

## GOM and Namibia Maj-June 2011 by Mike Skebo



Kristi, my daughter, had travelled in Africa with a British group and on her own over 15 years ago. When she returned I was smitten by her photos of Namibia and its landscape. She also brought home three thumbnails of azurite, diopside and cuprite from the Tsumeb Mine, in Tsumeb for me. This was a country that I wanted to visit, not only for its wildlife, but its physiographic and minerals. Marco told me early in the year that the major trip would be to Namibia and I signed up immediately. Germano Fretti, Claudio Seghezzi, Pietro Merlo of Milano, Elsa and László (Les) Horvath from Canada and of course Marco Sturla were the participants. Our real trip leader was Andreas Palfi and also, for a few days, Ralf Wartha, both of Windhoek, Namibia.

Our trip was a triangular one starting in Windhoek - Karibib - Rossing - Swakopmund - Walvis Bay - Henties Bay - Brandenburg Mountain mineral occurrences - Erongo - Spitzkopf (Kleine and Grosse) - Messum Crater and back to Windhoek. These were not all of the collecting sites since I have yet to mention the most important to me the Ariskop Quarry and the Railway Quarry south of Windhoek. These latter two quarries were the most important for me, so much so that I would have sold Marco Sturla into slavery to get to these quarries.

Now the fun begins. The Horvaths and I decided to fly from Frankfurt to Windhoek a day ahead of time (May 25<sup>th</sup>) so that we could recover from the overnight flight. Marco et al were to fly on May 27<sup>th</sup> and meet us at Andreas' home. To make a long story short our airlines, Air Namibia, supposedly had engine problems and we were then whisked to South Africa aboard Lufthansa 787 to Johannesburg from Frankfurt. The "787" is the largest passenger plane in the world. It was an excellent flight. Once we arrived in Johannesburg we then flew to Windhoek in Namibia where we were met by Andreas and drove to his home.



*The "group"*



*"Guard Dogs" Whiskey and Vodka*



*Les Horvath  
behind  
and Andreas  
Palfi  
in the  
foreground  
  
in the Aris  
Quarry*

The **Aris Quarry** is in the Windhoek District. It is a phonolite quarry 20km South of Windhoek, Namibia. Here it's mined on and off for road and rail gravel. This phonolite is one of many phonolite's belonging to several alkaline intrusions between Windhoek and Rehoboth in central Namibia. A number of Mid Tertiary ( $\approx$ 34 Ma) phonolitic and trachytic bodies, appearing as domes, plugs, vents and associated hydrothermal dykes, occur in the Aris area where they intrude quartz-feldspar gneisses, mica schist and amphibolites of the Paleoproterozoic Hohewarte complex. The phonolites occur as flows, dykes and plugs exposed as eroded outcroppings and caps on small hills and buttes. They form part of the tertiary Auas alkaline volcanic field, which extends from Aris in the north to Rehoboth some 65 km further to the south.

Some zones of the phonolite rock contain numerous small cavities, mostly 1-2 cm in diameter with exceptional cavities to about 8 cm, with well-formed, microscopic crystals of various minerals. Most famous is the abundant occurrence of the world's best tupaussuaite, villiaumite and makatite. The most complete mineral list for the Aris Quarry is found at <http://www.mindat.org/loc-7687.html> (Mindat website) .

The day after our arrival (May 26<sup>th</sup>) we drove to Aris after picking up breakfast at the local supermarket. We purchased water, lunch, paper and other stuff for our first trip to the quarry. I have a suspicion that the "Italians" were not happy that we got to go to the quarry first. Upon arrival, I was surprised to see the size of the quarry. It was about 100 metres long and about 30-49 metres wide. I imagined it larger, but that was only in my dreams.

We immediately started to gather the gray rock with the small vugs. Elsa found the first Arisite so I started to follow her. I think she is a 'mineral magnet' They seem to find her. Collecting was good with tapersuatsiaite (brown and green), analcime, natrolite, biotite, calcite, fluorite, ellingsenite (TL), makatite, villiaumite and many others. I mentioned that Germano will be furious with our finds. So we made a small pile of rocks for them for the return trip next day.



*Ariskop Quarry, Namibia*



*White spray  
of Makatite.*

We returned through the streets of Windhoek, a modern city, to visit Ralf Wartha at his home. We did see some more Aris material but we left to change

and visit a local Portuguese restaurant for a good meal and wine. After the meal and interesting conversation we returned to Andreas' home and some sleep.

