



friendship force
HALIBURTON HIGHLANDS



Africa Our Way

South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana

Journals
April 14th to May 7th, 2015



Ambassadors at Stellenbosch: Bob Cole, Donna Smith, Terry Cooper, Carol Cooper

Reet Murray, Sharon Blake, Rhonda Elstone, Lynne Johnston, Mary Anderson, Karen Jones, Marilyn Burton, Judy Cole, Barbara Jones

Malcolm Blake, Shelagh Barrington, George Maclaren, Judy Neimann, Ken Jones, Antoinette Welch, John Anderson

Tuesday April 14 - Day 1

Today we flew to Capetown from Paris (or London, or Amsterdam) and after the long flight were greeted by an enthusiastic group from Capetown Friendship Force. Introductions, hugs, and smiles all round!! There we met our fellow ambassadors from Somerset, Toronto, and Hamilton as well. Then, off to the lovely home below Table Mountain of Elke, our host.

After a lazy afternoon we changed and drove to a restaurant, Cin-Cin's where Maatje (pronounced Mikie) the Cape Town ED had mixed up the seating so that we would have an opportunity to meet some of the Cape Towners and other ambassadors during dinner. A great evening...and then home to rest our exhausted bodies!!!

Wednesday April 15 - Day2

Our hosts, Eddie and Dulcie Cotton lived in Paarl, so we were up at 4:30 a.m., after 5 hours sleep, to catch the 7:30 bus. (One thing about Friendship Force - They show you a wonderful time but sleep?)

By nine we were picking up the rest of the group at Seapoint and Bob Cole informed me I was to write the journal page, a tradition I was not familiar with but here goes.

We started the day touring the gorgeous seacoast along the beach road, past Bantry Bay, Clifton, and Camps Bay to Hout Bay, a pricey area with farming and horses. We viewed the Twelve Apostles mountains towering over Camps Bay and if the view wasn't great enough, we were also provided with a gorgeous rainbow.

We stopped at the Tea Bag Factory for an interesting tour and it was a good example of what a dedicated individual can do to help the unemployment situation. I think almost everybody brought home some Tea Bag merchandise. Later, as a club gift, we made a donation to this enterprise.



Back on the bus, we went up Chapman's Peak. The bus was only allowed to go on the inside of the road which was probably best, because the scenery was spectacular but the drop's steep. We went through one stretch where there was an unusual half tunnel; that is, the rock over the road jugged out halfway over the road. We saw the results of the recent bush fires along here.



Then, on to Cape Point and up the funicular to again, more gorgeous scenery. The baboons were everywhere and very

cheeky. More than one member of the group lost food to them. Then on to the Cape of Good Hope.

Our last stop was at Simonstown where we saw the African penguins. On our walk back to the bus, it began to rain but we had done our walking sightseeing by then, so it was well timed. We travelled back to our meeting places via Fish Hoeck, Cook Bay, the Constanzia Wineries and the infamous District Six.



Dinner that night was with hosts and our hosts had invited some friends and family, so we had a lovely dinner with interesting conversation. One cousin was visiting from Australia and we found this part of a trend. It seemed almost everyone we talked to had a family member in Canada, U.S.A., U.K., Australia or New Zealand, which is a commentary on the problems of this beautiful and fascinating country.

We barely made it into bed before falling asleep for more fun the next day.

Thursday April 16 - Day 3

Ken and Karen hop-on-hop-off in Cape Town

It's Thursday, 16 April 2015, about quarter to eight in the morning and our genial host, Eddie Cotton, once more loads us (Ken and Karen Jones and Barbara Jones - no relation) into his car and drives the 60 or so kilometers into Cape Town. By 9:10 we're at the Two Oceans Aquarium. The take-off point for the hop-on-hop-off buses is right there. There are 3 choices: Red City Tour direct to Table Mountain Cableway, Yellow Downtown Tour and Blue Mini Peninsular Tour. They all interconnect at various places. A set of headphones connects the rider to a narrative describing the many points of interest. Every person can pick or choose the route he wishes to follow. At 9:30, Karen and I got on the Red Bus heading for the Table Mountain



Cableway. Unfortunately the cableway was not operating because of high winds and so we took some photos of the view of Cape Town (which is quite spectacular, even at that level) and got back on the next red bus and continued right round the city, following the coast, on the red route. At about 11:15 we decided to get off at a stop called Jewel Africa (Buitengracht Street) in downtown Cape Town and go for a walk to Green Market Square and got on a yellow

bus until noon. We walked to Green Market Square and got on the Yellow Bus at the red-blue-yellow junction. It's about 11:30. We continued on the yellow route until noon and got off at the District 6 Museum (commemorating thousands whose lives were completely disrupted in the name of apartheid) where we spent about 50 minutes.

