

Angola, it's not like they said...



An adventure story from advrider.com

Angola, it's not like they said

9-23-2007

This trip was going to be different.

I for one, have never updated my will before any other trip. And I wasn't alone. Out of the five of us that were going, three updated their wills and/or life insurance policies in the weeks before we left.

Where were we going?

Angola



Ok, so it may have been a bit of an over reaction, but I had a couple of concerns about this trip. Most of these concerns turned out to be baseless. Some turned out to be valid.

I'll get back to these as the trip unfolds.

For those who are unfamiliar with Angola, a short intro:

Angola was under Portuguese colonial rule since the 1500's. Around 1961 a violent uprising of the indigenous people signalled the start of a civil war

that finally ended in 2002. Yes, only 5 years ago.

In 1975 when the Portuguese granted Angola independence, three new factions called the MPLA, FNLA and Unita, received military backing from Cuba (Soviet puppet) and South Africa (American puppet) respectively. All combatants planted landmines, some with maps, some without and many individual mines that did not form part of a mine field.

In 1994, during a lull in the fighting, studies were conducted on the landmine situation and estimates of between 1 and 2 million mines were mentioned. That is 1-2 mines per person in the country! Since then there has been an extensive ongoing clearing operation run by many different groups. The clearing of mines is clearly having a positive impact. In 2003 there were 270 reported new mine casualties, in 2004 191 and 2005 only 96.

Today the country is trying to stand up from the ashes. Forty years of war leaves a lot of ashes.

So much for the history lesson, back to the trip.
The merry band of adventurers;

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Michnus



Hennie



Nardus



Fred



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and finally me



Not much to say about the 3500km trip to Ruacana in Namibia except that we did manage to get some shuteye.



Against all expectation we find that Ruacana boasts a very nice new lodge with accomodating staff that are quite happy to let us leave the bus & trailer in their grounds for 2 weeks.

We load up and finally throttles get twisted and the trip starts.

First up is the border post. And for the first time (for me), at a Namibian border post, all the engine and chassis numbers are checked. Minutely and in detail. Which then also teaches Nardus that his 950's chassis number differs from his registration papers with one digit. Almost stops his trip right there. But sanity prevails and we finally mosey on over to the Angolan Customs and Immigration.

Now here's an interesting bit. You can only visit Angola by invitation. In order to get a 30 day visa you have to have a written invitation from a resident who will be responsible for you while you are there. So they are not really big on tourism.

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Also stories abound about the border guards making travellers unpack all they carry down to the last tin, unless you offer a bribe. We had none of that. Although we know no Portuguese and they cannot speak English and all the forms are in Portuguese only, we had no trouble at all and found the customs and immigration people very friendly and helpful.

With high spirits we hit the road for all of about 60m before we get sidetracked for a beer break. Excellent, I like this country already.



In short thrift we are joined by the border police guy and the customs guy from the Namibian side? None of this officious officialdom shit over here. I like it.

Ruacana is a minor border post and it shows. When we hit the road again it's off into the bush on an enjoyable track. One rest stop later and we pull into Chitado. Chitado is one of those towns that were shot to shit and not yet rebuilt.

Some images of the town.

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We manage to find the local pub. Check out the stock.

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The first day of our trip and Fred is already missing his family.



An old timer getting comfortable. It was bloody hot, even the walls of the building was hot to the touch.

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A not-so-old-timer getting comfortable. Notice the red ochre and fat mix that is rubbed into the skin. This is the Himba tribe. They are nomads that live in Northern Namibia (Kaokoland) and South Western Angola.



We socialize here for quite some time and the locals enjoy having their pictures taken. The digital camera again shows its myriad of benefits. This woman belongs to the Herero. They share a language and distribution area with the Himba, but the two tribes do not inter-marry.

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We reluctantly take our leave and the road turns into a lovely fast red strip with bouncies.



This lasts until we leave the main road and turn west. Almost immediately the twin track gets sandy and twisty and Fred gets his first opportunity to lie down with his bike. This was to turn into a common theme. A little later in the afternoon Nardus got his chance, Hennie early the next morning and myself shortly thereafter. Michnus made it to day three before he had his first lie down. All of us continued to get regular opportunities on a daily basis.

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A short rest stop amongst some Baobabs.



As I mentioned, it's nice and hot and a bit of shade is welcome.



We start hitting river beds and Nardus gets some excercise.

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Michnus on the throttle.



Nardus piloting his leisure liner.

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We decide to make camp under a huge tree in the river bed and it's good to get the kit off. Still hot as hell though. It only cooled down just before dawn the next morning.



Sunset on day one and no body or bike is broken. Yeah baby, life is good and it's gonna get better.

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The next day we're up and at it early. It only starts feeling like a trip to me if the day starts with me waking up on the ground somewhere next to my bike.

The day starts out with no plan to reach any place in particular. Let me explain. The route we are planning on following is the source of most of my concerns. It goes through a wilderness area where we need to be self sufficient in all respects.

Depending on terrain, we expect it to take 4 - 6 days to reach civilisation again. This presents 4 problems.

1 - Fuel. We would have to carry a full tank plus an extra 30l each. That's a shitload of weight and space. One solution would be to take a backup vehicle. None of us were keen on that idea though. It is after all a BIKE trip.

2 - Food. We would have to carry enough food for a week. This is not too difficult. Generally one can survive comfortably on a tin of canned food a day. So each rider just have to carry 6 or so tins of bully beef or chilli sardines (for the gourmets) or whatever tickles your fancy.

3 - Water. This is a bigger problem. Riding would require you to have at least 4-5 litres of water per person per day. There's just no way you can carry that on top of the fuel load. And fuel gets preference. And when you are short of water things can turn very unpleasant.

What we do is each rider carries 5l of water. That's enough for one day or maybe even two if the riding is easy. Our route will take us to the mouth of the Kunene river where we can stock up on river water. We figure we could reach the river mouth (Foz do Cunene) at the end of day two. (We were wrong of course, it took us 4 days.)

4 - Medical emergency. There is always a possibility of getting hurt on any trip. Here however,

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help was going to be far far away. We were able to obtain a couple of ampules of Pethadine for that crushed-pelvis-with-bones-protruding situation. We also hoped to be able to secure a satelite phone, this however didn't happen. So if you were not able to ride out, you were going to have to wait at least 5 days for someone to come get you.

I don't deal well with pain.

So that's why we aren't going anywhere in particular. With all the beer drinking yesterday we know we have no chance of reaching Foz do Cunene by nightfall. So we are just going to ride to where we get to.

The morning ride is excellent, varying from splendid sightseeing to some more challenging stuff.

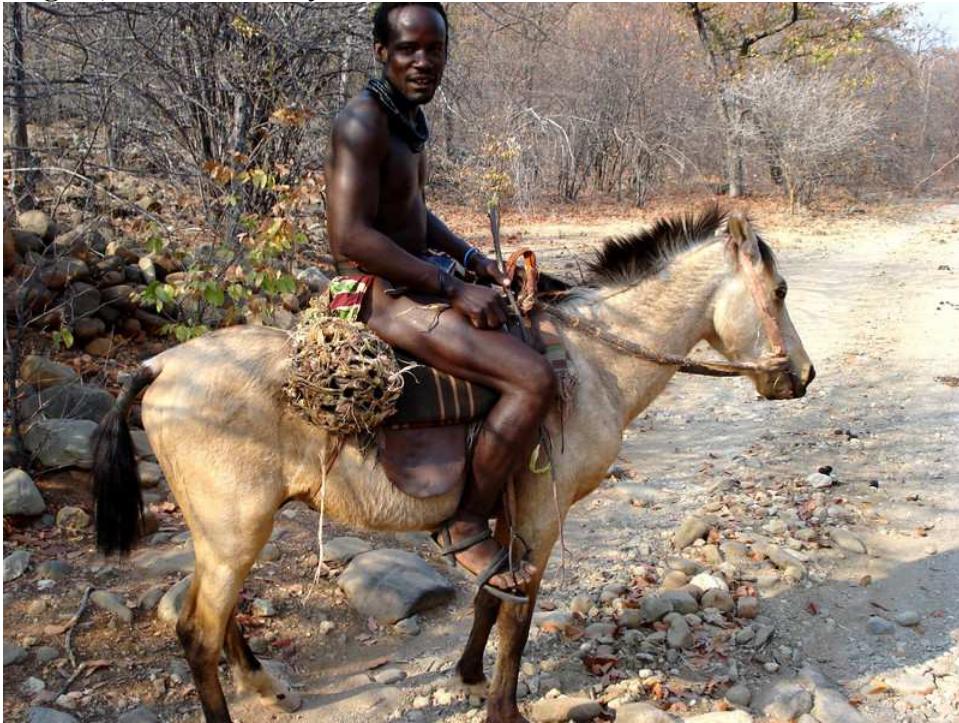


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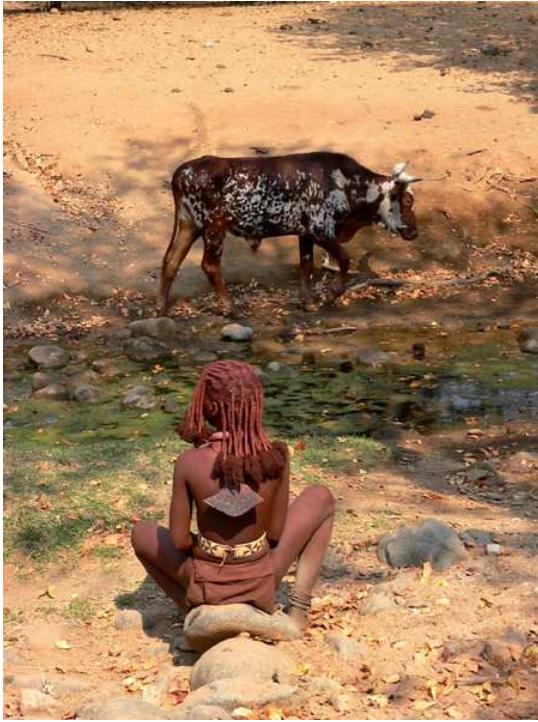


We meet some locals along the way.

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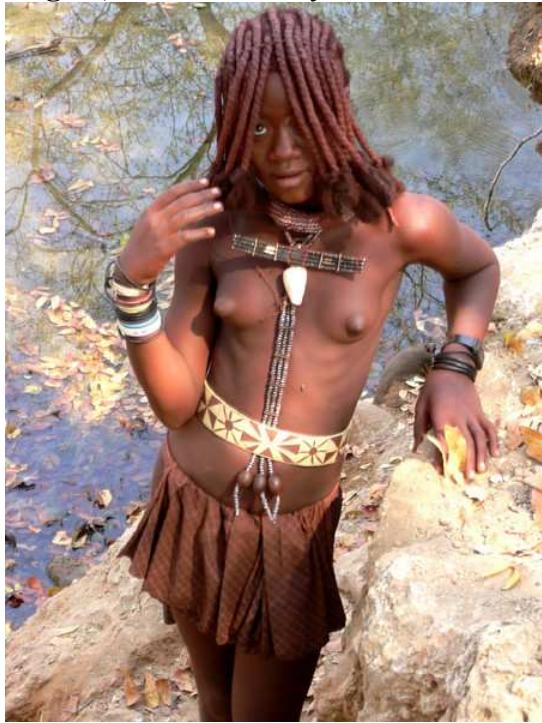


They have good looking cattle.



But the people are even better looking. This girl is bringing the cattle to drink.

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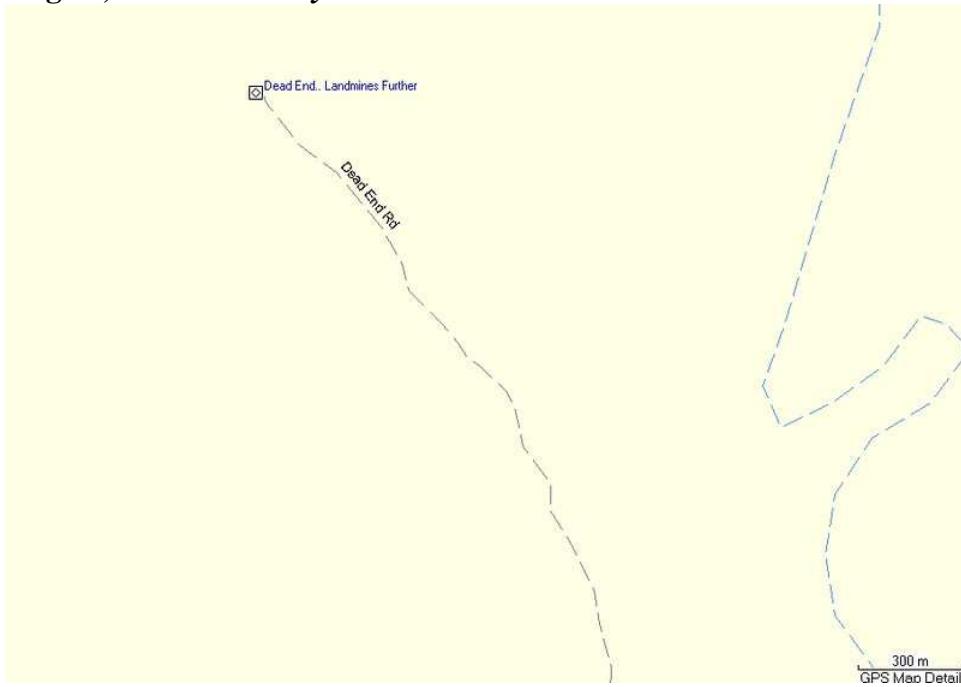
We take a break here and try the water but our stomachs would never make it.



