

Namibia Diary
November 2-19, 2018
Organized by the Cincinnati Zoo

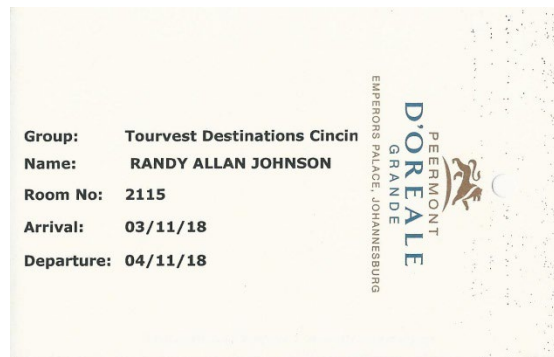
Friday, November 2 – Get away day

We are pretty well packed when we get up. Catch an 11:30 shuttle from the Marriot and get to the airport, through security, and to the gate in time to see the rest of the group off on the 12:30 pm flight to Atlanta. We have a leisurely lunch and get on our plane. Plane takes off and lands on time. We have plenty of time for the transfer. Catch up with the rest of the group again and board. Get dinner a little into the flight (with a gluten free meal for Jan). Then prepare for the overnight flight.



Saturday, November 3 – Johannesburg

Flight gets in about 4:00 pm, South African time. Bus to the hotel (right around the corner from the airport) with casino, etc. Have dinner at the hotel and then to bed.



Sunday, November 4 – Windhoek

Up at 6:00 for a 10:00 flight. Lunch is served on the plane. Arrive a little afternoon and bus in from the airport (the airport is 15 miles out of town). The bus is uncomfortably small. The hotel looks like a little castle overlooking the town. Nice hillside beside the pool for birdwatching. Species list is at the end of this day. Walk into town (downhill). Town is absolutely dead as it is Sunday. See "famous" church from outside and past the zoo into the center of town. See a meteorite display out in an open space in the town square. Walk back to the hotel the long way (up, down, and around the hill it sits on). Get back for a quick dip in the pool to cool off, then a glass of champagne, and then dinner with wine. Then to bed.

Species seen on the back hill:

Blue waxwing

Grey Hornbill
Red hooded agama *(female has a yellow head)
Rock hyrax
Lesser banded weaver
White browed sparrow weaver
Crimson breasted strike
Marico flycatcher
Helmeted guineafowl

Monday, November 5 – Otjiwa Lodge near Waterberg

Easy morning; up at 8:00, bags out at 9:00 and leave at 10:00. Drive to Otjiwa Lodge for a late lunch. Coming into the lodge is was a water hole with two Maribou storks at it. Organize laundry and go out for a game drive.

Species seen:

Warthog
Blue wildebeest
Black wildebeest
Springbok
Impala
Oryx
Stenbok
Ostrich
Blue cheeked bee eater
Kori Bustard
Buffalo weaver
Forked tail drongo
Bat-eared fox
Red crested korhaan
Giraffe
Tawny eagle
Camel
Giant eagle owl
Waterbuck

Coming back into lodge, there was an eland in the parking lot. Had dinner after the game drive (buffet) with a birthday cake for Joyce. Then to bed for an early morning tomorrow.

Tuesday, November 6 – Election day

Up at 4:30 for a 5:30 shove off. See lots of animals in the dawn on the road from the game farm:

Roan antelope
Blesbok
Red hartebeest
Batelear Eagle
Chacma baboons
Steenbok
Slender mongoose

Off to the Cheetah Conservation Fund area. Eat breakfast in the bus. Get there early. Have a cup of coffee. They take us to a cage for a “cheetah run,” their way of exercising the cheetahs that cannot be released. They have a bait (looked like a ball with a sock around it) that goes around in a square. The cheetahs chase the bait. When they catch it, they are rewarded with pieces of donkey meat. Then go to another enclosure for a different type of run. This time two female cheetahs chase a truck and are rewarded at the end with a small piece of meat. Then they chase the truck back and are rewarded with a big slab of meat.

