NAMIBIA

Evanescent Light



Ian Parker





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http://parkerlab.bio.uci.edu/evlight.htm

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Dedicated to Annie, my photographic elf.



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NAMIBIA - EVANESCENT LIGHT

Namibia - the land in the south-west of Africa between the Orange River in the south and the Kunene River in the north - is a barren land, like from another star, but still inviting and strangely familiar. Namibia is a paradise for photographers, a land of contrasts and clear colors. Those who are looking for peace and stillness and enjoy mesmerizing landscapes and wide desert expanse, are going to fall in love with Namibia, one of the least populated countries in the world. Namibia is Africa at its best, with friendly, natural people, with endless savannah and bushland and an amazingly diverse animal world, protected in the vast Etosha National Park and in many other game reserves.

Geography: With a total area of approximately 824.000 square km, Namibia is more than triple the size of Great Britain. The north-to-south length of the country is 1500 km, while the east-to-west width is around 600 kilometers in the south and 1100 kilometers in the north. The population density is very low (2 million people), amounting to 2,4 inhabitants per square kilometer. The main reason for this being the harsh desert and semi-desert conditions and the resultant scarcity of surface water.

Namibia is divided into four major geographical segments. In the west stretches the Namib Desert with hardly any vegetation, reaching from the north of South Africa up to Angola. The desert belt has a width of about 100 kms. Moving eastwards it gradually rises to an elevation of 600 meters. It is characterized by mighty sand dunes in its central part. In the north and the south gravel fields dominate the scenery.



Towards the inland, the desert belt is followed by the"Escarpment", a mountain wall of up to 2000 meters. Namibia's highest mountain peak is the Brandberg with an elevation of 2579m above sea level. The Escarpment changes into the Central Plateau which slowly descends towards the east. The majority of the Namibian towns and villages lie on this plateau, like the capital of Windhoek at 1654 meters above sea-level.

Further to the east lies the Kalahari Basin, also part of the plateau, which reaches elevations of 1000m in places. It is characterized by wide sandy plains and dune ridges with scarce vegetation.

Flora: Due to the climatic differences within the country, Namibia has a broad variety of plant species from desert and semi-desert vegetation to evergreen subtropical plants. About 70% of Namibia is savannah. In Central Namibia, thornbush-savannah is dominant with extensive grasslands and acacia bush. Sporadically you see trees, mainly camel-thorn trees and other kinds of acacia which often grow near dry riverbeds. Towards the north-east, where there is a higher rainfall, the thornbush savannah slowly turns into Mopane savannah and there is a greater number of trees.

Fauna: Namibia is one of the best game countries in Africa. The country is home to more than 300 mammal species, more than 500 bird and more than 100 reptile species as well as for innumerable insect species. Early in the 1900's, people started to take the protection of wildlife seriously and game reserves, like the Etosha National Park, 20.000 square kilometers in size, were established.

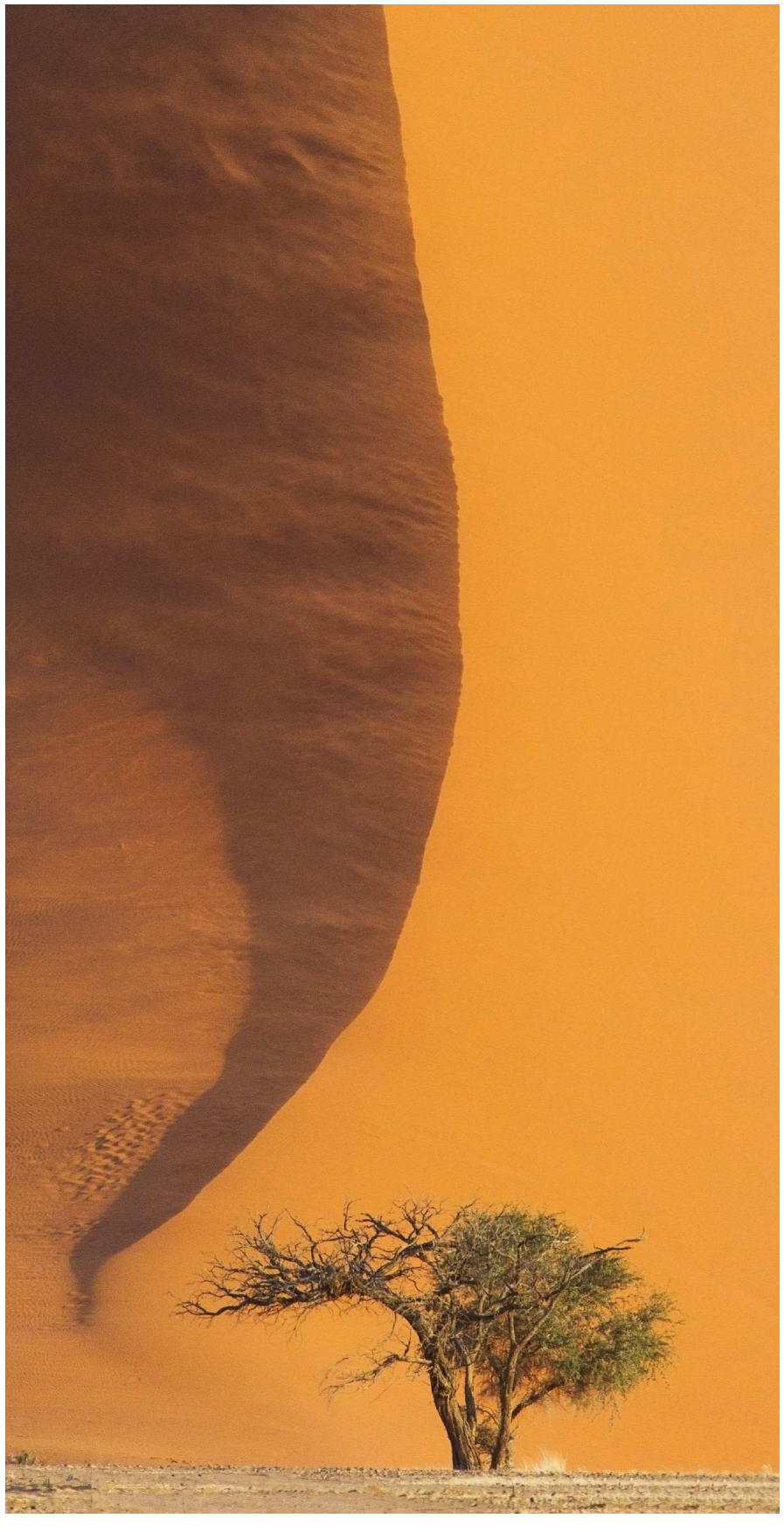
People: "One Namibia - one Nation" is the Namibian government's motto since Independence was achieved. And indeed, today there is a great feeling of solidarity amongst the Namibian people despite the variety of ethnic groups and the fact that Namibia is a multicultural nation. Each of the eleven national groups has its own history, language and culture and, as a result of the South African apartheid policy, its own homeland, although that system has been abolished. People still follow, particularly in rural areas, a traditional lifestyle with tribal and family communities. In total, Namibia only has about 2 million inhabitants; one of the lowest population densities of any country. More than half of the inhabitants, the Ovambos, Kavangos, Himbas and Caprivians, live in the rural regions of the north. In central Namibia live about 30% of the Namibians, mainly Herero and Damara and the majority of the white population, most of them in Windhoek and in the towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. **[*www.namibia-travel.net*]**

This compilation of photographs comes from a trip to Namibia in August-September 2012. We traveled by 4wd pickups equipped with roof tents around a long loop from Windhoek, with the key highlights being the sand dunes of Sossusvlei, and the wildlife of Etosha.

Google Earth image of Sossusvlei. The ephemeral Tsauchan river flows west, cutting deeply into the vast dune field. In historic times, periodic floods filled the Deadvlei clay pan (*bottom left*), allowing camelthorn trees to grow in the lake bed.



Sinusoidal dunes arrayed along the entrance road through Sossusvlei.



SOSSUSVLEI

Sossusvlei lies within the Namib desert: a vast expanse of sand dunes extending over 1000 miles from north to south, containing some of the tallest and most spectacular dunes in the world. The sands are a vivid pink-orange color, resulting from a high percentage of oxidized iron, with the oldest dunes becoming a more reddish color.

Over most of the Namib the dunes are arrayed in wavelike patterns, but this regularity is interrupted at Sossusvlei, where the ephemeral Tsauchab river cuts into the sands from the east (*Facing page, top*). Here, the patterns are strikingly altered, and satellite images show 'arrowheads' of dunes protruding into the flat river valley. From ground level these protrusions appear as sharp-edged sinusoids, that provide both a striking backdrop for photographing wildlife along the valley floor, and strenuous ridge-routes to climb for views of the sun rising across the endless sea of dunes.

