

# MIKE'S NAMIBIAN JOURNEY

JUNE / JULY 2017



Mike

Axel

Alex

At Winhoek

## **INTRODUCTION**

By way of introduction this follows on from my last bike trip which took place October/November of 2016 when Alex Richter (from Friedrichshafen in Germany) and myself rode a pair of BMW F800GSs from Dubai to Cape Town. Along the way we picked up my eldest son Geoff at Rustenberg in South Africa and he joined us on a hired F800GS on the last leg of our mini version of the Long Way Down to Cape Town. (This last being the Ewan McGregor and Charlie Borman trip when they made a film of their daring deeds.) Actually, Alex recorded almost everything on the way down through Africa earlier, I think he ended up with a couple of thousand photos. One day I will get to see them.

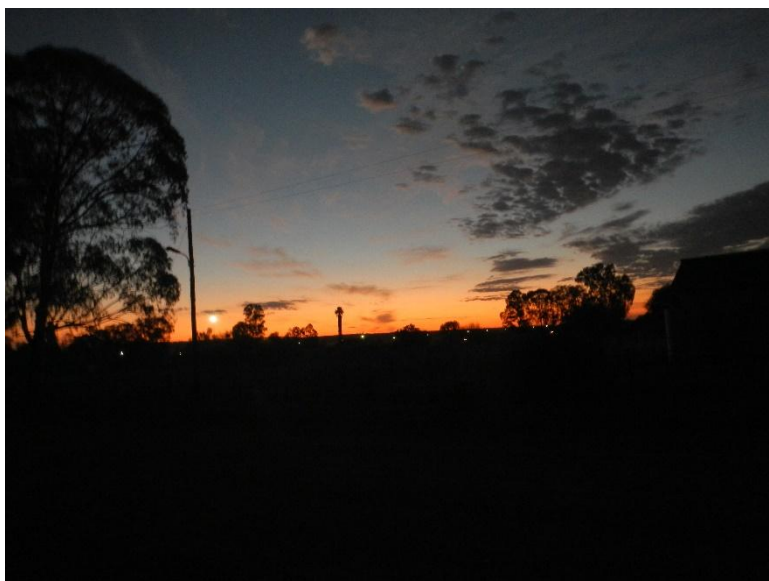
As a result of the trip last year the two bikes were serviced and have had new tyres fitted and have been in store at Donfords in Cape Town, the main BMW dealer, since then. So we will fly in to pick them up and then will ride north into Namibia. Alex has planned all this and whilst I have the routing, I have done no research so this is going to be a surprise. My Zumo 390GPS got damaged on the way home and as I write it may be on the way back to me having had a new screen fitted. Meanwhile I got another one with this time a 5 inch screen but for some reason it is not recognising it has the T4A maps inside it and it is modifying the routes as I send them across from the laptop. So this is the problem for today and tomorrow as I fly to Cape Town on Tuesday. It is an 11½ hour flight which I found surprising.

At the end of the trip the bikes will be shipped back to Felixstowe and I will get them out of the Customs hopefully without too much expense. The exit from South Africa will stamp the carnets which can then be taken back to the AAA in Dubai to get my deposits back and at the same time I will surrender the plates and get the bikes off the Dubai RTA computer. This will be the last link in my demob from the Emirates where off and on I have spent the last 20 years before (nominally) retiring at Christmas 2016.



### Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> June 408Km

Set off from Cape Town having decided to leave behind my panniers and put all in one flexible waterproof bag that was attached behind my seat with bungies. Also left behind the waterproofs. Alex had cut down his luggage somewhat and some gear was left in his big suitcase but he still had a tank bag and both panniers. My tankbag just held the tools. We went to Stellenbosch and found the Tracks4Africa people. These guys make excellent maps of Africa and sell them as well as the digital versions which can be used by Garmin GPS's. The helpful lady there loaded all Alex's routes onto a card along with the latest map and voila – putting that into my GPS gave me everything! From here we set off up the N7 to Nieuwoudtville. We turned off the N7 at Vanrhynsdorp and then had an exciting ride up the road that twists from the plain to the top of the mountain. We stayed the night in a small house with separate bedrooms. We had to walk back to the main building which was a former Blacksmiths to get food and internet. The proprietor, Hendrik Van Zuil, was an interesting man, formerly a lawyer from Cape Town. Nieuwoudtville, we learned is the centre of the flower bulb industry – but it was the wrong time of year for this.





**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June** 315Km

When refuelling first thing we discovered that the garage had a motorcycle museum. Unfortunately this was not open. From Nieuwoudtville we went by tar to Loeriesfontein and there visited the Windmill museum. The building itself which was a former chapel and then a school house held many local artefacts but the interesting stuff was in the field behind where they have many examples of windmills which are used as water pumps. The “fan” part drives the crank which then makes a rod go up and down. The simple one piston lift pump is installed at the bottom of the borehole casing and so they get the water from deep underground. There was also a building with an example of an ox wagon which the Voortrekkers used and their tent and other bits and pieces to show how they led their lives. They were pretty tough these early settlers! Retracing our steps a little we then set off along 230km of sand and gravel to Kliprand to refuel and then another 160km of similar roads to Springbok where we found the tar.







### **Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 285Km**

Started from Springbok Lodge which had a main building with the restaurant and was non-smoking and various accommodation buildings nearby. But Alex was disturbed during the night by several of the locals making various noises and having arguments. The breakfast was OTT with four rashers of bacon and two boerwursts and two fried eggs. Even Alex could not finish that! 120km on the tar later we arrived at the border with Namibia.

The South African customs was empty and we passed through quickly but some delays were caused at the Namibia side as the registration card for my bike has a zero where the engine number should have been. I googled where to find it on the crankcase. Refuelling just across the border we then went 50km on tar across empty desert type scenery until the Orange river. Here there are many vineyards and there was a local village of some large extent with all the huts and stockades made from reeds. The landscape at this point was exactly as the Oman with exposed rock hills with that dark patina that comes from the repeated heating and cooling eventually bringing the darker minerals from within the rock to be deposited on the outer surface.





The Orange river was beautiful with blue water and green reeds and good views. The gravel track was of a good standard. The alongside the river track ended and there was a short section of very loose gravel to get to the tar at the small town of Rosh Pinah. Here they have an active zinc mine and there is clearly a local economy based upon this. However all seemed to be closed up on a Saturday afternoon and it was only by the fourth guesthouse that we found any signs of life. We had a chalet type room. The bar was excellent as was the food but it seemed that all went to bed very early so we did too.





### Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June 357Km.

The day started with 17°C and a refuel at the garage where we met with four other South African bikers. Next was 75km of tar, the C13, heading north to Aus. In the middle of the Reckvlakte plains, Alex slowed and indicated right. I could see a turning with some hills in the distance and the plume of dust from a bakkie heading our way. This was a diversion I was informed, it still would get to Aus but by a more interesting off-road route. So off we went. Initially a plain, then wadi type country, then up and down and round many curves and across several dry river beds until finally a canyon. There was an abandoned hut at one point. Then, climbing out of the canyon, some more fine open views. A small deer ran across the track and also a troupe of apes were seen loping along.







The occasional farms started to appear and then in a wide valley there was a junction going left for Aus. Hereabouts there were several nasty soft sand patches where standing on the pegs, leaning back and gassing it was the way to progress. The D446 continued from this junction a further 50km to the B4 tar road and the railway track.



It was 33km to Aus and just before Aus we turned off to see the remains of the internment camp where the German population ended up in 1915 having surrendered to greatly outnumbering South African forces. They were held here until the treaty of Versailles that ended the first world war. There is not a lot left of the camp to see! Refuelling at Aus we then set off on 130km of tar to Luderitz. Arriving here late afternoon on a Sunday there was not a lot happening and after briefly enquiring about the price at the hotel we ended up in a very nice B&B in the middle of town. We set off on foot to explore the area round the port after that whilst also looking for somewhere to eat. We met a couple from Dresden who were similarly engaged. By this time, we had worked out where Ritzie's was which we had been told about and so we found it and ate there.

### **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June 24Km**

Some research initially indicated that most of the buildings to be visited in the town were not open until the afternoon so we had a brief walkabout in the sunshine before mounting up and heading for Kolmanskop.

A little about the history of what is now Namibia (only independent since 1990) is pertinent here. Portuguese seafarers were the first to discover Luderitz back in 1487 but departed again having

erected a stone cross to honour their dead. Nothing much happened in the following 300 years. Next was the discovery of guano on the offshore islands and the whales that frequented these waters. Various Americans and Brits partook in this harvest. Adolf Luderitz, a German, heard about the place and petitioned Bismark to be allowed to start a settlement in 1882 and some land was bought from the local Nama Chiefs. This stretched 20 miles inland from the coast and started at the Orange river in the south to the 26<sup>th</sup> degree latitude which is some 80km to the north of Luderitz. There followed a period of expansion of German interests spreading out from this initial area with the help of the now armed Nama tribesmen. By 1894 there were 2,628 white settlers in the town.

Meanwhile out in the bush the cattle rustling escalated and the Nama raided further north into Herero territory. A drought in 1904 led to a Herero uprising and 123 Germans were murdered. Some 770 Schutztruppe were then dispatched to face 8,000 Hereros with 6,000 rifles. The Germans however had some modern artillery and Maxim machine guns so the Herero were defeated at Waterburg on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1904. This did not stop the carnage however as Hendrik Witbooi, formerly allied to the German cause, now changed sides and declared war. The full might of the German machine was now aroused and the port of Luderitz gained two more jetties and a railway line that reached Aus by November 1905 and finally the war petered out by 1907.



