

24.3.2018 Molepolole, Mafenyatlala

Today we drive from Molepolole to Mafenyatlala. These African city names are really fun. For the first time in long we find ourselves in Molepolole in a traffic jam.

A coffee shop would be nice now, as we need to organize ourselves and plan our further trip, but such places seem not to exist here. Campsites are also very rare along this route so we spent the night at a fuel station once again. Unfortunately, it's a noisy night, today is Saturday – party night! All around us loud music is playing and new beer supply is always bought at the filling station, just as everywhere else in the world.



In Botswana the local people often talk to us because they like our Unimog with the high clearance. Cars approaching us give us a high beam or honk at us, people give us a “Thumbs up” or shout happily something at us which we do not understand. Today a countryside guy even asked us if we can transport animals in our truck.

25.3.2018 Gaborone

We have reached Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. It is early Sunday morning therefore traffic is little. In one of the newest malls we even find a Mugg & Bean Café and enjoy a bit Big-City-Feeling in the Riverwalk Mall.



There was considerable rainfall during the last few days and also today there are thunder storms forming. Serious flooding occurred in March in the North of the country around Maun, the A3 one of the main traffic routes through Botswana, is still impassable and closed. The private Jwanga Game Park, which we planned to visit, is closed as well due to flooding in the park.

We still drive to Kanye and plan to stay at the camp site „Motse Lodge“. As there is not a single sign pointing to the camp site we worry that they don't exist anymore. Maybe we should have called them in advance to check. But after the road almost disappears we finally see the sign „Motse Lodge and Cultural Village“. Just when we arrive another thunderstorm is bringing heavy downpours, but luckily we have a roofed terrace for cover where we can put up our chairs, because the rest of the camp site is very muddy.



26.3.2018 Kanye, Motse Lodge

Unfortunately, also today we can't really relax. The water leakage which is constantly flooding our back storage concerns us. We empty again the back storage and the cabin

storage. We try to find and follow the water pipes to see where they run. We lift the floor and finally open the only maintenance lid which is bolted down and glued onto the tank. Even then we can hardly see anything of the tank and we still do not know where the water outlet pipe is located. Absolutely nowhere one can access this damn water tank. In the late afternoon, we give up.



At least we have a nice camp fire in a huge boma which we exclusively have to



ourselves. A boma is actually an enclosure for keeping livestock or for community meetings. The word boma actually comes from Swahili, whereas the equivalent in Afrikaans is called „kraal“.

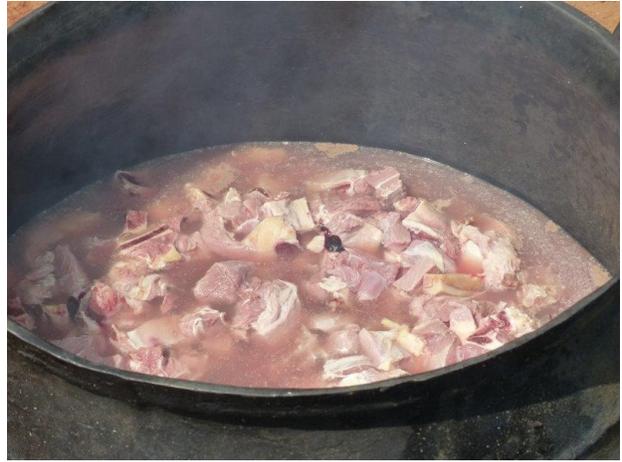


27.3.2018 Kanye, Jwaneng

The Motse Lodge is a community place and is used for many official events of



the community. Yesterday they had a large luncheon, and tonight they have another dinner event with 200 guests. Therefore, preparations for dinner already start early in the morning. For this feast a whole cattle beast has been slaughtered and is cooked up in huge Potjes.



As we removed the lid from our water tank, we have to reseal it again. Bolting it down alone will not get the lid watertight again. As there was a bit of water at the lid, there might be a small chance that the lid is the reason for the water leakage. In Kanye we search for a sealant to fix our water tank, but to no avail. We decide that we can use our Sikaflex 221i which we brought along, because the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) confirms that this sealant is food safe.

