

A Disco 3, a Wrangler and possibly a Risky Adventure?.....well maybe not!

It seems that Botswana has become even busier or perhaps I have just been lucky in the past with our bookings. I say this as we were unable to get any firm bookings at any of the campsites we had planned to visit.....I do however take responsibility for this as we had left things very late.

Anyway, after a few, probably irritating questions on Overland we had two basic plans in place. Either we were going to be heading to Kasane and hopefully getting a site at Chobe or we were going to do Hunters road or if that turned out to be too wet, then we were considering Hwange. Swambo wanted to get a campsite and not do the bush camping thing on this trip.

Before the trip, we were warned about our choice of vehicle, about its capabilities and reliability issues, with lots of people rolling their eyes and reminding me of Phillip Sprules incident a few months ago. We were also warned to stay on the light stuff only, and not to attempt things like thick sand, dense bush or any obstacles offroad while towing the Xplorer as the Discovery would not cope. Well we ended up do all of the above. ☺

What made the trip possibly even more risky for all concerned, was a mate of ours decided to join us in his Jeep Wrangler towing a Bush Trotter Caravan. Two vehicles with probably the worst reputations for overlanding, on one trip together and they were both towing!!!! I could imagine people like Livingston turning in their graves!

Aye yay ya, this was going to be interesting. ☺

7th July 2014

Anyway we decided to meet bright an early on Monday morning and head for the Romatswa border post and planned our first stop in Gaborone for breakfast. It was -4 deg C when we left JHB, so we set the climate control to 22 deg C which kept my passengers happy – unlike the Defender's heater which either was too hot or not hot enough.



The road from Johannesburg to Romatswa was pretty uneventful but very busy with trucks whose drivers don't seem to know how to dim their headlights. The Disco however is a pleasure to use as a tow vehicle and made overtaking very light work. This route also has probably the most expensive toll road I have ever had to pay and while the actual border crossing was very quick the rest of the route makes it not worthwhile to use and, unless we are traveling to the western or central part of Botswana we will not use this BP again.

Just a note on this BP is that you can pay your fees using your credit card which is handy and the staff are very friendly and helpful. They have also upgraded it since we last visited.

We eventually arrived in Gabs and stopped at the Wimpy for breakfast at the Gaboron Mall. I know some people turn their noses up at Wimpy breakfasts but it was probably one of the better breakfasts we have had in a while, while being on a trip.

We also filled the vehicles with fuel (Disco= 12.7ltrs per 100kms) and withdrew some money from an ATM so that we had Pula. We eventually left the chaos of Gabs and headed for Palaype with only a stop on the Tropic of Capricorn for a break. Unfortunately it was very littered, as seem to be all the road side laybys in Bots, so we didn't stay long.



In Palaype we arrived to more chaos. There was no fuel available due to their being a power failure. The Jeep doesn't have a great fuel range but we had a spare Jerry Can of petrol should we need, so a decision was made to head to Francistown. In hindsight we should not have taken this route but the original basic plan was to get to Elephant Sands and then to Kasane. A plan that was to change.

Just before Francistown they are busy working on the road so we ended up wasting a lot of time at stop/go's and in traffic with the Jeep only just making it to the first garage without needing the spare fuel in the Jerry can.

Eventually we were through Francistown and we decided to head towards the cutline just past Dukwi. This cutline is also used as a route to get to and from Kukonje Island.

Finally off road after a long day in the saddle.



Our first obstacle.....we made it ☺



After a long day we were now in the bush and able to light the fire.



8th July 2014

The next morning we spent time exploring the surroundings on foot.





I also adjusted the suspension rods on the Discovery which took about 2 minutes. The D3 and 4's have an irritating safety feature that lowers the vehicle from off road height at 50 km/h . The suspension rods, which cost a few 100 rand basically fool the sensors into thinking the vehicle is lower than what it is (it thinks it's at standard height) and effectively gives the vehicle a 30mm lift.

We eventually left the campsite at around 11am and headed for Elephant Sands with a stopover in Nata to replenish our fuel.

The road from Nata north has been re done since we last visited and was a pleasure to drive with quite a few sightings of animals along the route.

