

Cape to Congo River: 6 July to 22 August 2010: Part I

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Well a lot has been said on the LCCSA forum about Paul and Lin Fisher's trip report to Angola, as well as the few remarks that Philna and I have made about our trip that took place about a month or so earlier than Paul's. I have eventually put my report together, and quite a few photos might even be the same as those you will find in Paul's report.....
I have split my report also in two parts.

Cape to Congo River: 6 July 2010 – 22 August 2010

This trip planning started in Oct 2009 when Philna and I decided to join Koos Moorcroft from Africa Bushcraft on the "Cunene to Congo River 2010" trip. We wanted to see Angola and decided it would be best to do this one as a guided trip with someone that can speak Portuguese and know his way around. For months we received emails with all the relevant info for our trip, did the visa and vaccination thing and paid the guide fee of R9 000 per person.

The trip was to start on 22 July at EHA lodge and to end on 18 August in Rundu.

This was my first guided trip, except when we did the dunes in Namibia where you have to go with a company that has the concession.

Seeing that we had to travel to Ruacana for the start of the Angola trip, we decided to leave 3 weeks earlier and visit our favourite country Namibia again.

Our

Triplog:



Day 1-Tuesday 6 July 2010-Cape Town to Springbok-593km:We left the morning in some light rain, via Tulbagh to buy some Tarzan shoes....then Porterville and joined the N7 north of Piketberg and made our way slowly to the Kokerboom motel outside Springbok. Camping fees for 2 was R106 and it was very cold that first night...

Day 2-Wednesday 7 July 2010-Springbok to Klein Aus Vista-453km:At Vioolsdrif we went through the brand new border control offices and soon we were in the land of Tafel Lager!...

Border formalities on both sides were without any hassles and after topping up with Tafel Lagers at Noordoewer we were soon on our way to Klein Aus Vista.

We had a booking for camping at Klein Aus Vista but apparently they had some double bookings so for a small extra fee they put us in one of the houses.



Day 3-Thursday 8 July 2010-Klein Aus Vista to Hauchabfontein-363km

The next morning we left for Hauchabfontein. We passed this windmill (windpomp) - designed by a German farmer on the C13 between Aus and the turn-off west on the D707. Two square counter rotating wheels meant to be covered with canvas. Never tested.



The camp at Hauchabfontein was worth the R190...



Our ablutions



Day 4-6 Friday 9 to Sunday 11 July 2010-Hauchabfontein to Walvisbaai and driving around: 542km

From Hauchabfontein we travelled via Bullsport and the C14 to Walvis Bay. Here we stayed at Philna's sister, did some shopping for our next 10 days in Namibia(Tafel Lager and some food). I also changed the oil and oil filter on Bokwa as we had about another 10 000kms to do before we reached home again.

The Sunday we had a small get-together with some friends from the LandCruiser Club at the The Lighthouse Pub and restaurant in Swakopmund.

Some of the vehicles.



Day 7-Monday 12 July 2010-Walvis Bay to Messum Crater-238km

Monday morning we left Walvis for the Messum Crater and surrounds. Past Henties Bay at S21.88042 E14.09725 we turned off on the track to have a look at the "Dead sea Swimhole" but the corrugations were so bad that after about 2kms I turned back.... Just past Cape Cross we turned east towards the Messum Crater for my first visit to this amazingly beautiful area.







I am going back to this area again to explore some more....

When we parked to overnight in that lovely area Philna noticed some water dripping from the vehicle.....luckily it was only the 70lt aluminium water tank that was leaking..I found out later that the leak must be somewhere in the top quarter of the tank. Luckily I also have a 64lt stainless steel water tank in Bokwa.

Day 8-Tuesday 13 July 2010-Messum Crater to Rhino Ugab Camp-99km

We connected onto the D2303 towards the Ugab river, travelled a bit to the west and then back east and up and down Divorce pass.....I still have to find out why it is so called....it was a rather easy drive. Then back to Ugab Rhino Camp where we stayed the night, R90 and the donkey was quite nice and hot...

In the Ugab river....





Day 9-Wednesday 14 July 2010-Rhino Camp to Huab river-83km
We decided to go north and see where T4A will take us.



Philna wanted to see if she could find a specific place that she has been to before...and yes we found it.



