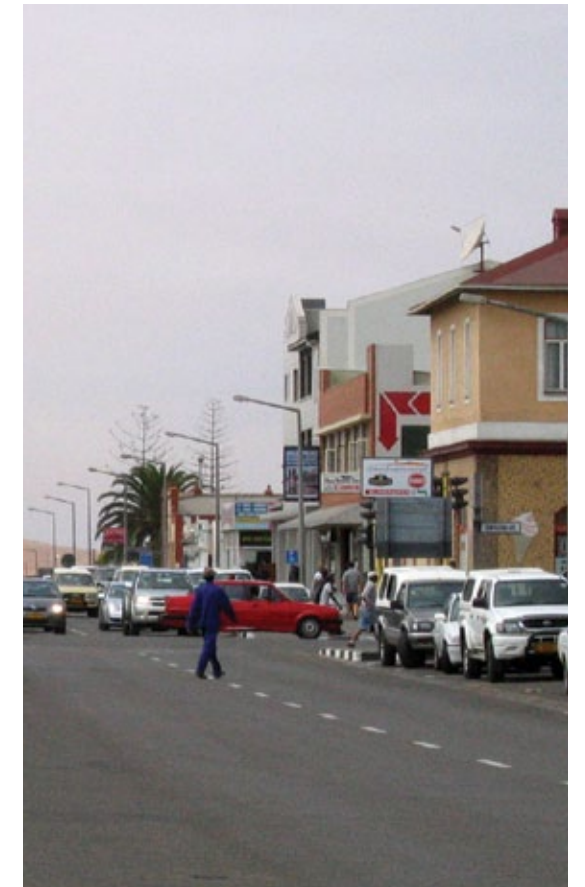


5 People of the Coast



While coastal zones around the world are often the most densely populated parts of a country, the exact opposite is true in Namibia. In fact, it is only in recent decades that comparatively large numbers of people have settled along the Namibian coast, mainly as immigrants from elsewhere in the country. In addition, almost everyone on the coast is concentrated in a handful of towns, rather than being scattered in fishing and farming villages, as is typically the case along many other coasts. The only remaining, long-standing residents are limited to a few hundred ≠Aonin (colloquially called Topnaar) people in Walvis Bay and along the Kuiseb River (see page 126).

The small population along the coast is to be expected, considering the aridity of the Namibian coast, and lack of surface water and arable soils in most places. In addition, much of the coast has been closed to settlement over the past century by the combination of protected areas and restricted diamond areas. Just a handful of urban hubs have been left open for habitation, largely for the pursuit of such modern economic activities as mining, commercial fishing, harbour trade and tourism, as described in the next chapter. The remainder of the coast remains closed and largely unscarred by human activity.

A brief history

Given the overall harshness of the coast, it is perhaps surprising to discover that coastal Namibia actually has a long history of occupation, with some stretches having been occupied intermittently for hundreds of thousands of years.¹ Indeed, the earliest evidence of human activity on the coast was found at an archaeological site known as Gemsbok, close to the mouth of the Orange River. It is estimated that this site was occupied some 800,000 years ago.² Archaeological remains from the Namib IV site, just south of the Kuiseb River, have been dated to between 400,000 and 700,000 years ago.³ The remains of an extinct elephant, which had perhaps been hunted, were found at this last site. Part of a skull of an archaic *Homo sapiens* was found on the beach near the mouth of the Orange River in 1988. This well-preserved cranium was found out of geological context but from its morphology and comparison with other skulls it is estimated to be about 50,000-100,000 years old.⁴

Some of these finds were lucky ones since the chances of artefacts surviving long and then being found are obviously small. As a result, the number of known archaeological sites with very old artefacts – for example from more than 10,000 years ago – are few, while newer ones are increasingly more abundant.

While many archaeological sites have been found up and down the coast and some sites show that the coast has been occupied for a long time, it would be wrong to think that people lived everywhere. For example, people were absent from areas which lacked fresh water. Likewise, occupation has not been continuous. Rather, people have come and gone, moving west to the coast during wetter periods, and

retreating east to permanent waters when more arid conditions set in. This was true for wet and dry seasons within a year, and also for wet and dry periods that lasted decades or centuries. For example, few archaeological sites have been found to represent occupation between 10,000 and 6,500 years ago, which suggests that the coast then endured several thousand years of extreme aridity.

Prior to one or two thousand years ago, everyone along the coast was a hunter-gatherer, sustenance coming from various small animals and fruits, bulbs and melons, including the famous !nara melon (see page 84). The availability of water was more often a limiting factor than food, however. Settlements were therefore close to water, which was permanently available from seepages near rocky hills and from springs along ephemeral rivers, which also provided a relative wealth of food to hunter-gatherers.

Close to the coast, people could harvest food from the shore. However, it was only comparatively recently that the use of marine resources became intensive.⁵ The great majority of archaeological sites occupied onwards from about 2,000 years ago are dominated by piles of mussel and other marine shells. Such accumulations are known as middens, and it was doubtless such nutritious mussels, oysters and other sea foods that enabled people to live close to the coast. The remains of seals and seabirds show that they were also eaten, while the finding of a freshly dead whale on the beach would have been a bonanza. Structures built from whale bones have been found at the Ugab River Mouth.

Again, just where people could live was firmly determined by the availability of fresh water. Some coastal middens are up to five kilometres inland in the Kuiseb River area where they appear to be associated with springs. Here, shells of white mussel dominate the middens, some of which are 10 cubic metres in volume, although most are much smaller.

These coastal inhabitants have previously been referred to as *strandlopers* (Afrikaans for beach walkers), a term that reflects their hunting and gathering livelihoods, and perhaps nomadism. Lifestyles changed and broadened with the addition of pastoralism following the arrival of domestic animals introduced by an expanding Bantu population. This may have happened as far back as 2,000 years ago, but it is only in the last 1,000 years that pastoralism became widespread along the coast, particularly in the central regions. Cattle and small stock became more and more common, and nomadic movements between the coast and hinterland were then guided both by the availability of pastures and the prospects of finding food to be hunted and gathered.

The Kuiseb Delta just inland of Walvis Bay provides a remarkably rich continuous record of occupation and changing economies over the past 2,000 years. Hundreds of archaeological sites have been found and documented here, making the Delta an extremely valuable archaeological resource which needs to be conserved.

A Middle Stone Age blade with a denticulate edge.



Above: A !nara knife lying in a midden of white mussel shells.