We have some lively discussion regarding where we are going to sleep. There is a road (I use the term loosely) heading down to the Kunene river. There is also a track leading from the river which intersects the road we are on some ways further. It would be good to sleep at the river and it wouldn't hurt filling up our water supplies.

On the other hand, the track leading from the river has this warning on it.

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If we can follow this track we won't have a problem. If we can't and have to backtrack, we may run out of fuel before we get to Tombwa (civilisation).

Why do we believe that we may be able to follow this track?

Next installment will explain all.

9-25-2007

The maps we use are Tracks for Africa <http://www.tracks4africa.com>

The maps are continually being updated and we had the newest version which shows a track skirting the dead end.



Nardus had also been able to confirm that someone had driven that route 2 months ago. We agree that if we can see any tracks left by a vehicle we will follow this route. The 'not recommended' and 'dangerous road' warnings of course makes it irresistible.

We are delighted to find a borehole and our water problems are solved for another day.

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We are heading for the Kunene and there it is. That green strip. The mountains behind is in Namibia.



When we get close to the river we find a police post and a settlement. We have been told many stories of corrupt police. That you have to report to the police in every town. That they ask for copies of all passports and other papers. People even take documents with lists of the travellers and their passport no's, explaining the purpose of their trip in portuguese etc.

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As we stop in front of the police post, Hennie's approach is to make the universal down-the-hatch sign and shout "CERVEJA" at the approaching policeman. Less than a minute later and we are downing beers under a tree with the police.



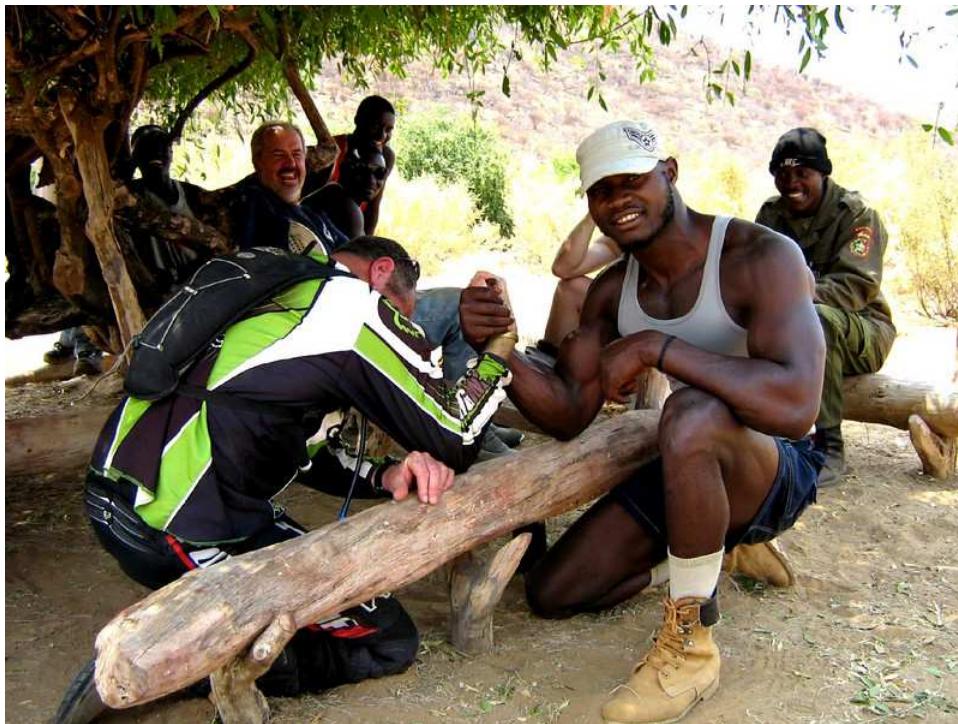
Before long we are joined by more policemen including the commanding officer or 'Sergeante Primero'. More people join and things get festive. We learn that the settlement is called Monte Negro.

This could well become the favourite pic that I have of my bike.



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Nardus takes on one of the policemen in an arm wrestling competition. For the first time since I've known him he loses. I don't think the policeman was even aware that Nardus was hanging on his arm, he was just posing for the camera.



We are later shown the gym that produces such unbridled power.



We have such a good time that we decide to stay over with the good people of Monte Negro. They are delighted and shows us a prime spot under a tree on the beach. We only did 60 km for the day but wtf, you gotta go with what feels good.

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As soon as we get to the river we go for a swim.

The Kunene has crocodiles. Plenty crocodiles.

Have a look at the thorns packed on the bank in the foreground. That is to discourage crocs from

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using this beach as a hang out. As soon as the locals see that we are going to swim regardless of their warnings, they join us. Their instructions appear to be: swim close to the bank and swim as noisily as possible. The water is just fantastic.



For most of the day my bike has been acting up. Now this is an issue for me. I have never done a trip such as this, where the bike's reliability is paramount, with any bike but BMWs. This would be my first on the 640. I have built my confidence in the bike by logging 11 000 problem free kms on it on other trips where recovery was not an issue. In fact, beforehand I was more concerned about Hennie's Dakar which is 'well used' to put it mildly. His response was that he was still going to tow a KTM in Angola.

Now my bike is bogging and stalling all over and blowing big black clouds of smoke. Bastard. So as soon as we are cooled down I start stripping the bike. The smell of the smoke tells me it is not rings but more likely just a too rich mixture. It turns out to be exactly right. The choke cable enters the carb in a metal bend which had pulled out of its housing and is keeping the choke open.

It's always a good feeling to fix an ailing bike on the fly. Happy happy.
I also put some effort into resurrecting my faith in my bike and we are partners again.

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The good people of Monte Negro even do room service and we get some refreshments. We are also offered a goat, but myself, Hennie and Nardus have some residual issues with goat meat from a previous trip.



We are joined by the community and this unplanned stop in Monte Negro turns into the highlight of the trip.

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Because Monte Negro lies at the end of a dead end 4x4 track, visitors must be scarce and the locals are even more interested in us than we are in them. We spend the afternoon having the best time with them.

This will probably be Hennie's favourite pic of his bike.



Michnus turns out to be extraordinarily popular. The women can't keep their eyes off him. Lovely family portrait. The little one has Michnus's mouth, don't you think?

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The men don't do the fat and ochre thing that the women do. Also where everything the women wear is hand made, the men accessorise with western clothes. Still very decorative.



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Mike, Sergeante Primero.



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Sidebar by Michnus;

Most Himba's and Herero's are strong on tradition and culture, only some girls think it's okay, but luckily the majority still stick to their tradition, but the western influence is creeping in every where. Especially the younger generation will try the rapper style look.

There's no TV there, where they get the info from and why it makes them feel good dressing like that is a mystery, we could not ask because we could not understand each other.

The girl you see dressed in the western clothes, had a boyfriend in Namibia and he told her to loose the Himba dress and get western clothes. Well that's what we could gather anyway.

Things don't happen fast this side of the world, TV's, Shopping Mall's and Starbucks are not part of the daily progress. The moment it's open for big tourism it's done for Angola, then you will only see western influence. But that said tourism is big in Namibia and they Himba Herero tradition are still strong there.

Visit this thread on our local site, we posted some additional pics there for the local South African folks, just ignore the Afrikaans language.

<http://www.wilddog.za.net/forum/index.php?topic=10359.0>

Simone; Nardus and I joined him and friends that night in his hut for a party. They very kindly played us the only tape they had with Western music. The radio runs off batteries that are charged by a solar panel. We actually found the Herero songs quite a bit better than 'our' tape.



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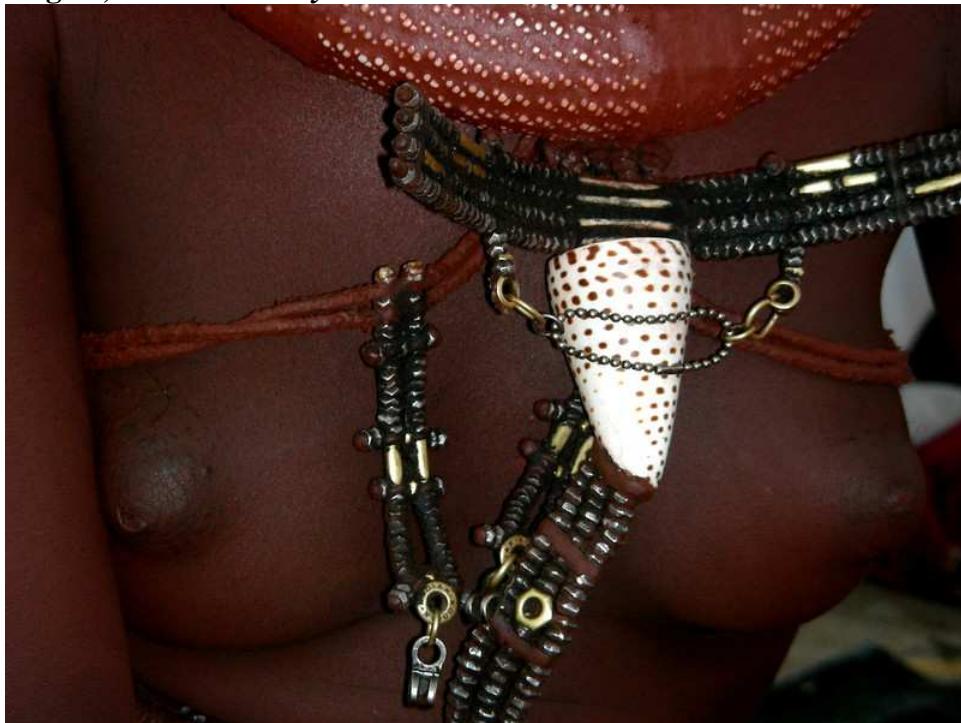


You just cannot take a bad picture of this girl.



Have a close look at the hand made decoration/jewellery. Carved lead and a variety of other utility parts. The shell is a prized possession. It has to be fetched from the ocean which means crossing the Namib desert. Later on we will cross it and you will see that it is a big deal.

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Any idea how heavy that neck ornament is?



Later the afternoon the goats come down to drink and is chased away with rocks. On enquiry it appears that they cannot drink here because of the crocodile threat! But swimming is OK?

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The beers do their job and I take a local for a spin up the riverbed and almost have my nipples torn off.

Surprisingly, when we return there are no more takers.



My good friend Casul on the right. Must be a monkey in the tree.

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Yep, it is.



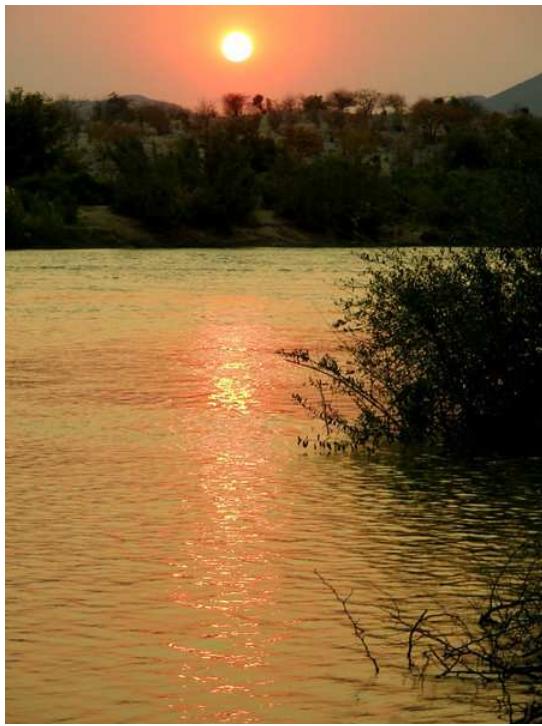
Here's something that intrigues me. Speaking for myself, I would have thought that after decades of war one would sort of have had enough. Yet, everywhere we saw camouflage and military apparel being used as fashion items. I think about that often still.

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The locals assure us there is fish. Hennie conclusively proves them wrong.



And to end a perfect day, a perfect sunset on the river.



Oh yes, check out our fridge.

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Monte Negro blew our minds. Fantastically friendly people, we made many friends. What makes it so exceptional is that we had no way to communicate as we did not understand a word of Portuguese (except 'cerveja') or Herero. They did not understand a word of English or Afrikaans. Yet we spent hours and hours being thoroughly entertained. This trend was to repeat itself every where we stopped.

Monte Negro will always be special to me though.

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Sidebar by Metaljockey;

Aaaaah, a beer discussion. One of my favourite topics.

The Black Label beer you see here is a South African Breweries (SAB) brand. It is in fact distributed in Namibia and not in Angola. Monte Negro is on the Kunene however (the Namibian border) and consequently the beer you see are illegal imports. Monte Negro is so inaccessible from the Angolan side that I doubt any distribution takes place there.

Black Label as a brand owes its current day popularity largely to me. I have been consuming large quantities since that day in 1989 when I had my first one. In the last two years Black Label has been outselling Castle Lager which is SAB's premier flagship brand.

