

Forth Region Namibia Expedition 2009



Back Row (left to right): Sandy Jack, Roy Davidson, Lewis Blaney, Jamie Steel, Colin Hastie, Douglas Horn, Gavin Lauder, Liam McKell, Richard Mulholland, James Cowie, Gavin Muirhead, Stan Sanderson, Ian McCall, Andrew Summers, Callum Mair, Alex. Duncan;

Second Back Row: David Mackie, Andrew McDonald, David Hodgkinson, Samantha Paterson, Robert Stirling, Kate McFarlane, Donald Mitchell, Clare Matthews, Amy Murray, Ross Imlach, Sam Beard, Andrew Hall, Simon Wells, Connor Tait, Colin Mackintosh, Vincent Farquhar;

Second Front Row: Rosemary Fletcher, John Spruce, Bret Smith, Fern Gaughan, Grant Collier, Sara Brockbank, Lynne Russell, Avril Robertson, Claire Cowie, Isabel Bain, Zoe Mackie, Kirsti Macdonald, Andrew Greenhill, Ross Agnew, *Paulina (Namibian Rover)*, Murray Horn;

Front Row: Colin Smith, Scott Stirling, Stephen Cosgrove, Graeme Stirling, Gerry McPeake, Alastair Stirling, Jordan Differ, Rachel Veitch, Amy Bilsborough

Principal Expedition Achievements



New training building erected on Oupundi camp site



1.1 Km of water pipe laid to provide fresh water for 200 people



Obstacle course built



Fence repaired at Oupundi campsite



Joint training camp with 400 Namibian Scouts to help develop Scouting in Namibia and over £1000 of equipment donated to Namibian Scouts





Project Work

Bagpipes, Breakfast and Building



Rising with the Sun

It is 6am, the sun is rising over the Oupundi campsite and 56 young and not so young eager souls are waking up from their slumber, sometimes with the help of a bagpipe tune or two playing outside, to have breakfast and then get to work. Who would have believed it but by 8am most mornings, after flagbreak and a few encouraging words from our esteemed leader we were divided into our work teams to labour for another day and apart from a two hour siesta during the hottest part of the day, we worked until sunset each day at 6pm.



Water, Water Everywhere



A major part of the project was bringing water to Oupundi and the surrounding communities, where many of the population have to walk, sometimes a fair distance, to draw water from a well or standpipe. All the teamwork and skill training beforehand meant we made steady progress on the digging of the 1100 meters long water track, excavating and backfilling nearly 400 cubic meters of sand. No machine diggers were available. Just picks, shovels, sheer determination, hard work and sweat. But the day dawned when 400 Namibian Scouts helped us lay in the 50mm water pipe into the open trench. It will bring water to Oupundi plus serving up to 22 homesteads on the way.

Obstacles in the Way

We all love a challenge and the obstacle course we built on the Oupundi site replicated the one already in place at Forth Region's campsite at Barrwood. We used 36, 6metre long 150mm diameter poles cut from the tree trunks of the Eucalyptus or Gum tree, cut, drilled and joined together with numerous nuts, bolts and screws to build the twelve different challenges which formed the obstacle course. Our young people sawed, hammered, chiselled and bolted the poles together then dug the holes in the ground, mixed the concrete and erected the structures. It was a real team effort with everyone learning new skills on the way.



Bob the Builder

Except it wasn't Bob, it was Leonard and his bricklaying squad who built the 10metre by 5metre Training Building to be used by the Namibian Scouts and also offered to the community for their use. Originally this building was to have been constructed in timber but the termites who might have found it all too tasty led to a decision to use a metal structure instead. When we arrived the metal frame was in place complete with roof. When we left the brick walls had been built using 10,000 bricks, together with windows and doors and the walls had been cement coated inside and out. We helped the builders along the way and cleared the surrounding ground ready for the grand handover ceremony the day before we departed. The building is to be named 'Scotia' to recognise the Scottish connection.

