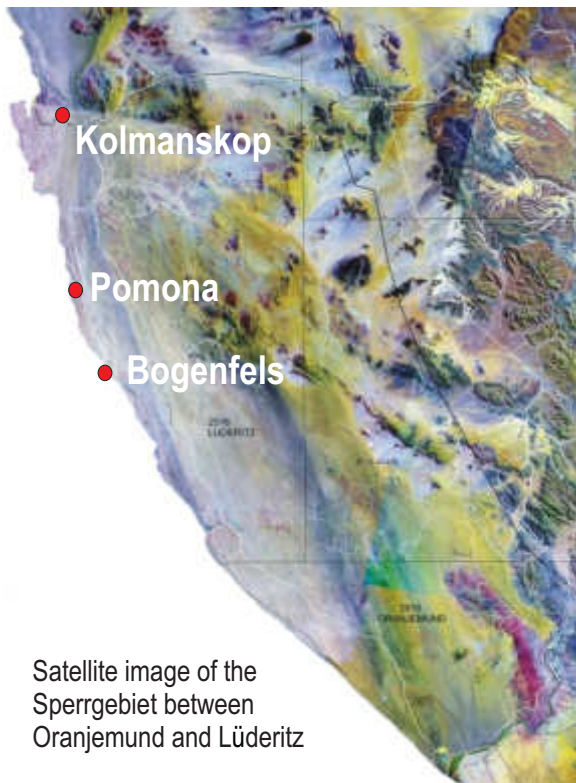


DIAMOND COAST



As a fair proportion of the world's gem-quality diamonds originates from here, the coastal strip between Oranjemund and Lüderitz is also known as Namibia's "Diamond Coast". What began in 1908 with the discovery of a few glittering stones by a railway worker at Kolmanskop near Lüderitz has since developed into one of the largest and most remarkable mining operations in history. But as the once fabulously rich onshore resources dwindle and mining shifts offshore and to the seabed, the area also becomes known for its unique landscapes of which the relics of former mining activities form an integral part.



Satellite image of the Sperrgebiet between Oranjemund and Lüderitz



Diamond mining 1908 (photo: State Archive)

The alluvial diamonds found along the Atlantic coast originate in the southern African hinterland, where they formed at great depths under immense pressures before being brought to the surface in so-called „kimberlite pipes“. Leached from these kimberlites millions of years ago, the erosion products were transported downstream by the Proto-Orange River, which deposited some along its banks *en route* to the Atlantic - today diamond-bearing terrace gravels are mined at several localities along the Orange. Upon reaching the sea, the diamondiferous sediment was caught up by northward moving long-shore currents, which distributed the precious stones along the coast in a 100 km long narrowing zone. Concomitant with the width of the diamond-bearing sediments (3 km in the south vs. 200 m in the north), the size of the stones decreases in a northerly direction, in accordance with a weakening southerly current.



Erstwhile mine manager's residence at Kolmanskop



...and 2008 (Foto: NAMDEB)



Bogenfels

Shortly after the diamond finds were confirmed, the entire coastal stretch between Marmora in the south and Lüderitz in the north was pegged. Numerous companies formed and acquired mining rights, and conditions on the diamond fields soon became chaotic. In September 1908, the "Sperrgebiet" (prohibited territory), which covers a 100 km wide coastal strip between the Orange River and latitude 26 south, was proclaimed, and the sole mining right reverted to the *Deutsche Kolonial-Gesellschaft für Südwestafrika*. Between 1908 and 1913, 4.7 million carats of diamonds, worth about 150 million *Reichsmark* were produced. After World War I, in 1920, nine companies working in the "Sperrgebiet" amalgamated into Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM), a subsidiary of DeBeers of Kimberley, who continued to hold the exclusive exploration and mining rights. In 1994 the Namibian government joined this venture to form a new company, NAMDEB. Since the Sperrgebiet National Park was proclaimed in 2008, conservation, tourism and mining endeavour to co-exist in the area.