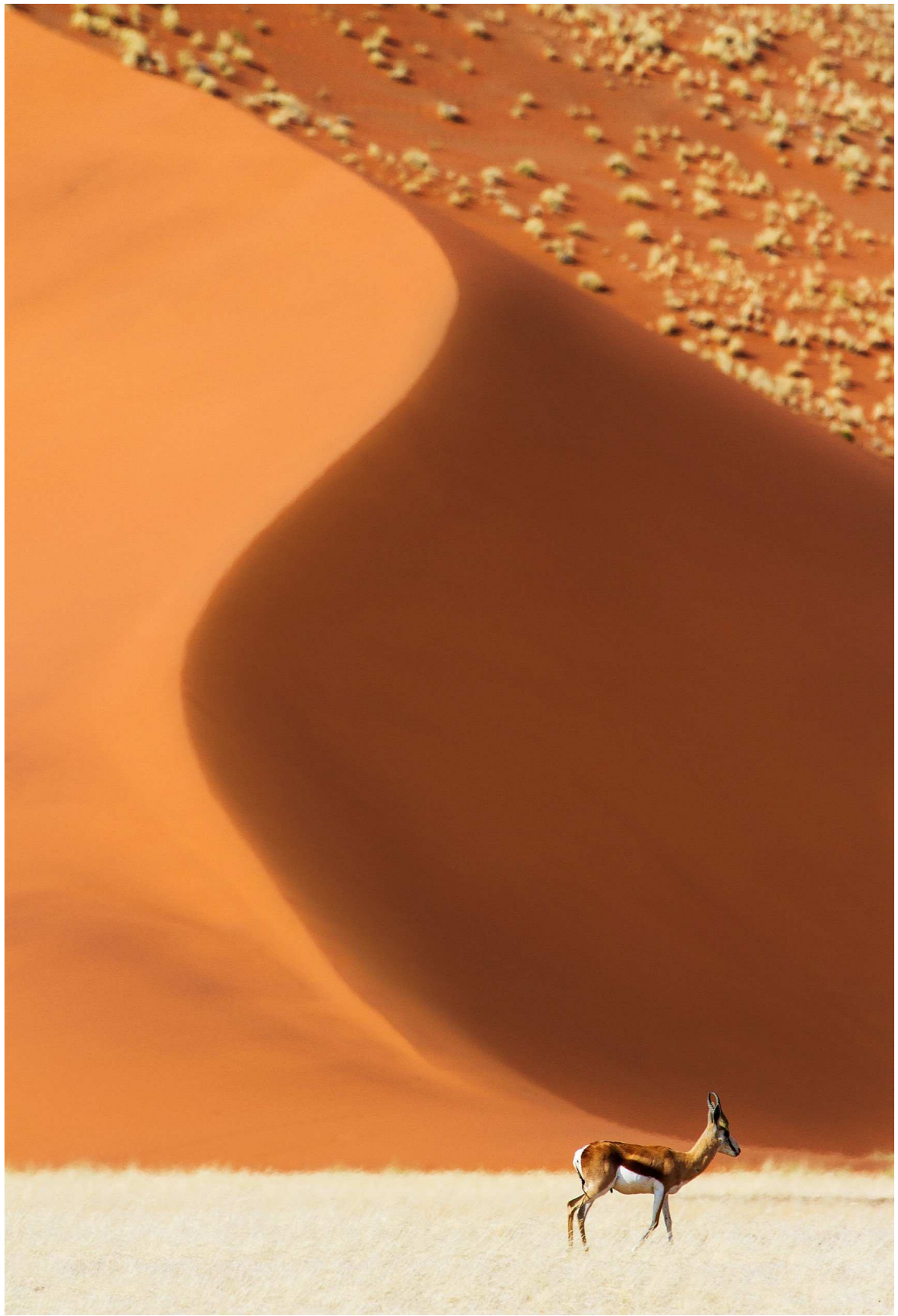
A paved road follows the course of the river allowing easy access into the heart of the dunes. Where the road ends it is possible to continue a few miles further in four-wheel drive through deep sand, and from the trailhead a short but strenuous hike over a sand ridge leads to the jewel of Sossusvlei: the dry clay pan of Deadvlei, populated with centuries-dead camelthorn trees and surrounded by some of the world's highest sand dunes.



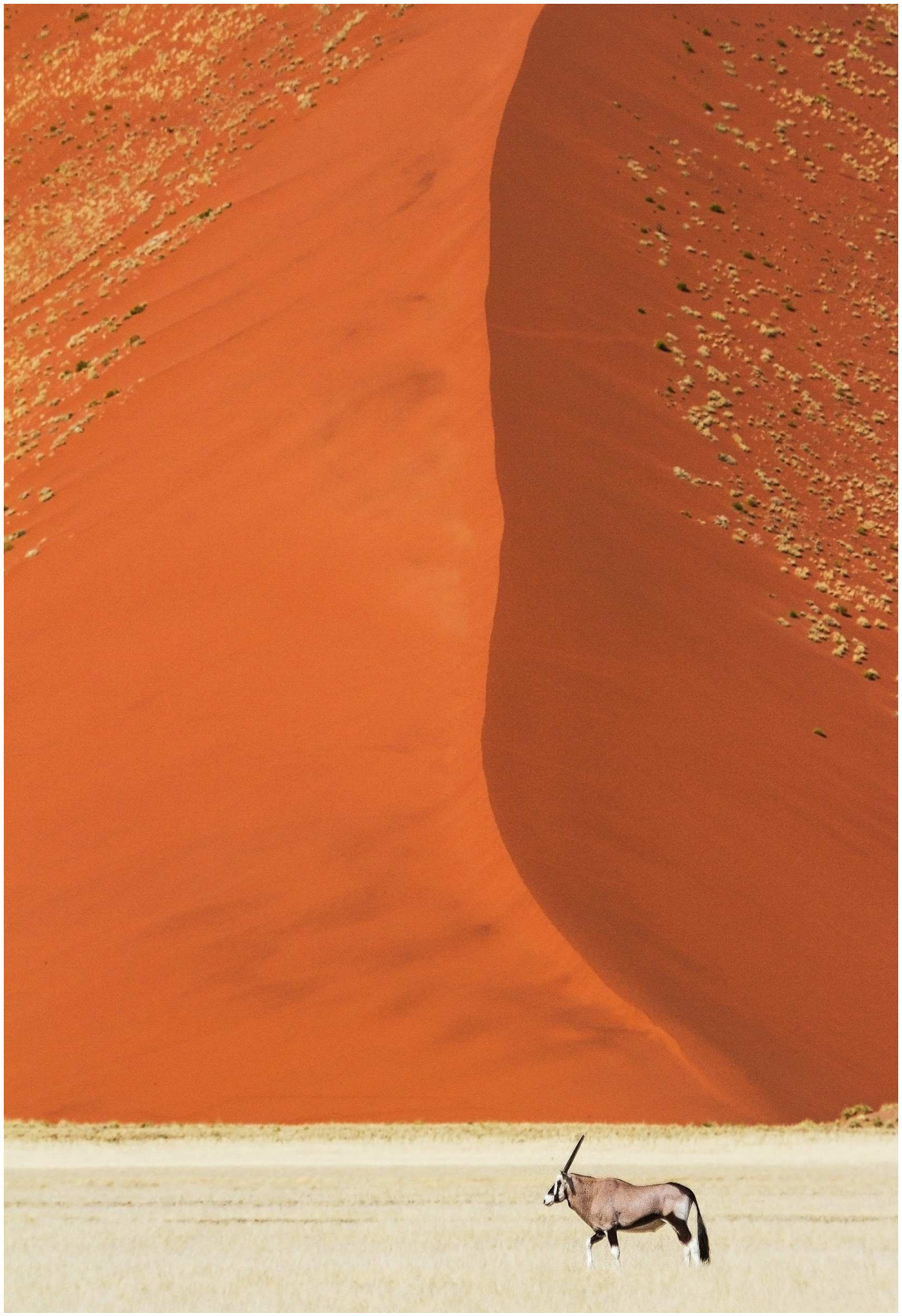
Lone tree below evening light on red dunes.



Oryx, dead tree and arrowhead dune.



Sinusoidal dune with springbok.



Sharp-edged dune with oryx.



A geometry textbook illustration of sand dunes.



Springbok below scalloped dunes



Google Earth image of Deadvlei. The clay pan of Deadvlei lies at the center of the image. Camelthorn trees are visible at the top end of the pan, close to where the approach trail can be seen crossing a low sand ridge which now blocks the river from the pan.



DEADVLEI

Dead Vlei means dead marsh or lake, and is the name of an awe-inspiring white clay pan at the heart of Sossusvlei. The clay pan was formed after rainfall, when the Tsauchab river flooded, creating temporary shallow pools where the abundance of water allowed camel thorn trees to grow. When the climate changed, drought hit the area, and sand dunes encroached on the pan, blocking the river from the area. The trees died, as there no longer was enough water to survive. There are some species of plants remaining, such as salsola and clumps of nara, adapted to surviving off the morning mist and very rare rainfall. The remaining skeletons of the trees, which are believed to be about 900 years old, are now black because the intense sun has scorched them. Though not petrified, the wood does not decompose because it is so dry. Although Deadvlei is surrounded by some of the highest sand dunes in the world, it is the skeletal trees which make it truly unique.

The contrast of black skeletal trees against the red dunes and white clay creates an iconic subject - one which can appear so abstract and unworldly that photographs look more like paintings. Dawn, when the trees are silhouetted against the apricot colored sand dunes is the optimal time to photograph, and the cloudless, dazzlingly blue sky adds to the stunning dichotomy of color. Dawn is also the time to absorb the spirit of the ancient trees in solitude, before the hordes of tourists arrive. But getting to Deadvlei so early presents some logistical difficulties, as the gates of the National Park open only an hour before sunrise. From there, it is a 60 km on paved road, several kilometers in 4wd low through deep sand, and a final hike through the dunes.

