

THE

Island

BREAKAWAY

Trip report by Anton Heiberg



Somewhere in the Makgadigadi Sea in Botswana, there is a mystical Island. On the island grows Boab trees. Those are the trees of which are said that God got cross with them and planted them upside down. The ships that anchor the island's shores have four wheels. Sometimes smaller vessels with two wheels frequent the island too. Ships are heavily loaded with camping equipment, precious water and other liquid gold refreshments. The captains are adventure seekers, braving the sea of sand and dust surrounding the island for some adventure and a break from the rat race. The beaches are long and unspoilt as the water retreats far, far away in the dry season.

The Island is called Kubu Island (Lekhubu which means Hippopotamus)

Pre log

The trip and its planning began when Bruce Turner from the “Overland forum” put up an open invitation to join him on a trip to Kubu Island to celebrate his 40th birthday. It didn't not take long to convince my wife and kids that this would be a cool trip to undertake and we were in from the word GO.

In the end there were about 15 vehicles in the convoy some from the overland forum some of their friends etc which included Mike Cliff, Marc Hall, Eric Sommer, Heine De Villiers, Anton Heiberg, Con De Bruin, Fanie Du Plessis, Hennie Rautenbach, Hannes Thirion, Anthony, Nick, Colin

Day 0 – 8 Aug 2012

Distance travelled: 159km

From: Middelburg

To: Pretoria

Since the travel plan changed somewhat in the week running up to the trip my original rendezvous point with the rest of the group seemed like it was not going to work so great anymore. So I tried to get some budget accommodation just to sleep over in Pretoria near the rendezvous point. I booked a place through www.availabed.co.za although the service was fast and friendly the accommodation was not as advertised. I am still trying to find out if it was Availabed or the Service provider's fault. But lets rather keep this a positive report than complain about the not have's.

Day 1 – 9 Aug 2012

Distance travelled : 723km

From : Pta PetroPort

To : Cutline Camp S21.44477 E26.11729

We got up at 04:00 and could not make coffee in the “3 star” accommodation as all the plugs were off...not a good start. Then the GPS took us on a little detour on a non existent road in the industrial area of Wonderboom as I still had T4A active and Garmaps deactivated...one we realised that we got the little problem sorted and headed for the Petroport. We arrived and filled up where we met up with the group at 05:00. By 05:15 we were on the road. The group travelled slowly and the radio communication caused a bit of tension in my vehicle as the Defender cab is noisy, the radio not very clear and the kids seem to think they need to talk louder than the radio despite several warnings to shut up when there is activity on the radio.

The group stuck together quite closely for the first while. After several stop-go's on the R33 road we were close to Ellisras (Lephalale) where Heine wanted to fill up before the border. We all stopped and I filled my shower water jerry can. After that the groups were separated and seemed a bit disorganised but the average speed picked up a bit. We seemed to regroup again at the border. At the border they asked for registration papers and checked them on the SA side while we were having our passports stamped. I changed a couple of Rands for Pula just for border formalities at the Bureau de Exchange but in the end was not needed as the officials on Botswana side did not have receipt books and are not allowed to accept money without receipt books. We were given a hand written letter with official stamp to ensure our “safe passage”. Our vehicle was not searched and we were only asked about any red meat or oranges of which we had neither.

Fortunately the group had spread out a bit otherwise the 40 odd km of dirt road would have to be driven is someone else's dust. We arrived at Palapye and withdrew some money from the Standard bank ATM. I filled up at the Shell garage and paid with my credit card without problems. Diesel was P8-80/l. We bought a couple groceries at the Spar and Choppies but the meat was a real disappointment as they had no real braai cuts in either store. Mike Cliff was somewhere in the back of the convoy and had some problem with his wheel bearing which had to be replaced. Bruce and Eric helped him to get spares etc and said that the rest of the group should move on to the waypoint on the cutline as it served no purpose to have 10 cars waiting for them. We then moved on. In Serowe was the last that we saw any of the group for the rest of the day.



