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IT WAS AN INCREDIBLE SUNSET,  
THE SKY TURNING FROM PINK,  
TO PURPLE, TO ORANGE

and leaving us plowing a desperately slow course on foot, our energy and motivation sinking as rapidly as our wheels.

An army of flies descended on us, drawn to the sole source of moisture and salt for miles around: our pouring sweat. With our hands clinging to the handlebars to try to stay upright, flies would brazenly land on our cheeks, noses, ears or eyelashes, edging ever closer to the glistening moisture of our eyes. Swatting them merely sent them boomeranging around our heads to restart their exploration.

Frustrated and exhausted, Uis suddenly seemed days away. I found myself trapped in a cycle of mental anguish: I would gee myself up, remind myself that all progress is progress, and get into a positive mindset, knowing that every metre covered was one fewer between us and our destination.

Then I'd make the mistake of allowing positivity to turn into optimism. I'd hit a patch of slightly solid ground and hop onto the saddle, elated at being able to ride again. Looking ahead, I'd spot a slight rise in the road or a change in the shade of the surface. Perhaps the sand was ending? I was imagining easy riding all the way to town.

Then the front wheel would sink, and my heart would drop with it.

### ICE COLD IN UIS

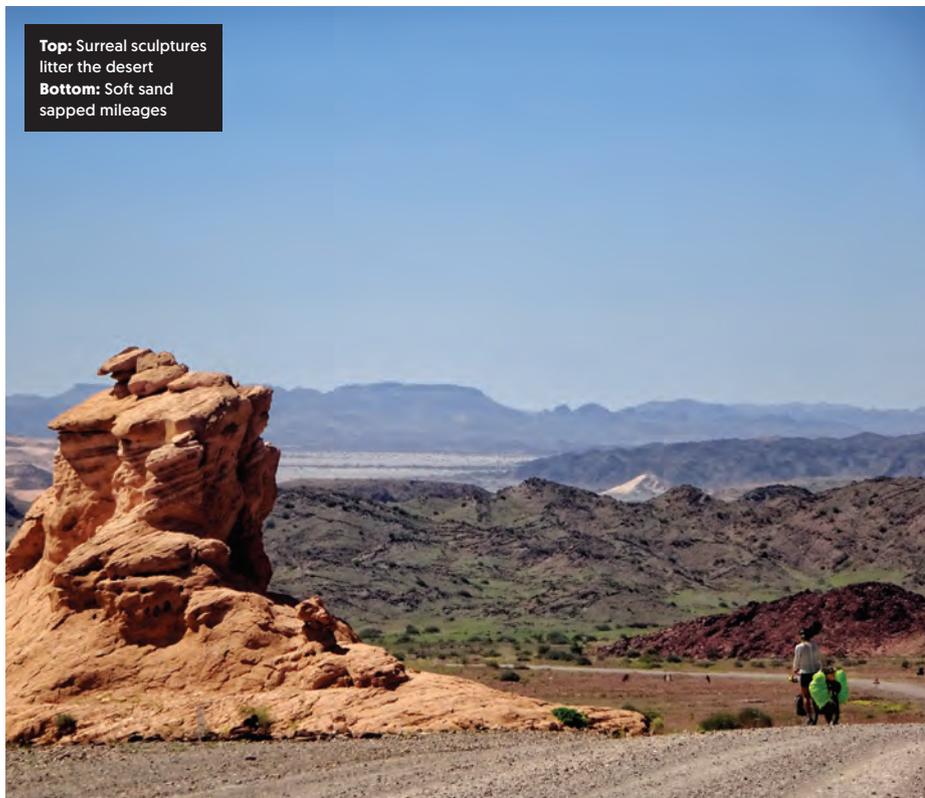
It was a punishing day: in six hours we covered just 20km. Our rations were thinning, and when we stopped, exhausted, for lunch, we discovered our six-day-old bread was mouldy. Emergency instant noodles – cooked with ease in the midday sun to preserve limited gas – saved lunch. But then we had to keep on pushing.

Eventually, with indescribable relief, we reached solid ground, and squeezed another 20km out of our tired legs. Our hope of reaching town the next day was alive.

Pitching our tent as the sun dropped, it felt like our perseverance had earned the desert's respect. We were treated to the most incredible sunset, the sky turning slowly from pink, to purple, to orange, to yellow, while the silhouette of Brandberg loomed on the horizon like a huge moon.

It was an energy-restoring, magical moment, and the following day our dreams came true: we were gifted with rideable roads. By 2pm we

**Top:** Surreal sculptures litter the desert  
**Bottom:** Soft sand sapped mileages



were sitting in the shade, clutching a pint, almost disbelieving the emotional rollercoaster of the previous seven days.

Elated and exhausted, we knew we'd barely scratched the surface of the Namib; we would spend the next month covering another 1,000km of this remarkable desert. But we also knew that if we'd managed Damaraland, we could manage anything, and that if the rest of Namibia was a fraction as incredible as this week had been, we'd be in for the ride of a lifetime. ●

### Cycling in Africa

Africa is easily stereotyped as unstable, yet many countries are not only safe but are filled with friendly people and fantastic cycling, especially if you're willing to explore the dirt and gravel backroads. However, it's important to be prepared. Bring your own spare parts, sun cream, camping kit, and everything else you'll need. For a cross-continental tour, the main challenge is covering the vast distances while avoiding the often busy intercity tarmac roads. Bikepacking.com has a detailed guide for cycling in Africa, which we found useful for preparation: [bikepacking.com/plan/bikepacking-africa/](https://bikepacking.com/plan/bikepacking-africa/)