



CyberTracker

Evaluation of Khwe San Trackers in the Bwabwata National Park, Namibia

In April 2014 ten trackers were evaluated for Track & Sign Interpretation in the Bwabwata National Park. Training was also conducted on trailing Kudu and Lions, although there were not sufficient time to conduct individual evaluations on trailing for every tracker.

Benson Kupinga and Alfred Tchadau got 100% (at the Lower Band) to earn their Track & Sign Professional certificates, compared to 97% and 91% respectively in December 2012. Gideon Katembo, (who got 99%), and Mafuta Nartjie, (who got 94%), were included in a four-man training team who received additional intensive training. Although not yet ready for the Senior Tracker certificate, Benson and Alfred now have a sufficient level of skill to conduct training and informal screening evaluations to select the top eight trackers for the next formal evaluation.

A significant result is that for tracks that were certain to myself, when the top four trackers gave different answers, they were able to give the correct answer after they engaged in critical discussion 93% of the time – 13 correct and 1 incorrect consensus answer (even if the initial correct answers were in the minority). For an additional three questions no consensus could be reached, but these were even uncertain to myself and would not be included in an evaluation. This means that even when there is not a Senior or Master Tracker Evaluator present, the training team will be correct 93% of the time for difficult tracks where some of them initially gave incorrect answers. It can be assumed that for tracks where all four gave the same answer, it would most likely be correct.

A highlight of the evaluation was the two days we spent tracking two male lions. This was the first time that they walked into lions on foot. This was clearly an invaluable experience for them, since they previously had an irrational fear of encountering lion on foot. The experience of walking into two male lions on foot helped to demonstrate that there is no need to be over-anxious as long as adequate caution and vigilance is maintained.

Animal tracks tested in the Track & Sign evaluation include:

Frog, squirrel, impala, banded mongoose, buffalo, kudu (male), aardvark, tortoise, hyaena, African wild cat, civet, leguan, lechwe, great white egret, plover, goose, hippo, dove, small passerine, snake, antlion, springhare, genet, springhare droppings, francolin, porcupine, hare, water mongoose, dikkop, wasp, dung beetle, mouse, kudu, bushbuck, warthog, socket of displaced stone, starling, francolin chicks, slender mongoose, dung beetle rolling ball, hornbill, lizard, small juvenile monitor, vervet monkey, female leopard, cane rat, waterbuck, small crocodile, elephant (detail), clawless otter, honey badger, male lion.

Track & Sign certificates were awarded to:

Ndala Ngendjo: Track & Sign II (88%, from 81% in 2012)

Jan Tande: Track & Sign III (90%)

Geofrey Tukupwele: Track & Sign III (91%)

Dawid Kwala: Track & Sign III (93%)

Dicks Siyauya: Track & Sign III (94%)

Mafuta Nartjie: Track & Sign III (94%, from 88% in 2012)

Masiriso Ndeunde: Track & Sign III (96%, from 86% in 2012)

Gideon Katembo: Track & Sign III (99%)

Alfred Tchadau: Track & Sign Professional (100%, from 91% in 2012)

Benson Kupinga: Track & Sign Professional (100%, from 97% in 2012)

All the candidates showed enthusiasm to participate in the evaluation and took pride in being part of this process.

Official Government Unit Standards for Tracking

A decision was made by the CyberTracker Evaluation Standards Committee that only one official government Unit Standard Level for Tracking should be developed, but divided into four modules. These would be equivalent to the CyberTracker Animal Tracker Level 1, including two modules for Animal Track & Sign Level 1 and Animal Trailing Level 1. In addition, a Unit Standard for Man-Tracking Level 1 (for anti-poaching) including two modules for Human Track & Sign Level 1 and Human Trailing Level 1.

In South Africa we have some control since we are represented on the government Standards Generating Body. We cannot dictate to the Namibian government what they should do, but we will limit our involvement to assisting in the development of one unit standard level consisting of four modules for tracking. Any other unit standards develop by the government would therefore not be consistent with the international CyberTracker standards. This may result in competing standards in the industry, but we have no control over that possibility. Competing standards, including other non-government standards for tracking, is maybe inevitable. Our objective is simply to ensure that the international CyberTracker Standards are maintained at the highest levels possible.

