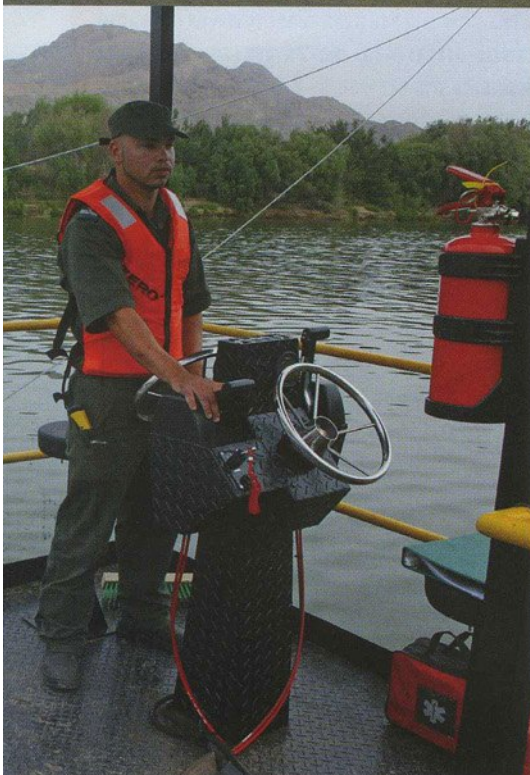


SA 4x4, December 2007

Crossing the thin blue line

The opening of the Sendelingsdrift pont



A Transfrontier Park is not a Transfrontier Park unless you're able to move freely and easily across the international borders which give it its name. On 17 October 2007 the Ais-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park fulfilled this obligation by opening the Sendelingsdrift pont across the Orange River. SA4x4 was there at 08h00 to take the very first vehicle across.

Words and pictures by Patrick Cruywagen.

Our September 2007 issue featured the Richtersveld National Park, a unique park owned by the communities in the region and managed in conjunction with South African National Parks. Those of you who read the article would've noticed that there was little mention of the Ais-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier National Park which came into being on 1 August '03 with the signing of an international treaty between the then

President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, and our own Thabo Mbeki.

The reason for this omission? Back then, in order to get from the South African side to the Namibian side of the park you had to detour a whopping 485 km, so visiting the supposed Transfrontier Park involved separate trips to the north or south. The pont at Sendelingsdrift has dramatically changed all that. The bridges over the Orange River at Vioolsdrif and

Oranjemund are no longer the only way to get over the river and into Namibia.

What few people know is that this new pont isn't actually new. There was one in place when Namibia fell under South African rule, in the days of the old South West Africa. This old pont last saw action in '88, two years prior to Namibia's independence, when it was destroyed in a flood; the powerful waters of the Orange River literally washed it up a tree!

Almost twenty years later, the pont has returned, thanks to the largesse of the people at the Scorpion Mine, who totally rebuilt it. A cynic might argue that mining companies can be amazingly generous if you give them permission to mine in one of your National Parks.

The newly-built pont can carry two vehicles at a time or one vehicle with a trailer or caravan, and takes less than five minutes to cross the river



each way. Forward motion is provided by two outboard motors and the pont is permanently attached to a cable spanned across the river as a sort of safety line. There's a second mooring point for the pont several metres higher

than the one we used, it's been built for when the rains come and the river rises. During our two days at Sendelingsdrift we noticed that the wind really picks up in the afternoon. If it blows too hard, the two pont ▶



PONT FACTS

Operating Hours

08h00 – 16h30 (South African time)

Contact number

(027) 831 1506

Cost

Standard vehicle

R150 (single) R250 (return)

Standard vehicle with trailer

R200 (single) R300 (return)

Motorcycles

R100 (single) R200 (return)

Overnight visitors to the park

R100 (single) R200 (return)

Overnight visitors to the park with trailer

R150 (single) R250 (return)

Visitors who've booked into the park for one or more nights may book a passage, subject to availability, 24 hours prior to the intended departure.

