

South Africa

November 2016



Bob and Molly Hillery

This was our fourth visit to South Africa and our second to our nephew's villa in Cape Town. This time we were to spend time in Cape Town (by ourselves and with friends) and took two driving trips. Much of the time we were repeating visits made on previous trips but that is no hardship in such a beautiful country.

We started with a couple of days in Cape Town before taking our first driving trip north of the city in the Western Cape. We stayed a couple of nights in three towns (Tulbagh, Clanwilliam and Franschhoek) and saw some magnificent mountain scenery and some fine examples of Dutch Colonial buildings.

On returning to Cape Town we were joined by our friends Jay and Gord who were to spend four days here before beginning their tour of Namibia. We did some sightseeing in the city and nearby Stellenbosch and took in a couple of wine tastings—as well as enjoying some great meals at local restaurants and at the villa.

When Jay and Gord left, Molly and I began an eight day driving trip along the Indian Ocean Garden Route. This is an area of spectacular ocean and mountain scenery and is probably the most visited tourist area in the country. We returned to Cape Town via the Wine Route.

Again, we passed through fantastic countryside, enjoyed more excellent meals and wine tastings—and enjoyed the company of the beautiful people of this beautiful country.

South Africa, November 2016

Saturday November 5

After breakfast with Elizabeth, Colin and Cameron, we finished our packing, got the condo ready and left for the airport soon after 12:30. We returned the rental car, checked-in and were through Security in time for an hour in the Sky Club Lounge.

Our flight to New York JFK left on time at 3:20 and we landed there at 5pm. We had a 2 hour layover so again had some time in the lounge before our 7pm overnight flight to Paris.

Sunday November 6

We arrived on time in Paris at 7:15am and followed the transfer signs (with a little help!) to the new terminal for our onward flight to Cape Town. We had a light breakfast in the Air France Lounge and boarded the Air France flight soon after 9am for a 10:10 departure. The weather in Paris was clear with a temperature of 40F – not unlike Cincinnati early yesterday morning before we left (although it had reached 60F by flight departure time from home).

Our flight to Cape Town took off about 45 minutes late (apparently Security was slow!) and it was a long (11+hours) flight over Africa. It was quite bouncy for much of the way but we both managed to get some sleep and, with two meals, the time eventually went by very well.

We arrived in Cape Town to be greeted by Jerome who drove us to the villa. Here we had a cup of tea, met the new concierge, Pat and then cleaned up before retiring. We weren't particularly tired at this point but went to sleep about 2am and actually slept well until about 8.

Monday November 7

We were up at eight and down for breakfast at 8:45. Here we met the new chef, Natasha, who is very nice. She is not as talkative as Danie had been but prepared a very good breakfast on the deck and chatted with us about her career. After breakfast, Pat stopped by and made sure that everything was OK (it was!) and arranged for our drives to various restaurant dates both this week and next.

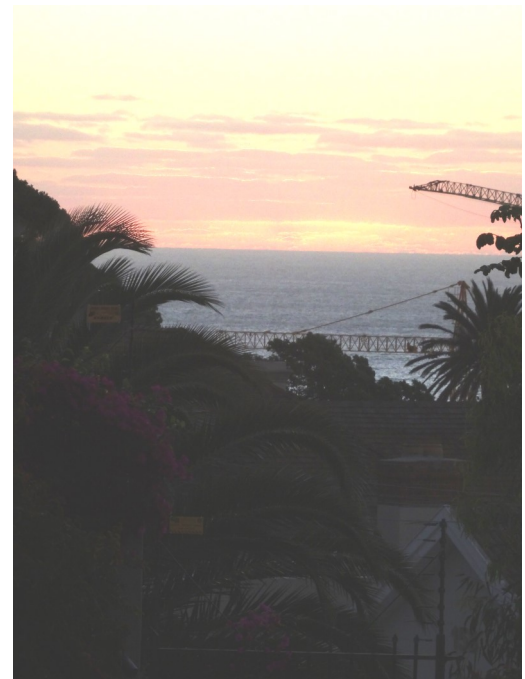


Late morning we took Mark's Audi and went to spend a little time at the V&A Waterfront shopping



Victoria and Alfred Waterfront

and restaurant area. We had coffee there, got some local currency and strolled around on a beautiful sunny day with a temperature near 70F. Perfect! Driving the Audi was a bit of an ordeal but we made it safely back. However, I think we'll take the Lexus in future.



We spent the rest of the afternoon on the deck relaxing and had a great dinner there prepared by Natasha..

Tuesday November 8

We had a relaxing breakfast after a not-so-good night; apparently jet lag kicked in for both of us. Late



morning we drove to Camps Bay, only about 10 minutes away, and strolled along the waterfront before enjoying coffee overlooking the ocean.