After meeting the cheetahs, it was off to the biofuel plant. Because of overgrazing, the bush has encroached on much of the savannah. This makes it impossible for the grass to grow that cattle need and too dense for wildlife. This demonstration plant shows what is necessary to take the woody plants from the bush and turn them into charcoal efficiently (without the pollution of a normal charcoal operation) and economically. Out in the field, the trees/bushes are cut and chipped. Then, back at the factory, they are pulverized and pressed into long dowels. They are then carbonized into charcoal in large furnaces. The product is lighter than the pressed tubes (much better for shipping).

Conservation of the cheetahs must include conservation of their prey. That requires restoration of the bush. Namibia is the cheetah capital of the world with more cheetahs per square mile than elsewhere. 80% of these animals are on private land. The CCF is trying to educate the farmers about how to live with these animals.

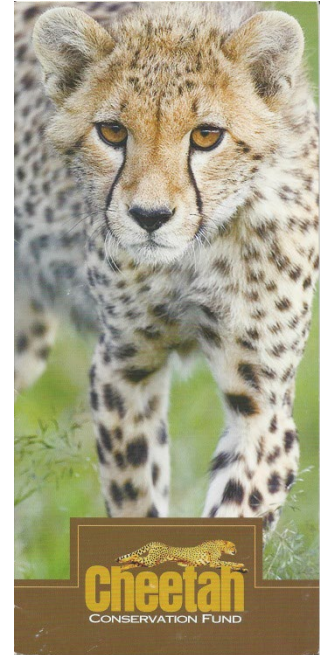
We then have lunch at the CCF and talk about the Anatolian shepherd dog program. These dogs will guard the herds and scare away predators. The CCF also teaches the locals to identify kill marks so that they can tell whether their livestock was killed by a cheetah or another predator (like a leopard). Since the latter hunts mainly at night and the cheetah is out during the day, the rancher usually assumes that the cheetah did it.

There is a similar problem on the other side of the mountains where the ranchers attribute all of their losses to the wild dogs and kill them indiscriminately. The wild dogs are quite rare and could be a huge tourist draw to the area. The CCF is contemplating starting up a similar program for them.

Then, it is back to the lodge and another game drive. We again see the rhinos and a giraffe with a little one. Then it is dinner and to bed for an early start in the morning.

Animals pictured on game drive:

- Common waterbuck
- White rhinos
- Blesbok
- Plains zebra
- Oryx
- Camel
- Swallow-tailed bee-eater
- Giraffe with young
- Scrub hare
- Pale chanting Goshawk
- Kori Bustard
- Bat-eared fox
- Southern yellow-billed hornbill
- Montiero’s hornbill



Please note: Here is where the written notes stop. The rest is from memory, our pictures, and from the various materials accumulated before and during the trip.

Wednesday, November 7 – Democrats regain the house but lose ground in the Senate.

Up early for drive to Etosha and Mushara Lodge. Stop along way in Tsumbe at a small museum documenting the towns history. It seems like a mini-Smithsonian. Indigenous pieces, guns, minerals, and machinery (including locomotives) outside. After arrival, we go for a game drive in the national park.

There we see and photograph:

- Blesbok
- Impala
- Giraffe
- Baleleur eagle
- Lappet-faced vulture
- Side-striped jackel
- Southern red-billed hornbill
- Lion
- Blue wildebeest
- Dik-dik
- Leopard

The lodge has a water hole and a blind that is illuminated at night. Graham takes us down there. Just as we arrive, a black rhino comes to the hole. He drinks a bit and then goes over to what appears to be a salt lick. I get pictures with my cellphone.

Thursday, November 8 –Etosha

Morning game drive into the national park visiting many of the same water holes as the previous evening. It is amazing how the wildlife changes from hour to hour (or even minute to minute). See:

- Dik-dik
- Giraffe
- Lion
- Pale chanting goshawk
- Oryx
- Kudu
- Kori Bustard
- Plains zebra
- Leopard
- Tawny Eagle

At the visitor's center, there is a troop of striped mongooses running around.

