



Before the park was a park

The name clicks off the tongue, conjuring up images of hunter-gatherers and they are among the earliest residents of the Etosha National Park. The name Hai||om is derived from the problems the Hai||om experienced with mosquitoes and malaria. To ward off mosquitoes they built a wooden scaffold with a platform called '#heeb' in a tree and underneath burned natural materials that drove mosquitoes away. This explains why the Hai||om are also called 'tree people' or 'tree dwellers'.

The men hunted using a combination of luck, patient stalking and the power of a poisoned arrow to kill. The women gathered bush foods. While only three out of ten Hai||om hunters were truly skilled, a woman never returned home from gathering without something to eat – even if it meant walking more than 20 km through lion territory carrying a baby on her back!

Today, the Xoms |Omis Project, an initiative that works with the Hai||om to archive their cultural, economic and environmental history in Etosha, is aimed at protecting the Hai||om's links to the past and the land.

Namutoni

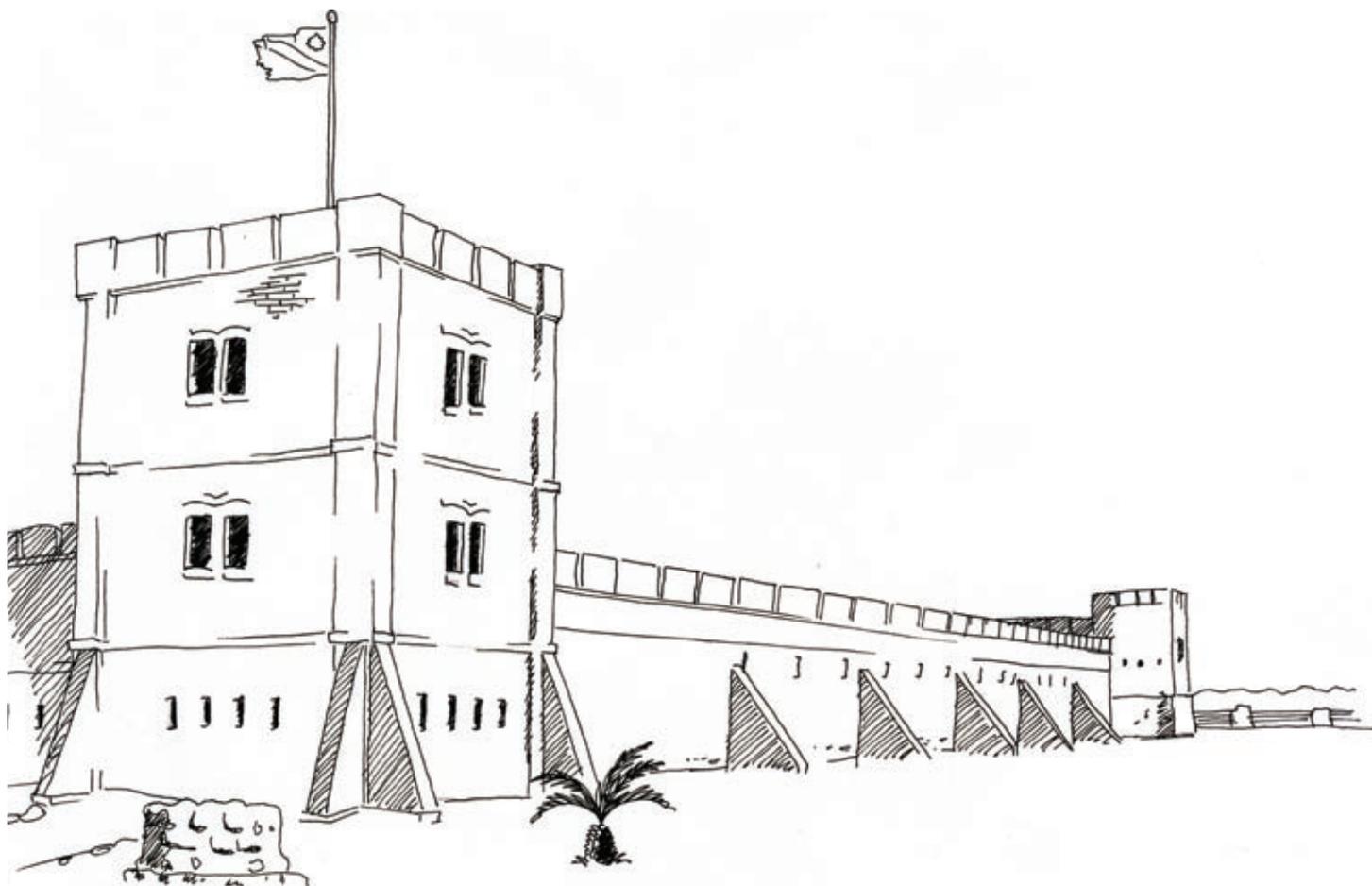
The building of the first fort at Namutoni was completed in 1903. It was used as a control post in an effort to stop the spread of rinderpest that was ravaging the eastern and southern part of Africa.

