2003
Southern Africa Tour

South Africa
Swaziland
Botswana
Zambia
Namibia

October 2 – November 14, 2003

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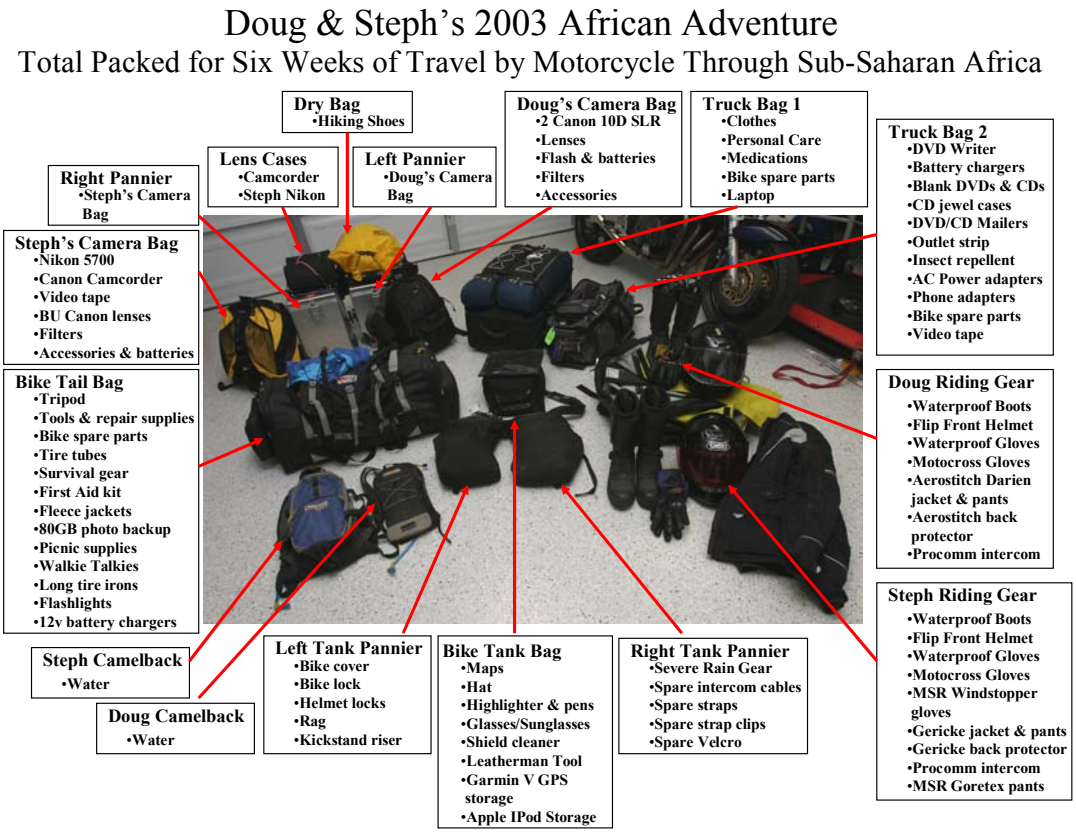


This is our luggage as we shipped it on the plane.

We carried the camera backpacks and the small truck bag (the gray duffel bag) on the plane as carry-on luggage.

The two red bags contained the pannier boxes, tank bag and tank panniers. The pannier boxes were filled with riding gear.

The Adidas duffel bag contained our helmets and the rest of our riding gear.

2 e-Postcard from Kirstenbosch

10/9/2003

Hello to all,

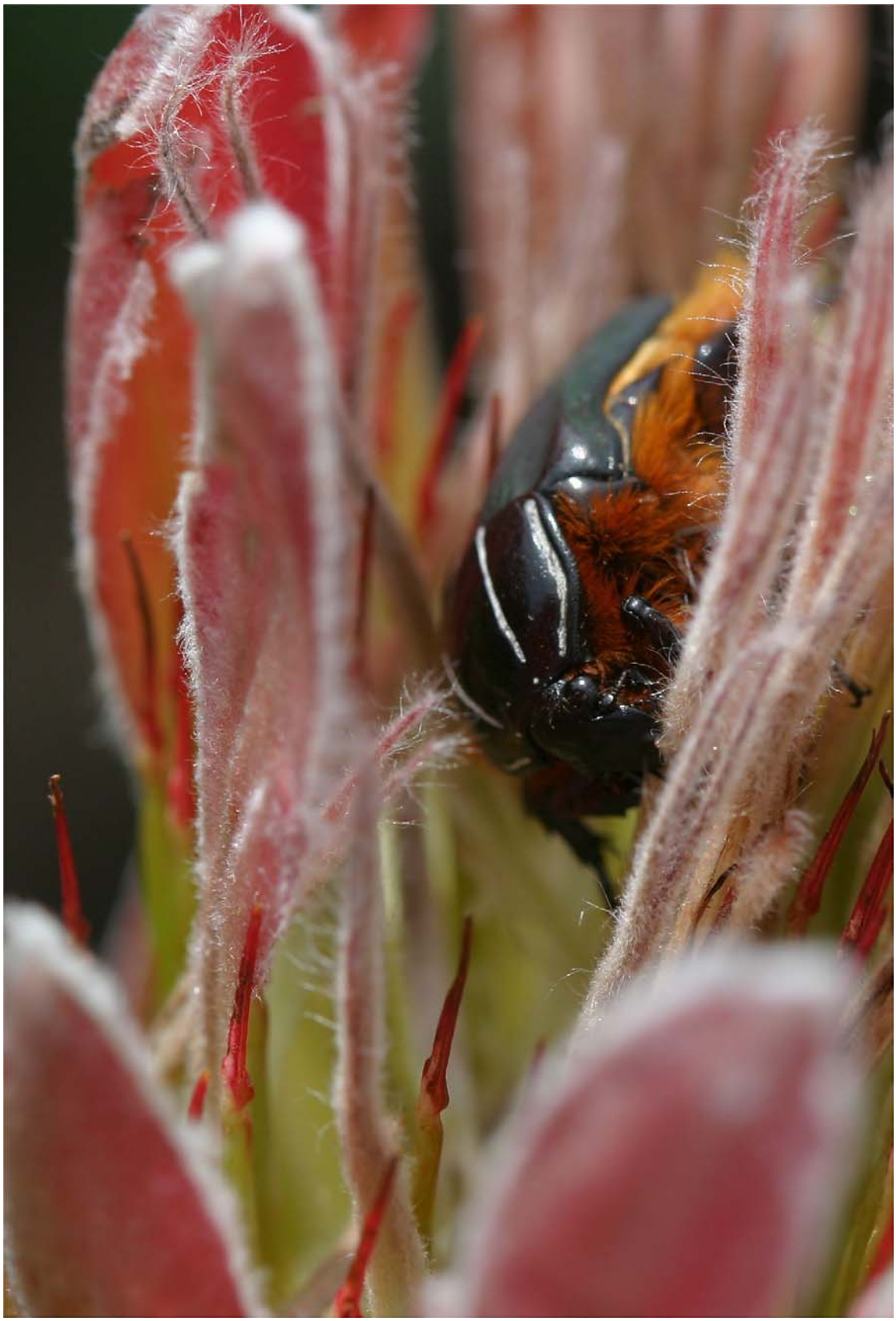
We've been here in Africa for about a week, and have had some time to explore the area around Cape Town, South Africa, before heading out on our motorcycle tour of the Southern portion of the continent.

After arrival, we spent our first full day at the local botanical gardens, Kirstenbosch. Home to over 9,000 of Southern Africa's 22,000 plant species, it is a wonderland of flora. Hard against the mountains that rise up in the middle of Cape Town, the gardens spill down the mountainside and empty out into the side of a valley. We enjoyed a leisurely afternoon soaking up the sunshine and fresh air, both of which were a welcome change after 48 hours breathing what passes for the atmosphere in airplanes and airports.

Steph shot the flowers, while I concentrated on capturing the local creatures that live among the plants and flowers.

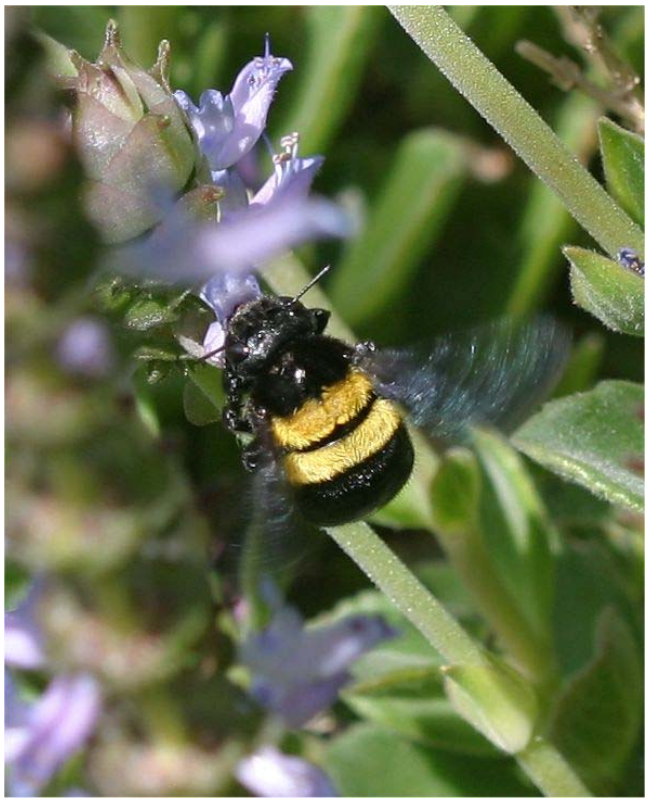
Following are a few samples.

Be well,
Doug

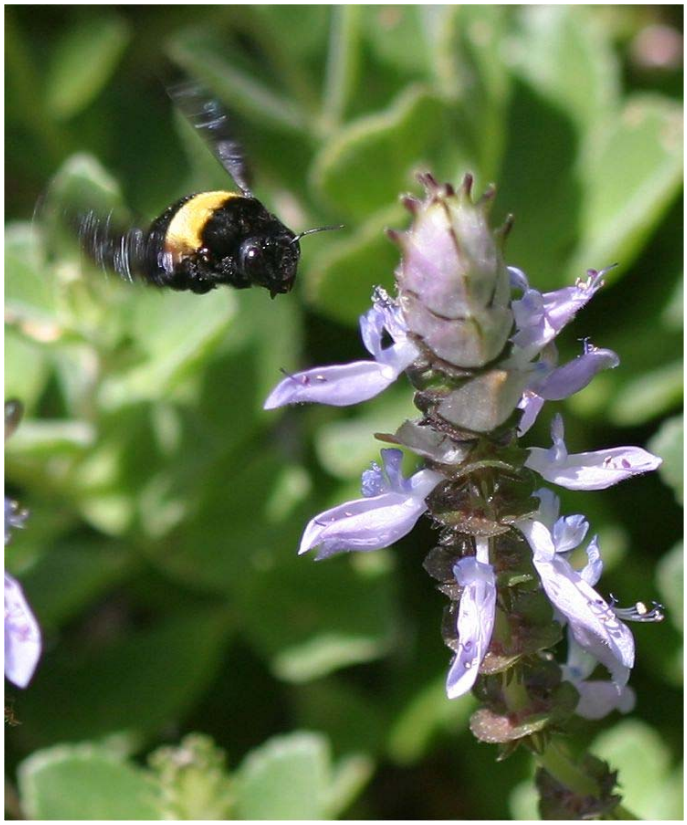


A sunbird perched on a protea, one of the dozens of protea species represented at the park.

That’s a tree branch. The bug is about half as big as my fist.



This one is a bit smaller, it’s about 1.5 times as big as my thumb.



I also shot a few plants and flowers:

3 e-Postcard from Crossroads Township

10/9/2003

Hello to all,

After the beauty of the botanical gardens, we spent a couple of days learning about the ugliness, beauty and potential of mankind, as it has played itself out in recent South African history.

We started with a tour of the District Six museum. The museum is all that is left of a neighborhood that was razed by the South African Apartheid government. District Six had been a diverse neighborhood, where blacks, Asians, Indians, and people of mixed race the government categorized as colored, all lived together in relative harmony, much to the chagrin of the a government that had declared that social harmony was only possible through different races "living apart," the literal translation of Apartheid.

Since the fifties, the South African government had a policy of separating the non-white races into various "homelands," which in most cases were merely ghettos arbitrarily carved out of the areas around the cities. District Six's number came up a few decades ago. The residents were dispersed and all the buildings were demolished.

The museum has a giant map of District Six on the floor that former residents have marked with the locations of families' homes, stores and neighborhood features. It's all that remains of a vibrant neighborhood, friendships and families. The museum was a sobering introduction to the rigid brutality of the reality of Apartheid.

Next we took a tour of several of the townships that ring the vibrant, modern metropolitan city of Cape Town. These are shantytowns that house over three million people and spread for miles and miles across the plains outside the city. Our guide, Gladstone, was a resident of Longo, one of the townships that we visited. He provided frank insights into the realities of life there, the challenges that face the black residents and their hopes for the future.

