos who inhabit the hills in large numbers. In fact the name 'Aha' is said to be a corruption of the San people's onomatopoeic name for the barking gecko.

Isolation, peace, Kalahari sunsets and glorious birds are not the only compelling features at the Aha Hills. They have an additional appeal because they are one of the few places left in Southern Africa which have not been extensively explored and documented. They are enigmatic and the question that most visitors ask is, 'What are the chances of finding caves, similar to Drotsky's Cave, here at Aha Hills?' After all, the geography of the areas is the same. Thus far no caves have been found, but two large sink holes have come to light. The holes, about 15 kilometres apart, measure approximately 55 and 35 metres deep respectively. The areas are unfenced and are potentially dangerous. It is not recommended that you attempt to explore them.

### CAMPING AT AHA HILLS

There are no designated camping sites or facilities of any kind at Aha Hills. You are therefore free to choose a campsite wherever it pleases you, making this one of the nicest places to visit. This freedom of movement is what makes Botswana such a special place. Conservation must, however, be a prime consideration when at Aha Hills. Avoid driving for miles across the plains in search of 'the perfect tree' under which to camp, as this will damage the fragile landscape.

Although the Aha Hills are remote, there are two villages in the vicinity if you need to make contact with the outside world. The first, Xai Xai, is 15 kilometres to the south of the hills where you can buy very basic commodities. The second, Dobe, is 60 kilometres to the north. Water is available at both of these villages but no fuel can be purchased. Once again it must be stressed that you need to be totally self-sufficient on this trail.

### THE ROUTE TO AHA HILLS

From Lake Ngami return to the main road to Seihitwa and Tsao. Approximately 1.5 kilometres north of Tsao take the left-hand turn. The sign

at this junction has fallen over, so go slowly and keep a sharp lookout. From here the road deteriorates and the heavy sand makes the going slow. Expect to take at least five hours to cover the 146 kilometres to the next intersection. Just prior to the intersection you will see a panoramic view of the vast open Kalahari to the west. To the north-west are the Aha Hills. Follow the track for a further 30 kilometres and you will reach the hills.

### DROTSKY'S CAVE

Drotsky's Cave is about 50 kilometres north of the Aha Hills and, not surprisingly, it too is carved out of dolomite, limestone and marble and is set in the undulating Kalahari dunes bedecked with scrub. The Kalahari hides her secrets well, and while slogging along the thick sand track which runs next to the Kwihabe River bed you will probably wonder just what it is that makes this cave so special. On arriving at the two low ridges of sand-covered rock which house the cave, you may even initially be disappointed. But enchantment awaits you inside the cave where you will catch a glimpse of a spectacular curtain of stalactites – the first of many wonders you will enjoy in this, nature's unspoilt treasure chamber.

There are two entrances to the cave, each of which opens onto a separate but interconnected system. The first system, or cavern, lies on the same level as the valley floor, while the second section can be reached after climbing about 12 metres. Both entrances were formed through the collapse of the cavern roof. As you enter the cave you may feel somewhat claustrophobic as the roof is low and you will need to pick your way along a boulder-strewn path which leads into the low-roofed cavern. A word of warning – like all caves, Drotsky's Cave has its population of creatures that have adapted to life in the darkness. Your first introduction to the most common of these animals will come as you step cautiously into the first cavern – bat guano. The caves have a large and highly vocal bat population. Bats, while perhaps creepy are, contrary to popular myth, harmless.

There is much to see in the caves with their maze of passages leading you to frozen waterfalls, flowstones of various subtle colours, great and sometimes bizarre rock formations, stalactites, inlets, apertures and hallways. While exploring the caves bear in mind that it was water that carved, dissolved and formed these magnificent chambers and formations. This fact is even more astonishing in view of the dry, arid country through which one drives to reach

Drotsky's Cave. To us the true appeal of Drotsky's Cave is that it is a wonderfully unspoilt and uncommercialised place. There are no artificial lights, no piped music, and there is no one selling popcorn positioned at the entrance to detract from its simple beauty.

It is worth spending a day here exploring Drotsky's Cave. The caves are, however, totally devoid of light. It is therefore essential that you not only take torches with you, but also an emergency light source such as matches and a candle which you should carry in your pocket in the event of a torch failing. Be extremely cautious. The caves are not on the prime tourist route; in fact they were only 'discovered' in 1932 when explorer Martinus Drotsky was taken there by a Bushman (although the caves were probably well known to the San people long before this time). If you do have a problem or an accident it may be many weeks before someone passes that way again. There is always a chance of getting lost while exploring caves, but if you keep a cool head and have sufficient light with you, you are unlikely to stay lost for very long. If you wish to photograph the caves you will need a powerful flash. You will also need to protect your camera gear from the thick, invasive dust found in the caves.

#### CAMPING AT DROTSKY'S CAVE

Once again self-sufficiency is the order of the day as there is no water available here. As far as camping is concerned, the same principles apply as at Aha Hills.

#### THE ROUTE TO DROTSKY'S CAVE

To get to Drotsky's Cave from Aha Hills you will need to drive back along the main track until you reach a signpost with the Botswana Museum Zebra logo indicating a left turn. From here you will travel for 26 kilometres along the river valley to Drotsky's Cave. The sand here is particularly thick.

#### TSODILO HILLS

Nothing can prepare you for Tsodilo Hills. These pitted, eroded rocks which rise majestically from the dense bush and endless sand are unique. This is a mystical place with great spiritual significance for the San people, who regard it as a resting place of the spirits of the deceased. It is worthwhile reading Laurens Van Der Post's *The Lost World of the Kalahari* before your visit. Van Der Post's sympathetic handling of the mystical and spiritual nature of Tsodilo Hills will give you a greater appreciation of this

special place. His description of the approach to Tsodilo Hills perfectly sums up the effect these hills have on the visitor:

*"By eleven o'clock the highest of the hills rose above the blue of distance, and between us and them lay a bush of shimmering peacock leaves. After so many weeks in flat land and level swamp, the sudden lift of the remote hills produced an immediate emotion, and one experienced forthwith that urge to devotion which once made hills and mountains sacred to man who believed that, wherever the earth soared upwards to meet the sky, one was in the presence of an act of the spirit as much as a feature of geology. I thought of the psalmist's 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help', and marvelled that the same instinct had conducted Samutchose to the hills to pray."*

Tsodilo is made up of four hills of micaceous quartzite schists lying roughly in a line. The largest, called by the San 'the Male', is a bare rock rising some 300 metres above the surrounding bush. Its companion is called 'the Female' and the next in size, 'the Child'. The smallest hill is unnamed. Due to its soaring height above the flat Kalahari, it is the Male that you will see first as you approach the hills.

An important part of your explorations will undoubtedly be centred on the more than 2 700 magnificent rock paintings which adorn the sides of the hills, most of which are on the Female rock. These masterpieces, some exquisitely preserved, tell the story of life amongst the San people. You will quickly gain an appreciation of their value systems and the harmony in which they lived with the animals in their environment. The majority of the paintings are concerned with animals, many of which, like the rhino, are no longer found in this part of Botswana, while others show the skill of the San hunter. Please do not tamper with them in any way. Do not throw liquid onto them to highlight the colours as this severely damages them.

You will probably see a small San encampment near the hills which may be inhabited at the time of your visit, as the San people have been living near their sacred hills for thousands of years. The San are not the only people to live around the hills; the Hambukushu, a Bantu people, also have a village near the Male hill. The road to Tsodilo will lead you to this village where you will be met by a representative from the museum who will direct you to the field office about 5 kilometres away.

There are six walking trails, three of which have signposts, and a detailed brochure which leads you through each feature. To walk the

other three, I recommend taking a Hambukushu or San guide to assist you with your explorations.

### CAMPING AT TSODILO HILLS

The National Museum, Monuments and Art Gallery of Botswana have established four campsites at Tsodilo. Campsites close to the hills have running water but those further away have no facilities other than a fireplace. There is now a nominal fee for visiting the area.

### THE ROUTE TO TSODILO HILLS

The turn-off to Tsodilo is a few kilometres before Sepopa. The track is unusually firm and passes through thick mopane bush which will brush the side of your vehicle. It is a good idea to fold in your wing mirrors at the turn-off. A little after halfway you enter the dune country. Seen from the air, the rolling dunes give the impression that the land is like a giant ocean frozen in an instant. Line upon line of ancient sand dunes, now permanently established by the vegetation growing on them, stretch out into the distance. The road through this vast dune field flattens and hardens in the trough of each wave and as each summit is reached so the sand gets thicker, until at the crest, it takes low gear to get you through. From the turn-off at Sepopa expect to take about three hours to reach Tsodilo. One hour or so before reaching Tsodilo you will see a blue-black rock rising above the trees. This is 'the Male' hill.

### SHAKAWA

The Shakawe area, being a mix of riverine bush, savannah and semi-desert, is a mecca for bird-watchers. It marks the start of the Okavango panhandle which channels the waters of the Okavango River between thick, meandering banks of papyrus for approximately 80 kilometres before it opens up into the vast fan-shaped Delta.

Shakawe offers a delightful respite from roughing it in the bush, as you can relax on the banks of the swiftly flowing river and indulge in some tiger fishing and bird-watching.

### CAMPING AT SHAKAWA

There are a few lodges in the Shakawe area, but the one with which we are most familiar is the Shakawe Fishing Camp. It is set on the banks of the Okavango River and offers pleasantly civilised camping and good tiger fishing. The wooded camp has a bar and open-air ablution facilities.

Petrol and diesel are normally available at Etosha approximately 288km from Maun, but should not be relied on. It is advisable to carry enough fuel to get you to Andara in the Caprivi.

### DESTINATIONS FROM SHAKAWA

Shakawe ends this trail. It is however an excellent place from which to head off to Northern Namibia to Etosha or Kaudom Game Reserve, if you are in the mood for more isolation. Alternatively, head east across northern Botswana via Katima Mulilo towards Kasane and the Chobe River.

### YOUR GUIDE TO CONSERVATION

- Do not make tracks – only follow existing ones.
- Leave nothing behind you – take all your litter out with you.
- Do not feed any wild animals.
- During dry seasons, approach animals with care. Avoid causing animals to take fright and run. They conserve their bodily resources by resting during the day.
- Do not break, damage or remove any artifacts, stones or rock formations at any of the sites visited, especially at Drotsky's Cave.
- Do not tamper with, or wet any of the paintings at Tsodilo Hills.

### AVAILABILITY OF FACILITIES AND SAFARI SUPPLIES

Makalamabedi: Water  
Central Kalahari Game Reserve: Visitors must be totally self-sufficient.

Maun: Just about everything you're likely to need.

Lake Ngami and Aha Hills: Visitors must be totally self-sufficient.

Drosky's Cave and Tsodilo Hills: Visitors must be totally self-sufficient.

Shakawe: Camping, accommodation, fuel (not reliable), liquor, soft-drinks, foodstuffs, water.

### MAPS AND BOOKS

The best map for use on this trail is Veronica Roodt's Shell Botswana map. The best book is Mike Main's Botswana Visitors' Guide. They are both available from most 4x4 outlets and by mail order by calling the 4xForum on 021 785 5752.

*Kalahari. Life's variety in Dune and Delta* by Mike Main. Published by Southern.

*The Cry of the Kalahari* by Mark and Delia Owens. Published by Fontana 1985.

