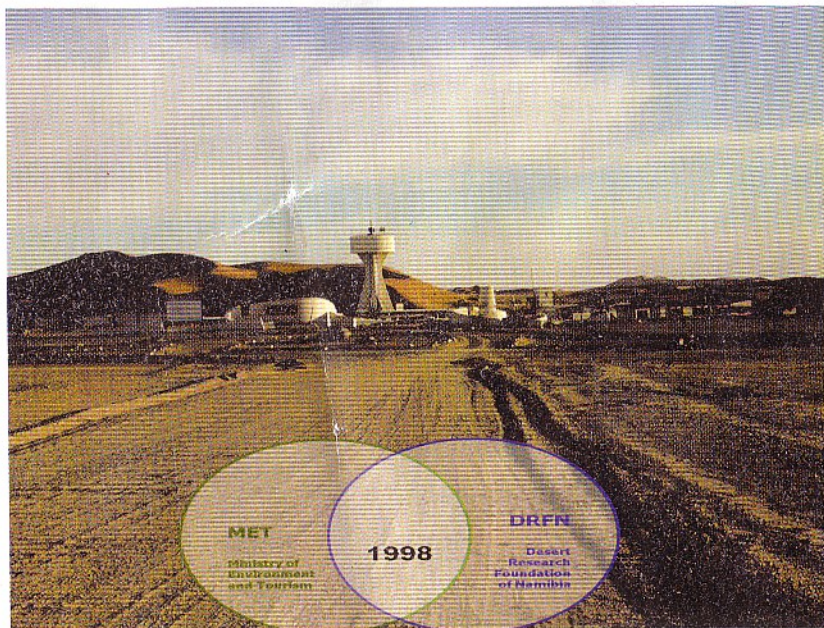


# THE GOBABEB HISTORY

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Gobabeb Research and Training Centre

"Oasis of Learning"



Gobabeb is a catalyst for gathering, disseminating and implementing understanding of arid environments

Compiled by: Emily Mutota  
Layout & Editing by: Ronald N. Kanguti

## 1948-1959

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| <p><b>1948</b> University of California, Berkeley and the Transvaal Museum embark on a joint expedition through the southern Namib and Kalahari area.</p> <p><b>1949-1957</b> The expeditions of the Transvaal Museum and colleagues continued. This time they also go to northern Namib and adjacent areas.</p> | <p><b>1957</b> Dr. Charles Koch (Entomologist of the Transvaal Museum) and Mr. A.F. Port (Honorary Warden of Nature Reserve No.3) first visit to Gobabeb.</p> <p><b>1958</b> The Transvaal Museum in South Africa agreed To set up a field station in the central Namib Desert to facilitate research there.</p> <p><b>1959</b> The Bernard Carp Expedition confirmed Gobabeb (also known as //Nomabeb) as the site for a research station.</p> |
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### Early Namib Expeditions

It took several long expeditions before the discovery and selection of the place known today as Gobabeb Research and Training Centre. In 1948 a group of scientists from Transvaal Museum, South Africa and University of California, Berkeley embark on a joint expedition through the southern Namib and Kalahari. The group was sponsored by the State Alluvial Diggings, Consolidated Diamond Mines, General Motors and Shell Oil Company.

As from 1949-1957 a multidisciplinary team of the same group of scientists led and funded by Mr Bernard Carp, an industrialist and Dr. Charles Koch of the Transvaal Museum with their colleagues, undertook several expeditions through southern and northern Namib, Kalahari and adjacent areas. These expeditions each extended about 10 days. Some specific areas visited were: Richtersveld & Namaqualand, southern Namib, Kaokoveld and Iona/Angola in the northern Namib and Tsauchab River, Kuiseb River, Swakop River, Messum River in the central Namib.

### Selection of Gobabeb

In 1957 Dr. Charles Koch, together with Mr. A.F. Port, a Honorary Warden of the Nature Reserve and Bernard Carp visited Gobabeb (known as //Nomabeb) for the first time. The men recommended Gobabeb as the site for a research station, because of the great diversity of fauna, especially the tenebrionid beetles. The choice of this site was also influenced by its proximity to three distinct desert biotopes (a) the high (up to 120 meters in height) moving dunes of loose wind-blown red sand, (b) the open flat gravelly, hard-baked plains and (c) the dry bed of the Kuiseb River, supporting a comparatively good vegetation cover of shrubs and trees.

Another added advantage to the selection of this site was that it is within the boundary of the Game Reserve, thereby ensuring some protection for long term research sites. In 1959, a decision was taken at the Transvaal Museum in South Africa to set up a field station at Gobabeb in order to facilitate Namib future research. The following year in April, the Head of the Department of Nature Conservation, Mr B de la Bat, the Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr V FitzSimons, accompanied by Dr Koch, Mr Port and Mr Kellerman visited the Namib again and confirmed Gobabeb as the final location of the proposed station. Gobabeb was then called //Nomabeb which means "place of the fig tree" in Nama language. The actual station was set up (as it can be seen today) on the north bank of the Kuiseb River bed, 100 km south-east of Walvis Bay and 56 km directly inland from the coast.



Dr. Koch with colleagues having breakfast at Gobabeb 1964



Mr E van Koenen, Gobabeb staff member, taking weather reading back in 1963

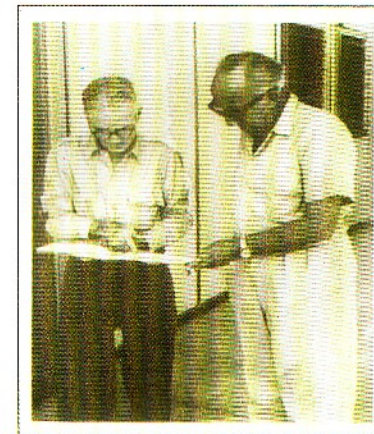


## 1960-1970

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|---|---|
| <p><b>1960</b> The Head of the Department of Nature Conservation, Mr B de la Bat, and the Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr FitzSimons, accompanied by Dr Koch, Mr Port and Mr Kellerman confirm the final location of the station during a site visit.</p> <p><b>1961</b> The South West African Administration grants a 50-year lease of Gobabeb to the Transvaal Museum. Several organisations join hands to establish the Namib Desert Research Association.</p> | <p><b>1962</b> Official Foundation of the Gobabeb Namib Desert Research Station. The Namib Desert Research Association was formed as a non-profit company. Scientific papers of the Namib Desert Research Station, edited by Dr. Koch, were started.</p> <p><b>1963</b> Inauguration of the first buildings at Gobabeb</p> <p><b>1965</b> Establishment of Desert Ecological Research Unit, DERU, supported by CSIR and the Transvaal Museum, first Director: Dr. Koch.</p> |
|---|---|
- 1970** Dr. Charles Koch passed away in Windhoek and Dr. M. K. Seely became Director of DERU

### Transvaal Museum granted the site

In 1961 the South West African Administration granted the Transvaal Museum the Gobabeb site on a 50-year lease for R2000 per year. In February the following year, an Action Committee for Gobabeb was formed. The committee included the South West Africa Scientific Society (now Namibia Scientific Society), State Museum (now National Museum of Namibia), Department of Nature Conservation (now Ministry of Environment and Tourism), the Transvaal Museum and Council for Scientific and Industrial Research of South Africa (CSIR). These institutional partnerships together laid the foundation for the operation of the Namib Desert Research Association (NDRA). In April 1962, the NDRA was established and registered as a non profit organisation under the auspices of the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria, South Africa.



