



I have no idea how we managed to make something that vaguely resembles a vegetable garden from this random patch of desert. Of course its not elephant proof yet - hopefully Hendrick's chili oil recipe will work! To think on top of that that this will benefit Ella's family and the local community astonishes me even further. In just three days three families (with some help from Hendrick, Rachel, Matais, Adolf and some random guy in a green shirt) have achieved something that Ella and her family have been wanting for years. It feels truly amazing to have been part of that, even though all I did was basically mix cement and carry around water and wheelbarrows full of rocks.

Even without the great feeling you get from helping others, this project was fun anyway. I'm not going to deny it is hard work - lugging heavy stuff around under a hot sun is never going to be easy, and if your work gloves are rubbish, blisters aren't enjoyable either. However, there's enough easy jobs, like shoveling goat poop (not my favorite) job and raking out the vegetable patches. But the after work bit was probably the best. Sleeping in the tree house under the stars, Chris's star gazing thing, playing football with the random guy in the green shirt, trying to teach baby Gami how to throw a ball, climbing the neighbouring hill, sitting around the camp fire wrapped in a blanket, chatting and roasting marsh mallows. All this is ten times better as there are no mopani bees in the evening. Despite our traps (coffee and sugar on duct tape) there were still thousands of them, and they were very annoying, especially during lunch. Nevertheless, the rest day was still very welcome, even if Hendrick's idea of a lie in is seven o'clock. Also, he decided to take us on a walk, to tell us about the local trees and the wildlife, as well as how to find your way if you are lost, which was interesting, if slightly worrying as we were about to start patrol week. To be honest it wasn't much of a rest day after all, especially as I was on washing up duty.



Now for patrol week. Patrol week is not just following elephants around in a truck, you also see jackals, oryx, giraffes, baboons, meercats, ostrich, rock hyrax and loads of antelopes. We had lunch in the nice cool shade of a tree everyday, and most tried to have a siesta, which was frequently disrupted by our friends the mopani bees. Unlike at camp, where there are lovely showers and toilets with a beautiful view of the riverbed, sadly neither of

these are available during patrol week. You just get a packet of wet wipes, a shovel and an amazing view of the stars. On the last day of patrol, we went to a lodge with a swimming pool and a toilet. This was a lovely surprise, but surprise it was, so none of us had swimming costumes, so everyone just went in in their normal shorts. Our other visits were to the White Lady rock paintings and to the school, where EHRA had just built a wall to protect their vegetable garden. All the kids were really friendly to us, and most wanted to touch our hair or see a picture of themselves. Most were very confused by my braces and didn't understand my explanations - their English was good, but not good enough to understand "they're for straightening my teeth".

On patrol, we also slept out under the stars. This was amazing, if a little scary, but the fire was kept burning all night and we had Matais and Hendrick to protect us. Usually we pitched camp by a kopje, which is just a big pile of boulders. One night we decided to climb one, and the views from the top were amazing, especially the sunset. We then decided to climb it at dawn as well - not the greatest idea in the world as I consequently had to get up at quarter past five next morning.



When we finally left, it was really sad saying all our goodbyes to everyone, including the huge number of dogs. We parted ways with Rachel and the other families after our final dinner (just a hint - get the oryx steak!) back in Swakopmund. It was an amazing experience and I'd like to thank everyone involved, especially Hendrick and Rachel. If you've actually bothered reading this whole review and I've managed to do this experience justice, which I almost definitely haven't, and you are thinking of volunteering with EHRA, I have two final words for you - do it.]

Billy Howard, 13