Below: The only case known in Namibia of whale bones being used for building material is near the Ugab River mouth.





These stone circles near Cape Frio show the perimeters of houses and cooking shelters.

The thousands of artefacts provide a historical sequence from those typically left by hunter-gatherers between 1,000 and 2,000 years ago to ones that reflect how pastoralism became increasingly prominent during the past 1,000 years. And then from the late 15th century onwards, new artefacts occur, indicating that trading with seafarers became an important addition to the economy of the coastal residents. For example, sites dating from before trading began are middens of shells, animal bones and hearths with indigenous pottery, ostrich eggshells and stone tools. Thereafter, glass beads and bottles, copper and metal artefacts, coins, Inara knives, smoking pipes, and imported pottery are added to the assemblages of artefacts.

Major economic and political events affecting the coast over the past 250 years	
Year	Events
Late 1700s	Whaling and sealing
1840s to 1860s	The heyday of guano mining
1861 to 1878	Britain claims guano islands and Walvis Bay
1884	Germany claims mainland Deutsch-Südwestafrika
1908	Diamond rush south of Lüderitz
1910	Walvis Bay and islands become part of the Union of South Africa
1915 to 1920	South Africa takes over administration of Namibia
Late 1920s	Diamond mining moves south to the Orange River area
1950s	Beginning of commercial fishing
1960s to 1970s	Heyday of commercial fishing and collapse of stock
1960s	Rock lobster boom and collapse
1970s	Uranium mining begins at Rössing
1980s	Deep-sea Red Crab boom and collapse
1990	Namibian independence; 200 nautical mile economic zone established
1990s	Offshore diamond mining begins; uranium prices collapse
1994	Walvis Bay and islands added to Namibia
2000s	Renewed interest and rush on uranium

An archaeologist recording finds from a settlement site along the Namib coast.



The Portuguese explorer Diego Cão was the first recorded European to land on Namibian shores at Cape Cross in 1486, although most mariners subsequently avoided the arid south western coast of Africa, preferring to replenish their supplies on the more luxuriant east coast.⁶

The discovery of the shipping route round Africa to Asia opened up the spice trade to Europe which was exploited most successfully by the Dutch in the 17th and 18th centuries. Navigating the west coast of Africa required setting up supply bases but early attempts by the Dutch in the 17th century to establish contact with people on the west coast were evidently unsuccessful, discouraging early settlement and further exploration of the Namib coast.⁷ Few records of early contact thus exist⁸, but copper coins found on the coast near Meob Bay probably originate from the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, translated as the Dutch East India Company) ship Vlissingen, a vessel which was lost at sea in 1747⁹. The coins were minted in Middelburg, The Netherlands in 1746 and the vessel was on an outward voyage to the east. Any survivors of this and the many other shipwrecks described below may have established the first interactions between foreign mariners and Namibians.

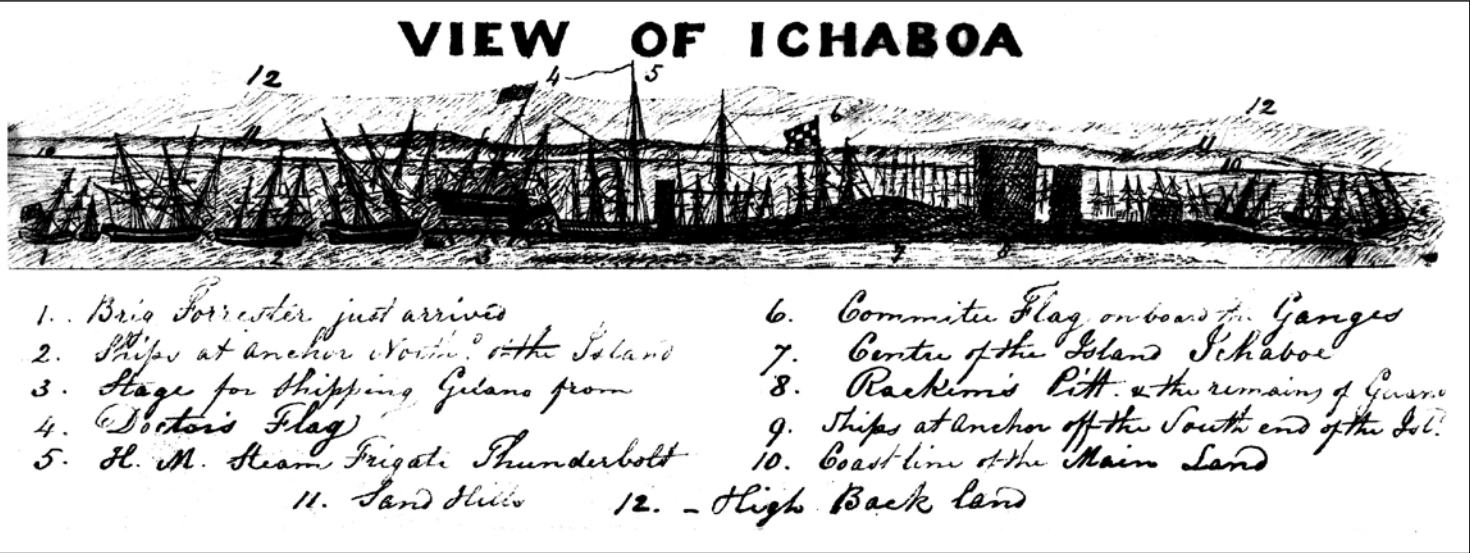
Some contact with the outside world had, however, definitely been established by 1786 when Captain T.B. Thompson of the British Royal Navy found local people at Walvis Bay in possession of glass beads and iron goods. They also requested goods such as tobacco and brandy, again showing that they had prior knowledge of these foreign commodities. Thompson's brief was to explore the Namib coast and investigate the Orange River mouth as a possible port for use by the British as a penal colony, later established at Botany Bay in Australia¹⁰. However, he failed to find the river mouth – a fact which illustrates the difficulties of mapping this coastline. Other seafarers explored the Namib coast in search of safe bays and to establish trading links with local inhabitants later in the eighteenth century. The Hydrographic Office of the Royal Navy conducted regular surveys of the coast to facilitate navigation in these waters¹¹.

The first groups known to have traded with coastal people on a significant scale were American whalers and sealers in the latter half of the 18th century. Having discovered the rewarding whaling grounds off the south-west African coast, the whalers needed to replenish their stores of meat and water which they did by trading goods such as tobacco, rum, tin ware, wire, cloth and soap. By the end of the 18th century it was estimated that 20 to 30 American whaling ships stopped in Walvis Bay every season.¹² Whale carcasses from which the blubber had been stripped would have provided coastal inhabitants with occasional windfalls of meat.

