

WORKING IN THE WILD

Photojournalist **Scott Ramsay** spent a year travelling to South Africa's most special nature reserves, including all the national parks. He shares his thoughts on the gear that made Year in the Wild a success.

FORD EVEREST

I've grown attached to my three-litre diesel Everest 4x4, which Ford loaned me for Year in the Wild. Every day, I've relied on it to take me across different types of terrain: rocky desert in Richtersveld, thick sand in Tembe, icy gravel on uKhahlamba's mountain passes, muddy back roads in Gamkaberg and long stretches of tar on the highways. At first I may have been skeptical of its abilities, but I quickly realised the Everest was the ideal vehicle for my needs. It's highly adaptable and a great all-rounder. It's easy to drive over long distances and can cruise at 120 kilometres an hour all day, using about 11 litres of diesel over 100 kilometres (fully loaded and with a rooftop tent). Overtaking is a cinch because the engine delivers suitable torque at both high and low revs. The vehicle is almost more at home on gravel; for off-road I engaged the low-range gearbox and drove slowly and carefully – not once did I get stuck or not have enough torque. The Everest has a limited-slip differential, which automatically delivers power to the wheels when it's needed. Ford fitted special 4x4 shock absorbers and a long-range fuel tank, courtesy of local customising agent GFS, and although it started leaking in Tankwa Karoo, Rocco Swanepoel and Thys du Plessis drove all the way from Johannesburg to Springbok to fix it for me. Since then, I've had no problems. Costs R420210, www.ford.co.za.



CONQUEROR CONQUEST TRAILER

While in Richtersveld and Kgalagadi, I used a Conquest trailer, one of several models made by local manufacturers Conqueror. Owners Thinus and Philip de Vries started out making trailers for the military and today their durable technology is used in consumer models. The Conquest has plenty of accessories, including eight ammo boxes, a fridge, two jerry cans, kitchen utensils, glasses, a gas cooker and gas canisters, 150-litre water tank, pump, plug points and a four-man tent. Most importantly, it's tough. The axle beam is designed for 2,5 tonnes, but a fully loaded trailer weighs about a tonne. The metal frame is galvanised steel, so rust isn't an issue, and ground clearance of the axle is 310mm, while tail clearance is 470mm. Fully equipped trailer costs R150000, excluding VAT. Tel 016-349-6533, email philip@conqueror.co.za, www.conqueror.co.za.



EEZIAWN ROOFTOP TENT

This was one of my favourite accessories and I've always slept very well in the canvas EeziAwn tent, which measures 1,4m x 2,4m x 1,3m. It's easy to set up, taking no more than five minutes, and stow away, and a ladder drops down from the one side. The canvas is durable and a waterproof cover keeps the tent dry in a storm. Mosquito meshing keeps bugs out, but with big zip-up windows on all four sides, a breeze can flow through in hot climates. The 65 mm mattress is surprisingly comfortable. Costs R10360. Tel 011-794-6311, email eeziawn@icon.co.za, www.eeziawn.co.za.

TOTAL

As official fuel supplier to South African National Parks, Total has also sponsored my diesel and travel expenses – a project like Year in the Wild wouldn't be possible without its support. It has a long history of association with San-Parks and conservation and it has helped fund projects such as the relocation of white rhino, hippo and elephants between parks and the establishment of Kruger's Mopani and Olifants camps. More recently, Total has funded the Keep Kruger Clean campaign to keep the country's largest national park free of litter and it also supports the park's anti-poaching rangers. www.total.co.za.



FRONT RUNNER ROOF RACK AND DRAWER SYSTEM

South Africa's leading off-road customising company, which supplies a range of accessories and services, fitted a lightweight Windcheetah roof rack to my Everest, onto which they attached an EeziAwn rooftop tent. Front Runner installed a National Luna dual-battery system to power a National Luna fridge and a drawer system in the back of the vehicle, which made packing easier and meant I could store valuables out of sight. Costs R4760 for the roof rack and R8900 for the drawer system. Tel 011-466-0155, email info@fronrunner.co.za, www.fronrunner.co.za.



GOODYEAR WRANGLER ALL-TERRAIN TYRES AND HI-Q FITMENT CENTRES

Correct tyres are crucial for a project like Year in the Wild. Goodyear's Wranglers provide plenty of grip in off-road conditions, but are still suited to long-distance tar driving because of the well-designed tread. They also have reinforced sidewalls, so there's less chance of cuts from rocks when tyres are deflated for gravel driving; in more than a year of driving and two sets of tyres, I had only one puncture. Correct tyre pressure (higher for tar, lower for gravel) is critical for tyre life and makes for a more comfortable ride. Costs R1500 a tyre. Tel 041-505-5400, www.goodyear.co.za. I found the Hi-Q fitment centres in Cape Town (021-425-3439) and Empangeni (035-787-0428) were helpful and efficient. www.hiq.co.za.

