



A ROAD TRIP

As in all life, there were a lot of ups and downs in my fieldwork life at Kauri. A day of exultant discovery would be succeeded by one that was grey with sameness or failures in communication. I was slow in reaching clarity about the stories and figures of the Ju/'hoan imagination I had first heard about from Lorna Marshall back in Cambridge. But the process gradually became more reliable. Communications in Ju/'hoansi about ordinary daily life, though, still eluded me at times. Missing verbal cues often made me feel out of focus and blue. I was fine if I was working on concrete things with people, like the ongoing construction of the Toothbrush Tree camp, but I often bemoaned my inability to enter into the banter and joking that accompanied these activities.

MAY 17, 1971

[I] brought a load of *gumi zisi* (cow manure) back to my camp. Women started mixing it with anthill sand and water. Men working on =Oma's house. Tcoq'a finishing kitchen roof. =Oma Djo in the bush cutting poles for a kitchen bench. G/aq'o making a door. What I did was help with [the] roof, help with *tobo*-ing (plastering) a piece of the kitchen wall behind the food shelves, arrange the kitchen, cut grass over kitchen door, make a shelf for things in my house (termites horrible here—everything should be on a shelf). . . .

MAY 18, 1971

But I have been feeling cut off from people for the last few days—nothing to say. When people sit around the fire and talk, I go into a kind of stupor. I am convinced that the way to get into verbal creativity in this culture is to enter the daily gabble of conversation: that must be where the art is. It is certainly where the enthusiasm is. I find I can only enter conversations, though, when I am asking questions. Otherwise it is too rapid to follow, and I am ignored and feel like I'm not really there. But to enter into ordinary conversation seems a monumental task. I haven't even got the energy to listen to it for very long, much less participate in it. Talk tires me, but they seem to thrive on it. I need to be alone some; they seem rarely to seek that. It is a weird situation this, my not really having my own life here to be

involved in; rather, [I am] preying on theirs. Consequently I feel rejected where I would otherwise not be hurt, because I would have other emotional resources.

I'm also upset by another plateau I seem to have reached in the language. There is enough dialect difference between here and Dobe, too, to set me back a month or so. Often I feel absurd because my work demands so much facility in the language and yet I still get tangled up in the language of everyday transactions. . . . But later today women finished *tobo-ing* my house, Tci!xo finished *tobo-ing* the kitchen. Those two houses are done. In PM things tapered off nicely. . . . The evening was a great surprise—that I could be with people again. Part of it was the kitchen—I think the familiarity of sitting in a kitchen comforted me . . . [and] we had a gay time. I understood virtually everything that was said. Then opening the food trunk and letting people choose what they wanted for supper gave me a good feeling. We had a silly supper of pickled aubergines, potatoes, lima beans, cheese, and tomatoes. At one point everyone left [clearly preferring to sit by the fire] but Di//xao and me, and we *talked together* for the first time really, with her volunteering information, her great round face shining. !Xuma was happy because he has a new girlfriend. He told me N=amece had seen a dead elephant in the bush and was carving the tusks, and did I want to go see the dead elephant on donkeyback in a few days? . . . I feel of course much better, but realize that ups and downs are exaggerated because all depends on how you're hitting it off with "them."

By the end of May, though, roughly six months into my fieldwork, I was surprised and delighted to make an important transition. I went from feeling a fool for things I was missing in the language to suddenly understanding pretty much everything (except for things, fair enough, people didn't want me to hear, which were easy to conceal from me). At least this was true when I was asking questions or hearing stories, and when I had become familiar with contexts and plots, though ordinary rapid conversation among others often still eluded me. (But that was fine with me: I had no wish to eavesdrop on people who were already sharing so much of their lives with me in that slice of time.) I resolved to stop trying to push that boundary, regarding it rather as a kind of natural privacy, which could benefit both me and the people surrounding me.

