

4/5/13 -Day 89-Naledi BushCamp Safari, Morning & Night Game Drives: Our first full day at Naledi BushCamp started with a gentle tap on our door at 5am and Kjell letting us know that the morning game drive would be starting at 5:30am. We had already started to stir but this notice put us in high gear and we quickly donned the khaki safari clothes we had picked out last summer in anticipation of this moment. It was still dark when the Naledi 4x4 Toyota Landrover pulled into the compound and we climbed aboard along with our Amsterdam friends Tom & Jean as well as the 4 other guests Charles, Muriel and their two children Marie and Louie. The Toyota pickup had been modified to provide “stadium” seating with three rows of bench seats facing forward with the seats further back being progressively higher for better visibility. There was a top covering this morning but that was removed for subsequent drives. The picture on the right that we took later shows the set-up. The morning air was a bit chilly and moist from the rainy weather yesterday but blankets and ponchos were provided that kept us all warm and comfy.



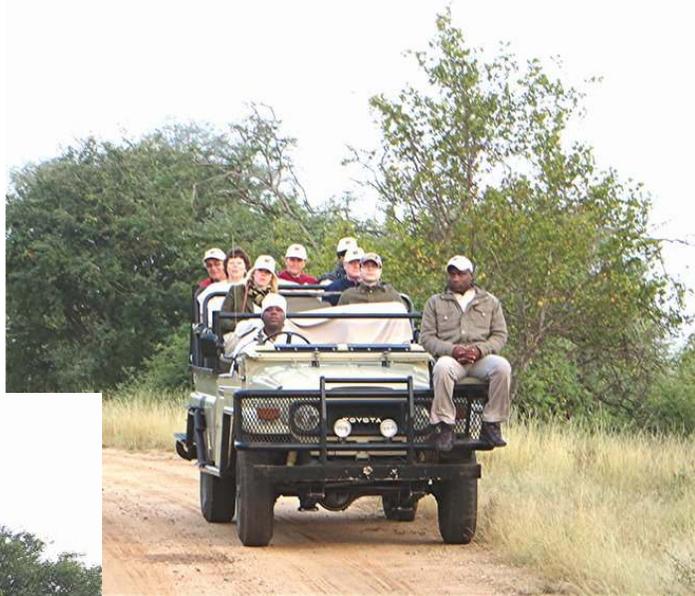
There was another vital modification of the Toyota pickup and that was installation of a seat over the left front bumper where Opa, our game tracker would sit and search for the faint signs of animals that would guide us to our quarry. That arrangement is shown in the picture on the left. Also shown to the right of the seat is a hand held searchlight that Opa would use during dark hours to scan the brush looking for the reflection from the eyes of

animals that may be checking us out as we passed by. Kjell pointed out that at Naledi a special dispersion lens was installed on the search light that was much more gentle than normal searchlights when hitting the undeveloped eyes of young animal cubs (like lions) that we might encounter. **Everything was about the animals!**

We met Opa, our game tracker, and were soon joined by the other 6 guests at BushCamp. It was still dark at 5:30am as we climbed aboard our safari vehicle and Kjell drove us out of the compound on our first game drive.

The technique that was employed on the game drives without daylight was for Kjell to cruise at a low speed over the network of roads and off-road opportunities while Opa swept the passing brush and ground with the searchlight. Opa (and the rest of us) was looking for flashes of light reflected from the eyes of animals in the bush. He was also looking for the myriad of other signs left by animals and known by trackers who have spent a lifetime learning their trade.

This morning there were no animals found in the bush as we patrolled the network of trails that blanket the Balule Nature Reserve and adjoining properties. Kjell said that typically between 15 and 20 km (9-12 miles) are covered on these drives. While we did not venture as far as the Kruger National Park, Kjell told us that there was a cooperative agreement between the private reserves in the region and Kruger National Park. The fence separating Kruger National Park and the private reserves had been removed so the animals were free to roam back and forth with everyone, including the animals, benefiting from the arrangement. After about an hour of searching it was getting daylight and we met a truck carrying the guests staying at the Enkoveni compound, as shown on the right. Enkoveni is a nearby part of the Naledi Game Lodges property with accommodations for 12 guests.



