

3.4.2018 Khiding Camp, Kgalagadi TFP

Yesterday at the reception they hinted that maybe a campsite in the park would be available for us today. Indeed, we get a place at the Khiding Pan. Another episode with the National Park booking system where every campsite is always „fully booked“. Why can't they not just say right away that there is a free campsite, they should know that...

The drive to the camp site through typical African bush takes about two hours. We see some animal marks and tracks crossing the road, but do not see a lot of game except the odd antelope.



In the afternoon we do a small walk around the camp, because not too far away in a pan we've spot a few Oryx. But the wind is coming from behind and they scent us very quickly, so we stop walking and watch them from the distance. Later a few Hartebeest are crossing our track not far from us.



There are plenty of ground squirrels around us and they are fun to watch, quite hectic and lumbering, they remind us of a Walt Disney cartoon.



The campsites in Botswana are not fenced like they are in South Africa or Namibia. Wildlife can walk through the campsite at any time and one has to be prepared to have wild animals within the camp. However, we only got a jackal visiting us looking for some goodies. He is obviously used to humans and comes quite close.



We are all alone on our campsite, the announced neighbour does – surprise surprise – not turn up. The park booking system in Botswana is like 20 years ago totally messy and unorganized... Most visitors do meanwhile use the services of private booking agencies, who do the bookings against a service charge and obviously know how the “system” works. However, this should not be needed and such a system should not be supported, it’s only about a simple campsite booking.

We have heard that many tour operators book all possible campsites at the beginning of the season and leave them empty if they do not have any guests, because they do not have to pay anything. They seem to have a strong lobby and the national park staff is probably happy if they do not need to work when everything is empty...

4.4.2018 Kgalagadi TFP, Khama Wildlife Management Area

We are going on an extensive game drive through the park, but do not see many animals. However, we enjoy the landscape.



In the afternoon we check-out and leave the park, driving southbound on the very sandy track. As usual we are on the lookout for a place to camp for the night and come across a picnic spot. Probably the only one for a few hundred kilometers. This is our ideal camp spot.

5.4.2018 Tsabong, Middelpits

The thunderstorms of last night have passed, we awake to blue skies and shiny golden grass – very picturesque.



Our map warned us that this track is heavily corrugated and takes much longer time to drive as usual. However, it looks like that the sand track running from Kgalagadi TFP to the South has been maintained and we make good progress. After 2.5 hours of driving we already reach Tsabong instead of the anticipated four hours.



In Tsabong we have mobile phone reception, can buy supplies and fill up on diesel. The fuel stations in Botswana are few and far apart from each other, sometimes also running out of fuel. Therefore, if there is a fuel station one better fills up.



From Tsabong we still drive to Middelpits where we park close to the border crossing to South Africa. This is kind of in the middle of the village, but most people will think, that we came too late and missed the opening hours of the border crossing. We have quiet

night, except for the donkeys who gallop through the entire village chasing each other while nickering loudly. We have never seen such active donkeys.



6.4.2018 Bokspits, Struizendam

The Kgalagadi TFP is bordering the three countries South Africa, Botswana and Namibia and one can immi/emigrate to between these countries through different gates. There is a minimum stay of two nights in the park needed in order to be allowed to cross borders within the park. We will travel through the Mata Mata gate from the South African side of the Kgalagadi TFP to Namibia. Therefore, we first have to cross from Botswana to South Africa and want to do so at Two Rivers as this border crossing is located directly at the park boundary.

From Middelpits we drive to Bokspits, where we want to spend our remaining Pula and fill up the truck. Unfortunately, there is no more fuel available in Bokspits. The local shop is hidden behind barbed wire and the door is locked, they have to open the door for each customer. Not a very inviting village.





We drive on a very corrugated track to Struizendam, where the „Kgalagadi Birdsong Campsite” is supposed to be located. As we cannot find the place we ask in the village and find the owner of the campsite who guides us there personally. Like so often there were big plans, but the site has no water, no electricity and looks a bit like still being under construction. However, the owner Frederic is very friendly and helpful and we have a long chat with him.



During the evening the wind is getting stronger and the sparks of our camp fire fly all over the place, hopefully we will not cause a bush fire... Suddenly, a Scorpio is running past us quite fast. In a flyer we read that this species of white Scorpio can be seen more often when there is a strong northerly wind. We can confirm this! And we better quickly change from our thongs to real shoes.

7.4.2018 Two Rivers, Bokspits

The border post Two Rivers from Botswana to Twee Rivieren in South Africa is built up smartly. Both countries share one building, immigration as well as national park offices are located in this building. One can do immigration formalities as well as check-in to the national park by going from one side to the other.