I mention all this because much of this is chronicled in pictures and dioramas in Windhoek's Independence museum which we visited later in the trip.

Just to continue with the history lesson a little more, in July 1908 August Stauch notified the authorities that had found diamonds in the desert near to Luderitz. He was employed at the time



clearing the sand dunes off the tracks of the railway line just a few km inland from the coastline. And after a difficult start raising the necessary capital, Kolemankop was built between 1908 and 1910. (The above extracted from “Desert Diamonds” by Gino Noli)

So we went to see the abandoned diamond mining town. This is a collection of original and part recently restored wooden buildings. The largest is the recreation club which is fully restored and operational today whilst on the hill above are a row of houses of ever increasing splendour culminating in the mine Director’s house which has also been restored. The rest have been left to the ravages of the wind and the desert sands with the exception of a row of buildings that were the bakery, the shop and the butchers and the cold store. The former shopkeeper’s house was filled with period furniture. These are more or less intact and the guide explains all on an interesting tour. The hospital is a long building still with the odd bed and one could well imagine the patients lying there looking out on the desert. A full account may be found in the book mentioned above.

We adjourned to the town again and visited the Goethe house, the museum and the Lutheran church. The main stain glass window behind the altar here was donated by the Kaiser himself. At the museum we met the “Nitty Gritty Nomads”. Three young bearded guys on Kawasaki 650s and a girl on a 250.

Next was Agate beach at dusk and along the way we passed the vegetation growing downstream of the sewage treatment plant that attracts Springboks and Oryx. We ended up back in Ritzie’s for dinner with the couple from Dresden.

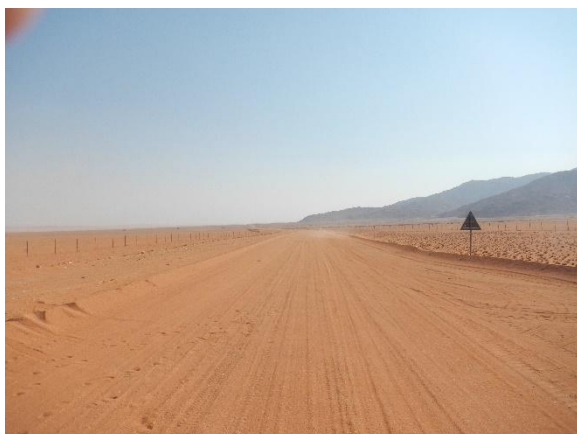






## **Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 350Km**

Set off from Luderitz on 122km of tar to Aus. Spied one ostrich and eight then three more wild horses on this section of road near to Aus. About 5km out of Aus we turned off on the C13, a gravel road with some soft patches but generally OK for 55km before turning for Sattensburg on the D707. Here the wind was quite strong and there was blowing sand. Alex tried to photograph us using his big Nikon and the tripod but the wind blew it over. This track was sand being a westerly then northerly detour of the C13 which it then rejoined at Spes Bona. Along this section we met a couple from South Africa with a Mercedes SUV towing a trailer. He had shredded his right rear tyre. So he gets out the skinny spare. Unfortunately the skinny spare needed a set of much shorter wheel bolts which he did not have! He had a spare tyre but no tools to remove the remains of old tyre from the rim or fit a new one. Some other guy stopped and gave him a lift to the nearest lodge for help but I could not help thinking he was a tad unprepared.



A couple more 20km legs got us to Duwisib castle and our next stop at the adjacent farmhouse. Parts of the D707 were very sandy and it was not a comfortable ride for me. Towards the end we put more air in the tyres and this improved the front-end tracking but by this time it was gravel anyway.

We were the only guests at the farmhouse and we ate our meals with Jochen who is the owner. Of German extraction but Namibian passport he is a farmer but adds to his income by letting rooms out to tourists. The main building was, as at Nieuwoudtville, a former blacksmith's forge. Here though the original hearth and bellows were still installed with some other old machinery on display. In the morning we had a look round the adjacent castle built in 1909 as a fortified house and read about the German nobleman who built it then lost his life in WWI. I photographed the sheep.

### **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June** 163Km

Started from Duwisib castle farmhouse after a nice omelette and yet another chat to mine host Jochen Frank Shultze. It was 20km back to Betta then north-west. Only 160km today and quite a lot of it was very loose but I survived it. Along the way we came across some Oryx on the road and upon closer inspection found a field full of them. They are farmed for meat locally. Arrived at Sesriem about 3pm. Met a Japanese guy sat under a tree resting up with his bicycle parked nearby. He was exhausted. He was heading for Cape Town having started in Ethiopia. Totally mad some people! If you see the track of the bicycle wheels on this sort of loose surface you wonder how anyone perseveres with such a mode of travel. We ended up in a desert camp about 3km away from the main lodge. Despite the loose surfaces there were some very fine views of the countryside. Went to the main lodge for dinner but it was somewhat cool.



### **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June** 141Km.

It froze over night! There was ice on the bikes when we set off at 6.15am to get to the lodge to join the tour for the Sossusvlei trip. I forgot about the handlebar heaters until we were almost there and my fingers had no feeling left. (This was the time when Cape Town had a heavy storm so perhaps we got the edge of this weather front) We were eight tourists, a driver and a Uri vehicle. This is something that they make in South Africa out of Toyota Land Cruiser running gear. It had a canvas roof and open sides and bench seats without any padding. A four-cylinder engine that was running only on three pots which eventually quit 10km from the park gates on the return journey. The 60km drive on tar down a valley following the river is bounded on both sides by tall red sand dunes. (Just like the UAE) Obviously big red sand dunes are interesting to most tourists and at not long after dawn with the sun low in the sky there is good contrast and nice photos to be taken. People were marvelling at the sand blowing off the ridge and taking pictures of this whereas I was more taken



with the birds which took off from a tree and then spiralled skywards using the wind on the upstream face of the dunes.



In the early part of the trip several Springbok were sighted and the odd Oryx and Ostrich but nothing much thereafter. At the end of the tar road most transport stops except the 4x4s which can carry on a bit closer to the Big Daddy dune. Off the side of same is an area where the Tsauchab river dries and goes into the sand and this is the Deadvlei. It's a bit different geologically to the surrounding sands and contains several dead trees. So we did the tourist bit and walked about halfway up the ridge of the Big Daddy dune except for one younger lady in our party who went all the way to the top. However that made her late for breakfast and the guide had first to park us up and then go back and find her. We had a late breakfast in an area where the river, when it runs, finally disappears into the sand as its way to the sea is blocked by more red dunes. There were quite a few trees and hungry birds here, it was a very nice spot. The story about the red sand is that it originated in the Kalahari desert 3-5 million years ago. It was washed down to the sea by the Orange river and out to sea and then northwards by the currents to be deposited along the coast when it was driven inland again. The red sand very clearly looks foreign to the strata of the existing plain, a geological unconformity. But it is an interesting valley and has its clear attractions.





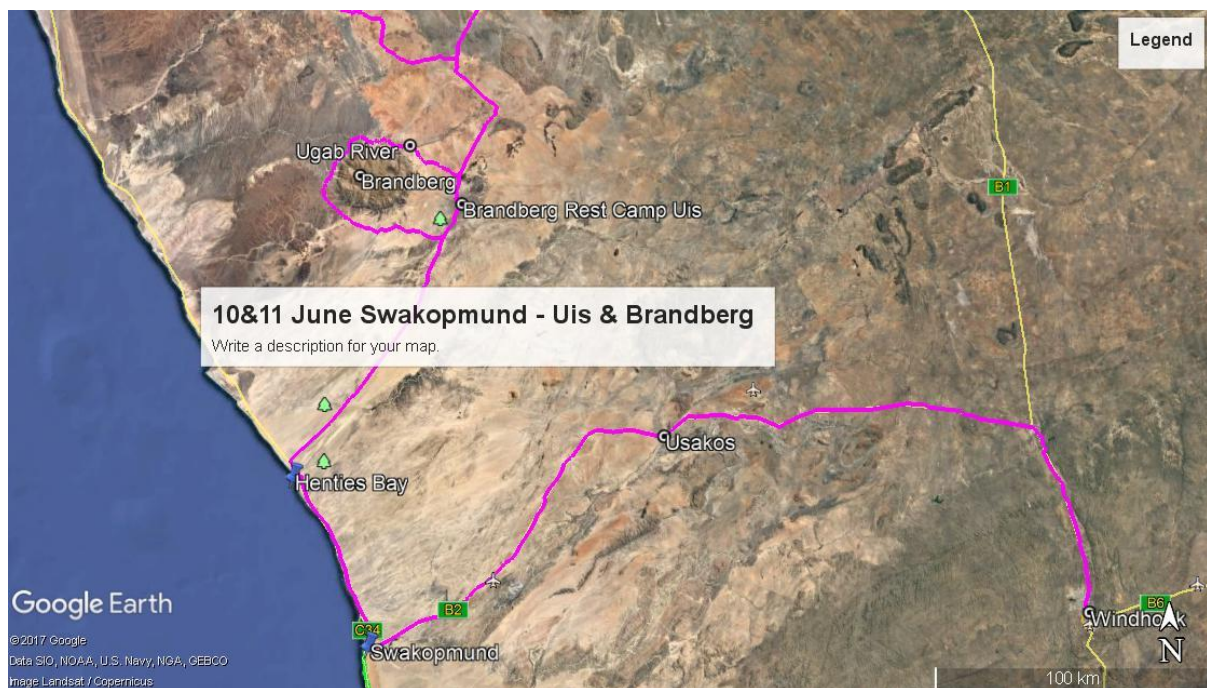
## **Friday 9<sup>th</sup> June** 349Km

Today was a gravel road ride from Sesriem to Solitare where we refuelled and then to Walvis Bay and on to Swakopmund and Werner and Marina Kluge's place by about 4pm. Some loose gravel especially just after starting. We went down the Guab pass and over a bridge and then a little further on was the Kusieb river crossing. There was even some water to be seen here. These were two nice river gorges. After that there was 100km of very boring white sand desert. I thought that road would never end but the GPS told the story how far it was to go. About 30km from the coastline, the gravel changed to smooth sand that was bound with something. Turns out that near to the coast they spray the sand roads with salt water and this provides the smooth road that in a fading light you can mistake for tarmac. It is though reputed to get very slippery when wet.

