



News from Namibia

Roughing it in the Kaokoveld!

The National Herbarium of Namibia (WIND), in collaboration with the Tree Atlas Project (TAP), organised a field trip to the north-western region of Namibia from 3-14 March 2003. This area is known as the Kaokoveld, and lies in the Kunene Region. Its vegetation comprises mainly of mopane savanna. Collecting was done over 17 quarter degree squares, with a total distance of 2,325 km covered by each vehicle.

Together, the five of us, that is, Barbara Curtis (TAP), Luise Hoffmann (TAP), Silke Rügheimer (WIND), Esmeriella Klaassen (WIND), and I, Sonja Schubert (WIND), collected approximately 1,063 specimens, recorded 850 TAP observations and collected about 20 live plants for the National Botanic Garden.

Kaokoveld is a semi-desert to very arid region, consisting of a variety of landscapes, ranging from areas with deep sand to areas that are very hilly, rocky and rough. Travelling there is extremely tough on vehicles. Our entire field trip had been planned in the communal areas, meaning that we would see no people, cars or get into a town for many consecutive days. As vehicles can break down quite easily and garages are virtually non-existent, it is important to use at least two vehicles on a trip when travelling in this area. Owing to a shortage of space, we used three 4 X 4 vehicles, one of which was a SABONET vehicle, the second a vehicle hired by SABONET, and the third, a private vehicle used by the Tree Atlas Team, a little Suzuki with a big "heart". We mainly targeted undercollected grids as determined from the Specimen Database at WIND.

At first, our collecting prospects seemed very bleak as hardly any rain had fallen in this area. The ground looked barren. This feeling of hopelessness changed radically when we stopped to take some photographs of flowering *Adenium boehmianum* specimens next to the road and spotted many different herbs! Now our collecting endeavours could take off properly, with plant presses carried up and down mountains to press those delicate specimens immediately before they have a chance to wilt. Every now and then you would hear: "Hey! Look what I found—this is one of my babies", and so the excitement continued. Being new at the herbarium and on my first field trip, these comments sounded rather strange.

As the Kaokoveld is mostly communal farm land, there are many two-track paths that we followed to do our collecting. We also collected on mountains, often known to harbour greater species diversity than the plains or lower lying areas. Fortunately Luise speaks a little of the local language. However broken, her command of Otjiherero often helped us to locate guides who could assist in finding the places we were targeting for collecting purposes. At the Etoto Hills, some of the local people were interested in our activities, and when Luise explained the purpose of our presence there, they brought her all types of plant specimens and taught her the Otjiherero names for these. This was very useful.

Five days were spent in the area south and slightly south-west of Ruacana. Rainfall had been quite good in this area and collecting went well. On the Etoto Hills, Essie and I collected about 65 different herb species on the southern slope of the mountain. Such good collecting filled half of our presses within five days—we brought 25 presses along!

Travelling further west, we entered the more semi-arid region. This area was very



Euphorbia

dry, making herb collecting quite difficult. We concentrated on collecting in the Zebra Mountains and their surrounding areas and saw many specimens of *Euphorbia eduardoi*. This species is endemic to the area, and is cited in the Red Data List of Namibia.

The further west we travelled, the drier it became. Every herb that dared to emerge was pressed. We travelled all the way up to the northern border of Namibia, and tried our luck collecting along the perennial Kunene River, but as the River had come down in flood, the tracks had either washed away or were underwater. We started removing parts of a huge *Combretum imberbe* that had washed over a little detour we were trying to build, but cut it short at the thought of the flow of the river that at times rise up to and over 2 metres within a few hours. It all depends on the amount of water released through the sluices at the Ruacana Hydroelectric Scheme. What if the river came down in flood while we were

From left to right: Having a break at the spectacular Ruacana Falls. From left to right: Silke, Essie (Kleintjie), Barbara and myself. Luise is the specialist photographer; Luise pressing plant specimens.





The Zebra Mountain area.

busy building roads? We thought it wiser to get out of the area!

Of course, every field trip has its unexpected mishaps as well. On the second day we thought things had turned for the worst

when it looked as if we would have to travel on enthusiasm as a substitute for petrol. The pipe leading from the spare petrol tank to the main tank of the hired vehicle had a serious leak. Never without a plan, we mixed finely cut pieces of sunlight soap with water to form a mush pulp that was put on the broken section of the pipe. This lasted till we reached Ruacana. Ruacana, not surprisingly, does not have a mechanic workshop, but the owner of the petrol station organised a 2 m long water hose, which we used to make the repair. Essie and I were drenched with petrol in the process—our improvisation lasted until the end of the trip. Barbara rewarded us with a six pack of ice cold beer for our hard, messy work.

