


## CULTURAL OVERVIEW OF THE NORTHERN CAPE

### Meet the people

The people of the Northern Cape is a diverse mixture, comprising of Khoisan, Nama, Coloureds, Basters, Korana, Griqua, Xhosa, Tswana and Afrikaner. Although from different cultural backgrounds, the people of the Karoo, the Kgalagadi (Kalahari) and Namaqualand share in their hospitality, warmth and friendliness towards travellers to this region. Children are still unspoilt by computer games and television and occupy themselves with toys made from wire and by playing outside. Adults enjoy dances such as the 'Nama stap', the 'Riel' and 'Langarm' (long arm - dancing to country style music) and telling stories. Another fun event is 'Springbokdrol-spoeg' competitions where the participants try and spit the small, hard droppings of the Springbuck as far possible.

### Traditional food – some favourites

Succulent lamb	The aromatic bushes of the Karoo give the meat its very unique taste.
Pofadders ('Puff-adder')	It has nothing to do with the venomous snake, but is a thick sausage made from the large intestine (traditionally that of an antelope) stuffed with spiced heart, liver and kidney.
Skilpadjies ('tortoises')	Sheep's liver wrapped in net-fat. This, as well as the 'Pofadders' are cooked over coals (a hot open fire).
'Namaqua biltong'	Commonly known as 'Bokkoms', are salted, dried herrings (type of fish) and are eaten by peeling the dried flesh off the bones.
Skuienkoek	This is also an original western coast recipe and is not found anywhere else (Dean,2005). Sweetened bun dough, flavoured with aniseed and allowed to rise. It is pressed to about 3cm in thickness and then cut into parallelogram slices, thus the name 'angle cake'.  It is then deep-fried and sprinkled with caster sugar.
Roosterkoek	Bread or scone dough flattened to the size of a slice of bread and then slowly grilled over the coals (a hot open fire).
N'abbas	These are small truffle-like delicacies found in the sand dunes. It is unique to the Kalahari and can only be collected at certain times during the year.
Jams / Preserves	Made from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Black night shade', the bulbous root of the indigenous <i>kambroo</i></li> <li>The <i>ghaab</i> (indigenous plant)</li> <li>Sour fig (<i>Carpebrotus edulis</i>)</li> </ul>

**LANGUAGE**

The Namakwalanders have a unique pronunciation of Afrikaans and special idiomatic expressions. They speak the way they see or experience things and geographical location also plays an important role in the dialect.

**Some unique expressions**

Source	Afrikaans expression, with direct English translation in brackets.	Meaning in Afrikaans	Translation into English
Gert Niewoudt (Garies)	"Lewendige melk" (live milk)	Vars melk	Fresh milk
	"Hy kan gekom het." (He could have come)	Dit is lekker	It is nice
Hanna Claasen (Kamieskroon)	"Jy kan steel sonder om in die tronk te beland." (You can steal without ending up in jail)	Met jou oë steel	To steal with your eyes
Solda Meisenheimer (Leliefontein)	"Moedige hoes" (Brave cough)	Oneindige hoes	Never-ending cough
Grietjie Adams (Garies)	"Jou ewige klein kamertjie" (Your eternal small room)	Doodskis	coffin
Ds Dokkie Lindtveld (Garies)	"Sy's nie baie fotogenies nie. Sy lyk altyd op 'n foto soos 'n kind wat pak gekry het." (She is not very photogenic. She always looks like a child who got a hiding.)	Hartseer lyk	To look sad
Komaggas	"Winkelbakkies" (Shopface)	Voorgee om anders te wees.	Pretending to be something else.
Soebatsfontein	"Lugloop" (Air walk)	Vliegtuig ry.	To fly in an aeroplane.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SAN'S CULTURE

Traditionally hunter-gatherers.

### Political structure

- The San govern themselves by group consensus and there is no designated chief.
- Disputes are resolved through lengthy discussions until an agreement is reached and everyone involved has had the chance to speak their mind.
- However, some individuals who excel for instance in, hunting or healing rituals, may act as leaders in these areas but not exercise authority in general.

### Housing and social structure

- Disposable and simple huts are made of long sticks bound at the top with some or other fiber and then covered in grass.
- Each family has their own hut, but older children may live in separate huts with others in their age group.
- The Khoisan is polygamous (more than one wife). Wives may share or occupy different huts depending on how well they get along.
- Visitors are entertained outside the huts around the fire.
- The San are excellent storytellers, accompanied by mimics of people and animals. These stories are told around a campfire at night.

