

As this is desert country you must be prepared to carry sufficient water for your entire party. You can expect to find water at some of the Himba settlements but for your own peace of mind do not rely on these...

Close to Otupo is Kamanjab, where 2 km north of the town is Mopane Lodge where there is a pleasant camping site at reasonable fees. There are also self-catering bungalows. Otupo, meaning 'the end in Herero, has a service station where you should stock up with fuel...

Epupa Falls is 74 kilometres from Otjiandara. There are a number of roads leaving Otjiandara, therefore take care with the directions to ensure that you select the correct route to Epupa Falls. Directions start at Tinas Hebe's shop. From the shop head for the gate just past the unexcused military base on the left-hand side of the road...

Should you wish to visit Ruacana, Epupa Falls is 184 kilometres away along a tough, steep track, likely to take the entire day to negotiate. Almost all of the tracks that follow the Kunene are particularly rough, so much so that some have become graveyards of off-road trailers and caravans.

It is approximately 157 kms from Epupa to Otjiandara but you can expect to take all day to travel this section. You begin by back-tracking from Epupa Falls to Otjiandara along the same route you followed to reach the Falls. Otjiandara is only 63 kilometres from Otjiandara but you can expect to spend up to 5 hours driving the distance as the track is very slow going.

From this point, road option-2, from Otjiandara. OPTION-2 Otupo, Omumbukha (Baaitje), Khowarib Schlucht, Sesfontein, Opuwo, Otjiandara, Marienfluss, Hartmann Mountains, Purros, Sesfontein, Min 8 days. It is important to carry a well stocked first-aid kit, as medical help is far from easy in the event of an emergency.

The best time of the year to visit is in the cooler winter months from April to September. Summers can be unbearably hot with temperatures soaring into the mid and upper 40s. During winter, but days are still guaranteed, as daytime temperatures often reach 35°C, while during the hours of darkness temperatures can be expected to drop as low as 5°C.

It is important that your vehicles are equipped with recovery gear and each vehicle must carry a fire-extinguisher as sections of the trail traverse grasslands where the risk of fire caused by grass caught under the vehicle is great and where you will frequently need to stop and check the underside of your vehicle.

My stay in Sesfontein was highlighted by the rescue of an adventurous English couple who had gone in search of elephant and got themselves well and truly bogged down in the river bed. Still, they saw the elephant and I did!

DEPART SESOENTEN - OPUWO Separation Point by heading east along the same road used to enter the town. Travel for 11 km and take the left turn to Otupo. The track is a good one for the first thirty kilometres or so, and then steepens and deteriorates into a rutted track, slow going but not overly tedious.

OPUWO If you have not yet seen the striking Himba women, Opuwo is where you will find many. It is true that many dress to impress the tourists, but nevertheless their appearance is striking. Opuwo is a comparatively large town where reliable supplies of diesel and petrol is found as well as general goods, cool drinks, liquor and food.

Head back out of town, returning to the intersection west of the town. Take the D5703 road, which begins as quite a good road but after about 50 km deteriorates into a 4x4-only track. At 33 km there is a water hole on the right and then a river crossing at 42 km.

Van Zyl's Pass has earned the same reputation as Lesotho's Sani Pass once had, as a remote, forbidding and dangerous challenge. Unlike Sani Pass, it is still a challenge, but it is not forbidding nor dangerous. It is a dramatic descent of approximately 572 metres over a distance of 10.4 km, an average drop of 1:18.

Van Zyl's Pass will take you to Otjiandara. Turn left to Van Zyl's Pass. I suggest that you collect firewood before you descend the pass, because there is none available until the Kunene is reached, and even then it is scarce.

Van Zyl's Pass is the easterly entrance to the spectacular Marienfluss. I use the word spectacular reservedly because this is the kind of desert landscape that makes me get into my vehicle, and drive for four or five days, just to see, taste, smell and feel.

Another feature of the Marienfluss are the circular patches of bare, sterile ground in the grassland, sometimes called fairy circles. The patches vary in size from two to five metres in diameter and on sloping ground they are usually oval in shape.

It is important that you reach Otjiandara before nightfall as the threat of fire in the Marienfluss is very real and there are no suitable campsites where you can safely build a fire at night.

