





January 2001



The Barking Gecko



 Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Volume 2, Issue 1

Desert Guides Training Course: 25 November to 2 December 2000

ALSO OF GOLD BUNDLES, DANCING GIRLS AND THE WILD(ERNESS) WEST IN GENERAL.

The third Desert Guides Training Course offered by NATH was once again held at Wolwedans. This course had all the wrinkles ironed out and was based at the Dunes Lodge, which meant all the participants and lecturers stayed in one place. "Course" conjures images of study, of stern lecturers and horror of horrors, exams! All this was there, although to study after a complete three-course meal as the Dunes Lodge serves, is not easy (as the Afrikaners say "magie vol - ogies toe"). Seeing the lecturers live off the same fare, the level of sternness diminished and as for the exams, well one in seven days is not too bad.

The aim of the course is to develop an understanding of the Namib so as to make guiding easier and more professional. The course should be obligatory for any guide planning to guide anywhere in the Namib - be it Sperrgebiet, Central Namib or Northern Namib. As to the Wild(erness)West in the title: a core concept that came out throughout the course from all lecturers, but specifically from Dr H. Berry and J.A. Lenssen, was that of Wilderness. The capital letter in Wilderness is not a mistake: as our civilisation drives itself to become more efficient, friendlier and bigger (read huge), the Wilderness areas (of which there is no finite definition as each of us has our own concept of the term) are diminished daily, but are also sought out by more and more people. How to protect these areas? How to utilise them? These questions were raised and most participants of the course, whilst



obviously not finding all the answers, left Wolwedans feeling that apart from factual knowledge, a desert spiritualism had been awakened. As Wallace Stegner put it in his "Geography of Hope", "Something will have gone out of us as people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed, and so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world,, as part of the geography of hope."

We on NRNR have the chance to make a difference, to develop a Wilderness where people may come to look in on things as they were once, maybe as they should be, in effect we are also part of other's "geography of hope".

On the more factual side we were given a huge amount of information on why the desert is here, what adaptations living organisms (insects, birds, mammals and plants) have adopted to survive, where to find these organisms, who should go into the desert how and when. We were given ample opportunity to do practical work and were given permission by the NRNR Control Warden to do some live trapping of fauna. We were very lucky. The course participants are now among the handful (clawful?) of people who have actually seen and touched a real, live bundle of gold. The bucket traps set for the Grant's golden mole proved to be very successful and two were caught. They were photographed, touched, stroked, displayed and happily, for the mole, released. In short, they were treated like the stars of the Namib that they are.

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All stars, and shows, need a chorus line. The Namib has a super, albeit a solo, chorus line that dances on request. However our dancer is very shy and recalcitrant and it takes a while to locate her "cloak room" (tunnel) and like all prima donnas this "girl!"

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Desert Guides (contd)

(Continued from page 1)

needs to hear the crowds. We finally managed all this and saw (no-one wanted to touch) a Dancing White-Lady, which was not Ms Goosen dancing Herman's Oryx Milking Tango, but a real, live, beautiful spider which "dances" when threatened, by waving her front legs in the air. This was a real treat.



For those that wanted to get homesick we had our resident course "mother" in the form of Hermann who made sure that all needs were catered for and also checked any unruly behaviour. A big thank-you and well done is in order for Hermann and the team at Wolwedans. It cannot be overstressed what a wonderful venue the Dunes Lodge is. If courses were graded, this one would be five star. The meals (especially the chocolate mousse) and service made us feel we were guests, not course participants. If school were like this none of us would ever want to leave. The course ran its course (ha, ha) smoothly (memories of chocolate mousse) in great part due to the professionalism and dedication of the lecturers viz Dr H. Berry, Conny Berry, Achim Lenssen and Peter Bridgeford. The combined experience, knowledge and love for the desert was evident and extremely well presented in an informal way which relaxed everyone.

Aandstêr, the southernmost farm of NRNR, was purchased in 1999. Mr M. M. (Thys) Louw, the previous owner, paid a short visit to Aandstêr during October 2000. While he was here, he gave me some background information on the farm.

Mr M.M. Louw Snr., Thys' father, arrived in this area in 1941/42 from the Cape. The farms had not all been surveyed, but he did have grazing rights west of the present Wêreldend and Kameelhof, and according to Thys this area was part of the Sperrgebiet.

