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RINUS AND HELGA IN REMOTE NAMIBIA

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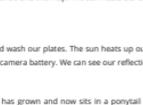
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In the last two years Rinus and his partner, Helga, have traveled overland through Europe, Asia, around Australia and through Southern Africa. In the next nine months Rinus and Helga have planned to drive back to Europe crossing East, West and North Africa. They use a [REDARC 700W Pure Sine Wave Inverter](#) and a [BCDC1225 REDARC in-vehicle DC to DC Battery charger](#).

REMOTE NAMIBIA, KOKKALAND

Thursday June 3rd 2016

The sun comes up slowly and the first rays of light manage to get through the thick layer of dust. We've been awake a while and are sitting on narrow wooden benches with our freshly brewed coffee and the map. The sun heats our surroundings up quickly and the heat plus the caffeine helps us to get going.

We pack up the tent, put the cutlery in its place and wash our plates. The sun heats up our windscreen and our [foldable solar panel](#) starts to produce the first power, just enough to charge our camera battery. We can see our reflections in the dusty window.

I've been on the road for almost 2 years, my hair has grown and now sits in a ponytail at the back of my head. It's more convenience than fashion. The hairs on my chin form a messy beard. My nose and shoulders are raw and red because of the sun and deep creases are in my lips. They hurt from time to time and start bleeding when I smile. I'm walking on my bare feet which have calluses and are brown from the dust. There is a faint trace of white on them: my flip-flops. My hands are also dry and the tips of my fingers shed their skin due to physical work and the dry climate. I smile at my reflection and get behind the steering wheel.

We are now in the Northern part of Namibia, Kaokoland, and on our way to Sesfontein. Sesfontein is a dusty "town" separated by a broad sandy road full of corrugations. The first shed we pass has a handmade sign that says "Tyre repair shop. The door is made of an old shower curtain. An old CocaCola refrigerator fills the room and some men are sitting outside waiting for work. Unfortunately for them our tyres have survived the trip. The next shed has a sign in the same handwriting and says: "Bar". Too early for that. A police car races by and leaves us in a cloud of dust, we even have to stop to let it clear up around us. We drive past another tyre repair shop with the same handwritten sign. It shows that Namibia can actually make a living out of the bad roads surrounding Sesfontein. We will travel through the more remote northern part of Namibia. It is dry, hot, navigating is a pain and you will have to prepare for days without getting groceries, fuel or water.

We drive west towards the Skeleton Coast. Alongside the road we see small huts made out of clay, where whole families live. The dogs, cows, goats and sometimes pigs reluctantly leave the road to make way for us. The women are usually dressed traditionally, with dark red clay on their skin and bare breasts. The men wear t-shirts with a traditional cloth around their waists which kind of looks like a coloured diaper. We drive on GPS coordinates and leave the small huts behind. The road is very corrugated with loose sand on top which makes for heavy dust clouds, but also makes it a bit more comfortable to drive on.

We turn off again, onto an even smaller track. After a while we have to stop on the side of the road because of a car from the opposite direction. Through the open window we exchange pleasantries. A very large antenna on the roof of the sand coloured Landcruiser points to the fact that this is not just your average car. The man behind the wheel, with a tanned skin and a long white beard acknowledges this. He is a biologist and tells us that he works in this area and that he studies the lions here. We slowly drive on after meeting him. The moment we see a tree which has been trampled and eaten by an elephant we stop to collect firewood. The idea of having a fire seems like a very good idea now we know there are lions around.

A large rock wall protects us from the wind that night. The sky is very clear and the stars light up everything. Mesmerized we stare up until the cold forces us to bed. The red glow of the fire colours the inside of our tent scarlet. It gives us a safe feeling, even if it's for a little while until we fall asleep.



Friday June 4th 2016

We don't have to set the alarm, the sun burns us out of the tent anyway. The ladder of the tent sits in the loose sand and the fire still smokes a little bit. Slightly neurotic I scan the ground around our car for fresh tracks. I don't see any. Satisfied I pull the salami out of the fridge for breakfast which is located next to our pure sine wave inverter and the laptop which are on charge at this very moment.

We put the coordinates for a waterhole in our navigation. Waterholes are often meeting places for different types of animals. A dry riverbed leads us to it. This riverbed is particularly sandy and the cars have to work hard to get through.

