

Chapter 7 – Weds/Thurs 17/18 May: Desert Camp 3 (Olifantsbad)

This day was much the same except that the steady sequence of parallel dunes slowly gave way to a very disorganised sea of massive sand dune ‘swells’ facing all directions – it reminded me of the sea around Sodwana Bay when out fishing and a strong southerly blows up. The day basically ended when we crested a sand dune and descended steeply around 150 meters into a bowl, and then shortly thereafter our camp area where we would spend 2 nights.



Photo – Eben Delpont and Lynne



Photo – Lunch



I will comment on the perceived performance of the various vehicles in the tour, but obviously the performance is to a larger extent directly related to the driver and not the limits of the vehicle. There was also a significant and important tyre issue that one of the vehicles experienced that I will describe in a following paragraph.

The rather new and very large V8 diesel Landcruiser stationwagon was, to me, a bit cumbersome. It got immobilised many times on climbs and crests – my assumption after hearing various comments by the two drivers, a father and son combo, is that the auto modes etc did not allow full utilisation of the capabilities of the vehicle – ie too much electronic interference. I am not sure if there is a way to shut all this down and then use the brute force of the vehicle to do what it was ultimately designed for. Actually its curb weight is only 100kgs or so heavier than the Patrol and I carried double the fuel etc so weight should not have been the problem, and the 610nm torque should have been more than enough to accelerate and drive it up and over the dunes. Its inability to do so as consistently as other vehicles in the fleet however led me to believe that the main issue was driver inexperience.

The Prado's did very well and so did the Pajeros. In fact there were a number of identical Pajero's and they all had overall different results in general – obviously due only to differences in driver skill and technique.

One guy had an old manual 4.2 carburetted Landcruiser stationwagon. This vehicle performed very well too and the only place it struggled was gaining enough momentum (due to slow acceleration) to climb out of one of the 'play' holes. It was this person's second tour of the desert and so I take it he had plenty experience.

The Ford did great as well when given the chance. The guy's wife did most of the driving though and she could just not get the cresting technique right and so ended up pivoting on top more often than not.

The L/C double cap 4L manual petrol – just great, and Joachim’s technique was to start everything in 3rd low range and just floor it! Many times all we could hear was the revs and rev limiter vying for attention.

The Patrol – was just awesome!

The L/C and the Patrol were the only ones not needing a push/pull/dig at all during the entire trip!

Tyres – There were various brands of tyres and all performed *admirably* in the extremely harsh conditions ie 530kms in desert, at often full power accelerations and often hard turns, except one type. ***DO NOT BUY COOPER ST3*** if you consider ever doing low pressure driving for extended periods. By day 2, the rear tyres were delaminating and splitting on the sides. This is the tyre with the white lettering. Apparently this is not a new or unknown phenomenon with these tyres according to what some of the guys said. Eben’s vehicle and at least 2 others also had the older Coopers tyres with no problems being experienced.

Only twice out of 5 days and 13 vehicles did we have incidence of de-beading tyre. These were quickly repaired and we were on our way again. No physical punctures were experienced to my knowledge.

Thurs 18 May: Explore south along coast to Conception Bay (shipwrecks Edward Bohlen and Shawnee, abandoned towns, police outpost)

Today we drove down the coast and visited various historical sites relating to the old diamond mining endeavours and also saw various bays and wild animals such as jackals and seals.

Approaching the sea for the first time gave an awesome sight along the crests of dunes with the sea in the distance.