

John & Noelene do South Africa

Tuesday 23rd October

On The Way

Got myself 100% ready as The Boss continued to work, work, work on (I think) her “Young in Bolton” project. We were due to get a taxi at 1:40 pm but at 2:00 pm she was still at it and we finally left at about 2:10 pm, dropped her laptop (almost literally!) at BREC and got to Bolton Station just as the train to Manchester Airport was leaving. Hot and sweaty, we jumped aboard.

After that the stress started to fade away as things seemed to start running smoothly. The BMI flight to Heathrow was on time, Heathrow was the usual horrendous experience and we found our way to the Virgin ticket desk “A okay”. Finally we had in our hands the tickets I’d been fretting about for weeks. We checked in, went through yet another security check, preceded by a huge queue which took at least half an hour for their incredibly inefficient system to process.



I tried to bluff my way into several of the business class lounges with my Malaysia Airlines Enrich Card but none of them wanted to accept us pair of oikes. In any case there wasn't long to wait before we boarded the completely full (except for the two passengers who didn't turn up and delayed our takeoff – bastards!) A3 something or other Airbus.

The flight was just fine, food and wine okay even in cattle class and not too cramped. I took half a Zopiclone sleeping tablet and slept a fair part of the way. We woke up, probably around 7:00 am

somewhere over one of the countries just to the north of South Africa.

Wednesday 24th October

Got There

As we flew over southern Africa I was reminded again just what a big and relatively empty place it is. However, although I took a few photos out of the aircraft window (port hole?) there were none of the spectacular views I'd had over Afghanistan and that area when I flew back from India a couple of weeks ago.

Johannesburg (Jo'burg) Airport – properly “Oliver Tambo International Airport”) was a surprise. It's obviously being completely rebuilt for the 2010 Football World Cup – a bloody sight better than the awful Heathrow in every respect. As airports go, I liked it. There were barely any delays as we went through Immigration (The Boss used her British passport so that she could get at least one stamp in it!) and we then picked up the hire car from Avis that I'd booked from the UK. It's a white Toyota Corolla 1.4 saloon – reasonably roomy but rather underpowered to say the least. But it should be fine for getting us around and it does have aircon!

I'd plotted a route to Mikey and Tertia's house in Bergbron via the Shell Geostar website but The Boss decided that she knew best and we ignored the directions it gave (a long arc on the ring road south of Jo'burg) and instead we went straight through the city centre. Jo'burg

surprised me rather. Everyone had said how horrible and unsafe it is and how we should avoid it at all costs. So I'd expected it to be a real shit heap. But it was nowhere near as bad as Mumbai and it probably is rather dangerous in places but it seemed clean, well ordered and functioned pretty okay.



After eventually asking a guy at a petrol station we finally found Mikey and Tertia's house and we received a warm, warm welcome from Tertia and her cleaning lady (I refuse to call a fully mature woman a "girl" as the South African whites do). We slept for a couple of hours and woke to Mikey painting the plunge pool, bubble bath or whatever it is, in his garden. We had huge, huge hugs and kisses all round and a really good old chinwag.

Since we were here five years ago Mikey and Tertia have done with their house something similar to what we have done with ours. It's now at least 50% bigger and looks very good indeed. Their conversion, however, cost a lot, lot less than ours!

In the evening, Noelene's older brother, Neville (Nevvie) came over. He's changed his job recently, given up his legal practice in Carletonville and is now working as some sort of corporate lawyer in Pretoria, working and living there in the week and spending the weekends with his family in Carletonville. He seems pretty satisfied with his new job and is set for a six week, 11 country tour of Africa sometime early next year.

We eventually went out to eat at a steak house not so far away and had a very good meal, a couple of bottles of wine, etc. – all for about £50 for the six of us!

Later, back at Mikey's we chatted for a while but then crashed into bed fine style. I slept until about 8:30 am and The Boss is still in the "land of nod"!

Thursday 25th October

Shopping!

Woke up at about 8:30 am. Nevvie had gone off to work in Pretoria and Mikey, who'd planned to get new tyres for his car, had nodded off and was running "a bit behind schedule"! (like brother, like sister!). He's now gone and I'm sitting here in the garden jotting these notes.

The weather yesterday was fabulous – warm/hot and sunny with not a cloud in the sky. Today it's dull, cloudy, windy and rather chilly. The weather forecast on the TV says that the temperature in Jo'burg will only be the same as in London today – 18°C! Later Noelene's mum, who I've christened the Queen Mother (or QM for short), arrived and tomorrow we're off to the Drakensberg Mountains for a long weekend. So today we're shopping for all the food and booze we'll need for the three nights we're going to spend at the self-catering place that we'll be at not so far away from the Champagne Castle resort. Hope the weather improves!

The shopping drove me mad, especially the hours that The Boss spent in the chemists shop buying shampoos, hair conditioner, suntan cream, etc. However, it was all done and back at Mikey's place he and The Boss cooked delicious sausages and mash with an excellent onion gravy/sauce. Had a shower and was in bed by 11:30 pm or so.

Friday 26th October

Heading for the Mountains



Travelling day. Set off from Mikey and Tertia's at about 6:00 am, having loaded most of the stuff last night. Tyron, Mikey and Tertia's son, brought his friend Anthony (Ant) along and we initially headed for Winterton, missing the Jo'burg rush hour traffic. We stopped a couple of times along the way and had lunch at an African craft place (The Waffle Hut and African Weavers, I think) which served excellent pancakes and waffles. Inside the building, carpets were being woven from local wool and The Boss and I bought a very beautiful 70% wool carpet for the dining room (~£325 including delivery to the UK).

In the trees outside the Waffle Hut there were Spoonbills nesting and I managed a few very nice photos of this very impressive bird. After leaving this place we stopped a few times to view the increasingly becoming scenery and a Vulture sanctuary! As we continued the road became worse and worse (a bit like Mumbai but without the traffic!) and eventually turned into a dirt track, the surface of which was actually better than the tarmac road we'd left.



We reached Injusuthi Camp in the late afternoon and found it to be a wonderfully charming little settlement of holiday chalets in the most spectacular surroundings I think I've ever seen (imagine the lake District without the lakes, magnified 10 fold).

Unfortunately the weather was still dull and overcast with the tops of the mountains covered in cloud. However, we set off on a short walk, The Boss wearing the new walking boots that she'd bought a couple of days earlier, not long after arriving – Mikey & Tertia, The Boss and I, Tyron and Ant and even The QM. We meandered along a stream for a couple of kms, leaving The QM sitting on a convenient fallen tree after a while. We passed a copse where non-indigenous Blue Gum trees had been ring barked and treated with (I think) copper sulphate solution to kill them. Apparently there is a programme to try to get rid of non-indigenous trees/shrubs in certain areas and where this has been successful, streams, dry for decades, have returned and indigenous vegetation has re-established itself.



After a while we reached a couple of ruined shepherds' huts and then turned back. When we reached the place we'd left The QM she was nowhere to be seen – she wandered off, missed the path and ended up "a little lost" (mmm, reminds me of someone I know rather well!) – a South African version of what is referred to as "The Malaysian Incident"! Anyway, we found her in no time at all and returned to the camp over the little suspended bridge (which The Boss, bravely for her, crossed with some trepidation).

In the evening, before the electricity was turned off at 10:00 pm, Mikey cooked a “fat cook” (or whatever it’s called) – deep fried bread dough. I could almost feel my arteries clogging up but it was “oh so lekker”! He served it with the chicken soup he’d made the previous evening and which we’d carried with us on the journey.



It was still pretty cold and gloomy outside so we made a fire in Mikey and Tertia’s chalet which just wouldn’t start no matter how many fire lighters and kindling wood we used. But, eventually, after a lot of huff and puff on my part it did get going and was wonderfully cheery.

Having slept just five hours last night we crashed into bed before “lights out” at 10:00 pm.

Saturday 27th October

The Boss Makes It



We were up, well I was at least, at 7:00 am and the weather had changed with the sun breaking through. By the time we’d breakfasted and got ready for our walk at 9:00 am the whole of the surrounding mountains were in view. It is just magnificent here and I’m really, really in love with this place. We walked about nine km up to rocks where the ancient African Bushmen had painted wonderful pictures centuries ago. It had taken us about four hours to get there and when we arrived we were met by a guide who played us a tape explaining the paintings, their history and that of the Bushmen who had made them. We were reminded that it was the arrival of the white man about 500 years ago which had spelt the end for these ancient people.