In about 1950 Aandstêr was surveyed

The consensus is that this is a super course.

On NRNR we are guiding in an area set aside for Nature to take her course with us as visitors. Let us convey this to our guests and ensure the protection, survival and correct development of this gem of the Namib. This can only be achieved when the guides have a sound knowledge of the area, which the Desert Guide's course introduces everyone to.

The hope is that Wolwedans and NATH will be able to host the next course, which will certainly have enough participants, as successfully at the same venue.

A closing thought is this: A course should be seen as a guideline and every participant should take it upon themselves to further their love, respect and knowledge of the Namib because in terms of the desert, a week is a split second when eternity is your life-span.

Marc Dürr, Tok Tokkie Trails.

NRNR Annual General Meeting

Thanks to everyone who attended the AGM of the NamibRand Nature Reserve held in Windhoek in December last year. A wonderful spirit of co-operation reigned, extending into the evening at Gathemann's, where some truly wondrous and unbeatable tricks were on display by our on-form Sky Adventurer Eric. Pity the spirit of co-operation didn't extend to the street outside our meeting, where some no-good chose to saw off the steering wheel of Achim's Land Cruiser.



and Mr Louw Snr then took legal possession of the farm. Until that time he was living on the farm Karichab, east of Maltahöhe. Besides farming he also traded in Karakul pelts. On Aandstêr he farmed with Karakul and had a Karakul stud. The main house was built in 1951/52, and various alterations were made over time. The three roomed annex west of the house was built in 1960, and the two guest rooms

Next Issue:
For the April 2001 issue, please let us have any articles of interest as early as possible in April.

From last issue, we began running a **concessionaire profile** per issue, with the bulk of the profile material provided by the concessionaire themselves (one to two A4 pages when laid-out). A description of your product, perhaps how it came about, photos, people, etc...

The sequence is as follows:

Oct '00	Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge
Jan '01	NamibRand Family Hide-out
Apr '01	Tok Tokkie Trails
Jul '01	Wolwedans Dunes Lodge and Dune Camp
Oct '01	Namib Sky Adventure Safaris

The Gospel According to Thys (or the History of Aandstêr)

with bathroom in 1967.

Thys farmed with Karakul and cattle and later went into hunting. In 1974, he and some farmers in the district formed the „Maltahöhe Jag en Wildbewaringvereeniging" to promote ethical hunting and make farmers aware of the value of game. This was before the establishment of the "Namibia Professional Hunters' Association". He successfully farmed and hunted for more than 20 years and was the recipient of the "Game Farmer of the Year" award in the early nineties.

Peter Bridgeford

Concessionaire Profile

Of all the NamibRand concessionaires, we are the littlest and most modest by about a mile. Our product on offer is a self-catering, fully-equipped and -furnished house, occupying the old Stellarine farmhouse, from which up to 10 guests may independently and at will embark upon hikes or 4x4 drives (on dedicated and well-marked tracks only) into the stunning dunes in the southern part of the Reserve. They may fly a kite, dune-board or simply "vrot" around a braai and infuse the Namib silence, disturbed only around nightfall by the click of countless barking geckos.

The only other possible source of disturbance may of course be the guests' own children frolicking in the mini-dunes literally on the Hideout's doorstep. As its full name suggests, the Hideout is family-friendly, and our own experience has shown that kids absolutely love it.

How did the Hideout come into being? Firstly, after the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, it is the Reserve's newest concessionaire, having opened in August 1999, ten years after our very first visit to NamibRand. We had visited NamibRand often in the days of the Chateau, Gorrasis and (responsible) self-driving, and loved it. We popped in occasionally at the empty Stellarine farmhouse, with its three still very much alive eucalyptus trees and the sand dunes encroaching slowly on what used to be human territory. How could anyone have possibly lived there? It was a Kolmanskop-type experience, in all its eeriness and emptiness.

Once tourism began in earnest on the



NamibRand Family Hideout



Reserve and especially after the arrival of our little girl, Tanya, we found it more and more difficult to find a place to stay down there which provided us with the sense of freedom, seclusion and peace of mind which we had so come to love about NamibRand.