We turned into Elephant Sands and were greeted with some thick sand.....flip what now??? Do I deflate my tyres, what mode do I put the Disco in???

I selected sand mode and turned off ASC it was easier than I thought and we didn't struggle at all. I then had to drive up the side of the road to get out of the way for oncoming traffic; I felt the disco sink into the sand when I stopped – of S%8T!!!!..... ☺

When the oncoming vehicles had passed us, I waited for them to be out of view, in case I was stuck, I put the Disco into low range and then started to accelerate. The disco hesitated a bit and sank a bit more, then climbed out of the thick sand without any effort at all. I stopped selected high range again and drove to reception without any issue – ok so its not so bad in sand. ☺

We checked in and chose a campsite.



The campsite was fairly quiet until around 4pm when all the convoys started pulling in. Two guys leading a convoy of cruisers from the cape even thought it was a great idea to accelerate, spinning their wheels, letting everyone know they had a free flow exhaust on their V6's and headed straight for a group of Elephants. The Elephants, with a few very young ones, went into a panic and ran off trumpeting, which this group of idiots though was very funny!

The campsite quickly filled up and the campsite we had chosen soon became the main route to the pub and restaurant.....I mean people didn't walk around our campsite, they literally walked through it, in between our chairs and most didn't even bother to say hello!!

Hmmm not what I expected!

We also helped a Pretoria family in a Honda plat car thing towing a venter trailer out of the thick sand in front of reception. We pulled him to firm ground and once he was there we started removing the tow strap. He was impatient and didn't wait for us to get out of the way and tried to drive around us, off the main track into soft sand again. We left the clown their.

We did however have a great meal in the restaurant and did enjoy the elephants.



When it got a bit too crowded we decided to head back to our campsite. We also met a nice family, with 3 late teen early 20's daughters from Belgium who had hired a 130 in Lusaka and were traveling to SA.

We then watch two hi-ace tour vans with trailers with GP pull in and start putting up dome tents (17) all around and in front of our campsite with all the clanging and banging, and sliding to close the hi-ace doors that goes along with it. What made it worse is these two drivers who clearly slept in the vans kept them idling the entire night, clearly to keep them warm! They then awoke the entire campsite at 4.30 am when they started packing up again. I wish I had got the name of the tour group!

9th July 2014

By 8am I had the kids saying they wanted to leave and even swambo who originally insisted on a decent campsite type holiday, saying we needed to find a cutline and leave straight away! So after a light breakfast we packed up and left to find hunters road.

Pity, as we had planned to relax for 2 days at Elephant sands.

At the turn off to Hunters road we were greeted by a large red warning sign saying no entry. Under advice we ignored the sign and took the track. A short while later an old man tried to wave us down, so under advice again we just smiled and waved as we drove past.

The bush was very thick and I added a few scratches to the Disco's pristine metallic paintwork but stuff it, we were enjoying the trip. We had to also stop a few times to remove trees and branches from the road with some of them needing to be chopped....luckily we were prepared! The first approx. 20kms was slow going. We also missed the turnoff to get onto a little connecting track onto hunters as it was so overgrown which required us to do a U-turn which was fun. I zoomed in on the 276 and we could still not find it, so we climbed out of the vehicles and looked on foot. Eventually we found it. The turn off is 30.5 kms from the tar road at S19 25.732 E26 07.561.

The worst thing for me on this whole track was, I was worried about getting punctures on the Disco due to all the broken branches and sticks we had to drive over. The Disco is shod with Firestone Destinations and I had no idea if they were any good or not.

We were finally on Hunters road and heading North.....and it seemed like it hardly gets used as there were no other vehicle tracks.

We came across some more thick sand and this time with a bit of a climb. Just kept the momentum going and had no issue at all. This disco is brilliant in sand, even when towing!

We eventually found a nice tree under which we decided to camp. We also had a view of a small water hole. As we had kids with us we decided to park in a L shape just for a bit of safety from one side. We also didn't camp under the tree as there were two very well used elephant foot paths that went straight past the tree.



We popped across to Zimbabwe to get some firewood as there was plenty available and we didn't think Bob would mind.



The kids cleared a spot and started the fire.





