

# BUSHMEN ON SAFARI

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By Werner Pfeifer

“Werner, can you take us to Etosha,” Ghau, the manager of the **Ju/Hoansi Historic Living Village in Grashoek (Bushmanland)** had asked me while visiting this Living Museum with tourists. “We had never been there and hardly any of us had ever seen Elephant, Lion, Giraffe or Eland”. And I thought by my self, why not take the Bushmen on Safari. That should be possible...

Back in Windhoek, the Manager of **Bwana Tucke Tucke Katrin Gebhard**, the German student **Sebastian Dürschmidt**, **Peter- Hain Kazapua of Easy Travelling Ways** and my self **Werner Pfeifer of BushCulture Experience** started organizing a proper tour for our Bushmen friends.



**Eagles Rock Tours and Safaris** sponsored the Truck and tents and many others helped with money, food, petrol free entrance to parks and so on, and after a few weeks of intensive work we drove to Bushmanland with our truck and collected 35 Bushmen at Grashoek.

Our tour took us over Grootboom and Tsintsabis to Onguma and Mokuti at the eastern gate of Etosha. Never before our Bushmen tourists had ever been on safari and excitement exploded to an ear bursting crescendo in our truck. At Grootboom, the monumental Baobab tree east of Tsintsabis, our hunters immediately discovered ancient old steps in the tree trunk made by long forgotten Bushmen looking in tree holes for water and honey. Some climbed these steps and chatted for a while from above with their friends.



At Mokuti we were invited for dinner. When the Bushmen saw the mounts of food their eyes shone bright and soon the plates looked like little termite mounts. It looked so good, all these Bushmen in traditional dress sitting on the huge tables, served by white skirted waiters, the

friendly cooks under their huge white cook hats carrying in more bowls of food enjoying these new clients with bright smiles. The Bushmen ate as they had never seen food before and bellies started popping out. I had never before and after seen Bushmen not finishing the mounts of food served by the kitchen, but at this rare occasion the cooks won the battle.



After dinner they made a nice dancing and singing performance in front of about 150 lodge guests. Everybody was highly excited and soon after the show our donation box was filled and also the Bushmen had made very good money by selling a huge amount of crafts they had prepared for these occasions. Everybody smiled happily while driving back to our camp at Onguma and soon lights went out after this first exiting day on tour.

The next 3 days saw us driving in Etosha National Park. Our tourists looked forward to this and became excited at the sight of the first Springbok, Zebra, Wildebeest and Impala. They intensively discussed every detail and movement of them. The men, the hunters, could watch the game for long while the women soon started chatting women talk again. After a while only seeing the “normal stuff” I was clearly told to show them the important game, which meant Elephant, Lion, Giraffe and Eland. They saw the first Lions sleeping far away in the shade of a little hook thorn. Noise rose in the bus as everybody shouted to his or her friends their observations. The Lions did not even look up. Our Bushmen tourists passed around my binoculars to get a closer view. When the approximately 75 year old father of Ghau looked through the binoculars and suddenly found the Lions so close by, he hopped from shock, but soon recovered to the friendly laughter of his companions.



The next Lions were much closer. I stopped the bus about 15m from a lioness lying open on a short grass plane looking with huge yellow eyes right into the hearts of our little Kalahari Bushmen. Silence filled our truck and the Bushmen assembled on the opposite side, so far as possible away from these eyes, keeping a wary eye on them, not trusting this thin glass and metal in between.



After a while a huge male lion stood up behind a bush and slowly walked away followed by our lioness. Relieved Bushmen changed seats, becoming brave and shouting to the lions to come back. They ignored us and we drove on to encounter the next excitement.

A huge Elephant bull blocked our journey by cooling his feet in a little puddle on the road. As I know the tolerance level of the Etosha elephants and they know us trucks, I rolled slowly closer and closer. Again silence filled the back of our truck and 70 wide opened eyes stared through the front window. Suddenly I heard a soft Bushman voice: “Werner, Elephants are dangerous, stop, stop, don’t go so close, Werner, stop...”