I reflected that it couldn't be entirely comfortable for them to have me there: though their ability to all talk at once made them seem, to me, to lack self-consciousness, I noted among some an inability to meet my eyes. My understanding that there was indeed some self-consciousness being dealt with by some people was confirmed on Friday, May 21:

“Another interesting thing today was that Big Kaqece drank a lot of beer and was able to look me in the eye while talking. Also his stutter almost disappeared.”

My event calendar entry for that day and the next two reflected the balance finally achieved thanks to the language breakthrough and my comfortably set-up camp.

Had two good interviews with Di//xao Pari /Kai (Goat Foot)—she’s tireless. All her kids around and she still wants to do [folklore] work, + *tobo* the houses in her spare time! I’m looking forward to spending some days at her village, since she’s invited me. /Xoan N!a’an came and listened in on the interview + didn’t interrupt but at times laughed herself silly over some things Di//xao said. So I’ll have to make inquiries when I interview her. I was impressed with the quality of abandonment in her laughter. She seemed to give herself up to it wholeheartedly. She is the only woman trancer here, too. I wonder. . . .

Some interesting things that came out of the interviews today were the name of an ancestor of Bushmen, /’Oma /’oma or /’Oma /’omane, whose brother is Jiso [Jesus]! Both are sons of Kaoxa. Also got leads on a number of stories. Di//xao said all peoples’ gods were the same, even if they have different names.

Women still working on the Bushmen’s houses, *tobo*-ing them. Finished one, started on the other. =Oma Djo working on a kitchen bench. Everything very calm for me today. I was able to get down to some papers and studying. Nice to be set up at last.

=Oma !Oma went to Tsau for water—big hole in some important part of cooling system on way back, so took them a long time to come in.

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 1971

I was sitting around the fire in front of !Xuma’s house (where the center of sociability seems to be moving to) after a nice quiet cup of coffee early this morning, when Kxauru’s husband came up and gave me a fresh young guinea fowl. I was very pleased. . . . We plucked and cooked it right away . . . and it was delicious. Tender and perfect, just detectably different from chicken. . . . Had a very good interview again with Di//xao—[her baby] N!hunkxama fell asleep, thank heaven—about death and burial. . . . Got some info on medicine used to bring a person’s soul back when supposed dead.

Then lunch—only a few people still working and eating. Then I had a bath. =Oma !Oma ran into difficulties fixing the truck + we both fiddled with it the rest of the afternoon. Very pleasant. Still a good sense of getting down to business, order, + calm. Good evening talk with =Oma and

!Xuma about our immediate plans, the water and food situation, the truck repairs. . . . I feel much closer to people, somehow, than I did several days ago. I think I'm more relieved than I'd like to admit that I have my books lined up and organized and my house neat and my interviews started. After all, it's been five and a half months of continual disorder and overtaxing of the heart and brain.

I see that I'm going to have to spend a good deal of time in the villages, though, both to get stories in context and to witness all the things I have only heard about, like births and deaths, menstrual dances, etc. I feel anxious to do that now, as I'm more or less settled. And now going to villages, I know I'll always have a quiet, neat place to come back to.

I just hope I can get the damn hole in the Land Rover cooling system patched up tomorrow. Richard Lee has the right idea, that of going around on donkeys. The truck will probably always be my main trouble.

The next day =Oma !Oma invented and crafted the needed Land Rover tool from leftover metal bits out of the old Dobe *tjipitju*. The tool could turn a right angle inside the tightly packed Land Rover engine and allowed the hole to be stoppered permanently.

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 1971

Well, the truck took all day to fix. It was infuriating. You couldn't get at the place, and then the solder wire kept falling out, and the red-hot screwdrivers were only good for a few seconds. Finally as the sun was going down we jammed a wooden plug with a burlap sack around it into the hole [using the new tool invented by =Oma !Oma] and it held! Jumped in to take a trial spin, and lo + behold something else went wrong—the petrol pedal. . . . It's minor, I think, but we'll see tomorrow. Meanwhile today I had a pretty good interview with Di//xao about stars, rainbows, and rain.

