**Kavango Open Africa Route (KOAR)**

Open Africa is a Tourism Initiative and an organization funded by the World Bank and other donors, based in RSA and Zambia, from where they have established almost 70 Tourist routes in RSA, and 3 in Zambia. In Namibia they have initiated 4 such routes. One of these routes, the Kavango Route was officially launched in Namibia, at the Windhoek Tourism Expo in May 2011, seven years since it was first introduced in 2004. With TV and other media coverage and in close association with HAN and Mr. Ricky Kalaluka (Open Africa), the guest speakers included Mr. Sem Shikongo (Director of Tourism), Mrs. Gitta Paetzold (CEO of HAN) and Mr. Mark Paxton (Chairman of KOAR)

The principal aim of KOAR is the promotion of the Kavango Region, achieved by marketing it as an attractive and worthwhile tourism destination, rather than a region merely traveled through en-route to other more well-known areas in Northern Namibia and neighbouring countries. In this way we hope to improve and diversify income generation opportunities for the residents of this region.

We have established the route to be from Mohembo Gate, on the Botswana border in the South-east, to Katwitwi on the Angolan border to the North-west. The route then emphasizes the older and original gravel road between Rundu and Divundu along the river, and not the more well-known B8 tarred road. This route gives the visitor more access to the attractive river scenery as well as the diverse cultural activities of the people living alongside it. Participants along this route include any legitimate individuals or organizations that have anything of interest to offer to the travelling Tourist. These involve **Tourism Accommodation Establishments (Lodges, Camps and Campsites whether private or Community-based), Government organizations, Community-based NGO’s, Clubs, Schools, Missions and Churches, Conservancies, Community Forests, Craft producers, Historical points and a variety of Private Entrepreneurs**.

All route participants are required to have a Conservation-based ethic as well as a commitment to the protection of the natural resources and wildlife along the Okavango River. To this end we have designated 5 flagship species covering the Mammals, Birds, Fish and Trees, which we feel are most representative of the Region, and require some form of protection and monitoring. These are **African Skimmer, Grey-headed Parrot, Tiger-fish, Hippopotamus and Kiaat**, and the active participants are required to monitor at least one of these species. Open Africa in turn offers long-term website exposure, with marketing details on their extensive website **(**[**www.openafrica.org**](http://www.openafrica.org)**)** and in a comprehensive brochure of the route at selected distribution outlets within Namibia and in neighbouring countries.

Since the official launch KOAR has established itself as a formally recognized Association with an elected committee and constitution. As such it has embarked on an extensive awareness campaign throughout the region, involving permanently placed signboards at specific locations along the route, coupled with posters and T-shirt distribution. Community members and Schools have been directly involved in this campaign. KOAR is also placing demarcation and direction road-signs at strategic points along the route on the district roads and throughout Rundu.

At the moment we are still largely supported by Open Africa funding, but KOAR will shortly be a self-sufficient body in its own right.

We have met with, and enjoy the enthusiastic support of the Minister of MET, the Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and the Ministry of Inland Fisheries with whom we will be working hand-in-hand with in this on-going monitoring process. We intend to form a secure, co-operative and productive working relationship with these and many other similar-minded organizations that have the interests of this region and the residents there of at heart.

Mark Paxton (KOAR Chairman), January 2012.