We drove along the A14 to the cut line entrance. I let down tire pressures as we entered the cutline gate (1.6 bar front and 2.6 bar back) and were at one of the 2 waypoints at exactly the planned time 16:00. We decided to just make coffee and play cricket with the kids and not put up camp yet. I tried to call several times on the radio but found no answer. I then checked the other cutline waypoint and found it was 12km from where we were so we decided to drive to that after an hour to see if we could find anyone from the group. No-one was there and no radio contact was made. By 17:30 we had driven 6km past the last waypoint and decided that the rest of the group would not pitch tonight and we would set up camp and meet up with them the next day.

Dinner was pan baked fish and copper penny salad. We also prepared hamburger patties for *padkos* for the next day. The temperature dropped sharply after sunset. We had a body wash in a basin with water as it was too cold to shower and we were in bed by 08:30

Day 2 – 10 Aug 2012

Distance travelled: 137km

From: Cutline Camp S21.44477 E26.11729

To: Kubu Island

Temperature: Min 0°C Max 31°C

We woke up several times during the early morning hours with freezing feet despite having -5°C rated sleeping bags and socks on. We got out with sunrise at 06:45 and started with coffee and risks and later breakfast which consisted of scramble eggs, beacon and bread. It warmed up quite fast and it was 19°C before we left. The planned time to leave for the convoy was 09:00 but we stayed a bit longer just in case the convoy were still behind us and had to catch up. We started breaking camp and left the cutline at 09:30.



We drove the rest of the cutline and then turn onto the gravel road that went over A30 via Mouse and through Mmatshumo. The road was good and travelling speeds around 80km/h. We drove through the village of Mmatshumo to the sand track leading to the Makgadikadi viewpoint on the edge of the pan. We stopped at the vet fence and were let through without any questions being asked. I was a bit worried that we might not have enough water to hold for the rest of the weekend so I asked the guy if I could get 5l of water from his water tank which he agreed to. It does help to know a few basic Tswana words. We did a couple of photos of the Landy on the pans with an attempt to kick up some dust but not much was visible on the photos as the road is quite hard.

We arrived at Kubu and enquired if the rest of the group has arrived yet. We were told to camp at site 5 and they would come to visit the camp site later to collect the camp fees. I am still waiting for them to collect mine as they did seem to collect everyone else's. We met Hannes Thirion under the tree and had our hamburger lunch with some Ice cold beer.

We started setting up camp under the tree next to Hannes's vehicle when Hennie Rautenbach (a last minute joiner) arrived at the camp. He had met up with the rest of the group the night before at Kama Rhino Sanctuary when they decided to sleep there due to leaving Palapye late with Mike's repair job on his TOYOTA. ☺ Apparently Kama was even colder the night before with temps of -5°C.

We finished setting up camp and had a quick bush shower under one of the boabs with a nice rock under it so we would not have to stand in the mud. After that we were having a cold beer and a chat with Hennie and Hannes when the rest of the group arrived. Bruce was still under the impression that he lost us along the way and was a bit worried.

That evening before sunset Hannes got everyone with a camera together to go and do a bit of boab photography. We got a few interesting pictures with the setting sun and the cold and warm colours.



Day 3 – 11 Aug 2012

Distance travelled: 0km

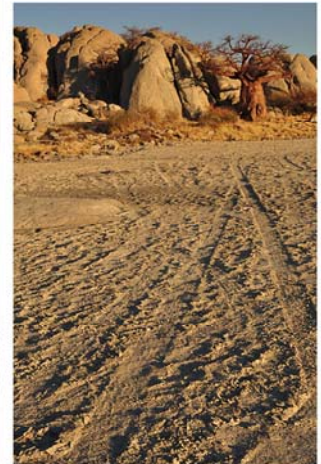
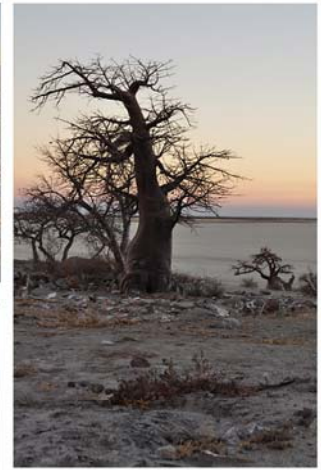
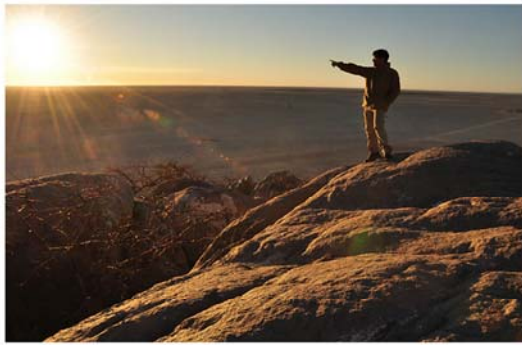
From: Kubu Island