We had a picnic lunch there (last night’s leftovers plus some!) and then headed back, first along the route we’d come on but towards the end diverting to a



different path which took us to a river which we had to ford. So it was boots off and wading to the knees in the wonderfully cool, clear and very strong current, over slippery rocks. Well, we all made it without any serious mishap and we continued through an “enchanted” wood (more evidence of the S. African’s belief in f*****g fairies!) back to the camp which we arrived at about seven hours and 17 kms after leaving. The Boss did exceptionally well; this was the furthest she had ever walked and it was great to see her enjoying herself so much, stopping at every plant we passed and telling us not only its

name but its family history too!

After getting back we relaxed with the obligatory couple of Windhoeks. Mikey and I played cricket with Tyron and Anthony (we – the old guys, that is – were exhausted) and then Mikey barbecued (sorry, braaied) the dinner. Tomorrow I hope to have a long walk on my own whilst the others “potter about” a little.

Sunday 28th October

Barking....

Mikey's braai last night was superb, as his cooking always is. We had the usual, over the top, carnivores' feast of ribs, lamb steaks, wurst, etc. with a "lekker" salad. I had rather too much of the excellent Nederberg Baronne but what an enjoyable evening it had been. We got to bed just before "lights out" at 10:00 pm and didn't sleep so well, probably as a result of the overindulgence of the previous evening especially the Nederberg Baronne! However, I woke at about 7:00 am feeling pretty good and, after showering, etc. went to the next door chalet to make myself some food for my walk only to find that Mikey had beaten me to it and prepared a huge lunch pack for me. What a good guy!



I set off walking at about 8:15 am on a route which Mikey and Tertia knew and which they had walked themselves in about six to seven hours. It went from the camp on a circular path to the Grindstone Caves and then back to the Old Huts, which we had briefly visited in the cool and mist on Friday, along the Cataract valley – named for all the streams and waterfalls along the way, rather than after any sort of eye defect!

The views along the way were just stunning as I climbed (and climbed and climbed), eventually levelling out and then descending almost as steeply. I saw baboons, buck (Springlip?), lots of flowers, a lizard, etc. which were all duly photographed. At the Grindstone Caves there was a family of a couple and three young children who had camped overnight – what a great adventure – and I saw a party of five Polish walkers. But apart from them I saw no-one else on the 15 km walk.



When I got back to the camp 4¾ hours after starting, Tertia and The Boss had gone off for a short walk on their own, up to the "Dipping Tank" (an old stone farm tank for dipping sheep in "bug killer"). I was surprised that The Boss wanted to and was able to walk after yesterday's 17 km but she has evidently got the bug! After waiting for them for some time they appeared on the horizon, ambling along and chatting as they walked. Suddenly we heard a loud bark from a very big Baboon and the two girls jumped out of their skins and almost ran along the path as the ape followed them higher up the slope. It was so, so funny and became one of the jokes of the holiday.

Eventually they arrived back at camp, chatting twenty to the dozen as they'd apparently been doing throughout the walk and very pleased with themselves they were too.

We've spent the late part of the afternoon just sitting around, relaxing and chatting as Mikey's food in a pootjie (pronounced "poiki" – a three legged cast iron African cooking pot – the sort in which they used to cook missionaries!) slowly cooked over a fire.

I have a plan! Since we're staying here an extra night we'll arrive at Brenda's in Mtunzini on Tuesday and depart on Thursday, then spend nine days going down to Cape Town and back



Monday 29th October

Mountaineers

It had rained in the night and the morning air was cool(ish) with the sun coming out through patches of cloud and most of the peaks were exposed. We breakfasted as usual, in dribs and drabs with the boys second from last and The Boss bringing up the rear and we then set off to conquer a mountain! Van Heynigens peak rises up about 2,300 m from the camp's position of about 1,600 m. We carried with us a very cold bottle of white wine and four wine glasses with which to celebrate on the peak!



The Boss coped surprisingly well (she surprised herself as well as impressing everyone else) as we climbed up the long path with parts almost vertical, criss-crossing streams where we stopped for water and admired the increasingly spectacular vistas.

We eventually reached the top and Mikey photographed Noelene and I placing a rock on which we'd carved our initials on top of the summit cairn, itself on the edge of a precipice about which I was not at all happy!



From there we went to a second peak where we sat under a tree, ate cheese and biscuits with fruit and drank the bottle of (still cool) white wine. Of course, this old fart took several dozen photos, as the vistas were absolutely stunning. Way, way below we could see the chalets and, with Mikey's binoculars, we thought we could see The QM (it later turned out to be a couple of towels draped over the back of some chairs to dry!).



I was so, so proud of The Boss; she'd walked every day while we'd been at the 'Berg and climbed a mountain too – all without whingeing!

We eventually and reluctantly left the peak and returned via the route we'd come up on, taking about two hours for the descent compared with three going up.

The six of us then drove about six or seven kms

away to a part of the Injusuthi River, which passes through the camp, where it forms deep pools beneath waterfalls. There we swam and dived into the river. It was wonderfully clean, cool and refreshing after the earlier exertions and we stayed there for quite a while just playing in the strong currents (and drinking a beer or two – of course!) before returning to the camp where The Boss, aided by Mikey for a change, cooked a delicious spaghetti bolognaise for dinner.

After eating we played a stupid game called 30 Seconds in which you have half a minute to do as many of five charades as possible. By about 9:30 pm I was desperate for a shower after the day's exertions so I left the guys and gals at it. By the time the lights went out at 10:15 pm I was already asleep (so how did I know that the lights had gone off at 10:15?!).

Tuesday 30th October

Meandering

Departure day! Very reluctantly we packed, breakfasted and, having said goodbye to the rest of the "fandamily", left this enchanting place ourselves. It had been a wonderful four days in the most beautiful scenery imaginable, better even than Winter Hill!



Today we travelled to Brenda and Caldon's place at Mtunzini on the KwaZulu Natal coast. The Boss decided that we should take the "Midlands Meander" route south along the R103. This is the old road, now replaced by the N3, and it has been developed into a "craft route" lined with places to visit and stay. So we drove along the bumpy road to Estcourt and Mooi River down to Pietermaritzburg, stopping at a cheese farm, a (f*****g) fairy shop called The Hobbit's Hut, a vineyard (The Stables Wine Estate, where we bought a mixed case of red and white wines) and, of course, a shoe shop where The Boss,

naturally enough, indulged! We briefly stopped at Howick where Noelene had lived for a while many years ago and drove to the very impressive waterfalls there, where the uMngeni River falls 97 m.



As we headed south and east the weather became more and more dreary with the light drizzle turning into a rainy fog, which made the driving more and more difficult and much slower. So when we eventually arrived at Brenda and Caldon's lovely house in Mtunzini it was rather later than we had anticipated.

The two girls were ecstatic about seeing each other after more than five years and Brenda and Caldon's daughter, Charné, has grown into a gorgeous little eight year old, very articulate, catty and bi-lingual to boot!

Cal cooked us another huge and very tasty ~~brai, braai, briy~~ barbecue (the usual S. African mix of wurst, ribs and steaks) which I just love and we drank wine and chatted away until well after midnight as the girls "reunited".

Wednesday 31st October

Beaches, Crabs and Forests

We both slept well and woke to the sound of the sea – you can see the Indian Ocean (just about) from the front of Brenda and Cal's house. We had a super and relaxing outdoor breakfast, Charné had gone to school (school hours here are 7:30 am until 2:00 pm!). In the morning Cal and I rode in the back of Brenda's bakkie (pickup truck) as the girls travelled in



the “posh seats” at the front and we visited first the spectacularly beautiful coast at Mtunzini. Here huge sand dunes roll down to the completely deserted Indian Ocean beaches to the waves. It was hot, sunny and very windy so plenty of suntan cream was the order of the day. We walked along the beach a little and then back to the bakkie over sand which, by then, was too hot to walk on barefooted.

Brenda drove us to the Umlalazi Nature Reserve where we saw zebra, monkey, buck and thousands and thousands of crabs – most of them small, living in the estuarine mud. We saw beautiful water birds (although no Fish Eagles, which do live in these parts) and even a few of those half way between a fish and a land lizard – the Mudskipper, a very peculiar creature. It was an excellent place and we spent a couple of hours just driving around and stopping from time to time to look at things.