We want to cross in Two Rivers / Twee Rivieren from Botswana to South Africa, but there are no customs officers on the Botswana side who could chop our Carnet. The police officer as well as the immigration officer refuse to give us any chop on our Carnet, whereas at other border crossings without customs always the police would give us the needed chop. After a long discussion they really send us back to Bokspits, again 60km on the really badly corrugated road! We were in Bokspits yesterday already – we could have had this much easier. As we already have the emigration stamp in our passports the immigration officer gets a headache how to solve this problem. Finally, he cancels our departure stamp in the passport just by hand. Quite unhappy we drive back the 60 km to Bokspits. When we arrive at least the customs officer is already waiting for us at the gate. His colleagues from Two Rivers have called him and we get our chop in the Carnet de Passage immediately.

But our day doesn't end here. At the South African border post, we are not allowed to bring our cumberdously collected fire wood into the country. The border police claims, that there may be "bad bugs" from Botswana in the wood. Well, as this is a unified park, the same bad insects should be existing on both sides of the park border as they share the same flora and fauna. What a pity, we have collected some nice Kalahari hard wood. We even still have some fire wood from Germany which we take back out of police custody, claiming that this wood is from Germany and therefore bad-bugs-from-Botswana-free. We are sure they will have a nice braai tonight with our fire wood.

On South African side at least the road is tarred and we make good progress. We find a camping spot just opposite of Struizendam.

Today was not exactly a productive day for us. We now urgently need a sundowner beer to digest all this bureaucracy.



8.4.2018 Twee Rivieren, Nossob

In the morning we are back at the Twee Rivieren border crossing, which is also the entrance gate to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. First we check in at the „SAN Park“ reception and thereafter go to immigration. On the South African side everything is much more professional and better organized than on the Botswana side. Check-in is going smoothly and the friendly receptionist even orders freshly baked „Roosterkoek“ („Roasted Cake“ – bread rolls grilled on a barbeque) at the camp site for us when he notices that we were talking about the flyer offering bread-ordering-service at the camp.

In three days we want to immigrate into Namibia at the Mata Mata gate. However, in Mata Mata there is no South African border police which means that our passports as well as our Carnet have to be chopped for departure already here in Twee Rivieren. In fact, we are now driving through the park as through No-man’s-Land, because we have already departed from South Africa, but have not entered any other country.....

Now it is 163km to our camp in Nossob. The travelling time is indicated with four hours, which seems pretty realistic, as the road is heavily corrugated.

In the park are very large bird nests to be seen. A species of sociable weaver birds builds such common nests. One colony can have more than 1000 birds. Some trees do not survive the extensive amount of tenants on their branches and die. Other trees collapse under the weight of the nests.



Soon after entering the park an ostrich family with plenty of chicks is welcoming us. An ostrich cock has a harem of up to 12 hens and therefore many children. We also see a very rare kind of black stork called Abdim Stork.





And then finally – we spot a lion! He looks very sleepy and can hardly keep his eyes open... Well, nothing much is going to happen here.



9.4.2018 Nossob, Kgalagadi TFP

In Nossob we had to book a private camp site as the normal camp sites were all fully booked. The camp site is done nicely, we have our own private bath room and an outdoor sink. The camp site is also big enough for some maintenance as we have to fix our truck horn as well as replace a broken hose on our portal axle gears.



For our evening game drive we don't have to go far. Our friendly neighbours inform us that a cheetah was seen rather close to the camp. We are happy to get this hint, as we would not have expected one of the big cats so close to the camp and would have most likely missed it.

Indeed after 10 minutes of driving we spot the cheetah. The cheetah is walking a few steps to the next tree and takes a rest in the shade. We wait for 30 min until she is getting up again – just to disappear in the bushes. After this sighting, we have to go back to the camp in order to meet the gate closing time. At last, we saw two of the big cats today!



10.4.2018 Mata Mata

In the night two heavy thunderstorms at 1:00 a.m. and at 5:00 a.m. keep us awake. The landscape is brightly illuminated by the constant lightening and the thunder is really loud. During these heavy downpours we have to close all windows to prevent the water from flowing into our car. After the heaviest rain has passed we have to open all windows again because it gets too hot and stuffy inside. With the next thunderstorm the procedure starts again and we can hardly find any sleep.

The result of the heavy downpour from last night we see this morning. The camp site is basically flooded and we are standing in a huge puddle of water, everything is wet...



Today's destination is Mata Mata, the camp right next to the border to Namibia. Due to the heavy rainfall water is everywhere, a very unusual in sight in the Kalahari. The animals really do not even have to go near a waterhole.

