

September 21, 2003

Traveling through South Africa

So, there we were, face to face with a steenbok about to charge ...

"WE ARE MARCHING TO PRETORIA"

These are words from a song the Brits used to sing to commemorate their victory in the Boer Wars in the late 1800's.

On Sunday, September 21 we departed Kruger National Park for our return trip to Pretoria, one of South Africa's capital cities. We decided to take the northern route, exiting Kruger via the Phalaborwa Gate, then through what's known as the Escarpment and Panorama Route.

We left Olifants camp at 7:00AM knowing that we had a lot of miles to cover. We stopped at Letaba camp for a good breakfast and a wonderful elephant museum. We then slightly exceeded the 40 mph speed limit heading for the gate. Sure, we saw more animals - zebra, giraffe, kudu, elephant - but we barely slowed down; same old same old.

We heard the news that a leopard jumped through a car window and mauled a man. Apparently the leopard was walking down the center of the road when it was suddenly surrounded by cars. It rose up on its hind legs and rested its forepaws on an open window, right next to the driver. The driver jumped over to the passenger side, raised his feet up, and began kicking at the cat. The cat jumped through the window and proceeded to maul the man's legs pretty badly. The cat then exited the vehicle and was immediately run over by another car. As he was writhing on the pavement another driver exited his vehicle with a gun, and shot the leopard dead.

The park rangers launched a rather fruitless search for the man with the gun, because guns are illegal within the confines of the park. The investigation continues.

We headed west for Phalaborwa, the Park's Central Gate. Our plan was to travel along the Drakensberg Escarpment south to where we would intersect with the autoroute to Pretoria.

We had to take a short side trip in Phalaborwa. I spied a huge refinery with the name "SASOL" on it. Stands for South African Synthetic Oil Limited. They make oil out of coal. Back in the early '80's when the oil price was over \$30. a barrel, the synthetic fuel industry was coming on strong. We at Kamy Valve in Glens Falls, NY were chasing this business for all it was worth. The extreme environment of the refining process called for some highly specialized valving.

We had a few good years until the oil prices tumbled to the point that the high cost of synthetic fuel production rendered it non-competitive. However, SASOL stayed ahead of the curve. They were able to produce competitively, and still can, judging from the size of this plant. The size compares to a large steel mill. Outside the plant lay a veritable yellow mountain of sulfur, which they must extract from the finished product to make it sweeter and more useable. I would have liked to stop and ask more questions about the process, but Anzie insisted that we had more important matters to attend to, like seeing more scenery.

Sure enough, she was right. As we entered the Drakenberg Mountains we came upon tall orange rocky peaks decorated with striations of yellow green lichen. The contrast and the majesty were worth a painting. Maybe someday.... We made our way past scenic vistas like God's Window and Pilgrim's Rest. They provided awesome views of the *lowveld* up to 1000 meters below.

We arrived in Pretoria at 5PM. Found our hotel, The Arcadia Courtyard located in the Hatfield district wherein lies the Univ. of Pretoria and all of the foreign embassies - the high rent district. Very nice digs included huge breakfast, afternoon tea and cocktails 5-7PM. Reminded me of Embassy Suites. Finally met up with Anne's counterparts, Gene Peuse and Brownie Lee, as well as their boss - Barbara Brown.

After a couple of cocktails we all walked over to the Hatfield shopping district for dinner. The whole group hit it off immediately -- lots of creative energy. Actually they had all known each other beforehand on a virtual basis via almost daily e-mail contact. I'm still amazed by the power of the Internet.

The next morning the group assembled at Gene's house for the day, while yours truly was left free to explore the environs of Pretoria. The first day I did absolutely nothing memorable, save a trip to the airport to confirm flights for everyone. Had a slow leak in one tire fixed. Bought groceries for our room.

Every evening we met for cocktails in the living room of the main mansion. We discussed the details of the day, and then dispersed for dinner. Anzie and I would often nosh on the hors d'oeuvres, and forego dinner.