## GPS-CO-ORDINATES CENTRAL AND WESTERN BOTSWANA ISOLATION TRAIL - WGS84 DATUM

Waypoint	insert user wpt	
Khutsi border (TshilTwane Pan)	23 19 22 S	24 24 15 E
Khwakhwe Pan	23 14 05 S	24 22 73 E
Khankhe Junction (236 to Xade)	23 11 19 S	24 19 11 E
Kukama Village	23 06 92 S	24 15 43 E
Mothomelo – Xade – Molapo junction	22 38 45 S	24 10 04 E
Molapo Village	21 58 10 S	23 55 88 E
Deception Valley junction	21 24 33 S	23 47 81 E
Sunday Pan junction	21 24 24 S	23 41 62 E
Matswera Wildlife camp	21 11 24 S	23 41 62 E
Letiatau Waterhole	21 36 57 S	32 36 96 E
Xade Wildlife camp (village airstrip)	22 20 36 S	23 00 49 E
Xade turn west / Khutsi turn south	22 22 44 S	23 50 20 E
Mahurushele Pan/ junction to Khankhe	23 17 69 S	24 21 80 E
Khankhe Pan	23 13 75 S	24 21 33 E
Heavy-duty junction	23 09 66 S	24 17 94 E
Kukama – Kikao junction	23 04 53 S	24 10 21 E
Mothomelo village	22 49 94 S	24 09 84 E
Kalahari transverse cutline – Molopo junction	21 24 54 S	24 10 82 E
Owen's airstrip	21 25 72 S	23 48 35 E
Sunday Pan	21 20 60 S	23 40 73 E
Piper Pan	21 46 70 S	23 12 49 E
Xaka junction	22 22 24 S	23 30 54 E
Tsodilo Hills turnoff from main road (Sepupa)	18 45 22 S	22 10 77 E
Tsodilo Hills turnoff from main road ( Somachima Cordon Fence)	18 29 30 S	21 55 00 E
Tsodilo Hills turnoff from main road (cutline)	18 36 02 S	21 59 90 E
Drotsky's Caves turnoff from main road(11 km north of Tsao)	20 06 66 S	22 22 30 E
Drotsky's Caves turnoff from main road(Nokaneng)	19 39 60 S	22 11 00 E

# KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

Ghanzi District

MINIMUM TIME REQUIRED

3 days

## THE TRAIL

### STATUS

Driving skills required: ★★

Overlanding skills required: ★★★

Non-guided

### THE ROUTE

Botswana

Gaborone (starting point)

Molepolole (refuel)

Khutse Game Reserve

### SUMMARY

The Khutse Game Reserve lies at the southern base of the Central Kalahari Reserve in Kalahari Pan country. Four-wheel drive is required to negotiate the thick sand tracks on route to the reserve. Visitors must be self-sufficient as there are no facilities.

### DIFFICULTY AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Safari experience is necessary due to the remoteness of the area. Self-sufficiency is required and all supplies, including water, must be carried. Difficult sand driving conditions may be encountered, therefore some experience in thick sand is advisable. Close campsite encounters with wild animals, especially brown hyena, are also likely.

### NUMBER OF VEHICLES REQUIRED

Experienced travellers may safely take a single vehicle but for novices, two vehicles are advised. If intending to explore further north into the Central Kalahari Reserve, sand ladders, spades and a high-lift jack are mandatory as the sand conditions in the southern quarter of the reserve are particularly bad.

### RECOMMENDED TIME OF YEAR

The summer months are hot and temperatures often reach 40°C. It is, however, during these months, when there is a likelihood of rain, that the game – including predators – concentrate in the area. This is therefore the best time to visit for game-viewing. October is the hottest month when the Kalahari should be avoided. The cool winter months are always a pleasant time to visit, but these southern sections will be very dry and the only game you are likely to see will be hardy gemsbok, springbok and perhaps brown hyena. From April to September you can expect the nights to be cold.

### KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

With an area of approximately 2500 square kilometres, Khutse is one of Botswana's smallest game reserves. It is set in typical Kalahari pan country where you can expect sweeping grasslands of tawny hues in winter and delicate greens when the rain comes. During years of good rain and standing water, a wide range of antelope can be seen wandering across the pans or grazing on the grasslands. The game population in Khutse relies on the availability of water, so timing is crucial. Between December and March there is usually water in the pans and visitors are frequently blessed with sightings of not only antelope, but predators such as lion, leopard and cheetah. Bird-life in the reserve is excellent, again particularly so when standing water remains.

We have witnessed some of the most memorable wildlife sights when visiting the Khutse Reserve. One moonless night we camped out on our own near Khutse 2 Pan and while preparing our evening meal of lamb chops over our open fire, we felt a strange presence. Gwynn and I both felt an eerie sensation that we were being watched. I grabbed the Maglite and scanned the bush around us. In the beam of light we saw seven pairs of greenish eyes. Gradually the eyes moved around us in a broad arc. At first we had no idea who the eyes belonged to. Faint shapes soon began to materialise out of the inky blackness into the beam of the torch. With rising excitement we recognised seven brown hyena, doing exactly what the text books say they do not do. Instead of the solitary animals we had read about, this was a pack. During the next hour they moved in a broad arc around us. Once they had circled us completely they moved off into the night.

The following day we witnessed a Kalahari thunderstorm. About 20 mm of rain fell in the 30 minutes. Afterwards while walking on the pans our feet became so heavy with thick, cloying grey mud that we struggled to move. With the consistency of modelling putty, the mud had stuck to our shoes until it layered some five centimetres thick. We curtailed our walk and returned to the pan edge. From there we watched the passing springbok coping with the same problem. It was very comical to see the springbok walking with large round lumps bigger than tennis balls clinging to their hooves.

Khutse is a very relaxing destination. Most of the tracks are firm and there is plenty of opportunity for game-viewing.

### CAMPING AT KHUTSE

Full National Parks tariffs are charged. No facilities other than 26 demarcated campsites have been provided. Moreswa Pan, the furthest large pan from the entrance gate, is the most popular camping area, due largely to the concentrations of game.

### THE ROUTE TO KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

From Gaborone head for Molepolole, 52 kilometres away on a narrow tar road. From Molepolole continue in a north-westerly direction to Letlhakeng where the tar ends. From Letlhakeng continue along the sand track to the Reserve entrance via the villages of Khudumalapye, Salajwe and Kungwane. This road is sandy and can be treacherous, keep your speed down and stay alert. During one trip to the area, on a single two-kilometre stretch of road, we came upon a Land Rover Forward Control lying on its side. The driver told me that he had hit a very soft patch and although his speed was low, it was enough to induce a spin, which resulted in the vehicle toppling over.

The road seems to deteriorate the closer you get to Khutse. This is largely caused by 4X4 vehicles not engaging four-wheel drive and the occasional high two-wheel drive vehicle push-

ing its way through the sand and spinning its rear wheels. This ploughing and spinning creates sand ridges which make driving on such tracks like riding a roller coaster. Keep your speed down or you may find yourself airborne.

The distance from Molepolole to Khutse is approximately 168 kilometres.

### GPS INFO – KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

Should you wish to continue northwards into the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, GPS co-ordinates for the entire reserve can be found in the section in this chapter, 'Botswana Isolation Trail'.

### MAPS AND BOOKS

The best map for use on this trail is Veronica Roodt's Shell 1: 750 000 Botswana map. The best book is Mike Main's *Botswana Visitors' Guide*.

### GUIDE TO CONSERVATION

- Stick to the existing tracks.
- Take out all of your rubbish. We suggest you take a wooden block and a two-kilogram hammer to crush all your food and drink cans, thus making your rubbish more manageable.

### AVAILABILITY OF FACILITIES AND SAFARI SUPPLIES

Molepolole: Petrol, diesel, liquor, water.  
Khutse: Visitors must be totally self-sufficient.  
Water (salty and do not rely on the supply)

GPS-CO-ORDINATES KHUTSI GAME RESERVE - WGS84 DATUM			
Waypoint	insert user wpt		
Wildlife Camp (Airstrip)		23 21 25 S	24 30 37 E
Khutse 1 Pan		23 20 58 S	24 30 62 E
Motailane Pan		23 19 52 S	24 27 44 E
Molose Waterhole		23 22 85 S	24 11 06 E
Makuakalobe Pan		23 35 10 S	24 03 71 E
Lonaka Pan		23 40 78 S	24 03 30 E
Senopi Pan		23 40 95 S	24 04 72 E
Tsunye Pan		23 38 51 S	24 15 60 E
Sutswane Pan		23 20 75 S	24 33 60 E
Khutse 2 Pan		23 20 54 S	24 29 50 E
Khutse/Central K G R border (Tshilwane Pan)		23 19 22 S	24 24 15 E
Moreswa Pan		23 33 70 S	24 06 03 E
Gwia Pan		23 25 00 S	24 26 27 E
Ngohowe Pan		23 39 00 S	24 05 55 E
Sehohu Pan		23 39 51 S	24 10 60 E

# MAKGADIKGADI PANS

## Central District - Botswana

### STATUS

Driving skills required: ★★

Overlanding skills required: ★★★

Non-guided

### ROUTE

Nata, Makgadikgadi Salt Pans including Kubu and Kokonje Islands and the Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve, Nxai Pan and Baines' baobabs.

### SUMMARY

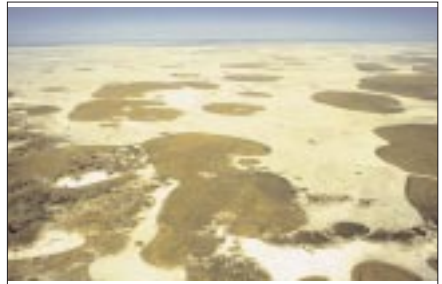
The Makgadikgadi Salt Pans offer a rare opportunity to participate in genuine off-roading; driving where there are no roads or tracks, navigating using compass and GPS and enjoying total solitude. This does come at a price however, as on some sections of the trail travelling in a single vehicle is definitely not recommended. Please take special precautions against the sun when in this area. Sunstroke is a serious threat on the pans as at the hottest time of the day the reflected heat becomes unbearable. I have been bogged down on Sowa Pan attempting to get to Kokonje Island at midday in March and it was a stressful experience. Dehydration set in fast and after an hour we realised that we had one last chance to get the vehicle out before being forced to build a shelter from the sun and wait for nightfall when we would walk to the mainland and replenish our water supplies. Fortunately we managed to free the vehicle and did not need to put our plan into action. How we would have carried the water back to our stricken vehicle is a problem which only occurs to me now!

### DIFFICULTY AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Previous off-road or safari experience is required, particularly in the area of vehicle recovery, as challenges on this trail include the possibility of bogging down. By following the advice on driving on salt pans given here your chances of bogging down are reduced. Bogging down on the pans is unpleasant as a vehicle can become extremely difficult to extricate even with other winch-equipped vehicles at hand.

### NUMBER OF VEHICLES REQUIRED

Two vehicles, both able to accept a high-lift jack front and back, are essential. If this is not the case, the destinations on the trail are limited to Kubu Island and Nata Sanctuary. Kokonje Island should then be regarded as out of reach.



*Aerial views of Sowa Pan (top) and Ntwetwe Pan (lower)*

### RECOMMENDED TIME OF YEAR

The best time to visit is in the cool months between March and August. In March much of the pans are still unnavigable due to water and mud. The bird-life in the Nata Sanctuary is the most abundant from February to March. The heat in October and November is unbearable.

### TIME REQUIRED

One week is ideal to get the most out of the pans.