Arriving at Walvis Bay I headed for the Port cranes but the Port was closed up tight and so we passed on up the coastline. We turned off about halfway to look at the sea and there was an aerial roadway being fixed to an artificial offshore island. They have built a platform a little way offshore to allow the seabirds to roost and deposit guano which they harvest once a year. We were a little early for the Kluges so their neighbour across the street, alerted by the dogs barking, came to investigate. He allowed us to park the bikes in his garden and get most of our gear off which allowed us to walk to the sea and have a beer.

We walked back through the town to meet with our hosts where we enjoyed a warm welcome and a braai along with friend Gunter and slept in the adjacent flat to their property.

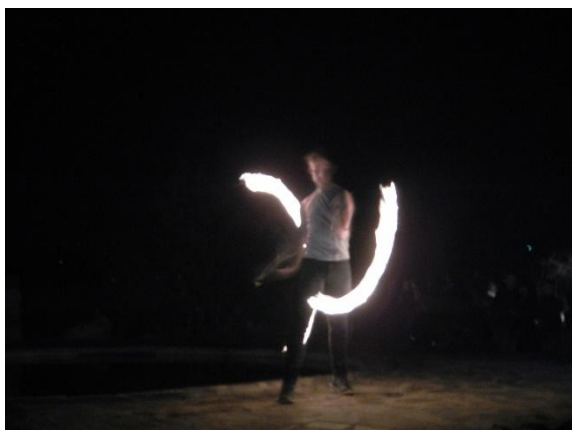




### **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June 192Km**

Breakfast was served in the main house kitchen with the family, the two dogs, three cats and later I discovered a tortoise in the garden. Oh and I almost forgot to mention the beautiful daughters 11 & 12. We took a quick trip to the shops with Werner and then stopped for a beer in the sunshine at the Brauhaus. We walked a bit round the town and discovered the old railway station now turned into a hotel. There was a fascinating book in the bar detailing the first 100 years of the railways in Namibia also some interesting pictures on the walls. Back at Werner's we got ready to head off to Uis calling first at Gunter's so we set off on three bikes and with Werner driving Gunter's bakkie loaded with camping gear. First we went up the tar road to Henties Bay then it was gravel all the 120km way to Uis.

Arriving at the Brandberg guest house and campground we set up the campbeds and mattresses for a night under the stars then we adjourned to a place nearby where there was supposed to be a briefing for the morrow's Rhino run. Some were running including Gunter whilst others were cycling including Werner. The evening went on a bit with speeches for a while, then a local choir followed by a man swinging fire balls and later light sticks. Then they started the auction of goodies such as stays at local lodges. And meanwhile it got colder.



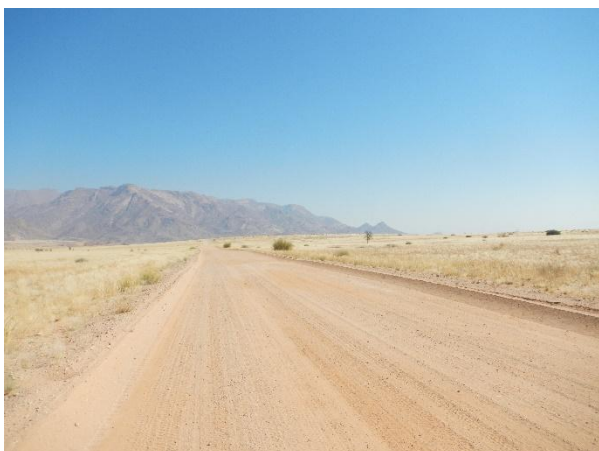




However, there was a lot of cooking going on and so eventually all were fed and the event wound up without any instructions. So, we adjourned to the campground and slept disturbed first by drunken singing, then by the full moon and also the bright lights of the adjacent toilet block not to mention the mosquitoes. The dawn came at 5.30am but before that Gunter and Werner were up and away to do the run.

### **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June 178Km**

The Swakop men returned from the Rhino run and by 8am we were having breakfast. They then packed up and left with both Gunter's 650 BMW and Werner's off-road cycle and all of the camping gear in the truck. Then Alex told me of the plan for the day – the trip round the Brandsberg. Alex had planned the northern part of this trip by following the website of "graveltravel". Turns out that these guys from Windhoek are seriously hard off-road men and are running dirt bikes as opposed to the half road, half dirt 800s that we have. So it was we set off initially on gravel roads for a 178km circular ride round the nearby granite "burnt mountain". As we turned off the very minor roads to White Lady lodge I began to see more and more sand. I lost it completely on a right hand bend in deep sand. Alex solicitously said at this point that he would quite understand if I wanted to bail out. Foolishly I continued.



Near the lodge the track headed off towards the river, lots of trees and very beautiful and clear signs of elephant. Thus far the going was good but eventually we arrived at the river bed proper and deep



sand. Before very long I fell off again and we struggled. Each time I got stuck Alex had to rescue my bike. It was 32°C and we had full gear on.

The way out after 6km of this torture was a side wadi whose entrance I initially missed and that resulted in another Alex rescue to get both bikes out of the river onto the new track. Initially the going was ok but as the wadi opened up the sand came back and I struggled once again. By 3pm we were sat panting in the shade wishing we were not there some 90km from base and when was this sand going to end? I gathered my strength for a fresh assault on the terrain and found to my delight 100m further on that the rocks began. So I was a happy bunny at this point with some traction albeit on an uphill, sometimes steep track with lots of sharp projecting bedrock. However, I have had lot of practice on this sort of going in the mountains of the UAE and Oman.

This track climbed out into the stony desert at the south-west corner of the mountain. I came across a windmill water pump with a concreted pond adjacent. As there is no human habitation for miles I concluded (correctly) that this was for the wildlife. A little way on the track forked and here was the 5km section to a D road and salvation. Alex rolled up with a flat front wheel at 5pm. We had 30mins until dark so we repaired a hole in the tube and then stumbled along this faint track to the gravel road. Alex's front wheel was down again but it pumped up. I re-aimed my headlamp so I could see further and we set off. To be fair the track was not too bad but rivers of sand swept in at right angles every now and again which was confusing in the dark. After 10km Alex's front tyre was down again so we pumped it and it lasted 10km and so we continued. Eventually, 30km from base camp my front tyre went down too. It would not pump up, so I limped the bike back travelling even more slowly. (Flat front tyre, gravel road and dark!) The bar and the food were closed by the time we got back but a nearby restaurant opened up again and we were fed and beered. We collapsed after that!

### **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June** 0Km

This day was declared to be a rest day which given the state of the front wheels was going to be required. Thus we took the tubes out and just across the road a very competent lad called Johnson added patches where directed. My problem was a thorn which eventually had holed the tube. This is the price to be paid for following the elephant tracks through the bushes along the side of the river rather than getting stuck in the sand of the river bed. Alex had 4 holes due to hitting a rock at speed. My front rim now has a big kink which gives a steering oscillation at low speed, amazingly the tyre survived 30km of flat running without damage. We both had extended sessions extracting thorns from the front tyres which if not removed eventually cause punctures. During this repair day we were told of the six hungry desert lions that frequent the windmill pool near where we were repairing the first puncture as darkness fell the day before. Later in the day we joined Basil the owner and his friend Louis (a retired game catcher and relocater man) round the table for dinner. At this point Alex received some advice upon possible routings hopefully avoiding too much soft sand.

And so to bed.



Basil and Louis



**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 288Km**

Alex's front wheel was flat again (shades of Ethiopia, we had this problem before!) So out the tube came and another leak was repaired. The inside of the tyre was again meticulously inspected, had



we missed a thorn? But no, the concussion with the rock caused more than one hole and we had not checked the tube submerging it in water after applying five patches which we did now before and after putting on patch no. 6 to be absolutely sure of no more leaks. Reassembled, we got going about 11.30 only to bump into a German couple just outside the gate with a German plated Ural sidecar outfit so we delayed whilst stories and pictures were exchanged. Setting off north from Uis we stopped after 130km to visit Burnt Mountain and the Organ pipes.



Both are examples of volcanic activity. The organ pipes looked like columnar basalt to me whilst the burnt mountain was pile of black ash. After this brief respite we travelled another 120km to Palmvag Lodge. This was in the middle of nowhere, a former game lodge, it had been bought in a bad state by the present owner and a lot of money has been spent which is evident in the class of the accommodation and the main lodge buildings. It was just the other side of a veterinary fence which initially they did not want to let me past but I think it was just a wind up as where else could we go? There are two bars, almost fine dining, and the chalets had thatched roofs. We had a nice dinner with Alex chatting up the Herero waitress and then adjourned to the second bar to have a conversation with some young Dutchmen.



