

# - Kalahari / Kgalagadi

| [HOME](#) | [Map of Kalahari desert](#) | [Animals in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Roar of the Kalahari movie](#) |  
 | [Plants in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Tribes in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Sands of the Kalahari movie DVD](#)  
 |  
 | [Life of the Kalahari Bushmen](#) | [Kalahari desert climate](#) | [Kalahari desert pictures](#) | [Kalahari pans](#) |  
 | [Kalahari desert paintings](#) | [Kalahari dunes](#) | [Namib and Kalahari desert](#) | [Lost city of the Kalahari](#) |  
 | [From Gondwanaland to Kalahari](#) | [Witdraai - Camel Breeding](#) | [Kalahari Camels](#) | [Scotty Smith](#)  
 |  
 | [Kalahari personalities](#) | [Some Kalahari policemen](#) | [Lost city of the Kalahari](#) | [Sights on your way](#) |  
 | [Kalahari Bushmen \(Komani San, Saasi\)](#) | [E-mail Site Owner at info@abbott-infotech.co.za](#) |

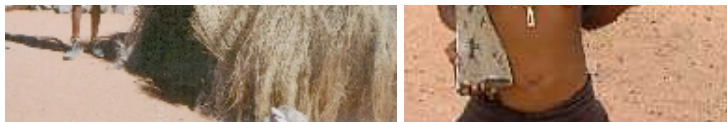
This web page gives info about South Africas people and culture in the Kalahari region, and the !Kung Bushmen. Khomani San, the Vasekela bushman, Mbarakwena, , /Gwi, //Ganaa, Kua and !Xo bushman tribes that live in and around the Kalahari desert.

## Tribes in the Kalahari desert South Africa

Tribes in the Kalahari desert includes the Kung, Khomani San or San Bushmen, Khoi or Hottentot people, (called together with the San or Bushmen the Khoi-San), Nama or Namaqua tribes and Griqua people.

Besides a small number of so-called "wild" Khomani San Bushmen living their ancestral live as hunters-gatherers, a truly stone-age way of life, to which they have clinged for at least 20 thousand years, this traditional Bushman way of life is now very scarce, and becoming scarcer by the day. The Khomani San Bushmen have maintained their way of life against all odds, and yes, against many dedicated extermination campaigns! For many years the San or Bushmen were actually hunted as wild animals or "vermin"! Possibly by your forefathers or mine. White, Black and Coloured people, both together and separately, were involved in these exterminations, and there is ample historical evidence of this.





**Kalahari San Bushman hut    Kalahari San Bushman crafts**

Many of the Griqua, Koranna, Nama and Khomani San Bushmen, and what little remains of the Khoi, Hkoi-khoi, or Koekhoen people or so-called "Hottentotte", have been absorbed into the ranks of the "Colored People" or Kleurlinge and these people use Afrikaans a primary communication medium, if not as mother language. For many years it was regarded as a sign of low rank or shame to even acknowledge any knowledge of your ancestral language or culture, while it was considered progressive, learned, and cultured to speak Afrikaans, and/or even better English, and live a Western, Westernised, or "European" life-style.

Fortunately, a few die-hards, mainly in the remote Kalahari, Namakwaland and Richtersveld areas of South Africa, which is sparsely populated and considered by many to be backward, maintained their own mainly Nama-traditions and culture, even if it was sometimes on the sly. Fortunately for them and for us, this has kept alive this ancient but vibrant culture and ways of life, from which we can learn a lot.

On this web site I can try to give you a small glimpse of the varied peoples, cultures, traditions and ways of life amongst the tribes in the Kalahari desert and South Africa's people and culture.

## **Bushmen or San - the "Aboriginal" or "First" people of the Kalahari and Southern Africa**

The Bushmen or San as they are known to Science, are part of the so-called Khoi-San races. The word KhoiSan denotes the two related groups of people, namely the larger KhoiKhoi people, also called Hotentotte who were a physically larger and more yellow people than the San or Bushmen, and who were cattle-herders and pastoralists.

There is quite a bit of evidence to suggest that the Khoisan derided the hunter-gatherer Bushmen or San, to some extent. I vaguely remember having read somewhere that, the name San, is actually a slightly derogative name that the KhoiKhoi used for the Bushmen. The two terms are however so widely used today, that it would be difficult to change.

The San or Bushmen of the Southern Kalahari around Witdraai, are called the "Khomani San" by scientists, although the remaining speakers of the language, of which 25 have now been identified, say that this refers to a specific clan. Academics from the turn of the century had used the name Khomani san for them, but the community says it is the name of a related clan, that does not really apply to them. They refer to themselves in the aggregate as "Saasi", and their language as "!Kabee".





