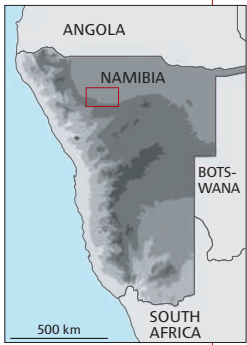


100 years of Etosha – an issue of people and parks



In 2007, the Etosha National Park – the premier tourist attraction in Namibia – celebrates its centenary as a protected area. The popularity of this park, covering an area of 22,270 km², is based on the abundance of wildlife: most of Namibia's lions, elephants, rhinos and other large animals live within the boundaries of the park. Today, when tourists travel on the comfortable roads of the park they think that they are travelling in a virgin natural environment. Nevertheless, Etosha has a long history of human-nature interaction. Even after its inception as a game reserve land use practices were not limited to wildlife conservation alone. For almost fifty years, the southeastern part of the area was still inhabited by people, who primarily survived from hunting and gathering. However, in the 1950s, the former inhabitants were evicted from their previous settlements and the majority had to leave the game reserve. This article outlines the development of the park and its impact on the former residents¹.

The establishment of the game reserve

In 1907, Governor von Lindequist proclaimed the Etosha region as one of three game reserves². During the 19th century, hunting had become an economic enterprise in the northern parts of Namibia and game had become scarce. Therefore, the motivation for the establishment of game reserves was to protect game in specific areas, mainly for economic reasons: 'The use of game reserves for the country might be the following: Centres could be established where game could multiply without disturbance. This increase may mean that game would have to spread out to other grazing areas and eventually reach the farms, where it could be shot and processed'³.

When South Africa took over the territory, the German Proclamation was repealed by Ordinance No. 1 1916 and slightly amended to suit the new situation. Permanently manned police posts were established at Namutoni and Okaukuejo (DE LA BAT 1982: 12).

The proclaimed Game Reserve No. 2 originally included an area of 93,240 km². The many minor and several major boundary alterations (BERRY 1980: 53, DE LA BAT 1982: 19 f; see Fig. 1) indicate that apart from wildlife conservation other considerations were also involved, primarily the native and settler policies. For example, in 1947, the size of the game reserve was reduced by the administration: The Kaokoland portion was set aside "for the sole use and occupation by natives" and 3,406 km² were cut off from Etosha and surveyed as farms for settlers (DE LA BAT 1982: 14).

The early years and Hai||om inhabitants⁴

The area south of Etosha Pan, a huge salt pan, where most of the tourist roads run, had long been the home of a hunter-gatherer community, which was generally categorised as one of the 'Bushmen' or San groups of Namibia.

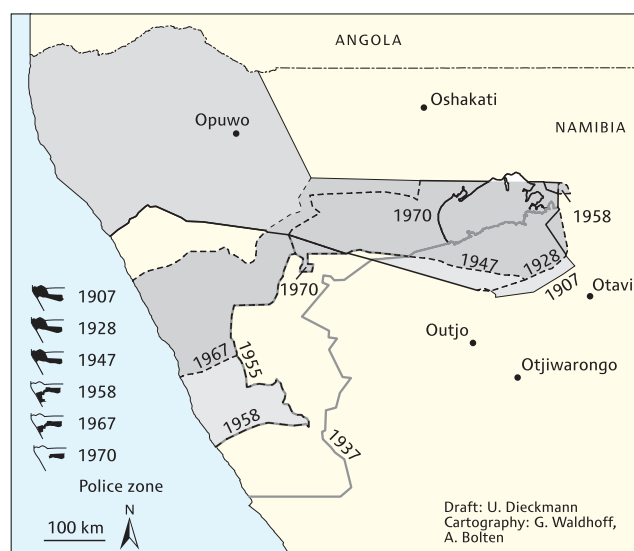


Fig. 1 Etosha border alterations.

They came to be known as Hai||om and were reported to have lived over large parts of northern central Namibia in the 19th century. Initially and for a long time after the establishment of the game reserve, the Hai||om were accepted as residents, while the areas east and south of it were surveyed and occupied as commercial farms. There, laws banning hunting with bow and arrows and vagrancy were applied. Indeed, the park became a temporary refuge for many Hai||om.