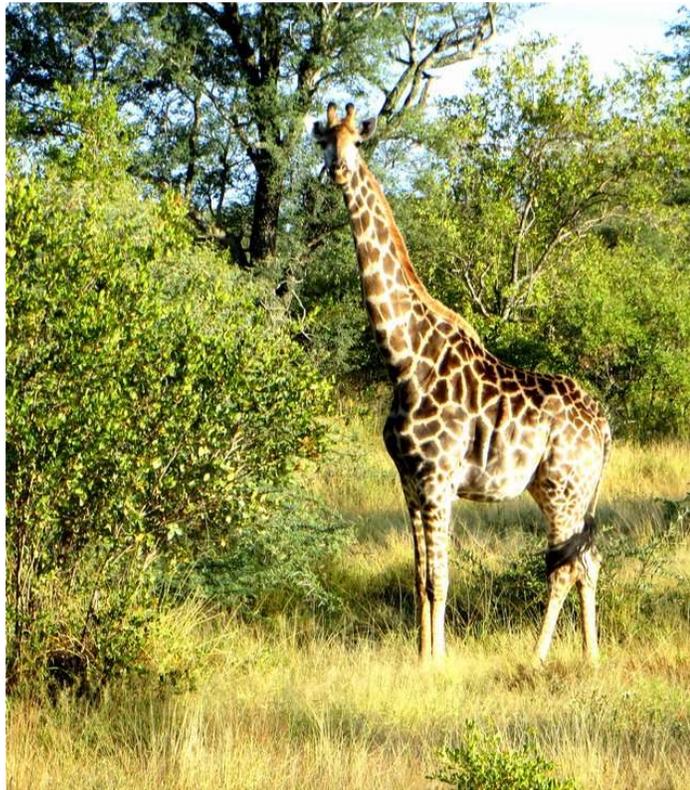
Kjell and the guide in the other truck chatted briefly and we got the bad news that our pickup had a tire that was going flat.

The flat tire problem was overcome and soon we were on our way again.



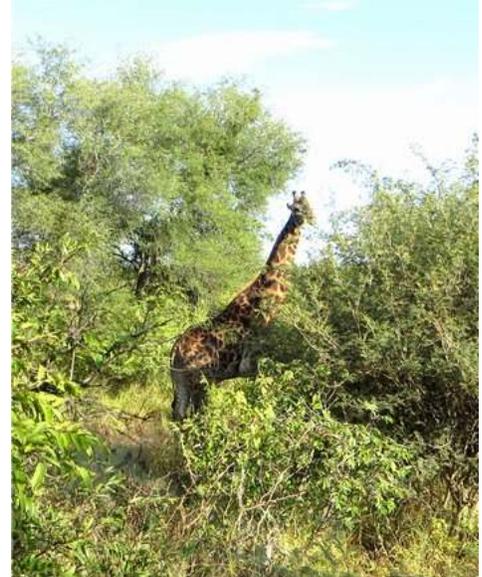
We had not traveled far when Barbara yelled, there is a giraffe! Indeed she had made her first sighting and had a memory she would not forget. Everyone got down to the serious business of taking pictures as Kjell occasionally adjusted our truck position to improve the view. A picture of the beautiful animal is shown on the right.

When everyone had captured all the photos they wanted we moved on through the bush. We were on the trail of elephants that Opa had detected from their footprints.



While working our way up a creek bed, Kjell pointed out a tree, shown on the left. It was marked by a dark smudge and worn area created by elephants using it to rub their skin after covering themselves with mud. This behavior is part of a normal behavior that elephants use to keep their skin healthy.

Then we saw another giraffe munching the top branches of a tree. With these two initial sightings we were already beginning to feel like seasoned safari people.



About this time Kjell decided it was time for a break in the morning game drive so we stopped and a picnic of coffee and tea with several kinds of cookies was set up for us to enjoy, as shown on the right.



One of the reasons we stopped at this point was that Opa had seen



some elephant signs in the form of fresh footprints, like the one shown on the left. The marks left by the elephant's toenails can be seen in the part of the indentation closest to Orlin's shoes.