Back in the huge town of Mtunzini (another one horse town without a hitching post!) we had lunch at the very nice Fat Cat Café and very tasty it was too. Cal picked Charné up from school and, after going back to their place to get changed, we headed off in Cal's VW Jetta Diesel (very nice car and one I think I'll look at when I get my new one, hopefully early next year) inland to Eshowe and the Dlinza Forest Reserve where there is a very impressive tree canopy top board walk for a couple of hundred metres into the forest, culminating in a tower which rises way above the trees and which, to be honest,

with my increasing sense of vertigo, I actually found quite scary. But, funnily enough, after being up high for 10 minutes or so, the vertigo subsided a bit and I felt much more comfortable.

After the tower, we wandered along the forest floor, following one of the trails for about 1.3 km. It was enchanting with a huge variety of trees, birds, fungi (of course!). We all enjoyed it tremendously and it was later than we had thought when we got back to the house.

In the evening we treated everyone to dinner at the (fairly) nearby Clay Oven Restaurant – a really rustic seafood place. The food was just spot on, we downed a couple of bottles, of course, including one of the excellent Nederberg Baronne red, of which we'd had a fair few bottles on this holiday so far! Altogether the bill for the five of us was just over £40 – incredible!

Back at the house we listened to some of Cal's hilarious comedy downloads before retiring at just after 11:30 pm. We were knackered but it had been just a wonderful day.

Thursday 1st November

More Shopping!

Today was a shopping day and therefore not especially to my liking. However, Cal drove us to Empangeni and we saw the school that The Boss had attended as a kid. Nothing much about it seems to have changed. The town itself, as with every place we've visited, seems to have got much bigger. We spent an hour or so in one of the ubiquitous shopping malls and I really don't recollect what we bought, although we did stop for a rather nice coffee (Mocha, actually in my case).

Afterwards we continued to Richard's bay where we had a look around the harbour and small surfing beach where we saw more crabs! The Boss bought some nice (Kenyan, I think) small canvass paintings as gifts for the guys and gals back home.



Then we headed for another f*****g shopping mall with which I was too bored to make note! But Cal and Brenda did buy another huge pile of grub for dinner later.

One thing I must say about South Africans is that they eat huge amounts of food and I have seen hardly any slim middle aged men or women whilst I've been here. A typical braai (managed to spell it correctly at last) consists of all of the following and sometimes more:

- Sausages (wurst)
- Spare ribs
- Lamb chops
- Steaks
- Kebabs (sosaties)

Today Cal restricted himself to cooking a delicious chicken liver peri-peri and braaing (how the f**k do you spell the word) some fish (Snoek) and spatchcock chicken. Both were superb but enough to feed at least six of us! We chatted for a long time before finally retiring at about midnight to then pack and prepare for departure the next day. It was just after 1:00 am before we finally sank into "the pit".

Friday 2nd November

Heading South

Today is a travelling day as we head "Capewards". After breakfast we went to the nearby nature reserve and bought a birthday present for Brenda before setting off. The drive south was pretty uneventful, following the motorway to Durban and further south until the dual carriageway turned into a normal single carriageway road, widening into three lanes to pass other vehicles over the hills.

We eventually reached the Eastern Cape, formerly one of the so-called black homelands known as the Transkei. On the way we'd stopped at the spectacular Oribi Gorge which, with my increasing vertigo (already mentioned, I believe), I found exhilarating but rather scary. We lunched at the pretty reasonable Oribi Gorge Hotel and then drove through the gorge itself back onto the main road (the N2) and continued through a number of small towns. This part of S. Africa seems entirely black and the towns we passed through not so good as further



north – poor, run down, dirty and very untidy.

Early in the evening we came to Mthatha (previously Umtata) at about 7:30 pm after driving for 600 kms. We'd intended staying at the Wild Coast but that would have meant another 70 kms along very uncertain roads and a similar return trip in the morning. We drove through Mthatha and all of the hotels and B & B's looked rather grotty, but we suddenly came upon the Garden Court Southern Sun in a rather better looking part of the town (on the southern outskirts) and got a great double room for

<£40. We had a drink in the bar, buffet dinner (including a lamb curry – well, it was Friday night) with a bottle of Two Oceans Sauvignon Blanc (not too bad) and then crashed into bed for a good night's sleep.

Saturday 3rd November

And Further....



Woke this morning at just after 7:00 am to bright and beautiful sunshine. It's just after 8:00 am as I write and I've just caught up with my jottings for the last three days as The Boss slept in for a while. Today we're heading for Port Elizabeth (PE for those in the know!) to visit The Boss's niece Jacqueline, her husband Andrew and child Aeryn. We left Mthatha at about 10:00 am in bright sunshine again for the 500 kms drive. Through the former Transkei the roads were pretty poor and the small towns through which we passed were much the same. Again, it seemed that this part of South Africa is almost 100% black

with hardly a white face to be seen until we crossed the Kei River Bridge, where the border between the Transkei and the Eastern cape had formerly been and where we stopped for some welcome refreshments.

From there the road went through ever changing scenery to East London where the single carriageway road with occasional passing places up (and sometimes down) hills changed briefly into a proper four lane motorway. This didn't last long and we were soon back on the single carriageway roads with overtaking lanes and long hold ups at road works. However, the road was still fast and with hardly any traffic we reached PE at about 5:15 pm, met Andrew at a shopping centre and he guided us to their small house where we got a wonderfully warm welcome from Jackie and a very shy Aeryn.



When we arrived Jackie had already started cooking so we were too late to take them out for dinner. We had spaghetti with a sort of beef stew and one of the bottles of wine that Brenda had thoughtfully provided for the journey. We chatted and chatted with Jackie showing The Boss the craftwork that she does and we drank Windhoek Light (2.5% alcohol but with that strange distinctive flavour that low alcohols beers always have and which I've never got to like or even got used to).

Very kindly they gave up their bed for us and we slept pretty

well until the alarm went off at about 7:30 am.

Sunday 4th November

Strange Encounter

Went with Jackie, Andrew and Aeryn to an African Craft Market (although I suppose that all craft markets in Africa are “African”!) where The Boss bought a few more items of jewellery, including some items for the girls at (her) work. But it started to rain and Jackie and Andrew suggested that we go to “The Boardwalk” which turned out to be yet another f*****g shopping centre. So we mooched around there for a bit and treated them to Bruch at the place of Andrew’s choice – a Wimpey Bar!



As we ate, an old looking guy sat down at the table diagonally opposite us. Unbelievably Jackie recognised him as “Uncle Colin”, The Boss’s late father’s younger brother. He was as surprised to see us as we were him and we chatted for a while, got his address and phone no. and left. Oh, nearly forgot, while we were there I took a photo of an ice cream parlour opposite, called, I think, “Fairies Delight” (South Africans seem to be obsessed with fairies for some reason!). The woman in charge had a right old go at me for taking the photo – a f*****g fairy head herself if you ask me!

We said our goodbyes to Jackie, Andrew and Aeryn and continued west along the N2, heading for Knysner. We stopped at the Storms River Gorge where the biggest, or highest, road bridge in South Africa crosses the (yes, you guessed it!) Storms River. We spent a while there and I walked over and under it and back taking a few photos, of course. It’s in situations such as that, that I feel my fear of heights (is it that, or is it vertigo, or are they the same thing?) has got much worse. I was really terrified as I crossed the bridge on foot, especially when a large lorry passed and made it shake.



We continued to Knysner and looked for somewhere to stay for the night. The Protea Hotel overlooked the yacht basin but their R1,200 (excluding breakfast) for a room at the back of the hotel was crap and their attitude was similar. We eventually found The Old Cape Road Guest House – an absolutely wonderful neo-colonial place, beautifully refurbished in 2000 and with spectacular views of the Knysner Heads. At R600 (~£45) for the two of us, including breakfast, it was less than half the price of the bloody Protea and much, much better.

Unfortunately there was a power cut (there had been one all day) as we checked in and Vee, the lady running the place, gave us a couple of candles to light our way. We settled in and then drove down to the fairly poncey harbour area, still in the dark because of the power cut and we eventually found a table at The Waterfront and had a wonderful seafood meal with a glass of Champagne (style white sparkling wine) and a very pleasant bottle of white between us. Then, in true South African style, I drove back to the guest house!

Monday 5th November

Just Beautiful



After a really crap night's sleep I woke early to beautiful sunshine and took photos of Knysner and the Heads from the veranda outside our room. Breakfast was great (an almost English one!) and we reluctantly left Knysner, knowing that if we ever go back it would be for several more than one night and would certainly be at The Old Cape Road Guest House..

We continued along the N2 towards Cape Town and stopped at Mossel Bay to see The Old Post Tree.

