The People Of The Kalahari Desert Essay, Research Paper

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Part One

Introduction, Location and Environment

The people of the Kalahari desert are extraordinary people. For centuries their hunting and food gathering

techniques have enabled them to survive in the difficult environment of the dry, hot and barren Kalahari desert.

They are known as the Bushmen. Or the Kung or the Gikwe since Bushmen is rather discriminating because the

“Bushmen” live among shrubs and trees and sand and such.

The people of Kalahari Desert live in a dry bush desert in South-West Africa and western Bechuanaland, bordered in

the North by Lake Ngami and the Okovngo River in the South by the Orange river and west by the Damera Hills.

The Kalahari is there all low with sand dunes and great plains. A hostile country of thirst and heat. A country with

scorpions, thorny bushes and of course sand as far as the eye can see and perpetual dust.

In the hot months it the temperature goes up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. In the months of winter, which are June and

July, the winds from the Antarctic cold blow at night. But during the day it eventually rises up to around 80 degrees

Fahrenheit and drops down in the evening. There are only three months of winter and these begin in December and

in March the drought season starts and by August all the water holes that were made during the rainy season are

dried up.

It is not dead, the desert. There are boabab trees that give pear shaped fruits, flowers, and blossoms resembling

gardenias. There are tall grasses. There are bushes flowering either red, white or violet flowers, tsama melons which

very much look like watermelons and are the size of a small cantaloupe. There are also mogongo nuts that are very

high in protein. When in season one person can eat as many as 400 nuts.

These people who inhabit the dry, barren Kalahari have a hard life, so it seems… But, really, do they?

Part two

Food Resources and Technology

Living in the hot sandy Kalahari might seem very difficult, even impossible. But if one knows the secrets of the

desert. The desert will give you a living. The people of the Kalahari know these secrets. No fancy machinery

necessary. No modern technology needed. Only simple handmade tools and weapons such as digging sticks, little

axes, bows and arrows, small traps or snares, knives. Not to mention their senses and their wits.

They poison the arrows so the game will die faster when hit. The poison is extracted from a certain grub. Great

hunters know where the best place to shoot an animal so the poison will work best. Great hunters also know how to

make the finest arrows. They also know all the habits of all the animals from the mice to the antelopes, they know

what time of day that is best for hunting, too.

There are quite a few food resources such as tsama melons, mongongo nuts, roots, berries, wildebeests, kudu,

gemsbok, antelopes, steenbok, porcupines, elands, small animals like the mongoose and the chicken fowl, birds-

even babies-, wild boars as well as honey from the bees. And of course there are a couple of temporary and

permanent water holes around.

They use digging sticks to dig up roots, they gather tsama melons, mongongo nuts, and berries. They hunt game

with bows and arrows and spears on foot.

They cook mongongo nuts in hot ashes, eat the entire animal from the hide-which they work into leather sometimes-

to the marrow inside the bones. Of course this might seem like a lot a meat since the game is plentiful but really 80

percent of their diet is vegetables. Sometimes when cooking meat they cook it in the rind of the tsama melon with

the liquid still inside and it makes a stew.

The people are smart and know their land very well. Therefore as long as they know the secrets the hot desert holds,

the desert will give them a living and they’ll never go hungry.

Part three

Social System and Leisure

The size of the groups vary from 20 to 100 people or even 200 people per group. The groups have to be small or else

moving from place to place will be extremely difficult.

The roll of a man is to hunt and gather honey from the bees. The roll of the woman is to gather and dig for roots and

taste them to see if the root is sweet or sour. Although the women do not hunt they can set small snares to trap small

animals like the mongoose. Both genders cook and make clothing.

The children don’t really get a proper education or at least what we call an education. All the children do are play

and have fun. They play Tug of War and climb trees. But I guess they learn a lot by imitating adults which is one of

their favorite activities. But in reality they boys don’t start to hunt until their late teens and the girls don’t need to

make a living until they get married which in their case is around the ages of 15 and 16. They just move around from

camp to camp living with one relative or another.

In the case of some marriages, if you are recognized as a great hunter, you might be asked to be married to a woman

that is in a different area. Therefore you would have to move into your wife s area. IF that women is the chief’s

daughter, chances are that you will become chief one day, if you are an excellent hunter and a great leader. But

usually the new chief is someone of the old chief’s kin.

The people of the Kalahari spend their free time dancing, singing, socializing, making jewelry out of bone and shell

and such, and making stuff necessary for everyday life. Such as clothing, bags, arrows, bows, et cetera..

All in all, these people have a basically easy life although it seems to us a very busy and back-breaking schedule. In

reality they only hunt 2 to 3 days a week. Their social system is well thought out and they cooperate easily enabling

them to have an easier life. They are very creative people, they are destined to go on for a long time yet. Or are they?

Part Four

Conclusion

Their way of life would solve many of our problems. They make quick decisions (unlike the OJ Simpson case that

recently ended after a long while) and make an effort to cooperate because if there is a big dispute that would mean

catastrophe for them. Like the saying goes: United we stand. Divided we fall. And that is certainly true in their case.

These people look out for one another. They take care of everybody. No one is left out to die. Children grow up at

everybody s scherms (shelter). That’s what I admire about them. I also admire them because of their abilities to live

in the rugged desert. After all, it is not everybody who knows how to survive under those conditions.

Unfortunately, good things always come to their end. As you read this these people are being pushed out of their

desert homes and into reservations like animals in a zoo. Either that or they are being enveloped in the White way of

life. The Bantu and the Whites are taking the desert from them to give to grazing animals and ranches. As more

influence of the modern times are coming into the Kalahari people, they are neglecting the old traditions of hunting

and gathering. They have dogs to sniff animals, they have horses to chase them. Hunting is slowly disappearing as a

skill and reappearing as something everybody can do. There is no longer the thrill of a chase. What chase? The

horses are chasing, not the people. As traditions are ignored they are ultimately forgotten. Lost forever.. Existing

only in history books. More technology is put at their disposal. Water pumps for instance. They will also forget how

to get water from roots and melons if they don’t practice it. If and w!

hen the pumps break and they don’ t know how to fix them. They shall die of thirst if they haven’t practiced their

skills for getting water. Grazing animals are coming and taking all the plants and eating them. They are eating these

people out of home.

The ranch owners will push them father and father away and when at last there is no place to turn. The people and

the culture shall be swallowed and blended into the life and styles of living they use of those who live around them.

The people of the Kalahari are remarkable people. It would be very impressing to see them overcome the influence

of the Bantu and the Whites. Then after that obstacle maybe, just maybe they shall live on as a permanent culture

keeping the good qualities they have adapted through the years and teach other cultures to cooperated and work

together as they do.