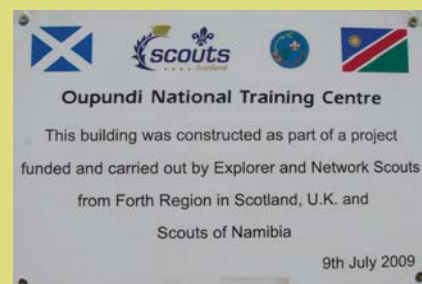


Don't Fence Me In

Well we did! The annual floods had damaged sections of the 1.7 kilometre fence around Oupundi. We set to and replaced a section and carried out other repairs where we could...more concrete mixing and shuttering, more fixing and tying, more cutting and joining.

A Job Well Done

Everything we set out to do was completed. The money raised by the efforts of the young people and given so generously by many had paid for everything. Many of us learned new skills. Most of us made new friends both Namibian and Scottish as we toiled in our work teams and played together. We have left a tangible legacy of our expedition to the Scouts of Namibia and the community.



Bagpipes, breakfast and building? A strange mixture but one which worked and we have come back with very many happy memories and a real sense of achievement of a "Job Well Done!"



Developing Scouting in Namibia



Plans of clans and parades went out the window as 150 turned into over 400! The Namibian Scout population boomed with the news over the radio that Scottish Scouts were visiting and holding a camp for the Namibian Scouts. They arrived on foot and crowded into bus and pick-up; dancing, singing and making merry. Tents, comprising of two marquees and various small domes, somehow expanded inside to fit everyone and their duvets (it was cold!!).

Camp got underway early on the Saturday with activity and project bases. Each team comprised a Scottish Explorer, as team leader, with up to twenty Namibian Scouts under their wing. Great rapport was built between Explorers and Namibians, language refusing to be an issue



The 1st Oupundi Highland Games- from three-legged races to tossing the caber, and tug-o-war to pestering Gerry for his photograph. Chaos easily organised itself, with Scouts wandering, sampling and enjoying. There was one lad who loved the parachute so much, he stayed there all afternoon!



A sing off of 'A boom a chick a boom' left the Namibians victorious, while an impromptu game of rugby saved the Scots from losing face only due to the Namibians being called in by their leaders. We did, however, manage to beat them at tug-o-war, except when they all piled onto the other end of the rope, significantly piling the odds in their favour.

The evening offered a Namibian campfire treat. Wow, they can sing and harmonise! We offered a selection of Scottish campfire songs in response to the Namibian variety. Songs were learned and stored to take home, though some songs sounded strangely familiar through 'learn while you sleep'!



Sunday afternoon saw the first length of pipe ceremoniously being laid by all present. Ranged along the trench, Namibians and Scots interspersed, everyone took up the pipe and thankfully laid it into the trench. Then we threw all the dirt back in after it. After all our hard work digging it out too!

After a Scouts' Own and closing ceremony the Namibians were then waved off home with a strange mixture of sadness and relief. It had been a busy, yet rewarding weekend, giving a welcome relief to daylong trenching, forging new friendships and experiencing a really different culture.

With such enthusiasm and interest in all we were doing to develop their campsite, many of the Scouts were already planning their next visit. Mission accomplished!

Camp Life



Daybreak was heralded by the sound of the builders' generator in the distance, donkeys braying, cocks crowing or the noise of a tent companion getting up for cook team duties. Most people managed the 7o'clock breakfast but there were occasional stragglers. This was the time to remind everyone about their daily (malaria) medication.



After flag break we had our first shift on the projects, with a welcome break mid-morning for a drink and biscuits. The second shift was somewhat shorter as the heat of the day became more intense, and after lunch (usually cheese / meat / salad rolls and fruit) there was a chance to relax / catch up with sleep during siesta time.



The late afternoon shift - back in the trenches - finished at 5.30 when the lucky ones managed to grab a hot solar shower before evening meal. The rest of us made do with cold showers. Meanwhile the 'cook team' had been busy preparing dinner from the ingredients bought the previous day. Everyone took turns and the variety and quality of the food was most impressive considering the difficulties of catering for 60 hungry workers.



The after-dinner entertainment was varied - a quiz, "nae-talent" contest, card games and the day came to a close when the generator was switched off, and silence fell across the campsite.

But the highlight of the week for each team was surely the escape to Ongwediva to do the shopping and to enjoy a leisurely and relaxing time in and around the pool at Bennie's Entertainment Park



Written by Rosemary Fletcher

Gerry's bit

I'm glad we chose Namibia for our expedition because there was great enthusiasm and support from all the Scouts of Namibia team and without this 'on the ground' expertise we would not have been able to achieve as much as we did.

