THE GOBABEB HISTORY

Gobabeb Research and Training Centre

"Oasis of Learning"

Gobabeb is a catalyst for gathering, disseminating and implementing understanding of arid environments

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Early Namib Expeditions

It took several long expeditions before the discovery and selection of the place known today as Gobabeb Research and Training Centre. In 1948, a group of scientists from Transvaal Museum, South Africa, and University of California, Berkeley, embarked on a joint expedition through the southern Namib and Kalahari areas. The group was sponsored by the State Aluminum Dility, Consolidated Diamond Mines, General Motors and Shell Oil Company.

As from 1949-1957, a multidisciplinary team, in which the group consisted of scientists led and funded by Mr. Bernard Carne, an industrialist, and the late Charles Koch of the Transvaal Museum, undertook several expeditions through southern Namibia, Kalahari, and adjacent areas. These expeditions, which lasted about 10 days, were initiated by the State Aluminium Dility, Consolidated Diamond Mines, General Motors and Shell Oil Company.

Selection of Gobabeb

In 1957, Dr. Charles Koch, together with Mr. G. Port, a Honorary Warden of the Nature Reserve, and Bernard Carne visited Gobabeb (known as J/Nobabeb) for the first time. The men were already familiar with the area, having visited the site for a research station, because of its great diversity of fauna, especially the terrestrial birds. The choice of this site was also influenced by its proximity to the distinct desert biotopes: (a) the flood (up to 120 meters in height) moving dunes of loose wind-blown sand, (b) the open flat gravelly, hard-packed plains and (c) the dry bed of the Kuiseb River, supporting a comparatively good vegetation cover of shrubs and trees.

Another added advantage to the selection of this site was that it is within the boundary of the Garie Reserve, thereby ensuring some protection for long-term research sites. In 1959, a report was taken at the Transvaal Museum in South Africa to set up a field station at Gobabeb in order to facilitate Namib future research. The following year, the Head of the Department of Nature Conservation, M. B. de la Bat, the Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr. V. FitzSimons, accompanied by Dr. Koch, Mr. Port, and Mr. Kal来自, established the headquarters of the J/Nobabeb Research Station, which was then known as the J/Nobabeb Research Station.

Gobabeb History

1948
University of California, Berkeley, and the Transvaal Museum embark on a joint expedition through the southern Namib and Kalahari areas.

1949-1957
The expeditions of the Transvaal Museum continued. This time they also go to northern Namib and adjacent areas.

1957
Dr. Charles Koch (Entomologist of the Transvaal Museum) and Mr. A.F. Port (Honorary Warden of Nature Reserve No.3) first visit to Gobabeb.

1958
The Transvaal Museum in South Africa agreed to set up a field station in the central Namib Desert to facilitate research there.

1959
The Bernard Carp Expedition confirmed Gobabeb (also known as J/Nobabeb) as the site for a research station.

1960-1970

1960
The Head of the Department of Nature Conservation, M. B. de la Bat, and the Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr. V. FitzSimons, accompanied by Dr. Koch, Mr. Port, and Mr. KalLOOR, confirm the final location of the station during a visit.

1970
Dr. Charles Koch moved away in Windhoek and M. K. Saison became Director of DIER.

Transvaal Museum granted the site

In 1981, the South West African Administration granted the Transvaal Museum the Gobabeb site on a 50-year lease for R200 per year. In February of the following year, an Action Committee for Gobabeb was formed. The committee included the South West Africa Scientific Society (now Namibia Scientific Society), State Museum (now National Museum of Namibia), Department of Nature Conservation (now Ministry of Environment and Tourism), the Transvaal Museum, and Council for Scientific and Industrial Research of South Africa (CSIR). These institutional partnerships together laid the foundation for the Namib Desert Research Station (NDRSA), which was established in 1982.

Fundraising campaigns

To raise money for development of the station, a fund-raising campaign was launched in 1982. The fundraising included a series of auctions. Among others, one of the items written by the then Director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr. R. FitzSimons, was published in the Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum No. 6, January 1961, p.2. This auction was a success, contributions were received from various sources both in South Africa and overseas. By the end of 1982, approximately R5 000 was raised. The use of the station is primarily for any research personnel from anywhere in the world, as long as it is done through the coordinating bodies and prior approval to conduct research is obtained.

