

Monday, October 31, 2005

As one trip ends another begins. I say goodbye to my fellow Donegal travelers and head back to Tswahne (Pretoria) with Dores. We share hugs all around. I am glad I don't have to face the 19 hour plane ride for another week.

On our ride back to her flat, Dores asks what I'd like to eat. I answer in one word
VEGETARIAN!!!!

She obliges me as we share a meal of vegetarian pasta and salad. Our week's lineup is as follows:

1. Tue Nov 1 – Rest and recovery day for me as Dores works at Pretoria University. I will use the day to organize pictures, type up my hand written travel logs, and do laundry. Then we will go to the University for me to load by travel logs on my webpage.
2. Wed Nov 2 – Make the short, 40 kilo (25 mile) drive to Cullinan where the largest diamond was found and DeBeers has for 100 years been mining diamonds.
3. Thu Nov 3 – We will make another short drive to view the Tswain Meteorite Crater in the morning, and then explore downtown Tswahne (Pretoria) in the afternoon, i.e., Church Square, the Paul Kruger house, the “heroes” cemetery (white heroes that is both British & Afrikaans), and finally walk the zoo area.
4. Fri Nov 4 & Sat Nov 5 – We'll make the long, nearly 7 hour 4,000 kilo (250 mile) drive to Kimberly where the original, but now defunct Diamond Mine is located (home of the largest hand dug hole). We'll also visit the MagGregor Museum, Wildebeest Kuil and the !Xun and Khwe San rock engravings found there, and finally Magersfontien, the scene of one of many Boer war (1899 – 1903) battlefields.
5. Sun Nov 6 – Church with Graham Duncan at the church he convenes in Mamolodi Township and followed by marketing at the Sunday market at Rosebank Mall in Joburg.

So that's the lineup. So here goes (skipping Tuesday as it is largely a rest day). I should point out that in a weak moment I mention to Dores that Wednesday is my birthday. She says she'll make a chocolate cake with chocolate icing and invite a friend she knows from Binghamton University name Tu. She's doing research at the archives in downtown Tswahne (Pretoria)

Wednesday, November 2nd.



It turns out to be a very hot day we discover as we arrive in Cullinah. Reports say it will reach nearly 38 degrees Celsius (that's 100 degrees Fahrenheit). Luckily it's the very dry heat I remember from my days in the mid 80's when I lived in Egypt. To me this is MUCH more bearable than the 80 degree Fahrenheit with humidity to match we have back home in PA.

We have a nice tour of the mine, accompanying us on our tour is a local man from Joburg (seems the women folk are off shopping today and he decided to come here on his own) and a French couple. Our guide is very nice, but has a rather thick accent that makes it hard for me to understand her at times.



As I said earlier, it is here that the largest diamond (about the size of a fist) in the world was found around 1905. It was cut and made into I think nine stones (all in possession of the British Royalty). It resulted in the largest polished diamond – the Star of Africa, now on the British Royal Scepter.

The tour takes us through the working mine and to a lookout point. The hole here is larger than the one in Kimberly (where we go later in the week), but it was dug by machinery, hence the more famous one in Kimberly, which is known as the largest hand dug hole in the world.



After touring the mine we stop for lunch at a nice outdoor café called the Lemon Tree. The street outside the mine is a series of old mining buildings that used to house the miners. They now house restaurants and shops, including the place we eat at. It



The evening is left for my little B-Day party. We shop for the ingredients for the cake and go home and Dores bake the cake and cooks a fish she purchased while doing archaeological research in nearby Mozambique. While she cooks I work on, what else, organizing my pictures and typing up my travel logs. We are joined by Tu and have a wonderful small party.... just as I like it.

Thursday, November 3rd

We're off north to Tswain Meteorite Crater. Million of years ago a meteorite crashed at this location. It's another hot day, maybe even hotter than yesterday. Along the way I snap many pictures and movies of the townships as we pass by. Going by them just continues to emphasize to me the two words that is the new South Africa, i.e., it is truly a work in progress. There are the beautiful homes off a distance from the road that can be barely scene, and then there are the little shacks with privies crowded together by the road. I might mention that we occasionally pass by small government housing sites that are being built to replace these shanty towns, but they are going up at too woefully a pace to match the need.



