

Driving up to the border post in our humble little Toyota Hilux named Jane(Plane-Jane) and so for good reason, facing up toward the horde of 10 mighty, fully-rigged Nissan Patrols silently looking down on our little Hilux. But nevertheless the grim ambience we were greeted by the 35 friendly faces joining us on this epic Explorers Route journey. Phew, what a relief!



After getting past the border proceeding we met up for our 1st official group meeting on Botswana soil, after formal introductions and a good laugh, we set our sights on a nearby fuel stop to top up our thirsty vehicles and make our way to our 1st cut line, where to the surprise of a local police officer who couldn't believe his eyes when we told him that we wanted to drive the bad road instead of the stunning tar highway, what idiots we are he must have thought! This marks the official start to our adventure, little did we know we were in for a number of surprises along the way!

After covering a short distance on the sandy cut line just outside civilization's reach, we caught a glimpse of a massive thorn tree standing tall in the middle of our way, and with a spark of insanity we decided that this would make the perfect campsite. So we made an early camp. With some good food and great laughs enjoyed amongst the campfire, what a way to end off the 1st day!

The next day we were awoken to the gloomy sounds of thunder in the distance, naïvely we started preparing some good old fashioned French toast when the heavens came raining down on us, now for those of you that don't know believe me, there are

only a handful of things more depressing than having to pack up camp in the pouring rain! But all seriousness aside, at the end it was good fun and we were all still in good spirits.

With an entire day of driving on some of the most awesome cut lines Botswana has to offer, we were excited to say the least! And after a day playing in the tracks left behind by massive mining trucks we were a tad exhausted when the time came to start setting up camp at our luxury destination - middle of nowhere wherever we damn-well please. Oh and were we in for a fun filled night!



Just after midnight our brand new tents, of which the brand shall not be named, were put to the test against a torrential downpour of rain. To summarize – Mother Nature 1 , Tents 0. After a very not-dry night's sleep moral was a bit low, but we had a new day's journey to look forward to, and at the end of the day that's what we're here for isn't it? And what better destination to look forward to than the ever awe-inspiring sullen silences of the Makgadikgadi Pans. And after concurring with some of our local sources, we had more or less an idea of what the area had in store for us, but little did we know!

After making our way down the water filled two track through some dense Mopane forest, we were greeted by a miracle of nature. Here we are, looking at the Makgadikgadi Pans completely covered in water as far as the eye can see. Needless to say our next day's plan of crossing over the pans would be an impossibility, and unfortunately we forgot our kayaks at home! After setting up camp the surroundings were pure euphoria. To be honest I don't think too many people can say they've had a swim in the Makgadikgadi pans!





After waking up and having breakfast next to the splendour of Lake Makgadikgadi we took a quick detour to a little hidden paradise we call “Island X”, a spectacular hidden island on the pans filled with lush green bush and one beautiful hollow Baobab, we decided to name Piet for reasons unknown to us even today. After a quick few rounds between JJ and a very confused and feisty owl it was time to hit the road to another mysterious area, the infamous disappearing Lake Xau.

The next day had us facing some peculiar challenges, the biggest of which was a 43inch mud-terrain blowing on Alex’s patrol at a decent speed. Luckily our resident Michael Schumager saved the day with his driving skill, preventing a nasty roll, getting himself and his family off the road safely where our resident bush mechanic could make quick work of the damages with some unique improvised techniques. Thereafter, much to our surprise given the ultra wet Botswana we found ourselves at an almost barren grass field where according to the locals water had resided only a few days prior. One would never guess, but nevertheless we found ourselves the perfect campsite overlooking the long grass plains. With a bit of imagination you can almost feel as if you are sitting next to the open plains of the Serengeti. To top it off we found ourselves celebrating a birthday of all things! Many drinks and laughs next to the campfire later it was time to cap off what was again the perfect day travelling through the lesser known gems hidden within Botswana.