Pretoria was celebrating National Heritage Month, which marked the ninth anniversary of the overthrow of apartheid. The second morning as I was exploring downtown, I came upon a large park in which there were installed a large stage and several large white tents. I decided to see what was up. I walked through the entrance, marked by a banner heralding National Heritage Month. I continued on through two large tents in which people were selling crafts -- mostly unimpressive beadwork, some nice fabrics, wood carvings. I entered the main area in front of the huge stage to find myself surrounded by about 2000 people. They were all standing around listening to speeches made by men in suits upon the stage. I then noticed that I was about the only white person. On

the side of the stage opposite the craft tents I spied a tent fronted with mosquito netting in which about 100 people were sitting on folding chairs, all well-dressed, some of them white.

The final speaker was thanking a list of people and announcing the up-coming entertainment when an elderly white gentleman came up to me and introduced himself -- Professor Willem Kleynhams, age 82, retired from the faculty of the University of Pretoria. He looked like Gyro Gearloose standing there in white dress shirt and black tie, battered briefcase tucked under one arm with papers peeking out of the top corner, several pens nestled in a pocket protector in his shirt, his shock of white hair looking more like nerve ends, the black eyes of a mongoose piercing from under bushy eyebrows.

After some small talk about where I was from and his journeys to the states:

Professor: Mr. Kennedy, allow me to point some things out to you. This is supposed to be a celebration of the end of apartheid, of our "Rainbow Nation", many colors all living together in peace. Tell me how many whites do you see here today?

Me: Funny. I was just noticing that myself. Not many.

Professor: How many whites do you see on the speakers' stage?

Me: None.

Professor: In fact, there are no whites on the Organizing Committee.

Me: Where are all the Afrikaners?

Professor: They're home watching Rugby on television. That's all they do. What you see here is the reality of the Rainbow Nation. It's not working.

Me: It took us a lot longer than nine years to get to where we are in the States. We began to battle Segregation - our Apartheid - back in the late '50's - early '60's. Although we've made great strides, we still have a way to go.

Professor: Before you leave here you must visit one of our many shanty towns, or squatter camps. They give you dramatic evidence of the vast gulf between the rich and the poor in this country.

Me: I saw a huge one on our way to Kruger, in Witbank, the coal mining area. Hundreds and hundreds of shacks made of cardboard and

plastic sheeting, sitting across the Autoroute from the coal mines and refineries.

Professor: They're very dangerous. Every week a candle tips over and one hundred of those shacks burn to the ground within minutes. In order for this government to succeed without a revolution, it must narrow the gap between rich and poor. It must improve the welfare of the poor.

Me: From what I understand the government is now primarily black. Don't you think the government should get more whites involved?

Professor: Certainly they should. The whites don't seem to be interested. They just go to work each day, and then sit home watching Rugby on television.

I want you to know that I had an epiphany 40 years ago. That was when I realized that apartheid would not work. I began to voice my opinion, and my life was no longer pretty. My family and I received threats. I almost lost my position at the University.

I was raised in an Afrikaner household. My parents believed strongly in apartheid. I remember that, at age 10, I befriended a black boy. He possessed an incredibly sharp mind. He knew as much as I did about subjects I learned in school -- Reading, Writing, Mathematics -- yet he had barely attended school. He had learned at home from his mother. The rest he had taught himself. I just knew that he was as smart as I was. Over the years I came to realize that, given the right circumstances, Aob (that was his name) could accomplish much.

One of the happiest days of my life was the day they voted to abolish apartheid. I had worked long and hard for that day. It was nice to be proven right.

Me: Are you still working?

Professor: Right now I am writing a lot. I have published much.

That was the end of our conversation. I sincerely thanked the professor for enlightening me.

The next day I accompanied the group to a conference center located 30 miles outside of town. They were there to monitor and facilitate a Peace Corps conference of IT staff. I spent my time sitting in the sun on a dock overlooking a

river watching the birds and writing. A delightful setting, plus I accomplished much.

The next day Anne took the afternoon off, and we went to the zoo. The Pretoria Zoo is so huge that the best way to tour it is to rent a golf cart. Even then it took us two hours. It also enabled us to put names to some of the animals we had seen in Kruger. We noticed that several bird pens were empty, and the chicken wire had large holes in it. We heard later that, the night before, some person or persons broke into the zoo and made off with several of the most costly birds.