To: Kubu Island

I woke up early and decided to get my lazy ass in gear and join Hannes on a sunrise photo expedition on the Island. Thanks Hannes for forcing me to take my tripod along and getting up early it was nice to be into photography again! Fanie wanted to go too but seems he slept in a bit.

The Makgadigadi pans are just too vast and open to really capture that on camera. Its just one of those places where you can get interested by viewing someone else pictures but you have to experience it in person to really get to feel the place. Trying to explain to someone who hasn't been there, exactly what is beautiful about miles and miles of nothing but sand and dust is hard...but boy I love it. Its has a certain charm and mystique to it. After an hour or so photographing, I went back to camp feeling satisfied. The boys invited me to come for a walk with them and explore the island. Zerko had a real adventure spirit that morning. He kept on going wanting to see what is just over the next large rock and look down on the pans, never wanting to stop and rest After walking across every bolder on the island we went back to have some break fast. Breakfast was coffee and rusks followed by scramble eggs and bacon.

A slight breeze was blowing and I thought it to be an ideal time to fly the power kite I brought along. While flying the kite for an hour a few adventure bikes drove around the island (which is not permitted). I was quite amazed at how light these people travel but guessed they stay in lodges and didn't camp as their visit was very brief.



On our way back to camp Mike Cliff and his wife took their blow up “*poefs*” and very shocking pink beach umbrella to the pans to read books. I just had to go and photograph them as I had made jokes the week before we left for the trip on facebook about going on an ISLAND holiday which everyone interpreted as an tropical island. (photo on the cover)

Lunch was pancakes with mayo tuna filling and some with sugar and cinnamon. Using one pan in a light breeze with a low pressure gas stove it does take a while to make a batch of pancakes. The afternoon was spent lazing around and chatting in the group. We took the kids for a bush shower. 1ℓ boiling water from the kettle into the solar shower sack and 3ℓ of cold water and you are set to go. Both kids showered with a litre of water to spare, just shows how little water you actually need. We too went for another afternoon bush shower under the same tree again and this time Setilda could have a luxury shower with the extra water left over by the kids. Two adults showered with less than 5ℓ. At some stage Eric came and invited us to the rock in the pan for sundowners.

At that point we didn’t quite know what they were up to and just thought we were going to watch the sun go down drink your own drinks and go back to camp when the sun went under. We delayed going there to the last minute as we didn’t think to make a fuzz about it. We even got a bit upset that Overlanders in our group that were supposed to know better was driving on the pan when it is not permitted and were too lazy to carry their own chairs. Little did we know they were setting up a very elaborate cheese and wine party with tables, candles, olives, Melba toast, shrimps, crackers, loads and loads of different cheeses the worx. They had to beg the camp officials to drive the loads of food tables etc to the rock and had permission to do so. It was Bruce’s birthday party.



WOW!!!! What an impressive organising and stunning thing to do. A few short speeches and thank you's were said and about 34 people were fed with what was supposed to be snacks. We had planned to make pot pizza that night for dinner but ended up being so full we made the pizza for *padkos* for the next day instead. We chatted until it was quite dark before we left back to camp again. (Unfortunately I didn't take my camera with so I have to steal a photo or two just for my own records here. Sorry Hennie...at least Setilda took two of them...with your camera ☺).

Some time was spent around the fire chatting and telling jokes before we hit the sack at 22:00

Day 4 – 12 Aug 2012

Distance travelled: 440km

From: Kubu Island

To: African Ranches Limpopo River Camp

We were woken by the sounds of Fanie who were starting to pack early as they had to go back all the way to Pta. We had coffee and rusks with them and chatted while they were breaking camp. A terrible chilly wind was blowing and dust was everywhere. We were glad the weather was much better than this the previous two days. Breakfast was Weet-Bix and milk. We packed up as quickly as possible to escape the dust cloud. By 08:00 we had gotten the GPS waypoints from Hennie on where the group decided to stay the previous night. One group would do a bush camp (possible at a cutline) and the rest would head for African Ranches next to the Limpopo just before Martins Drift Border post. We had done bush camp so we opted for African Ranches.