Back to the lodge and take an afternoon game drive on the lodge grounds. Don't see much to photograph. However, we have our first "sun-downer," drives and appetizers out in the bush. As we are drinking a black rhino comes close to the safari vehicles. Some run for the vehicles and others stay put. After a while, he moseys away.

Back at the lodge for dinner, we see oryx, black rhinos, and an African porcupine come to the waterhole.

Friday, November 9 – Game drive across Etosha

Get in our safari vehicles for the long (bumpy) ride across the national park (actually only half way across where the other gate is). On the way out of the lodge, we see a common duiker (of which I

don't even get a butt shot but just a back shot) and a warthog. First stop at the water hole by the entrance where we have been twice before. There we see:

- Dik-dik
- Kudu
- Eland
- Plains zebras
- Side striped jackel

As we drive to the next water hole we see:

- Elephant
- Ostrich
- Springbok
- Blue-cheeked bee-eater

At the next waterhole (Twin Pines?) we see:

- Zebra
- Blue crane (rare in this area)
- Side striped jackel (again)

Back to another previously visited waterhole and we see:

- Oryx
- Plains zebra
- Kudu
- Springbok

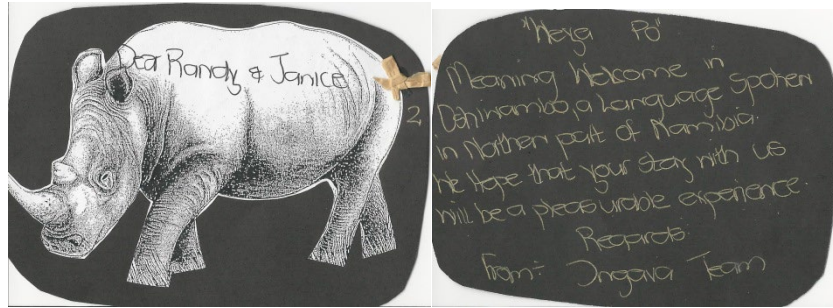
Then on the road again and we find:

- Elephant
- Black rhino
- European bee-eater
- Cheetah
- Ostrich with little ones
- Blue wildebeest
- Red hartebeest
- Lion
- White-backed vulture
- Plains Zebra
- Springbok
- Kori bustard

Have lunch in the park. When everyone else was pretty accommodating for Jan's gluten free requirements, this restaurant (which served a buffet) didn't really have anything that she could eat. When asked, they came out with spaghetti and sauce.

Back on the road again and at the next waterhole we find:

- Elephants
- Springbok
- Zebra
- Lion



The on to the Ongava Lodge which was right outside the west entrance (I mean right outside, first left turn!).

Saturday, November 10 – Etosha West

Out on a game drive back in Otosha. Near the first water hole we see:

- Black rhino
- Zebra
- Warthogs
- Ground squirrel
- Ostrich
- Springbok

On the way to the last waterhole we had seen last night we find:

- Namaqua sandgrouse
- Springbok
- Lion
- Blue wildebeest
- Elephants
- Cape crow

At the waterhole:

- Zebra
- Springbok
- Oryx
- Elephant (+ a young one who didn't know how to use his trunk yet)
- Impala
- Kudu

On the road again:

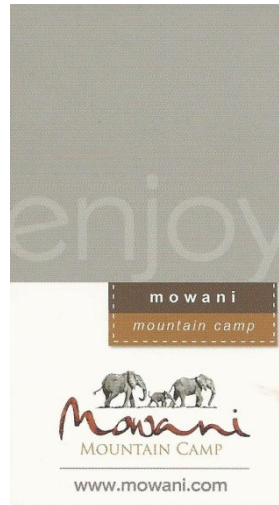
- Kori bustard
- Giraffe
- African hawk eagle

Go back to lodge and have a game drive on their reserve. Go to a waterhole where there are elephants and five lions. Elephants go over and blow sand at the lions and get them to move (but not very far away). Have a nice "sun-downer" and a nice sunset.

