

Osprey athlete, world traveler shares an African country's distinct approach to conservation

By Christine Rasmussen
Colorado correspondent

DOLORES, Colo. — Author, professional climber and sponsored athlete of Cortez-based Osprey Packs, Majka Burhardt stopped in Dolores Jan. 12 to share a multimedia presentation exploring the theme: How does adventure complement, and conflict with, environmental understanding?

The stop was part of a year-long speaking tour for Burhardt, who is sharing her experiences traveling and rock climbing in Namibia, Africa, to promote her documentary film "Way Point Namibia." All proceeds of the event went to the Colorado Environmental Coalition, which, regionally, has helped work on the San Juan Wilderness legislation and protection of the Dolores River.

Last year Burhardt and fellow climbers spent a month in Africa's most recently independent country. "Native lands went from being the cast-off

blemishes of Namibia to its jewels, because they'd done all this work with conservation right, when it became independent in 1990," said Burhardt, who resides in Boulder, Colo.

The natives of Namibia were given the right to manage land in a way they saw would best fit with their practices, needs and opportunities for economic gain, according to Burhardt.

The fifth-least-populated country in the world, Namibia has a complex history. Considered part of greater South Africa since the 1930s until its independence, it was in the middle of an extensive border war between Angola and South Africa. It also had to function under all of South Africa's apartheid rules.

"All the desolate rural lands where you couldn't farm is where the native people were moved to, and any rich farming land with a lot of wildlife was given to whites," Burhardt explained.



Osprey athlete Majka Burhardt, climbing in Namibia. Courtesy photo by Gabe Rogel

New approach to conservation

In contrast to a national-park system where people have been taken off the land, every conservation project in Namibia starts



Burhardt and her team after a climb. Courtesy photo by Gabe Rogel

first with the native people, said Burhardt: "Conservation in Namibia is not tied to preservation, it's tied to integration."

The Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation, or IRDNC, works as a go-between for government and the tribes.

"That's the same thing we're looking at here, just with different players and at a different stage in the game," she said. "Integrated use is about protecting the land while understanding that, ultimately, it's humans who need to use that land and make it functional for

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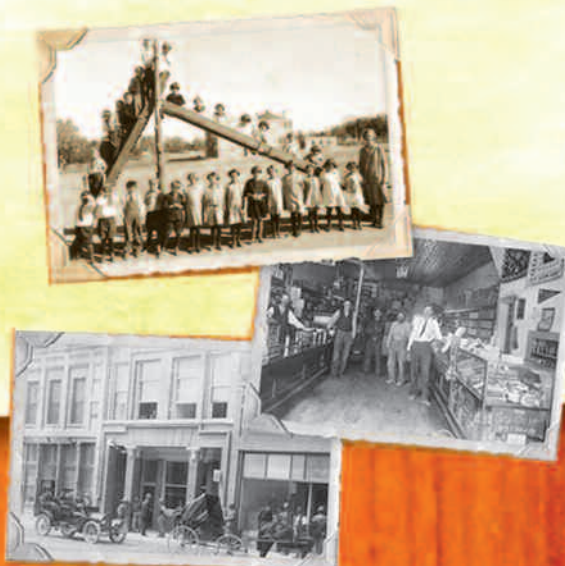
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