

# Rössing

October 1996

20 YEARS OF PRODUCTION 1976-1996





## 1 "THE GDR KIDS" YESTERDAY AND TODAY

by Constance Kenna

Constance Kenna is a Lecturer of German at Middlebury College in Vermont, USA. Under the auspices of the American Fulbright Fellowship programme, she recently spent ten months in Namibia doing research. Her book on the "ex-GDR Kids" is planned for 1997. Photos 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 & 10 by the author. Photo 8 by Gudrun Ott. Photos 6 & 7 by Caleb Kenna.

## 6 THE WHEELS THAT KEEP RÖSSING ROLLING

This in-house article, written to commemorate twenty years of production, celebrates some of the people behind the wheels that keep Rössing turning.



## 13 MEDIEVAL CASTLES: NAMIBIA'S TEUTONIC LEGACY

by Sharri Whiting Shaw

An award winning American writer, Sharri Whiting Shaw lives in Rome after spending almost four years in Namibia. Her feature articles and interviews are published by American newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times, Nashville Tennessean and St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and by southern African magazines, the Air Namibia Flamingo and Sun Air Ilango. Whiting Shaw and her husband, Pierro de Masi, former Italian ambassador to Namibia, lived in Schwerinsburg Castle.

Photos 3, 6, 9 & 10 courtesy of Namibian National Archives.

Photos 1, 2, 5, 7 & 8 by the author.

Photo 4 courtesy of von Kunow family.

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Cover: Willem Joseph knows very well that he operates the biggest machine at Rössing. Safety always comes first. He has never been hurt, neither has he hurt anyone else during his 18 years in the pit.

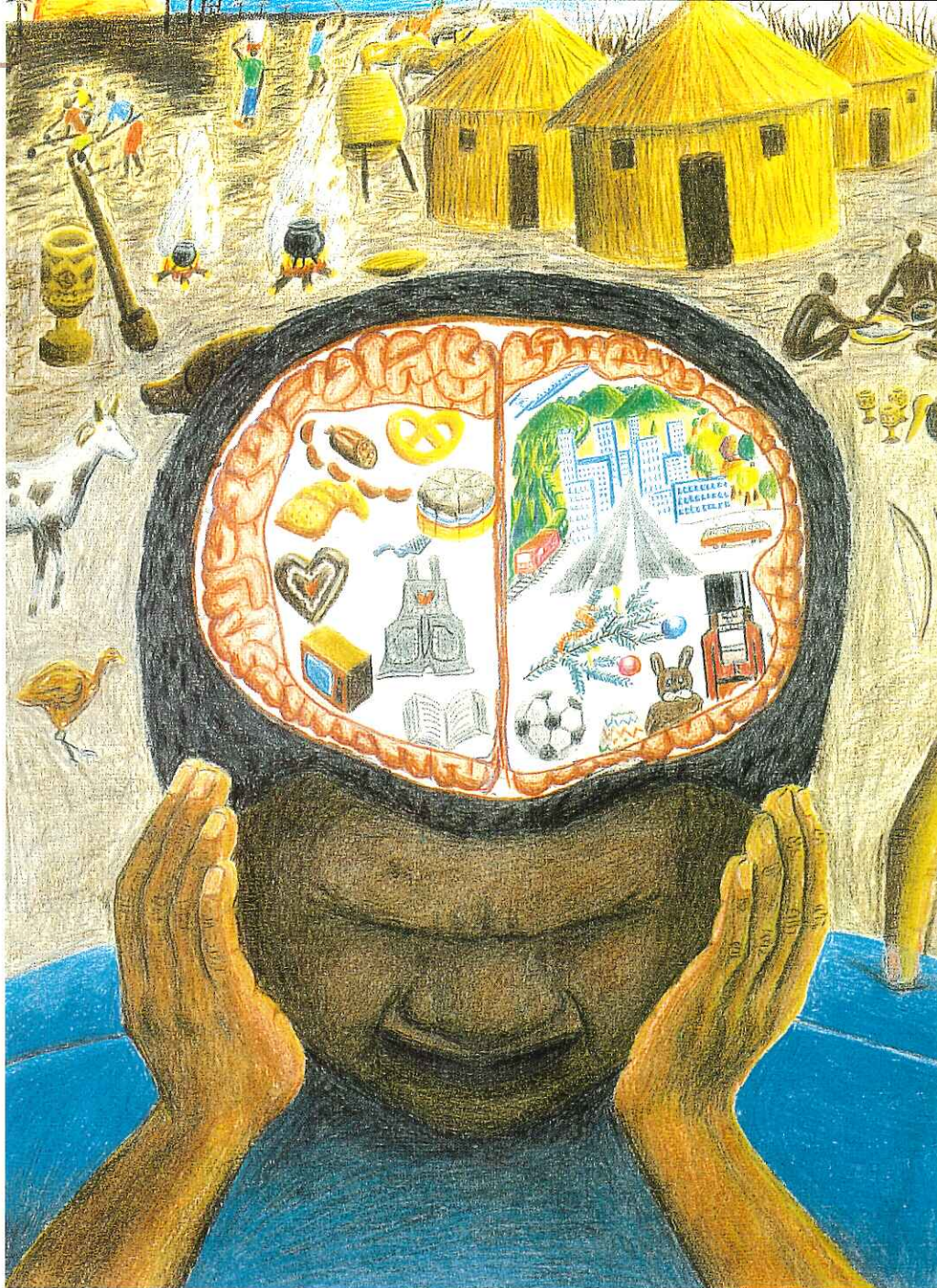
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Rössing Magazine aims to contribute towards a broader knowledge of Namibia and its people. It is published twice a year, each issue illustrating various aspects of the country. We hope you will find the magazine both interesting and informative and we welcome readers' comments and suggestions for future articles.

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1. "Rückkehr aus dem Exil" ("Return from Exile"), coloured pencil drawing by Ipumbu Benjamin Amushila (born in 1975 in Windhoek).

# "THE GDR KIDS" YESTERDAY AND TODAY

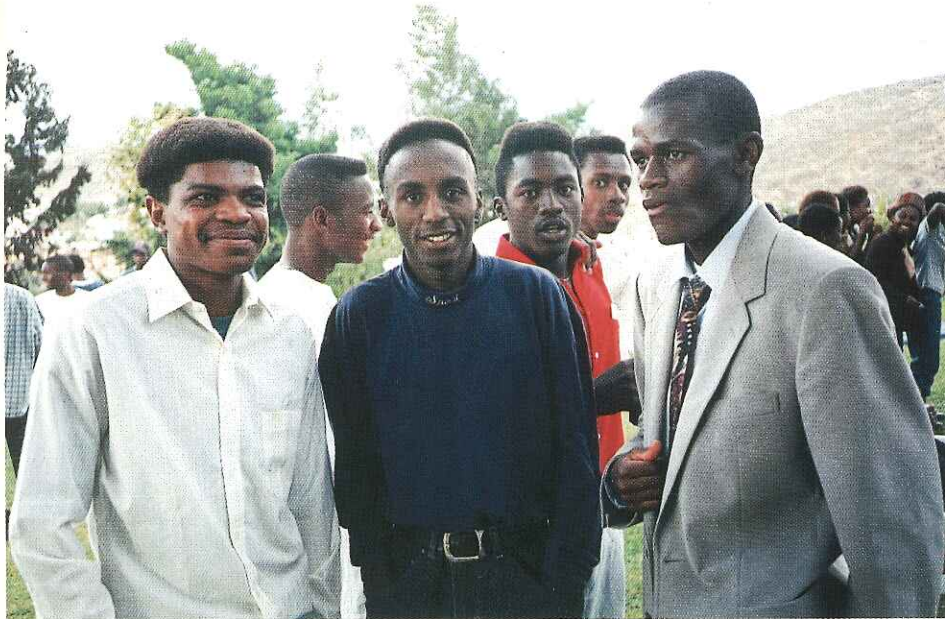
Constance Kenna

**M**any people in Namibia have heard of the "GDR Kids" because of all the attention focused on them in the past six years. These young Namibians who were in exile in the German Democratic Republic in the 1980s are especially known to the German-speaking community in Namibia. When they were repatriated

in 1990 it was the Germans particularly, who provided assistance to them, often becoming their host families during school holidays.