We also saw some rocks that could be petrified trees??



We stopped at Klein Gai ais as well as Gai ais and then onto the Huab river where we camped for the night.



It amazes me that a barren landscape like this



can have a fountain like this



Somebody is looking after all the creatures...

Day 10-Thursday 15 July 2010-Huab River to Goantagab River-86km

The next day we tracked back through Gai ais and via the Doros Crater down to a spot in the Goantagab river. We were seeing more animals now and of course the scenery was beyond words...and we were getting nearer to the Brandberg area....I just cannot describe what that mountain and surrounding area does to me, I feel that I have lived there in my previous life...



Camp in the Goantagab river near the Leadwood tree



I am sure we saw some lion spoor in the riverbed....

Day 11-12-Friday16 to Saturday17 July 2010-Goantagab river to White Lady Lodge and driving in Ugab river-144km

Today we went around the eastern side of the Doros crater and then south east via some abandoned mines, Vegkop and Landcruiser hill towards White lady lodge. Don't know what the fuss is about LandCruiser hill, it is just a sandy slope, but Vegkop is a steep uphill that I do not want to drive up....my passenger decided to get out of Bokwa on one section of the downhill.....

We decided to camp at White lady lodge for 2 nights in order to catch up on some washing. Camping was R160p/n for the 2 of us. I am glad to see that they have built quite a few new ablutions.

The Saturday we spent driving in the Ugab up to Sorris-Sorris and back and that evening we had a nice dinner in the lodge restaurant, a perfect meal as usual...

For nearly a week we travelled alone in this beautiful part of Namibia and saw no people or vehicles....but unfortunately now we were back to reality....

Solar powered borehole



New ablutions at White lady lodge



The Brandberg mountain....did not take many photos this time....but I will be back....



Day 13-Sunday 18July2010-White lady lodge to Ombinda Country lodge, Outjo-307km

We had breakfast at Uis and took the C35 towards Khorixas where we turned off on the D2743 towards the Finger of God.



Then onto the D2752 (with plenty cattle grids) to Ombinda Country Lodge in Outjo where we camped for the night (R140.00).

Day 14-Monday 19July 2010-Outjo to Okakuejo in Etosha-260kmNext morning we stocked up again at the local grocer and then we were off to Etosha where we would spend the next two days. We booked one night at Okakuejo and one night at Halali, cost R600 plus R260 entrance fee for 2 days.

We were 5 minutes into the main Anderson gate when we saw our first lion and elephant...



We booked in, had something to eat and went for a drive.





Also saw some birds....

Pale chanting goshawk



Lilac breasted roller



That night we sat at the waterhole but it became too cold and went to bed....

Day 15-Tuesday 20 July 2010-Okakuejo to Halali-226km

The next morning we packed up and moved to Halali. It was again very dry in Etosha.



I was driving slowly and suddenly I saw this leopard in the road....I grabbed the camera whilst trying to stop and could only get this bad shot.....



Day 16-Wednesday 21 July 2010-Halali to Tsumeb-211 km

We took a slow drive towards the Namutoni gate on our way to Tsumeb.
Damara hornbill



Then a pofadder in the road...



Big old elephant....



Dorslandtrek memorial and grave in Etosha



We said goodbye to Etosha and headed for Tsumeb. Before the trip started we had ordered our vacuum packed meat for the Angola trip from Tuckie Coetzee [tuckie@iway.na] from the Shafting Box Cafe and Butchery (S19.23779 E17.71000). I can highly recommend them for your meat requirements, the quality was superb!

We did some shopping at the Spar, collected out meat which was very nicely packed and vacuumed and booked in at the Kupferquelle resort. Camping for the night was R230 at a very clean and upmarket camp.



I should have hosed off Bokwa here when I had the chance.....

Day 17-Thursday 22July 2010-Tsumeb to EHA Lodge Ruacana-449km

At last the day has arrived to meet the rest of the crowd in Ruacana and get acquainted....

I have always wondered about the amount of Cuca shops on the road to Oshakati....and the amount of beer that must be consumed especially in this area...

Anyway we made it to EHA camp...unfortunately without stopping at one of these Cuca shops...but next time I will stop for a beer and a chat with the locals....

