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## A Chronology of Some Significant Events in Namib Research

### 1958

Charles Koch participated in an expedition to the central Namib, sponsored by Bernard Carp. Its purpose was to study the little-known insect fauna of the Gobabeb area and dunes near Sossus Vlei.

A decision was then taken at the Transvaal Museum to set up a field station in the Namib to facilitate research there.

### 1959

A meeting of the Southern African Museums Association was held in Windhoek at which plans for the Transvaal Museum's Namib field station were announced. An expedition sponsored by Bernard Carp and Volkswagen Ltd. then left for the Gobabeb area to select a site for the proposed station.

### 1960

A visit was made to Gobabeb by Dr Koch, Dr V. FitzSimons, Mr B. de la Bat, Mr A. F. Port and the Administration Architect, Mr J. Kellerman, to confirm the final location for the station.

### 1961

The S.W.A. Administration granted tenure of the selected site for a 50-year period and gave a grant of R 2000 per year towards the project. Architect's plans for the station buildings were drawn.

### 1962

An Action Committee was formed with representatives from the Transvaal Museum, the S.W.A. Administration, the C.S.I.R. and the S.W.A. Scientific Society to proceed with building operations at Gobabeb.

A fund-raising body, the Namib Desert Research Association Ltd., was formed as a non-profit company and raised R 15 000 in its first year. A resident manager was appointed at Gobabeb and the *Scientific Papers of the Namib Desert Research Station*, edited by Dr Koch, were started.

### 1963

On 9 October the Desert Research Station was inaugurated by the Administrator of South West Africa, Mr D. T. du P. Viljoen, with a ceremony at Gobabeb convened by Dr V. FitzSimons. The main building was named the 'Erich Lubbert House' after the station's major benefactor.

### 1964

Special emphasis was given to the continuous collection of climatological data with the erection of four thermohygrographic substations between Gobabeb and the coast. This and other projects were facilitated by grants from the U.S. Army Research Office.

### 1965

The C.S.I.R. established the Desert Ecological Research Unit, with Dr Koch as its first Director, in November, following an investigation under Prof. C. A. du Toit.

### 1966

Dr V. FitzSimons retired as Director of the Transvaal Museum and was succeeded by Dr W. J. Steyn. The first DERU Steering Committee was held at Gobabeb with Dr W. G. H. Coaton as Chairman.

### 1967

Further building occurred at Gobabeb, and the C.S.I.R. made a grant of R 25 000 towards the building fund. Staff of the National Building Research Institute in Pretoria were involved in the planning of four self-contained bungalows as living quarters for visiting scientists.

Prof. G. N. Louw started a long-term association with DERU that influenced the programme toward an emphasis on eco-physiology that has continued till today.

Prof. W. J. Hamilton III first visited the Namib to study tenebrionid beetle colouration and has remained an active collaborator, now concentrating on baboon behaviour.

### 1968

Dr W. J. Steyn died and was succeeded as Director of the Transvaal Museum by Dr C. K. Brain.

Further staff appointments were made at Gobabeb and a commemorative volume of the *Scientific Papers of the Namib Desert Research Station*, containing 25 articles, was issued in honour of Dr FitzSimons.

Prof. C. H. Bornman initiated a programme of research on many aspects of *Welwitschia* plants, which resulted in many scientific publications and a popular book.

### 1969

The building programme was completed and the four bungalows brought into use. New C.S.I.R. staff appointments were made, including a resident manager and two research biologists, one of whom was Dr M. K. Seely.

A combined meeting of the DERU Steering Committee, the Namib Desert Research Association and the South West African Department of Nature Conservation represented by Mr B. de la Bat, was held in Windhoek. In view of the serious problem involving the upkeep of the station it was decided to transfer the fixed assets of the N.D.R.A., including all the station buildings, to the South West African Administration, while cash assets would go to a new body, which became the Koch Namib Research Foundation (K.N.R.F.). The N.D.R.A.

ceased to exist when the new arrangement took effect from 31 December.

Dr Helga Besler of the Geographical Institute, University of Stuttgart, started a long association with DERU involving dune-movement measurements which are still continuing.