**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 235Km**

It's now 2pm and I am at the Puma fuel station at Opuwo waiting on Alex turning up. I should perhaps mention at this point, due to our differing skill levels as riders, especially on loose surfaces and very especially on sand, I proceed somewhat slower than Alex doing 80-90kph whereas he stops to take photographs very frequently and does 120kph in between the stops. We arrive at the same place at the end of the day or part way through if that is appropriate at a junction where one could go either way. In this way we both stay reasonably happy doing what we want to do and if I crash he will eventually pick me up.



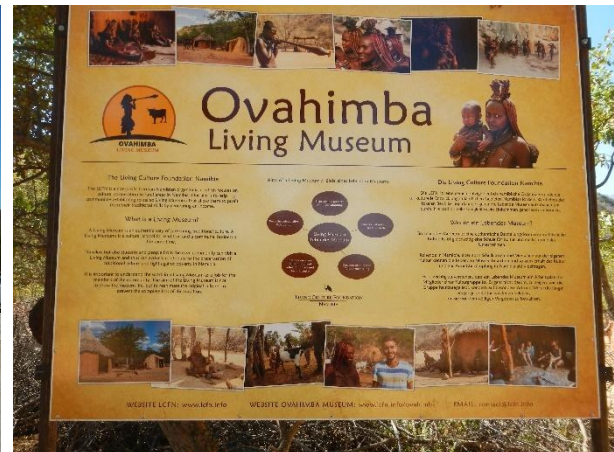
Today's ride was good gravel roads with very little in the way of loose stuff. There was one wet and slippery but concreted ford type river crossing and another with dry sand and there was even a short tar section when we went through a mountain pass. By this point it is evident that there is some water about and the grazing is more plentiful and there are consequently many villages. Upon my arrival here I was immediately accosted by several half naked ladies from the Himba tribe selling bracelets. I bought three, one for each small grand-daughter and they left me alone after that. In contrast the Herero women dress in colourful Victorian bustle gowns and wear hats with two points as cows horns and there were several of these ladies passing by with their shopping.

Fuelled up, I joined several other South African bikers mostly on KTMs who were hanging about. Alex rolled up at 15.10 and he got the Himba ladies treatment as well. So we then went off to find the lodge which was up a hill slightly away from the centre but not so far away that we could not hear the racket from the shabeens during the night. This had a nice lodge with a huge building overlooking a big valley. Massage was offered by the ladies at the check-in who were being given the usual Alex chat up treatment and were responding accordingly. So we each had one hour of a massage. The lady was pretty good and knew her job. She found my tight calf muscles and my feet got a lot of attention as well. By the time Alex had had his massage it was gone 6pm so we adjourned to the dining area. The South African bikers were outside in a group and were getting a tad loud by this time. The set menu looked fine but was less than perfectly executed and we sent back the cold Oryx kebabs. The fillet steak was Ok but very tough in the middle so I just sawed off the bits that I could eat and chew. The carrot cake was fine but in the end was probably too much; we were overfull. We had a further round in the bar and adjourned to bed.

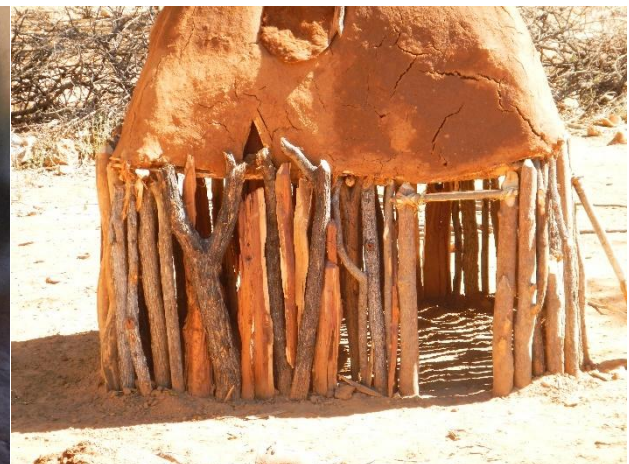
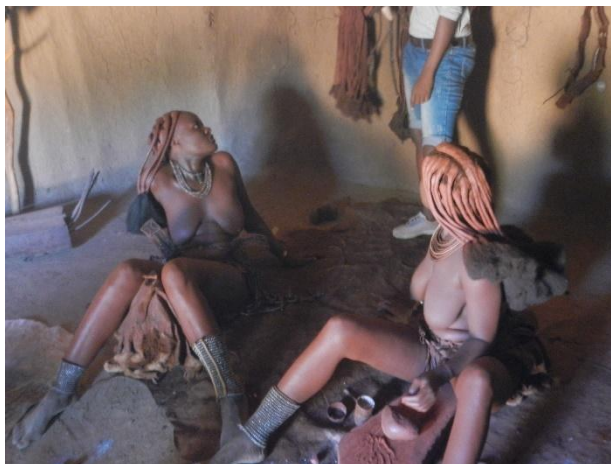


**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June** 180Km

The South African bikers who were all staying next to us in a sort of terraced set of rooms started their engines early and with the exception of one, were away before 7am after which we got up. They left a guy whose bike was broken. I tried to find him to see if we could assist but he was hiding somewhere. It had a Cape Town registration so he had some way to go. After buying some top up cards for the Namibian phone SIMS we bought in Luderitz a local lady advised on how we should add the money to the cards. This turns out to be a two stage process; first add the money and then redistribute that between calls, SMS and data. Cracking on northwards we came upon an Ovahimba Living Museum so we stopped there and had the guide lady show us round and explain what was going on. There was a small corral guarded with thorn bushes and inside were several huts of sticks and mud.



The “fridges” were no more than stores above ground for maize. The ladies don’t wash with water but perfume their bodies with smoke from a burning bark. They also coat themselves in a red ochre stone powder which they spend a long time grinding to obtain. Their hair is a bit special – see the pictures. Clearly the dancing and singing was put on for the benefit of us tourists but they seemed to be enjoying it anyway. We went on northwards and I came across the village of Okangwati where there were many signs offering petrol for sale so I refuelled with five litres to top up as there is no petrol north of here we were told. The day ended at the lodge at Epupa falls which is a truly magical place.



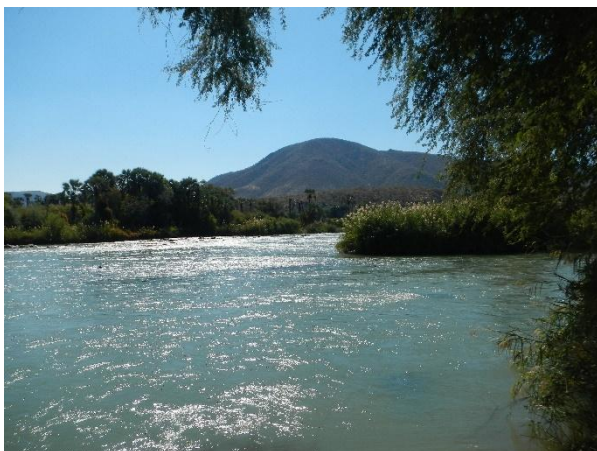




### **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 0Km**

We arrived at the Epupa falls after a day of gravel track riding from Opuwo. The Epupa falls and the adjacent lodges are a must see. The Cunene river rises in the mountains of Angola some way to the north-east of this place and along this section forms the border between Angola and Namibia. Alex was a bit under the weather when we arrived and retired early to bed. There was a Net signal so I managed to see what things were happening in Dubai. Hans came through on Whatsapp to tell of a fellow German biker from Dubai also touring through Africa whose BMW R1200GSA had expired with a dead engine in Tanzania. This was Axel Gross who works for Deutsche Bank. I spent some time trying to find out what the problem might have been caused by and thinking of solutions.

Alex recovered enough by lunchtime to get up and join the canoe rafting. Two guides and a driver took four of us 8km up river towing a trailer with three inflatable canoes. And so we paddled/drifted down the river back to camp passing by several crocodiles which were duly snapped and also seeing vervet monkeys scampering about in the palm trees lining the banks of the river. The rapids were mildly exciting and we got a bit wet. Overall, we spotted five crocodiles, one was 3.5m in length; this is one river that you don't want to go swimming in or laze upon its banks. Local herders as well as livestock are known to get seized and eaten. A late message from Axel told that he had found a mechanic in Dar Es Salaam who had a spare engine so he was on his way with the bike mounted on a truck to meet this man.







### **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June 99Km**

It was with reluctance that we left the idyllic setting of the camp at Epupa falls and I set off down the track alongside of the river. We had been reliably informed that this 150km along the side of the river road had mostly been completely rebuilt by a man called Uwe recently and what had been a 7-8 hour struggle in a 4x4 was now a breeze at 3 hours. What this guy had done was to move the track inland away from the river so it did not get wiped out each year in the floods. Nevertheless it was a track and went uphill and down dale quite a lot with some steep gradients. There are mountains immediately to the right (south) and the track had to cross the many tributaries and rivers heading for the Cunene; there being no culverts or bridges of course. I proceeded with caution worried about my front wheel getting damaged from a rock. But it was not so bad that I could not appreciate the fine views when the jungle backed off a bit to allow them to be seen. At one point there was a steep descent into a river bed and here parked up in the shade were four 4x4s from South Africa. They were all farmers from the Craddock area of the Great Karoo and we met them again later in the day.