The German-speaking community in Namibia comprises, first of all, those German-Namibians living in this southwestern part of the African

continent in the fourth or fifth generation and even after Independence, often referring to themselves as "Südwestler" ("Southwesters"). Among the Germans in Namibia are also those who immigrated to "Southwest" in the past three or four decades. Prominent in the German-speaking community in Namibia are



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2. From left to right: Maxton Phillip, James Nghishakenwa, Andreas Shiyoo, Amukongo Amushila, Cliffy Hellao, and Matheus Nangolo at a celebration for the "GDRs" in Windhoek in November 1995.



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3. Ipumbu Benjamin Amushila (born in 1975 in Windhoek) has set himself the goal of drawing President Sam Nujoma and all members of his cabinet.

4. "Life Was Just a Dream", oil painting about her childhood in the German Democratic Republic by Niita Indongo.

5. Nali Conrad (born in 1976 in exile in Luanda, Angola) worked at the Swakopmund Library before going to Germany where she has begun an apprenticeship as an assistant in a doctor's office.

6. George Angula Fernando (right) born in 1973 in Odibo in the North of Namibia, works at the Windhoek Veterinary Clinic. Here he is assisted by Titus Hamutenya (left).



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young refugees came the offer from East Germany to accept 80 pre-primary children. So in December 1979 the first group of Namibian children (3 to 7 years old) accompanied by their Namibian caregivers arrived at the SWAPO Children's Home in Bellin near Güstrow in the north of the German Democratic Republic.

In the course of the 1980s they were joined by many more Namibian children so that by 1990 there were over 400 children in East Germany at two sites: nearly 300 at the "School of Friendship" in Staßfurt near Magdeburg and over 100 at the original SWAPO Children's Home in Bellin.

those one might call "Deutsche auf Zeit" (i.e. Germans in the country only temporarily, say for two or three years on assignment from Germany, Namibia's biggest donor country). These Germans are with governmental agencies, or teach at one of the German medium schools, or work for one of the many non-governmental organisations in Namibia with a base in Germany.

Outside the German-speaking community in Namibia, the "GDR Kids" are perhaps not so well known, but theirs is a story that merits telling. The story of their experiences in Bellin and Staßfurt and their lives in Namibia since repatriation is a complex and compelling tale. It has its roots in the SWAPO liberation struggle, is related thematically to the broader context of refugees and exiles in twentieth

century Africa, involves contrasts and clashes between the first and third worlds, and finally hinges on the successes and failures of integrating into the post-Independence Namibian society which has not been entirely accepting of them.

In May 1978, in the course of Namibia's struggle for liberation, the Namibian refugee camp, Kassinga, in southern Angola was raided by the South African Defence Force. Upwards of 600 Namibians perished. Survivors included babies and young children who were taken, together with others, to Kwanza Sul, another Namibian settlement for refugees further north in Angola.

When SWAPO President, Sam Nujoma, appealed for help internationally, among the many offers to take in



Some of the children were orphans from Kassinga. Most children had parents who were involved in the liberation struggle either as combatants or workers in the various refugee settlements, or as prominent SWAPO political and diplomatic leaders. The parents of some children were students in exile in other countries. Several of the caregivers brought their own children to East Germany or gave birth to them there.

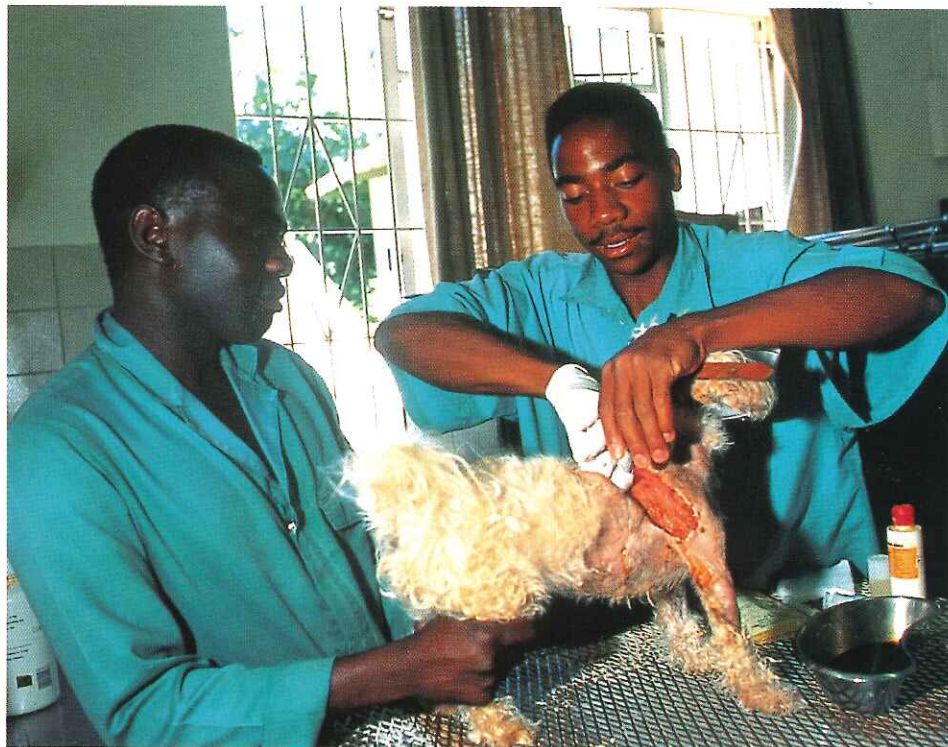
SWAPO was relieved that the children were safe from the ravages of the bush war in Angola and pleased that the children received medical care, housing and schooling. When the oldest children



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children was the standard GDR school curriculum, but it was adjusted somewhat to give prominence to Namibian and southern African themes. For instance, Biology included lessons on the fauna and flora of Namibia, the Geography curriculum emphasised Sub-Saharan Africa, and there were special efforts to familiarise the children with Namibian culture, especially music and dance. One of the tasks of the Namibian caregivers in the SWAPO Children's Home was to teach the Oshivambo language and convey to the children their Namibian heritage.

When the oldest of the children had completed grade 9 (just one year short



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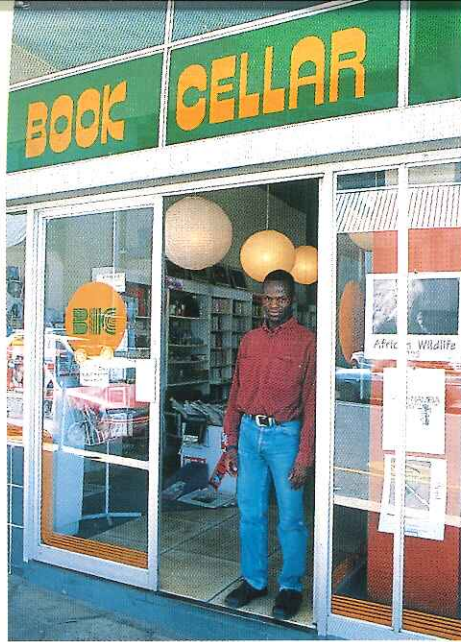
in Bellin had learned sufficient German (they also had German caregivers), they began attending school in nearby Zehna.

