

Willis's Walkabouts

2016 South Africa, Namibia, Botswana 4WD & Walk

4-5 Weeks: March - April 2016

First draft: October 2016

This trip will be based partly on a 7 week trip we did in 2007, partly on other trips we've done and partly on things we've long wanted to do.

Why use a Darwin-based firm for a South African tour?

Although this will be our eleventh trip to South Africa, there is still no one else offering tours like these. Transport during the trip will be primarily by rental 4WD but may include various forms of public transportation as well and, of course, your own feet while carrying a day or overnight pack.

While only a small part of the trip is in South Africa, hiring the vehicle(s) there costs far less than hiring in Namibia or Botswana. When we are talking about hundreds of dollars per person, it's worth an extra drive – especially when there are interesting things to see along the way.

The Itinerary

This will be a flexible, partly exploratory trip. We plan to begin in Cape Town and do a huge loop finishing in Johannesburg. If you are interested in joining this trip, please have a look at some of the links which follow. Maybe you'll find something else which you think we should include. But please remember, this is a **draft**. We may not be able to include every single thing listed here. Book early and you get to help fix the final itinerary.

It's worth noting that the South African rand has been dropping along with the Australian dollar so you can still get good value for your money in this part of the world.

Cape Town has everything. We'll spend at least two, probably three, nights there getting supplies that may be a bit hard to find later. We'll probably stay at Dale Court, a place I've stopped at many times, www.dalecourt.co.za/ It's a relatively short walk from there to the V&A waterfront, one of the biggest shopping centres in Cape Town.

You can't visit Cape Town without visiting Table Mountain, so we'll do a day walk there, probably going between the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens and the cable car.

Richtersveld

From Cape Town, we head north stopping somewhere along the way before reaching Richtersveld in the northwest corner of South Africa. I've been reading about Richtersveld since I first went to South Africa in 1999. This time, I'm going to make it happen. This section should take about a week.

Two websites to look at are the Wikipedia Richtersveld page, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richtersveld> And the official South African National Parks Richtersveld page, <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/richtersveld/>



[Richtersveld landscape. It's an amazing place.](#)

Fish River Canyon



[Fish River Canyon from the rim.](#)
[Photo from our 2003 trip.](#)

This is one of the most famous and spectacular walks in southern Africa. Unfortunately, because of high temperatures it is now closed to hikers from mid September through April. But, while we can't hike the trail, it would be a shame to pass by without a look so we'll spend a day or two in the area. See <http://www.namibia-travel.net/travelguide/southern-namibia/fish-river-canyon.html>

If people are interested, there are easier walks in the upper reaches of the canyon. I did one of the walks in 2003 and would be happy to do it, or something similar, again.

Sossusvlei and the Namib Naukluft National Park

The Sossusvlei dunes are probably the best known natural feature in Namibia. I've already been there twice and couldn't let myself pass by without another visit. We'll spend two or three days in the area having a good look around. The two photos here were taken on our first trip here in 2003. As you can see, we do more than just look. We climb up and walk for a couple of hours so we can truly appreciate this incredible landscape. See <http://www.sossusvlei.org/>



Sossusvlei Dunes



Climbing the dunes

Rock Art

There are a number of interesting rock art sites that we can visit. One is done on a seriously steep overnight walk. Others are done on short day walks. They are somewhat out of the way but if people are interested, we can include some in the itinerary. If no one has a particular interest in the rock art, we'll restrict ourselves to sites near our final route.



Waterberg

Waterberg is an amazing moderately sized park most of which is on a plateau which rises about 200 metres above the surrounding plain. There is a four day unguided walk which I did in 2003, a three day guided walk, several shorter walks and a 4WD day trip. If we are going near, it's definitely worth a stop.

There are many websites which mention it. One of the better ones is <https://www.expertafrica.com/namibia/waterberg-plateau-national-park>

Rest stop on the Waterberg plateau

Etosha

A visit to Namibia would be almost unthinkable without a visit to Etosha, the best-known game park in Namibia. The relatively arid landscape combined with permanent waterholes make this one of the best places for game viewing in all of Africa. We'll be there at the end of the wetter season so the game won't be quite as concentrated, but the viewing will still be excellent. Depending on how much is open, we'll spend two or three days in the park. The three photos here were taken on two of our previous visits. The one at right shows a large group of animals at a waterhole. The two below show traffic problems.