Back on the yellow line we got off at the Castle of Good Hope at about 12:45 p.m. and stayed until around 2:00 when we continued on the yellow route to the junction of the 3 lines at the Long Street City Sightseeing Tour Office. Did a little shopping, had some lunch at a place called Craves, did a little more shopping at an outdoor market and then got on the red line and returned to the waterfront sightseeing tour office, where we had started that morning. It was about 4:45 and Eddie was there to meet us. The hop-on-hop-off buses are a great way to easily and economically see a lot of Cape Town but take a couple of days! In the evening, we went to dinner with friends of the Cottons, who used to be in Friendship Force. We had a delightful dinner and good conversation. I trust everybody had a similar experience. Then, home, dead tired!



Friday April 17 - Day 4

Countryside, vineyards and sunshine with Magdalane

Our first stop is the three (Africa, Europe and Asia) spiked Afrikaanse Taal (language) Monument. Afrikaans is a conglomeration of many languages (Malay German English Dutch French and Indigenous) and is newly recognized and legislated as an official language along with English www.taalmonument.co.za



Spice Route Wines www.spiceroute.co.za

Here we learn about the chocolate process. Cocoa trees grow only in the equatorial region. The cocoa pods take 6 months to mature and are harvested twice annually. The pod can be peeled and the fruit eaten discarding the seeds. Or to make chocolate the fruit is fermented, turning first to alcohol and then vinegar. It is the vinegar reacting with the seed that results in the chocolate flavor.



This wine tasting is paired with a variety of Viltong, dried spiced sausage and begins with a Sauvignon Blanc, very fruity from the Darling region. Viogner is from a local bush vine grape or non-trellised vine. Mouvedre, like a young shiraz, and the only S African wine, Pinotage a hybrid of pinot noir and hermitage grapes. Chakalaka, is their signature blend of 6 varieties.

At the Fairview Farm (1693) the paired tastings are of wine and cheeses (produced by 8000 goats). Sauvignon Blanc, most planted and versatile Chenin Blanc, Viognier a Rhone grape, Mourvedre from Spain, Shitaz a sweet red from the Pinotage grape and brandy.



Franschhoek is a pretty little tourist town nestled against the mountains. The town was first founded by the French Huguenots, who were escaping religious persecution. It was these immigrants who brought the vines and vinteculture to South Africa. Also, olive oil used to be imported but it was discovered that this area had excellent soil and climate for olive orchards.

We drive a winding pass through the stunning Simons Mountains towards Stellenbosch home of the first Afrikaans university. It is a beautiful treed town full of both lovingly restored Victorian residences and stunning modern buildings.

Amazink Restaurant in Kayamandi, in the less desirable district just outside Stellenbosch, our group of 25 joins about 100 other guests for a good buffet hometown dinner and great local entertainment. The troupe of 12 singing and dancing youth put on what we later learn is a stellar final performance. Four years of success but it is time to move on. Too bad: a great showcase and role model of success for this community.



Saturday April 18 - Day 5

Sunny and warming up.

A notice sent by Canadian Dept of Foreign Affairs stated that there was unrest in South Africa. Apparently an anti foreign worker protest by the local unemployed in Joburg yesterday.



Lucy and Merle drive us through the brightly painted homes of the Bo Kaap, on the mountain slope, now a revitalized and in demand residential area.

We have picked a spectacular day to take the cable car up Table Mountain. Arriving at 10 we thought there would be line ups but the early crowd walks bikes or runs up the mountain so not a problem. Beautiful views down the front side onto Cape Town and Table Bay. Across the saddle between Table and Lyon Mountains is a view of False Bay and the lovely white sand beaches and exclusive real estate. A 30 minute walk takes us around the back side for long range views out towards the Cape where we drove the coast road Thursday.



On the stroll along the well-maintained path we meet a small furry mammal called a procavia capersis or Dassie, related to the elephant?



Back to the waterfront for lattes and great sandwiches for lunch before joining the long line up for the Robben Island ferry. The first step in experiencing prisoner deprivation! After a 20 min ride on the comfortable ferry (we could have arrived on the open tug as many did) we are herded towards waiting coaches that immediately transport us to the prison. The tour led by a former inmate was hardly



intelligible and did not have much depth. A brief tour of the sanitized prison and then back onto coaches for the historic island tour. This young guide was much better but there was no opportunity for rest breaks or refreshments as everything was closed. We arrived on island at 2 and depart at 4.30. Warning: bring your own refreshments and use mainland or ferry washrooms before landing.