## THE TRAIL

### NATA

The trail starts at the village of Nata, an ideal base from which to explore the Pans. When approaching from the West, the earth changes from the familiar rusty, red Kalahari sand to a pale grey. Cattle, goats and donkeys are also very much in evidence the closer one gets to Nata, so drive with care.

Nata is a wonderful place to 'break in' those people not accustomed to bush living. It abounds in wildlife, most of it very small and al-

though fairly harmless, somewhat scary to the uninitiated. Once, while camped at Nata Lodge, we were infested by hordes of evil-looking spider-like creatures known as solifuges. The pale yellow solifuge is particularly hideous as its legs rise up to well above its body height and two hairy pedipalps hang down in front of its face probing the air space ahead. These nocturnal hunters run at high speed in search of food between the campers, raising screams from men and women alike.

Nata has grown rapidly in the past ten years and now has reasonable shops and equipped fuel stations. Nata boasts a motel, but I recommend either of the two camping sites just outside Nata, both with good facilities. These are Nata Lodge and Nata Sanctuary.

### NATA SANCTUARY

Nata Sanctuary is the first of the two camping sites you will come across as you travel from Francistown towards Nata. The Sanctuary is situated on the left hand side of the road, 170 km from Francistown. At the entrance to Nata Sanctuary is an administration hut and a brick wall entrance. The camping site is equipped with running water, the hot water being heated by solar panels. The campsite is very pleasant, but unfortunately too close to the main road, so noise is a problem, particularly at night when the many heavy trucks servicing Ngamiland speed by.

From the Nata Sanctuary one can explore the northern extremities of the pans without too much fear of getting stuck. If dry, you should have no trouble at all as most of Nata Sanctuary's picturesque spots are accessible without a four-wheel drive vehicle. There is permanent water in the northern section of Sowa Pan inside the Nata Sanctuary and this is home to many birds, although most larger species are not resident all year round. Maps are available at the entrance, but are not particularly accurate as many of the roads marked are not well-defined on land and many tracks that exist on the land are not marked on the map. The cost of entrance and camping at Nata Sanctuary is very much lower than charges levied for other wildlife reserves such as Nxai Pan or the Chobe National Park. Surplus revenue from the Sanctuary is used for capital development for the four villages within the area, namely Nata, Maposa, Mmanxotae and Sepako. You will also be able to buy baskets and walking sticks made by the local people who now have an outlet for their crafts. Nata Sanctuary opens from 7am to 7pm daily.

### NATA LODGE

Nata Lodge is well-established and accommodation ranges from A-frame chalets to tents and camping. There is a restaurant, bar, a small curio and book shop and a swimming pool. The restaurant food is wholesome and good value for money. Bird life in and around the lodge, particularly in summer, is excellent. The lodge has a jovial atmosphere and is worth a visit. The diesel motor in the campsite used to generate electric current is unfortunately very disturbing until it is switched off at 10 p.m. When selecting a camp-site, unless you want to stay awake all night, stay well away from large groups in overland trucks, particularly if they are Australians!

### MAKGADIKGADI SALT PANS

The Makgadikgadi Salt Pans is my favourite part of Botswana – a destination I continually return to. Part of my fascination with the pans can be traced back to their enigmatic origins. The Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, comprising the smaller Sowa and the larger Ntwetwe pans, are considered to be the remnants of a great lake or inland sea which, in wetter times, covered much of northern Botswana. Climatic and tectonic changes through the ages slowly dried this great lake, leaving in its wake the stunning Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. Astronauts circling the earth and looking down on Botswana can clearly see the outline of the original lake which stretched beyond the present day Orapa in the south, to an area well north of Nxai Pan and onto Maun in the west. The theory of a great lake is further reinforced by the presence of ancient shorelines around the perimeter of the current pans characterised by well-rolled pebbles shaped and smoothed by the breaking waves. Other shorelines can be found as far as 100 kilometres from the existing pans.

Wind and water have been the architects of this flat, majestic moonscape where, if one's eyes can adjust to the blinding white haze and look beyond the spiralling dust devils into the far distance, it is possible to see clearly the curvature of the earth. Seen from the air, Sowa and Ntwetwe pans are very different. The surface of Sowa Pan is utterly featureless save for the occasional animal track. Ntwetwe Pan, however, looks like a vast pond, and floating on it like giant lily pads the islands of grass, sometimes kilometres in diameter. At noon the brassy sun beats relentlessly down on the grey-white, cracked, salty crust of the pan, driving even the hardiest visitor to one of the islands to seek the



sparse shade of the ancient baobab trees. Two of these islands, Kubu and Kukonje, are popular destinations for explorers of the Pans.

During the rainy season when the pans are wet, they are home to great flocks of pelicans and flamingos which, when seen through the distant mirage, look like white-and-pink-frosted-icing on a shimmering blue cake. Birds are not the only summer visitors to this desolate land; vast herds of zebra and wildebeest congregate on its shores to feed on the grass and to prepare themselves for the long trek north when the days again become short, and the winter wind shrivels the grass and evaporates any drinkable water into cracked mud. During the dry months the pans, which only a few short weeks before had teemed with life, belong again to the ostrich, springbok, jackal and crows who have adapted to life with little or no water.

### EXPLORING THE PANS

Outside the Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve there are no designated camp-sites, although Kubu Island has become so popular that the shady spots under some of the larger baobabs almost look like designated campsites. Many people visit the pans by visiting Kubu Island alone. Although Kubu is a highlight there is more to the area than this.

If you wish to explore the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans from a home base then the Nata Sanctuary is ideal, although to get the most out of your visit, camping on the lonely shores of Sowa or Ntwetwe Pan is essential.

To do this you must be totally self-sufficient and carry all your water. Firewood is only plentiful in certain areas so collect it when you can.

### DRIVING TIPS

Attempting to explore the pans when they are flooded is pointless. If they are dry, then no



*Driving on salt pans must not be taken lightly. Vehicles can become so badly bogged down that recovery becomes close to impossible.*

© Andrew St. Pierre White 2000

Botswana

matter how tempted you may be, under no circumstances attempt to cross the middle of a pan – stay close to the edge. During the dry season the pans appear hard, but are often soft and slushy underneath. The soft patches are sometimes invisible from the surface and one can drive unwittingly onto one and break through. Tyre pressures should be deflated to about 1.5 bar for driving on salt pans. Do not deflate tyres too much as some driving will be over the islands where soft tyres can be damaged. Although broad tyres are not generally recommended for mud, this is the kind of mud that not even a tractor tyre will work on. The only way to stay unstuck is to load your vehicle evenly on all four wheels and spread the load over as wide an area as possible.

When driving on the edge of the pans, follow the tracks of the vehicle in front and drive straddling the other tracks. Never drive in two-wheel drive as at stages you will need four-wheel traction and there will be no time to engage four-wheel drive. Stay in high-range second. If you go into third be ready to crash-change into second and floor the accelerator when a soft patch is reached. If you do with only the rear wheels being driven then it will be too late. Full-time four-wheel drive vehicles must lock the centre differential lock before reaching the pan surface.

Avoid any steering action if you encounter soft ground as it will in most cases cause you to bog down. For this reason rear axle differentials must not be locked as this increases drag when turning. No matter how tempting or how dry the surface is, NEVER play pancakes, even at low speed. It is not only irresponsible, but dangerous, for if the outside wheels break through, which they do without warning, your vehicle will roll. You have been warned!

Grass collecting around exhaust pipes and igniting is a threat in the grasslands of the Makgadikgadi so make frequent checks under your vehicle and keep a fire-extinguisher within easy reach. Every year vehicles are lost in the Makgadikgadi, if not from sinking in the mud, then by fires. A grass seed catcher in front of the radiator is essential.

### KUBU ISLAND

Kubu Island is the private domain of a closely knit family of baobabs and crows on an island of immeasurable beauty. The silence is deafening, the sun's rays are blinding and the loneliness difficult to endure. A visit to Kubu (Tswana for Hippo) for most people remains indelible in the memory and beckons them back.

Makgadikgadi Pans

There are no facilities and visitors may camp where they please. I am pleased to say that the standard of care shown by visitors remains high and litter or buried rubbish is not yet a problem. Kubu Island is a natural heritage site and if visitors abuse it, it will be closed to the public. This would be a tragedy as how often does one encounter something of great natural beauty that has not been commandeered by the tourism market and turned into an up-market establishment no longer affordable or desirable to the explorer. Look after Kubu Island when you visit by making sure that your campsite is spotless when you leave.

### THE ROUTE TO KUBU ISLAND

The only map where a route from Nata to Kubu Island is clearly marked is on Veronica Roodt's Shell series where a 1:890 000 map of the Makgadikgadi Pans is featured. In fact it does not even appear on the official 1:250 000 chart.

No route to Kubu is reliable or easy to follow, even with the aid of a GPS. Every time I travel there I seem to take a different route. I attempted to plot an accurate and easy-to-follow path from Nata to Kubu in March '98, but failed, as time after time the track vanished in front of me. To make matters worse, for 30 minutes, and for no apparent reason, my GPS stopped working as only two satellites could be received. I spent the morning losing the track then finding a new one, but always heading south. Without losing a lot of time I found Kubu Island in all her splendour.

Zero your odo at the Shell service station in Nata. Travel 24 kilometres west and take the track south. Intersection: 20 10 05S – 25 57 27E. About half a kilometre after this turning you will cross the original white calcrete bone-jarring road to Maun.

Take the ninety degree right turn demarcated by an orange plastic crate that has been tied to a tree – if you reach a small settlement you have gone too far. One kilometre after the turning you will pass a baobab on the right and at 1.3km you will cross a track. There is a landmark clump of baobab trees although they are not that easy to find due to the maze of tracks that criss-cross each other. You should reach a junction on the main road south to Sekara village [20 10 49S – 25 56 36E] which is recognisable by a similar width, double spoor track which crosses at right angles in the middle of a broad open grassy plain. Set your odometer at zero at the junction and follow these directions as far as possible: At 1.1km from the junction the road splits. Bear right, and as the

track reaches the end of the wide open plain it splits again – take a left and follow the less used track. You will come to a number of intersections where tracks cross each other, remember there are many ways to reach Kubu island and you should get there if you follow the golden rule of finding it: if in doubt, head south. If the track that you are on starts heading off in a direction other than south and you remember passing an intersection, go back to the intersection and try another track. Be prepared for a bit of trial and error exploring and remember to head south.