So the idea arose that we were probably not the only ones who would enjoy such a facility in this wonderful part of Namibia. We spent a weekend eyeing out the old farmhouses on the farms Toskaan and Draaihoek as possibilities for renovation, but realised that our hearts were actually more in the dunes. When Andreas suggested Stellarine, I nearly booked him in for a psychiatric check-up ("... it doesn't even have a ROOF! What about all the pigeon-sh.. and the dunes in the lounge?"). By this time, the eucalyptus trees were dead, so even the appeal of the shade had gone. Anyway, after a reconnaissance trip with a builder and architect and much measuring, the plans began to take shape. Thanks to the vision and hard work of our talented friend and architect Memi Merdes, we had a plan by May 1999 which appealed to all and made best use of the existing structure.



One of the old gum trees blew over in an east wind during the building activities, narrowly missing the newly installed roof. As a result we all decided that the second tree had to go as it was teetering on its last roots, dangerously close to the house. Our builder, Fritz Schroeter, and his team have many a story about the powdery state of the clay walls, the skewness of the cement floors and the old scribbles on the rafters. The place reeks of history and that's the feeling we wanted to retain. At the same

time, we wanted to create an atmosphere of homeliness and comfort, shelter from the blazing heat and occasional blasts of east wind.

The only other aspect to be sorted out remained the cleaning between guests and the maintenance of the Hideout, which we were hardly in a position to do personally from Windhoek. Fortunately for us, Elinor and Marc of Tok Tokkie Trails agreed to look after the place, key hand-over, etc. from their home base, 5 kilometres away. We are very much indebted to them for their friendly and willing co-operation. Also to all the other NamibRand people who bestowed their best wishes on the project - you all helped us to realise our dream in a very short space of time.

The bookings received in our first year were more than satisfactory. Our guests have so far been mainly families from Namibia and South Africa, their report-backs very favourable. We believe that our product has a niche market in the "first world" too, among those who have grown tired of being handed everything on a plate, as their distance from our earth grows and the space around them diminishes.

We also believe that our product should in no way compete with any of the other accommodation offerings on the NamibRand Nature Reserve, as it requires a different level of self-sufficiency on the part of the guest (not everyone's cup of tea!). We thank you for supporting us.

Andreas and Mandy Brückner

NamibRand People—Hugo Hayes

I consider myself as a bit of "local" born and bred on the farm Onze-rust (now known as Intu Africa), being a hunting farm at the time, I grew up in the hospitality industry.

I received schooling at Stampriet Primary and finished off at the Technical High in Windhoek.

After school I joined Namibia Resorts International, where I completed my in-house training as chef under the watchful eye of chef Reiner Bertram. I spent time within the group working at several of their other establishments.

I joined the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge pre-opening team in October 1999. It was a great experience to be involved from the very beginning of a challenging project.

It was a great opportunity to pass on

some of my knowledge to very willing and eager staff (all the kitchen staff were employed without prior experience). Although it required some long hours in the first few months the result was a team that produced food at a high standard set by myself.

The food I serve is considered Afro-centric, that means by using traditional European cooking methods but using African products (local) to produce a four-course meal.

I am currently an active committee member of the Namibian Chefs Association. A personal and professional career highlight occurred when I was selected as one of the top twenty young chefs in the world. This resulted in a two week educational in Boston, USA, at the Johnson & Wales

Culinary University.

This was a great opportunity to learn more about American cuisine and the different cultures of all the other young chefs that participated. The other countries represented were: South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland, USA, Costa Rica, Germany and Israel.



Since this was my first time abroad it was a great experience and an eye-opener to see how things are done in

other countries. This experience also improved my communication skills with our guests very much.

I am proud to be associated with NamibRand Nature Reserve and Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge and I will always carry these two names very high wherever I go.

Hugo Hayes, Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge Head Chef

Reserve News—Achim Lenssen

On 20 October 2000 a cheetah with a collar was sighted at the foot of Ysterkop, which is about 2 km NW of Keerweder house. Unfortunately light was fading and no particulars of the collar could be identified. It is presumed that it is one of the younger animals released in May this year.