We arrive in Capetown:

After a combination birthday for Brownie Lee and farewell dinner for the group at a fine Thai restaurant located on the outskirts of the Brooklin Mall on Thursday eve, we left for Capetown early Friday. Two hours later we circled Capetown and were able to view the town, the Cape of Good Hope, Table Mountain, Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned), the awesome coastline and the mountains around the Winelands District.

We picked up our rental car - a Tazz, as in Tazmanian Devil. Sounds meaner than it is. We had to use all five gears to get to the top of some mountains. We left the airport, skirted Capetown and traveled three hours northwest. Exited the AutoRoute at Swellendam and navigated narrow mountain roads to get to Montagu. Montagu is situated on the border of the Wine lands and the Little Karoo National Reserve, a vast arid land to the north.

Located in a mountain valley the air in Montagu was dry and crisp, Colorado Springs-like. It is known for its hot springs, colony of artists and other escapees. We had taken the advice of friends Axel and Sylvia and reserved a room at the Mimosa Lodge B & B. We arrived at 5PM, had time for a short walk around the grounds, which included a swimming pool, croquet court and well-manicured gardens. We gathered with the other guests in the "Club" for a wine-tasting. We were surprised at the geographic diversity represented by the guests: German, Swiss and Irish. Of course, in this part of the world Americans are still the oddity.

A truly gourmet dinner was followed by an adjournment of all guests to the Club for après-diners and lively conversation. This is what we love about B&B's. They're the perfect setup for people experiences. Went to bed under a down quilt with the windows open.

The next morning we forced down a wonderful breakfast on top of the previous night's repast, and hit the road. The clear blue sky fairly sparkled. Heading east we detoured through the town of Robertson. The center for one of the largest winegrowing areas, it is at the same time bustling and dull. After a ten minute cruise, we were out of there.

Next stop - Worcester and the Karoo National Botanic Garden. It's a micro-view of just about any type of desert vegetation one could find anywhere. Over 140 acres of cacti, century plants, aloe, all sorts of succulents. Our timing was pretty good. In early spring many plants were starting to blossom.

While at the Garden Visitor Center we met a French family, the Baudelots. They lived in Capetown where Claude Baudelot worked for a large international shipping company. A year later we ran into them again in West Africa, and discovered that they were living about two blocks away from us in Dakar. Talk about the Small World Syndrome!

On our way to Worcester we noted rain clouds gathering up against yonder mountains. It began to sprinkle as we left the Gardens. We left the N1 AutoRoute at the first sign that said Paarl, which was our destination. By this time it was a full-fledged rainstorm. It was a bad choice. The road led to *Du Toits Kloof*, a road so steep and windy that I almost broke my wrists steering around the many hairpin turns. The road clung to the side of this mountain with a worrisome lack of guardrails. All we could see was a foggy abyss below. When we made it back to the main road, we decided to look at a map. We then understood that we could have avoided our death-defying 45-minute mountain route by staying on the AutoRoute though the Huguenot Tunnel. We would have arrived at the same spot in ten minutes. So much for our navigator. As with everything else in life, you get what you pay for.

We arrived in Paarl, which is known for its granite domes, the mountains that overlook the town. We couldn't see them. We did a quick loop of the downtown, and noted the KWV wineries (KWV appears to be a conglomerate that produces and distributes wines throughout the region). We also noted that Paarl was a modern, clean commercial center.

We passed the Afrikaans Language Museum. Back in the 1800's a townsman named Gideon Malherbe, along with other men of either Dutch or French Huguenot ancestry founded the Association of True Afrikaners here as a reaction to the colonial approach of the British. Afrikaans was proclaimed an official language in 1925, and is still protected under the new constitution. It was the language we most often overheard spoken by white Africans on the streets, in restaurants and malls. Funny, their children go barefoot regardless of the venue. Perhaps it's a nostalgic throwback to Boer heritage. "Boer" means farmer. The *Voortrekker* is another proud part of their heritage. Voortrekkers were the Dutch settlers who, dissatisfied with life under British rule, left the Cape in 1830 and migrated as far as Pretoria. They formed the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

This is as good a place as any to stop. Next we'll visit the Winelands, Capetown, the Zoo that is South Africa.

