

Y Care's Makgadikgadi Pan Walk 2010

17 – 21 July 2010

About the Pans

Botswana's great two pans: Sua and Ntwetwe Pans collectively comprise the 12,000 sq km Makgadikgadi Pans. The grassy Makgadikgadi Pans National Park includes only a portion of Ntwetwe Pan. These landscapes are like no other on earth; especially in the sizzling heat of late winter, the stark pans take on a disorienting and ethereal austerity. Heat mirages destroy all sense of space or direction, imaginary lakes shimmer and disappear, ostriches fly, and stones turn to mountains and float in the mid-air. These are just tricks the heat waves cause our eyes to imagine.

In September, herds of wildebeest, zebra and other antelopes move into the thirsty grasslands west of the pans to await the first rains. Although the water is short-lived, wildlife gravitates towards depressions that retain stores of water after the surface moisture has evaporated. Around December, the deluge of rain begins. The fringing grasses turn green and the herds arrive to partake of the bounty. Flamingos, pelicans, ducks, geese and other water birds flock to the mouth of the Nata River to build shoreline nests and feed on algae and tiny crustaceans that have lain dormant in the salty earth during the dry months.

Geology

The Makgadikgadi Pans are the residue of a great lake that once covered much of northern Botswana, fed by rivers carrying salts leached from the lake's catchment area. Ancient lakeshore terraces reveal that the water depth fluctuated by as much as 33 metres and, at its greatest extent, the lake covered an area of 60,000 sq km. Because the basin had no outlet, the salts were concentrated in low lying areas. Less than 10,000 years ago, climatic changes caused the lake to evaporate, leaving only salt deposits.

Sua Pan

Sua Pan is mostly a single sheet of salt-encrusted mud stretching across the lowest basin in north-eastern Botswana. Sua means salt in the language of the San, who once mined the pan to sell salt to the Kalanga people. In wet season of normal rainfall, flocks of water-loving birds gather to nest at the delta where the Nata River flows into the northern end of Sua Pan. At these times, its expanses are covered with a film of water only a few centimetres deep, creating an eerie and surreal effect that reflects the sky and obliterates the horizon.

Kubu Island

Near the south-western corner of Sua Pan lies Kubu Island, the original desert island. But for one tenuous finger of grass, the ancient 20 metre high scrap of rock and its ghostly Baobab trees lies surrounded by a sea of salt. In cool weather, this bizarre sight can make visitors feel like castaways on an alien planet. In Zulu-based languages, "Kubu" means hippopotamus, and as unlikely as it may seem, given the current environment, the site may have been inhabited as recently as 500 to 1,500 years ago. On one shore lies an ancient crescent-shaped stone enclosure of unknown origin that has yielded numerous pot shards, stone tools and ostrich eggshell beads.

Sua Spit

Sua Spit, about a 10 minute drive north of the Dukwe buffalo fence, is a long, slender protrusion extending into the heart of Sua Pan. It is the nexus of Botswana's lucrative soda ash industry.

Introduction to the walk

This vast and desolate region is the spectacular location for the previous Y Care Makgadikgadi Pans Walks. For 2010, the walk on the Pans will be no different in terms of scenery and purpose. The walks have proved to be a fantastic way to explore the beauty of Botswana's nature and culture, on foot, whilst raising funds for charity.

The 2010 Makgadikgadi Pans Walk will cover approx. 150 km during the 3 walking days.

Start & Finish point of the walk:

Starting point: Makgadikgadi Lodge, Sowa Town

Finish point: Makgadikgadi Lodge, Sowa Town

Route

Makgadikgadi Lodge – Thabatshukudu - Kubu Island – Thabatshukudu – Makgadikgadi Lodge.

Day Schedule

Day 1	Bus/Transport to the start of the walk 07.00: Departure from Gaborone (Barclays Bank – the processing centre) 16.00: Arrival to Makgadikgadi Lodge. Setting up camp. 18.00: Dinner 19.00: Walk brief, route, walking etiquette
Day 2, 3 & 4	6.00 – 6.30 Light breakfast – cereal, bread, jam, tea & coffee served. 6.30 Walk starts. Mornings are cold but it warms up during the morning hours. Long sleeves and light colour clothing is recommended to protect you from the sun & the heat. Follow the quad bike tracks done by the support team and stay together in groups. The quad bikes will stop and wait for all walkers to re-group every 6 km. For the first 3 stops (18 km) the support team will provide fruit and water to re-fill your bottle. Jackets and sweatshirts can be loaded on the quads. Stretching your muscles and check your feet are important. 13.00 – At the 24 km stop we will have a light lunch of bread, cheese, cold meat, tomatoes, cucumbers, salad and fruit will be served. The lunch is the best time for checking your feet, stretch and rest. 17.00-18.00 – Arrival to the camp where your tent will be set up. Soak your blistered feet in a warm tub – the paramedic from the support team can treat your painful blisters – if you have them and get a cup of coffee/tea and muffins in your camping chair around the camp fire! A cooked supper will be served. After supper, sit down by the camp fire and enjoy the evening together with the walkers before it’s time to say goodnight...
Day 5	06.00: Wake up call 06.30: Breakfast 07.00: Pack & clean camp site 09.00: Departure from Makgadikgadi Lodge

Transport

- There will organized bus/transport of walkers and luggage from Gaborone to the start/finish point of the walk and back to Gaborone after the walk.
- Use of own vehicle(s) is also possible.
- Support vehicles will transport your tent, sleeping bag and belongings for the duration of the walk.

	PANS 2 (July 16 – 20)
Departure from Gaborone	Barclays Bank, Western Bypass, Friday July 16, 07.00am (SHARP). Packing time: 06.00-07.00
Departure from the walk	Tuesday July 20, 09.00am
Arriving to Gaborone	Barclays Bank, Western Bypass, Tues July 20, 18.00

Food & Drinks

Y Care will provide all meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner), incl. for vegetarians and adequate supply of water. If you have any special dietary needs, please provide these for yourself.

Pre Walk Training

We will cover 40-50 km per day on the walks. This requires that all walkers to be in a good physical condition. Therefore, pre-walk training is strongly recommended.

As soon as possible, you should get out at least once or twice a week, walking for an hour or more. We advice you to make 1-2 walks per month of each 30-40 km from the month of February. This is to get the experience; feeling of a longer walk and to build up the endurance.

Equipment

Walkers will need to provide their own tents, sleeping bags, camping chairs and walking sticks. Make sure your tent is complete with all its parts and that you are familiar of how to put it up. It is important to break in or try out new equipment before the walk. This includes new walking shoes. Please, label all your belongings with your name.

Packing List

All your belongings should be packed in a durable and reasonable sized bag. Please don't bring valuables as during the walk and transportation items may get lost. Y Care is not responsible for lost or damaged property.

Emergency

If relatives of family needs to come in contact with one of the walkers in an emergency situation, a hotline number will be given to all walkers in due cause.

Application & Indemnity Form

Before a participant can start on the walk, he/she must have completed and signed an Indemnity Form and an Application Form.

Medical Support

During the walk, there will be a trained medical support to take care of any medical emergencies. If you have any medical conditions, please advice Y Care (on the Application Form) prior to commencement of the walk.

More Information

For more information, don't hesitate to contact us.

Contact Y Care coordinator Stellan Bengtsson.

You can find him on email: ycare@it.bw, on Skype: stellanb, cell: +267 71784212, phone: +267 393 22 53, fax: +267 393 22 42.

On Y Care's website www.ycare.org.bw you can find more info about Y Care, the walks, sponsors, beneficiaries, forms, maps, etc.