Pre-human history
Marine and terrestrial fossil deposits dating back as far as the Cretaceous period (85 million years ago) are particularly abundant in the Sperrgebiet National Park. These range in size from snails, termites and frogs to deinotheres (proto-elephants with tusks only in the lower jaw), crocodiles, giant ostriches, dassies the size of sheep and rhinoceros. A particularly dramatic find of rare Miocene-era mega-fauna was made at Arrisdrift, 35 kilometres upstream of the Orange River mouth.

Human history
Archaeological remains indicate Early Stone Age man settled in the region around the Orange River mouth at least 300 000 years ago. Late Stone Age man ventured further inland, leaving exquisite rock art as evidence of his presence. But shell middens, ostrich eggshell fragments, tortoise shells, crayfish carapaces and cetacean bones indicate a hunter-gatherer lifestyle still heavily dependent on coastal resources. The Portuguese were the first European mariners to reach the coast, arriving in the 15th century. Subsequent explorers reported encountering Khoi (‘Hottentot’) villages constructed of animal hide stretched over whalebones and locals wearing coats made from penguin skins. In the 19th century American whaling and sealing vessels and British guano collectors arrived in increasing numbers and traded with the scattered Khoi communities. The early 20th century brought the discovery of diamonds and the establishment of an exclusion zone. By happy coincidence this sheltered one of the most botanically diverse regions in the world.

Archaeological sites are rich and new finds are still being made. In 2008 diamond miners uncovered what is believed to be the earliest sub-Saharan shipwreck yet discovered. Among items of cargo retrieved were bronze cannons, over 70 elephant tusks, navigation equipment and thousands of Spanish and Portuguese gold coins minted in the 1400s and 1500s. With the opening of the Sperrgebiet the area enters into a new era of human history – environmentally sensitive tourism allowing people from around the world access to its long-hidden natural marvels.

Diamonds in the rough
Diamonds and the Sperrgebiet are intimately linked. These precious ‘stones’ are valued worldwide – you’ve probably got one – but how much do you know about what is on your ring or your necklace?

Diamonds derive their name from the Greek word adamas meaning ‘invincible’. This is apt. They are the hardest natural material known on our planet and can only be scratched by another diamond. This makes them ideal for industrial purposes such as cutting and polishing, (80 per cent of all diamonds mined annually are for industry) and, of course, jewellery. The diamond is
Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:
• Only enter the park with Ministry of Environment and Tourism concessionaires.
• Keep to existing roads and tracks.
• Do not litter.
• Do not remove any plant or animal material or artifacts from the park.
• Follow the rules and regulations on your park permit.

Enjoy the magic that is the Sperrgebiet National Park!

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