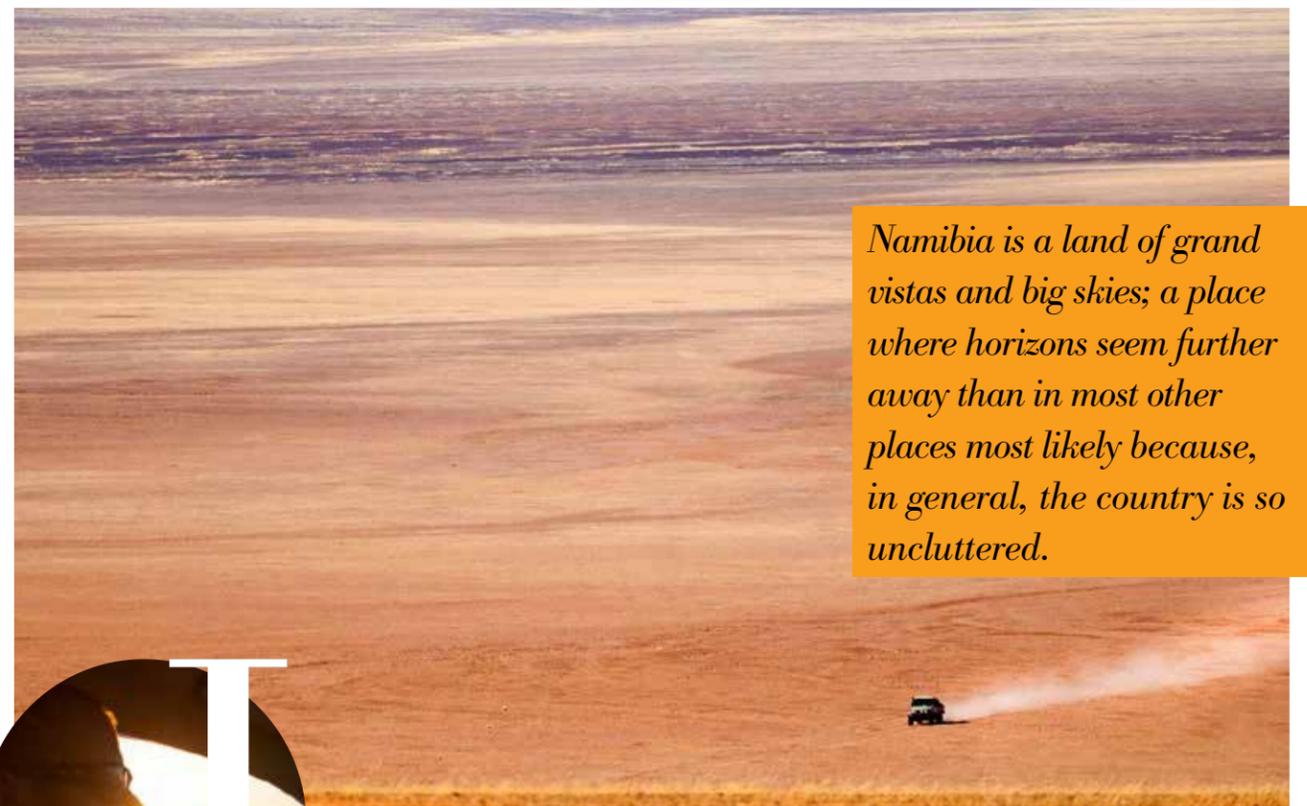
