

Damaraland and Kaokoland - Where to now?

by Dan Craven

Exerpts from various reports over the past 20 years.

'THE COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO SWA AFFAIRS 1962 - 1963' more commonly known as 'The Odendaal Report'

Item 88. Although the Kaokoveld is a home area, it is at the same time a game conservation area. In some parts as in the south in the vicinity of Sesfontein, elephants are still plentiful. According to estimates, there are about 3 000 elephants in the Kaokoveld. A small number of rhinoceros also occur and along the Kunene in the north impala are to be found. For the rest, most of the ordinary species of game are encountered, the so called mountain zebra being particularly abundant.

Item 1512. Elephant Guns

The inhabitants of these areas made strong representations to the commission that they should be supplied with effective weapons against elephants.

The Commission therefore recommends that elephant guns be supplied to responsible persons against payment.

NAMIBIA WILDLIFE TRUST AERIAL GAME CENSUS 1982 (20 years later)

	Kaokoveld	
	Damaraland	Kaokoland
Black rhinoceros	23	0
Carcasses	19	2
Elephant	184	36
Carcasses	85	36

Thus Kaokoveld elephant numbers decreased from approximately 3 000 in 1962 to 120 in only 20 years. What is the reason for this dramatic decline in an area which has an extremely low human population, where the African elephant is not unduly threatened by human development and encroachment of agriculture?

Kaokoland Survey - 1983 - Garth Owen-Smith pg 5

During the Bantu Affairs Department's (BAD) entire period of responsibility for Kaokoland, no nature conservator was ever appointed within the Territory and the only conviction for a poaching offense in the area resulted from a charge laid by a senior conservator from Etosha who was on holiday in the region.

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Kaokoland Survey Pg 3 ... virtually unlimited big game hunting had long been an unofficial perk for white administration staff based in the Kaakoveld ...

High ranking Government officials were also involved in large scale illegal hunting and, in some cases, the trade in ivory and rhino horn, with the result that all attempts to expose these nefarious activities were invariably suppressed.

... in 1980, following a major SWAPO offensive in Kaokoland, 'special police' were recruited locally and armed with modern automatic weapons ...

Well over a thousand .303 rifles with ample ammunition were sold cheaply to locals. With the example of years of wanton slaughter by white officials and soldiers, and secure in the knowledge that no one was ever prosecuted for illegal hunting in the region, the rifles were put to use on the surviving game.

The 1982 Aerial Game Census of NWT revealed that carcasses of elephant spotted and then investigated on the ground, 86,78% were shot. There was evidence too of two cases where animals were chased to death, one by a vehicle and one by an aeroplane.



Kaokoland Survey pg 2... To date (1983) in conjunction with the senior nature conservators of the Skeleton Coast Park and Damaraland a total of 30 persons have been convicted of illegal hunting and for the illegal possession of ivory or rhino horn. Eighteen of these convictions stemmed directly from poaching cases uncovered by the field staff working on the Damaraland/Kaokoland project of the NWT.

From an NWT press release on the third Aerial Survey of November 1983 which was never published:

' ... a highlight of the survey was the large percent of young animals seen ... no poachers, nor evidence of poaching was found in the area.

... delighted to report the spotting (from the air) of 14 black rhino in the concession area, including a new calf with its mother, both in good health.'

The picture was just beginning to look rosy ...

But once again, dark clouds are gathering -

- on 14 February it was announced that the proclamation of a conservation area in Damaraland had foundered.
- on 6 March 1984 the NWT announced its plan to cease operations in Damaraland.
- on 15 March 1984 it was known that the much respected senior nature conservator for Damaraland was to be transferred away from the area to the far south of South West.

Have personal issues crept in, once again to push conservation aside?

SKEUROOR MIGHT YET HAVE DIED FOR NOTHING.