The second major influx of foreigners to the Namib coast started in 1842 after British merchants became aware of significant deposits of guano on islands off the Namib coast. These had been reported in the journals of an American sealer, Benjamin Morrell in 1832. The greatest number of vessels recorded at Ichaboe Island was 460

A painting by Thomas Baines from 1864 of Topnaar people with spears that were used for catching fish. The new and developing settlement of Walvis Bay can be seen in the background.

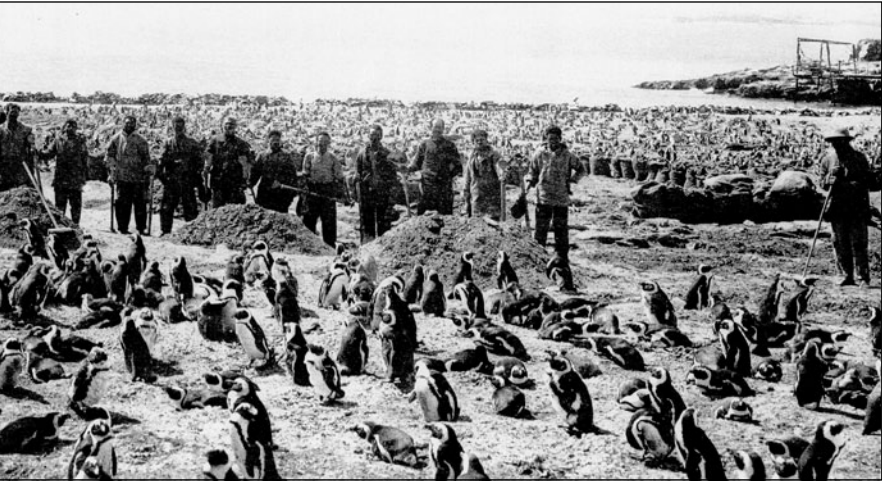




“View of Ichaboa”. A sketch of guano ships at anchor off Ichaboe Island in January 1845. This sketch is from the log of the brig *Forrester*.

in December 1844 but by the middle of 1845 this guano resource was depleted.¹³ The guano was largely exported to Europe for use in gunpowder and as fertiliser. Ships visiting the islands put in at Walvis Bay and other localities for replenishments.

The British presence on the Namib coast grew with its commercial activity on the guano islands and in response to competition for resources from Germany. Ichaboe Island was annexed by Britain in 1861; the other islands followed in 1866 and Walvis Bay in 1878. Merchants from the Cape, the De Pass brothers and a certain Captain Spence went into partnership in an attempt to control the lucrative guano trade. They also came to an agreement with Chief David Christian from Bethany for the coastal mining rights, mainly for lead and zinc.



Following whales and seals, the next set of resources to attract the attention of foreign enterprises was guano, which was first discovered in 1842. Here, a group of men dig and heap guano produced by African Penguins.



Although Germany had not participated in much of the early scramble for Africa, it had expanded its commercial interests in the interior of the country. This led to Germany’s claim in 1884 of the territory that became known as German South West Africa. In 1883 Chief Josef Fredericks, the successor to David Christian, sold to Adolf Lüderitz the area between 26°S and the Orange River and which extended 20 geographic miles inland of the coast (equivalent to about 148 kilometres).¹⁴ Lüderitz then consolidated his position by entering into further treaties with Fredericks. None of his enterprises flourished, however, and in 1885 the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG, translated as German Colonial Society) took over all his interests. Meanwhile De Pass and Spence were left with the guano islands, the areas around Sandwich Harbour, Hottentot Bay and Pomona, but they knew nothing of the diamond riches lying there. It was only with the discovery of diamonds near the coast in 1908 that significant economic development began on the coast, which was to have such an enduring influence on both the coast and the country as a whole.¹⁵

The first diamond was found by Zacharia Lewala while clearing wind-blown sand off the railway inland of Lüderitz. The exact location of his find remains unknown, but it was probably somewhere near Grasplatz where he was based. He passed the diamond on to his supervisor, August Stauch, who already had two exploration claims in the area. After Stauch took his find to the DKG in Swakopmund a major rush for diamonds began. To control the diamond fever the German government rapidly put into place an exclusion zone which was similar in extent from north to south as the land originally bought by Lüderitz but approximately 100 kilometres wide. This became known as the Sperrgebiet (meaning ‘forbidden zone’) and was later to become Diamond Area I (see page 16). Some of the early discoveries were enormously rich and a few deposits that were mined then have subsequently been re-mined on several occasions. Soon after the discovery of the coastal diamonds it was recognised that they were associated with beach deposits, and this focused



The African Penguin population was severely affected by guano harvesting as they prefer to nest in burrows in guano where their eggs and chicks are protected from predation and heat. The population has not recovered, as shown by the contrast in these photographs of Halifax Island taken in 1939 (left) and 2004 (right).

Many migrant workers came from northern Namibia to work on the diamond fields, having a substantial impact on the economy there.





The original discoveries of diamonds were amongst the richest in the world, so rich that the diamonds could be picked up off the surface of the land. The photograph to the right shows a crew crawling across the ground picking up diamonds and placing them in tin cans which were hung around their necks. Elsewhere, gravels were sieved to concentrate the material from which the diamonds could be sorted and retrieved, as shown in the small photograph.



attention on the actual coastline. This focus on coastal diamonds has continued until today, and the scars of diamond exploration and failed mining attempts remain visible from the Orange to the Kunene River.

Kolmanskop, Elizabeth Bay, Pomona, Bogenfels, Stauchslager and other mines were developed during those early years. The aftermath of World War I however saw Germany lose control of the territory and many mines closed. After the war Ernest Oppenheimer amalgamated the fragmented mines, forming the Consolidated Diamond Mines of SWA (CDM) in 1920. This marked the beginning of South Africa’s commercial interests in Namibia, since all previous trading and mining activity had been by the Germans, Americans and British.¹⁶

When Jack Carstens discovered diamonds south of the Orange River mouth in 1926, the attention of miners moved to Oranjemund which gradually overtook the more northerly mines to become the hub of diamond mining. Diamond Area II was proclaimed in 1939, extending from the northern boundary of Diamond Area I to about 50 kilometres south of Walvis Bay and 100 kilometres inland. However, exploration and mining activity in Diamond Area II was limited and all of the area was ultimately de-proclaimed and incorporated into the Namib-Naukluft Park in 1986 (see pages 16 and 17).