Upon completing the first four grades, the oldest children were transferred to the "School of Friendship" in Staßfurt where they resided in facilities that had become available after the young Mozambicans, for whom the school had been built in 1981, began their apprenticeships. For three years (1985 - 1988) the Namibian children were schooled in Löderburg, a small community near Staßfurt. After the Mozambicans had completed their apprenticeships and returned to Africa, the schooling for the Namibians continued in the classrooms of the "School of Friendship."

The curriculum for the Namibian

of completing the standard East German schooling), the sojourn of the Namibian children in East Germany abruptly came to an end. At the same time the first free and democratic general elections were taking place in Namibia (November 1989) and shortly thereafter Independence was achieved (March 1990). The Berlin Wall came tumbling down and the two Germanys were negotiating unification. The radical changes in Namibia, as well as those in Germany and the rest of Europe, had strong repercussions on the lives of the young Namibians. In mid-1990, the Namibian government made the decision to bring all the children home, and their repatriation to Namibia took place in August 1990.

For several months, everything was quite confusing and chaotic for many



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of the children. They certainly had not been satisfactorily prepared to confront and come to terms with Namibian culture and society. Not only was it difficult for those who stayed in Windhoek where first world (downtown Windhoek and white residential suburbs) and third world (the predominantly black township of Katutura and its ever-growing extensions) uneasily co-exist; it was also difficult for those who travelled to the North, to densely populated, but rural and undeveloped Ovamboland. Many of their families had originally come from here.

Towards the end of 1990, a vigorous media campaign was mounted appealing for help. The German-speaking community in Namibia especially responded. Fascinated that black "kids" could speak excellent German and had grown up familiar with German culture, many offered financial assistance and school holiday accommodation to the children not yet reconnected with their own families. Out of this initial effort grew relationships between many of the young black people and German-speaking families, primarily in Windhoek and Swakopmund, that have endured over the years.

From late 1991/early 1992 to the present, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany has been the major provider of funds for school fees, uniforms, books and supplies, and transportation for many of the "Ex-GDRs." The German government funnels its monies through Namibian non-governmental organisations.



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Until mid-1993 the Triple R Committee (Repatriation Resettlement Rehabilitation) and the Council of Churches of Namibia were the NGOs responsible, and then TUCSIN (The University Centre for Studies in Namibia) took over. In addition,

many individuals and organisations in Namibia and also in Germany have stepped forward to help, most recently in the area of vocational training.

In June 1996 a photo exhibit entitled "What Has Become of the '79ers"?

## PART OF MY LIFE

Maria Shangala gave birth to me on the 12th of July 1977 and called me "Nawala" "Nawala" means "emptiness". Why she called me "Nawala" I really do not know.

A year later in 1978, war broke out in Kassinga, and Maria had to flee with thousands of other people. She was carrying me on her back. After walking very far, she was shot from the front and fell to the ground, with me on her back. I was crying the hell out of my voice. Nangula, a friend of my mother's, rescued me from the back of my dead mother.

One of the soldiers was very anxious that my crying would betray them and ordered Nangula to leave me behind - for the safety of the other people. Luckily, she was convinced that the child had to survive the war, no matter what, and she kept me with her. Later that year we were accommodated in a refugee camp called Kwanza Sul.

In 1979, eighty Namibian children were brought to Germany (GDR). Just over two years later, another group of thirty - including me - also flew to Germany. It was a big shock for me to see another country that was white (with snow) and inhabited with white people. I cried and wanted to go back to Nangula whom I trusted. We resided in a Children's Home in Bellin. Soon I got used to my new surroundings.

I have lived almost all my years in different hostels and never got to know what living in a family is like. Sometimes I wish I knew my parents, especially my mother. I would be satisfied, even if I only had one single picture of her - to know how she looked. I miss my mother even though I never got to know her.

Half of the story was told to me by Nangula whom I got to see again in 1991 and the other part came alive in my dreams.

Nawala Trianus, 1996.



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I was affiliated with TUCSIN and met frequently with Hallo Hopf, social worker and family therapist who works out of the TUCSIN offices to assist the "Ex-GDRs" with personal, familial and academic problems. In conversation with her, the idea of documenting this phase in the lives of the "79ers" was born. Together with my son, Caleb Kenna, I photographed thirty-eight of the oldest "Ex-GDRs," now finished with secondary school.

The photographs depict the "79ers" at their places of employment, in training, or at their universities, primarily in Windhoek, but also in Swakopmund, as well as in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in South Africa. Each photograph was accompanied by a statement about the individual's post-secondary school activity written by the individual portrayed. I shall soon travel to Germany to photograph 30 young Namibians studying, working or in training there.

The study undertaken has shown that unusual efforts on the part of the young people themselves, their Namibian and German caregivers, educators, teachers and school administrators, their parents and foster parents, host families and church people, at least three governments, and several non-governmental organisations in Namibia and Germany are resulting in a remarkable record of achievement. One cannot predict what the future has in store, but following these particular young Namibians into their years of mature adulthood should certainly be an interesting task.

7. Johnny Sheehama (born in 1975 in Oshakati in the North of Namibia) works at the Book Cellar/Bücher-Kellar in downtown Windhoek.

8. Namibian preprimary children at Kwanza Sul refugee settlement in Angola in the early 1980s.

9. Some of the over 50 "Ex-GDR Kids" who attended the opening on 11 June 1996 of the photo exhibit in Windhoek "What Has Become of the '79ers'?" "Ex-GDR Kids' Working".

10. Daniel Stephanus (born in 1977 in exile in Ondjaba, Angola) lays computer cables for Namibian Computer Services at the Holy Cross Convent Hospital in Windhoek.

"Ex-GDR Kids' Working" was mounted at the Namibian-German Foundation for Cultural Co-operation in Windhoek. The photos accompanying this article stem from that exhibit which I organised. As an American Fulbright researcher in Namibia for 1995 - 96,

# THE WHEELS THAT KEEP RÖSSING

**T**he vast, sandy wastes, rocky outcrops and gravel plains of the oldest desert in the world surround the largest open pit uranium mine in the world. On cold mornings the desert is covered in a blanket of mist rolling in from the Atlantic on the coast. Before the sun rises to reveal a brilliant blue sky, the wheels start rolling at the mine.

The great variety of wheels found at Rössing Uranium ranges from a haultruck tyre measuring 2,8 metres in diameter and weighing 2½ tonnes to tiny office chair wheels measuring 5cm in diameter and weighing less than a kilogram. The number of wheels used at Rössing over the 20 years the mine has been in production, adds up to a staggering figure.

Rössing without wheels would be like a cheetah without its claws. But wheels alone are useless - an operator is needed to set them in motion. A former Managing Director, Sean James, said "Rössing's biggest asset is its people," and it is exactly these people who have kept the wheels rolling over all these years.

Sitting 4,5m above the ground and being in charge of a 150 ton haultruck is, according to Willem Joseph and Hans Josef, the hardest and most dangerous work on the mine. They have 38 years of experience between the two of them and know the open pit like the palms of their hands.