Discussions about rain, especially about the gentle, healing “female rain” as opposed to the destructive “male rain” accompanied by lightning and thunder, always prompted welcome thoughts in the Kalahari. Even then, at the start of the dry season, talking with Di//xao about rain brought the frustrations about truck troubles into perspective for me that day. Escaping worry, I slept well.

The truck problems were solved, at least temporarily, and I began traveling to other places to visit *ju sa !'han tcisi*, “people who know things.” This phrase applied to wise, mostly older, storytellers, healers, and musicians. On my trips I was often accompanied by a few of the Kauri people who wanted to visit their relatives along the way. Our first trip, in April 1971, turned out to be memorable in many ways. It was

to be a big clockwise circle from Kauri to /Kae/kae to Dobe and thence back to Tsau, from where we would return on the sand track to Kauri. I had been talking about the trip for several days before we left, and various people asked me whether (or rather informed me that) they would go with us. Kha//an and !Unn/obe, knowing some *hxaro* (delayed reciprocity gifts) were probably waiting for them in /Kae/kae, wanted to visit Kha//an's daughter's family there. /Xoan N!a'an wanted to visit her sister in !Xabe, between /Kae/kae and Dobe. With the members of my own camp, our camping gear, and supplies, that already made a full truckload.

I planned to drive due west from Kauri to /Kae/kae along the "cut-line," the sandy track made by Consolidated Diamond Mines, known as CDM. This was the South African company that was prospecting western Ngamiland by sampling the sand for diamonds along a grid of such cutlines. On the day of departure, I and !Xuma and =Oma !Oma and Di//xao and their child spent hours packing up the vehicle and shutting down our camp. The last thing I put into the Land Rover was the huge, all-important Herero sour-milk gourd I used for traveling. This gourd was bound with leather straps used to carry it or suspend it from the low branch of a tree. It contained the buttermilk culture we used to turn gifts of fresh milk along the way into a nourishing drink that was deliciously tangy, completely portable, and did not have to be refrigerated.

About midmorning we drove down the sandy road to the Ju//hoan camp at Kauri and found the would-be travelers calmly sitting by their fires doing household tasks. They didn't seem ready to go, or to have any bags or bundles packed. "/Am n/hau! M!a ka u-o!" yelled !Xuma. (The sun is going down! Let's go!) I had already learned that "The sun is going down!"—meaning "Hurry up!"—could be said, to comical effect, at any time of day, even right after the sun had come up—or long after it had gone down. The three people who had wanted to go with us strolled slowly into their houses, and my heart sank. Surely the sun *would* go down before we got to where we meant to sleep that night. But in a very few minutes, all of the travelers were heading for the Land Rover with small bundles on their backs. I chided myself for realizing only belatedly how little time it takes to pack, for people with so few possessions.

On this first trip back to the western communities from Kauri, I was traveling with !Unn/obe and Kha//an as well as with !Xuma, my language teacher, /Xoan N!a'an, the storyteller, and =Oma !Oma and his wife, Di//xao. As we traveled and spoke of those we were to visit, I often heard these people's names and others in the Ju//hoan name rep-

ertoire mentioned. The geography of Ngamiland began to seem like a fabric of kinship dotted with repeating colors. As I've said, the Ju/'hoan practice of naming creates a special relationship between the child and the grandparent for whom he or she is named. The fact that we were on a story recording trip and that two of our group had the same names as the two sons of the trickster god who first invented the trance dance was an entirely unremarkable circumstance—except to me. I had a strong feeling that time, even the time before time, was folding back on itself, always making more connections like this one to the Ju/'hoansi's ancient repertoire of names, always enriching the fabric of understanding.

Piled into the Land Rover together, talking, singing, and watching for meaty birds to slingshoot out the windows, we became a kind of mobile story corps. We camped for two nights along the CDM track until we reached /Kae/kae, the next settlement of any kind, where I knew we would find several Ju/'hoan camps coexisting in the usual apparently congenial—but at base uneasy—symbiosis with camps of Herero herders. The fun and freedom of travel before we got there made the trip completely delightful. Everyone was happy and excited to be traveling in a Land Rover over miles they had so often traversed much more slowly on foot or donkeyback.