The Elephant enjoyed his pond, half sleeping in the midday heat. After a while he strolled a few steps aside to start feeding slowly on low shrubs. Many Bushmen noses pressed on glass and a soft mumbling could be heard. Everybody started to relax and this encounter with one of the great of the African Bushveld was discussed for long after we drove on.

We stayed one night in Okaukuejo with its illuminated water hole and the Bushmen saw their first Rhinos, but also Elephant and Lion came to pleasure us. A brief singing and dancing show for the tourists and the camp staff filled our donation box and the Bushmen pockets again. At the last day in Etosha we took a brake in Okaukuejo camp to recover. The women enjoyed themselves sitting in the shade chatting, playing with the kids and making crafts while the men and older children enjoyed splashing in the pool and watched game at the water hole for hours.



After a pleasant night for free at Etosha Safari Camp just outside Etosha on the Outjo road we carried on to Twyfelfontein, the most famous place for Stone Age rock engravings in Namibia.

When I was a teenager I often visited Twyfelfontein, sitting between the red sand stone rocks, looking into the valley and day dreaming of Bushmen walking around, hiding at the little fountain for game to come, singing and dancing on the plateau between the scatterings of white and black stone flakes covering the entire place... and today it became true. Here they were, the Bushmen in their traditional dress, the hunters with their hunting gear, walking between the red rocks, women with babies in leather back bags, chatting in their click language, discussing the engravings and paintings at the sight. It was real magic!



At Brandberg we were invited to stay for free for two nights at the Ugab Campsite of Brandberg White Lady Lodge.

In the cool of the morning we visited the Stone Age rock paintings, the so called “White Lady” site, the “Ladies School” and one of the main shelters where archaeologists had found the evidence of many thousand year old occupation of this place. After !Unta, the main traditional healer of Grashoek had seen the White Lady paintings he came to me and told me following: “The “White Lady” man is the same as me. He was the traditional trance healer of that group living here. The brown figure behind him is the trance healers assistant, like !Ao in Grashoek, who help me to come back when I am in trance. When I am in trance I meet the ancestors, who look similar to the other figures painted here on this rock. I try to convince them to do no harm to my people and to let them take away the evil spirits they have caused upon some of us. To come back from trance the whole group of my people must carry on singing and clapping until !Ao had managed to bring me back from the other world. If it seems to be tough for me to come back !Ao must touch me here on my head or on the toe, similar to what this helper does here with the “White Lady” man.”

Wow, this was first hand interpretation of rock art, and I decided to do more Bushmen Safaries to follow this up.

The friendly **Brandberg Mountain Guide** who took us on that walk came over to our camp at night with his Damara singing and dancing group and both traditional groups enjoyed each others performances until late. **Bazil Kalitz from Brandberg Restcamp** (the former Hotel in Uis) had joined in the fun and invited us for Breakfast to his place, which we happily did.

When we reached the coast at Cape Cross the Bushmen climbed out of the truck and stared at the distant sea. “Is it angry with us” asked !Amasche turning to me after looking a while at the roaring waves. I convinced him that it is always like this and not a living thing. Then we drove closer and parked at the pick nick site close to the shore. Some brave joined us with their feet in the water but spurted away as soon as another little wave appeared splashing and growling. It was big big fun for all.



Some tasted the salty water and washed their face with it. !Amasche emptied two water bottles and filled them with sea water for his children at home. But none would dare to go swimming even after Sebastian and my self demonstrated that it was good. This huge water was a bit too much for our Kalahari people. When I tried to catch one of the hunters to drag him into the water they all fled like birds and I did not manage to come close to one. This was good fun for every body.



They were sitting for half an hour watching the seals at the great Cape Seal colony. Every animal with hair attracted their full attention and could keep them busy for a very long time.



Birds on the other hand were plainly recognized, but that was it then.

We took them briefly on a short ride through Swakopmund, the biggest city they had ever seen. They did not like it at all, too many houses, too many people and far too cold although the sun was shining and everybody else enjoyed the mild breeze.

