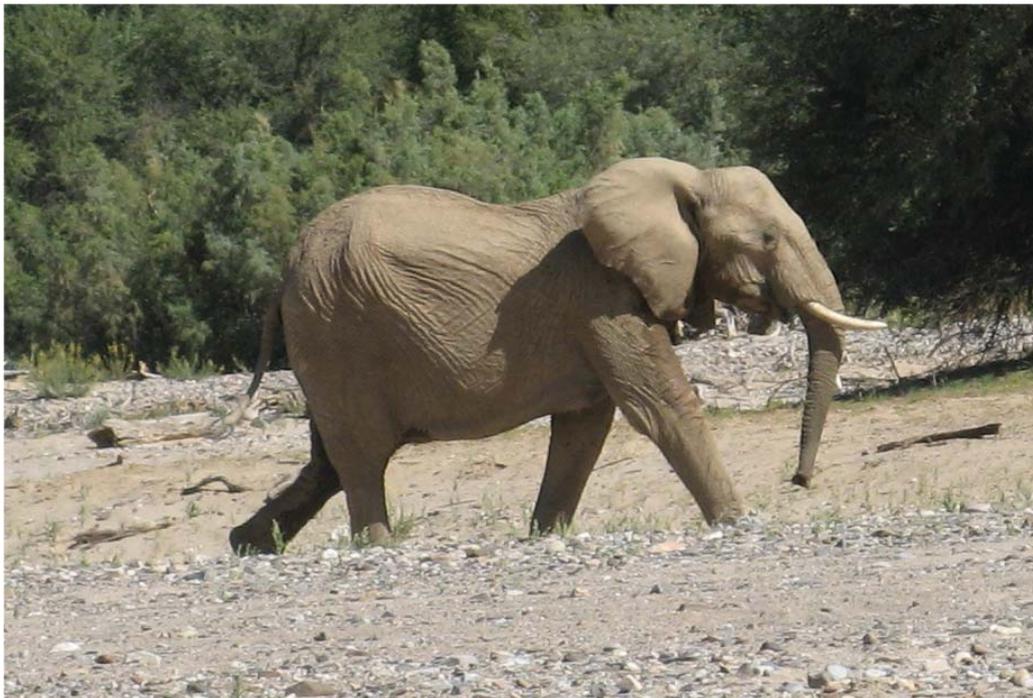


JoLT Fund-Raising Trek Damaraland, Namibia



April 29th – May 12th 2007

Introduction

Since 1983, the Journey of a Lifetime Trust (JoLT) has been making a positive lasting difference to the lives of hundreds of disabled, ill, abused and neglected young people. Every two years, it takes groups of youngsters on challenging, month-long expeditions to remote parts of the world, giving them a real sense of achievement, greater confidence and self-esteem and the ability to take control of their future.

The charity is run on a totally voluntary basis and is funded entirely by donations and the income from sponsored activities. It has now become a tradition for a women-only trek to act as an advance JoLT expedition, travelling to the same part of the world, finding out more about conditions there and making useful local contacts. And raising funds, of course.

The next JoLT trip is to Namibia and Southern Africa in July 2008. Which was why six of us had planned a two-week trek in north-west Namibia in May 2007, walking every day, camping out under the stars and seeing as much wildlife as we could.

Trek members:

Dorothy Dalton
Dr Olivia Hussey
Dr Georgina Bird-Liebermann
Lindsay Driscoll
Denise Bolland
Veronica Colin

Monday, April 30th 2007

Our journey began with a ten-hour overnight flight to Johannesburg, followed by a short hop to Windhoek in Namibia. Here we were reunited with our bags and met our guide, Volker Röder. Tired and stiff, we emerged blinking into the brilliant African sunshine and climbed aboard a big white Land-Cruiser for the next part of our journey to Twyfelfontein in the north-west of the country, some 470 kilometres distant. We were to get to know this vehicle very well.