The next day, Andreas picked up the Italian guys at the airport at 5:30. Then my worst nightmare occurred. Upon arriving at Palfi's, Marco found out where I was sleeping and he and Claudio (traitor) stormed into my room and woke me up at 6:30. I guess this was pay back for me taking a photo of Marco in bed when we were in France the previous year. I wanted to get some more sleep but it was impossible.

Marco met the dogs and they were not too sure of him. Andreas' response was that Marco was spaghetti. We did spend the day collecting at the Aris Quarry and Germano, Marco, Claudio and Pietro all found the same material we did. The only difficulty was that they were tired. I do not think they paid any attention to our pile of rocks that we left for them. It was a long tiring day for the Italian guys.

We left the next day on our expedition with the "English" folks in Andreas' car and the Italians in Andreas second and older car. Marco did the driving and it was a stick shift on the left side. He did a great job driving the car throughout the trip. I personally didn't like splitting the group this way but there was no alternative.

We headed for the phosphates of Rubicon and the Helikon pegmatites. The open pit operation of the phosphate deposit was no longer being mined but proved to be an interesting photo opportunity. I did not collect much as there did not seem to be much available. I would imagine if the waste piles were turned over, more material would be found.



I think it is necessary to mention that the 'local' folks collect here as well and this is how they make their living. They are very thorough. We did see a Puff Adder snake. Everyone but Andreas and I jumped out the vehicles. This is one nasty beast, slow moving but

extremely deadly. You may live for 10 minutes after a bite from this snake and there is no antidote.

After we did our collecting, darkness was approaching rapidly and we headed for the Karibib Lodge. After a real good meal we turned in.

I had a great sleep as my roommate will attest. I slept through two alarms. Today, after a full breakfast of bacon en eggs, we went back to a local mineral shop in Karibib. It was like a museum filled with 2-4 cm and micro samples. I saw

some samples which I really wanted to buy but they didn't take VISA and I did not have enough Namibian dollars. I could have used Euro but didn't even think of them. I sure wasn't thinking too clearly. Pietro Merlo bought the ones that I was looking at as well as many other fine samples. Way to go Pietro.

We moved on to visit the Crossing Mineral dealers, a number of indigenous collectors who were selling their crystals to the tourists and other mineral collectors like us. There some nice quartz crystals, schorl and other material. It is challenging to say no when you see how they live on a meagre income.



*The minerals from the shop in Karibib.*



From the dealers tables, we left for the Moonscape and the Goanikontes boltwoodite collecting site.. Boltwoodite, a uranium mineral was found by everyone. There were some great acicular crystals unearthed here..



*Moonscape*

We drove through the Moonscape of the area and the geology was really evident in the rock. It really was a bleak zone. There was a hint of grass growing here as Namibia had more rain this year than in

the previous 40 years.

We tried to cross a river with the vehicles but discretion was the better part of valour. We looked at the majestic river but realized it was too deep and the current would have defeated us in our attempt to cross.



*The swollen river.*



*Marco  
with his wife's "pink" camera.*

Andreas was disappointed that we couldn't cross the river but made the decision to drive to Swakopmund.

We arrived just before dark and it was a charming "colonial" city with a huge pier and a great restaurant on the pier. We found that out at the dinner hour. We did stay at the Hotel Alte Brücke. Absolutely no camping for us. The food at the restaurant was absolutely delicious. The staff hurried us a bit to order early as there was a group of 50 people coming into the restaurant.

Andreas decided that he was going to room with me. He decided to wake me the next morning at our agreed time but he woke me an hour earlier. Perhaps Marco was involved??? Andreas assured me that it was all an awful mistake. He left to clean his pipes.

Today was another collecting day but before we went to the Rössing Mountains, we visited the sand dunes just outside of Swakopmund. We did climb the dunes and I followed Germano the "Mountain Man". This was very obviously a sandy desert. In some places your feet just sunk into the sand while just a meter or less away the sand was compacted and it was much easier to climb. We all made it to the top.



Next, on to Rössing Mountain. We were looking for milarite, blue apatite, chalcedony and corundum. Germano did find blue apatite and if I remember correctly, Pietro also found many of the minerals. I did find chalcedony. Other findings were titanite, euxenite, schorl and blue spinel cubes by Germano. We did encounter the army on training exercises and they strongly suggested to us to collect in a certain area as they were target practicing. We complied. The area has been well picked over and there were not many dumps to work through. It was decided we would continue onto the Namib Lead Mine. This mine was formerly called the Deblin Mine in the Swakopmund District, Erongo Region of Namibia. Production ceased in 1992. There were extensive pile of debris to look through, however nothing really productive was found.