Bartholomew Diaz, when he passed this way 500 years ago, left a message in a tree for another Portuguese mariner who picked it up a few months later. It then became a place for mariners to regularly exchange mail. We had a look at the Shell Museum (the things that crustaceans grow in, not the oil company!) which was pretty good and also the Bartholomew Diaz Museum which was not quite so interesting, except that it had an Albion printing press very much the same, although bigger, as The Boss's. Then we lunched at the Café Gannet which was crap! It was full, so (our own choice, I have to say) we sat outside in a howling gale, drank almost cold coffee and ate the worst toasted sandwich we'd had in a long time, served with tepid, soggy chips. If you're in Mossel Bay avoid the Café Gannet!



We happily left Mossel Bay and continued west along the N2, stopping a couple of times to take a few photos and briefly visiting Swellendam, a very old and quite beautiful small town with some lovely traditional buildings. We drove back to the N2 and then diverted south along a small road to Bredasdorp – a 50 km drive along narrow but straight and empty roads, through mainly arable agricultural land with several Ostrich farms. From Bredasdorp we continued south to the southernmost point of the African continent – Cape Agulhas, where

we got a room at the Tip of Africa Guest House (an excellent place with views over the ocean, run by a very garrulous guy called Derick).



We ate at the Zuidste Kaapse Restaurant and Pub – the most southerly in all of Africa and had a superb “fish supper” (Yellowfin for me and BIG prawns for The Boss) with a bottle of a very pleasant Chenin Blanc from a vineyard at Elim, about 20 kms away.

Tomorrow we'll take a look at the place where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet and then head for

Cape Town. Goodnight!

Tuesday 6th November

The Southernmost Couple



I had an excellent night's sleep and left The Boss snoozing while I went for an early morning walk and to take a few photos. Cape Agulhas is a wonderful little place – very befitting for the southernmost town/village in Africa. I walked along the beach in bright sunshine but with a still blustery wind and saw the tidal swimming pools that I suppose the local town folk use, wandered onto a spit of land projecting into the sea where the waves seem to crash on each side from opposite directions. I supposed (wrongly it later transpired) that this was the place where the two oceans meet. I meandered

up to the lighthouse, of course the most southern in Africa, and along the shore a little further, taking photos of this extremely photogenic place as I went.

I returned to The Tip of Africa Guest House, past the southernmost laundrette in Africa, and The Boss “got going”. After another wonderful breakfast, we said goodbye to Derick Burger and his wife and followed the road for 1 km where there is the place that the two oceans really are supposed to meet and is marked by a stone dedicated by P. W.



Botha! I must say that I had expected something rather special at the meeting point of the Indian and Atlantic oceans. I'm not sure what, maybe some kind of maelstrom or the view of the blue Indian meeting the grey Atlantic. But in that I was disappointed. However, we took photos of each other on the “boundary” stone, taking our turn behind a coach

load of Brits, one of who kindly photographed us together. For a few minutes we had been the southernmost people in the whole of Africa!

We headed for the lighthouse which I and (very bravely for her) The Boss climbed. There were lovely views from the top but when we came down it was time for us to leave Cape Agulhas, a superb place to which I hope to return one day.



From Agulhas we drove a few kms back towards Bredasdorp and found a dirt road which we followed for 60 or 70 kms to the beautiful little settlement of Elim with its huge, white painted, church and lovely thatched buildings. Elim was established by the Moravian Church in 1824 and I believe that the ancestors of those who founded it still own the town, now an official South African monument. We stopped for the obligatory photos and an ice cream and noticed that, strangely to me at least, there was a memorial to mark the abolition of slavery in South Africa on 1st December 1838. If only the people who erected the monument could have lived long enough to see the agony that the black people of South Africa would have to go through during the following 150 years!

From there we continued on dirt or sand roads to Pearl Bay

and on to Gansbaai, where The Boss spotted a whale just off the coast. This is a section of the coast where about 350 Right Whales live and can be frequently seen. They're called "Right Whales" because, during the period when whales were hunted these were the most popular ones to kill as of their high blubber content made them float, and therefore easier to "harvest", once they were dead. We watched the whale for a long time and I attempted to take some photos of it (actually more than "some") as it dived and resurfaced.



We visited the nearby Danger Point lighthouse, which was pretty picturesque and then drove on to nearby Hermanus, a busy little tourist town, popular because it is in the bay in which it sits that whales can be most commonly seen and indeed, from the cliff tops, we did see a couple just a few hundred metres offshore.

Still heading for Cape Town we reached Betty's bay (I haven't yet found out who the Betty was after whom the place is named) and it was only when we got there that we found out that there is a large colony of South African penguins here and we wandered through it and which, of course, I photographed a few times. Amongst the penguins live a lot of sea birds and also Dossies, also known as Rock Rabbits (a bit like a very overgrown Guinea Pig), which give out the loudest noise I've ever heard from a small animal, somewhat like a constipated donkey on heat!



Further along the coast the road hugs the shore and, as it rose and fell, we stopped to watch yet another whale – wonderful creatures. I just can't believe that in these so called "enlightened times", the Japanese and Norwegians, among others, still want to hunt them when the products they are processed for can be manufactured from petroleum.



Then, as late afternoon approached, we passed Gordon's Bay and back onto the N2 to Cape Town itself. As we approached the city the road goes by several huge shanty towns and we were both appalled at the terrible living conditions of the people there. What does this say for 14 years of a government that was supposed to bring people, such as those who live in Cape Flats, to a better lifestyle? We were very depressed by it.

In Cape Town The Boss wanted to stay either at the Victoria and Alfred Hotel (V&A) on the waterfront or at another hotel, the name of which she had forgotten. So we stayed at the V&A, despite the room, at ~£300 for the night, not being as good as those at either the Old Cape Road Guest House in Knysner or the Tip of Africa Guest House in Cape Agulhas. At least, when we checked in, the room had a wonderful view of Table Mountain which I, of course, photographed and I looked forward to seeing the sun rise behind it in the morning to take many more!

Our next problem was finding somewhere to eat. We'd both been to the Cape Town waterfront about 18 years ago when we first met and it was in the process of being

developed. We remembered a wonderful seafood restaurant and set out to find it. However, the waterfront is now, to our eyes at least, very overdeveloped and we wandered around for over an hour without finding the place we remembered (vaguely, it must be said). Eventually we settled on the Hildebrand Restaurant, Italian and pretty good. We shared a huge seafood platter and a splendid bottle of white wine before returning to the V&A and bed!

Wednesday 7th November

Obscured by Clouds



Well, we woke up, I after a dreadful night's sleep, expecting a spectacular view of the sun behind Table Mountain but instead the whole mountain, not just the top as frequently occurs (when the mountain is said to "have its table cloth on"), was covered in cloud and it was very dull outside – probably the worst day's weather so far during our trip. Having paid so much for the mediocre bedroom just for the view, the weather and the mountain could have at least obliged us by putting on "a good show". We were mightily pissed off, especially as I so much wanted to go up to the top of the mountain as The

Boss and I had done together when we first met. There was no way we'd be able to do it in the awful weather.

So, we're off to shower, get dressed and have breakfast.

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PS I forgot to mention that yesterday, during our meanderings, we saw lots of animals and flowers too, including tortoises (one of which I almost ran over in the car), blue cranes, ostriches, springbok, various species of Protea, etc. All were dutifully photographed. Also, after we'd checked in to the hotel, I wanted to download the days' photos onto the laptop as I'd been doing all holiday so far. All I got from the f*****g machine was the "blue screen of death" which I can't seem to cure no matter what I do. The thing seems to be well and truly f****d!

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After a really excellent breakfast (which goes to confirm to me that the only things wrong with this hotel are the quality of the room and the price) we wandered for a while around the waterfront again, saw a Cape Coloured trad jazz band made up, so it seemed, of guys all in their 80s and took a few photos of the harbour, including the bloody clouds over the completely blanketed Table Mountain.

Then we left the V&A – never to return. The staff there were lovely, the breakfast, as I've already mentioned, was wonderful but the room, even if we'd

woken up to "South Africa's favourite view" (as the tourist brochures say) was certainly not worth what we'd paid.

In very misty and drizzly weather we drove along the coast, past the famous Cape Town



beaches, deserted because of the weather, and reached the fishing village of Hout Bay which The Boss had visited right up until she'd stopped working for NCP (that's National Chemical Products – the South African former chemical distributor, NOT National Car Parks!) and saw the trawlers tied up, some still being unloaded from last night's fishing. Noelene bought some smoked Snoek and had it vacuum packed to take back to the Queen Mother and we said "goodbye" to Hout Bay in the now persistent rain.