As part of the Apartheid government's strategy to retain power for the minority white population, they provided preferential treatment for the non-black citizens of the country. Colored, Indian and Asian people got better homes, better jobs, better schools and a better life. The black African residents were relegated to townships with little to no public services, the worst jobs and little to no opportunity to advance their lives.

On our township tour, we first visited a tenant building, which had been built to house 16 men. Once the access laws were relaxed and family members were allowed into the townships, it housed 16 families. People who could not get into a tenant building built shacks. The tenant buildings and shacks share public faucets for water and all have outdoor toilets.

The townships today are home for millions of people. Many of the shacks now have electricity. Ownership of the shacks and the land they are built on is now possible.

Shopping as we know it and the modern supermarkets are still located miles away, close to the colored townships. Groceries and meat in the black townships are primarily sold in open air markets.

Although billions of dollars in aid have flowed into South Africa targeted at the townships, the most visible signs of advancement are those programs and initiatives generated by the residents themselves. We visited a local environmental center, which provides recycling services, gardening instruction, compost distribution, and an outlet for locally produced arts and crafts. We also visited a successful Bed and Breakfast in the heart of a township. It is owned by Vicky, who

gave up her pursuit of a four year degree in electrical engineering after two years due to financial difficulties. She now runs her B&B, which caters to non-black tourists, and is usually completely booked during the non-Winter months.

The township experience was very powerful. The things that stick with me are the power and resilience of the human spirit exemplified by the lives and communities the residents have built, and the incredible happiness and friendliness of the people we met there.

We referred a friend of ours to the township tour company and he visited the same places we had seen the following day. When we saw him at dinner that night, he was moved to tears while relating what he felt during his tour. This reaction was from one of the biggest, toughest riders on our trip, and typical of our experience and that of everyone we talked to who had shared it.

The following day, we visited Robben Island, to see where the Apartheid government had held the political prisoners of that era.

The tours of the prison are conducted by former prisoners, and our guide had spent most of the 80's in the very prison cells and exercise yards he was leading us through. I couldn't imagine the feelings he and his peers must have as day after day, they walk through the very doors that denied them freedom during the prime years of their lives.

It was a strange and powerful feeling to view the jail cell where Nelson Mandela spent so much of his life. To say it was a moving experience would be an understatement.

I marveled at the resilience of the prisoners and their ability to withstand punishments and brutalities. I admired their ingenuity in methods of communicating and educating each other. I was awed to learn that they had spent decades transforming their existence from one of prison survival to that of democratic government incubator.

I viewed clandestine discussion documents on political doctrine and governmental structure that Mandela and the other prisoners had spent years debating. "It took some time because each person wanted to fully voice their opinion," was the modest note attached.

These men had chosen to spend their decades behind bars not sharpening their claws for revenge, but sharpening their logic and their arguments for the democratic, open and pluralistic society they wished to create.

When the locks turned and the doors finally swung open, these men marched out not to burn down the government and society of their oppressors, but to lead the building of a new, truly democratic, truly equal government and society.

It was and remains an inspiring example of what is possible when people focus on reconciliation rather than polarization, when they focus on the future rather than the past, and when they focus on building a new and better society rather than seeking revenge for real and perceived slights.

As I walked out of the prison and back to the ferry, I saw a group of young school children starting their tour. The image I witnessed is my favorite of that chapter of our African experience: the flag of a new South African nation snapping in the breeze and a group of young black children preparing to tour the prison that for so long imprisoned the dreams of those who eventually laid the foundations for their future.

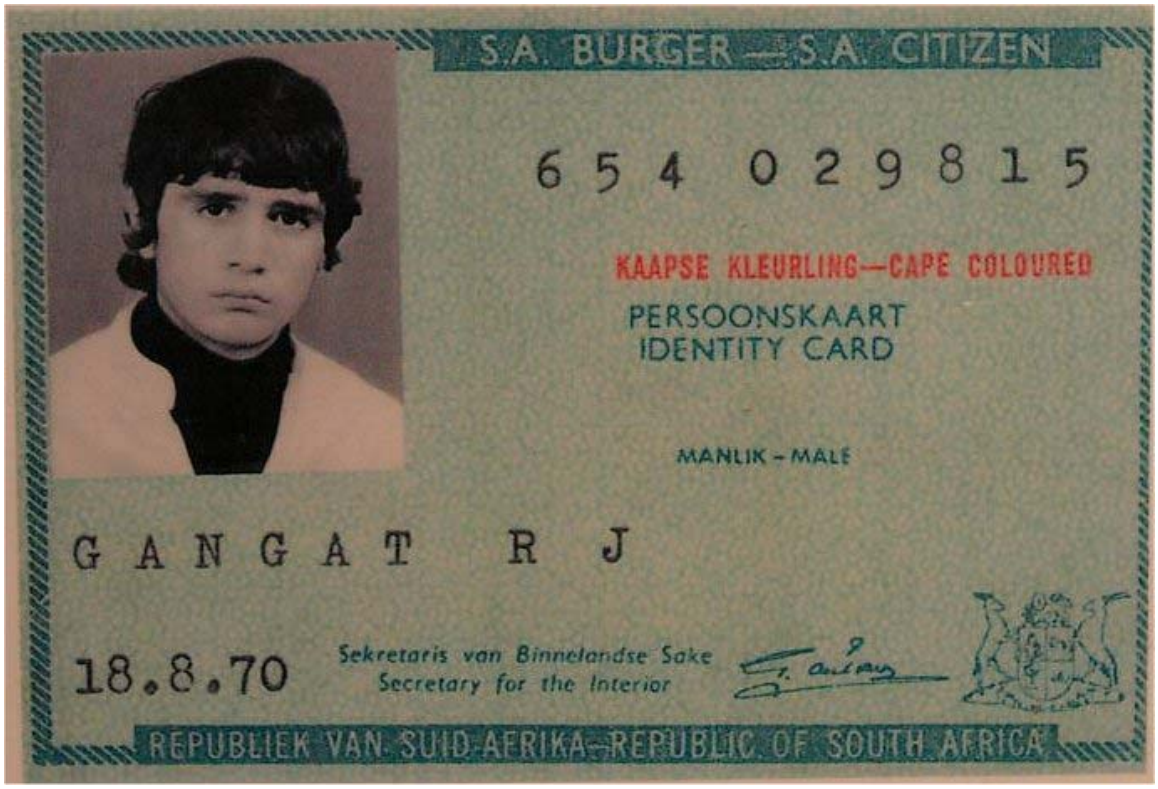
Following are some photos from our tours.

Be well,
Doug

The District Six Museum

The map of District Six, with notations by former residents.

The Nationalist party was elected into power in 1948 and spent the next 42 years building a nation of Apartheid, or “living apart,” in which the races were rigidly segregated in all aspects of life.



A pass such as this one was required to leave the townships. The hated pass laws led to widespread violent and non-violent protests.

Visiting the Townships

The tenant building we visited. It was built to hold sixteen men, and now houses over twelve families. The man in the blue coat is standing in front of the shack that he and his family live in.

This bedroom is used by three families every night. Anyone who cannot fit into this room sleeps in the common room.

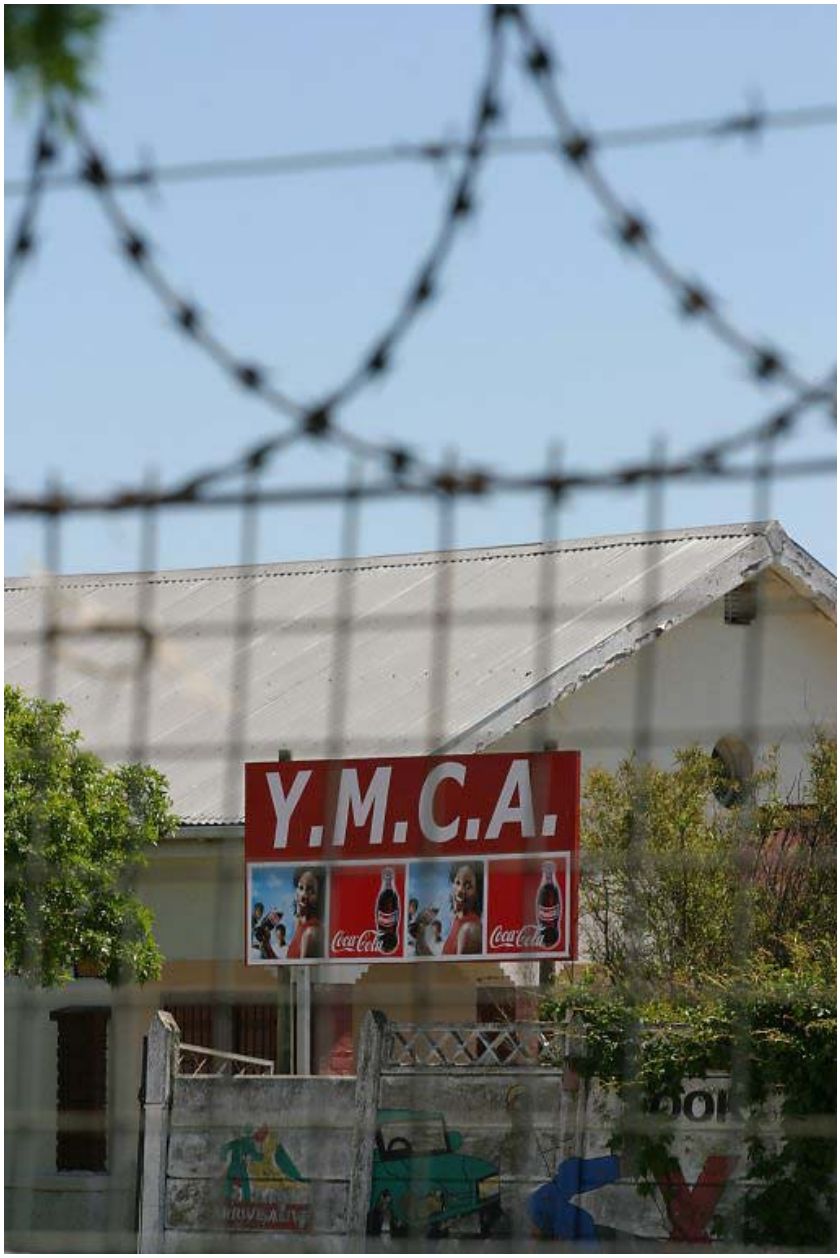
One family’s entire collection of cooking utensils and household goods.

One family's entire collection of cups and silverware.

One family's entire collection of toiletries and medications.

The common room, where six families eat and many of them sleep. The entire 2nd floor rents for about $2.50 a month and there are months when it can be a financial struggle for the six families to pool that much money together.

The kitchen, where three families cook every meal.

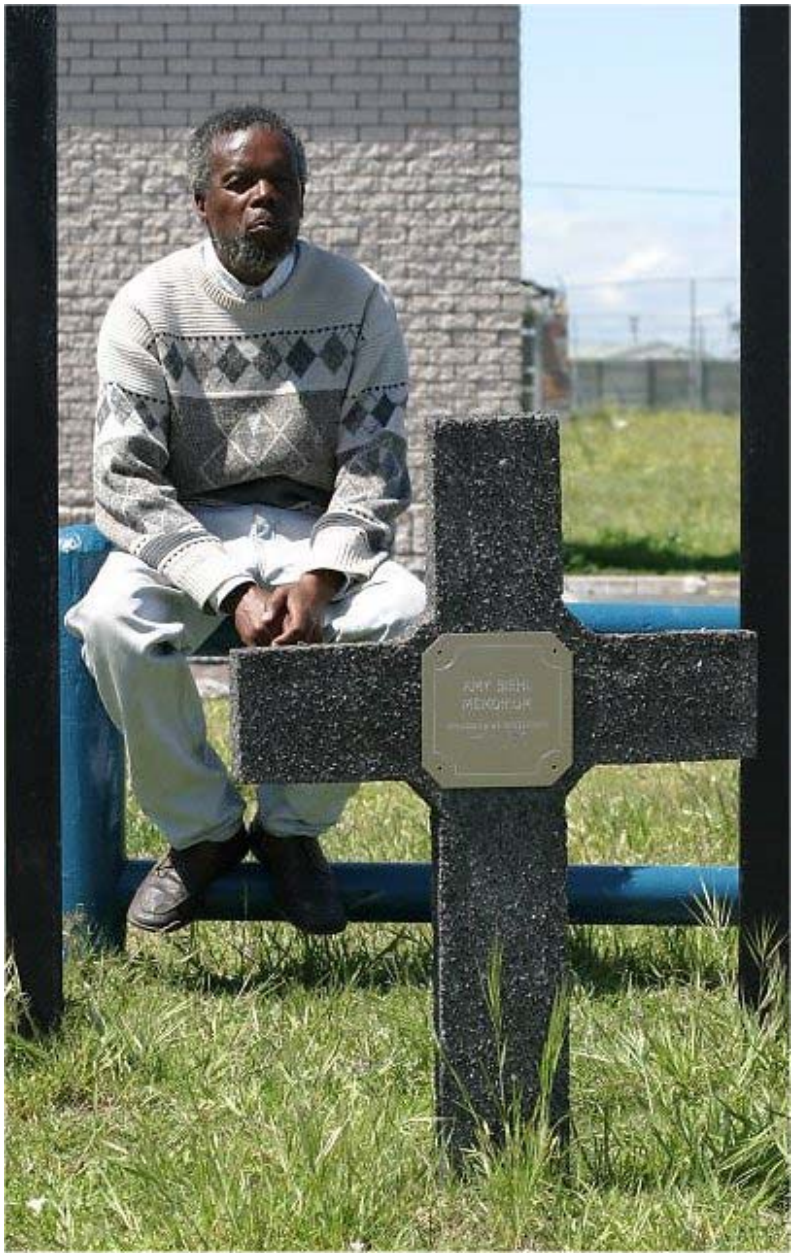


With few alternatives to fill their time, many young men turn to crime.