Please stay tuned.

27th

South Africa: The Winelands, Capetown and Its Environs, The Zoo That Is South Africa:

Interesting Fact: South Africa constitutes one of the six floral kingdoms of the world. Its plant diversity compares to that found in the Boreal Kingdom, which covers Europe, North America and Asia. In other words, you can see a whole lot of different plants and flowers within a small area.

Franschhoek:

Next stop: Franschhoek. A picturesque village set in a valley of vineyards banked by huge blue mountains. Every turn in the road presents a scenic view that deserves to be painted, even through the rain. We cruised the main street, noting the wine tasting salons and toney boutiques. We finally chose Monneaux Restaurant, which is located in the Franschhoek Country House, a wine chateau inn on the Main Road into Franschhoek. As we were pretty damp, we chose a table next to the blazing fireplace. For drinks Anne chose a Muscat, while I chose a Ratafia. Ratafia is like a sauterne with a kick. It's a sweet white, like a reisling, blended with brandy. Excellent with cheese. As a matter of fact, I think I'll have one now! I bought two bottles from the vineyard, Haute Cabriere's "Pierre Jourdan" label.

I'm back. Ratafia is served in a sherry glass. It goes down so smoothly that I drank one in the kitchen.

Anyway, back to Monneaux. We ordered mussels for an entrée. They were without doubt the best mussels we had ever eaten! The biggest, the plumpest, they were served in a sweet curry cream base. After the mussels were gone we sopped up every last drop of sauce. Our main dishes were also excellent. Anzie tends to coo over food she really likes. This time I joined her. We must have sounded like a bevy of pigeons. The service, the attention to detail right down to the basil sorbet palette-cleanser, everything made this a four star experience.

This was our introduction to the wine and food experience that is Franschhoek. They really compete head-to-head with the French. What's more, they speak English.

Boy, those Ratafias don't go very far. Be right back.

I'm back. Of course I asked dear Anzie if she'd like to partake. So I had to have one with her. They certainly are tasty. And I feel so much better.

Anyway, where were we? Oh yes, so we cruised through Franschhhoek and decided to head over to Stellenbosch, our ultimate goal. Again we see gorgeous scenery around every turn, along with countless vineyards beckoning us to taste their wares. Rather than stop we reconnoitered the area, figuring that we'd be back sometimes during the next three dayss. So, what about Bush? Has anybody told him he doesn't have any clothes on? I'm thirsty. Be back.

Bak! Jahmissme? Bottle's empty. I dunno, mush be theheet. I'm tired. Seeya.

I'm back again. It's the morning after. I can't understand why I feel so lousy. Guess it's a sign of age: I wake up hung over even though I didn't drink anything the night before ... well, hardly anything.

Stellenbosch:

This town is home to the University of Afrikaans, as well as a center of the Winelands. We drove straight to our B&B, Ons Genot, which was located about five minutes from downtown. A pastoral setting, it is surrounded by a wine estate, with a golf course right down the road. A large pond in front attracts a variety of birds. It was too cold to use the swimming pool. Ons Genot is run by a Belgian couple, Yves and Marlene, who had purchased and remodeled the property two years ago. Our room had everything, including terry cloth robes, stocked fridge, comfortable king-size bed. Sliding doors opened onto a patio and garden. Enough wineries were located in close proximity that we seriously contemplated hiring bicycles to do a winery tour. Regretfully this plan was precluded by our time constraints. We were into the macro- as opposed to the micro-view for this trip.

It was still raining when we parked our car in downtown Stellenbosch. We wanted to explore and find a place to eat. We window-shopped several art galleries and craft shops. We searched all over for D'Ouwe Werf, "the oldest (1802) existing country inn in South Africa", according to our Frommers. Finally found it; stopped in for a glass and a look around. Retains an old-fashioned, elegant atmosphere. We stopped for a beer at Dros, an Applebees-type pub/restaurant – the only restaurant chain we had seen in all of Africa besides the occasional McDonalds and KFC. We never did eat. Just went home and to bed.

