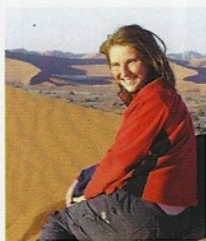


Community spirit



Exactly four years ago my car broke down on a remote stretch of rutted road in Kaokoland. It could have been disastrous but for a remarkable stroke of good luck – I was just a few hundred metres from a community campsite.

Purros was one of Namibia's first community ventures. It is run by a Himba group and the profits are ploughed back into a local village. It was a fabulous place to be stuck. My pitch was clean, private and surrounded by trees that were filled with hornbills and glossy starlings. During the day I could take a walk to the Himba village to chat to the women as they made crafts. But, best of all, the campsite is on one of the routes regularly used by the region's desert elephants as they search for water. One morning a family of three elephants was feeding so close to my tent that I was woken by their rumbling stomachs. As I accidentally found, visiting such community sites can add something quite exceptional to your holiday. Namibian tourism entrepreneur Leslie Gariseb sums it up well in *A responsible trip* (page 60),

"...they may not run 4- or 5-Star establishments, but they offer something in terms of a cultural exchange experience that cannot be replaced by a luxurious lodge". Interested? Have a look at our map of some of Namibia's best community ventures (page 48).

However, the value of these projects goes further. In a country where the rural population is often especially poor, they can make conservation more profitable than other land uses. This summer the government issued permits that allowed three desert-adapted bull elephants to be shot. The rights and wrongs of this hunt are not as straightforward as you might think – some of the profits went straight to some very needy communities (*The hunting debate* page 17). Interestingly, the people of Purros chose not to cash in on the shoot, deciding that – because of tourism – elephants on their land were worth more to them alive than dead.

National Geographic photographer George Steinmetz was camping at Purros too. Over a shared campfire he told me about his brief to photograph Africa from a precarious-looking paraglider. Since then, I have often wondered how George's photographs turned out, and I was fascinated when his book, *African Air*, arrived in the office. His portfolio (page 8) serves as a reminder that Namibia has some of the world's most beautiful remote places; places that, with a little thought about where we spend our tourist dollar, we can all help to conserve.

Happy holidays,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal line that extends to the left and underlines the name.

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