

# Botswana loses a national treasure:

*!Nate "Shortie" Brahman (1956 – January 2016)*

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**D**espite his 1.45 metre height and size 4 shoes, Shortie was an exceptional charismatic presence. He seemed to be known wherever he travelled in the Kalahari – enlivening the mood everywhere, with people often swarming around him like bees to a hive.

The diminutive Shortie was the most renowned and respected tracker in the Kalahari, one of only four persons in Botswana to hold a "Master Tracker" Certificate. The tracker certification system, for which "Master" is the highest award, was introduced by Louis Liebenberg as a result of his prolonged study of tracking beginning in the 1980's at Lone Tree, with Shortie as his main teacher. Shortie's experience immersed in the bush allowed him and his age-mates to track wild animals at an advanced level. Their skill of pursuit was so practiced that they almost became the creatures they were following, and were therefore able to make predictions about where the animal was headed, then test those predictions based on evidence presented by fresh tracks. This allowed them to catch up to animals which would otherwise outpace the hunter. Short-

ie's teachings allowed Louis to develop his theory of tracking as the origin of humankind's scientific mind, from which all science and technology, which the global economy thrives on today, were to ultimately follow. Louis' profound thesis is published in his book "The Art of Tracking, The Origin of Science".

Shortie's knowledge was indispensable in both understanding the origin of modern science and subsequent development of the CyberTracker Software (for which an image of Shortie with bow and arrow is its logo). CyberTracker technology is now being used for thousands of applications around the world, from wildlife research and conservation to health surveys, crime prevention and disaster relief.

At the same time he was contributing his experience to the development of science and technology, Shortie also worked for some 20 years with Clive Eaton and others as a professional tracker on safari operations all over Botswana, earning a living for his family. At times he was even called upon by the Botswana Police Force to investigate crime scenes, and his tracking prowess led to the capture and prosecution of murderers. Throughout the 1990's into the 2000's and 2010's he continued to be indispensable to numerous wildlife conservation research efforts, including Con-

servation International's work in Botswana and both of our PhD projects.

Shortie featured in several documentary films, most notably alongside the other Master Trackers in the BBC Natural History production "The Life of Mammals" narrated by David Attenborough. This film draws attention to a long-forgotten mystery of human history – one of the earliest and most effective techniques of hunting ever practiced by human beings known as the "persistence hunt". Shortie was one of the last people skilled enough to run down a large antelope to an eventual end of physical exhaustion and death during the hottest days of the year, using no weapons, only his senses and physical endurance. He therefore helped shed light on the origin and evolution of endurance running in human beings, and why we are able to run marathons today.

Shortie was a bridge between humanity's deep past and our modern present; a rare charismatic personality possessing the foresight and patience to share his rich knowledge with us. He was therefore a messenger not only to Botswana but to the world. The tragedy is - he knew far more about everything in the Kalahari environment than was ever recorded in books and film or was passed on to his children, grandchildren, and us others privileged to spend time

with him in the bush. It wasn't just his knowledge of animals and tracking, it included every variety of plant life, their interactions, medicines that remain unknown to modern science, and all his wisdom of how to survive and thrive in a natural environment with nothing more than what God endowed, what he inherited from his ancestors, and his own sharp mind. On top of this he was a musician, dancer, story-teller and could converse poetically in 6 languages.

He was among the last of the great walking Encyclopedias of the Kalahari, and his passing is somewhat like the burning of a library. It signifies the very nearing end of an Age. Young people in the Kalahari villages do not have the same opportunity to immerse themselves in the bush, nor are they very interested in the old ways. We mourn not only that Shortie is no longer with us in the flesh to colour the present, but the impoverished future around the corner for the coming generations. They might have more material wealth and distractions, but they will understand much less than the immediate generation before them.

So long dear friend, we are mere students without a Master.

The indigenous people of Botswana

