

## 53479 Caught in the high tide. (Sept 2007)

This is an extract of a trip report (Sept 2007) by Erik covering only the part through the 'doodsakker' (death acre). The full trip report <http://www.advrider.com/forums/showthread.php?t=269251>

Here's the thing.

There's a section today renowned for taking vehicles. The reason is that the waves break straight onto a dune face. There is no beach to ride on. It's about 80km long with here and there a place where there is a break in the dune. About 40 km of it though, has no break. Just waves and dune. It is referred to as the "*doodsakker*". I don't know what the translation is but it is a term used when you are lying in ambush. It refers to the area where the enemy has to be before you open fire.

You cannot go around. As the waves break straight onto the dune, the only way to get through is to use the intertidal area at low tide. It is sloped, soft and not very wide. You have to be quick or get caught. Have a look.



T4A has this to say:

*"Do not drive on this beach track between Baia DosTigres and Tombua, not even with 'experienced' tour guides. It is extremely dangerous and you stand a good chance of being trapped by the tide."*

We have always taken "very dangerous" and "not recommended" as indicators of where some good riding was to be had. This would be the first time we were wrong and 'they' were right.

So you learn.

It's still dark as we break camp. We need to be ready as soon as dawn breaks. It will be low tide then.



My bike is not co-operating. When you kick it over, the dash lights dim and sometimes disappear. It's getting worse. I kick with the left foot until I can no more. Then I get off and kick with the right foot until the leg gives out.



Then it's Hennie's turn, then Michnus (no patience, that boy), then Nardus.



Waiting for the KTM.



Eventually the flippin bike fires up. I now know that I have to keep it running until we stop for the night. Fuck'n excellent way to start a morning, sweating like a pig and some mental shit to carry with you all day.

We camped right at the start of this dune section. Immediately the riding is a lot more challenging. The sand is soft and the bikes labour. Some riders labour too. A 950 showing off the *kak* side of gravity.



I remember a TV ad for a Subaru where the car is driven through the shallows on a beach with water being sprayed all over the bonnet. I used to have a conniption every time I saw it. We quickly find that there is no place for squeamishness about the bikes getting salt water all over them. You have to ride in the wet left by receding waves to get traction.

Have a look at the last two bikes; they are less than 2 metres apart, yet one has traction and one is digging.



The sea mist is also fouling your goggles, every 200m you have to let go of the bars and wipe them.



There are lots of seals and seal carcasses. Also jackal that feed off them, but they don't pose for pictures.



A 'before and after' picture, or a warning to the naive bikers?



The riding progressively gets worse and worse. The soft sand is un-ridable. In places your front wheel throws up a bow wave that you can see flying past you. The bikes are just sucking, sucking fuel. Even before we enter the *doodsakker*, I am forced to leave the others behind. I cannot afford the rest stops because it wastes fuel. I feel like shit because I'm useless to the others.

This gives you an idea of where the tide goes to.



Fourty kilometres can be as long as life itself. When you think you've had enough you look back to the horizon and see this.



You look forward to the horizon and see this.



The immense drag on your front wheel, and the fact that you cannot back off the throttle, makes the back



wheel step out and try to overtake you now and then. I ride out two successfully, but the third ends in a mini-highside. I land on my back but my left hand still has the clutch lever in a deathgrip. So the engine doesn't stall and I am saved.



The longer we ride the more intense it gets. The sand is so thick and waterlogged it's hard to believe. At one point the drag pulls me down until I'm in 1st gear with the throttle wound to the stop. The motor don't rev out though. It sits in the fat part of the torque curve. The bike bellows like a wounded animal and it kills me.

It just kills me.

No motor should be abused like this. It goes on for a good hundred metres. And there's nothing you can do. I'm on the pegs, murdering the bike and moving at just above walking pace. If I tap off for just a second I'll be stuck, with no way to get going again. And if I get stuck I get fucked. It turns into a refrain in my head that I can't control: **"If you get stuck here, you get fucked here"**.