Capetown and the Peninsula:

The next morning we headed off to Capetown, about a 35-minute drive on the AutoRoute. Like the mall rats that we are, we decided to hit the Victoria & Albert Mall. Located right on the waterfront, it is massive. 240 stores: art galleries, restaurants and gift shops abound. There's an IMAX theater, an aquarium. I'm tellin' ya, this isn't Africa. It's either California or else it's Africa according to Disney. The Presidential Shirt Store sells copies of the same shirts worn by

Nelson Mandela. Long sleeve silk shirts, they are printed with pictures in a variety of colorful motifs – faces, animals, cars - loud with a certain panache. Not exactly my style. I like shirts that make a statement, but I want less "loud" and more "panache".

The prices are a bit high, but the quality of the offerings is good.

This is where you catch a tour boat to Robben Island – Mandela's prison for over 20 years. Next to the pier is a cement platform on which the harbor seals sun themselves. It's like being at the zoo except more intimate. They're just the other side of a wire mesh fence from you. Five seals demonstrated no fear of humans as they slept, nuzzled, tried to get it on -- without success, I might add.

Anzie bought some nice handicrafts, including some Zulu woven baskets. These have lids, also woven, that fit surprisingly well.

It was getting crowded, so we left to explore the Gold Coast area heading west. Looks like South Miami Beach without the pastel colors. We stopped at the Hotel President, which was alleged to co-timeshare with Interval, the company we hooked up with while in Kauai. We were checking places out, since we hope to return here next Spring. Wasn't our type of place -- a Miami Beach high-rise surrounded by concrete and blacktop.

However, the Gold Coast is extremely civilized. The esplanade stretches for miles along the beach, offering views of rolling surf and rocky outcrops decorated with seals and shore birds. There's plenty of traffic cruising the avenue.

We pointed our Tazz inland toward Table Mountain and started climbing. We reached our uptown goal, a resort lodge run by Best Western that purported to maintain an alliance with Interval. Sure it wasn't close to the beach, but it and the surrounding area possessed a certain ambience that made it attractive. We had lunch, decided we'd contact the name they gave us at reception, and continued our meander.

This time we headed east along the coast route. Passed through some lovely beach towns as well as scenic pine groves in the higher elevations. We planned to tour the Cape Peninsula all the way to Good Hope. We had to turn around at the Chapman's Peak Road because of a rockslide. This detoured us through the Constanzia Valley wine route, where the South African wine industry got its start. Although it was lush and well worth the detour, we didn't stop at any of the wineries. We wanted to tour the Cape.

45 minutes later we arrived at the eastern base of the peninsula. We followed the coast to Simon's Town. There we noticed many cars parked alongside the road and crowds lining the beach. We parked and disembarked for a look-see. A

pod of large Right whales was cavorting about 50-75 yards off the beach. We counted five of them.

We stayed for about a half-hour before we headed south. We got as far as Boulder Beach - another five miles. We recognized Boulder as the home of the Jackass Penguins. We headed down to a beach parking area, parked and walked to the beach. There we spotted a bevy(?) pod(?) passel(?) of penguins swimming and walking the rocks. We were amazed to see penguins in their natural habitat.

Anzie climbed down to the sandy beach to get a closer look. She got to within five feet of one. They stand about 2-1/2-3 feet tall. I noticed their lips/beaks moving. They were engaged in conversation. I could only catch parts of it:

Anzie: You look like you're wearing a tuxedo.

Penguin: How do you know I'm not wearing a tuxedo?

Anzie bought a small Inuit-style penguin statue from a vendor in the parking lot. By now it was 4 PM. We decided to head home for Stellenbosch, and save Good Hope for another day. Just outside of Stellenbosch we came upon an ostrich farm. Ostriches of all sizes were evident around the pasturelands. We had noted that every gift shop and convenient store displayed ostrich eggs for sale, some painted beautifully.

So, in one day we had spotted seals, whales, penguins and ostriches. Oh yeah, and one fella walking bare-ass naked alongside the road. What'd he do? Lose a bet? Anzie expressed the opinion that he was well-endowed.