The number of Hai||om living in the park varied between a few hundred and one thousand depending on economic and environmental conditions such as the need for farm labour, the seasonal availability of wild foods, or serious droughts. The Hai||om lived in family groups near the various waterholes inside the park. Every group occupied a specific area that often included a number of permanent and seasonal fountains and waterholes, specific bushfood areas and hunting grounds. Headmen, very rarely also headwomen, were called to settle disputes and had to be asked permission by people from other areas for hunting or gathering rights. Usually people moved within their area according to season, and extended family networks guaranteed access to natural resources in other areas (Fig. 2).

All permanent settlements were situated in the vicinity of a waterhole where water was available the whole year round⁵. Men went on seasonal hunting expeditions (*Ihamis*) and women undertook trips (*Iharos*) to gather specific seasonal wild plants. Mostly elder people and children always 'guarding' the permanent settlement.

During the winter, people used to stay closer to the pan, it being the season in which zebra, springbok and wildebeest were to be found there. Winter was also the time when the tourists were passed by. Tourism started slowly in the 1930s and during the early years the reserve was only open for tourism in the winter months. Up to the early 1950s infrastructure for tourists was almost non-existent, tourists used to camp at the police stations and visited waterholes close to the main road Okaukuejo-Namutoni where they – apart from game – encountered Hai||om. Reportedly, the tourists brought oranges, sweets and sometimes clothes for the Hai||om and took photographs. The Hai||om appreciated their visits and the remunerations they got in exchange for posing for photos. Evidently, until the mid 1940s, the Hai||om formed 'part and parcel' of the game reserve as observed by the native commissioner⁶.

For the Bushmen of the wider region the official policy offered two alternatives: either employment on farms, which meant a direct integration into the colonial system, or living within the boundaries of the park⁷. It was the lesser evil to have Hai||om staying there than to have them 'roaming around' on farmland, 'bothering' farmers