The track continued and it was relatively easy going except at the major river crossings. Here a long approach in sand followed by some small dunes to be hopped over, the actual river bed in sand, the wet part and then a very steep climb out on rock at the far side. These required on my part a careful reconnoitre on foot and choosing my line carefully and then trying to stay on it. Well it worked and there were three of such crossings! At the 90km point I reached a village and here the track joined the original road. This had not been rebuilt recently and was somewhat more difficult than hitherto but driveable with care. The sign for Kunene Lodge appeared. About this time there was a junction with the roads labelled dry season only and an all weather road. I leave you to guess which way Alex and I went.

Arriving at the lodge just before the 4x4s we had met earlier we decided to call it a day and booked in. Not as nice as the last place by the falls but still good enough. Certainly, the staff were very welcoming. We had an interesting conversation with one of the Craddock farmers. He said that they should legalise the sale of Rhino and Elephant horn. Commercial farmers as he would then be assured of a market for the horn and would actively encourage the breeding of the animals but there would be 24/7 armed security. In this way the numbers of the animals would never reach danger level. There were he said anyway too many elephants in some areas which were causing stress on the environment and conflicts with the tribes people. A more informed viewpoint perhaps and a solution to the problem?

The Net informed us that Axel had reached Dar Es Salaam and found the man with the spare engine. His own engine had been taken apart enough to see that one of the big end bearings had failed catastrophically. We never got the whole story but we sat and discussed for some time how this might have happened. Anyway it sounded like he was getting fixed up and that was good.

### **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June** 510Km

510km today! Well I guess it was not my day to die today but I came close a couple of times. But first the story told to us by the lady keeping the Lodge. Two years ago a couple of South African bikers on BMW1200s and heavily laden passed through going the down river direction. At the village they continued on the original track along the river which was mostly by then abandoned. There are some very steep hills on this track. One of the guys crashed and broke his leg so could not be moved. His mate tried to come back for help but could not get his bike up the steep slopes so he gave up and started walking. He did not have enough water. A night passed with these guys out in the bush. A pair of English dirt bike riders then found the man with the broken leg and one stayed with him whilst the other headed for help. He found the other man almost dead from lack of water. He then got this man's BMW up the hills and they rode to the lodge to get help. The lodge went for the man with the broken leg and retrieved him with a 4x4. But the next part of the rescue people would not use the lodge's airstrip so they then had to drive him another 50km along the track to Ruacana before he could be flown to hospital.



Thus it was I set off along this next section of the track with this story fresh in my ears. Actually it was mostly OK but after 15km I dropped the bike in deep sand and it was quite a struggle to pick it up. The sand patches were generally quite short but very steep gradients featured several times descending into crossing river beds. At one section they were actively building the track and dozers were working. I stopped at the top of a hill to survey a possible route and then followed the wheel tracks of three 4x4s that came through the opposite direction and cleared it successfully. The track was not done with me yet as the horizon lightened and I could see the valley with the river in it far below. In the distance there was water at a high level and a straight line so that must have been the dam. The track went very steeply downhill and was quite loose where the 4x4s had cut up the surface. And there was a 90 degree bend in the middle of this section. I went down very carefully and shouted for joy upon reaching the tar at the valley bottom! I called at the Power station buildings but it was Sunday and they did not do tours without a prior appointment. Pity, I would have liked to see the turbine hall and diagrams of the penstock tunnels. I rode on up the hill and by exploring the tar roads discovered that the dam was across the border in Angola so we were not going to be able to visit that either.



We rode on to Ruacana village and refuelled. A tar road led us swiftly to Kamanjab 287km further on where another fuelling set us up for the last run of the day which was Grootberg lodge at the top of the Grootberg pass. After relaxing on the tar road, the gravel C40 had parts of sheer terror and it was when going through such a section that I saw another solo rider who looked like he wanted a chat but I did not stop. Alex did and this turned out to be Patrick from Montreal who had flown himself and his bike from Canada to Paris, had passed through Spain and Morocco and down the west side of Africa. More about him later.



Upon reaching the top of the Grootberg pass I saw that there were some cars parked in prepared bays at the bottom of a track that looked to be very steep and loose leading to the lodge. The GPS

said it was 1.6km away. So I started up on foot to investigate. After 600m or so I was well up the mountain and I could see that there was an almost impossible section coming up. A first gear, low ratio, diff locks engaged type of ascent for a 4x4. So I decided no way. Also there had to be a reason why obvious guest 4x4s were parked at the bottom of the track. Alex rolled up shortly after I had walked back down again and he heard my story and off he went. I watched as he approached the suicide section and could see that he was going too slowly to make it which he didn't. He eventually turned round and rode back down and uttered one word, "Palmvag". This was only 22km further on and with the light fading was the only other option. It turns out that the Grootberg lodge was another "graveltravel" recommendation and that you are supposed to call them on the phone and they come down the track and take you to the lodge.

So, we booked in to this nice lodge again and had dinner and then went to the other bar where we had an interesting conversation with Flora behind the bar. She is a Himba lady with four children and a somewhat wayward husband. Apparently in Africa everyone shares but clearly she was unhappy about hearing that her husband had fathered a child by another woman. There was another younger girl at the bar who came from Opuwo and was visiting her sister locally. She basically lived off her mother who has a job as a school teacher; and she was already a mother. I asked about education and yes they all wanted it for their children on the grounds that they could then get a better job. But the truth is that in these areas of rural Namibia there are very few jobs outside tourism. It seems inevitable that the traditional ways of life and some of the things that the tourists come to see will die out eventually but you can see that it is a difficult problem. (Not dissimilar to the British Labour Government deciding that all should get a chance to go to University, then down grading the tertiary education system by calling all such establishments universities and loosing onto the employment market many graduates with indifferent arts degrees. These graduates naturally had high aspirations as they had a "degree". Regretfully not many of same found comparable employment.)

### **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June 283Km**

I received news on Whatsapp that the "bubble" had been successfully installed in Sheikh Hamdan's deepest diving pool in the world in Dubai. The whole story is too long to include here but it was very gratifying to see that the team I had left behind when I retired, faithfully followed my engineering and method statements and managed to fix this 5-tonne piece of plastic underwater. It was undoubtedly a major triumph for the subcontractor concerned, he might even now get paid!



Well as you have read above my skills on loose surfaces are not in the same league as Alex's and we had some further discussions about the advisability of following the further recommendations of "graveltravel". He was disappointed but he had to re-plan faced with my complete rebellion at this stage about further crazy roads. The story about the guy with the broken leg could easily happen to me and I have come too far down life's track now to be stupid about things. Thus today's journey was largely a repeat of the northbound trip to Palmvag going south initially on the C39 to Khorixas but turning off on the loose sand and gravel road the D2612. The plan was to see Twyfelfontein however this turned out to be not much more than a collection of small huts. Eventually I regained the C35 and arrived back at Uis and the Brandsberg resthouse. I arrived at 2pm and was able to wash my clothes and relax.

I discovered today if I look so far ahead that I cannot actually focus on the corrugations and the grooves in the loose surfaces ahead, that actually the bike tracks straighter. On the off-road course I did, the mantra was always look up – not at the rock that you are about to hit or you will hit it. So it



would appear that I have begun to overcome the feedback system between my eyes and the track ahead that then translates to my hands on the bars actually causing or accentuating the violent front wheel weaving when a slight wobble is induced.

Alex later confirmed this but cautioned that your peripheral vision should be keeping a track of the near field whilst your main focus should be distant. The gyro effect of the 21inch front wheel revolving actually keeps the bike going straight – mostly. And small wobbles will correct themselves as long as the going does not get too tough or as in my case my grip on the bars was actually making things worse. I have got quite a bit better but I do not think that I will ever be truly comfortable with a bike on loose surfaces at relatively high speeds. 95kph was what I was doing for quite a lot of today and that seems to me to be fast enough.



### **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June** OKm

A rest day at Uis. Actually I am not very good at doing nothing unless I have a good book so I spent most of the day stripping the front brake of our host Basil's Honda Africa Twin. Basil admitted that he had bought the bike second hand and had never looked at the front brake until it stopped working. Not changing the fluid eventually allows it to take on water which leads to corrosion of the metal bits and seizure. It was a long job without full workshop facilities but it kept me amused whilst Alex was chatting to Cammy, a young French lady, also a biker who had bought her KTM 640 second hand in Kenya and was riding alone. In the evening we had a braai with Basil and his friend Louis and demolished at least four bottles of excellent red wine between us.

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June** OKm

Another day at Uis. Today I had a go at trying to fix Basil's Toyota Land Cruiser. He had a new solenoid installed yesterday and although the car initially started for the man who installed it the batteries had gone flat over night. After much research on a very slow Net and cleaning every connection that was there on this twin battery setup I had to admit defeat. Clearly the new device was causing the problem but without any further information I could not fix it. The new solenoid was not the actual starter solenoid but a 12/24V relay unit and I was unable to figure out what it was supposed to be doing.

Frustrating, I do not like admitting defeat! Meanwhile Alex was doing some necessary adjustments to Cammy's bike which was bearing the scars of amateur mechanics and many droppings. It looked a lot better by the time he had finished with it. I found a book that described the irregular forces of the South African Police fighting the SWAPO and PLAN forces who were coming across the Angolan border and that whiled away some hours although I later wished I had taken more notice of the early chapters describing the political situation leading up this war so as to be able to better understand what we saw later in Windhoek.