We meet Merle at the waterfront for restorative beers and then join Lucy for our drive to the Black Angus Steak House in Milnerton, close to home. The reason for the choice. Barb mentioned the fantastic steak and an interesting game platter- both excellent!



Starting with top left is Warthog, Ostrich, Kudu, Springbok & Impala

Sunday April 19 - Day 6

Sunday was our free day. Lynne had missed the trip to Table Mountain the other day so Cori and I dropped her off there.

Cori had a business meeting in Hout Bay in the morning so we set off there. Stopped and did a little shopping at a children's store then met up with Cori's contact. It was a short meeting and afterwards we stopped and had a coffee before heading back to Table Mountain to pick up Lynne.

Because Cori was going to be tied up with business on Monday we decided to go to Kirstenbosch Gardens today. We had a delightful lunch at the restaurant and then spent the afternoon wandering around the gardens. Unfortunately, not a lot of flowers were in bloom, but it was a delightful place. The setting is quite magnificent. I can imagine what it would be like in the spring and summer when everything is in bloom.

We did get to enjoy the tree canopy walk: 130 M of steel and timber winding through the treetops. Neat!



After our trip to the gardens we returned home and Donna (Smith) and her host Suzin Grimes joined us for an evening of wine and cheese and other goodies and lots of conversation.

The end to a perfect day!

Monday April 20 - Day 7

After a leisurely breakfast we headed to the V & A waterfront. We wandered around the interesting shopping centre, looked at the big ferris wheel, checked out the different venue's. It is a lovely, colourful shopping centre with something for everyone. Maatjie picked us up and we headed to the Kirstenbosch national botanical garden at the eastern foot of Table Mountain where we had the pleasure of looking at the beautiful garden. We saw Cyclads, the Proteas garden and "Mandela Gold". An interesting pool in the shape of a bird where natural spring water ran down the hill. It was created by its namesake Colonel Bird in 1911. There were Buchus and herb gardens. We had a delicious lunch at the restaurant then continued to see more flowers.

Valerie our day host drove us to a bus to take all of us to The Strand (the beach 50 km. southeast of Cape Town). Strand is a seaside resort on the eastern edge of False Bay

(Indian Ocean) at the foot of the Hottentots Holland mountains. Some of us walked the beach and some went to the restaurant Casa del Sol for a drink.



The Farewell was at Hettie and Bokkie condo (The Hibernian Towers) on the 10th floor where there is a party room .The views were outstanding. There was beer tasting, a lamb on a “Spit Braai”. It smelled and tasted delicious. We ate around 7:00 and had a beet root salad, potatoes, carrot salad and bread. A good time was had by all. The evening ended with goodbyes from Maatjie and Bob who thanked everyone who helped with the exchange.

On the way home we stopped at McDonald’s for an ice cream cone and coffee.

Tuesday April 21 - Day 8

On Day 8 of our African adventure, we said a tearful “au revoir” to our Cape Town hosts and boarded a small 22-passenger bus, pulling a trailer containing our luggage, as we set out on a two-day trip along ”the Garden Route” towards Port Elizabeth.



Our tour guide Gabriel, gave a very interesting and informative narrative along the way. We travelled through the 3.8 km Huguenot tunnel, and along a rolling hilly highway dotted with small villages, vineyards, & olive groves.

At noon we stopped for a delicious lunch at “Clarke of Karoo” (Karoo is the name of the bush sheep graze on) in Barrydale. We enjoyed meat, veg, & fruit platters, chibatta bread, along with cheeses & chutneys & lemon pie, all for 200R (\$20.00) each.



In the afternoon we headed into the mountains where the scenery abruptly changed to steep mountain slopes, dotted with watering holes, constructed to collect rainwater in the winter, to use for irrigation during the dry summer months.

The Swartberg mountain range, which means black in Afrikaans, is more than 2000 m high & runs east west along the semi arid Little Karoo, and is the tallest & among the longest in the Western Cape.



Just before 4 in the afternoon we arrived at the Mooiplaas Guest House and Ostrich farm where we were met with a



welcoming drink, shown to our beautifully modern rooms, and then immediately taken on an interesting tour of the Ostrich farm operation. We even got to hold a 1-day-old baby ostrich!

At dinner we were treated to Ostrich filet, cooked outdoors in an open oven, which was very lean, tender and tasty.

After a wonderful and fact filled day, & catching up on emails on the restaurant porch, we were off to our rooms to prepare for day 2 of our trip along the Garden route.

Wednesday April 22 - Day 9

We departed at 08:30 a.m., for Oudtshoorn & the Cango caves. We drove past many alfalfa fields, which is the product used to make the popular thatched roofs in SA. There are wild ostrich in this area and en route, Gabriel gave a very interesting history of the Ostrich farm business.