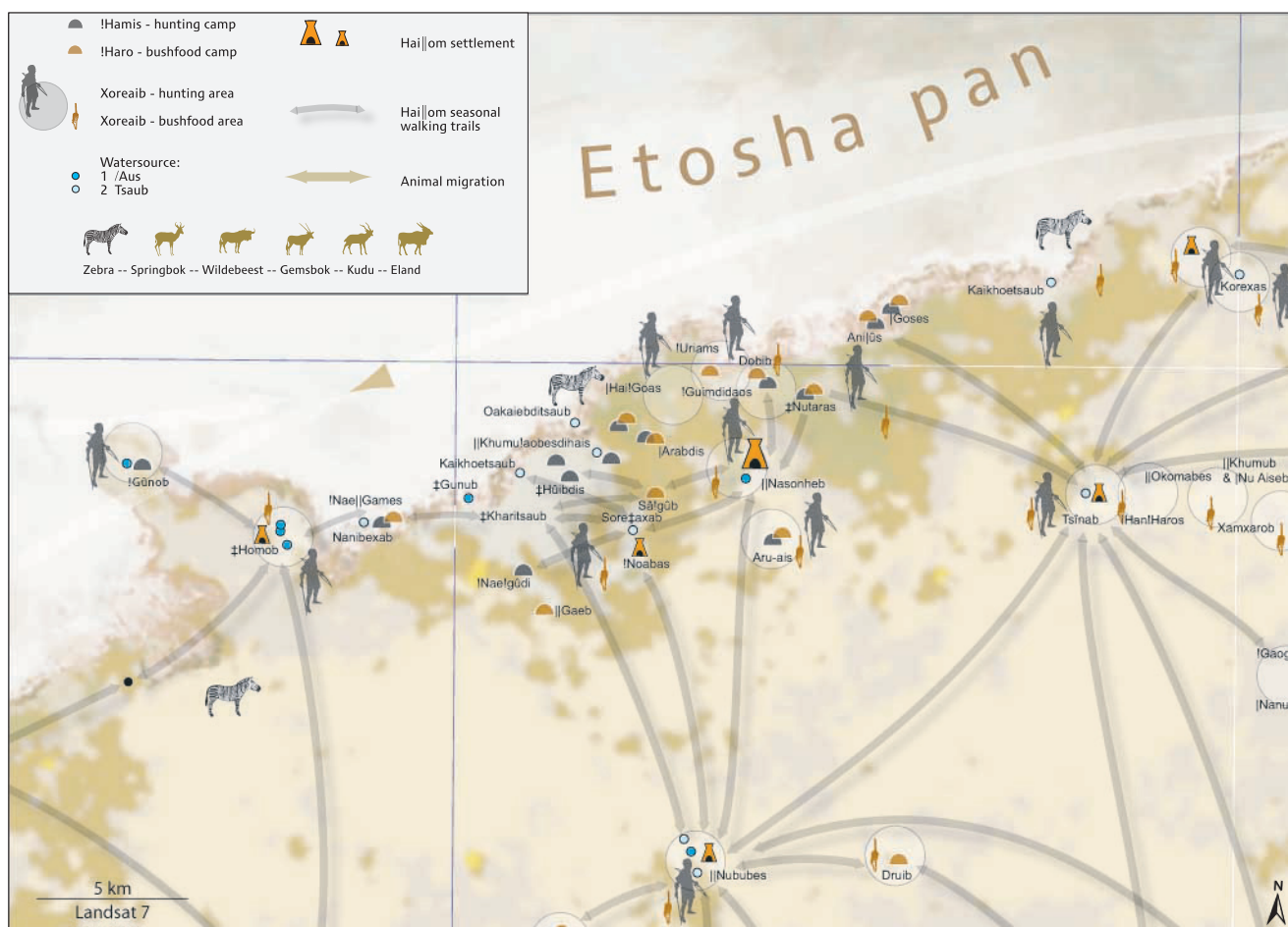


Fig. 2 Hai||om seasonal settlements and mobility south of the Etosha pan as documented prior to the 1950s. The author is involved in a cultural mapping project of the southeastern part of Etosha. The purpose of the project is twofold: 1) to document and recognise the cultural heritage of the Hai||om in Etosha, 2) to use it for tourism to generate income for the former inhabitants. As BODEN (this volume) pointed out, this is of course not a proper presentation of indigenous cognition. I rather understand it as a translation of the knowledge etc. for a broader audience.

and hindering development of the colony. Much like the whole area north of the police zone the game reserve was regarded as a 'dump' for Hai||om. Although the station commanders at Namutoni or Okaukuejo were sometimes concerned about Hai||om moving in and killing game⁸, this problem was not tackled sincerely due to the conflict of interests with the more general Bushmen policy. Furthermore, efficient control measures to prevent Bushmen from entering were lacking as well.

The hunting by Hai||om was not regarded as a problem in the 1920s and 1930s⁹. There were certain limitations such as the ban of firearms and dogs or the prohibition to kill certain species¹⁰, but even their violation could not be pursued thoroughly. Many Hai||om settlements were out of reach for regular police patrols.

A lot of Hai||om families also possessed livestock: especially goats, but also a few head of cattle and donkeys¹¹. Livestock was bought from or exchanged with the Oshivambo speaking people, purchased at farms or were given as remuneration for farm labour. They were a symbol of the owner's wealth, supplied milk and was slaughtered in cases of drought or unsuccessful hunting. There was uncertainty among the officials about the number of stock to be allowed¹². It was decided that the Bushmen should not keep more than 10 head of large, and 50 head of small stock per person within the borders of the reserve¹³. However, during the 1930s, there were fair numbers of livestock at some waterholes. In 1937, numbers definitely exceeded the ten head allowed¹⁴. In 1939, the numbers reported had increased even further¹⁵. The station commander discussed the matter with the stock-owning Hai||om¹⁶ and reported

two months later that all Bushmen livestock owners had reduced their herds considerably¹⁷.

Moreover, there were several opportunities for seasonal or regular employment. In the 1920s a number of Hai||om were employed in the Bobas mine near Tsumeb¹⁸. Hai||om could also seek work on farms around the game reserve, a possibility that several men chose temporarily throughout the first half of the 20th century¹⁹. Furthermore, there were lots of possibilities for temporary employment within the park such as road construction and maintenance or keeping waterholes clean²⁰. Already in the 1920s, some Hai||om had worked for a long period of time at the police stations²¹. Their names appeared frequently in the monthly and annual reports. Without doubt, these men served as cultural brokers, imparting and mediating between the Hai||om out of direct colonial control and the local representatives of the colonial administration.

From the point of view of my Hai||om interview partners, the relationship with the police was usually good, and the work was done voluntarily. Payment for work varied substantially. Sometimes the only payment was the permission to stay in the park, sometimes they were given rations such as mealie meal, sugar and tobacco, and sometimes they received additional wages. The money earned was used to buy blankets and other commercial goods at farm shops. At least in the game reserve, a positive trend can be observed over the years. Threats to expel the Hai||om from the reserve were replaced by rations of mealie meal, sugar and tobacco and later by 'proper' wages and supplements of meat to the food rations.