I doubt it is related to your Canadian version. It won the Grand Champion award at the Brewing Industry International Awards in 1990. It won the Grand Champion award at the Australian International Beer Awards in 1996. It was a gold medal winner at the Brewing Industry International Awards in 1996 and in 1998. It was a gold medal winner at the Australian International Beer Awards in 1997 and in 2001.

I do have an issue with SAB which is relevant to this trip report though. The quarts (750ml) that you see here have a return policy in South Africa. You return your empty bottle and get something like 90 cents in return. The quarts sold in Namibia however has no returns policy, as can be seen on this pic.



Because there is no monetary value to the empty bottles they are strewn around these wilderness areas. This goes for Kaokoland also. It is an incredible eyesore and it is horrendous to think that a company of SAB's stature (they are a dominant international player in the brewing industry) is sending large quantities of beer into areas where there are no waste disposal ability.

Places start to look like this.



To prove my point we stopped at a shop (selling N'gola beer) on the main road between Namibia and Angola some days later. Not one single empty bottle was to be seen. They would also not let us take our beer away. We had to drink there and return the bottles. Nardus says they have a policy that if the shop does not produce an empty, they are not allowed to buy beer. They have to pay a penalty. It certainly works like a charm.

9-26-2007

Yesterday was such a lovely day of excesses and decadence. Today will be the day we pay for those. And I'm not talking money here. I'm talking 'sweat of your brow' kind of shit. Today we tackle the 'landmine track' referred to before.

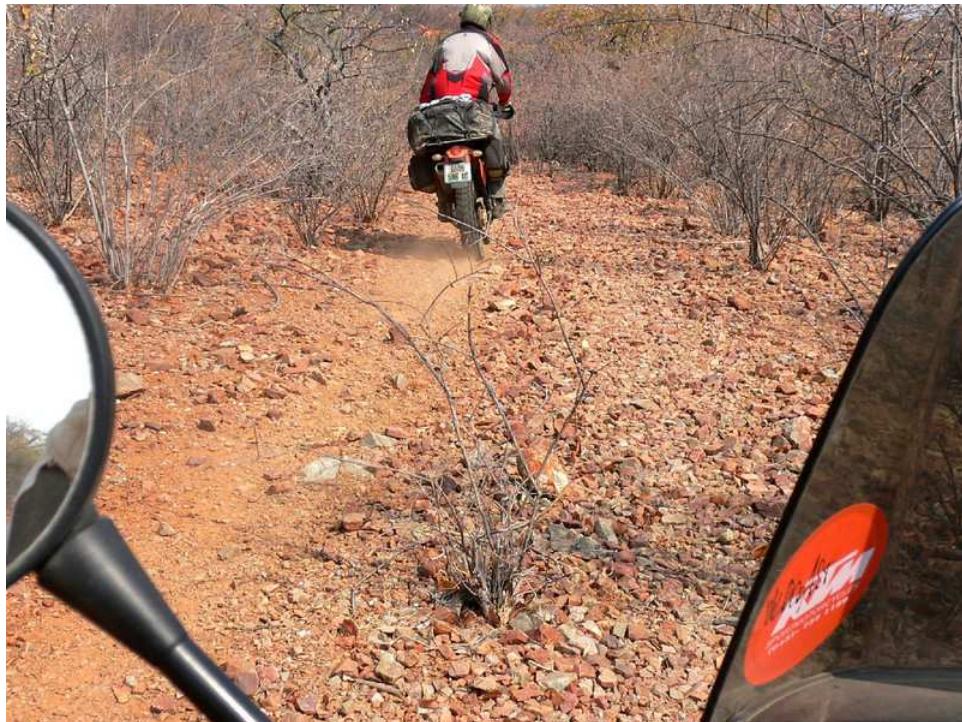
Less than a km and I get dumped on my face.
Good!

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You deserved that you lazy bastard.
Pay attention. Today we're gonna ride.

We do a riverbed and an extreme river rock section within the first 5km which wakes us up nicely and gets the beer converted into sweat in no-time. Sorry, no pics, everybody was a bit shell shocked.

As we turn away from the river we quickly realise that the word "track" is a bit optimistic. (me)



It's rocks, rocks, rocks, rocks and some more rocks. The bikes are handling like crap. I referred before to the 30 litres of petrol each was carrying in addition to his full tank. Let me put that in perspective for you:

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That's the fuel only.

The packing priorities was clear to everyone. First fuel. Then water. Then tools. Then the optional stuff such as bedding, mattress, tent, clothing and all the stuff one would normally pack.

The massive weight of the fuel and water makes your bike a stranger. I was riding a pogo stick front connected to a drunk hippopotamus at the rear. Not lekker at all.

And still it is rocks, rocks, rocks. First gear, second gear stuff. We take so many forced rest breaks I doubt we will ever make it to Foz do Cunene.

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The 950 comes into its own however. The weight of the bike allows it to track straight and ignore all but the ugliest rocks. (Nardus)



Sidebar by Metaljockey:

The title of his thread says it "Angola, it's not like they said". We also heard many stories. We found a different Angola. People so friendly and helpfull it makes your eyes water.

And we are from South Africa, a former aggressor that invaded Angola and destroyed and killed as one is prone to do in war. The current regime was assisted by Portugal from inception and also with training during the war. Portugal is now by far it's biggest trading partner. I seriously doubt that you will be less than welcome.

Why Angola? Because there are no roads, no infrastructure, a place where one is dependent on yourself, no one else. It is where life tastes so much sweeter, because it is not taken for granted.

Because the rocks determine your line, the thorn bushes are just plain having their way with you. My gloves gets ripped to shreds.

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I'm pretty impressed with the new pants I'm trying out. No tearing even though the thorns are drawing blood.



And still more rocks. (Nardus)



Sometimes it just gets plain silly.

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What is worse is that you cannot afford to go down. If you are going to try and save the bike you will break something. If you abandon the bike, it will get damaged.

We are not in a place where you can depend on help.

Best case scenario - someone rides out to get help. That's one day if all goes well. To get to a place where an evacuation vehicle can be sourced, another day. For a vehicle to get to where we're at, three days minimum. To get back to the border, two days. That's 6-7 days before you get to Ruacana and then you still need to get airlifted to the hospital of your choice in South Africa.

It's risky riding and it takes everything you have. All of your skill and all of your concentration.

And did I mention rocks? (Hennie)



Let's talk about Fred for a moment. This is him.

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I have done many trips with Hennie, Nardus and Michnus. This is my first full trip with Fred. It will be Fred's first serious trip. His dual sport experience is limited to the 3000km he has put on his new Dakar. Ordinarily we would not take someone like that on a trip such as this.

But Fred is not ordinary. He is by far the fittest of the group. He's like a Sportsmans Illustrated poster boy. He ran the Comrades marathon (5 times). He rowed the Duzi Canoe Marathon. One week before this trip he completed a 230km day/night mountain bike race. This is what clinched it for me. If he is a mountain bike racer, how difficult can the transition to a motorcycle be? Fred was the unfortunate donner who was going to find out.

We ride out of sight of each other due to the dust. The second last oke stops periodically and check that the last oke is still coming. Fred comes out of a drift and loses it, going down heavily. His body twists around but not his right leg, this is trapped under the bike. He lies in the sun with fuel dripping on his leg. After lying there in pain for a while he realises that the next oke isn't coming.

The next oke is supposed to be me. As fate would have it I get a rock that punches through my tyre (specially bought Michelin Desert) and through the bottom and top of my tube, just as Fred goes down. So I am a km or two down the road fixing a flat in the same sun that Fred is lying in. Blissfully unaware.

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It takes Fred the better part of 15 minutes to extricate himself. The bike is heavily loaded with all that extra fuel. Have a look at the marks where he thrashed about the dust.



I was confounded by the helmet under the bike until he explained that he would lift the bike and wedge the helmet, rest, then do it again until he got out.

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He had an opportunity to do a lie down every day so far but this is the first one that hurt. His ankle and knee got twisted and his chest also took a knock.

But, we have to ride and so on to more rocks.



Fred starts taking pictures of rocks?



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And stil more...



Ok, I have a hundred more of these but I'm sure you get my point. There were a lot of rocks.

And of course there is also riverbeds just to test the spread of skills.

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Michnus fails the test spectacularly. That dust cloud out front is him connecting a large rock.



Another rest stop.



Sidebar by Michnus;

Nose bleeding bone dry hot. And we run seriously short on water and there's no place we could fill up. Our only hope was Iona police station, but like stuff was going in Angola you can't bargain on that either.

We see some strange plant life.

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As the sun sets we pull into a riverbed to make camp.



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And there we find something to put our easy, privileged lives back into perspective.

This morning a donkey threw this boy off and stepped on his arm causing it to fracture and the bone to stick out the bottom of his arm.



They are on their way to Namibia for medical help. To walk to the nearest Angolan town would take weeks. They have been walking all day. They have a further 3 day's walk to get to Namibia. We set the arm and give them some pain pills.

I suddenly think a little differently about the idyllic lives these free nomads lead.

Sidebar by Michnus;
Between the 5 of them they had 5L of water, and there's no water around. They did direct us to a pool of water, but I doubt even a very thirsty animal would rather abstain from drinking at that small murky brown puddle.

The boy was incredibly brave, his arm was all skew from the fracture and his eyes as big as saucer, he was really scared. When they cross the Kunene river they still had a day or two to travel to get to a clinic or Doctor.

As we lie in the riverbed we take stock of the situation. Everybody started with 5 litres of water this morning. No-one has more than 500 ml left. We are nowhere near Foz do Cunene. If tomorrow is going to be like today we are going to have a serious problem. We pin our hopes on Iona. The National Park takes its name and we know there is a Police post so it should at least have a shop. Hopefully we can also stock up on some tins of food.

Everybody is hurting after the day's riding but I notice that Fred is very quiet. His knee isn't giving him any joy.

We have a look at the GPS stats and I almost laugh out loud. Moving average for the day: 26 km/h. That's at the top of first gear for fuck's sake. I sure as hell hope that tomorrow isn't more of the same.

9-27-2007

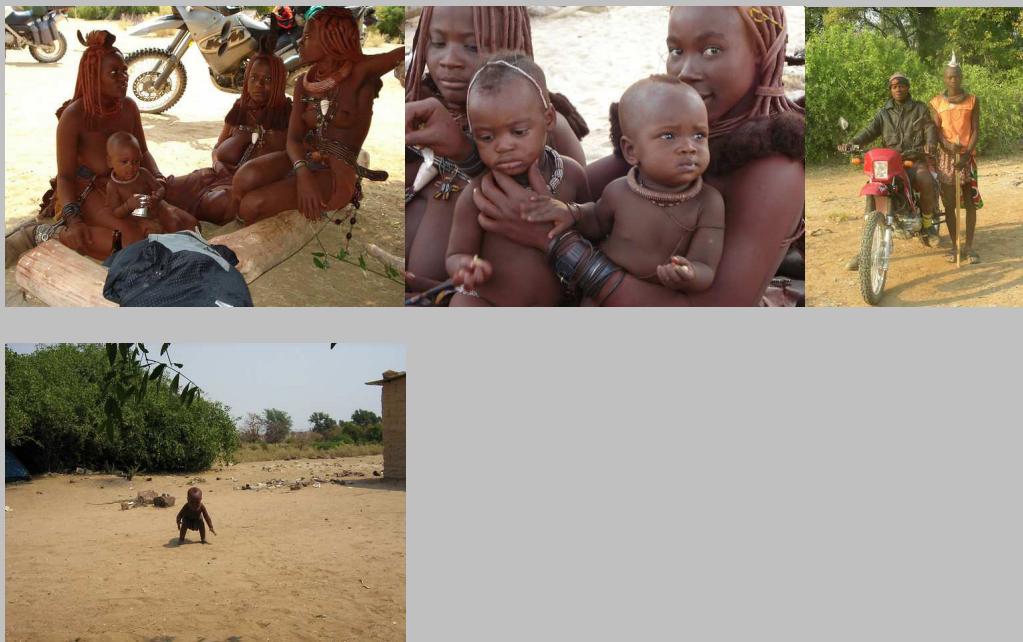
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Sidebar by Michnus;

He sure will find medical attention, chances are it's not going to be top notch medical attention, but he will be okay. The Himba and Herero people are really a tough bunch, man, all the people living there are tough asses.

The kids and toddlers there must be healthy, there are no doctors or pharmacies in hundred of miles and they must walk where they want to be. The kids are definitely healthier than our urban dwellers with all their vitamins and pills they suck away everyday.

The other freaky thing we must understand is, the people have much less money than the average person on this forum, but they are not "poor", they don't have as much belongings as us, but that does not make them poor. They measure value in cattle, a 125cc motorcycle will cost them 4 cows. That's their lifes and that's how they live it, full out. You are their equal and they treat you that way, your wealth means bugger all to them.



To get back to the fuel aspect; I decided to go this way.



My reasoning was that we were going to need to carry the extra fuel for the first 2-3 days. The route we wanted to take would also require us to carry extra fuel on the last two days. I wasn't keen on carting around 30 litre containers for the whole trip. With these wine bags it would not be a problem as they can fold up small and be packed away until needed again.

