

SAN TRACKER PROJECT

Kalahari San Master Tracker Programme

The Old Way sponsors and is affiliated with Louis Liebenberg's Kalahari San Master Tracker Programme, and forms part of its European Feeder Programme. A large part of the inspiration and motivation for The Old Way programme came from supporting and fulfilling the main aim of the San Tracker Master Programme in Africa, which is to create employment opportunities for indigenous San Master Trackers in the Kalahari to ensure that tracking skills will not die out. We believe that the wider longer term aims of the Programme are crucial in providing an invaluable resource for nature conservation worldwide by monitoring rare and endangered species and by helping prevent the poaching of endangered species. Their tracking skills are a vital source of information about human evolution, and science and the human species would suffer a permanent and irreplaceable loss if they vanished. As such, this group of Master Trackers represents a unique part of humanity's cultural heritage.

Imagine if you found yourself in a unique position to help save the last fifteen tigers. Or, if you had the opportunity to preserve the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Bayeaux Tapestry. What would you do? What choice would you make? Historically, there have been many crossroads that individuals, communities and nations have stood and decided which paths to take. Consequences then followed. What position might we take now with the benefit of hindsight if we stood at an important historical crossroads?

Well, it so happens we are at perhaps the very last fork in the road when it comes to helping preserve one of our own species most ancient and important cultural lineages - the Master Trackers of the hunter-gatherer culture of the Ju /'Hoansi Bushmen. The Old Way Yearcourse journeys deep into the Kalahari to this remote tribe in association with CyberTracker to play a part in helping to preserve this most ancient cultural expression of our human lineage. As there are only fifteen active master trackers and hunters left at the last count in 2018 the situation today is an urgent and critical one.

The Kalahari San Bushmen of which the Ju/'Hoansi are one group, are genetically the oldest modern people who once roamed over much of Africa. They have been exploited, persecuted and displaced for many hundreds of years, and experienced enormous hardship. We travel to the part of the desert which is the last place in Africa where they still retain rights to their ancestral lands, where they are still able to hunt with a bow and arrow and where the community still subsist with some of their traditional life-ways intact.

It's important to stress that this invitation came from the Ju/'Hoansi Bushmen themselves. We are fully aware of the trap which many Western organisations fall into of thinking they know what's best for other communities. Our primary guide is the renowned anthropologist, scientist and founder of CyberTracker, Louis Liebenberg, who has been working with the Bushmen in the Kalahari since 1985, and being a true master tracker himself is highly respected and trusted. He was asked by the elders in 1990 to help them to pass on their cultural practices to the younger generation of San before they are lost forever. It is crucial that a programme of employment creation be initiated in order to ensure that their invaluable tracking expertise is passed on to the younger generation of San by incentivising and motivating them to keep their knowledge and skills alive. Teaming up with Louis, puts us in a very privileged position to have a unique opportunity to help preserve one of the oldest and most significant cultural expressions of our human lineage, through this kind of immersive experience.

Being the longest, continuous intact human culture, the San people afford a unique chance to learn so much from them, not least their exceptional and astounding ability to read the earth for stories and track and trail animals for days, representing a continuous tradition that goes back more than 100 000 years.

Their tracking skills are a vital source of information about human evolution, and science would suffer a permanent and irreplaceable loss if they vanished. As such, these very last few remaining bow hunters who are master trackers represent a unique part of humanity's cultural heritage.

The money raised by your participation goes towards directly supporting these communities and will be a lifeline of employment for them whilst also encouraging these ancient and important cultural practices. It also enables these trips to take place. Any surplus raised will be spent on resources or capital expenses the village may need after consultation with the elders and Louis Liebenberg.

As an international community we tend to value "things" -- old buildings, paintings, sculptures etc. If this was a work of art we were trying to preserve, that would already have happened. Historic buildings have huge sums thrown at them, and to put it into perspective, Louis is working on the same budget for one single museum guard, sitting on one stool, in just one room, in just one museum, in just one capital city.

We will be journeying to one of the remotest parts of the Kalahari to an isolated camp where we will spend our days engaged in a moving and deeply immersive cross-cultural exchange. Living basically we will be playing with the children, crafting necklaces out of ostrich shells, gathering plants, singing, dancing and of course going out in small groups at dawn tracking with the bow hunting Master Trackers themselves.

It's time to recognise the threshold we are on – the cultural crossroads to decide the fate of the most ancient people on earth. In a way, the choice we need to make can be put simply - do we wish to preserve this culture or not? We think it's time to sit at the feet of these elders, and to listen to their ancient voices speaking about the old ways that have so much to offer our corrupted contemporary world.

