

Lekhubu Island – Bruce's Coming of Age Party - August 9 – 13, 2012



Day 1 – August 9th – Distance – 653 kms

“Oh woe is me! 03:00 is way too early in the morning! I mean the birds have not even thought about farting yet!” Exclaimed Margaret as the alarm went off at 03:00 on Thursday morning. Women’s day nogal! But, we had been looking forward to this trip for some time, and had been working our butts off to get the new canopy into travel shape, so we got busy with the 3 “S’s”, made the coffee and we are off at 03:35.

We arrive at the Total PetrolPort at 04:35 and we see a few likely suspects for our group. Fanie and Heine were already there. We fill up with diesel and have a conversation with few other guys who turned out to not be with our group. Which, after speaking with others they experienced the same. Estelle even gave a guy a big hug! Heine was worried that some of the camo crowd would be our group and he was starting to wonder if it was such a good idea! ☺ Slowly by slowly the group trickled in and a departure of 05:16 happened. A speed of 100kph was set as we went as fast as the slowest vehicle could travel. There were some scary idiots on the road that morning. When you travel at 100kph, a BMW charging along at 180 in the dark can create all kinds of havoc. A SPAR truck with the driver falling asleep added to the challenge. I’m sure there were a few of the Oppi Koppie fans who were cursing those f’n 4x4’s overtaking even slower traffic, but hey, we all made it to the Kranskop Toll Gate safely at 06:20. We decided to regroup here to let the whole group bunch up again. About 12 minutes later, we headed out. There were a number of stop and go’s on the R33, some took longer than others. At each stop and go a lot of chatting happened and Eric handed out border crossing papers, at least all the extra’s that we had. A few random people thought we were having way too much fun and wanted to join us at Kubu. One guy even wanted to deliver his dentist chair to someplace in Limpopo via Kubu! ☺

About 30 minutes past Kranskop received a phone call from Con asking where we were. He had evidently missed the bit about turning off on the R33 and would now meet us at the border. Just before the border Con called again and was going thru Martin’s Drift and would then meet us in Serowe. And that was the last we heard from him until the next day! ☺

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We arrived at the Stockpoort border control at 10:08 and it took a while as their radios were apparently not working and "all" the vehicle papers were gathered and then checked inside. A couple of vehicles managed to sneak through as papers were at home. On the Botswana side a very junior Agriculture man was asking if we had oranges, red meat. Spoke nicely to him and there was no need to open up the truck at all, maybe it was the accent??? Graham chatted him up even more and also got through no problem. Most had no issues at all and we were cleared through at 10:38 and after a general discussion, it was thought best that everyone made their way through to Serowe and we all meet up there again. On route some decided to stop in Palapye for meat and if no joy would then try Serowe.

Mark decided to investigate a bit of the route in a direction back towards RSA, but after getting himself turned around, he was soon back on track. But this time as tail end Charlie! ☺ A few others almost made the same mistake, but a long blast on the air horn got their attention.

We arrived in Palapye at 12:18 and after tried to withdraw money from the FNB ATM at the Puma Station. We got a timeout message, although others after us managed. Palapye looks dilapidated, and as we had been assured that Serowe was a better place to buy supplies, we headed for Serowe. About 10kms out of town, there is some sort of message about Mike and Estelle having an issue, but there was a bit of static, so not 100% clear. We carried on, and just before we hit Serowe (about 40kms out), we get the message his left rear bearing is fubar. We decide to carry on to the Toyota in Serowe to get spare parts. A quick stop at the ATM to withdraw cash and Margaret runs into the Spar (very nice) for orange juice. Margaret meets Mark in the Spar and asks him to be on the lookout for Con as we had not yet seen him. It is now 13:20 and we head back to Palapye and meet up with Mike at the mechanic's place. Just north of town, on the road to the TESTING STATION, at the end of the tar. Sekunjalo Motors – Phibion Bvirwa - +267 71488728.