10 July 2014

The next morning we made a full breakfast – nothing beats breakfast in the bush! We were also visited by a Honey Badger and a few other small buck and a couple Elephant. All the animals seem to be very shy and on edge in this area. We also didn't hear anything at night, not even Jackal. Perhaps this is a result of the Hunting in the area??

We took it easy and around midday decided we would move up the cutline where had already decided that we wanted to find a campsite where we could camp for 2 days minimum.

We also passed the first cutline. I would suggest if anyone wants to do this route to rather use this cutline to get onto Hunters. The bottom track we used was too dense with bush to see anything anyway until we got onto Hunters.

We eventually found ourselves a little water hole which we decided was a good spot to camp. Lots of wood in the area and even had a water front campsite. 😊



Around the entire area as well as on the main track we saw fresh lion spoor as well as elephant and a range of spoor belonging to other animals.

We again set up camp and collected firewood. I also connected my solar panel to the Xplorer. I had only bought one 90w panel with me on this trip and was keen to see how our power would last. In the Disco I only had the fridge running off the aux battery.

We spend the rest of the day doing pretty much nothing.

Later on in the afternoon the sound was disturbed by what sounded like a platoon of tanks walking through the bush (without the sound of motors). It was a herd of Elephant.



As soon as they saw us they stopped. It's amazing how they seem to be able to communicate with each other silently, and almost at the exact moment they all started moving again and took another route to the other side of our little pond. After waiting in line and having their fill of water they disappeared into the bush again. We were visited by several groups during the night.



The next morning we decided that we would definitely stay another day here, besides my daughter, who loves her cooking, wanted to bake a cake for us on the fire. She made a brilliant Red Velvet Cake. Slightly crispy on top but cooked to perfection. Was quite a treat!.



We spent the day doing as little as possible. Throughout the day we had elephant visit us.



I also dared the kids to cross our pond! It was a bit cold apparently. 😊



That night all hell broke loose in the bush on the Zimbabwean side of Hunters. We first heard a Lion roar and then the Elephant went crazy. Sounded like they were being attacked by a pride of lion. I must say when you hear elephant flatten trees that crack as loud as gun shots, and hear elephants running trumpeting and lion roaring, it gets a little scary. It sent the kids running into the caravan.

After about 10 minutes it was all over. Whatever had happened had ended and the final sound was a few giggling Hyena's which we heard for most of the evening. The Elephant also continued to visit throughout the night. One herd being at least 30+ strong. It was full moon so we could see them.

12th July 2014

We pulled out the map and decided we should maybe go to Kubu Island as Johan and his son had not been there before. The plan was to head south along Hunters road and then take the cutline back to the main road. Then head for Nata and then Kubu. Long day but we wanted to spend two nights on Kubu.

The cutline has a few thick sandy spots on it but we experienced no issues at all.



We had forgotten the rule about meat when traveling south and at the first vet fence we were searched but an inspector who smelt of liquor and who politely slurred his way through his practised speech on why he needed to search us. I opened up the drinks fridge in the disco first and his face lit up when he saw my Captain and cola's.....he said he wanted one pack and he will then not search the caravan. When he became insistent about sharing my Captains and pushy, I politely told him what to do with himself in good old South African French. And left him there.....thirsty!

We eventually arrived in Nata. Northgate didn't have any diesel so I went across the road to another garage.

To to reports about the pans still being wet we decided to take the middle (main track) down to Kubu and apart from almost having a head on collision with an idiot in a black Range Rover Sport who was clearly in a major hurry, it was a fairly uneventful trip. Just very dusty and in some sections the track is in a terrible condition.

As we got closer to Kubu some of the pans still had water in them, which I hadn't seen before in Winter.



We were really surprised at seeing about 5 different campsites along the pans where people had basically set up bush camps about 10 kms from Kubu and on arriving at Kubu there was one other campsite occupied.

We stopped in our usual campsite, which was covered in litter and waited for the staff to come visit us for payment. This is where things went pear shaped.

Two arrogant ladies came up to us demanding P156 per person. It had been a long day so I paid! I then asked for wood and they said P20. "No problem. Give us two please" I said. I was then told I have to go and gather it! This is when I got, let's say, hot under the collar and demanded our money back which they refused!

