

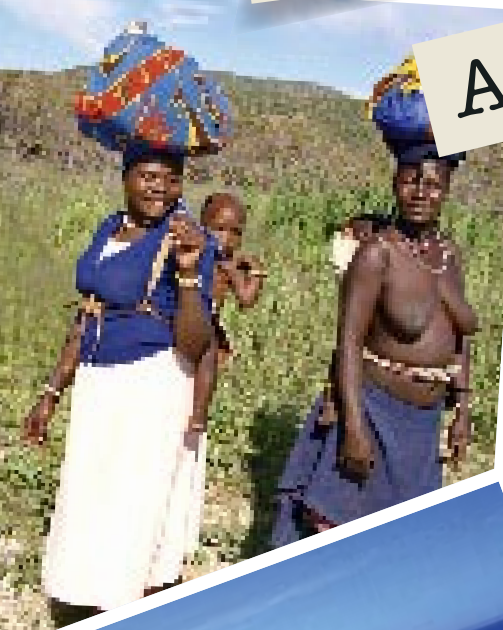


RON'S DIARY

BY RON MOON



From deepest, darkest Africa... well, almost



Elephant at sunset in Chobe NP (top); on the way to market in Namibia (centre); coastal trail through diamond leases - South Africa's west coast (above)

**W**e're currently sitting in Cape Town watching the sun come up over the mountains and splash some colour onto Table Mountain, the surrounding city and its harbour. Wow - it is a beautiful city... and I don't normally like these sorts of places!

The last month has been spent touring Botswana and Zambia to Victoria Falls on the mighty Zambezi River. Then, we've continued through Namibia and South Africa's west coast to Cape Town in a Land Rover. With our Patrol in the UK waiting our return and our LOE Africa trip on the go, I drew the short straw and ended up in an old, superseded Td5 Defender for the 6000km sojourn. Some say that only in a Land Rover can you have the quintessential African experience, but I'm not so sure. However, if breaking down and being towed is part of the 'quintessential African experience' then we got that in spades when the fuel pump stopped and we had to be towed 80km to Livingstone.

Now it was definitely an archetypal Land Rover experience with the problem being an electrical relay or its contacts. The fix? Pull out said relay, plug the same relay

back in and... bingo! Away we would go for an hour, a day and sometimes even more. What's that old saying about Lucas Electrics being the 'Prince of Darkness'?

Got to say, though, the latest incarnation of the Defender is a much better vehicle than the previous ones. We had one of them in our group as well and, with the new 2.4TD engine, six-speed manual box, a more modern dash that incorporates the airconditioning (how novel!) and more legroom, especially for the front seat passenger, the latest Defender is a much better deal.

The rest of the vehicles in our group were the latest turbo-diesel Ford Raiders and 70 Series Cruiser wagons, the latter without the potent TDV8 engine we have in Australia.

In Africa, there are no Euro-4 emission standards to worry about so the 70 Series comes with the normally aspirated 1HZ diesel engine we lost some time back. Every African we talked to just drooled when we spoke of the intercooled V8 we have. All of them are hoping it won't be long before the V8 hits their shores - but pricing and tariffs will probably block that for some time yet!

Still, our trip was an exciting and fantastic voyage with plenty of wildlife, much of it up close and personal, ancient tribes still living

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their nomadic lifestyle and mind-blowing scenery that changed each and every day.

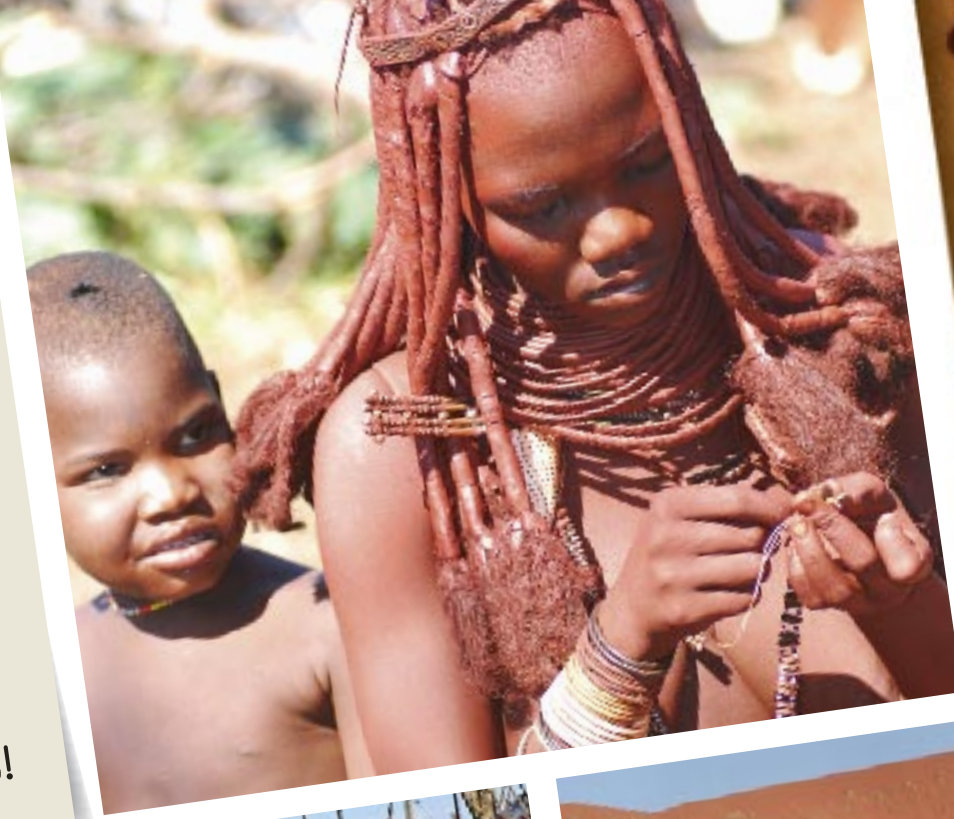
Namibia is a fantastic destination we don't hear much of in Australia but most Aussies would love the place. It is packed with wide expanses, long sweeping beaches, huge desert dunes, great dirt roads and wildlife that near rivals the Serengeti. In the country's north there are some big rivers that offer exciting fishing for the mouthful of teeth that is the prized tiger fish.

Just to turn the tables a bit, along the Skeleton Coast we were blasted by one of the best - read 'meanest' - dust and sand storms I've ever experienced. Our vehicles were pelted with grains of sand as if they were being pumped from a high-pressure gun and we had to slow down in front of the onslaught to save paintwork, windscreens and air-cleaner elements!

There were no other hassles though and there was even a bit of mud for a change as we cruised through villages and farmland in northern Namibia, while elsewhere the desert was lush after recent heavy rains. We even came across a group of the elusive desert elephant; these taller, slightly lighter-built elephants wander the harsh remote desert country of north-western Namibia in an endless quest for water and food.

We got as close as we dared but

Regards,  
Ron and Viv



Himba woman and child (top); springbok, rare green grass and big dunes - Sossuslvie (above); local butcher (above left); Steve and black Rhino rescued after being badly injured while fighting (below)