There followed 18 months of hard work fundraising, led by the parents in each District, which meant we were able to not only complete the projects, but also increase the scope of the building work and leave some funds in Namibia to enable more work to be undertaken.

The 'Core Team' ensured that all the planning and preparation was done in a timely manner and that nothing was left to chance. Thanks are due to Allan Stalker for managing all the communications and website updates and also to Jim McKellar and Jamie Sime for being our 'home contacts'.

Our Explorers, Network members and Leaders were a great credit to Scouting and tremendous ambassadors for Forth Region and Scotland.

Well done and thanks to everyone who helped make this trip possible!

Gerry McPeake,
Expedition Leader





African Life



We all knew before we went to Africa that life in Namibia, especially rural Namibia, was going to be totally different from life at home. We thought that we were prepared for the lack of water and electricity, for the poverty, for the insect life, for the heat, but life still surprised and amazed us.

While living on Oupundi Campsite we came into contact with some of the local homesteaders, local tradesmen, and lots of Scouts and their leaders, while in the nearby town of Ongwediva we encountered a wider range of local people, some who stopped and spoke to us, and others who stared and treated us as oddities. The fact that we went shopping in groups of eight, all wearing the same T-shirts, might have had something to do with that!



Being close to the equator means that Namibia has almost 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness, and that, combined with the heat, has a huge effect on the way people live their lives. The homesteaders start work just after sunrise, and the children set off to walk to school just after 7am. Businesses open early but then close for lunch to avoid the heat of the day.

We were in Namibia during their winter, though temperatures were still reaching 27°C, and during the day we wore shorts and T-shirts to try to keep cool, and sun hats to try to stop us from burning. In the evenings we added a sweatshirt and often long summer trousers. The local people thought that we were quite mad, as they found their winter weather cold. It was quite common to meet local people wearing thick trousers, warm jumpers and jackets. Some of the Scouts who camped with us wore woolly hats and gloves! When we were working together we made quite a contrast.



The types of housing in the Ongwediva Area varied enormously, from very basic shelters with no obvious services, to a few very smart, almost 'western style' houses. Much of the construction was done using concrete blocks, and in the town areas many of the houses appeared to be only one or two rooms, built from blocks, combined with any other materials that the people could find. There were few wooden buildings as wood is relatively scarce, but also because there is a far higher chance of a wooden building being eaten by termites.

A few of us were very privileged to be invited to visit one of the local homesteads, very close to where we were digging the trench for the water pipe. Selma's home consisted of a series of round,

thatched-roof mud huts, which we assumed were for storage, and a couple of slightly larger rectangular concrete block huts, which we assumed were the living areas. A rough wooden palisade fence round the perimeter protected all of this. Selma spoke no English, but her daughter Sammy explained that each round hut with its compacted earth floor was in fact a room, and the open areas between formed corridors or hallways. There were two or three bedrooms, each with a bed and cupboard; a kitchen area with extended wooden screening, and a living area.



Inside, the round living room was very basic, and far from comfortable. The furniture consisted of two plastic garden chairs, a wooden kitchen table, and a microwave. The microwave truly fascinated us, as Selma had neither running water nor electricity! Towards the back of the compound was a fenced off area where the goats were housed at night.

Shopping in Ongwediva and the surrounding area was definitely an 'experience' with opening and closing times meaning little, and with nothing done in a hurry. Refilling the gas canisters took ages, and the lingering smell of escaped gas in the area emphasised that 'Health and Safety at Work' has not reached Namibia yet.

We were very surprised to discover some local supermarkets, especially 'Spar', which were not unlike small supermarkets in Britain. The products in the Spar were very similar to those that we buy at home, and indeed some were even the same brand. The range of goods was very limited, and stocks of some of our regular purchases were not replenished when they ran out, just replaced with something else. We were very pleased to discover that Cadbury's chocolate was widely available, and indeed there were varieties that we do not have at home. We bought so much of the fudge and biscuit chocolate that the Spar ran out. After purchasing and paying for goods, customers progressed to the security guards, who checked every item purchased against the receipt, even if they had just watched the goods being packed and paid for.