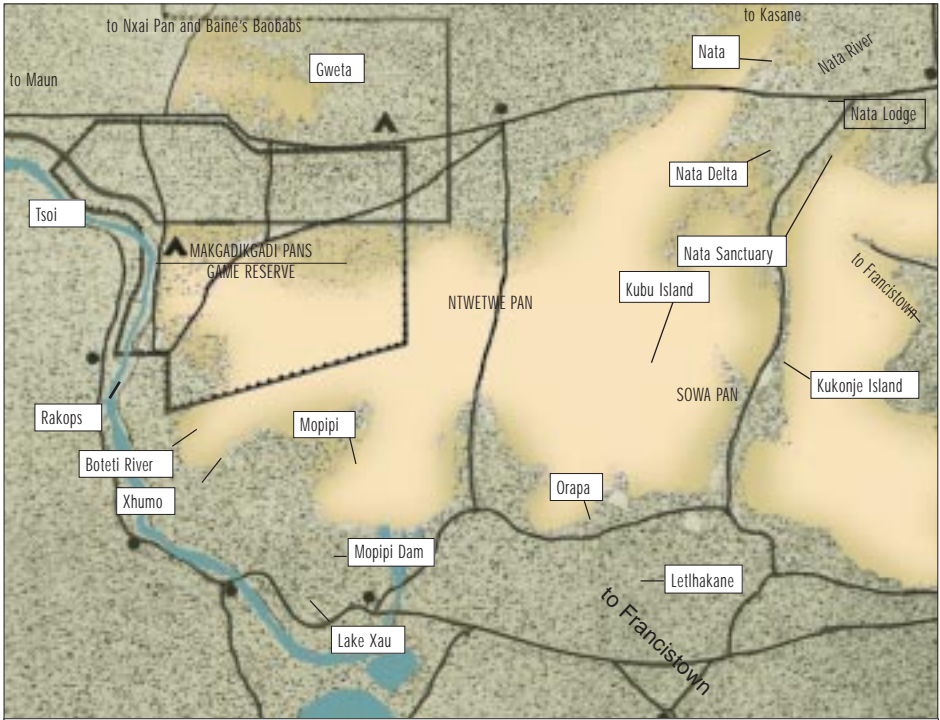
You will encounter thick black dust on this route. This is the original bed of the ancient lake and the dust is so thick that at times even light cannot penetrate the vehicle's rear window when these sections of the pan are driven through at speed. The dust is ultra-fine and coats everything.

Sometimes when the track nears a village it disappears as the ground gets churned up by the people and animals from the settlement. If your track happens to vanish, circumnavigate the village and look for a track that is heading in a southerly direction, once you have found the track you are probably on the right route.

At approximately 82km from the junction (depending on how extensively you have 'explored' the area) you should reach the veterinary gate at Tswagong. About 2km after this gate there is a very sharp turn to the left to Kubu Island. After the gate you hit another village and again the track vanishes. Drive around the village to the right and find a track heading off to the left and eventually you should hit the right track again. Calculate your average speed for the journey at about 40km per hour excluding any stops.

The Southerly Route to Kubu is easier. From the main Francistown-Orapa road and approximately 153km from Francistown is the Tlamabele Veterinary Gate. On the right and just before the gate is the track heading north to Kokonje Island. Immediately after the gate is a second track heading north west. This is the track to Kubu via Mosu and Mmatshumo. At 26.5 km the track passes through Mosu village and, on a rise, Sowa Pan can be seen ahead. A further 42 km and Mmatshumo village is reached. The track out of Mmatshumo heads due north. The track is not sign posted but fairly obvious. If in doubt, ask a local for the road to Sowa or Kubu.

Five kilometres after Mmatshumo the road rises again and there is a second view of Sowa. The track here is very sandy. Follow the clearly de-



## CENTRAL DISTRICT AND THE MAKGADIKGADI SALT PANS

fined track past another veterinary fence. At this gate ask directions to Kubu or measure 7,5 kilometres and take a right fork. The road ahead is only passable if the pans are dry, as it travels over the pan surface. It is by far the quickest way to Kubu if it is dry and by far the longest should you bog down.

If you decide to go the 'dry' route, continue straight for another 19,7 kilometres. Two kilometres before the Tswagong Veterinary gate swing hard right and follow the 'route from Nata' route.

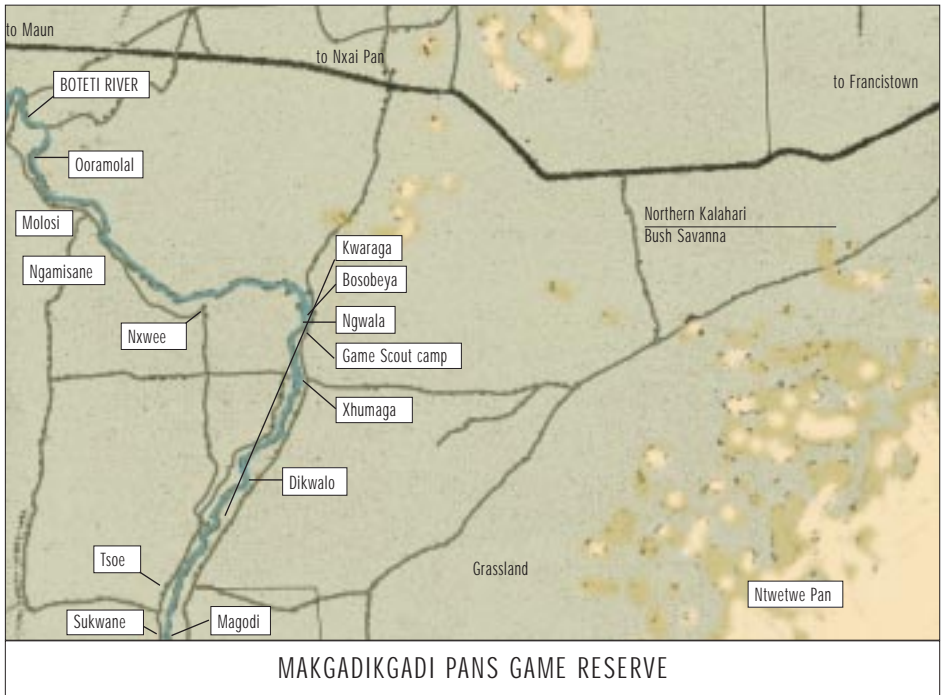
### KUKONJE ISLAND

Kukonje Island guards her secrets well. I visited Kokonje for the first time in 1989. Since then I have tried three times to reach her shores without success. Kukonje is considerably larger and higher than Kubu and is an island in the true sense – cut off from the mainland by a vast stretch of white pan. During the wet times (November to April) it is cut off from all but wandering animals. Even in mid winter the tracks leading to Kukonje remain wet and dan-

gerous. Accessibility to Kukonje therefore depends on how plentiful the rains were and when they fell.

In contrast to Kubu, Kukonje's trees appear stunted and grotesque. Other trees resembling dwarf baobab divide the rocks. Game tracks in their millions litter the sandy floor and there is the distinct smell of animal droppings without there being a creature in sight.

Standing on Kukonje's high hill on a moonlit night is an unforgettable way to see Sowa Pan. On one such night on Kukonje I heard an approaching train: click-click, click-click, click-click. Thinking that my mind was playing tricks, I listened more carefully. The train was slowly coming closer. With my binoculars I scanned the glowing surface of the pan. Then I saw what I regard as the most memorable animal sighting I have ever witnessed: four wildebeest, trotting in perfect harmony on the firm pan surface, in faultless line-astern and on a fixed course. Ignorant of our presence they moved past and disappeared out of sight.



## MAKGADIKGADI PANS GAME RESERVE

### The Route to Kukonje Island

There is only one way to get to Kukonje and that is from the veterinary gate some three kilometres to the east of the island. From Francistown head west on the main Maun road for 130 kilometres or, from Nata, drive east 49 kilometres to the Dukwe Veterinary game fence. Take the track on the east side of the fence and head south.

This track, which is fairly easy going, will take you across the main road and railway line serving the Sowa Spit Soda Ash Project and, after 47 kilometres, to a manned gate on your right. You will reach this gate soon after crossing a section of pan from where you will see a part of Sowa Pan from behind the game fence, which runs parallel to the track all the way from Dukwe. The attendant will open the gate for you. He is always accommodating and often asks for cigarettes or a Coke. I always oblige and like to give him a magazine if I have one in my vehicle. Once having crossed the gate, Kukonje lies off-shore directly in front of you. The most well-used route to the island is by driving alongside the veterinary fence.

When the pan is dry, its edge consists of white powder dust, which indicates that the pan is safe to drive on. If the consistency of the sur-

face darkens and becomes smooth as you drive, and you are less than half way across, it is probable that the route is impassable, as ahead the ground will be too soft to bear the weight of a vehicle. Turn around early. Turning once it has already become soft and you are using all the vehicle's power just to keep moving means you have left it too late and turning will probably result in bogging down. If you have let this happen to you (as I foolishly did on my last attempt) continue straight and try to make it to the tussock grass. The tussock grass, although firmer than the pan surrounding it, is often too soft and you must not stop. Use it for added floatation and traction and get to the island.

### GAME

Timing is critical if you have come to view game or birds. Flamingos and pelicans visit the area in their tens of thousands but their arrival is unpredictable. If you have come to the Magadikgadi to see game then Gweta is the ideal home base, some 100 kilometres closer to Maun than Nata, and the Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve should be considered.

## MAKGADIKGADI PANS GAME RESERVE

A glance at a map will show you that this 4144 km<sup>2</sup> game reserve, despite being named after the pans, includes only a small portion of Ntvetwe Pan within its borders. Game is varied and at the beginning of the rainy season, prolific, when huge herds of wildebeest and their accompanying predators cross the plains. Common permanent residents include gemsbok, springbok, brown hyena and jackal as well as abundant bird-life.

Entrance to this reserve has been formalised and park fees are levied. Visitors must be self-sufficient, and bring their own firewood, as it is very scarce. It is a good idea to make a sketch of the map printed on the board at the entrance gate to enable you to find your way around the reserve.

There is a choice of two worthwhile campsites from where the real magic of the Kalahari can be appreciated. The first is Xhumaga on the Boteti River. To reach this camp you must stay on the main south-westerly track and travel for 48 kilometres. Fishing in the Boteti is often very rewarding. Plump bream, seasoned with herbs and lemon over an open fire, makes a meal to remember. The second campsite is in the Njuca Hills and is found by travelling south-west for 14 kilometres until you come to a left turn which you follow. After another 5,3 kilometres you will reach a T-junction where you turn left. After a further 2,7 kilometres the road splits and both tracks lead to this wonderful campsite.

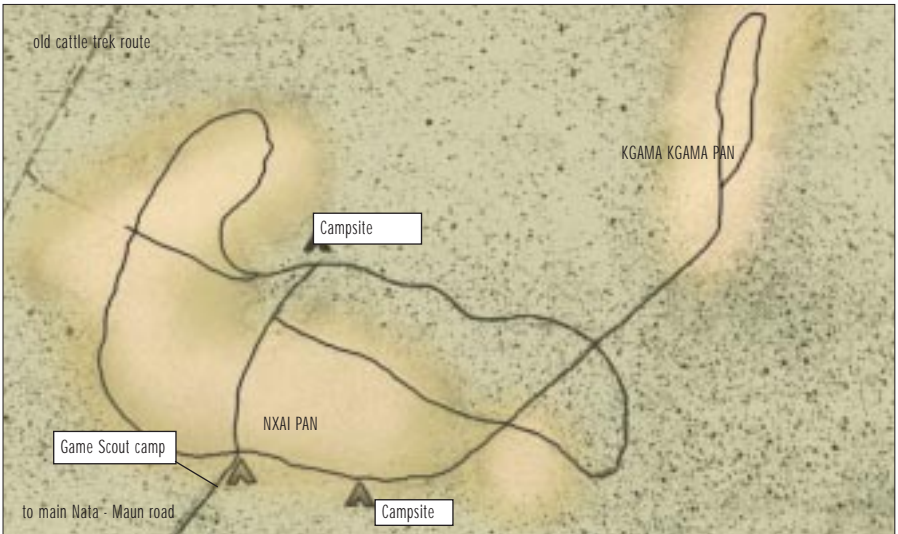
## THE ROUTE TO THE MAKGADIKGADI PANS GAME RESERVE

The entrance to the reserve is located some 137 kilometres from Nata or 37 kilometres west of Gweta on the main Nata – Maun road. It is situated opposite a Roads Department camp.

