

South Africa Blog 2. Cape Town and the Garden Route

At the end of our last post we had returned to Cape Town after a six day tour of the Western Cape and were anticipating the arrival of two friends to stay with us for a few days. Jay and Gordon arrived on Wednesday afternoon and stayed with us until this past Sunday (November 20). During



ing their stay we spent some time sightseeing in Cape Town and took a one day drive to nearby Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch is less than 40 miles from Cape Town, is the second oldest town in South



Africa and is home to many beautiful Dutch Colonial homes, churches and civic buildings. We took a self-guided walking tour of the central area on a beautiful sunny and warm day.



On Saturday, we were driven to the Stellenbosch area once again for visits to three Wine Estates. We had a five wine sampling at the first, lunch at the second and another five wines at the third. This last is owned by Ernie Els, one of a number of famous South African golfers.



The wines were excellent (and very cheap) and the estates were set in



absolutely stunning countryside with views over the vineyards and the surrounding mountains.

In addition to the wine tastings, the four of us enjoyed two excellent dinners at local restaurants (again on wine estates) and had two equally good dinners on the patio of the villa at which we were staying (belonging to our nephew).

This past Sunday, our friends flew to Johannesburg to begin a tour of Namibia while Molly and I set off on the second of our driving trips; this time along the Garden Route, perhaps the most visited area of South Africa. This relatively short drive of only a few hundred miles takes in some of the finest scenery there is—the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the amazing farming areas along a coastal plateau and the densely forested and green areas to the west which gives the drive its name.



We stayed two nights in Hermanus (on the Atlantic Ocean)

and two in Wilderness, in the center of the Garden Route and on the Indian Ocean. We visited the boundary between these two oceans at L'Agulhas and drove along the



Two Oceans

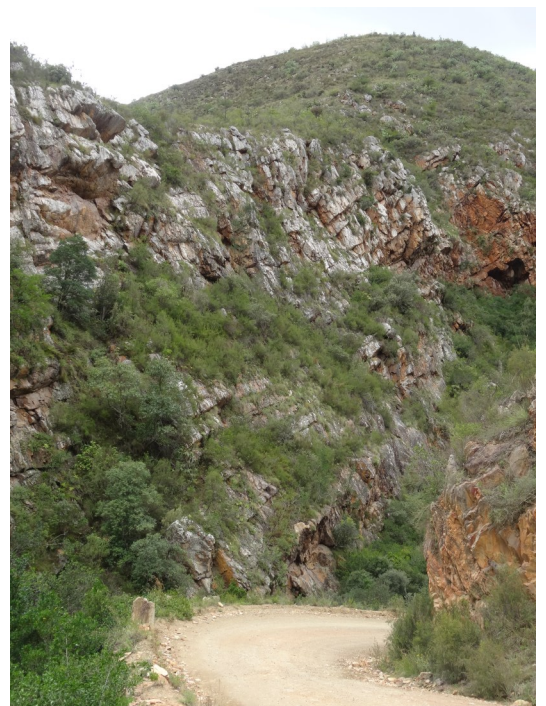


ocean

roads and through the extremely lush forests around Wilderness.

And all the time we had a beautiful mountain range to our north.

On Thursday we turned inland and headed north across the first mountain range to the Klein Karoo, a desert area in a long, relatively narrow valley which runs between the Langeberg and Swartberg Ranges. Rather than take the one hour direct route we decided on a somewhat longer drive north to cross the mountain range. The map indicated that we would go via two passes (probably less than 2000 feet each) but this would be on a 45 mile stretch of unpaved road. Since we had come through a heavy shower, we wondered about the condition of the road we would be on for about 3 hours (yes that was the prediction on Google Maps!). Would the rain have simply made the road less dusty or would we end up trying to negotiate very muddy and slippery conditions?



There was only one way to find out so we started on the unpaved road that climbed rather sedately for about an hour. It was generally wide enough for two to pass with care but we were still grateful that all we saw coming in the opposite direction were a handful of cars and a few logging trucks! There were some slick-looking spots but for the most part the road was dry, with the occasional puddle and rut with collected water.

The scenery was stunning! We passed through heavily forested areas, with every species of tree imaginable – including conifers planted for harvesting – and an equal number of different ground covers and plants and bushes. As we



started to climb the first of the two passes, there were many bends and a number of hair-raising climbs and descents.

Throughout we had superb views across the mountains and the valleys, most of which were forested or rock for-

mations but with occasional patches of farm land and even the odd tiny hamlet. At times we passed between sheer rock faces (of every color you might want) and there were even a couple of waterfalls to add a little more variety. In all, it was a remarkable road and a beautiful journey – if a little tense at times for both driver and passenger. We have taken similar roads on two previous occasions but we both felt that this was as picturesque as any and perhaps even a little more daring.

After three hours (Google was right) we emerged on to a paved road and found a coffee shop to quench our thirst and relax our nerves. We were now in the Klein Karoo, an essentially desert valley of perhaps 30 to 50 miles width.

At first it seemed like we were traveling across Nevada – except for the occasional ostrich farm – but as we approached our destination we began to see grain fields (at this elevation still being harvested), green crops and the first of the vineyards in what is now the eastern end of the wine route that stretches all the way to Cape Town. A



spectacular day's drive! Since we were in the "Ostrich Capital of the World" our Thanksgiving Dinner was from a bird somewhat bigger than the traditional turkey.



On Friday we took another drive from Oudtshoorn through the Karoo valley and across another small mountain range. We found another stretch of unpaved road but this was relatively flat and straight so we made pretty good time. Once again we saw some magnificent scenery of mountains, desert and open barren land as well as passing through one spectacular gorge.

Saturday was the day we left Ostrich Country and started west back towards Cape Town, along the famous Wine Route. The first 60 miles or so was still desert with some great views once more, just a few ostrich farms and very little in the way of





vineyards. That continued until the tiny town of Barrymore, with its quite unexpected coffee shop “on the



water”, after which we were in wine country. This would continue all the way to Montagu (where we stayed Saturday and Sunday) and essentially right back to Cape Town and up the Western Cape—perhaps 200 miles of vineyards in all.



During our stay in Montagu we took a short drive to see dozens of wine estates in this area. Once again, the scenery was magnificent and the trees in



bloom were especially colorful. We stopped for a wine and cheese tasting for our Sunday lunch. It was extremely pleasant



sitting in the shaded courtyard (despite temperatures above 100F) and a superb way to end (almost) this trip to South Africa.

Tomorrow (Monday November 28) we drive back to Cape Town to return our nephew's car, have one final meal on the patio at his villa and then leave for the airport. We have a midnight flight to Amsterdam, followed by the Transatlantic crossing so it will be Tuesday evening before we arrive in Cincinnati.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading about our trip to this beautiful country. South Africa is a diverse land with some very significant problems but must be one of the very best tourist destinations in the world. I hope to be able to express that in our full journal (on the web site soon) if anyone is interested.

Molly and Bob