After our morning break for coffee and tea we got back in the truck and were on the trail again. Before long we spotted our first elephant, casually having a meal on some brush, as shown on the right. Kjell brought the truck to a halt and our cameras started clicking.



Shown below are several pictures from this elephant encounter as Kjell adjusted our truck position from time to time.



This guy looked like a real “TUSKER”.



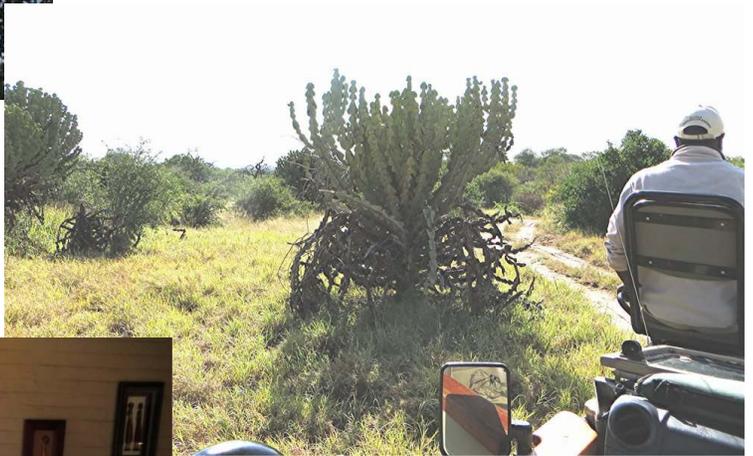
We had heard about the long eyelashes that elephants have to protect them from the bushes. This was an opportunity to get a good close-up look at the eyelashes as shown in the picture on the left.

After having our fill of elephant viewing we traveled on. Kjell took us along a cleared area under some high voltage electric transmission wires. Here we saw an example of how the animals of the bush were coping with man's encroachment into their area. Some eagles and other large birds had built nests on the transmission line towers, as shown on the here.



We continued to prowl on and off the trail while looking for animals and enjoying the scenery. We were fascinated by the huge succulent bushes that are nearly trees, as shown below. They seem to be everywhere in South African countryside.

We arrived back at the BushCamp compound about 8:30am. We spent a few minutes in our rooms and then met again in the main lodge for breakfast. TK and Phindile had laid out a



wonderful breakfast table, as shown on the left with Jean and Barbara looking on in anticipation. A feature of the Naledi experience that we really appreciated was that chefs, Sam or Luther, would come in before each meal and describe for us what they he had prepared for the meal we were about to eat. It was a bit unusual for us but showed a lot of class.

After breakfast Kjell came by

and got us organized for the rest of the day. There was nothing planned until about 11am. At that time we could take a nature walk around the area close to BushCamp with Opa our tracker, go to an elevated “blind” near a water hole to look for animals, or simply take some time on our own to nap or lounge around the main lodge. After these activities there would be lunch at 2:30pm and then the night game drive from 5:30pm to about 8:30pm. That would be followed by dinner and then to bed in preparation for the 5am wake-up call the next day.

For the next events on today’s agenda, Tom and Jean opted to go to one of the blinds while Charles and his family, along with us, chose to take a walk with Opa.

It was a wonderful day for a walk with bright sunshine and a few clouds. Opa came by about 11am and collected us for the walk. Shown on the right is Opa with two of his guests in tow. Opa carried a rifle for the unlikely event that there would be a threatening animal encounter.