First scientific papers

In 1985, Dr. Koch started his research at Gobabeb, when the site was recognized as a Namib Desert Research Station. Scientific papers from the Namib Desert Research Station, edited by Dr. Koch, started to be written and published that same year. These papers are available in the Gobabeb Library. Scientific research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was mainly directed towards climate, ecology, and geology of the desert landscape, archaeological remains of ancient inhabitants and any other subject which shed light on the coasts, islands, and weather of the desert. The weather station was set up in 1992 and was monitored since then. Thanks to Gobabeb, the Namib is today one of the most thoroughly researched deserts of the world.
First buildings and upgrading

In July 1960, the station was completed and opened. The newly erected buildings were official opened by Honorary Mr. D. T. du P. Wipper, along with Mr. Fitzsimons as Convener and Dr. Koch as Secretary of the association. This building (now part of the tea house) was a simple house, which consisted of a small research area for Dr. Koch and his wife. The station has a kitchen and a living area for visiting scientists, as well as an extensive laboratory. The following year, new facilities were added to the station, such as a landing strip, communication network, and a water tower and generator. The station was also equipped with a laboratory and a research area for visiting scientists.

Exhibition of Namib endemic plants in Paris

The year 1964 was a remarkable one for the Namib Desert. In that year, the most famous endemic Namib plants, Wolvisthelia and Hares Plants, were displayed at the International Flower Exhibition in Paris, France. The event was held in both the Namib Desert and the Namib Desert on the world map, especially for botanists. It increased the awareness of the station and the number of visiting researchers, most of whom came to carry out their scientific research projects.

Formation of DERU

On May 13, a partnership between CSIR and Transvaal Museum formed the Desert Ecological Research Unit (DERU) with Dr. Koch as the first director of DERU. The establishment of DERU also ensured a greater degree of permanency for the research work.

New experiments, New ideas

As research grew, so did the experiments. In 1965, Dr. Koch used helicopters to collect samples from the site. This was the first use of helicopters to collect samples from the site. This technique was later used to collect samples from other sites.

More funds to the building

Year by year the Centre continued to grow, both in staff capacity and infrastructure. In 1968, the first people were appointed as staff at Golubeb. The CSIR donated R52,000 to extend the buildings of the station. In 1968 the first people were appointed as staff at Golubeb. The station was extended to include a research area for visiting scientists, a laboratory, and a research area for visiting scientists.

1970-1970

End of association

Early 1970, Dr. Koch continued his work with the Department of Nature Conservation. The NORSO (now known as the NORSO) took over the management of the station in 1970. The NORSO then transferred the research infrastructure to the new Bridger Research Unit in Windhoek.

The death of Dr. Koch, appointed of Dr. Sedgey

In February 1971, Dr. Sedgey was appointed as the Director of Transvaal Museum. In his honour, a commemorative volume of the scientific papers of the Namib Desert Research Station was published. The volume consisted of 25 papers, written by his colleagues and other researchers who had conducted research through the Transvaal Museum and DERU.

1960-1970

An unexpected contribution from the Namib Desert to our understanding of early hominid-bearing fossil assemblages

By C.K. (Bob) Brain, Emeritus Curator at the Ditsong Museum of Natural History (Transvaal Museum), Pretoria.

In 1969, I was privileged to have been a member of the Bernard Carles-Delabre Expedition, led by Charles Koch, that made its way down into the Namib Desert from Windhoek to set up a site for the establishment of the Namib Desert Research Station. The spot chosen was at Golubeb, on the northern bank of the Kuiseb River, where high dunes to the south of the river bed were within walking distance of the gravel plains to the north. Here the first buildings of the Namib Desert Research Station were erected and opened in 1969 and I returned there two years later to set up an experiment designed to show how bones weather in an arid environment. This was a major project, with which I was then busy, aimed at the interpretation of fossil collections from South African caves that included remains of early hominids. The objective was to establish what animals had contributed bones to the collections, and to recuperate how these animals, including our human ancestors and relatives, lived and died. This very labour-intensive undertaking has been inspired by Raymond Dart, who, without being affected by the natural environment, has lived in the southern African desert for over 20 years. Dart's basic research was on his studies of an extraordinary fossiliferous deposit in the Makapan Hang Dam, which he had been carried out by a local school teacher.

