

FRIDAY WRAP

#2.1

'A Glimpse of Humour'

14 January 2011



Sunset in Graaff-Reinet

Wrap

- ~ Rap -- to talk., *conversation*.
- ~ a piece of thin, flat bread *that can contain anything* eaten as a sandwich.
- ~ Signaling *the end (ie of a week)*
- ~ *Under wraps – secret.*

Road Trip 2011

We had planned this trip for some time.

At the end of 2009 we (my wife and I and 2 friends) had a road trip up the north west to Namibia to see the Fish River Canyon, Ai Ais and Aughrabies Falls, this year we were going to the north east to see the Drakensberg, Sani Pass, Eastern Cape and Port St Johns. The rule was going to be the same as last year where we wanted to keep to the back roads and visit towns that is off the beaten path and not drive the same road twice.

Day 1 ~ Sunday 2 January 2010.

Cape Town, Worcester, Touwsrivier, Laingsberg, Beaufort West, Aberdeen, Graaff-Reinet. 686.50km.

Our road trip started off in brilliant weather, all clear skies with mild temperatures. We were two couples in two cars taking the long road for a holiday and to seek adventure, wanting to experience the South Africa we only see in books and magazines.

We stopped at the toll with Car #1 (so called because they had the GPS) having to fetch refreshments from the boot only to hear later at the Ultra City that the bag actually contained old food. They had taken the wrong bag. Not a good start to our trip.

We were taking the N1 to get to where we want to be very quickly and soon we were making good time to Beaufort West.

We had a MP3 player with 4Gigs of music at our disposal kindly 'donated' by a colleague. But you can't choose what you want to hear, you just have to listen to it sequentially. So from Touwsrivier to Beaufort West we listened to Arabic music. Arabic music for an hour is entertaining but for 3 hours its excruciating. No offence meant, you can only belly dance so much.

Lunch and prayers in Beaufort West, realizing that we did the same thing on the same day last year but we were on our way home that time.

Then the back roads started, up to Aberdeen and Graaff-Reinet.

We reached Graaff-Reinet in the late afternoon. This town is the only town in South Africa that is surrounded completely by a nature reserve. So all around was stunning views. We rate a town by the amount of churches it has and by the amount of high-brand shops it has. Graaff-Reinet had a Steers and a KFC, so it was fairly big.

With a few phone calls we had accommodation for the night. This was going to be the blueprint for the whole trip ~ drive to a town then call ahead for accommodation. The places should be self-catering and clean with a shower and beds. We avoided the B&B as they would not be able to cater for us. We found a place called Jesa outside of the town in Adendorp. At R125 per person per night it was a bargain. It was an old place but it was clean and well kept and the manager extra friendly.

A fire was made for an impromptu braai as we watched a spectacular sunset as the rain clouds moved in overhead. We had chops and sausage and crisps for supper. Excellent if you hungry.

After some discussion the goals of the trip was reset. No more Sani Pass and Eastern Cape as Sani Pass is only accessible by 4X4 and the tractor charges R500 per person for the 10km trip. So we were rather going to Maseru to see if we can reach the Sani Pass that way though we doubted it from the start.

Day 2 ~ Monday 3 January 2011.
Graaff-Reinet, Middelburg, Burgersdorp (R56), Aliwal North, Rouxville, Zastron, Wepener, Dewetsdorp(oops), Wepener, Hobhouse, Maseru. 676.5km

The next morning after a night of rain and a hearty breakfast we were back on the road.

We drove through the town taking in the sights and wanting an ATM and petrol. The town was crowded, every ATM had a long queue, every step and shady point and people seated there. I enquired at the garage and was informed it is All Pay day, the day grants are paid out to the needy and it was the town's busiest day. Car #1's driver commented that the ANC is really good to the people. Yeah right, but it means we normal people can't get to the ATM's.

On the Road.

Middelburg.

Burgersdorp (R56).

Aliwal North. There was a Pick Pay, Shoprite, Wimpy and Steers. This town was on the fast flowing muddy Orange River, filled to capacity due to the rain in the highlands. Here we stopped for a glut break (your bum falls asleep after so long in the seat), toilet and refreshments.

After some shoddy service at the Steer's and a lost car keys scare we were back on the road. No lunch.



Bridge across the Orange River at Aliwal North



Storm arising ~ On the road to Wepener

As we turned north to Zastron at Rouxville we could see the huge thunder clouds lying ahead. The whole region was inundated with bad weather and there was a deluge of rain causing floods and the Vaal dam's floodgates to be opened. We were heading right into this storm.