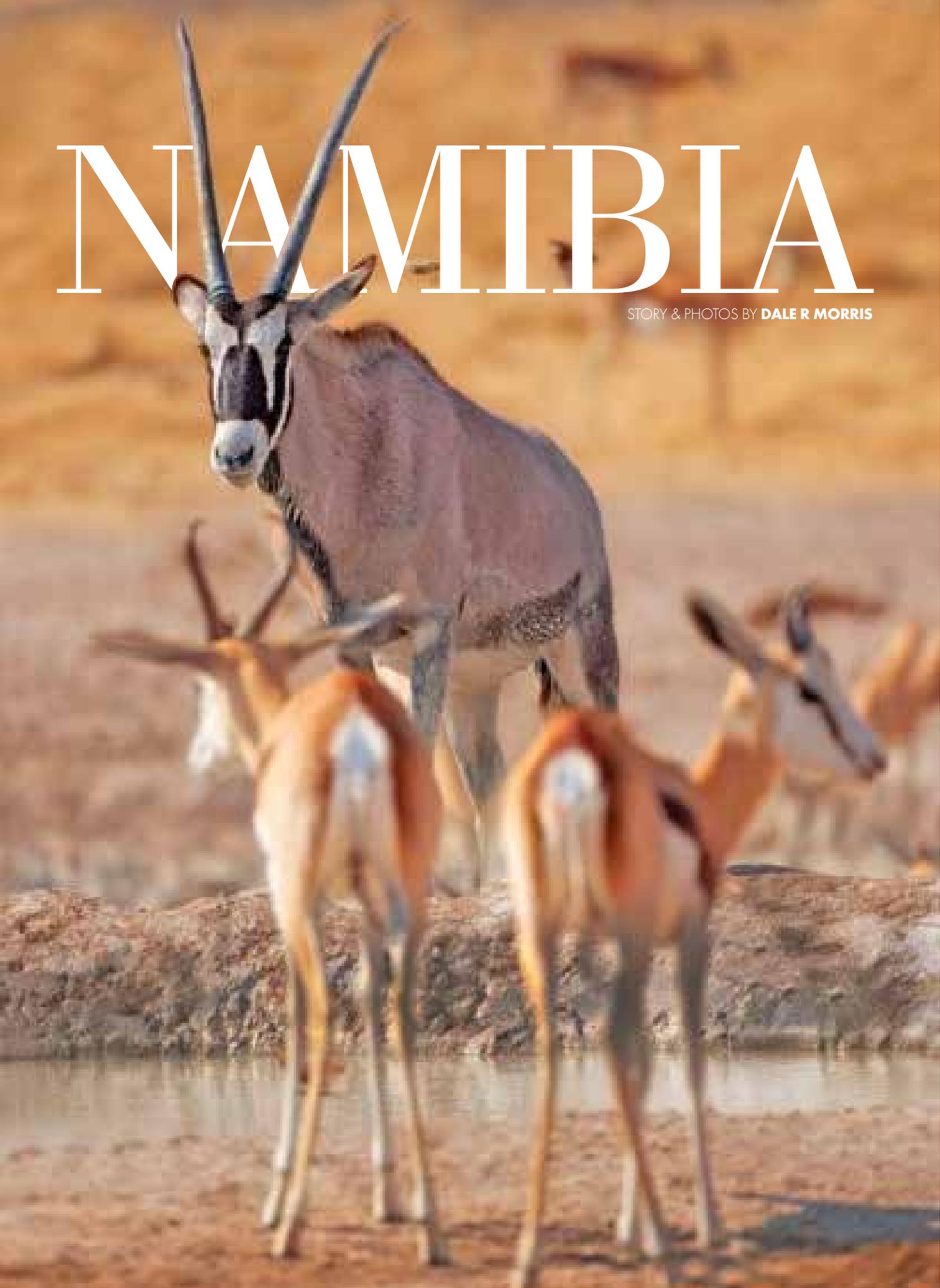