Axel is on his travels again. The new engine is installed and he was heading for Malawi. The engine management light was on however which I feared might happen as the ECU will have detected that some sensors have been changed. The good news is that he is mobile again and \$1500 seemed to be a fair price for an exchange engine fitted including labour. I sent him the link to the people in South Africa who make the adaptor and sell the software that allow you to connect the bike to an external computer. It's pretty impressive stuff seeing all the sensor outputs and engine responses plotted against rpm. And you can perform all necessary resets on the ECU and turn off service lamps etc. This tool saves a great deal of money by not having to visit a BMW dealer for the same service.

#### **Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June** 194Km

Initially at Uis. Alex went for a solo trip round the Brandsberg again. I played with the electrics on the Land Cruiser for a while but had to give up again defeated. And in the early afternoon we headed off down the road for Henties bay and Swakopmund and Werner's place again.

#### **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June**

After breakfast in the Village cafe we went first for haircuts then to check out the local museum and that was very interesting with a mix of all sorts of things. There was a 1953 series 1 Land Rover in there assembled from parts in SA. A nice diorama of animals, stuffed but you could get really close and study the genuine article. Old guns, medals, currency, shipping artefacts, an ox wagon, lots of stuff. Then we went to Werner's workplace which is Namib Diesel at Walvis Bay. Here they fix big diesel engines on a multi franchise basis. Werner previously used to work for MTU as Alex does now which is how they met. A quick lunch in the cafe opposite and then his foreman took us inside the port to an Icelandic owned but firstly of East German manufacture for the Russians fishing trawler. The ship was alongside and was undergoing a full refit. The Chief Engineer of the Company showed us round.

At 120m long, 7,500 tonnes she can hold 2,500 tonnes of frozen fish. Down the main engine room most all was in pieces, the two main engines having new pistons and liners installed. The main engines drive a gearbox and then the single shaft for the prop and hanging off this gearbox there were two alternators. There were additionally another pair of SKL auxiliary engines driving more alternators. The refrigeration plant was extensive. They basically freeze everything they catch under the watchful eyes of two Namibian fisheries inspectors.

Alex was talking to one of the many subcontractors on board who were involved with the overhaul. I was a little disappointed not being able to see the radio gear as the bridge too was in a state of semi strip out. But an excellent tour for two mechanically minded engineers! This day ended back at Swakopmund and after a beer at a beach bar on the south side of town we took the family out to the local pizza place. The pizzas were definitely too big to finish in one sitting so takeaway boxes are always supplied.

#### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June**

Carnival day in Swakopmund! A brass band from the Namibian Navy led the parade followed by a bevy of young ladies with tricorn hats and white boots. There were several floats full of people after that and other dressed up marchers. They went twice round the inner part of the town and it was quite colourful. On the way back from the parade to Werner's we saw Patrick standing in the street next to his bike so we jumped off the bakkie and met with him. Our hosts graciously offered him a bed in the annex where we were sleeping so he was rapidly installed there. Next we adjourned to the beer tent in the local Sports centre. Here they had erected a large tent. There was a stage and further raised seating behind and many tables with benches alongside all in the best traditions of a German beer hall. So we got the beer tokens and now also joined by Gunter, observed the



proceedings. There were several speeches in German and also presentations then displays of dancing on the stage by various groups. Eventually this wound down and a two man group took over and more conventional dancing followed with Alex and Gunter trying and in some cases succeeding with some of the local ladies. The day ended with another excellent braai at Werner's place.





### Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June 372Km

Alex and Patrick decided to go for a session of dune bashing so off they went in the morning. My back was giving me some pain; Marina noticed and offered to give me a massage. It likely ranks as the best massage that I have ever had and afterwards I was able to stand vertically without pain. This set me up for the rest of the day which was to travel to Windhoek. There are two ways to get to Windhoek from Swakopmund, by the tar roads and by a slightly shorter but largely gravel road route. I opted for the tar and went initially north-east from Swakop along the B2 to Usako, then Karib and Okahandja to Windhoek. There was something very dodgy about the petrol pump in Usako as the bike allegedly took 8.48 litres to fill after only 142km; this leads to the unbelievable figure of almost 6 litres/100km. Usually, going at 100kph or so I was getting 4 which increased to 5 at a steady 120kph.

The first part of the ride to Usako is the same boring stony desert as the Uis/Henties Bay road but then the road dropped down to 950m above sea level and there was more greenery and hills on both sides. This countryside continued with more vegetation and rivers all the way to Okahenja. To the north of Windhoek there were roadworks for several km which gave way to newly constructed dual carriageways leading right into town. The GPS directed me faithfully to the designated overnight stopping point. I was there but 15 minutes when I heard the raspy sound of an approaching 1200 with one of those fruity aftermarket exhausts. So this was Axel! It was about 4pm by this time so we sat in the waning sunshine until it got too cold.

There was still no sign of Alex so I left the key and a note in the room and Axel and I adjourned to a bar nearby. There we fell into conversation with Michael, a white man from Jo'burg who trained as an aircraft maintenance engineer. He had worked for some twelve years in SA but lost out to affirmative action. So now he was working at Windhoek airport. The Namibians have got a more sensible attitude to the use of properly trained engineers. He was riding an F800GS so he must have been a sensible chap! Alex rocked up eventually having spent so long in the sand that he set off too late to enjoy the gravel roads and instead travelled as I had done on the tar. We had dinner then Axel came up with a plan to visit Chompsi's bar. This turned out to be the other side of town and was what would have been called a "black man's bar" in the days that I lived in Shepherds Bush alongside the West Indians in London. One round was consumed here whilst a drunken girl tried to get both Alex and Axel to buy her a drink. I wonder why she never tried it on with me? Then it was back to the



B&B and bed.



### Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June

We said goodbye to Axel after breakfast as he had shorter term plans than us to get back to Cape Town. Turns out that he manages the African Clients for his bank and so flies twice a month via Emirates to Africa. He long ago passed Platinum card status and now he never even books a flight, just turns up and he gets “invited” on board and ushered into a first class seat. Awesome! I told him too late about the deal Patrick got from Air Canada. He paid for two seats and his bike travelled on the same plane as him to Paris. Maybe Emirates will do a similar deal for special clients?

We walked to town and first visited the old German fort built to house members of the Schutztruppe during the 1904-07 years. This was being restored so was not open. In the courtyard there was an impressive bronze statue of a mounted Schutztrupper. Adjacent is a newish building with a bronze of the first President Sam Nujoma outside and this was the Independence museum. This was on several floors and was basically lots of very well executed wall pictures telling the story of Namibia’s rise to independence. Unfortunately there was no text narrative so it was difficult to work out the whole story. I described above the early history and how the Nama who originally came north from what is now South Africa into southern Namibia. Wealth amongst tribespeople was measured in numbers of cattle.



The Herero lived further north where there is more water and better grazing and therefore more cattle. So, cattle rustling was a big thing and the injection of guns into the equation altered the balance for a while until some other external power armed the other faction. Thus, the lowest floor described these early years and the struggle against the Imperial Germans in the period leading up to the first world war. That changed things somewhat when South African forces finally achieved the surrender of the Schutztruppe in 1915. From that point onwards, what is now Namibia, was governed by South Africa.

The more recent struggles have their origin in the formation of a political party in 1957 which became SWAPO (South West Africa People Organisation) in 1960 and this spawned in 1962 another organisation called PLAN (Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia) which was the active military wing. PLAN was based in southern Angola and Zambia and basically engaged in guerrilla warfare coming across the border and planting mines and blowing up infrastructure. They were engaged initially on the ground by South African Defence Forces (SADF) until the point where the Portuguese left Angola and then SADF and the irregular South African police forces crossed the border pursuing returning fighters and carrying the war to their bases. SWAPO derived support from the Communist world and it was assisting pouring money into the flames to assist the struggle against by now the pariah state of South Africa which was isolated and embargoed by the Western world due to their practise of apartheid during the period 1948 - 1991. World events have a way of reaching other parts and with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of most of the Communist block, support for the war fell away and they came to the table in a UN sponsored accord which led to the formation of the Independent Nation of Namibia in 1990. All of this is described in pictures in the museum but it would have been handy to have been able to read it up as well to understand what we were looking at. After a spot of lunch on the top floor, next was the German Lutheran church inside its own roundabout built in 1913. A large plaque in bronze on the wall inside lists the German nationals killed in the 1904-08 war.





We walked through the main street checking out the old buildings and arrived at the railway station. Here there is a museum above the existing ticket hall and dotted about outside several locos and other railway kit. The museum itself was a joy for two engineers and we spent the rest of the day in there assisted time by time by the man looking after it. Different rooms with different themes. The map room showing the various tracks was good as by this time we could identify with many of the places and had ridden alongside the railway many times. In the communications room there was all sorts of old test gear as well as signalling stuff. I was somewhat amazed to find an RCA AR88 comms receiver on the floor in externally good condition. This 16 valve superhet general coverage receiver was made during WWII and is a classic receiver these days for collectors. In the drawing office where they have the plans in a locked drawing chest there were examples of drawing instruments and old scales and parallel rules as well as slide rules. All stuff that I was using 40 years ago! There were also examples of mechanical hand crank calculators which we used for serious calculations following the end of the era of 13 figure logarithms.

We hit Joe's bar again for dinner that night.