The highest density of trees is found at the northern end of the pan where the hiking trail enters, but I favored the opposite side of the 'forest' where the trees are more sparse and allowed for a simplified composition. In particular, there is a small grouping that includes some wonderfully sinuous trunks. The orange/red of the dunes form a striking backdrop, contrasting with the slightly blue-white of the clay pan, intensely colored from both the red sand itself and the warm sunlight shortly after dawn. The sun rises behind a large dune to the east, casting a shadow line that descends down the opposite dune. I was able to arrive just before the shadow reached the clay pan to photograph the trees silhouetted against the glowing distant dune while the pan remained in shadow. A little later, long shadows cast by the trees created playful compositions; but soon after the light became too harsh, throngs of tourists arrived, and it was time to seek shade for a long-overdue breakfast.



More like a painting than a photograph. Elegantly disported camelthorn trees form silhouettes against the glowing face of the far dune before the rising sun begins to touch the edge of the clay pan.



Two trees and a dune.



Shadowlands. Once the rising sun fully illuminates the clay pan the color of the dunes becomes much less saturated, but now the shadows become a subject in themselves.



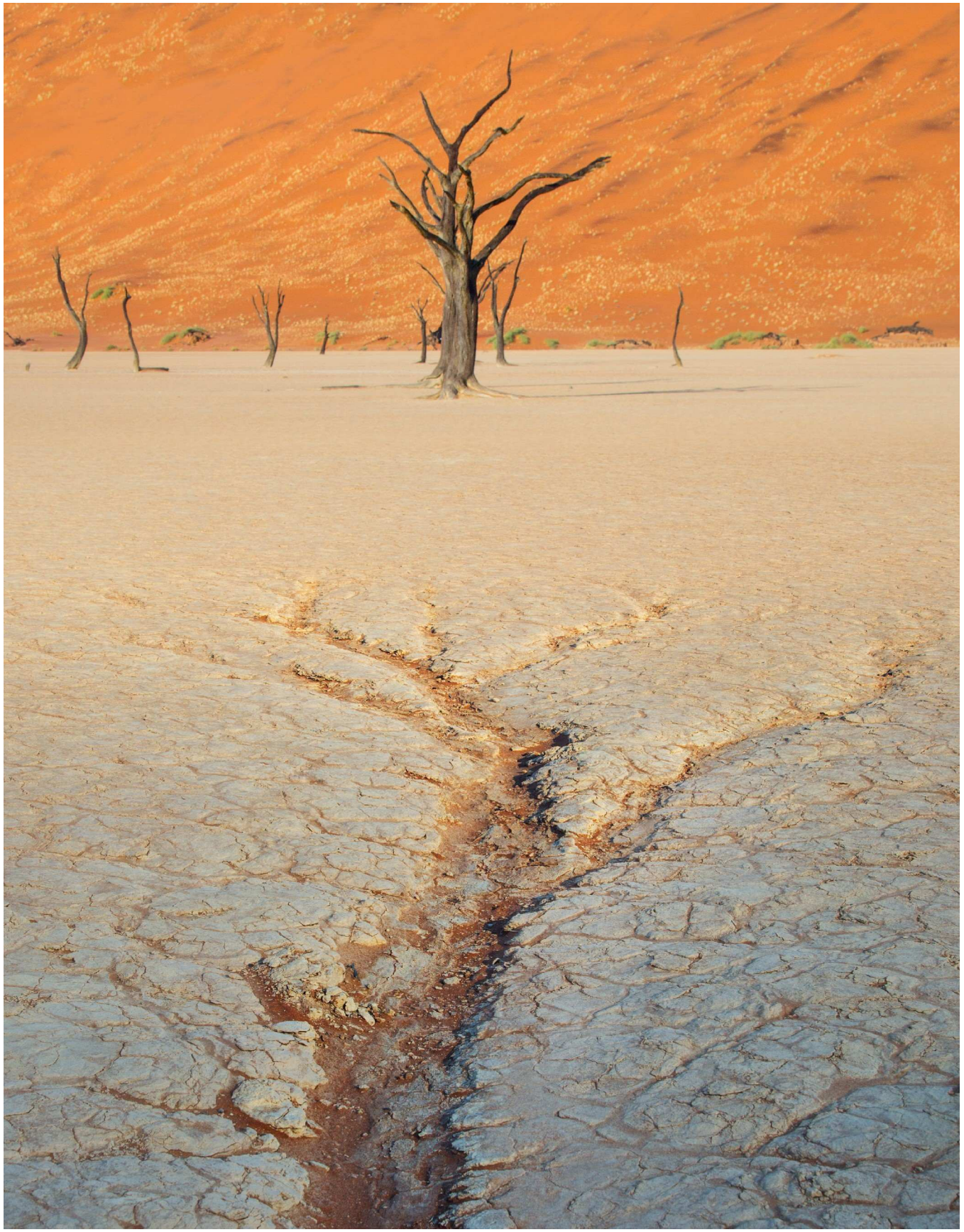
Roots mirroring branches mirroring shadows.



Lonely sentinels. A wider perspective on Deadvlei.



The disporting trees - a ground-level perspective.



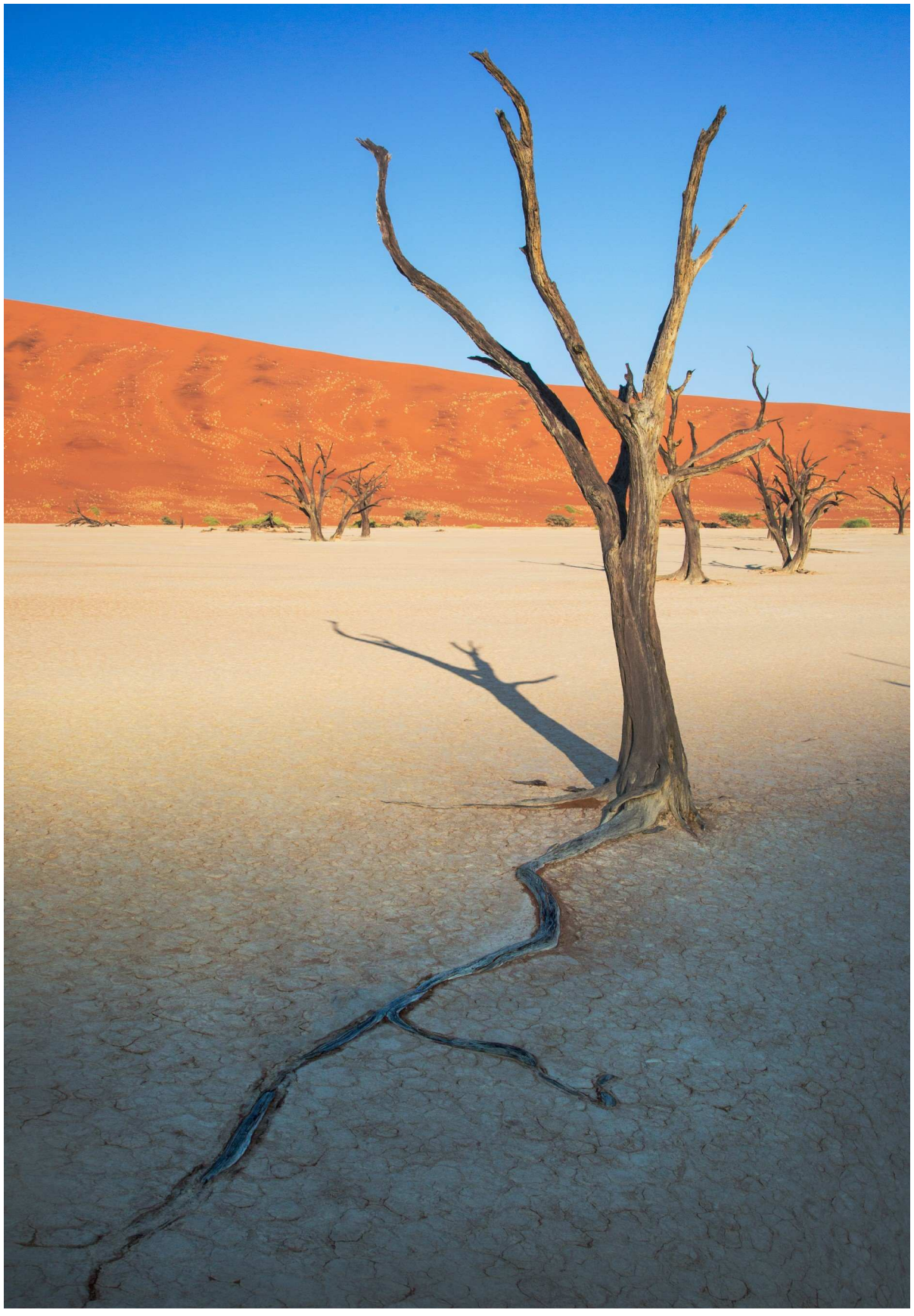
Dendritic drainage patterns.



Textures of the clay pan. Reminiscent of the Racetrack in Death Valley; but that boasts moving rocks, not dead camelthorn trees.



Camelthorn trees with oryx.