All other persons making use of this facility will be catered for on a first-come-first served basis.



operators shut down the system for the day or until the wind abates sufficiently to make crossing possible again. The pont's outboard motors are not powerful enough to counteract the strong winds, and you can actually see how the pont gets pushed downwind. Fortunately the cable ensures all is not lost!

The Richtersveld National Park is one of the harshest and remotest of the SANParks and visitors have to be totally self-sufficient, which restricts the pont's appeal to a relatively small group of travellers. But one hopes this unusual experience will draw more visitors,



The Hon. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, South African Minister of Home Affairs: "Take care of this pont. It belongs to you, the people."

the Park needs them. It'll certainly be of great interest to that loyal band of 4x4 enthusiasts who religiously spend a week every July holidays at the De Hoop riverside campsite on the South African side of the border. It'll be a case of "Fancy a quick jaunt across the border?" "Sure, why not!"



TOUGH JUST GOT...

TRITON

There's tough, there's tougher and there's Triton. The Mitsubishi Triton, we're proud to say, is a whole new breed of bakkie and from the end of this year, it will replace the legendary Mitsubishi colt range. Which means from now on you can still experience the famous ruggedness and power that made Mitsubishi one of South Africa's most popular bakkie ranges. You can

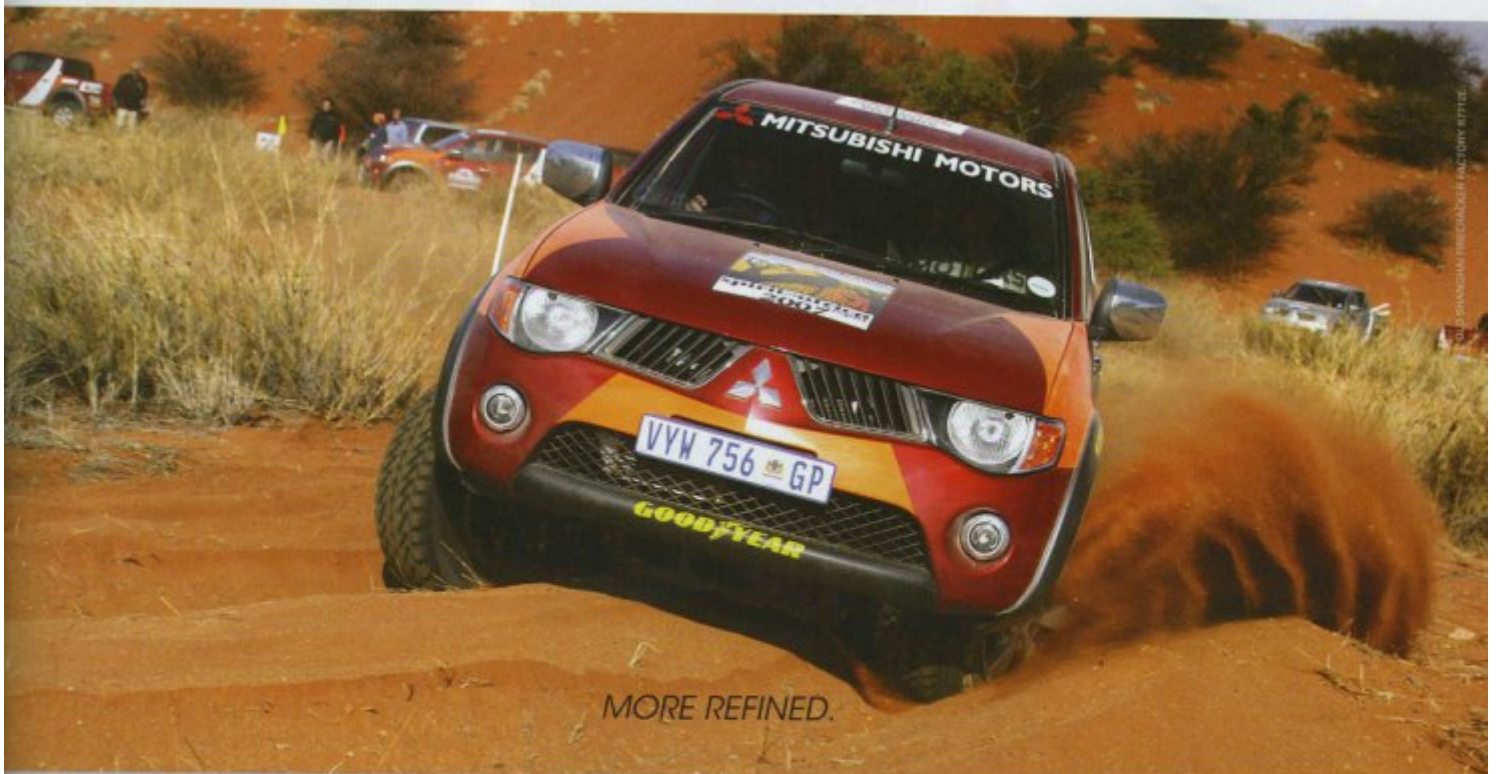
The new crossing also provides Richtersveld visitors with an alternative route home, taking in the many sights of southern Namibia, and as the Namibian side of the park is more than double the size of the South African section, there's plenty of space to explore.