We were heading for Fishhoek but the weather was getting worse and the mountain pass road which we'd have had to use was closed as a result. So we decided to leave Cape Town and its environs and I must say that the only things I ever want to go back for would be to go to the top of Table Mountain on a clear day and treat The Boss to a visit to the famed Botanical Gardens.



We drove to Somerset West and the Lord Charles Hotel where The Boss and I had first met and where we very definitely "consummated" our relationship. We sat in the lounge and had a very relaxed coffee (WE were relaxed, NOT the coffee) and it seems that the place hadn't change much since we met there 18 years ago. It was wonderfully memorable and it was wonderful to just sit there together, drink the coffee, read a newspaper and enjoy being with each other. I just wish that we'd stayed there instead of in Cape Town last night.

We reluctantly left Somerset West in blustery rain and headed for Stellenbosch where we'd planned to stay the night. We stopped at the Meerlust vineyard and tasted their wines. Meerlust is The Boss's favourite winery and I must say that the wines we tasted were excellent so we bought a case of the one she really likes best of all – the Rubicon, a blended wine unique to Meerlust. There will be two bottles each for Mikey and Nevvie and two to take back to the UK for Goughie – but all concerned have to keep them until we can be there to help drink them!

Because of the weather and also the very, very long drive tomorrow (possibly ~750 kms) we decided to press on past Stellenbosch and headed for Worcester in the Hex River Valley. As we headed north east the sun broke through and the mountains became more and more beautiful. There was even an impressive rainbow to welcome us at one stage.



We reached Worcester with the possibility of a couple of B&Bs but we found nowhere of any note to eat so we left the rather pretty little place with its mountain vistas and continued to the De Vlei Country Inn at De Doorn right in the middle of the Hex River Valley. It's in this area that most of South Africa's table grapes, especially the ones that are exported, are grown. The valley is spectacularly beautiful.

We received an enthusiastic and very warm welcome from the very chatty middle/late aged couple, he from Mauritius and

from a French upbringing and she from Zimbabwe (with family there still enduring the “Zimbabwean torment”). Our accommodation was in a round thatched cottage (a rondavaal) and very nice it was too. We were the only guests and ate alone in their beautiful restaurant – delicious, local Karoo lamb shanks with a dessert of Malva pudding (the recipe for which the lady left for Noelene in the morning), washed down with a bottle of Fat Bastard Chenin Blanc. It was excellent, as was the company.

At about 10:00 pm it was “lights out” and a much better sleep than the previous night. Oh, and the laptop came alive again!

Thursday 8th November

Trekking

Woke up in good time for breakfast at 8:00 am to a perfect early summer day with bright sunshine and not a cloud in the sky. Today is a driving day (probably ~750 kms). Had a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon (again!) and then set off on the “Grand Trek”.

The N1 north (or south, I suppose) has a reputation for being exceedingly boring and more accidents are said to be caused by drivers nodding off than any other cause, but I didn’t find it that way. The countryside started with the exceptionally beautiful Hex River valley (we never did see the Hex River!) and then varied between open fields and scrubland grazing. Yes,



there were places where the road stretched kms straight to the horizon and others where scrubland went as far as the eye could see but I didn’t find it at all bad. Maybe I have a high boredom threshold (actually I know, I DO have a high boredom threshold!). We only made one proper stop and that was at Matjiesfontein (pronounced “Mikey’s fontein”), established by a Briton called Johnny Logan who came from England as a railway worker and made a fortune. Matjiesfontein is like the last outpost of the British Empire and the hotel (The Lord Milner Hotel) carries the Union Jack, the South African and the

Apartheid era South African flags.

We had a good look around and spent some time in the wonderful little bric-a-brac museum at the railway station where a private train was waiting to take a party to, I suppose, Cape Town. After that we were shown around the Lord Milner Hotel by a very colourful Cape Coloured guy called Johnny, who afterwards entertained us in the pub by playing the piano and singing New Orleans jazz style.

We continued up the N1 where (with a speed limit of 120 kph it’s possible to keep up a good 140 kph most of the time and through or past towns such as Leeu-Gam Ka, Beaufort West, Three Sisters, Richmond and Colesberg, some of them with the most appalling looking shanty towns on their outskirts.

We eventually, after a couple of lengthy road work stops reached the edge of Springfontein and the absolutely wonderful Prior Grange Guest Farm, recommended to us by the couple at De Doorn we’d stayed with the previous night, and 4 kms off the tarmac road down a dirt track.



The farm is still owned by relatives of its original founders and we were given a very warm welcome by Blackie and Sheryl De Swardt. Prior Grange is another of the “almost beautiful beyond belief” places at which we’ve stayed. It’s a sheep farm where each animal has 1 Ha on which to graze, but most of the land is so poor that they need such space. We joined Blackie, Sheryl and two other guests in their “pub” and chatted amiably, although the other couple (he especially) were the sort of “know it alls” with upper middle class pretensions that we hate. Then we retired to Gum Tree Cottage, “billeted” (beneath one of the largest gum trees in Africa) to which Sheryl brought our dinner – home reared lamb with mostly home grown veggies. After eating we sat outside for a while as I tried to photograph the stars (not very successfully). The Boss stood on the veranda staring up into the beauty of the starry African sky with tears of love and joy rolling down her face. Even I, a dyed in the wool Brit, felt the passionate emotion of the night.

the beautiful building in which we were



We eventually went to bed, exhausted after the long day’s drive. I slept fitfully and had some very strange dreams!

Friday 9th November

I Always Knew She Was Clever!



Breakfast was brought to our “chalet” at 7:00 am (!) by Sheryl and I paid for our accommodation, food and drinks, the massive amount of a total of <£40 – unbelievable!

Once The Boss surfaced, we sat on the veranda in the warm early morning sun and enjoyed our breakfast to the sounds of animals, wild and domesticated.

In a while we’ll pack and then head first to Bloemfontein and then to Thaba Nchu to see the

Goughie family mission before finally setting off across country to Klerksdorp and the farm where Noelene’s sister Teresa (Topsy) her husband Martenes, the Queen Mother and her nephew Rowan all live.

Maybe more later.....

We got away from Prior Grange at about 9:00 am, went into Springfontein itself – another one horse town without a hitching post and pretty impoverished looking and then drove back to the N1 and headed for Bloemfontein. The drive there was pretty fast and unremarkable and we drove through the city, which seemed quite pleasant, to the N8 and finally reached the predominantly black (in fact, as far as we could see, entirely black) town of Thaba Nchu.

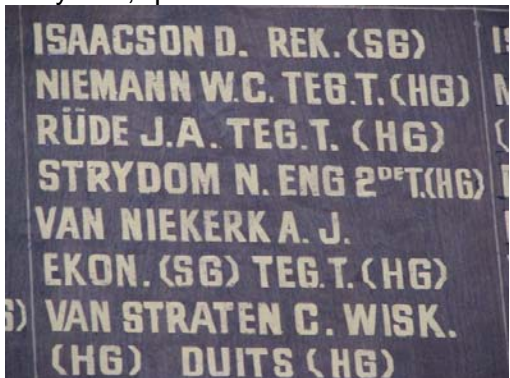


After driving around for a while we eventually found the Methodist mission which turned out to be a ruin – but a protected ruin, a scheduled monument which is destined to be (maybe) rebuilt. Next door to the ruin is the fine new Methodist church and a very kind guy (I couldn't figure out if he was a security guard or working on the reconstruction) showed us around the ruins of the old mission. Finally, in the grounds, we found a monument with the names of all the Ministers over the years. There, amongst them, from 1943 – 1950 was the name of Goughie's uncle – W. Illsley. I took the requisite number of photos plus a

few more and we departed for Klerksdorp.

To avoid a dirt road we went up the N8 a little further towards Lesotho and then north through Excelsior, back onto the N1 and north towards Ventersburg, where we took the R70 to Hennenman where The Boss and her siblings had gone to school. After mistaking the primary school for the high school we finally found Hoeskool Hennenman. One of the caretakers was there and he showed us around the school, Noelene chatting to him in Afrikaans (his language).

Hardly anything seemed to have changed at the school and there in the entrance hall was the board of honour with, in 1976, the year in which The Boss matriculated, one "N. STRYDOM" listed as gaining a distinction in English, something which she never knew she'd achieved. He showed us through the building and to the sports field where Nevvie had briefly played rugby and then to the Headmaster's study and the photos of the rugby teams and staff over the years, quite a few of which Noelene recognised. One thing which struck me was how, 14



years after the end of Apartheid, this school which was 100% white is, if the faces in the 2005/2006 rugby team photos are anything to go by, now only 99% white!