Before the 1st WW Ostrich feathers were used for ladies hats and were as valuable as gold. We drove through towns with beautiful homes (Ostrich palaces) with interior finishes from all around Europe, owned by wealthy ostrich farmers. After the war the automobile manufacturers designed closed-in cars and the huge ostrich hats would not fit inside, went out of fashion, and the Ostrich business went bust.



Shortly afterwards gold was discovered in Port Elizabeth which brought immigrants from the Netherlands. The Jewish from Lithuania followed shortly after and took over the bankrupt ostrich businesses making feather dusters and using the skins for leather products.



We stopped at the Cango caves (cango means water area) for an interesting tour of the mostly inactive caves, filled with stalactites and stalagmites. There is a national geographic film available on line of these caves.

Back on the bus, we drove through the Outeniquia (means honey to the locals) mountain range, which had dramatically different weather & vegetation on either side. Up toward the pass the weather was warm & misty but suddenly changed to cool, sunny & very green as we drove through the pass & down the mountainside switchback roads toward George.

We caught glimpses of the Indian Ocean as we drove through this area known for its golf courses & vegetable growing because of its consistent amount of rain & sun throughout the year. We stopped in George for lunch at the King George hotel and enjoyed yet another beautiful buffet.



After lunch we entered the Lake District near Knyzna which is a vacation area filled with retirees & Europeans who use their homes only during the summer months. The area has 8 lakes and one of the few natural forests left in SA. It's a holiday paradise with many species of birds, fish & cultured oysters. In Knyzna we toured the town by bus and looked out on Knyzna Head where the sea comes into a lagoon in the town. Shipping traffic is prohibited through the passage, as it is too treacherous. On to Knyzna Hollow Country Estate where we stayed in rooms with thatched roofs and enjoyed yet another delectable dinner.

Thursday April 23 - St George's Day - Day 10

A lie in....bliss... just the start for the special day for us English.

Leisurely breakfast, then a stroll around the complex which had THREE pools. Reet and I took lots of photos before sitting on the porch of our Lodge. Off to meet the coach at 10.55 for our Boat ride. Cloudy but warm.

The boat (The Spirit of Nysha) belonged to the Featherbed Company. The Captain was called "Big Boy" and the Life jacket demo was very humorous.



The Nysha Yacht Club is the 3rd oldest Club at 105 years. The Nysha River is an Estuary not a Lagoon and is the 2nd largest Wetland in South Africa. Two of the Islands in the estuary were populated. The commercial Harbour was closed in 1954 with the ban on shipping through the channel at Knyzna Head. Four of the Jettys in the harbour were built in England. Fresh and Seawater Fish and sometimes Sharks live here. No Shark attacks as yet. Also Seals, Dolphins and Southern Right Whales are seen.

The Tide changes every six and a half hours and the Nysha Sea Horse is only found in three places in the whole World. Unusually it's the Male that becomes pregnant.

The 2nd Island is the leisure one and is protected by Sandbanks.

Our Boat ride ended at noon and had been very pleasant.

We were then taken to the top of the mountain in Trailers. Three of us came back whilst the others went on a trek back down the mountain.



We saw a female Bushbuck (out came the Cameras) then walked along a trail and met the trekkers.

At 2pm we sat down and tucked into a good lunch. Back at the Dock we visited a great Art Gallery and finally left at 4 pm.



We had to call into a shopping mall as liquor and a Memory stick were needed to be purchased.

Back home by 5pm....a good day.

Friday April 24 - Day 11

Our tour continued along the Garden Route through lush forests. Only 1% of S. Africa is forested and mostly with N. African pine and imported eucalyptus. There is a large lumber industry –forestry and making of props for mining tunnels and pulp and paper. We saw vineyards and glimpses of the Indian Ocean and many beehives along the road next to the forests. This is a very high rainfall area, thus the lush vegetation.

We stopped briefly in the town of Plettenberry Bay and enjoyed the view from an overlook. The ocean here has plentiful sharks and whales but none in view today. We did see beautiful wide sand beaches, and walked a garden path through orange



and mauve Bouganvella and plentiful gigantic Aloe plants. This is a beautiful tourist town with the very expensive summer homes of the wealthy. We saw a Curves, KFC and Woolworths !

As we headed for Port Elizabeth (232km. to go), the elevation increased. We passed by sandy, and rocky mountains on one side and the ocean in the distance on the other. We passed over 5 very high bridges spanning rivers or deep canyons.



En route we stopped at Monkey land for a tour. This is a sanctuary and rehabilitation site for 11 types of rescued monkeys. They will never return to the wild. Apparently 500-600 monkeys live here. They were delightful, following our group tour from each food platform to the next. They swung through the trees and scurried on foot, keeping a few feet from us at all times. We walked over the longest suspension bridge in S. Africa, having to space ourselves and treaded lightly to minimize swinging.