Louis Liebenberg's Vision

The exceptional skills of indigenous Kalahari San Master Trackers may soon be lost. It is crucial that the last remaining Master Trackers in the Kalahari are identified and that a programme of employment creation be initiated in order to ensure that their invaluable expertise is passed on to the younger generation and trackers from around the world.

Louis has been working with Kalahari San Master Trackers since 1985. Over this period about 90% of these Master Trackers have passed away. However, he estimates that there may be more than 100 Master Trackers in the Kalahari who have not yet been identified and certified. This may be one of the largest living populations of traditional Master Trackers alive and may therefore be an invaluable resource for nature conservation worldwide.

The Kalahari San are genetically the oldest modern people and the art of tracking may be the origin of science, representing a continuous tradition that goes back more than 100 000 years (See Louis's book 'The Origin of Science'). Their tracking skills are a vital source of information about human evolution, and science would suffer a permanent and irreplaceable loss if they vanished.

The world is experiencing a period of rapid environmental change linked to habitat change, pollution, and climate change. Monitoring biodiversity is critical for effective conservation management. There are too few professional ecologists to deal with the scale of environmental challenges. Furthermore, global biodiversity conservation is seriously challenged by gaps in the geographical coverage of existing information. Locally based monitoring is particularly important in developing countries, where it can empower local communities to manage their natural resources. Trackers can play a critical role in preventing poaching of endangered species such as rhino, elephant and tigers. Trackers can also be of great value for monitoring rare and endangered species.

Over the last twenty years Louis has developed the CyberTracker Tracker Certification system which has gained international recognition for maintaining the highest standards in tracking skills. More than 5000 tracker certificates have been issued worldwide, including Tracker Levels I, II, III, Professional Tracker, Senior Tracker and Master Tracker. The success of the CyberTracker certification has resulted in a growing number of tracker training centres around the world. However, there is a critical shortage of Master Trackers who can provide the highest levels of tracker training to the new generation of trackers. At present there are only 10 certified Master Trackers worldwide.

The Master Tracker Programme will develop the highest standards of excellence in the art of tracking. The programme will combine academic research and practical tracking skills to implement a rigorous scientific peer review process to develop the future generations of Master Trackers.

Objectives for First Three Years

The main objective is to create employment opportunities for indigenous San Master Trackers in the Kalahari to ensure that tracking skills will not die out.

A key problem is that potential employers do not know who the true Master Trackers are or where to find them. To overcome this problem, we need to identify the best indigenous trackers and issue them with Master Tracker certificates so that they can be provided with employment.

1. In the first three years we will aim to provide 50 to 100 Master Tracker certificates to indigenous San trackers in the Kalahari in Namibia and Botswana.
2. Identify young trackers who are reasonably fluent in English to act as translators for elder Master Trackers, and who may be mentored to become the next generation of trackers.
3. Develop a network of tour guides who can conduct expeditions to the Kalahari in order to create jobs for trackers.
4. Promote potential job creation by the Wildlife departments of Namibia and Botswana to employ trackers on a full-time basis in nature conservation.
5. Promote employment of Master Trackers in scientific research, such as the Tracking in Caves project, wildlife surveys using animal track counts and scientific research on animal behaviour.

Broader socio-economic benefits

Document the process, including the social dynamics within the communities. For example, any project that may provide an advantage to some individuals within a community may inadvertently cause resentment among individuals who feel that they do not benefit from the project. We therefore need to be sensitive to how the project can have a larger benefit to the community as a whole, and how these benefits can be communicated to the community.

For example, creating jobs for Master Trackers will bring tour groups to the villages, where they may buy crafts made by the women. In addition to creating direct jobs for trackers, additional economic benefits can also be created for the women. We need to think about how we can create additional socio-economic benefits to the community as a whole.

Long Term Objectives

Master Trackers employed in the Kalahari will conduct ongoing wildlife monitoring and mentor trackers from other parts of the world. Since bow hunting (and therefore the real need to track) is now banned in Botswana, Master Trackers need to be taught new skills so that they can be employed to do wildlife monitoring, animal track surveys and work with scientists conducting research on animal

behaviour. These skills include the use of the CyberTracker software to record their observations in the field. In Namibia there are still a number of trackers who hunt with the traditional bow-and-arrow. This provides the unique opportunity to maintain traditional bow-and-arrow hunting and tracking skills as well as developing new skills in using the CyberTracker software for wildlife monitoring. Only by developing a rigorous scientific research programme will Master Tracker skills be retained and developed into the future.

Louis Liebenberg

Co-Founder and Executive Director: CyberTracker Conservation NPC Associate of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University Laureate of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise

Author: *The Origin of Science* (2013) and *The Art of Tracking* (1990)

www.cybertracker.org