NAMIBIA

STORY & PHOTOS BY DALE R MORRIS



Namibia is a land of grand vistas and big skies; a place where horizons seem further away than in most other places most likely because, in general, the country is so uncluttered.



I was in the Namutoni Camp in Namibia's Etosha National Park when the mongoose clan I had been sneaking up on overwhelmed me by force of numbers. I had been lying prostrate upon ground, camera in hand, no more than a meter away from where they dozed when suddenly an alarm call went up causing the entire group to spring into action. Within a split second, all twenty of them were on top of me. Little claws raked across my face, dust billowed into my lens, paws became tangled in my hair. I thought I was under attack but they weren't after me. They were only interested in an insect caked 4x4



vehicle which had just pulled in through the camp gates.

Disheveled dragon flies were pulled out of the radiator grille, buckled butterflies were peeled from the headlamps, bits of squished crow were winkled from the tyre tread.

It was the most efficient valeting service I think I have ever seen, but as fascinating as it was to witness, it wasn't the black rhinoceros I'd been praying for.

I had been in Namibia for exactly two weeks, ticking off species from a list; but the black rhinoceros (my personal favorite) had yet to acquire an X next to its name.

I had so far seen a desert adapted oryx as well as some desert adapted elephants and I had also tracked down and 'ticked off' desert adapted welwitchia plants and



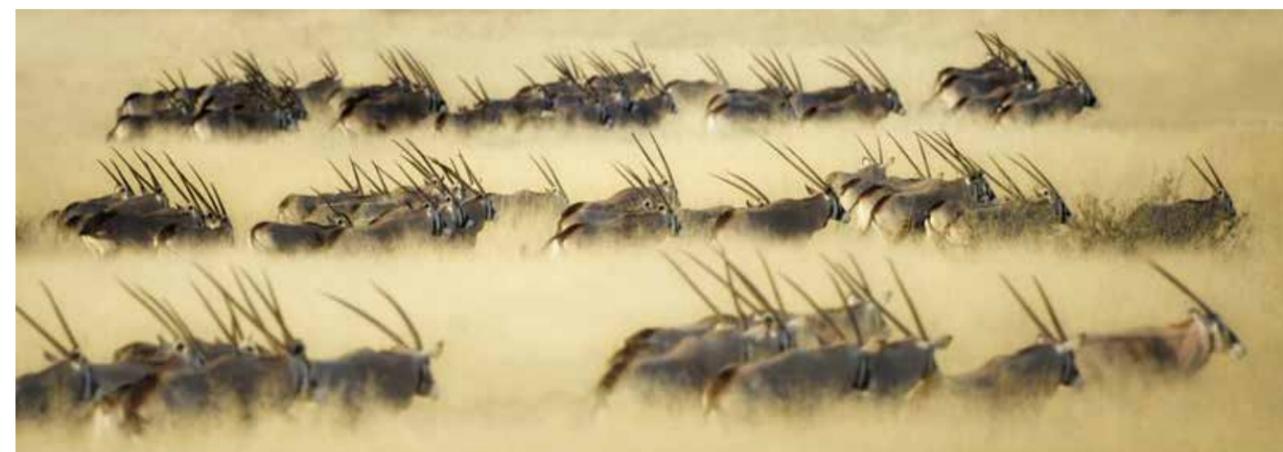
cool drinks (and fresh strawberries), it is doubtful that a normal human (such as I) could survive for more than a few hours.

The fact that an Oryx, one of Southern Africa's largest antelope species flourishes in a place with no water, no shade, very little food and terrible temperatures is nothing short of amazing.

I watched in awe as a line of these majestic creatures ran along the ridge of a towering dune with their heads held high and nostrils flaring wide.

I was delighted to 'tick' the Oryx from my wish list, and that evening a 2nd presented itself to me when I was forced to heed to the call of nature whilst camping on a dune.

I don't know who was more alarmed; me or the sidewinder snake.....



a desert adapted sidewinder snake. But no black rhinos; desert adapted or not!

And it was my last day too....

AN AWFUL LOT OF EMPTINESS

Namibia is a land of grand vistas and big skies; a place where horizons seem further away than in most other places most likely because, in general, the country is so uncluttered.

With a surface area of around 824 thousand kilometers and a human density of around 2.5 people per km2 you'll be hard pressed to find anywhere else quite so empty.

Culture vultures will enjoy meeting with fascinating tribes such as the Himba and the San Bushmen, whilst wildlife fans will be satiated by a trip to Etosha National Park.

Lovers of landscapes will most certainly appreciate the dunes, sea and mountains of the Naukluft National Park.

Namibia's scenery, most of which is breathtaking even outside of the parks, lends

itself to leisurely driving holidays as do the roads; most of which are in good condition.

As such, Namibia has to be one of the best driving destinations in Africa (if not the whole world).

INTO THE DESERT

My first port of call on this particular self-drive trip was a brand new trail through the Namib Desert to a place named Bushman's Paradise; a picturesque mountain in the middle of a slowly drifting dune sea, and one of the prettiest locations I have yet seen.

Have you ever seen images sent back from the Martian Rover? If you have, then you will have an idea of what the area looks like: barren, empty, rocky, sandy, red and very, very beautiful.

The Namib measures some 81000 km2, has an evaporation rate 25 times that of rainfall and regularly hosts temperatures of 40 and even 50 degrees.

Without aircon and a 12v fridge for

They are amazing creatures; and just like oryx (and many other desert adapted animals), they do not require water to survive. Spending most of their time hidden just beneath the surface, desert vipers are ambush predators that see their prey with oddly-positioned eyes that poke out above the sand.

Their strike is lightning fast. A fact I witnessed for myself as the surprised snake sinuously slipped out from beneath my poised bottom and slithered down the dune, head and fangs zapping at thin air in all directions at once.

It had been a close call for the both of us. The highlight of the desert dune convoy trip came as we reached the lip of the most massive sand dune I had yet seen, aptly named "Wall of Death," a navigational obstacle of note.

Standing at more than 200 meters, this almost sheer sided monster presented us with an absolutely stunning view of the

surrounding desert and the Atlantic Ocean below.

Waves crashed upon a desolate beach and seals lounged around in the sun.

The next port of call on my itinerary was Spitzkoppe; a collection of weather sculpted sandstone mountains which rise more than 700 meters from a flat and arid landscape.