**Map showing current location of Kalahari San Bushman.**

The following main groups of Kalahari Bushmen still live in the Kalahari region and on its borders: the !Kung Bushmen, the Khomani San, the Vasekela bushman, the Mbarakwena, the /Gwi, //Ganaa, Kua and !Xo. The !Kung and /Kwe located just below the name "Lesotho", is at Schmidtsdrift just outside Kimberley, where they were translocated after the ending of South Africa's military campaigns against Swapo and Angola, many years ago. They were given the choice of remaining in Angola or Northern Namibia where they were employed by the South African Army as trackers and interpreters, or to be translocated to an area within South Africa. Those located at Schmidtsdrift today, chose to be relocated.

The Bushmen are a people with very little in the line of personal belongings. Just the few skins that they carry on their backs, sticks, a minimum of iron utensils and tools that they now use, which they have picked up from their modern neighbours, is all that they have. When you have to carry everything you own on your back, one learns to travel light! Food, clothing, weapons, everything he needs the bushman gets from nature.

The Bushmen or San does not have a government, a King or a National leader. Not even a "Chief", "Chieftain" or "Captain" in the sense understood in Africa. They lead what many believe to be an ideal and simple social life, where at the most one or two related families or family groups or clans live together in a loose knit community or group. Each individual do largely as he pleases, within the constraints of their customs, and if there is a disagreement about something, the group simply splits up and the families go their separate ways, with little or no coercion. They have no taxes, no Government, except that imposed upon them by outsiders.

The San or Bushmen do, however, have a culture and a religion, and we would do well to copy many of their cultural practices. They have a life-style that is most highly attuned with nature, and the ultimate in eco-friendly and sustained life-style, that they have maintained for aeons and perhaps millennia. So-called "Modern man" has only lately started to realise the importance of this.

The Bushmen of the Kalahari is known for their legendary ability to track or "sny spoor" from "spoor-sny" (= cut track) as it is known in Afrikaans. They are equally well known for their superb hunting ability and endurance. If you had to catch your meat on the hoof after killing it from a short distance with a poisoned arrow, you would also develop marvelous endurance, or become mighty thin in a short time.

The Bushmen are equally well known for their dancing and music, the mimicking of birds and animals, their knowledge of plants as medicine, poison, and food. They are perhaps the people on earth that lives the closest to nature, and scientists are often amazed at the accurate knowledge and fine observational skills of the San Bushmen of the Kalahari.

### **Orthographic symbols:**

If you have never heard of "Orthographic symbols", please read on and be informed!

Throughout these pages, you have seen those strange "letters" /, //, ! and ≠ . No, I'm not crazy, these are actual letters or characters in the Khoi, San or Bushman and Nama as its known today for the older form "Namaqua" or "Namakwa" languages, and some of these clicks are even used in Nguni or Bantu languages such as !Xhosa, although they may now be written differently, according to a more modern Orthographic system. In the case of the Khoisan languages, it was decided to retain the old symbols, for continuity with the older research on which much of our knowledge of these languages depends.

### **How to pronounce these clicks!**

- / the voiceless dental click
- ≠ voiceless alveo-palatal click
- ! the voiceless palatal click
- // lateral click

This section is to be expanded with actual recordings of the clicks pronounced by native speakers!

As a direct result of the San or Bushmen living in small clans or family groups, and far apart, they have a large number of different languages. Some so similar as English versus American, but others completely mutually incomprehensible, and as different as English versus French. The !Kung and /Kwe Bushmen living at Schmidtsdrift, have mutually incomprehensible languages, and although they are forced to live together and go to a single school where the main language of instruction is largely Afrikaans, there appears to be very little love lost between the two groups.

Indeed, the school is built in the middle, and the !Kung lives on one side, and the /Kwe on the other. Even to an uninformed ear such as my own, the !Kung language with its many clicks, is very different from the /Kwe language which have hardly any clicks at all and sound rather similar to Tswana to me.

What goes for language, goes for the Bushman's culture and religion. Although they are obviously related to a larger or lesser extent as may be the case, there are some marked differences.

### **Religion**

Although it was claimed by Bleek, Orpen, Stow and Sir Lourens van der Post that "Kagn" or "Kaggen" as the supreme being was called by the now extinct "Cape Bushmen" or "Plains Bushmen" that this refers to the Praying mantis, this now seems unlikely.

Other (later) experts such as Bert Woodhouse who studied Bushman paintings, Coral Fourie and S.S. Dornan, think that this was due to a misunderstanding or confusion with another word. None of the living bushmen give attention or special preference to the praying mantis

None of the living Bushmen give attention or special preference to the praying manna.

Most Kalahari Bushmen believe in a "Greater" and a "Lesser" Supreme being or God. There are other supernatural beings as well, and the spirits of the dead.