In Walfish Bay the manager of the **Aonin Campsite** at Rooibank in the Kuiseb River, **Rudolf Dauseb**, welcomed us warmly. We stay there 2 nights for free enjoying an exceptional heartily hospitality with Rudolf and his helpers.

After we had collected mounts of German traditional sausages sponsored by **Charlies Meat Marked** in Walfish Bay the next morning, we had a short presentation show in Swakopmund to promote the Historic Living Village in Grashoek. The Bushmen were more than happy to leave this crowded place.

Then we left for Walfish Bay to find 3 Boats from **Mola Mola Marine and Desert Adventures** waiting for us. Although we had tried to convince every body during the tour that this boat trip would be not dangerous and one of the highlights for them, most of the women did not dare to put a foot on the boats. So we started with 2 boats loaded with two women, some children and all the men, every one dressed in their traditional dress. As soon as we took of and every body found a seat on the middle bench a huge male seal hopped onto the boat. The Bushmen hastily squeezed themselves into the little cabin and I was glad that none jumped over board. But Walter, our skipper, touched the seal, fed it with fish and soon the Bushmen did the same. That was excitement! Then the seal jumped off to visit the other boat. A big discussion started on our boat.



Walter made Pelicans and the Cape Cormorant “Fritz” fly right next to the boat to grab fish out of his hand. The Bushmen liked that as well, but were always on the look out for the “hond”, as they called the seal.

Walter took us through the harbour and we explained the ships to the Bushmen, where they come from and that they bring most of the stuff from over the big water so that we can buy it in shops. The Brötchens and Coke provided by Mola Mola were happily consumed while enjoying the scenery.

Then Walter drove with full speed over the waves and made place for !Unta to take over the steering. !Untas face was one big smile, eyes shining and he drove as if he had never done anything else. Off course every one got his turn to race over the ocean. Then !Unta asked if he could talk to the other boat after he had observed Walter doing so. Walter explained the technique shortly, informed the second boat and then for the first time since man appeared on earth a radio talk in the Ju/Hoansi language was heard over the oceans. First there was a short silence after !Untas words, then suddenly came an answer and every Bushmen lay on his back laughing and then off course every Bushmen had to chat with his friends over there in that other boat. They must have told the others about them being skippers driving like hell over the big water because this idea jumped the boats and soon the other boat had new captains. What a great fun.



After that trip they asserted that this had been the highlight of the highlights on our tour.

Back at Rooibank in our camp we met Ernst Sauber and Katrin and Uwe Schulze Neuhoff from Naukluft Experience who had brought along 6 Namas from the village Nawaseb in the Naukluft area. They wanted to meet the Bushmen in order to learn about their Historic Living Village as they think of doing a Nama one at their home. They had also sponsored a half car load of meat and the party started. The Bushmen and the Nama made traditional shows and they sat chatting to each other, meat cooked in huge pots, Rudolf Dauseb, his family, some Topnaar Namas from the area and Spanish foundation members who assist Rudolf with his Topnaar projects were there to make this evening an unforgettable one.

The next day saw us travelling all the long way back from Walfish Bay to Grashoek, crossing Namibia from west to north east. We arrived late in the night at Grashoek, but the villagers had been waiting and every body was very tired bur extremely happy.



This tour with the Bushmen was very different to any tour I had ever done with tourists. The Bushmen had enjoyed every moment, appreciated every detail we offered them and were such

a nice bunch of people to have around. And every where we had stopped we became the attraction for other tourists and Namibians. So we will definitely do this again.

With this we, the organisation team and the Bushmen would like to thank all our sponsors and helpers who made this tour an unforgettable one for the Bushmen as well as for us and the many people we met on tour.

**Here now every one who made this tour possible:**

**Organisation:**

Bwana Tucke Tucke (Katrin Gebhard, Carsten Möhle und Sabastian Dürschmidt)  
Easy Travelling Ways (Peter- Hain Kazapua)  
BushCulture Experience (Peter- Hain Kazapua und Werner Pfeifer)

**Sponsors:**

Eagles Rock Tours and Safaris (They sponsored the truck plus the tents)

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