While the depression years of the 1930s and the outbreak of World War II in 1939 severely hampered mining, the diamond industry remained resilient and CDM survived these crises. Now in the form of the Namdeb Diamond Corporation, a partnership between de Beers (of which CDM was a subsidiary) and the Namibian government, this company remains a major contributor to the Namibian economy (see page 138).

The presence of radioactive minerals was first recognised in Namibia by Ernst Reuning in 1910, but the most significant early discovery was in the Rössing area by the Louw family in 1928. They claimed the area and exploration began by companies such as Anglo American in partnership with the Louws. However it was not until



the 1970s that active exploitation of this resource began, heralding the start of the next phase of mining development on the coast. The development of Rössing Mine stimulated growth in Swakopmund, and a resurgence of this happened in the late 2000s with the development of a new mine at Langer Heinrich and the exploration for more uranium resources (see page 144).

Relatively little is known about the beginning of the offshore fishing industry. Although people had foraged for sea food along the coast of south-western Africa for thousands of years, it was demand for canned, processed fish during the Second World War that stimulated the development of large-scale fishing. In the south-east Atlantic, this started during the early 1950s and skyrocketed to the heyday of commercial fishing which lasted for some 15 years between the mid-1960s and late 1970s.¹⁷ Fishing fleets converged on the south-east Atlantic to focus their nets on pelagic Sardines or Pilchards. When their catches declined, attention switched to Mid-water Hake until their numbers too fell sharply. Anchovies and Horse Mackerel became substitutes, but their harvests likewise also later dropped (see page 149). Interspersed with these ups and downs were different booms and collapses of West Coast Rock Lobster and Deep-sea Red Crab harvests (see page 149), while just the same has happened more recently to Orange Roughy.

2	Government Gazette	28 February 1994	No. 805
Act No. 1, 1994	WALVIS BAY AND OFF-SHORE ISLANDS ACT		
ACT			
WHEREAS Walvis Bay and the off-shore islands in terms of Article 1(4) of the Namibian Constitution are part of the national territory of Namibia;			
AND WHEREAS , after the independence of Namibia and notwithstanding the aforesaid provision of the Namibian Constitution, Walvis Bay and the off-shore islands continued to be controlled by the Republic of South Africa in accordance with the laws of South Africa;			
AND WHEREAS the Government of the Republic of Namibia and the Government of the Republic of South Africa have agreed that the Republic of South Africa shall cease, with effect from 1 March 1994, to exercise any control over Walvis Bay and the off-shore islands;			
AND WHEREAS it is regarded necessary to provide for the smooth transfer of control over Walvis Bay and the off-shore islands from the Republic of South Africa to the Republic of Namibia;			
NOW THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, as follows:-			
<i>(Signed by the President on 24 February 1994)</i>			
Definitions.	1. In this Act, unless the context otherwise indicates -		
	"effective date" means the date of the reintegration of Walvis Bay into Namibia, being 1 March 1994;		
	"South Africa" means the Republic of South Africa;		

The British Government placed Walvis Bay under the administration of the Cape Colony in 1894. Walvis Bay and the islands were then included in South Africa when it became a union in 1910. They remained part of South Africa until March 1994 when they were included within Namibia.

Although Namibia now controls fishing in its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ), exploitation of marine resources was a veritable free-for-all before independence. Hundreds of foreign trawlers from many countries converged on the rich waters each year, carrying off hundreds of tonnes of fish for free. The majority of foreign trawlers were from the former Soviet Union, Spain, Romania and Poland. Statistics assembled by the International Commission for South-East Atlantic Fisheries (ICSEAF) indicate that over three million tonnes were taken out of the south-east Atlantic annually during the ‘best’ years. However, the hauls were probably much bigger since many foreign vessels would have had little reason to report the size of their catches.¹⁸



Above: The *Henrietta Spashetti* was a 100 tonne fishing vessel which ran aground near Torra Bay in July 1968. Everyone on board made it safely to the shore.

Below: The *Zeila* was a fishing vessel sold for scrap to an Indian company. She broke free from her moorings in August 2008 and became stranded 14 kilometres south of Henties Bay. A similar fate befell the *Kolmanskop* which was wrecked just south of Swakopmund in 2006.



Shipwrecks

The combination of thick fog, strong winds and heavy swells make the Namibian coastline a hazardous area for ships. Just how risky is well illustrated by the fact that around 300 shipwrecks have been identified, with a further 200 relics that can not be identified.¹⁹ The cold water of the Benguela Current is also dangerous for shipwrecked sailors: death can result after five hours when a person is immersed in water of 15°Celsius or less. Since many early incidents occurred far offshore lots of sailors must have perished in the cold water before reaching the shoreline. In addition, the strong current makes it hard to swim to the beach even from relatively close inshore.

Most wrecks have been poorly preserved on the Namibian coast, the fierce winds and currents breaking them up and driving them northwards. One of the few wrecks still preserved is that of the *Otavi* because it lies sheltered behind the headland at Dolphin Head near Mercury Island; the *Otavi* struck land in 1945 while carrying a cargo of guano. Many of the wrecks are clustered in areas which are more hazardous than others, while others are in places where many ships congregated (Figure 36). For example, the 45 wrecks known from around Ichaboe Island alone hail back to the guano boom in the mid-1840s when several hundred ships at a time were loading guano. However, there seems to be no obvious reason for the clusters of wrecks in the Ambrose Bay-Ugab River mouth area on the Skeleton Coast.

The oldest known wreck on the Namibian coast, indeed the oldest in sub-Saharan Africa, was discovered close to Oranjemund in April 2008 during diamond mining operations. A particularly fascinating find, this wreck is thought to be the *Bom Jesus*, a trading vessel (called a *naus*) en route to India from Lisbon, which was lost sometime around 1533.²⁰ Clues as to the vessel’s origins were provided by coins found with the wreck, in particular the coins of King João III of Portugal which were known to have been minted between 1525 and 1538, after which they were recalled and melted down. The 22 tons of copper ingots found with the ship also indicate that the vessel was probably on its outward journey to the east, carrying money to use for trade. The finding of many Spanish gold pieces associated with this

Portuguese wreck was initially puzzling, but the discovery of a letter indicating that some Spaniards had invested in the fleet subsequently explained this oddity. Of 21 Portuguese ships lost on their way around Africa to the east between 1525 and 1600, only the *Bom Jesus* was recorded as being lost near Namibia.