As our water tank is not yet re-sealed we drive carefully along the Trans-Kalahari Highway to Jwaneng, “the town of the small stones”. The town of Jwaneng was built around the Jwaneng diamond mine and was initially a “closed town”. Means that one was only allowed to live there with the permission of the owner of the mine ‘Debswana Diamond Co. Ltd.’ Debswana is the largest diamond producer in the world measured by the value of diamonds produced and Jwaneng is one of the most profitable mines producing diamonds of the very best qualities, so they say.

We park at the parking lot of the Jwaneng Bus Terminal, as the camp site which is marked on our map does not exist anymore. Again, we have to scoop out a few liters of water from our back storage compartment. Then we seal the lid and hope that no one will chase us away because we should not really drive as long as the sealant is not all dried up.



When we return from our evening stroll a police patrol stops next to us. We assume we are told to leave, but the policeman just wants to know who we are, what we are doing here and then wishes us a good evening. Of course, being all alone on that huge parking lot we kind of stick out. As this is a high value diamond town it could be that the police is also more alert to strangers - in big cars, too.



28.3.2018 Gaborone

The next morning we check our sealed tank, it looks quite good and seems tight. Satisfied we get ready to leave, but the Unimog won't start. Unfortunately, Werner is not playing a prank, the starter does not give any sign of life. What is this now? Just before shipping to Africa we exchanged the starter to a brand new one!

Werner is able to start the engine by using a big screw driver bridging the poles on the magnetic switch of the starter, but this is a rather rough method of starting the truck. This means at least that the battery is fully charged and the starter is in fact working. It seems the starter does not get any power to run, either a broken cable or a kind of relay is malfunctioning when the ignition key is turned.

At the Shell station opposite the road we ask for a workshop. A friendly guy guides us to a backyard workshop. He has the idea to bridge the power supply to the starter with a switch to be installed inside the cabin, so we can start the truck by using the switch instead of the ignition key. This is actually the same method of what Werner did before

with the screw driver. We are not so convinced about this truly African solution and drive to another workshop, but they also have no better suggestion.



We don't feel very comfortable with the idea to shortcut the truck's starter with a "light switch". Werner starts the car with the screw driver method one more time and we decide to drive back 160 km to Gaborone to the real Mercedes Benz truck workshop.

The local car mechanic informs us that as of tomorrow afternoon all shops will be closed due to Easter holidays, maybe he also hopes that we'll change our mind and still use his services. But we hurry up, that we'll reach Mercedes Benz in Gaborone before 5:00pm today and things can be repaired before Easter holidays. If it does not work out, we will have to spend Easter holidays in the Mercedes garage.

At 4:15pm we drive onto the yards of the Mercedes truck workshop and get served immediately. Luckily, we gave them a call before hitting the road. The problem is found relatively quickly: It is a malfunctioning relay and not the starter itself!

Lately, we also had the problem, that we sometimes cannot switch off the engine anymore and learn that this is also because of a relay. What an incredible coincidence, that two separate relays break down at the same time, leading to the almost funny situation that we can neither start nor switch off the engine anymore.



The replacement relays are ordered immediately and should be delivered tomorrow morning. The staff of the Mercedes workshop is very friendly and we are allowed to camp in their yard. Only then we find out, that the workshop is a short walk from Riverwalk Mall where we end the day with a mean burger and a few beers.



29.3.2018 Gaborone

Early morning the electrician arrives with the new relays and builds them in quickly. Good that everything was solved so smoothly. We were lucky that weren't too far away from Gaborone, when the problem occurred. After all, it was the right decision to drive back to the real Mercedes workshop.

This afternoon, Easter holidays start in Botswana and everyone warned us not to drive on the roads today as it will be too crowded and too dangerous, because half of the population of Gaborone leaves the city and travels to their home villages all over the



country. We can see the traffic getting worse already and happily follow the advice, stay in town and have a coffee at Mugg & Bean instead. Yesterday was enough driving already and avoiding Easter traffic jams with its high accident rate is good idea.

For the night we just stay on the parking lot of the Riverwalk Mall and to our own surprise are not asked to leave.