We arrive at the crater around 10:30 a.m. It is our expectation that we will quickly view the crater from a lookout point and then drive back to Tswahne (Pretoria). **WRONG!** It turns out the only way to see the crater is to follow a 7.2 kilo (4.5 mile) trail. Actually there is a short cut to trim that distance a bit but only very slightly. Dores is not exactly prepared for hiking as she is wearing her best sandals and neither of us brought a hat for the hot, bright sun. But, off we go, after a quick purchase of some mineral water. The walk is wonderful and we are literarily by ourselves. The landscape is barren but beautiful and we catch overviews of the meteorite crater as we go. We



stop and snap many pictures along the way. This is the perfect place to put the panorama mode of the camera to work.

All in all it takes us slightly less than two hours for our hike, which includes a fairly steep descent to the crater's bed. There is a very salty lake there, which resulted in a factory operating until the 1950s. The factory took the salty water from the lake and refined it. We pass the remains of the factory on our way back to the visitor

center and our car.



We are glad to get back as we are long ago use up our water. Given the desert and the heat, one quickly gains the appreciation of the importance of water at times like this. We stop, and each purchase and drink very quickly more mineral water. We both go back for a Fanta Orange drink that also goes down very quickly.



Then it's back to the city for our tour of downtown Tswahne (Pretoria). Talk about a difference in surroundings. We go from complete solitude to the hustle and bustle of a typical African city. Pretoria was, until Apartheid fell, largely the domains of the white world, with the blacks only allowed if they had a proper work pass. Otherwise they were subjugated to either living in one of the townships or a homeland area (such an area was found at Mthatha when it was called Transkei). The city center at Church Square houses a statue of Paul Kruger (the first President of the "white" South African Republic after the Afrikaans left British controlled Capetown region on the great trek inland and

north). Around it sits many elegant, colonial buildings from the days of white control. The ironic part is that nary a white face is to be found in the new downtown Tswahne..... save my and Dore's face and a smattering of other white faces we see as we walk about. Somewhere, I think Mr. Kruger must be turning over in his grave. Perhaps I will soon see as we have on the agenda for the day the "heroes" graveyard where Mr. Kruger is buried.

We walk from Church Square east to the Paul Kruger house and then return to the car. We were very lucky to find a parking space right on the square and after a small tip to a young man there left our car safe and sound, i.e., after multiple locks were engaged (a routine practice in crime ridden South Africa).



Our next stop is the aforementioned “heroes” graveyard. We are able to find a gate open, drive right in and stroll reading the grave stones as we go. We are there alone save for a couple of watchmen. The graveyard is split into two sections, the first we come to is the British section where we see many graves of fallen heroes from the Boer War. The second is the Afrikaans section. Here we come



upon the graves of many famous Afrikaners. Among those we see are Paul Kruger’s gravel (no signs of his turning over in his grave, but who knows what is happening down there!) and H.F. Verwoerd, former Prime Minister who is credited with being the architect of the Apartheid System. We also see the heroes acre where many Afrikaans heroes of the Boer war are buried.

Our final stop for the day is the zoo area. It is already nearing five o’clock as we stroll pass by the vendors in front of the zoo and across from the street from the mini-bus taxi stands. Because of blatant in your face, in the open crime, this is supposed to be an area to be avoided by whites, especially late in the evening. But, we pass by without incident.

We end the day meeting Tu for a drink at a little out door café.

Friday, November 4th

This is the first of our big, two day road trip to Kimberly in Northern Cape Province. Here is the location of the original diamond mines in South Africa (now out of operation and a museum). It is the home of the Big Hole. Though not as large as the one in Cullinan, it was hand dug and is therefore known as the larges man made hole ever dug.

The drive to Kimberly is some 4,500 plus kilos (250 miles). After passing through Joburg and the normal morning traffic jam up on the N1, we pass by several gold mines with their large man made mountains of left over mining debris. Shortly after, the landscape quickly turns into a VERY flat one. It reminds me of West Texas, minus the tumble weeds. It’s very dry and home to mostly very large cattle ranches.