The *Bom Jesus*, photographed from directly above the wreck, and some of the treasures and artefacts found in and around the remains of the vessel:
A - old coins
B - pewter utensils
C - an anchor
D - ivory.

We know nothing, or almost nothing of the sagas that must have accompanied each of the hundreds of wrecks. They and their crews simply vanished! However, many of them must have seen the kinds of drama that struck the wreck of the *Dunedin Star*, for which we do have a detailed record.²¹ This British cargo ship hit a submerged object and then beached in November 1942 near Cape Frio. All 21 passengers and 42 of the 85 crew reached shore but were immediately hit by the extreme heat of the day and bitter cold of the night. No water, food or shelter was to be found. Luckily, two overland expeditions and four ships were sent to rescue them. The vessels saved the remaining 43 crew members but waves prevented them from rescuing the shore party. Meanwhile the overland vehicles struggled through soft sand and crossings of rivers in flash flood. One of the rescue ships sent from Walvis Bay, the tug *Sir Charles Elliott*, herself ran aground further south with the loss of two lives, the only deaths in the entire saga. As part of the rescue attempt, a Ventura bomber landed near the wreck but then got bogged down in the sand. Other aircraft later parachuted supplies to the castaways while additional supplies were floated onshore from the naval vessels. The first overland convoy eventually reached the survivors 13 days after the vessel had run aground, and evacuated them.



Above: The *Eduard Bohlen* was a 2,272 tonne steamer that now lies far inland. The hull of the ship offers protection to animals such as the Brown Hyaena.

Below: The wreck of the *Otavi* in Spencer Bay is relatively well preserved in comparison to most Namibian wrecks as it lies on the northern side of Dolphin Head where it is protected from the southerly winds and ocean swell.



But the drama was not yet over. In late January 1943 a team was sent to free the stuck Ventura bomber. This they achieved, but having successfully taken off, one engine seized 45 minutes into the flight causing the plane to crash land in the surf. Again with a stroke of good fortune, the crew survived and managed to walk the 50 kilometres to the Sarusas Fountain in time to intercept the convoy that had been sent to free the aeroplane.

One of the few wrecks that remains relatively intact is the wreck near Conception Bay of the 2,272 tonne *Eduard Bohlen* which now lies in an incongruous setting some 370 metres inland due to the shifting shoreline (see page 57). She was on a voyage from Swakopmund to Cape Town in September 1909 when she ran aground in thick fog. The shell of the ship is now home to Brown Hyaenas, while many of her original fittings are in private homes in Namibia.

Even ships with modern navigational equipment are not immune from running aground on this shoreline. The *Suiderkruis*, a modern trawler with state-of-the-art navigation and radar equipment ran aground near Möwe Bay in 1976 on her maiden voyage. Little remains of this wreck today.

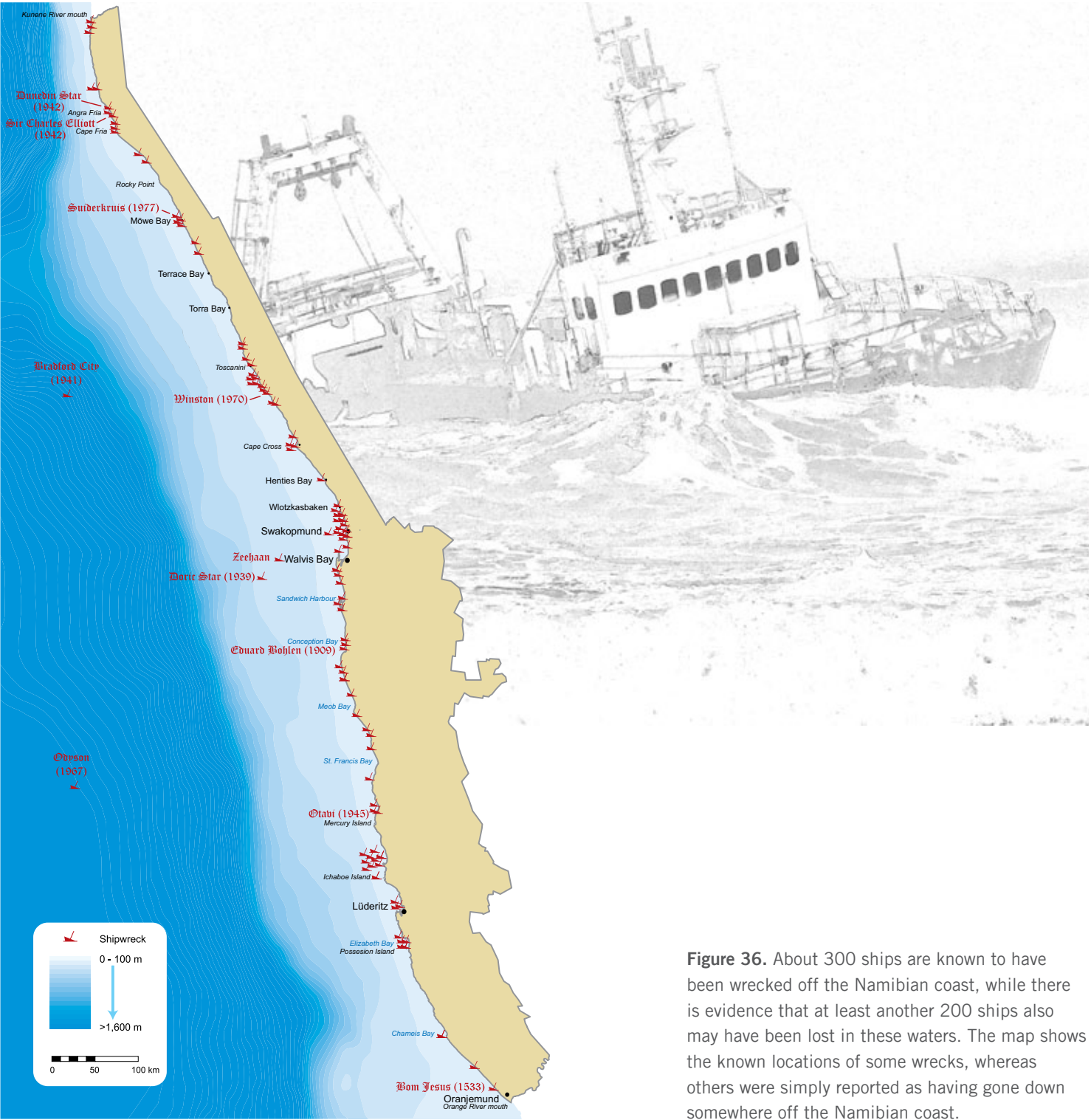


Figure 36. About 300 ships are known to have been wrecked off the Namibian coast, while there is evidence that at least another 200 ships also may have been lost in these waters. The map shows the known locations of some wrecks, whereas others were simply reported as having gone down somewhere off the Namibian coast.