As this style of writing strike me as unusual in a serious scientific context, I asked Dart what he hoped to achieve by using it. He replied without the slightest hesitation, "That will get them talking!" He continued, "I want to discuss the activities of Dart's word on the behavior of our early ancestors that I spent 40 years developing the new discipline of Cave Technology, whereby fossils in African caves could be interpreted with more interesting content and more interesting inferences. And this is where the unexpected contribution from the Namib Desert came in. In that large sample of antelope fossils from the Makapan Hang Dam, Dart had found that certain parts of the skeletons were common, while others were not represented at all. For instance, lower jaw bones were abundant, but Dart thought these had been deliberately selected by our ancestors as tools or weapons, while in the case of antelope front leg bones or humeri, the lower and upper ends were ten times more common than the upper or lower ends. Once again, Dart concluded that the lower ends had been specially valued as tools and weapons, while the upper ends were simply discarded.

Dr. Sedgey then made some interesting use of paleoanthropology in the field of paleoanthropology. In the field of paleoanthropology, Dr. Sedgey then made some interesting use of paleoanthropology in the field of paleoanthropology.

Starting in the 1950s, he arranged for a sample of over 7000 fossil bones to be shipped from the field campaign and found that those included remains of ape-men similar to those from Taung and Sibonkolin, although over 60 percent of the bones came from antelopes.
It so happened that when I was at Gobabeb in 1965, I noticed that there were numerous goat bones lying on the sand in the nearby villages occupied by Nama Toprak people. Out of sheer curiosity, I picked up a sample of these bones and laid them out on a table at the Research Station. It struck me at once that some parts of the skeletons were well represented, while others were rare or absent. Lower ends of the humerus bones, for instance, had been so important in Dart's osteodentocultural concept, were common but, search as I might, I could not find a single upper end of a humerus. The explanation was not difficult to find: the bones represented the resistant residue of goat skeletons, able to survive the treatment they had received. But what had this treatment been? Inquiries and observations showed that goats were virtually the only source of meat for these rural people. When a goat was slaughtered, its body was treated in a traditional manner and those parts that the people found edible were tossed to their dogs, that were typically the size of jackals. Where they, in turn, were finished, the parts unreachable by person or dog were left on the desert surface, where recovery was easy for me, as the sand was devoid of vegetation in the villages. Apart from occasional heaves, no other carnivors or scavengers were involved. After the initial renaissance in 1965 (Brain, 1967), I returned the following year to collect all the available bones and investigate the circumstances in greater detail. On this occasion, I was accompanied by Trisha Jenkins, who undertook a thorough genealogical and demographic study of the Nama population there. We found that the total population of the lower Kuiseb Valley was 135 people who lived in eight separate villages. Between them, they had 40 dogs and 1754 goats, while the spacing of the villages along the riverbank was determined by the number of goats kept at each. Since grazing could only take place in the riverbed and the outside of a village's pasture was measured in a linear fashion (Brain & Jenkins, 1967, Brain, 1969). The collection of bones made in the villages consisted of 2375 pieces, which included 386 bones and horn-core pieces from an estimated number of 190 individuals.

However, it was clear that the horns survived the weathering effects of the arid desert climate much better than did other bone pieces and in long-deserted villages, these were the only parts to be found. Therefore, in the final estimation of the number of animals involved, horns were excluded in favour of the next most abundant element, which happened to be lower jaw pieces. Since Dart's Makapansgat sample, I found that the 448 jaw fragments came from a minimum of 66 individual goats that had contributed to the sample.

On known tooth-echuation and wear criteria, I continued to believe that there was no tooth in the sample that had died before the age of 15 years. The goat had therefore been slaughtered largely when under a year in age, or when fully mature. The village people confirmed that this was their usual practice, the yearlings being the best meat. As many old pieces, the most common preserved skeletal element was the distal humerus, followed by the distal tibia, proximal radius, and ulna and so on. Parts absent altogether were tail vertebrae and proximal humeri. The conclusion was drawn simply that survival is not hazardous, but related to the inherent qualities of the parts (Brain, 1969, p. 21).