The tour of the school was brilliant, the more so because it was unexpected and, because, apart from a couple of additions to the buildings, nothing much has changed in 30 years!

From Hennenman we headed to Odendaalrus, Bothaville and Orkney from where we phoned Tippy and she arranged for her son, Rowan (also known as Manetjie – pronounced Manakie, meaning "little man") to meet us and guide us to the farm on which they live. While we waited, The Boss went off and did a bit of shopping (got me a couple of blank DVDs), we met



Manetjie and his girlfriend Bonita and he guided us to their home, a farm in the middle of nowhere just off the N12 west of Klerksdorp. The farm is rather run down but is very comfy and spacious, surrounded by fields and "nothingness". I like it.

Merle, The QM, had cooked us a wonderful curry which we devoured with great enthusiasm and while the girls looked at photos I watched the SA vs. NZ cricket on TV and fell asleep on the sofa doing so. We eventually went to bed at about 11:30 pm to another night's rather interrupted sleep.

Saturday 10th November

Carnivores' Delight



I woke at about 7:30 am to another fine sunny and breezy day. The others were already up and cooking! Later we're off to Carletonville for a couple of days with Nevvie, Nonnie and family.

It's quite a long (~2 hrs) and, for me, a bafflingly complicated drive from Topsy and Co's to Nevvie and family's house but we eventually arrived at lunchtime or so.

Nevvie's new house is quite different from his old one in Carletonville – smaller but much more modern, better and more interestingly laid out and with a back garden split into two parts, one which seems to be just a lawn for parking cars (it does, however, **have** a lawn!) and the other is the family living area with a smashing pool, small lappa and shady places to sit in the hot sun.

As with all South Africans we know, they are fantastically hospitable and it wasn't long before mid afternoon when a lunch of cold meats, salad and rolls was served – washed down, of course, with the inevitable bottle or two of Windhoek Lager (for me, at least).



Later we did nothing in particular, which suited me just nicely, but did watch the SA vs. NZ test match on TV a bit (the Kiwis are going to lose without a doubt!) and swim in the pool, which was refreshingly chilling on this hot early summer day.

In the evening was the inevitable braai (barbecue) with the usual huge amount of meat (lamb chops, sausages, kebabs, T-bone steaks) – enough to feed more than twice the people who were here. Nonnie made "crimelpop" (I'm sure that's spelt wrongly, but it's a maize meal porridge!) and Nevvie also cooked a very delicious veggie dish called "Chakalaka", or something like that. Well the food was all delicious and we ate until bursting point but there was still plenty left for the following day's breakfast!

Sunday 11th November

Even More Shopping!

Later last night we played the Buzz computer quiz game with Corlee, Nevvie and Nonnie's eldest, who in the years since we saw her last, has grown from a very chubby 12 year old to a beautiful 17 year old woman. Needless to say, brainbox won the quiz!

This morning I didn't wake until well after 9:30, the best night's sleep I've had all holiday so far. Even The Boss was up and about before me. Breakfast was a re-run of last night's dinner and very tasty it was too.

Today was the girls' day – shop, shop, shopping at some bloody awful shopping mall close to Jo'burg, about an hour and a half's drive from Nevvie's house. I wouldn't say it was purgatory, but.....



Anyway, The Boss bought presents for Corlee and Christma (whose name we've been wrongly spelling as Krysmas for years!) and we had drinks, including a very nice, although rather sweet for me, bottle of South African Champagne style wine. We sat in the hot sun just enjoying being there and then went inside to one of the chain seafood restaurants for another huge meal, including oysters which young Christma devoured with relish. The dinner for the seven of us was a little more than £85 and, as usual, there were doggy bags to bring home!

Back "at the ranch" we did nothing in particular, which was as required, other than watch the re-run of S. Africa's comprehensive victory over the Kiwis in the test match.

Tomorrow Nevvie is due to go back to Pretoria where he works all week and Corlee, Christma and Nonnie are off to school (Nonnie teaches!) where the kids are doing exams. Corlee had been pretty poorly with a cold, sore throat and lost voice so she was medicated and went to bed straight after we got back. We retired not too late and I slept fairly well until.....

Monday 12th November

A Grave Problem!

~7:30 am. When I got up Nevvie had left for Pretoria, Corlee and Christma to school and Nonnie to Christma's school where she teaches. So it was quiet in the house except for the noisy f*****g parrot!



Anyway, after breakfast we headed for Randfontein so that The QM could pick up the rents from the tenants who are in her house and we also had another mission – to try to find the grave of one of Jo Verran's ancestors who had been a miner in Chile, moved to South Africa and was buried in the town's cemetery.

So, after conducting The QM's business, we headed for the "dead centre" of town where we realised the enormity of the task. So I asked the gravediggers for help and they directed us to the town hall. There we were referred to Lydia in the Engineers Dept. She was so, so helpful but we realised that without more details than just a surname we'll have no chance of finding the grave. We went to an Internet café and I e-mailed Jo. While we were there The Boss checked our home e-mail to see if there was any news about the job she'd applied for just before we left for our holiday – but there wasn't any! On the way back to the farm we called in again at Carletonville and did some shopping.

In the evening Benita and I took the dog for a short walk across the fields to the nearby dam (reservoir) which looked quite lovely as the sun went down and I took (just) a few photos.

Tuesday 13th November

Nowt Much But Cooking

After a pretty good night's sleep I took the most shallow bath (about 10 cms) in quite a while and The Boss, Tippy, The QM and I went into Klerksdorp to shop, shop, shop. We eventually found a place to get the gas cylinder (which they use to fuel the cooker) filled and we then bought Tippy a gift - a clingfilm wrapping machine for her diabetic cake and biscuit making business. We stopped for an iced coffee – probably the sweetest I've ever tasted and I had a look around some of the “more “interesting” shops on my own. So, all in all, it had been a “do nothing of real interest” day.

However, in the evening, The Boss cooked up a storm – Gnocchi with a creamy walnut, almond and parsley sauce followed by Melanzane, pork chops in a mustard sauce and rice with peas and bacon, finished off with Baklava (made with fructose and very delicious). It was a real “tour de force” of Italian, with just a bit of Greek, cuisine and we ate it along with a couple of bottles of a very nice Du Toitskloof Champagne style wine. The whole meal, though inevitably a little late, was “briaar lekker”!

We retired, once again very, very full and showed Tippy and Martenes our photos, which sent them to sleep fine style.

Wednesday 14th November

Stormy

Again I slept quite well and, not being able to face the thought of another 10 cm bath, washed and faced the prospects of a real “Boer breakfast” which was great – maize meal (pop) with Russians (big sausages), mushrooms, eggs, tomatoes – but again far, far too much food.



Today I'm trying to write the photos I've taken so far to DVD using the Nero programme. Yesterday I went through all the pictures and cut the number down from over 1,200 to just over 900.

For some reason the Nero programme has failed a couple of times and now, just as I'm on the third try there's been a power cut and there's not enough battery power left in the laptop to complete the DVD burn.

Eventually the power came back on just before the laptop battery failed and this time the DVD was written successfully.



It's been very hot today, I'm not sure what the temperature is but I would think the low to mid 30s. Noelene and Tippy cooled down by donning their cozzies and playing amongst the lawn sprinklers. Then, later in the afternoon, while the outdoor water tank was being filled they allowed it to overflow and The Boss showered in the cold, cold water.

Afterwards as it began to get dark, the sky became

very cloudy and, in the distance, there was a terrific thunder storm. So I went outside with the camera, set it on a chair on the manual setting with a five second exposure and pressed the button. Eventually, after several attempts, I managed to get a photo of a lightning bolt. It looks very impressive.

Thursday 15th November

Chow (not Ciao!)



Got up a bit earlier today (~7:30 am) as I was taking Rowan to work in nearby Klerksdorp. On the way we saw the aftermath of a horrendous car crash.

Later, the brother of the guy from whom Tippy rents the farm allowed the cattle he was herding to stray into their garden, which doesn't have a proper fence. This seems to have happened quite a few times and on this occasion all hell broke loose with Rowan and Tippy having a right old row with the guy, dogs barking at each other and their next door neighbour came across in his car, burst through the fence and

joined in on the side of the farmer.

Later in the day, once everything had calmed down, we went to Mikey's to start getting things ready for Saturday night's party.