The people of today

From what has been described so far, it is clear that the coast has seen many rushes: of people rushing to kill whales and seals, then to scrape, bag and export guano, then to mine for diamonds, and more recently in pursuit of various kinds of fish and lobsters. Nowadays, Namibians talk about the new rush on uranium that might be mined along the coast.

These are all rushes in pursuit of commodities and wealth. But the coast has also seen a more gradual influx over the past few decades of people to coastal towns. Most people have been attracted by economic prospects which have steadily expanded, while others have been drawn by the recreational and aesthetic pleasures offered by the coast, as well as the milder climate than in the interior.



Numbers of people

In 2010, the entire population of the coast numbered approximately 143,000 residents, three-quarters of whom were in the central section of the coast in the harbour city of Walvis Bay and the resort town of Swakopmund. North of Swakopmund, the only sizeable concentration of people is at Henties Bay which has a resident population numbering about 4,500. And to the north of this, along the 480 kilometre coastline of the infamous Skeleton Coast Park, the only residents are park staff, some police officers, tourist concession operators and scattered miners.



However, the number of people at the coast changes dramatically seasonally, with a huge influx of visitors to parts of the central coast in December and January. The greatest influx is to Swakopmund, but the populations of such places such as Wlotskasbaken, Henties Bay, Terrace Bay and Torra Bay may double or treble during holidays.

The entire coast to the south of Walvis Bay has only two towns, totalling approximately 25,000 residents. The first is Lüderitz, sandwiched between the sand sea of the Namib Naukluft Park to the north and the Sperrgebiet National Park to the south. The second is the mining town of Oranjemund which owes its existence to diamonds and associated mining operations. Oranjemund is currently managed by the Namdeb Diamond Corporation for their employees and associates, and is accessible only to people with authorisation from Namdeb. Currently, approximately 9,000 people have access to Oranjemund.

Outside these five urban centres, people live in only a few other places in the coastal regions. These consist largely of staff and families associated with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, particularly at Möwe Bay, Ugabmond, Springbokwasser, Ganab and Naukluft. Additional settlements are found at Cape Cross, Wlotskasbaken and the scientific research centre at Gobabeb on the Kuiseb River.



The coastal population is relatively small but has grown enormously in recent decades. The towns of the coast also experience massive seasonal influxes of visitors.



Sprawling townships have expanded in recent years, especially informal shanty towns such as the DRC outside Swakopmund (above) and more formal developments at Kuisebmond in Walvis Bay (below).



There are also several settlements along the Kuiseb River occupied by about 350 people of the ≠Aonin (also called Topnaar) group. The river provides a narrow linear oasis of riparian woodlands suitable for limited stock farming as it winds its way between the northern gravel plains and southern sand sea.²² These are perhaps the only rural inhabitants along the entire coast even though most of the households are supported by remittances provided by relatives working in towns. Other income is provided by stock farming (primarily goats) and the harvesting of !nara melon fruits. Some of the harvest is sold while the rest is used for domestic consumption. Traditionally people moved nomadically along the river between natural pools and springs called *gorras*, but permanent settlements developed along the Kuiseb when water from boreholes was provided in 1979. Nonetheless, people still move in and out of the area, especially to and from Walvis Bay where many ≠Aonin people have settled in recent years.

The only other farming activities along the coast consist of a small number of plots (mainly for vegetables) along the Swakop River just inland; the oyster farms at Lüderitz, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, and small-scale seaweed cultivation and harvesting in the Lüderitz area (see page 153). Other farms for abalone, mussels and scallops may be established at Lüderitz.

Although the coastal population is relatively small, its size has grown enormously in recent decades (Figure 37). Much of the overall growth has been in the biggest towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. In the 30 years since 1980, the number of residents in Walvis Bay has more than trebled, while Swakopmund and the other towns have doubled their populations over the same period. Many of the new residents were attracted by opportunities stemming from the expansion of economic activities, such as harbour trade, tourism and mining. However, urban growth in these and all other towns in the country has also been driven by migration from rural to urban areas by people hoping to earn cash incomes rather than being limited to food-based subsistence.

Walvis Bay’s current growth is largely fuelled by the expansion of harbour trade, but this may be surpassed by the impacts of the uranium mining industry if it develops to the extent that has been predicted (see page 145).²³ Much of that growth is expected to be in the vicinity of Swakopmund where some predict that as many as 5,000 new jobs will be created in the mining and utility (mainly water and power) industries up to 2013. Many more jobs should come from outsourced operations and developments associated with the mines.²⁴ If each job supports several family members, populations and demands for housing and other services in the central coastal towns can be expected to increase dramatically in the next few years.

Population estimates for the main coastal urban centres over the past 20 years ²⁵				
	1991	2001	2006	2010 (estimate)
Walvis Bay	21,249	42,015	57,749	70,000
Swakopmund	17,670	26,309	34,886	40,000
Henties Bay	1,602	3,408	4,177	4,500
Oranjemund	4,855	7,789	7,615	9,000
Lüderitz	7,700	12,607	16,000	19,500
TOTAL	55,067	92,128	120,427	143,000

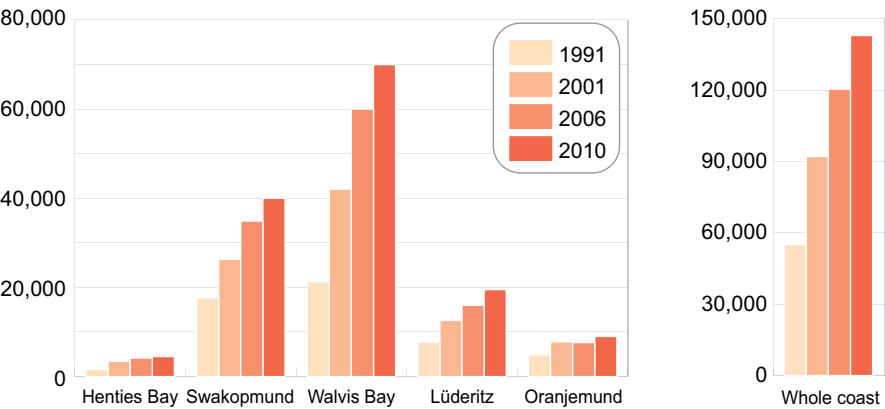


Figure 37. All the towns along the coast have grown rapidly in recent decades, and Walvis Bay has now become the second largest urban centre in Namibia. Only Windhoek is larger, while Rundu in Kavango Region is close to the size of Walvis Bay.