It get's worse and worse. No pics were taken when things got wild but this will give you an idea.



We are forced to power down into the wave area after a receding wave in the hope that we'll reach traction before the next wave chases us up into the soft sand again. You have no choice. You plow down into the wet, get traction, pick up speed, and then try and outrun the next wave. If you don't get traction before the next wave hits, you are history. The waves down at the bottom is breaking about a metre and a half high. And in my head it's going: **"if you get stuck here you get fucked here"** on and on and on and on!

There's no way to avoid it. When you're racing the waves, sometimes you are going to lose. You get surf that just rushes in at a speed greater than the limits of grip in turning. So you crash through it. And everytime that you hit that wave at speed you know you're fucking with chance, or fate, call it what you will. And everytime you make it, it's not even a relief, because it's gonna happen again, and how lucky

can 5 guys expect to be? Wer'e working like our lives depend on it. Which it does.

When you get traction you gun it. You're gonna need the speed soon. I'll be flying at 75 km/h and feel the sand make a grab at my front wheel. Immediately I'll bang down on the seat and lock my arms straight. The next soft patch is bound to be worse and you have no way of visually identifying it, or with what tenacity it's going to grip your front wheel. Flying over the front wheel is staring you in the face (like that ugly stranger you see in the mirror when taking a piss some very late, very drunk night at some dive that you never thought you'll be caught dead in). Yeah, like that.

Whatever mistake you make has the potential to be really serious. Whether you fall, stall, get stuck, misjudge, whatever. I have never ridden like this. It scares me shitless.



And in the end it's fear. Naked fear, but no choice. I'm riding at a risk level that's totally unacceptable. And I try to be liberal about that kind of thing.

But if you stop, you are fucked. so you keep riding, racing, shouting obscenities at fate, knowing you're gonna get the short end of the stick. Turning like the worm being trod upon. Let no-one ever tell you that the worm doesn't turn. He turns..... he knows.

There are limits. Always and to everything. And behind me the limits are being reached. There's a limit to how long our luck was going to hold out.

There's a limit as to how deep water a Dakar can crash into and hope to punch through.

Fred is the unlucky one that draws the short stick. As he hits the wave, the bike starts it's cartwheel. Fred does not get thrown clear. His soft bags wrap around his foot and he becomes an active participant in this unnatural, ugly, vertical carousel.

Like I said, there are limits to everything, and swinging a grown man around by his foot is going to reach some limit. His ankle accordingly fractures. As Fred and his android bike finally comes to rest, he has the presence of mind to hit the kill switch before the first wave breaks over his head. Respect!

There's no-one on the scene yet. The second wave breaks over his head. He realises that this may be some serious shit. His fucked-up leg is wrapped up under the bike and he can't fix this. The third wave does not break over his head but fills his helmet. He rips off his goggles gasping for air. Yes, this is serious.

In the mean time Nardus comes upon this scene. Firstly he has his own demons to deal with. He's got a fat pig that's not happy in sand. He knows that if he gets stuck, he cannot fix it. What he sees when he arrives on the scene is a Dakar lying in the surf ..... and the rider too. This is serious shit. If you ain't dead, your'e supposed to stand up. Nardus have known Fred and his family intimately for many years. He invited Fred on this trip. This is not the kind of news he should be expected to break to the family. He gets a bit of a loose bowel feeling until he sees Fred raise his head. Relief! And anger! He cannot stop here, wtf man, why me? He'll be stuck. So he shouts something useless at Fred and rides past to some place where he can stop.

Hennie in the mean time is not absolved from demons. He stopped to help Nardus where he got stuck. As soon as Nardus got traction he just wrung that throttle. He was rattled. "**You get stuck here, you get fucked here**". Hennie takes some time to extricate his own bike and races off after Nardus. He is last in line and no-one is going to assist him. He has been on reserve for some time already. And like everybody else , he still has to chase the receding waves. If he runs out of fuel while down below, he is fucked. Fucked! He races at over 100km/h where-ever he gets grip. Either he catches up or he donates his bike to Poseidon.