## NXAI PAN AND BAINES' BAOBABS

Nxai Pan, which offers a combination of dry pans, thick bush and flat, pasture-like grassland, is a pleasing stopover. This is especially so between December and April if good rains have fallen, when the game congregates at the unnamed pan complex at the entrance to the reserve and at the Kgama-Kgama Pan which lies some nine kilometres north-east. This beautiful area is the breeding ground for large herds of springbok, gemsbok, eland, wildebeest and zebra. During this time predators, including lion, cheetah, hyenas, jackals and wild dogs are plentiful. Bat-eared foxes and jackals are common throughout the year. There is a man-made drinking hole in the reserve which the game scouts regularly fill from a nearby borehole. It attracts game, especially in the early mornings and evenings.

In the south of the National Park is another complex of pans, the largest of which is Kudiakam. The main feature at Kudiakam is an isolated group of baobabs, some ancient and gnarled, interspersed with a new generation of upright, smooth-barked trees, a fascinating place



to explore. These baobabs were first made famous by Thomas Baines who painted them over a 100 years ago. These dark giants, which seem incongruous with the blinding white pan around them, face a small hill on which a lone baobab stands, as if surveying the timeless panorama spread out before it.

When visiting Nxai Pan and Baines' Baobabs you are expected to be self-sufficient for supplies including firewood, although water can usually be relied upon at Nxai Pan. There are two official campsites at Nxai Pan but they are unfortunately not well-situated, as neither has a view of the open plains. The first is on the edge of the pan about three kilometres from the scout camp. The second is about seven kilometres from the main entrance and is set in thicker bush beyond the northern side of the pan. Cold water ablution facilities are offered at one of the camps and braai areas are provided. There are no facilities and camping is not permitted at Baines' Baobabs.

The area is worth at least a three-day visit, including one day exploring Baines' Baobabs.

#### THE ROUTE TO NXAI PAN NATIONAL PARK AND BAINES' BAOBABS

The road to Nxai Pan heads northwards from the main Nata-Maun road, approximately 170 kilometres west of Nata. It is narrow, sandy and badly corrugated in places. During the wet months isolated patches of mud do bog down inexperienced drivers.

The turn-off to Baines' Baobabs is 17 kilometres from the main road to Nxai Pan. The road heads east (turn right) and travels for one kilometre where a fork in the road divides the wet and dry season routes to the Baobabs. If you are travelling in the wet months or if there has been evidence of water lying in the pans, then you must take the right fork. The distance

from this point along the wet season route is 17 kilometres. After 13 kilometres a right turn must be taken. Follow the most well-worn tracks.

The shorter, dry season route (left turn at the fork) takes you across some pans and after 11 kilometres you will arrive at Baines' Baobabs.

#### ARRANGING YOUR TRAIL

Booking is not required in the pans because no tourism facilities exist. This is what makes this trail so special. If you want to book for the Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve (not essential) or Nxai Pan (advisable) the booking service is contactable at: Parks and Reserves Reservations Office (Gaborone) PO Box 131, Gaborone, Botswana Tel: (267) 58 0774 Fax: (267) 58 0775 e-mail: DWNPBOTS@GLOBAL.BW

#### MAPS AND BOOKS

The best maps for use on this trail are Veronica Roodt's Shell Botswana 1:1 750 000, Chobe and Moreme maps. The best book is Mike Main's Botswana Visitors' Guide. They are both available from most 4x4 outlets and by mail order by calling the 4xForum on 021 785 5752.

#### AVAILABILITY OF FACILITIES AND SUPPLIES

Nata: Fuel, liquor, garage facilities, limited food & drinks, water, accommodation, airfield.

Nata Lodge: Accommodation, camping, curios, bar, water (water is briny).

Nata Sanctuary: Camping, water.

Makgadikgadi Pans: Self-sufficiency required.

Gweta: Fuel, liquor, soft drinks, garage, water.

Nxai Pan: Camping, water.

GPS-CO-ORDINATES MAKGADIKGADI PANS REGION - WGS84 DATUM			
Waypoint	insert user wpt		
Xhumaga:		20 28 23S	24 30 53E
Njuca junction		20 26 36S	24 50 88E
Dukwe Vet Control:		20 34 06S	26 29 19E
Dukwe Vet gate:		20 50 31S	25 49 43E
Kukonje Island:		20 55 00S	26 12 20E
Sexara Village:		20 10 49S	25 56 35E
Tswagong Veterinary Gate:		20 45 44S	25 44 05E
Thabatshekubu:		20 42 61S	25 47 48E
Kubu Island:		20 53 74S	25 49 42E
Tlamabele Veterinary Gate:		21 18 36S	26 13 22E
Mmatshumo village:		21 08 56S	25 39 12E

# OKAVANGO, MOREMI AND CHOBE TRAIL

## Ngamiland and Chobe district

### STATUS

Driving skills required:★★  
Overlanding skills required: ★★★  
Non-guided

### ROUTE

Maun, Moremi Wildlife Reserve including an Okavango Delta excursion, Chobe National Park including the Savute Channel and Serondella on the Chobe River, Kasane in northern Botswana and finally, Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

### SUMMARY

This trail covers the very popular wildlife reserve route through northern Botswana, and in many cases has been the motivation for many to purchase a 4x4 vehicle in the first place. It has become a busy route and the most popular times to visit are Easter and September.

### DIFFICULTY AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

No previous off-road or safari experience is required although the beginner will benefit from reading up on subjects such as driving in sand and mud, camping with wild animals and conservation.

Challenges on this trail will include the possibility of close encounters with wild animals, including lion, hyena, baboons and elephant. Challenging driving conditions will only be found well into the safari and these include fairly heavy sand, although the sand is rarely thick enough to require deflated tyres (unless a trailer in under tow), and mud which may be encountered in the wet months.

### NUMBER OF VEHICLES REQUIRED

A party in a single vehicle can tackle this trail with confidence.

### RECOMMENDED TIME OF YEAR

The best time to visit Botswana is in the cool months between March and September. You are also more likely to see game during this period as they leave their summer feeding grounds when the dry weather starts and migrate northwards to the well-watered Moremi and Chobe areas to spend the winter. The Okavango is at its most impressive when the water level is at its highest which, because of the leisurely pace at

which the annual flood covers the delta, is in August. The wet summer months are hot but not unbearable, while October, prior to the rains, is the hottest month.

### TIME REQUIRED

Depending on the route and destinations you choose, this safari can take from ten days to three weeks.

## THE TRAIL

### MAUN

This bustling tourist town which serves as the gateway to the Okavango Delta and the glorious northern wildlife area is also the administrative capital of Ngamiland district which includes the Delta. Maun, pronounced Maung, meaning 'The place of short reeds', is a perfect stopover on the way north and an ideal place to stock up and plan all your safari requirements.

To many Botswana travellers, the very mention of the name 'Maun' conjures up images of a dusty, bustling frontier town, set on the blue Thamalakane River reached only after an agonising journey from Nata along the notoriously bad Nata-Maun road. Those days are now gone, and Maun, linked by a good tar road to Francistown, has undergone phenomenal development, including a plush new airport building, government offices and extensive shopping malls with tarred parking areas.

Sadly, improved shopping opportunities are not the only changes that the new road has brought to Maun. Violent crime, virtually unheard of a few years ago, is on the increase and it is quite common to see posters of wanted criminals pinned up in shop windows. It is therefore important that you lock your vehicle and look after your valuables. The driving standards in Maun are much the same as in the past, so expect the unexpected from other motorists as well as children, chickens, goats and cattle on the side of the road. Donkeys appear to have been employed as vehicle roadworthiness examiners and, with perfect timing, will walk out in the path of your vehicle to test your brakes.

Shopping for safari supplies in Maun is satisfying as most supermarkets offer a wide range of foodstuffs. Fresh fruit and vegetables are also available due to the plentiful supplies being trucked in for the lodges in the Delta.

### Where to stay in Maun

For those with money to spend, there is Riley's Hotel on the high street, but booking is essential in the high season. Fully equipped camping



sites and low budget accommodation in the Maun area is plentiful and varied. Island Safari Lodge and restaurant located on the banks of the Thamalakane River is one example. To reach Island Safari Lodge, drive out of Maun on the Moremi road until you come to a bridge crossing the Thamalakane River. Before the bridge, turn left and follow the corrugated dirt road for about seven kilometres. The lodge is well sign-posted. Okavango River Lodge, Livingstone Lodge and Crocodile Camp, all perched along the Thamalakane River, are other options. Most of these camps offer professional services to take you into the Delta should you require it.

### THE OKAVANGO DELTA

The Delta is unique in that instead of flowing into the sea, the annual flood of fresh water in the Okavango River flows inland to spread over a vast flat sea of white Kalahari sand, transforming the arid semi-desert into a tropical oasis of reeds, trees, palms and papyrus. Many books and films have been produced about the Okavango and these should be read or viewed before a visit.

The best times of the year to visit the Delta are the dry months from April to September. The delta itself is formed when the Okavango River exits the 80-kilometre panhandle (or wrist if one imagines the fan-shaped Delta to be a long-fingered hand) where its turbulent progress is channelled and controlled between meandering banks of luxuriant papyrus.

Once clear of the restraining banks of the panhandle, the Okavango River ceases to exist and the water, now heavy with sediment, spreads over the vast fan-shaped area of Kalahari sand. The characteristic fan-shape of the Delta is caused by a series of faults which have the effect of 'damming' the flow of the water across an enormous area in which reed-lined channels, grass covered flood plains and secluded backwaters form. Rising from the water are countless islands, some no larger than anthills, while others such as Chief's Island cover more than 1000

square kilometres. The most prominent feature of the smaller islands which dot the Delta are the spider webs of animal tracks which emerge from the water onto the islands where the game gather to feed.

### Boating in the Okavango

If you are visiting the Okavango you may be tempted to take a boat with you to save on the cost of hiring a craft and a guide. This is not recommended. Manoeuvrability in the Delta outside the main water channels is difficult as water plants continually foul the propeller. In addition, for the most part, the Okavango is not deep enough to allow the passage of ordinary boats. Apart from the main channels, the area is largely unmapped. The main channels regularly alter course as they are cut off by new growth, and new channels are created by the many hippos that populate the Delta. The result is that navigation for a visitor to the Okavango is near impossible and any attempt would be extremely foolish. You will enjoy far greater pleasure by either hiring a makoro or motor boat with guides who will be able to show you the Delta. Another reason not to take your own boat onto the Delta is the threat of spreading the water weed, salvinia, which is taken seriously by the Botswana authorities. All water equipment has to be registered and sprayed before entering the country. Contact The Department of Water Affairs, Private Bag 0029, Gaborone, where an Aquatic Certificate will be issued if you are determined to take your own boat.

### Excursions into the Okavango Delta

Driving into the Okavango is not advised. In any event, driving north of the cattle fence which runs along the southern perimeter of the Delta it is not allowed without a permit. This is rarely granted to visitors, as permits are usually restricted to local residents. I had the opportunity of driving some distance into the Delta, but without the experienced guide travelling with me I would have become hopelessly lost. The variations in the depth of water also restrict the passage of vehicles, and only a guide who knows the area very well will be able to predict in advance if a route is open to vehicles.