I was entranced by the way the members of our small group welded themselves into an efficient and comfortable unit. The tasks of setting up camp at night and getting a supper fire going, fetching water and firewood if any was available, seemed to be cheery second nature to all. Though I had always enjoyed camping with friends in the US, there had often been awkwardness in it, because none of us camped often enough, or spent enough time in each other's presence, to be really relaxed. In contrast, the seamless comfort the Ju/'hoansi showed with each new situation on our road trip was a marvel to me. Camping preliminaries were quickly gotten out of the way so the really enjoyable part of each day—talking, telling stories, eating around a fire, and sometimes hearing music played on a small thumb piano pulled out of someone's back pocket—could commence. If we had to camp in an area where the travelers feared lions, leopards, or hyenas, they simply cut thorn branches and built a ring of them so we could make our camp and our fire inside it and forget about predators.

Once during this trip I finally reached a breaking point about something that had been literally gnawing at me. The Ju/'hoansi quickly solved my problem, however. I had had a sore, itchy, achy spot on my back, just above the waist, for some time. I had thought it was an insect bite that would heal, but it kept getting worse. It felt like something was eating me from within. Driving along the lengthy, hot track to /Kae/Kae,

the pain and strangeness of the spot at last got to me, and I exclaimed, "People, something is eating me!" We all got out of the car. I pulled up my shirt and bent over. =Oma !Oma said, "Why didn't you speak up sooner? We can take care of this right away." He took out a small penknife, sterilized its blade with a match, and deftly picked something out of the sore spot. He then opened his hand and showed me what he had extracted. A small white grub squirmed in his palm. It was a botfly larva, common, he said, in places where there were cattle or antelopes. "We get them all the time." I looked at it for a second in horror and then realized I had felt immediate relief. I was grateful to =Oma for his matter-of-fact handling of the situation. A splash of Dettol antiseptic on the wound, and we pressed on.

When we reached a village on a trip like this, we would invariably be invited to stay at the fire of relatives or namesakes of those with whom we were traveling. The kin connections and the names, even mine, Baq'u, made us into instant family wherever we went. If it was the dry season (approximately nine months of the year), we camped in the open, laying out our bedrolls or sleeping blankets right along with those of our hosts around their fire. If it was rainy, often there would be a hut or small shelter of sticks and tarps we could sleep in. I also carried a small blue tent, which I sometimes set up to have a little privacy. In it I could just sit up, but it allowed me to change clothes and have a place to read at night or before it got too hot in the mornings.

The blue tent's sewn-in floor also let me relax awhile from my constant vigilance about snakes. Mambas, cobras, and puffadders abound in Ngamiland. I had heard it said that there are two kinds of people in the world, those who can stay calm and do the rational thing if a snake appears, and those who can't. I was afraid, given my spitting cobra experience at Dobe, that I was in the latter category, and because I once found myself flying straight upward out of a meeting when another snake (not poisonous) crossed the sand in the middle of our circle of chairs. I had also already crashed my desk chair over backward in the sand when a small green mamba fell onto my desk at Kauri out of the big tree from which it was suspended. Soon, however, I was to find that when I absolutely had to, even I could summon the courage to face a snake.

It happened this way. We arrived in /Kae/kae at night, and, even this late in the season, rain was pelting down. Dry spots in various huts were found for my Ju/'hoan friends, and then Kha//an's sister took me to a little stick hut a bit away from the village. The hut had been built for my teacher Richard Lee in a previous season. It had an ancient tarp over the top that kept out most of the rain, so even though it was

not tall enough to stand up in, I thought it would keep me reasonably dry. I nipped into the house quickly, spread out my sleeping bag, and climbed in. I read by torch (flashlight) for a while but was soon sleepy, lulled by the soothing sound of rain in the otherwise absolute silence. I turned off the torch and laid it so I could find it in the dark, at arm's length from the right side of the sleeping bag. Settling down for the night, I lay still for a few moments in the pitch blackness.