Rössing's 22 haultrucks transport approximately 80 000 tonnes of ore per day. This is equal to a 100-car goods train leaving the pit every 20 minutes, 16 hours a day, 365 days a year. The haultruck fleet has covered 20 million kilometres, a distance that is equivalent to 500 trips around the earth or 26 return flights to the moon.

Hans is a very versatile driver. He holds licenses for nine different types of

Over twenty years  
many wheels have kept  
Rössing turning.

machinery in the open pit, including the Caterpillar 992 front-end loader. The main function of this machine is to load sand in the riverbed. Hans often works an eight hour shift all on his own, sometimes even at night. Willem and Hans are used to spending eight hours of work all by themselves, but they agree that it is better not to think too much about personal matters. "It only

breaks your concentration." When not behind the wheel, Hans has many stories to tell. He fondly remembers the early days at Rössing. "We were young and it was very exciting playing with these big toys. We used to compete to see who could load the most loads on a shift."

The B25B Bell truck is primarily used to load and tip sand on the tailings dam.





# ROLLING



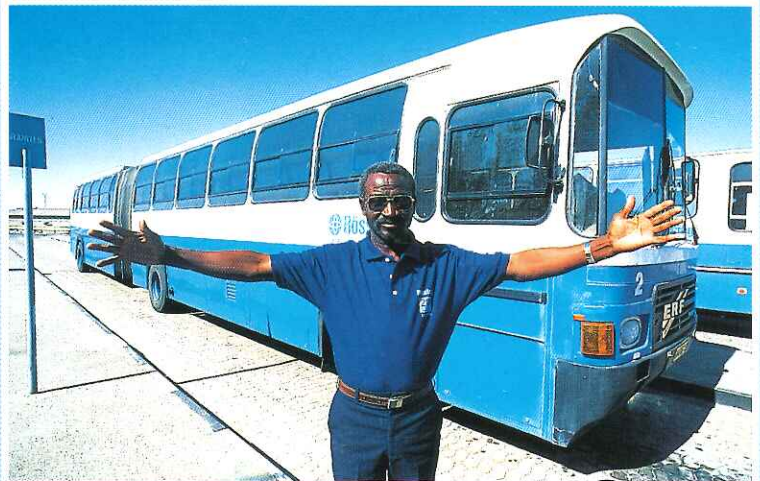
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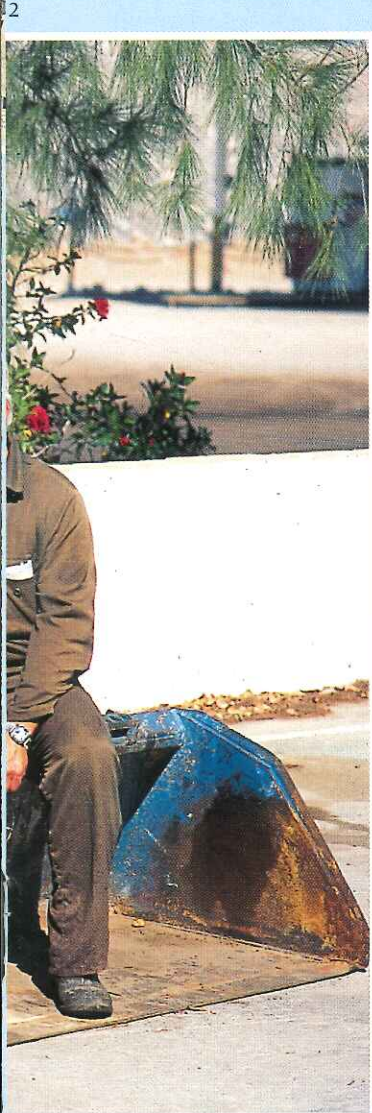
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1. Jan Nolte has performed miracles with this Bobcat.
2. Derrick Southworth has flown any imaginable passenger, from Margaret Thatcher to two cheetahs, in this King Air 350. He flies an average of 500 hours or 270 000km per year.
3. As an experienced haultruck operator Erastus Shivoru found it easy to switch to driving the B25B Bell. Apart from loading sand, the Bell is also used to dump rubbish and to transport calcine.
4. Ernie Duiker with the Ford F100 rescue tender vehicle.
5. Abilas Gaseb has enough time behind the wheel of his Uno to think about and solve all his problems. And as long as the music is playing he is happy.
6. Erastus Sakarias has one of the most responsible jobs at Rössing and one of the best safety records - he mostly drives the bus train or jumbo bus which takes 108 people.



Erastus Shivoro is one of seven operators of the two Bells at Rössing. Four years ago he was transferred from the open pit. The changeover to driving the Bell was not difficult, said Erastus. "It is actually much easier. No trolley lines to hook up to, and I am allowed to get out of the truck for a lunch break!" The haultrucks must keep moving all the time, so the operators take a lunch break in their cabins whenever they have time.

The Demag 110 ton crane, with its computer system and 45m long retractable boom, was state-of-the-art when it was bought in 1990. As far as Markus Basson and Jack van Reenen know it is the only one of its kind in Namibia, which makes it a very sought after crane. It has often been used for other jobs, including the replacement of power pylons in the Namib desert and off-loading a shovel at the Walvis Bay harbour.

"It drives like a Mercedes Benz," says Jack "and it is definitely the most mobile and easiest to handle of Rössing's wide range of cranes. Even driving in the sandy riverbed is not a problem."

The Demag is used for a wide variety of functions, mostly lifting anything weighing less than 50 tons. The Rössing photographer might not be a typical load for the crane, but the crane once lifted him high enough to take aerial photographs.

Rössing's location in the desert means that all its employees need to be transported to work. Most of the 1 208 employees travel by bus. The distances covered per day range between 190km from Walvis Bay and back, to 28km from Arandis and back.

Erastus Sakarias has been behind the wheel of Rössing's buses for the past 17 years. His main route is to Arandis and back, but he has even driven as far as Ondangwa to fetch contract labourers in the earlier days of Rössing. The employees know that the 19 full-time bus drivers for the fleet of 24 buses are regarded as the safest drivers on Namibia's roads and as a result, sleep comes very quickly to most of the 8 500 passengers carried in a four week period on day shift alone.

The Bobcat might be one of the smallest pieces of machinery at Rössing, but it definitely is one of the most useful. It is also one of the foremost money-saving tools on site. Jan Nolte, with 17 years of service, is the king of the Bobcat. He has literally tamed the cat and with his



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innovative ideas saved the company thousands of dollars by way of his suggestions entered for the Suggestion Scheme Competition. Jan is one of the major contributors to this scheme which encourages employees to come up with ideas to save money and improve safety.

"People don't always realise the usefulness of this machine," Jan said. He can manoeuvre the Bobcat in places where others would think impossible, and is always on the lookout to find new functions for it. One of his ingenious suggestions was to lift the Bobcat into an empty leach tank which needed to be cleaned out. As the Bobcat performs the tasks of several people with wheelbarrows, this particular project was completed much sooner than planned. The Bobcat in the open pit also performs a major task. It is used for the stemming of all drill holes before blasting. The yearly tonnage blasted is approximately 18 million tonnes.

The Hyster forklift is another small invaluable machine. Rudolph Kapukare is one of several operators of the various forklifts on site. As a fitter, Rudolph uses the forklift to fetch parts from the stores and other workshops. He has had to transport some unusual cargo through the years, such as a big washing machine. Loading drums, each of which contains approximately 400kg of uranium oxide (U<sub>3</sub>O<sub>8</sub>), into containers, is an important task performed by forklift



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operators. These are then railed to the Walvis Bay harbour. A total of 200 000 drums has been shipped to date.