We found out almost immediately that the US dollars we had brought with us were not universally acceptable and Volker advised us to change them in Windhoek into Namibian dollars or South African rand. This took more than an hour to accomplish and meant that the last part of our journey took place after dark.

We drove for several hours along good straight roads across a flat scrub-covered plain through the small towns of Okahanda and Omaruru. Gravel roads then took us into a more mountainous area, past the Brandberg massif and through a succession of rocky valleys flanked by flat-topped sandstone hills. While it was still light, we saw our first African wildlife - springbok and baboons, a family of warthogs scurrying into the undergrowth and fork-tailed drongos and lilac-breasted rollers perched on telegraph poles by the road.

Numerous small carts, drawn by two or three donkeys, trotted along tracks at the side of the road.

It had just got dark when we saw a large 4x4 parked at the side of the road. Volker pulled up, got out and went to speak to the occupants. We thought at first that he was offering help to strangers in distress, but it turned out that this was our trek back-up truck, driven by the two camp assistants, Augie and David. The vehicle had apparently just had a respray which had stopped its lights functioning. They were able to fix this fault, so Volker drove on.

Eventually we saw the lights of Twyfelfontein Country Lodge in the distance (the name means *doubtful spring*) and were extremely happy to arrive and enjoy a welcome drink. We then went to our rooms, showered and changed into clean clothes before dinner.

Twyfelfontein Lodge is a complex of low buildings nestling in a rocky valley which has been carefully designed to blend into its surroundings. It is built in natural stone, with a thick thatched roof. We made the most of the Lodge's comforts, aware that we would soon be sleeping in tents with no running water or flush loos.

Over dinner, we made arrangement to visit the famous San (Bushmen) rock art a few kilometres away before starting out on the trek proper on the following day. This meant an early start and we all went to bed as soon as we had eaten.

Tuesday, May 1st Twyfelfontein - Aba-Huab

We packed, had breakfast and then drove five kilometres to the rock art site in a valley nearby. This is one of the richest rock art sites in Africa, with more than 2,000 paintings and engravings of animals, animal tracks and people on flat slabs of sandstone, some dating back to before 3300BC. We were guided up and down a stony track to see the most striking art, such as the Lion Man and Dancing Kudu. It was still early and comparatively cool. At the end we filled up our water bottles from a natural spring and returned to load up our bags and start walking.

David and Augie, (full name, Augustus), our two camp assistants, drove ahead in the Land-Cruiser and back-up vehicle to set up our first night's camp. Volker had made arrangement with Augie to meet up with us at lunchtime and top up our supply of liquids.

We walked westwards for two to three hours along the Aba-Huab river bed, a maze of sandy channels fringed with acacias and mopane trees with their dark green butterfly-shaped leaves. Aba means *to carry on back* and the Aba-Huab was a tributary of the main Huab river which flowed west into the Atlantic. At least, it would have flowed west if there had been any water in it, but the rains had been less than expected and all the river beds we encountered (with a couple of exceptions) were bone dry.

It grew steadily hotter. Finally we sat down to rest on the river bank underneath a mopane tree, beating off irritating small black mopane bees, while Volker tried to locate Augie and the Land-Cruiser. Radio contact was eventually made and we all met up for a lateish lunch, continuing on to the campsite a few kilometres further on.

I found the change of climate and heat on the first day difficult to tolerate and had to summon a lift for the final 500-metre approach to the campsite, feeling extremely unwell. Luckily I soon cooled down, was able to communicate rationally again and join the others for supper.

Our camp in the Huab river valley was pitched in a shady grove of trees and set the pattern for all the campsites on the trek. Six of us shared three dome tents, following a rota which Dorothy had drawn up. Volker, David and Augie slept on top of the vehicles.

Each tent was neatly equipped with two comfortable bedding rolls, with small canvas wash-stands standing outside. Transparent netted panels on the top and on each side of the tent gave us a good all-round view of the moonlit campsite and the stars above us. The loo and shower tent were pitched at a tactful distance – the loo was equipped with a seat over a hole in the ground and the shower was a canvas bucket filled with warmish water suspended over a branch. We twisted a valve to release a trickle of water and then turned it off again as soon as we could. We rapidly realised the value of water in such an arid country.