Sunday, November 11 – Drive through Daramaland

Leave the camp early and drive to Outjo. Supposed to have breakfast in a café there but it doesn't open until 10:00 on Sunday. Breakfast across the street at the Farmhouse Restaurant. Go shopping at a store next to it where they have crystal jewelry. Back on the bus and head out of town.

Just outside of town, the bus dies. Obi (our driver) preforms a miracle, gets mechanics out from the small town on a Sunday, and gets the bus fixed. We are back on the road after a relatively minor delay.



Because of the bus breakdown, we skip the petrified forest and go directly to the Mowani Mountain Camp. This is an incredible place built among the granite rocks that have been wind sculpted into huge balls. The “tents” (actually thatched roof huts with expansive windows in the front) are nestled within the rocks. They have a pool among the rocks and an observation post for watching the sunset.

After lunch we are off to see the petroglyphs etched into the mountains. They claim to be quite old. They are quite interesting though.

A short distance away are the “Organ Pipes”, volcanic rock that is fractured into vertical many sided pieces. These are not the hexagonal pieces that occur at places like the devil’s staircase in Ireland but rather irregular polygons. Very interesting.

Back to the lodge for dinner (we miss happy hour on the sunset observation post).

Monday, November 12

Out for a morning game ride to see the “desert elephants.” The guides go out in search of them taking different directions when we get to the dried river bed. The other group found them first and we head back in their direction. There is a group of them feeding on the trees. At one point, a mother heads toward our safari vehicle right a Jan (who doesn’t know what is happening), sniffs a bit and lies down. Then her young calf lies down behind here.

In the afternoon we go to Damara living museum, a museum that tries to relive the older ways of the Darama people. We saw a demonstration of their blacksmithing, sewing, making a local alcoholic drink, and a board game. The game I found interesting and would like to know the rules. We got a picture of it and maybe I can find out. The tour included a dance demonstration.

After we go back, Randy took a dip in the pool and we made it to the sundown platform for drink this evening.

Additional sightings:

Oryx

Sprinbok

Rupell’s korhaan

Tuesday, November 13 – Cape Cross

Before we leave the lodge, we make the following sightings:

Dassie rat (looks like a rock hyrax)

Red-eyed bul bul

Boulton's Namib Day Gecko

Leave the mountain lodge and head for the coast. Stop at Cape Cross and see the very large colony of southern fur seals that are just birthing. See many pups and some placentas. Quite smelly. Up the road a bit for lunch and then on to Swakopmund, Namibia's second largest city. Stop at a rug manufacturing facility and watch make the rugs. Then on to the hotel.

Wednesday, November 14 - Swakopmund

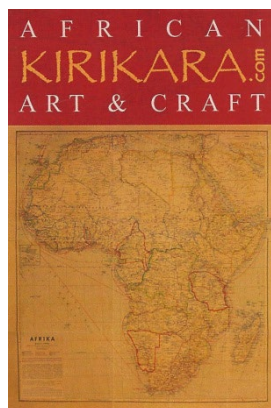
We take a bay cruise in the morning out by the lighthouse near pelican point. The shore is dotted with seal colonies and flamingos. On the boat, some seals come aboard and we get to see them up close and personal. Also, white pelicans with very colorful beaks land on the boat. The boat goes out to see if it can find dolphins. We do manage to see one heavy side dolphin, but nothing else.

In the afternoon, we get into trucks and head for the dunes. First we tour the salt fields where they are making salt. Go up on a dune and look over the entire operation. The red color comes from an algae and that is what gives the flamingos their color. We drive along the coast and see greater and lesser flamingos.