Charles, Muriel and the kids joined us and we walked out through the main gate of the Naledi compound. We stuck to the well beaten tracks that meandered in a clockwise direction around the



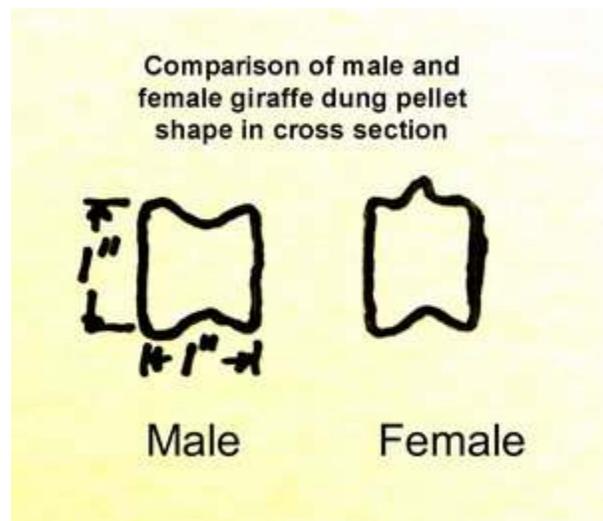
compound. As we went along Opa would tell us about roadside plants and signs that animals had left in the last few days.

Louie was particularly interested in the skull of an impala that was beside the road. He picked it up by the horns for a few moments and then put it back on the ground.

At one point Opa stopped and picked up a handful of pellets from the ground, as shown on the right. It turned out to be dung dropping left by some giraffes. Opa had some knowledge about this stuff, shown at higher magnification below, that he wanted to share with us.



He said that there was a difference in the shape of droppings from a male giraffe as compared with droppings from a female. This was not something we would have guessed so he got our interest. He said that the cylindrical pellets from a male giraffe are indented on each end. On the other hand, dung droppings from a female giraffe have an indentation on one end but a point on the other end. The difference in appearance of the two types of giraffe dung pellets is illustrated in the photo on the right. The next time we want to determine whether a male or female giraffe left dung dropping in our path we will be armed with this little known tidbit of knowledge about animals. Orlin, of course, was interested in knowing what mysterious action in the dung producing system of giraffes caused this difference in pellet shape but that will have to be answered at a later time.



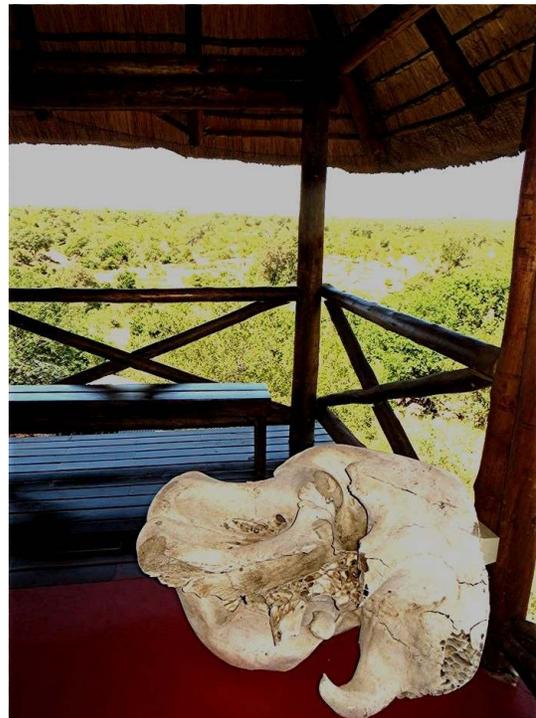
We completed our walk around the compound in about 2 hours. Tom and Jean returned from the blind and reported seeing zebras at the water hole and they got plenty of pictures. It was now time for lunch which was set out on a large table in the open air observation room above the main lodge, as shown on the right. The wide-open architecture of the building's second floor building was designed for maximum enjoyment of the BushCamp view.



The photo below with Barbara posing for the camera shows



some of the scenery that can be seen from the upper room of the main lodge. Another picture taken to show the view reveals the large skull of an elephant that



is certain to draw the attention of guests.

We had a nice lunch in the lodge second floor dining room. We were soon ready to get on with the rest of our day. As we left the second floor there was an opportunity to get a close look at the top of the roof thatching that covers all of the buildings. The thatch is neatly covered with chicken wire, as shown on the right. Kjell said that the purpose of the chicken wire was to stop monkeys from damaging the thatch by searching for insects that may be in there.