Chasing the Whales Redux:

We ate that evening in Stellenbosch at the Fish Monger. We met an American couple: she a pretty California blonde; he, twenty years older, a winner of the Rush Limbaugh look-alike contest who sold private jets. They were about to embark on a new marriage - his third, her second. They had a home in Provence, but were looking for a house in this area. He said property here was "cheap, cheap, cheap." It was then that I realized why we had seen so many new housing and condominium developments in the Winelands. Many people of different nationalities are buying retirement homes here. The weather and the life are pretty easy, and you can live well for less. Still, for Americans it's a long way from home and family.

Up bright and early the next day. Off to the coast. The town of Hermanus on False Bay is touted as the whale-watching capital of the world. It was Spring, and their Whale-Watching Festival was in full-bloom. Even though we had elected to go on a weekday to avoid the crowds, we still found plenty of traffic

and people. The shoreline was cultivated with a massive rock garden. As we cruised the meandering paths we came upon a gaggle(?) pride(?) bunch(?) of *rock dassies*. They look like rabbits without the ears and tails. They seemed pretty tame. We could get within four feet before they scampered off.

We wandered along the shoreline keeping our eyes out for the leviathans when we heard the distinct sound of a giant conch shell trumpeting. This is how the official "whale cryer" announces sightings in downtown Hermanus. Sure enough we noted the doings of two right whales just 25 feet off a rock outcropping that was an easy jump - even for me - from the beach. I had seen whales from the deck of a boat out of San Diego. We had seen Minky whales off the Isle of Shoals. We had never seen them this close to shore. Perhaps Hermanus salts its waters with krill in order to attract these beautiful monsters. If so, it's a win-win for both whales and spectators.

We left Hermanus and wandered our way on back roads over to Franschoek. Phenomonal scenery: mountains, valleys, hilly plains all checkerboarded in spring crops and vineyards. Definitely god's country. On the outskirts of Franschoek we stopped at Haute Cabriere Cellar Restaurant, which is built into the side of a hill. The dining room overlooks the cave wherein rests huge wooden barrels of wine. As this winery is known for its Pierre Jourdan "Ratafia", we had a glass. A great apéritif.

We had made a luncheon reservation the day before at *La Petite Ferme*. Frommer's says:

"If you are only spending one day in Franschoek, make sure you lunch here. Book a table on the veranda, order the signature deboned rainbow trout served in a creamy horseradish sauce, and allow plenty of time to drink in both the view and one of the farm's superb wines."

We did all of that, plus. We began with a bottle of Muscat while sitting on the lawn overlooking the painterly vineyards and blue hills in the distance. Wine, dessert and coffee concluded our memorable dejeuner, all for \$40.00. The next day we read in the "South African Wine Magazine" that La Petite Ferme had just been voted one of the ten best restaurants in South Africa.

Afterward, we followed the directions of the Maitre D' to a cheese factory. Damned if we can remember the name, but it's just down the road from the Haute Cabriere primary vineyard, about three kms into town from their cave restaurant. We arrived at the cheese factory just at the end of the luncheon crowd. Yes, they run a restaurant and a B & B. The distinguished gentleman playing the keyboard for the lunch crowd turned out to be the owner. He stopped playing immediately after our inquiry about cheese. The "factory" is more like a kitchen. He ushered us into the cheese shop, and we began to taste a multitude of cheeses. All this atop our huge luncheon. Eric, a Dutchman, had made his

nut as a financial advisor for Morgan Stanley in New York. His wife, who is French, runs the restaurant, cheese factory and B&B. This is the way Eric is spending his retirement years. He is loving it.

It was almost 6 PM when we arrived back at our lodging. That night we stayed in, nursed our swollen bellies, sipped a little wine, snacked on a little cheese and fruit and watched TV.

The next morning we ate another wonderful breakfast, and headed for the Capetown Airport. 7½ hours after the plane took off, we were home.

You won't hear from us for a couple of weeks. We're going to southern Spain - Malaga area on November 21-30. We can't let that moss grow, y'know. Meanwhile, please keep in touch. We miss you and what you're doing.

A la prochaine, Chuck