Back at home, the “fun” part of the field trip, namely identifying all collected plants, lay ahead. Not all specimens have been identified yet, but two of the specimens caused a lot of excitement in the institute: a new record was identified by Silke from her collection (*Stapelia leenderitziae* N.E.Br.), and Essie collected a rare specimen—only the second record for Namibia (*Rhinacanthus kaokoensis* K.Balkwill & S.Williamson).

A Lifesaving Tip for a “Successful” Field Trip

At the end of a hard day’s work, there is nothing more enjoyable than a cold beer. It relieves the frustration of the chores, such as changing blotters and making notes that need to be taken care of in the evenings. Luise’s recipe to keep a beer cold is as follows: Take a sock; soak it in water; put the beer bottle into the sock; hang the sock in a tree where there is enough wind circulation for half an hour; take the sock down; open the beer and enjoy!

(Thanks TAP for providing the beer incentive for the evenings.) We would also like to thank SABONET for sponsoring the hired vehicle. This increased our capacity to take enough presses along to make the trip really worthwhile. Thanks also to the Anglo American Camp for the generous use of their most welcome facilities in the Zebra Mountains for two nights. ▲

—Sonja Schubert

Pursuing Plants in the Khomas Hochland, Central Namibia

We started out on a field trip on 11 February 2003 that took us to Nauchas, the Spreegtschoogte, and the Gamsberg. The cloudy skies kept us cool and calm. As we drove from Windhoek up into the Khomas Hochland, it was hard to imagine that only a few weeks before it had been dry and blisteringly hot—the January rains refusing to fall, with record high temperatures the order of the day. Now everywhere was green.

It was a Tuesday morning when Silke Bartsch, Tobias Angula and I set out in the SABONET vehicle with our spades, secateurs, crowbars, boxes and enthusiasm to collect a range of plants for the National Botanic Garden in Windhoek. We aimed to collect cuttings of *Euphorbia guerichiana* and *Commiphora* sp., as well as some live plants. With Silke at the wheel, we made steady progress west out of Windhoek and then south towards the Namibgrens Guesthouse. We stopped regularly as we marvelled at the difference in the roadside plants, as compared to when we had travelled here with Ian Oliver, curator of the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden, before the rains. We stopped at the two known locations for *Euphorbia pseudoduseimata*, looking for seeds. Although there were no seeds, we were delighted to find another small population!

We also found *Pterodiscus aurantiacus*, a small caudiciform plant, and lifted two.

Damp soil eased the task of lifting *Euphorbia gariopina* subsp. *gariopina* and reduced damage to the root system in the process. Tobias showed some mastery with the crowbar, while Silke cursed the GPS and relentlessly filled in data collection forms. When lunchtime came, we sought the shelter of a tree next to the road. With no time to waste, we soon took to the road again and it was then that I became aware of something burrowing into my neck. It was a tick! To my horror I noticed more, crawling up my legs and shirt. Time stood still as I furiously plucked them off. Strangely, my companions were tick-free...

With the afternoon stretching out before us and the drizzle keeping us in good spirits, we stopped to lift *Ebracteola montismoltkei*, *Sarcocaulon marlothii*, *Anacampseros albissima* and a *Stapelia flavapurpurea* (that almost escaped our attention under a thick bush).

Shortly before reaching our destination for the night, we stopped to explore an interesting granite koppie alongside the road. The rock hyrax (dassie) watched our every movement. The koppie turned out to be a place of great interest with a number of large *Aloe viridiflora* and *Cyphostemma bainesii* growing on the slopes. We lifted two *C. bainesii*. We were disappointed to find

neither young *A. viridiflora* plants nor any seeds. Reports from farmers in the area suggest that young *A. viridiflora* plants are rare, as the baboons remove the inflorescences before the seeds have time to disperse.

We reached our destination, grapevines laden with sweet, ripe, black grapes waiting as if ordered – a delicious entrée to the main course of venison. The busy day called for an early night.

On Wednesday morning we worked our way down the Spreegtschoogte Pass. Here we targeted *Euphorbia guerichiana*, taking cuttings and lifting young *Euphorbia guerichiana* plants. About 30 truncheon cuttings of *E. guerichiana* were taken to create a “forest” in the National Botanic Garden. We were also hoping to lift some *Sarcocaulon salm oniflorum*, but had to settle for only one plant in the end. The very steep, rocky terrain did not allow for the removal of the plants with sufficient roots intact. As we progressed down the pass, we saw *Commiphora*, *Hoodia* and *Moringa*. It was obvious that the season’s rain had not yet been down the pass into the lower Namib and it was dry and hot. After lunch, enjoyed under a *Boscia albitrunca*, we set off on the circular route for the Gamsberg. We stopped near some white quartz plains, hoping for an interesting find. I searched in vain, while my colleagues, who chose to climb a nearby mountain ridge, were excited to find a *Commiphora saxicola*. We