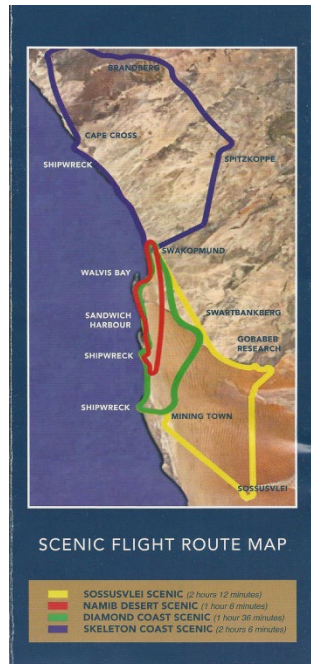
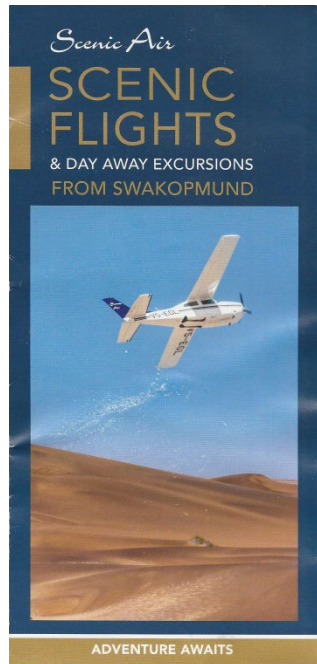
Then on to the dunes, tall, yellowish dunes. The wind blows the sand up one side and it falls down the other. The leeward side is very steep. The trucks drive up and down them like a roller coaster. Jan is in the front seat (finally and on probably the worst day for her). We stop along the coast and try to climb up the windward side of one. It was like walking on snow, very difficult. Randy gets about 20 feet up the side and then tries to slide down very unsuccessfully.

This is called the skeleton coast for two reasons: 1) the native Africans of this area buried their dead in the sand which eventually blew away and exposed the bones (which we saw), and 2) sailors on the ships that wrecked here had very little hope of survival.

Toward the end of the trip, the trucks stop to feed some jackals that are used to their tours. We get to see them up close.

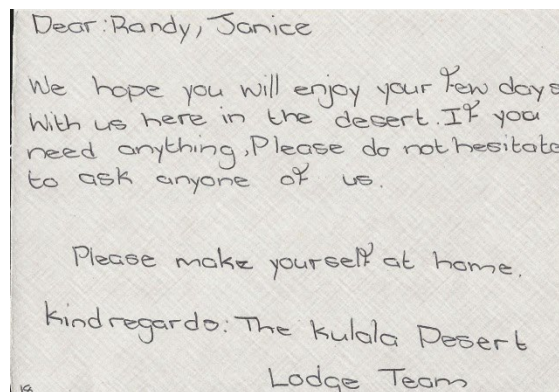


Back at the hotel, we go shopping along a little craft mart that is next to the hotel. We also walk into town to get some money for tips. Dinner, the farewell dinner for those that are not on the extension, is at a local restaurant right by the sea. Then back to the hotel to pack.



Thursday, November 15 – Sossusvlei

The group transfers to the big airport outside of town and we go to a smaller airport just inside of town. There we get picked up by a small plane. After a short briefing, we are on our way. There are four of us and there is no problem with the luggage. The pilot, Dean, is being certified by a co-pilot. We could have had twice as much and still had plenty of room. We fly along the sea coast where we had driven yesterday. We see a couple of skeletons of shipwrecks and a lot of sea colonies. Then we turn inland. The sand gets redder and redder as we fly. Where-ever there is an obstruction, a dune forms. Very little vegetation.



We land in a small, sandy strip in Sossusvlei and our met by our guide who is with us for the entire stay at the resort, the Kulala Desert Lodge. The lodge looks out over the desert and a water hole. There are often oryx at the waterhole. During our stay at the lodge and on game drives we see oryx, springbok, ostriches, Rupell's korhaan, and jackals quite often. It is amazing that there is enough water and vegetation here to support any wildlife! However, when you look horizontally across the plains, you see a tinge of green.