### **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June** 301Km

We set off into Windhoek town initially to get Alex's sunglasses fixed and then off down the road to the airport the B6 until the C15 to Dordabis. Here the tar ended and the gravel road began. We passed by a working windmill or two still supplying water to the farms. At Naus Klein there was some sort of castle like structure across the track from a working farm. Here also a herd of cows accompanied by a bull and despite best efforts, most of the herd were running down the road ahead of me. I stopped in the end and was overtaken by a pickup driven by a pregnant white lady with some black farmhands who rounded up the cattle and sent them back towards the farm. The next section was pure marbles and left me badly frightened after nearly falling twice. The gravel road finally reached the C20/M42 and then we had a westerly run for 11km in very strong winds to the gates of a lodge. Unfortunately, there was another 2km of sand to go until I could switch off the engine for the day.



This lodge was inside a fenced area so a mini game park if you like. But no big predators, just ungulates. We signed up for the game drive and joined several other tourists in a Land cruiser modified for game watching. That is with a canvas roof, no sides and bench seats. The guide/driver man was quite new to the job but knew his way round and found several animals for us to take picture of. A large herd of zebra followed by a young giraffe, a kudu, oryx and many springbok, finally some wildebeest. We drove round for quite some time on what is a red sand desert but stabilised by

vegetation and eventually parked up at a prepared spot where we were joined by another two vehicles. They set up a bar on a table and once I had borrowed a jersey from the driver and got some beers and wine down I felt a lot warmer.

The tourists photographed the sun going down over the dunes. Back to the lodge and passable set dinner. The staff formed themselves into a choir and we were treated to several songs. We were about 30km west of Mariental at this point.



### **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June** 287Km

Today was first tar to Mariental then 230km to Keetmanshoop. We filled up there and then went 15km on a gravel road to a farm. Here they had some very strange looking buildings that were former railway workers accommodation and we stayed in one of these. This farm had the quiver tree forest so we went and checked that out. These trees are specially adapted for survival in a very dry climate having a trunk which is like balsa wood and is full of fluid filled holes. The leaves and flowers are a bit weird too. There were several groundhogs about as well as meerkats. The feeding of the three pet cheetahs was the next entertainment and I got some good photos of that. He also had three greyhounds, five collie dogs and two pet warthogs. The dinner was served in the main farmhouse and was excellent. It was cold overnight.





### **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June 260Km**

After breakfast in the farmhouse and a photo session with the warthogs we mounted up and headed for Keetmanshoop and the B1. Shortly we turned down the B4 for Seeheim. There is a D road, the D545, shown on the map and this turns out to be the main road past a dam site and is signed as the C15 if you are heading for the Fish River canyon. I thought to stay on the tar a few km longer and did another 5km or so before I had to take a gravel road to Seeheim. Passing by this place the track snaked down a river bed and over the railway before coming back up again.

It is now the F something and this track was in terrible condition. So bad in fact, that I seriously considered turning back. I overtook a bakkie with a trailer behind him examining his set up. I actually felt sorry for him trying to drive that lot along such a road. This bad track finally joined the C15 and I waited there for Alex to arrive.



We travelled a while until a turning for the Fish River canyon and the Canyon Roadhouse. This place has many old vehicles outside and also inside a big shed and we spent some time here looking at all of the machinery. Alex got excited about a Daimler truck which had one of the first Bosch diesel injection pumps on it. We motored on but shortly encountered Patrick yet again going in the opposite direction. So we stopped briefly. He was a really cool guy. Early 40s, he qualified as an Electronics engineer and was for some years working as a chip designer in California. He had though not been working for the last 3 years. He looked after his Dad who had cancer for a year; he had an accident and basically had to mend for a year and this last year he has been travelling; a truly laid back individual.

We took our leave of Patrick and passed on to Hobas where you pay an entrance fee to the park and then some 10km further you arrive at the main viewing point for the Fish River Canyon. There are 3

viewing points and Alex was at them all for quite some time for the perfect photograph. Actually, impressive though it was, we had already seen something very similar on the way down to Salalah in the Oman. I met a couple of SA bikers here on a 1200 GSA and a 1290 KTM. Africaans speakers, they might have been father and son. Certainly I admired the easy way they rode away on the dirt road; the older guy under perfect control laying down just enough power not to smoke the back wheel, whilst the younger one was more flashy and was deliberately provoking the big KTM with gobs of throttle, chucking it about, yet under perfect control. These guys were born on the dirt, I came to it too late!



After I saw Alex coming back from the third viewpoint I assumed that was it and we were going but apparently not so I set off anyway as riding on dirt roads in the dark is not a good idea. It was almost 70 km of gravel to the camp with the hot springs at Ai Ais so I set off anyway reaching there at 4.30pm passing the last part though a nice canyon but with the sun straight in my eyes. I asked about a room and was told that there was nothing available so I retreated to the bar and bought a beer and parked the bike so that when Alex rolled in he could not miss it and waited for his arrival. As it went dark, he arrived. I explained the situation. He went off to reception. He returned to report we now had mattresses, blankets and pillows and we could sleep on the grass. I had already ascertained where the bar and the food was. So we were sorted. We pitched camp and had food and beer and then went to swim in the hot pool which was very nice and slept the night under the stars.

### **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June 245Km**

It was not too cold overnight as it turned out but we were woken at 5am by two women having an emotional conversation in the adjacent toilet block which went on for some time. Breakfast was acceptable and I had it in mind that we were pressing on for the border at this point and was somewhat taken aback when Alex announced his intention to go to the top of the nearest mountain. So off he went and I tried to preserve my back a bit by not doing too much. But I explored the campsite from one end to the other and walked up the riverbed to check out the dam. Then I waited for Alex to return. Meanwhile I had been calculating. There was 70km of dirt roads (mostly sand as it turned out) and 50km of tar to go and then the border crossing. After the crossing we still had to get 120km to Springbok to find a bed for the night. I resolved therefore to set off by 2pm whatever. Alex came back by 1.30 so I was on the way 15 minutes later having agreed to meet at the border. It likely was not going to be a problem but we should cross together as both bikes are in my name. You never know with border controls what questions they may ask. We were both at the border by 3.30pm which, with a quick crossing, had us to Springbok and Annie's guesthouse as it went dark. We tried 3 places to eat but all were full of smokers so we ended up back in our earlier haunt and had a nice dinner.





### **Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 460Km**

At Springbok and Annie's place where the beds were luxurious, it was not too cold, in bed anyway, and there was good internet and even pork sausages for breakfast. Highly recommended! By 10.30am we were ready to roll and it was 17°C. We travelled all by way of the tar N7 today to Citrusdal which is likely the centre of the orange and lemon growing hereabouts. The country side gradually got greener as we went south and more farms appeared as the water sources became more evident.

At Citrusdal the first priority was fuel and then as that used up the last of my cash, an ATM. But the main street was full of people and there were large queues at all the ATMs. It turned out to be end of the month and payday so all wanted their money. There were large numbers of people hitting the bottle stores as well. So we gave up on that idea and went looking for the Warmbad place seen on a sign; it was closed.

We drove around for a while chasing a place to stay and eventually found a room in the Country House hotel in the main street. It had a bar and a restaurant and we had oxtail for main course which was excellent. Only two other guests in the room at this time and one of them approached us as we were leaving. He was a local Afrikaaner approaching 60 and he thought that we were Russians.

His request was could we find him a Russian bride about 35 years old? He was he added a rich man and everybody in town knew him. I immediately thought that there must be clubs in Cape Town where such ladies frequent looking for local husbands but my subsequent lines of enquiry turned up nothing so he is likely still looking.



### **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July** 258Km

The main street was quiet after yesterday and access to the ATMs was easy. After a good breakfast we set off along the R203 out of town which promised some mountain passes and dirt riding. And this was the case with excellent views. The dirt road ended upon descending to the next valley which was filled with farms, lush greenery and livestock. Ceres after 100km was another fruit town where we refuelled, seeing in the garage there a VW1600TL fastback from the '60s, a car that my father had at one time. We made our way to Worcester and then Villiersdorp and to the turning at the dam for Franschhoek. The road along the reservoir lake was very windy and what looked like rain was being blown through the pass which we had to ascend. But the rain held off and we ascended and descended the pass on the eastern side of Franschhoek. The first place we tried for a stay did not answer the door but the next one, despite saying fully booked, did and we were welcomed into Centreville B&B by Jacob and Elsa as the only guests.