The road was bad, filled with potholes. And just after Zastron the sky closed in and the rain came pelting down. Rain like you seldom experienced. Rain so hard that everything turns to grey outside. Greyout. Very, very bad weather and very, very bad road led to nerves being frazzled.

All along the route from Aliwal North we were met with incredible vistas with each topping of a hill or winding through a pass. The views were stunning and you realise why people travel from all over the world to come travel our back roads. Awesome. Now there was nothing to see.

We duly missed the Hobhouse turnoff and headed instead for Dewetsdorp, way off course. We can blame this on a 'GPS

malfunction', notice the quotes. In Dewetsdorp, with the rain easing up we refueled and we headed back the way we came to get Maseru before nightfall with me now in the lead. We did not stop until we reached the border crossing.



Border crossing



Tourist Information Centre in Maseru, Lesotho

We entered Maseru in the rain at sunset and everything looked dark and muddy and wet. After some searching we opted for a lodge on the Main road just outside town. Self-catering check, clean check, shower check. This was four modern apartments in one building all with five star plushness. A bit expensive but a excellent find.

After a supper of Viennas, sausages , beans and baked potatoes everybody was bushed and it was early to bed for all of us.

Day 3 ~ Tuesday 4 January 2011.
Maseru, Mafeteng, Wepener, Zastron, Rouxville, Aliwal North. 255.8km

We were met by a most beautiful sight when we woke up. The sky was clear and the view from the front window was stupendous. No wonder Lesotho is known as the Mountain Kingdom.

After checking out we made our way to the famous Tourist Information building

in downtown Maseru shaped like a Basotho hat which I could remember from my school days visit way back in 1974. Remember Nas? Saatchie?

We filled on Tourissy stuff and the pamphlets and maps. We would not be able to get to the Sani Pass nor the Mojale Dam nor the highest waterfall in southern Africa as they were all accessible with a 4x4 and the gravel roads were notoriously bad. We had a walk around and visited the local Shoprite.

There I met an old man at the water fridges. After an exchange of 'Good day' and 'How are you?' he replied that he is fine and after some hesitation he said, 'And I am happy', with a big smile on his face, 'because God is here...' and he pointed at his chest. You travel 1500km to be taught something beautiful by an old man in Shoprite.

Now we were heading south to Mafeteng to spend another night there or further



Goods for Sale ~ Maseru

on in Quiling.

We stopped slightly in Mafeteng. It looked like they were having an All Pay day too. The town was crowded. The only shop worthwhile looking at was a Shoprite. I am not knocking this town but this was definitely a no-horse town. Sorry all you Lesothonians/ Lesthowaninans whatever. I love your country anyway.

We headed east now to Quiling but not even a kilometer out of town the road got very bad. And I mean very. After some consultation we opted to do a u-turn and head through van Rooyensnek Border Post to Wepener and on to spend the night in Aliwal North. This was the first of two times we were to drive the exact same road. And we were glad to be back in South Africa.

Another day with no lunch.

With the rain now making a comeback we reached Aliwal North and after a quick search we found a place to sleep for the night but it was tiny, there wasn't even place for our luggage, and with

some more phone calls we found a place at half the price and three times the size. Old yes but clean and self-catering. And right next door to the Aliwal Spa. Ooh nice.

A supper of Moroccan chicken sosaties and drumsticks was a worthwhile feast and fit a for king.

Day 4 ~ Wednesday 5 January 2011.
Aliwal North, Queenstown, Sada, Fort Beaufort, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth.
517.7km

We woke up with Car# 1's couple already packed and bed's made up and gone. For a walk.

By 10.00 we were on the road heading due east to Queenstown under a perfectly blue sky. We went thru some stunning passes and after glut break, toilet and refreshments we were back on the road heading to Fort Beaufort and Grahamstown. We entered Grahamstown with rain in search of food. We found a KFC and with no 'Halaal' certificate so we rather carried on to Port Elizabeth.

After Grahamstown the sun came out and we had clear skies all the way to PE. After one visit to a lodge we found excellent lodging at the 'Crow's Nest' two blocks up from Beach Road.

Supper was taken early with a search for an Ocean Basket not producing a 'halaal' one and we ended up at Kentucky on the beachfront opposite the Boardwalk. Is it 'halaal' to eat at a Casino.? Food tastes good when you are hungry.