As we stopped at the EHA campsite, I noticed that my spare wheel bracket was not looking the same as before.....and when I touched the spare wheel the bracket nearly broke off in my hands...damn...what was I to do?

Luckily the first person we set our eyes upon was Koos Moorcroft who could arrange a guy with a welder that could fix the arm and later that evening I was a happy man again....

Spare wheel bracket fixed.....



Camping costs at EHA was R130 and the facilities were not too bad....

Most of our tour group had already arrived, we were to be 12 vehicles in the group plus Koos and the guide Manuel.

The Group:

Philna and I from Cape Town in a LandCruiser EFI pickup
Allen and Sally Bradley from Cape Town in a LandCruiser 200
Nico and Elisma Schoeman from Durbanville in a Toyota Hilux
Brand and Annatjie Leach from Langebaan in a Toyota Hilux
Hendrie Bredenkamp from Piketberg in a LandCruiser pickup
Piet and Adrie Pretorius from Piketberg in a Landrover County
Lawrence and Jenny Hart from Matjiesfontein in a Pajero
Anthony and Heather Butler from Umkomaas in a Toyota Condor
Graham Pears from Johannesburg in a Landrover Defender
Jim and Susan French from United Kingdom in a LandCruiser pickup
John and Hermien Aspinall from Pretoria in a Toyota Hilux
Jos and Elsabe Joubert from Pretoria in a Landcruiser pickup
Koos Moorcroft and Manuel in a LandCruiser EFI pickup

Eleven diesel vehicles, only Koos and I drove petrol vehicles.....

That evening the task of getting to know each other and trying to remember names started.....we were to gather around Koos the next morning for the trip briefing....

Day 18-Friday 23 July 2010-Ruacana to bushcamp outside Chitado- 113km

Early morning excitement as we meet to listen to Koos about what we will see and experience on our "expedition", where not to take pictures, be on the lookout for the motorcycles, driving on the right hand side of the road, be very patient at the border crossing, don't take photos of people in uniform.....etc...etc.....little did we know...

Koos also informed us that we will not be able to drive the beach and "doodsakker" from Foz de Cunene to Flamingo Lodge because of the rocks that were open and impassable. We were vey disappointed as it was part of the Angola trip that we would have love to experience, but in hindsight it was the correct decision made by Koos as we had some vehicles that I don't think would have made it through...

Maybe some day I will go back to travel the Iona park region of Angola again as well as the "doodsakker"..

Koos also suggested that as we were such a large group we try to form two groups at night for braaiing etc....but I don't think that worked out so well as we soon split into an English and an Afrikaans group and through the tour this continued.....

Koos Moorcroft



Some members of the group



Some of the vehicles ready to go...



We left Ruacana at 10h30 for a very frustrating border crossing.....
The previous afternoon we had to complete forms for the border crossing which Koos took through earlier, but with all this organisation we still only left the Angolan border post at 15h00...oh boy do they take their time....
They had a look in a few vehicles but Anthony had to unpack nearly his whole Condor for them to check....
We also had to pay R320 road tax...for what roads I ask you!!
We travelled 113km that day and bush camped that night north of Chitado, our first night in Angola. Don't know where they come from but you have not stopped for 10minutes then the spectators arrive. The children just stand around and gawk at your vehicle and what you are doing, they don't really ask for food....but oh boy do not make the mistake to hand out something then the whole camp will be in your face soon....
Best is to keep what you want to give and hand it out the next morning just before you leave.

Day 19- Saturday 24 July 2010-Via Oncocua to Etamba river: 158km

The scenery resembles the Namib south of the Cunene river, and so did the inhabitants....



Camping in the Etamba riverbed



Butterwood tree



Many dry riverbed crossings and quite a nice and interesting slow going track.
It was here where the Condor had his first flat tyre, he had I think 5 in all through the trip. So the convoy just stopped and the drivers nearest to him had to help. It is my belief that Koos should have an assistant driving at the back to help in cases like this or where misfortune strikes. After all we pay R9000 per person.
I was one of the fortunate to have a Vhf as well as a 29mhz radio in Bokwa, but not all had radios and unfortunately Koos did not have enough radios to hand out..... I think we had 4 vehicles with no comms.
So in our vehicle Philna had to relay the messages and info to the 29mhz guys.....which later on became a bit of a schlep...and it was also frustrating when both radios started chatting away at the same time....
A prerequisite of a trip like this should be a Vhf radio as you can easily get lost in a city in Angola.....as we experienced later on in the trip....