Dr FitzSimons and Dr Koch discussing plans of the newly constructed Gobabeb in 1963

### Fundraising campaigns

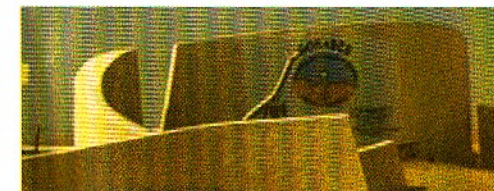
To raise money for development of the station, a fund raising campaign, in which Dr. Koch played a leading part, started in 1962. The fundraising included a series of articles. Among others, one of the articles written by the then Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr FitzSimons was published in the *Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum* No. 6, January 1961, p.2. This article requested in kind contributions toward the building project and it also highlighted the architect's plan of the building. This article was a success, contributions were received from various sources both in South Africa and overseas. By the end of 1962 about R 15 000 was raised. The use of the station is primarily for any research personnel from anywhere in the world, as long as it is done through the controlling bodies and prior application to con-



The delegates and staff at the inauguration of the Namib Desert Research Station in August in 1963

### First scientific papers

In 1962, Dr. Koch started his research at Gobabeb, when the centre was known as the Namib Desert Research Station. Scientific papers from the Namib Desert Research Station edited by Dr. Koch started to be written and published that same year. These papers are available in the Gobabeb library. Scientific research in the nineteen sixties, seventies and eighties was principally focused on climate, arid ecology, geology and geomorphology of the desert landscape, archaeological remnants of early inhabitants and any other subjects which shed light on the biota of the desert. The weather station was set up in 1962 and weather was monitored since then. Thanks to Gobabeb, the Namib is today one of the most thoroughly researched deserts of the world.



1960-1970

**First buildings and upgrading**

In July 1963 the station was successfully completed and inauguration of the first buildings at the station took place on the 9th October that same year. The newly erected buildings were official opened by Honourable Mr. D.T. du P. Viljoen, with Dr. FitzSimons as Convenor and Dr. Koch as secretary of the association. This building (now part of the tea lounge) was a simple house, which consisted of a small research area for Dr. Koch and his wife, two guest bedrooms, a kitchen and lounge for visiting scientists as well as a large laboratory space. The following year, new facilities such as a landing strip, communication network and adequate electricity and water were added on to the station. More staff houses, a water tower and a generator were also installed at the station.



Dr. Koch in the laboratory in 1964

**Exhibition of Namib endemic plants in Paris**

The year 1964 was a remarkable one for Gobabeb and the Namib Desert. In that year, the two fascinating endemic Namib plants: Welwitschia and Inara plants, were displayed at the International Flower Exhibition in Paris, France. The event put both Gobabeb and the Namib Desert on the world map, especially for botanists. It increased the awareness of the station and increased the number of visiting researchers, most of whom came to carry out their scientific research projects.

**Formation of DERU**

In 1965, a partnership between CSIR and Transvaal Museum formed the Desert Ecological Research Unit (DERU) with Dr. Koch as the first director of DERU. The establishment of DERU also ensured a greater degree of permanency to the research work.

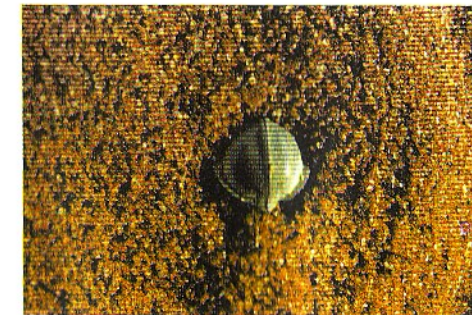
**New experiments, New ideas**

As research grew, so did the new experiments. In 1965, Dr. Koch with help of permanent staff at that time initiated a trapline method to trap animals. With this experiment, new taxa of insects, arachnids, reptiles and small mammals came to light. This technique is currently known as pit fall trapping. This method has since been used by many researchers throughout Namibia and world.

**More funds to the building**

Year by year the Centre continued to grow, both in staff capacity and infrastructure. In 1968 the first people were appointed as staff at Gobabeb. The CSIR donated R25000 to extend the buildings of the station. In the same year Dr. V. FitzSimons retired as the Director of Transvaal Museum; in his honour, a commemoration volume of the Scientific Papers of the Namib Desert Research Station was published. The volume consisted of 25 papers, written by his colleagues and other researchers who conducted their research through the Transvaal Museum and DERU.

In a 1969 four fully furnished self-contained bungalows (with kitchens, bathrooms and other facilities) were commissioned and completed.



**End of association**

Early 1970, Dr. Koch completed negotiations with the Department of Nature Conservation that later in 1973 extended the station infrastructure. 1970 marked the end of the NDRA founded in 1962. The station with all its infrastructure were removed from the NDRA and transferred to the SWA Administration.

In 1970 an agreement was signed between the Division of Nature Conservation and Tourism (NCT), and DERU, to have a ranger and warden stationed at Gobabeb to maintain the infrastructure, supervise the workers, facilitate supply trips and conduct or assist in research projects. This arrangement went on for twenty years until independence of Namibia in 1990.

**The death of Dr. Koch, appointment of Dr. Seely**

In February 1970, a dark cloud passed Gobabeb, when Dr. Charles Koch died in Windhoek at the age of 66. That tragic month saw the end of the man who was the main source of inspiration and action in the creation of the station. Dr. Mary Seely was appointed as the second director of Gobabeb. Dr. Seely first started working at Gobabeb as a research biologist in 1967. Through her direction research continued and more and more scientists visited the centre.

1960-1970

**An unexpected contribution from the Namib Desert to our understanding of early hominid-bearing fossil assemblages**

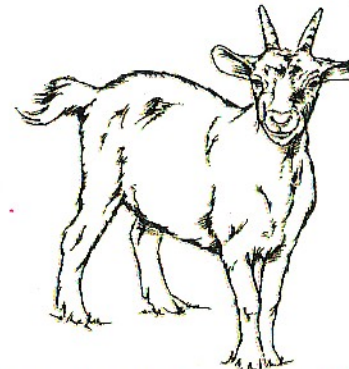
By C. K. (Bob) Brain, Emeritus Curator at the Ditsong Museum of Natural History (Transvaal Museum), Pretoria.