Stomach full we headed home for another early night as everyone was tired, we were soon happily in dream land.

Day 5 ~ Thursday 6 January 2011.
Port Elizabeth, Jeffriesbay, Plett, Knysna, George, Kleinbrakrivier.
413.5km

I was up before dawn to take some photos of the sunrise. It was surprisingly good, with PE being said to be so un-picturesque..

After breakfast and check out and watching England beat the stuffing out of Australia at cricket we went on a quick tour of Beach Road and a walk on



Shark Rock Pier, Beach Road Port Elizabeth



Donkin Hill lighthouse ~ Port Elizabeth



Keurboom River Estuary ~ Plettenberg Bay

Shark Rock Pier. It was a warm day but the wind kept everyone cool even cold. Then to the flea market then on to the City Centre.

Here the 'GPS' way led us again and we ended up on the edge of Govan Mbeki Road. With a quick drive in a circle we ended up exactly where we were ten minutes ago. You really can't trust GPS and I realise even with a GPS you can get lost. Not that I did not know where I was for one minute. The other car ended up on the road to George while we still went for a tour of mid town and got to see the Lighthouse on the Donkin Hill. Awesome.

This lighthouse on top of the hill had the biggest South African flag I have ever seen flapping in the wind, it was stunning and by 1300 we were on the way to Knysna.

Lunch in Jeffries Bay. Still windy.

Now the day was getting hotter and hotter as we were getting closer to Cape Town.

We stopped on the hill in Plett then

again at the Blaukrans Pass to watch the people bungee-jumping. I wanted to jump but I was chewing some gum and I was afraid I might lose it. I know someone who, after she jumped, they had to replace the rope and her bra strap. But that is another story.

Then on to Knysna. Revised. On to George. Revised. On to Kleinbrakrivier.

There was a house there that we could use for free which proved to be a far less exciting experience. WE felt more of an intrusion than a visitor, but we did what we had to eat, sleep and watch TV, and prepare us for another day tomorrow.

**Day 6 ~ Friday 7 January 2011.
Kleinbrakrivier, George, Oudtshoorn,
Calitzdorp. 553km**

We woke up early and was ready early for our trip to George for Jumu'ah. They day was getting hotter from the onset and George was baking in the heat when we got there. We went to Pick&Pay just for the air-conditioning until it was time for Mosque. We found a lot of

Capetonians in the Mosque and I even



George Mosque

had two cousins sitting at the door like 2 security guards.

There was a slight breeze thru the mosque but the ladies suffered as they had no ventilation upstairs. We were glad to be back in an air-conditioned car and with a quick 'lunch' at Tastebuds. Then we and Car #1 parted company as they were spending another night in Kleinbrakrivier and we making our way to Calitzdorp and R62.

It was short hop over the Outeniqua Pass to Oudtshoorn and, as we went up the pass, it started to get cooler right down to 29.5 from 34.5 in George. But much to our dismay the mercury started to climb as soon as we descended on the other side., first up to 41.5 then to 44.5. Oudtshoorn was just wilted in the heat with many a shop and business closed already by 1600 on Friday. I did not blame them. I did a quick visit to the Ostrich Shop with my wife refusing to get out of the air-conditioned car. I wanted to buy an

ostrich egg but realised it would be cooked by the time we get home.

With a quick U-turn I was on my way again to Calitzdorp.

We stopped at the most interesting and friendliest Road Stall of the whole trip. The shop had the most interesting things and the lady behind the counter was chatty and welcoming. I bought some homemade ginger beer and some extraordinary salad dressing that looked too good to use. Only after I had ridden off did I realise I did not take a photo of the shop. A return visit is now required.

Calitzdorp, for all its fame, is tiny. Just one stop street and a sort-of supermarket and a butcher and 20 bars and or coffee shops. Okay maybe not 20 but a lot. One even advertise they are biker friendly. What does that mean? That they do not shoot bikers on sight? Anyway.

This town was tiny because the two churches were built next to each other something you seldom see in a small town as in the old days these churches were quite patriarchal.

We found a place to stay very quickly and it turned out to be the best place and the cheapest. It was fully fitted with heaters and two fans, 2 bathrooms, lounge and dining area with 5 chairs. They even supplied mosquito repellent. There was no microwave and TV but that was a blessing. They even had a pool for residents which is a boon in +40deg heat. The bedding and towels were crispy and clean and a return visit is now definitely required.