Then "whump!" Something heavy and clearly alive fell from the stick roof onto my stomach and remained there. I had no way of seeing what it was, but I had earlier seen large coiled snakes fall from high shelves and even from the inside of a Land Rover engine. I thought I was a goner. Whatever it was remained immobile. I reached ever so slowly for the torch. Slowly, slowly I placed it beneath my chin and pointed at the weight on my stomach. I had to turn on the light, had to know what I was dealing with. I fully expected that when I turned it on I might receive a fatal strike in the face.

What the bright light revealed on my stomach, however, was not a snake but a giant frog! Horrified but mightily relieved, I came out of that sleeping bag like greased lightning. The frog, my rejected prince, hopped heavily out the door. I spent the rest of the night reading by flashlight and glancing uneasily at the door as the rain continued to come down. Until that moment I hadn't known that giant frogs existed in the Kalahari. I later learned that they lived beneath the sand most of the time, emerging only during the rains. There was general hilarity the next morning when I stumblingly told the story. Soon I got over my fright and joined in the laughter.

I had come to /Kae/kae hoping to hear music by Jimmy /Ai!ae, a well-known composer of thumb piano songs. Jimmy's compositions were so good that many thumb piano players took them up and played them, always acknowledging that they were originally Jimmy's. He called himself, and was known as, *Jikxao*, the Owner of Lying, the Master of Tricks.

I first heard about Jimmy from Marjorie Shostak when we were still at Dobe together. Marjorie, as I've said, had been making a study of Ju/'hoan children's acquisition of musical skills and had heard Jimmy play at /Kae/kae. She also shared with me a long interview she had done with him, a life history, actually, focused primarily on the events he experienced that brought him to play and sing with the thumb piano as he did. One of these events was "spirit sickness," which he said he contracted when he fell headfirst down a well; another was being

struck by lightning. Jimmy was one of very few musicians who sang or spoke words along with his music. People also said he was the only person who used the thumb piano as other San use dance music—as a vehicle for trance and a medium for speaking to God.

Jimmy was in his twenties when I went to look for him at /Kae/kae. He was one of the first Ju/'hoan adopters of the thumb piano, which according to ethnomusicologist Nicholas England appears to have come from the north and east, ultimately from Bantu groups via speakers of Central Bushman languages. The instrument had only been adopted recently by the Ju/'hoansi because they lacked materials for its construction—chiefly heavy-gauge metal for the keys. But in 1958 a windfall occurred in their area during an epidemic of foot-and-mouth-disease. A team of South West African veterinarians came to /Kae/kae to construct *kraals* (corrals) in which to kill infected cattle, and they dumped their extra wire and nails there. Since then, some of the wire and nails had been pounded into musical keys. Thumb pianos had been gaining popularity, and by the time I was there in the early 1970s, most Ju/'hoan settlements had several of them.

We located Jimmy sitting under a tree, out beyond one of the /Kae/kae camps in the late afternoon. I learned he often lived somewhat apart from other people, a choice that would be unthinkable to most of the highly sociable San. Jimmy looked much like other Ju/'hoansi, but the habitually pained and distracted expression on his face set him apart. Though I liked him immensely as soon as we met, I was also a little afraid of him. With few preliminaries, he launched into a haunting song I recorded but was able to translate only much later.

Terrible God deceives, torments.
 God's arms descend into my fingers.
 Yesterday God said, "Be my child and listen.
 Take what I say to the people."
 God's arms.
 God's arms.
 A young soul lives in the western sky
 And is still learning.
 These are my tears:
 I mourn at death for years and years—
 This is what I have to tell.
 God spoke, telling me to take up
 These metal bits and this scrap of wood
 And with them to sing.
 Where will I hide from God's death?
 The day when God speaks where will I be?
 Where will I hide from terrible God who torments me?

The year of my death is known.
 The day of my death is known.
 Hoo, hoo!
 Owner of tricks, yes, am I.
 Master of lying, hoo.
 One who can fool you, that's me.
 Master of tricks, yes.
 Owner of lies!