There are two routes you can take into the Delta: you can either drive to a camp near Maun close to the outskirts of the Delta, and from there take a mokoro trail, or you can park your vehicle at Maun Airport, fly deeper into the Delta and then operate from a base in the Delta itself. Driving to a camp will not take you into the heart of the Okavango, so flying, although





*Swimming in the Okavango is a delightful experience. Crocodiles and hippo are a threat so get clearance from a local guide before you swim.*

more expensive, is well worthwhile and what is more, the deeper into the Delta you can get, the better your chances are of seeing big game. A flight over the Delta will also give you an excellent perspective of the area and a very clear impression of the true wilderness into which you are travelling. Between April and October during times of flood, a flight over the Delta is fascinating, but during the low water-level months it can be disappointing. Game-viewing flights over the Delta can also be organised from Maun. I strongly recommend that you take the opportunity of flying into the Delta.

#### Fly-in Mokoro Trails

The most rewarding and relaxing method of seeing the Okavango is by taking a short hop in a light aircraft to one of the camps in the Delta followed by a mokoro (canoe carved out of a single tree) camping trail on the waterways and palm-clad islands. Seeing the Okavango from a mokoro is without doubt the finest way to travel in the region – an experience hard to forget. Camps in the Okavango offer five-star luxury or facilities for self-sufficient bushwhacking but neither option is particularly cheap. In the interests of the 4x4 explorer I will highlight the self-sufficient bushwhacking experience.

There are a number of fly-in safari companies operating out of Maun. During the winter months it is advisable to book in advance. In Summer there is a fair chance of getting a flight and a mokoro tour without pre-booking.

Flying into the Delta and camping does present a few logistical problems, due to limited luggage space on the light aircraft. Canoeing gear is available for hire by some budget safari camps such as Oddballs. The mokoro trail is conducted by professional guides who supply the mokoro and who have a vast knowledge of

the Delta and its wildlife. But for everything else, you must be self-sufficient. Each mokoro seats two people and the guide who stands at the rear poling through the crystal clear channels and lagoons of lilies and reeds.

Your guide will take you to islands on which you will set up your camp and from where you will go out on foot in search of game. Do not attempt walking in sandals as the grass will cut your feet severely – tackies or boots are essential. You may be expected to walk through shallow water and this is quite safe. Bilharzia is not a serious threat in the Okavango and only exists in very isolated areas in the immediate vicinity of human settlements.

The guides are not armed, so approaching game is always done with a fair amount of caution. Guides are particularly careful when approaching buffalo and will not approach a lone buffalo. Hippo, too, are a danger and guides will back off if one is seen in the water within a 100 metres of the mokoro. Have respect for your guide's knowledge – generally, guides are of a high standard. The relationship you form with your guide will greatly influence how much you enjoy your excursion. The guide may offer to help with camp chores such as washing dishes or pitching tents but do not expect this as it is not strictly part of his duties. He is employed to show you the Delta, to teach you bushcraft, to point out birds and animals and to ensure your safety. He is more than ably equipped to accomplish this. Your guide will share your campfire and will, if encouraged, tell you fascinating stories about his people and their folklore. Mokoro may appear unsteady but they are remarkably stable crafts. Once a fully-laden mo-koro is on the water the free-board is sometimes less than 30 cms but, despite this, only on rare occasions will it tip enough to take in water over the side. Most leak so take some plastic bags in which to carry your kit.

Poling a mokoro is not as easy as it looks and always draws jeers from onlookers and guides when first attempted by a visitor. Poling takes some basics before the task of simply staying standing is accomplished. The following tips should help: Do not stand with your legs apart facing the front of the mokoro; face sideways, Egyptian style, with your legs apart, one in front of the other. Steering is effected by a twisting action of the body. Place the pole (ngashi) into the river bed close to and directly behind the mokoro. Push gently while twisting your body in an effort to swing the nose of the mokoro in the direction of intended travel. Your guide will in most cases be happy to let you have a try at pol-

ing, but breaking the pole may mean that you are unable to get home when you like and you will be expected to pay for a replacement. A good ngashi is worth about R100.

### Fishing

Fishing in the Delta is best during low-water months between October and April. In the southern Delta you will catch bream, barbel, African pike and silver catfish. In the northern Delta you will also find tigerfish. Bream makes superb eating and is best caught using small pieces of meat and float tackle. Both pike and bream will take spinners while the silver catfish, which is considered a nuisance, will take spinners voraciously the moment the sun sets. Tigerfish will strike anything that moves but seem to have a preference for yellow spinners. (This may be a local condition of the Xakanaxa Lagoon.) Pike and tigerfish do not make good eating and should be returned to the water unless claimed by your guide who will be happy to cope with the bones. Both fish are armed with very sharp teeth, so go equipped with pliers with which to remove hooks. Much of the Okavango is suffering from over-fishing so only remove fish you intend to eat.

### Booking

There are a number of travel agents in Maun and all will offer a wide range of camp-out opportunities. Most visitors choose to spend three to five days camping in the Delta.

### MOREMI

Having completed your Okavango excursion it is a good idea to spend a night in Maun and to restock safari supplies for the journey north – especially fuel which cannot be purchased along the way. If you have limited time, consider the following: if you have already visited the Moremi Wildlife Reserve during your excursion into the Okavango rather go directly to Savute and spend more time in the Chobe National Park.

### Moremi Wildlife Reserve

This 5 000 square kilometre wilderness paradise named after Chief Moremi, situated in the north-eastern Okavango Delta, was proclaimed a wildlife reserve in 1968 by the Tswana people, an act which at the time earned them high praise for their far-sighted pragmatism.

Moremi, with its diverse and fascinating ecological zones, varied wildlife and spectacular bird-life is a beautiful, unspoilt wilderness area and is worth a visit of at least four days. En-

trance to the park is controlled at North and South gates, from where you can follow what is essentially a circular drive through the various ecological zones. You will have an opportunity to drive through dense mopane woodland, where the broken trees and branches clearly testify to the presence of elephant, onto forests of giant acacia trees to places where the road skirts the waters of the Okavango. It is on these stretches of water that you are likely to see the shy red lechwe, an antelope which, in Southern Africa, occurs naturally only in the shallow waters of the swamp areas of both Botswana and Zambia. Moremi also has its fair share of open grasslands and water holes with excellent game-viewing.

Game-viewing in the Moremi, while good throughout the year, is at its best from May to November. For those keen on bird-watching, the Moremi will hold special appeal. Here you will have an opportunity of studying both bushveld and aquatic species, and a wide variety of raptors.

### Camping in the Moremi

Do not sleep in the open as there is a real danger, especially from hyena. You will, however, be perfectly safe in a tent. More valuable information regarding camping in Africa and how to avoid exposing yourself and your party to danger from wild animals can be found in the other book in this series, 'The Complete Guide to a Four-Wheel Drive in Southern Africa'. Wild animals need not be feared, only respected.

There is a choice of four campsites in the reserve: South Gate (Maqwee Gate), Third Bridge, Xakanaxa and North Gate. For those choosing not to take the tour into the depths of Moremi, South and North Gate camps are your only options. South Gate campsite is outside the reserve and is ideal if you arrive late and find the entrance gate closed. It is set in mopane trees and has toilets and showers. Although the campsite is outside the reserve, full park fees are levied. At North Gate, beware of baboons stealing food. Only at Serondella on the Chobe River are they worse.

The most popular campsite is Third Bridge. Game is usually abundant and the area is delightful. Some people are tempted to sleep on the bridge but this is not recommended as lion frequently cross the bridge at night. Almost every visitor to Third Bridge asks the question, 'Are there crocodiles in the river?', and the answer is, 'yes'. Although swimming is prohibited, visitors still do it. If you must swim, take the following precautions:

- Do not swim alone.
- Make the swim brief.
- Swimming at the same time each day creates a pattern on which a crafty crocodile will capitalise.
- Be careful not to pollute the water with soap suds or similar substances as the suds get into the crocodiles' eyes!

Ablution facilities have been built at the very popular Xakanaxa public campsite near the Xakanaxa Lagoon. There are three private camps on the edge of the lagoon and it is possible to hire a boat from Xakanaxa or Jedibe Camps but, because these camps cater more for high tariff pre-booked trade, they may only be able to oblige if given fair advance warning. The scenic photography and bird-watching opportunities from the lagoon are very special. Although the tiger fishing is fair, the average fish size is somewhat small.

The campsite at North Gate is 50 kilometres from Xakanaxa and is located inside the reserve. It has running water, toilets and showers. At South Gate there are two routes you can follow which will determine where you camp in the reserve. The longest route takes you to the western extremity of the reserve to Mboma, Third bridge and then onto Xakanaxa while the shorter route travels directly to Xakanaxa.

### *Route to the Moremi Wildlife Reserve*

Road building during the past three years in Botswana has been widespread and sections of tarred road seem to appear out of nowhere. This route guide is given to enable travellers to plan ahead, taking the slow sections which may still exist into consideration.

It is roughly 197 kilometres from Maun to Savute if you travel there directly. If you choose to detour through Moremi it is  $\pm$  245 kilometres. If however you decide to spend a night in Moremi, you can estimate driving a total of  $\pm$  335km from Maun to Savute. Bear in mind that at times the roads are sandy and slow going and that you will want to stop to view game. A mere 245km normally takes much of the day to complete.

The route to the Moremi Wildlife Reserve is straightforward. Head out of Maun in a northerly direction along the tarred road to the town of Shorobe following the Thamalakane River. If you are on the western bank you will come to the Matlapaneng Bridge. Once crossed, head north. You will pass Crocodile Camp on your left. Once past Shorobe the tar ends and the road becomes sandy. After about nine kilometre-

tres you will reach a fork in the road where you must choose between the easy going, direct route to the right or a thick sand route to the left. Both routes will take you to the Moremi South Gate. We recommend that you take the right fork, i.e. continue straight at this junction for a further 19 kilometres where you will come across a second fork. This second fork is sign-posted and you will take the track to the left. This track leads directly to Moremi South Gate, 29 kilometres further on. If you wish to bypass Moremi and go directly to Savute, do not turn at the fork but continue straight.

The Moremi South Gate opens at daybreak and closes at about sunset. You will be charged camping and vehicle entrance fees. This must be paid in advance in cash, and camping is not permitted in Moremi without a booking.

The main road from Moremi North Gate takes you back to the main Maun-Savute road via the Magwikhwe Sand Ridge. The ridge, more than 100 kilometres long, is said to be the barrier beach which marked the western border of the super-lake that once covered much of Botswana, and it presents the most serious 4X4 challenge on the route. The ridge is, as the name implies, very deep, soft sand and you will definitely need four-wheel drive to mount the summit after which the firm surface of the Mababe Depression confronts you. The Mababe Depression, a seemingly endless and featureless plain stretching out to the east, is a fascinating formation in that it is part of the bed of the super-lake. There are sections of the Mababe Depression that, when wet, can be very difficult to get through. After rains a mud forms, known as black cotton mud, horrible stuff that can quickly trap a vehicle. The road is, however, well-used and if you find yourself badly bogged down, you shouldn't have to wait too long for assistance. The South Gate of the Chobe National Park lies 58 kilometres from Savute. Entrance and camping fees must be paid here.

### THE CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

Chobe National Park, named after the Chobe River which forms the northern boundary of the park, is 10 878 km<sup>2</sup> in extent and is made of two distinct portions, namely the Savute area in the south and the Chobe area in the north. The reserve is renowned for its game – especially the famous elephants of the Chobe. Because the park is so large these two sections of the park are discussed separately.