We stopped to inflate tires again just outside Mmatshumo and drove on to Letlhekane and then Serowe. We stopped and filled with diesel again at the Engen in Serowe and used the toilets which were clean and neat. We arrived at African Ranches at 14:30 with Hennie short on our heels. There were a couple of people from KZN with off-road caravans heading for a 3 week stint through Bots and Zimbabwe to Mana Pools and back home.



We had just finished pitching camp when Heine, Nick and Con arrived at the camp too. They set up camp and chairs were pulled up in a circle for a bit of *gesels*. The friendly “*boer se vrou*” arrived and we explained that we didn’t book and were happy to stay in this crowded spot. She collected Rand / Pula 100 per adult from us and children under 12 stay free. There are two bathrooms with toilet and showers. All very clean and neat with towels provided. (She did apologize that she would not have towels for us all)

Con was self appointed fire master and Hennie organised a two medium sized trees to be offered in the fire too. I had braai buns (from Spar), and some fillet with baby mielies for dinner. A few cold ones were put to sleep around the fire and we had a lights out limit of 22:00 as to not upset the neighbours too much.

Day 5 – 13 Aug 2012

Distance travelled: 444km

From: African Ranches Limpopo River Camp

To: Middelburg

Temperature: Min 1.5°C Max 20°C

It was a cold night again and we again were awake early with freezing feet. The sound of a fish eagle being the only alarm that it would be time to get up now. Con had rekindled the hardwood fire again and by the time I had my first mug of coffee around the fire with my feet thawing in the flames he had his 3rd cup. Everyone had begun to break up camp in a hurry again. We were going nowhere fast and decided to make omelettes and prepare padkos for the trip too. I had to dump 25 litres of water and ±30litres still left in the fender tank of the 90 litre of water we had available for the trip. Everyone had left by 08:00 and then we leisurely finished packing and eating. We left the campsite at 09:30. On the way to the gate at the watering hole we saw kudu, warthog, vervet monkeys and impala drinking but they would not get closer when we stopped.

We filled up the last time on cheap Botswana diesel and headed for Martins drift. After filling up again just before Martins Drift I heard a noise on the roof rack and stopped to check the secureness of the load. Everything was tight but I didn’t check the solar panel as it sounded like the noise was coming from the back not the front where the solar panel was mounted. The brackets that keep the solar panel down on the roof rack rattled loose somehow and I didn’t notice.

We picked up speed and heard the noise again once or twice before it sounded like the lid of the "toolbox" I have on the roof tore loose and I could see something cash to the ground in the rear view mirror. We must have been doing 80-90km/h. I said to Setilda the lid tore off but it made no sense as I locked it and it’s impossible, then Zan-Roux said: "Dis die solar panel"My heart skipped a beat or six. Oh no please don't say that. I reversed and feared the worst. Luckily no-one was close behind me and didn't drive over the thing. When I got to the panel I expected the armoured glass to be in a million pieces and being kept together by the photocells....to my surprise it was in one piece. It’s a miracle!!! And a well designed frame. Just a scratch that could be wiped off on the glass. The frame that Renzo (Bush Power) sells with the solar panel has some bad scuff marks on the corners but other than that not much visible damage...I still need to test it electrically but think it should be ok. Phew... could have been an expensive OOPS...that after I told my wife the previous night that I think I need to rethink the way I fasten the solar panel. Needless to say those brackets are in the dustbin!!!

The Border crossing was fairly uneventful and took about 30mins both sides. We just had to turn back to get a gate pass on the Bots side as it doesn’t say so on any sign and no-one told us. The road to Mokopane surely had the most warthogs along the way next to the road that I have ever seen. The rest of the road was plain sailing and our ship docked in Middelburg harbour at 15:15.

Thanks everyone for making this a memorable trip...



Figure 1- Track log for Day1

