

Cybertracker in the Karoo National Park: Where it all started!

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During the late 1980's when Louis Liebenberg first developed Cybertracker, one of the first places the program was tested was the Karoo National Park. It was here that Louis "discovered" Pokie Benadie, a field ranger in the park who spent his entire life in the park.



Louis Liebenberg and Pokie Benadie with an early version of Cybertracker.

Cybertracker was mainly aimed at utilizing the incredible veld skills and knowledge of people who spent their lives in the veld, and it was during the initial testing of the program that it was found that Pokie had highly developed veld and tracking skills. He straight away passed an assessment and earned the title of Senior Tracker. Pokie has in the meantime become literate and numerate, but above all his veld knowledge keeps improving and he is a great asset for the park and for conservation! Cybertracker has now become a part of the park's daily routine as Pokie and his colleagues collect data on reintroduced and rare black rhino; their habitat selection, movements, condition, even the plants they

select to browse on. The rhino project is important for their successful management and to ensure their survival, but data is also collected on all other animals including antelope, zebra and medium-sized predators.

As the park has now grown to 90000ha we want to use Cybertracker to build up a base-line GIS (Maps with data) on all aspects of the park; water points like boreholes, springs, rivers, dams, windmills etc. (which is vital for our water management plan!), old tracks and roads, fossils, even cultural historical sites and artifacts like graves, rock paintings, stone houses, San dwellings and much more! We even use Cybertracker as an enforcement and protection tool to log patrol information, fence condition and breaches etc. The wonder of Cybertracker is that it can be used to collect data on basically anything; we want to expand it to collect data on reptiles, birds, fish, amphibians, even insects which play such a big ecological role in the Karoo environment! The required information is simply extracted from the data banks using a simple filter system.

In this way information on the number and status of any animal (or plant) can be extracted and comparative studies done to monitor change, water distribution can be monitored throughout the year, and patrol reports generated to give a first-glance view of weak points in terms of area coverage and area protection.

The potential benefits of Cybertracker for nature conservation work are limitless, but the problem for the Karoo National Park is a lack of funding for the hand-held computers with GPS (Global Positioning System) needed to collect the data. The park currently owns two units, but can only exploit the full potential of the program if every patrol can do "cybertracking"; that means another three units at least! As these devices are fairly fragile for field work there is also a fair amount of "down time" for repairs and technical glitches.

We would like to make a plea for all lovers of the Karoo and the Karoo National Park to assist us with funding for this exciting and powerful tool! It is a giant leap for the protection and conservation of YOUR park!