As we pass through the two towns of Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp, we see the ever present two worlds of townships shacks and the nice homes of those with money. We also find we are entering a world where the first language for all, black and white is Afrikaans. Everyone first speak to us in Afrikaans and only after we say we only know English to the switch over.



We reach Kimberly around 3:00 p.m. and Dores calls her archaeological contact named Richard Morris. He gives us a tip on a good B & B, and we set up to meet at a local British pub around 5:00 p.m. The little B & B is lovely and only costs 340 Rands (under \$50) for both of us. Once settled in, we head for the mine. There is supposed to be a nice little 19th century village here of the old town of Kimberly when it was a virtual boom town. This town went from non existence to a boom little city of 30,000 plus people almost overnight after diamonds were found in the 19th century.

Unfortunately we find the museum grounds one big construction zone, as they are undergoing a large renovation. They do have a few of the quaint, little building open for observing as we make the walk to the Big Hole. The Big Hole can only be viewed from a cage enclosed structure. I am able to take a picture using the panoramic mode of my camera being careful not to drop it into the Big Hole. They also have three moderately sized bins full of fake diamonds representing all the diamonds found from this site over the time of its operation. This is the sum total of diamonds produced from some 22.5 million tons of hand excavated earth!



We return and meet Richard for a drink, and dinner. I have the traditional South African dish called Bobotie. It's like a Shepard pie of minced lamb & beef with a curry taste and a creamy sour cream based topping. During the meal we sketch out our Saturday, which includes visiting the MacGregor Museum where Richard works, driving to Wildebeest Kuil where we will find a sacred !Xun and Khwe San rock art engravings site and finally on our way home, a quick stop at Magersfontein where there was a famous battle during the 1899-1902 Boer War.

Saturday, November 5th

We awake to a lovely B & B breakfast we share with other guests, two South African folk on their way to Cape Town, and a couple from Luxembourg in the middle of a three week tour of South Africa. We walk to the museum and find it is excellent. It is housed in an old British Colonial building. In the museum you basically walk through South Africa's history. You begin with its natural history (of animals of the region), next comes the human anthropological history of Homo Sapiens, which leads to the more recent settlements of humans in South African, native African as well as Dutch & British settlers, and finally leads up to the present with info on the British Boer War and the siege of Kimberly.

Our next stop is Wildebeest Kuil, which some 1,000 to 2,000 year ago was a sacred place with rock engravings made by the !Xun and Khwe San people. The museum attempts to help the native people, as the museum is run and staffed by the descendants of the !Xun and Khwe San. They

also sell their crafts at the museum. It is another one of those solitary, amazing places I sometime find myself and have to pinch myself to realize how lucky I am. Dores and I both make some purchases of the lovely crafts and posters. We realize that every rand we spend helps the people there.



Finally we stop at Magerfontein, which is the site of a Boer War battle in 1899. Very briefly, the site is one of the few, of this very flat landscape, where there are hills of any size. Seems the Brits were coming up the road to relieve the British folks under siege in the Diamond Mine city of Kimberly (some 30 kilos – 20 miles) north. The Afrikaans (Boers) were defending the road to stop their advance. The Brits (Scottish Highlands dressed in Kilts) presumed the Boers had taken the high ground and planned to over run them there with their superior numbers and firepower. They began the morning by lobbing cannon fire into the hills to try to soften them up. But, unbeknown to them, the clever Boers had tried a new, here-to-fore never used tactic of digging and hiding in trenches at the foot of the hill. So, the cannon fire didn't affect the Boers at all and only gave them warning of the coming attack. To make a long story short, the Brits attacked and were surprised to find the Boers protected in the trenches and firing at them from ground level. The result was a massacre of the kilted Scottish Highland troops. The end result was that it was many months before any relief came for the Brits in Kimberly (which included John Rhodes – the Diamond Mogul).