Many of the local people shopped in the large, busy, open air markets, which seemed to sell a whole range of produce, from meat, to fruit and vegetables, to clothes and household goods. We stuck to shopping in the clean and relatively hygienic supermarkets, preferring not to risk the meat sold out in the heat and covered in flies!

Many of the Namibian people that we met had very little; no running water, no electricity, no home comforts, but yet they were always pleasant and cheerful. This was emphasised very clearly when the Namibian Scouts came to camp for the weekend. Some of the children arriving had nothing at all with them, no sleeping bag, no change of clothes, nothing, yet they all wanted to come to meet us and to spend time with us. One group of young Scouts arrived in their school uniforms, and on the Saturday afternoon they took time out to find a basin, wash their school clothes, and hang them on bushes to dry. By the time they got home on the Sunday it would be far too late to wash and dry clothes, and the uniforms were needed for school on Monday morning.

We hope that in providing new facilities and especially the fresh drinking water we have made a small difference to the undoubtedly hard lives of the Oupundi community.

On Safari



The last week of the trip was spent working our way down from Oupundi to Windhoek, via Etosha Game reserve, Swakopmund, and the giant sand dunes of Sesriem.

The trip started when three buses from Wild Dog Safaris turned up at our camp. In the morning, once the buses had been suitably attired with Scotland and Lion rampant flags (thanks James!), we headed off towards Etosha. Once in the park animals soon started to appear.



The first night was spent camping in Namutoni. In the morning we all got up early for an early morning game drive. Unfortunately the radiator of one of the buses sprung a leak, so after the Scouts had been moved onto another bus, the remaining leaders headed back to the

camp, for breakfast, and to wait for another bus. Thankfully a spare bus happened to be passing on the way back to Windhoek, so it was diverted to save us!



The buses made their own way to our camp for the second night, Halali. Here there was a floodlit water hole where three Rhino came to visit. While on safari we managed to find most of the major animals: lots of giraffes, elephants, and even a cheetah and lion (from a great distance).



In the morning, we all headed off to Swakopmund, out on the coast, where we spent a couple of nights having the luxury of a comfy bed. Whilst in Swakopmund everyone took part in an activity of their choosing. This included a dolphin cruise, horse riding, quad biking, sand boarding, or a living desert tour. In the afternoon were able to wander round the shops in the town.

After the second night in Swakopmund, we left early to head south to our desert camp and the giant sand dunes in the Namib desert.

We were up very early the next morning, (apparently there is a five in the morning as well as the evening!) and left camp to head out towards the sand dunes. We arrived before the gates opened, so had to wait patiently. Once the gates opened we headed out towards the giant dunes. Unfortunately a sand storm had whipped up, and by the time we got to the final car park it was proving difficult to stand upright. The decision was taken not to travel out to the giant dunes, but to head back to one of the smaller dunes. However by the time we had got back, the storm had followed us! Most people decided to leave the safety of the bus and head out onto the dunes, but most turned back after a few minutes, only a few hardy souls made it to the top.



After the dunes we started making our way back to Windhoek. About 20 miles from Windhoek, the bus that had broken down earlier in the week, decided to have a puncture, in the middle of nowhere. Of course the spanner for the wheel nuts was missing from the bus! After waiting for 30 mins without seeing another vehicle we gave up and called for help from another of our buses ahead. This was promised once they had dropped off their Scouts. Some 40 minutes later the bus turned up, still full of Scottish Scouts, who had been 10 mins from the hotel. Needless to say they weren't too happy at being that close, and being turned around. However they had the right spanner and once the wheel had been changed we all headed back to the hotel, looking forward to a hot shower, and a "refreshment" or two in the bar for the leaders.

A short taste of Namibia, but what an experience...wilderness, wild animals, beautiful scenery and wonderful people.

