



Picking over the Bones

Over the last ten years I have been lucky enough to see most National Parks and reserves across Africa. I've tracked chimpanzee in the Mahale Mountains and dived with a giant potato grouper on Mafia Island reefs. Whilst I have lots of favourite places in Africa, the single most unforgettable trip I have ever taken was the three days flying along Namibia's Skeleton Coast with André Schoeman on a Skeleton Coast safari.

FACT FILE

A ten-night fly-drive safari to Namibia including return flights costs from £2,100 per person. A three night/four day trip to Skeleton coast with the Schoemans, as a separate itinerary, starts from £2,115 per person. Please call Tor, Roger or Heather on 01993 838 525 for details.

WEB PLUS

www.audleytravel.com/namibia
Details of travel to Namibia

The Skeleton Coast Safari was the first time I had ever been in a light aircraft. I was slightly nervous, and even more so when sitting in the cockpit of AMY – the Cessna 206 (named after Amy Schoeman). André turned to me and said, “Right, would you like to do take off?” So, we took a rather wobbly line down the tarmac of Eros Airport and rose into the air at an angle not generally recommended by flight instructors. André suggested I might loosen my grip just a fraction on the controls and we levelled out and headed south.

Stopping to pick up some clients in southern Namibia (by which time I had relinquished the controls to my better qualified co-pilot) we then took one of the most spectacular flights of my life.

Gliding over the brilliant ochre dunes of Sossusvlei we came to the sea, turned right and started skimming up the coast. The Schoemans fly very low and zipping over the beach we passed hundred-strong seal colonies, saw flocks of pelicans and flamingos over petrol green water and jackals trotting along the wet sand. When lunchtime came we landed on the beach and ate chicken drumsticks hundreds of miles from the nearest village. Nobody, save those on a Schoeman safari (and possibly a shipwrecked sailor) had ever stepped on this sand. We could see whale carcasses and seal bones and watch thousands of ghost crabs scuttle to the sea.

Flying north again our first night stop was Kuidas Camp. Located above a spring, it looks out over gravel plains dotted with giant euphorbias. We ate under the most brilliant stars and warmed our boots on the campfire. There were hot bucket showers, a simple bed and cooked breakfast the next morning. What more could you want?

On day two we rose at sunrise and set off to learn about the desert. Why sit inside a vehicle when you can sit on top? This is the way the Schoemans' brains work and thus there were seats

thoughtfully attached to the roof of the Land Rover. From my rooftop perch I watched, eyes popping, as we slid down dunes that roared as they reverberated and looked at everything from the tiniest lichen to the largest rock formations.

The night was spent at Purros Camp in the dry river bed of the Hoarusib River. A migratory route for desert-adapted elephants, there were borassus palms and the smell of elephants in the air. With each day there were new and impossibly better adventures. We tracked elephant on foot, met Himba communities, took boat trips along the Kunene River and flew around the rocky mountains of the Ugab Formations. The Schoemans use planes as others use Land Rovers. Popping them down when there's something interesting to see, we landed in river beds and on beaches and gravel plains.

After a final night on the banks of the Kunene River, looking toward spectacular rock formations in Angola, we flew back to Windhoek. Trundling down the tarmac of Eros airport I was back where I'd begun. You never forget a Skeleton Coast safari though and I can still remember mine vividly, even some years on.

Heather Miller
Africa Programme Manager