When he catches up, it's where Nardus is trying to get Fred disentangled from his bike. Hennie doesn't help. He doesn't take a picture (very, very unlike Hennie), he rips the fuel from Nardus's bike and starts filling his tank.

It's new to me, I haven't ever seen the both of them lose it like this.

Out front (and none the wiser) I reach the end of the *doodsakker*. I'm fucking dilly. The first jackal that doesn't dissappear but just stands there watching me go by, has me waving at him like he's a friendly local. I have to shout at myself in my helmet to get real.

I pull up at the first place where I can get above the high water mark.



Not too long and Michnus joins me. We seriously underestimated the *doodsakker*. He sucks on his tripper like his life depends on it.



I'm a bit in shock. On every trip you have one or two moments when you overcook things and miss a turn or race into a flock of sheep at breakneck speed; this was like that, except that it continued for for 3 hours with no let up.

Nobody else arrives. My God, how did we fuck this up so badly?

Michnus and myself have no idea what's happened behind us. All we know is it can't be good.

When we ride in remote areas such as this, we always try to be at least three riders. This allows one to stay with an injured rider while the third goes for help. Behind us are three riders but not one of them made it out of the doodsakker. I would expect at least one to come through with an update.

With no-one forthcoming, I can only think of two explanations.

I was in front and I don't have the GPS. Maybe the route veered away from the beach through an unseen gap in the dune. I very seriously doubt it though. I've been hugging that dune like I hugged Leonie Van Der Walt when she pulled me into her ample bosom the first time at a school dance.

If there was a gap, I would have seen it.

The other reason could be that someone is dead. I cannot think of any other reason that all three bikes will stay away.

We cannot go back. We had hoped that we could all leave Foz do Cunene with a full tank of fuel. This did not happen. Except for one bike, everybody had already started using their last tank in the desert. Fuel moved from being the main priority to being the only priority. On this, both Michnus and myself agree. There's no way we are going to be riding in any direction, but to Tombua.

We can make camp here and wait until tomorrow, but what if they still don't turn up? Then we've wasted a day and we're still in the same position. And it's not like we're overstocked on food either.

Michnus says he still saw Fred's headlight behind him not too far back. Maybe one or two kilometres. So we decide to walk back.

The walking turns out to be little different from the riding. It's more slogging than walking. Every step sinks in. In the beginning we still take a picture or two when we come across something interesting.





This one is my favourite:  
Jackall spoor.



After about an hour's walk I climb onto the dune to see if I can get a better view. Surprisingly it's easier to walk on the dune. So we move upstairs.





We also get to see what the interior looks like. Damn!





And we walk and we walk.

Two and a half hours walking brings us upon this scene.



We learn of what happened. At this stage we don't know his ankle is broken. Fred isn't willing to take off his boot for fear of not being able to get it back on. Good call. We are over here:



It's not like we can summon an ambulance. He's gonna need that boot to get out of here.

The twenty minutes or so it took to get Fred and his bike recovered from the sea, had shut the door on

the *doodsakker*. So they decided to ram the bikes as far up the dune as they can and wait out the tide. It would have been plain stupid to try and send one rider through to us.



We are very lucky that the sea is relatively calm. The waves make us nervous but it does not reach the

bikes.





I had always reasoned that, worst case scenario, we can always drag the bikes up the dune. Being here it's clear that that was never gonna happen.



Fred's bike amazes everyone. The only damage from the cartwheel is a bent handlebar, a throttle that is now manual and some broken indicators. By the time Fred was sorted, the bike had been lying in the waves for probably 15 minutes. Yet it fired into life like nothing untoward had happened. Score! Two problems solved; we do not need to recover a broken bike and Fred has transport.

