

Chapter 6 - Tuesday 16 May: Kuiseb to Desert Camp 2

The next morning there was a further surprise. Eben told us to pump our tyres to at least 1.5 bar as we would be climbing the rocky north wall of the canyon, and the many sharp rocks could damage our flat tyres....

The thirteen vehicles slowly climbed the rocky trail out of the canyon to eventually look down on the spectacular views, the contrasting south and north sides of the canyon now more strongly evident than before in the early morning light.



We descended once again and then drove west along the river bed for approx. 10-15 kms before climbing back into the sandy desert. Eben had told us about the local inhabitants who basically subsistence farmed in the canyon. The clan was called the 'Topnaars'. This group was a remnant of the hottentots/strandlopers of old, when the Dutch first arrived in the Cape and west coast areas. Apparently the name Topnaar is what the Dutch used for those inhabitants that lived out on the edge of what they then called civilisation... out on the edge somehow translating to 'topnaars'. For more info google it or see <http://kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.co.za/2014/03/topnaar-people-nama-khoikhoi-people-on.html>

Along the river bed we encountered their animals and dwellings.

Today things started to get interesting as we crossed a large number of parallel valleys and massive dune ridges as we headed further west. Eben would have to crisscross the ridges until he found a suitable way down the near (or what initially seemed near) vertical slip-faces on the western sides of the dune ridges. These faces are normally around 36 degrees slope and initially as scary as hell. We would cross and descend probably 50-60 of these throughout the trip, some of them down slopes 300-400 feet high.



The place where vehicles (or rather, the 'nut holding the wheel') struggled most was (1) gaining enough speed to climb the ridge, (2) maintaining just enough momentum to cross the sharp V at the top of the ridge without center pivoting or getting airborne over the face, in order to descend in a controlled manner down the far side slip-face. There were many temporarily immobilised vehicles at various stages of the process but all were quickly recovered and the trek continued.



The Amarok struggled, and I even remember saying to my wife that they should not allow this light 4x4 on this trail as we were being physically held up by the slow progress. However, after various more experienced guys had given the two young novice drivers some wise inputs and sound advice, things improved dramatically and actually, to my pleasant surprise the Amorok became a very impressive and capable vehicle – well done to the Amarok boys Jonathan and Gerno!