While we removed surplus sand from our persons, Volker, David and Augie would be busy preparing our dinner over a crackling wood fire – an interesting reversal of roles. We ladies sat round a long table drinking tea and hot water as the sun set and bats darted overhead. Four candles in glass funnels were placed along the centre of the table, attracting an interesting assortment of insect life including moths, crickets and, on one occasion, a praying mantis. Every night Volker would prepare a new and appetising dish, such as chicken in peanut sauce, pork, sausages and spare ribs, marinated fish, a South African speciality, *bobotie*, made with curried mince and topped with egg, and oryx steaks. Each main course was accompanied by at least three vegetable dishes, such as stuffed butternut squash, and a different kind of salad.

From time to time, Volker would bring out his drum and fill the air with an intoxicating rhythmic beat, while we would chatter idly and wonder whether it was too early to go to bed.

Wednesday, May 3rd - Aba-Huab – Palmwag

We woke as the sun was rising, had breakfast and left Augie and David to pack up and load everything on to the backup truck. We were extremely impressed by their efficiency and speed. Tents and bedding were rolled up neatly, food and kitchen equipment packed away in containers and the camp site returned to a pristine state in an unbelievably short time.

Before we set off, Volker got us to do some energetic warm-up exercises and then led us off at a smart pace along the river bed. The going was mostly sandy, which was tiring to walk through, interspersed with small hills and dry grassy meadow-like stretches. This was only a half-day walk and we met up with Augie and David at De-Riet (The Reed) rendezvous point under the shade of an ancient acacia tree at lunchtime.

We saw a small spitting cobra entwined in a bush at the top of a hill and were shown a black fog-eating beetle which lives on sand dunes. About the size of a thumb-nail, it is able to harvest water from fog by upending itself so that droplets of moisture collect on its back and dribble down into its mouth. Flocks of Namaqua sandgrouse flew overhead. These travel huge distances to collect water for their young, absorbing it specially-adapted breast feathers. We also saw examples of fairy circles, or 'desert acne', round bare patches where nothing grows. Dead *euphorbia damarana* bushes had been suggested as a possible cause, since they are extremely poisonous, but Volker was not convinced that this theory was correct.

After lunch we drove on some 100 kilometres along gravel roads to Palmwag Lodge at the Uniab River. This is one of Namibia's oldest lodges, set among malakani palms. We had been booked into luxury tents for one night – semi-permanent raised structures, with twin beds, canvas roofs and adjoining bathrooms, overlooking thick clumps of reeds in the river bed. We had arrived early enough for a swim in one of the Lodge's two small pools – total immersion in water after a dusty bumpy drive was a wonderfully luxurious experience.

Oryx steaks were on the menu that night for dinner and we were entertained by the all the dining room staff processing in and giving us a short and cheerful concert.

Thursday 3rd May – Palmwag Country Lodge – Orunende Spring

We left Palmwag early the next morning and were driven a short way into the Palmwag Concession Area. This is one of a number of large blocks of land reserved by the government for tourism, accessed by permit. We would be camping in the concession for the next three days.

Palmwag was a good area for seeing desert-adapted elephants – so we understood – and visitors had reported seeing thirteen of these beasts the day before. But the elephants kept their distance and all we saw on the way to the Van Zyl Gat at the concession entrance was a ground squirrel and some mountain zebras.

We left the vehicles and started walking, cooled by a pleasant east wind which had started to blow just before dawn. Volker warned us that it wouldn't last. We crossed bare open hillsides, dotted with spiky euphorbia bushes, and then scrambled down down into the Uniab river gorge, where we saw a pair of hammerkops, large water birds, and the succulent plant, *Hoodia gordonii*, topped with pink-red flowers. Then we climbed up the other side of the gorge.