A new dawn and a day begins. Nothing too special today just a “liaison stage” to the town of Maun. After a short day that took way longer than expected we arrived at our night’s accommodation. Our 1st formal campsite on our adventure. We topped off the night with a great meal in their restaurant before we headed off to bed to rest up for tomorrow.



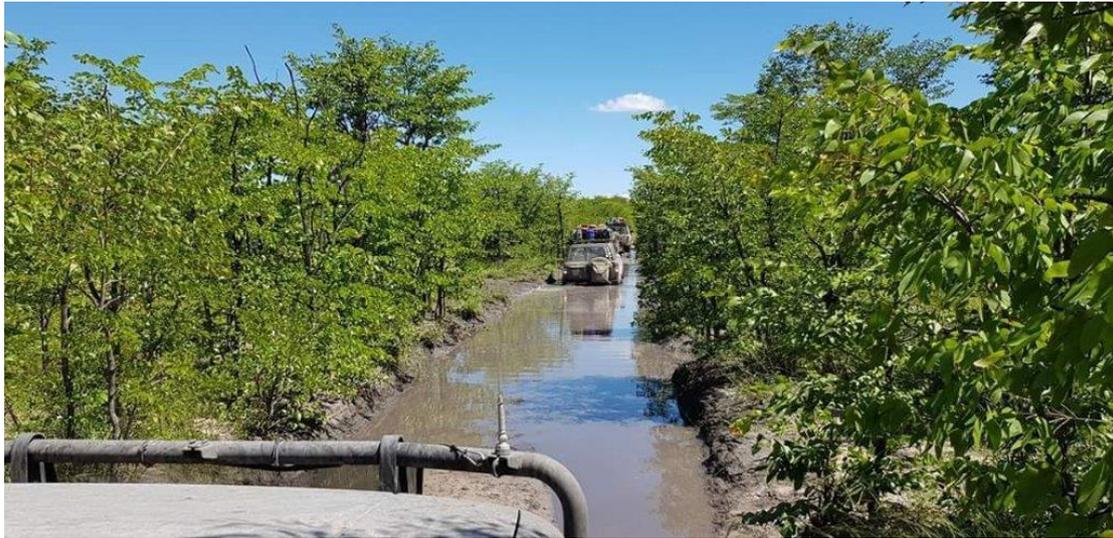
Now the adventure starts! We’ve had our fair share of rain, water and mud but it would be taken to a whole new level today! We’re off and we’re heading north toward the Khwai wilderness area. Soon after turning off the main roads taking the “scenic route” as always, we came across our 1st major water crossing complete with a brand new Hilux drowned and abandoned within,



obviously after seeing this we knew the only way to proceed with the current route would have been by boat. Luckily there was a small 2



track bush trail we could tackle.



Now, even being a lot more accommodating than our original route, this one was not without its own challenges. Water was the order of the day, luckily we had more than enough traction and all vehicles were more than equipped to handle the task at hand so we made plain sailing of what the area threw ahead of us, at a slow and steady pace, of course.

After a good day's fun we arrived at Khwai community camp. The name can be misleading as the "camp" is none but a few allocated trees and that's all she wrote, but please don't get me wrong the area is picturesque and basic is just what we ordered.

As night fell we were greeted by the odd Hyena call and birds mucking around, other than that we could only describe the crystal clear evening as nothing short of perfect.



Now this is where things start getting interesting. Our route for the day, or as it ended up days, a very remote and seldom used, track we then named the Ivory Track, for reasons obvious, it felt like for every mud hole there were about 3 elephants lurking

within the thick bush. Close to Linynti. What was originally a day's travel turned into a full two days. Sounds lovely, right? We stopped count at the 150th mud hole (no, I'm not exaggerating)



So after what seemed like the 50th recovery, night fell quickly upon us and it was time to make camp. As per our original plan we wouldn't have needed to but we were faced with simply 10 times the amount of water we had originally anticipated. And yet again we were blessed with another perfect day and more mud than we could ever dream of!