Next, we walked across the road to Birds of Eden a true, free flight bird sanctuary, where we enjoyed a walking tour through the rainforest. We saw many different African birds of all sizes and colours (red, green, blue, orange, yellow, black, and on and on...) They were magnificent! Surprise! Surprise! There were even a few Canada Geese on a pond.

Then I had my first HAMBURGER and FRIES in S. Africa and at THE PEPPERMILL RESTAURANT!! It was excellent and the fries were HUMMUNGUS.

We shopped next door at a Mohair Store. 62% of the world's mohair is produced in S. Africa. The industry started in 1830 from 12 Angora Goats brought from Tibet. This industry enables rural women to earn an income. It is a labour intensive process and results in lovely products.



We continued on to Port Elizabeth where we met our hosts and proceeded to our homes. Six of us



stayed in a duplex right on the ocean with our hosts Hettie and Bokkie Hyman. We could see wide white beaches and sand dunes just around the corner.

After a brief time of introductions and unpacking, we proceeded to Eatly's a tavern for our welcome by the Port Elizabeth F.F. Club. We were to learn that this is a very new club and we were their first ambassadors.

Several members of the Capetown Club came to assist and actually had done most of the organization. It was wonderful to spend more time with them. Eatery's was a neighbourhood tavern with LOUD music. We enjoyed a "Potjeikos" meal, which was cooked in a large wrought iron pot suspended over a fire. The ingredients were lamb or chicken, vegetables and spices, wine or beer and it was served with a maize based gruel. Delicious! It was like a stew but very differently spiced.

The evening ended with our very tired group heading home to bed. It was a full day.

Saturday April 25th - PORT ELIZABETH – Day 12

Six ladies from F.F. Haliburton were lodged together. Lots of fun. We had an early morning breakfast and then off to a guided city tour with Mr. Peter Joseph. Much was learned about the early history of Port Elizabeth. Close by was "Route 67" which we walked to (uphill). This route was constructed in honour of Nelson Mandela. It consisted of murals and quotes from some of Mandela's former speeches. Very moving.



We then did a little tourist shopping (which happened frequently) and off to Mandela Bay for the afternoon.

First on the agenda, a donkey cart ride to Cape Recife Lighthouse, which was built in the 1800's where we had a guided tour. After that we enjoyed a picnic lunch by the Bay.



We then visited the SAMREC Penguin re-hab and education centre. Found this visit most enjoyable. We got to see the Penguins and marine birds up close.



They were being treated for injuries and/or being rehabilitated. There were Cormorants and Cape Gannett's plus the Penguins. The fun part was at dinner time, watching them being fed.

After that we were off to a Cafe for coffee and muffins before going home with our hosts.

Sunday April 26 – Day 13



In the Addo Elephant Park (the only one with the big 7 in South Africa - the normal big 5 as well as the White Shark and the Southern Right Whale) Lynne Johnston saw the first animals (warthogs) and was awarded a beer by Cori Nel.

We saw many elephants, a buffalo, red hartebeests, warthogs, zebras, kudus, and a blue crane.

After an excellent buffet lunch in the park we drove very quickly to Sundays River where we enjoyed a river cruise and liquid refreshments. Many hardy souls climbed a sand bank along the river in the sunset.

We all drove back to where I was staying at Bookie and Hettie Hyman's and the whole group enjoyed a final braai (BBQ) of sausages and drinks. We were all tired but enjoyed the time together.



Monday April 27 – Day 14

Up early this a.m. to catch our 8:50 flight from Port Elizabeth to Joburg. We planned on treating our hosts to breakfast, but the service at the airport restaurant was so abysmal that we had to leave before Colin & John received theirs. Good-byes to our wonderful hosts were said and then we ran to board the plane. However, John & Mary go into the wrong line, went into the baggage area, had to go through security again, and almost missed the flight!!!

After that excitement, a quick smooth flight took us to Johannesburg where we were met by Geoffrey who took us to the bus driven by Gladwell, which would take us to Hazyview.

The first three hours of the trip from Joburg we felt very at home...rolling hills reminded us of Southern Alberta. But these prairies were planted with white maize (corn) and dotted with coal mines and coal-fired generating plants.

About half way to our destination we visited a highway stop for lunch & a view of Cape buffalo, rhinos, ostrich & zebras. It was a hub of activity for many races because this highway ended in Mozambique and also, it was the last day of a long weekend celebrating Freedom Day.