At 3pm, Jerome picked us up and we drove to the Stellenbosch area for two wine tastings before dinner! The first was a tasting with chocolate pairings



(we had enjoyed this two years ago and, yes, we did leave with a sample) and the second was simply a sampling of six different wines. Then we went for dinner at Ruste en Vrede, probably the best in the Cape Town area) where we

also had a six course tasting menu – although we chose not to partake of the wine pairings! The meal and service were excellent and very reasonably priced. We both agreed that it would be nice to have such a good restaurant in Cincinnati.

It was about midnight when we got back to the villa after a wonderful afternoon and evening.

Wednesday November 9

We had breakfast on the deck again and then packed ready for our six day driving trip up the west coast. We caught up with the news (a new president-elect) and relaxed before heading north about noon.

Once we got out of Cape Town it was a very pleasant 1 ½ hour drive to Tulbagh. Most of the way we

were passing through farmland and vineyards, as well as a number of wineries. To the north and east were jagged mountain peaks, although a number were seen through a haze. What surprised us was that the hay had been harvested and the vines were well developed despite the fact that it is relatively early springtime here. Perhaps the absence of a hard winter allows for earlier planting and harvesting; or perhaps this area has a two crop season.

We arrived in Tulbagh and found the Tulbagh Boutique Hotel on the main street. It would appear that the town is not much more than this and a parallel street or two but we are told that there are a number of historical buildings. Taking a walk through this area is on our agenda for tomorrow.

We ate in the hotel tonight and had a very good meal with wine, dessert, after dinner drinks – all for \$40!

Thursday November 10

We had breakfast on the deck outside the hotel and then started our walking tour of Tulbagh. As noted yesterday, the town is only about two streets, each a half mile in length, but has many historic buildings. Tulbagh is situated on the route followed by the Huguenots, the diamond miners on their way to Kimberley and others and is the fourth oldest settlement in South Africa. It clearly had been very prosperous in the late 1700s and well into Victorian times and has many buildings dating from that period.

It is much like a small Stellenbosch, with virtually all the buildings a bright white (many with thatched roofs) in the Dutch Colonial and Victorian styles. The main historic area is along Church Street and each building has an informative plaque, so we were able to learn a little about the architecture and the original owners. Many, it seems, were missionaries and perhaps this is reflected in the number of churches which we estimated to be at least one per ten homes.





Tulbagh suffered a 6.5 earthquake in 1969 causing a good deal of damage to many of the buildings. As part of the reconstruction and renovation effort it was decided to return each home, church and civic building to its original form (Victorian and much earlier) and remove the many additions and modifications that had taken place over the years. As a result, we were now enjoying buildings that are essentially original, at least in architecture and decoration.

As part of our walk we decided on what appeared to be a short circular walk alongside the river. It turned out to be an interesting detour! The path was little more than an uncovered area of brush and it rose quite

steeply from the narrow river to give us a good view of the small town. The path went much further than we had expected and we were wonder-

Now what???



ing if there was indeed another bridge back over the river to get us back to town. There wasn't! What there was was a very narrow stretch of river (a stream only at this point) with a few rocks and tree logs strewn across it to form a somewhat perilous crossing. We made it safely but I don't think that I got too many points from Molly for my suggestion of the walk. Perhaps as well it was my birthday.

Once back in town we walked the entire length of Church Street to admire the buildings and then had a cup of tea sitting on the stoop of one of the many cafes that this small town provides.



After our short break we took two drives out of town to see some more of the mountain scenery. First we drove to Ceres (about 15 miles) which had little to offer except the landscape on the way, espe-



cially at the one pass that we had to cross. This was not particularly high but it did provide some outstanding views of the gray stone cliffs of the jagged peaks. We didn't get out of the car on the roadside as there were many signs warning of the dangerous baboons in this area. We certainly saw quite a

number.

After this drive we went north of Tulbagh on a cou-



Relaxing in our room

ple of branch roads out of the town. Tulbagh sits between two mountain ranges to the east and west and is also virtually cut off to the north by more mountains. Since this was a major route followed in earlier times, there must be some passable points to the north but there are certainly no drivable roads today. So, we drove north on two branches for about 5 miles, past several wineries

and wine estates, with vineyards and fruit farms along both sides of the road. Again, the mountain scenery is quite spectacular.

We got back to the hotel by mid-afternoon and relaxed until dinner time. We chose to dine at the hotel again but this time selected a table outside on the stoop. Unfortunately, the wind that had been blowing all day had picked up in intensity after sunset so we were obliged to sit inside once again. Nevertheless we had another good meal and somehow managed to get the bill to add up to \$60. Perhaps we chose more exotic dishes and a more expensive wine but still a bargain. In fact, since this was Molly's treat for my birthday, it was an even better value.

Friday November 11

We had breakfast on the deck and then spent a very leisurely morning before leaving Tulbagh around eleven.

We started out by retracing our route from Cape Town but soon were headed north with the highest mountain range to our right. We were traveling along huge valleys which were filled with grains just at the point of being harvested. There were very few villages and only the occasional farm house or



hamlet and the roads were very quiet. Most roads in this part of South Africa are two lanes but the wide shoulder is used by slower traffic to allow passing, so it has the effect of being a four lane highway and a good speed can be maintained. In addition, on mountain passes and even on some of the lesser grades, there are a number of additional passing lanes so truck or farm traffic doesn't slow you down.

