

South Africa, November 2016

We are just over a week into our fourth visit to South Africa and are currently staying at our nephew's villa on the outskirts of Cape Town, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean,

We arrived here late on Sunday, November 6 and spent Monday and Tuesday in and around Cape Town. We visited the Victoria and Alfred Water-front, which is a large expanse of restaurants, shops and entertainment sites very close to downtown and with beautiful vistas of the ocean and Table Mountain.



On our second day we spent some time in Camps Bay, very close to Bantry Bay which is where we were staying, and strolled along the beautiful beach on the Atlantic. In the

afternoon we went to TWO wine tasting venues near Stellenbosch (one tasting was paired with chocolates, the other a simple tasting of six local wines) before dining at one of the best restaurants in the Cape Town area. The wine tastings are ridiculously cheap and, as we were being driven to each, we took full advantage of the sampling, sitting in beautiful shaded gardens at the wine estates.



On Wednesday we drove north from Cape Town to the small town of Tulbagh, set in a wide valley at the southern end of the Cederberg Mountains. The town is only two short streets but has a large number of historic buildings from the Dutch Colonial and Victorian era, covering a period of about 150 years from the late 1700s. The town is the fourth oldest in South Africa and was a major settlement for the early Huguenot refugees as well as a stop on the



way north to Kimberley at the onset of the Diamond Rush.



After two nights in Tulbagh we drove further north to Clanwilliam which, again, is a small town right in the Cederberg Range. The town is “base camp” for many tourist activities in the mountains (usually more active than ourselves) and has little else attract visitors—except one excellent restaurant that provides a quiet oasis from the busy trading street. We have found this a not-uncommon feature in our previous visits to South Africa: one can walk off the crowded main street (perhaps the only street in some towns) and sit in an elegant Victorian restaurant or a beautiful shaded garden courtyard and enjoy a wonderful meal accompanied by some of the best wines anywhere. And, often have difficulty spending \$50!

On our one full day in Clanwilliam (Saturday) we took a drive into the mountains. We went over three passes at elevations of about 3000 feet (the range typically has peaks around 6000 feet) and spent about two hours (50 miles) on unpaved roads on a vast plateau. The scenery was magnificent as the rock formations changed in shape and color and the abundant ground cover provided contrasts of pink, blue, orange and green. There was essentially



no cultivated land and only one small hamlet on our route and we saw only two other cars on the long stretch of unpaved road. We didn't think too much about the possible consequences of a flat tire or other breakdown!

The return to Clanwilliam along the Western Cape plateau (essentially at sea level) and the whole of the drive to Franschhoek on Sunday was quite different. We were driving alongside fruit farms, vineyards and huge grain fields—all the time with a backdrop of jagged peaked gray or green mountains. We were once again amazed



at just how

beautiful this part of South Africa is and just how neat and clean everything seems to be.

Franschhoek and its near neighbor Stellenbosch are at the center of the Cape wine region with Stellenbosch the more historic town and Franschhoek being a high-end tourist destination with fancy restaurants and boutique shopping. Each is set in beautiful countryside with mountains visible in all directions. Franschhoek is also where the Hugenots settled in the late 1600s after being persecuted in their native France. There is a **huge monument** to those early settlers at the end of the main street

through the town.

On Monday we took an absolutely spectacular drive from Franschhoek in a large clockwise circle. On a perfectly clear day with sunny skies (and a brisk wind) we couldn't have had a more scenic journey in South Africa or virtually anywhere else in the world, we felt. We crossed two major mountain passes (only about 2500 feet but spectacular) and saw an ever-changing landscape. First we would be driving with vineyards on either side, then golden grain fields, then fruit farms, maybe a few cows, or goats and sheep, a few well-kept farm houses – and, of course, mountains visible in every direction throughout.



We avoided the motorway (one of the very few true expressways in South Africa) and took the much quieter and more picturesque routes, stopping every few minutes it seemed for the “perfect” photograph.

We stopped in **Worcester**, which is a charming town not unlike Stellenbosch – with its central grassy area and immaculate white-painted buildings – and soon came across a coffee shop. We parked outside (indicating to the hovering boy that we wanted him to keep an eye on the car – a trick we learned on our first visit here) and then were “buzzed” into the restaurant via a locked gate. This again is not uncommon in South Africa as unemployment is exceptionally high and petty crime correspondingly prevalent.



Once inside, however, we were in a different world and enjoyed our tea and scones in a courtyard garden with every refinement of service that might be expected in the finer places

of England, for example, but probably not common in most other parts of the world.



From Worcester we returned on a more southerly route which for the last 15 kilometers took us up Franschhoek Pass (another 2500 feet) and, at its summit, presented us with the most fantastic view over the town of ***Franschhoek and its wide and fertile valley***. Whether this was the most spectacular view of the drive is difficult to say – there were so many – but it provided a dramatic end to our day as well as a steep and thrilling drive down the switchbacks to our hotel.

On Tuesday (today) we drove back to Cape Town and to the villa once again for a five day stay. Two friends of ours from Massachusetts are joining us tomorrow for four days as they pass through South Africa on their way to a tour of Namibia. We anticipate some local touring and some more wine tasting during their stay with us.



We hope to post more on this trip as we take our next drive along the Garden Route.