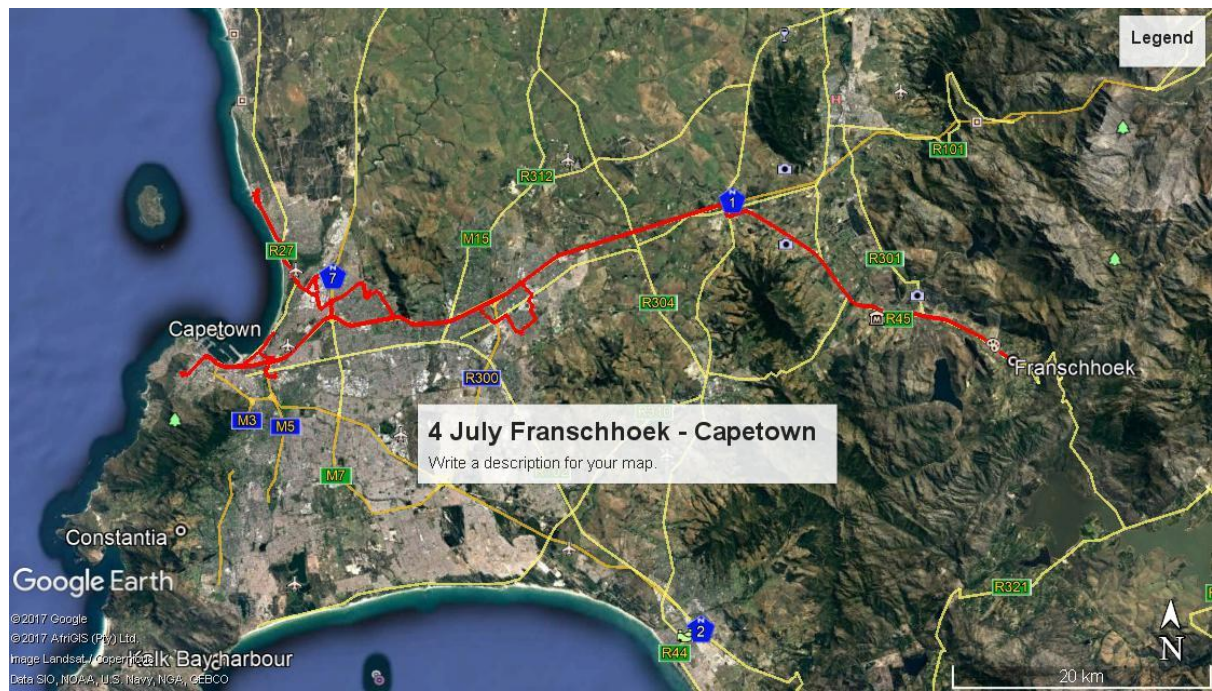
This couple used to farm about 1500km to the north but have now retired. They bought the 1905 constructed house and built in extra rooms into the roof space. It was very charming and full of old things and had a warm log burner. My room, named "Passion", had a spa bath in it which we both had a soak in (separately!). We walked a few hundred metres to the main street and had dinner in an Italian restaurant. It rained a little overnight.



### **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July**

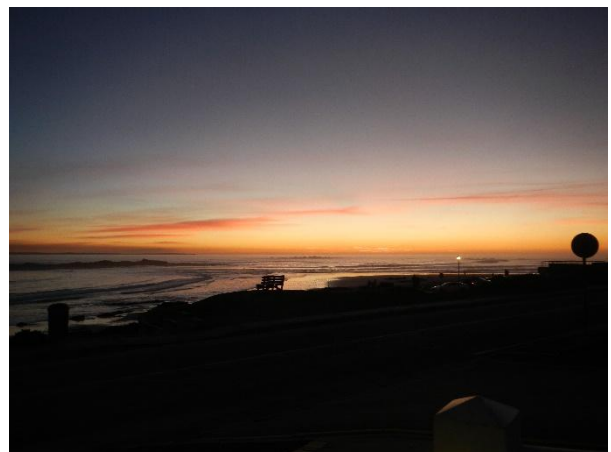
The day dawned a little chilly but with no rain, we got lucky again. The bikes were parked under the stoep so remained dry. After an excellent breakfast we walked to the Huguenot museum and educated ourselves upon the first Huguenots to arrive at the Cape and what they got up to. (These people were persecuted in Catholic France from the time of the reformation period and many of them left for other places). They founded most of the local farms in the area having been allocated areas of bush in which to settle. Next we went on the wine tasting experience. This starts on a bus which leads to a tramcar running on the original rail track and runs down the valley a few kms. Various estate transports then connect with the tram stops and convey tourists through the vines to the wine tasting experiences. There is of course food available too. So with the basic transport problem sorted we were able to indulge ourselves in a minor orgy of wine tasting accompanied by other groups who grew more inebriated as the day continued. I would like to think I got to know a bit more about wines after this experience but like the rest of them we were somewhat inebriated by the end of the day! We hit the same restaurant for dinner.





## Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> July 203Km

We bade farewell to our hosts and set off in bright sunshine through the vinelands for Cape Town where we eventually located the shipping agents in an industrial estate called Paardoneiland. Having made ourselves known it was clear that visiting them on Thursday morning would suffice to conclude our business so we rode away to collect our abandoned gear in the first Cape Town B&B from a month ago and check in to another in Tamboerland a bit further up the rear of Signal Hill. Alex had meanwhile been on the phone and we set off to the Cape Town office of MTU where Werner used to be the manager. Alex toured the offices being welcomed as the man from the HQ factory in Germany. Many of the engineers had been in email contact with him or had also previously met him. A quick tour of the workshop and we were off again; Alex and Francois to go dune bashing on the bikes, myself being directed to a bar overlooking the sea to await their arrival.



The view out to sea was nice and I settled down to wait watching the sun set but it grew colder and colder. They had those heater things dotted about between the tables and I secreted myself to keep out of the wind and gain as much warmth as possible.

The boys rolled up after dark and then we followed Francois at illegal speeds for 30km across the outskirts of Cape Town to his house where we were welcomed by his wife and two small children A



braai was duly prepared and we ate and drank and passed the time with this family before leaving at almost midnight for another cold ride back to the B&B.

### **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July** 209Km

This was to be a tourist day and we took the bikes first to the winelands and the Klein Constanzia estate which has been resurrected from being abandoned following a disease of the vines. Here they have brought back the special grape that makes a sweet dessert type wine that was a favourite tippie of Napoleon amongst others. There were original bottles of this wine from 500 years before in a display cabinet bought from Southebys and bearing a label that they had come from the cellar of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle. Alex arranged the purchase and delivery of some of this to his parents place in eastern Germany. It was though too sweet for my palate. We cracked on down the east side of the Cape Peninsula pausing at Kalk Bay for lunch in a fish restaurant overlooking the harbour where boats were landing boxes of rock lobster and brown fur seals were lying sunbathing on the jetty. We failed to get into the Naval museum at Simon's Town as it was closing as we arrived. We bypassed the penguins, already got those pics on an earlier visit. And then round some curvy roads following the coastline to Scarborough Beach where there was some surfing activity. This part is mostly undeveloped and has a raw sort of beauty to the landscape. We returned to Capetown using the Ou Kaapse Weg pass or M64.



### **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> July** 29Km.

Rode to the shipping warehouse and took off the screens and the mirrors and the panniers. Alex had his bike cleaned first! Filled in a form and had a discussion concerning the time it might take the UK Customs to grant to "Transfer of Residence" (ToR) and Adrian agreed to just crate the bikes and store them for free until I had the magic number from HMR&C. Taxi back to the digs and then to the airport. Once we had dumped our checked in luggage we passed to airside and had a couple of beers to use up the Rand.

### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July**

The flight back on BA was not pleasant as I was sandwiched between two women. The breakfast was pretty bad and ended up giving me food poisoning later that day. Margaret met me at the station. It was nice to be home and I thought to take the dog for a walk but only managed a short way before having to return and get horizontal.

### **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July**

Woke up feeling steamrollered but on the mend. BA sent me a customer survey so I got to have a complain! There has been a deathly silence since. Spent some time on the computer filling in the ToR application and went to the Post Office and dispatched it.

### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July**

Email from Sean Daley of HMRC rejecting the ToR as I had not supplied a packing list so I hastened to respond informing him the shipment just consisted of the bikes and some tools etc. Subsequently ToR was granted - big sighs of relief especially from Alex as the duty and VAT on the 2014 year machine would have been considerable. Capetown were informed of the magic number and were instructed to ship the bikes.

### **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August**

Mail from Cape Town to advise that the bikes will arrive London Gateway on 18th August. But this is a problem as we fly to Malta on the 20<sup>th</sup> so for sure they will want to deliver them during the time we are away. How to arrange payment meanwhile? In the event we ended up paying for three days of storage at the UK shipper man's warehouse.

### **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September**

The bikes arrived at Richard's workshop last Thursday and were taken off the truck with the forklift and left outside. I got there in the afternoon and unpacked my bike and got it home to my garage. Friday morning I was back this time with my battery powered electric drill and an 8mm socket. This made short work of extracting the 4" screws holding the box sides together and the bike was ready to roll in about two hours. Both are back in my garage now and whilst I wait for the customs documents to arrive I am researching how to get a replacement front rim installed. More than 2mm wobble is an MOT failure so a new rim is a necessity. I need new front discs too. Overall this could be nearly a thousand pound bill!

### **Later**

And just to round off the story ToR was granted in respect of both bikes and they are now safe and sound in my garage at home albeit not registered. I found a wheel builder man down in Essex and took him my front wheel and that is now installed on the bike. It will easily pass the MOT test now. Alex's bike also needs this service.

The front discs are "floating" in that the outer part gripped by the pads and will get hot is secured to the inner part that is screwed to the hub by special rivets with some spring washers. So I gave the rivets a session in a fly press to clench them up a bit tighter and so stop the outer flopping about on the inner parts. This repair should be good for a while longer.

In October I discovered that the Power of Attorney I thought I had arranged allowing Hans to de-register the bikes from the Dubai RTA computer and to reclaim the Dh24,000 being held for the carnets was no good. After 3 attempts by the typing centre to get it right I had taken the dual language papers away without getting the Notary's signature! So I had no option but to get on a flight back to Dubai to do this job myself. This was successfully accomplished although somewhat stressfully as when I arrived in Dubai for what should have been an easy trip round the RTA and the AAA and the Bank, I was high jacked by my former employers for work and spent 3 days in meetings and sprinting about during the lunch hours.



Adding up, we covered 7,175Km distance and this was quite an experience but to tell you the truth a lot of it was beyond my comfort zone. Nevertheless I survived albeit a bit battered and bruised. Sad to say my left thumb that got wrenched back when the handlebars twitched violently is still not mended 7 months later and I have some pain in my foot where the bike dropped on it. This is the price for getting old unfortunately; we just do not heal as well or as fast as we did in our younger days.



My F800GS just before the washing session in Capetown