Housing millions of people, the townships stretch to the horizon around many metropolitan areas.

Cars are an economic luxury that many in the townships can only dream of.

Small township food shops are a critical necessity, as the large, modern supermarkets are miles away.



The Amy Biehl memorial. Amy was a white American college student killed in the townships. She had just dropped off a friend after classes and was stoned to death by a black Pan Africa Congress mob chanting “one farmer, one bullet,” a phrase referring to the conservative white farmers who supported the Apartheid regime.

Both sides of the war committed acts of unspeakable cruelty and brutality. Both sides have used the venue of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to admit their guilt and obtain clemency for their crimes, including the young men who killed Amy.

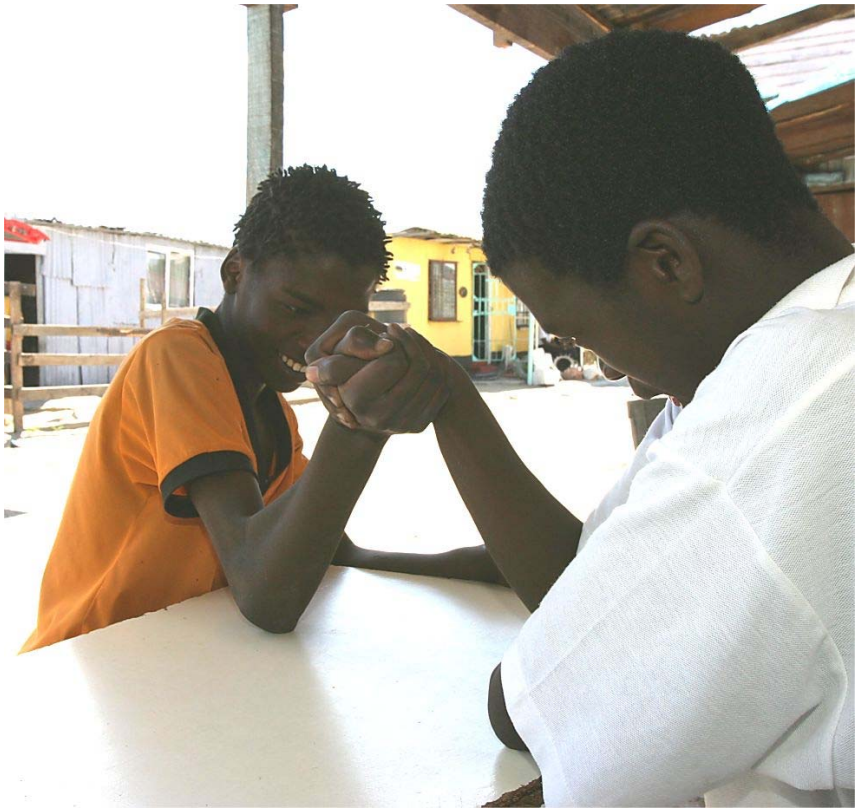
The unemployment rate in the townships is over 60%. These young adults are part of the “lost generation” who abandoned school as part of the protests against the Apartheid government. The township society today places its hopes on the next generation currently attending school.

The government is now building replacement homes for shack owners. Approximately 20% of existing shacks have been replaced by homes such as these. The residents call them “feet houses” because they are so small your feet almost stick out when you lie down to sleep.

Mail service is possible in some areas now that every shack has been assigned a physical address. This was done to enable all residents to vote in the 1994 elections. Black voters were promised that if they elected the African National Congress to power, each of them would get a home and a car. The vast majority of them are still waiting.

Vicky, owner and operator of Miss Vicky's B&B, inside her Bed and Breakfast.

The strange duality of the townships. It is but a shack, but a shack with a pickup in the garage, electricity and a television.



Two young boys of the townships test their strength. Their battle is similar to the two forces at work in South Africa today, progress vs. impatience. Miss Vicky's B&B in the background represents progress. These boys and their parents are impatient for the promised prosperity to arrive.

These young boys represent the future of the townships, and in many respects, of the nation. If the nation can provide them with an equal opportunity that they can meet with an equal education, anything is possible. Short of that, it is questionable that the society can hold back the longings for economic equality that pervade the townships.

Robben Island Prison

The gate to hell. The entrance to Robben Island, where all suffered and many died.

One of the cells in B Block, which held Nelson Mandela and his peers.

The lock that kept Mandela and his generation of leaders imprisoned.

Our guide, who spent ten years of his life here as a political prisoner, stands in the doorway to freedom, for himself, for Nelson Mandela, and for their nation.

The flag of their new nation snapping in the breeze, a group of school children prepare to tour the prison that held the dreams of a desegregated South Africa hostage for over 30 years. The irony of these black school children walking the corridors of this once dreaded house of horrors is not lost on the guides, nor is the importance of their education, for on the shoulders of these children lies the fate of the nation so many sacrificed so much to build.

4 e-Postcard from Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal

10/13/2003

Hello to all,

This message comes to you from the homeland of the Zulu, the feared warriors of this portion of Africa. When you think of our trip to Africa many of you may have images of these warriors, with their long spears and tall shields, spring to mind, rising up from books and black and white movies of long ago. The Zulu were indeed formidable warriors, using their organizational and military skills to drive rival tribes from these prized grazing grounds in past centuries. They were also unique in their ability to withstand the military might of the Europeans during the colonial period, providing the first sustained setbacks to the British army in this part of the world.

We drove here across the Transkei, literally “across the Kei,” referring to the Kei river, and the area that lies between the massive Kei river valley and the Drakensberg Mountains. The Transkei was once an autonomous region, with its own government. The Lonely Planet guide says, “If it had been recognized internationally, it would have been one of the poorest nations in Africa, and one of the most densely populated.” It is certainly still worthy of these characterizations today. It is very densely populated rural land, and that is not an oxymoron in this context. It is also remains economically undeveloped.

Nelson Mandela grew up in the Transkei, and we passed through the village where he spent much of his early life. There is also a museum of the culture and his life in one of the cities along the route we traveled.

The Transkei stands in stark contrast to KwaZulu-Natal, which is a rich tapestry of healthy farms, fat herds and well developed rural communities. Traversing the Transkei is a long day’s drive through a gauntlet of economic deprivation, barren landscapes, and free range cattle and goats dotting both lanes of the highway, while KwaZulu-Natal is a relative oasis of vigorous communities, productive pastures and abundant farmlands.

After dinner tonight, we spent the last few hours talking with one of our guides, Willie Joubert. Willie is a native South African. His father was a surveyor, and spent most of his time in the bush (the undeveloped rural outback of Africa). Willie grew up at his father’s knee, and consequently spent much of his childhood exploring the bush. When it came time for his compulsory stint in the South African military, his time tracking wildlife, finding water, and sleeping in the wild pointed him towards the Special Forces. Consequently, he spent his military career there, fighting the “shadow wars” that are often the mission of that branch of military forces around the world.

Willie told us of sleeping in the bush while on a mission with his unit. One morning, he awoke before dawn to find a Puff Adder in his sleeping bag with him. The Puff Adder, while being one of the deadliest snakes in Africa, is as attracted to a warm place to sleep as any other reptile in the bush. Willie managed to get the attention of a few of his comrades and had one pull his sleeping bag off by the closed end, while two others simultaneously pulled him out of the open end by his armpits. Fortunately, as the men pulled the sleeping bag/Willie sandwich apart, the snake landed on the ground in the middle and they were able to dispatch it without harm to anyone but the snake.

At that point in history, South Africa and its neighboring countries were being used as pawns in the cold war by the Eastern Bloc and the West. All out war raged between South Africa, Angola and other surrounding nations, as well as the rising tide of guerilla warfare being waged by the black factional groups within South Africa itself. After the Berlin wall fell and the cold war ended, the funding from the protagonists of that conflict disappeared. Lacking superpower money to fuel their causes, the two sides within South Africa soon came to the table and produced the change to representative government that so radically changed this nation.

Willie and his peers stayed on through this period of transition, believing in balancing the inequities that had led to 2% of the population holding 95% of the wealth of the nation. Though as time went on, his enthusiasm for being part of a new nation diminished in the face of the rising tide of crime. He described a typical return from a day's work: "I'd pull through the electric fence of our gated community, drive down to the house, pull through the barbed wire security gate of our house, wait for it to close, open the garage door, pull into the garage, wait for it to close, go through the security gate from the garage, go through the security gate into the house, shut off the alarm system, check on both of our large dogs, unchamber the round in the handgun I carried, check to see if my wife had put her handgun away safely, check the perimeter of the razor wire fenced backyard that was too dangerous for our children to play in, then settle in for the evening."

As the circle of experience of violent crime closed in from 'friends of friends of friends' to 'friends of friends' to 'friends' to two attempted carjackings that he had to fend of with his own gun, Willie and his wife began to wonder what kind of world they were providing for their children. When the new government refused to crack down on the wave of violent crime sweeping the country, they made the decision to emigrate. They now live in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, and have joined the flood of over 50% of the non-black residents of South Africa that have departed in the last ten years.

Although Willie believes in providing equity to those who have had so little in the past, and supported the new government, he was eventually worn down by the high rates of crime and the inability to provide a save environment and future for his young children. He is, and always will be, a South African. He hopes to retire here someday if the government can provide a safe society free of violent crime. But until that day arrives, he will remain an expatriate, viewing his nation's struggles from afar.

We all got a taste of the level of crime in South Africa. It came to visit our group last night at our hotel in Port Alfred. About 4 AM, a burglar entered the only three rooms of the hotel that were not equipped with bars on the widow, all of them occupied by sleeping members of our group. He stole cash, cameras, binoculars, clothes and passports. One of the guys in our group woke up and scared the burglar off, just as he was reaching for another camera.

Needless to say, all of us were shaken by the experience. It easily could have been Steph and I in those rooms. If I had known ground floor rooms were available (as all of those burglarized were), I would have requested one as it would have made our load in/load out much easier. All of us are taking security much more seriously, and have pulled together to replace what has been lost by our fellow travelers. Thankfully, no one was hurt, and the critical items can be replaced, although the pervasive sense of violation, mistrust and fear hung with all of us throughout the day today.

Tomorrow we travel on to Durban to pick up our bikes and begin the trip in earnest.

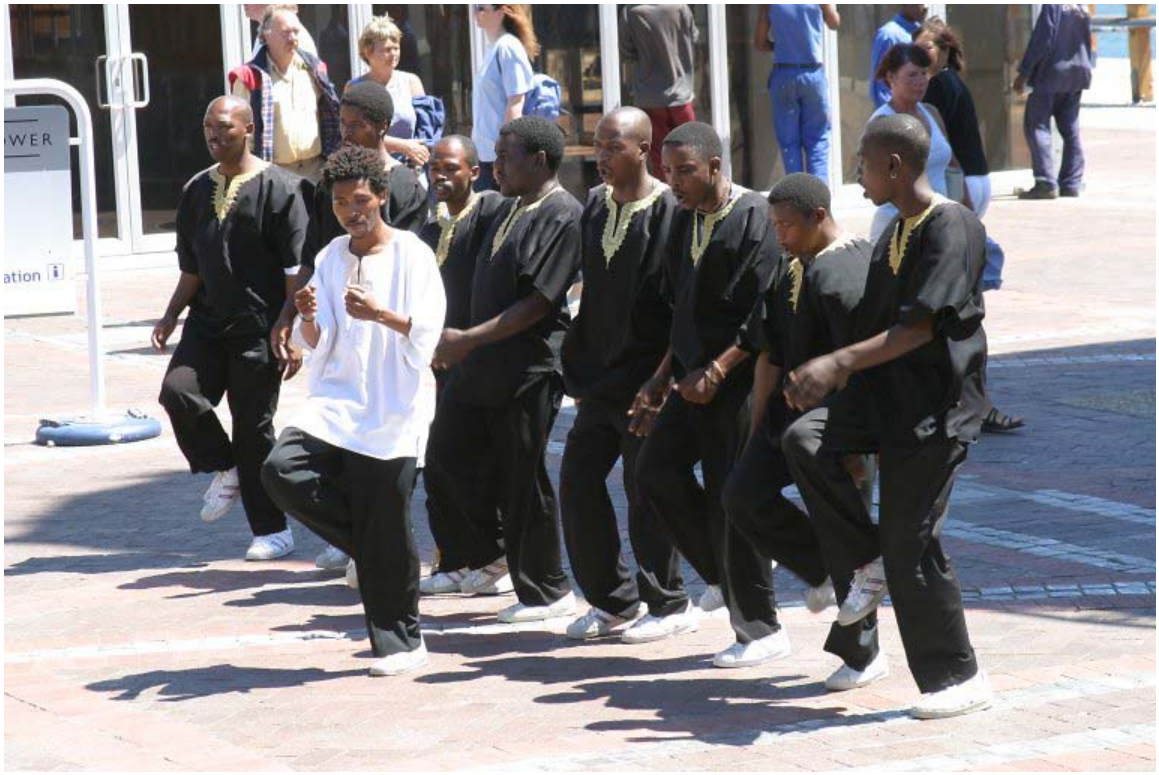
More to follow.