Following the densely vegetated cut line we slowly made our way to an abandoned cattle post marking the end of the super adventurous part of our journey, although not without a truly magical moment. What are the odds that within this 60 000 square KM wilderness area we stumble upon a pack of at least 15 wild dogs? To see these amazing creatures play alongside the vehicles, not phased in the slightest about our presence was truly a once in a lifetime experience. Now, we could have admired them for hours, but unfortunately they made their way disappearing into the bush, we still had a way to go to our next well deserved place of rest, a tiny little campsite on the Delta near Seronga. Then after the long days past we arrived this little oasis on the banks of the Okavango delta with a picture perfect little campsite and hot showers, a very well deserved luxury!



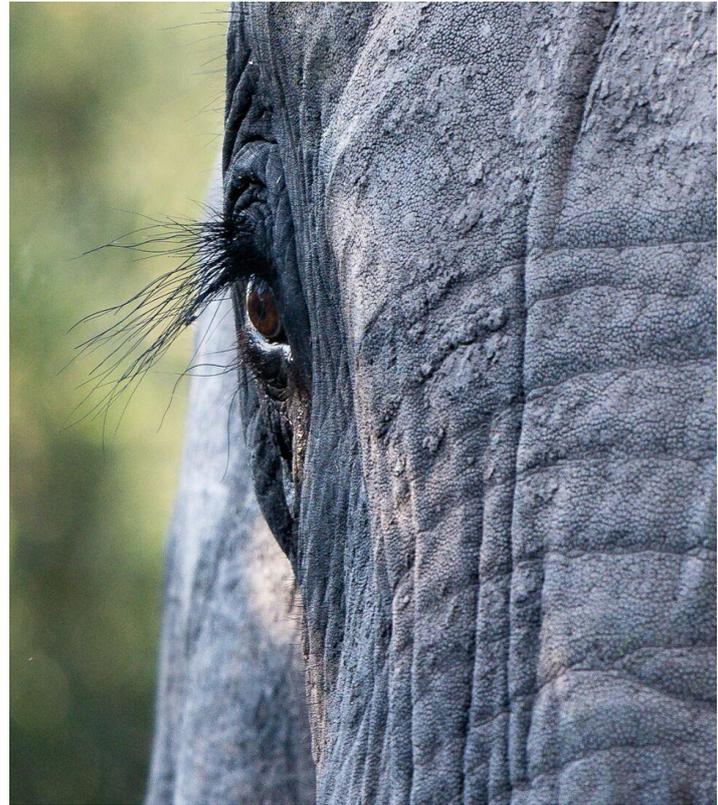
A nice day of rest and relaxation lay ahead. Some repairs and maintenance were done on the vehicles, but the highlight of the day had to have been the awesome makoro

trip into the delta. And along therewith, a 1st for one of our trips, catching some Tiger Fish right off of the makoro. So a warm-hearted congratulations to Michael and Phillip with the excellent catches! Now when one thinks of tiger fish you usually get caught up in the rush of catching them and so on, but what very few tell you is that those buggers taste out of this world! Straight from the waters, gutted, seasoned and thrown right onto the fire, mmm now that's gourmet dining comparable only to our one and only master Chef Graham's leg of lamb a la Patrol!



Now, with this being our final evening together as a group, naturally all the previously suppressed clowns came out to play, and what good fun it was! We had our own little bush stage with only the finest of A-list celebrities appearing and putting their best foot forward. With some of the antics out of the way it was time for one last meal catered

for by our bush restaurant. A well kept and well deserved steak! Followed by a good night's rest.



With a heavy heart we arose the next morning knowing that our final few kilometres to the ferry taking us to Shakawe would be our last.

Looking back on this Explorers Route Adventure, yeah it was a bit tough and the rain had us beat a bit, but compared to the lush green, masses of water and variety of wildlife along the way, man can we please go again!

We will be presenting this Family Adventure again in 2019....

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