I found the music otherworldly, impossibly sad and sweet, sounding like the music of souls in suspension. There was something else, too—a demonic note. Often the phrases were harsh and full of ingenious, clanging discords. The music was entirely his own, very different from any other thumb piano music I had heard—even when others were playing his compositions. But the music worked: it gave the impression of using diabolical materials to build a new kind of sweetness, one unheard before on the earth.

Jimmy was regarded as a very special person, set apart from ordinary people. Others considered him to have a great deal of power because of the uniqueness of his relationship to the great God. He was seen as different, even from other healers or *n/om kxaosi* (medicine owners). Healing men, such as Kxao =Oah, of whom I wrote in chapter 3, and the healing women I will describe further on, went into trance at dances and did battle in that context with the spirits sent by God to bring misfortune and sickness. They also drew out the invisible arrows of illness that the lesser god and the spirits had shot into the bodies of the sick. Jimmy, however, tranced not at dances but most often when playing the thumb piano. He felt himself to be a special medium for transmission of the word and power of God.

His songs had the triple function of praying to God, relating to other people what God replied, and lamenting his own outcast state among humanity. He was sort of like a “holy fool,” socially marginal but spiritually powerful. In some important sense, Jimmy did seem like an outcast—but an outcast of his own making. Though he was respected for his power and his art, he was seen as extremely hard to get along with. His exterior was thorny—this among a people celebrated for their ability to maintain smooth relations with each other. I myself felt concerned that he could make me do things I might not want to, like taking him places or giving him things, just by the power of his personality.

Another name he called himself, and was called by others, was “Jimmy Diasi,” Crazy Jimmy. *Di* as an adjective meant crazy, as a noun meant madness, and as a verb meant to be crazy. *Diasi* literally meant “crazinesses.” This was similar to the *!aia* (trance) and *!ai* (death) cog-

nates I learned about from other healers. But I had also heard the word *dia* in another context with which it seemed to have cognate connections, that of performative excellence. Jimmy's performances were highly musical, their brilliance taking his listeners into unknown realms of spirituality. "Ha dia!" is roughly translatable as "He nailed it!" I loved it that, in Ju//hoansi, a crazy musician could be crazy wonderful, even transcendent, just like in English.

Meeting Jimmy was the beginning of my understanding of the reverence Ju//hoansi hold for true creativity, wherever and however it occurs. Like many Ju//hoansi, I was both enticed and repelled by the discordant mystery of Jimmy's music. I knew I needed to understand much more about both the deep references in his art—some of which I was coming to know through the folktales—and his own strange relationship to them. I invited him to visit for an extended time later at Kauri, and eventually he came. There we worked together over long swaths of the reel-to-reel recordings I had made of him, so that I eventually understood the phrases, even the elliptical ones, that he used over and over. I wrote an article on his music for *Botswana Notes and Records* (Biesele 1993: 171–88), which contains a large number of translated songs.

I chanced upon Jimmy again later in 1971, during a winter visit to Dobe. There was an eclipse of the moon visible from the Kalahari at that time, some two years after the US Apollo 11 moon landing in July 1969. Radios were few and far between in Ngamiland at that time. So word of the moon landing—but not of the coming eclipse—had spread. Jimmy played and sang ardently during the eclipse until the moon came back, easing the tension of a dangerous time. "Why have senseless children played with the moon and ruined it?" he sang, rolling his eyes dramatically and thrusting his head forward and back on his neck like a pigeon.

After our time staying at /Kae/kae with Kha//an's daughter and other relatives, we headed north toward Dobe. We were intending to deliver Di//xao (=Oma !Oma's wife) and their toddler to her people. Di//xao had become too homesick to stay at Kauri, but =Oma !Oma said he would continue to work for me. So we drove the Land Rover to one of the villages near Dobe where Di//xao's family had been living several months before. We learned that her people were not currently in residence, that they were living even further north, near Cherocheroha, in the direction of the mongongo groves, gathering the wild fruits and vegetables of that abundant rainy season, and hunting.