## Savute

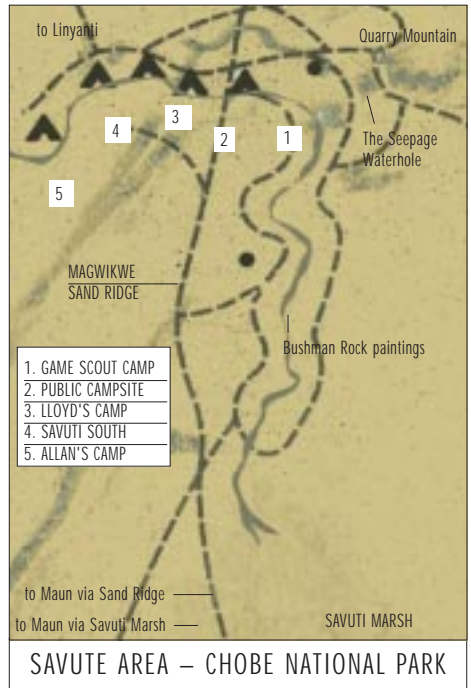
'Wall-to-wall game' is how the Savute is sometimes described. Elephant, lion, leopard, hyena, antelope of many kinds, wildebeest, zebra and a host of small game can be seen. The bird-life is superb and anyone interested in wildlife can expect to have a thoroughly good time.

Animals can be the cause of headaches at Savute as hyena will tear open any food container left exposed over night. The jaws of a hungry hyena can even tear open a steel trunk. Elephants will take any citrus fruit that you are carrying and anything vaguely edible or brightly coloured left unattended for a moment will be taken by baboons.

One of the striking and somewhat puzzling features of Savute is the main channel itself, with its hundreds of large dead trees. The Savute Channel covers a distance of 100 kilometres from the Chobe River, through a gap in the sand ridge, to the Mababe Depression. The channel, with its meagre gradient of only 20 cm for every kilometre, brings water from the Chobe to Mababe, creating a small marsh where it enters the depression. This marsh is a popular feeding ground for zebra, buffalo and various antelope species. The mystery that surrounds the Savute Channel with its rows of dead trees lies in the erratic flow of this water from the Chobe. The waters can flow for many years and then, for no apparent reason, dry up and become the ideal seeding ground for large trees such as the acacia seen now as upright skeletons standing in the tall grass. Years later the channel begins to flow again drowning the roots of the trees. The reason for the Savute Channel's fickle nature has been under scrutiny for many years and it is believed that it is more likely tectonic rather than hydrological factors that control its flow.

## Camping in Savute

The most popular campsite within the boundaries of the Chobe National Park is at Savute. It is popular because of the rich variety of game found in the area. Unfortunately, as a result of its popularity, there is quite a lot of rubbish lying around and the tracks within the campsites have been churned up and are very sandy. Savute has a large population of lone male elephants and these animals have become accustomed to the activities of humans. They regularly dig up the plumbing in search of water and thus, like so many campsites in Botswana, water supplies there should not be relied upon. The elephants in the area have become famous over the years for stealing



fruit.

A new camp at Savute has been set up on the other side of the river and features elephant-proof ablution facility with solar water heating. I have not seen this new camp and want to know how anyone can build anything elephant-proof!

## Northern Chobe

I have been a regular visitor to Chobe since the early seventies. During recent visits I have found the game-viewing in this section of the park disappointing. It appears that the massive destruction by the elephants has chased much of the other game away and thus the only animals in abundance are elephants. Nonetheless, the Chobe River is strikingly beautiful from campsites on the river.

The river is at its finest in late afternoon. From the camps in Kasane an evening river cruise can be arranged, or a river game drive taken. An hour or two before sunset, drive west along the river bank and position yourself close to the river with your back to the setting sun. When the river is high, many of these tracks are submerged and they should be skirted as some of the pools lying across the track can be de-

ceptively deep. Once in position, sit and wait. Almost every evening many large herds of elephant come down to the river to bathe.

One clear, warm evening in 1986, while on safari in the Chobe National Park, we parked close to the river bank, about 100 yards from an elephant herd of about 40 strong. They had come down to wallow in the cool water. A couple paired off and began to frolic and play. To our delight their affection was a prelude to one of the most remarkable sights to be witnessed in the bush; they mated semi-submerged in the clear water. This lasted for some ten minutes before they emerged from the water on the opposite bank and then stood motionless with their trunks entwined. The autumn sun gradually settled itself behind the acacia trees and formed a magnificent sunset.

### Camping at the Chobe River

The well-known campsite at Serondella is closed and the new camp called Ihaha, about 20km before Serondella (from the Savute), overlooks the Chobe River and has new ablutions with solar water heating.

At present baboons are a not a nuisance, but it is only time that will change that. At no time of the day or night should you leave your camp unattended unless everything is locked away in a tent or vehicle with all of the tents collapsed. The baboons at Serondella learnt how to unzip tents and would empty the contents in minutes. They have not yet been able to pitch a tent, but I imagine they are trying to work it out.

### The Route to Ihaha from Savute

There are two options available to you to reach Ihaha from Savute. The first is the more heavily used western road which is the direct route to the Chobe River seen on the map. The distance along this route is approximately 207 kilometres and will take a minimum of six hours. Road conditions are a combination of firm track and heavy sand.

The second, easterly route is more interesting and there are camping facilities on the way. It is longer, but as the road conditions are better it usually takes less time. This route is however unreliable during a wet season. The route is as follows: Take the main road north out of Savute. 3.1 kilometres past the turn-off to Linyanti you will cross an old river channel. Here, turn right. Both tracks lead to Harvey's Pan from which you will clearly see, in an easterly direction, Quarry Hill. After some 113 kilometres you will reach a signposted junction where a right turn takes you into a maze of

tracks around Ngwezumba Dam and the campsite at Nogatsaa. If you carry straight on past the junction, the road takes you directly to Kasane. After 22 kilometres another junction also allows access to Ngwezumba and Nogatsaa. Ignore this and carry on straight and, after passing Nantanga Pans, you will meet the main Kasane-Ngoma Gate road. Go straight if your destination is the Chobe River and Ihaha, or right to Kasane.

### KASANE

In Kasane you will find all of the amenities and supplies you need including a Midas spare parts shop. Fuel is more expensive than in the major towns. There are a number of luxury lodges in the area such as Chobe Chilwero, Chobe Game Lodge, Chobe Safari Lodge and Kubu Lodge. As an alternative to Ihaha, the last mentioned has a campsite which is quieter and, because it is outside the reserve, considerably cheaper.

### GUIDE TO CONSERVATION

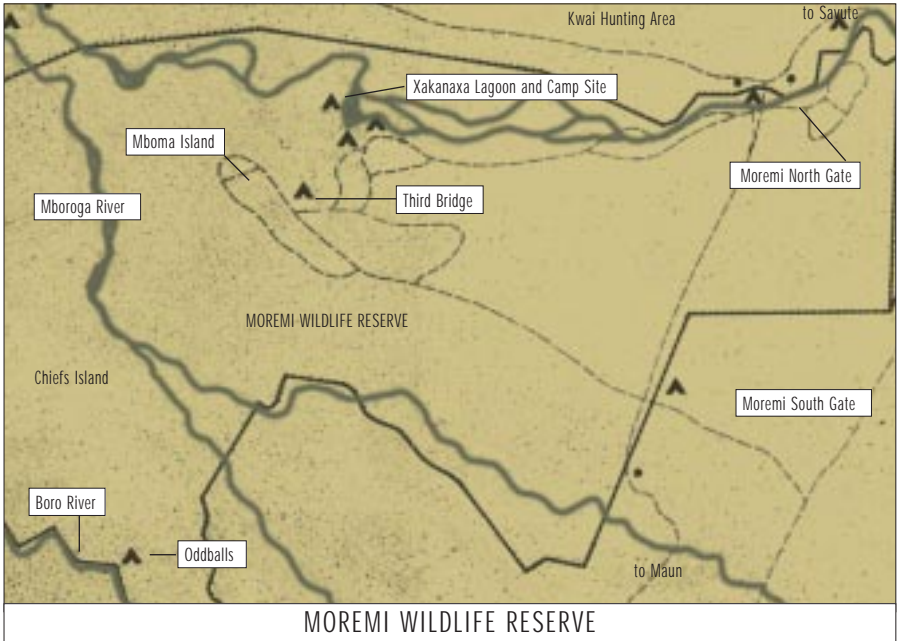
- Stick to existing tracks.
- Do not bury your rubbish - take it with you.
- Beware of starting fires - especially in areas like the Okavango Delta and Chief's Island. If you smoke, put your extinguished cigarette butts into your pocket as this not only prevents fire but also the unsightly presence of non-biodegradable filters in the wilderness areas.
- Do not break branches from living trees for firewood. Collect your dead firewood with care, taking only as much as you need.
- Do not pollute the water in rivers with non-biodegradable soaps and detergents.

### ARRANGING YOUR TRAIL

Booking well in advance is essential. Book at Parks and Reserves Reservations Office (Gaborone), PO Box 131, Gaborone, Botswana. Tel: (267) 58 0774, fax: (267) 58 0775 e-mail: DWNPBOTS@GLOBAL.BW For private lodges contact your travel agent, also well in advance.

### MAPS AND BOOKS

Ideal maps are the Shell Botswana 1:1,750 000, Chobe and Moreme maps. The best book is Mike Main's Botswana Visitors' Guide. They are available by mail order from the Continental 4xForum 021 785 5752. (<http://www.4xforum.co.za>)



MOREMI WILDLIFE RESERVE

# GEMSBOK WILDERNESS TRAIL

## Kgalagadi District - Botswana

### STATUS

Driving skills required: ★

Overlanding skills required: ★★★★★

Non-guided

### SUMMARY

The Gemsbok National Park has finally been opened to off-roaders wanting to enjoy the unspoilt wilderness of this area. For some 285km of track, on which only 4x4 vehicles may travel, those who wish to experience a sense of solitude and freedom in the wilderness will find no sign of development, no signposts, no set campsites and will be asked to observe only the most basic of rules. For the lover of the Kalahari the area is very rewarding and the isolation hard to beat.

### THE TRAIL

Although this route can only be negotiated by 4x4 vehicles it is not intended as a testing ground but rather as an opportunity to enjoy the solitude and unspoilt environment. The trail, which links various pans, is lightly defined and rough, sometimes passing through areas of tall grass and sometimes over ridges and dunes of churning sand. Normal desert species of wildlife can be seen in varying concentrations along the trail and lion, jackal and brown hyena often explore camps at night. The park is also the home

of the famous black-maned lions. These lions, while not uncommon in the sub-region, are certainly striking and dignified in appearance. Their manes, which distinguish them from other tawny lions, are actually very dark brown, profusely mixed with black hairs. They also have a yellowish or tawny fringe which surrounds their faces.

The area is a bird-watching and game-viewing paradise. Most visitors wax lyrical about the area as they recount stories of lion and cheetah sightings, wonderful vistas with antelope and spectacular birds. We too have always been richly rewarded with wildlife encounters when we have visited the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park.

Administration and check in/out is handled by the Wildlife entrance gate at Two Rivers and the trail, which is travelled in an anti-clockwise direction, starts and finishes at different points along the Nossob Valley. Travelling time averages about 20 kilometres per hour.

### THE PARK

This 1 087 000-hectare (Botswana side) and 970 000-hectare (South African side) national park shares the Mabuasehube Game Reserve's (Botswana) western border. Although the international border divides the park into two sections, there is no dividing fence between the two and game can thus migrate freely within one huge ecological area. On the western side the national park borders Namibia and South Africa.

The Nossob River Valley, well covered with trees and grass, has ample subterranean water.