After our visit to the battlefield all that is left is the long drive back to Tswahne (Pretoria). We take the slightly longer but much better N1 toll road. It is a first class road, not dissimilar to our interstate roads. As we near Joburg we start seeing some large, irrigated crops growing alongside the cattle ranches.

Sunday, November 6th

I meet Graham Duncan at his house for the drive to Mamolodi and the UPCSA Church where he is the convener. It is a special Youth Sunday, with the youth preparing the service. Graham is not quite certain what has been prepared by the youth, but has a sermon in hand just in case. We

swing by and pick up Zwai at the Youth housing (remember him from the early part of Week one). It is good to see him again. We make the drive to the church yard and arrive about a half hour early. Zwai and I have a chance to talk as Graham attempts to figure out what is going on. We talk about his plans, the challenges of the new South Africa. I am somewhat surprised, as we greet people of the congregation that this must be a former "white" PCSA church. I say this as all the women are wearing the white hat which signifies a former PCSA Congregation. Being in a township I was expecting the black hat of the former "black" RPC.

Graham returns and says the youth will be leading the entire service. He warns me that at some point I will be asked to say a few words. He leads Zwai and me into the elder's room for handshakes and hugs follow by a brief prayer. We then enter the sanctuary. I sit between Zwai and Graham in the front of the church. I might mention that Sandra was off with her granddaughter at a white UPCSA congregation in Pretoria. It seems that her daughter and husband typically have late Saturday evenings with his Afrikaans family and friends, and as a result rarely get their daughter to church. So Sandra has taken over that role. Sounds like an all too familiar scenario back home.

At first things seem to be normal, with a young woman leading us through the planned order of service. But, there is a twist that unexpectedly develops. At some point I notice a very nicely dressed young man who really gets into the singing of the hymns, much more than the more stoic members of the former PCSA congregation. Graham mentions to me later, though a black congregation that follows much the same format we saw in Mthatha Congregations, this being a former PCSA Congregation does not exhibit as much motion and exuberance as a former RPC Congregation. It's a subtle difference but is apparent upon reflection. Anyway, at the point in the service when the Sermon is preached, suddenly the nicely dressed man I just mentioned is introduced as the preacher for the day. It turns out, as I was to say to Graham later, I came to a Presbyterian Church and a Pentecostal Service broke out. Note when I told him this he replied not to not spread this word around as it would ruin his reputation. So mum's the word. Anyway, I did not understand most of the language our preacher for the day spoke but it was not hard to get the gist of his hour plus long sermon. I paraphrase his message: Come down Jesus, Thank you Jesus (actually GU-sus) Save us Jesus. I sensed Graham was as surprised as I was, but was unhappily not in control.

The service then got back on a more even path with different youth called upon to come forward to read scripture, make brief statements and sing. But then our Pentecostal friend was asked to pray as all the children came forward. He then went back into a long, long prayer and was literally walking the aisles as he ranted on and on often in tears as we hummed a hymn in the background. As the service passed the two hour mark, Graham chose to take control by standing and putting his hand up, signaling the end of the prayer. He then moved the service through the final formal, Presbyterian, order of service.

As we left the church and Zwai & I were awaiting Graham, I said to Zwai that I guess we got fire and brimstone today. At first he didn't understand what I meant, but then realized and gave me a big laugh. Graham then came and we drove to meet Sandra and her daughter for breakfast. On the way he talked of changes in the future for youth Sunday, with all plans going through him. He also said there is some worry that this kind of Pentecostal service may be what many of (particularly the youth) secretly prefer. More likely he says it is the actions of the young woman who ran the service who took it upon herself to invite this young (it turns out AOG) pastor. Anyway, it made for an interesting experience for a white Presbyterian from the States used to stoically worshipping with little or no movement.

I had a nice breakfast with Graham, Zwai, Sandra and the Duncan's granddaughter. We then drove back to the Duncan's house after Graham barely missed backing into the car Sandra was driving. There I showed them my pictures from Mthtatha (and gave them a disc with my travel logs & pictures) as I awaited Dores. She came and we said our goodbyes. The Duncans said they hoped to come stateside very soon, and I said you be sure to let us know when.