In contrast to the goats, the cattle are not as well represented in the sample, since the collection of cattle was made from a mixed population of 2357 pieces, which included 386 bones and horn-core pieces from an estimated number of 190 individuals. However, it was clear that the horns survived the weathering effects of the arid desert climate much better than did other bone pieces and in long-deserted villages, these were the only parts to be found. Therefore, in the final estimation of the number of animals involved, horns were excluded in favour of the next most abundant element, which happened to be lower jaw pieces. Since Dart's Makapansgat sample, I found that the 448 jaw fragments came from a minimum of 66 individual goats that had contributed to the sample.

Bronze plaque in memory of Dr. Koch
In June 1971, a bronze plaque in memory of Dr. Koch was unveiled at Gobabeb by Prof. F. G. Eloff, Chairman of the Transvaal Museum. This plaque is still in place at the station, in front of the reception office.

Three-wheeled motorcycle introduced
Prof. Bill Hammond introduced the three-wheeled motorcycle in 1972. These vehicles were a valuable asset to desert research over sand. These vehicles were mainly used for research in the sand dunes.

Publication continues
The three-famous Scientific Paper series of the Namib Desert Research Station was amalgamated with Muskoka, a publication of the South West African Administration. The first Namib Bulletin was published as a supplement to the Transvaal Museum Bulletin in 1976. In addition, papers by D. S. and Prof. Hamilton on the use of fog by Namib dune tarantula beetles were featured on the cover of Science and Nature in 1976.

Expanded facilities
The South West African Administration Works Department completed a major building programme at the station in 1974. The expanded new buildings of the station were re-named the Namib Research Institute. An opening ceremony for the newly erected buildings coincided with the annual DERU Steering Committee meeting on 1 August 1974.

First of many films
In the same year, Anglia Television made the first natural history film at Gobabeb. This film covered the station facilities as well as the research being conducted over the years. The film was first shown in 1975 and almost immediately thereafter adopted by National Geographic.

Double Three Radio
Double three, double three, double three, double three, come in double three this is two six. Double three, double three, double three, double three, this is two six. Many were the long hours we spent at the radio sending the weather, exchanging short messages, and saying those words over and over again. What a relief when we emerged into the "in-person" communication - although we still aren't totally there.

Longest flood flow post Gobabeb
The year 1974 was a remarkable year at Gobabeb flood monitoring station. It represented the longest period of Kuiseb flow recorded at Gobabeb – 102 days – since observations began in 1959.
My involvement with DERU and its various life forms

Willie Weideman

The South Africa Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was established during 1948, and I joined the Council's University and Medical Research Division during 1956 and soon realized that this was the best career move I could ever make. All of a sudden I had a different set of clients. Clients who were well educated, who were engaged in the pursuit of new knowledge either as postgraduate students, professional officers at museums, or as academics. These people impressed me with their single-mindedness, their enthusiasm and enduring minds.

The excitement surrounding the scientists involved in fundamental research somehow rubbed off on the administrative members of the Division. Reading or discussing about the scientific breakthroughs of "our" grant holders invariably gave me quite a boost. I was promoted as head of the Research Grants Division (RGD) of the CSIR in 1979-80, i.e., after the SA Medical Research Council was established. The RGD was responsible for the award of postgraduate bursaries and the support of research in the General Science and Engineering at Universities and Museums.

I was during this period that I started to travel around the country as Secretary to the Investigating, Steering and Review Committees that were established to oversee the research support and the state of the work undertaken at the various Research Units and Groups running the country. The Desert Ecological Research Unit was established because of Dr. Charles Koch's reputation and record as a research worker with an outstanding record of achievement. At around the time Dr. Koch became critically ill. and when Dr. Dr. Koch was still working as Acting Director I was asked to visit Gaborone to help with the distribution of building household and research equipment acquired by Dr. Koch over the years.

"Don't Leave proved to be the one of the most stable, friendly and knowledgeable persons I have ever met. He helped me to make my stay at Gaborone a memorable experience. We worked hard and finished the task in record time. To thank him and all the other people of Gaborone, I bought a gift from Mr. Koesje, the Chief of the Nama tribe, who was kind enough to offer his assistance and supply with a "nana", a name of the Nama tribe's most famous beverage. This beverage is available at Dr. Seely attended the "nana" and brought some salt to give a semblance of class to the occasion. She left early and thus missed the most remarkable hunting and other adventure stories one could ever wish for. I found the Namibians to be a truly remarkable people and during that night the trip to the Nama desert to make a new friend there.