In 1959, I was privileged to have been a member of the Bernard Carp / Volkswagen Expedition, led by Charles Koch, that made its way down into the Namib Desert from Windhoek, to select a site for the establishment of the Namib Desert Research Station. The spot chosen was at Gobabeb, on the northern bank of the Kuiseb River, where high dunes to the south of the river bed were within walking distance of the gravel plains to the north. Here the first buildings of the Namib Desert Research Station were erected and opened in 1963 and I returned there two years later to set up an experiment designed to show how bones weather in an arid environment. This was part of a major project, with which I was then busy, aimed at the interpretation of fossil collections from South African caves that included remains of early hominids. The objective was to establish what animals had contributed bones to the collections, and to reconstruct how these animals, including our human ancestors and relatives, had lived and died. This very labour-intensive undertaking had been inspired by Raymond Dart who not only described the first skull of an African ape-man in 1924, that he named *Australopithecus africanus*, from a cave at Taung in the northern Cape, but also speculated extensively on how our early ancestors lived in southern Africa several million years ago. He based most of his conclusions on his study of an extremely rich fossiliferous deposit in the Makapansgat Limeworks Cave in what was then called the Northern Transvaal, to which his attention had been drawn by a local school teacher.

He concluded that the Makapansgat cave had been a living site of the hominids who had been powerful hunters, practising an "osteodontokeratic" (bone, tooth and horn) culture. Dart developed this theory through a series of 39 publications, the text of which was often in the form of powerful, provocative prose. For instance, in his paper "The predatory transition from ape to man" (1953) he wrote: "On this thesis, man's predecessors differed from living apes in being confirmed killers: carnivorous creatures that seized living quarries by violence, battered them to death, tore apart their broken bodies, dismembered them limb from limb, slaking their ravenous thirst with the hot blood of victims and greedily devouring livid writhing flesh."



As this style of writing struck me as unusual in a serious scientific context, I asked Dart what he hoped to achieve by using it. He replied without a moment's hesitation. "That will get 'em talking!" he said, and he certainly succeeded with this. His provocative ideas and style of writing sparked heated discussion in many parts of the world, while my own imagination was so captivated by Dart's ideas on the behavior of our early ancestors that I spent 40 years developing the new discipline of Cave Taphonomy, whereby fossils in African caves could be interpreted with ever increasing confidence. And this is where the unexpected contribution from the Namib Desert came in. In that large sample of antelope fossils from the Makapansgat Cave, Dart had found that certain parts of the skeletons were common, while others were not represented at all. For instance, lower jaw bones were abundant, and Dart thought that these had been deliberately selected by our ancestors as saws and scrapers, while in the case of antelope front leg bones or humeri, the lower or distal ends were ten times as common as the proximal or upper ones. Once again, Dart concluded that the lower ends had been specially valued as tools and weapons, while the upper ends were simply discarded.

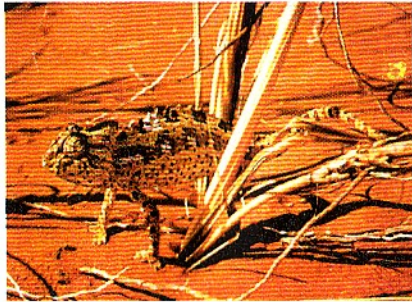


Dr Bob Brain made innovative use of goat remains he found in the Namib near Gobabeb to interpret early hominid-bearing fossil assemblages

Starting in the 1940's he arranged for a sample of over 7000 fossil bones to be chipped from the solid cave-filling and found that these included remains of ape-men similar to those from Taung and Sterkfontein, although over 90 percent of the bones came from antelopes.

1960-1970

It so happened that when I was at Gobabeb in 1965, I noticed that there were numerous goat bones lying on the sand in the nearby villages occupied by Nama Topnaar people. Out of sheer curiosity, I picked up a sample of these bones and laid them out on a table at the Research Station. It struck me at once that some parts of the skeletons were well represented, while others were rare or absent. Lower ends of the humerus bones, for instance, that had been so important in Dart's osteodontokeratic cultural concept, were common but, search as I might, I could not find a single upper end of a humerus. The explanation was not difficult to find: the bones represented the resistant residue of goat skeletons, able to survive the treatment they had received. But what had this treatment been? Inquiries and observations showed that goats were virtually the only source of meat for these rural people. When a goat was slaughtered, its body was treated in a traditional manner and those parts that the people found inedible were tossed to their dogs, that were typically the size of jackals. When they, in turn, were finished, the parts unchewable by person or dog were left on the desert surface, where recovery was easy for me, as the sand was devoid of vegetation in the villages. Apart from occasional crows, no other carnivores or scavengers were involved. After the initial reconnaissance in 1965 (Brain, 1967), I returned the following year to collect all the available bones and investigate the circumstances in greater detail. On this occasion, I was accompanied by Trefor Jenkins who undertook a thorough genetic and demographic study of the Nama population there. We found that the total population of the lower Kuiseb valley was 133 people who lived in eight separate villages. Between them they had 40 dogs and 1754 goats, while the spacing of the villages along the riverbank was determined by the number of goats kept at each, since grazing could only take place in the riverbed and the extent of a village's pasturage was measured in a linear fashion (Brain & Jenkins, 1967, Brain, 1969). The collection of bones made in the villages consisted of 2373 pieces, which included 385 horns and horn-core pieces from an estimated number of 190 individuals.



On known tooth-eruption and wear criteria it transpired that there was one goat in the sample that had died while under 6 months in age, 23 between 9 and 12 months, 7 between 15 and 30 months and 35 more than 30 months in age. The goats had therefore been slaughtered largely when just under a year in age, or when fully mature. The village people confirmed that this was their usual practice, the yearlings usually being the surplus males. After mandible pieces, the most commonly preserved skeletal element was the distal humerus, followed by the distal tibia, proximal radius and ulna and so on. Parts absent altogether were tail vertebrae and proximal humeri. The conclusion drawn was simply that survival is not haphazard, but is related to the inherent qualities of the parts (Brain, 1981, p. 21).