The Rössing locomotive performs a very important task - drums filled with uranium oxide are railed from Final Product Recovery to Arandis station. TransNamib then transports them to Walvis Bay harbour to be shipped to clients. The locomotive, which is a shunting engine, has been in operation for more than 20 years and JP Erasmus, better known as Rassie, has spent 17 working years on it. The locomotive has a tight schedule as it also rails all other imports and exports including pyrite for the Acid Plant, ammonium nitrate for blasting in the open pit, diesel, platinum

7. Markus Basson (left) and Jack van Reenen are very proud to be operators of the Demag 110 ton crane. Its computer system tells you exactly what you can lift, what the items weigh and the radius you can move the item in.

8. The Mercedes Benz fire engine in use during a routine practice.

9. Why not keep fit while you work? John Redman has the right idea.

10. (Following page) Rassie Erasmus is Rössing's railway man. With 38 years of experience he has probably spent more time on the railroad than on any other road.

11. (Following page) Rudolph Kapukare is at home behind the wheel of the forklift. He first had to train as an operator and has to renew his licence every two years.

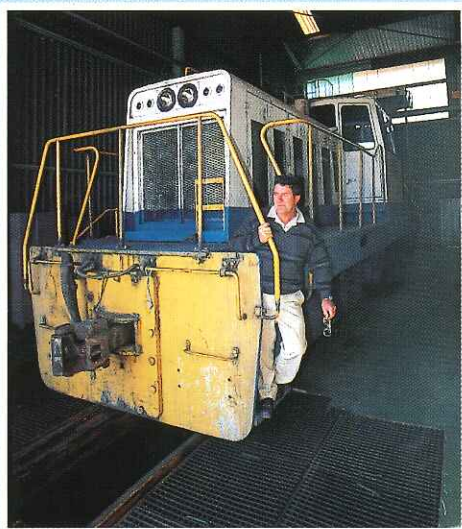
12. (Following page) Hans Josef is not afraid to operate the Cat 992 on night shift all by himself in the riverbed.

slag for the sandblasting yard and caustic soda for the CIX plant.

One of the highlights of Rassie's regular trips is all the animals he sees along the railway line. His list includes springbok, hares (especially at night), klipspringers (African chamois), baboons, porcupine, ostrich and dassies. Something else Rassie enjoys is taking people, especially managers, for a ride. "I love watching their reactions, especially when I am nearing a carriage and they think I am not going to stop in time."

To deal with a situation such as the infamous SX fire in 1978, which destroyed half of the solvent extraction plant and resulted in the biggest

insurance claim in the southern hemisphere at the time. The fire prevention system at Rössing has been developed into a very sophisticated system. Ernie Duiker, with 21 years of service of which 16 were with the fire station, is the expert fire fighter on site. He went to England in 1984 for three months to study at a fire college and to work at fire stations to gain practical experience. He also attended a para-med course in Cape Town. As senior protection controller (fire), he is very proud of Rössing's Mercedes Benz double-cab fire engine with its Ziegler pumps which have a capacity of 3 800 litres per minute on 8 bar. The engine also has storing capacity for 2 000 litres of water and 500 litres of foam. It is equipped with five sets of breathing apparatus as well as tools used to expedite entry into burning buildings or vehicles. The fire station responds to an average of 80 calls per year, including off-site calls. Most of these calls are fortunately false alarms. With the SX fire still fresh in his memory, Ernie makes sure he keeps his men on their toes.



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The rescue tender and the ambulance are two other important vehicles in the emergency services fleet. The rescue tender was converted on site from an ambulance. It carries all rescue equipment, including jaws of life, pneumatic lifting bags and a disaster kit. The ambulance is a para-med ambulance fully equipped to carry five seriously injured people. Ernie is one of ten qualified para-medics at Rössing. They are often called out by the police for accidents on the main road to Swakopmund and Windhoek.

Abilas Gaseb is Rössing's external mail dispatcher. He has been mail man and messenger for the past 16 of his 19 years with the company. Abilas spends his mornings in Swakopmund paying all kinds of bills, purchasing necessities



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such as coffee and tea, dispatching parcels and registered letters and fetching mail from the other Rössing offices in town. Around midday he drives out to the mine and approximately two-and-a-half hours later he returns to Swakopmund with his new activity list and deliveries.

Abilas must be one of the most popular men on the mine, especially when an employee has forgotten something at home. He often gets calls asking him to fetch someone's glasses, pills or even lunch boxes in Swakopmund. As these are all private requests, he only grants them when he has the time.

Through the years he has driven a variety of cars. His latest vehicle is an Uno with one very important feature - a radio/cassette player. As a member of Swakopmund's most famous band, M-Connection, Abilas enjoys listening to music, especially jazz, to get ideas for his own compositions.

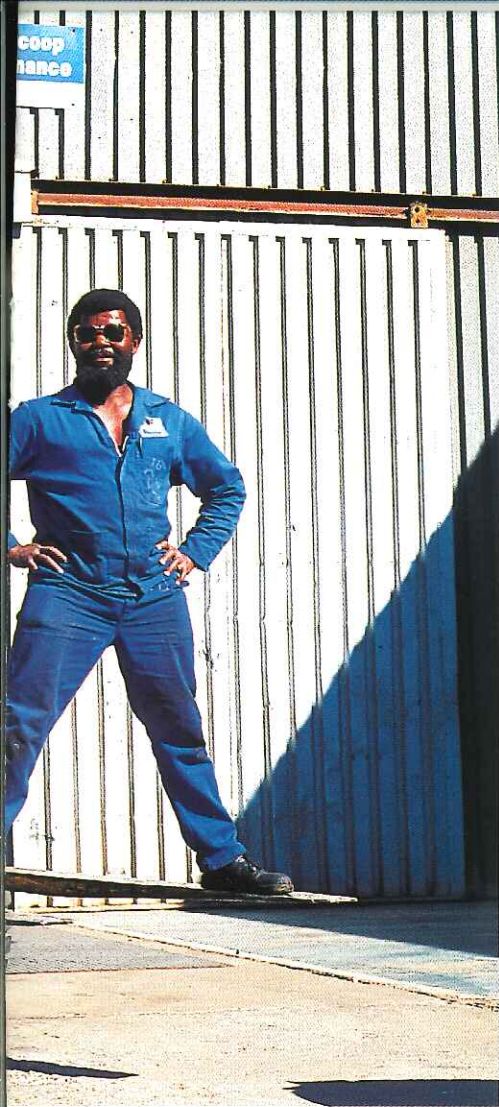
The only wheels at Rössing driven by man power are the delivery and mountain bikes. John Redman, foreman at the Machine Shop, is a firm believer

in pedal power. John is convinced it does not take much longer to cycle anywhere on site than it does to drive there, especially as he does not have to bother with reverse parking. He also does not hesitate to cycle a fair distance - the different offices and workshops are spread out over a radius of approximately 5km.

The main function of an aeroplane might be to fly, but to get into the air it needs wheels and when these wheels do not want to come down upon landing... Rössing's chief pilot, Derrick Southworth clearly remembers such an incident as he was about to land at the Arandis Airport. "We returned to Windhoek, flew around to burn off fuel and eventually pumped the wheels down by hand before we could land."

Following in his dad's footsteps, Derrick now counts 34 years as a pilot with 3 000 hours flying time. He started flying for Rio Tinto in 1969 and officially joined Rössing in 1971.