We climbed over one significant pass and were then in another wide valley but, instead of grain, we were now in citrus fruit groves most of the time. Also, on one opposite mountain range there was a significant brush fire in progress. It would appear that this one was being left to burn itself out as there were no signs of fire-fighters on the ground or in the air. This part of the country is suffering from a drought and water restrictions apply in many areas.



After climbing over a second, somewhat lower, pass we were now in the valley that contained the

small town of Clanwilliam. The valley here seemed to be much smaller than the previous ones and the Cederberg Mountains appeared to be much closer in all directions.

We found the Clanwilliam Lodge where we had stayed on a visit in 2009 and checked in before 2pm. The lodge seems to have undergone some improvements since we were last here and our room (The Presidential Suite!) was very nice – although the “open plan” of bedroom and bath/shower was a little unusual.

I walked into town to scout for restaurants and also to find a new mouse (I did!). There were lots of people on the streets, mostly doing nothing or lining up at ATMs. There are dozens in this small town and each had a dozen or more in line. Why?

Tonight we ate at a nearby restaurant, Dam Bistro. We were able to sit outside in a rather pleasant courtyard (the temperature had dropped from the 90s to the mid-sixties) and enjoyed a good meal that once again cost less than \$40, including a bottle of wine.

Saturday November 12

We walked into town to have breakfast at Nancy’s Tearoom. From the street it didn’t look like much but we were shown to the beautiful shaded garden at the back and felt we were miles away from the bustle of the street. The breakfast was excellent and it was really pleasant to linger over the meal before starting our day out.

Our plan was to take a circular route north from Clanwilliam into the Cederberg Mountains. On leaving the town, we climbed very quickly to our first pass of the day at 3000 feet (the town is at an elevation below 1000 feet) and had some spectacular views of the nearby and distant hills. The road cut through high rock cliffs that had been eroded to form some interesting shapes, including many precariously balanced rocks. The stone was predominantly red/orange, although there were other colors nearby from gray to pink.

Shortly after cresting the pass, the road suddenly switched from paved to dirt and gravel – and was to remain that way for the next fifty miles.



We were now on a plateau with some gentle undulations and, for the most part, the road was well packed down and we were able to maintain speeds of 20 mph, speeding to as much as 50 mph for



very short stretches. On this plateau (with much higher hills to our right) there was little in the way of green vegetation (the odd tree and the even less frequent small farm holding) but the brush and road-side flowers provided a wide range of colors. Much of it appeared a light purple but was actually a “cottony” white as we looked more closely but there were many other shades – blue, pink, red and yellow. Altogether the contrasting terrain provided a very pleasant, if relatively slow, journey.



We climbed another pass on this road and of course the surface



became more rutted on the steeper parts as well as narrowing to essentially a one car width in spots – with a several hundred feet drop to our right. Fortunately there was very little traffic – we



saw two cars pass in the opposite direction in the entire 50 miles – so all we had to do was watch for the ruts and the more uneven surfaces.



An Interesting Drive In the Cederberg Mountains

We eventually reached another paved road and turned west. Now we were on a high plateau with even more colorful flowering plants and shrubs and even a few more trees. Nevertheless, the overall picture was not unlike parts of the far western United States, probably most like Nevada. Unlike Nevada, however, we very suddenly reached the edge of the plateau and were looking at a 2000 feet drop to a huge valley below. It was one of those surprisingly abrupt changes in terrain that literally take your breath away. It was a slow descent as there were a number of trucks taking it very seriously at less than 5mph.



An abrupt change in terrain

- and a slow descent

We were hoping to find a coffee shop on this more traveled road but reached the north-south “expressway” with nothing open. Apparently Saturday afternoon is not a big tourist time or everyone wants to take some time off. Eventually we drove all the way back to Clanwilliam and had tea and biscuits in the room after completing the final 50 miles south on a very fast road – the main artery to Cape Town.



As we traveled south in the valley we were now once again in farm and vineyard country and the greens were a stark contrast to the majority of the journey so far. About a mile to our left was the almost sheer cliff side that was the boundary to the plateau on which we had spent the past several hours.

We arrived back in Clanwilliam about 4pm and enjoyed our tea and biscuits on our deck, after which we relaxed until dinner at Rheinhold’s in town. As soon as we walked in the restaurant (which was nothing to look at from the street) Molly said that we had eaten here on our last visit to Clanwilliam in 2009. It took me a little longer but I believe also that we had been here. It was a lovely, eight table restaurant with dim lighting and lots of framed photographs and heavy curtains. Such a contrast to the town outside the door. The meal and service were excellent and the waitress (owner?) was very pleasant. There were only about half the tables occupied (but last night had been fully booked) and the service was leisurely. Classical music topped off the superb ambiance.