

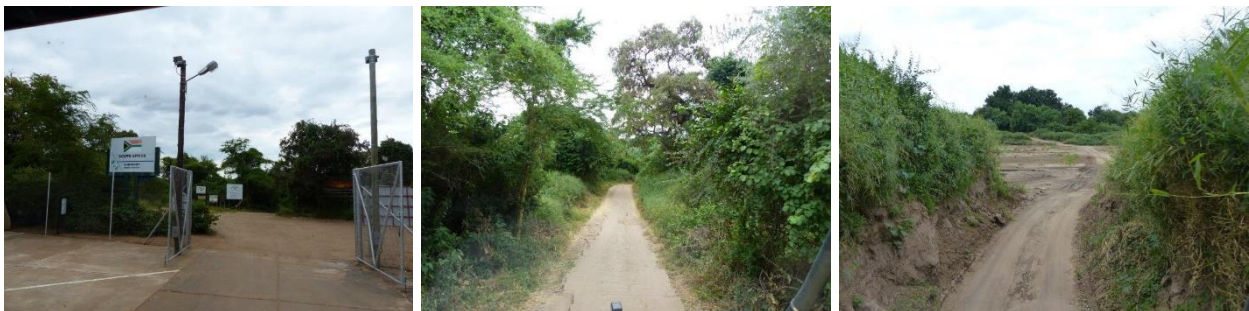
17.3.2018 Musima, Pontdrift, Molema Bush Camp

Botswana is calling and we have some preparations to do. However, we won't leave without one last dip in the hot pool. Today it's overcast and temperatures have dropped by 15 degrees compared to yesterday – the ideal weather to sit in the hot pool.

At noon we reach Musima, a busy little town with a brand-new mall, where we stock up on supplies and fill up the car. The city is prospering because of its close location to the Botswana as well as the Zimbabwe border.



We are surprised that the border crossing in Pontdrift is a small narrow unpaved track leading through the Limpopo river bed. The Limpopo river is the border between South Africa and Botswana. The customs officer of Botswana wants to classify our Unimog as a bus and keeps asking for our vehicle weight and number of passenger seats available. We finally show him our camper from the inside to convince him that there is only room for two. Of course, as a bus we would have to pay more road user charges.



Botswana declared independence from the British Commonwealth in 1966 and is meanwhile one of the most politically stable and successful countries in Africa. The country with just over 2 Mio inhabitants is approximately the size of France. Main income is mining, livestock production and tourism. Botswana is mainly a flat country and 70% of the land is covered by the Kalahari Desert.

After border crossing we are in the Tuli Block Nature Reserve located at the very eastern corner of Botswana, a narrow piece of land squeezed in between Zimbabwe und South Africa. A few private game farms have formed this conservancy and have removed most of the fences. Our destination is the Molema Bush Camp, 34km away, we need 1.5 hours to cover the distance. The drive becomes a game drive, we see giraffes, zebras and many antelopes. On our way we also pass by a rock formation

named „Solomon’s Wall“. These basalt rocks were part of a former natural dam wall at the Motloutse river, at some places up to 30m high.



The Molema Bush Camp is a nice surprise. In total only 5-6 large camp sites far apart from each other located under huge Nyala trees. There is a fireplace, braai and a private bathroom with outdoor shower to each camp site.





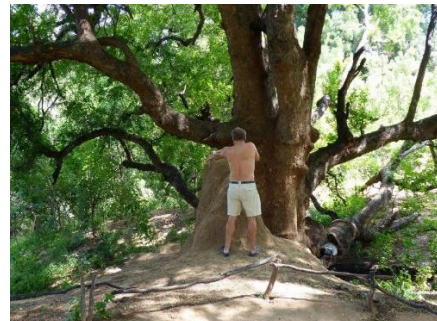
18.3.2018 Molema Bush Camp

We stay two nights in the camp and take care of some maintenance and house work. The Unimog needs a bit of TLC, belts have to be tightened, the tire pressure control system needs to be cleaned and the water tank checked. Unfortunately, there is water leaking into our back storage compartment and we are not sure where it comes from.



This campsite is also too idyllic to only stay a day and rush away too quickly. We enjoy the African “bush feeling”. In the morning even the „room service“ is coming and cleans the fire place! The gigantic Nyala trees are so beautiful, one can't stop looking into the crowns.