That evening proved to be the first of the annual legendary "nana". It took place on the evening after the DERU steering Committee had finished its work. The only difference from the original "nana" in later years was the singing led by our researcher, Dr. Gerhard Krabbendam, and the fact that Dr. Seely and her staff took over the catering and provision of more kosher meals and more palatable dishes than the goats meat, liver and puli porridge of my first Nama "nana". Other great happenings at Gaborone, like the seminars, the volleyball matches and the going down of the Sun ceremonies performed on the large dunes across the river will remain with me forever.

I was truly blessed to have known so much of the Nama and their very generous people. The expedition to Solitaire and Sesriem I remember because of a young Dutch technician's strange behavior after becoming dehydrated. He did not like the water we had and would not stop to drink beer. Also vivid in my memory is the time when Dr. Koch and I plus two committee members, went to Sandwich Harbour. We arrived there at about 11:30 and found two nozzles conserving almost frozen stuff in their vehicle. They were too cold to fix a second flat tyre. On the same trip the two committee members who steel remained anonymous showed the only bedroom in the shack at Sandwich. Both of them smelt like gunpowder. But I took our sleeping bags as far away from them as possible. The next morning they complained separately to me about their felonious sleeping and vowed never to share a bedroom with each other again.

The co-operation of Mr. de la Rie and his successors Mr. Pieter Swart and Mr. Eugene Jobse as well as Mr. CS Coetzer, Director of the State Museum Windhoek was of the highest order. Without it the Unit could have been so successful.

What a marvelous lot these committee members were. They took their responsibility as peer reviewers very seriously even though they only received a very modest subsistence and transport allowances for the three or four days we annually spent at Gaborone. I must also specially mention Mr. CK Brain, Director of the Transvaal Museum and Mr. K Eerens, Head of the Museum's administration. Their courtesy, cheerful cooperation and quest for excellence helped me to a great deal and I shall always stay with me.
First DERU/Gobabeb symposium
In 1981 DERU organized a symposium as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting in San Francisco. The aim of this symposium was to promote Gobabeb internationally.

Gobabeb appeared in BBC film
In 1981, Gobabeb contributed to a BBC film as it was the first time. The film "The Rising Desert", described the desert biomes. This film was part of David Attenborough's Planet Earth Series. In 1982, another BBC film, "The vanishing River" by Rod and Moira Borland was produced at Gobabeb. Another film was made by Dr Yves Coliné, Paris, in the same year.

Ecology of Desert Organisms book published
A book titled Ecology of Desert Organisms by Prof Gideon Low and Dr. Seely was published in 1982.

Show and Tell
In 1983 Gobabeb held the first open weekend (19-20 March) which thereafter became an annual event. About 500 people, particularly from Swakopmund, visited the Centre that weekend. DERU hosted the Zoological Society of Southern Africa's annual meeting in Swakopmund under the theme Zoology of Arid and Semi-arid Environments. Additionally, DERU hosted field excursions in the Namib in collaboration with the South African Society for Quaternary Research meeting in Swakopmund entitled Late Quaternary Palaeoenvironments of the Southern Hemisphere. In this same year, for the first time an article about the Namib and Gobabeb appeared in the National Geographic Magazine.

Award given to Dr. Seely
In 1986 the first Foundation for Research Development comprehensive grant was awarded to Dr. Seely. The aim of the award was to enhance research activities at DERU. The year also welcomed delegates from all over Africa to a field excursion of the IV International Colloquium on Ecology and Taxonomy of African Small Mammals, which was hosted by Gobabeb.

Major contribution to Central Namib Development
Gobabeb contributed additionally to the West Coast Planning Meeting held in Swakopmund in 1986. The result from the meeting was a document entitled "Guidelines for the Development of the Central Namib." This meeting produced other comprehensive information about the coastal area.

A Scientist Remembers
Pam de Villiers, working on her PND on fenebrod beetles, introduced me to Gobabeb, and I was hooked. Mary Seely had already been on a universitywide radio show to convince South Africans to use the Gobabeb research station on their doorstep. Fascinated as I was, I never imagined I would go there, let alone become involved. It was an ideal time to work on fenebrod beetles. Much of the pioneering work on collecting and identifying beetles living in the Namib was completed by then. The site of the research station had been chosen for its proximity to an amazingly rich and diverse beetle fauna described and identified by Charles Koch.