This river valley is an ideal place to view springbok, gemsbok, hartebeest and wildebeest. Lion and cheetah are also fairly common. The second river found in the national park, the Auob (meaning 'bitter tasting'), although flowing only occasionally, also has a vegetation-covered valley somewhat narrower than the Nossob. The two rivers join at the southern tip of the park, hence the name of the camp built there, Twee Rivieren (Two Rivers). The area in the interior, between the two rivers, is primarily sand dunes and thorn scrub interspersed with pans and watering holes.

#### Camping at Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (regular rest camps on South African side)

There are three rest camps, namely Twee Rivieren, Nossob, and Mata Mata. All three camps offer both camping or accommodation in chalets. Basic groceries, soft drinks and curios can be bought at all three camps, but fresh vegetables, meat, eggs, etc. are only available at Twee Rivieren. There is also a restaurant at Twee Rivieren. Petrol and diesel are available at all three camps.

Twee Rivieren is the first camp in the reserve and is situated at the entrance. It is therefore the logical place to spend the first night. Nossob and Mata Mata camps are however, in our opinion, nicer campsites. The roads in the park are good except after heavy rain when they can become muddy.

#### Camping in the Gemsbok National Park

To me this is real camping – no facilities, no amenities and no rules – just peace and solitude. Everything must be brought in with you and carried out.

#### MINIMUM TIME REQUIRED

Time allocated to complete the trail is three days and two nights and may not be done in a shorter time.

#### NUMBER OF VEHICLES

Only one group of not less than two 4x4 vehicles will be allowed to start the trail on any

given day, ensuring privacy and isolation. No vehicles over 3500kg unladen weight will be allowed on the trail due to the nature of the track.

#### ARRANGING YOUR TRAIL

For almost all the destinations on this trail, booking well in advance is essential. Book at Parks and Reserves Reservations Office (Gaborone), PO Box 131, Gaborone, Botswana. Tel: (267) 58 0774  
Fax: (267) 58 0775  
e-mail: DWNPBOTS@GLOBAL.BW





# SEVEN LOST TRAILS OF THE FAR INTERIOR

## Central District

### STATUS

Driving skills required: ★★- ★★★★★

Navigation skills required: ★★★★★- ★★★★★

Non-guided

### SUMMARY

For the past 10 years the organisers of these trails have researched the old wagon routes in Botswana, especially those in the eastern portion of the Central District. During this time they have painstakingly recorded the history of the 19th century hunters, missionaries, adventurers and gold seekers who first opened up the country. After years spent in archives, libraries and antiquarian book-stores to determine the exact routes followed by these pioneers, and many weekends devoted to clearing the bush along the routes, the organisers are now ready to invite other 4x4 enthusiasts to come and share in the joy of driving these lost trails again.

There are seven trails in total, four of which are now open. Users of the trails purchase a Trail Guide Package, which is a circular trail, containing one or more of the Seven Lost Trails. Most Packages begin at the camping site, known as Peg's Camp in the Tuli Block.

The Package is licensed to the holder only, is valid for a limited period and serves as a permit. It contains the following items:

- Colour 1:50 000 maps on which all the escape routes have been marked.
- Historical guide book and bookmarks of each trail which outline the history of the trail and the people who travelled it. Their adventures are recorded step by step along the trail and the Navigation Route Schedule has quick references to the booklet.

- Checklists of birds and trees found along the route.
- A Junior Schedule for youngsters aged between 8-11 is an optional extra. This keeps children occupied with ETA, spotting landmarks and stories about life on trek.
- A user-friendly navigation route schedule which can be used with or without a GPS. The Seven Lost Trails are in a wild and remote country where GPS users can fully enjoy their navigation. The schedule includes the following information: point ID, waypoints, co-ordinates, grids, features/directions, landmarks/clocks, leg km, trip km, estimated times, bookmarks and narratives.

### DIFFICULTY AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Two reliable vehicles are recommended. You must be self-sufficient in fuel, food and camping gear. The trails cross deep, sandy rivers, Kalahari sand, rocky ridges and dongas. The research team has cleared the trails of overhanging branches and trees to minimise paint damage and scratching. Each trail offers different driving and navigational challenges:

#### The Missionaries Road

Some driving experience is required. Someone in the party must be able to navigate well as this is a four star navigation trail.

#### Thomas Baines' Prospectors' Path

An inexperienced driver will handle this trail with ease. However, it is a four star navigation trail.

#### The Ivory Trail

This trail is rated as a five star driving experience only suitable to those enthusiasts who are confident off-road. The route is described as a 'theme park roller coaster ride' going up and down steep rocky ridges through sandy rivers. Navigation should not present too many challenges.



### The Pioneer Road

This is a four star driving trail which takes you through one of Botswana's few mountain passes onto thick sands with river crossings and dongas.

### Phikwe Trails

These are day trails from Selebi-Phikwe which require driving skills from the novice to the very experienced.

### NUMBER OF VEHICLES REQUIRED

Minimum of two vehicles per trail and maximum six per trail.

### RECOMMENDED TIME OF YEAR

The best times to visit are from March to September when days are warm and nights cool.

### MINIMUM TIME REQUIRED

Packages last from one day to a week. Drivers may self-pace their trail and there is no time limit.

## THE TRAILS

### THE MISSIONARIES ROAD

Robert Moffat's Missionary Road was the strategic Suez Canal to the north. Moffat obtained permission to open a Christian Mission in Matabeleland, and within five years the Mashona country was opened to hunters. Karl Mauch found gold at Tati and sparked off the first gold rush in Africa, turning the Missionaries Road into Jan Smuts Avenue at peak hour. The Zeederberg Coaches carried mail and passengers along the route. You will find thick sand, deep rivers, tree savannah and mopane forest and beautiful granite hills along this route. The trail ends at the Shashe River Drift.

### THOMAS BAINES' PROSPECTORS' PATH

This was an old cattle rustling route used by the Boers and the Amandebele from at least 1840. In 1871 Thomas Baines, the famous artist after whom Baines' Baobabs are named, 'rediscovered' the route on his last trip through the area. He had received a concession to mine gold in Mashonaland from King Lobengula who told him of a short cut from the Shashe River to the Limpopo, but warned him of the perilous tsetse fly. Baines and his companions walked every inch of the road from Gu-Buluwayo to the safety of the Limpopo before bringing their wagons and oxen through. The research team have

traced the road from the Shashe to the Limpopo and en-route positively identified the last baobab to receive attention from Baines' artist's brush. The road is very scenic and cuts through a poort in the Lepokole Hills, which conceal rock art and Zimbabwe-type ruins. It continues past the huge granite dwalas with deep natural pools that Baines called Byles' Pools after his companion Henry Byles.

### THE IVORY TRAIL

This was the access road to the last of the great elephant herds who sought refuge in the inhospitable wasteland of the Shashe river valley away from renowned hunters like Viljoen, van Rooyen and Selous. The rocky ridges are similar to the Koakoveld in scenic beauty. The research team report that on their first trip along the rugged trail they averaged a mere seven kilometres per hour!

### THE PIONEER ROAD

This route was built in 1890 by Frederick Selous and his Ngwato friend, Makamana, to facilitate the wagon train of the Pioneer Column that occupied Mashonaland. Hundreds of settlers followed the road to settle in the fledgling colony of Rhodesia. The road goes over one of Botswana's few passes, the Malaka Pass, entering thick Kalahari sand before reaching Fort Elbe. It passes an historical baobab at Phakwe, from where it dips through dongas to Fort Matlaputla and the ghost village of Macloutsie.

### PHIKWE TRAILS

These are day trails from Selebi-Phikwe to British forts, pre-history sites from Zimbabwe and Khami periods, San rock paintings, traditional villages, museums, 4x4 trails to nowhere and sacred waterfalls. One of the researchers, Ilona Somerset, has recorded these fascinating sites in her book 'The Seven Lost Trails and other Outdoor Adventures in Eastern Botswana' The Phikwe trails last from half an hour to four hours.

### GUIDE TO CONSERVATION

- Stick to the existing tracks.
- Take out all of your rubbish. We suggest you take a wooden block and a two-kilogram hammer to crush all your food and drink cans, thus making your rubbish more manageable.

### FACILITIES AND SAFARI SUPPLIES EN ROUTE

Peg's Camp: Self-catering campsite with flushing toilets and hot showers on the banks of the Limpopo. Each campsite has a view of the river.

There is a designated braai area, firewood is provided and a lapa with a fully equipped kitchen. There are two shaded, level decks overlooking the river from where visitors can enjoy the prolific bird- life. It is safe to walk, although leopard has been spotted and hippo graze on the banks at night. Swimming is not permitted due to the threat of crocodiles, but there is a swimming pool. The camp is named after Peggy, the largest resident crocodile. She is estimated to be two and a half metres long. All trails include two nights camping at Peg's Camp.

Selebi-Phikwe: Halfway point between Gauteng and Maun, Chobe and Victoria Falls. Petrol, hotels, camping supplies, food and drinks, motor repairs and medical facilities.

Tuli Block: Game reserves from the budget to ultra high cost.

- tickets booked in advance for all live shows at Phikwe Arts Group's Focus Theatre.
- self-published guide books to Fort Matlapula and Guide to eastern Botswana available.

#### ORGANISING YOUR TRAIL

Reservations are essential through telefax: 09267 810 642

e-mail: 7trails@it.bw

website: www.it.bw/~7trails

PO Box 559, Selebi-Phikwe, Botswana.

#### EXTRAS

- export quality meat from the Tuli Block is vacuum packed according to client's specifications and meat permits are arranged in advance.
- special educational bush awareness tour arranged for children and teenagers with Colin Kirkham of Bush Awareness Botswana.
- hand tooled and hand painted leather goods procured at factory prices.
- route schedules to rock paintings, sites of natural beauty, traditional villages, Botswana's only wine route, ruins from the Zimbabwe and Khami periods and Fort Matalputla – eastern Botswana's ghost village – guided or prepared.
- exciting outdoor birthday parties for children organised.
- temporary membership of sports clubs in Selebi-Phikwe offering tennis, bowls, squash, horse riding, cricket, volleyball and rugby.

#### KGALAGADI TRAIL WAYPOINTS WGS 84 DATUM

DESCRIPTION	S	E
Bokspits Border Post	26 54.272	20 41.453
Botswana Police	26 53.553	20 41.806
Two Rivers	26 28.788 (app)	20 36.951 (app)
Tweerivieren	26 28.788 (app)	20 36.577 (app)
Nossob	25 25.350 (app)	20 35.750 (app)
Polenswa Camp	25 05.259	20 25.726
Tweelina Rambuka	24 47.073	20 23.829
Dimpho Pan	24 44.200	20 31.300
Kanle Pan	24 40.400	20 32.250
Route curves left	24 37.414	20 36.641
Route curves right	24 36.341	20 36.875

Turnoff to Sesatswe	24 32.229	20 49.052
Sesatswe Camp	24 32.908	20 49.404
Turnoff to Sesatswe	4 32.229	20 49.052
Junction - turn left	24 29.318	20 49.166
Junction - turn left	24 22.829	20 40.857
Junction - turn left	24 22.824	20 40.850
Route curves right	24 30.853	20 37.189
Route curves left	24 39.254	20 24.153
Lang Rambuka Camp	24 47.949	20 21.167
Route curves left	24 42.293	20 18.872
Twin Rambuka	24 44.993	20 13.020
Trail ends/main road	24 59.307	20 18.963

co-ordinates thanks to Herbet Smith <MScape@CPro.co.za>