I was quite taken aback. How would we find them? There were no roads—not even tracks—through the heavy sands of !Xu, the region of transverse dunes between Dobe and the groves. We were carrying a drum of petrol lashed snugly behind the back seat, and its contents were

measured to suffice for only the kilometer distance we had planned to travel, with very little for contingencies. A stick poked down through the drum cap revealed only six inches of petrol left—and we still had 125 kilometers of heavy sand back from Dobe to Tsau, which had the nearest petrol pump. Yet we couldn't ask a young woman alone, carrying a small child, to make a trek like the one between Dobe and Cherocheroha. Nor did the village people know when her family would return to the Dobe area. So the next morning we began bush-bashing northwards. I was in utter trepidation, worrying about, among other things, running out of fuel, thus losing precious weeks of assembling the materials for my thesis. But as =Oma !Oma, who knew how much petrol we had and how much might be needed, was, along with everyone else, relaxed and cheery, I decided I would just have to trust in his confidence.

After we spent hours banging into stumps, falling into aardvark holes, and cutting our truck out of thorn bushes, the afternoon sun began to wane and we had not found Di//xao's family. I began to feel quite desperate. Every thicket, every clearing, started to look the same to me, and I worried that we might be going around in circles. My hands on the steering wheel were so hot I thought they might actually be getting burned. I was so weary and anxious that I felt we should go no further. "Stop!" said Di//xao suddenly. Gratefully, I stopped the Land Rover. She was sitting behind me on the back seat and pointing out her window. "Mba !u," she murmured. "There's my father's footprint."

In minutes we had located the people we were looking for. I was amazed but glad, as they were to be suddenly reunited, though everyone else concerned treated the whole episode as quite routine. The contrast could not have been starker between my amazement and their matter-of-fact certainty that the people would be found using a combination of tracks known to all with geographic and social information about their likely whereabouts. It whetted my appetite for learning about tracking knowledge: not a magical skill but an element of "people's science." This skill was reinforced by information on animal behavior encoded in the folktales, on which Ju/'hoansi and their ancestors had clearly relied for millennia.

We left Di//xao with her people and turned the Land Rover's nose south again. Driving much more quickly than on our trip north, we followed our own track back to Dobe. Mindful still of our dwindling petrol, we immediately continued on towards Nokaneng and Tsau.

We drove pretty well into the long stretch between G!o'oce and Nokaneng before stopping, because there was a full moon. Then we had trouble find-

ing a place to camp because there were termite diggings everywhere, and they eat your blankets in the night. Finally we stopped and cleared away the dry grass and built a big fire. We had a quiet, pleasant supper, and then long conversations. . . . It was all very interesting. A glorious sleep, then, with my feet right up to the fire.

Drove all day and never saw any game but an ostrich. Once we all piled out of the truck and ran through fabulous grass to a long-ago bee tree, but it was now empty. On the way we found a *n=ah* tree, the kind G!kon//’hom-dima [literally, “the beautiful aardvark girl,” another guise of the python-elephant folktale heroine] falls out of into the well [in her adventure mentioned in chapter 4]. It was a tall tree with small reddish fruit. !Xuma also dug up a */ha* root, which we later roasted—it tasted like a cross between broccoli and potato, like most roots here seem to.

We made it back to the petrol pump in Tsau with at least two inches to spare in the bottom of the drum. This experience was one of many pivotal moments leading to my eventual focus (in my thesis and indeed in the rest of my life) not only on tracking but on the knowledge and communication systems—in general—of the Ju/’hoansi and other hunter-gatherers. I was thoroughly galvanized by the idea that there were close relationships between the ways information was communicated and remembered (including via the stories I was recording, which were rife with information about how animals behave, and how humans *ought* to behave) and the people’s achievement of daily subsistence. The deep reliability of the knowledge base they established that way seemed to have everything to do with the serene confidence I observed among my Ju/’hoan friends. It allowed them the security of knowing that what they were already deciding to do next was unquestionably a sound judgment, thoroughly grounded in proven information and wisdom.