The structure of the population²⁶

A typical population profile for a developing country has a classic pyramid shape with a broad base reflecting a high proportion of children. The pyramid narrows upwards since fewer people of each age group were born and fewer survived in the past than nowadays.

However, the urban centres on the coast have population pyramids very different from this typical shape (Figures 38 and 39). For example, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Lüderitz show a pronounced bulge in their profiles for age groups between 20 and 39, and relatively lower proportions of young people. This is a clear consequence of the substantial influx of people of working ages attracted by the possibilities of jobs and cash incomes. In Walvis Bay, Lüderitz and Oranjemund two-thirds of the inhabitants fall within the working age groups of between 20 and 65. In all of the urban centres there are more working age men than working age women.

The proportions (as percentages) of males and females in each coastal town		
	Females	Males
Henties Bay	50	50
Swakopmund	48	52
Walvis Bay	45	55
Lüderitz	45	55
Oranjemund	44	56

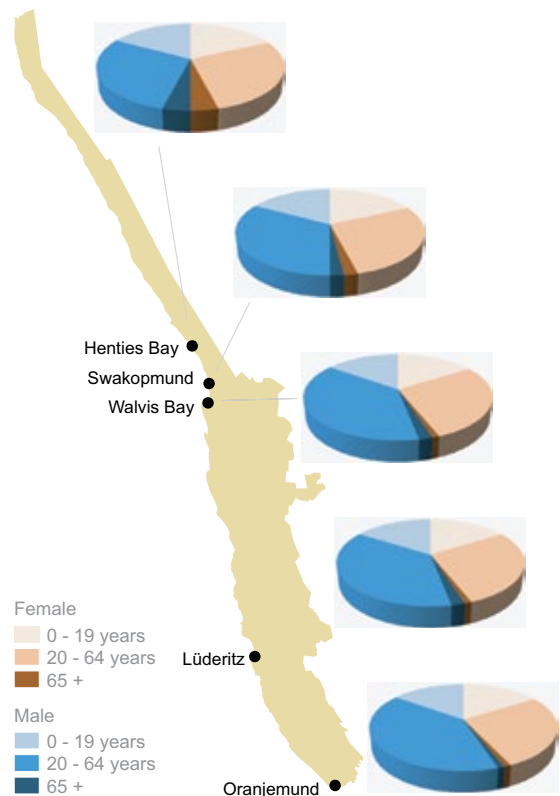


Figure 38 and table. Percentages of each town’s population in different age groups of females and males. Young women and men aged less than 20 years make up 30-35% of the total, while people aged 65 and older comprise 2-8% of the populations in different towns.

The structure of Oranjemund’s pyramid follows the shape expected for a mining town: the proportions of younger and older people are roughly similar with relatively few people older than 60, there is a much higher proportion of males than females, and there is a contraction of numbers at the high school/tertiary education ages. Henties Bay only came into existence in 1967 and developed primarily as a holiday town and fishing resort. It too has disproportionately high numbers of people aged 20-39 who are attracted to the potential economic opportunities in the town.

	Females			Males		
	Age groups			Age groups		
	0 - 19	20 - 64	65+	0 - 19	20 - 64	65+
Henties Bay	18	28	4	17	29	4
Swakopmund	18	28	2	17	33	2
Walvis Bay	16	28	1	15	38	2
Lüderitz	16	28	1	16	37	2
Oranjemund	16	27	1	15	40	1



Rapid population growth, especially at Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, has led to increased demands and prices for housing. Supplies of water, electricity and other services have had to increase to meet the demand.

Where do the people come from?

With so many of the middle age groups of people in the urban centres comprising migrant workers, it is interesting to determine the origins of the coastal population. The pie diagrams in Figure 39 show the proportion of people in each town who were born in different areas to show the origins of the coastal population.

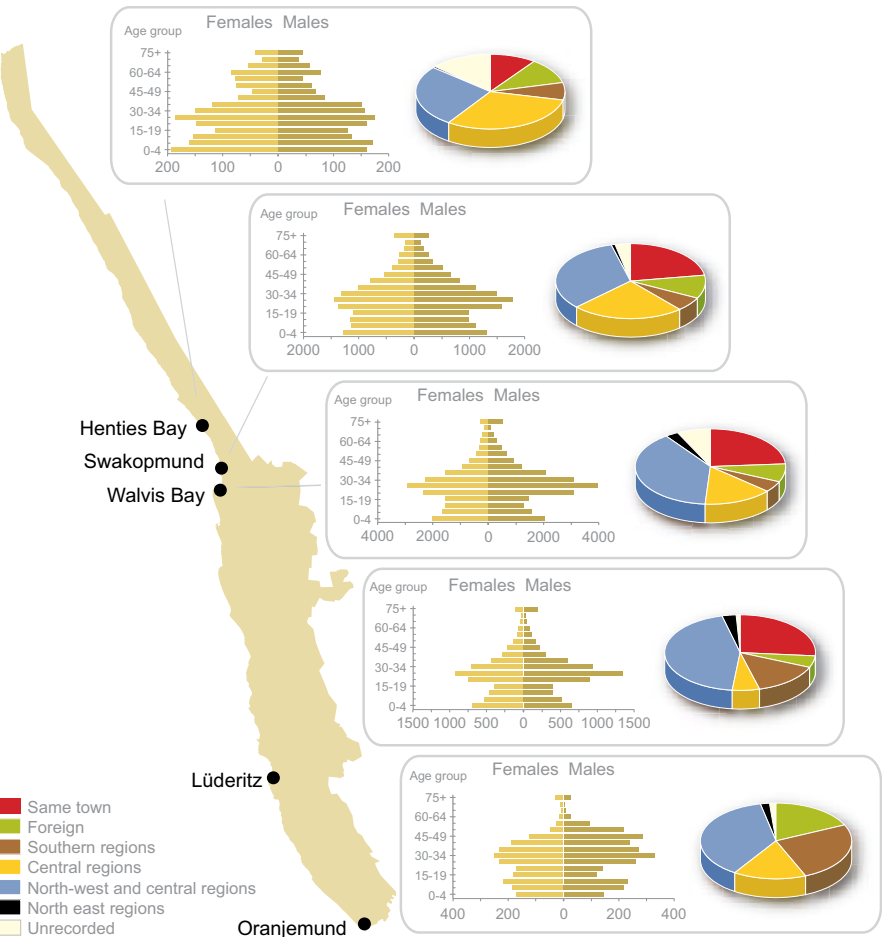


Figure 39. The age pyramids show the structure of each town’s population; females are on the left, and males on the right. The pie diagrams reflect the origins of people living in each town, each slice indicating the proportion of people born in different places.