We arrived at 15:53 to see some struggles happening to get the vehicle lifted, but eventually, with the help of Mike's jack, the vehicle was raised high enough to get the wheel off. Over the next while, the bits and pieces come off, and eventually the offending bearing is revealed to the light of day. Off to an engineering shop to get the old stuff pressed off and the new stuff pressed on. I'll let Mike tell that story, but, suffice it to say that the engineering shop is a bit of a joke. They cut off the retaining collar, and that is what became the holdup in the end. That and a broken press jack! Unfortunately, the parts I had gotten for Mike were for a standard Hilux, and his is an SRX. Slightly different bearing setup as it is imported.

That leads me to a thing I learned – it is a good idea to actually have proper details of your fellow travellers' vehicular details. Make, model, year, oddities.

Slowly more and more vehicles arrived in the yard. Anthony arrived and introduced himself to the girls. We lamented that we would never remember all the names so Anthony gave us several options and the last one sounded like "Babe", ah no problem the girls will remember that one! A few minutes later Mike was introduced to Anthony and he said his wife Chantel was just there. Mike being Mike, goes around the car and exclaims...CHANTEL.....I can't believe it's you.....! Meanwhile Chantel is looking slightly confused! Just after that someone asked Heine, where his passenger was...? He looks around.....I thought....oops!

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Jumps in his truck and tears off, only to find Colin wandering around the side of the road. The question begs to be asked "how do you, in a single cab vehicle, not notice your passenger is missing?"

After a phone call with Marc, who was in Serowe with rest of the group, and the need for meat to be purchased yet, the decision gets made that Bruce, Nick, Anthony, Heine and company would leave and join the rest of the group and head out to the cut line meeting point. Graham, Anneka and ourselves would stay behind with Mike and Estelle. Mike appeared several times back at the mechanics yard for this or that, each time getting a bit more frazzled.

We were discussing various options, but as the afternoon wore on, it became obvious that we would not be making it to anywhere tonight, even if we did get it repaired before morning. So Graham goes to speak to Phibion about a place to camp, and Phibion offered us his yard. So, at 17:53 an executive decision was made that we would camp there and we shifted our kit into the corner, and setup tents, caravans and rooftops! While this was going on, Mike arrived back with the new bearing and correct retaining collar finally pressed on and reassembly could begin.

During the latter part of the afternoon, several SMS's were exchanged between Eric and Marc – Phone calls were shockingly poor and difficult. Bruce and Co had also made an executive decision and they would be camping Khama Rhino Sanctuary that night. Along the way, Anton from Middleburg had been lost (he spent the night on the cut line), Hennie Rautenbach had been found (he was a secret joiner) and Con had been found as well.

Finally, at 20:40, the truck is lowered back onto the wheels, and Mike takes it for a test drive. Cheers all around! We setup a nice table next to the fire and enjoyed a Chicken Thai curry that Mike had made at home and a nice salad. Of course, there was a bottle or two of red that need mouth to mouth.

All in all we had a lovely night in the mechanics yard and hit the sack just after 10pm.



Day 2 – August 10th – Distance – 319 kms

As one gets older, the bladder becomes a more and more effective alarm clock, and we were up at 06:30, much to the dismay of Estelle!

Phibion arrived just after 07:30 and after a bit of negotiation, Mike settled up with him and we were ready to roll.

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We left the mechanics yard at 8:10 and immediately had a scare. Mike hears this horrible scraping noise, and of course, things play on your mind. Graham and I have a listen to it while Estelle drives it forward slowly, and we were both of the opinion that it was either the dust cover, or seeing as the brakes had oil spilled onto the pads, and they had been reset, they were a bit tight and were rubbing slightly. This turned out to be true (one of them) and after a few kms the sound went away. We proceeded to Sandy's Butchery – beside the Caltex, that Mike had seen on his travels around the town, and had been told had the best meat in the area. The sign on the door stated that they would not open until 9am and we were a tad early. Just as we turned to leave the door opened and this voice said...."Kan ek jou help?????" – duh, YES! A South African runs the place – a little run down inside, but clean and a reasonable supply of meat.