*Native crafts*



*Just a short break*

I was really feeling tired and I felt a return of my nasty cold that I thought I was finished with in April. This was not to be the case. As the others searched the dumps of the Lead Mine I was left to guard the trucks. After a late lunch we returned to our hotel as Swakopmund. We did see two Springboks on the return trip. I visited the Italian chalet and was warmly welcomed. We drank some wine and chatted. Time for dinner and another great fish feast.

I neglected to mention that we also found calcite with orange phantoms in the boltwoodite area and beautiful orange descloisite by Germano (as usual).

Tuesday, May 31st, was a Swakopmund town visit. We spent the morning viewing the local museum and the mineral store and showplace "Kristall. The mineral place had excellent specimens to look at and to purchase.



I felt that my cold was starting to move into my respiratory system. Not good for me. I visited a pharmacy, saw the doctor and was given antibiotics. The folks at the pharmacy were just extremely helpful. I was told to start the pills immediately. We had lunch and snacks in various places and around 14:00 we left for the Cape Cross Lodge and the Cape Cross Seal Colony.

We did find the lodge, spectacular, and the stinky seals. They sure did make one heck of a racket. It was interesting to see the different sizes of the beasts as well as the young ones.



Another superb meal, sleep and off to the Messum Caldera. According to the information on Mindat, Messum is a large circular, alkaline igneous ring complex ~23 km in diameter, about half of which is obscured by sand and scree. The Arcuate mountains form the outer ring and an inner ring surrounds a central group of domes, well exposed in the Messum caldera. The complex consists of a large number of diverse rocks including basalt and pophyritic lavas, foyaite, tinguaita, syenite, granites, gabbro, anorthosite and others. The age of the intrusion is ~122 Ma. The Messum Caldera is over 20 km in diameter, and is a secluded volcanic feature in the Goboboseb Mountains west of Brandberg, Namibia. It was one of the volcanoes of the Etendeka period, about 133 million years ago.

We really spent the entire time in Messum driving through the cauldrea with a short stop to collect. The scenery was fantastic especially since it was highlighted by the tall grass as a result of all of the rain.



above and to the upper right Messum Caldera



Tafelkop Mine

Leaving the caldera we drove toward the Tafelkop Mine which was a quartz/amethyst, prehnite mine in Uis. There were about 14 other minerals but the above mentioned were dominant. The sign to the mine was interesting. We ate lunch and then collected in the mine on the sides of the hills. Everyone found some material while I slept and played guard for the vehicles. It really wasn't necessary. The mine was on the side of a mountain (1073 m asl) in the northwestern corner of the Goboboseb Mountains. The minerals are in basalt cavities while the mining is small scale by the locals.

Next on the day's agenda was the Erongo Mine. It was not what I had envisioned, instead it was a series of small sites where collecting took place. It was not a mine in my opinion. To reach the "mine" we had to drive through the tall grass and the trail was mainly hidden. It was an interesting ride through the grass. I wondered what was lurking in that grass.

**Tafelkop  
collecting**



Horvath  
photo



**Erongo scenery**

Horvath photo



Looking for the track in the Erongo District.

Horvath photo

Andreas eventually followed the collecting location. Not much was found. I think everyone was tired and it was time to head for the Brandberg White Lady Lodge.

Andreas thought he would give the group the experience of 'luxury' camping. As it turned out, it was really nothing more than a cement platform on which to pitch a tent. There was a lot of rushing to the office to change to the huts (wood cabin) that had amenities. Due to my cold, I had a cabin. The lodge was great and so was the food.



Carlos the Meerkat



and Carlos with Piero

After dinner we were entertained by a singing and dancing group from one of the local tribes. I thought they were very good.

We left late in the morning for a place where Marco wanted to collect tantalite. I found two nice pieces but Marco refused my gift. He wanted to collect his own. I don't remember him finding anything. I remember sitting and enjoying the scenery and watching Marco work. A little later we went to a small village for lunch at a restaurant. It was a good change. While we were waiting for our sandwiches, Germano was checking the rocks piled up around trees. Below are the results of his inspecting. The location was Kandesei, Kunene which I think is where we had lunch. ( I did not record the name of the place)

In the afternoon, we visited another abandoned quarry that had filled with water.