A new water-point for game was constructed on Stellarine near the Horseshoe. This water point is thus called Horseshoe-water. There is no borehole at this site and so water is pumped up from the old Turbex site. The residents will have noticed that the old windpump that was broken for years has been taken down and the old unsightly reservoir has been demolished. This place is now also renamed Horseshoe-pump because of all the changes that have taken place.

On Aandster the old fences are still coming down and in the last year 85 km of fence have been removed. The sale of the used material is producing a revenue for the Reserve. Especially the mesh wire is in high demand. Steel wire is piling up as there are few farmers putting up new fences these days.

A new entrance road to Wolwedans was constructed in the last months and commissioned at the end of October. This new road avoids the Verweg house and improves the first impression for visitors. If you should drive on the new road at night you may now see the light in the Verweg house. Markus, a Reserve worker, who lives there now has solar power light in

each room.

Keerweder staff recently assisted the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge with the installation of a mono pump into one of their boreholes, as a training exercise for their maintenance staff. For an unknown reason however the pump only delivers a fraction of the volume of water that it should.

Several sightings of hyaena were reported. Meanwhile our neighbour on Wereldend is throwing out poison to kill all predators. Apparently he has already killed five spotted hyaena in the last few months. How many other carnivorous animals are killed in this senseless manner will never be known.

A Christmas Gift

"..... a time of year where all slows down and the mood is relaxed and the individual can take stock of the year passed....!"

At this time of year we all trust that we will get something that will please our desire and make our lives filled with joy. Of all the things I've wished for, it was always my dream to have a

piece of Africa to make a home for myself.... this dream already walked half way with me when I came to stay on NamibRand. A step further when I

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A Christmas Gift (contd.)

(Continued from page 4)

moved and now live on top of the dune - always sure that I am the only person that lives in a penthouse on top of the dune. Then Christmas 2000 brought me the good, no excellent news:

"you may share a piece of this beautiful world with us permanently." A piece of land so beautiful that no words can describe it, with an even more spectacular view on a part of Africa that fills my heart, soul and body.

Christmas always was a beautiful time - now it will be even more beautiful with the joy of a home I can call home, a piece of Africa for myself.

"The eagles' shadow runs across the yellow grassy plain, towards the distant, air-blue mountains.

But the shadows of the oryx, sit close between their hoofs, where they stand immovable - and

wait for the evening, wait to stretch out, upon the plain, painted gold, yellow and brick-red by the sunset, and wander to a water-hole.

The moon rises over the mountain - gold turns to grey and grey turns to silver - gathered around the water-hole are shadows, now ghostly reflected in the water.

Time to turn in, time to listen for the evening and night calls.

Time to be thankful, for a piece of Africa."

Herman Cloete, Wolwedans

Garden Plants on NamibRand—Achim Lenssen

The commercial farms that comprise NamibRand all had their farmsteads with gardens. We have inherited gardens with plants in them that do not fit the concept of a nature reserve because they are foreign to this part of the world or country. We have unwanted plants in some gardens and now face the dilemma of what should we do with them.

Scientific terms which we all should be familiar with when discussing such a topic are:

Endemic - a plant or animal that occurs only in a particular part of the world and nowhere else, eg. the Welwitschia plant is endemic to the Namib desert.

Indigenous - plants or animals that occur naturally in that country/part of the world.

Exotic - plants/animals introduced by man from another part of the world or another continent.

Alien - same as above

Invasive - a plant that displaces other

plants through some (invader) interference of man in nature. Invasive plants are commonly exotic or alien but can also be indigenous, eg swarthak in central Namibia.

Par. 6.5. of the NRNR rules and guidelines stipulates that only indigenous trees and shrubs may be planted with

the exception of lawn grass and some other horticultural plants which need prior approval. This does make gardening very difficult. What must be taken out and what to plant in its place. Let me help you with some thoughts and advice.

If a plant can spread from your garden and propagate itself elsewhere on the reserve without human assistance then you are dealing with a potential invader. You should kill such a plant in your garden before it spreads.