Scott Ramsay



NATIONAL LUNA

A portable fridge is imperative for a long-range expedition, especially when travelling to areas where there are no shops for hundreds of kilometres. My National Luna 90-litre stainless-steel fridge has two compartments, each of which can be set as a freezer or fridge. Powered by a dual-battery power pack, which is charged when driving the car, it keeps food cold or frozen for up to two days in a hot climate without needing a recharge. It can also run off AC power. Importantly, National Luna fridges are manufactured in South Africa, so it's easy to get one fixed or serviced. Costs R12 750 (for a 90-litre fridge, a portable power pack costs another R2 950). Tel 011-452-5438, email natluna@mweb.co.za, www.nationalluna.com.



VODACOM 3G DONGLE AND CONTRACT

Communicating is the essence of my project and, because I've been on the road for more than a year, I've had to use my cellphone a lot. My internet usage has been prodigious as well, as I've frequently uploaded photos and blogs. When I've had cellphone reception, I've used Vodacom's 3G dongle, which works well when near urban areas. Without it, well, the project wouldn't have been possible. www.vodacom.co.za.

EVOSAT BGAN UNIT

I have blogged and uploaded photos to Facebook almost every day during my Year in the Wild and Evosat's BGAN Explorer 500 satellite unit is an amazing piece of technology which has been vital to my work. I can sit in the middle of the Kgalagadi, where there's no cellphone reception for hundreds of kilometres in any direction, and still access the internet at near broadband speeds. The unit is the size of a small laptop and using it is simple: turn it on, point it north, plug it into a laptop and, voila, you can communicate with the world. The battery life of several hours is excellent and the unit is splashproof and shockproof. Costs \$3 200 (about R25 000), and data plans vary according to the requirements. Tel 021-488-3946, email sales@evosat.com, www.evosat.com.



LACIE RUGGED EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE

I've taken more than 30 000 photos this year and I'm assiduous at backing up. Direct Distribution Services sponsored several of these hard drives. They're powered by USB from a laptop – a major benefit when working without electricity. The drives are shockproof, splashproof and not one of mine failed. Costs R1 625. Tel 021-552-2654, email info@directservices.co.za, www.directservices.co.za.



GARMIN OREGON 550 GPS

Essential to any expedition, especially when exploring away from public roads, this tough nut has a sunlight-readable, colour-touchscreen display, and is water resistant and shockproof. The Oregon makes mapping easy and as I found points of interest, I'd tag them as waypoints and download the tracks onto my computer. It's also a valuable research tool with a 3,2 megapixel digital camera, a high-sensitivity GPS, barometric altimeter, three-axis electronic compass and microSD card slot for optional storage. Costs R4 799 (costs an additional R999 for Southern Africa digital street maps). Tel 011-251-9999, email info@garmin.co.za, www.garmin.co.za.

K-WAY GEAR

Over the past year, I've worked in all sorts of weather conditions: rain in Addo, freezing wind in Namaqua National Park and searing heat in the Karoo. My K-Way gear has made a big difference, especially in winter. The K-Way Mercury shell jacket (left, R999) is waterproof and breathable and the lightweight Razorback fleece (right, R399) keeps you warm, but also dries out quickly after a rainfall. However, my favourite item is the Axel beanie (R99), which keeps my head warm while sleeping out under the stars, even in a Kalahari winter. www.capeunionmart.co.za.



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SAFARI CENTRE CAPE TOWN

Whenever I've needed advice on accessories and 4x4ing, I've called Johan and Horst Kellerman. This father-and-son team run Cape Town's Safari Centre, an all-in-one equipment and fitment centre for 4x4s. The quality of work is always excellent. Tel 021-595-3910, email sales@safarict.co.za, www.safaricentre.co.za.

YEAR IN THE WILD SOUTH AFRICA Photojournalist Scott Ramsay travelled to 31 of South Africa's most special nature reserves, including all the national parks.

As well as those sponsors mentioned here, several other companies have supported Year in the Wild in some way, including Nokia, Escape Seat Covers, DigiCape, Hetzner. To see Scott's photos and blogs, go to www.yearinthewild.com and www.facebook.com/yearinthewild.