On the way we stopped in Klerksdorp to buy some blank DVDs, have a lunch of Lamb Bunny Chow (part of an uncut white bread loaf, hollowed out, filled with a very tasty lamb curry and some of the bread replaced to form a plug on the top – it's delicious and wonderful) and then The Boss and The QM spent an hour in a shop buying beads for her niece while I sat in the car outside. T

We got to Mikey's just as he'd arrived home from work and immediately made "intimate contact" with a Windhoek! We sat outside and chatted for an hour or so as the cloud came over and the thunder and lightning began. Eventually the heavens opened and the storm we'd hoped to see arrived (or had it?). Unfortunately, after only half an hour the rain stopped and that was that as far as the African storm was concerned.

Mikey cooked a simple but delicious dinner of barbecued (or braid?) steaks with garlic bread and salad. It was just the job – for a hungry carnivore, anyway! Afterwards we just chatted until not long before midnight and crashed for a good night's sleep.

Friday 16th November

Shopping with Purpose!

Awoke at about 8:00 am, after Mikey and Tertia had gone to work and Tyron to school, where he had exams today.

Joyce, the maid, was cleaning and The QM was sitting in the garden having "a puff" of which she does far, far too much. The Boss was also up bright and early so we drove out to a very nice garden centre-cum-menagerie where we had breakfast, a good look around and The Boss bought some plants for The QM to put in her garden.

Across the road from the Little Falls Garden Centre is the Clearwater Shopping mall (oh, how

I've come to hate those places on this holiday!) so we had to, of course, indulge. The Boss is very insistent on buying presents for all our family and friends in the UK. Is this to somehow apologise for us having four weeks holiday whilst they are still working, I wonder? Anyway, we bought the requisite gifts and I did see a small camera (a Fuji Z100 or maybe Z1000) which could be interesting.

When we got back to Mikey and Tertia's house "the main man" was there, having taken the afternoon off work to do the shopping for tomorrow's party. So we shopped – got beers and loaned glasses, went to Makro for food and their booze shop for a mountain (or should it be "a lake") of wines, spirits, mixers for cocktails, etc. Altogether the booze and food cost about R3,000 (~£230). Then we went to the wonderful greengrocer chain "Fruit and Veg" and finally got back to the house just after 7:00 pm. Can't remember what we ate on Friday night but I expect that it was very good and that there was too much of it! Oh, and while we were in Makro earlier there had been a hell of a storm – brill!

Saturday 17th November

Party Time



Party day! We'd invited all of The Boss's South African family plus Tertia (2) and her family to the party at Mikey's house because we just wouldn't have had the time to visit them all while in the country, as well as having a holiday! In the morning we ran around getting gas bottles for Mikey's braai, picking up the meat (half a cow, half a sheep and half a pig – actually, about 3½ kg of each) and getting half a tonne of ice to cool the drinks, etc.



The Boss and Tertia went off to get other stuff but became sidetracked and distracted by a shoe shop – surprise, surprise! Anyway, by 1:00 pm, when people started arriving, we were just about ready and what a lovely time we had on a bright, sunny, warm day and evening. So many people turned up that I'd almost forgotten who was there and who wasn't but all those we wanted to be there, apart from Nevvie and family because Nonnie was ill, made it. Tertia (1) made cocktails, the names of most of which I've forgotten - even if I knew them in the first place! I think one was called a Springbok and was layers of green and yellow/brown and then there was the inevitable Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster!

Of course, with about 10 kgs of meat, plus all the food which Tippy had prepared, there was only just enough (I do jest, of course!) and the whole event was just perfect.

By about 11:00 pm we were all pretty well "pised" so we cleared up a bit and then hit the hay. It had been an excellent day.

Sunday 18th November

More Meat Eating!

I forgot to mention that we've planned to go to the fourth day of the South Africa vs. New Zealand test match at Centurion Park, Pretoria on Monday. So far it looks touch and go as to whether there will be play tomorrow as New Zealand have almost "hoisted the white flag" after just two days of the five day match! Last Friday we also booked to see Foreigner at one of the indoor stadia (Carnival City – I think it's a casino!) in Jo'burg on Tuesday, the day before we come home. Unbelievably, the tickets were just R250 (less than £20!).



So, back to Sunday. After some more perfunctory cleaning up we all set off for the [Rhino and Lion Nature Reserve](#) in the "Cradle of Humankind", a declared World Heritage Site, about 40 km north-west of Jo'burg. The whole gang of us went and we were joined by Nevvie, Nonnie and the girls and met there by fat Gary and Bridget, Johan and baby and Charles, Janet and Janet's two kids (her husband was Portuguese, ran a small shop and was shot

dead by burglars a couple of years ago – very sad). Janet and Charles were foster children of Terry's mother and, in fact, Charles was eventually adopted.



So we all took the drive to the park, paid our R70 (just over £5) entrance fee and had the most wonderful time ever. We saw lions being fed on half a horse (a couple of them also ate one of the tyres of someone's car!). We saw wild dogs and cheetah, both also being fed and we saw rhino in the (almost) wild, including females with babies, a hippopotamus, a guy wrestling with tigers....

(Q: How many Australian crocodile hunters does it take to catch a stingray? A: More than one, apparently!)



....all sorts of other animals and then a group of us went down the "Wondercave" – the third largest in S. Africa. It was very impressive and even The QM managed the 87 steps down (before the 20m lift ride).

Later we saw (more) ostrich, wild pigs, wildebeest and lots of birds and other animals that I've almost forgotten about. We had a wonderful picnic in an area with purpose built shades and managed to consume just about all the food that was left over from yesterday.

It was just a perfect day (cue Lou Reed song!) and we saw so many animals, most of them in as close to a natural environment as is possible in our "civilised" world.

We eventually got back to Mikey and Tertia's at about 7:30 pm to discover that New Zealand had actually surrendered the test match to South Africa, which meant that our planned day

out on Monday was well and truly buggered! We had takeaway pizzas for dinner and they were delicious, we looked through our photos of the day (there were only just over 150 of mine!) and had an early night, just after 10:30.

Monday 19th November

The Best of Days

I woke very, very refreshed at just after 6:30 am after a great night's sleep. It seems that the longer this holiday goes on the more relaxed I become and the better I sleep. Only just over 6½ years until I retire!! Tyron went off to school about an hour later to do his exam and Tertia took him and Mikey, who has to work for a few hours this morning, before we go off on today's, as yet unplanned, adventure.

We did some more tidying up from Saturday's party, although Joyce, Mikey and Tertia's cleaner, had done most of it yesterday. Tippy, Martenes, Rowan and Benita left for their place, down on the farm, not long after and it's now 8:30 am and we're sitting here outside – just The Boss, The QM and me in relative peace, with Joyce busily working inside. It's very pleasant.

As previously mentioned, due to the Kiwi surrender in the third day of the second test match (what can you expect from a nation whose team didn't even make it to the rugby world cup final?) we won't be going to the fourth day of the test match today, which is a real shame as I'd have loved to have been part of the South African "cricket experience".

We went out and did a few errands earlier on and ascertained that if we run out of luggage space going home we can send 5 kgs of it by surface post for R210 (~£16) or R550 (~£42) by air. I think the former, if needs be.

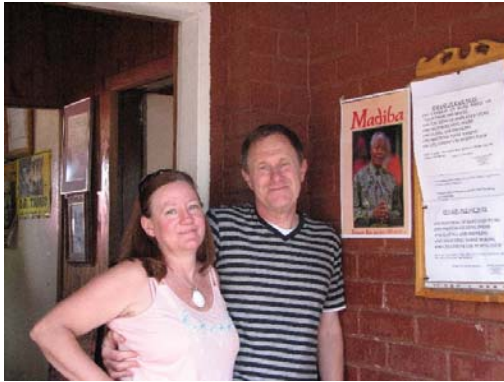
We picked Mikey up from his work at just after 10:00 am and he announced that we were off to Soweto to see the Mandela family house in which The Madiba lived before his imprisonment and for a short time after he was released, where his children were bought up and where Winnie Mandela lived right through much of her then husband's incarceration.

So we set off for Soweto and I was amazed at what a relatively well ordered place it is – much better and seemingly more prosperous than several of the towns we'd passed through in the former Transkei, including Mthatha.



Just on the outskirts of the city, and it must be remembered that with a population of over two million Soweto is one of the larger cities in Africa, we came upon a disused power station at Orlando Ekhaya which has two enormous cooling towers, upon which murals have been painted – one with the name and logo of, what I took to be the sponsor (FNB – First National Bank) and the other with local scenes. The "local scenes" one was amazing – beautifully colourful with the work so well done. We wandered around them for a while and I took the requisite number of photos (i.e. a lot!), then climbed up inside the FNB one to see where people use them for abseiling. Later I read in a paper that the former power station itself is to be transformed into some sort of precinct (more shopping, I suppose) and that the towers, 90 m tall, will be used for "adventure activities", including abseiling, as now, and the first indoor bungee jumping with an observation platform around the rim of one of them. Can't say that I fancy it myself but I guess it will be a good use for these impressive

structures.