Elephants always have right of way. The leopard was less than a metre from the car – good thing the windows were closed.

For more information on Etosha, see <http://www.etoshanationalpark.org/> or, for a more comprehensive view, see the Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etosha_National_Park

Okavango

While we'll be there at the beginning of the dry season, the water flows down the Okavango so slowly that it may just be arriving when we get there. That was the case on our 2007 trip. We plan to do a mokoro (boat) tour where we camp out for a couple of nights. The tents will be provided. The photos here are from our 2007 trip showing our group riding in the mokoros (what we can take is obviously limited), at our camp and on a walk from the camp.



The large white object in the final photo is an elephant's skull. As you can see, there is nothing between us and the wildlife.

In 2007, we stayed at a camp called Oddballs. In 2013, I did a tour in South Africa where I met the manager of another camp, Audi, who offer similar trips. We'll probably use one or the other. Audi is substantially cheaper partly because you don't have to fly in.

Here's a good site for basic info. http://www.game-reserve.com/botswana_okavango-moremi.html

This site gives a good overview of the geology and geography of the area.
<http://www.greatestplaces.org/notes/okavango.htm>

This next site has some general information plus links to more details about a number of places in the region.
<http://www.go2africa.com/botswana/okavango-delta/>

From the Okavango, it should take us 3-4 days to get back to Johannesburg depending on what we stop to see along the way.

Other

I haven't listed every possibility but I have listed enough to give you a good idea of what to expect. Other things you need to know are that the roads aren't always as good as they may be shown on the maps and that fuel is not always available where maps and tour guides say it is. Anyone who comes on this trip will need to be prepared for changes in plans along the way.

Optional Extra

We begin in Cape Town. The Biosphere Breakerway is a 3 or 4 day daypack walk for people interested in the unique flora of the region. It's something I've wanted to do since I first heard about it in late 2013. If anyone is interested, we may be able to add it on at the beginning. Please see <http://www.breakerway.com/> for more information. The links in the top menu are all worth a look. At current exchange rates (October 2015), the cost for the three day trip is about A\$590 and for the four day A\$780.

What does it cost?

South Africa and Namibia are two of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Botswana tends to be more expensive. Our fee is \$2095 with or without the Biosphere Breakerway. Our public liability insurance requires you to have your own travel insurance. It may sound like overkill, but I have heard of a case where the Travel Insurer sued a tour operator for something that happened that they had to cover.

The \$2095 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and cook, plus the evening meals on the sections where we do the catering (Richtersveld). In addition, you will have to pay your share of all the expenses for food, accommodation, transport, etc. The guide will pay the same fees and fares as everyone else and will keep these as low as reasonable comfort, reliability and availability will allow.

If exchange rates stay similar, our town accommodation should cost anywhere from about A\$20 to A\$50 (US\$15 to US\$40) per night. Okavango will cost much more. The relatively low cost of restaurant meals and the high quality of our accommodation have been one of the more pleasant aspects of our previous trips. The prices above were twin share in what would be considered three or four star establishments in Australia.

Based on our recent expenses, a **very rough** estimate of the cost follows. With luck, we'll be able to shave a bit off the total. If the Aussie dollar collapses against the rand, it will cost more. If it gains, it should cost less. We do not expect the whole trip to cost less than \$7000 or more than \$9000. This does not include any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure. I suspect it will be higher as I haven't included the cost of any guided game park walks.

Return airfare	\$	2000	Breakfasts & lunches	\$	200
Walkabouts fee		2100	Your own travel insurance		300
Hire Car		1000	Restaurant meals		500
Okavango		1000	<u>Accommodation</u>		<u>600</u>
Other park & camping fees		400	Total		\$8100

What do you get for the fee?

You get expert advice on the things to bring, the probable weather, etc. You get someone who will handle the mundane details of making the travel arrangements, doing the food shopping for the walks, organising accommodation etc. You get someone who will provide all the group equipment (billies, stoves, etc) and who will cook all the evening meals on the walks allowing you to relax and enjoy yourself. You also get a small, like-minded group of people with whom you can share your experiences and expenses. Hiring a vehicle as part of a group costs far less than hiring it with only two or three.