I couldn't find any reference to some-one else having tried this. So what I did was to do a test by

Angola, it's not like they said

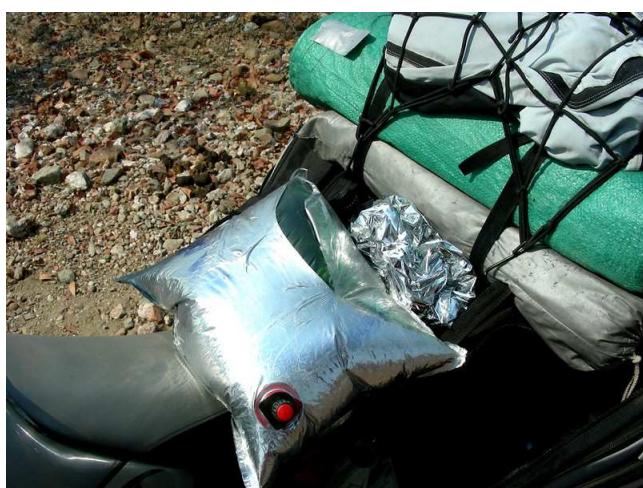
filling one with fuel and leaving it for two weeks. There appeared to be no deterioration in the bag and the fuel was still clear. I also had my daughter jump up and down on one to test the strength, no problem there either. All I needed to do was to make sure that they are packed properly so that they don't chafe.

This is where the Kappa soft panniers came in. This would also be the first trip that I would do with panniers.

Each side carried 3 x 5 litre bags even though the manufacturer specifies only 5kg carrying capacity per bag. To assist the bags I put a strap around them as can be seen in this pic. (Also notice how it brings the weight low and in front of the rear axle)



Well, as it turns out it was a bad idea. The bags expand from the excessive heat and the foil part cannot contain the pressure. Luckily the plastic inner lining can expand so I never lost any fuel.



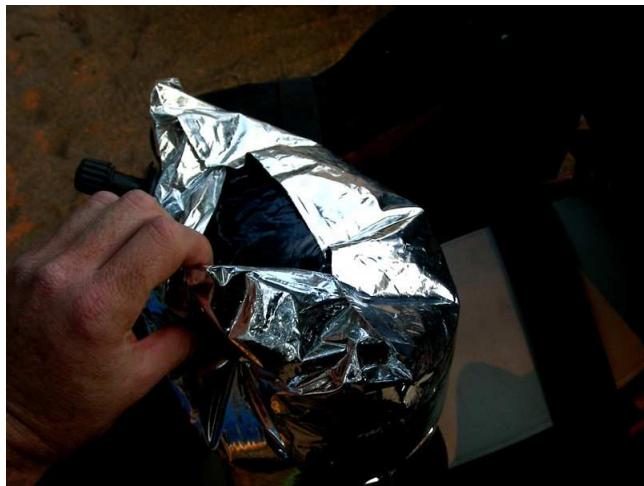
Sidebar by Michnus;

MJ did not fill them to full capacity as to leave some room for vapour pressure and if he falls they would not burst on impact.

It was quite hot and there was obviously just not enough room left for the favour to expand without bursting the outside rapping. The inside plastic part took the pressure quite well and even the dissolving properties of petrol did no damage to the bag.

The very funny part is we tried to source fuel bags like those all over the net, and even manufacturers of water bladders advised us not to use their bladders for fuel. Well after many drunk weekends this ridiculous cheap solution won the gamble.

Angola, it's not like they said



At least I learned something new. If anyone should come up with such a hare brained scheme again, I will be able to crap all over them.

As for the Kappa bags, I'm a convert now. Gets the weight exactly where you want it and it laughs in the face of adversity. I washed them two days ago and they look like new.

9-27-2007

The next morning the coffee gets made early because that's the last of the water. We are wanting to use the cool morning to get to Iona.

Sidebar by Metaljockey;

Wildlife was few and far between. The elephant and rhino that was in this area had been wiped out during the war years. I remember that our Senior rank structure used to hunt with assault rifles from choppers. There was also a devastating drought in the early eighties.

We did see some though, springbok, oryx, monkeys, jackal and such. Not really good enough for pictures though.

Angola, it's not like they said



Deja vu.



Luckily it turns out to be only a scare. Once we hit the main road to Iona things improve markedly.

Angola, it's not like they said



So much so that we start seeing the beauty in nature again.



Angola, it's not like they said



And it's always enjoyable to breathe the morning air from the seat of a bike.



Here and there a bit of a climb, but it is just entertainment.

Angola, it's not like they said



We even get to use third gear! What a joy.



We run into a frenchman doing Africa solo. He's done over 300 000km in this Land Rover. All in Africa. Talk about hardcore!

Angola, it's not like they said



This was to be the only vehicle we saw in 6 days of riding. It was in fact the longest I have ever ridden without coming across any other vehicles.

We get to Iona and find that we seriously overestimated the place. It is one school building. Nothing else. No shop to buy food, no nothing. Not even a hut. Just veldt, and this school. Unbelievably, the school is operating.



What you see here is a common theme through-out Africa. It still gets to me everytime though.

Angola, it's not like they said

We now get to another of my concerns, mentioned at the start of this report. We are now in the middle of *Parque Nacional do Iona*. National Parks as a rule do not allow motorcycles. We had long discussions on this aspect when planning the trip. The consensus was that the odds that we would run into a patrol is remote enough for us to risk it.

Hennie and Nardus have been jailed in Botswana specifically for this reason. Angola is the very last place on my list of preferred places to be jailed.

The police post in Iona is a couple of kms up a dead end road into the mountains. We can very easily bypass them.

But, we need water. When you need it, you NEED it. So we pull into the police post. Once again, we find friendly, helpful folk that let us get water from their containers. I suck down a quick litre and fill again. Man I like this country.



And things just gets better, Iona is the last of the mountains and we ride into the soft velvet plains.

Angola, it's not like they said



It is just fantastic to open up. Damn! It's the first opportunity on this whole trip.



I have no words to tell you how sweet it is.



Look Ma, no rocks!

Angola, it's not like they said



And it's pretty.



Angola, it's not like they said

We start seeing Welwitchias, in fact lots of Welwitchias. This means that we are entering the Namib desert.



The sign says it all. We should be fine.



As the desert starts to unfold we hit a horribly corrugated section. But we cannot let the tyres down as it is interspersed with embedded rocks. So we just rattle on.

Angola, it's not like they said



We cover a lot of distance.



Angola, it's not like they said

And some more. Strange how the nothingness of a desert can be so beautiful.



We make up a lot of time lost over the previous days.



We make a detour to go and see what the Kunene looks like as it cuts through the desert.

Angola, it's not like they said



Cooling off time. This trip has everything. We are very fortunate.



Ok, that's it for now. I need to get some sleep.

Here's a teaser for the next installment.

Angola, it's not like they said



9-30-2007

Suitably cooled down and having rinsed some clothes we leave the river behind again.



Not too shabby for someone with no sand riding experience.

Angola, it's not like they said



Another smoke break. Before this trip only Nardus smoked. He quickly converted another two ex-smokers.



Angola, it's not like they said



As I hit the starter at the next stop I hear 'poof' and my bike is dead. Dead. No dash lights, no nothing.

I so wanted this bike to be reliable. I so wanted to trust it.



It certainly chose the worst place to shaft me like this. A scenic spot officially known as Fucking Nowhere.

Angola, it's not like they said



If the problem is the battery, I can still believe in the bike.

We spend some time trying to figure out what the problem is. It's clearly electrical. It could be the battery, the CDI (God forbid), the starter, fuses, ignition switch, starter relay or any wire pinched somewhere.

Intermittently the dashlights would come on. The headlight would also work fine. So we figure it's not the battery. When you hit the starter however everything disappears again, only to come back after some time and ignition switching.

It could be a connection though, so I sand the contacts on the battery wires. I strip the earth wire from the frame and sand that too.

It makes no difference.

We can hear the starter relay kick in, so it is not that either. Unless it engages but the main contacts are burnt. It's sealed though so we'll have to ignore that possibility for the time being.

We strip out the ignition. I have previously come across reports of the ignition wires coming loose. It's not that either. We strip the ignition to the contacts and clean them. We fit it again but there is no change.

Angola, it's not like they said



Getting comfortable, we may have to spend the night.



We isolate the entire ignition by pulling the plug and shorting the contacts with a paper clip.

This appears to have one benefit, the dash lights comes on everytime. The lights don't work though and neither does the starter.

We try to kickstart it while the dash lights are working. This bike does not start easily with a kick starter. But after a while it fires up. Halleluja!

I'm not gonna tempt fate so we decide that I will ride as fast as I can and only stop when I reach Foz. Hennie is to accompany me as he has a GPS and if we do get seperated at least we'll still be two groups of 2 and 3.

It doesn't work out exactly that way because less than 500m from where we were Fred and Hennie hits the deck coming down a dune. Fred takes the impact on his hip which buckles his spine and takes a while to recover. I've always said that a chiropractor will be very handy on these trips. By the time Hennie gets going again I've already dissapeared into the desert and he decides to stay with the group.

Angola, it's not like they said



And so we race the setting sun.



Just as a quick aside, remember the shell worn by the Himba women? This is why I said it's a big deal. Imagine crossing this on foot.



Being on my own and riding at pace this turns into the most enjoyable riding of the trip.

Just me, the desert, the bike and poetry.

Angola, it's not like they said

Dammit, this bike is just sublime when you use the suspension properly. This afternoons ride will stay with me for a long time.

I finally get to Foz do Cunene and pull up at the Police post. Hell of a friendly chaps and I spend some time with them while waiting for the others. Much laughter ensues when Michnus drops in with the rest in tow.



The ruins you see above is the whole of Foz do Cunene.

Fred with the Angolan flag. It's been a longish day. We left at daybreak.



We are in time to catch the setting sun though.

Angola, it's not like they said



When I try to start my bike it is not interested at all and we have to push it down to the river. Good thing I kept it going while it was going.

We camp by the old pump house to try and get some shelter from the cold coastal wind.



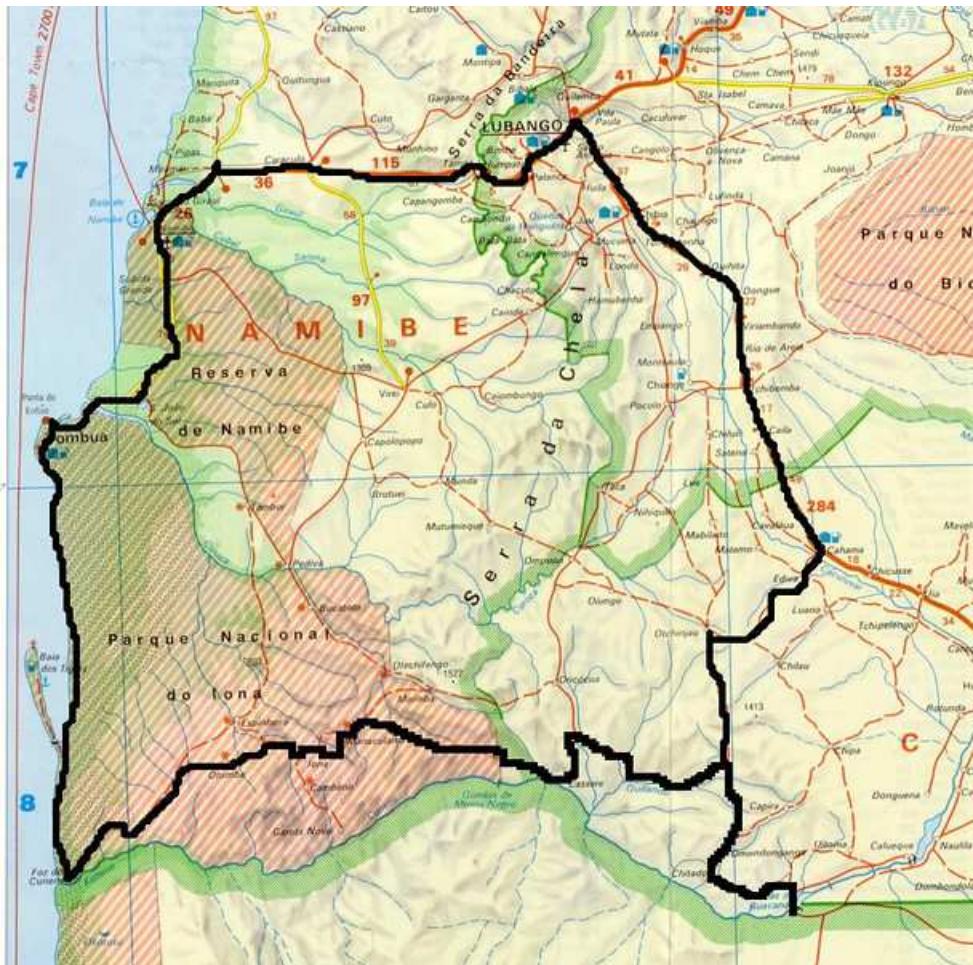
My lodgings.



Angola, it's not like they said

One last thing on these policemen at Foz do Cunene. They must have the worst post in the force. I'm sure you get sent here for punishment.

Here's a map. Foz do Cunene (Kunene Mouth) is in the far bottom-left corner.



There is nothing anywhere close to it. They drink river water. They eat only fish that they catch in the sea several kms away. There is no beer, no shop, they don't have their wives staying there, there are no women, no goats, nothing except sand, sun and wind and 7 guys. Oh, and one book where they copy names and passport numbers in.