The edge of the light - roots and shadows



Martian sunrise over the endless gravel plains of the Namib desert below the rocks and campsite at Vogelferderberg.



Towering aloe dichotomous with sunstar .

DAMARALAND

On route from Sossusvlei to Etosha: Brandberg / Spitzkoppe / prehistoric flora

Damaraland is one of the most scenic areas in Namibia, a huge, untamed, ruggedly beautiful region that offers the more traveller a more adventurous challenge. Here there are prehistoric water courses with open plains and grassland, massive granite koppies and deep gorges. Towards the west, the geography changes dramatically with endless sandy wastes, that incredibly are able to sustain small, but wide-ranging, populations of desert-adapted elephant, black rhino, giraffe, ostrich and springbok.

Brandberg 'the fire mountain' is named after the effect created by the setting of the sun on its western face, which causes the granite massif to resemble a burning slag heap glowing red.

The Spitzkoppe between Usakos and Swakopmund is known as as the "Matterhorn of Namibia". Rising to a altitude of 1728 meres, the Spitzkoppe is not Namibia's highest mountain, however, due to its striking outlines, it is the most well-known mountain in the country. Situated in an endless, dry plain, the island of mountains can be seen from far away. The granite massif, which is part of the Erongo Mountains, was created by the collapse of a gigantic volcano more than 100 million years ago and the subsequent erosion, which exposed the volcanic rock, granite. Over millions of years the outer layer was carried off by wind erosion, exposing the granite intrusion.

For the botanically-minded in our party, there was a lot to look at in the apparent wasteland; the yellow Butter Trees; the Poison Tree (euphorbia virosa), which leaks an extremely poisonous white juice; towering, wonderfully symmetrical dichotomous aloe. The Welwitchia Drive leads to the Moon Landscape at the Swakop River and into the northern part of the Namib Naukluft Park, inhabited by the prehistoric plant, the *Welwitchia mirabilis*.



Crepuscular sunset rays through an aloe tree.



Welwichia mirabalis (the fossil plant) under dramatic skies



God rays over *Aloe asperifola* : Spitzkoppe



A hazy sunrise backlights *Euphorbia virosa*



Namibian sunrise through paired trees.



Sunstar through aloe branches.



Dramatic storm sunset over Brandberg - the highest mountain in Namibia.



Diagonal God-rays over grasses.



Aloe dichotomous in front of the granite walls at Spitzkoppe.



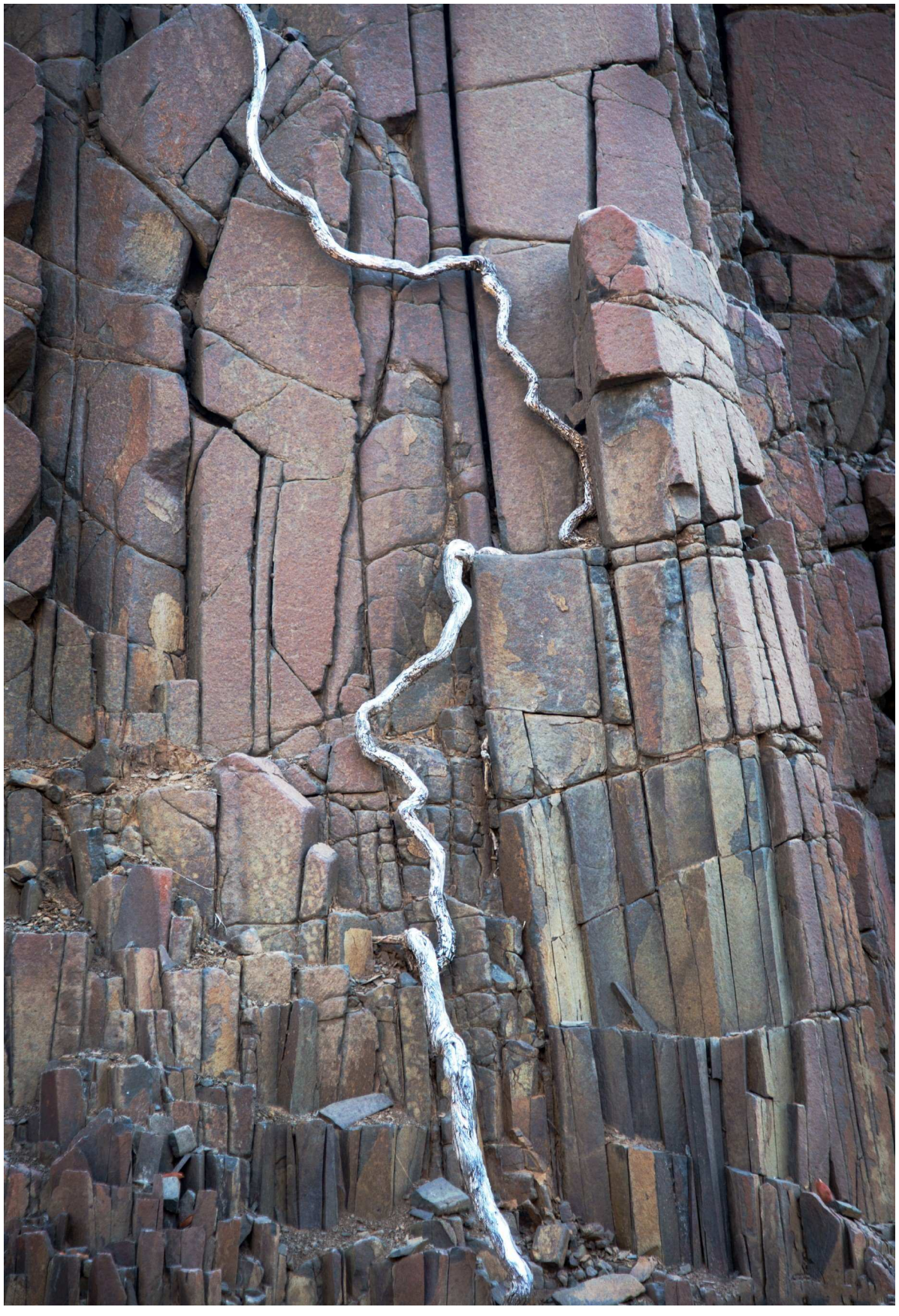
Aloe asperifola.



Suzie the meerkat.



Orange-headed lizard : seen near the White Lady pictographs.

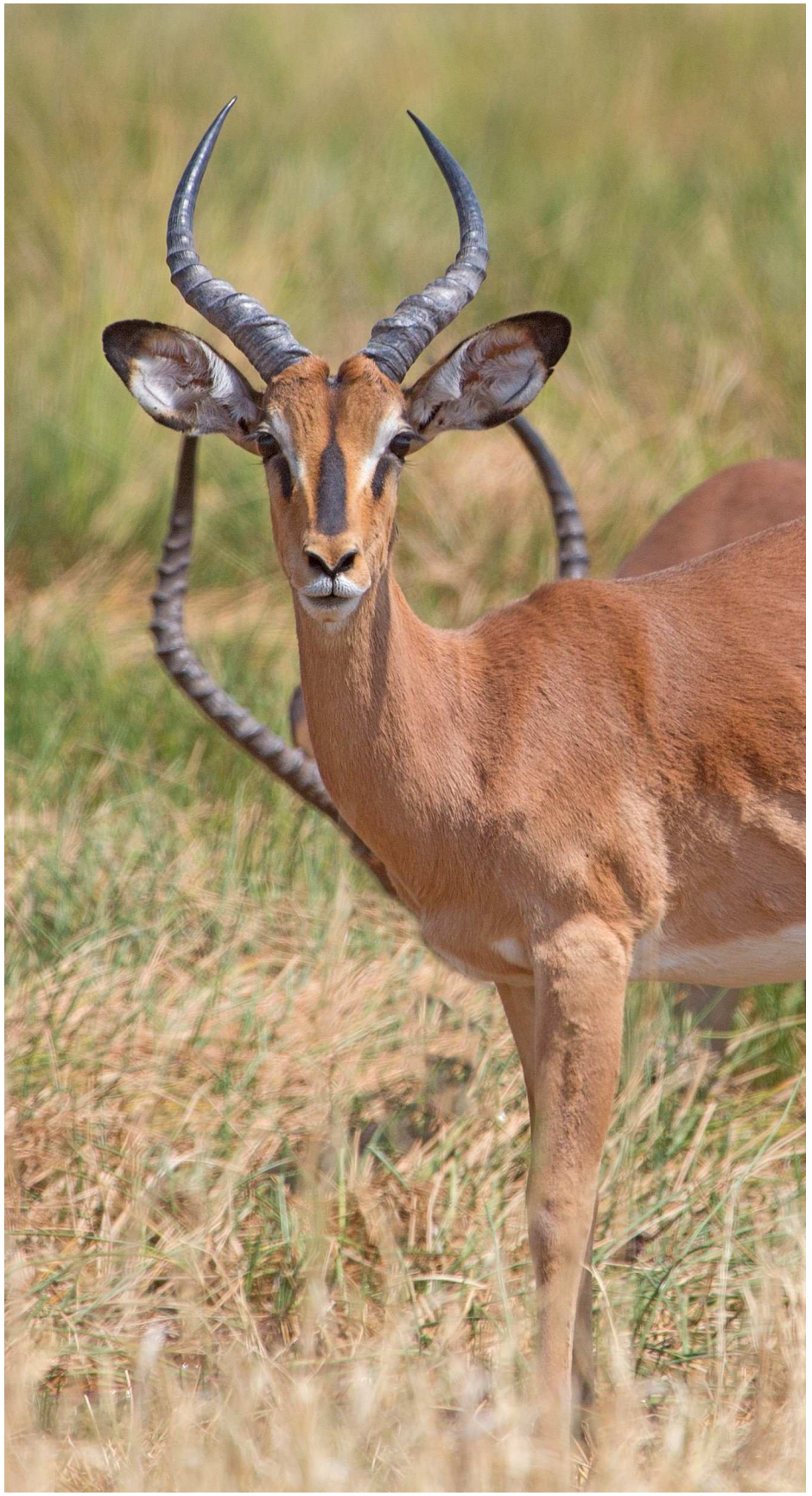


Roots : Organ Pipes, Damaraland.