At 4:30pm we gathered again at the safari vehicle ready for our evening game drive. We



boarded the vehicle with Kjell driving and Opa riding out front in the tracker seat. We started cruising the network of roads through the bush as we had done for the morning game drive. We had no luck in sighting any animals. As dusk was starting to settle in we met one of the vehicles from another safari lodge as shown on the left. Kjell and the guide in the other vehicle chatted for a while to exchange information on

the latest sighting of animals. Soon we were on our way again.

We came across a group of impala that were grazing in a forest clearing, as shown on the right. Opa had joked about the impala being the “MacDonald’s” of the bush because all the predators love to dine on them. They are like a fast food restaurant in the wild. Opa pointed out that the analogy is reinforced by the markings on the rear end of the impala, as shown below. The dark markings resemble the shape of the “Golden Arches” of MacDonald’s” restaurants.



It continued to get darker and Kjell handed Opa the spotlight to use in scanning the brush as we passed by. Kjell was communicating on a radio network most of time even though wheeling through the torturous trails of the bush would seem to take all of a person’s mental and physical capability. Suddenly there was an increase in speed and Kjell said that one of the other safari vehicles had sighted a group of lions. We were headed for that spot as

fast as it could be done. We arrived at the location of the sighting and the other vehicle was shining a light in the direction of the lions. Opa shined his light in that direction and we got our first night photo of a lion in the wild, as shown on the right.



Our camera was not optimum for night or low light photography so much of what we saw didn’t end up in a useable photo. However, we got a few good shots and those are the ones we show here.

Some additional photos we got from this sighting are shown below.



This female lion did not seem to be bothered by the lights shining around her.

Then these three lionesses came wandering by.



Bringing up the rear was a fifth female lion herding two cubs in front of her. Kjell estimated that the two lion cubs shown on the left were about 2 years old. There was some real drama unfolding as at least one male lion had also been sighted and there was concern that the male lion would kill the cubs because they were produced by way of some other male lion. There was hope for them because the mother of the cubs was in the area and provided protection for them. At one point we heard what sounded like a mega cat fight going on in the darkness then there was silence. We were hopeful that the mother lion had been successful in defending her cubs.

While all of this was going on, Kjell and the other guides were on their radios constantly and they were repositioning their vehicles to improve viewing with their searchlights. The cooperation between safari guides from different lodges and the radio coordination that we observed as events unfolded in this and subsequent encounters was super impressive. Everyone seemed to be sharing whatever useful information they had to help the guests get a good view of the animals.

Another dimension of excitement was added to the evening by the fact that we were being driven through thorn bushes and over rocks and gulleys in the dark as the vehicles were being moved around to improve our view. The safari vehicles have minimum side and top protection to maximize the viewing possibilities so we quickly became expert at dodging the thorn bush branches that whipped by our heads.

We eventually had one more sighting and this time it was the male lion “King of Beasts” himself, as shown below.



The guides said there were two male lions in the area and neither one was on friendly terms with the females we had seen. Some of our group saw a male lion with scratches and blood on his face, presumably from the defending female, but we didn't get a photo of that. The best guess was that the cubs had hunkered down somewhere in safety and the mother had been successful in defending them. The lions moved deeper into the brush and eventually we couldn't find any of them.

About this time there was a report from some other safari party that a cheetah had been sighted. We hustled over to that site and arrived after about 15 minutes of threading our way through the bush trail network. We caught a couple glimpses of the cheetah moving from bush to bush but never had a chance to take a good photograph. At least we could say that we saw a cheetah on our safari adventure.

Anyway, by that time it was about 8:30pm and time for dinner. We drove back to the lodge in a state of excitement from what we had seen. Back at the lodge, the staff had set out torches that lit the way into the Naledi Game Lodge compound, as shown on the right.



TK had set out a beautiful dinner table, as shown below, for us to enjoy, as shown on the left.

The kids, Louie and Marie, went to bed but the rest of us Naledi guests were joined by Kjell for a wonderful dinner prepared and described for us by Sam the chef. We told Kjell how happy we were that he was our guide on these game drives because he is

aggressive and pursues every possibility for finding the large animals. We appreciated the passion he shows for making the safari experience as good as it can be.

After dinner we all turned in. We were looking forward to another active day starting with our 5am wake-up call for the morning game drive.