30.3.2018 Jwaneng



And again... Today we drive back to Jwaneng and give it another try to get into the Kgalagadi Nature reserve.

As we are familiar with the place now, we drive directly to the Jwaneng bus terminal to stay there for the night.

The area still got some heavy downpours and our truck gets pretty muddy on the way.

31.3.2018 Khakea, Sekoma

We can recommend the fuel station in Sekoma, as it has some good local food. In the bigger cities there are unfortunately only fast food restaurants available, chains like Wimpy, Steers, Spurs, KFC, Nandos etc. dominate the restaurant scene. We order beef stew and try to decide which sides to order. Bogobe, Pap or Samp? Bogobe is a relatively firm porridge made from millet. Pap and Samp are porridges made from corn. We decide to try out the Bogobe... The lady at the cashier asks us several times if it's correct that we want Bogobe - and yes, we are sure. Actually, the porridge has no taste at all but goes well with the sauce.



After our beef stew, the Unimog also gets his load of diesel and we drive to the beginning of the 4x4 track, leading to the Mabuasehube Gate of the „Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (TFP)“ about 120 km south of Sekoma. In 1999 a historic contract between Botswana and South Africa was signed. The Botswana „Gemsbok National Park“ and the South African „Kalahari Gemsbok National Park“ were combined to the „Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park“. Fences were removed so the animals can migrate freely across country borders. Hence the name „Transfrontier Park“. The park is now 38,000 km² big, $\frac{3}{4}$ are on Botswana side and $\frac{1}{4}$ is on South African side.



For the remainder of the day we do not meet any other car or person – a true Kalahari experience. We can just stay next to the road and nobody is bothered.



1.4.2018 To Mabuasehube Gate

We are now travelling in the southern Kalahari. The Kalahari is not a sandy desert, occasional rainfall supports the growth of grass, bushes and small trees.

The sandy road to the Mabuasehube Gate of the Kgalagadi TFP runs in a straight line westwards. Basically, we can see already in the morning where we are going to stop for lunch... While driving the entire day we do not meet any other car and only see few animals who are relatively shy and run away immediately as they see or hear our truck.



The track is sandy but easy to drive, we bounce along with an average speed of 20km/h, trying not to fall asleep. At least the weather is not boring, massive and impressive thunderstorms form in the Kalahari all around us. These bad weather cells unload an incredible spectacle of lightning and finally huge downpours.



2.4.2018 Kgalagadi Transfontier Park (TFP), Mabuasehube Camp

We have shot a leopard! Don't worry, only with our camera... We took along a trap camera to see what and who is visiting our campsite during night time. But we did not use it too often yet....

The leopard who visited our camp was obviously curious to see what was for dinner. What a pity, that we were sound asleep and did not see him.



As we arrive at the Mabuasehube Gate we are told that all camp sites are fully booked. But we are allowed to do a game drive for 44Pula (~4 EUR), 20P per Person und 4P for the car. We can't believe our ears and immediately agree to their suggestion. We do not really understand how they calculated and why this park is so cheap compared to Chobe and Moremi where we would have to pay over 200 USD per day. Well, we won't complain and take the unexpected opportunity to visit a National Park in Botswana.

We start our game drive right away. At the Monamodi Pan we spot a Hyena family with three cubs. They have big bellies, and can only move slowly, obviously they had a big feast. Looks like they have killed an ostrich last night, the last ostrich leg is still carried along as provision for later. They are not shy at all, in contrary they seem to take an interest in our Unimog and come very close to the car.





At 5:00 pm we are back to the gate as agreed with the rangers. They wanted to check if any camp site would be still available for us. Indeed, we are lucky and get an emergency camp site right behind the entrance gate. The ablutions are not working and locked, there is also no water. As they are fully booked, they are expecting three more parties to arrive. Jokingly the ranger tells us not to fight for the space with the other parties, when they arrive, but to communicate well with each other and we promise to do so.

But as expected, the other party or persons never arrived, so there was no need to fight for any camp site. We are wondering, whether they do not feel a bit embarrassed saying such things or they simply do not know any better? And why are all campsites always fully booked but no one is ever there? The campsites booking system in the Botswana National Parks has certainly room for improvement.