Columnar basalt: Organ Pipes, Damaraland.





Framed impala.

ETOSHA

Etosha, is among the best wildlife viewing areas in Africa, certainly equalling better known locations in Kenya and Tanzania. The name Etosha means ‘place of dry water’, and the National Park encloses a huge, flat calcrete depression (or pan) of about 5 thousand square km. The ‘Pan’ provides a great, parched, silver-white backdrop of shimmering mirages to an area of semi-arid savannah grassland and thorn scrub. The pan itself contains water only after very good rains and sometimes for only a few days each year. It was dry when we visited; a dazzling expanse of cracked white mud. Although animals sometimes wander out onto the pan, we failed to encounter any such photographic opportunities but had better luck at the waterholes in the brush ringing the southern margin of the pan.

The park is served by three well established rest camps Okaukuejo, Halali and Namutoni, which we visited in that order, traveling west to east. The flood-lit waterhole close to the Okaukeujo Lodge attracts the most wildlife in the National Park. At night we were able to see the rare black rhinoceros and lots of elephants and antelopes. All three camps provided good daytime access to numerous surrounding waterholes, but we had little success with finding night-time visitors to the floodlit waterholes at Halali and Namutoni. By consolation, Namutoni is built around an old German fort, and it was a wonderful experience to eat dinner under the night sky within the courtyard of the fort.





Zebra line-up at Olifanstsbad waterhole





Blowing dust.



Kicking up the dust.



Humpback symmetry



Trunk tussle.



Backlit zebra before sunset.





Zebra dust trails.



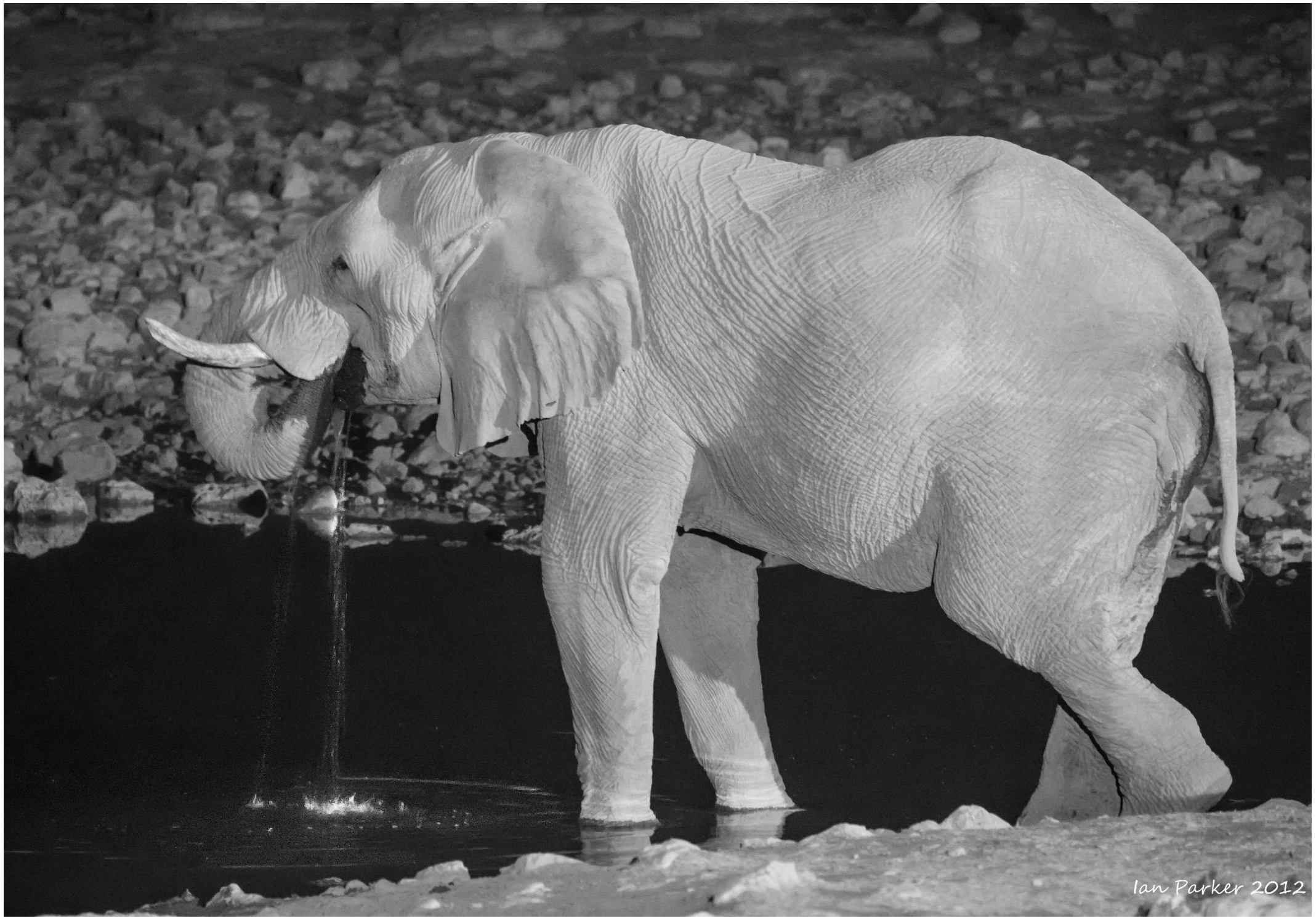


Zebra pairs.





Night-time rhino reflections: Okaukuejo waterhole.



Drinking elephant by floodlight: Okaukuejo waterhole.



Skittish oryx.



Fleeing impala.



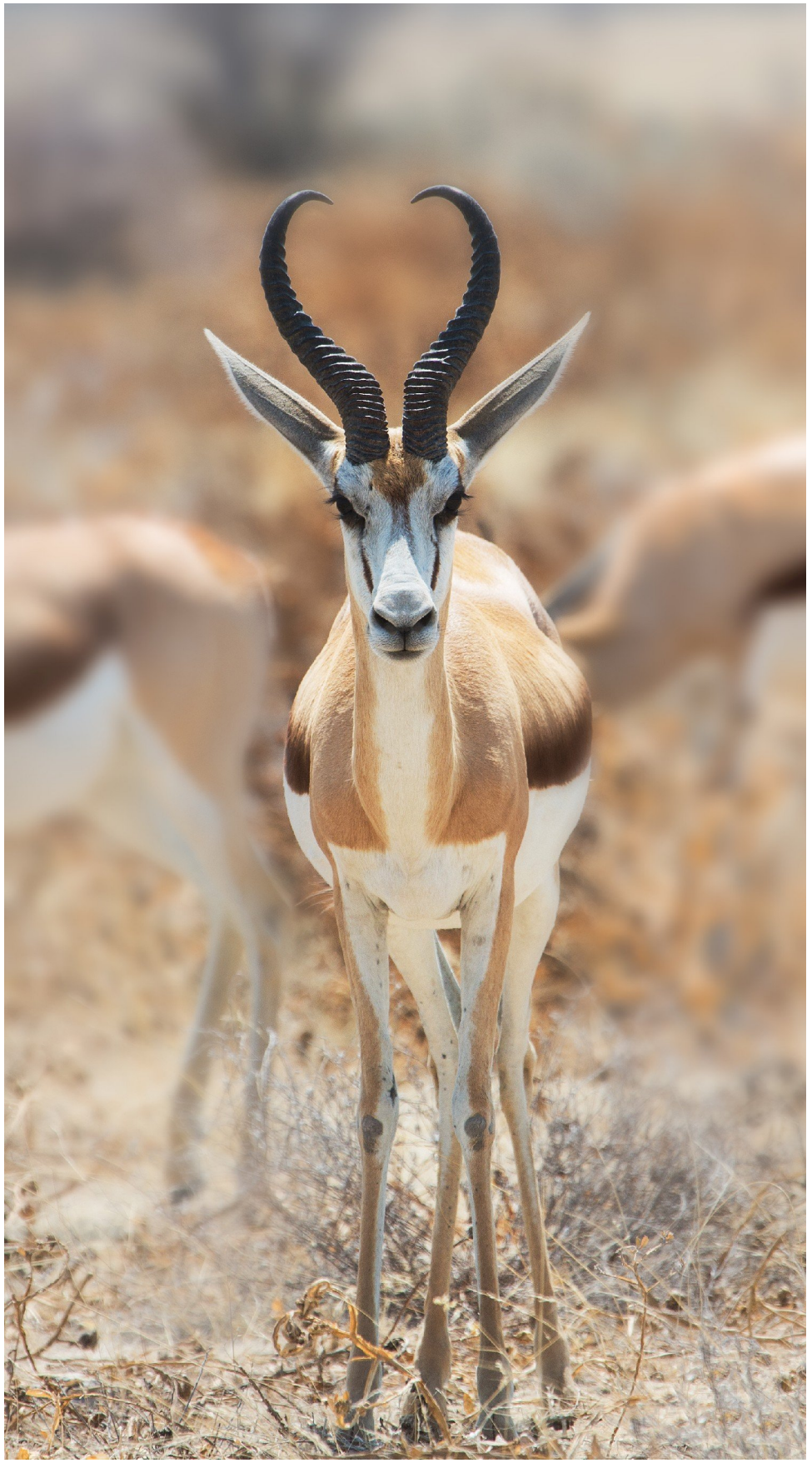
Elephant troupe marching toward a waterhole.



