

Most were built in a local sandstone but there were a number that had more the feel of Antebellum Southern US or New Orleans, with some fine wrought iron work. There were several early churches, the largest of which was the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (Dutch Reformed Church) building. Again it was stone built but for reasons that are not clear it appears to have been given a coat of paint in almost the same color. So much for “maintenance free”.



*Dutch Reformed and Anglican Churches*







*More of Oudtshoorn, including a somewhat rickety footbridge and the magnificent CP Nel school*

There were churches of all denominations, including a small but attractive Anglican church, and a number of civic buildings and homes of the former rich and famous, presumably built on ostrich feather money. The CP Nel Museum (bottom right above), which we had spent some time inside during our last visit, was originally built as a boys' school and is perhaps the most imposing in the town and sits at the junction between the main street and the east-west road that runs from Beaufort West to Cape Town. This road as it heads west is the huge wine district of South Africa.

A feature of this town that we have seen on every visit (now four) and which must have existed much longer, is the corner just mentioned at which there are always six to ten African ladies selling ostrich feather dusters (see photo page 22). Trade today was slow as a result of the cool (and later, rainy) weather, but presumably it remains worth their while to sit at this important crossroads and sell the local product.

At 1pm – right on time per the forecast – it started to rain so we returned to the car and took a 50KM drive east to the Meiringspoort Pass in the Swartberg Mountains. This is somewhat similar to the road we had taken yesterday from Prince Albert but this is paved and, if anything, even more spectacular in its geological formations. The gorge was formed as a result of two huge upheavals of the earth's crust – one when this area was still part of the “super continent” Gondwanaland – and a second over 100 million



years later that not only threw more rock down the ravine but allowed the waterflow that is now the river which we crossed two dozen times on the 15 KM drive in this spectacular “crack” in the rock.



### *Meiringspoort Pass*

At the top of the pass (where we turned round and headed back to Oudtshoorn) the weather was beautiful and we were very impressed with the white cloud formations that streamed over the mountain tops in much the same vein as that on Table Mountain in Cape Town.

We returned to our hotel, through a little more rain, and enjoyed a glass of wine as we relaxed before going out to dinner. It was still cold (barely above 50F) so dining outside was not to be an option tonight.

Then, about 5pm, the power went out again and we were once again in the mode of “getting things done” while we could see. Despite this outage, our chosen restaurant (Jemima’s, where we have eaten several times) was open, albeit with a limited menu. When we arrived around 7:30 it was of course completely dark so we were cautiously ushered inside to one of the dining rooms, lit only by candlelight and a roaring wood fire. There were only three other tables occupied and there was no background music to interfere with conversation, so we settled in for a very pleasant evening. We both enjoyed ostrich (and a little beef for me) with the usual complements of salad, wine and dessert, all of which were excellent. This was one of our best and most expensive meals to date at \$73.

We arrived back at the hotel with everything still in darkness and that’s the way it remained until about 3:30 on Tuesday morning.





## Tuesday November 6

We had breakfast inside once again as it was quite cool (48F) and there was a little drizzle – although nothing like the pounding rain we had heard while dining out last night. We packed and took our time leaving on a dreary morning but finally left Oudtshoorn about 11am.

We drove south via yet another mountain pass, this time in the Outeniqua Range. It was cloudy and we went through several patches of rain as we climbed to the summit and then started the descent. It was here that we saw the full extent of the recent fires with entire hillsides completely blackened, with most vegetation burned to a crisp. A huge area had been devastated and we later learned that the fire had spread over an east-west area of about 100KM. Several people had lost their lives and there had been mass evacuation in some parts; clearly the effects are going to be felt for some time – making our experience with a few hours out of power seem insignificant.



As we drove through the prosperous town of George and then along the coast to Knysna, the sun came out and the temperature rose into the low sixties. We had a light lunch in a relatively new waterfront complex in Knysna and then drove slowly to our hotel for the next two nights, just outside the small town of Wilderness. We had stayed here two years ago and had been first introduced to its restaurant two years before that. The meals were excellent on each occasion, so we are hoping for continued good food, wine and service.

The evening did not disappoint! We were first ushered into the lounge for a pre-dinner drink and some talk with fellow guests (all from Germany). This was followed by the chef discussing the menu for the evening; not simply what we would eat, but also where it was from, how it was prepared and (in the case of meats) whether or not he had a hand in the hunt! Then we went in for a five course meal with an amuse bouche and a cleansing palate course, accompanied by excellent wine. The owners, two chefs (husband and wife) and the two waiters recognized us from previous visits – or at least they put on a fine show of remembering. It was a wonderful meal and we are already looking forward to tomorrow's version.