Much later, after leaving the main highway we entered an agricultural area growing oranges, avocados, bananas and lumber from eucalyptus and pine farms. The eucalyptus was especially interesting. Foresters cut the trees down when they reach the desired size and burn the stumps. This induces the roots to send up new shoots and three or four trees grow up from the stump where there was one before. They can do this up to four times until the root weakens.



We arrived at Bohms Zeederburg Country House near Hazyview about 5 and soon were treated to a steak dinner before retiring for the night to our cabins, two to a building, a short walk across the grounds from the main part of the hotel.

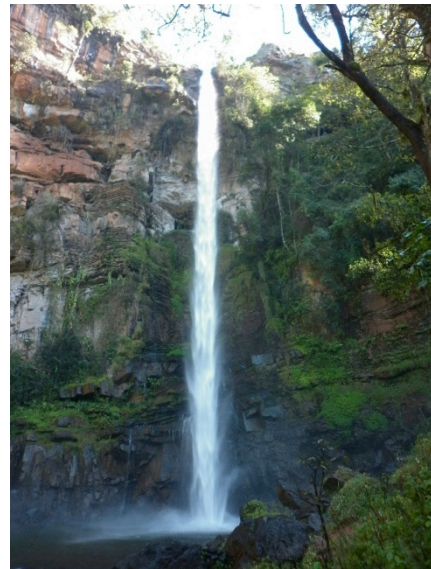
Tuesday April 28 – Day 15

After rain the night before, we woke to a bright sunny day looking out on to beautiful scenery; our first opportunity to see the place where we were staying.

Today the plan is The Panorama Route. We leave the hotel passing numerous places selling bags of oranges and avocados, all grown locally. As are macadamia nuts; in fact South Africa is now the biggest producer in the world. The road we used (R536) was very twisting and winding and was apparently design by a road builder with motorcyclists in mind!

We then passed acres and acres of pine and eucalyptus trees. Eucalyptus started to be grown as a 'crop' 150 years ago and has many uses from pit props to house building. Interestingly the eucalyptus sprouts from the stump left after it has been felled; a process that is repeated four or five times.

Our first stop was at Lone Creek Falls; a beautiful falls, 68 metres of water flowing as one fall. Then on to God's Window at 1,650 metres,



which, in the summer is often covered in fog but we were lucky, just a little mist which reduced the quality of the photos. Many of us climbed the steps and scrambled over the stones to reach the furthest and highest lookout.

Our next treat was the Blyde River Canyon, the third largest in the world after the Grand Canyon in USA and Fish River Canyon in Namibia. We were looking at a scenic jumble of cliffs, majestic rocks and plateaus left after the River Blyde washed the softer rocks away to form the canyon which is 20km long, 1km wide and 700m deep. It was very impressive.



Then it was back on the bus for the short trip to Bourke's Luck, which were potholes formed by the erosion effect of grit and pebbles being carried by the swirling waters at the confluence of two rivers, the Blyde and the Treur.

The potholes were spectacular and we really needed more time to enjoy them rather than just rushing around them.

Lunch was pancakes at 'Harrie's Pancakes' at Graskop with us all choosing from their large choice. Very nice. Then time for some retail therapy with African Silks being of particular interest; the silk coming from the Sabie Valley.

Our route home from Graskop was on the scenic, twisting road (R535) through the Sabie Valley towards Hazyview which was built following the route that the elephants used to take.

In the evening we enjoyed another excellent Boehm's Zeederberg dinner, followed by an early night.



Wednesday April 29 – Day 16

It was an early morning call (4:30am) and then a brief rush around to be on the safari vehicles by 5am for our safari in Kruger National Park. We arrived early at the Phabeni Gate and it was a good thing that we did because a queue was already starting to form. The gate opened and suddenly there was the traffic moving in every direction; however it soon sorted itself out and we were on our way to see the wildlife. During our six-hour visit to the park we saw hundreds of animals. These included:

rhinoceroses, impalas, kudus, zebras, vultures, wildebeests, cape buffalos, hippopotamuses, giraffes, warthogs, fish eagles, a steenbok, and a distant sighting of a crocodile. Someone in



our vehicle commented “I wonder how many animals that we did not see, saw us?”

We stopped at the protected park village of Skukuza at 9:00am for our packed picnic breakfast. This was very useful as it gave time for our neck muscles to relax from looking for the game.



Our early afternoon return home was for some free time to relax, swim in the pool and take a siesta but an opportunity for some lunch would have been useful.

The day and our stay at Bohms was rounded off with another fine dinner.

Thursday April 30 – Day 17

We left @ 11:00 for Thornybush Waterside Lodge, Kruger Private Reserve and arrived at 1:00 pm in time for a really good lunch.