Be well,
Doug

PS: Following are some pictures from the trip so far.

A note about the photos:

- All photos were taken by Douglas Hackney
- All photos, unless otherwise noted, were taken on a Canon EOS 10D digital SLR using one of the following lenses: 16-35mm f2.8L, 100mm f2.8 Macro, 35-350mm f4.5-5.6L. Due to the imaging sensor size, the 10D creates a 1.6 lens magnification factor, so a 100mm lens performs like a 160mm lens on a normal 35mm camera.
- All photos were shot in high resolution, low compression JPEG mode.
- All photos have been reduced in size and resolution in order to keep this document down to a reasonable file size. The result is a significant loss of detail and clarity when compared to the original images.
- Image processing consisted of minor Unsharp Mask (.6) to all images to compensate for resolution reduction and minor contrast adjustment on a few images shot in hazy conditions.
- Several of the images have been cropped.
- A circular polarizing filter was used for several shots, all others were taken with a UV filter.



An Isicathamiya male choral group performing on the Cape Town waterfront. Isicathamiya (from the Zulu word meaning “to walk or step on one’s toes lightly”) groups were formed by groups of young males who left their rural homes to work in the cities and mines in the early twentieth century. The groups were used to preserve the bonds of home and tribe in the crowded urban environments that offered jobs. The best known such group in the U.S. is Ladysmith Black Mambazo who performed on Paul Simon’s 1986 album Graceland.

Beach changing rooms on the beach at St. James.

Penguins from the 4,000 strong colony at Simon's town.

Wild baboons at the Cape of Good Hope National Park eating dinner.

Wild Ostrich eating dinner, Cape of Good Hope National Park.

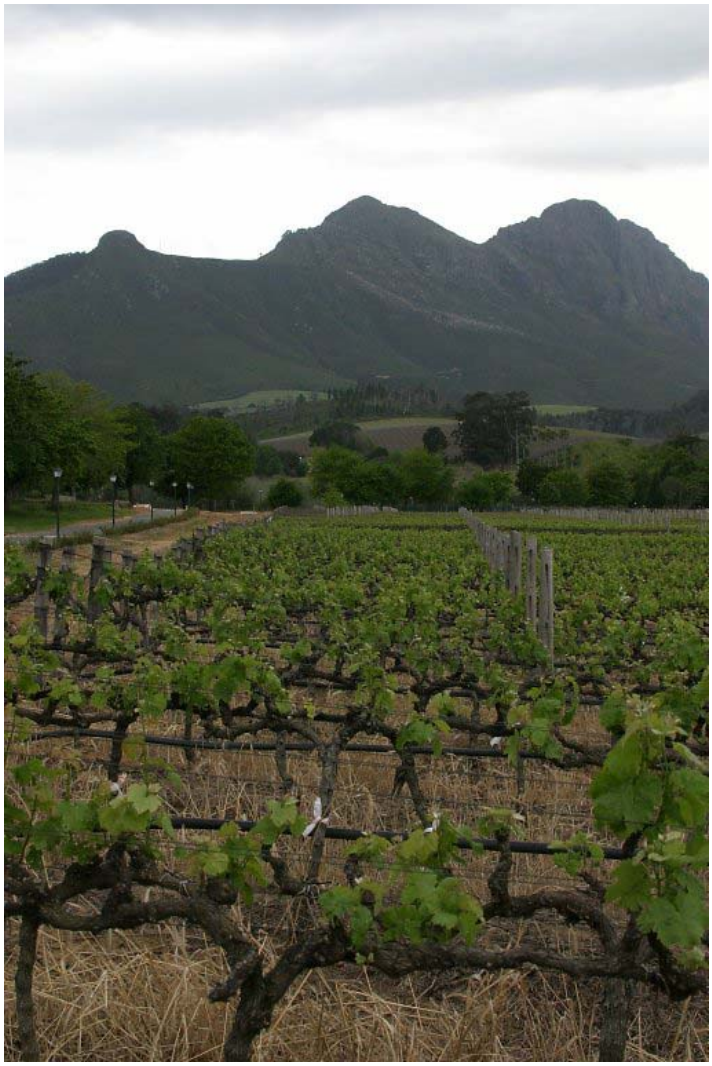
Steph shooting the wild Ostriches at the Cape of Good Hope National Park.

Countless ships met their fate in the stormy waters off this cape, where the warm waters of the Indian ocean collide with the cold waters of the South Atlantic.

Male lion, lion reserve near Cape Town.

Rosie the meerkat, mascot of the staff at the lion reserve.

A tortoise who lives at the lion reserve.



The wine country near Stellenbosch. South African wines are not widely available or well known in the U.S. The reds are of excellent quality and are extremely affordable here. It is hard to find a bottle of quality red for over $40 USD, with most costing $5 to $10 USD.

Steph sampling wine in a tasting room built in a 300 year old barn. (1.5 sec, F22)

Cheetah yawning in a Cheetah preserve near Cape Town.

Steph petting a domesticated cheetah at the preserve. Cheetahs were customarily kept as pets in the courts of royalty. They were known for their peaceful and docile disposition and hunting prowess. This Cheetah was born in captivity and cannot be returned to the wild. It is used for outreach programs such as school visits to raise awareness about the endangered status of the wild cheetah. All proceeds from the interactive sessions such as the one Steph participated in are used to purchase Turkish Anatolian Shepard dogs. The dogs are given to Namibian farmers to guard their herds. As Cheetahs will not attack anything bigger than themselves, the large dogs are effective in keeping the wild cheetahs away from the farmer's herds. Since the free dog program was started, farmer shootings of cheetahs in Namibia have dropped by over 50%.

Scarecrows in a strawberry field east of Cape Town. There were at least 50 scarecrows in this field, every one of them uniquely costumed.

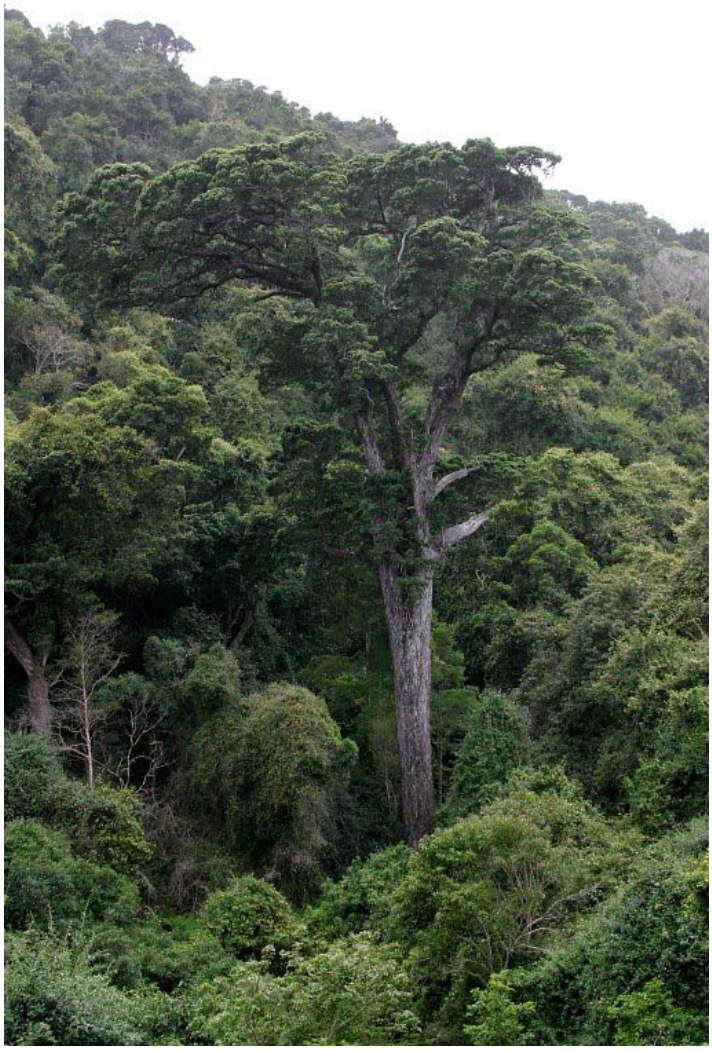
Our thatched roof cottage in Swellendam. (Nikon 3100)

Faces of domestic ostriches, from a field near Wittsan, South Africa.

English Lawn Bowling in Wittsan. This club was playing on Saturday morning rather than their usual Saturday afternoon time slot because the national rugby team, the Springboks, were playing that afternoon in the Rugby World Cup. The morning start time allowed them to break tradition and play in clothes other than the traditional all white ensemble typified by the man on the left.

A Southern Right Whale breaching in Wittsan bay. There were over 75 whales counted in this bay a few days before we arrived and Wittsan experiences up to 200 whales in the bay during this time of year. The Southern Right Whale is a cousin of the Northern Right Whale, which was hunted to near extinction, with only a handful remaining in North Atlantic waters. They are called the “Right” Whale because they were the “right” whale to hunt. They stayed afloat after they were killed and were easy to tow into the beach to render, which was a requirement prior to the floating whale processing factory ships of today that can process a whale within the ship.

A Southern Right Whale “sailing” in Wittsan Bay. A “sailing” whale will stand on its head and hold its tail upright out of the water for 30-60 seconds. It is speculated that they are doing this to cool their bodies. They have just spent the prior months in cold Antarctic waters feeding to build up a layer of blubber. They come to these warm water bays to give birth to their young, who cannot survive in cold waters at an early age. The tail (flukes) of the whale is filled with many blood vessels, and it is thought that the evaporation of the water from the tail while it is exposed to air may provide some cooling effects.



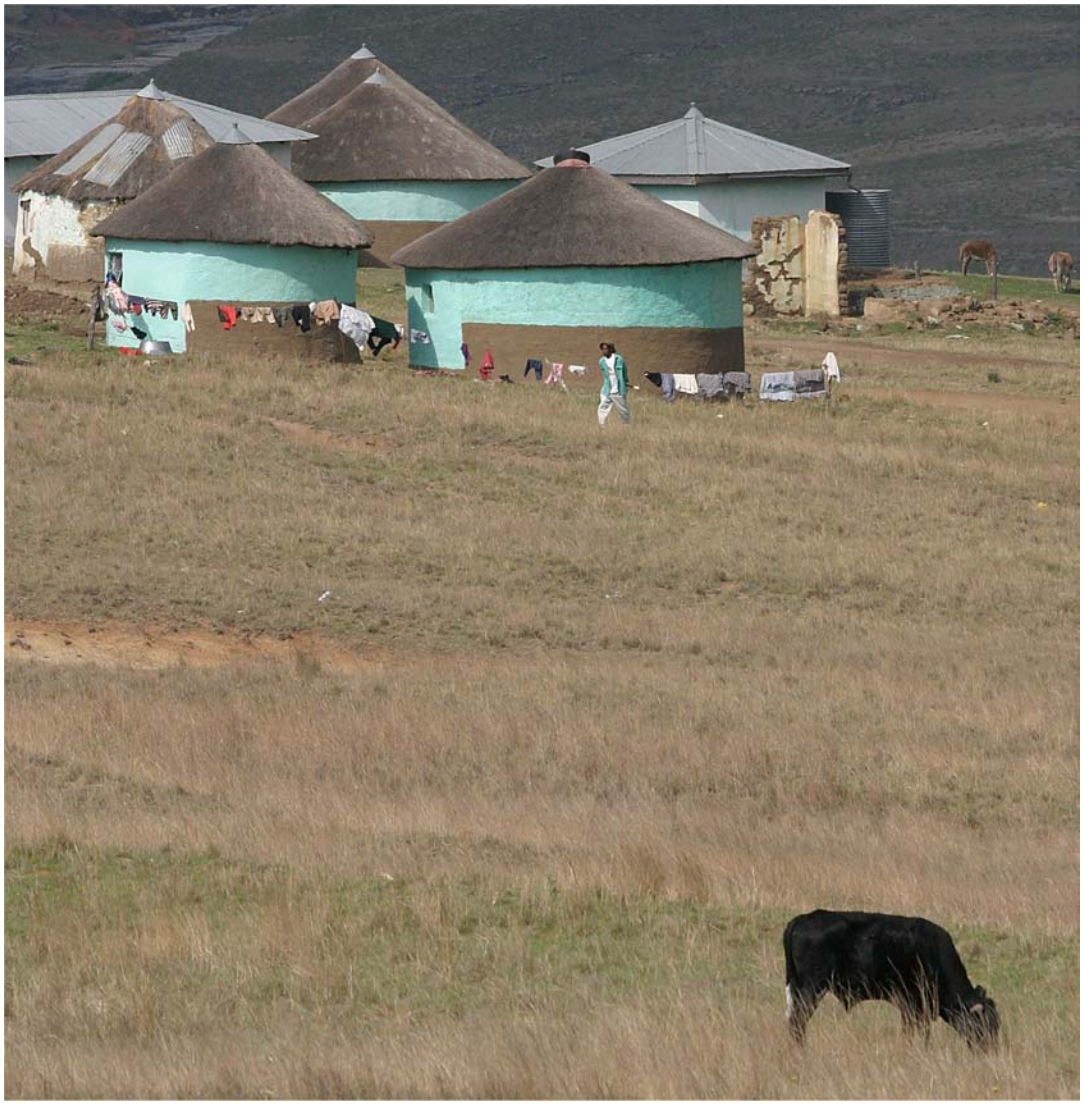
Jungle canopy near Nature Valley.