Dores and I then drove to our final outing of my trip, a drive to Joburg and the Rosebank Mall. This is your basic normal mall, but with one section devoted to crafts from Africa where bargaining for the final price is the game. But, there is more. On Sunday only, there is a very large room open as sort of a flea market, with even more folks selling their crafts, food, and other stuff. It is WONDERFUL. My long since departed Donegal partners would have LOVED this place. It makes any other market they went to pale in comparison. Anyway, I had a little over 200 rands (\$30) left to spend before departing tomorrow. I tried to use that in my bargaining by saying, I have only this much money as I am leaving, I really love this (name the item) can you possibly give me it for this price. I an able to use it to my advantage to buy some small beaded Christmas ornaments, a very nice 1.5 X 2 meter hand painted tapestry, as well as some small clay pots for my mother's miniature displays.



We stop afterwards for cappuccino and chocolate cake before heading home. That evening we go out to a really nice dinner on my tab before calling it a day (actually for me a vacation).

Monday, November 7th

Nothing really to report as Doris has to work and I stay home to pack and spend time on my laptop writing travel logs and organizing all my many pictures and turning some of them into panoramas. Check my webpage to view some of them at www.geocities.com/donegalpbyhunger/umtatatrip2005

That's largely all from this trip as the journey home was very smooth and uneventful if a little long (19 hour flight). I might mention that as I sat awaiting my flight home a young man came by asking if I was willing to take part in a tourist bureau questionnaire. I say yes mentioning it will help pass the time. At one point he asked which provinces I had visited. As I listed them one by one I came up with, Gauteng, Northwest, Kwa Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, and Free State, I realize I've seen a lot of the country missing only Western Cape (and Cape Town a big miss), Limpop and Mpumalanga (and Kruger Game Reserve also a big miss). All in all not bad for a two plus week adventure.

One final observation, as I glance at a newspaper as I winged my way home, I read an article on the police foiling a plot to attack the Rosebank Mall on the very day we were there. Seems the police got a tip of the plan and found an empty unlocked car with massive amount of armaments in the back seat. They suspect that someone drove the weapons in and left it for gang of youth to come, pick up the weapons and head to the mall for the attack and robbery. Such attacks are common place and one of many problems facing the new South African.

Although in my trip we were lucky not to run into any violence or robbery, the problem of crime is very much all around. I fear it is the vestiges of the legacy of Apartheid. It was a system which bred a small minority (the whites) with a protected status of opulence, while the black majority were held in abject poverty out of site and largely out of mind of the white world. Now thankfully that world has ended, and all have mixed together, but the legacy of the haves and have nots still is very much present. The whites, still with most of the wealth, live apart in their nice neighborhoods behind razor sharp barbed wire and electrified fences, while the black majority largely live in poverty in shacks in the townships.

Dores said one of her professor friends who was at Pretoria U. for a semester lecturing said upon leaving (and excuse the language but it is a direct quote) "He was glad to be leaving as this is one f___ed up country." I choose to differ and would reply to him that perhaps it is a "f___ed" up place (although I would argue with that too), but it is not nearly as "f___ed" up as it used to be. Further, though no doubt there are many challenges ahead, the HIV \ AIDS crisis, unemployment of over 40%, extreme differential in income levels, massive crime, violent and petty, to name a few, I choose to see South Africa as a wonderful country honorably attempting to overcome a terrible past, and attempting to take the first baby steps to make it happen. But to be honest, it won't happen over night and may take generations to make it work.

I mention to Zwai in our conversation at church yesterday, that we in the USA too have a somewhat different but similar legacy of racism and segregation that we've been working on for a long, long time. It is a legacy we are still trying to overcome since the day Rosa Park (who died while I was here) first resisted when she sat, in protest, in the front of the bus some fifty years ago.

So I say to my friends in South Africa have patience things, with God's help, will get better if we, as Christian, black and white, follow Jesus' teaching to feed the hungry. Luckily, patience and spirit of the Lord are something my South African friends are much, much richer in than we in America. In fact it is a lesson we could learn from our South African friends and Mthatha Presbytery partners. So in closing I say God Bless all the many friends I have met on my journey.