

Report on our Namibian and Botswana Air Tour - June/July 2008

Or

An excursion into the land and into the mind.

By P.K. Odendaal

PART 2 - Botswana

Day 8.

We stayed for days 6 and 7 and got into arguments about recalibration again, but on day 8 we leave for the Caprivi, Maun and Camp Okuti in the Okavango Delta via Tsumeb (for fuel) and Grootfontein (for Customs). Our flight log says we will be flying for 5 and a half hours.

We also got clever with the take-offs. This time we lined up back to back taking off in opposite directions, took power simultaneously and we were in the air simultaneously without any dust.

Just after take-off, as I started a premature turn to the left at two metres above ground level, my wife shouted from the back "Yippeeeee !!!!!!!!!!" - I was somewhat flabbergasted and asked her what it was - as she did not like flying, to which she replied - I do!!! - and what about the bounces - I do not notice them anymore !.

After Tsumeb and Grootfontein we set heading for the Caprivi strip to pick up the Okavango river early at Bagani, but I changed the plan to save 10 minutes of flying and set heading for Shakawe on the Botswana side. This was to be a flight of over two hours over uninteresting terrain and the thermals was bouncing us about like never before on this trip. I was enjoying myself concentrating on the flying, when Pieter announces that he was sleepy (he got up for the lions at 3 o'clock and did not sleep again) , did not like the terrain below, did not like the bumpy air and wondered whether we should not break our journey at Shakawe and find some place to overnight there - we will not make it to Camp Okuti in one day. Naturally I resisted the request and told him my wife and I were enjoying ourselves.

So after 2 hours (we had a tail wind) we reach Shakawe and the upper reaches of the Okavango River and it is beautiful and look at all the game and it is joy abundantly - no need to sleep now.



The Okavango River and the Delta south of Shakawe

The two hours over the Okavango River and Delta up to Maun passed if it was only 10 minutes' flying. When we called for landing at Maun the wind varied between still and 15 knots in any direction. Pieter landed first and reported no wind. However, when I landed the wind was 15 knots in any direction and my wife must have thought I was doing the tap dance with the controls just to keep the aircraft more or less in the vicinity of the runway. I lost a point on the landing and braced myself to score on the next landing at Okuti - but how wrong can one be.

After customs at Maun we proceeded to where we thought the Xakanaxa landing strip was - but the coordinates the female agent gave us was wrong, so when we arrived there was no airfield. It then dawned on us that for a women coordinates mean nothing - it can be changed without any problem. Maybe she liked the wrong coordinates better - women are like that. Where to now ? We called on the radio and another friendly pilot supplied the right coordinates to us. Off to the right landing strip.

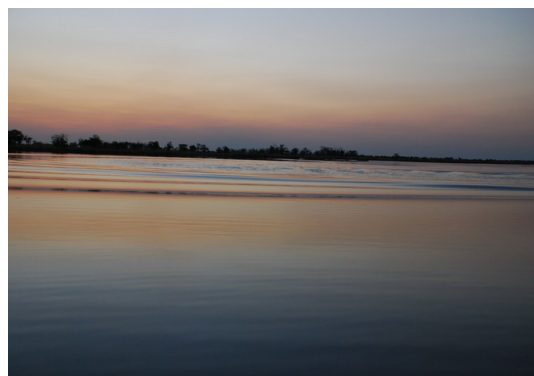
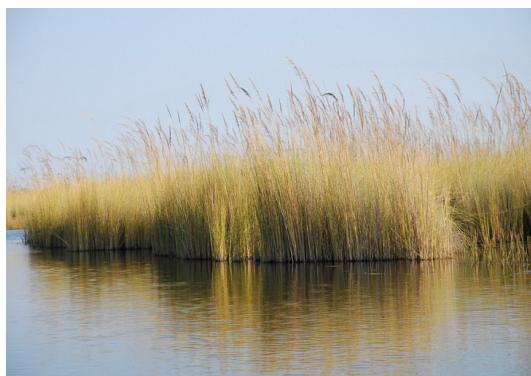
After Pieter landed he reported a good landing, but that there were bad spots on the runway and that I must try and land between them. So I sit on final approach and I am ready for any eventuality. I see the bad spots, try and jump over them, misjudge myself on push on the stick. The aircraft hits the ground and starts to jump. Open the power quickly and go around - you have messed this one up - the landing points are level now - what have you done !

We were booked for 3 nights at this camp and straight after landing our first game drive started.

On the second day we saw quite a few fish eagles - and then suddenly I heard it - the I that was missing came from the fish eagles. Ai... Ai... Aiiiii I suddenly feel that this was the moment I was waiting for - the moment in which the symphony reaches its crescendo and the minor chord resolves into that satisfying major chord.

It suddenly brought me back to my school days and I started to talk to my son as an old man usually does - telling him of days gone by of which he will not know and is probably not interested in. Of a big game hunter named P.J. Schoeman who wrote the book named 'Op ver paaie' translated into English it means 'On far roads'. Was that why I regarded this as the far country and do I still remember his story of the white horse which led a herd of Zebras and how he followed this herd by foot to find the horse ? Ultimately he only hears the horse neighing one night in the clear night air. He returns satisfied that he has heard this and that he had no further desire to see the horse. If he had seen the horse eating grass like any other horse it would have taken away something of the romance of his trip and his admiration for this horse. I think of the pilots at home - are they not better off thinking of some utopia that exists somewhere in the swamps of Botswana - a place they dream of - and will probably never see.

I will not go into all the game we saw, but it was abundant for the two days we were there.





Camp Okuti lagoon and the chalets we stayed in.



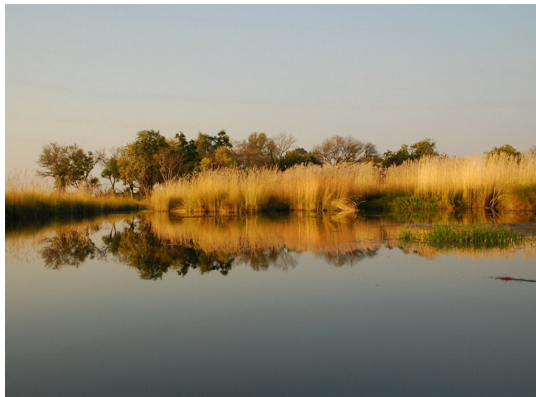


Game and trees at the Moremi Game Reserve near Camp Okuti.

Day 10

On the second day at Camp Okuti Pieter starts to itch - I want to go deeper into the delta and ride on the Mokoros. I protest to show him the folly of that idea and of the time we will lose to transfer - the bad runway at the other camp, and how happy we are to stay at Camp Okuti, but nothing works. Our kind camp manager swaps nights with the Kanana camp and off we are to ride on the Mokoros and see the heron nursery - beautiful !

The time in the Delta was magnificent, enjoyable and a feast for the eyes. The photos below speak for themselves. We will definitely come back here.



Kanana - swamps, a mokoro and their airfield

Last day

Well - its day 11 and we must head home. My flight log says it is 5 hours' flying, clearing customs in Maun and the Lost City - enough time to ponder on how the past 11 days has changed me - and maybe all of us.

The verdict for our points out of 10 for the whole trip was unanimous - 10 out of 10 - and that was calibrated - the journey of a lifetime.