



Sossusvlei

Take a walk on the sandy side

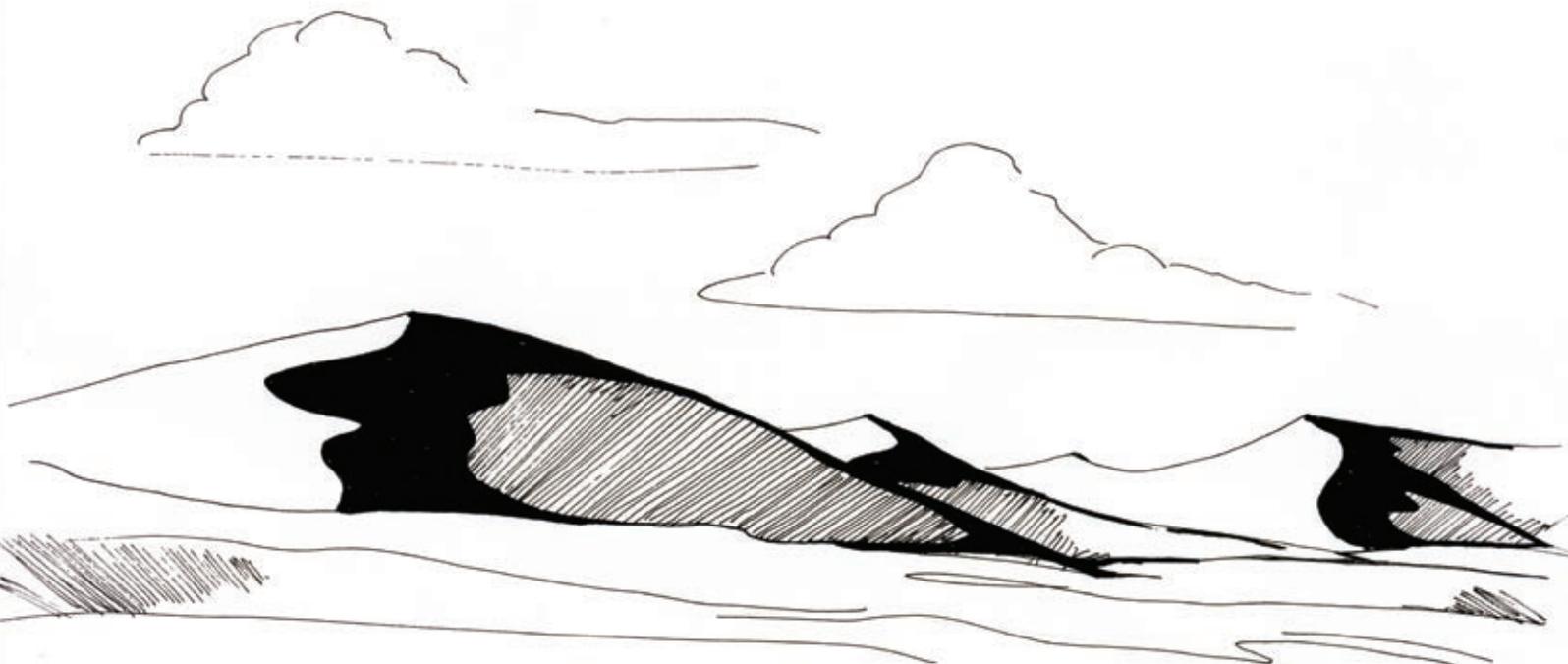
There you are – finally – standing at the top of Big Mama, the name locals have affectionately given to the highest dune at Sossusvlei. Lie splayed out in the sand, rest for a while. Take several deep breaths and a few more glugs of water. Once your heart rate and hands have steadied, look around, take a few pictures, and then wonder, "What's next?"

You may have reached the top, but there is still much more to discover. Look to the left and you'll see Naravlei, named after the many !nara plants found on and around the edge of the pan. !Nara are cucumber-like melons, the preferred food for many desert inhabitants and a source of pride and sustenance for the Topnaar people living along the Kuiseb River.

South of Big Mama you'll see Cessna Pan, visible over the dunes, and Witberg (White Mountain), its rocky ridges creating a beacon for travellers in the desert.

Spectacular vleis

Also south of Sossusvlei's highest dune is another of the desert's most spectacular landmarks, Deadvlei or Dead Pan. Located just 1.1 km from the parking area, Deadvlei resembles a perfect stage set for photography. Towering red dunes on three sides surround a flat, reflective white floor that is studded with dark, dead camel-thorn trees that are over 600 years old. Deadvlei encapsulates the drama and timelessness of the desert. The quest for the perfect photograph of Deadvlei brings photographers back to Sossusvlei time and time again.



The vlei closest to the 2x4 parking lot is Hiddenvlei, so called because, yes, you guessed right: It is hidden behind a dune! Dead and live camel-thorn trees dot the base of the dunes here too, providing shelter for many different species of birds.

Elim Dune is the closest dune from Sesriem campsite (4.8 km) and the office responsible for the area. With shade, food and shelter found at the base of the dune, it is home to an amazing variety of desert-adapted insects, reptiles, birds and animals. It is also the perfect place to watch the sunrise over the Namib.

Though Sossusvlei has come to symbolise a collection of dunes and vleis, it is actually a distinct vlei, located at the end point of the ephemeral Tsauchab River. At the close of day, rest at the picnic tables located under camel-thorn trees. This is the perfect place for plotting your next move on the sandy side.

Your questions answered:

- **Why are the dunes red?**

Iron oxide gives the dunes their colour; the more iron oxide in the sand, the redder the dunes are.

- **What causes the different shapes of the dunes?**

The prevailing wind of the desert, the south-wester, shapes the dunes at Sossusvlei into pointed multi-crested stars. There are also linear and hummock dunes in other parts of the Namib Desert formed by different wind regimes.

Besides sculpting the dunes into distinctive shapes, wind keeps the sand loose. This allows reptiles, beetles and small mammals the chance to dive into the sand and escape from predators. Wind also carries dead plant and animal material across the dunes. This material, known as detritus, is an important part of the diet for some desert beetles.

- **What is the maximum degree angle of a slipface?**

Wind continuously reshapes the dunes. It forces the grains of sand on the flat windward slope upwards to the crest of the dune. Here they fall down in the wind shade. The leeward slope is therefore always considerably steeper than the windward side but never more than a maximum of a 32-degree angle.

- **What stops the dunes from taking over the entire desert?**

Wind and water, coming from the occasional flooding of the Tsauchab River, keep the encroaching movements of the dunes in check.

- **How old is the Namib?**

This is an age-old and hotly debated question. The answer dates back to between the breaking up of the super-continent, Gondwanaland, some 130 million years, and 80 million years ago.

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Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

- **Keep to existing roads and tracks.**
- **Do not litter.**
- **Do not remove any plants or animals from the park.**
- **Follow the rules and regulations as printed on your permit.**

Have fun!

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