They look like giant jelly molds, and are sometimes referred to as the Matterhorn of Namibia.

Anyone who has seen Ayres Rock in Australia or the beautiful granite cliffs of Yosemite National Park in California will have an inkling of what Spitzkoppe looks like - a stunning gallery of nature's most simplistic sculptures.

My travel companions and I spent a night at the community run campground at the base of the mountains and there we slept out in the open beneath the milky-way and a sky full of brilliant stars.



Anyone who has seen Ayres Rock in Australia or the beautiful granite cliffs of Yosemite National Park in California will have an inkling of what Spitzkoppe looks like.

It was a nice idea; romantic and rugged at the same time, but after the fifth scorpion tried getting into my sleeping bag with me, I opted for erecting my tent instead.

We then traveled for a short distance north along dusty Damaraland roads to the Brandberg massif; a huge bare rock mountain standing nearly 2600 meters above sea level.

The fossilized remnants of volcanic activity, this enormous monolith (which covers 650km2) derives its names from the Afrikaans word for fire; a name I understood when at sunset the mountain changed colour from brown to the most vivid glowing red.

The valleys and overhangs of the Brandberg Massif are festooned with ancient bushman rock paintings and stone carvings depicting wild animals, hunting scenes and dream states.

"There's even a picture of a whale here





I watched them as they dug holes in the dry river bed with their feet and then sucked up whatever water came to the surface.

ETOSHA

Our final destination in Namibia was the magnificent Etosha National Park; a stunning big game destination where one can expect to encounter the usual big sexy beasts of Africa. Scenically, it's rather bland (when compared to the desert and mountains) but its geographical saving grace is an enormous salt pan that stretches to the horizon like a giant snowy field. Rarely does the pan contain water, but there is often seepage at the margins and this in turn attracts animals, lots and lots and lots of them.

Within an hour of driving around the park's well graded tracks I had seen more elephants than I could count. I had also seen oodles of lions, hyena, zebra and other iconic beasts as well as birds, birds and yet more birds. No rhinos though.

And so it was, on my last evening in Namibia I sat atop a termite mound watching the mongoose clan cleaning up one last car before they bedded down for the night.

The sun slipped behind a row of mopani trees and jackals moved through the fence waiting for the tourists to begin their Braais.

Somewhere distant, a lion roared at the rising of the moon.

Soon enough it was time for bed, but firstly I decided to go visit the nearby floodlit waterhole one last time. Maybe I would get lucky and see that lion that was making so much noise. Instead, and much to my elation, I found the rhinoceros I had so been wanting to see; five of them to be precise, splashing and snorting like children at play.

It was a wonderful experience and one which I will never forget.

The icing on the cake of a fantastic road trip across one of the most empty, barren and unbelievably beautiful countries in Africa. 🌍

somewhere," my guide told me as we walked slowly up a ravine to where the most famous of all rock paintings 'The White Lady' can be viewed. "There are more than 45000 works of art here but this one must surely be the most interesting." We stood in front of a red stone wall upon which was etched an intricate hunting scene depicting animals and people, at the centre of which stood a shamanic figure painted in white. "It's more than 2000 years old," my guide told me, "whilst some of the stone carvings here may even be three times that age."

That evening, we camped in the dry Ugab River beneath the shade of acacia trees where I nervously nibbled my fingernails to the quick courtesy of a large herd of desert elephants that decided to pass through at 01:00 in the morning.

I was way too scared to go out for a look, but come sunrise, the herd was still pretty close and I followed their spore until coming upon them.

These elephants are one of only two populations that survive in a desert environment (the other being in Mali) and although they don't really belong there (they hid in the desert to avoid humans) they nonetheless survive admirably and can

go days without water.

They were absent from the Ugab River for many years, but in 95, a lone male began to venture south from the desert proper, and now, many elephants are following the old routes back.

I watched them as they dug holes in the dry river bed with their feet and then sucked up whatever water came to the surface.

Happy that I had ticked off yet another species from my Namibian wish list, our next port of call was the skeleton coast; a place of such barrenness that it made the dune sea (with its occasional tuft of grass) look positively verdant.

Here we traveled on roads made of salty brine through a thick fog that reduced visibility to mere meters.

One of the driest places on earth, it sometimes doesn't rain on the Skeleton Coast for decades, but the fog which rolls in from the cold Atlantic gives life nonetheless to this baked and empty land.

Tiny succulents that more resemble jellybeans than plants cling to existence in sandy channels whilst beetles run up and down sand dunes collecting dew on their backs.

If it were not for this fog, nothing here could survive.

guy we need to email
this to franki to order
hres pics!!