They have no electricity, so I assume they have no communications. They have no vehicle. They must be dropped here and left until it is time to fetch them again.

They borrowed our English/Portuguese phrase book for entertainment. Now they know how politely enquire if room service is available and what to say when they tip the porter.

Those okes at Monte Negro don't know how good they have it.

10-3-2007

Angola, it's not like they said

Today is the day all of us have been looking forward to. Today we reach the coast and the next leg of our trip starts. About 200km of deserted beach and dunes. Woohoo!

We are ready for some of this.



Surprisingly my bike starts without too much kicking and we head out to find the river mouth.

And this is what it looks like where the Kunene enters the sea.



Angola, it's not like they said



We cannot contain our joy. We made it. We feel a lovely sense of accomplishment. Now our beach holiday starts.



We celebrate with a breakfast of biltong and Stroh rum.

Angola, it's not like they said



Hennie goes off to go catch something for the pot.



We are in angler's Mecca. By all reports, this place is swarming with fish. You can throw almost anything at the sea and pull fish out. A bite per cast they say.

Well, they don't know Hennie.

On the way through Namibia we had to stop in Keetmanshoop and Mariental. We spent what felt like hours in the heat waiting for Hennie and Fred who was looking for rods and tackle. I started having my doubts when Hennie asked what a swivel was at the one shop. The idea is that we spend a couple of days living off the sea here. Hmmmmmm.

One of the policemen is fishing with a handline. Hennie uses the same bait and casts right next to him. The policeman pulls out four cob. Hennie pulls out the bait he cast in.

Angola, it's not like they said



Don't know what happened here but it looks like it was funny.



Nardus taking the ATGATT thing a tad too far.

Angola, it's not like they said



The river provides plenty driftwood.



While Hennie is out proving that angling needs skill, Fred sorts out a slow puncture. I also strip the 640 again and start isolating parts and testing. I'm slowly starting to suspect the battery again.

Angola, it's not like they said



Hennie returns with great fanfare. He successfully bought these fish off the policeman for R50. We applaud him for setting a record as the only person ever to come to Angola and catch buggerall.



My carrier rack becomes an impromptu cutting board.

Angola, it's not like they said



Fresh fish tastes much better than shop fish. No doubt about that.

Angola, it's not like they said



The wind picks up and starts sweeping the beach.



On these wastelands there's nothing to stop it. If you need shelter, you'd better make a shelter.



Angola, it's not like they said



Behind the shelter sand continuously sifts down on us. Fred's ear is starting it's own beach.

Angola, it's not like they said



Later in the afternoon we can't take it anymore and decide to head out.

Angola, it's not like they said



We move inland to join a marked track.



We find it.

Angola, it's not like they said



It quickly disappears under the sand though and it turns into a guessing game.



So we move down to the beach again.

Angola, it's not like they said



We would have liked so much to play on the dunes but we cannot. Our fuel situation is bordering on serious. We are either just going to make it or just not going to make it.



Angola, it's not like they said

The riding on the beach is lovely though.



Nardus looks over his shoulder to see if the next rider is coming and the 950 promptly shakes him off. KTM's are like that. They like for you to pay attention to them. They want you to be committed. A lot like women actually.

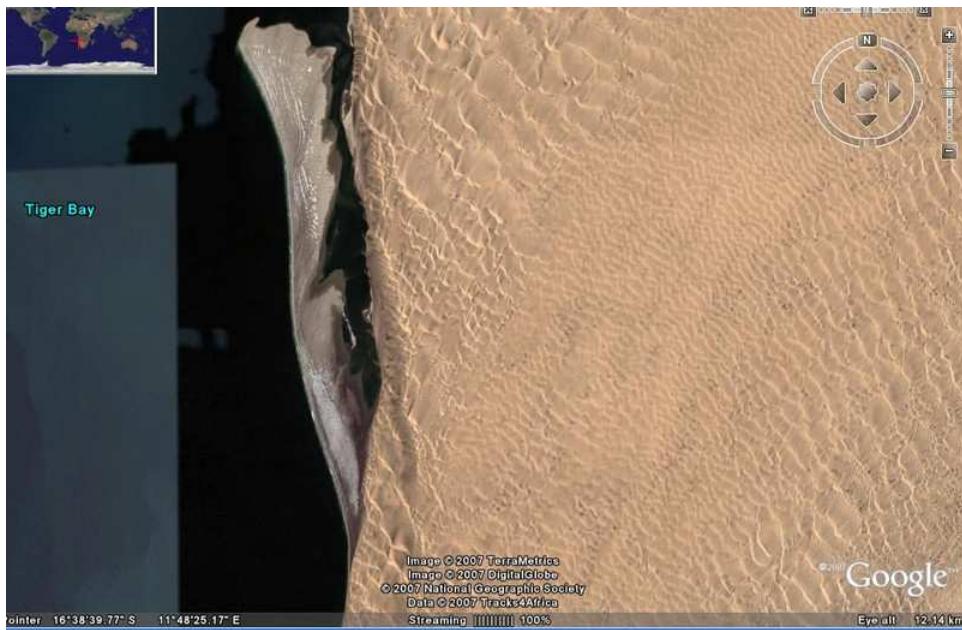


Some places the dunes move away from the sea but you have to stick with them. Usually there are lagoons and if you stay on the shoreline you have to backtrack tens of kms to get around them.

Angola, it's not like they said



See what I mean?



Angola, it's not like they said



We find a spot to overnight.



Sunset over the sea. We live on the other side of the continent. We are used to a sunrise over the sea.

Angola, it's not like they said



Fresh mussels for dinner. Very tasty.



Yeah, life is good in Africa.

Angola, it's not like they said



The day's riding had been easier than we expected. I know that Fred especially had been worried, because every time we have hit sand so far, he had had a hard time. Knowing that we had 200km of beach and dunes on the way must have weighed a bit on his mind.

After today though, we are all relaxed and full of confidence.

Little did we know what we were in for the following day.
Another teaser.



Sidebar by Narri;

The Grosvenor was stranded about 200km from where we are staying. Between East London and the "wreck site", lies the Wild Coast (former Transkei Homeland) with incredible DS riding opportunities. We are very familiar with this area, so if anybody wants to take a ride, please let us know !! An opportunity to meet MJ and his crazy comrades

We are proud to be South African and African, albeit from the pale variety !! Although not everybody shares our outlook on life and our love for all people, I have to agree - there is hope !!

PS. I'll get to the next installment soon. One day max.

Angola, it's not like they said

10-4-2007

Here's the thing.

There's a section today renowned for taking vehicles. The reason is that the waves break straight onto a dune face. There is no beach to ride on. It's about 80km long with here and there a place where there is a break in the dune. About 40 km of it though, has no break. Just waves and dune. It is referred to as the "*doodsakker*". I don't know what the translation is but it is a term used when you are lying in ambush. It refers to the area where the enemy has to be before you open fire.

You cannot go around. As the waves break straight onto the dune, the only way to get through is to use the intertidal area at low tide. It is sloped, soft and not very wide. You have to be quick or get caught. Have a look.



T4A has this to say:

"Do not drive on this beach track between Baia Dos Tigres and Tombua, not even with 'experienced' tour guides. It is extremely dangerous and you stand a good chance of being trapped by the tide."

We have always taken "very dangerous" and "not recommended" as indicators of where some good riding was to be had.

This would be the first time we were wrong and 'they' were right.

So you learn.

It's still dark as we break camp. We need to be ready as soon as dawn breaks. It will be low tide then.

Angola, it's not like they said



My bike is not co-operating. When you kick it over, the dash lights dim and sometimes disappears. It's getting worse. I kick with the left foot until I can no more. Then I get off and kick with the right foot until the leg gives out.



Then it's Hennie's turn, then Michnus (no patience, that boy), then Nardus.



Angola, it's not like they said

Waiting for the KTM.



Eventually the flippin bike fires up. I now know that I have to keep it running until we stop for the night. Fuck'n excellent way to start a morning, sweating like a pig and some mental shit to carry with you all day.

We camped right at the start of this dune section. Immediately the riding is a lot more challenging. The sand is soft and the bikes labour. Some riders labour too. A 950 showing off the *kak* side of gravity.



Angola, it's not like they said

I remember a TV ad for a Subaru where the car is driven through the shallows on a beach with water being sprayed all over the bonnet. I used to have a conniption every time I saw it. We quickly find that there is no place for squeamishness about the bikes getting salt water all over them. You have to ride in the wet left by receding waves to get traction.

Have a look at the last two bikes; they are less than 2 metres apart, yet one has traction and one is digging.



The sea mist is also fouling your goggles, every 200m you have to let go of the bars and wipe them.

Angola, it's not like they said



There are lots of seals and seal carcasses. Also jackal that feed off them, but they don't pose for pictures.



A 'before and after' picture, or a warning to the naive bikers?

Angola, it's not like they said



The riding progressively gets worse and worse. The soft sand is un-ridable. In places your front wheel throws up a bow wave that you can see flying past you. The bikes are just sucking, sucking fuel. Even before we enter the *doodsakker*, I am forced to leave the others behind. I cannot afford the rest stops because it wastes fuel. I feel like shit because I'm useless to the others.

This gives you an idea of where the tide goes to.

Angola, it's not like they said



Fourty kilometres can be as long as life itself. When you think you've had enough you look back to the horizon and see this.



Sidebar by Metaljockey;
We were told by locals that a lot of the dead seals come from being caught in the nets of the fishing trawlers. We also raced by many sleeping seals, they can get mighty pissed off.

You look forward to the horizon and see this.

Angola, it's not like they said



The immense drag on your front wheel, and the fact that you cannot back off the throttle, makes the back wheel step out and try to overtake you now and then. I ride out two successfully, but the third ends in a mini-highside. I land on my back but my left hand still has the clutch lever in a deathgrip. So the engine doesn't stall and I am saved.



Sidebar by Metaljockey;

You can't change the weight of the fuel, only the place where you carry it. I think the saddle bags or soft panniers is about the best option.

We carried fuel, water, tools, food, oil and just about nothing else. I for instance carried one denim (because I didn't trust my new pants yet), one t-shirt and 6 pairs of socks. That's it. So there's nothing we could leave behind next time. If one has the moolla though, I think tyre balls would be a good idea. Then one could leave the spare tubes, slime and tyre levers. Quite a bit of weight there already.

I wouldn't carry sand tyres, just plan better.

A lighter bike would be better. It's just difficult to find a lighter bike that can carry 60l of fuel. Also the 650's was very close to being short on power.

The longer we ride the more intense it gets. The sand is so thick and waterlogged it's hard to believe. At one point the drag pulls me down until I'm in 1st gear with the throttle wound to the stop. The motor don't rev out though. It sits in the fat part of the torque curve. The bike bellows like a wounded animal and it kills me.

It just kills me.

No motor should be abused like this. It goes on for a good hundred metres. And there's nothing you can do. I'm on the pegs, murdering the bike and moving at just above walking pace. If I tap off for just a second I'll be stuck, with no way to get going again. And if I get stuck I get fucked.

Angola, it's not like they said

It turns into a refrain in my head that I can't control: "**If you get stuck here, you get fucked here**".

It gets worse and worse. No pics were taken when things got wild but this will give you an idea.



We are forced to power down into the wave area after a receding wave in the hope that we'll reach traction before the next wave chases us up into the soft sand again. You have no choice. You plow down into the wet, get traction, pick up speed, and then try and outrun the next wave. If you don't get traction before the next wave hits, you are history. The waves down at the bottom is breaking about a metre and a half high. And in my head it's going: "**if you get stuck here you get fucked here**" on and on and on and on!

There's no way to avoid it. When you're racing the waves, sometimes you are going to lose. You get surf that just rushes in at a speed greater than the limits of grip in turning. So you crash through it. And everytime that you hit that wave at speed you know you're fucking with chance, or fate, call it what you will. And everytime you make it, it's not even a relief, because it's gonna happen again, and how lucky can 5 guys expect to be? We're working like our lives depend on it. Which it does.

When you get traction you gun it. You're gonna need the speed soon. I'll be flying at 75 km/h and feel the sand make a grab at my front wheel. Immediately I'll bang down on the seat and lock my arms straight. The next soft patch is bound to be worse and you have no way of visually identifying it, or with what tenacity it's going to grip your front wheel. Flying over the front wheel is staring you in the face (like that ugly stranger you see in the mirror when taking a piss some very late, very drunk night at some dive that you never thought you'll be caught dead in). Yeah, like that.

Whatever mistake you make has the potential to be really serious. Whether you fall, stall, get stuck, misjudge, whatever. I have never ridden like this. It scares me shitless.

Angola, it's not like they said



And in the end it's fear. Naked fear, but no choice. I'm riding at a risk level that's totally unacceptable. And I try to be liberal about that kind of thing.

But if you stop, you are fucked. so you keep riding, racing, shouting obscenities at fate, knowing you're gonna get the short end of the stick. Turning like the worm being trod upon. Let no-one ever tell you that the worm doesn't turn. He turns..... he knows.

There are limits. Always and to everything. And behind me the limits are being reached. There's a limit to how long our luck was going to hold out.

There's a limit as to how deep water a Dakar can crash into and hope to punch through.

Fred is the unlucky one that draws the short stick. As he hits the wave, the bike starts it's cartwheel. Fred does not get thrown clear. His soft bags wrap around his foot and he becomes an active participant in this unnatural, ugly, vertical carousel.