Rössing's planes have flown many people on special, scheduled, mercy and chartered flights over the whole of



southern Africa. The list of people includes Namibia's president and Mrs Indira Gandhi. Derrick regards flying Margaret Thatcher as one of the highlights of his flying career at Rössing. Many lives have been saved with the help of Rössing Air's willingness and quick response. Premature babies have been rushed to Windhoek in the middle of the night.

Apart from starting charter flights in recent years, the King Air 350 has also transported very unusual passengers - ten cheetahs from the Africat Foundation in Namibia to Pilanesburg in South Africa.

Derrick is a good example of a person whose head may be in the clouds but whose feet are firmly planted on the ground. He believes that no matter whether it is a VIP trip or just another routine flight, it is very important that the service provided by Rössing Air is as uneventful and as punctual as possible.

All these wheels, and all those not even mentioned here, have covered millions of kilometres over the past 20 years and with the dedication of their operators will surely cover many millions more.





# MEDIEVAL CASTLES NAMIBIA'S TEUTONIC LEGACY

Sharri Whiting Shaw

**A**lthough the Germans who colonised Namibia remained in power only a few decades, their impact on the country pervades the culture even today. Beyond the ubiquitous German restaurants and bakeries, German schools and German cemeteries, it is the architecture of public buildings and residences that remain as the constant reminder of those who braved forbidding seas and harsh deserts to form a country.

The lack of trees and snowy mountains did nothing to keep the population from building houses with peaked roofs designed to withstand heavy snows or structures better suited to cold weather than desert heat. Yet their

Namibia's castles are the product of an imaginative German architect.

Teutonic lines add a certain charm to the landscape and certainly created a comforting familiarity for those who chose, or were sent, to make a life here.

Perhaps the medieval castles are the most distinctive of all the German buildings. Namibia's castles are the product of an imaginative German architect, Willi Sander, whose imprint can

be seen most particularly in Windhoek and Swakopmund. Sander was the catalyst; a man who found in members of the German nobility sent to Southwest Africa at the turn of the century the perfect patrons to execute his visions of new German-style buildings in a barren and empty landscape.

Willi Sander designed much of Windhoek's downtown, including the railway station and the Gathemann building. He also designed the railway station in Swakopmund, now the Swakopmund Hotel and Casino complex, and many of the preserved buildings that make this coastal resort the most German of Namibian towns. But, his imagination was





mostly fired by an old fortress of loose stones built by Curt von Francois in 1890 atop the highest hill in Windhoek. It was to become his first castle, Schwerinsburg.

At the request of Count von Schwerin, a German nobleman assigned as secretary to the Governor, Sander turned the old fortress into a medieval style castle in 1904, thereby beginning a legacy which was to include three burgs (castles on hills) in Windhoek and one Schloss (a castle on flat ground more like a palace) outside Maltahöhe.

Visitors are often struck by the incongruity of this white-towered castle which,

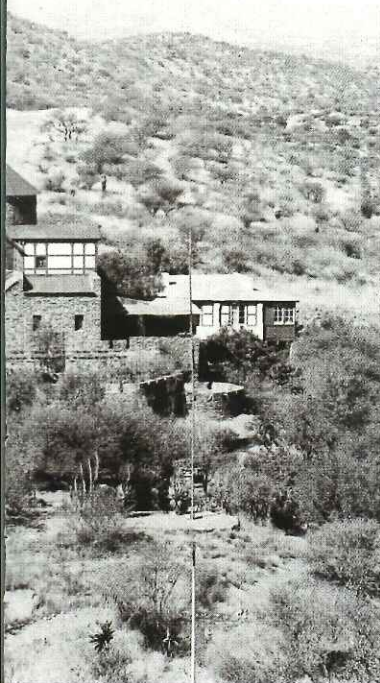
standing high above the city, can be seen from all over town. Originally erected by the German army in 1890 as a fortress, it was little more than a rough mica wall from behind which the soldiers could shoot in the event of attack.

When this was no longer an issue, Willi Sander, who had arrived from Germany to begin working in Namibia, turned the fortress into a kind of "romantic ruin" with a spectacular view of the mountains surrounding the city. The ruin became Sperlingslust, "sparrow's joy", a tavern for the troops.

Around 1904, the property was sold to the Graf von Schwerin for DM 14,000. Perhaps dreaming of home,

he commissioned Sander to design a castle. Timber was sent out from Germany for massive beams and elements of the von Schwerin coat of arms were incorporated into the design of the fireplace, as well as into an outside fountain.

Originally the Count was sold only the structure and the land it stood upon. In 1917 the City of Windhoek allowed the Count to buy adjoining land with the caveat that von Schwerin allow the city the right to erect their water towers to provide drinking water and fire protection. In addition, water pipes could be constructed to lead from the property down to the military barracks on Jan Jonker Road.

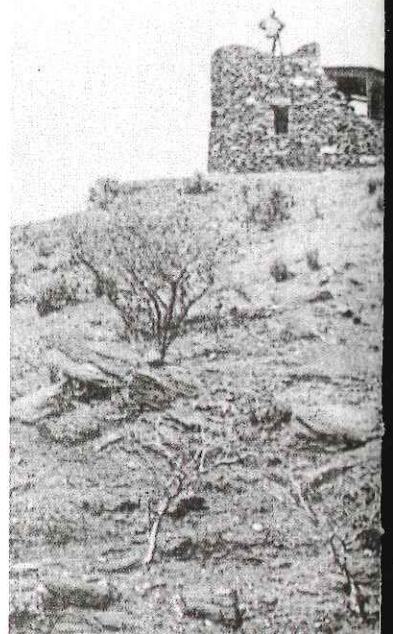




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Windhuk - Sperli  
Deutsch - Südwest





After moving into Schwerinsburg, the Count decided to drill for water himself. Eighteen oxen dragged equipment up the steep grade as Windhoek citizens chuckled at the Count's foolishness. A water diviner was called in to determine where to dig the borehole. After drilling down over 100 metres into the rocky hill, the Count hit water, proving the validity of his instincts.

After seventy years of various owners, the house was purchased in 1990 by the Italian government as the official residence of its ambassador. It was carefully updated while maintaining its historic presence, and it remains a monument to the imagination, energy and nostalgia for home, shared by Willi Sander and Count von Schwerin.



## HEINITZBURG AND SANDERBERG

By 1908, Willi Sander was ready to build his second castle, this time for himself. But Count von Schwerin prevailed upon Sander to sell him the second castle also, this time for his wife, who came from a titled family, von Heinitz. So, the tiny castle just down the hill from Schwerinsburg became Heinitzburg.