Our picnic on the beach at Jeffreys Bay, one of the most famous surfing spots in the world. Steph had heard about this beach her whole life, so it was a real treat to stop and have lunch here. The unique shape and depth of the bay enable the formation of long waves called “supertubes,” in which surfers can ride in the tube of the wave for up to three minutes.

Steph’s collection of sea shells from Jeffreys Bay beach.

Traditional homestead in the Transkei. This photo was taken in Qunu, the town where Nelson Mandela spent most of his childhood.

Zulu woman walking home from the market, carrying her baby in a traditional binding. Most heavy loads are carried on the head, with amazing dexterity and balance.



Typical Zulu homestead.

5 e-Postcard from Pilgrim's Rest

10/18/2003

Hello to all,

The giant beast lurched to the right and then plowed a great wake as it turned back to the left, desperately correcting its course. Realizing it was overcorrecting to the left, it leaned back to the right, gravity sucking at the ponderous weight of its extremities, pulling it down into the warm, deep, silt. It dropped, stopped, shook a few final times, and then lay still.

All was silence but for the sounds of the birds and the beasts in the deep African forest surrounding the once powerful, now fallen, behemoth.

"Are you OK?" I asked Steph.

"Yes, I'm all right," she replied. She was already up on her feet.

I didn't have that option. My right ankle was pinned between the right pannier box and the ground. With my left leg, I kicked the seat to rock the bike off of my ankle and pulled out my right leg. I could move the right ankle joint, and I wasn't feeling the sharp, stabbing pain that signals a broken bone, so I figured I could stand on it. It was sore, but livable, and besides, my body was pumping adrenaline into my system, along with the other body chemicals that constitute the physiological condition of shock, and that perform so well at masking pain and fueling our primordial "fight or flight" response to events such as this.

With razor sharp reflexes honed by crashing my dirt bikes hundreds of times, I had used the kill switch to stop the motor as soon as we hit the ground. I reached down again to the handlebars to lever the bike up off the ground. By the time I had my hands around the grip, two Zulu workers and one of the village residents, in full traditional Zulu costume, had ran up to the pile of motorcycle I had deposited in the middle of the road. Without comment, they had deftly hopped over the deep furrows I'd plowed in the nearly ankle deep silt that constituted the roadbed in front of the parking lot.

The four of us had the bike up on the first heave. I hopped on, fired up the bike, got Steph mounted and we motored on down the road, our minds and bodies still racing from the hormones, enzymes and proteins unleashed by our bodies to enable our survival in these situations.

We jumped back on the highway, and about a mile down the road, I noticed the right tank pannier bag was swinging in the wind. Swearing softly, I pulled off on the shoulder. As we walked around the bike to examine the damage more closely, we had a more measured response to our zero speed, classic porpoise weave drop of the bike. We'd picked up a small dent and some minor scratches, torn a strap off the tank pannier bag and bent our right pannier box lid slightly. Both of us were OK, and the bike was definitely ride-able. Not bad for our first time together going down on a bike, and a great way to round out our first day of riding here in Africa.

The next morning, as I pulled 50 pounds of stuff we didn't need off of the bike and repackaged what remained to lower the center of gravity, I reflected on dropping the bike with my wife on the back. The last time I could remember going down on a bike with a passenger was dropping Scott Dyer's Kawasaki Z1 900 in front of Urbandale high school with my brother, Jeff, on the back. That was back in the late '70s, so I'd had a pretty good run riding two up.

I know we'd never been down on the RF900 together, I don't think I ever dropped the DRZ400 that Steph and I rode around Mexico when she was on it with me (although I know with great certainty that I dropped it when I was riding solo), and I know I didn't drop the GS650 that we'd ridden around New Zealand. But I guess this maiden drop on the GS1150 was inevitable, and in some way good, to get it out of the way in such a relatively harmless way early on in the trip.

I suppose the street oriented tires we have on the bike and the deep silt played a role, but the main culprit was all the excess baggage we had piled on it. Once I pulled that off, both the motorcycle and the humans were much happier.

Just before we dumped the bike we'd visited a Zulu village where we'd been taught how the traditional Zulu lived, and still live in the communities that have chosen to retain traditional ways. While there are some that are closed and not open to visitors, we had been fortunate to spend several hours at one that is open to the public. The Zulu people we met all live in the village, which is used to demonstrate the traditional Zulu way of life to those from other cultures and places.

It was an interesting peek into another way of life, one that requires no car payments, no phone bills, and no big trips to the shopping mall. While not immune to the influences of modern life, those that have chosen the traditional ways are not dependant on them either. As others have observed, the subsistence farmers are not the ones dependent on foreign aid for survival and are not the ones starving in the periodic famines that rack the African continent.

Since our visit with the Zulus, we've spent a couple of days visiting a wildlife reserve, riding through Swaziland and are now back in South Africa. Tomorrow we head to Botswana, then on to Zambia and Namibia.

We spent the afternoon today in Pilgrims Rest, an old mining town in the mountains of North Eastern South Africa. We met some local sport bike riders along the road today, and they told us about their favorite destination in Pilgrims Rest, John's Pub. Once we hit town, we sought it out and found a wonderful little place, full of character, with a huge seating area in the back lined with chairs and televisions.

While a little mystified by the TVs out back and the one perched on top of a beer case in the dining room, we faced down the challenge of ordering from the menu in the dark, as the power was out in the entire town. As soon as the power popped back on, we quickly discerned the need for all the TVs and the explanation for the mystery of why half the adult population of the region would be gathered in this relatively small establishment. The South African Springboks, the national rugby team, was playing a match against England in the Rugby World Cup this afternoon. This was arguably the biggest South African rugby match since the Springboks won the world title over the New Zealand All Blacks in the 1995 championship game, and no local rugby fan with the faintest of pulse was about to miss it.

Sadly, the home team lost, but we used the time during the game to get to know some locals around us, as well as a group of fellow travelers from Holland, one of our favorite European countries. The Dutch group had flown in, rented a van, and was finding their own way around the region, armed with nothing but ATM cards, travel books and good maps. Clearly, they were our kind of travelers.

It had been raining pretty steadily on our way up into the mountains, with the temperature dropping to 38 degrees (F) as we pulled into our lunch stop. We decided to walk around the quaint old town for a bit and then headed for our hotel, which was located about six miles out of town. As we climbed higher into the mountains, the fog closed in, the rain came down harder and the wind began to blow in earnest.

I had the heated grips on at full strength, my heated seat and jacket up to half strength and was still feeling the cold, so I was glad to finally see the sign for the hotel materialize out of the rain, fog and fast closing darkness. By the time we came up to the entrance gate, the wind was a full force gale, with blowing sheets of rain and the temperature dropping like a sandbag from a balloon.

Once we checked in and found our cottage, I checked the thermometer on the bike. I looked and looked again. It showed 0 degrees Celsius, 32 degrees Fahrenheit. When we got into the room we discovered that the only heat was provided by the wood burning fireplace, which I quickly utilized in a desperate attempt to throw some heat into the breezes that fluttered our curtains.

I write this now seated in front of the blazing fire, the wind shrieking against the cottage, a glass of excellent South African red wine in hand, and my ever patient, ever adventurous wife by my side. I am eternally grateful for both of those gifts.

Tonight we enjoy the warmth of the wine and the fire. Tomorrow we ride further into the mysteries and rewards of Africa.

Be well,
Doug

P.S. Some photos from our recent days follow.

Zulu wedding dance. ISO 400 1/250 F6.7 16-35mm @33mm external E-TTL flash

Household goods from a typical Zulu household. There were a few huts open to the public, the rest were homes of the people in the village and were not open to the public. The private huts all contained household goods similar to these. ISO 800 1/60 F4 16-35mm @16mm external E-TTL bounce flash

Zulu warriors in battle. ISO 400 1/500 F4.0 35-350mm @50mm

Zulu woman in traditional costume. ISO 400 1/500 F5.6 35-350mm @90mm

Zulu performers review video of themselves with Helge Pedersen, the organizer of our tour.
ISO 400 1/180 F6.7 16-35mm @35mm external E-TTL flash

Zulu women discuss motorcycling with Steph on the way back to the parking lot. The women were fascinated with Steph riding on the bike with me.
ISO 400 1/180 F6.7 16-35mm @18mm external E-TTL flash

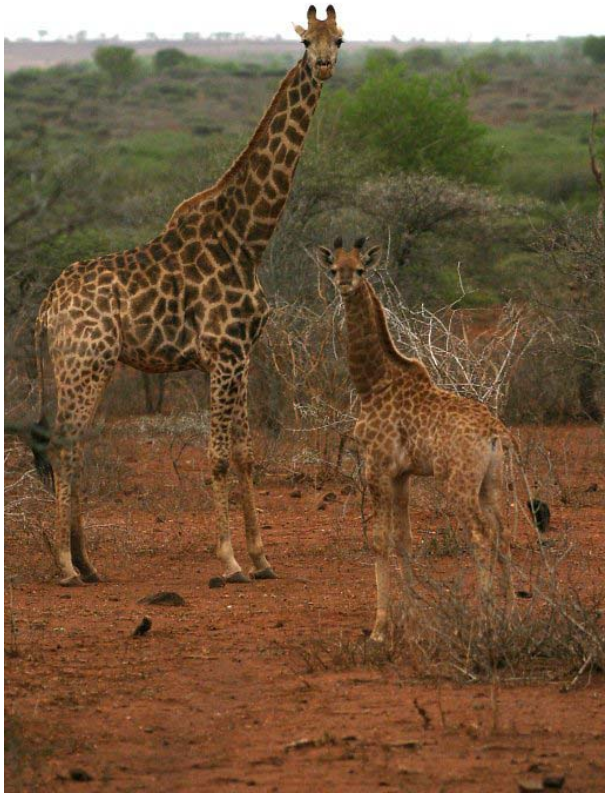
Our room at Shayamoya Lodge, a wonderful destination. We were all heartbroken that we only spent one night here. ISO 400 1/60 F4 16-35mm @16mm handheld external E-TTL bounce flash

Our outdoor shower in our room. Heavenly! ISO 800 1/30 F2.8 16-35mm @16mm handheld

Sunset at Shayamoya. ISO 800 1/350 F9.5 28-135mm @135mm

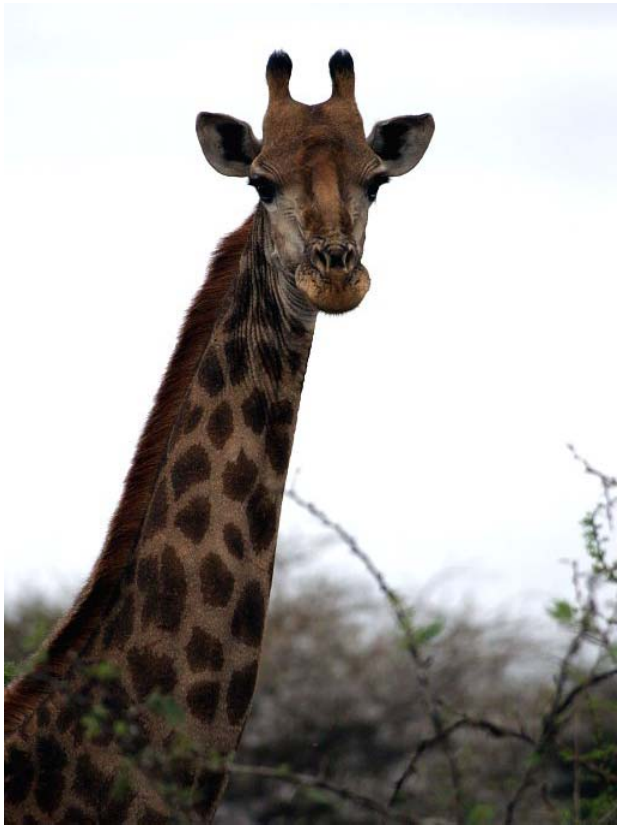
African Tiger fish, caught on a fly rod in the lake in the valley below our cabin.
ISO 400 1/60 F5.6 28-135mm @135mm built in flash

African Spotted Eagle Owl with the bat he caught for dinner. Note the large bug on its right thigh.
ISO 3200 1/60 F2.8 16-35mm @35mm External 550EX E-TTL Flash



The next morning we went on a tour of the wild animal reserve next to the lodge. Because we are here in the Spring for the Southern Hemisphere, there are lots of newborns. This baby giraffe was only a few weeks old.
ISO 800 1/750 F4.5 35-350mm @210mm

Zebras grazing near the lake. ISO 800 1/1000 F5.6 35-350mm @320mm



Giraffe checking out the tourists. ISO 800 1/750 F6.7 35-350mm @350mm

Rhino grazing. ISO 800 1/500 F5.6 35-350mm @320mm

ISO 800 1/1500 F5.6 35-350mm @350mm

ISO 800 1/1500 F5.6 35-350mm @350mm

Mother and baby Rhino. They traveled parallel to us for over a mile, with the baby trotting ahead of the mother. The baby was less than a month old.
ISO 800 1/1000 F5.6 35-350mm @350mm

ISO 800 1/1500 F5.6 35-350mm @350mm

The day after this message was written, we visited Echo Cave, where I shot this Hair Bat.
ISO 400 1/60 F2.8 16-35mm @35mm External 550EX E-TTL Flash

6 e-Postcard from Chobe

10/21/2003

Hello to all,

Just a short note to update you on our travels.