Elephants in dust haze.



A medley of springbok horns.



Springbok portrait.



Oryx horn frame.



Dik-dik portrait.



Lone tree on the edge of the vast Etosha pan.



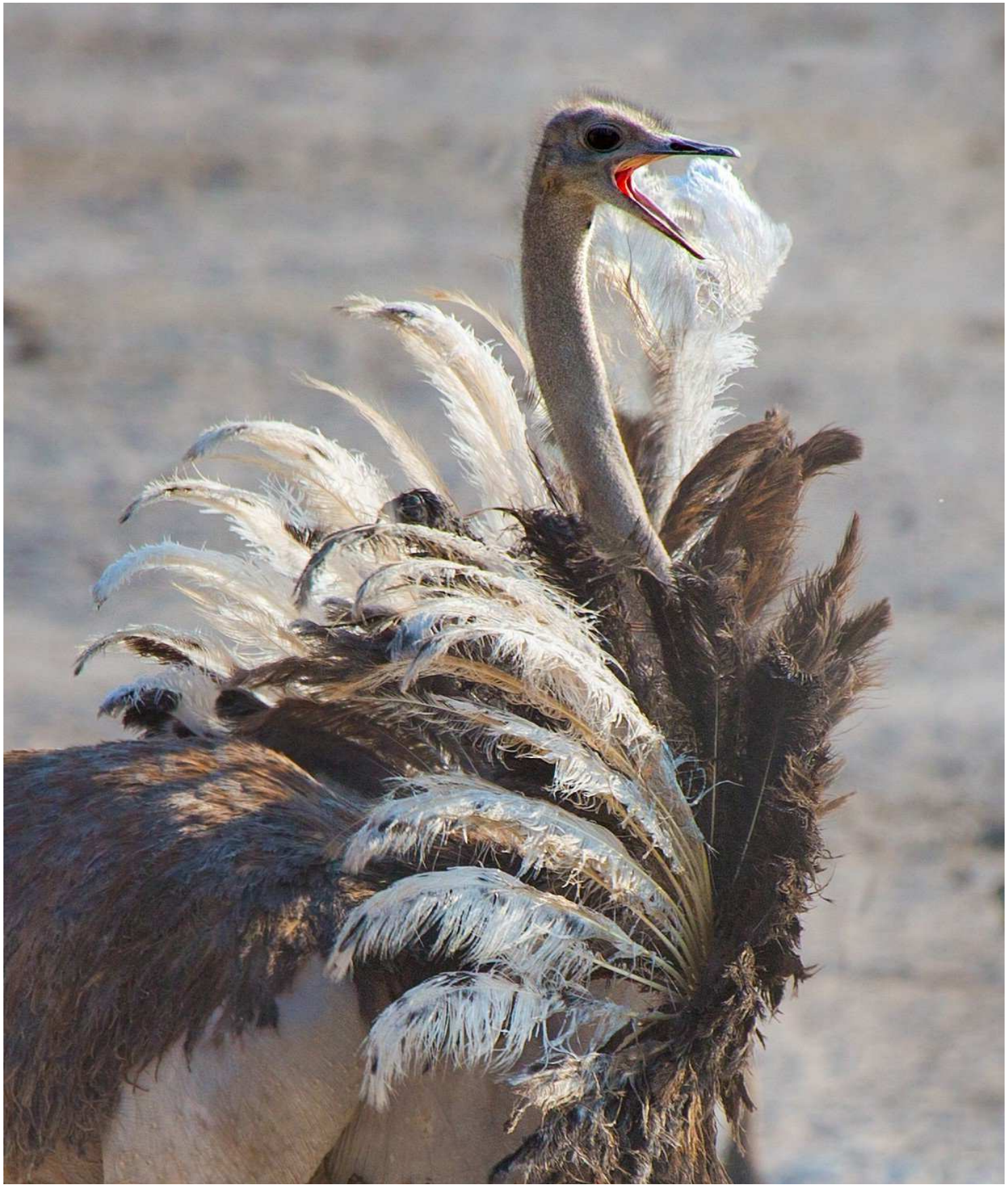
Twilight reflections in Okaukuejo waterhole.



Insect flight patterns around a waterhole floodlight.



Cloud of red-billed quela.



Aggravated ostrich.



Lilac-breasted roller.



Zebra pair necking.



Lion and lioness after a kill.



Sunset with zebra.



Moonrise over Okaukuejo waterhole, with elephant and tree.



Zebra symmetry.





Jousting oryx with a disinterested onlooker.



Greater kudu procession.

CAPE TOWN

En route to Namibia

There are no direct flights to Namibia from the US. We flew to Cape Town, staying there for a few days before flying on to Windhoek.

Cape Town must have one of the most dramatic settings of any major city, with the near vertical cliffs and flat-topped summit of Table Mountain towering 1,000 m above, and with Devil's Peak and Lion's Head on either side forming a dramatic mountainous backdrop enclosing the central area of Cape Town. A ridge-line extending from Lion's Head to Signal Hill was easily accessible from our hotel, and was a nice place for a short hike away from the bustle of the city, with expansive views over the city and harbor.



Lion's Head from the road to Signal Hill.



Bo Kaap district, Cape Town



Viewed from Signal Hill, the Devil's Peak and Lion's Head bracket a double rainbow over Cape Town.





Spectacular sunset clouds above Table Mountain, viewed from the evening cruise.



Storm light in the wine country above Stellenbosch.



Enticing doorway : Simonsig Winery : Stellenbosch.



Window detail : Simonsig Winery : Stellenbosch



Pre-dawn panorama of Cape Town from Signal Hill.



A TRAVEL GUIDE TO NAMIBIA

In August and September 2012 I travelled to Namibia in a small group with my wife and photographic elph, Anne; son, Robin; and two colleagues, Eric and Vince, who are both photographers and keen botanists. Before leaving I had corresponded by e-mail with Beat Steffen, a Swiss photographer who had made several trips to Namibia. He kindly sent me a detailed suggested itinerary. We followed this quite closely, and found it to be so helpful that (with Beat's permission) I have reproduced it here to make it more widely accessible for others planning to visit the country.

GETTING TO NAMIBIA

There are no direct flights from the US. We flew to Windhoek from Cape Town, which is well worth visiting in its own right. From Los Angeles there are several flights to Cape Town connecting through Europe (London, Frankfurt ...), but we chose to fly Emirates via Dubai. Although a few thousand miles longer, the service, food, seat comfort and in-flight entertainment was the best I have experienced in economy class. It is a REALLY long flight from Dubai to LAX, but you do get to pass directly above the North Pole.

CAPE TOWN AND THE CAPE



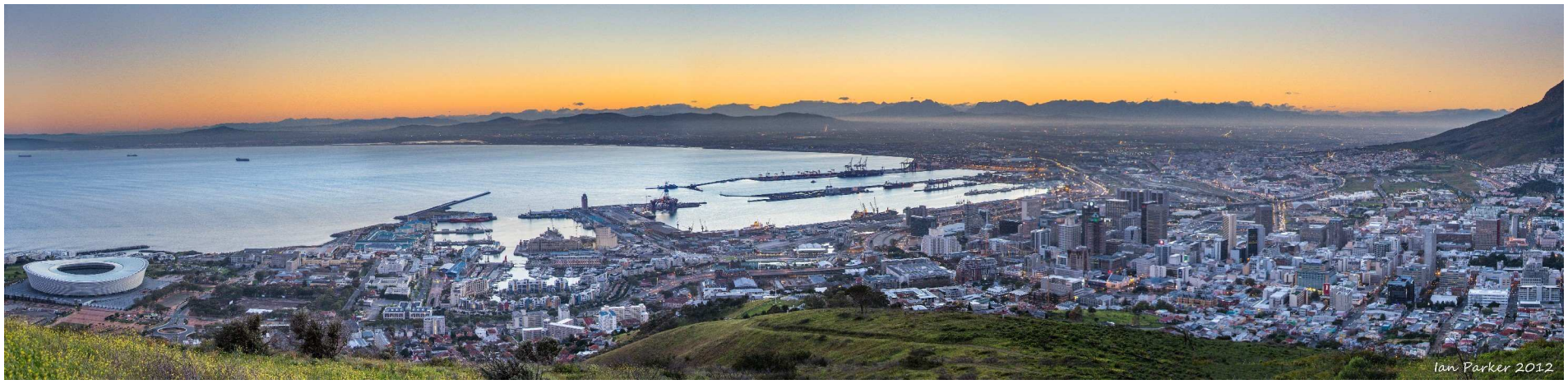
Cape wine country



Bo Kaap district, Cape Town



Cape Town sunrise



Cape Town panorama before sunrise from Signal Hill



Double rainbow over Cape Town and Lion's Head



Vinyards at Stellenbosch



CAR RENTAL IN NAMIBIA:

We rented from 4WD Camping Car Hire in Windhoek. It’s run by former Germans and everything pre-ordered is ready and in good shape: http://www.camping-carhire.com/
- You will have to mention them your flight connections and they will pick you up at the airport which is about 25 miles out of Windhoek
- As a photographer, I recommend renting a double cab with roof tent. A double cab will enable you to have your gear there and reachable within short time. Furthermore you could move on the back seat in case there is something interesting on the side where your wife is.
- They offer it fully equipped (incl. cutlery, towels etc.). In addition I recommend asking them for two additional green plastic boxes to store food.
- Ask them for a good street map (as far as I remember it was included in the rental but if not, it costs little).