The ground had just started to flatten out when we saw a large grey shape humped in the shade of a euphorbia bush about thirty metres away. We froze. Volker silently indicated an alternative route that would take us up the side of a hill on the left. As we crept quietly away, our hearts thudding, a black rhino lumbered to its feet and a smaller rhino joined it. It stared suspiciously in our direction, its horns looking extremely sharp and menacing. A third rhino lay unmoving under another bush nearby.

It was as well, Volker told us later, that we had been down-wind. The rhino, luckily, had not been able to smell us. As we climbed higher and further out of range, it continued to peer in the direction we had just come.

I was extremely wary of euphorbia bushes after this and gave them a wide berth.

The rest of that morning's walk was uneventful. We saw a large number of *Welwitschia mirabilis*, the world's oldest plant. It is able to live for hundreds of years and its seeds only germinate after a large amount of rain has fallen. With its untidy, shredded leaves, it looks as if someone has dropped a pile of old, ragged clothes on the ground.

Late in the morning, we joined the gravel road and met up with the Land-Cruiser, enjoying icy-cold drinks from the cool box Augie had brought.

It was then decision-time. As there was still a three hour-walk ahead over rough ground to reach our next campsite, Volker suggested that Denise and I ride there in the vehicle. There wouldn't be another opportunity to be 'air-lifted' out. Although this would have been an easy enough walk in cooler British climes, we had not yet got acclimatised to the heat and so discretion won out. We drove off with Augie down the track to reach the campsite about half an hour later.

It got very hot. Denise and I pottered around the campsite, drank tea, read and napped. Eventually the rest of the party staggered in, looking shattered. They had huddled in the shade of a tiny bush to have lunch and then the wind had dropped, making the last few hours of walking much tougher than they had expected.

But they recovered quickly and we spent another pleasant evening, eating dinner by candlelight as the full moon rose overhead.

Friday, 4th May – Orunende to Kai-As Waterhole

The wind got up again before dawn. We started out early, walking down the track and then over a pass, following game trails, up along a sandy channel which was marked with droppings and excavations indicating a rhino's territory. But thankfully no rhino came hurtling down the path and we crossed the pass safely and dropped down into another dry river channel, bordered with green vegetation and reeds. We saw some distant ostriches on the river bed, but very little game. Volker attributed this to the wind which he said made the animals skittish.

At one point, we stopped to rest under a tree but rapidly moved on again when we discovered that the ground was alive with small black ticks – and some much bigger ones – which bit us all mercilessly.

The last part of this trek was a mineral-spotter's dream. White and blue-grey agates lay among the dark basalt boulders but we were all walking too briskly to look at them properly. It was only when we reached the camp site that Lindsay and I were able to wander back over the rocky hillside nearby and pick up a few interesting crystals, such as natrolites with their radiated structure, banded slivers of agate and zeolites, all formed by the rapid cooling off of lava rocks. Collecting minerals in a National Park would have been illegal, but this was not a National Park, so I felt able to bring a small number of stones back with me.

Kai-As Waterhole was the most remote of all our camp sites. That evening we watched a brilliant golden-red sunset, followed by an amazing display of stars - the Southern Cross, Alpha Centauri and the great misty sweep of the Milky Way. From time to time a shooting star left a trail of fire above our head. Then the moon rose, already on the wane, and the stars grew dimmer. Augie and David spotted a jackal prowling around the camp and pinpointed it in a torch-beam.

Later that night a rhino came snuffling and crashing through the bushes near our tents and woke most people up. I slept through it all, much to my annoyance.

Saturday, 5th May – Kai-As to Mudorib River Valley

We made a change to the itinerary planned for us, walking for a couple of hours in the cool of the morning before being picked up by the Land-Cruiser and driven some fifty kilometres to the northern part of the concession. The east wind still blew and animals were not much in evidence. But we enjoyed trekking through vast open spaces, following narrow game trails that contoured their way across hillsides and along valleys.