In short, the first four decades after the establishment of the game reserve entailed an economic diversification

for the Etosha Hai||om. Compared to those Hai||om living some distance from the reserve (or outside the police zone), the inhabitants of Etosha had more and better options, the reserve being protected from occupation by white farmers but at the same time granting open boundaries. Life in Etosha was not isolated, there were also continuous fluctuations of people to and from the area. From the perspective of the Etosha Hai||om, the changes were not seen as a threat to their way of life; rather, they represented a broadening of options.

The transformation: clearing the park from 'wild' residents

Life within the park changed over the years, new laws were made, and new opportunities arose. An increasing interest in tourism²² – and the potential of nature conservation in this context – was observable in the second half of the 1940s (see DIECKMANN 2005 for details).

However, another development was more crucial for the course of events, namely the general Bushmen policy of the administration. From the beginning of colonisation, the administration had faced difficulties in gaining proper control over Bushmen. A magistrate was murdered in the early 1920s by Bushmen, Ovambo contract workers were occasionally attacked and robbed on their way back to Ovamboland, and farmers complained regularly about the Bushmen, whom they held responsible for stock thefts, grass fires and attacks²³. All these factors pressured the administration to solve the 'Bushman problem'. The administration took action: the Vagrancy Proclamation was passed in 1927²⁴ and the Arms and Ammunition Proclamation defining Bushmen bows and arrows as 'firearms' in 1928 (GORDON 1992: 130). Thereafter, a slight improvement was reported in the situation²⁵. Another – controversially discussed – suggestion to handle the 'Bushman problem' was the creation of a Bushmen reserve. Despite all of the discussions and actions taken, the issue of how to deal with the Bushmen was not solved at all until the end of World War II. More concerted steps were taken in the second half of the 1940s.

The first action was the formulation of a general policy with regard to the future treatment and control of 'wild Bushmen', namely to 'befriend' them rather than 'scare them off'. This included food donation schemes, as well as a peaceful and confidence-seeking attitude by the police towards the Bushmen. The police were issued with small supplies of tobacco, salt and maize meal to hand out when necessary in making contact with Bushmen. The main purpose was to prevent further stock thefts²⁶.

A further and more significant move was the appointment of The Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen in 1949. The commission was requested to 'go into the question of the preservation of Bushmen in South West Africa thoroughly and to recommend what action the administration should take in the matter'²⁷. The intention was further explained:

'What the administration wanted was to create conditions where the Bushmen would be able to lead their ordinary lives with a sufficiency of the necessities of life available for them, and where they would be given every opportunity to preserve their separate identity and thereafter to work out their own destiny with the sympathetic help of the administration.'²⁸

The recommendation in the final report with regard to the Hai||om in Etosha was that all Hai||om (except twelve

families still employed within the park) were to leave the game reserve in 1954 and move either to Ovamboland or to farms south of Windhoek, where they were expected to look for work²⁹. The reasons for the decision to expel the Hai||om without any compensation were not clearly expressed in the report. From the perspective of nature conservation, this harsh recommendation might seem surprising, because until then there had been no consistent complaints about Hai||om killing game. Rather, the general opinion that the Hai||om were not 'real Bushmen' was an important factor:

'Nowhere did your [the administrator's] commissioners receive the impression that it would be worthwhile to preserve either the Heikum or the Barrakwengwe [Khwe, another group labelled 'Bushman'] as Bushmen. In both cases the process of assimilation has proceeded too far and these Bushmen are already abandoning their nomadic habits and are settling down amongst the neighbouring tribes to agriculture and stock breeding [...]'³⁰

We are faced here with a remarkable irony of history: The necessity to integrate the Hai||om into the economic system, which did not stop at the borders of Etosha, almost inevitably led to their assimilation. This implied the alienation from an exclusively foraging way of life, and this in turn finally produced the opinion that the Hai||om were not worth 'preserving.'³¹

Nonetheless, just a couple of years earlier, an article about the Etosha Pan Game Reserve, prepared by an officer of the South West African Administration for a publisher in Johannesburg stated: 'Perhaps one should also mention the Bushmen, although nowadays they are no longer classed as 'game'! They certainly fit into the picture and help to give to the Etosha pan something of the atmosphere of the old wild Africa that is fast disappearing everywhere [...]'³². If this view – implying Hai||om being real Bushmen – had reflected the general opinion, the recommendations might have been different.