Like I said, there are limits to everything, and swinging a grown man around by his foot is going to reach some limit. His ankle accordingly fractures. As Fred and his android bike finally comes to rest, he has the presence of mind to hit the kill switch before the first wave breaks over his head. Respect!

There's no-one on the scene yet. The second wave breaks over his head. He realises that this may be some serious shit. His fucked-up leg is wrapped up under the bike and he can't fix this. The third wave does not break over his head but fills his helmet. He rips off his goggles gasping for air. Yes, this is serious.

In the mean time Nardus comes upon this scene. Firstly he has his own demons to deal with. He's got a fat pig that's not happy in sand. He knows that if he gets stuck, he cannot fix it. What he

Angola, it's not like they said

sees when he arrives on the scene is a Dakar lying in the surf and the rider too. This is serious shit. If you ain't dead, your'e supposed to stand up. Nardus have known Fred and his family intimately for many years. He invited Fred on this trip. This is not the kind of news he should be expected to break to the family. He gets a bit of a loose bowel feeling until he sees Fred raise his head. Relief! And anger! He cannot stop here, wtf man, why me? He'll be stuck. So he shouts something useless at Fred and rides past to some place where he can stop.

Hennie in the mean time is not absolved from demons. He stopped to help Nardus where he got stuck. As soon as Nardus got traction he just wrung that throttle. He was rattled. "**You get stuck here, you get fucked here**". Hennie takes some time to extricate his own bike and races off after Nardus. He is last in line and no-one is going to assist him. He has been on reserve for some time already. And like everybody else , he still has to chase the receding waves. If he runs out of fuel while down below, he is fucked. Fucked! He races at over 100km/h where-ever he gets grip. Either he catches up or he donates his bike to Poseidon.

When he catches up, it's where Nardus is trying to get Fred disentangled from his bike. Hennie doesn't help. He doesn't take a picture (very, very unlike Hennie), he rips the fuel from Nardus's bike and starts filling his tank.

It's new to me, I haven't ever seen the both of them lose it like this.

Out front (and none the wiser) I reach the end of the *doodsakker*. I'm fucking dilly. The first jackal that doesn't dissapear but just stands there watching me go by, has me waving at him like he's a friendly local. I have to shout at myself in my helmet to get real.

I pull up at the first place where I can get above the high water mark.



Angola, it's not like they said

Not too long and Michnus joins me. We seriously underestimated the *doodsakker*. He sucks on his tripper like his life depends on it.



Angola, it's not like they said

I'm a bit in shock. On every trip you have one or two moments when you overcook things and miss a turn or race into a flock of sheep at breakneck speed; this was like that, except that it continued for 3 hours with no let up.

Nobody else arrives. My God, how did we fuck this up so badly?

10-8-2007

Michnus and myself have no idea what's happened behind us. All we know is it can't be good.

When we ride in remote areas such as this, we always try to be at least three riders. This allows one to stay with an injured rider while the third goes for help. Behind us are three riders but not one of them made it out of the doodsakker. I would expect at least one to come through with an update.

With no-one forthcoming, I can only think of two explanations.

I was in front and I don't have the GPS. Maybe the route veered away from the beach through an unseen gap in the dune. I very seriously doubt it though. I've been hugging that dune like I hugged Leonie Van Der Walt when she pulled me into her ample bosom the first time at a school dance.

If there was a gap, I would have seen it.

The other reason could be that someone is dead. I cannot think of any other reason that all three bikes will stay away.

We cannot go back. We had hoped that we could all leave Foz do Cunene with a full tank of fuel. This did not happen. Except for one bike, everybody had already started using their last tank in the desert. Fuel moved from being the main priority to being the only priority. On this, both Michnus and myself agree. There's no way we are going to be riding in any direction, but to Tombua.

We can make camp here and wait until tomorrow, but what if they still don't turn up? Then we've wasted a day and we're still in the same position. And it's not like we're overstocked on food either.

Michnus says he still saw Fred's headlight behind him not too far back. Maybe one or two kilometres. So we decide to walk back.

The walking turns out to be little different from the riding. It's more slogging than walking. Every step sinks in. In the beginning we still take a picture or two when we come across something interesting.

Angola, it's not like they said



This one is my favourite: Jackall spoor.



After about an hour's walk I climb onto the dune to see if I can get a better view. Surprisingly it's easier to walk on the dune. So we move upstairs.

Angola, it's not like they said



We also get to see what the interior looks like. Damn!



Angola, it's not like they said



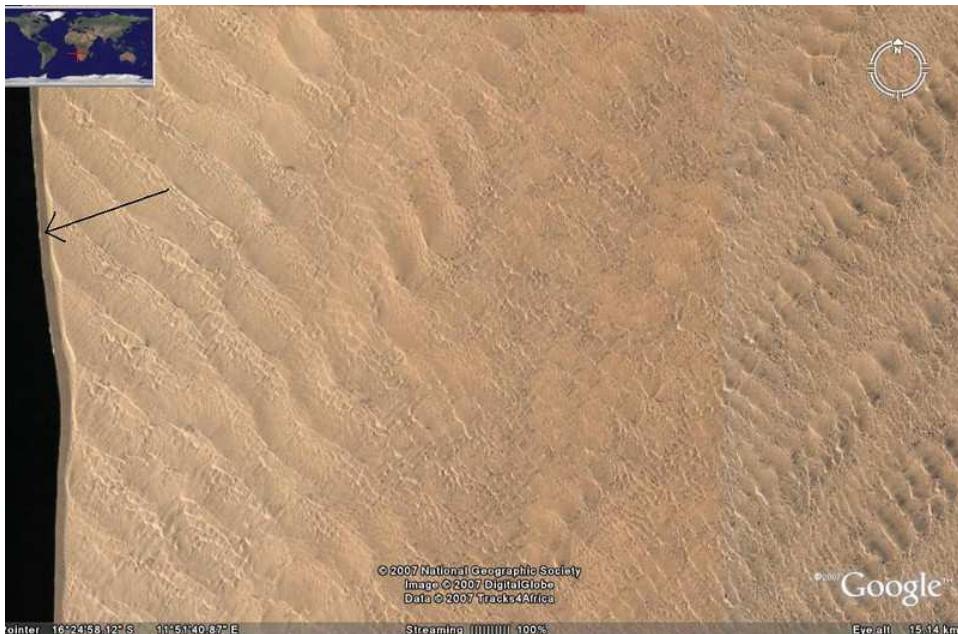
Angola, it's not like they said

And we walk and we walk.

Two and a half hours walking brings us upon this scene.



We learn of what happened. At this stage we don't know his ankle is broken. Fred isn't willing to take off his boot for fear of not being able to get it back on. Good call. We are over here:



It's not like we can summon an ambulance. He's gonna need that boot to get out of here.

Angola, it's not like they said

The twenty minutes or so it took to get Fred and his bike recovered from the sea, had shut the door on the *doodsakker*. So they decided to ram the bikes as far up the dune as they can and wait out the tide. It would have been plain stupid to try and send one rider through to us.



We are very lucky that the sea is relatively calm. The waves make us nervous but it does not reach the bikes.



Angola, it's not like they said



I had always reasoned that, worst case scenario, we can always drag the bikes up the dune. Being here it's clear that that was never gonna happen.

Angola, it's not like they said



Fred's bike amazes everyone. The only damage from the cartwheel is a bent handlebar, a throttle that is now manual and some broken indicators. By the time Fred was sorted, the bike had been lying in the waves for probably 15 minutes. Yet it fired into life like nothing untoward had happened. Score! Two problems solved; we do not need to recover a broken bike and Fred has transport.

It's too bad that it had to be Fred. It could have been any of us. Every day so far he had to work three times as hard as the rest of us. Every day so far he had an off. Twice he got hurt. The ankle that now broke is the same one that took the punishment two days before (remember the helmet wedge pic?). Every night he would be pleased at how he exceeded his own abilities that day.

He has a lot to digest whilst lying against this dune. Taking a tumble like that messes with your head quite a bit. By this afternoon when the tide goes out again, he needs to be ready to get back on the bike and once again attack the sand monster. This time with one leg he can't use, bent handlebars and a sticky throttle.

I really feel for him, I feel even worse for not being able to offer any help. He is on his own in this.

We agree that they will try to ride out on the afternoons low tide. If it comes too late they'll catch the next morning's. Me and Michnus should return to our bikes and wait.

We rest for an hour or so and then start the walk back. As we leave we see a grey mass come in from the south. It's a cold wind racing over the Benguela current.

Neither Michnus nor myself can be called fitness freaks. This time it takes longer than two and a half hours. We are so knackered that we stop to rest three times with our bikes already in view. They are filthy dirty. There will have to be a total strip down.

Angola, it's not like they said



This foul wind is icy cold and we pitch tents to get out of it.

The poor bastards against the dune don't have that luxury.



Beach holiday my ass.

Angola, it's not like they said

Late that afternoon we hear the bikes over the wind. They made it. While we pull our tents down Nardus is doing his 'Tough Biker' impression.



While the rest of us kick the shit out of my bike, Hennie and Fred gets going. While he can, he must ride. They'll wait for us where the route veers back into the interior.

When we finally get going the riding is suddenly easy. We still ride the wet stuff but there is grip in most places and we can get the speed up nicely. There's also a wide beach to run to when the waves come in.

As the afternoon slows into a sunset, one after the other the bikes start hitting reserve. We are still carrying about 7 litres in containers. Everybody knows how far his bike can go on reserve and we only stop for fuel when empty is imminent. We start sharing out the fuel at about a litre a time. We know we might not make it but now we are close enough to Tombua to walk out in one or two days max. It may be unpleasant, but it is do-able.

Along the beach the scenery is spectacular. It is really enjoyable riding. In our country all beach riding is banned. We are getting our fill now.

Angola, it's not like they said



At the final wreck Hennie and Fred is waiting.



When we get there, the day is gone.

Angola, it's not like they said



It is here that we turn inland. With the wind, camping doesn't look like such a peachy idea. We decide to keep going.

As Fred tries to clear the shelf dropping onto the beach he goes down. He goes down on the sore leg. I feel it. This would not to be the last time. If you cannot use your leg to steady the bike, then that's the side you will fall onto more often.

It gets dark. My bike has no lights and neither does Hennie's. We are riding in the desert again on a reasonable track with the odd sandy stretch. It's not that pleasant without lights. But it is possible for us to get to Tombua tonight still. It's been three days since we've seen a beer.

We suddenly hit a tall dune and Fred just plain flies up it. Both me and Hennie have to take more than one run at it. Looks like Fred wants to get to Tombua without any fannying about.

I find that riding sand blind is actually easier as I do not see the sandy bits coming. I only feel it and respond. Who would've guessed.

In the mean time, our reserve fuel is no more. The next bike that runs out, runs out. It's just incredible that we can cut it this close after 6 days of riding over all kinds of terrain.

Five guys caress their throttles in the most sensitive manner. We roll into Tombua on fumes and millilitres. We pull straight into the filling station. Relief! Shit, we made it. We're back in civilisation. People all over!

We are filthy and fucking tired. Tombua is a fishing port. I know that there is no accommodation, not even a camp site. But once again the good people of Angola humble us. We ask a car at the fuel station where we could sleep. He takes us to a mate of his called Ze. Ze speaks English, he has a factory that we can sleep at. He directs us first to a restaurant, promising to fetch us when we are finished eating.

Angola, it's not like they said

We chuck down beers like oysters. We eat food prepared by someone. Meat. Man, it's difficult to describe what one feels. When Ze fetches us and takes us to his factory grounds, I feel like I have a father again, looking out for me. Showering will have to wait till the next day when the factory generator is started. We pitch our tents and pass out.

Angola, it's not like they said

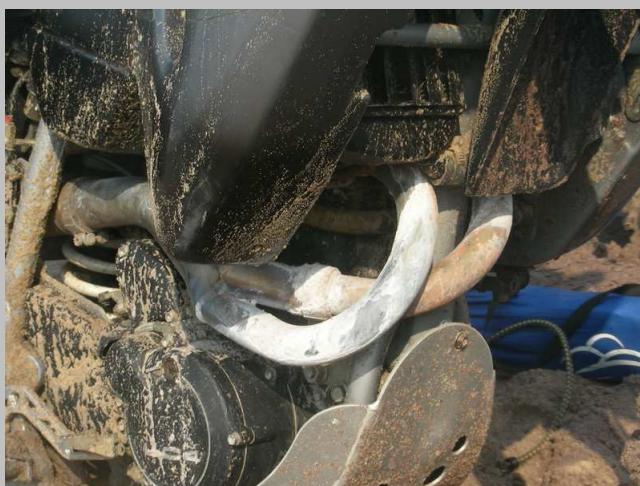
Sidebar by Michnus;

just have to add these few pictures to Metaljockey's report.

Fred stopped me, there was something wrong with his bike, just the ABS acting up from all the sand. Well, we didn't ride with the ABS off, just was too much of a hassle to put it off every time we started again.



Seawater is not your friend.



Now, this is the thing, I don't believe in walking if you can ride, that's why humankind evolved and invented the wheel. But seeing our predicament, I will do what have to be done and take a stroll with Metaljockey back to where I last seen Fred behind me.

