With apologies to Mr C Dickens. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness....

Khutse, southernmost part of the CKGR. The trip was conceived in what now seems like another life time. It was planned as one of those 'I've got to get away from the stress of city living' trips, a short dash up to the border, by pass Gaborone and head off onto sand roads all before the sun had shaken itself awake.

As with previous Vetgat Toere outings the final personnel were always going to be a mystery, for sure there would be Gasman and me. At one time we had 4 cars and 8 people on the list, the final count was 3 and 4, Gasman, Carolyn, Charlotte and myself.

And like previous trips there was to be nothing standard in our individual journeys to Molose2

Late last year SWAMBO and I decided to throw in the towel, we now live in Port Nolloth but that's a whole different story. Suffice to say the quick dash to the border was now a road trip all of itself. Being of an age where distances are defiantly not something to be sneered at, coupled with the blazing top speed of Jaeger Defender, two overnight stops were added to the short bush break.

Kalahari Monate Lodge just outside Upington hosted my first night and now being a seasoned toere(ist) it was a simple matter to find a quiet spot, push the button to erect the tent and then light a fire. On the menu tonight, homemade pork stew and mashed potatoes lovingly crafted by SWAMBO.
It needed to be almost edible through a straw as at this stage I was still recovering from an infected tooth that was extracted 5 days before leaving, it left me with a face swollen to such an extent I could barely open my mouth. But hey this is Africa and I’m a Toere(ist) and this trip had already had its share of misfortunes before it even got underway.

On the Monday prior to departure another couple of Toere(ists) had to pull the plug, work issues compounded by a dog bite putting paid to their trips.

Yip, after nearly 550 kms on the road from Port Nolloth to Upington I celebrate with a cup of Rooibos tea. The doc said take these antibiotics, they will solve the face problem BUT NO ALCOHOL. Never argue with SWAMBO, the tax man or a doctor is what my old mum used to say.

Day two of my “quick, dash avoiding Gaborone” was a 650 km jaunt through Vryburg, Mahikeng, cross the border at Ramatlabama and onto Phuduhudu.

An unpleasant incident in Mafikeng cast a cloud over the journey. Unable to purchase Pula from the banks in Port Nolloth or Springbok, wasn’t sure if I would need them at Ramatlabama, I had called ahead to FNB Mahikeng and arranged to collect 800 for just in case.
Pulling into Mahikeng I found a parking spot right outside the bank. Lady luck was smiling on me. Now we all say we check because we all know about the remote jamming scan and I swear I checked, it’s just something I do automatically so I’m convinced that Jaeger Defender was locked when I left him. I think you know what’s coming 😊

Off I trot to the bank, this was going to be a quick in, collect, out and back on the road to the border…

Half way through the transaction a staff member asks if I was the owner of the green bakkie parked outside. My initial reaction, nope I drive a Landover 😄. Then it dawned on me she was referring to Jaeger Defender, I had just become another statistic

The toe rag (not the name I called the thief at the time) made off with one item, brown bag containing my GoPro camera and HP laptop and it’s not as if it was sitting in open view. Had it packed in the passenger foot well under a coupled of jumpers, a jacket and various maps and books.

Nothing like that to put a damper on things. Don’t know if I was more annoyed at myself or the thief.

Insurance company were helpful at the time, they said I could report the loss to any police station after I explained my concerns about delays which might prevent me making the border crossing and having to travel after sunset in Botswana. Case was eventually opened when I returned to Port Nolloth, whether I’m covered or not is now open to debate. We’ll see how it pans out.

And to rub salt into the wound, Ramatlabama has card facilities so there was no need for Pula in any event.

However if I thought my luck was bad an SMS from Charlotte as I was going through immigration was the beginning of another one of life’s little challenges.

In the Grey Nomad, she was well ahead of me on the sand road to Khutse gate when she lost not one but two tyres almost on top of each other. Now Charlotte is a seasoned traveler and something as simple as an exploded tyre was not going to stop her for long but when the second one went she knew it was time to think of bush camping for the night. But that is a story for another day.

My own dark clouds’ silver lining came after arriving at Phuduhudu. I was originally booked to camp for the night but when Roshan had to pull out he had told Sharon at reception to let me have the lodge that he had paid for. Have to say even with a push button tent it was an offer I wasn’t going to turn down, would you?.
My companion, a small dog who was more than happy to have some company.
In classic Jock of the Bushveld style we made fire, burnt a boerewors, rustled up some baked beans and a cup of rooibos, remember the antibiotics and stuck mouth guys.

Suddenly “Jock” gets all excited, barking and running around. Ok what’s up mate jackals maybe? Nope out of the dark looms the biggest Great Dane I’ve seen in a long time.
Thankfully equally well behaved and so the three of us share supper, clearly my culinary skills have come a long way.

Charlotte I’m told by SMS is safe in Salajwe, a tiny village half way along the dirt road between Lethakeng and Khutse gate. She has set up camp behind the police compound, arrangement have been made to find two replacement tyres in the morning. Gasman will be making an unscheduled stop in Gaborone.

With that piece of good news, it’s time to hit the sack. Heaven after an eventful day on the road, hot shower, double bed, duvet and only the sounds of the bush serenading me to sleep. Thanks Roshan I owe you one😊

Thursday is going to be an interesting day …