The drive to the Mudorib river valley took us across the watershed. At first, huge flat empty plains stretched out almost endlessly, with distant flat-topped mountains shimmering in the heat. Then we noticed the geology change to folded and tilted rock formations, showing the effects of gigantic tectonic movements. It was easy to understand why Namibia holds such a fascination for geoscientists.

The fields of small boulders we passed showed what Volker termed desert tan. Dissolved iron and manganese compounds had reacted with the oxygen in the air and formed black metallic oxides, coating the surfaces of the rocks to give them a shiny, varnished appearance.

The track to the Mudorib was rocky and rough, and the Land-Cruiser frequently lurched into sudden dips in the road. Since these always provoked involuntary shrieks from Georgie sitting on the back seat, we called them Georgie bumps. On one occasion, Livvy in the centre hit her head on the roof while those on either side of her were thrown on to the floor, laughing helplessly. We used to gauge the roughness of the track by the noise level from the back seat.

We arrived in the upper Mudorib valley in mid-afternoon. This, a tributary of the Huanib river, was a complete contrast to the wide open plains we had just left, a much more intimate landscape, bordered by high rock walls and shaded by big acacia trees. Almost immediately we saw a young giraffe a short distance away, nibbling a nearby tree. It ambled away down the valley, joined by two others.

While David and Augie started to pitch camp, Volker took us all on a drive down the river valley in search of elephants. The signs were propitious, plenty of elephant droppings, deep circular tracks in the sand and many broken-down acacia branches, evidence of elephants' destructive feeding habits. But the tracks and droppings were old and we drew a blank. Elephants travel huge distances and it seemed that they had long gone from this area. But we did see the three giraffes again, as well as three klipspringer, tiny deer that climb almost sheer rock walls, and other animals, such as oryx.

Sunday 6th May – Mudorib – Purros

The next morning we walked for a couple of hours down to a water point at the junction of two river valleys, mostly retracing our drive of the night before. We then climbed aboard the Land-Cruiser, with David and Augie following in the support vehicle and set off down a track which seemed little used.

We had decided to make a change to our itinerary, driving directly to the Purros community campsite on the Hoarusib rive (*father of all rivers*) in Kaokoland and spending two days there. The change would avoid a stop at Hobatere, which Volker had told us was infested with lions. We also needed to top up our water supplies. The previous evening we had all suffered from an unusual thirst, which made us suspect that the drinking water might be slightly brackish. Our supply of mineral water had almost run out.

This drive took us along a wide valley and we saw a lot of game including springbok and great herds of oryx, cantering gracefully over the sand hillsides alongside the track. We stopped for lunch in the shade of an acacia tree by a rocky bank. The river valley widened and soon we could see a spectacular sand dune spilling like a yellow stain down the mountainside.

We stopped briefly at Purros, an Ovahimba and Herero settlement at the Hoarusib river, to buy soft drinks, and were surrounded almost immediately by a cheerful crowd of children. The settlement was a scattered collection of small mud buildings with tin roofs and wooden palisades on a flat sandy plain. It looked hot and shadeless, in contrast to our destination, a well-designed community campsite on the river bed a few kilometres further on. Our site had large shady trees, a special kitchen area, a flush loo and a shower. Water was heated by a small wood stove called a donkey. These facilities were imaginatively located in doorless enclosures within a green cave of creepers and vegetation surrounding a tree. They were easy enough to navigate during the day but one night I dropped my head torch and took some time to find my way out.

Augie and David started to set up the camp while Volker took us in the Land-Cruiser to hunt down some mineral water and inspect some wetlands in a neighbouring gorge where elephants might be lurking. They were known to frequent this area. Droppings were plentiful and a notice in the kitchen area warned us not to leave food where they could see or smell it.