The "God" or supreme being first created himself, then the land and its food, the water and air. He is generally a good power, that protects and wards off disease and teaches people skills. However, when he is angered, he can send bad fortune. The greater god, depending on his manifestation, is called different names by the same people at different times, and also have different names among the different language groups.

The "supreme being" of the Bushmen are called !Hara or //Gauha by the !Kung, /Ghammaa, ≠ Gaughapipi or Bohopi by the //Ganaa of central Botswana. Their neighbours the /Gwi calls him N/adima or Pisiboro, the !Xo calls him Ghu/e or /oa and the Kua bushmen calls him Parabhise or Bhise.

The lesser god is regarded as bad or/and evil, a black magician, a destroyer rather than builder, and a bearer of bad luck and disease. Just like the "supreme being" he is called by various names.

The !Kung calls him !Kuh or ≠Gao nqa'a, the //Ganaa call him /≠U/ghammaa and the neighbouring //Gwi //Gamammaa. Surprisingly, the nearby Kua do not believe in a lesser god, but only in Bhise or Parabhise. They believe bad luck and disease is caused by the spirits of the dead, because they want to bring the living to the same place they are. Similar to the black people in South Africa, the Bushman have a strong believe that the ancestral spirits play an important role in the fate of the living, but they don't use the same rituals to appease them.

### **Birth, Death, Marriage and initiation. - To be expanded as time permits**

Amongst the Bushman or San, birth is not generally a big issue. They don't really prepare and or go to a hospital like modern man. It is claimed that a Bushman women who is about to give birth will simply go behind a bush and "squeeze out" the baby. There is also some claims that they prepare a medicine from devils claw (*Harpagophytum spp.*), have the baby, and is back in her daily routine within a hour. In reality she is likely to take her mom or an elder aunt along, for comfort and help. The book "Shadow Bird" by Willemien le Roux, describes a Bushman birth with complications, and the old woman that was called to help, so it doesn't always go as easy as it is supposed to.

After the birth a Bushman child will receive much love and attention from his parents and other adults and even older children. **Their love of children, both their own and that of other people, is one of the most noticeable things about the Bushman.**

If a child is born under very severe drought conditions, when the fertility of the Bushman women are in any case low, perhaps to prevent such an occurrence. The mother will quietly relieve the just born baby of severe and certain future suffering by ending its life. This is most likely to happen in lean years, if she is still suckling another child and will obviously not be able to feed both of the children. This is accepted behaviour, and born out of necessity and not malice or any other consideration. It stems from the simple reality of live in a harsh climate, and the realisation that the life of the child that a lot has already been invested in, and that might be put at risk by tender feelings for a new-born that are in any case likely to die soon, are not likely to have a good outcome.

Death is a very natural thing to the Bushmen as shown by the following lines from a Bushman song, quoted by Coral Fourie in her book "Living Legends of a dying culture".

"The day we die a soft breeze will wipe out our footprints in the sand. When the wind dies down, who will tell the timelessness that once we walked this way in the

dawn of time?"

If some-ones dies at a specific camp, the clan will move away and never camp at that spot again. Bushmen will never knowingly cross the place where some-one has been buried. If they have to pass near such a place, they will throw a pebble on the grave and mutter under their breath, to the spirits to ensure good luck. They never step on a grave and believe that the spirit remains active on that spot above ground, and they don't want to offend it.

Amoing most Bushmen, a wedding is a private event between the Bridegroom and the Bride. Only in exceptional cases may a guest be invited, but there is no celebration or other ritual as we understand it, only a private "ceremony" or agreement between the two people involved.

The Bushmen don't have initiaion ceremonies. There is some dancing and cleansing ceremony after a maiden has shed her first menstrual blood. Boys are not considered men untill they have killed their first large and dangerous animal. Thereafter they are are treated as full members of the clan or tribe.

### More information

| [HOME](#) | [Map of Kalahari desert](#) | [Animals in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Roar of the Kalahari movie](#) |  
| [Plants in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Tribes in the Kalahari desert](#) | [Sands of the Kalahari movie DVD](#)  
|  
| [Life of the Kalahari Bushmen](#) | [Kalahari desert climate](#) | [Kalahari desert pictures](#) | [Kalahari  
pans](#) |  
| [Kalahari desert paintings](#) | [Kalahari dunes](#) | [Namib and Kalahari desert](#) | [Lost city of the  
Kalahari](#) |  
| [From Gondwanaland to Kalahari](#) | [Witdraai - Camel Breeding](#) | [Kalahari Camels](#) | [Scotty Smith](#)  
|  
| [Kalahari personalities](#) | [Some Kalahari policemen](#) | [Lost city of the Kalahari](#) | [Sights on your  
way](#) |  
| [Kalahari Bushmen \(Komani San, Saasi\)](#) | [E-mail Site Owner at info@abbott-infotech.co.za](#) |  
| [Tour South Africa.com](#) |