And it is hot! We photographed the thermometer at the lodge at 47.7°C (118°F). On other days at the lodge it was over 125°F!

The afternoon game drive ended with a “sundowner” (snacks and a gin and tonic). Then back to the hotel for dinner.

Friday, November 16 – Sossusvlei

Up at sunrise so that we can climb the sand dunes today. Into the national park and down to the far end. The dunes are very reddish which we are told indicates the age of the sand. As you get further from the coast, the sand has been exposed to the sun for a longer period of time and the iron in it gets oxidized and turns red.

Unlike when we were at the dunes on the Skeleton Coast, here we walk up the dune ridge. It is still very difficult walking, but your feet don’t sink in as much. And if you can step in the footprints of the previous person, the sand is even semi-hard. Jan gets about half way up to the top of the first flattening of the ridge and decides to go down the side. It is a very eerie experience walking as you are sinking into the sand half way up your calf. Randy makes it almost to the first flat area, then gives up and goes down. He walks along the bottom until Dan comes down further along. We all head to the safari vehicle and walk around a bit looking at the other dunes.

Back to the resort for lunch, rest, and another game ride. This time we head in the opposite direction to Sesreim Canyon. On the way there we pass a few other resorts (one with its own airstrip too). One resort had brought in a herd of wildebeests. We have no idea how they survive in this hot arid region.

The canyon is a slot canyon formed by the run-off from the adjacent mountains. The rains are very infrequent, but they do come. And when they do, they wash all of the feces into the canyon. It had rained a week or so before and when we got down to the bottom, it smelled. We couldn’t walk very far along the canyon floor because there were still pools of stinky water blocking us.

Back up at the top, we see a group of baboons moseying along both sides of the canyon. Our guide then finds us a spot for our “sundowner.”

Saturday, November 17 – Sossusvlei

The morning game ride is out to find the mountain zebras. On the way, we stop at the den of a black backed jackal. While mom was a bit off trying her best to distract us, there were three kits in the den popping their heads up and down. One of the adventurous kits actually came out of the den and walked around a bit. We decided that either he was the first one that would be killed or that he was the only one that would make it.

Then on to the mountains were our guide did find the mountain zebras. They are distinguished from the plains zebras because they have very broad strips on their rump and a white belly. They are very shy, skittish and we only saw them from a distance. They then ran away (toward another lodge which presumably had a water hole. Our guide then took us up to the ridge of the mountain range and let us look out. It was extremely windy. We halfway wondered if the wind would blow us over the edge.

Our last outing in the afternoon was another dune climb. We went to a slightly closer, smaller one this time. Jan decided to stay at the bottom but mountain goat Randy, Dan, and another couple went up along the sand ridge. Randy was doing pretty well in Dan’s footsteps. However, when another couple came down the ridge, they messed up the steps and it got very soft and difficult. Randy set a goal for himself of a little rise in the ridge and almost made it before giving up. Down the side we came again with the same sensations as last time. And then our last “sun downer” for the trip.

Sunday, November 18 – Starting home

Back to the sandy airport to another small plane to Windhoek. At Windhoek we check in with Namibian Airlines and they check our bags all the way to Cincinnati. We also have lunch in a little kiosk outside the terminal building. The flight is later than we expected and it is a rush in Johannesburg to get to our plane even though we don't have to go through customs. Get there when the plane is half boarded. Have to squeeze in our carry-ons a little bit but it is fine. Have dinner on board the flight.

Monday, November 19 – Back in the USA

Have breakfast just before landing. Use our global entry to get through customs. Randy's passport does not scan and the attendant has to enter in the number. We are not hungry and very tired as we wait for our plane to Cincinnati. Boarding was not a problem and the flight was easy. We are elated when our luggage arrives as it should (it had travelled a long way too). Take the limo to UC and the car home.