I honestly thought it was only a mile or two from where we were, huuuge mistake, all the adrenalin and tension buggers around with your mind. It ended up being a return journey of 9 miles (14km). Well for the most that's nothing, but we are really tired from the ride, our energy levels are low and ploughing through the sand with biking boots is not fun.

It is a eerie feeling leaving your bike, with all your supplies and walk along a desert and a coast that has no mercy for anything, even with MJ there, you know you are bloody alone, it's really a very weird uncomfortable feeling.

Angola, it's not like they said

Never had I felt scared and absolutely happy at the same time, it's a privilege to experience the beauty and loneliness that's there, day after day, and civilisation can't encroach there, they can't destroy it, it's ruthless, it's one place mankind can't live, can't build malls.



Metaljockey's bike is standing closest to the sea, before we left we moved his bike up to where mine is standing, just in case, because high tide was still coming in.

When we came back the water had just missed our bikes, if we left his bike standing there, it would have been buried in the sand.



On our way back and we are really tired and hungry. I lost my hat a few days before and the sun screws with me big time.

Angola, it's not like they said



Back at our bikes, we have some comfort, our friends are alive and well.



10-9-2007

The next morning we have a look at Fred's ankle. It's an unpretty thing that balloons out both sides, but he is able to wriggle his toes and to move his foot up and down ever so slightly. So our combined 'expert' opinion is that it's only the ligaments that went. It may be a bad sprain but a sprain none the less. And if it's a sprain there's no purpose in seeking medical help, they'll just tape it up and that we can do ourselves.

Our accomodation in Ze's factory.

Angola, it's not like they said



We also do a post mortem on the ride and hindsight shows us where we went wrong. The reason the riding was so much easier in the afternoon, is that we started riding on the ebb. In other words it was not yet low tide, this gives us a better quality of sand to ride and gives us extra time. It took us three hours to do the run against the dune. We started just after low tide and we were racing the incoming tide, which just squeezed the breath out of us.

Sidebar by Narri;

For the ladies out there: I have cropped this picture to enable better perving/viewing/drooling Enjoy !! Ha - ha - ha !

Thanks for the replies - everybody !



What we should have done is to schedule the whole trip around this section so that we could utilize Spring Low Tide. If we then departed on the ebb, it would have been a lot safer, time

Angola, it's not like they said

wise. As it happenend, we were there 2 or 3 days after Neap Tide. We couldn't leave earlier as it was still dark. Even before we left that morning, we were already doomed. Our planning let us down.

We get to rinse the bikes with fresh water. And they need it badly. This is the back side of the 950's radiator.



Hennie and myself construct a jumper cable that plugs into his power outlet. My bike gets it connected and carried externally so we don't have to take the seat off every time we need to use it. It does'nt work, as it overheats, but we learn a very important thing. The starter goes 'tchigdrrrrrrrrrrrr'. That's the sound of a flat battery. So it's not the starter, solenoid, relay, ignition, or any of a myriad other possibilities. All the other options have now been eliminated. I feel massively better. It's not the bike. It's the battery. And so I learn that a battery can have the headlights shining strongly, yet still be unservicable and short out once a bigger load is put on it.

Ze takes me to an outdoor market and there between the bras, panties, pots and pangas we find three motorcycle batteries. Two tiny 2.5As and one, still not that big, 6A one. My bike needs an 8A battery but this will have to do. I fill it and put it in my bag to charge up properly. I'll fit it in Namibe, the next town.

Some local biker brothers.

Angola, it's not like they said



Tombua is the first sizable town we get to and we learn a couple of things. We learn that people are happy to go out of their way to help. Ze had taken a good portion out of his evening to take us around, he had let us sleep in his factory, he let us wash our bikes, he arranged for hot showers, he took Nardus around to change Dollars to Kwanza, he took me around to find a battery. This is a man with a factory to run and a family etc. We owe him. He intends to start a tourism business soon. Tombua is ripe for it.

We learn that if you want to run a business, you must generate your own power. The Municipal power is on for perhaps 3 or 4 hours during the day, on a good day. This turned out to be so, not only in Tombua, but throughout the country.

On the issue of changing money; in Angola it is illegal to import Kwanza. In other words you are not allowed to obtain their currency outside the country and bring it with you through the border. Consequently you have to obtain your Kwanza once you are in the country. The problem is that their banking system is not linked to any foreign banks. So even though the bigger towns may have ATMs, we will not be able to draw money from them. The solution is to carry your whole budget in US Dollars, it is accepted most places and the conversion rate is easy to calculate; 10 Kwanza to the Rand and 7 Rand to the Dollar.

We also learn that the people here are of a different calibre than back home. The town centre consists mostly of abandoned buildings and potholes. There is no lighting as there is no electricity. When we were at the restaurant the previous night, our bikes was parked in the dark outside, with all our gear on, surrounded by twenty or so youngsters. When we mentioned our concern for theft, it provoked surprised laughter. Nothing was touched, we still got up now and again to have a look, but here we were the freaks for being so suspicious.

Angola, it's not like they said

We leave Tombua and head to Namibe on a tarred road.

Normally I detest tar when on the 640, but it is novel and I enjoy sitting back and just letting the bike get on with it. Angolans drive on the 'wrong' side of the road however, so everytime I see a vehicle approach my stomache gives a slight turn.

Namibe turns out to be a major town. As we pull in, we stop to get something to eat and we have the most fantastic pastries. We notice a lot of Portuguese come in and drink what looks like cappucino and whisky as a combination. We also have guys pose next to our bikes for photo's. they appear to be well-off and drive new 4x4s and wear Ferrari branded clothing. This is clearly a more affluent town and it shows. The roads are better, we see a traffic cop and the place has many bars, pubs and discos.

We head to the beach front to find accomodation and we find a restaurant where we grind to a halt.



The service is excellent and having the prettiest waitresses in town does'nt hurt either.

Angola, it's not like they said



Angola, it's not like they said

The beach.



We spend the whole day on this veranda spending a large part of our budget. Money well spent I say.

We are entertained by this guy doing all sorts of tricks at breakneck speed.



Angola, it's not like they said

My favourite is when he comes past with his legs over the handlebars, his hands behind his head as if he's sitting on a sofa, keeping the throttle open with his calf. We stop taking pictures though because we can just see that this lot is going to end badly if we keep on encouraging him.

We just loved the local bicycle gang. All with impressive skills.



That is another thing we notice. It looks like children here have the time and space to play. We see unsupervised groups of 8yr olds swimming at the beach and playing games. Where I stay that would be out of the question.

We find camping for R50 a person (\$7). We are the only people there.

Angola, it's not like they said



Fred's ankle appears to be worse than the previous day and he is clearly in a lot of pain. As soon as we've eaten, he heads off to take a lie down.

We have high expectations from Namibe. It's Africa, it's Portuguese, it's by the seaside, and we know there will be many clubs and young people partying. And the locals we have seen so far are sensational. What we forget is that we are not that young anymore. A long story short - we wander the streets looking for a good time from 19:00 to 23:00 by which time we are so tired we go to bed. The night life in Namibe starts at midnight. I kid you not. At midnight people only start going out. Then they party until 6 or 7 in the morning.

So, to my utter embarrassment, we fade and have nothing to show of Namibe.

I apologise.

10-16-2007

The one thing I love about these trips is that you learn new stuff all the time. Yesterday I learned that battery acid stains my pants white when rinsed with water, and black when rinsed with Angolan beer. This kind of stuff can come in handy some day.

So the new battery is fitted, the starter swings over and an angel choir breaks out in song. My inner thighs says a quiet thank you, they haven't been looking forward to this morning's kicking session. To atone for my sinfull thoughts towards the bike, I wash the airfilter and coat it with some very expensive synthetic oil. Nothing like starting the day with the smell of petrol on your hands.

Fred's day starts with a trip around town looking for a pair of crutches. If he stops hobbling around on that foot, maybe the 'sprain' will be less painful. Again there is a local that goes out of his way to take them around to the hospital and Fred returns with a very expensive pair of WWII

Angola, it's not like they said

steel crutches. Apparently the hospital was a less than pleasant experience and he tells us of several malaria cases being brought in while they were there and of one that was tied to a bed etc.

There's another thing I forgot to mention, the restaurant that we were at, had a guard standing around outside. When it became dark he appeared with an AK47 over his shoulder. So did the caretaker at the camp grounds. Also, when we were roaming the town, every so often we would find someone stationed on a corner with a chair and an assault rifle. Whether it was police or some civil guarding system I don't know. It appears they take safety and security seriously here. For us however it is strange to see, in our country it is only government forces that are allowed to possess fully automatic rifles. And AK47's are only ever seen in the hands of criminals. We felt very safe though.

After breakfast we reluctantly take our leave from Namibe, none more so than Nardus. Just like Monte Negro, he campaigns valiantly to stay another day.

Once again we have good tarred road under our wheels and we watch the scenery change from yellow desert to scraggy brush to proper bushveld with Baobabs etc. In Namibe it was cold, but as the scenery changes so too does the temperature and we are forced to stop and get rid of some clothing.

Our plan for the day is to reach Lubango and sleep in the bush somewhere on the other side of it. As we start the bikes mine is dead. Dead.

The new battery is of as much use as a rock. Son of a beige! Now it could be the bike again. Maybe the alternator charges the batteries to a frazzle. This one only lasted a couple of hundred km's. It's very possible because over the past 12 mnths I fitted 3 new batteries to this piece of shit bike.

This time kicking is futile. It's hot. Hennie takes a meditative approach to the kicking.



Sidebar from Metaljockey:
My clocks showed 714km. That is starting with a full tank of 26l and carrying an additional 30l and then in the end I bummed a couple of litres off the Dakar boys. Their consumption was spectacularly better than the two KTM's.

Finally we decide to run-start seeing as there is a tarred surface. The compression is too much to run it in 1st or 2nd and the wheel just locks up. In 3rd the engine turns over too slowly to get the thing to run.

The trick is to get a good run (with your mates pushing), then hook it into second (with your mates still pushing), then drop the clutch in 2nd whilst still holding the decompression lever in

Angola, it's not like they said

(with your mates giving their all), let it turn over a couple of times like that (with your mates hating your guts but still pushing), and then drop the decompression lever whilst jumping on the pegs to get traction. Surprisingly tricky to get your left hand to follow the sequence.

That's the way to go if you want to piss your mates off. Have them push your bike around, in the sun, with you on the seat, and periodically fuck up the sequence between the in gear/out of gear, clutch and decomp, with the lovely expectation that this may be the situation for the rest of the trip.

We get the bike started though, but it is clearly not a happy chappie. It is not keen to start, not keen to idle and only seem to be OK when given a handful.

At least we are going to Lubango. It's the second largest city in Angola. Mechanics and bike batteries ought to abound.

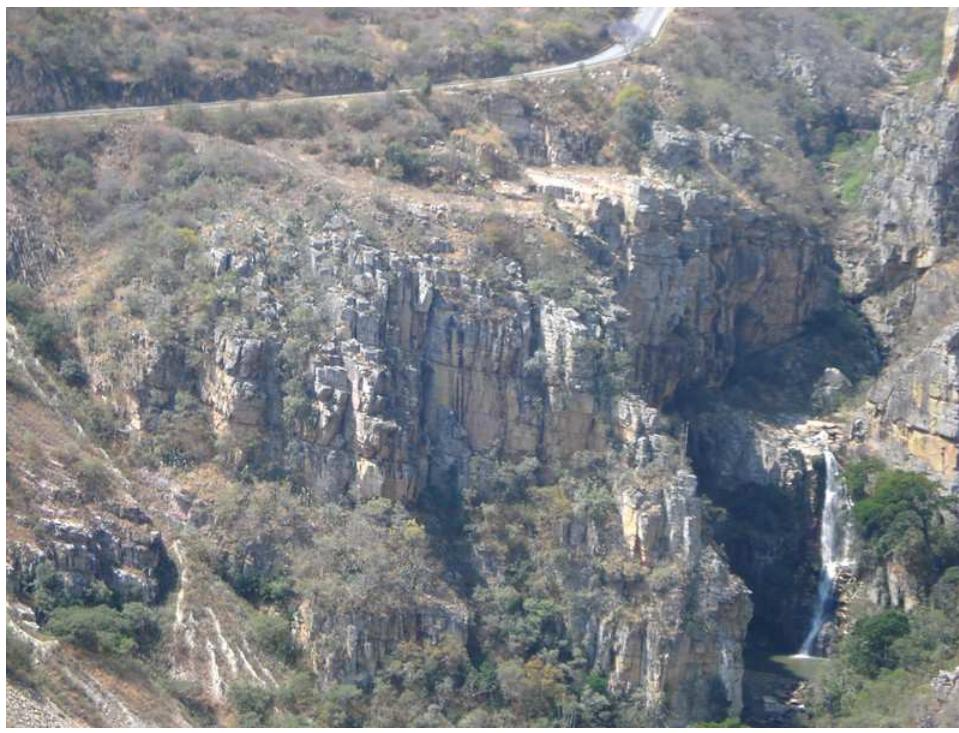
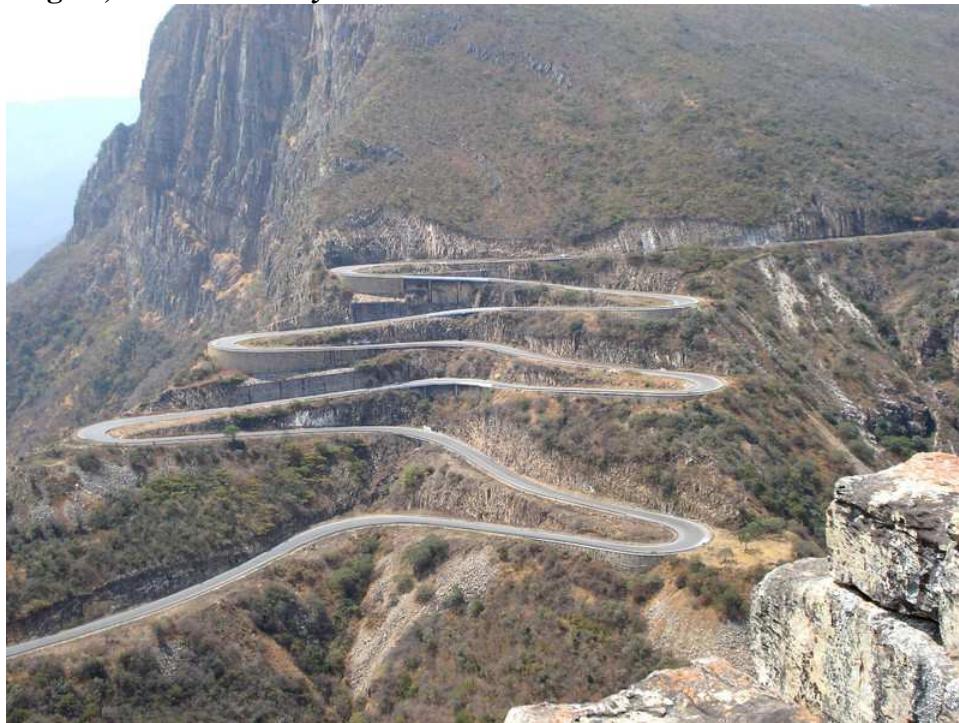
Next to the road we notice that the locals are wearing a different traditional dress than before. The women are still going topless but generally have small breasts which are tied down with cloth or string. I really should do a little research beforehand, the experience is always enhanced by knowing the local customs and colour.