The Namib Book, first version publication
In 1987, the first version of The Namib: Natural History of an Ancient Desert by Dr. Seely was published by Shelly Oil SWA Ltd. In the same year, the first Foundation for Research Development contact exchange program started at Gobabeb. The visit was led by Dr. Y. Levin.

DERU Renome
The DERU unit was renamed to Desert Biological Research Unit (DERU) at Namibia (DERU of Namibia) in 1989.

First EE course at Gobabeb, birth of DRFN
In 1989, the Advisory Committee of DERU at Namibia agreed that in future DERU should put greater emphasis on educational training programs that are directly relevant to the country. In this regard, the first Ecology Methods course for the 3rd year Zoology Students from Academy of Namibia (University of Namibia) was held at Gobabeb. That same year, DERU of Namibia (in Swakopmund) at an international conference, DUNES '89, Geomorphology and Ecology of the Coastal and Desert Sand Dunes.

DERU of Namibia co-hosted the 3rd Colloquium of the Research Group for the Study of African Aridlands, at Swakopmund. The new unit also hosted a meeting on Namib/Bergenue Interactions at Gobabeb.

The new exciting questions lay in understanding how these beetles survived and thrived in what to us was a barren and demanding environment. It was a great time for eco-physiological studies. The big rains of the early seventies followed by extensive periods of grass development had allowed for a beetle population explosion in later years and beetles were plentiful to work on.

Liz McCalm wandered in from the USA and worked at Gobabeb as a post-doctoral student with Raul Pampolino and charmed many of us into working with her. One specific project related to how some beetles protect themselves against desiccation while searching for food or mates in the bright sunlight and at baking temperatures. Numbers of species were found to produce wax ‘brooms’ on their bodies which reduced water loss from the body surface. We learned how the wax was secreted by glands in the integument and how it formed brooms on the beetle surface when they were exposed to dry conditions. Those of us not stationed at Gobabeb provided expertise and equipment and collaborated with scientists like Liz who did the field work.

We were all enhanced by the process.

Funds for running the research station at Gobabeb were hopelessly inadequate but the enthusiastic and collaborative approach to research fostered by Mary Seely made working there and working with people stationed there a career best.

By: Professor Shirley Hamilton
Namibia Independence, more opportunity for Gobabeb and its partner DFRN

In February 1989, the Koch Namib Research Foundation which was established in 1971 was dissolved and its finances and other assets were transferred to DFRN, together with the Gobabeb assets of the Transvaal Museum. On the 21st March 1990 Namibia became independent from South African government. Soon after independence, DFRN together with Gobabeb extended its focus from the Namib to the entire country.

Enviroteach materials developed

The Enviroteach materials, first developed in training for Gobabeb, the centre welcomed more than 100 Environmental Education groups. In 1990 to 1999 years, Gobabeb and DFRN staff developed Environmental Education materials under the Enviroteach Programme. The programme was funded by Sida, the materials were developed in partnership with Gobabeb, MMEC and NEDO. Enviroteach materials were tested out in primary and secondary schools in Namibia and extended to Botswana. Nowadays, the materials are used with visiting training groups at Gobabeb.

Start of SDP programme at Gobabeb

In 1990/1991, Gobabeb in partnership with DFRN, initiated an annual Summer Desertification Programme. This programme was aimed at tertiary students, mainly from the Polytechnics of Namibia, University of Namibia and Agricultural Colleges. By the end of 2005, about 150 students were trained through this programme. Many of these students, who have jobs in influential positions in government or NGOs, while others are still studying.

The founding President of Namibia visits Gobabeb

In 1991, the first President of Namibia, His Excellency Dr Sam Nujoma visited Gobabeb. The aim of the visit was to learn about the Centre and its activities and to hear presentations from SDP2 participants. In the same year DFRN moved its headquarters to Windhoek, leaving a research unit at Gobabeb station. Gobabeb on its own expanded its education and training activities.