#### 1970

The death of Dr Koch occurred in February and he was succeeded as DERU Director by Dr M. K. Seely. Mr W. J. Weideman became Head of the C.S.I.R.'s University Research Grants Division, under which DERU fell.

#### 1971

A Charles Koch commemorative plaque was unveiled at Gobabeb by Prof. F. C. Eloff, Chairman of the Transvaal Museum Board.

#### 1972

The *Scientific Papers of the Namib Desert Research Station* were superseded by *Madoqua Series II*, a publication of the South West African Administration.

The first three-wheeled motorcycle was introduced to the Namib by Prof. Hamilton and these vehicles have been a valuable asset to desert research ever since.

#### 1973

The South West African Administration's Works Department completed a major building programme at Gobabeb, involving three new staff houses, a laboratory/office block, garages, ablution block, compound, recreational facilities, generator, sewerage system and water tower. The expanded facilities were renamed the Namib Research Institute. A television film on Namib Natural History was made at Gobabeb by Anglia TV.

The Kuiseb Project Advisory Committee was established which eventually led to the C.S.I.R.'s National Programme for Environmental Sciences Kuiseb Environmental Project.

#### 1974

Dr S. Endrödy-Younga served as Acting Director of DERU during the absence of Dr Seely.

The longest period of Kuiseb River flow since observations began at Gobabeb in 1959 was recorded – 102 days. An opening ceremony of the new enlarged buildings coincided with the annual DERU Steering Committee meeting on 1 August 1974.

Mr D. L. Goode and Mr F. K. van den Broek of the Transvaal Museum erected display cases in the lounge and vestibules of the station.

#### 1975

There was a visit to Gobabeb by Prof. H. Walter of the University of Hohenheim-Stuttgart, a well-known author on Namib ecology who first visited the area in 1935.

#### 1976

A total of over 100 mm of rain fell in January and March, the highest annual value recorded at Gobabeb since measurements were started.

Papers by Dr Seely and Prof. Hamilton on the use of fog by Namib dune tenebrionid beetles were featured on the covers

of *Science and Nature* during the same month.

The first *Namib Bulletin* was published as a supplement to the *Transvaal Museum Bulletin*.

A brochure entitled *Research opportunities in the Namib* was made available for distribution to prospective Namib researchers and the first association was formed with the *Namib Times* newspaper, to inform the local population about conservation and research in the Namib Desert.

DERU's contribution to the Kuiseb Environmental Project was initiated by Mr R. L. Tilson and an important film on Namib biology was made at Gobabeb by Dr D. Hughes.

#### 1978

Dr Seely and Prof. Hamilton published a paper describing the long-term effects of vehicle tracks on the Namib desert substrate.

#### 1979

The DERU Steering Committee met for the last time in Pretoria, all subsequent meetings being held at Gobabeb. Three-year reviews of DERU's performance were undertaken by the Steering Committee during 1973, 1976, 1979 and 1982.

#### 1980

DERU organized a Namib Ecology Symposium as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science programme at its annual meeting in San Francisco.

The first research visit to Gobabeb was made by Prof. Duncan Mitchell which started an extensive co-operative research effort with a number of scientists from the University of the Witwatersrand, the emphasis being on ecophysiology.

#### 1981

The first visit to Gobabeb was made by Prof. C. S. Crawford, of the University of New Mexico, whose research on Namib detritus is still progressing.

A contribution to the BBC film *The Baking Desert* on the desert biome in David Attenborough's *Planet Earth* series was filmed at Gobabeb.

The death occurred of Mr B. de la Bat who was succeeded as Director of the South West African Department of Nature Conservation by Mr P. Swart.

#### 1982

A book, *Ecology of Desert Organisms* by Prof. G. N. Louw and Dr M. K. Seely, was published by Longmans. A BBC film, *The Vanishing River* by Rod and Moira Borland, was made at Gobabeb, while the first of four Namib films by Yves Coineau appeared.

