**The San of the Kalahari**

 The Kalahari Desert, in the southern part of the **AFRICAN** continent, has existed for approximately sixty **MILLION** years. The desert covers approximately 900,000 square **KILOMETRES** and covers parts of the African countries of Botswana, **NAMIBIA** and South Africa.

The Kalahari gets very hot; it can reach temperatures of 40 **DEGREES** celsius in the summer. In winter the desert has a dry, cold climate where the temperature can reach 0 degrees **CELCIUS**. The vegetation consists mostly of grasses, scattered trees and **SHRUBS** including Acacia.

The San people's successful **ADAPTATION** to the arid Kalahari has earned them the title of ultimate survivors. The San have lived in the Kalahari for around twenty thousand **YEARS** and are considered to be one of the oldest **CULTURES** in the world. A small group of these people still follow the traditional **NOMADIC** lifestyle as hunter gatherers.

The San have survived invasions, first, from other African groups such as the Zulu and **BANTU** and, later, from **EUROPEAN** colonists. The arrival of white settlers in the 1600s brought dispossession of land, **ENSLAVEMENT** and slaughter of the San.

Traditionally, their hunter gather diet consisted of 70 - 80% of plant food, including **BERRIES**, nuts, roots and melons gathered primarily by the **WOMEN**. The remaining 20 - 30% was **MEAT** hunted by the men using poisoned **ARROWS** and spears on hunts that could last several days. They made their own **TEMPORARY** homes from wood that they gathered.

The San are not **WASTEFUL** and every part of the animal is used. The **SKINS** are used for blankets and the **BONES** are used for arrows and spears. In the Kalahari water is hard to come by. The San collect moisture by scraping and squeezing the water held in **ROOTS** and tubers. They also **DIG** holes in the sand to find water. They also carry water in an **OSTRICH** eggshell.

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**Modern Challenges for the San**

The San hunting and gathering economy and **SOCIAL** structure had remained virtually unchanged for tens of thousands of years until recently. European colonialism destroyed the San nomadic way of life, they were no longer allowed to **ROAM** freely and trophy hunters destroyed the vast herds of **GAME** that formed their food supply.

The San have been under great pressure to abandon their nomadic lifestyle. Beginning in the 1950's, many San have converted from a nomadic to an agricultural **FARMING** lifestyle. For example, today in **BOTSWANA**– the country with the largest San population – out of a population of 50,000 San, only about 3,000 follow the **TRADITIONAL** way of life. Land that the San used to hunt on is increasingly being used for **GRAZING** cattle. **FENCES** are put up to protect the cattle which means that the **WILDLIFE** the San depend upon for their hunting are changing their migrating patterns.

The last of the hunter gatherers were forcibly evicted from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in 2002, by the Botswana government to make way for **DIAMOND** mines. A court case is currently in existence to help the San  **CLAIM** back their land.

Governments have forced the San to relocate to **PERMANENT** locations usually with the intention of 'civilizing' them and providing schooling, running **WATER** and other modern amenities. Unfortunately rounding up hunter gatherers and forcing them to live in settlements has been tried in many countries and has not been very **SUCCESSFUL**.

Sadly, few modern San are able to continue as nomadic **HUNTER GATHERERS** and most live at the very **BOTTOM** of the social scale in unacceptable conditions of poverty, leading to alcoholism, disease and **DESPAIR**.

farming despair roam hunter gatherers claim Botswana

wildlife diamonds water social traditional successful game bottom evicted grazing permanent