It was worth his while to "help" us out and we bought up his supply of fillet. 😊

A fill up on fuel for us and Mike and we left Palapye at 8:45

As we arrived in Serowe at 09:10 and made contact with Bruce and co. We discovered that Con had been found but Anton was MIA. We had seen him the day before driving into Serowe as we were heading back to Palapye. They all were making their way out of the park and heading for Kubu and we would all regroup on the edge of the pan.

In Serowe Mike and ourselves went to the Toyota dealership to refund the incorrect parts and get the correct ones....just in case! Graham meanwhile has been searching for the right fuel and finally found it at the Caltex by the dealership. So, being altogether, we said farewell to Serowe and headed out for Letlhakane and points north at 09:44

As we were coming close to Khama Rhino Sanctuary Mike suggests we inquire about wood. Margaret also took the opportunity to purchase hats for us both as we had forgotten them...! Meet up with Anthony "Babe" while loading wood. He was the last to leave of the bunch. Mike and Eric bought 10 bags of wood each and Graham 4, so Graham was quickly loaded and left with Anthony – we would catch up with them, which we did just the other side of Letlhakane. We hit the dirt at end of the new road leading to Mmatshumo at 12:40 and after letting tyres down (1 bar front, 2 bar back) we headed for the pan

Eventually, at 13:25 we arrive to join most of the group on the edge of the pan. Time for a beer. A few people are conspicuously absent, notably, Heine, Nick, Anton and Hennie. Turns out Heine and Nick were on the way to Kasane, and Anton and Hennie were already at Kubu.

More than a few of us on this trip did not actually load the waypoints onto some or all of our GPS units, and the importance of checking things before hand was made abundantly clear. Make sure you have verified your destination on your GPS so that you are being led in the correct direction!

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We decided that that was a good time to get things rolling and gave Bruce and Mike their T-Shirts. Bruce’s said “Captain Bruce Since 1972” and Mike’s “Captain’s Boy Since 2010” (for how that name came about, read our trip report on the Jean Vos Engine Rescue!)

A call was going out to Heine and Nick, as they seemed to have gone MIA. We assumed that they had gone ahead with Hennie. But just in case he had not, we were attempting to raise him to find out where they were.



We all convoyed to Kubu with a few incidents. Con’s bikes on the back came loose, which took a few minutes to re attach and Anthony’s suspension was overheating. A few minutes of standing time sorted him out and he rolled into camp not long after us.

Finally just before camp we could hear from Heine and Nick and a good hour later they also rolled into camp. Apparently they went to the wrong Island!

Campsite 5 was big enough for all of us, in fact, we sort of ended up split up into several groups that night but we had a lekker time anyway. Finally hit the sack at 12ish

Day 3 – August 11th – Distance – about 6kms walking. Zero for the Cruiser!

Up again with the body clock at 06h30 after a nice long sleep. Slowly life camp into the camp and by 8 most were accounted for. Eric made breakfast for Bruce of scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, feta, chives and spring onion. Along with Champagne and O J.

A nice quiet day was had with lovely weather. We went for a walk around the Island with a few refreshment stops. Found some interesting bugs along the way, took some nice panoramic photos (Kubu sort of lends itself to that!)



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Made the rounds to the group and informed all that at 17:00 there was sundowners and snacks at Lover’s Rock. Mike and Estelle had setup on the edge of the pan unit their “pink” umbrella. Not just a little bit pink – VERY PINK!



At 16:00 Mike and Estelle headed out to Lover’s Rock to start to set up. Graham and Anneka left with them. We gathered up our various bits and walked out. You are no longer allowed to drive around the island, and they are quite insistent on this. Being as it was a 600 meter walk from camp to Lover’s Rock, after several trips walking stuff back and forth Mike went to the Camp manager and inquired about driving out to the rock. A lot of humming and hawing and finally he got permission.