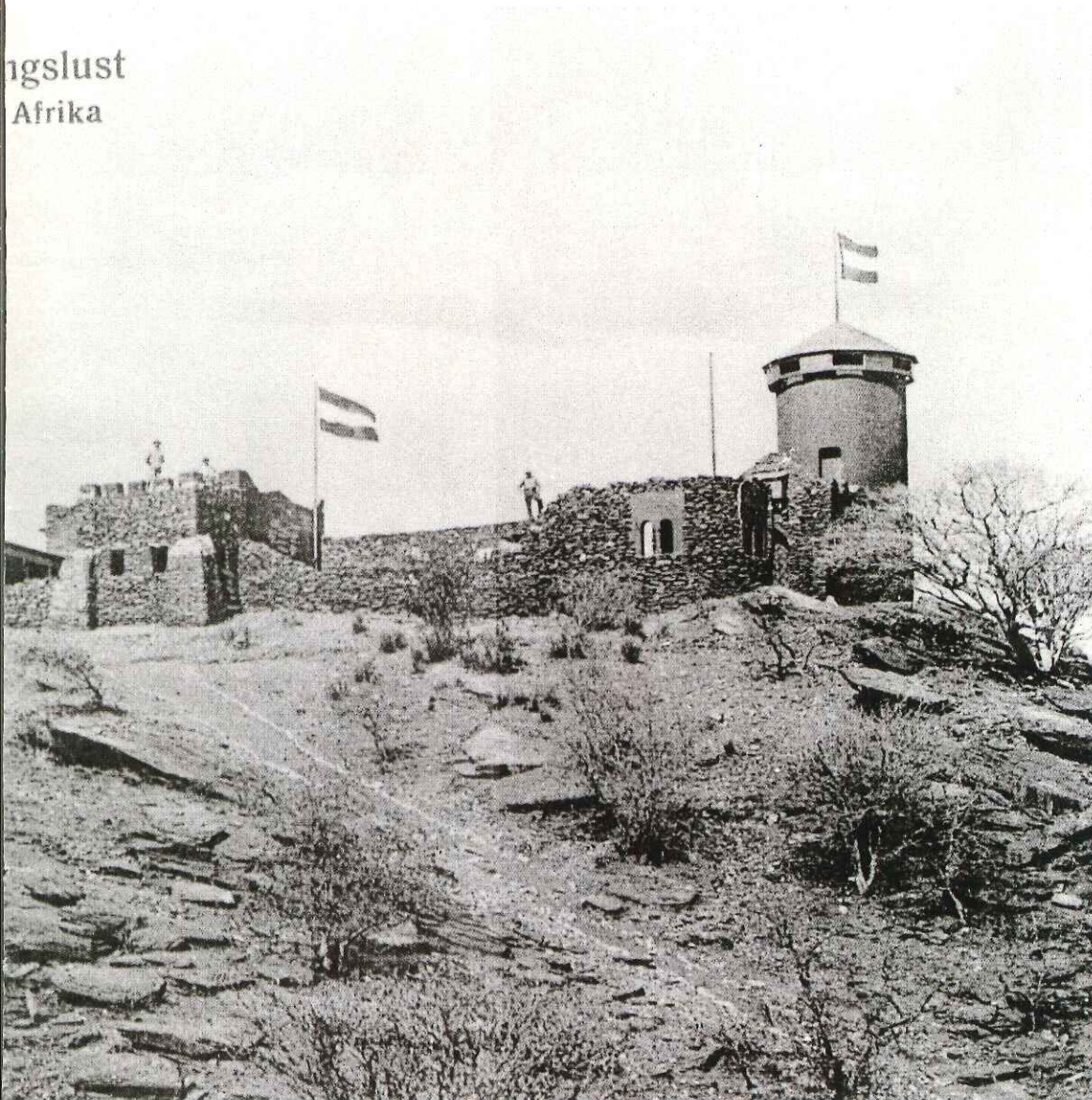
There are tales that the von Schwerins had a rather stormy relationship, which might explain why husband and wife lived in two different castles. There are other rumours that she never lived there at all, although after her death Willi Sander was forced to sue her estate to collect monies owed him for his work on Heinitzburg.

However, there was a path between the two castles, down which the count is reputed to have sent a messenger when he wished to communicate with his wife. There is also the rumour of a tunnel which opens under a trap door at Heinitzburg to come out at the castle above. The entrance can be seen in the lounge at Heinitzburg, but there is no apparent opening

**Heinitzburg  
has always been  
owned by  
dynamic women.**

still extant at Schwerinsburg. Heinitzburg is surrounded by beautiful terraces which give a panoramic view of Windhoek and the mountains beyond. Unlike Schwerinsburg, whose

ngslust  
Afrika



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1. (Previous page) Willi Sander's fireplace at Heinitzburg.
2. (Previous page) Schwerinsburg today with the Italian flag flying.
3. (Previous page) Willi Sander finally found a home at Sanderburg, the third castle he built in Windhoek in the early twentieth century.
4. Baron von Wolf, Master of Duwisib.
5. The garden courtyard of Schwerinsburg today.
6. Schwerinsburg Castle as a fortress.
7. A fireplace in Duwisib.
8. (Following page) Heinitzburg today overlooking the city of Windhoek.
9. (Following page) Heinitzburg overlooking an empty plain earlier in the twentieth century.
10. (Following page) German soldiers enjoy their drinks in the garden of what is today Schwerinsburg Castle.

main tower is round, the Heinitzburg castle has a tall square tower which dominates the structure, plus two smaller round towers at the rear.

Always owned by dynamic women, from the countess to Mrs Olga Levinson, a patroness of the arts in Windhoek for almost half a century, the castle today is the property of Mrs Beate Raith who operates it as a charming small hotel.

From Heinitzburg, one can see up the hill to Schwerinsburg and down the hill to Sanderburg, the third castle in Windhoek where Sander lived from 1917 until 1924. Today Sanderburg is a private home surrounded by the more modern neighbourhood of Luxury Hill.

#### DUWISIB

Perhaps Willi Sander's most ambitious project was the Schloss Duwisib, located in the countryside eighty kilometres from Maltahöhe. Completed in 1909 for Baron Hans-Heinrich von Wolf, Duwisib is a 22-room mansion set incongruously in the most remote middle of

**The castles overlook an arid landscape, like mirages shimmering in the African heat.**

nowhere. The name, which means "the white lime place without water," is an apt description of the location.

Much larger than any of the three Windhoek castles, Duwisib rises above the desert floor as a startling neo-romanesque fortress in the midst of a vast scrubland. The home of the young baron and his rich American bride, Duwisib was a project on which no expense was spared. Building materials