International scientist at Gobabeb

The first time I came to Gobabeb was in 1997. I had just arrived in Namibia, taking up the position as the YB-SR at the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia. The Southern African Development Community Centre for Hydrology and Environmental Engineering (SADC) in 1997 designated Gobabeb as a SADC Centre of Excellence under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Birth of Gobabeb Training and Research Centre and Funds from GTZ

In 1998, a joint venture agreement between the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and Gobabeb was signed. The Centre was officially opened as the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre. The German Government, through German Organisation for Technical Development (GTZ) in collaboration with SADC, provided funds for the new centre. GTZ continued to provide financial support until 2007. This fund made it possible for Gobabeb to extend the buildings at the station and particularly expand its role in training. The construction took place between 1998 and 2004. This included new staff quarters, visitor bungalows, Amethyst Conference Hall, the Research Centre (with Japanese funding) and the installation of a solar/wind hybrid energy system (with Danish funding). Today almost the complete energy needs of the station are supplied by renewable energies.

Over the years I have been part of introducing various projects at Gobabeb, configuring the first centre held several courses, ranging from the Summer Desertification Programme (SDP) to the Stockholm University Geography Excursion (SUGE), the Namibian Land Care Program (SLCP) and supervised several student groups and interns both from Namibia and elsewhere.

There are many good memories from Gobabeb that I would like to share, but space is limited, so I can only say. Thank you Gobabeb and all the great colleagues and friends I have had the fortune to work with and to know while there. You will always have a special place in my heart. Congratulations to fifty very successful years. Now we are looking forward to the next fifty years and to celebrate the 100th anniversary for 2013.

By: Dr Patrick Kühnberg
2001-2012

**New director of Gobabeb**
In 2002 Dr. Joh Henschel became the Executive Director of Gobabeb. Dr. Henschel had previously worked at Gobabeb, first as an intern and later in the research section.

**More energy at Gobabeb**
The installation of the off-grid hybrid system with funding of DANIDA, the Demonstration Project of Renewable Energy and Efficiency (DEGREE), was set up at Gobabeb in 2004. This new energy eliminated the "lost" generator which was used at Gobabeb since 1972.

**Inauguration of Gobabeb**
In 2005, the new Gobabeb logo was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Naass Aripita on behalf of President Hifikepunye Pohamba. More than 200 people attended the inauguration event. The inauguration celebrates the continuous development of Gobabeb since 1962, the joint venture agreement and new development of facilities and programmes. The Gobabeb In-Service Training (GIST) was initiated in 2005. The programme was funded by the Swedish government. This programme offers Polytechnic of Namibia 1st and 4th year students experience in the workplace and hands-on participation during the application of theory to environmental problem solving for sustainable development.

In its seven sessions of existence until 2005, the GIST programme trained over 50 students from the schools of Agriculture, Nature Conservation, and Land Management, all from the Polytechnic of Namibia (P-TEC). The project has been replaced with the current Gobabeb Training and Research Internship Programme (GTRIP).

**ILTER and ELTOSA conference**
In October 2006 Gobabeb hosted the 2nd International Long-Term Ecological Research (ILTER). More than 64 delegates from 12 countries all over the world attended the conference. The conference was opened by the then Minister of Environment and Tourism, Honourable Reverend Winifred Kungwani. In the same year Gobabeb hosted the Environmental Long-Term Observatories Network of Southern Africa (ELTOSA) conference. Dr. Joh Henschel was the principal organiser of both conferences. Another international event that was hosted by Gobabeb was the Volkswagen Stiftung Conference for developing research for sub-Saharan Africa. As from June 2005 to June 2007, Gobabeb, in partnership with DFID, served as secretariat of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification for Namibia. The project was celebrated under the theme "Proud of our deserts, while combating desertification."

**Gobabeb still SADC centre of Excellence**
At a Gobabeb Board Meeting held in 2006, the SADC secretariat confirmed Gobabeb as a SADC Centre of Excellence.

**End of GTZ funding**
The year 2007 was a challenging year for Gobabeb. The centre's core funding from GTZ came to an end. GTZ had been funding Gobabeb since 1991. Apart from GTZ, Gobabeb had also received financial support from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, USA and Japan, and of course ME&I and other local donors.

On the 24-25 October 2007, Gobabeb hosted the Energy Symposium, under the theme "Hybrid electricity systems powering mini-grids, a southern African perspective." The workshop was attended by Namibians and SADC delegates. The aim of the workshop was to exchange views and reflect on costs and benefits of hybrid systems, technical and managerial aspects, institutional arrangements and the role that hybrid electricity systems play in continued electrification in southern Africa.