4WD Camping Car hires out vehicles like this. A Nissan quad-cab 4wd truck, with a shell to securely hold gear, and one or two ingenious fold-out tents on the roof. The shell is already quite packed with a second spare tire, gas stove, electric fridge and camping gear. So, it is best to minimize the amount of extra stuff you bring, and to pack in duffel bags/backpacks rather than hard cases. Space in the back of the cab is also cramped; OK for 3 people in total, but would be very cramped for 4. Other firms rent out Toyota Hilux vehicles - similarly set-up but larger.

We had good experience with this company; in particular they arranged emergency vehicle repair in Walvis Bay over a holiday weekend when the garage was ordinarily shut.



A SUGGESTED ITINERARY FOR A 2-3 WEEK TRIP WITH EMPHASIS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

(Beat's suggestions are in Roman type, my comments in sidebars are in *italics*)

Windhoek/Rehoboth (1 day). I usually arrive in Windhoek during the morning, pick the car up and go to the grocery store to get all I need. There is a fairly big one not far away from the rental car company and they will explain you how to get there. What I usually buy in bigger quantities is bottled water. You will find it later on again without problem but here it's by far cheaper. Windhoek is not ugly but I prefer to stay outdoor and usually leave towards Rehoboth in the afternoon. Maybe you want to buy a book in Windhoek regarding the different mammals, birds and reptiles you may see during your trip that explains you a bit about how and where they live, how they behave etc. Arriving at Rehoboth here is a dam with a lodge and they also offer camp sites beautifully located overlooking the lake. This drive will take you about one hour. Money: the official currency in Namibia is the Namib $ which is equal to the Rand in South Africa (you can also pay with Rand in Namibia and sometimes you get Rand as a change but you can't pay with Namib $ in South Africa).

Sossusvlei (2 days: longer better) From Rehoboth head over the Spreetshoogte Pass where you enjoy a fantastic view over the Namib desert. Also the drive down is fairly spectacular but not dangerous. After the pass and on the way towards Sesriem (that's where the park entrance is) there is a little village / gas station called Solitaire. Please check out the "Streuselkuchen" (cake) here as it is truly delicious and if you like good bread – that's the place to get it! On This street there is already a good chance to spot Springbok and/or Zebra. You should arrive in Sesriem in the early afternoon. If possible, try to make reservations for the camp site as it is always very well booked. As you as a photographer know, the huge sand dunes are best photographed before sunset and after sunrise. So if you are up to you should drive to Dune 45 (which is the first big dune next to the street with a parking lot) and take some shots in that area. In the morning, make sure you know when the park gate opens and be there on time. It will allow you to arrive on time for the sunrise at Dune 45 that I recommend climbing if you like (although the best part is to run down on the side of the dune afterwards). Continue the road towards Sossusvlei and enjoy the spectacular scenery and make sure you have enough memory with you…In Sossusvlei there are some big trees that provide shadow over the hottest time of the day (although I don't expect it to be extremely hot in late August). Over this time I usually stay in the shadow and read a book. Then (and you MUST NOT) miss this, go to the parking lot with the sign "Dead Vlei" or "Deadvlei" which is maybe one mile back on the street. From there you will need to walk about 1-1.5 miles and end up at the place where the Tsauchab river flew into hundreds of years ago. The trees are still there but are dead. The ground is light grey and the dunes reddish – gorgeous in the afternoon light! Please make sure you don't leave too late because they close the date at a certain time. If you have enough time you may want to stop once or twice on the way back. There is also a fairly good chance to see Oryx antelopes and ostriches and sometimes even wild cats. If you are up to you can go into the park again the next morning. Then go to the ranger station and ask for a permit (incl. a map) to get to Blutkuppe, a remote section in the Namib Desert on the way to Swakopmund.

Sossusvlei/Deadvlei is a truly world-class location. We stayed only 2 nights, which was a mistake. There is enough to keep a photographer occupied and entranced for 4 days or more. It is best (almost essential) to stay in the campground within the outer gate at Sossusvlei so as to get a head-start driving to the dunes at sunrise. There is an overflow campsite here, and even if you can't get advance reservations chances are you can just show up and find a site. The inner gate opens about 30 min before sunrise. From there it is a 60km drive on paved road, 5 km in 4wd through deep sand, then a 15 min hike to get to Deadvlei. If you are first in line at the gate, you can get to Deadvlei while the dune is still in partial shadow. On the way back allow plenty of time for wildlife viewing along the paved road, with fantastic dunes as a backdrop.



Blutkuppe (1 day). This is a place that not too many people know – I'm pretty sure you will feel lonely but again, Namibia is not dangerous at all! Blutkuppe is basically a huge round rock with a primitive campground (make sure you have firewood with you to make a BBQ). The rock has an amazing color at sunset that you can't miss! A few miles from Blutkuppe is also a natural arch that is worth a short detour (depending on the timing you can also go there the next morning).



Owing to a detour necessitated by vehicle trouble) we also stayed a night at Vogelferderberg camp. The map you get from the ranger station includes this, and several other camps in the Namib Naukluft park. The campsites are nestled under an overhanging rock, and involve driving up a slickrock slope. We had the place to ourselves,and it had a wonderful feel of isolation, set among hundreds of square kilometers of flat, barren desert.



Swakopmund (2 days). From Blutkuppe you head towards Swakopmund (forget Walvis Bay – really not interesting). On the way to Swakopmund there is a small place where you will find the so-called Welwitschia Mirabilis, really old plants that only grow here (check your travel guide for details). Further (or before?) the area looks like a bit like on the moon… In Swakopmund it's best to take a hotel as it is fairly humid and cold (usually foggy). I recommend Sam's Giardino House, run by a Swiss guy that lives there since ages (please say hello from me, maybe he remembers). He also serves excellent dinners (great wine selection) and delicious breakfast. In Swakopmund you may want to visit the tannery where they make (among other stuff) local shoes made from Kudu (antelope) leather.

The Welwitschia and other strange plants in this area are worth visiting (being with botanists, I had no option!), as is the lunar landscape, but we did not enjoy Swakopmund. Indeed, I would recommend omitting it from an itinerary. The coast is cold, foggy and barren - though we did eat a very good seafood lunch in Walvis Bay.





Heenties Bay / Spitzkoppe / Bulls Party (3 days or so) You will long for warm temperatures after Swakopmund! Head North to see one of the largest seal colonies in the world (it really stinks here…). In the afternoon of the same day you head to Spitzkoppe, a true highlight for every photographer! At the entrance, please ask for a camp site next to the bridge, a natural arch that is as beautiful as the most beautiful ones in Arches N.P. There are about 3 sites that are just 50 to 100 yards away. I'm currently traveling but will send you some shots when I'm back home. The arch is best photographed in the morning but also evening is really good. There are some rock dassies here, a small mammal similar to a marmot which is actually the closest relative to the elephant (no joke). Stay 2 nights here. It's a primitive campground but one of the most beautiful ones in all Africa that I know. There are some rock paintings / engravings in this area – please ask at the entrance where you can find those places. On the way to Spitzkoppe you will see a lot of little booth on the side of the street. Local Damaras sell semi-precious stones like aquamarine, black / green tourmaline etc and some are really beautiful and don't cost much (don't buy the shaped / polished ones as they are normally not from the area). Make sure you negotiate and start around 10% of the price they give you. Normally you "meet" around 30%. Not far away from Spitzkoppe there is a place called "Bulls Party", also worth a trip and a nice possibility to walk around in the area (please check you travel guide for more details). When you walk around make sure to have plenty of water with you but you know that from the Southwest in the US. If you are short on time, skip Bulls Party.