The toilets could be smelt from quite a distance away and the campsites were covered in cigarette butts and litter; and clearly someone had been to Wimpy in Nata like we had been – actually disgusting people leave their rubbish lying around. The "bush" around the campsite had decorations of toilet paper all over also. Such a shame!



We decided to just stay there, and move on in the morning.

13th July 2014

The next day we decided to head for Khama Rhino Sanctuary, but first we took a drive around the island and had breakfast away from the dirty campsites.

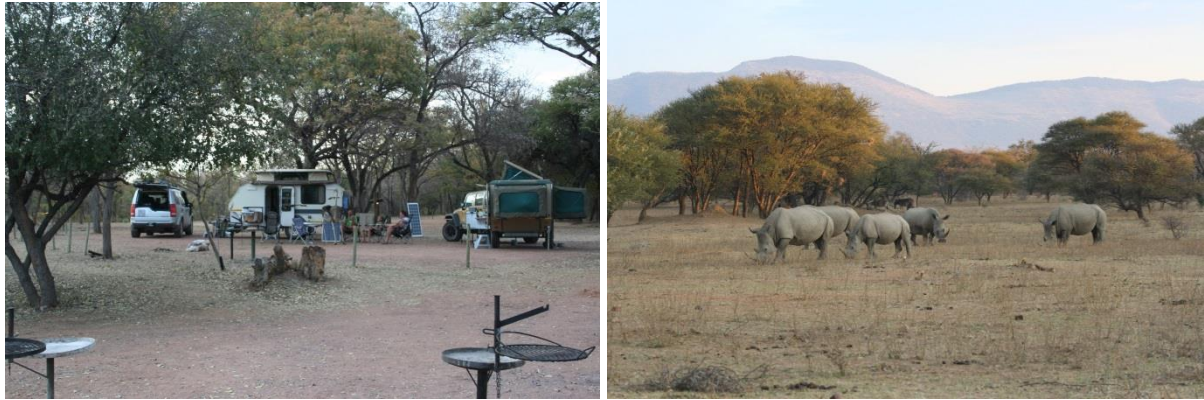


The trip to Khama was uneventful. It was however fully booked, so they made a plan and let us camp next to the education center. Not the best campsite but at least we had decent showers and toilets to use. The noise from the main road was really intrusive though, but beggar's cant be choosers. 😊

14th July 2014

We were going to spend two days at Khama but due to the “bad” campsite we decided to head back to SA and find a place on route to camp.

We used Martins Drift and where through the formalities in 15 minutes and then decided to head to Marakele for our last night.



We had covered just about 2400kms on this trip. I would say only about 300kms was off the tar.

We did sand, a bit of rock, gravel, some dry river crossings including some with a bit of a steep climb out, pan driving and driving through thick bush where the tracks were barely visible and the Discovery managed everything brilliantly. Average fuel consumption for the entire trip was 12.9ltrs per 100kms (worked out manually but the vehicle said 12.2 ltrs per 100kms) and we arrived home with 70km range left on the fuel tank.

I also did a few mods before the trip, I fitted a 3mm ali floor to the rack with jerry can holders, fitted my Icon 706 radio and fitted Discoeast rods for the suspension. After this trip there is nothing else I feel that I need to do to the disco.

Floor (worked brilliantly for chucking wood onto it without worrying about damage to the roof),
Jerry can brackets and Radio mounting



Drinking Water container, tap (I have a pipe that fits to the end of the orange fitting to make it easier to use – the thing with the blue handle is obviously the tap), Jerry Cans (didn't need the Jerry cans after all) and antenna.



The Wrangler also did brilliantly with no hassles at all. I know these are compared to the Defenders but I think they are better made than Defenders. The only negatives for me are the fuel consumption and interior space.

Notes/ changes:

- We definitely prefer the eastern side of bots to the Western side.
- Will not stay at Kubu again unless things change.
- Cruise control is the best thing since sliced bread on those long boring roads in Bots.
- I would travel more cutlines and use less formal campsite especially now that I have more confidence in the disco's abilities.
- One Oz Tent Chair is falling apart which is disappointing considering how much they actually get used and the price you pay for them. (stitching coming loose and legs coming)

