



Ombupupu

Okahao In Print



Special Focus On...



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Okahao Town Council Newsletter

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Editor's Note



O. D. Shigwedha

The site of the historical baobab tree in Okahao is undeniably eye catching and some may wonder what exactly is at the site. Many people call it a lodge, but it isn't. The huge tree on the site is a National Heritage object, declared by the National Heritage Council of Namibia in September 2011. This makes the site as significant as any other nationally declared heritage place, such as Omugulugwoombashe. Some might be wondering as to "Why this tree?" of all other trees. Wonder no more, because this special edition of the newsletter will briefly tell you a concise story of the site with a combination of pictures and words. I hope there won't be unanswered questions about Okahao Baobab National Heritage Site after grabbing a copy of this issue. With the festive season around the corner, it is only advisable that you pay a visit to the site to obtain first-hand experience of what you will see in this issue.

Happy reading and have a blessed festive season!

Let's find out more...

...ABOUT THE BAOBAB TREE

The Okahao baobab tree is no ordinary tree. The background of this giant tree is well-known in the community of Okahao and beyond. Because a South African army camp was based here during the colonial era, the South African soldiers found the tree ideal for interrogating local people. Such interrogations were violent and ruthless, involving hangings, beatings and electric shocking of civilians. Many victims lost their lives as a result. Information that was needed and forced out of innocent civilians was to reveal the whereabouts of wanted PLAN fighters in the area. One such fighter was a well-known local by the name Patrick Iyambo, nicknamed "Lunganda". Patrick was known to be a tactical combatant, who on several occasions swiftly slipped away from the hands and eyes of South African soldiers. His slippery antics made him the most wanted PLAN fighter in the area, and the main reason why local people became victims of the cruelties carried out in the baobab tree.



Kristofina Namukwambi and Josefina Shivute are on site to tell visitors more about the history of the tree

Stories of the Victims

Victims that were brought to the tree were mainly family members, neighbours and acquaintances of Patrick. Stories of the surviving victims of barbarities correspond and have a lot in common. They have vivid recollections of the tortures and know the culprits' names as though they are pasted in their minds. Their bodies carry evidence of brutal encounters at the hands of merciless South African soldiers of the time



Kuku Albertina Shaanika knew Patrick through her brother, whom once came home with Patrick. She however denied knowing Patrick during the times she was brought to the baobab tree for questioning. She says she will never forget one merciless black soldier who once told her that "You will feel hell on earth today", before subjecting her to painful electric shocks. The tortures also left her with a permanently crippled leg



Another torture survivor is Tk Joel Kamati. Trouble with the South African soldiers came his way after his involvement in assisting Patrick with travelling, as he had a car then. He became a target right away and was not spared from the cruel interrogations at the tree. He says electric shocking was mostly done in the mornings and evenings. Unlike others who were repeatedly brought to the tree, Tk Joel says he was only held and tortured for about two consecutive months and released. He adds that even though he knew well where Patrick was, it was in the interest of the liberation struggle that he opted to be tortured than reveal Patrick's whereabouts



When an acquaintance was captured from his house and taken to the tree for interrogation, Tk Festus Uugwanga decided to follow. Upon arrival at the tree, he was warned to go back home and never look back. He was however picked up again to be tortured in order to reveal where Patrick was. Despite the pain from electric shocking, he too refused to make any revelations. Unlike the majority of victims, Tk Festus says he was only brought to the tree once for torturing. He was never brought back after his release



Tk Jason Ekandjo says he is one of the few people that survived the brutalities. He grew up with Patrick Iyambo at the same village, making him an obvious target of atrocities like many others. He described the beatings he received as the worst beatings of his life. "It was so bad that you do not know who is beating you and who is not", he says. Mentioning names as he makes a comparison between white and black South African soldiers, Tk Ekandjo confirms that it was black soldiers who meted out the worst torture



South African soldiers would pick her up in the morning and take her to the tree for torturing, but she never gave in to demands. She recalls soldiers telling her crying children that “we will kill your mother”. During her interrogations, Kuku Lahja Iyambo could not deny knowing Patrick because he was her younger brother, but she protested that she never saw him in many years. She says men suffered more at the baobab tree because unlike women, they were undressed first before being subjected to electric shocks. She is disheartened by the fact that the suffering she endured was mainly at the hands of people who spoke the same language as her



Tk Leonard Shitumwa is Patrick’s elder brother. Because he worked at Orajemund by then, he provided his brother Patrick money to ease his mobility. His first encounter with the South African soldiers was when he came home one day and went to attend church service at a local parish. He was confronted at the church right after the service, got a few beatings and went home. Little did he know was that it was only an introduction and the full journey to torture is still coming. He was repetitively captured thereafter and taken to the tree for continuous brutalities.

On several occasions he was also taken to Ondangwa prison for further torturing and questioning. But Tk Leonard maintains that the long suffering periods made the victims more determined. He says it made no sense to give in at last, after having suffered all along



Tk. Onesmus Maharero says his father was Patrick’s uncle and they lived in the same village. He was very young when he was tortured together with his father. He vividly remembers the events of the day that he was tied and hanged up on the tree before being shocked with an electric prod. He revealed that by that time of his suffering, he in fact did not even know Patrick. It was however obvious that by virtue of his family relationship with Patrick, the perpetrators would not believe he does not know who Patrick was



Kuku Secilia Shitumwa is another victim that was brought to the tree five times, but she says she was only tortured for three of the five occasions. She also says she did not experience any electric shocking but received beatings of her life that always left her body swollen. She did not only suffer for being Patrick’s sister, but also for providing food to PLAN fighters. One afternoon she was picked up from a school where she was a teacher and brought to the tree for interrogation. She was tied and hanged up on the tree, then beaten so bad that her dress got all bloody. The next morning she was taken back to school and fellow teachers gave her a clean dress. Kuku Secilia also says as punishment for her involvement with PLAN fighters, she did not receive her salary from April 1969 to January 1970

Site development

After the baobab tree received a National Heritage status, Okahao Town Council with assistance from the National Heritage Council of Namibia started to develop the tree site so that it does not only serve as a heritage place but also a modern site for tourist attraction and economic development. The site currently features various facilities and offers services to both locals and visitors



Craft Shop

Guard Room

Ablution Facilities



Restaurant with various cuisines



Braai facilities & Camping area

Charges (July 2013 - June 2014)

Camping per night - N\$ 40.00 per person (Namibians)

N\$ 60.00 per person (Non-Namibians)

Site booking (for private events/functions) - N\$ 100.00 per day

Such events include: Wedding photo shoots, birthday parties, kiddies fun days, friends/family come together parties etc.

Bookings:

At the site or at Town Council offices +264 65 252204 or +264 65 252205 or o.shigwedha@okahaotc.com.na

NB*Live traditional performances at the site can be arranged when booked at least 14 days in advance

Pictures - Opening Ceremony

Okahao Baobab Heritage Site was officially opened on the 14th May 2013.
In attendance was the site patron, Founding President Dr. Sam Nujoma.



Pictures - Opening Ceremony



Have Comments?
email editor:
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