Overall, about 80% of the population was not born in coastal towns. Put another way, only about one person out of five was born on the coast, and the great majority of those ‘one-in-fives’ are children. Most adults were thus born elsewhere and then moved to work and live on the coast. While about one quarter of the residents in Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Lüderitz were born in their current home town, only 10% of Henties Bay residents were born there.

Many more migrants come from the four north-central regions (Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto) than from any other of the regional groupings shown in Figure 39. The proportion of people from the four north-central regions in each town is as follows: Lüderitz (44%), Oranjemund (37%), Walvis Bay (37%) and Swakopmund (29%). A relatively high proportion of residents (40%) in Henties Bay were born in Kunene or elsewhere in Erongo.



For many decades, men of working ages dominated the coast’s population, providing their labour largely to the mining and fishing industries. Many of the workers were migrants, regularly moving from and back to their homes elsewhere in the country, while other workers shifted to the coast permanently. Recently, more immigrants have been attracted to work in the tourism industry, including the selling of crafts (opposite).



Compared to many other areas of Namibia, the coast presents a healthy environment since tropical diseases, such as malaria and bilharzia, are absent. However, coastal towns have not escaped the scourge of HIV and AIDS. National surveys of HIV infection rates in pregnant women have been undertaken every two years. Although the subjects of the survey are women aged 15 to 49, studies have shown that their infection rates reflect the rates of infection in the population as a whole. Along the coast, only the main towns of Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Lüderitz are included in the surveys. The latest survey, undertaken in 2010, indicates that Walvis Bay has the highest HIV prevalence (20%), followed by Lüderitz (18%) and Swakopmund (18%).²⁷ To put this in a national context, the highest rate in the country is at Katima Mulilo in Caprivi (35.6%) while the national average is 18.8%.

Year	Swakopmund	Walvis Bay	Lüderitz
1992	3	No data	No data
1994	7	No data	No data
1996	17	No data	No data
1998	15	29	No data
2000	22	28	No data
2002	16	25	No data
2004	28	26	22
2006	17	22	22
2008	14	21	20
2010	18	20	18

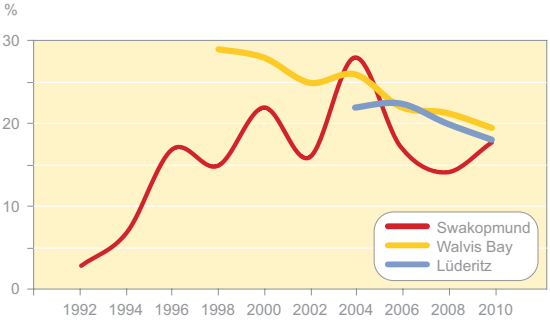


Figure 40. Rates of HIV infection (as percentages) among samples of women attending antenatal clinics. The actual figures are shown in the table.



Future generations...

For hundreds of thousands of years the coast was sparsely populated, as much of it still is. The early inhabitants were often nomadic, spending much of their time on the move up and down the coast, and from east to west between the coast and the interior. The resources they pursued were animals to hunt, food to gather, water to drink, and pastures for livestock during the last thousand years.

Then, over the past 250 years, came waves of fortune-seekers with the coast being the axis along which many indigenous Namibians ‘met’ the outside world. Each wave of new-comers were in pursuit of a new resource. Many left when the commodity was depleted, while others stayed and moved on to new enterprises. For a long time, the coast was the only interface between the people of the interior and the rest of the world. A handful of towns were established on the coast, and these have continued to grow, often in spurts as new resources are discovered and exploited.

Given this pattern of development in the past, what pathways of growth can we expect in the future, and how will these affect the coastal environment? Will new enterprises continue to be largely driven by foreign interests and markets? Will resources exploited along the coast continue to support much of the Namibian economy? Will our planning for the future have horizons measured in years, or decades or centuries? What scars and opportunities will be left for future generations? How can we best use the coast without destroying its very character? Some of these and other tough questions are addressed in Chapter 7.



Key points

- Archaeological remains indicate that people have lived along the coast for at least 800,000 years.
- Prior to two thousand years ago people were nomadic hunter gatherers, their movements being governed largely by the availability of water and food.
- Cattle and small stock farming – or pastoralism – became increasingly prominent over the past one thousand years. Hundreds of sites occupied during this period have been documented.
- The first interactions with ‘outsiders’ occurred following the arrival of Portuguese vessels in the late 15th century; however, contact with the outside world only became regular over the past 200 years with the advent of whaling and harvesting of guano from the coastal islands.
- All the islands and Walvis Bay were annexed by the British in 1866 and 1878 respectively, in response to competition for resources from Germany. In 1884 Germany laid claim to German South West Africa (Namibia as we know it today).
- The finding of diamonds in 1908 near Lüderitz led to a diamond rush and the designation of the Sperrgebiet as a restricted-access area for mining only. Nowadays, most diamond mining has shifted offshore. Diamond mining remains a major contributor to the Namibian economy.
- Over 300 vessels are known to have met their demise along the coast. The oldest known wreck is the *Bom Jesus*, a Portuguese vessel dating back to 1533.
- In 2010 the population along the entire coast numbered about 143,000 people living in five urban centres: Oranjemund (9,000), Lüderitz (19,500), Walvis Bay (70,000), Swakopmund (40,000) and Henties Bay (4,500). The only rural inhabitants are the Topnaar or ǀAonin people who live along the Kuiseb River.
- Only one in every five people currently living at the coast was born at the coast. The majority of migrants come from the four north-central regions, and there are substantially more working-age males than females in Oranjemund, Lüderitz and Walvis Bay.

