



Namibia's most dramatic geographic features are the sand dunes at Sousesvlei.

Like the Patagonian area of South America, Namibia's population density is among the world's lowest. This has superb consequences if one enjoys camping in the wild and discovering quiet back roads. In fact, the drive from the northern river border with Angola to the southern river border with South Africa can be completed almost entirely on gravel roads. Early colonization by Germany and subsequent administration by South Africa helped to develop a country with a strong infrastructure, which in turn attracted tourists who wanted an authentic African desert and wildlife experience, but who also placed value in safety, sausages, and good beer.

I arrived in beautiful Cape Town at the end of September. It's a liberal city that was easy for me to enjoy, reminding me of Vancouver in both lifestyle and natural environment. My first task upon arriving was to look

for a job for the upcoming six months while the rains ran their course in eastern Africa. I had no idea what to do and since I had only a tourist visa, any work I could get would be technically illegal.

My stay was made easier after visiting Henk, when he offered me the chance to stay in one of the little wooden houses a hundred metres from the main house on his apple farm. If there was ever a perfect place to



Natural hazards of Namibian roads.

spend time, it was there, 80 kilometres east of Cape Town. A one-room wooden cottage with a toilet, shower, double bed and electricity made up the living area, and another wooden cottage of a similar size had a two-burner gas range, a compact refrigerator and a kitchen sink. The small patio faced southwest over acres of rolling hills, apple trees and vineyards in the distance.

Henk kept busy with farm details and new or existing tourism projects. A veteran of hundreds of trips to Namibia, he would drop all the daily farm jobs for a chance to get up there to deliver a part to one of the Zulu Overland tourist trucks that he owned, preferring his motorcycle as his delivery vehicle. His wife Maryke is a woman of infinite patience who has

seen hundreds of Henk's ideas come and go over the years. With a catering business that was running at full steam, she had no time to worry about Henk, but she didn't really need to anyway.

On occasion, I went with Henk and Maryke to cater events. Henk was clever enough not to get in Maryke's way with any of the details of the catering, with the exception of making the fire and tending to the spit roasting – two activities which come naturally to all South African men.

While Henk watched the meat, my role was to keep his double brandy and Coke topped up. Admittedly, I was not an exemplary employee, as I often got sidetracked talking to guests about South Africa or motorcycles.

At a neighbour's 40th birthday party, Maryke, Henk and I attended to the catering. In between trips to the bar for Henk, I got involved in a heated debate with an attractive brunette about the old wives' tale regarding "things happening for a reason." Colette said things certainly do happen for a reason, and I argued that they most certainly do not. In my view, things just happen, yet humans are very good at making connections and plopping cause-and-effect relationships where there shouldn't be any.

Before I could get any deeper into the argument, I was pulled away by the sight of Henk staring at me and meaningfully tipping his glass upside-down. But I had managed to find out where Colette worked and I told her I would stop by and visit the following week. As the night wound down, I got another contact, this time on the travelling side. The neighbours had a niece who had travelled through Africa on a BMW with her husband; the pair were now stationed in Dubai, taking a break from their travels to earn some money. I took down their email address and made a note to ask them for any advice for the way up Africa or across the Arabian Peninsula.

Four days later, I arrived at Colette's work. I met her with a friendly handshake and told her I had a full day planned for us on the motorcycle. It became clear that she hadn't been awaiting my arrival with breathless anticipation when she asked, "What was your name again?"

I was startled but managed to stammer out, "Rene."

"Oh, that's right. I should have remembered that, since it's the same name as my brother," she said with a laugh.

"Yes," I thought. "You should have."

I was tempted to throw out a snotty "Everything happens for a reason," but I resisted the urge, and soon we were both on the BMW taking a slow coastal breakfast run in search of calving southern right whales. It was hard to not have an impressive day when the morning ride by the ocean transitioned into an afternoon of gorgeous vineyards and a picnic of local wine and cheese on a nearby mountain pass. This was certainly the television commercial version of adventure travel by motorcycle. The idyllic commercial would not go on to show the moment when, after two dates, you get a raised eyebrow and the question "Didn't you wear that last time we went out?"

The courting period available to a travelling motorcyclist with only two sets of clothing can be quite short.

By January of 2007, Colette and I were spending most of our days together, choosing to remain blissfully ignorant about what was going to happen in a few months when I left. January also meant calendar selling season in Canada, so my sister and brother contacted the motorcycle shows in Calgary and Edmonton and were allowed to sell the 2007 version of the calendars on my behalf. I needed them to sell \$3500 worth in order for me to break even on the printing and expenses of selling the calendars. I was extremely grateful when the email came advising me that they had taken in \$2200. I had lost a little bit of money on the calendar exercise, but I had enjoyed writing and putting it together, and I started thinking about another one for 2008. I was determined to be able to break even on a project like this and tell my story in a fun way at the same time. Having this plan forced me to take more photos from the road and take more detailed notes about the places I went.

By April, I had ridden countless miles with the hardcore local motorcycle clubs and toured the very best roads that South Africa had to offer. April was also the time for me to leave. Colette and I spent our final weekend together visiting small towns on South Africa's sparsely populat-