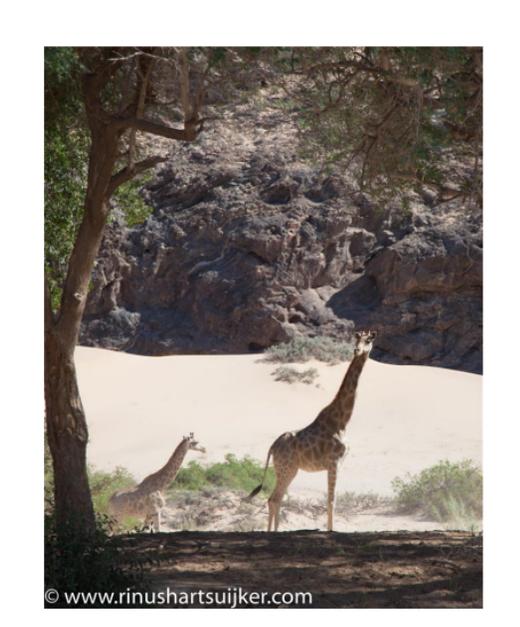
From behind a large tree and a curtain of leaves we get locked at by a large male elephant. He turns himself towards the cars the moment we pass him. We see him move rather nervously and his large ears move front to back. We leave him be and drive on slowly. We don't have to wait much longer before we're in luck again: a group of giraffes are gorging on the green trees on the side of the riverbed. The cars don't really seem to bother them.



Saturday June 5th 2016

The sun rises and the rays of light find their way through the tiny little holes in the mosquito net. I turn around on my stomach and look out over the riverbed where we camped. The footprints from our rightly visit are clearly visible from the tent. They lead to the water where they disappear. I get myself out of my warm sleeping bag and get dressed in the same clothes as the days before. My shirt is starting to get stiff from dust and sweat. My legs look tanned, but are actually covered in dust. I get down the ladder backwards and walk towards the tracks. My foot fits in it 5 times. I follow the steps towards the small stream, and can see they continue through the river away from our camp. I walk back to the tent, where Helga just comes out of it. I take the dusty towel which hangs on the ladder, look for the soap and walk back to the river. Time for a little wash.

When I walk back all washed, the coffee is ready and the map is spread out over the breakfast table. While I am leaning over the map and are tracing the riverbed north, Helga grabs my elbow. "Look, they are back". I look up and see a small herd of elephants slowly walking our way. They also see us and are clearly hesitating to come any closer. They decide to change their course and stop at a distance. We jask up our tents quickly, finish our breakfast and are on our way. Via the riverbed, partly through the river itself, we drive north. We haven't travelled far before we see another amazing sight: a large mother elephant with a newly born calf.



Sunday June 6th 2016

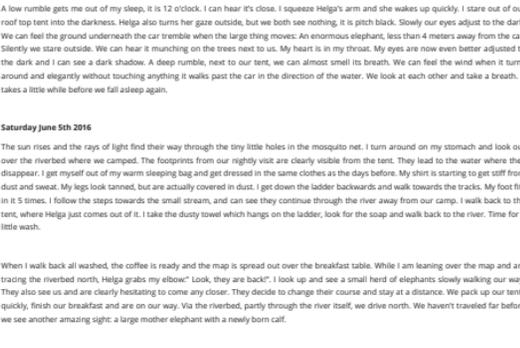
We are glad we stopped early the day before when we see the road ahead of us...we are shaking all over the place while I attempt to climb up a rockside in first gear. We can see there have been cars before us, by the rubber prints on the rocks in front of us. I sit very straight while I manage the pedals. The car is able to do this, we know this, it is the driver who chooses the location for the tyres. I can feel one of our front wheels driving over a large rock, our rear wheel follows, the weight of the car dislodges the rock and our rear wheel slips off while the rock ends up underneath the car. I can feel the car come up slightly at the back. I wait for the moment that we land again, but that doesn't come. I push the gas pedal, but other than the engine making loud noises, nothing happens. Even though the car is on a steep hill, I don't need the handbrake. I get out of the car to have a look at the situation. The front wheels are stuck in a ditch, but not too bad. Momentum will get them out. The rock that changed position is now underneath the leaf springs and one of my rear wheels is off the ground. A very good position to change tyres, I observe, but that won't do me any good now.

A jack will do, but as soon as you lift the car at the back to remove the rock, there is a lot of energy that wants to go down...

Eventually we decide to build a ramp underneath the suspended back wheel. This way we use gravity to get the car lifted and we will be able to remove the rock. I put the gearbox in the lowest gear backwards and with a lot of effort the car drives upwards on the ramp we build. Now we can move the rock and the road to the top is free!

The road takes us through a small Himba village. We stop to see if it is possible to get some water. It doesn't take long before we are surrounded by curious people. We are welcomed, as curious and hesitant, as we are approaching them. Stefan and I hand out noodles and soap. Surrounded by Himba women we try to explain how to use these items. Insecure about whether we succeeded we leave the small settlement.

It takes us another hour to drive to the Omuhonga primary school where we are invited to visit.



To read the latest from Rinus Hartsuijker visit www.rinushartsuijker.com/blog. Follow them on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep up to date.

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