Note 1. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in southern Africa is restricted. Permits have to be arranged well in advance all trails have strict limits. Some of our walks are in national parks run by a national authority. Some are in provincial parks. Some are in other areas. In past years, making these bookings took anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks depending on the agency involved. All that paperwork has to be done well in advance or we won't be able to do the walks as planned.

As another example, prior to one of the long walks, you might spend a day relaxing or sightseeing while the guide goes out and hits the supermarkets, then spends an hour (or two or three) doing the final organising for the meals on the walk. If you can't see the value in services like these, you are unlikely to feel that you are getting real value for your fee.

Note 2. Prices are subject to change.

Note 3. A large majority of those who have taken part in our overseas tours are Australian so all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. We have had several people from other countries take part by making their own travel arrangements to and from the start and finish points.

Note 4. All bushwalks and 4WD driving routes are subject to change due to weather conditions. If we get really foul weather at the start of a walk, we may wish to abort it, at least temporarily. If we get really foul weather later on, we may have to cut a route short. If a road is impassable, we may have to do a long detour.

What you don't get?

You do not get a guide who will hold your hand and make every decision for you. **You** must be prepared to take on a much greater degree of responsibility than on most other tours. All members of the group, including the guide, are expected to work together in establishing how the group will function, who will lead on the walks, who will look after the stragglers, etc.

A trip such as this cannot work unless everyone helps out. A few examples may help you understand just how important this is.

Accepting the responsibility that goes with a trip like this is part of the experience we offer. It is one of the things that sets our trips apart from the vast majority of "adventure" trips on the market. For those prepared to accept this responsibility, it makes the experience doubly rewarding. Those who are not prepared to accept such responsibility would be better off going on a "normal" tour.

Is it for you?

This trip is not for the average tourist. We can neither control nor predict the weather, only accept it as it comes. If you do not want to take the necessary responsibility and/or you cannot obtain the necessary equipment, it is not for you. Good physical fitness and a good mental attitude are both necessary. If you have never carried a pack on an overnight walk, have never walked off trail, have never camped in cold, windy and wet conditions, it will be harder for you to cope with the likely conditions than for a person who has had the relevant experience. Past experience has shown us that a fit, experienced 70 year old may cope better than a fitter 25 year old who does not have experience in coping with adverse conditions.

A Final Caution and a suggestion

Do not expect everything to run like clockwork. Such things often fail to happen in South Africa. If you want to get maximum value for your money, you can go off and go sightseeing or simply relax while the guide does the food shopping or tries to organise or reconfirm hiking permits, etc. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to join him or her while (s)he does these things.

There may be occasional days between sections where you will be left to your own devices while the guide slows down and relaxes a bit and catches up on the organising. Based on past experience, things will run more smoothly if the guide does this.

If you would like a better visual picture of what these walks will be like, please have a look at our South Africa web page: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/html/africa.htm. There are many photos from previous trips and links to other pages giving more information.

Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by mid December. Final payment is due by 1 December.
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before 1 December, \$600 before 20 December, \$1000 before 15 January and the full \$2095. The different African authorities with whom we make bookings all have their own cancellation fees. If you cancel after we have made and paid for a booking on your behalf, you will lose whatever is non-refundable as well as our cancellation fee.
3. All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance. **We need to see proof of your travel insurance before departure.** We need this because of our own insurance.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Russell Willis

Final Note. If you are interested in this trip and you have something else you are particularly interested in seeing, please let us know and we may be able to include it in the itinerary.

Very Rough Itinerary

If you do the Biosphere Breakerway, add 5-6 days at the start. List below includes travel time.

Cape Town	2-3 days
To and in Richtersveld	7-8 days
Fish River	1-4 days
Sossusvlei	2-3 days
Waterberg	0-2 days
Etosha	3-4 days
To and in Okavango	4-7 days
<u>To Johannesburg</u>	<u>3-4 days</u>
Total	22-35 days

I don't think the shortest version is practical, but four weeks certainly is.