

**BOTSWANA
Mount Otse
June 2008
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

The first time I set foot on Mt Otse was in November 2006. Two friends and I just got back from hiking in Namibia and we had a vague idea where Botswana's highest peak was. After two hours of asking the locals where the highest peak in Botswana was, we found ourselves in front of Otse's cheese factory. The lady behind the counter showed me where the highest peak is but warned me not to go the top. According to folklore, people don't return. My two friends had enough of mountains and it was decided that I must run to the top, try to take pictures of myself on top of Botswana's highest peak (without reading the camera's manual and therefore not knowing how the self timer works) and run back.

The second time I set foot on Mt Otse was in September 2007. I had, in the meantime, discovered that there is a trig beacon on top of Botswana's highest peak. Needless to say, I had to go back and find the real highest peak. Crossing the border post at Ramatlabama, the staff informed us that people disappear when they go to Mt Otse. We were, however, adamant and this time I knew exactly where the mountain was. Finding the highest peak could not be that difficult. We found ourselves parked in front of the Cheese factory by 10h00. This time I asked the owner where the highest peak was. By 14h00 we were sipping a beer in the tea garden opposite the cheese factory discussing our hike. Yes, we did find a trig beacon but discovered a higher point about 50 m away. Taking the necessary pictures and coordinates, I can also lay claim to the first lady ever to fall off the "highest peak" in Botswana. It was while trying to recover some of my dignity that I spotted what seemed like a higher peak 3 km away. Decisions! Decisions! We were running out of water and time.

Back at the border post we had a wonderful welcome. The staff came running out of the building to make sure that we were flesh and blood. What a nice welcome back after visiting Botswana's highest peak.

The third time I set my foot on Mt Otse was in June 2008. This time we wrote "Monalanong Hill" as the place of our visit at the border post. Armed with several GPS coordinates we turned left before the cheese factory and followed the dirt road for a while. By 10h00 we were parked in front of a lodge. Looking at the top of the mountain we slowly unpacked our daypacks. 90 minutes to the top, 90 minutes down. 2 Litre of water and 4 energy bars amongst us would be more than enough. 90 Minutes later we were standing on top of a peak. The highest in Botswana it definitely was not. Far right, I could see the peak I visited in 2006. To our right were the ones we visited in 2007. To our left, about 2 km away, were the ones we saw in 2007. Decisions! Decisions! With renewed energy we raced to the range 2 km away. To be double sure I measure the peak to the left before rushing off to measure the peak to the right. Alas, somewhere along the line, by eliminating the other possibilities, Eureka! Trig Beacon and all!

For me, every encounter with a mountain is different. Some mountains are gentle, some are unforgiving. Normally I get a sense of a mountain when I lay eyes on her. With Mt Otse I'm still trying to figure out if it is respect.

The conclusion I arrived at after comparing the GPS coordinates I took with a Garmin Vista C with two I got off the internet

- Google Earth's Highest peak in Botswana was 42 km away
- Peak Bagger's highest peak in Botswana was 18 km away