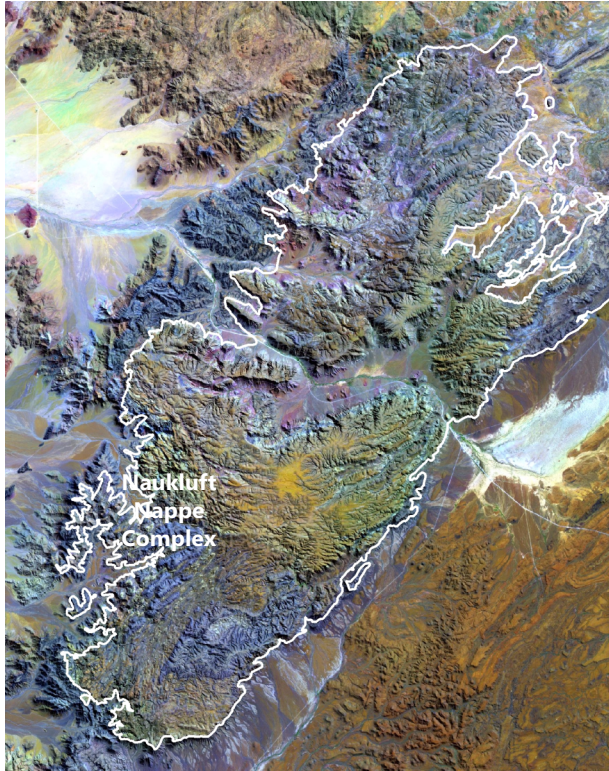


NAUKLUFT



Source: Roadside Geology of Namibia

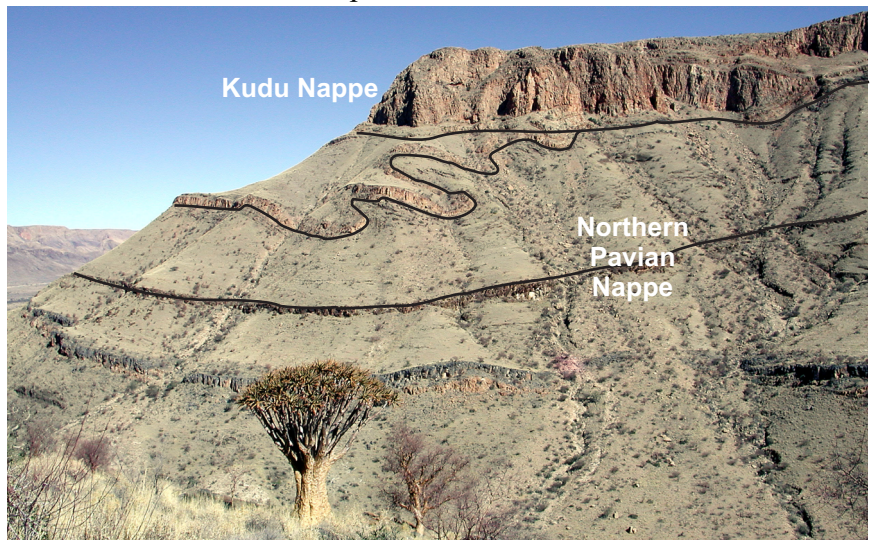
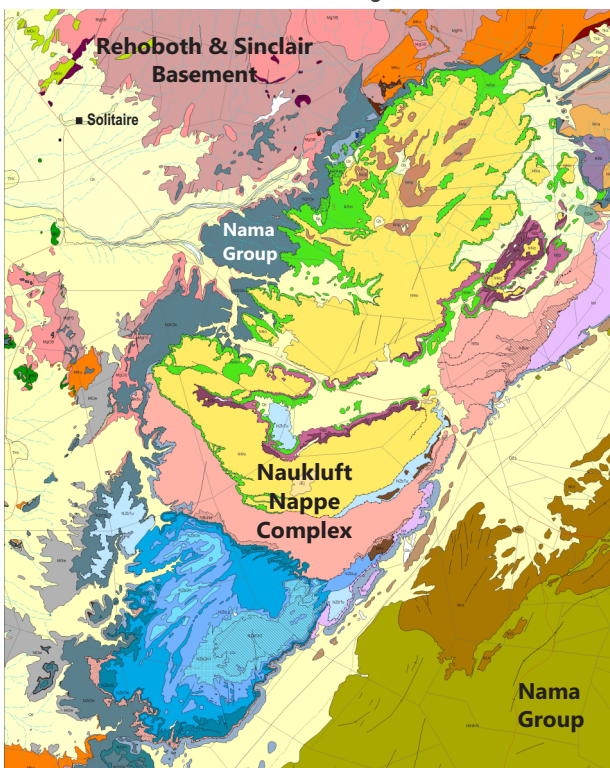
Situated some 130 km southwest of Rehoboth, the Naukluft Mountains are part of the Great Escarpment that marks the western edge of the Khomas Highlands. The flat top of the complex is separated from the plateau to the south by impressive near vertical cliffs, while in the northwest and west its peaks rise almost 1000 m above the Namib plains. Several hiking trails meander through the narrow ravines and over the wildly beautiful mountains covered in rich and varied vegetation, with wild figs and olive trees, and wild mint growing at perennial pools; various species of acacia, euphorbia and aloe prosper on the more exposed plateau. Furthermore, the mountains are home to an exceptionally rich wildlife encompassing over 50 species of mammals, such as Hartmann's mountain zebra, klipspringer, kudu, springbok, oryx, duiker, steenbok and rock dassie; close on 200 bird species make the Naukluft an ornithologist's paradise, with black eagles breeding on the high cliffs.



The complex and rather unique geology of the Naukluft consists of three distinct units. Metamorphic and intrusive rocks of the 1800 to 1000 m. y. old Rehoboth and Sinclair basement in the foothills are overlain by sandstones and carbonate rocks of the Nama Group (ca. 600 m. y.), which originated in a shallow tropical sea then covering the entire southwestern part of the southern African sub-continent; the upper-most unit is formed by the *Naukluft Nappe Complex* - a series of large, intensely folded, sheet-like bodies of dolomite, limestone, shale, conglomerate and quartzite that was originally deposited in the area of the Hakos Mountains some 80 km to the north. Movements in the Earth's crust caused this package to become dislodged and slide southwards upon a thin band of dolomite acting as a lubricant, some 550 to 500 m. y. ago.

Younger dissolution of carbonate rocks has given rise to karstification and the development of an extensive underground drainage system. In some of the deeply incised valleys discharge from this underground water occurs as fountains and pools, with associated tufa formations - a soft, semi-friable, porous limestone, formed through evaporation of calcium carbonate-rich water. The widespread distribution of tufa throughout the Naukluft attests to a wetter climate in the recent past.

Satellite image (above) and geological map (below) of the Naukluft Mountains and surroundings



Naukluft Nappe Complex (black lines indicate stratigraphic units and/or nappes)

Due to its higher rainfall the Naukluft has been an obvious refuge to early man. Stone artifacts and various rock paintings are evidence of its inhabitation by Stone Age peoples, while in the early 20th century, the mountains were the scene of a conflict between German troops and the Witbooi Namas, who retreated upon their permanent watering places, after refusing to submit to the supreme authority of the German emperor. A few trenches and cannon sites still remind of these historic events.