Mikey drove us around Soweto for a bit and we saw many of the sites of an almost totally black African area, including a cow being dismembered – its head on a table in the sun for sale and its skin being prepared for making leather.

We reached the Mandela Family Home, which is a very small normal house, like those around it with a living area, kitchen, two other rooms and a bathroom which was added much later. This is the place where you see most of the white faces that make it to Soweto. The house and its memorabilia are very moving and more than once I found myself becoming a “little emotional”! The Boss and Mikey were the same. Afterwards we sat opposite the house having a beer with some black American tourists. The visit had brought home to me, as if I needed reminding, the reality of Apartheid; blacks were cruelly treated and the white government lied to those white, who naturally enough, were taken in by the propaganda.



From the Mandela Family Home we had lunch at a nearby restaurant (Nambitha), and what a scrumptious and far too large again, meal it was. I had mutton curry with pumpkin and samp (some sort of cooked maize meal) plus, of course, a couple of Windhoeks. We just sat eating, talking and drinking for a couple of hours and watched the world go by. Whilst doing so a donkey cart driven by two young guys passed by. They were collecting scrap but with style, for they had a huge sound system on board which was blasting out music. It was so, so “cool” and very “African” and I loved it and the whole atmosphere of the place.

Eventually we prised ourselves away from that wonderful place, Mikey drove us around a bit more and then we went into the very centre of Jo’burg where people (white ones, that is) reckon it’s unsafe to go – ha! When The Boss and I drove through the centre on our way from the airport to Mikey’s almost four weeks ago we found it to be nowhere as bad as its reputation and we confirmed this on our “family outing”.



We went to the top of the Carlton Centre, 223 metres high and on the 50th floor, probably at about 200 m, is an observatory where we spent some time looking over and photographing, naturally, Jo’burg and the surrounding areas. On quite a clear day the views were great and it’s a rather impressive city. We took more photos and then headed for the Newtown area where we hoped we’d be able to go to Kippies, a jazz club on the corner of Carr and Quinn Streets. But, being a Monday, it was unfortunately closed. So Mikey drove us through the suburbs which I found quite interesting and we headed back to his place.

By this time it was getting rather dark but still pretty warm, so we all, apart from The QM, jumped in his pool and had a wonderfully relaxing, cooling and fun hour or so.



Even though none of us felt especially hungry after the huge lunch we nevertheless went off to a nearby seafood restaurant and had yet another excellent but rather lighter meal, thankfully. (I think the place was called Adega or something similar and the food is said to be Portuguese in style). I had Codfish Á Braz – cooked flaked cod with flaked potatoes, vegetables and egg, shallow fried and served with a small salad and slices of hardboiled eggs. It was tasty, well cooked and not too heavy. The Boss and Tertia shared a kilo of BIG prawns, Mikey had Cabalho (I'm sure that's spelt wrongly!), Tykie had squid and The

QM had fried haloumi with a small salad.

When we got back to the house at ~10:30 pm we all went to bed almost straightaway. It had been a wonderful day and a good substitute for not going to the cricket.

Tuesday 20th November

Jukebox Heroes!

Tomorrow evening (night, actually) we fly back home and this wonderful holiday will be at an end. I want to stay here!! Today we're tidying up a few loose ends, hopefully getting some information from Randfontein about Jo's ancestor from Lydia, going off to a garden centre to also hopefully get The QM a trug, if anyone in this country knows what one is, and get me a couple of pairs of those rather good and inexpensive Woolworth's (in S. Africa, the equivalent of Marks and Sparks) trousers for work.

Tonight we're off to see Foreigner ("I've been waiting for a girl like you....") at Carnival City in Jo'burg – should, hopefully, be good.

Well, first of all I did speak to Lydia, gave her the information about Jo's ancestor and she said that she'd try to find out more information, e.g. where in the cemetery he might be planted, and call me back but she didn't. So either she didn't have time or was unable to find anything useful.

We did a good old trawl of several garden centres and drove a fair way doing it but no-one seemed to know exactly what a trug is and they certainly didn't have one. We were much more successful at Woolworth's where I did indeed buy three pairs of the work trousers that I like (and bought when we were here five years ago) for the princely sum of ~£36 – for the three, BARGAIN!



We got back to Mikey's at around 5:00 pm and left for "Carnival City" – a wonderfully kitsch and completely over the top casino complex with a concert hall where we were to see Foreigner.

The support band, Fat something or other, a group of seven local musicians fronted by the biggest lead singer I've ever seen (made Meat Loaf look like a baby) were surprisingly good and were well received by the ~5,000 sell out audience. Although our seats

were at the back we had a perfect view of the stage in this relatively small venue.

Foreigner just blew us away. They were terrific, playing all their well known as well as some



newish numbers and the audience responded appropriately. Even though there are only two of the original band still playing the sound to me is just as it ever was, the lead singer in particular emulating his predecessor superbly.

All too soon, and after a lengthy encore, the concert was over. I'd taken loads of photos, even a bit of video and had almost got nabbed by the "anti-photo" guy.

Afterwards we stopped for hotdogs, bought tee shirts and DVDs and got back to Mikey and Tertia's at just after 1:00 am. So, by the time we'd downloaded the photos to the laptop, connected that to Mikey's network and started copying all 1,500 photos I'd taken on the holiday to his PC, it was well after 2:00 am when we hit the hay. But it had been another great and very enjoyable day and an excellent way in which to (nearly) finish the holiday.

Wednesday 21st November

Going Home (sob)



Woke at about 7:00 am feeling rather bleary eyed as we wanted to say "goodbye" to Mikey, Tertia and Tykie before they left for school and work. It was rather tearful, bidding our farewells after all the time we've spent with them during the last four weeks and after the wonderful love, friendship, hospitality and generosity they've shown us.

After they left we set about packing – trying to cram all we'd brought with us, and more that we'd bought or were given on the trip, into two suitcases and a holdall whilst trying to keep within our luggage limit (impossible even when we packed 5 kgs of it, mainly The Boss's summer clothes, into a Pick N Pay cool bag to post back home).

Finally were ready to depart and loaded our luggage, The QM's and The QM herself into the car. Then we had to try and make arrangements to post the 5 kg package and that proved to not be so easy as we had thought. First we had to get brown paper and tape (tricky in itself) and then, after struggling for half an hour, we decided that we needed proper parcel tape and string so gave up, for then, and headed for Tippy's place just outside Klerksdorp – about 160 kms away from Bergbron.

The drive was quick and easy and we arrived at the farm just before 1:00 pm. Tippy, in true Strydom style (or should that be "true South African style"?) had laid on a delicious but way over the top lunch. However, we didn't abstain!

Then we had to say our farewells to this part of the "fandamily" and it was especially traumatic saying goodbye to our darling QM. She and The Boss hugged and hugged each other, told each other that they loved the other a thousand times and then we were off. As we drove away from the farm for the last time (because I can't believe that they'll still be living there when we return in three years time) even I shed a tear or two!

We drove the 100 kms or so to Nevvie and Nonnie's house in Carletonville, had immense trouble finding their house, but then stopped with Nonnie and the girls for an hour or so. I

changed for the journey and we left the 5 kg parcel, which we'd thoroughly packed and labelled at Tippy's, for Nonnie to post for us.

Then we said the last of our "goodbyes" of the day and left Nonnie and the girls just after 5:00 pm for our drive of an hour and a half or so to Jo'burg's Oliver Tambo International Airport (to give it its full name).

There were no hold ups on the way and we arrived early, dropped off the Toyota Corolla, which had served us well, although a little sluggishly, for 6,500 kms over the last four weeks. It was almost like saying goodbye to a friend!

So we checked in, did a last bit of shopping – some small beady shongololos for Luc and Sam, had an ABF (Absolutely Bloody Final) Windhoek and glass of white wine and are now on the Virgin Atlantic Airbus, several thousand metres in the air somewhere over southern Africa, having left on time. In a while we'll eat, take half a sleeping tablet and hopefully arrive at Heathrow (the very word fills me with dread!) in good time for our connection to Manchester.

It's been an absolutely brilliantly wonderful, super, smashing, lovely, great four weeks and we're both very sorry to be going home.

Maybe, one day, we won't....