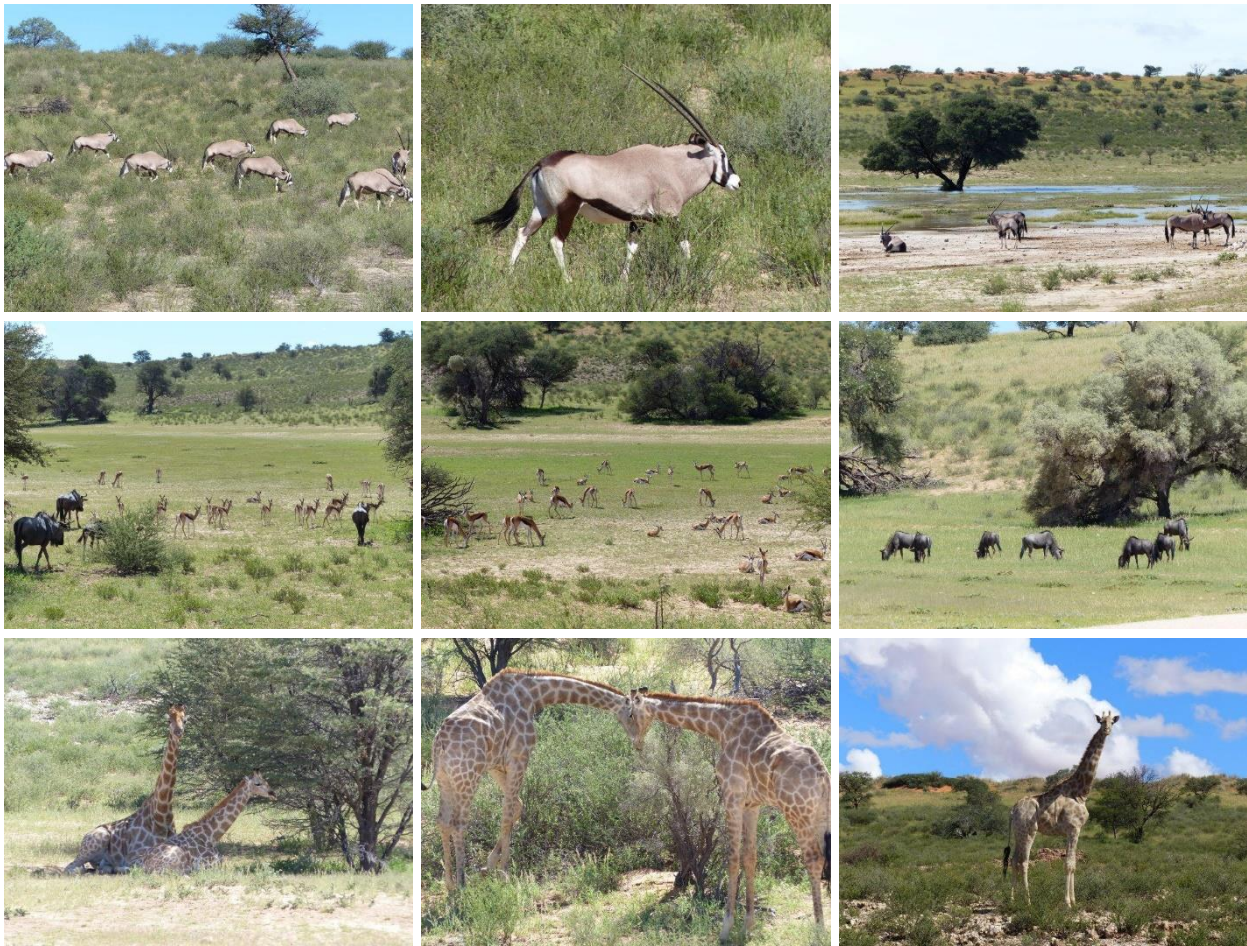


Parts of the tracks have turned into rivers – these are not water puddles anymore. These mega puddles are sometimes 200-300m long. With our Unimog it is quite fun to drive through these river tracks, but it slows us down quite a bit, as we have to slow down and shift gears for every puddle. But for a car going through so much water for an extended period of time is not too healthy, afterwards it needs to be re-greased etc. For the 180 km from our camp to Mata Mata we need 6.5 hours.





The former name of the Kgalagadi TFP „Kalahari Gemsbok National Park“ was chosen for a reason, we see many gemsbok (Oryx) here.



At Mata Mata we had to even book a chalet for the first night, because the camp site was „fully booked“ and without a reservation one is not allowed to enter the park.

In Mata Mata we meet up with the Döll family and brother Thomas again, which we got to know in P.E. and we are very happy to see them again. As we have the chalet, we can have a private barbeque party on our terrace.



We are looking forward to sleep in a proper bed – for the first time in almost five months. As we are going to bed, the power generator switches off at 10:00 p.m. Which means that our air con also goes off and within a few minutes it gets very warm and stuffy in our room. We can't open the windows and let some cool air in, as this "luxury" chalet has no mosquito nets – neither over the bed nor in front of the windows. As there are so many mosquitos in this park – actually in all Africa – it is extremely shortsighted of SAN Parks to save on mosquito nets in these expensive chalets. As soon as we open the door to the living room to let some air in, many mosquitoes rush into our bed room. The result is: we paid for this expensive chalet but ended up sleeping in the Unimog again!