The gorge was damp and lush with vegetation. We saw blacksmith lapwings, with their striking black and white plumage, stalking through pools of water. But no elephants. The track alternated between thick mud and deep sand which the Land-Cruiser took in its stride. Eventually we took a side turning and left the main valley, startling a couple of ostriches, who kept pace with us for some time, their beaks opening and closing with dismay when they realised that we were going as fast as they were.

Our mineral water quest had taken us to a luxurious tourist complex on the way to the gorge – the Okahirongo Elephant Camp. This was a cluster of domed terracotta buildings which was located on a hill outside Purros. The place had appeared

deserted on our first visit so we decided to try again. This time we found the manager, bought some water and treated ourselves to ice-cream and beer, sitting on comfortable loungers by the swimming pool, looking at the sun setting on the distant mountains.

We then returned to the campsite to enjoy another of Volker's splendid meals. And so to bed.

Monday, 8th May – Purros

Something scampered noisily past our tent in the night. Augie and David said it was a dog, but we were convinced that it was heavier and had hooves. The chorus of bird calls in the trees above was loud and tuneful and woke us all up before dawn.

We decided to go on a full-day walk up the river valley in search of elephants. We were beginning to wonder whether these animals were invented by the Namibian Tourist Board, who employed people to come out each night to scatter droppings and make large footprints in areas frequented by eager tourists. But by the end of the day we had dismissed this unworthy thought.

We walked for two to three hours along the course of the river, sometimes over gravel banks, sometimes through grassy meadows, sometimes along stretches of the river bed where mud washed down by the rains had dried into a thin crisp layer of interlocking shapes, curling at the edges – rather like walking over cornflakes. Bright yellow devil's thorn (*Tribulus zeyheri*) bloomed where rain had fallen.

Early in the walk, Volker lost radio contact with Augie, despite climbing to the top of a small hill in line of sight of the camp. We continued along the river for about ten kilometres, eventually making for the track where Augie was to meet us at ten o'clock. Eleven o'clock came and went but there was no sign of the Land-Cruiser, our water was running low and the radio still did not work. At the same time, Denise had been bravely trying to overcome an attack of D&V which had started to trouble her the previous evening. By lunchtime, the two doctors insisted that she stop walking.

Luckily a German couple drove past and kindly took Denise back to the camp. The rest of us had started walking back along the track when Augie rolled up at last.

We all climbed aboard the Land-Cruiser and went on a single-minded pursuit of elephants. The German couple told us they had seen several from a look-out point up-stream, a small gravel hill about 150 feet above the river. We drove first to one look out point and then to another, but saw only giraffes. Then Volker drove down into the river bed and we stopped for a picnic lunch. Shortly after, we met another vehicle and the occupants told us that they had just seen five elephants in the stretch of river bed we had walked up. A male elephant was in musth and needed to be approached with care.

Volker drove rapidly in the correct direction. We saw the elephants almost immediately and spent a considerable time watching and photographing them from the safety of the Land-Cruiser. A large agitated male was stomping down the river bed in pursuit of a female, who unhurriedly sought sanctuary with a group of other

females and a juvenile. They crossed and re-crossed the river bed and eventually took shelter in a clump of trees, while the male remained at a short distance, also in the shade of a tree. They took no notice of us all.

We moved off and drove back to the campsite, seeing a troupe of baboons on the way. Denise was feeling better and reported seeing a scarlet-breasted shrike nearby – a small consolation for missing out on the elephants.

Tuesday 9th May – Purros to Khowarib

The following morning we walked up yet another river valley while Augie and David struck camp. Denise was by now fully recovered.

The morning walk was pleasant and undemanding, following the river bed up through groves of tamarisks. Augie had left the Land-Cruiser parked in the shade. We climbed on board, drove across the Giribes Plain to Sesfontein and then on to the Khowarib Gorge on the Hoanib river where Volker had promised us running water and rock pools.

Sesfontein (*six springs*) is a green and pleasant town, scattered with fan palms and fig trees. It was once a strategic German military outpost but the fort is now a hotel.