We went on a guided tour and had lots of excitement. We came upon a huge elephant that was screaming at a much younger elephant. We backed off and went around the big one and watched the bigger one converse with the smaller (reminds one of father and son squaring off).

The impala's warned the herd of danger. We went looking and found a leopard resting on a huge branch of a tree.

We drove on and the spotter saw an impala with a leopard watching his kill. Saw 3 porcupines crossing the road - quite different than ours and 3X bigger than ours.

Saw a huge spider web with flashlight that lit it like small bulbs

A super night.



Friday May 1 – Day 18

Friday was our second day at Thornybush and what a day it was.

We started with a 5:30 am wake-up call, coffee in the lounge and a 6:00am start of our first safari of the day with Monica our driver and Willies our tracker.

Our first encounter of the day was a pride of lions-6 adults and 3 cubs. After that we came upon a huge herd of cape buffalos. There must have been over 100 in the herd. They were



hanging around a big water hole. Next we saw a pair of lions-this was a male and female. They walked so close to our land rover I think we could have touched them.

We spent the rest of the morning driving over roads and through forests. Got to see some hippos and crocodiles at another water hole. Lots of Impalas, giraffes and zebra.

Back to the hotel for Breakfast then went on a short walk with Monica and another guide. 3 things from the walk stood out for me. Our guide pointed out a bush called the “Devils Thorn”.

When you poured water over the leaves and rubbed them between your hands they made a soapy solution. I think the guide said that this was what the natives used to use for bathing. The next thing that got my interest was the sausage tree.



This was quite an amazing tree. The ‘sausages’ were about 8-12 inches long and were very heavy. They can weigh up to 5kg. Apparently they contain lots of seeds and are eaten by baboons, bushpigs, elephants, giraffes and hippos.



The third thing I liked on our hike was the tortoise we saw.

In the afternoon at 4PM we headed out for another safari with Monica and Willies. The first thing we saw was more giraffes and then some wildabeasts.

The really interesting part of the afternoon was our encounter with the leopard. Yesterday afternoon we had come upon a kill, which we presumed, was a leopard kill. We went away from the site but visited it on our way home and sure enough saw the leopard under the tree just protecting his dinner - wasn't eating it just looking at it. So today we checked and the kill was still there. It had been dragged under the trees a little bit, but no leopard. Later on in the afternoon we came upon the leopard just lazing away in a dried up riverbed. After watching him for quite a while he got up and moved away. We followed and found him back at the kill site. He was dragging the impala further under the trees and we actually saw him eating away at the animal.



Monica got word that a black rhino had been spotted and we set off in search of him We did find him but weren't able to get too close to him. A majestic animal. Also saw more giraffes in our pursuit of the rhino

On the way back to the lodge we came upon the same lion pride that we had seen in the morning. We followed them for a while and watched as they seemed to be bedding down for the night. One of the lions didn't seem to like us being quite so close to the pride and stared us down so we moved a little farther away. What a great day!

We ended it by having a wonderful meal back at the lodge. I had Kudo-and it was delicious.

Saturday May 2 – Day 19

Thornybush Private Game Reserve – Final Morning

On the morning of May 2, the group had one final dawn safaris before departing for Johannesburg. Depending on which of the two groups you were in you may have seen different wildlife. Our group was fortunate to see the rare white rhino up close and the encounter even surprised our ranger and tracker. We also saw a foam nest tree frog.



What the two groups did see (depending on the land rover) were the white and black rhinos, elephants, giraffes, wildebeest, a fish eagle, zebras, velvet monkeys, mongoose, zebras, hippos, impalas, wart hogs, nyala, cape buffalo and diekei. Below is a sampling of some the wildlife photos taken which some may not have encountered (such as the frog) or time of morning when a better picture may have been taken. However, to me seeing the lions once again was a thrill given how close we could get to them. Unfortunately the leopard and its kill (impala) was not seen again. Perhaps the cat will now learn to take its kill up the tree so the hyenas don't take it away.

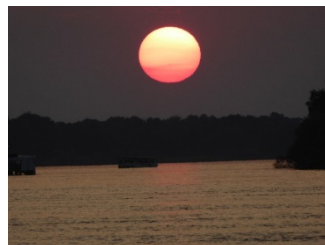


Sunday May 3 – Day 20

Zambezi River Cruise – Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Upon arrival in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe after our short flight from Johannesburg we checked into the Kingdom Hotel then took a relaxing river cruise upstream along the Zambezi River while observing a variety of game in their native environment. The crew supplied us with assorted appetizers, wine and their local Zambezi beer. Joining us on the cruise were a group of Washington D.C. men celebrating one of their friends 40th birthday and, believe it or not, not one of them was involved in the political circus in Washington.