We had a fight with a huge cockroach who seemed to have taken up residence in the cottage. These insects were dangerous as they seem to run at you when you try to hit them with a broom. I was quite disturbed when I finally 'offed' him. He did but up a good fight though and I honourably flushed him down the toilet.

Supper was fried potatoes and fried fresh fish with salad. Cooking required some ingenuity in the absence of a microwave but we survived. Strange our we rely on modern technology.



Pool at Spekboom Cottages ~ Calitzdorp



No 6 Spekboom Cottages ~ Calitzdorp



The street where I lived ~ Spekboom Cottages ~ Calitzdorp

Even with the heat we noticed that everybody else's windows were closed and as we were busy cooking we realised why when a huge cockroach flew in by the window through my hair. Through my hair!! Cockroaches are not one of my favourite insects so being attacked by one was rather distressing. I had to murder another one later the evening. We did not put a foot outside as there were insects of all kinds meandering outside, some looking quite vicious, some with horns!

Sleep finally came. The mosquitoes being quite disturbing but we survived after lavishly applying insect repellent and switching all the electronic anti-insect devices. With the oppressive heat the fan ran the whole night.

**Day 7 ~ Saturday 8 January 2011.
Calitzdorp, Ladismith, Barrydale,
Montague, Ashton, Robertson, Worcester,
Cape Town. 553km**

I was up at the crack of dawn with my camera on the hill at the top of the street waiting for the sun to rise.



Sunrise on Spekboom

It is quite stunning to be outside on a clear day out in the country. You could hear far-off voices in the town and the cars rushing either way on the R62. And through the trees the church steeple was glinting in the dawn.

The sun was slowly making her appearance. No fuss, no bother, but was lighting all the mountains all around in a sharp orange hue. Awesome. And very soon was lighting up the whole area in her sharp orange.

After some photos it was back to bed for a nap and later woke up for breakfast and a shower and getting ready for the final slog on the road. The temperature at 0830 was above 30deg already and the quicker we get on the road the quicker we will have air-conditioning. Yay.

I went to take some final pics at the pool area and was surprised to find a mouse doing laps in the pool. He probably fell in and there was no way he could get out of the pool. It actually swam right up to me and looked at me with pleading eyes then continued



Doing his laps

with his laps. I thought of just whacking it with a stick but I thought it would not be nice for anybody coming to swim later so I did a quick Macgyver with a brick and a stick and mousey swam up to the brick, shook himself

off, then ran up the stick and out of harms way.

He stood for a moment and looked at me. I did not know what to do so I waved to him. With another shake and a look he was up and gone in the undergrowth.

Good shot, my good deed for the day was done.

By 1000 we were on the road with the temperature steadily climbing. I took some pics of the town and only later saw the advert for the smallest book shop in South Africa and I missed it. Damn, a return visit is now definitely required.



I later stopped at Ronnie's Sex Shop. This is a bar, people, a world famous bar. This is one of the reasons I came back along the R62. The inside of Ronnie's Sex Shop is decorated with all sorts of underwear and the walls is covered in photos and business cards. This is out in the middle of nowhere but at that early hour the regulars



were already seated at the bar. Ronnie, with his long beard, was having his picture taken with some tourists. I bought myself an ice-cold bottled water as a memento but we drank it up before Montague.

Back on the road, listening now to 'Whackhead' Simpson on the MP3 modulator taking my mind off the road and eating up the kilometers and very soon the mountains of Montague was in sight. The roads was busy with lots of City-dwellers coming out into the country for a drive and breakfast. Ashton, Robertson, Worcester. And back on the N1 and only the second time we drove the same road twice.

Through the Huguenot Tunnel with Table Mountain, in all its glory, now in sight.

We arrived home at 1430 hot, hungry, tired and happy to be home.

And in high spirits for the experience. We can't wait to do it again.

Total Kilometres : 3103km

What I have learnt

1. Always take a electric lead, the electric appliance and the outlet may not always be close to each other.
2. Don't forget the bug spray, Tabard and Doom. And fly swatter. And a hammer for the horny bugs.
3. You may have three phones and a GPS but it does not mean you won't get lost.
4. Always have more than enough cash.
5. Always carry more than enough toilet paper.
6. Bring our own pan, plates and utensils especially a cutting board.
7. Make sure your meat is frozen and preferably vacuum packed.
8. Food items for quick meals lengthens the holiday.
9. Don't bank on finding halaal food along the way.
10. Keep a diary of petrol, kilometers travelled, temperature etc.