**Kuiseb Basin Management Committee**
Gobabeb Centre was instrumental in testing the concept of basin management in Namibia by establishing the first basin management committees in Namibia for the Kuiseb River known as the KPMC. They also contributed to the Kuiseb Basin Management Plan which laid down the guiding principles for ongoing management and monitoring.

**Namib-Naukluft Park celebrates 100 years**
The Namib-Naukluft Park was first proclaimed in 1907 as a game reserve of 10,000 km². By 2007 it had grown to more than 20,000 km² encompassing the original gravel plains but also an extensive sand dune system and the bordering Naukluft Mountains. To celebrate this centennial, Gobabeb authors produced a book entitled Namib: secrets of a desert uncovered. This was launched at Gobabeb in 2008 as the Minister of Environment and Tourism and others celebrated on the banks of the Kuiseb River.

**Change of leadership**
In 2011, the Management Committee for the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre took over leadership of the Centre. They restructured the organisation, changed its name to Gobabeb Research and Training Centre, and are leading its programme to new heights. A new Executive Director is currently being sought.

**NERAUA**
The Namib Ecological Restoration and Monitoring Unit has been created by Gobabeb in response to the ‘Uranium Rush’ of the central Namib. It will serve to monitor the activities of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the several uranium prospecting areas and mines within and bordering the Namib-Naukluft Park. Funding was provided by the German BGR and a two-year agreement signed in 2012.

**50 years of Gobabeb**
During 2012, the Gobabeb Research and Training Centre celebrates its 50th anniversary with an activity-filled programme. This ranges from an Information Day at the end of the Summer Land Care Programme, to a Royal Society Colloquium, to hosting the Southern African Association of Geomorphologists back to back with the Southern African Geomorphological Association, to hosting a bonanza Open Day and ending the year with another summer research programme in critical thinking for tertiary students.

**Namib Sand Sea nominated as World Heritage Site**
Based on the extensive information generated by the Gobabeb Centre, 20,000 km² of the Namib-Sand Sea has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If the nomination is approved (in 2013), the unique area with its ‘outstanding universal value’ will be afforded extensive protection while giving a boost to Namibia’s tourism and its economic situation.
Kuiseb Basin Management Committee
Gobabeb Centre was instrumental in testing the concept of basin management in Namibia by establishing the first basin management committee in Namibia for the Kuiseb River known as the KEMC. They also contributed to the Kuiseb Basin Management Plan which laid down the guiding principles for ongoing management and monitoring.

Namib-Naukluft Park celebrates 100 years
The Namib-Naukluft Park was first proclaimed in 2007 as a game reserve of 10,000 km². By 2007 it had grown to more than 50,000 km² encompassing the original gravel plains but also an extensive sand dune system and the bordering Naukluft Mountains. To celebrate this centennial, Gobabeb authors produced a book entitled *Namib: secrets of a desert uncovered*. This was launched at Gobabeb in 2009 as the Minister of Environment and Tourism and others celebrated on the banks of the Kuiseb River.

Change of leadership
In 2011, the Management Committee of the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre took over leadership of the Centre. They have restructured the organization, changed its name to Gobabeb Research and Training Centre, and are leading its programme to new heights. A new Executive Director is currently being sought.

Namib Sand Sea nominated as World Heritage Site
Based on the extensive information generated by the Gobabeb Centre, 30,000 km² of the Namib Sand Sea has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If the nomination is approved (in 2013), the unique area with its outstanding universal values will be afforded extensive protection while giving a boost to Namibia’s tourism and its economic situation.

NERMU
The Namib Environmental Restoration and Monitoring Unit has been created by Gobabeb as a response to the "Uranium Rush" of the central Namib. It will serve to monitor the activities of the Strategic Environmental Monitoring Plan addressing the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the several uranium prospecting areas and mines within and bordering the Namib-Naukluft Park. Funding was provided by the German BGR and a two-year agreement signed in 2012.

50 years of Gobabeb
During 2012, the Gobabeb Research and Training Centre celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with an activity-filled programme. This ranges from an Information Day at the end of the Summer Land Care Programme, to a Royal Society Colloquium, to hosting the Southern African Association of Geomorphologists back to back with the Southern African Quaternary Association, to holding a bonanza Open Day and ending the year with another summer research programme in critical thinking for tertiary students.