Sunset glow on the rocks at Spitzkoppe

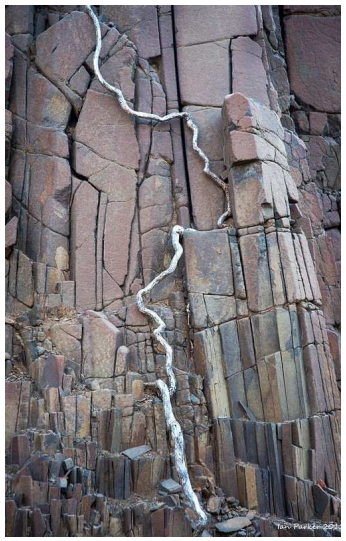


Early-morning "God-beams" at Spitzkoppe

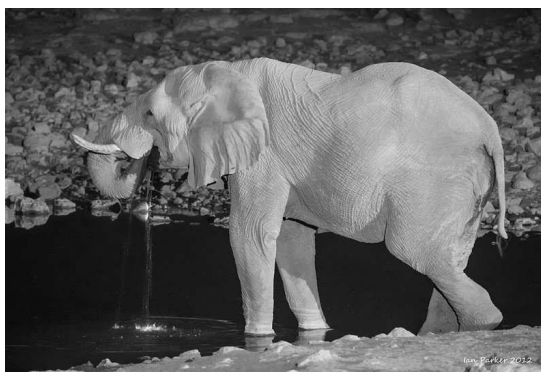


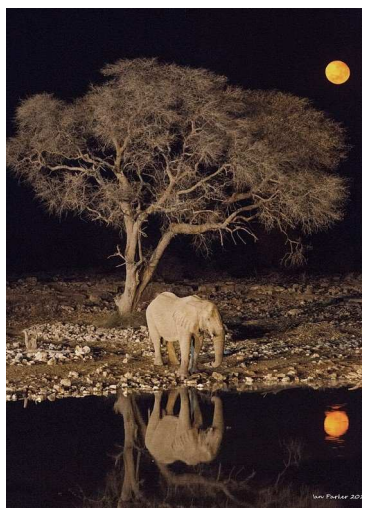
Twyfelfontein (1 day). Definitely worth visiting! Twyfelfountain means “doubtful source” and you will be able to walk there (with a guide only). The source is not spectacular but there are some beautiful rock engravings along the way you walk. The guides are well educated and know a lot about the area. Some miles before Twyfelfountain (the road is a dead end as far as I remember) you cross a (probably dry) riverbed. Just after the bridge there used to be a campground called Aba Huab which is nicely located. Palmwag (1-2 days) I don’t have a map here but there are (as far as I remember) two routes to Etosha N.P. Either you go directly via Kamanjab (which is on the South side of Anderson Gate of Etosha N.P. or you make a detour through Palmwag. Not far away from Twyfelfontein there is a Petrified Forest – not as beautiful as the one in Arizona but definitely worth spending some time there. If you decide to go via Palmwag, make sure you have a reservation (you will find them on the web). It’s a nice lodge (not sure if you can camp) and they offer trekking to spot black rhinos and desert elephants. Some of the guides used to be poachers (they normally poached for the meat and little money) but now the lodge offers them jobs which allows them to take care of the family. This is a fairly remote area but absolutely beautiful! Funny enough they also have a swimming pool and sometimes you see elephants coming really close.

Etosha (4-6 days): When you leave Palmwag in the morning you will be in Etosha in the later afternoon, just in time for the afternoon game drive! There are big chance that you will already see Kudu antelopes, giraffes etc. next to the road, but entering the park is overwhelming! Try to get reservation on the internet for the camp sites. If you are not successful or go there already a day before you planned, go there anyway and try – there are almost always no-shows. I recommend staying at least 2 nights in Okaukuejo which is the most western camp you can stay (from the side you come in). It has the most beautiful waterhole from the 3 camps within Etosha. It’s almost impossible to go to sleep because there is always something going on and there is some light at the waterhole which allows you to see animals that are nocturnal. You will have an almost 100% chance here to see the rare black rhino and they mirror beautifully in the little waterhole . Just after sunset it also becomes really “kitschy” because from where you stand you look westwards and it’s extremely colorful. Try to stay 2 days at each camp (if your plans will allow it) as all camps (especially the water holes around the camps) offer opportunities to see different species. The easternmost camp (Namutoni) is built around a former fort, and is the most attractive of the three. Dinner at the open air restaurant within the walls of the fort is a very nice experience. But, the waterhole at Namutoni appears to be infrequently visited by wildlife.



Basalt columns near Twyfelfountain







Floodlit waterhole reflections at Okaukuejo

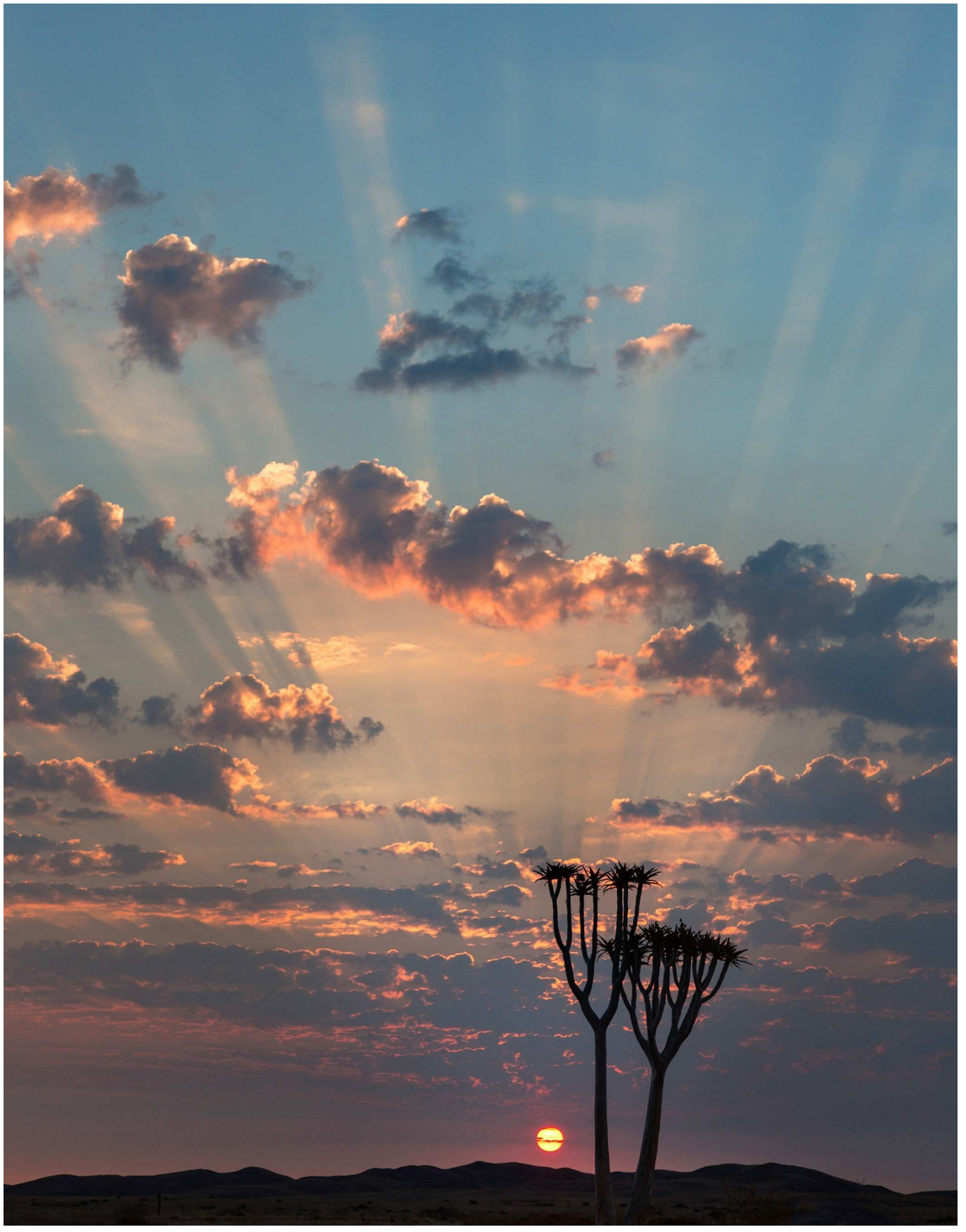


The park gates open and close strictly at sunrise and sunset, and you must be back inside the fence during the night. Given that the best light, and most active times for wildlife are around sunrise and set, we got in the line of vehicles waiting for the gates to open, and tried to time our arrival back after the afternoon drive with only a small safety margin.



Waterberg (1 day): From Etosha you head to Waterberg, also a N.P. Nice walk on a plateau (about 1-1.5 hours) that offers beautiful views. There is a campground but you can also go to a place called Waterberg Lodge that I like a lot (small but really nice bungalows). The guy that runs it offers sundown drive to "Little Serengeti“ where you can see lots of different animals. Before that he could bring you to a nearby place where they look after cheetahs that were sick or that farmers brought because they were chasing and killing their livestock.

Okahandja (1 day): The last night I usually stay in the Okahandja Lodge in Okahandja, about 45 minutes to one hour North of Windhoek. They also have a campground but the lodge offers you to pack all your stuff in a “non-sandy” place. They also serve good stuff for dinner. In Okahandja there is a beautiful market where people sell animals, bowls, cutlery etc. carved from wood. One of the best places I know to get beautiful and authentic souvenirs. Remember what I told you regarding negotiating… When I travel to Africa I usually take along old jeans, T-Shirts and sneakers that I trade here when the trip ends. In case they are not willing to go down with the price, throw in a T-shirt and the world may look different. The price is in my opinion of second importance – the great deal here is the experience!





Annie Robin



Eric

blurb