### The use of plants

Both the San and the Nama are excellent in identifying plants, since they were depended upon it for food supply, medicine, fuel and building material.

Food	<p><i>"Womenfolk, both Bushmen and Nama, were charged with shopping for vegetables in the open-air supermarket of Namaqualand. Since most of the greens consumed were seasonal, the shelves must have been very bare during the summer" (Cowlings, 2002).</i></p> <p>Food that are eaten raw include Namakwa kool ('Namaqua cabbage' or <i>Trachyandra falcate</i>), while others are boiled into stews (for example kinkelbos (<i>Tetragonia fruticosa</i>).</p> <p>Bulbs are dug out as soon as their leaves and flowers appear. It is eaten raw, roasted or as a porridge. Examples of these bulbs include uintjies (<i>Moreae</i> and <i>Hexaglottis</i>), bobbejaantjies ('small baboons – <i>Babiana</i>) and large surings (<i>Oxalis</i>). The slimy roots of Pietsnot (<i>Grielum humifusum</i>) are also eaten.</p> <p>Fruits include jakkalsbessie ('jackal berry' – <i>Diospyros ramulosa</i>) and suurvy ('sour fig' - <i>Carpobrotus</i>). However, the most sought after veldkos ('food from the veld') is the fruits of the kukumakranka (<i>Gethyllis</i>).</p>
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## Module 2: Component 1: Cultural Overview

Medicinal plants	Almost any ailment is treated with plants.
Mind altering substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It seems that this were an essential part of life. The most popular is kannagoed or kougoed ('chew stuff') from the vygie genus (<i>Sceletium</i>). It is chewed or smoked with dagga/marijuana (<i>Cannabis sativa</i>). Kougoed induces a feeling of well-being and has a calming effect. It is used by the Shamans to enter into a trance.</li> <li>The San also enjoy smoking and taking stuff.</li> <li>Nowadays, the consumption of alcohol is becoming a big problem.</li> </ul>
Fuel for cooking	In the Sandveld and Richtersveld where wood is very scarce, taller vygies (especially <i>Stoeberia frutescens</i> or commonly known as rooivy ('red fig') is used)
Building material	

### Hunting

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- The San are excellent hunters (with bow and arrow) and trackers.
- San's arrows do not kill animals straight away.
- It is the deadly poison which eventually causes death. Small animals can die within a few hours, while large game, such as giraffe, could last up to three days.
- The larvae of small beetles are the most commonly used to produce poison, but plants such as the euphorbia and also snake venom might be used.
- Ka or ngwa (a type of caterpillar) was also used. The poison is very dangerous and the San handles it with great care while applying it to the arrow tips (bone points).
- The poison does not affect the whole animal, only the heart (cardiotoxic) and the contact area cannot be used (eaten) and is removed.

### Religion and mythology ([www.theartofafrica.co.za](http://www.theartofafrica.co.za))

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/Kaggen	He is the creator of many things and appears in many myths where he is depicted as foolish or wise, tiresome or helpful. The name can be translated as 'mantis', which has lead to the belief that the San worship the praying mantis. However, this is only one of many forms in which he manifests and others include being an eland, hare, snake or vulture.
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## Module 2: Component 1: Cultural Overview

The eland is their most spiritual animal and appears in four rituals

1) Boys' first kill	A boy is told how to hunt an eland and he becomes an adult when he kills his first large antelope, preferably an eland.
2) Girls' puberty and Eland Bull Dance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Eland Bull Dance is performed by the women of the tribe when a young girl has her first menstruation (at this time she is isolated in her hut).</li> <li>• The women imitate the eland cow and how she mates. A man will play the part of the eland bull, usually with horns on his head.</li> <li>• This ritual will keep the girl beautiful and peaceful.</li> </ul>
3) Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the marriage ritual, the man gives the fat from the elands' heart to the girls' parents.</li> <li>• At a later stage the girl is anointed with eland fat.</li> </ul>
4) Trance dance	The shaman aspire to possess the eland's potency since it is the most potent of all the animals and believed to be /Kaggen's favourite.
Medicine People' or shamans	A shaman is someone who enters a trance in order to heal people, protect them from evil spirits and sickness, foretell the future, control the weather, ensure good hunting and generally try to look after the wellbeing of their group.

## THE NAMA

### Political organisation

- It is believed, based on linguistic grounds, that the Khoikhoi were people derived from the San and lived in northern Botswana. The change from being hunter-gathers to herders had a significant impact on their social organisation.
- The village settlement of the Khoikhoi was relatively large, often well over one hundred persons.