We did see a number of hippos, a crocodile, several birds and a beautiful sunset. All of the sunsets in Africa have been beautiful, but they are especially stunning when observing



them with the water reflection. As we docked after sunset we saw the full moon rising – a fitting end to a lovely evening.

The flight from Johannesburg to Victoria Falls was relatively short (even given a *free* snack and beer / wine if desired – something Air Canada should take notice of) but getting through customs at the Victoria Falls airport was a zoo as all passengers needed a visa to enter. Since we were also going to Chobe National Park in Botswana on our last day we needed to purchase a Kasa visa (\$50 US), which allowed unlimited access to Zimbabwe

for 30 days. Some of the group were advised by the customs staff to purchase a single entry, more expensive visa (\$75 US) that made no sense whatsoever. Why would any visitor take a single entry visa? Thankfully we were warned ahead of time by our travel guide to insist on the Kasa visa. All luggage needed to be scanned but the individual viewing the screen was more focused on his cell phone and rarely looked at the monitor—some security!!! However, all of our luggage arrived safely.

Monday May 4 – Day 21

VICTORIA FALLS

The roar of the water, the water drops rising like upside down rain, the damp earthy smells, the mists in the cataracts and the mental snapshots. What an amazing experience!



The Kingdom hotel was built to resemble The Great Zimbabwe, the capital of the ancient Shona Kingdom in Zimbabwe (1200-1500 AD). On site excavations have unearthed Arabian coins and shards of Chinese pottery.



LA BOMA

An artist painted an animal on the cheek of each guest, and we were given African shawls. A floorshow of African music and dance followed. The highlight of the evening came when Bongos were distributed and the audience became part of the entertainment.



THANK YOU

Without the support of my fellow travellers, I would not have been able to enjoy the last five days of our holiday. Thank you, everyone, for giving me the most accessible seats, saving seats for me in airports etc., helping me navigate airports and providing me with medications.

A FEW THINGS I LEARNED

1. Nearly everyone in Southern Africa is bilingual.
2. TIA is a great slogan.
3. Africans have amazing smiles.
4. Natural wonders are great to view without viewing decks and safety barriers.
5. South Africans learn to drive on narrower traffic lanes, with fewer guard rails.
- 6.
- 7.

Tuesday May 5 – Day 22

What a fabulous day this was! The bus carried us from Victoria Falls to the border between Zimbabwe and Botswana. Here we walked into Botswana where our new guide and bus awaited.

We entered Chobe Province and went to the Chobe River where we embarked on the Chobe River Cruise. This, for me, was a highlight of our trip. The animal sightings were wonderful - Crocodiles, Monitor lizards, Elephants, African fish hawks, Impala, Kudu, Hippos and Mongoose. The elephant herd came toward us along the shore from a long way ahead, lead by the huge matriarch. She led them across the river to the lush delta (Okayango Delta) where they would eat the grasses all day. There were all ages: babies, adolescents, young males and the mothers. One adolescent male lagged behind the herd and was left behind, stranded, on the riverbank. When he discovered that he was alone, he cried (trumpeted) for his mother. She ignored him - from across on the delta. He then "tested the water" hesitantly several times before finally setting out for the other side. He swam, actually diving under and resurfacing until he reached the other side. There the mothers were waiting for him and they trumpeted loudly, obviously scolding him. What an insight into elephant family life!!



We finally saw hippos entirely out of the water. One was attempting to enter the river from an elevated bank, and because their eyesight is so bad, was feeling his way down hesitantly with his hooves. When he finally started to slide down, it was uncontrolled. It seemed he was very relieved to end up safe in the river.



We were taken back to the lodge for a lovely lunch and then proceeded on a land safari in Chobe National Park. There were many more excellent animal sightings before returning to the lodge and our bus. We were weary as we were bused back to the border to be met by our guide and bus after we walked into Zimbabwe.

That evening Marilyn, Rhonda and I enjoyed fantastic African game and African entertainment at LA Boma with Jeff and Carol Way and their daughters, Leah and Naomi. They are missionaries in Zimbabwe and related to Marilyn. What a fun time - drumming, dancing, eating, laughing. It was a real treat to be so immersed in the culture.

A wonderful busy and interesting day.

Wednesday May 6 – Day 23

We all enjoyed our guide Laville and thanked and tipped him at the Victoria Falls airport. We were met at the Jo'burg by our final guide Jeff and transferred again to the Garden Court Sandton City Hotel. We all decided to try an Indian restaurant for dinner in the Nelson Mandela Square but sadly it was extremely noisy. I did enjoy the hotel room all to myself as Antoinette Welch had left for home.

Thursday May 7 – Day 24

Everyone headed home.