

AFRIKA ODYSSEY EXPEDITION



KINGSLEY Holgate and the Botswana Land Rover Club are warmly welcomed by about 300 pupils, their teachers and families at Mmokolodi Primary School on the second chapter of their 'Afrika Odyssey'. | Supplied

Into Africa with Kingsley Holgate and company

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THERE are some of us who explore far-flung destinations in our country, those who do regular overland expeditions into Southern Africa, a handful who traverse Africa and even fewer that immerse themselves in the continent, leaving a trail of humanitarian work in their wake.

And when it comes to that there really is only one name that springs to mind and that's Kingsley Holgate, aka The Beard.

It took me about two seconds to say yes when the invitation came to spend two nights and three days with Kingsley, his partner Sheelagh and son Ross, the expedition leader, as they embarked on the second chapter of their "Afrika Odyssey".

We would be driving to Gaborone in Botswana and follow the Trans-Kalahari Highway to fly back from Windhoek in Namibia.

Last year we said farewell to them at the Lesedi Cultural Village in Lanseria when they started their journey as part of an expedition to connect 22 game parks managed by the conservation NGO African Parks in partnership with the government of each country.

They have reached 15 of the 22 parks on their list in south-western Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi; reached the furthest and highest source of the White Nile in the mountainous rainforests of Nyungwe in Rwanda, made it to two remote wildlife parks in South Sudan and nearly lost the Defenders to the worst floods in 20 years at Garamba national park in the remote north-eastern corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The second leg is into the heart of some of the most vicious, dangerous and unforgiving countries and terrains that include the DRC, Central African Republic, Chad and Benin.

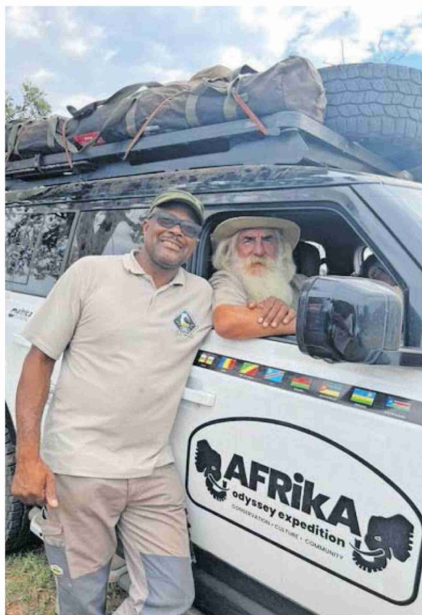
Kingsley shrugs it off though saying simply "we're all part of Mamma Africa".

Colleague Brendon Staniforth from Maroela Media and I met the trio at Lesedi Village just after sunrise and were warmly welcomed by Ross who was finishing packing one of two heavily loaded Land Rover D300 Defenders 130s.

After countless expeditions, I can tell you that the three of them have mastered the art of using every bit of space available to them.

We had one rucksack, a sleeping bag, a blow-up mattress and a pop-up tent each that was duly loaded between the two Defenders.

After breakfast and the last por-



SHARPE Kamutati, left, the chairperson of the Botswana Land Rover club, with Kingsley Holgate, Kamutati and a number of club members welcomed Holgate and his party to Botswana. | Supplied

celain we would see in a few days, I jumped in next to Ross as we headed towards Gaborone via the Tlokweng border post.

A few calls between "Pop" and son about the best route and the state of diesel and we settled down to shoot the breeze, and having spent time with the three of them I can in all honesty say that despite their legendary status they are the most down to earth, humble and nicest people you could ever hope to meet.

After a quick comfort break, Ross handed me the keys to take the wheel for our destination in Gaborone.

Pulling away you could feel that the 130 was very heavy. Keep in mind

it was the start of the expedition, but it's what it was designed for and later the vehicles would impress me even more as they gobbled up the miles in Botswana and Namibia.

We were to meet members of the Botswana Land Rover Club who had called ahead and informed Kingsley a few of them would be there to greet us once we passed customs.

Getting through was a breeze and I reckon it helps when you're an absolute legend and one of the most recognised groups of explorers on the continent.

On the other side, a previous generation V8 Defender and TDI 300 Defender with Sharpe Kamutati and



THE expedition by the Kingsley Holgate Foundation also focuses on the 'Right to Sight' in addition to conservation. Fifty-five elderly people were delighted to receive spectacles to help them see clearly. | Supplied

his two sons dubbed Sharpe One and Two, roared down the road with smiles that would light up a suburb on a dark load-shedded evening.

As with most tales of exploration and overlanding, how the club and the Holgates met is legendary.

In 2016, they were having a meeting in its clubhouse called Solihull, when one of the members saw the Holgates drive past in expedition branded new Discoveries. The meeting was abandoned and they drove around Gaborone until they found the cars parked outside a hotel. A call to Kingsley's room and from there a friendship and association grew driven by the passion for the brand.

As with all Holgate Foundation expeditions, there's a humanitarian side to it as well and they do it not because it's the right thing to do or to score some points or to tick a corporate to-do list, they do it because they absolutely believe in improving people's lives and surroundings.

The Land Rover club had chosen Mmokolodi Primary School because it's close to their heart and on arrival, there was a cluster of about 20 Land Rovers that included TDI 200s, 300s, TDS 90s, 110s, bakkies, a V6 Discovery three and even a Forward Control.

Three hundred or so pupils, their teachers, parents and grandparents hosted us with speeches, singing, cultural dances and Holgate herograms

before getting down to business.

Wildlife art on A3 paper with an elephant and a calf with text describing its habitat and the terrible slaughter and poaching these grey beauties face is used to educate the youth about wildlife and how important it is to our future on the African continent.

Fifty-five elderly folk were helped by Ross and Sheelagh with glasses as part of the Right to Sight and it's emotional to see the smiles on their faces when they realise that everything is back in focus again.

And if there are any Banyana Banyana scouts reading this, there's a young girl goalkeeper who showed enormous talent during a soccer match between the Rhinos and Elephants on a dusty pitch with makeshift goals.

Rounding the events off, I was roped in to plant a tree with Kingsley that the owners club had brought along so if you come across the picture on any social media posts, I'm the one without the beard.

From there we would wild camp with the club on a field outside Gaborone with some of the most spectacular hospitality I have ever encountered, drive along the Trans-Kalahari Highway and wild camp again next to the road before entering Namibia, but we'll save that for the second instalment.