## Wednesday November 7

We had breakfast at 9 and then chatted with the owner for quite some time (mostly about politics and change in South Africa) before starting out on our day out. It was a beautiful sunny day, although the high temperature was predicted to get to 70F only.

*View from our room in Wilderness*



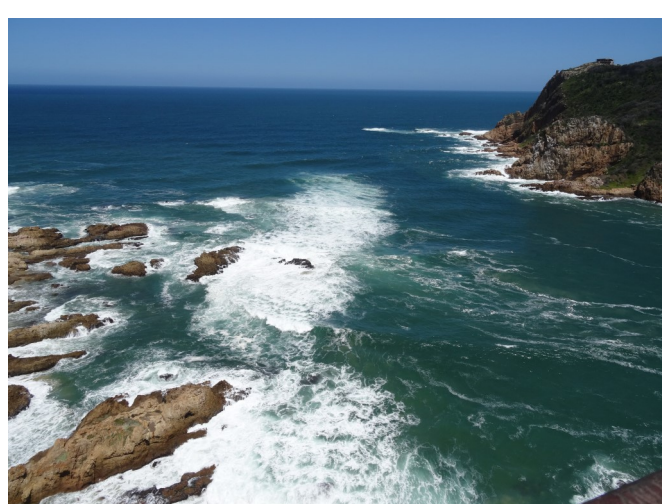
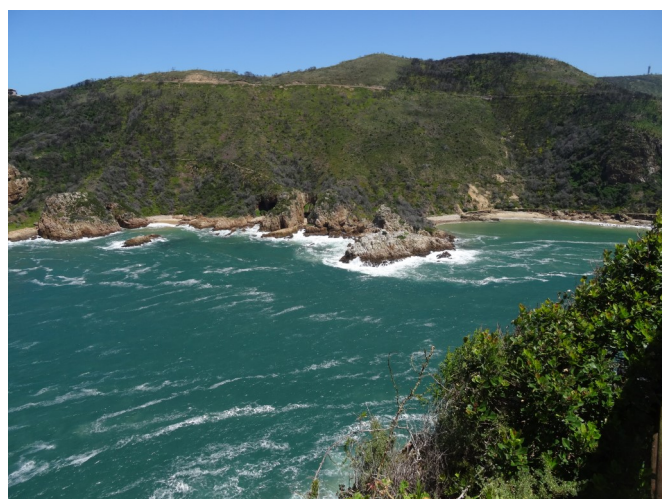




We were now on the Garden Route, widely regarded as the most beautiful stretch in South Africa and certainly the most well-known. And, as we are in early spring, everything is very green and the blossoms are beautiful reds, purple and orange. This part of the route had been spared the fires (although not by much) so everything looked fantastic – all with a backdrop of the Indian Ocean with its sandy beaches, blue waters and rolling white caps. Beautiful!

We drove east to Knysna and immediately went up to an area called the Knysna Heads. Here there is a breach in the 300 feet high

cliffs that allows water from the Indian Ocean to reach the large Knysna lagoon. The narrow channel between the cliffs generates some swift and choppy currents and in the past we have seen speed boats carrying frightened and very wet tourists through the choppy and somewhat dangerous waters. There were none today, however, but still the view was magnificent.



We then went another 20 miles to Plettenberg Bay where we found a very nice little coffee shop for a su-



per sandwich lunch. We had stayed in Plettenberg Bay on our very first visit to South Africa (and at the same lodge on our second visit) so we had to try and find the beautiful location overlooking the water and where we took our first swim in the Indian Ocean. We did find it – after a few wrong turns – and also spent time simply watching the waves crash against the beach and the rocks along the shoreline. With clear blue skies it was an idyllic picture.