In contrast to the goat bone sample, Dart's Makapansgat sample was made up of remains from 293 antelopes, ranging in size from large to very small. From these, it was possible to calculate the percentage survival of various parts of the skeletons as was done for the Namib goat bones. When listed and plotted in descending order of survival, the Makapansgat bones showed a remarkable similarity to those from the goats despite the fact that the fossil bones came from such a wide variety of species and size range and that they could have been subjected to a variety of destructive processes. So what the Namib goat bone study did show is that skeletal-part disproportions are extremely likely to occur in an assemblage and that they can inform us on the destructive influences that the contributing skeletons had suffered. When it became obvious to me that the evidence for our early hominid ancestors at Makapansgat having been the mighty hunters, who collected the bones there, was falling away, I showed the Namib goat-bone collection to Dart. For a few minutes he was quiet and clearly disturbed. Then his face lit up and he said "This is wonderful - at last we are getting closer to the truth". Two weeks later he nominated me for an award! It is now generally agreed that the Makapansgat bones had been collected by Striped Hyenas that had used the cave as a lair and that the ape-man fossils there were simply the food remains of these and other carnivores. It was only much later that the expansion of the human brain led to increased intelligence and improved technology, and people established themselves as dominant hunters in the natural world. In understanding the early details of this remarkable story, the evidence from the Namib Desert goats, described here, was of critical importance.



However it was clear that the horns survived the weathering effects of the arid desert climate much better than did other bony pieces and in long-deserted villages, these were the only parts to be found. Therefore, in the final estimation of the number of animals involved, horns were excluded in favour of the next most abundant element, which happened to be lower jaw pieces as in Dart's Makapansgat sample. I found that the 188 jaw fragments came from a minimum of 64 individual goats that had contributed to the sample.

1971-1980

1971/72 The Namib Desert Research Association was changed to Koch Namib Research Foundation after Dr. Koch's death

1974 The longest Kuiseb River flow past Gobabeb — 102 days — since observations began in 1959.

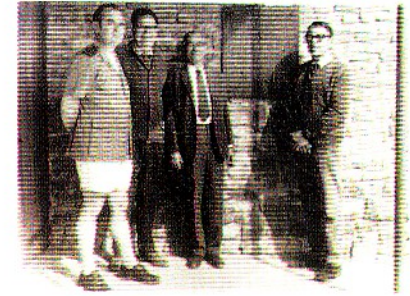
1975 Construction of the staff houses, laboratory and office block, garages and water tower completed, and generators installed.

**Bronze plaque in memory of Dr. Koch**

In June 1971, a bronze plaque in the memory of Dr. Koch was unveiled at Gobabeb by Prof F.C. Eloff, Chairman of the Transvaal Museum. This plaque is still found at the station, in front of the reception office.

**Three-wheeled motorcycle introduced**

Prof. Bill Hamilton introduced the three-wheeled motorcycle in 1972. These vehicles were a valuable asset to desert research ever since. These vehicles were mainly used for research in the sand dunes.



Mr. de la Bat, Dr. Binn, Prof. du Toit and Prof. Eloff unveil a plaque in memory of Dr. Koch

**Publication continues**

The then-famous Scientific Paper series of the Namib Desert Research Station was amalgamated with Madoqua, a publication of the South West African Administration. The first Namib Bulletin was published as a supplement to the Transvaal Museum Bulletin in 1976. In addition, papers by Dr. Seely and Prof. Hamilton on the use of fog by Namib dune tenebrionid beetles were featured on the covers of Science and Nature in 1976.

**Expanded facilities**

The South West African Administration Works Department completed a major building programme at the station in 1974. The expanded new complex of buildings was re-named Namib Research Institute. An opening ceremony for the enlarged buildings coincided with the annual DERU Steering Committee meeting on 1 August 1974.

**First of many films**

In the same year, Anglia Television made the first natural history film at Gobabeb. This film covered the station facilities as well as the research being conducted over the years. The film was first shown in 1976 and almost immediately thereafter adopted by Natural Geographic.

**Double Three Radio**

Double three, double three, double three, double three, come in double three this is two two six. Double three, double three, double three, double three, this is two two six. Many were the long hours we spent at the radio, sending the weather, exchanging short messages, and saying these words over and over again. What a relief when we emerged into the 'modern' era communication - although we still aren't totally there!



Dr. Seely, after her appointment as Director of DERU, shown here with Mr. Weidman, Head of University Research Division of the C.S.I.R.

**Longest flood flow past Gobabeb**

The year 1974 was a remarkable year in the Gobabeb flood monitoring history. It represented the longest period of Kuiseb flow recorded by Gobabeb -102 days - since observations began in 1959.

## 1971-1980

### My involvement with DERU and its various life forms

Willie Weideman

The South Africa Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was established during 1946, and I joined the Council's University and Medical Research Division during 1956 and soon realized that this was the best career move I could have made. All of a sudden I had a different set of clients. Clients who were well educated, who were engaged in the pursuit of new knowledge either as post-graduate students, professional officers at museums, or as academics. These people impressed me with their single mindedness, their enthusiasm and enquiring minds.

The excitement surrounding the scientists involved in fundamental research somehow also rubbed off on the administrative members of the division. Hearing or reading about the scientific breakthroughs of "our" grant holders invariably gave us quite a boost. I was promoted as head of the Research Grants Division (RGD) of the CSIR in 1970, i.e. after the SA Medical Research Council was established. The RGD was responsible for the award of post-graduate bursaries and the support of research in the General Sciences and Engineering at Universities and Museums.

It was during this period that I started to travel around the country as Secretary to all the Investigating, Steering and Review Committees that were established to oversee the research support and the merits of the work undertaken at the various Research Units and Groups round the country. The Desert Ecological Research Unit was established because of Dr. Charles Koch's reputation and record as a research worker with an outstanding record of achievement. At around the time Dr. Koch became critically ill and when Dr. MK Seely was still working as Acting Director I was asked to visit Gobabeb to help with the distribution of building, household and research equipment acquired by Dr. Koch over the years.



Mr Willie Weideman, back-row centre, surrounded by his team of Steering Committee advisors during one of their annual visits to Gobabeb.

The equipment had to be distributed between the three organizations involved in the collaborative project at Gobabeb namely the CSIR, the Transvaal Museum and the SWA Department of the Nature Conservation and Tourism. On my way to Gobabeb I visited Mr Bernabe' de la Bat, Director of the SWA Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism to meet him as a matter of courtesy and to obtain his views as well as a permit to visit the Namib Naukluft Park. Mr. de la Bat promised me his full support and instructed Mr. Sixie Holthausen, a member of his staff at Gobabeb, to help me.



"Oom" Sixie proved to be one of the most able, friendly and knowledgeable persons I have ever met. He helped me to make my stay at Gobabeb a memorable experience. We worked hard and finished the task in record time. To thank him and all other people at Gobabeb I bought a goat from Mr. Kootjie, Chief of the Topnaar people of the Kuiseb river, slaughtered it and with Mr. Holthausen and Roelf de Bruine's assistance arranged for a "braai" on the banks of the Kuiseb river. I also arranged for a case of Namibia's most famous beverage to be available. Dr. Seely attended the "braai" and brought some salad to give a semblance of class to the occasion. She left early and thus missed the most remarkable hunting and other adventure stories one could ever wish for. I found the Namibians to be a truly remarkable people and during that night the urge to always return to the Namib was born in me. (The lure of the desert remains with me still)

That evening proved to be the first of the annual legendary "braais" which took place on the evening after the DERU steering Committee had finished its work. The only differences from the original "braai" in later years were the singing led by our maestro, Dr. Gerhard Prinsloo, and the fact that Dr. Seely and her staff took over the catering and the provision of more kosher meat and more palatable dishes than the goats meat, beer and putu porridge of my first Namib "braai". Other great happenings at Gobabeb, like the seminars, the volleyball matches and the going down of the Sun ceremonies performed on the large dune across the river will remain with me forever.

