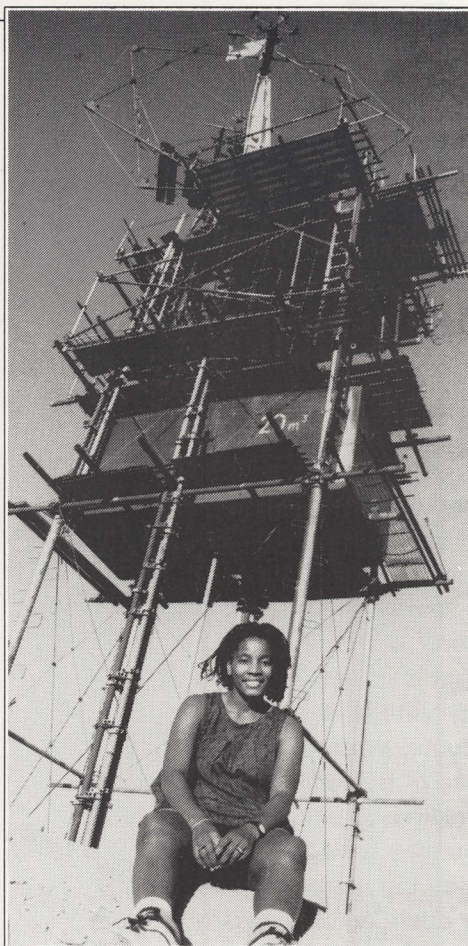


The South is dry country. People eke out a living on land that can sustain a few goats and donkeys but not much else. Travelling through lonely land on the gravel road towards Luderitz, nothing but a silent and peaceful landscape is in sight for kilometres. And then suddenly a bizarre structure rises out of the earth. It is a type of windmill. On the other side of the road is a farmer's house. Farmers here are dependent on underground water for their livestock.

My friend and colleague Maila, who does the marketing and distribution of Sister magazine, views this land with newborn eyes. She is a woman from the North and spent 15 years in exile. She is of the opinion that you can grow crops on this land if you can get rid of the stones. I laugh. Maila is always on the look-out for "ways and means" to improve the lives of Namibians. She has the mind of an entrepreneur, constantly speculating possibilities others may have overlooked. I have become used to this. Sometimes it fascinates me, other times I think she's crazy.

At the windmill structure I ask her to sit for a photo. We each need to go to the toilet, but the nearest one is in Aus, another 120 km further on. The highest bush around is ankle high. We squat low on the ground, see the farmer's bakkie approaching, cannot wait to get air-dried and run laughing back to the combi.



At the windmill structure I ask her to sit for a photo.

A trip down South

A sketch by Estelle Coetzee

In the combi we talk about yesterday's incident when we got stuck in a dry riverbed between Schlip and Maltahöhe. It was not just any river, according to the good-hearted farmer who promptly stood up from his meal when I asked him to help us out. It was the mighty Khan, the same river that runs through Rehoboth. We laugh again, remembering how he instructed us to fetch "skille" (the bark of dead trees) to put under the back wheels, paying no heed to the fact that I told him Maila could not understand Afrikaans well. We took it that he could not speak English.

"Hierdie lewe wil gelewe wees" (this life wants to be lived), he replied when I asked him if it was hard to make a living off that land. The sun was very low when we finally sped (following the farmer's advice of "gee bietjie petrol") through the riverbed, leaving him and his stories about the river flooding and people getting stuck behind.

Also now the sun was diving when the combi suddenly wouldn't go faster than 80km per hour. Ah shit, will we reach Lüderitz tonight I wondered. Luckily the crossing to Aus was only ten minutes away and we were back onto tarred road.

At Aus the petrol attendant assured us the problem was caused by the change in atmospheric pressure and that the engine would adjust. The ocean was near, but it was almost dark and a dangerous stretch of road lay ahead. Mighty strong wind and small sand dunes creeping their way across the road are characteristic of the Aus-Lüderitz road.

Both Maila's and my eyes were glued to the road. I asked her if she could sing to keep our spirits up. She went right ahead with Oshiwambo, West African and her own songs. The one I liked best she had learned in Sierra Leone in Pidgin English. It's about asking a friend for help, saying that money is not the problem, that she can pay.

Then she sang one of her own songs, a somewhat bitter one about the time she was deserted by the father of her baby girl. By the time we reached Lüderitz that night we only had energy for a light meal before we hit the sheets. ●