*Khoikhoi groups living in the North-Western Cape were called the Namaqua (plural for Nama).*

### Clans and headman

- Each village had a headman, which was hereditary – passed from father to eldest son of the founding father of each generation. He acted as mediator, judged criminal and civil disputes and indicated when and where the clan should move.
- It consisted of members of the same patrilineal clan (based on or tracing descent through the male line), with their wives and children. Villages also included some members of other clans, as well as some dependants or servants, San etc.

### Tribes and chiefs

- Several villages (clans) were usually united into a much larger unit, called a tribe. One clan's seniority was recognised and the head of this clan acted as chief.
- The extent of tribal land was defined less in terms of exact boundaries, than with reference to land around key water holes, which was under the control of the tribal chiefs.

### Housing

Matjieshuis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The basic housing structure was a round hut (matjieshuis) made of a frame of green branches planted into the ground, bent over and tied together, then covered with reed mats.</li> <li>• The openings between the reeds allowed air to circulate keeping it cool during summer. During the winter it was isolated with skins from the inside. The structure could easily be dismantled (mats were simply rolled up) and conveyed to a new site when it was time to move on to 'greener pastures'.</li> <li>• The frames were sometimes left behind if they knew they would be returning to the same site.</li> </ul>
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### **Livestock ownership**

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- All stock was individually owned but the chiefs and headmen owned larger herds (an indication of status).
- Although the Nama were mainly herders or pastoralists, they also obtained food by hunting and gathering at times.
- An important factor in the social life of the village was the sharing of food.
- The sharing of food (any significant kill) was an important aspect of village life.
- Everybody attending a ceremonial feast where cattle and sheep were killed was allowed to participate in the meal.

### **Raiding**

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- Raiding between different groups took place on a regular basis.
- It seems that all herders shared a 'high social evaluation of cattle. They were also subjected to more-or-less the same environmental constraints. This called for mobility, physical endurance and highly developed bush skills from the herders' (study by Fukui and Turton). Raiding fostered these skills.
- Successful raids enlarged the herds and hence the status of the raiders.
- However, should the raiders not be able to keep and look after the herd, reprisal raids reduced the numbers again. In this way a balance could be maintained between the needs of the clan and its ability to manage the herd.
- Hostilities were controlled by conventions, but should the raiding become too frequent, too many cattle taken and young girls abducted, this could lead to full-scale war. The latter were averted by negotiations and compensation, sometimes through the intervention of the missionaries and Dutch settlers.

### **Marriage**

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- Men from one clan had to seek wives in another clan.
- It is likely that most men found wives within the tribe as related clans lived closer to each other.
- Marriage was a means to promote social unity and involved the transfer of cattle.
- The bridegroom had to spend the first months of marriage (until the birth of the first child) living at the village of his parents-in-law.
- Thereafter, the bride had to leave her family's home and from then on reside in the village of her husband.
- The abduction of young girls during raids also contributed to the social reproductive process.

### **Rituals**

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- The central theme of most rituals was the idea of transition from one state to another e.g. birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage and death. It also showed the way for the reintroduction into the society, now with a different role to play. The key elements of all ceremonies involved a period of seclusion associated with vulnerability and danger.
- During these periods some things had to be avoided, especially water, while fire and buchu were associated with protection.
- Domestic stock seems to have always been associated with protection.

## Module 2: Component 1: Cultural Overview

Birth	<p>Prior to delivery, the mother to be was taken to a hut where she remained for at least seven days after delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No men were allowed to enter the hut.</li> <li>• The mother and baby had to avoid contact with water as far as possible.</li> <li>• For the first three months, the child was fed on goats or cows milk and not from the mother's milk.</li> <li>• A special fire was also lit in the hut.</li> </ul> <p>Their bodies were smeared with cow dung, fat and buchu (a fragrant plant) when they joined the society again and a feast followed.</p>
Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During initiation ceremonies, stock were killed and the omentum, part of the animal's intestine, was hung around the neck of individuals to show that they were going through change or transition.</li> </ul>

### Dancing and singing

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The 'Riel' has its origin in the Khoisan's dancing and singing around the fire centuries ago. It is said to be the oldest dance form in South Africa. This particular dance form originated in the 1940s/50s among the farm workers. Although they could not read or write, they were able to come up with a song on the spot.

Some of the dancing is related to love and courting:

Skoenlapper dans ('Butterfly dance')	The legs are fluttered together to draw the attention of the girl.
Vlerksleep "Wing pull"	An Afrikaans expression meaning, "to pay amorous attention or court". This resembles the way an ostrich or turkey attracts the females attention during the mating season

The dances and singing are also about every day events and work.