I was truly blessed to have seen so much of the Namib and its very generous people. The expedition to Solitaire and SosusVlei I remember because of a young Dutch technician's strange behavior after becoming dehydrated. He did not like the water we had and would not stop to drink beer. Also vivid in my memory is the time when Dr. CK Brain and I, plus two committee members, went to Sandwich Harbour. We arrived there at about 11hrs and found two nature conservators almost frozen stiff in their vehicle. They were too cold to fix a second flat tyre. On the same trip the two committee members who shall remain anonymous shared the only bedroom in the shack at Sandwich. Both of them snored like Grampuses. Bob and I took our sleeping bags as far away from them as possible. The next morning they complained separately to me about their roommate's snoring and vowed never to share a bedroom with each other again.

The co-operation of Mr. de la Bat and his successors Mr. Polla Swart and Mr. Eugene Joubert as well as Mr. CG Coetzee Director of the State Museum Windhoek was of the highest order. Without it the Unit could have been so successful.

## 1971-1980

What a marvelous lot these committee members were. They took their responsibility as peer reviewers very seriously even though they only received a very modest subsistence and transport allowance for the three or four days we annually spent at Gobabeb. I must also specially mention Dr. CK Brain Director of the Transvaal Museum and Ms M Erasmus, Head of the Museum's administration. Their courtesy, cheerful cooperation and quiet competence helped me a great deal and will always stay with me.

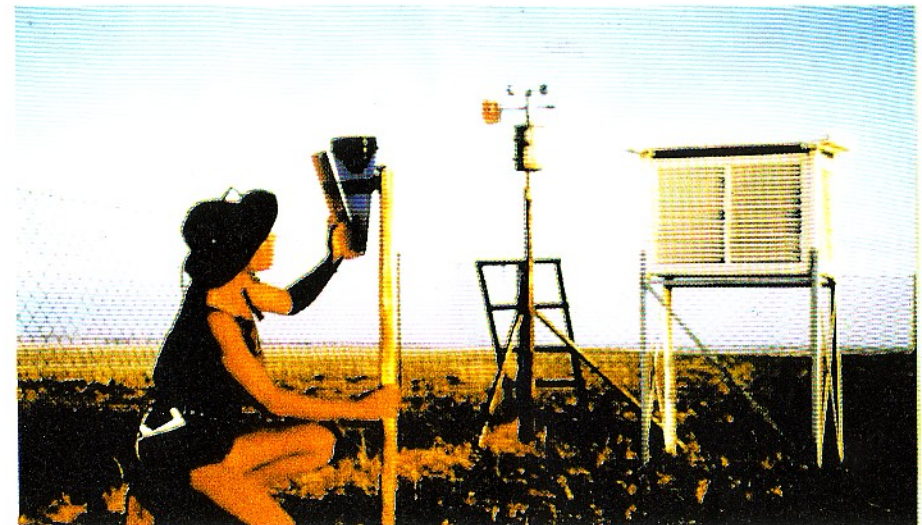


Dr. Mary Seely and her staff as well as the Unit's unofficial liaison officer and dogs-body in Windhoek Mr. Eckart Pfeifer, were always ready to receive me and the members of the steering committee. I have an idea that their friendliness and hospitality, the well arranged seminars by students, staff and visiting scientists and the lure of the Namib desert contributed to the fact that our Steering Committee members attended every meeting and never submitted an apology for absence. The CSIR also never had difficulty in filling the few vacancies in their ranks.

I must admit at this stage I have always felt that I had the full weight of authority of the CSIR Executive, the Transvaal Museum and the Department of the Nature Conservation and Tourism behind me in dealing with problems at the station and I hope therefore that my actions were of some benefit to the students, staff and visiting scientists who found DERU to be such a stimulating environment. The fact that I was entrusted with the responsibility to chair the Joint Management Committee for Gobabeb which meetings always proceeded the Steering Committee meetings makes me feel very humble. I am proud that this "house" committee always managed to get internal problems at Gobabeb sorted out before the Scientific Committee convened and that it contributed to a large extent to the coherence and tranquility that is necessary for researchers to achieve their best results.

I can remember how proud I was of the Director and her staff when I accompanied two VIP guests of the CSIR to Namibia. They were Dr. Eugen Seibold President of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and his wife, (both geologists). Dr. Seibold told me that the DFG found it extremely difficult to administer field stations at long range and that he could not believe that we managed to do that so well on such a very tight budget. Obviously the credit for this achievement must be given to Dr. Seely and all the people of Gobabeb who realized that complete commitment and cooperation were preferable to failure in a very harsh environment.

The Namib will always remain with me and those members of my staff who enjoyed the privilege of visiting Gobabeb over the years. May the Gobabeb Research and Training Centre go from strength to strength in the years to come.



## 1981-1990

**1983** The first Open Weekend is held at Gobabeb.

**1989** The first Ecology Methods course was held for Academy of Namibia, later known as University of Namibia and Polytechnic of Namibia

### First DERU/Gobabeb symposium

In 1980 DERU organized a symposium as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science programme at its annual meeting in San Francisco. The aim of this symposium was to promote Gobabeb internationally.

### Gobabeb appeared in BBC film

In 1981, Gobabeb contributed to a BBC film for the first time. This film "The Baking Desert", described the desert biomes. This film was part of David Attenborough's Planet Earth Series. In 1982, another BBC film, "The vanishing River" by Rod and Moira Borland was produced at Gobabeb. Another film was made by Dr Yves Coineau, Paris, in the same year.

### Ecology of Desert Organisms book published

A book, titled Ecology of Desert Organisms by Prof. Gideon Louw and Dr. Seely was published in 1982.

### Show and Tell

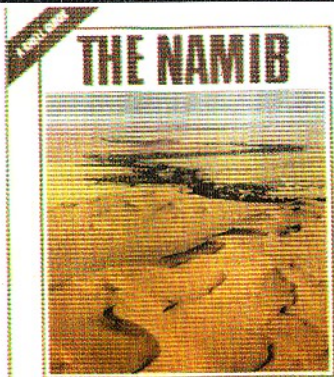
In 1983 Gobabeb held the first ever Open Weekend (19—20 March) which thereafter became an annual event. About 500 people, particularly from Swakopmund, visited the Centre that weekend. DERU hosted the Zoological Society of Southern Africa's annual meeting in Swakopmund under the theme Zoology of Arid and Semi-arid Environments. Additionally, DERU hosted field excursions in the Namib in collaboration with the South African Society for Quaternary Research meeting in Swaziland entitled Late Cainozoic Palaeoclimates of the Southern Hemisphere. In this same year, for the first time an article about the Namib and Gobabeb appeared in the National Geographic Magazine.