Noteworthy, one of the committee's members, the anthropologist P. A. Schoeman, had also been responsible for Etosha as a full-time game warden since 1951. He recognised Etosha's tourist potential and had already started to develop tourist infrastructure in the game reserve by constructing bungalows for tourists, improving roads, and drilling new bore-holes (DE LA BAT 1982: 15). Schoemann – like others – did not regard the Hai||om as the archetype of 'pristine' Bushmen (see DIECKMANN 2005: chapter 5.1.2.)

The requests of white farmers might also have been considered in the final recommendations. The farmers needed labour, and perhaps this explains why the Hai||om were ultimately not forced to shift to an area south of Windhoek (originally aimed at preventing them from moving back to their 'homeland'). Instead, it was accepted that they be moved to farms neighbouring the game reserve. The message finally delivered to the Hai||om about their removal was unequivocal: Hai||om had to leave the reserve for the sake of the game [sic!]. They would only be allowed to return if they were in possession of a permit³³. Thus, the official justification for the removal was the protection of game. Three months later it was reported that all Bushmen except for the few employees had left the game reserve to work on neighbouring farms³⁴.

After 1954, more funds were made available for the expansion of tourism, resulting in more specific planning and development. At least some Hai||om could stay

in the park, although no longer at the various waterholes, but under tight control at the rest camps at Okaukuejo and Namutoni and near the two gates, Lindequist and Ombika³⁵. Because of an increase in the need for a labour force, others could return from the farms to work in the park as well.

After 1958, Game Reserve No. 2 became Etosha National Park (BERRY 1980: 53). Due to the shift in objective from game reserve to national park, fencing became both an important and difficult task. The first fences at Etosha were erected by European farmers on the southern boundary during the period between 1955 and 1960. In 1961, an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease in the northern regions of Namibia resulted in the erection of a 'game-proof' fence along the eastern and southern boundaries. The complete fencing of Etosha was finished in 1973 (BERRY 1980: 54). Since governmental interest in tourism had increased significantly and a greater awareness of conservation had also become evident (DE LA BAT 1982: 20), there was no lack of labour in the following years for the remaining Hai||om. Tourist facilities were expanded and new locations for 'black' employees were built³⁶. Women were employed to clean rest camps, and as domestic workers for the sergeants and game wardens. Men were employed in road construction, as cleaners, mechanics, and assistants of the 'veldwagters'. Those who were born in the park were given permission to stay there for the rest of their lives³⁷.

With Namibia's independence in 1990, the political environment changed. New concepts of nature conservation and tourism were to be developed. Now, the impact on, and the eventual benefits to, the local population had to be taken into consideration. Hitherto, no general method had been found to reconcile the interests of local people with those of conservation. Several initiatives were taken, especially by the Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism (now the Ministry of Environment and Tourism [MET]) to approach this issue. Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is one important approach towards reconciling such apparent contradictions of interest. It aims at providing "communal area residents with appropriate incentives to use their resources sustainably" (JONES 1999: 2). Community-based tourism is another relevant concept being developed in communal areas as well (see e.g., Research Discussion Papers of the MET 1994-1999). Since the majority of the Hai||om are living in the commercial farming sector in northern central Namibia (either on the farms or in the townships), they have not benefited from these initiatives. However, discussions are currently taking place between various stakeholders (including the MET, and the Hai||om Traditional Authority) about possibilities for sustainable resource management and livelihood projects for Hai||om on commercial farmland adjacent to Etosha.

Future prospects

The Hai||om, with whom I worked in Etosha, watch this development with suspicion. Up to date, they have the right to stay – and die – in the park even after their retirement. Indeed, many of the former employees currently support their children and grandchildren who themselves no longer get jobs in the national park with their employment based pension. These elderly Hai||om fear another eviction, another clean-up of the park. Although they acknowledge the issue, that the park has to deal with increasing numbers of temporary and partially unofficial inhabitants at

the various locations ('junior staff quarters') near the rest camps, they claim that members of other ethnic groups – also sometimes unemployed – are tolerated, while Hai||om are becoming the first target group of the clean-up. They do not offer final solutions when reflecting on possible steps for the future. However, first and foremost they want a symbolic acknowledgment of their ties to the park, the park not being a 'vast white place', an isolated island, but an area with a rich cultural and historical heritage.