It has to be noted that the only way to get around the South African side of the Transfrontier Park is by 4x4. But these days one can travel with a regular sedan to Sendelingsdrift and nip across on the pont to visit the Namibian side of the park, where you don't need a 4x4 because the dirt roads are pretty good.

One of the things that make this Transfrontier Park unique is that once you cross into Namibia and have cleared customs and immigrations, there aren't any park officials on the other side waiting to take your money. It's only once you try to enter attractions such as the Ais-Ais Hot Springs or the Fish River Canyon that you have to fork out the fees. ▶

THANKS

Thank you to Chris Carolin of Malmesbury Motors for the loan of a 2.5-litre diesel Mitsubishi Triton. While working at another Mitsubishi dealership Chris was responsible for the development of the very popular Pajero "Africa". Not surprisingly, he's done a similar upgrade to the new Triton, adding a long-range tank, spotlights and a protective skid plate, plus a bit of lift. But if you want one, you'd better be quick, Chris has a great reputation for doing clever things to Mitsubishi's so these special vehicles will sell faster than boerewors rolls at a *sokkiejof*. Call Chris on (022) 482 2981 for more information.



MORE REFINED.

also now enjoy the sleek new exterior and stylish, car-like interior with features like power steering, electric windows, air con, front CD loader, driver and passenger airbags and remote alarm of the Triton. Come on in for a test drive and you'll realize that toughness has just been redefined. To test drive the new Triton, call 0800 133 355 or visit www.mitsubishi-motors.co.za



a hassle-free entrance option into Namibia



The Hon. Rosalia Nghidinwa, Namibian Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration:
"This pont will provide people with an alternative and shorter route. It will also promote the movement of people across a common border."



The Hon. Willem Konjore, Namibian Minister of Environment and Tourism:
"This pont symbolises a joint tourism effort by Namibia and South Africa."



The Hon. Rejoice Mabudafhasi, South African Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism:
"I come to the Richtersveld religiously every year. I love this place."



Our pont crossing was smooth and uneventful, two basic requirements for getting into relaxing mode at the start of any such trip. As we neared the Namibian side we could see a vehicle from Rosh Pinah on the other bank, waiting to cross back into South Africa. Only Father Time will tell if the Sendelingsdrift pont will give a much needed boost to tourism in the area. What we do know is that it has given 4x4 enthusiasts visiting the Richtersveld a quick, cheap and hassle-free entrance option into Namibia, with easy access to some of its must-see attractions. ■