In 1904, 500 Owambo soldiers of King Nehale Iya Mpingana of Ondonga, led by Captain Shivute, attacked Namutoni. Those German troops who weren't killed in the fighting, fled under cover of darkness and the fort was burnt to the ground. In 1905 the fort was rebuilt and in 1906 First Lieutenant Adolf Fischer took command. Fischer became the first Game Warden of Namutoni, and the pan nearby bears his name.

In 1996, Namibia's first President, Dr Sam Nujoma, unveiled a plaque outside the entrance to the old horse stables just north of Namutoni. It honours the 68 Owambo soldiers who lost their lives in the 1904 battle, the 40 warriors who went missing and 20 others who returned home wounded.

Etosha's incredible shrinking boundaries

In 1907 when it was proclaimed, the Etosha National Park



encompassed approximately 90 000 km², extending north-west to the Kunene River and the coast. This made it the largest game reserve in the world. But by 1958 its size had been decreased to about 55 000 km². In 1963, the borders were again redefined, reducing Etosha to its current size of 22 935 km², about a quarter of its former area.

Back to the future

The good news is that, even at a fraction of its original size, the Etosha National Park is a vital ecosystem, supporting a vast variety of plant and animal species. Further good news is that the Namibian Government, in close collaboration with the Kunene Regional Council, traditional authorities, communal conservancies and other local stakeholders, is currently working to establish the Kunene People's Park. The vision is to link the Etosha National Park and Skeleton Coast Park by proclaiming the current three concession areas (Hobatare, Etendeka and Palmwag) and working neighbouring conservancies. The Kunene People's Park is envisaged not only to restore migratory routes for wildlife, but also to ensure that many more people will benefit from Namibia's progressive conservation strategies.

Rietfontein

While abundant wildlife enjoys the cooling relief at Rietfontein waterhole, there is a plaque a few hundred metres away that commemorates the Dorstrand Trekkers, those hardy pioneers who left South Africa in 1874 and through disease, death and every other calamity imaginable, made it to Rietfontein in 1879. Here they rested, regaining their

strength from the sweet water provided by the artesian fountain, and hunted the abundant game before setting off again, this time for Angola. Eventually many of these tough trekkers returned to farm in and around what is now the Etosha National Park.

Did you know that...

...there are many different meanings for the name Etosha? In local languages the name means 'to go to a pan' or 'where the pan is'. The name has various interpretations in English: the Place of Dry Water, the Great White Place, or Place of Emptiness; Lake of a Mother's Tears (this explains the limitless grief of a Hai||om mother when her infant dies); 'to run falteringly across' (illustrating the fatigue an early hunter felt when he attempted to cross the pan); and the Hai||om 'chum-chum' from the noise made by a person's feet when walking across the pan.

...although Etosha is best known today as a spectacular refuge for an abundance of animals, it is also a part of the world that is providing critical evidence for the existence and evolution of ancestral animals? The rocks in the hills near Halali have revealed fossil life as old as 650 million years!

...in 1955 Etosha opened its gates to tourists for the first time? Although Etosha has existed as a protected area for more than a hundred years, it was proclaimed as a national park only in 1967.

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Environmental Care Code

Kindly respect the fact that the Etosha National Park is a haven for wild animals; you are the visitor. Please adhere to the following while enjoying a memorable trip to this fascinating place:

- Stay on existing roads.
- Do not exceed speed limits.
- Do not get out of your vehicle unless you are at a rest camp or rest area.
- Do not harass or feed the animals.
- Do not litter.
- Follow the park rules and regulations as listed on your permit.

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