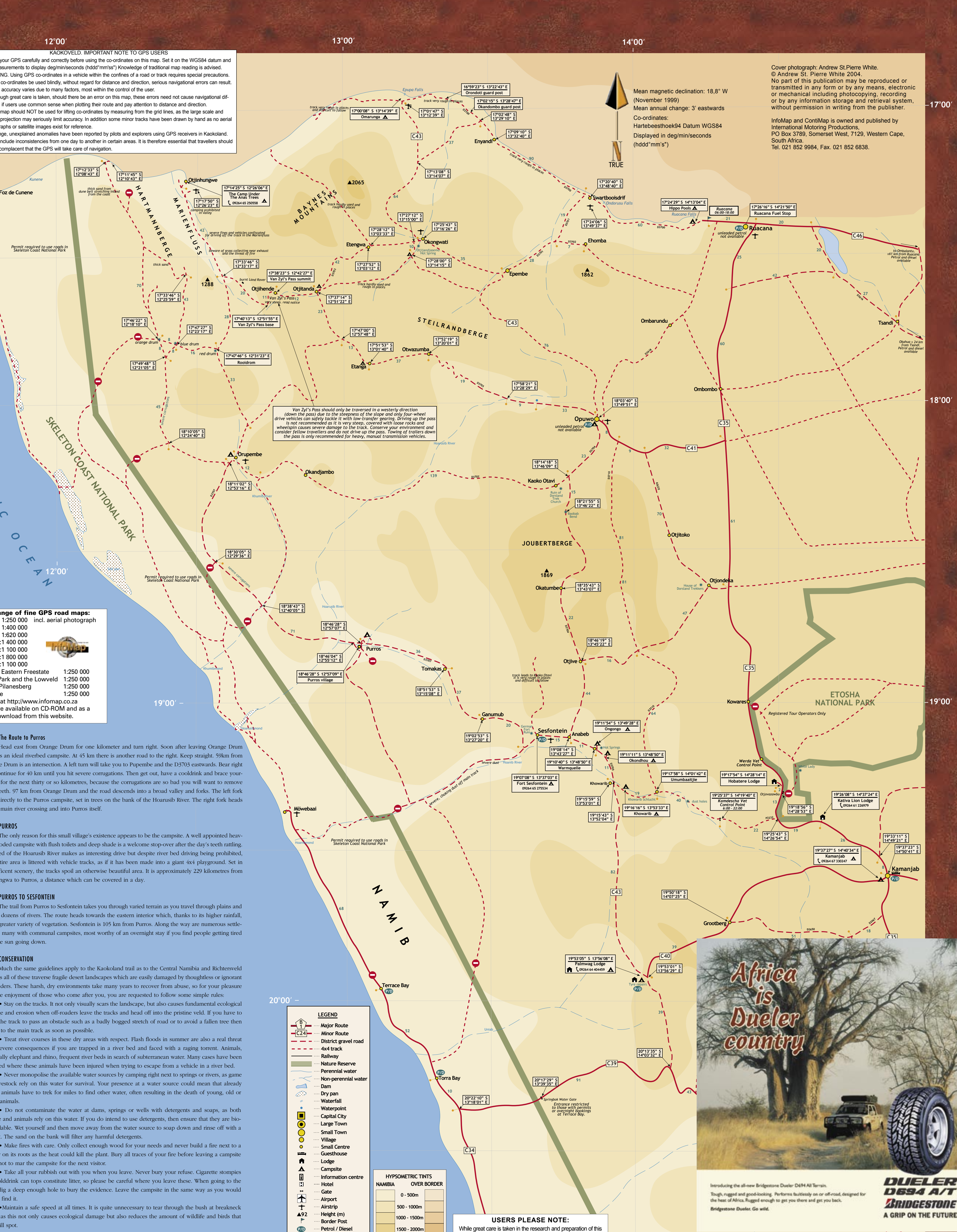
53 km from the bottom of Van Zyl's Pass Otjiandara river bed is crossed and the final approach to the Otjiandara camp and the 'Camp Under the Ana Tree' on the banks of the Kunene River. The river camping site is by far more pleasant and only marginally more expensive.

From Otjiandara the trail returns for 43 km and then splits at the 'Marienfluss intersection' (see GPS table). The right fork will take you to Rooib Dam. Many who visit the area are surprised at Rooibdam, because that is all it is - a real drum. There are two other drums in the immediate vicinity, all three used as landmark because in a land devoid of landmarks of almost any kind.

The route now takes you through Orupembe where you will find a large windmill which serves as the focal point of a number of Himba settlements in the area. Once past Orupembe the landscape changes again and you travel along a badly corrugated road through broad, flat country where the mustard bushes (Salvadora persica) flourish.

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