Mike and Estelle went all out, with candles and tonnes of cheese and crackers (additional supplies by Marc and ourselves). By 17:30 all the group had assembled and Marc gave a short speech followed by an even shorter speech by Bruce. Everyone then dug into the chow and there was plenty for everyone. It was a good social and everyone had (we think) and enjoyed themselves. Thanks Mike and Estelle! ☺ By 19:30 we had cleaned up the buffet and back at camp. Con was nice enough to have lit the fire.

Another evening around the fire, where the sand should be growing something soon. There was enough fertilizer spread that all it needed was some water and a seed! ☺ It was a bit of a late one, but not too late. The next morning the plan was to head out no later than 09:00

Day 4 – August 12th – Distance – 480kms

Again, up at 06:30 to start the packing and a coffee.....got to have that coffee! The weather was miserable, cold and very windy. A big difference from the day before. I think the weather had something to do with the quick pickup achieved by the entire group.

Slowly vehicles started to leave. First the ones that were trying to make it home in 1 day, and then others.

The final group watched Bruce finish his packing, I think he is selling that caravan! He was taking a bit of strain, Elmarie was not feeling well, and they were going to head straight for the border and a pharmacy. But first, he had to get that caravan packed. Sorry Bruce, but we did have some fun at your expense.

We were the last group to depart at 08:45. We arrived at the view point at 10:07, but seeing the wind we decided to keep right on going. Hitting the tar a few minutes later at 10:18 we kept trundling along at 70 kph as our tyres were quite soft and I needed some air. Too lazy to get the pump out and decided to just cruise to Letlhakane where we searched for an air pump to fill the tyres, but no pump anywhere in town. Mike offered to help with the pumping so we dug out our compressor and filled the tyres. Some 20 minutes behind everyone else we left. Caught up to Graham just as we arrived back in Serowe at 13:25.

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The rest of the group had also just arrived in Serowe and they headed east to the RSA Border, while only the three of us stayed the course.

Heine, Con and Nick decided to not bush camp with us that night because of the wind. But they should have travelled with us. We stopped at 16:05, at the Tropic of Capricorn (300 meters south), the wind was gone, it was a beautiful night, and after a shower in Mike's enclosed shower, we sat down to a nice fire and good meal and listened to the Jackals all night.

Day 5 – August 13th – Distance – 489 kms

Again, that magic getting up time of 06:30. Coffee, some rusks and after packing up, we departed at 08:04. It was going to be a very leisurely drive and we were not going to have to be rushed at all. We passed through Molepolole, Thamaga and we stopped at Boatle Puma to fill up with cheaper diesel (P8.76 / litre). We were at the Ramotswa border post at 10:35 and cleared out the RSA side at 10:52. Graham had gone ahead as we would be able to catch up with him.

Arriving in Zeerust at around 12 noon, Graham and Mike were stopping for fuel and food. We decided to say our goodbyes at that point and continued on towards home.

We arrived home at 14:12 without incident.

It was a nice trip, it had some special moments, it had some drama, it had some suspense. We learned that the 'accepted' routes to places are not always the 'best' routes. On the way up, we drove 884 kms taking (gathering stops and repair stops removed) about 15 hours of travelling. On the way back, we drove 962 kms with a total travelling time of 13.5 hours. Even though it was 80 kms further, it was 90 minutes faster. It also had less toll, less traffic, less hassles, less potholes, less cr@p and much better scenery!

We learned that you can camp in a mechanics yard and still have a good time.

It is not so much the where, but the 'who' that makes the trip.

For some pictures – they can be found at (wtw)

https://picasaweb.google.com/104454475172096801949/KubuBruceTurnerSBirthdayAugust9132012?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCJSR_7GF0Lb2Ww&feat=directlink

Margaret and Eric Sommer