The road into the Khowarib Gorge was probably one of the roughest we had yet encountered, with 45% inclines, huge potholes and rock outcrops, but the Land-Cruiser was undismayed and lurched its way slowly along the track, finally stopping at a campsite a few kilometres downstream.

And yes, there was actually water in the river, with a small waterfall splashing into a shallow pool. Denise was so delighted that she immediately plunged in fully-dressed – the rest of the party changed into their swimsuits and joined her. This was our last night under canvas and we all agreed that this was the best campsite to date.

Wednesday, 10th May – Khowarib - Ongava

Today we parted company with David and Augie, who were taking the back-up vehicle and equipment back to base. We had all appreciated their cheerfulness and efficiency and we made a presentation to them both after breakfast which included a JoLT t-shirt.

We then walked down the gorge with Volker, enjoying the cool morning and seeing interesting wild-life such as a flock of rosy-faced lovebirds and a few baboons. Now that we were all fit and acclimatised, we would have like to spend much more time here, perhaps walking the full length of the gorge, but all too soon, Augie drove up in the Land-Cruiser and Volker took him back to the site, returning shortly afterwards to take us on to the Ongava Game Reserve, close to the Etosha National Park.

It took us some hours to reach Ongava, stopping for coffee and fuel on the way, and we were all hot, tired and dusty by the time we reached the entrance to the reserve. To our dismay, we were told that there was no booking for us all the Ongava Homestead and we were redirected to the Tented Camp, some nineteen kilometres within the reserve, where they were expecting us.

The Tented Camp was in fact an upgrade and extremely comfortable. We were greeted by the staff with refreshing damp towels, our bags taken to our luxury tents - very like the ones at Palmwag - and cool drinks provided. There was a swimming pool and a spacious viewing platform outside the main building, where we could relax and watch the animals congregate and jostle at the waterhole in front of us.

Ongava, a 30 sq kilometre private reserve, had been formed by merging three extensive farms together and game of all sorts thrived in this protected environment.

We were taken on a game drive that evening just before sundown, with Rio, one of Ongava's senior guides. The 4x4 vehicle had specially raised seats and open sides for maximum visibility, and we drove slowly out into the reserve, stopping whenever a photo-opportunity presented itself. We saw zebra, gnu, springbok, kudu, water buck, black-faced impala, oryx and red hartebeest, jackals and groups or 'sounders' of warthogs. Rio identified a distant hump under a tree as a lion - we were to see several of these at closer quarters the next day. The bird life was just as varied. We saw various hornbills, hoopoes and a kori bustard (*Ardeotis kori*) stalking about in a grassy meadow. This is reputedly the largest flying bird in the world, but it stayed firmly on the ground while we went past.

Just as the sun was setting we pulled off the track and stopped. Rio spread a cloth over the bonnet of the vehicle and produced drinks for us all and a large dish of interesting snacks. The sun dropped below the horizon and it grew dark almost immediately. On the way back, Rio shone a strong flashlight around to show us yet more game, eyes glinting in the darkness.

We sat at a long table in the dining-room that night and enjoyed a three-course dinner with wine, chatting to some of the other guests. For our safety, after dark we needed to be escorted to and from our tents by one of the staff with a gun and flashlight. Tracks along the sandy path showed that a big cat - a cheetah or leopard - had recently trotted past, probably while we were having dinner. We made sure our door was very firmly shut.

Thursday, 11th May - Ongava

This was our last full day (so we thought) in Namibia, and we made the most of the game-viewing opportunities provided at Ongava. In the morning we went for a two-hour bush walk with Rio (equipped with a gun) along tracks and up and down small dolerite hills around the reserve. In the late afternoon we took another game drive, hopefully to see a rhino, but in the event we heard that a lion had just made a kill and we drove straight out to see it.

A lioness with three cubs had killed a female kudu, just by the track. We stopped some distance away and watched, fascinated. The kudu was a big animal, but the lioness effortlessly dragged it into the undergrowth so that her cubs could feed undisturbed. After a while a lion sauntered up - the father, we assumed - and joined them. We managed to get some photographs, but wished that there had been fewer bushes in the way.