### Award given to Dr. Seely

In 1985 the first Foundation for Research Development comprehensive grant was awarded to Dr. Seely. The aim of the award was to enhance research activities at DERU. The year also welcomed delegates from all over Africa to a field excursion of the IV International Colloquium on Ecology and Taxonomy of African Small Mammals, which was hosted by Gobabeb.

### Major contribution to Central Namib Development

Gobabeb contributed extensively to the West Coast Planning Meeting held in Swakopmund in 1986. The result from the meeting was a document entitled "Guidelines for the development of the Central Namib". This meeting produced other comprehensive information about the coastal area.



### The Namib Book, first version publication

In 1987 the first version of The Namib: Natural History of an Ancient Desert by Dr. Seely was published by Shell Oil SWA Ltd. In the same year, the first Foundation for Research Development, Israel Exchange programme started at Gobabeb. The visit was led by Dr. Y. Lubin.

### DERU Rename

The DERU unit was renamed to Desert Ecological Research Unit of Namibia (DERU of Namibia) in 1988.

### First EE course at Gobabeb, birth of DRFN

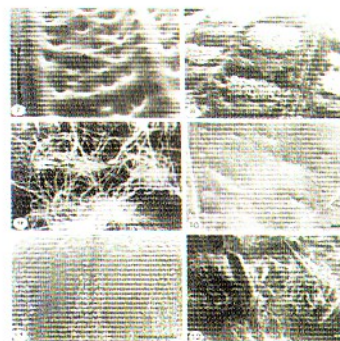
In 1989, the Advisory Committee of DERU of Namibia agreed that in future DERU should put greater emphasis on educational training programmes that are directly relevant to the country. In this regard, the first Ecology Methods course for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Zoology Students from Academy of Namibia (University of Namibia) was held at Gobabeb. That same year, DERU of Namibia held (in Swakopmund) an international conference, DUNES '89: Geomorphology and Ecology of the Coastal and Desert Sand Dunes.

DERU of Namibia co-hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Colloquium of the Research Group for the Study of African Arachnids, at Swakopmund. The new unit also hosted a meeting on Namib/ Benguela Interactions at Gobabeb.

## 1981-1990

### A Scientist Remembers

Pam deVilliers, working on her PhD on tenebrionid beetles, introduced me to Gobabeb, and I was hooked. Mary Seely had already been on a university wide road show to convince South Africans to use the Gobabeb research station on their doorstep. Fascinated as I was I never imagined I would go there, let alone become involved. It was an ideal time to work on tenebrionid beetles. Much of the pioneering work on collecting and identifying beetles living in the Namib had been completed by then. The site of the research station had been chosen for its proximity to an amazingly rich and diverse beetle fauna described and identified by Charles Koch.



Waxy blooms on tenebrionid beetles that Prof Shirley Hanrahan worked on with research colleagues from Gobabeb

The new exciting questions lay in understanding how these beetles survived and seemed to thrive in what to us was a barren and demanding environment. It was a great time for eco-physiological studies. The 'big rains' of the early seventies followed by extensive plains of grass development had allowed for beetle population explosions in later years and beetles were plentiful to work on

Liz McClain whirled in from the USA and worked at Gobabeb as a postdoctoral student with Randal Hepburn and charmed many of us into working with her. One specific project related to how some beetles protect themselves against desiccation while searching for food or mates in the bright sunlight and at blistering temperatures. Numbers of species were found to produce wax 'blooms' on their bodies which reduced water loss from the body surface. We learned how the wax was secreted by glands in the integument and how it formed blooms on the beetle surface when they were exposed to dry conditions. Those of us not stationed at Gobabeb provided expertise and equipment and collaborated with scientists like Liz who did the field work. We were all enhanced by the process.

Funds for running the research station at Gobabeb were hopelessly inadequate but the enthusiastic and collaborative approach to research fostered by Mary Seely made working there and working with people stationed there a career best.

By: Professor Shirley Hanrahan



1991-2000

1991	Enviroteach, an Environmental Education project funded by Sida, starts.	1997	Gobabeb recognized as a SADC Centre of Excellence and representative for combating desertification.
1992/93	The first Summer Desertification Project (SDP) is held at Gobabeb	1998	Joint – venture agreement signed between MET and DRFN at Gobabeb. GTZ funding of Gobabeb expansion and renovation initiated.
1994	President Sam Nujoma visits Gobabeb on a courtesy and fact-finding visit as well as to hear feedback from SDP 2 students.  First visit of Natural Resources Management students of the Polytechnic of Namibia.	1999	The Gobabeb Research and Training Centre officially recognised with registration of Trust

**Namibia Independence, more opportunity for Gobabeb and its partner DRFN**

In February 1990, The Koch Namib Research Foundation which was established in 1971 was dissolved and its finance and other assets were transferred to DRFN, together with the Gobabeb assets of the Transvaal Museum. On the 21st March 1990 Namibia became independent from South African government. Soon after independence, DRFN together with Gobabeb extended its focus from the Namib to the entire country.

**Enviroteach materials developed**

The year 1991 was a big highlight in training history for Gobabeb. The centre welcomed more than thirty Environmental Education groups. In the 1993 to 1999 years, Gobabeb and DRFN staff developed Environmental Education materials under the Enviroteach Programme. The programme was funded by Sida, the materials were developed in partnership with Gobabeb, MBEC and NIED. Enviroteach materials were tested out in many primary and secondary schools in Namibia and extended to Botswana. Nowadays the materials are used with visiting training groups at Gobabeb.

**Start of SDP programme at Gobabeb**

In 1992/3, Gobabeb in partnership with DRFN initiated an annual Summer Desertification Programme. This programme was aimed at tertiary students, mainly from the Polytechnic of Namibia, University of Namibia and Agricultural Colleges. By the end of 2005, about 150 students were trained through this programme. Many of these students, now have jobs in influential positions in government or NGOs, while others are studying further

**The founding President of Namibia visits Gobabeb**

In 1994 the first president of Namibia, His Excellency Dr. Sam Nujoma visited Gobabeb. The aim of the visit was to learn about the Centre and its activities and to hear presentations from SDP2 participants. In the same year DRFN moved its headquarters to Windhoek, leaving a research unit at Gobabeb station. Gobabeb on its own part expanded its education and training activities.



**Eco-sociology survey of the Topnaar**

In 1995, major eco-sociology survey was carried out by MET and Gobabeb staff. This survey looked at the neighbouring Topnaar communities, providing valuable information of their culture, traditions and present way of life. Similar studies continued over the years.