"Quotes"

The best food there was definitely the oryx steak...Donald

I have already had lots of enquiries from groups wanting to use the new facilities...Chief Scout of Namibia

I love to watch the sunset every morning.... Amy, to an audience at opening ceremony

If you want to be a Scout, come along with us...Philipas

Thank you, thank you, thank you.....Selma a local homesteader

As Scout trips go I would give it 11 out of 10....Sam

Even on a clear night in Scotland we will maybe see a hundred stars, whereas out there you could see each and every one ...Kirsti

No need for a JCB when Leo is wielding a pick in the trench

It was a really good experience and I think we would all like to do something similar again...Graeme

Namibia is a really beautiful country and all the people on the surrounding homesteads were very friendly and helpful towards us...Alastair

Seeing the two wee boys in their bare feet and with only their simple homemade toys brought a tear to my eye...John

I really enjoyed helping to build the new training centre and assault course and then having the local people see the finished result...Robert

I shall always remember the 400 Namibian Scouts singing and dancing whilst patiently waiting for their food to be served...Alex

My best memories include hearing the Namibian Scouts singing in the distance when they were approaching our camp. Their voices were amazing. They weren't quite so amazing in the early hours of the morning!...Gavin

Truly a trip of a lifetime!



The Money Bit



The total budget for the expedition, including both member and project costs, was £135,000. Concerted fundraising efforts and generous donations from the contributors listed below raised just over £55,000, and the rest was funded by the participants themselves. Bag packing, sponsored walks and cycles, ceilidhs, raffles, pampering evenings, coffee mornings and visits to Scout Groups were among the varied activities carried out to raise both funds and awareness of the expedition. The hard work and commitment put into this by participants and their families must be commended.

The financial arrangements needed to organise this kind of event are complex and the ever decreasing Pound vs. Namibian Dollar exchange rate caused a number of sleepless nights in the Core Team. Fortunately when the advance party arrived in Windhoek we were delighted to discover that the National Treasurer of Scouts of Namibia, Frank van Rooyen, had managed to get us a special rate through the bank where he worked and we were around 6% better off than we had expected.

Frank also provided a massive amount of help smoothing our passage through complicated Namibian banking rules. Standing in one queue for twenty minutes to collect a signed print out and then joining another twenty minute queue to cash it seemed fairly inefficient but the sky blue polo-shirts of the expedition 'informal uniform' soon became well known in the Oshakati branch. We left on first name terms with the manager and the promise that his son would join Scouts when old enough!

Thanks for the support from:

Companies:

Walker Group, Miller Construction, Sterling Precast, Kemfine, Wolfson Microelectronics, MacDonald Estates, Caledonian Produce, Water Instrumentation Ltd, Elliott Jardine and McDonalds Restaurants, Capacity Management Consultancy, Russell Trust, Laing Charitable Trust, Kerry Bioscience, Alex McGregor (Contractors) Ltd, Goldcrest Furnishings Ltd, Commsworld Ltd, Leapark Hotel

Scout organisations:

UK Headquarters Development Fund, Scottish Headquarters Development Fund, Forth Valley Area Scout Council, Stirling & Trossachs District Scout Council, West Lothian District Scout Council, Falkirk District Scout Council, Falkirk Fellowship, 9th West Lothian Scout Group, 11th Bridge of Allan Scout Group, 1st Stirling Scout Group, 88th Braehead Scout Group, Callander Scout Group, Tullibody Scout Group, 1st Alva Scout Group, Dunipace Brownies, 154th Leith BP Guild, Dollar Scout Group, 4th/6th Stirling Scout Group, 7th Beechwood Scout Group, Tillicoultry Scout Group, Clackmannan Scout Group

Other organisations:

Stirling Probus Club, Culross Church, Williamston Primary School, Friends of Mary Jack, Mid Calder Primary School, Bellsquarry Primary School, Livingston Cricket Club, Wedding guests of James and Claire Cowie, Livingston Players, Alloa Bowmar Pipe Band, Unite Grangemouth branch, Seagull Trust, Clackmannan Church, Falkirk Inner Wheel Club, Dunblane Rotary Club, Staff of Falkirk Royal Infirmary, Ochil Craft Association, St Ninians Old Parish Church, Stirling Trefoil Guild, Friends of Rosemary Fletcher, Larbert Rotary Club, Carse of Stirling Rotary Club, Alva Parish Church Guild, Doune Primary School, Bathgate Rotary Club, Larbert Round Table, Grangemouth Rotary Club, Falkirk Rotary Club, Alloa Rotary Club

...and countless other individuals and friends of Scouting who contributed so generously to our expedition and made it all possible.

Written by Claire Cowie



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