We rode into Botswana yesterday. As our guides told us, as soon as you cross the border, you will be in your vision of what Africa would be like. How true! Less than three miles from the border we saw crushed trees and droppings indicating the passage of elephants.

We rode about 100 miles on what would have been hard packed dirt roads. Fortunately for the locals, the two year drought is now over, we rode through rain for four and half days, and what would have been an easy run down hard packed dirt was a very interesting ride two up on a heavily loaded bike with 80/20 street oriented tires. The mud was the viscosity of grease on glass, so I had a challenging ride. We only went down once, in the first big mud hole we came across. It was the usual equation: my speed exceeded my ability. Fortunately, no damage to us or the bike and we soldiered on. We were, however, very glad to see the pavement.

Spending the night tonight in the Chobe Safari Lodge. We're flying out tomorrow morning into the Okavango Delta, the heart of what remains of wild Africa south of the Sahara. We'll be there for four days, and hope to have some excellent adventures sleeping in tents with wild game wandering through our camp.

I've attached a picture of what we came across while riding into our hotel. We came across this herd of elephants a few miles from here. There were at least 50, with lots and lots of babies.

I have reloaded the file for the e-postcard from KwaZulu-Natal. Please check it out, as it has some good pictures.

Also, please, please, please let me know ASAP if there are any problems with the files I'm posting on the web site. I have NO ability to check the files from where I am on the end of a 16.8kbs connection.

Be well,
Doug

Female African elephant defends a calf from our presence on the bike. We were about 100 feet away from them.

Photo by Stephanie Hackney, Nikon 5700

7 e-Postcard from the Okavango Delta

10/27/2003

Before my foot touched the ground, the hyena's head snapped towards me.

As I brought my second foot down, he slowed his syncopated gait and turned in my direction, at most a couple hundred feet away. I knew hyenas ate the entire body of their prey, crushing the bones in their powerful jaws. I also knew their bizarre shape and ungainly movements belied their speed and ruthlessly efficient cooperative hunting techniques. I glanced furtively towards him, and then looked in the opposite direction toward the female lion ripping meat off of the elephant she had just killed. She hadn't spotted me yet, as the truck was partially blocking her view, and thankfully, I was downwind of her. The two male lions, having eaten their fill before she had her turn, were lounging on the other side of the tree, without a direct view of me.

By taking that first step, I had violated the fundamental rule of survival in the bush. I had broken the visual outline of the trucks the animals are acclimated to and presented a new shape on the ground, the shape of fresh prey.

I was standing almost exactly midway between a female lion, one of the world's most powerful and cunning killing machines, and the lead elements of a hyena pack, closing in to battle the three lions for the elephant carcass. To them, I was nothing but fresh meat on the prairie, and fresh meat that did not have the speed, camouflage, armor, or fighting ability that their daily prey possessed.

I looked towards the lioness and saw that she had spotted my legs beneath the truck. Her ears perked up at full alert and her eyes locked onto my calves. They were a new target, unfamiliar, but distinctly animal.

My scent was blowing towards the gathering hyenas and my legs were being tracked by the lion.

I was on the ground in Africa, with two hungry carnivores sizing me up for dinner.

It was not necessarily the best place for a small town boy from Iowa to be.

**

It had started innocently enough.

"I dropped my lens cap," Steph said quietly. Busi, our Botswanian guide and driver, spun his head around and said, "What did you say?"

"I'm sorry. I dropped my lens cap," Steph repeated.

I lowered my camera and looked over the edge of the game drive truck we were perched upon. Sure enough, there lay her lens cap in the mud, tiny rivulets of water threatening to float it towards the water hole that had attracted the unlucky elephant calf.

I looked up at Busi. Our eyes locked. "I'll come and get it," he said with sincerity, albeit without his usual enthusiasm.

"No, I'll get it," I said firmly. He didn't argue. After all, he had a family to feed.

He moved the truck slightly to block the direct view of the lioness, but he could do nothing about my legs and feet showing underneath the truck, directly in her line of sight as she peered over the carcass scanning for her arch enemies, the fast approaching hyenas.

As I climbed down the short ladder I knew this would be an interesting moment in our trip around Southern Africa, but I didn't expect the impact of being a target locked in the sights of both a lion and a hyena. By visiting zoos, nature parks and watching carefully edited wildlife shows, we've become desensitized to the true nature of predators and the fate of their prey. As I swiveled my head back and forth between the hyena and the lion I felt exactly what it was like to be the pursued. I was powerfully reminded of how we fit into the scale of nature when it comes to bare handed killing power, or lack thereof.

The carcass of the elephant lay motionless except for the jerking limbs being tugged by the lion's jaws. Her eyes never left my legs as she worked on another bite. I felt the eyes of the hyena boring into my back. Around the fringes, a jackal slinked about, looking for opportunities to bolt in and grab a few bites between the feasting of the lions and hyenas. In the tree above us all, a vulture patiently waited its turn at the kill, wondering if their might be two meals tonight.

All the players in the drama were assembled. It only remained to see what fate would befall me as the action unfolded. A few hours before we had watched vultures consume three quarters of a fresh antelope carcass in twelve minutes. I knew it would take them even less time to pick apart whatever was left of me if things did not go well.

The last drops of the rain shower played a slow staccato on the canvas roof of the truck. My shoes added the harmony of a slow sucking slurp as I moved them in the thin layer of mud. The rains that day signaled the end of the dry season, and in some areas, the end of a four year drought. The underlying pan was sun baked to the consistency of concrete so the water had nowhere to go but to form pools, small streams and liquefy the top millimeter of dirt, where the lens cap waited. It was close, but very, very far away considering who was watching my every move.

Time slowed dramatically as I took the first few steps. The lioness stopped chewing. The hyena quickened his walk towards me. The jackal stopped his pacing and turned my way. The vulture stared down with interest.

As I bent down to pick up the lens cap, I was fervently hoping that no one had taken up a fund to pay Busi to drive off and leave me. Fortunately, the truck was still there when I turned back and reached for the ladder.

I was up and back in quickly, no one noticing my racing pulse and quiet panting.

As I lay in bed in our tent in the Okavango Delta that night, listening to the elephants trumpeting and the lions huffing, coughing and roaring all around us, I thought about how otherworldly it felt to be on the ground with the carnivores and to be just another piece of prey. It had been a life changing experience, but not one I would recommend for the faint of heart or ill prepared.

Through the canvas of the tent I heard a lion, very close, let loose a mild roar. I was very happy the lions had not yet discovered that these easily sliced open tents contained tasty treats, soft on the outside and crunchy on the inside.

I rolled over and went to sleep, my dreams filled with running antelope and pursuing carnivores, my limbs twitching in rhythm with the pounding hooves.

Be well,
Doug

PS – Following are pictures from our four days and three nights in the Okavango Delta.

A note about the photos:

- All photos were taken by Douglas Hackney
- All photos, unless otherwise noted, were taken on a Canon EOS 10D digital SLR using one of the following lenses: 16-35mm f2.8L, 100mm f2.8 Macro, 35-350mm f4.5-5.6L. Due to the imaging sensor size, the 10D creates a 1.6 lens magnification factor, so a 100mm lens performs like a 160mm lens on a normal 35mm camera.
- All photos were shot in high resolution, low compression JPEG mode.
- All photos have been reduced in size and resolution in order to keep this document down to a reasonable file size. The result is a significant loss of detail and clarity when compared to the original images.
- Image processing consisted of Unsharp Mask adjustment to all images to compensate for resolution reduction. Some images shot in low or flat lighting have also had histogram adjustments.
- Most of the images have been cropped.
- A circular polarizing filter was used for several shots, all others were taken with a UV filter.
- Unless otherwise noted, all shots were handheld.

Cape buffalo grazing with cattle egrets. It is very difficult to capture the immensity of the open savanna and the uncountable numbers of grazing herbivores.

Hamerkop

Male green (red billed) wood-hoopoe passing food to a female in their nest.

African Jacana

Female impala

Male impala

African fish eagle in flight.

Zebras and giraffe.

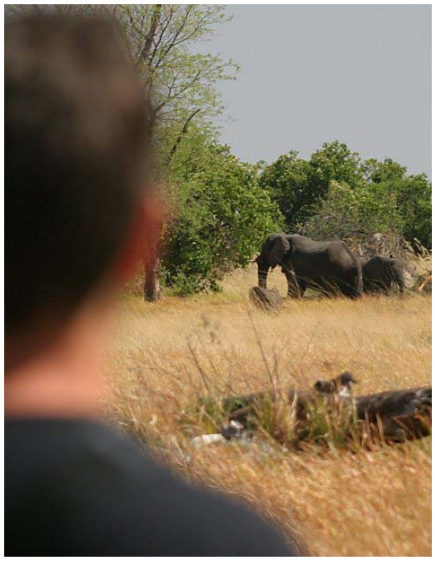
African elephant

Sunset on the Okavango Delta, day one

Dinner under lantern light. Manfrotto 482 micro tripod.

Marabou stork

Yellow billed stork



On the morning of day two, we went for a nature hike around the island we camped on. Near the end we came across this family of elephants.

Probably an immature African Fish Eagle, possibly an African Hawk Eagle

Warthog

Male red leshwe

Saddle billed stork

Male red leshwe

Tawny eagle

Black wildebeest (Gnu)

Spooked Zebras

Female saddle billed stork

African fish eagle

Male greater kudu

Male waterbuck

Male lion

Male lion drinking, female sitting

A small section of the immense destruction wreaked by the elephants. They have denuded and destroyed countless square miles of forest. The guides and local managers estimate that the elephant population is about 33% too large for the area to support.

Sunset on the Delta, day two. Note the two hippos sparring in the foreground. They are establishing the social hierarchy for this group.

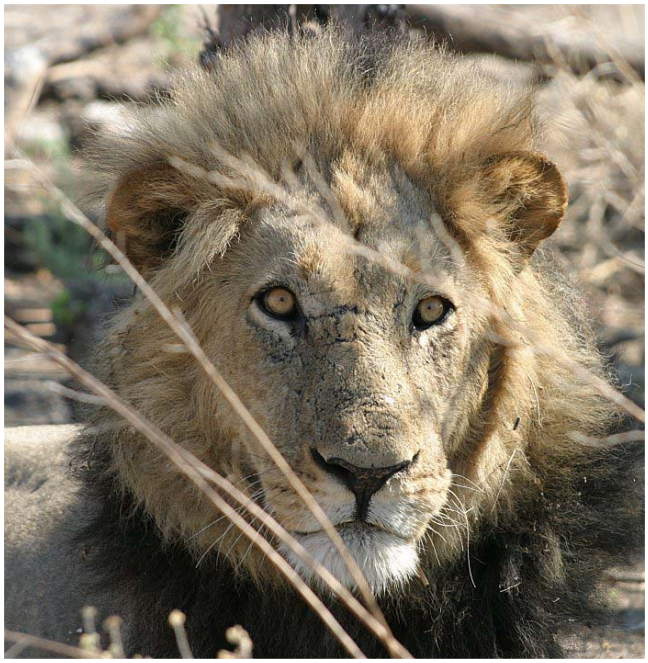
A leopard, one of the most elusive of the big cats.

Vervet monkey.

Wild dog running. We came across two packs of wild dogs, totaling about 30 dogs. This represents approximately .5% of the entire world population of these critically endangered animals. It is extremely rare to see these animals, and our guide told us that he hadn't seen wild dogs in the area we saw the second pack in over 11 years. The guide on one of the other trucks had only seen them twice in the 12 years he has worked in the delta.

Southern ground hornbills with a resting jackal in the background.

Black backed jackal at rest.



Male lion

Lilac-breasted roller

Female impala escaping a wild dog. The Impala had attempted to cross a small river and had gotten stuck in the mud. As a wild dog approached for the kill, the Impala struggled free and took flight across the savanna. This type of kicking and running motion, called stotting, is used when fleeing predators.

African white-backed vultures consuming a male impala carcass. It took them less than 12 minutes to consume the three quarters of this carcass left by the wild dogs.

Lappet-faced vulture

Yellow billed kite

African wattled lapwing (plover)

Possibly an osprey, unable to positively identify.

Yellow billed kite

More elephant destruction. Note the ground littered with elephant dung.

