

Botswana Bike Safari with adiridas team



Feb. 16th 2009 Mashatu Reserve, Botswana

While sitting in a luxury game lodge enjoying a big breakfast, watching a warthog drinking from the nearby waterhole, I'm reflecting on the last two weeks in Africa, which were extremely exciting, productive and adventurous but not exactly as luxurious as the lodge I spent the last night in.

Although my thoughts were already focusing on the long journey back to Europe, and I figured the trip was basically over, little did I know that I would soon be confronted with a real wild lion, which we had hoped to see all week long. Luckily for me, the lion had just eaten a young zebra for breakfast, therefore wasn't hungry and could not even be bothered to stand up when I faced her from less than 10 feet.

After spending the first week of this trip with my wife Carmen and cameraman Aaron Lutze in Tanzania to finish our Wheels 4 Life charity film, distribute more bikes and open two bike shops; we all flew to Johannesburg in South Africa where we met up with some of the ADIRiDAS guys, Phil Sundbaum, Joscha Forstreuter, Mads Haugen and Andrew Taylor. The ADIRiDAS are a freeride team sponsored by Adidas. Our crew was completed with my friend Sven Martin and Carmen who were our photographers, Aaron as videographer, by team managers Sonja and Mike Hamel as well as Greg and his armed guides from Cycle Mashatu.

I had ridden amongst wild animals on several occasions over the years, usually in a semi controlled environment, where we either had a vehicle nearby or the chances

were unlikely that I would ride into the lions den. Well, this time was different. The trip started right on the border between South Africa and Botswana, where we had to mount our bikes and cross a river pulled in a funky little cable-cage. This was no ordinary crossing nor was the one-man border-post on the other side. Welcome to Botswana, watch out for lions, leopards and don't get trampled by a herd of elephants! If one didn't have tubeless tires or slime, he or she would instantly become the weakest link in the food-chain. Oh, and did I mention already that we would sleep most of the nights in the wide open bush, sometimes even without tents?

But we were in good company; the guides from "Cycle Mashatu" looked after our well being, we all made sure that we'd stay near one of the riffles at all time.

Everybody brought a real riding bike, most of the guys rode their slopestyle bikes with a long seat-post, I rode my 6 inch GT Carbon Force, which was ideal for the conditions.

The first stage was only about 20km long, considering that we had only 2 hours of daytime left, before dark and before the cats would get active, we had to hurry up. Sure enough we ran out of light and it got a bit scary until we reached our campsite. I was stoked with my Exposure lights; ideal to blind the predators. The campsite was not necessarily safe, but with the help of a constantly burning campfire our guides were pretty sure the animals would keep their distance. We rigged up a sweet outdoors shower in a tree and dug a hole for the other business affairs.

Right from the first 5 minutes of our ride we saw tons of animals, from wildebeest, impala, eland, hyena, giraffe, snakes and zebras to baboons and all sorts of beautiful birds.

Despite the slime and other precautions, flat tires would haunt us constantly, just like the nasty mosquitoes did.

It is hard to describe the feeling, when one rides in the wild and a deadly animal could appear from behind every turn, bush or tree at any moment. It makes the ride most interesting and entertaining, and it makes one almost forget the aches, pains and the tremendous heat. We all had to obey strict instructions by our guides at all time and had to be super quiet. It wasn't until the second day that we had our first encounter with an elephant bull. Wow!!! What a majestic site it is to see an elephant or several elephants roam around or treat themselves to mud and sand bath. It was quite impressive how they could move far quieter than we could on our bikes.

One of my favorite moments was when the boys set up a sick jump with a perfect landing on the bank of a river-bed. You should have seen the faces of the tourists in a Safari Jeep that came around the corner. They were expecting lions, elephants and maybe all sorts of things, but definitely not a bike rider flipping his bike off a cliff in the middle of nowhere.



I found myself a few nice trials riding challenges, where the old man could show the young guns a move or two. Jeez, those kids are so young they could be my own!

The campsite on our third night in the bush was one of my all time favorite campsites. It was set right under a gigantic Mashatu tree, maybe 1000 years old, fenced in by vertical logs to keep unwanted visitors away. It was so beautiful to sleep under the star clustered sky and listen to the constant choir of wildlife. Our cook spoiled us with delicious meals.

The scariest moment was when my lovely wife Carmen mentioned a sudden swift movement in the 4 feet tall grass right next to the trail as we were hiking up a small hillside to a rocky monolith, where she wanted to take a photo. We all kind of dismissed her comment until the guide and guys below, who watched us from a distance, told us later that they saw a leopard emerge from the grass near us and run off into the sunset. Reality hit home once again, we all kept forgetting from time to time where we were. Despite all we got some stunning photos and footage on top of that ridge with a lone and ancient Baobab tree, the typical African tree with the enormous trunk.

Mads kept us entertained not only on his bike but also off his bike, by chasing an ostrich, pulling back flips, imitating elephant sounds or playing the smelly trumpet.

We usually covered about 40 – 50 km each day, then we would head out again at sunset time for some photo ops.

One night as we were driving back to camp, we slowed down because we saw some elephants ahead of us, all of a sudden our hearts stopped beating as a massive roar trumpeted through the air. Not sure if it was Mads or the real thing, as my flashlight revealed, we had spooked an elephant bull right next to our vehicle where we had stopped in the dark, it was to close for comfort but quite funny in retrospect.

I have done a lot of trips over the years, this is one I can truly recommend to any mountain biker, no matter what skill level, I can guarantee you won't be disappointed. The riding is good, the guides are great and the experience is off the scale.

Thank you Adidas for making this possible, I guess, Impossible is Nothing...

Hans Rey

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