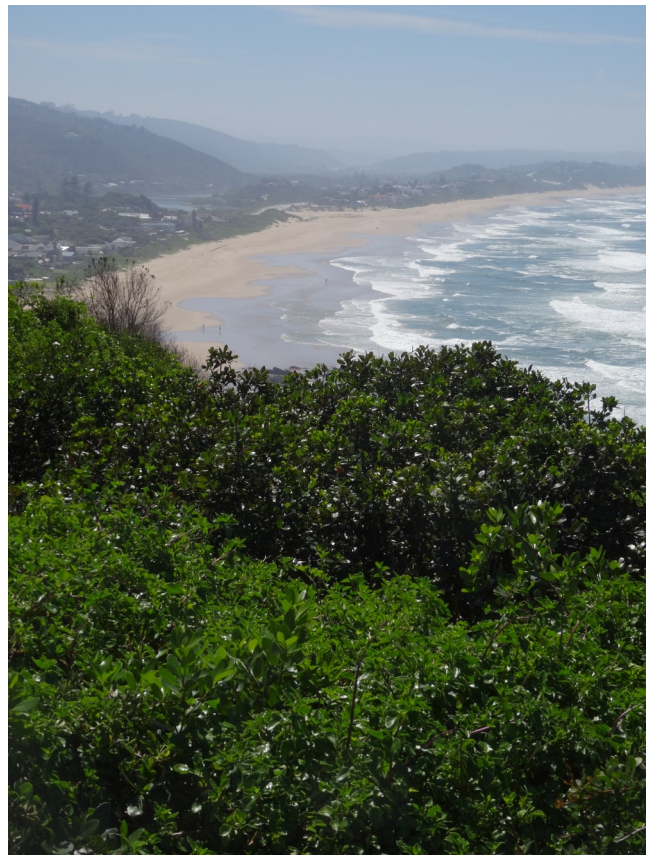
We returned to the hotel shortly after four and spent time on our deck overlooking the lagoon that separates us from the main road and the ocean. Then it was time for dinner again! Once more it was a superb meal. The official menu was the same as it had been the night before but they added a couple of alternative dishes for the two of us who were repeating. Although the wine list had prices, the food menu and “adders” (pre-dinner drink, etc) did not so it wasn’t until we checked out the following morning that we saw the bill. At about \$115 per night, we thought we had received a real bargain – easily \$200 or more for equivalent in the US – if, indeed, you can find such a meal!

### **Thursday November 8**

We left Wilderness soon after 10am and headed west along the remaining portion of the Garden Route as far as Mossel Bay. Here we left the ocean (or, rather, the coastline headed south to the Indian and Atlantic Ocean “border”) and, still driving west, were inland with mountains in what seemed like every direction.

### ***Leaving Wilderness, the Indian Ocean and the Garden Route***

We stopped in the small town of Albertinia for a light lunch sitting outside under a veranda. It was now into the seventies and very pleasant after a few cool days. The café was one of those that are common in South Africa (and New Zealand) that in most other parts of the world we would just drive by and look for a Starbucks-equivalent. But here, even the most modest of eating places not only provides service but many touches that you might expect in the finer (and way more expensive) cafes of Europe. Elegant tableware (albeit with a plastic cloth when outside), all the silverware one could need and everything presented “just so”. Obviously I am showing a little (perhaps more than a little) taste of stereotyping but of all the places we have eaten (and you may have reached the conclusion that eating is important!) who would guess that the most “elegant” (Victorian, old-fashioned, tasteful) ser-





vice-oriented restaurants would be in England and in South Africa? No offense intended to any other country in the world!!

We left Albertinia (famous for its aloe ferox and the skin care products produced) and the main road to Cape Town and turned north towards the mountains. For perhaps 20 miles we were in farm land with many crops just being started and some already being harvested. In either case, the land was very green and looked to be a very prosperous farming area. Quite suddenly, however, we began to climb (Garcia's Pass) into the hills and were in much more barren surroundings. Once again, many areas were blackened, although most gave the appearance that it had been quite some time since the fire, so not the ones of the past two weeks. Nevertheless, whether the result of fires or of the general geography, the next fifty miles were a steady climb through desert, much like parts of Nevada or Utah.

When we reached the highest point on our journey today, we turned on to Route 62, which is billed as the South Africa Wine Route and many establishments copy the US Route 66 symbolism to underscore its tourist attraction features. Not that we would have known as we turned west again that we were in grape-growing country as the whole region seemed almost devoid of vegetation and pretty barren. We knew from previous travels on this road that there were many vineyards to the east (which stretches to Oudtshoorn of three days ago) but not at this high point on the road.



Then, first a small vineyard, followed by a fruit orchard, then a few fields of greens and, soon, we were in heavily cultivated lands where orchards and vineyards predominated. Then followed a number of wine tasting establishments, wine estates with restaurants and the dozens of roadside stores where the local product could be sampled and bought. We were now in the heart of the South African wine country, which follows this road almost to Cape Town and then north along the Atlantic Coast, almost to the border with Namibia.