Male waterbuck

Tawny eagle

Female lions with a yawning cub

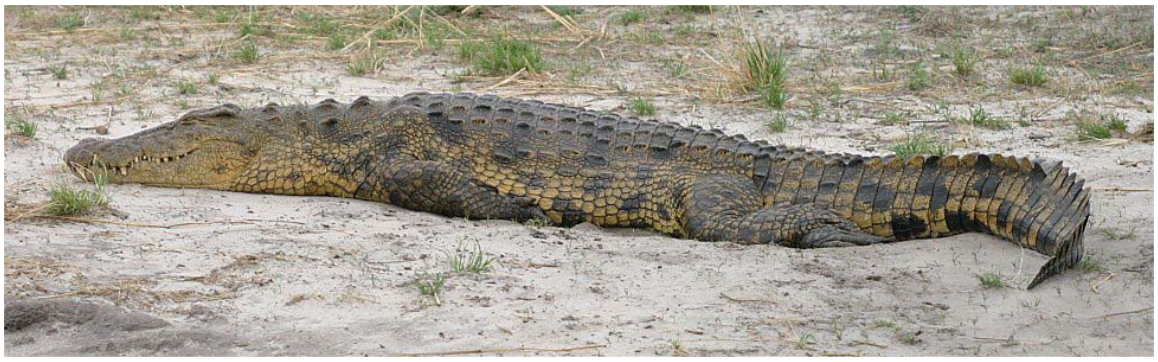
Steenbok, very shy and very fast, about the size of a medium dog

Kori bustard

Male lion

African darter

African darter in flight



African crocodile

Water monitor eating a fish

Yawning hippo

Spotted hyena

Female lion eating, male lion in the background, elephant calf prey

Sunset on the Delta, day three, female elephant with her kill

8 e-Postcard from Tyfelfontein

11/2/2003

Hello to all,

About 6,000 years ago the San people, the oldest indigenous tribe in southern Africa, started to record their surroundings by chiseling pictures in the sandstone rock of north central Namibia. Over the years they created over 2,500 images on the rocks around a spring nestled in a mountain valley.

The San people, commonly referred to as the Bushmen, are a nomadic, hunter / gatherer society. They hunt wild game and harvest the bounty that the land provides. They represent the last remaining link to the original people of Africa. They are a very shy, peaceful people, and will simply move away in the face of aggression. As a result, their land has been taken by more powerful tribes, and their numbers have dwindled. At one point, they were the most populous group in this region. Today there are an estimated 2,000 left in Namibia, and an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 across the whole of southern Africa.

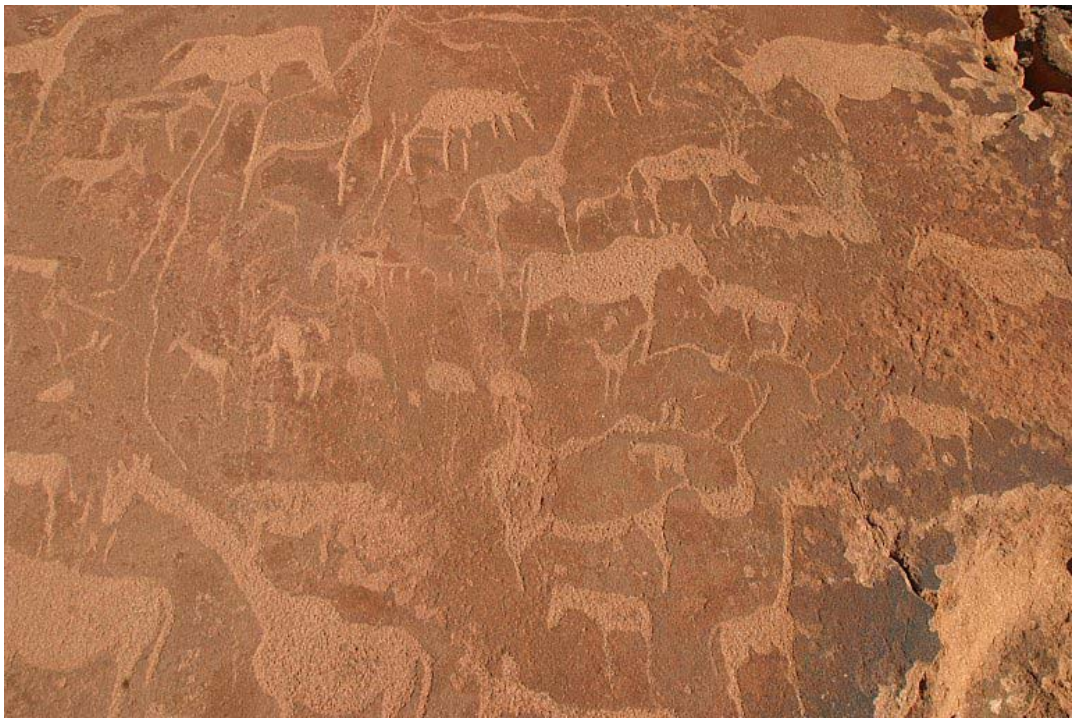
Of those that remain, there are essentially none that live a fully isolated, traditional life. Over the years they have been exposed to many facets of modern life, both good and bad. Today they still live a simple life in the bush, but are at the mercy of the farmers and game reserve owners who allow them to live, hunt and gather on their lands. Due to their isolated and reserved nature, contact and interaction with them is very rare.

A few days ago, we had the chance to meet a San family and interact with them. They showed us some facets of their traditional life. The opportunity for the experience was both intriguing and voyeuristic. It took some time and an extended conversation with our local guides before I could come to terms with it. The tough fact is that these people need some cash to survive in the world that has been left to them, and these interactions provides a means to generate that cash without turning to more damaging ways to acquire it.

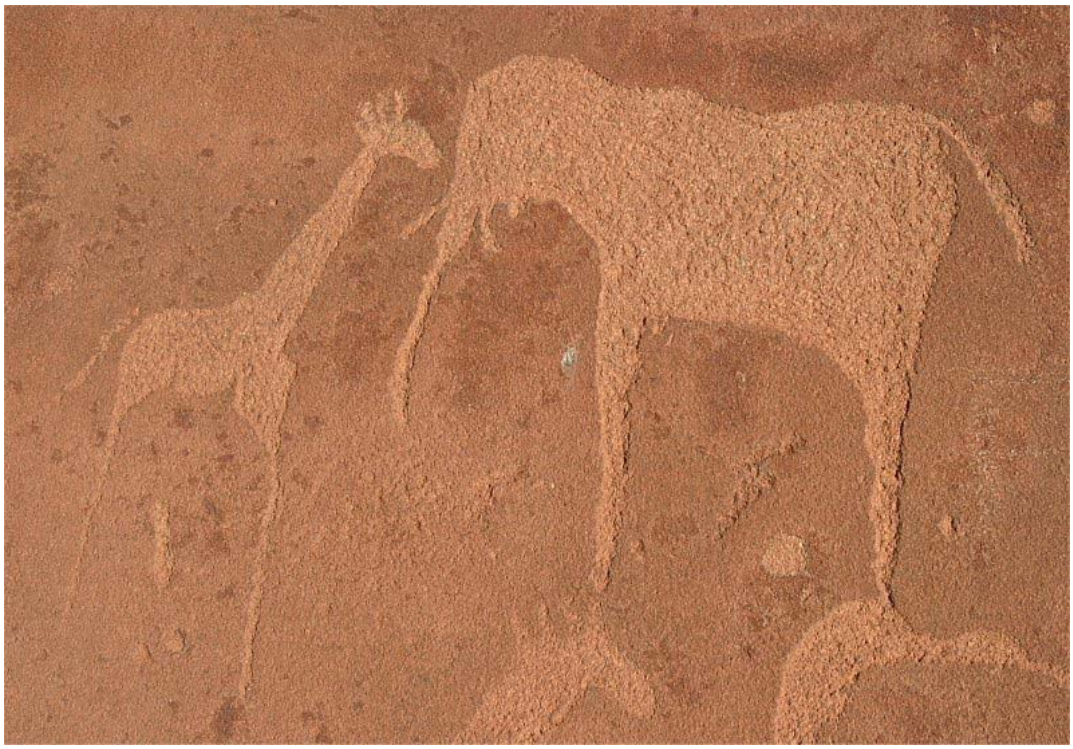
To minimize the impact of the interactions on their culture, the organizers of this experience rotate different family groups from the remote bush into the area where we met them every four to six weeks. Interaction is not an every day, scheduled event, but is organized at the request of the select number of guides who are aware of the situation. Many times the San have simply migrated away to a different camp or are out in the bush hunting and are not available to interact. We were very fortunate to have met them and to have touched a facet of human existence that connects us to the lives and the people of our most remote ancestors.

Following are some pictures from our time with the San.

Be well,
Doug



Petroglyphs of the ancient San people



Petroglyph detail

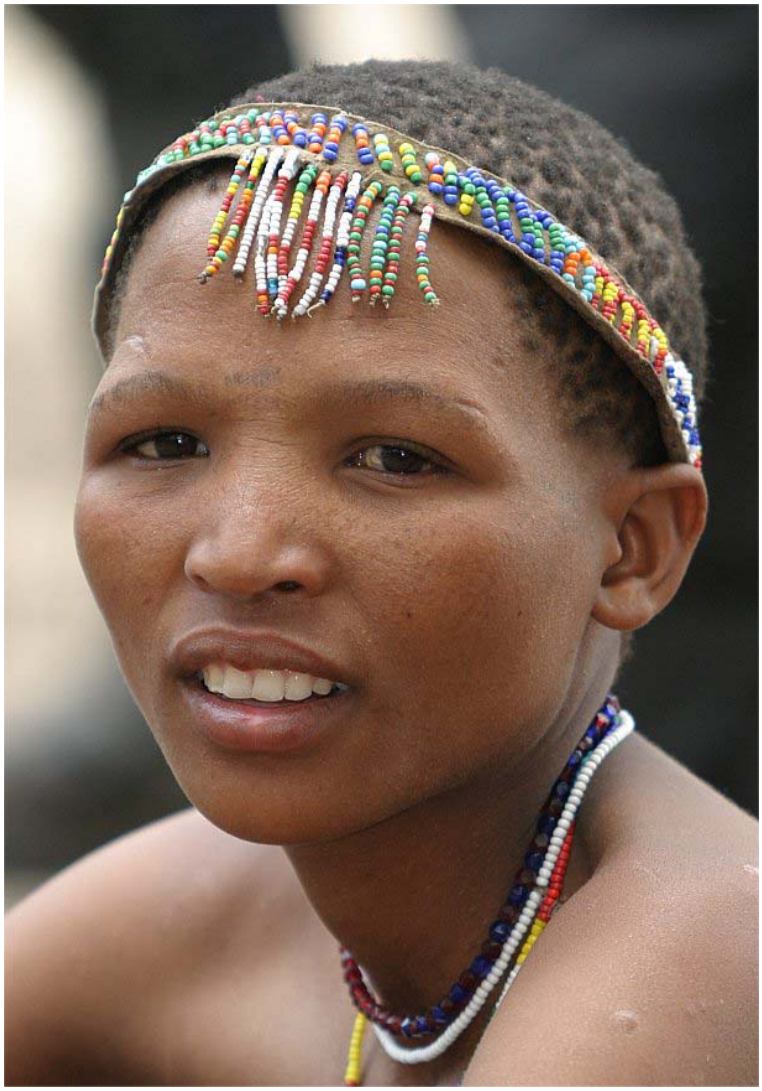
One of the San fathers looks on while the women and children of the family sing and play.

A young San girl.

Making fire.

Young San boy

One of the mothers in the family.



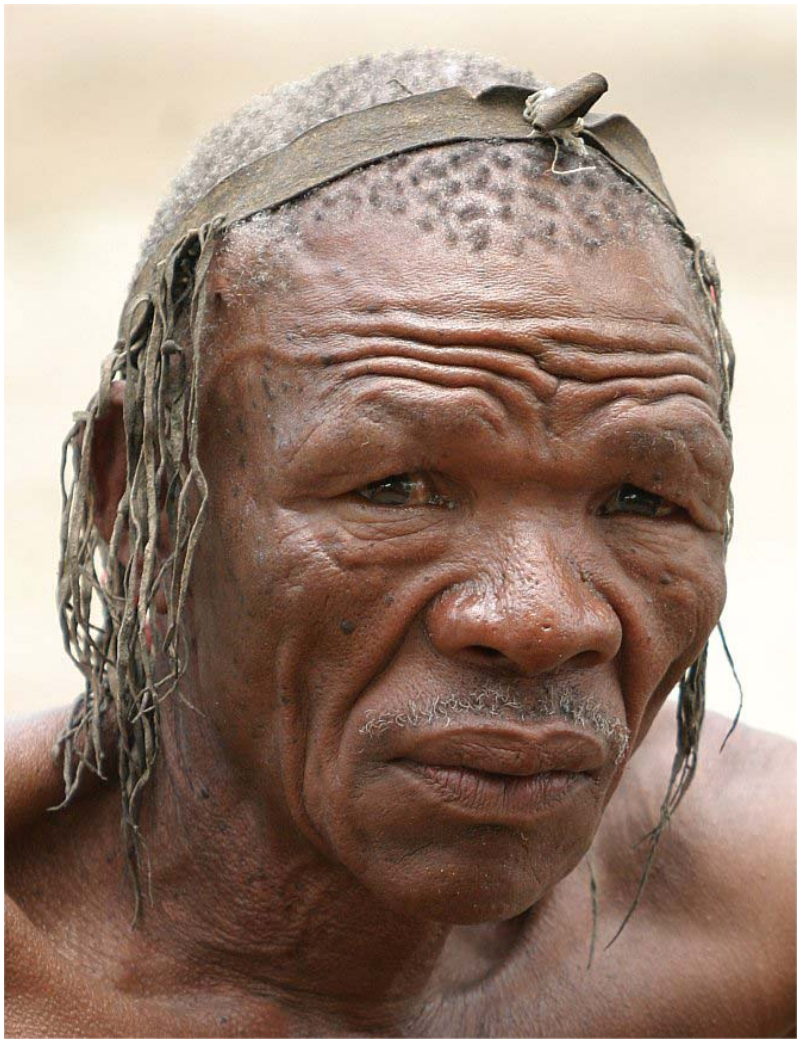
Another of the mothers.