Plants to look out for are the Prosopis trees, the wild tobacco plant, oleander, lantana and a few others. All the cactus species, also known as Opuntia,

were introduced to the country from America. However, they are invaders that are difficult to get rid of. Never take them out of the garden and dispose of them somewhere on a heap, as they will grow again. So will any section of the plant that is dropped along the way. All these plants must be killed with chemicals or burnt for a long time. If there is an old unused reservoir in your vicinity you can throw them onto the cement floor to dry out for a few years also. Remember that prickly-pear or Opuntia ficus-indica is also one of the cactus family.

As for the many other exotic plants, we can accept them in the farmstead garden but not elsewhere. Trees should not be taken out for the mere fact of not being indigenous. Replacements should be planted first and the exotic removed when it is competitive for space and water. It needs to be pointed out as well that not all acacia species are indigenous to Namibia as many were introduced from Australia. One is not safe to think that any acacia is kosher for the reserve.



Eco-tourism Corner

Termite Mounds

Termites need direct access to water and they need good ventilation in the colony. They cut grass which is then taken down into their cultivation chambers where the fungus grow on dead material.

Especially with the Harvester termites, they feed on dead material. The fungus, when it has a good substrate it then forms spores. The ter-

mites feed on spores, because that is the type of food they can digest.

For the fungus to grow it needs humidity or moist air and moderate temperature of between 12 and 18 degrees celcius.

The termites need a chimney erected above the ground for air circulation. They can open the chimney with a lot of holes.

The humidity evaporates because of the dry air coming into the colony. By opening and closing the holes in the chimney the temperature and humidity is regulated. Less evaporation creates high temperatures. By doing this they regulate the temperature which is optimum for the fungus.

Issy Karaerua



**Newsletter of the
NamibRand Nature Reserve**

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"The wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust and must account for it to those who come after us."

NamibRand Facts

How many Fairy Circles have been sold so far?

Concessionaire	Number Sold
Wolwedans	88
Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge	6
Tok Tokkie Trails	6
NR Family Hideout	3
NamibRand Nature Reserve and JAB	8
TOTAL	111

Websites:
www.wolwedans.com
www.ccafrica.com
www.members.mweb.com.na/nrfhideout



Many thanks to the following guests for Adopting a Fairy Circle since the last issue:

NamibRand Present at Expo 2000

In the July 2000 issue I reported on an invitation to attend Expo 2000 and introduce the NamibRand Nature Reserve Project during the World National Park Convention which was held at Gosslar towards the end of October 2000. Equipped with various publications on NRNR and - last but not least - the 36 magnificent slides, shot by Stephan and Burkhard Dobiely, I presented the project to an audience of some 200 people. These Convention attendees hailed from all parts of the world, while the European region was more than present.

Although my time was limited to ten minutes, I managed to convey the most important aspects concerning NRNR to a receptive audience and also was able to project most of the slides. I can safely say that the slide projection on NRNR was outstanding, was very well received and was by far the best material on exhibit. On the last day of the convention we all inaugurated a monument to conservation

at Torfhaus within the Nationalpark Harz which was inaugurated by the Minister for Environment of Umwelt-schutz, Mr Jüttner. The weather was miserable and cold, therefore, no photos.

During the Convention a few pertinent statements were made which makes one think, for instance:-

- every day more than 100 species disappear from this globe
- desertification claims 30 hectares of land every day
- Millions of tons of gasses and fumes are exhausted into the atmosphere daily
- the world population grows by millions every day

WHERE IS THIS ALL GOING TO END?

If anybody is interested in receiving a copy of my presentation, please shout.

Albi Brückner, CEO of NRNR

Piki and Sue Vith	Cape Town	Hideout
Gillie and Martin Bosman	Windhoek	Hideout
Irene Joa	Germany	Wolwedans
Dieter Joa	Germany	Wolwedans
Hans Kohlhammer	Germany	Wolwedans
Michael Wehlen	Switzerland	Wolwedans
Wendy Bowra	U.K.	Wolwedans
Horace Scheibli	France	Wolwedans
Doris Stockmar-Mücke	Germany	Wolwedans
Erin Sweeney & Jackie Sestak	U.S.A.	Wolwedans
Adolf Vogt-Ladner	Germany	Wolwedans
Heidi Wampfler	Switzerland	Wolwedans
Antje Mueggenburg	Germany	Wolwedans
Karl & Gudrun Mueller	Germany	Wolwedans
Nicola & Mirko Joa	Germany	Wolwedans