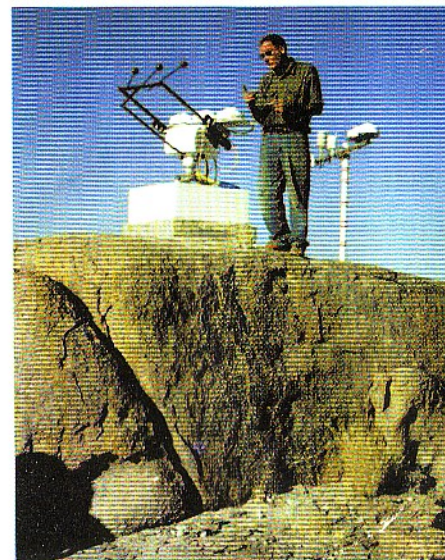
**Gobabeb, SADC Centre of Excellence**

Acknowledging past accomplishments and present efforts, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 1997 designated Gobabeb as a 'SADC Centre of Excellence' under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

**Birth of Gobabeb Training and Research Centre and Funds from GTZ**

In 1998, a joint venture agreement between the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and DRFN was signed. The Centre was officially declared as the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre. The German Government, administered through German Organisation for Technical Development (GTZ) in collaboration with SADC, provided funds for the new centre. GTZ continued to provide financial support until 2007. This fund made it possible for Gobabeb to extend the buildings at the station and particularly expand its role in training. The construction took place between 1998 and 2004. This included new staff quarters, visitor bungalows, Amabilis Conference Hall, the Resource Centre (with Japanese funding) and the installation of a solar/diesel hybrid energy system (with Danish funding). Today almost the complete energy needs of the station are supplied by renewable energies.

2001-2012



**International scientist at Gobabeb**

The first time I came to Gobabeb was in 1997. I had just arrived in Namibia, taking up the position as the YES-man at the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia. YES standing for Young Expert from Sweden, or more formally, the Bilateral Assistant Expert from Swedish Sida. Already after a few days in the Windhoek office I was requested to join Mary and Arthur Hussey (Deputy Director and in-house pilot) to fly to Gobabeb. That was a mind blowing experience, to fly in a four-seater Cessna 182 over the Khomas highlands and the Namib desert, and then eventually landing at Gobabeb. We arrived late afternoon and after a brief introduction I was left at the end of the gravel strip, while Mary and Arthur took off with the Cessna for a meeting at the coast. I was received by Sharon Montgomery and Juliane Zeidler, who were the only people at the centre that particular evening, as the rest of the staff had taken the weekend off and gone to town.

That first afternoon and evening at Gobabeb I experienced a sundowner on top of the station dune, was introduced to the SLUMS and even received a firm lecture by Sharon, that forever imprinted in my mind the importance of conserving water while in such a dry environment, after happily peeling potatoes under an open tap.

The following day I started to explore the state of the IT systems and the library as improving IT and library services at Gobabeb were two of many tasks outlined in a very elaborate job description.

This was the start of a long and exciting involvement with Gobabeb. It was love at first sight.

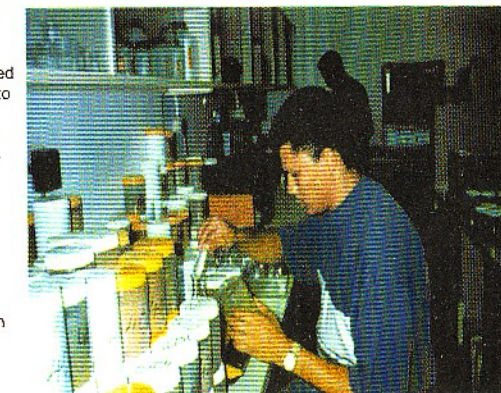
Over the years I have been part of introducing email at Gobabeb, configured the first server, held several courses, ranging from the Summer Desertification Program (SDP) to the Stockholm University Geography Excursion (SUGE), the Summer Land Care Program (SLCP) and supervised several student groups and interns, both from Namibia and elsewhere.

There are many good memories from Gobabeb that I would like to share, but space is limited, so I can only say: Thank you Gobabeb and all the great colleagues and friends I have had the fortune to work with and get to know while there! You will always have a special place in my heart. Congratulations to fifty very successful years. Now we are looking forward to the next fifty years and to celebrate the 100th anniversary!

By: Dr Patrik Klinterberg

**SLCP-Gobabeb: Christerline Ndeleki**

I came to Gobabeb for the first time during the Summer Land Care Program of 2010-2011 "Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF) in central northern Namibia". The description of Gobabeb from people was not comparable to the place I saw and discovered when I went there. This place was just another step in my career and personal life. It's a quiet, deserted place far from the noises of cars. I found Gobabeb to be a very conducive place, with all the study resources for academics and people alike and a good place for conferences or workshops. It was a good experience being at Gobabeb, it's a small place but has everything in it. I found that in Gobabeb there are foot tracks where people walk in order not to disturb the environment and everything that lives in it. I had time to work and relax in the dunes or play volleyball while others enjoyed swimming in the pool. For the first time in years, the Kuiseb river was running with more water than seen in many years and there was too much rain observed in the area. I would say Gobabeb changed my life because from there as an intern on SLCP I was given an opportunity to be an intern at DRFN under the water project E-CAP from which I have acquired skills and built on the skills I acquired from SLCP, i.e. I have acquired skills in research, critical thinking and analytical skills and reporting.



## 2001 - 2012

<p><b>2002</b> Dr. Joh Henschel, became fourth Director of Gobabeb.</p> <p><b>2004</b> Installation of the off-grid hybrid energy system with funding of DANIDA was set up under a project called DEGREEE.</p> <p>GTZ-facilitated construction of training complex completed: Amabilis Hall, Resource Centre and clay houses.</p>	<p><b>2005</b> The upgraded and renovated facilities were Inaugurated by Hon Nahas Angula representing His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba.</p> <p><b>2008</b> On the 2 March 2008 Gobabeb was hit by a big storm, the first of its kind experienced since Gobabeb was established in 1962. This storm destroyed some of the station facilities, worth the value of 2 million NAD</p>
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### New director of Gobabeb

In 2002 Dr. Joh Henschel became the Executive Director of Gobabeb. Dr. Henschel had been previously working at Gobabeb, first as an intern and later in the research section.

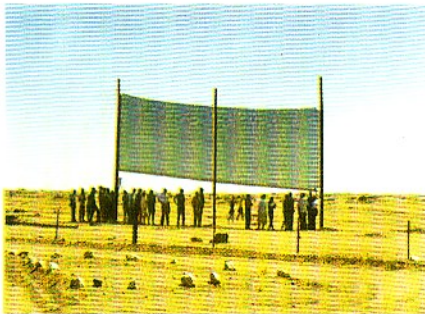
### More energy at Gobabeb

The installation of the off-grid hybrid energy system with funding of DANIDA, the Demonstration Project of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (DEGREEE), was set up at Gobabeb in 2004. This new energy eliminated the "loud" generator which was used at Gobabeb since 1972.