One of the senior sisters of the family.

The other senior sister

One of the husbands making rope from tree bark.

Making rope from tree bark. The finished product is incredibly light and strong.



The senior husband in the family.

9 e-Postcard from Solitaire

November 6, 2003

The Ring of Wealth

By Douglas Hackney

Wildfire news reaches remote Solitaire, Namibia
Photo: Stephanie Hackney

Solitaire, Namibia consists of a gas station, a campground and a small café that is famous for its apple pie. As my wife and I sat down for lunch we wondered if Solitaire's apple pie would be as good Julian's, a small mountain town near our home in Carlsbad, California. She then noticed something about California on the chalkboard in the parking lot that functions as the news ticker in this part of the world. She walked over and read "Brush fires in California, arson suspected, 2,000 homeless, 1,000 homes destroyed." Even in this remote and barren corner in the hinterlands of Africa the terrible news had reached us. We were both aghast with fear for our family and friends as there were no further details available there.

A few minutes in an internet café in the next sizable town told the tragic tale. A fire that was no bigger than a basketball court when the first fire crews arrived was left to burn because there were no passable roads available to access the area to extinguish it. It became the largest fire in San Diego Country. This and other fires, fueled by forests overstuffed with brush, undergrowth, excess trees and dead trees killed by bark beetles quickly became roaring crown fires, burning every tree and sterilizing the ground with their heat. The firestorms jumped fire lines, consumed entire towns, burned more than 2,500 homes and businesses, and killed more than a dozen people in San Diego County alone. Julian, our source of famous apple pies, was fighting for its life after the surrounding communities had been wiped out. People killed, homes and businesses burned, towns incinerated, lives destroyed, the devastation was beyond our comprehension.

What could have prevented or limited this tragedy? Perhaps a concept we learned while on our tour of Africa. A conservation biologist I met here introduced me to the concept that has saved the mountain gorilla and stabilized the populations of other endangered African animals: The Ring of Wealth.

The Ring of Wealth grew from the tragic death of Dianne Fossey, the gorilla researcher made famous by the movie "Gorillas in the Mist." The untold part of the story is that Fossey's many years invested in preserving the mountain gorilla population were largely a failure. Although she dedicated her life to these animals, her steadfast policy of denying human access to them and their environs led to a decreasing gorilla population and ultimately, to her tragic death.

Her successors took a more enlightened and pragmatic approach. Whereas Fossey's "no human access" policy had alienated the local communities, the new management team invited and encouraged balanced, managed and sustainable human access to the mountain gorillas and their forests. Visitors came, jobs were created, local crafts flourished, standards of living were raised, former poachers became park rangers and most remarkably, the gorilla population increased.

The key factor is that a “Ring of Wealth” fueled by tourism was created around the mountain gorillas, thus the local population became stakeholders in the gorilla’s health and welfare. The same approach has been used at other game preserves and national parks around Africa with similar success.

Recreation and tourism empowers local communities. Photo: Douglas Hackney

The answer is clear. In the face of growing local and world human populations, a policy of no human access to natural resources simply does not work. The answer is enlightened, managed and sustainable human access to natural resources with corresponding positive financial impacts on local communities.

There are striking similarities between Fossey’s failed “no human access” mountain gorilla policy and the current state of the national forests and public lands of California and the Western United States. American environmental groups, heavily influenced by a radical agenda, led the way in closing roads and outlawing human access to public lands throughout the region. They stonewalled efforts to thin the forests choked with growth due to the “zero fire tolerance” policies that resulted from the great fires of 1911. Instead, these groups promoted forest thinning limited to narrow bands around populated areas. Across the West the needs and desires of local communities were ignored as heavy handed environmental policies were imposed from above. Recreational opportunities were banned, tourism tapered off, jobs disappeared and local communities withered. The result was inevitable: closed and non-maintained roads, tinderbox forests and alienated, economically dying communities.

The tragedy of the firestorms cannot be denied, but at least they may serve to awaken the community as a whole to the fallacy of the policies promoted by the environmental movement. Arguably, the largest fire in San Diego Country could have been prevented if the once excellent system of California “fire roads” used to access remote areas had not been largely abandoned and human access denied. Undeniably, the firestorms that resulted from fuel choked forests could never be stopped by narrow bands of thinning around populated areas. How many of the firestorm deaths can be laid at the feet of the environmental idealists? Not all, but surely some.

Just as Dianne Fossey’s misguided “no access” policy nearly led to the extinction of the mountain gorilla, the environmentalists, with their misguided passion for “saving” the environment from the public, created deadly tinderboxes and are killing our national forests, public lands and rural communities. Instead of an environmentally and economically sustainable Ring of Wealth, their misguided idealism has created a Ring of Death.

How can we prevent another firestorm tragedy? We need forest thinning now, and not just in narrow bands around populated areas. We need to reopen and restore the network of fire roads in our forests and public lands. We need to create a “Ring of Wealth” around our forests and public lands by promoting managed and sustainable human access and recreation for all Americans, including the disabled, disadvantaged and elderly who are physically or financially unable to hike for long distances.

We need to hear voices other than the polished press releases and smooth spokespeople that the $6 billion dollar annual budgets of the environmental groups produce. We need our media to tell the stories of the grandparents who can’t take their grandchildren fishing in a remote mountain stream because roads have been closed. We need to hear the stories of the people who have lost their homes, business and towns because forest thinning programs were held up by environmental idealists’ lawsuits. We need a pragmatic, balanced approach to access, utilization and preserving our natural resources for the people, not from the people.

We are hoping that the next story we see chalked on the board of some tiny African hamlet such as Solitaire, Namibia does not tell of further environmental disasters in the United States that could have been prevented by the adoption of lessons already learned by environmental pragmatists here in Africa. We need to create a Ring of Wealth around our environmental treasures in America.

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Douglas and Stephanie Hackney of Carlsbad, California, are currently touring Southern Africa by motorcycle.

10 e-Postcard from the Cape Town Docks

11/14/2003

It's the rhythm I miss the most.

When you travel by motorcycle, your day has a rhythm.

You wake up early and put on your riding gear.

You walk outside, take off the cover and locks and then load your gear on the bike.

You eat some breakfast while reviewing the maps and route information for the day.

You strap on your helmet, pull on your gloves and ride off into the day's adventures and discoveries, every turn a joy, every hill revealing a new possibility just over the crest. Your nostrils fill with the smells of flowers, fresh crops, wild herbs, rich soil and sea air. You feel the temperature change as you descend into valleys and cross deserts. The wind, the weather, the road, the motorcycle and you are all together, all one.

You discover small towns and little cafes. You meet friendly people who are interested in you, your machine and your journey. It is easy to meet them, as there is no barrier, no boundary, no isolating vehicle between you and them. You are open to their world, to their children and to their curiosity.

At the end of the day you pull into your next destination. You fill the bike up with gas and check it over. You unload, lock and cover the bike, patting it a quick thanks for another day's journey. You shower, have dinner and share your discoveries and adventures with your fellow travelers over drinks around the bar, the beach or the campfire. You wander back to your bed and sleep soundly, your dreams filled not with stressful chases and escapes, but with long ago friends, adventures, laughter and joy.

Before the sun rises and the alarm goes off your eyes are already open, eager for another day.

And the rhythm begins anew.

It makes for a beautiful song of life, the steady beat pacing your soul. You never want it to end.

But earlier this week, ours did.

That morning, I rode the bike to the docks in Cape Town and loaded it into a 40' shipping container along with 16 others. As we struggled to close the door on the container I realized that this trip didn't want to end. Three of us, using all of our strength, couldn't close the door. The dock hands finally used a fork lift to force it closed and still the door shrieked in protest as the levers were pulled down on the locks. A shipping seal was snapped in place and the 2003 Southern Africa Tour was officially over.

As I watched it happen, a strange quiet filled me. The rhythm had stopped.

For days Steph and I knew it was coming. We did our best to prolong the contentment we had rekindled in our souls by discussing what we'd learned on this journey. We lingered long over sweet memories. We savored new discoveries. We marveled again at wonders we had stumbled upon along the way. We clung to each place, each experience, and each new friend.

Had we not been committed to transport the bike home by ship and be home for some family events we would have air freighted it somewhere else in the world, shipped home the 250 lbs. of excess baggage we didn't need, and kept going.

We loved the discoveries, adventures and rewards of this trip. We loved the rhythm. We wanted it go on and on and on.

Unfortunately, it wasn't an option this time.

But next time…

Be well,
Doug

PS – Before our journey ended we visited some fascinating places in Namibia and the West coast of South Africa. Some photos of this portion of our journey follow.

A beautiful walkway along the strand in Swakopmund, Namibia.

Just another day in the Namib desert, in the Western end of the Kalahari desert. This is the thermometer we have mounted on the bike, which was in the shade at the time.

We visited Sossusvlei, a unique valley that protrudes some 40 miles into the great dune sea of Namibia. The dunes stretch for hundreds of miles in an unbroken undulating ocean of sand, except for this finger of flat land piercing into it. Some dunes rise to more than 900 feet in height. To give you an idea of their immensity, the tree in the foreground of this photo is about 45 feet tall.

The bike in front of dune 45. Note the two people standing on top of the dune. As you can see here, we carried our two LowePro camera backpacks inside the two pannier boxes on the bike. The panniers provided lockable physical security and weather proof protection for our camera gear. The two round black tubes mounted to the pannier lid are two LowePro lens cases that I strapped to the pannier lid. We used them to hold the video camera, video camera batteries and a water bottle. They worked out great, as Steph was able to easily pull the video camera out, shoot and put it away while we were riding.

On the road to nowhere. Abandoned Chevrolet pickup, near Ai-Ais, Namibia.

Age, weather, rust and man combine to create art in the desert.

A Quiver Tree, which is actually a type of Aloe plant. It is called a quiver tree because the San people once used hollowed out limbs as arrow quivers.

Quiver tree bark.

Steph at Fish River Canyon, Namibia, Africa's "Grand Canyon."

Two Swedish tourists ignore the sign and head down into the canyon.

Sunset at fish river canyon.

A portion of the Cape Gannet colony at Lambert's Bay, South Africa.

A Cape Gannet comes in for a landing.

Cape Gannet in flight

A fishing boat taken over by Cormorants at Lambert's Bay.

The remains of the fishing fleet at Lambert's Bay. Fishing species have crashed in this area, leading to shrinkage of the fishing fleet from over 50 vessels to a handful.

On the beach at Muisbosskerm, which roughly translated means “tumbleweed shelter,” a unique beach restaurant & dining experience at Lambert’s Bay, South Africa. Our trip brought us many smiles, much adventure and more new friends than we could count.

Watching the sun set on our journey, Lambert’s Bay, South Africa.

11 e-Postcard from Carlsbad

11/15/2003

Hello to all,

We are home again.

We arrived home late Thursday afternoon after 36 hours of travel from Cape Town, via Frankfurt.

Our home is OK, as are those of our neighbors. Our families' homes are all OK, although we understand that one of my brother-in-law's homes was surrounded by flames and was on the fire line. We expect to have more details after we speak with them.

Steph knows of several people whose homes have burned and have lost everything. We are just beginning to research charity and relief opportunities, but a cursory search today showed there is no shortage of opportunities to help those in need.

All of our bags made it home in fine shape. The flights were fine, although the last couple of hours of the flight from Frankfurt to LA got a little warm and bumpy for Steph.

Four bins of mail awaited us.

Some trip factoids:

- We drove about 6,000 miles around Southern Africa, with about 4,500 of those miles by motorcycle.
- We traveled through five countries.
- We took about 15,000 digital photos, which took about 35 gigabytes to store.
- We shot about 13 hours of videotape.
- We used two sets of tires and 1.5 quarts of oil.
- We stayed in 25 different hotels and campgrounds.
- We were gone about six weeks.
- We discovered at least 40 vintners of excellent South Africa wine.
- We have no idea exactly how much we spent.
- We would do it again!

Steph on Safari in Botswana

Riding the Caprivi Strip, Namibia

Hiking in the mountains of Namibia.

Special thanks to all of you who kept us in your thoughts and prayers and were worried about our safety in Africa and that of our home here in California.

I've posted some updates on the web site and will continue to have new material there over the next few weeks: www.hackneys.com/africa.

We look forward to seeing all of you soon.

Until then,

be well,
Doug

Shooting the Sossusvlei valley in the Namibian dune sea.