¹ This article is based on archival research in the National Archives in Namibia and several years of field work in the region for my Ph.D. thesis. In Etosha, I mainly worked with elderly key informants, who were born and grew up in traditional settlements within the park area. ² ZBU MII E.1, Ordinance 88 of 1907. ³ ZBU MII E.1, translation by U.D. ⁴ My own research focussed on the south eastern area of the park and thus on Hai||om. To my knowledge, no in-depth research has been undertaken so far on the former inhabitants of the western or northern areas.

⁵ Settlements are considered as being permanent when people reside there the whole year round. ⁶ NAO 33/1, 14.11.1936: Native Commissioner (N.C.) Ovamboland to the Secretary for S.W.A. ⁷ NAO 33/1, Instructions for the Guidance of Game Ranger. The border of the Police Zone passed through Etosha (see HARTMANN et al. 1998: map: viii). ⁸ NAO 33/1, 17.10.1930, Post Commander (P.C.), Namutoni to the N. C., Ovamboland. ⁹ SWAA A50/26, Game Warden to the Native Commissioner, Ovamboland, 20.8.1926, NAO 33/1, 24.8.1936, Magistrate Grootfontein to the Secretary. ¹⁰ NAO 33/1, 17.9.1928, Officer in Charge, Native Affairs, Ovamboland to the P. C., Namutoni. ¹¹ E.g. NAO 33/1, 10.8.1929, Office of the S.W.A. Police, Namutoni to the Officer in Charge, Native Affairs, Ovamboland. ¹² E.g. NAO 33/1, July-August 1929, correspondence of the N. C., Ovamboland and P. C., Namutoni. ¹³ NAO 33/1, 17.10.1929, Officer in Charge, Native Affairs (N.A.), Ovamboland to the P. C., Namutoni. ¹⁴ NAO 33/1, Monthly Return October 1937. ¹⁵ SWAA A511/1, 11.10.1939, Station Commander (S.C.), Namutoni to the N.C., Ovamboland. ¹⁶ Ibid. ¹⁷ SWAA A511/1, 1.12.1939, S. C. Namutoni to the N.C., Ovamboland. ¹⁸ ADM 5503/1, 5.10.1922, 1.6.1924, Game Warden Namutoni to the Secretary for S.W.A., SWAA A50/26, 20.8.1926, Game Warden to the N.C., Ovamboland. ¹⁹ E.g. ADM 5530/1, 30.1.1924, Game Warden Namutoni to the Secretary for S.W.A. ²⁰ E.g. SWAA A511/1 Monthly Return April 1929, NAO 33/1, 22.10.1932, N.C., Ovamboland to the Secretary, 8.8.1938, S.C., Namutoni to the N.C., Ovamboland, SWAA A50/26, 5.9.1940, N.C., Ovamboland to the Chief Native Commissioner (C.N.C.), Windhoek, NAO 33/1, 25.5.1932, Note for the P.C., Namutoni. ²¹ NAO 33/1, 4.9.1928, Officer in Charge, N.A., Namutoni to the Secretary, S.W.A. ²² SWAA A511/10. ²³ SWAA A50/26. ²⁴ SWAA A50/27, 1927, Proclamation No. 32. ²⁵ E.g., LGR 17/15/6, Annual Report 1930. ²⁶ SWAA A50/67, 3.4.1947, Deputy Commissioner, Windhoek to the District Commandants, S.W.A. Police. ²⁷ SWAA A627/11/1, n.d.: 2. ²⁸ Ibid. ²⁹ SWAA A50/67, Secretary to the Administrator-in-Executive Committee, 20.8.1953. ³⁰ SWAA A627/11/1, 1956. ³¹ Preservation of 'pure' peoples had now become desirable. ³² SWAA A511/1, 9.5.1949. ³³ SWAA A50/67b, 1.2.1954. ³⁴ SWAA A50/67, 20.5.1954, S.C., Namutoni to the C.N.C., Windhoek. ³⁵ Since 1967, some have also stayed at Halali, an additional rest camp opened during that year (BERRY et al. 1996: 38). ³⁶ NTB N 13/3/2, 1958. ³⁷ I did not get exact information about the date, but both the Chief Game Warden and Hai||om informants assured me that they could stay there if they had been born there.