Here again, at the risk of sounding prejudiced, the South Africans certainly know how to market their wares in the most enticing and sophisticated manner. Over the next week or so, we will visit many estates and their restaurants and hopefully will be able to show how different (and in our opinion) how much more pleasant are the experiences here than in California, Oregon, Perth and Adelaide (Australia). That is not to “knock” those wine areas cited but rather to extoll the virtues of the SA experience. Or, maybe, it’s just something that Molly and I prefer; perhaps it’s the experience rather than the product. Whatever it is, we are fully intent on about ten more days of sampling!

We arrived in the small town of Montagu around 4:30 and soon found the “7 Church Street” guest house. We have



*Church Street, Montagu*



stayed here twice before (are we in a rut??) and have become quite friendly with the proprietors, Mike and May. Mike was a foundryman in Manchester (with little complimentary to say about my profession - probably with good reason) and May hails from Scotland. Just how and when they found themselves running a guest house behind security fences and remote-controlled gates in rural South Africa is something I should know (but have forgotten) and will attempt to flesh out in the next two days.

Meanwhile, they have booked us in at two of their restaurant recommendations and have provided all sorts of things for us to do during our stay. We are sure that it will all prove another memorable experience. Tonight we were booked at 22 Church Street where we have eaten several times and we had a good meal in pleasant – if not luxurious – surroundings.

### Friday November 9

We had breakfast in the courtyard just outside our room and had another good conversation with our hosts. We then left for a drive through the Robertson Valley Vineyards which is a prolific wine area just south and west of Montagu.

We first visited the town of Swellendam which was one of the first predominantly Dutch towns to be established as the Cape Colony became more and more British. It has a lot of buildings similar to those in Stellenbosch (closer to Cape Town) but doesn't appear as prosperous, although there are many high-end guest houses in town. There is also a magnificent Dutch Reformed Church on the main street which we were able to visit.





We then set out for the wine route proper, but not before we had stopped for tea in what, from the road was an unimposing coffee shop but what had, in fact, a very nice seating area both in a garden and under a veranda. We spent the best part of an hour there enjoying our tea and watching other customers come and go.



Then we were in the absolutely fabulous area covered in vineyards on both sides of the road and stretching as far as they could into the foothills of the mountains.



There were dozens of wine tasting houses and we chose one where we could get a small sampling with a light lunch. Molly chose a three wine pairing with olives and breads and I went for the five wines, each with its own cheese. We both agreed that our selections were delicious and, at a total cost of \$8, a great competition to our usual Starbucks!

From that vineyard it was a relatively easy drive back to the hotel, although we took a fruitless detour in search of a lavender farm recommended by our hostess.

We were back in Montagu around 4:30 and relaxed until it was time to walk up the street for our dinner at Ye Old Taverne. This was a little more “family style” than the previous night but still a very good meal for under \$55.

### **Saturday November 10**

We were up soon after eight and had breakfast in the courtyard again, although there was still a chilly breeze. After breakfast we loaded the car, said our goodbyes to Mike and May and set off for the drive to Cape Town – and our nephew’s villa.

We drove west towards Worcester and then turned south to take a big bend around the mountains to Franschhoek. This was a fantastic drive with almost every type of scenery imaginable. The backdrop in all



directions was mountains but the foreground was at one point desert, around the bend it was cultivated farmland with the odd small village – but mostly it was vineyards. Grape vines as far as the eye could see across the flat valley and as far up as possible on the nearest hillside. Each vineyard it seems had its tasting rooms and every field of vines was bordered by beautiful colorful shrubs or roses. Again, we were reminded that this setting is far more beautiful than similar wine routes in California or Australia (although they, too, are a magnificent drive) and belie (or maybe underscore) the range of income levels amongst South Africans.



Extreme poverty to very wealthy is a state that exists in many, if not all, countries, and is probably at one of the more extreme levels here in South Africa. Or, perhaps, it is more obvious here since the picture I have painted in the previous paragraph exists so close to shanty towns where thousands live in cardboard or corrugated iron shacks with limited water and electricity supply. They walk miles (or attempt to hitch a ride) to perform a menial task – or even to search for the same – often walking right by the “million dollar” mansions and wine estates. Most of us, of course, can relate to our poorer background and can to a degree relate to the differences that existed then. However, I suspect that most of us (certainly me) were at worst a little envious of our “rich” neighbors and, at best, completely oblivious to the fact that there was “another world”. We were ignorant – but content.