Rio picked out more lions with his flashlight on the way back – and also showed us a large green chameleon on a bush, which changed colour indignantly as the light fell on it.

We made sure we had an early night as we were setting out early the next morning for the airport.

Friday, 12th May – Ongava - Windhoek

Livvy and Denise remained another week in Namibia, and waved us off early the following morning. Lindsay and I climbed into the Land-Cruiser while Dorothy and Georgie opted to travel on top as far as the reserve gates. Shortly after we left, we encountered another game-viewing vehicle parked by the road which had been tracking a big white rhino – this lumbered crossly away just as we drove up. The two on top had a much better view than we did.

Then another 4x4 came racing up behind us, with Livvy and Denise waving brown paper bags at us. We had forgotten to take our packed lunches.

We then joined the main metalled road to Windhoek and we had been travelling for less than an hour when Volker noticed that the engine temperature had risen sharply. The Land-Cruiser, which had 400,000 kilometres on the clock and had performed valiantly throughout the trek, broke down spectacularly. A seam in the radiator had given way and water was pouring out. We filled it up with all the mineral water we had but to no avail.

The next few hours involved a lot of phone calls, a slow limp to the nearest town of Outjo where a garage welded the seam and then an extremely fast, non-stop drive to the airport. We arrived just five minutes too late to find our seats had already been given to standby passengers.

This meant another day in Windhoek, but there was little opportunity to do much with the extra time. We managed to book another flight to Johannesburg the next morning, and change our London tickets to a Saturday evening flight.

Volker rolled up at the hotel on Saturday morning to take us to the airport in the Land-Cruiser. The engine was by now sounding a little rough. We were just about to load up our bags when we noticed a steady stream of water pouring from the mended radiator. This, I'm afraid, caused considerable mirth. Volker was not so amused.

We did manage to catch our plane – transported in Volker's own vehicle which was in much better condition.

Our trip to Namibia was extraordinarily interesting. Those on the JoLT'08 trip will have an amazing and memorable time – I know we did.

*Veronica Colin
May 2007*

**Wildlife, plants and trees
seen on the trek included:**

Animals

Desert elephant
Giraffe
Lion
Black rhinoceros
White rhinoceros
Hartmann's mountain zebra
Burchell's zebra
Klipspringer
Oryx
Springbok
Steenbok
Water buck
Gnu
Kudu
Black-faced impala
Red hartebeest
Black-backed jackal
Warthog
Tree squirrel
Ground squirrel
Scrub hare
Rock hyrax
Baboon

Birds

Ostrich
Namaqua sandgrouse
Kori bustard
Ruppell's korhaan
Black-bellied korhaan
Rosy-cheeked lovebird
Francolin
Sociable weaver
White-browed sparrow weaver
Pale chanting goshawk
Crimson-breasted shrike
Helmeted guineafowl
Lilac-breasted roller
Grey, red-billed, yellow-billed and Monteiro's hornbills
Hammerkop
Lourie (go-away bird)
Bi-coloured crow
Tawny eagle
Burchell's starling
Secretary bird
Mountain chat
Egyptian goose
Crested bunting
Black flycatcher
Cape turtledove
Bulbul
Spotted dikkop
Brown-throated martin
Blacksmith lapwing
Fork-tailed drongo

Reptiles

Black-necked spitting cobra
Flap-necked chameleon
Gecko
Lizard
Orambo tree skink
Grass snake

Insects

Fog-eating beetle
Mopane bee
Praying mantis
Assorted bugs

Plants and trees

Welwitschia mirabilis
Wild sage
Camel-thorn acacia
Devil's thorn
Purple-pod terminalia
Makalani palm
Mopane
Ana tree
Moringa
Shepherd's tree
Tamarisk
Lead wood
Angel trumpet
Blackjack
Hoodia