A number of issues were discussed, but the most important are:

- 1) Tracking is a practical skill that must be tested in the field by experienced, expert tracker Evaluators. This involves a process of peer review amongst expert trackers with many years (at least 10 years or more) of practical experience in the field. Tracker standards therefore cannot be maintained by government regulations that are paper-based and enforced by government officials who are not expert trackers. For this reason we recommend that the official government Unit Standard for Tracking should only set the minimum standard for a “tracker” who is qualified to work as a tracker. The higher levels should be developed and maintained by trackers, such as with the CyberTracker Evaluation Standards, or any other competing tracker standards. Peer review amongst trackers will determine which of these standards are the highest, not government regulations.
- 2) If we allow the entire CyberTracker Evaluation Standards to be adopted by a government at a time when there is not enough expert Senior and Master Trackers, then the entire system will be degraded by whoever happens to be available to fill the positions in the Standards Committee. Our Principle of External Evaluation requires External Evaluators that are financially independent of each other. This means that the Standards Committee for Namibia would need to consist of individuals who cannot all be associated with Tekoa – it needs to include tracker Evaluators from other tracker training providers that are independent of Tekoa. At present we do not know what the standards are of other tracker trainers in Namibia, so there is a risk that their standards may be lower than the CyberTracker standards (or it may well be higher). If so, this may lower the overall standards in Namibia. If the Namibia Standards are associated with the CyberTracker Standards, it will therefore lower the international CyberTracker Standards.
- 3) Developing the capacity to maintain tracker standards takes time. It took 10 years to develop the initial standards in South Africa (we have now been conducting tracker evaluations for 20 years). It took at least 5 to 10 years to develop an equivalent standard in the USA. In Spain we have been developing training capacity for more than seven years, but they are not yet ready to maintain the CyberTracker Standards on their own (they do not have enough Senior Trackers). So it may take five to ten years to develop sufficient capacity in Namibia, but if government regulations are put in place before there is enough Senior Trackers (who are financially independent of each other), then whoever fills the positions in the Namibia Standards Committee may not be able to maintain the CyberTracker Standards.
- 4) Another consideration is that tracker evaluations are very labour intensive and therefore expensive in terms of the time required to conduct evaluations. Most trackers are poor and cannot afford to pay for tracker certification – tracker evaluations are usually subsidised with donor funding. The CyberTracker Evaluation system is very efficient and simplifies the amount of paperwork

involved. Official government Unit Standards for all Tracker levels will add a significant administrative burden on Evaluators. This will either make tracker evaluations more expensive (and unaffordable), or to cope with the additional administrative burden evaluators may be tempted to cut corners and lower practical standards.

Essentially, trying to develop official government unit standards for practical tracking skills is like trying to force a square peg into a round hole – it simply does not work. The only viable solution is to minimise government involvement in tracker evaluation standards by only having one unit standard level for the minimum standard required for official government recognition.

The objective of official government standards is to provide trackers with official recognition for the creation of jobs for trackers. Our approach is to provide the minimum standards required for official recognition at a level that provides a high enough standard to be employed as a tracker. The CyberTracker Tracker Level 1 requires 70%, which is much higher than what is required for a pass in many other subjects (in some school subjects a pass may be as low as 30% and rarely above 50%). Tracker Level 1 is therefore a good standard to ensure that a tracker has sufficient skill to be employed in the tourism industry. The higher levels under the CyberTracker Evaluation Standards is an exceptionally high international standard, which may be equivalent to the standards of private educational centres that are recognised as Centres of Excellence. In this sense, CyberTracker strives to be recognised as the “Harvard” of tracking, which may be higher than the requirements of government standards aimed at creating lower-level jobs for trackers.

We therefore recommend that Tekoa assist the Namibian government in developing the four Tracker Level 1 (70%) standard modules for official government recognition, which may apply to all tracker training providers in Namibia. At the same time Tekoa may strive to reach the international CyberTracker Senior Tracker and Master Tracker standards, which would distinguish Tekoa as a Centre of Excellence in the art of tracking.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louis Liebenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'L' and a long, sweeping underline.

Louis Liebenberg
July 2014