Here in South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it must be difficult “not to know”, when you are a native Black, walking along a dusty road past beautiful homes (mostly owned by Whites or Coloreds) and it must be doubly difficult to either ignore or to accept. In addition, with worldwide media available to virtually all, there can be no escaping the fact that your world is TOTALLY different to that which many enjoy. It’s all right there - either on the TV or right across the street.

And yet, in South Africa of all places, it is difficult not to see a smiling face on even the poorest of the poor. In the villages we passed, the most common sight was of large groups simply sitting alongside the road or families trying to shop for the week’s food – on the face of it, not unlike any town in America, but somehow so much different. If for no other reason than the sheer numbers; small towns are packed with people and clearly have traveled some distance to work or shop. In fact, as one travels the roads, it is difficult to see exactly where the population lives, as miles and miles go by with little sign of habitation.







The drive via Franschhoek took us over a mountain pass and then to a stunning view of the town and its surrounding vineyards. In Franschhoek we stopped for a light lunch before completing the journey to Cape Town where we were to turn in the car and stay for a week at our nephew's villa overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

Here our life jumped to another level. We were met by Jerome, who drove us to the villa where one of the staff took our cases to our room while the concierge brought us a glass of wine as we rested in the living room. At 4:30, the chef arrived, asked us at what time we would like to eat and would the deck be ok (or would we prefer inside?); she then set to work preparing a four course meal that she served as we sat overlooking the ocean – and, coincidentally Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela and others were incarcerated during the Apartheid period. Admittedly, he probably lived a life similar to ours eventually – but what a fight he (and thousands of others) had to get there. And, of course, tens of millions of his race are still waiting and hoping for that promised land which, even with the change to a Black government and being in a vast majority, still must seem beyond reach.

Clearly, I do not have the answer nor would I profess to even understand the problem well enough to propose any solutions. All I can say is that I have enough confidence in humankind to believe that answers will be found and a more equitable state will exist. Not that this means that we will all live to the same standards nor, in fact, do I believe that that should/could be the answer. Suffice it to say here that we will enjoy our time living in the lap of luxury and say a big “Thank You” to our nephew who was able to build this home (and several others around the world) as a result of his smarts and hard work – and despite his very humble beginnings. And, obviously, is very generous!

Tonight we had a wonderful meal (squid, kingklip, desert, coffee -and wine) prepared and served by Natasha as we sat on the deck and watched the sun set. It is difficult to imagine more idyllic surroundings and we felt like royalty.



## Sunday November 11

We had decided that, after two weeks on the road, we would like this to be a day of rest at the villa. So, after a lovely breakfast on the deck (again prepared by Natasha) we had a truly lazy day, watching the ships out at sea and catching up on correspondence and paperwork.



## *The Cape Town Villa and sunset at Camps Bay*

At 7pm, we were picked up by a Uber driver who drove us just a few miles to the Paranga restaurant in nearby Camps Bay. The restaurant sits right on the beach road and we were able to watch the sun set as we joined the large – and quite noisy – crowd enjoying a Sunday evening dinner on a perfect evening. The food was good but we felt the service was a little rushed (more American than we have seen here before) but we were still there for almost three hours before being driven home.





## Monday November 12

We awoke this morning to find the area shrouded in mist and it was a little cool as we ate breakfast outside on the deck. The forecast was for mostly cloudy skies in the area around Cape Town so we wondered about the advisability of our planned drive to the Cape of Good Hope. However, the forecast for the rest of the week was similar and we were advised that the sun may well be shining on the other side of Table Mountain – Bantry Bay is on the Atlantic side of this iconic landmark.

So, about 10am we learned how to drive Mark's Audi and set off for the Cape. Indeed, even before we reached the city, let alone the cape peninsula, there were breaks in the cloud and some blue sky. This just got better as we drove down the east coast of the peninsula and made our first stop in Simon's Town. This town has a main street of beautiful buildings and was one of the first settlements of the Cape Colony. It is also the home of the South African Navy and there is a significant naval presence here. Indeed, it was a strategic port for the Commonwealth in World War II.