The bush around our camp is alive with all kind of noises and the Baboons are the loudest. They are having fights while wandering around us. But thanks to Werner's sling shot we are able to keep these naughty animals at a safe distance.



During our evening camp fire even a Common Genet comes for a visit. She seems to feel very comfortable at the warm fire und would not leave for the evening.



19.3.2018 Baines Drift, Sherwood

Phew, last night was noisy, we could hardly sleep. We could hear elephants blowing, hippos grunting and many other animals making funny noises. A bird is “singing” every 10 minutes like the sound of a digital alarm clock, we wake up all the time. In the morning our room service lady tells us that there are fresh Hyena marks in our camp. Good, that we sleep high above the ground in our Unimog.

We want to cross Botswana from East to West, direction Namibia and will stay mainly in the South driving parallel to the South African border. Unfortunately, the national parks in Botswana got so expensive that we decided against visiting Chobe and Moremi National Parks. The entrance fee, camping and fee for our car > 7.5 MT would add up to 250 USD per day! Then we rather get a ‘Wild Card’ in South Africa and visit the parks there to see all the animals for a fraction of the price. However, one gets more adventure and true ‘Africa feeling’ in Botswana as the camp sites here are never fenced.

But first we drive to Sherwood, the next town about 150km away. The road is pretty bad and we need five hours, which means we only made an average speed of about 30km/h...





At a checkpoint in Baines Drift we pass by this road sign and stood there for a while trying to figure out whether we are allowed to drive on or not... We still do not really get it!

Sherwood has it all! A fuel station with a small shop, a money changer and a nice little picnic area with a braai so we decide to stay here for the night. Since we are close to Martin's Drift, another border crossing to South Africa, there is quite some traffic until midnight with heavy trucks wanting to cross the border. We did not think of this.



20.3.2018 Moremi Sacred Gorge

Temperatures are soaring and we do not even want to leave the shade. Luckily, today we do not have to drive very far. We want to visit „Moremi Sacred Gorge“ and stay at their community campsite Goo-Moremi Gorge.

The tarred road runs along flat and straight with endless fences on both sides. Almost all bus stops and even rubbish bins are painted in the Botswana national colors blue-white-black. Despite the fences a lot of cattle and goats are on the road crossing frequently.



The road to Moremi gorge ends in a village which is covered all over with pretty yellow flowers. From here we have to drive off-road to the camp, even our GPS system is lost.



At noon we reach the camp, the access track to the camp site has trees with branches too low for our Unimog. No problem, a helpful staff is happy to cut down two branches for us – after we borrow him our saw. He is climbing up the tree faster than we can look!



The Campsites in Botswana are generally more expensive than in South Africa, but they are often also better designed. Lots of space, shady trees, plenty of bushes dividing the camp sites and providing privacy as well as outdoor showers. The camping fee here includes a guided walk into the gorge, which we have booked for tomorrow morning.

Unfortunately, we have no time to enjoy this camp site. We try to find the source of our water leak which is still flooding the back storage compartment of our car every day. We

empty the entire back storage and drawers in the cabin, disassemble some timber boards in the camper in order to see if there is any water elsewhere in the cabin. Meanwhile we found out it is fresh water and there seems to be more water coming out when we are driving. The water tank was obviously built in first and then the cabin was built around it, which means there is no way to access the water tank without having to destroy the entire cabin. Also the water pipes are under a double-floor layer and can't be accessed. It is a shame that professional expedition mobile manufacturers build cabins where pieces of equipment cannot be easily accessed and maintained. On an expedition truck everything is prone to break down one day and needs to be accessible – a design fault! We realize that this water problem is not easy to solve on the go.



21.3.2018 Moremi Sacred Gorge Hike, Serowe

The main reason to visit this place is the hike into the gorge, which we have paid for already with our camp fees. We put the alarm clock at 6:00 am, as it is a 3.5 km hike to the entrance of the gorge, where we will meet our guide. Access to the gorge is only allowed with a guide, as this gorge is sacred to the people of the Moremi village.