### Inauguration of Gobabeb

In 2005, the new Gobabeb look was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Nahas Angula on behalf of President Hifikepunye Pohamba. More than 200 people attended the inauguration event. The inauguration celebrates the continuous development of Gobabeb since 1962, the joint venture agreement and new development of facilities and programmes. The Gobabeb In-Service Training (GIST) was initiated in 2005. The programme was funded by the Swedish government. This programme offers Polytechnic of Namibia 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students experience in the workplace and hands-on participation during the application of theory to environmental problem solving for sustainable development.

In its seven semesters of existence until 2008, the GIST programme trained over 30 students from the schools of Agriculture, Nature Conservation, and Land Management, all from the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN). The project has been replaced with the current Gobabeb Training and Research Internship Programme (GTRIP).



### ILTER and ELTOSA conference

In October 2006 Gobabeb hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Long-Term Ecological Research (ILTER). More than 64 delegates from 12 countries all over the world attended the conference. The conference was opened by the then-Minister of Environmental and Tourism, Honourable Reverend Willem Konjore. In the same year Gobabeb hosted the Environmental Long-Term Observatories Network of Southern Africa (ELTOSA) conference. Dr. Joh Henschel was the principal organiser of both conferences. Another international event that was hosted by Gobabeb was the Volkswagen Stiftung Conference for developing research for sub-Saharan Africa. As from June 2006 to June 2007, Gobabeb, in partnership with DRFN, served as secretariat of the International Year of Desert and Desertification for Namibia. The project was celebrated under the theme "Proud of our deserts, while combating desertification".

### Gobabeb still SADC centre of Excellence

At a Gobabeb Board Meeting held in 2006, the SADC secretariat confirmed Gobabeb as a SADC Centre of Excellence.

### End of GTZ funding

The year 2007 was a challenging one for Gobabeb. The Centre's core funding from GTZ came to an end. GTZ had been funding Gobabeb since 1998. Apart from GTZ, Gobabeb had also received financial support from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, USA and Japan, and of course MET and other local donors.

On the 24-25 October 2007, Gobabeb hosted the Energy symposium, under the theme "Hybrid electricity systems powering mini-grids: a southern African perspective". The workshop was attended by Namibian and SADC delegates. The aim of the symposium was to exchange views and reflect on costs and benefits of hybrid systems, technical and managerial aspects, institutional arrangements and the roles that hybrid electricity systems can play in continued electrification in southern Africa.

## 2001 - 2012

### Kuiseb Basin Management Committee

Gobabeb Centre was instrumental in testing the concept of basin management in Namibia by establishing the first basin management committee in Namibia for the Kuiseb River known as the KBMC. They also contributed to the Kuiseb Basin Management Plan which laid down the guiding principles for ongoing management and monitoring.

### Namib-Naukluft Park celebrates 100 years

The Namib-Naukluft Park was first proclaimed in 1907 as a game reserve of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>. By 2007 it had grown to more than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> encompassing the original gravel plains but also an extensive sand dune system and the bordering Naukluft Mountains. To celebrate this centennial, Gobabeb authors produced a book entitled *Namib: secrets of a desert uncovered*. This was launched at Gobabeb in 2009 as the Minister of Environment and Tourism and others celebrated on the banks of the Kuiseb River.

### Change of leadership

In 2011, the Management Committee of the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre took over leadership of the Centre. They restructured the organization, changed its name to Gobabeb Research and Training Centre, and are leading its programme to new heights. A new Executive Director is currently being sought.

### NERMU

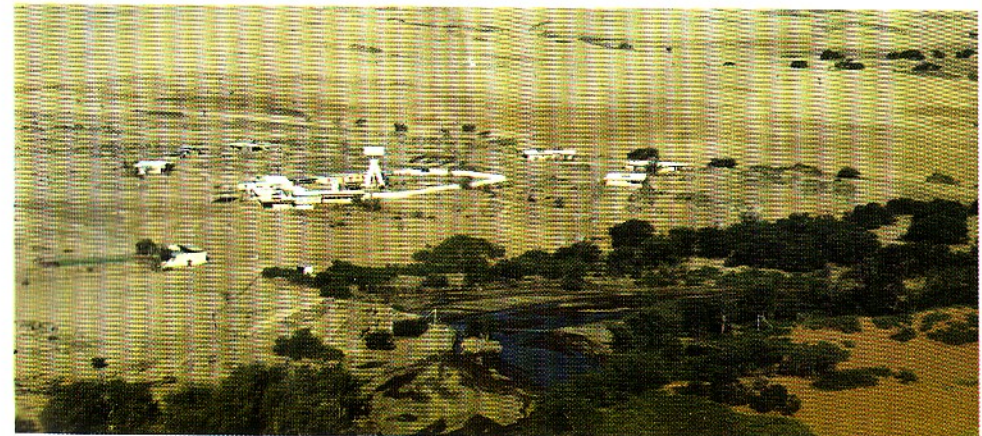
The Namib Ecological Restoration and Monitoring Unit has been created by Gobabeb as a response to the 'Uranium Rush' of the central Namib. It will serve to monitor the activities of the Strategic Environmental Monitoring Plan addressing the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the several uranium prospecting areas and mines within and bordering the Namib-Naukluft Park. Funding was provided by the German BGR and a two-year agreement signed in 2012.

### 50 years of Gobabeb

During 2012, the Gobabeb Research and Training Centre celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with an activity-filled programme. This ranges from an Information Day at the end of the Summer Land Care Programme, to a Royal Society Colloquium, to hosting the Southern African Association of Geomorphologists back to back with the Southern African Quaternary Association, to holding a bonanza Open Day and ending the year with another summer research programme in critical thinking for tertiary students.

### Namib Sand Sea nominated as World Heritage Site

Based on the extensive information generated by the Gobabeb Centre, 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the Namib Sand Sea has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If the nomination is approved (in 2013), the unique area with its 'outstanding universal values' will be afforded extensive protection while giving a boost to Namibia's tourism and its economic situation.



This booklet contains the history of Gobabeb Research and Training Centre, from the early expeditions, station establishment and development up to the present days. It highlights some remarkable events, research and training programmes, station infrastructure development, people and organizations that were or are still devoted to all those developments. The booklet is dedicated to the late Dr. Charles Koch, the founder of Gobabeb, whose enthusiasm for research encouraged researchers and educators worldwide to discover the Namib Desert.





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P O Box 953  
Walvis Bay  
Namibia  
Tel +264-64-694 199  
Fax +264-64-694197  
Gobabeb@gobabeb.org  
www.gobabeb.org