Day 20-Sunday 25July 2010-Espenhierra-78km

The countryside in Iona park still resembled Namibia...

We saw the smallest/youngest *Welwitschia mirabilis* that I have ever seen...look at the cigarette butt next to it...According to a reply I received from Kirstenbosch it is between 3 and 5 years old!



We arrived at the "Ghost town" of Espenhierra quite early and could set up camp and enjoy a cold one...or two....



This Cruiser of Jos Joubert has it all.....





Koos and Manuel the translator



More relaxation



Day 21-Monday 26July 2010-Espenhierra to Flamingo Lodge-209km

Today we had quite a rough ride with all types of roads.

Koos took us to a really big/old Welwitschia....spot the hands waving at the back....



We passed behind Lake Arco as we would be visiting it in two days time...



Then we hit the first tar road...built by the Chinese..and now the real driving on the right hand side of the road started...
Bus shelters of Angola...



We turned off west for Flamingo Lodge...and were warned about this 23km of horrendous sand track.....but I just loved it....sand and corrugations....and the Condor got stuck in the sand... Philna and I were happy to reach Flamingo Lodge as we have seen so much on TV about it. We were staying here for 3 nights so we eventually decided to camp for the first 2 nights and then take a bungalow for the last night....\$40 for camping per night for the 2 of us, and the bungalow \$80.

Flamingo Lodge



Our camp



Koos and Manuel



View from inside the lodge



The next day (day 22) we had a rest day and just walked around enjoying the scenery...and a nice meal at the lodge..

Day 23-Wednesday 28July 2010-Trip to Lake Arco and shipwreck Seafood Vanessa and back to Flamingo Lodge-195km

Again we had to travel that corrugated sand stretch to the tar and then to Lake Arco. What gets me hot under the collar about Angola is the fact that the inhabitants are so lazy, they just sit under a big tree, throw their rubbish down next to them, and then when you want to park to go and see the lake they can get up quickly to collect R50 for the chief in order for you to park there.....and it is no use telling them in your language what you think of them....

Lake Arco





Then we were off to Tombua for some beach driving to the Seafood Vanessa shipwreck.





Then disaster struck again.....my ARB compressor just made a horrible sound and that was the end of ARB.....luckily the good part is that when I got home I took it straight to Cris Ingram of R&D who got me a new compressor in no time...
Then back again to Flamingo Lodge to sleep in a bungalow for the last night...

**Day 24-Thursday 29July2010- Flamingo Lodge via Namib and
Leba Pass to Tundavalla-291km**

This day turned out to be rather long day on the road with arriving at the bushcamp after 18h00.

In Namib we had to park in one long row to wait for the moneychanger who moves from vehicle to vehicle with his pockets full of money.....



We had worked out how much kwanza we needed until we exit Angola and thus exchanged \$1200 for 114 000 kwanza, a rate of 95kwanza to the dollar. We paid about R8 per \$ in RSA, so our exchange rate was 8,5c=1kwanza. Petrol at 40Kwanza/lt was thus R3.37/lt...what a bargain!!

Biscuits in the shop at Namib...check out the Maria biscuits....



When last did you see this pump?



We left the town of Namib and stopped at our first "market"....



The people...





The Angola sports bra for the rough roads...



Then it was a tar road to Leba Pass.



It was becoming very clear to us that the Angolese drivers did not give a damn for road safety or any other person on the road. All the wrecks next to the road were evidence of that. And what was so funny about the wrecks was that they were all stripped to the body, every removable part was gone just the bare shell was left, sometimes within a metre of the road. Our next stop was the Dorslandtrek memorial and graves at Humpata.

Very neglected graveyard and memorial.



From there it was on to Lubango and the Cristo Rei Statue, the smallest of three that were erected by the Portuguese, the other two being in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.



A view on Lubango



It was here at the turn-off to the statue that the inevitable happened.....some of the vehicles without radios were so far behind the others that they did not see the turn-off and sped past towards Lubango. And because they now could not see the person in front they went still faster...thinking they were losing the convoy..

