



Sperrgebiet National Park

Past and future

Pre-human history

Marine and terrestrial fossil deposits dating back as far as the Cretaceous period (85 million years ago) are particularly abundant in the Sperrgebiet National Park. These range in size from snails, termites and frogs to deinotheres (proto-elephants with tusks only in the lower jaw), crocodiles, giant ostriches, dassies the size of sheep and rhinoceros. A particularly dramatic find of rare Miocene-era mega-fauna was made at Arrisdrift, 35 kilometres upstream of the Orange River mouth.

Human history

Archaeological remains indicate Early Stone Age man settled in the region around the Orange River mouth at least 300 000 years ago. Late Stone Age man ventured further inland, leaving exquisite rock art as evidence of his presence. But shell middens, ostrich eggshell fragments, tortoise shells, crayfish carapaces and cetacean bones indicate a hunter-gatherer lifestyle still heavily dependent on coastal resources. The Portuguese were the first European mariners to reach the coast, arriving in the 15th century. Subsequent explorers reported encountering Khoi ('Hottentot') villages constructed of animal hide stretched over whalebones and locals wearing coats made from penguin skins. In the 19th century American whaling and sealing vessels and British guano collectors arrived in increasing numbers and traded with the scattered Khoi communities. The early 20th century brought

the discovery of diamonds and the establishment of an exclusion zone. By happy coincidence this sheltered one of the most botanically diverse regions in the world.

Archaeological sites are rich and new finds are still being made. In 2008 diamond miners uncovered what is believed to be the earliest sub-Saharan shipwreck yet discovered. Among items of cargo retrieved were bronze cannons, over 70 elephant tusks, navigation equipment and thousands of Spanish and Portuguese gold coins minted in the 1400s and 1500s. With the opening of the Sperrgebiet the area enters into a new era of human history – environmentally sensitive tourism allowing people from around the world access to its long-hidden natural marvels.

Diamonds in the rough

Diamonds and the Sperrgebiet are intimately linked. These precious 'stones' are valued worldwide – you've probably got one – but how much do you know about what is on your ring or your necklace?

Diamonds derive their name from the Greek word *adamas* meaning 'invincible'. This is apt. They are the hardest natural material known on our planet and can only be scratched by another diamond. This makes them ideal for industrial purposes such as cutting and polishing, (80 per cent of all diamonds mined annually are for industry) and, of course, jewellery. The diamond is



the birthstone of people born in April and the symbol of 60th anniversaries.

Diamonds are weighed in carats. One carat is 200 milligrams. They can be any colour but the most common are yellow or brown. This is caused by traces of nitrogen. The famous vivid blue of the Hope Diamond is due to elements of boron.

The Cullinan Diamond, part of the British Crown Jewels collection, is the largest gem-quality diamond ever found (1905 in South Africa), but scientists at the US Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics believe that the galaxy's biggest diamond forms the core of a White Dwarf star. Observations indicate this diamond is 4 000 kilometres in diameter.

The first diamond in the Sperrgebiet (forbidden territory) was found by a railway worker, Zacharias Lewala, near Kolmanskop in 1908. The 'rush' was immediate and diamond mines sprang up all but overnight. The area was subsequently pronounced 'forbidden' after the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG) was given sole extraction rights.

While the area was flush with diamonds, the scarcity of fresh water was causing a problem. The Germans established a base at Grillental, where an underground aquifer fed four boreholes so that fresh water could be supplied to mines as far away as Kolmanskop and Bogenfels. Against a stunning hillside of marble, today only a few buildings and some rusted pieces of equipment remain.

Another fascinating location in the Sperrgebiet is Pomonona, a deserted mining village where, at the height of its productivity, some 1 500 people lived and worked. For 38 years, the trains ran, the processing plant operated, and men toiled against the extreme wind and hot and cold elements in one of the richest mining areas of its time. A cemetery, resting on a ridge with long views across the mountains to the distance shore, bears the headstones of a policeman, miners and others who perished at Pomonona between the years 1917 and 1925. During the second half of 1919, Ernest Oppenheimer, Chairman of the South African Anglo American Corporation, met with representatives of most of the larger German diamond companies in Holland. One of the representatives was August Stauch. With the financial backing of the Anglo American Corporation, Oppenheimer acquired, for the sum of £3 500 000, the assets of the German companies and formed the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM) on 9 February 1920.

Though these relics remain here, diamond mining is still a vital part of life and the economy in Namibia. Diamonds contribute to 40% of Namibia's export earnings, generate N\$700 million in taxes annually and NAMDEB employs more than 4 500 people (one per cent of the country's workforce). The waters off the coast of the Sperrgebiet National Park hold the richest deposits of marine diamonds in the world.

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Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

- Only enter the park with Ministry of Environment and Tourism concessionaires.
- Keep to existing roads and tracks.
- Do not litter.
- Do not remove any plant or animal material or artifacts from the park.
- Follow the rules and regulations on your park permit.

Enjoy the magic that is the Sperrgebiet National Park!

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