Askoekdans (Ash cake dance)	Mimics the way the Askoek is removed from the fire and the ash scratched off with both hands. The right leg is lifted up to the left knee and the hands are clapped together.
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Groups have an opportunity to show their skills during an annual competition by the ATKV (Afrikaans Language and Cultural Society) to encourage young people to continue with this traditional dancing.



### Religion and mythology

In Nama (Khoikhoi) mythology special significance is given to the moon and it is probably seen as the physical manifestation of a supreme being. The new and full moons were important times for rainmaking rites and dancing, and it would appear that the moon was viewed as the physical manifestation of a supreme being associated with heaven, earth and especially rain (which was of great importance for these people who were so dependent on rain in this arid region).

<b>SPRITUAL BEINGS</b>	
Tsiu/Tsui'goab	He is believed to be the creator, also sometimes seen as the founding ancestor of the Khoikhoi, and the guardian of health, the source of prosperity and abundance, and the controller of rain.
Gunab / Gaunab	An evil being, which causes sickness and a god of fate and death. He fought with Tsui'goab but lost.

<b>MYTHICAL HEROES</b>	
Heitsi-eibib or Haitsi-aibib /Heitsi (Kabip) God of the hunt	<p>A famous mythical ancestor and is said to have been the offspring of a cow and some magical grass that the cow ate. He was a legendary hunter, sorcerer and warrior and was responsible for killing Ga-gorib (see monsters below).</p> <p>He is believed to have died and resurrected himself on various occasions and his funeral cairns are located in many locations in southern Africa. It was seen as good luck for passers-by to add to the piles of stones already there, or to leave branches, pieces of their clothing, or skins.</p>

<b>MONSTERS</b>	
Aigamuxa / Aigamuchab	A man-eating, dune-dwelling, human-like creature resembling an ogre, with eyes under its feet. In order to see, it had to go down on its hands and knees and lift its one foot in the air.
Ga-gorib	<p>A legendary monster that sat by a deep hole in the ground and dared passers-by to throw rocks at him. The rocks would bounce off and kill the passer-by, who then fell into the hole.</p> <p>It is said, that Heitsi-eibib in his encounter with the monster, refused the dare. The monster then fell into its own pit as the legendary hero threw a stone hitting Ga-gorib below its ear when he was not looking.</p>
Hai-uri	An agile, jumping creature that is partially invisible, has only one side to its body (one arm and one leg), and eats humans.
Bi-blouk	An alternate, female version of Hai-uri.

Today, a large group of Nama in Namibia are Muslims.

**KARRETIEMENSE ('donkey cart people')**

*"The karretjiemense have had a nomadic existence for many generations. They trek from farm to farm with their donkey carts, in times of hardship and in times of prosperity, kilometer after kilometer, whether to shear sheep, mend fences or do odd jobs. At night they sleep next to their carts under the stars, only to pack up again and carry on trekking, like gypsies. Karoo gypsies. Afrikaans people"* (Snyman, 2008).

It is not known when the first karretjiemense started trekking through the Karoo, or when they called themselves such.

They usually move in groups of four to five donkey carts loaded with all their earthly belongings, including chickens and some meek goats. It is said that many of the dogs trotting along are called 'Oortjies' (Little ears).

At night, corrugated iron and wooden poles are skillfully set up around the cart (similar to the tent of a caravan) and the people would crawl under it to settle for the night.

According to Professor Mike de Jongh (anthropologist), there are only about a thousand left as many have settled in Karoo towns and the young ones seeked looking for found a new way of living.

In the words of Piet Tieties:

*Op die pad is daar altyd beterskap voor  
Toe gaan die beterskap weg;  
Nou sit ons hier, en trek  
In onse gedagtes*

*On the road there was always something  
better ahead  
Then that disappeared;  
Now we sit here,  
And trek in our thoughts"*

### Resources and further reading

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Snyman, D. *On the back roads – encounters with people and places*. Tafelberg Publishers. 2008. (Chapter 3 : 'Our trek has run out').

### Websites

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<http://khoisan.org>  
[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)  
[www.theartofafrica.co.za](http://www.theartofafrica.co.za)  
[www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)

### Oral Resources

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RSG – Monitor December 2008  
 Jannie and Retha de Beer (Soebatsfontein)

### Photos and explorations

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ML Kruger (Makiti Guides & Tours). 2003, 2006, 2008.  
 Vlam Kruger - December 2008 - Christmas at Soebatsfontein.

*Compiled by Maria Louise Kruger 2008.*