Shattuckite (Kandesei, Kunene, Namibia)



Diopside (Kandesei, Kunene, Namibia)



Abandoned quarry now used as a fish farm.

We drove to our final accommodation which was the Ameib Lodge.

"The Guest Farm AMEIB RANCH, at the edge of the Erongo Mountains, is a superb holiday and nature paradise. It offers many opportunities for photographers, friends of the rock art and nature lovers. Ameib, meaning "The Green Face", is also home of Hartman's Zebras, Oryx, Kudu, Springbuk, Klip-Springer, Steenbok, Giraffe, Pavian and many more.

Those interested in Namibia's history will delight in the discovery of **Bushman rock art** and paintings. The sculptured rocks at the **Bull's Party** (Klein Ameib), the **Stone Elephant Head** will be some of the highlights. The famous **Phillip's Cave** with the rock painting **The White Elephant** is another highlight." (Ameib website)

We were to spend two evenings here. Dinner was in an open 'restaurant' and they had a fire pit near the table as it was a little cold.



Springbok

Wow! Only four more days in the trip. Tempus fugit. Today everyone, except me, were visiting both the Grosse and Kleine Spitzkoppe.

Grosse Spitzkoppe Swakopmund, Swakopmund district, Erongo Region, Namibia, is an isolated granite massif elevating from a peneplain (~1000 m above sea level), 1728 m high. The Groot Spitzkopje is also called "Matterhorn of Africa". The biotite granite intruded during a late stage of the Damara orogeny (about 530



Ma: the neighboring Kleine Spitzkopje granite intruded ~ 400 Ma later). The Spitzkopje area is world famous for its pegmatite minerals, especially topaz.

Kleine Spitzkoppe (a granite stock) is located 30 km from Usakos next to the main road to Swakopmund. It is a remnant of a ring complex that has many miarolitic cavities with superb crystals.

I decided to remain at the Farm and try to catch up on some sleep. I think it was a good move as I felt better the next day. I did get caught up on my notes and also looked through my collecting material,

disposing of the poorer quality ones. On the groups return, they claimed that they

didn't find much but purchased some nice samples from the locals on the roadway. Elsa Horvath had a great clear topaz that she found for sale.

Our next day was sightseeing on the ranch. We drove to a place where there was Bushmen art carved into the granite rocks. The rocks themselves had been smoothed by weathering and they were a great spectacle themselves, all shapes and sizes. Some photos of the area are shown below:



After seeing the ranch "as advertised", it was a wonderful place. I personally took a lot of photos here.

We did move on to a mine owned by Andreas where we did some collecting. I did not get very much but others picked up a few samples. We had lunch at the mine and then began the long trip back to Windhoek. We had a great meal and met Vicky Nikku- Paavola who has a Masters Degree written on Aris and is halfway through her PhD studies.

This was our last collecting day (Sunday). We met Ralf Wartha and the entire group returned to the Aris Quarry and a new spot, the Railway Quarry which is part of the phonolite of both quarries. We stayed at the Railway Quarry for only

about an hour as it is a dangerous place to be. Dangerous due to unscrupulous people. The minerals were basically the same as Aris but I noticed a lot more manganoneptunite where I was collecting.



Railway  
Quarry

(Horvath  
photo)

We moved back across the highway and entered the Aris Quarry.



Railway Quarry on the left and the Aris Quarry on the right.

The “English” vehicle went to the north end of the quarry where Les and Elsa found some great samples of labuntsovite. It was little unfortunate that we didn’t have more time as I think there were more minerals just waiting to be discovered.



Piero (back),  
Germano and  
Mike  
at the Railway  
Quarry

This is a little animal  
that changes colours  
with its surroundings.  
Chameleon



Mike,  
Ralf  
Wartha  
and  
Elsie



Packaging  
the rocks  
for  
transport



At  
the  
airport.

We left Namibia late in the afternoon on Monday, June 6th, 2011. It was a great trip, especially the two phonolite quarries. The scenery, geology and mineralogy of Namibia are superb. We had a good group of people and Andreas, our main leader, was excellent. Thanks to Ralf and other guide who found time for us at the phonolite quarries.

Thanks to Germano, Claudio, Marco and Les and Elsie Horvath for providing me with extra photos. To me, it feels like a return trip is essential. Thanks to all.

*Mike Skebo*