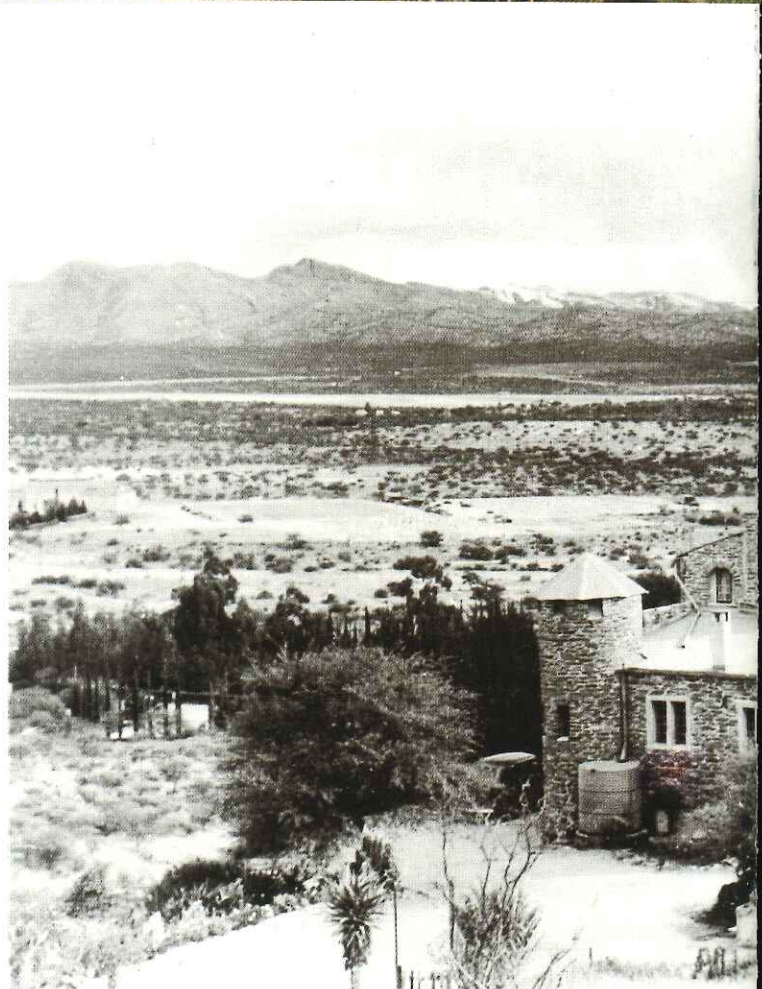


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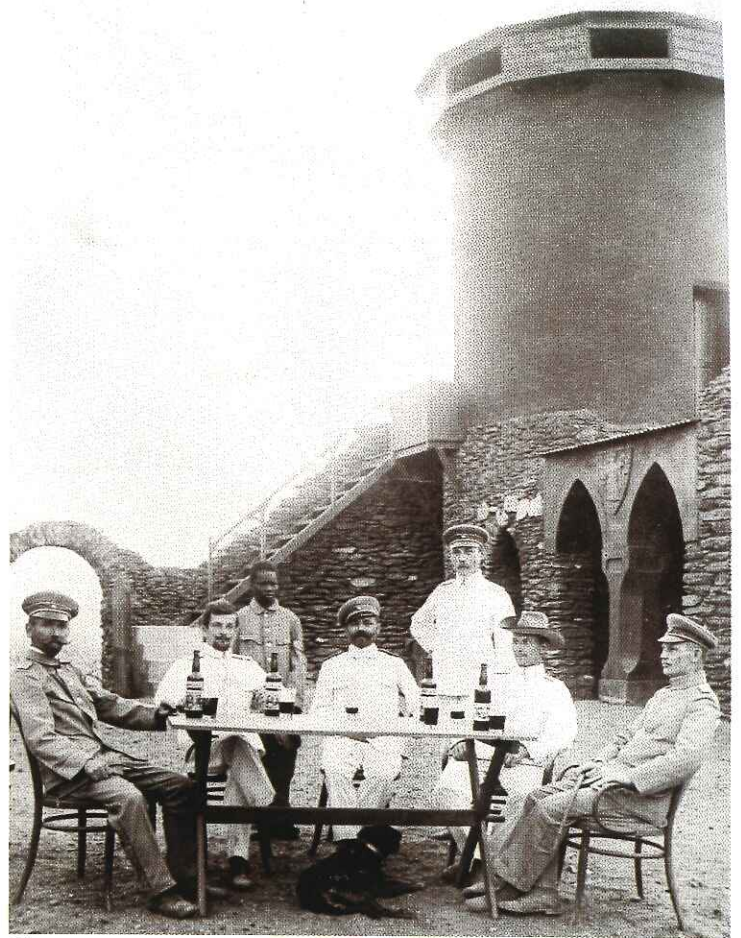
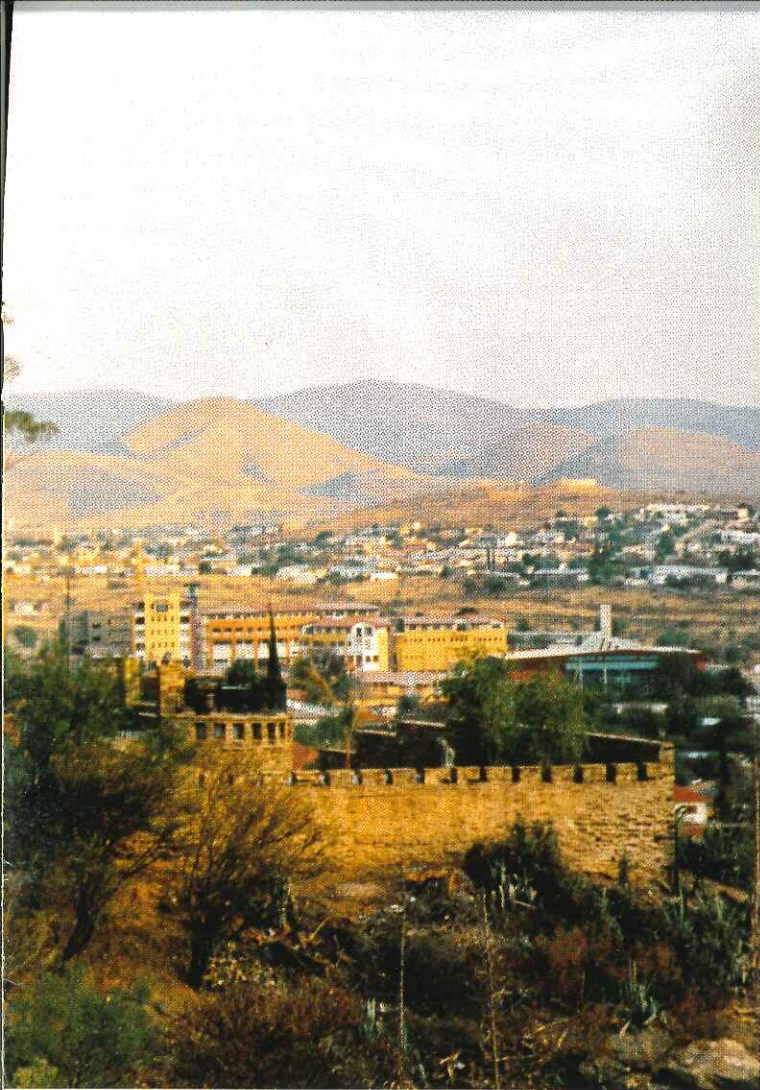
were imported from Europe and for two years ox-driven wagons carted the supplies 650 kilometers across the desert from the port of Lüderitz. In addition, there were masons from Italy to cut bricks from local sandstone, and carpenters from Sweden, Ireland and Denmark to create the Wilhelminic building style. The baron even constructed a swimming pool four meters deep.

Furnished with fine antiques, crystal and artworks, the castle was the site of gala balls and entertainments before World War I. The baron was known for his hell-raising. Old-timers say that he rode eighty kilometres into Maltahöhe once a month, and after the gruelling journey, celebrated by shooting up the local tavern.

The baron bred sheep, cattle and horses and it was on a trip to Brazil with his wife in 1914 to buy either studbulls



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or thoroughbred stallions that he learned the war had broken out. Von Wolf desperately wanted to return to Germany despite the English blockade. His wife, as an American, could travel freely, but the baron had to be smuggled on board a ship where he hid under his wife's bed. He managed to make it to Germany where he reported for duty as an officer and was killed in France in 1916.

### The Medieval castles are the most distinctive of all German buildings.

His wife never returned to Africa, referring to her life in Namibia as "an interesting experiment." Local residents say the couple left the castle unlocked when they left in 1914. Filled with all their belongings, it remained

undisturbed until around 1918 when a Swedish family bought Duwisib. In 1936, it was sold again to Thorer and Hollander, a German felt company who owned the castle for many years, employing professional managers to run the farm. Today Duwisib is owned by the Namibian government which has restored it to a close approximation of its original condition. It is open to the public and there is both a government campground and a restcamp with bungalows adjacent to the property. Still quite remote, it is a two and a half hour drive to Sesreim and three and a half hours to Windhoek.

Thus, while Namibia would be the last place on earth one would expect to find medieval castles, here they are, remnants of the German nobility who once lived in them incongruously overlooking the city of Windhoek and the most remote, arid landscape like mirages shimmering in the African heat.