Clear spring water is running through the gorge, but swimming is not allowed. There are five not very big water falls of which we walk only to the first three waterfalls. To visit the last two waterfalls would have involved some serious climbing. We see fresh water crabs, frogs and many vultures circling above our heads. We learn, that there are spiders who actually catch fish by putting their nets close above the water. Papyrus was planted here long ago in a failed attempt to produce paper. Marula trees grow here, this tree is nowadays best known for the Amarula liquor which is produced from its fruits. We get to know the plant called 'Elephant's Ear', its large leaves have a very soft surface and are used to answer nature's call.





This was a very educational experience, we walk back to our camp site, check out and drive to Palapye, finally a town where we can exchange money, do some shopping and buy a SIM card for our mobile phone.



One town further in Serowe we fill up our truck with diesel and just stay at the parking lot of the local mall. On the parking lot of 'Cashbuild', who sells building material, we blend in naturally as there are trucks all the time loading and unloading stuff. In case someone wants to chase us away, we can truthfully say that we have asked the guy at the filling station and he said it is OK to stay here...

Later another truck parks next to us – did anyone ever say we are big?



The local liquor store is well stocked and it is hard for us to decide which beer to buy as these are all new brands for us. A white local guy has a chat with us and recommends to buy all of them. At the cashier he's in front of us and just paid for his four bottles of beer when he suddenly squeezes past us back into the bottle shop mumbling „I better buy also one bottle for my wife” ...

22.3.2018 Khama Rhino Sanctuary

Not far behind Serowe is the 'Khama Rhino Sanctuary'. The Khama Rhino Sanctuary was founded in 1992 and is a community based wildlife project. Also here, the entrance fees for larger vehicles have increased. They charge 722Pula (60EUR) for entrance and



camping. We therefore only stay one night instead of the originally planned two nights. At least the camp sites are well done and spacious. On an Italian camp site there would be at least ten campers sharing the same space....

Approximately 50+ rhinos live in this 8600 ha sanctuary of the Kalahari Sandveld. White Rhinos, Black Rhinos and plenty of other animals are inhabiting this area. The Kalahari Sandveld is a semi-arid region in the southern Africa with regular droughts occurring

every 7 years. Rain falls mainly in the summer months in form of thunderstorms. We see many zebras, gnus and antelopes, really well-fed warthogs, ostriches and in total 6 white Rhinos.

We disturb a female rhino with her young one taking a mud bath, unfortunately the bush here is very dense and we couldn't see them earlier. They run away quickly, it is remarkable how quick and agile these huge and heavy animals can move. However, a rhino can't roll from one side to the other when he/she is lying. They always have to get up first and then can lie down on the other side.



Back in camp, a hornbill is visiting us. He is so hungry (greedy?), that he cannot wait to feed on our bread crumbs until we are gone....



23.3.2018 Lephephe, Boatlaname

Another night with little sleep! Around midnight, a heavy thunderstorm unloads tons of water directly above us. Suddenly we wake up, because our blankets are wet. Water is dripping through our roof window directly onto our bed. Oh no, quickly we gather bowls and towels, the water meanwhile is not dripping but running through our roof window to the inside.... Somehow lately we have no luck with water. As the rain gets weaker, we open the roof window and check if a leaf or a small branch is stuck between the window and the seal. The Rhino Park has extremely dense vegetation, bushes and low trees, it could have well been, that we collected some branches or leaves on our roof when ploughing through the bush which got stuck in the roof window. We clean the seal, put a towel below the window and try to get some sleep at last.

At 7:30 am we nevertheless start a game drive, even so after this weather, chances are low to see a rhino. It is relatively cool, with occasional drizzle of rain and there are plenty of water puddles almost everywhere. There is no real need for the rhinos to leave their hideouts in the bush.



At 11:00 am we exit the park and drive south. The road leads ahead in a straight line, left and right of the road is the usual endless line of fence. Fence manufacturing must be the best running business here.



It is clear that today it will not be easy to find a good spot to camp for the night. There are no side roads on this endless stretch of fenced road where we could turn off from the main road. For more than 300 km there is not even a fuel station. Finally, we pass by a construction site, where a few graders, diggers and trucks are parked up. They have stopped working for the day and a lady is guarding the equipment. We just ask her whether we can park alongside the equipment, we would blend in perfectly... She agrees and later even introduces the night guard to us. With a tip of 20 Pula the next morning all sides are happy and they give us a hearty farewell.