Luckily Koos had their tel numbers and phoned them and after a while we were re-united. It was about 17h00 when we had to venture into the mad traffic of Lubango and then onto a very bad road to our camp for the night, Tundavalla.

It is impossible to say if some of these roads are gravel or tar.....it is like a jigsaw puzzle..a bit of tar here and a bit of gravel there...and when you get a road like that you rather wish for a plain gravel road.

We camped at the Voetspore camping spot, 2250m above sea level. It was a cold night between the rocks.....

Scenery at Tundavala



My misfortune just continued....I was smelling petrol and then realised that my aluminium fuel tank (yes I have 3 tanks..it is necessary for the EFI..) has developed a very small leak....the bad roads has struck again.... Later in the trip we tried to fix it with sunlight soap and sugar and when that did not work we tried pratleys but to no avail. Luckily I could do the whole trip by just using my other 2 tanks and 2 jerry cans on the roof.

Day25- Friday 30 July 2010-Tundavala to Lake Azul-397km

We left Lobito on a tar road and at Cacula we turned west towards Benguela. From Cacula it was gravel, then tar, then gravel, and so it went on.....

It took some time for Koos to find the beach camping spot at Lake Azul but at last we were settled on the beach. As my ARB compressor was out of order I did not let the tyres down and got to my spot real easy.

The beach was strewn with rubbish...



The next morning just before we wanted to leave, up rocks a guy who is collecting 100kwanza from every vehicle, about R85. And we all have to pay otherwise Koos and his party will not be able to camp here next time.

Now that is the time that I wish I could speak the lingo in order to tell this guy how damn lazy I think they are, they just want to collect and do nothing in return. They could at least clean up the beach.

Day 26-27: Saturday 31 July to Sunday 1 August 2010-Benguela to Lobito-68km

We were of to Lobito for some welcome shopping and to spend 2 nights on the beach.



The Shoprite in Lobito is quite well stocked...except no soda water!! Luckily I still had enough but whisky drinkers beware.....you do not get soda water anywhere in Angola! Bottled water yes but no sparkling water either....

We were also told earlier by Koos that we should not drink water from a tap in Angola but buy bottled water.

And of course the shops in the small towns do not have margarine or fresh milk, but plenty of long life yoghurt.....

A carton of cigarettes cost R250 in RSA, R150 in Lobito and R50 and the market next to the road.

Ok so after shopping we all moved to the harbour where we had to wait in order for Koos to go and arrange our next camping spot. I am sure we were waiting at the local "pickup" spot because there were very nice cars with guys in them driving past and smiling at the 9women.....

Eventually Koos returned and announced that he has organised us a beach camping spot opposite the Zulu Bar at no cost for the 2 nights and we could also use their toilets.....

afterwards now when I read again the trip reports of previous travellers to Angola I notice that they had all camped there for free...

Camping on the beach



Building opposite our beach camp



Enjoying drinks at the Zulu bar....



The back streets...



Seeing that we were staying 2 nights we had enough time to do some washing. We had a drink or two at the Zulu bar and thought now was the time for some nice seafood, but after seeing the kitchen (you can see it when you go to the toilet) we decided that our stomachs will not be able to handle this.

Sundays are the time for the Angolese to party...or so it seems...they started that Sunday afternoon drinking and dancing in the street at the bar and at some time about 04h00 the next morning the party was still going strong.

The Monday morning it was not possible for us to use the toilets....the drinking that night took its toll....

Philna and I took a walk along the beach that weekend but the stench on the rocks that the Angolese were using as toilets made it impossible to enjoy the beach. I find it difficult to understand how such friendly people can be so neverminded and filthy.

While I was finishing my report I came upon a report in Leisure Wheels mag no 78 where a Fred Strauss wrote about their experience in Angola in April 2010 when they also went with a tour guide. Fred writes:

"Marius now took us straight down the coast to Lobito, and at lunch we sat down to freshly grilled fish and some chilled white Portuguese wine at a beach restaurant. We were told that we could camp on the beach, right next to the restaurant. We could also use their restrooms and get ice from them. Bliss."

Did they not experience any of what we (as well as Paul Fisher and their group) experienced at the beach or do you just keep quiet about the negatives when you write a trip report for a magazine? Maybe they were not there over a weekend....

Part II will follow....