It's too bad that it had to be Fred. It could have been any of us. Every day so far he had to work three times as hard as the rest of us. Every day so far he had an off. Twice he got hurt. The ankle that now broke is the same one that took the punishment two days before (remember the helmet wedge pic?). Every night he would be pleased at how he exceeded his own abilities that day.

He has a lot to digest whilst lying against this dune. Taking a tumble like that messes with your head quite a bit. By this afternoon when the tide goes out again, he needs to be ready to get back on the bike and once again attack the sand monster. This time with one leg he can't use, bent handlebars and a sticky throttle.

I really feel for him, I feel even worse for not being able to offer any help. He is on his own in this.

We agree that they will try to ride out on the afternoons low tide. If it comes too late they'll catch the next morning's. Me and Michnus should return to our bikes and wait.

We rest for an hour or so and then start the walk back. As we leave we see a grey mass come in from the south. It's a cold wind racing over the Benguela current.

Neither Michnus nor myself can be called fitness freaks. This time it takes longer than two and a half hours. We are so knackered that we stop to rest three times with our bikes already in view. They are filthy dirty. There will have to be a total strip down.



This foul wind is icy cold and we pitch tents to get out of it.

The poor bastards against the dune don't have that luxury.





Beach holiday my ass.

Late that afternoon we hear the bikes over the wind. They made it. While we pull our tents down Nardus is doing his 'Tough Biker' impression.



While the rest of us kick the shit out of my bike, Hennie and Fred gets going. While he can, he must ride. They'll wait for us where the route veers back into the interior.

When we finally get going the riding is suddenly easy. We still ride the wet stuff but there is grip in most places and we can get the speed up nicely. There's also a wide beach to run to when the waves come in.

As the afternoon slows into a sunset, one after the other the bikes start hitting reserve. We are still carrying about 7 litres in containers. Everybody knows how far his bike can go on reserve and we only stop for fuel when empty is imminent. We start sharing out the fuel at about a litre a time. We know we might not make it but now we are close enough to Tombua to walk out in one or two days max. It may be unpleasant, but it is do-able.

Along the beach the scenery is spectacular. It is really enjoyable riding. In our country all beach riding is banned. We are getting our fill now.



At the final wreck Hennie and Fred is waiting.



When we get there, the day is gone.



It is here that we turn inland. With the wind, camping doesn't look like such a peachy idea. We decide to keep going.

As Fred tries to clear the shelf dropping onto the beach he goes down. He goes down on the sore leg. I feel it. This would not be the last time. If you cannot use your leg to steady the bike, then that's the side you will fall onto more often.

It gets dark. My bike has no lights and neither does Hennie's. We are riding in the desert again on a reasonable track with the odd sandy stretch. It's not that pleasant without lights. But it is possible for us to get to Tombua tonight still. It's been three days since we've seen a beer.

We suddenly hit a tall dune and Fred just plain flies up it. Both me and Hennie have to take more than one run at it. Looks like Fred wants to get to Tombua without any fannying about.

I find that riding sand blind is actually easier as I do not see the sandy bits coming. I only feel it and respond. Who would've guessed.

In the mean time, our reserve fuel is no more. The next bike that runs out, runs out. It's just incredible that we can cut it this close after 6 days of riding over all kinds of terrain.

Five guys caress their throttles in the most sensitive manner. We roll into Tombua on fumes and millilitres.

We pull straight into the filling station. Relief! Shit, we made it. We're back in civilisation. People all over!

We are filthy and fucking tired. Tombua is a fishing port. I know that there is no accomodation, not even a camp site. But once again the good people of Angola humble us. We ask a car at the fuel station where we could sleep. He takes us to a mate of his called Ze. Ze speaks English, he has a factory that we can sleep at. He directs us first to a restaurant, promising to fetch us when we are finished eating.

We chuck down beers like oysters. We eat food prepared by someone. Meat. Man, it's difficult to describe what one feels. When Ze fetches us and takes us to his factory grounds, I feel like I have a father again, looking out for me. Showering will have to wait till the next day when the factory generator is started. We pitch our tents and pass out.