Between us and Lubango stands an escarpment rising 2km from the plains. Up it winds Leba pass. It's fantastic. Go see it.

We did not get good pictures as we were there in the heat of the day but here are some.



Angola, it's not like they said



Angola, it's not like they said



When we get to Lubango we head straight to Cristo Rei. I think it translates to 'Christ the Redeemer'. It is a copy of the statue on Corcovado Mountain in Rio De Janeiro. I'm told it's one of three, the other being in Lisbon. This one is also situated on a mountain overlooking the city.



It is however unique, it is the only one to be riddled with bullet holes. Using Jesus for target practice... only in Africa.

Angola, it's not like they said



On top of the same hill there are still some remnants of the city's defences. We used to call this a Stalin Organ (like the musical instrument, not the penis).

Angola, it's not like they said



Down below we can see the city sprawling and it is fascinating to hear it grumble. It's like a living animal.



I hate cities. To me they are just large containers for the desperate. Out in the rural areas one can be poor, but still live with integrity and self respect. I normally avoid cities like the plague when on a bike trip. Today I need what it offers though and so we descend.

9-18-2007

Like so much else on this trip, Lubango turns out to be a surprise highlight.

We intended to stop for fuel, a battery and some fresh vegetables and be on our way. In the heat and slow riding my bike starts acting up big time however. I have to rev the thing above 4000 in order to keep it going. When it stalls it takes a many attempts at run-starting to get it going.

Angola, it's not like they said

Where we were of the opinion that it's not too difficult to ride on the 'wrong' side of the road, we now find it very confusing. With heavy traffic, one-ways and roundabouts things look a lot different. Also, most of the crossings do not have stop signs, some have signs that indicate whether you are on the bigger or smaller of the intersecting roads.

We don't find a battery and I'm getting increasingly steamed up. In the afternoon the bike becomes so bad that Hennie has to pull me with a tow rope up and down a sidestreet. This is very funny (hopefully someday) because before we came on this trip, everyone was concerned about Hennie's bike, which was well used already. His response was that he was still going to be towing a KTM out of Angola. Imagine my pleasure at being towed by Hennie's bike in Angola.

While all this is going on Nardus gets on with socializing.



When the bike finally starts I just want to get out of the city. Luckily my mates have cooler heads and they decide to find a place to sleep so that my bike can be dealt with properly the next day.

We book in at Casper Lodge to camp. Not the most atmospheric place.

When the rest go out to hit the town, I just go to bed, this bike is burning my ring.

The next morning we start with repairs. Fred is still riding with a bent handlebar and a manual throttle. This gets sorted out with some teamwork.

Angola, it's not like they said



I wonder why the throttle was sticking?



I start stripping the bike with the intention of getting the carb out and re-setting the float level and cleaning jets out.



As soon as the tank is off though, I find the problem. It's that choke elbow again. This time I cable tie it in place and I set the adjuster on the choke as loose as it will go. Why the hell the adjuster is located under the tank, I don't know. So I start another day with petrol hands but a

Angola, it's not like they said

light heart because the bike is back to normal, idling away and pulling strongly from closed throttle like it should.

Amazing what a little bit of attention can do to a bike.

Hennie and myself goes off to find a multimeter so that we can trace the battery problem. This turns out to be one hell of a job involving all kinds, including using an incorrectly calibrated multimeter and getting lost around town with a helmetless mechanic perched on top of my luggage behind me and finally tracking down a working multimeter at a backyard mechanic's place in a shanty town. All this being made excruciatingly difficult by not being able to speak portuguese.



Sidebar by Metaljockey;

It's not that the 950 is crap in sand. It actually did very well I'd say. It's just that compared to the 650's it was a lot more difficult to keep upright and when you get stuck, you are going to work harder to get out.

Weight is weight, and when you are riding sand weight is not your friend. Nothing will ever change that.

The sand was bad, there was several places where none of the bikes would be able to get going again if they got stuck. Difficult to believe, but believe me, so it was.

But to my utter and uninhibited joy, we can finally rule out the bike as the problem. The alternator pushes a beautiful clean 13.4V. Even now I feel the joy of that moment. And again I have to apologise to the bike.

Next stop, to find a battery. This turns out to be a problem. We decide that I will wait with the bike and Hennie will scour town for the necessary. As I wait I learn new things again. That in the middle of the city, the old and new continue to live side by side.

Angola, it's not like they said



I learn again that Angolan people are different than where I come from. My bike is left unattended with all my gear in a busy street and no-one touches it.

Several people approach me and offer their help, giving me directions and phone numbers of people they think may be able to assist (still with the language problem).

As I wait a Varadero pulls up. It turns out to be José. José turns out to be able to speak reasonable English! José is the president of the local bike club!!

What? Angola! A bike club??!

One would think that this is as good as it gets. But it gets better. They have a clubhouse with bar and accommodation!!!

We go to their spot and have a cold beer foisted upon us. Here's what to look for.

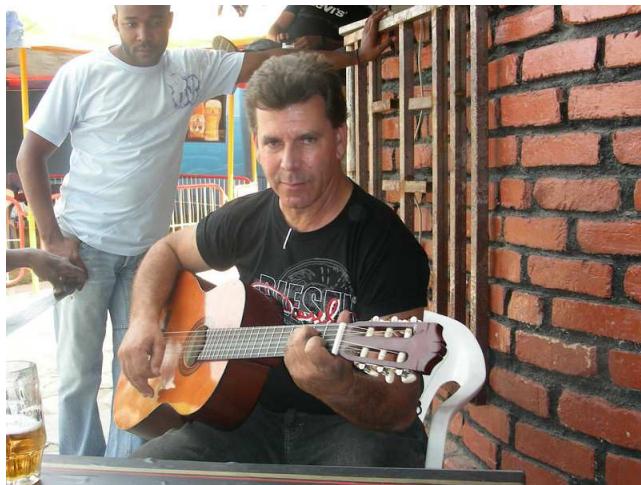


Angola, it's not like they said

Yes, the club is called the Falcons.

The other 3 have been patiently waiting at a bar on the road out of town for about 4 hours already. When we sms them about the biker bar they arrive within what felt like seconds. It's like coming home. Within minutes our plans to leave town as soon as a battery is found, is scuppered. We want to stay.

José takes me to various places to look for a battery. There is no shop that sells big bike batteries so we do the rounds to the local quad riders (apparently quite active over there) to see if any one has a spare battery. They don't but I do break one of my personal rules - never to ride on the back of a bike (it's a long story). And I break it in style, being paraded around Lubango without a helmet looking like Tom Cruise's floozy. This is José.



In the end José cuts open his battery holder to take the oversize battery he once personally fetched from Namibia, and I get the Vara's battery. It's a huge frikken thing and won't fit under my seat so we modify some cables and it gets carried in the saddle bag. Instead of 8A it is 20A. If this thing doesn't make this motor spin like a sewing machine nothing will.



José impressed me no end. One hell of a nice guy. I owe him. He tells us of his history. He never fled the country in 1976 when Portugal withdrew. Some bad things happened to the whites that stayed then. He stayed and later served in the army and is now a Major.

Angola, it's not like they said

This gets us to the final one of my concerns. Like I said, the war finally came to an end only 5 years ago. Even though our country withdrew in 1989, we do not know what kind of residual feelings there are towards South Africans. Keep in mind that we invaded them, and spent 13 years operating on their turf, fighting a variety of factions, the most relevant of which the current ruling party. The government.

Four of the five of us had done military service in Angola at some or other stage. Now we are here to holiday. It may be a problem for some.

That does not include José though. He sees us as bikers, friends. He clearly has put some work into putting things in perspective.

I don't really know how to explain all this and I don't even know if it should be dwelt on here. I will say only this.

José was wounded by a battalion I served in.

He showed me the Imperial Hotel in town.



Those holes was made by our planes.

We do a lot of talking that afternoon. We learn a lot of things we didn't know. The main thing I

Angola, it's not like they said

learn is that there are several emotions that have not yet been named. I'll leave it at that.

The bar is open to the public but the under cover parking right in front is reserved for bikes only.



By the way, José now imports trucks. You pay per meter deck space. So this is how you save on shipping costs.



They are very proud of this '69 Honda. At night its lights are switched on.

Angola, it's not like they said



We spend the entire afternoon seated and quaffing 'Ngola's.



Beers and entertainment, this guy can make that saw sing. Anything.



On the left, playing the saw is another José. Let's call him Jo. He fought alongside José for most of the war. They are inseperable. Jo is a helluva lekker ou. He makes a point of enjoying every moment to the full. Focussed on having a good time. My kinda guy.

Angola, it's not like they said



He is one hell of a singer too. Think Axl Rose crossed with Louis Armstrong.



This afternoon was just getting surreal man.

Fred's ankle getting some medical attention. Vinegar to get the swelling down. Just for the record - not very effective.

Angola, it's not like they said



The bar also has a braai area and a resident cook. We feel like some chicken and it is duly delivered.



They are left to wander around the dinner tables until later in the afternoon when they are knocked out with a kerie in amongst the guests. Another first for me. Having your dish killed in between the tables at a restaurant.

One of our waitresses and a niece of José's.

Angola, it's not like they said



Another of José's nieces.



And our chicken dinner.

Angola, it's not like they said



The later it gets, the better it gets, the Falcons is not only a bike club but also a band.



Angola, it's not like they said

At some stage a drunk Hennie gets onto the stage with his Dakar (after having fallen over in the parking lot) and proceed to ramp off it, which he does successfully, but fails to hit the brakes and hits a wall instead. Funny as all hell, they must've heard us laugh up at Cristo Rei.



It was a hell of a night.

Later on things became a bit strange.



We sleep right there amongst the tables after everyone had gone.

Lubango. Who would have thought.

Angola, it's not like they said.

Angola, it's not like they said

Sidebar by Michnus;

There were more sand in there than in the pic.

Some pics of our time in Lubango. Waiting for MJ trying to sort the 640



Angola, it's not like they said

We really felt sorry for Fred, and he looked battered that morning in Lubango.

The left corner of Fred's Dakar headlight has embedded into it forever Doodsakker sand, he will have to keep the light when he eventually sell the bike. How de hell it got in there is a complete mystery, it's embedded into the 2 layers of glass.



While sitting waiting for MJ and Hennie to fix the 640 we had some time to spend staring at the locals going their way in this busy city.

Africa!!!!!! and they want their cars to look like a rapper, porn-star, drug dealer pimp mobile.

Angola, it's not like they said



New Mitsubishi's pulling in, they have a weird personalised sticker scheme

Angola, it's not like they said



I can do a trip on a bike like that.....I think.



There's plenty of these taxi's around.

Angola, it's not like they said



Only big ass birds need apply, this scarecrow don't take shit



10-18-2007

Ok, I just can't let this shit go.

Allow me to introduce the band.

On drums - Jo, took eleven bullets in the leg, some of them tracers, twelve years now and the leg

Angola, it's not like they said
still weeps puss every so often.

On vocals and lead guitar, José, shot by my people.

On backup guitar - (can't recall his name), spent three days in an upside down, shot out tank with the bodies of seven of his crew and his leg broken in seven places.



These are the people we were supposed to kill.

What a fucking waste it would have been.

How wrong it would have been.