#### 1983

DERU hosted the Zoological Society of Southern Africa's annual meeting in Swakopmund with the theme *Zoology of arid and semi-arid environments*, while abstracts of papers presented were published in the *South African Journal of Science* the following year.

DERU also hosted field excursions in the Namib in conjunction with the South African Society for Quaternary Research meeting in Swaziland entitled *Late Cainozoic Palaeoclimates of the Southern Hemisphere*.

The first full-time DERU Administrative Officer, Mrs Linda Malan, was appointed.

The first Open Weekend, thereafter becoming an annual event, was held at Gobabeb. It allowed DERU to regain contact with the local community, particularly people from Swakopmund who had helped to establish the station originally. About 500 people visited Gobabeb on 19 and 20 March.

An article on the Namib and Gobabeb appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine*.

#### 1984

The Kuiseb River failed to flow past Gobabeb for the fourth year in succession – it had done so every other year since 1959.

#### 1985

Following the establishment of the Foundation for Research Development (F.R.D.) within the C.S.I.R., the DERU Steering Committee was replaced by the F.R.D. Advisory Committee which met at Gobabeb under chairmanship of Dr R. R. Arndt, Group Executive of the F.R.D.

The first F.R.D. comprehensive grant was awarded to Dr M. K. Seely to support DERU research.

Gobabeb hosted the field excursion of the *IVth International Colloquium on Ecology and Taxonomy of African Small Mammals*.

A record maximum temperature of 43,6 °C was recorded at Gobabeb in November.

#### 1986

DERU staff collaborated with the University of Port Elizabeth on a workshop on *The structure and function of sand dune ecosystems*.

DERU made major contributions to the West Coast Planning Meetings held in Swakopmund that resulted in a document entitled *Guidelines for the development of the Central Namib*.

The first Christmas Holiday Conservation Issue of the *Namib Times* was initiated by DERU

#### 1987

Miss G. U. Schirge succeeded Mr W. J. Weideman in the F.R.D. secretariat responsible for DERU

A booklet *The Namib: Natural History of an Ancient Desert* by Dr M. K. Seely was published by Shell Oil S.W.A. Ltd.

The F.R.D./Israel Exchange Programme was started with a visit to Gobabeb by Dr Y. Lubin.

#### 1988

The unit was renamed the *Desert Ecological Research Unit of Namibia* (DERU of Namibia).

DERU of Namibia co-hosted the 2nd Colloquium of the *Research Group for the Study of African Arachnids* at Swakopmund and organized an excursion to Gobabeb and the central Namib. DERU of Namibia also hosted a meeting on *Namib/Benguela Interactions* at Gobabeb.

#### 1989

In view of the impending independence of Namibia, the future of DERU of Namibia was discussed in detail at the Advisory Committee meeting held at Gobabeb. It was agreed that, in future, particular emphasis should be placed on educational programmes relevant to the new Namibia. Furthermore it was thought advisable that the controlling influence of the Transvaal Museum and F.R.D. should be reduced. The Committee recommended that a new Foundation should be set up in Namibia and that the Transvaal Museum should donate its assets at Gobabeb to the Foundation. This recommendation was subsequently accepted by the Board of the Transvaal Museum.

DERU of Namibia staff members were actively involved in the organization of an international conference, *DUNES '89: Geomorphology and Ecology of Coastal and Desert Sand Dunes*, held in Swakopmund, and the associated excursions.

The first *Ecology Methods Course* was held at Gobabeb for 3rd year Zoology students from the University of Namibia.

An organization, *Friends of Gobabeb*, was started with Mrs C. L. Crawford of the University of New Mexico as Chairman.

#### 1990

In February an inaugural meeting of the new *Desert Research Foundation of Namibia* was held in Windhoek under the chairmanship of Mr Justice H. Berker. The Charles Koch Foundation was dissolved and its financial assets transferred to the D.R.F.N., together with the Gobabeb-based assets of the Transvaal Museum. The F.R.D. made a two-year subsidy payment available in advance for the use of the Foundation which then assumed control of DERU of Namibia with Dr Seely remaining as Director.

Namibia became independent in March.