From here it was to be a relatively short drive to the Cape – except that we had to get through the gates into the National Park and pay our fee of a little over \$20 per person (or about one half of that if a South African resident). We didn't mind the fee but the queue to the toll gate moved VERY slowly and we were in line for the best part of an hour. However, we eventually made it and then were soon at the hectic parking area at the Southwesterly tip of the African Continent. This is NOT the point at which the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet (as we had thought for many years) but is, of course, the place where everyone flocks to and was named the Cape of Good Hope by a Dutch (or Portuguese) king who saw the value of the treasures in the East that were “just around the corner”. The marker indicating the coordinates for this point (surprisingly to me about 18 degrees east of Greenwich) was mobbed by people wanting the perfect picture. Interestingly, most were from India whereas in the past we have always been surrounded by Japanese at this locale. Another sign of the changing global economy?





Obviously, the attraction to this particular spot is the geographical location (and its importance over the centuries) but the scenery both here and all along the eastern and (particularly) western coasts is stunning.



Huge hills of barren rock jump directly from the water and often are enhanced by wide, white sandy beaches. The plateau above the ocean is filled with low growing cover in green and (in spring) beautiful yellows, pinks and purples. There are also a couple of historical monuments to the pioneer journeys of Bartholomew Dias (above) and Vasco de Gama (both Portuguese) who first rounded this headland almost 600 years ago.

We drove down the east coast and back via the west side and, as we said, there was stunning mountain and ocean scenery on both. However, the toll road known as Chapman's Pass on the west coast is one of the most spectacular drives anywhere that we have seen. It certainly compares with California Route 1 and rivals (if not beats) some of the coast roads that we traveled in Taiwan a year ago. It truly is spectacular and a masterpiece in road engineering.



So, after a beautiful drive, we arrived back at the villa in time to relax and clean up before our evening out – this time to a restaurant that we have enjoyed in the past and, as we remember, a little more in the “South African” style than the one we enjoyed last night. Indeed it was a very good meal in pleasant and rather more sedate surroundings. The only issue came when we tried to use Amex to pay; two cards “rejected” before having to use Visa. Obviously this was not the fault of the restaurant but we felt the manager was less than customer-related in his handling of the situation.



## Tuesday November 13

About mid-morning we left the villa and drove to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. This is a huge indoor and outdoor shopping and eating area and there are always a number of street entertainers to add to the ambiance. The area also has great views of Table Mountain and the city as well as parts of the old docklands. Cape Town now has a huge container ship port just outside the city but several smaller ships and some cruise ships still dock at this central location.



We spent about four hours simply strolling throughout the area and watching tourist and local alike enjoying a warm but generally overcast day. We also sat and watched every visitor pose for photographs with the statues of four of South Africa's Nobel Prize winners who were instrumental in bringing an end to Apartheid. It was quite moving to see how revered these four pioneers were. We had two stops for coffee before returning to the villa before 3pm. Tonight we had an early pickup (5:45) for dinner at Rust en Verde in Stellenbosch. This has been a highlight of our previous two visits to Mark's home, so we were anticipating another good evening.

As expected, everything was just perfect. As we walked up the path after Jerome had dropped us off, we were greeted by a hostess who asked if we would like to sit on the terrace and enjoy a pre-dinner drink.







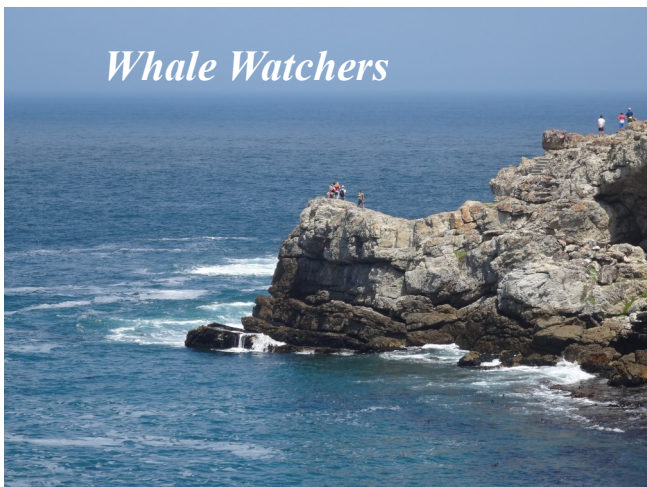
After about 20 minutes we were asked if we would like to go to our table inside and were given the menus. There are only two dinner alternatives, a four course meal with a selection from which to choose on each course, or a six course set tasting menu, with or without wine pairings.

We chose the four course but I also asked if appropriate wines could be paired with my selected dishes; of course that could happen! The dishes were small but beautifully presented and full of flavor. Each course – and the wine to go with it – was described in detail and there were small “sub-dishes” along the way. With an espresso to finish the meal, it was an excellent experience and took about 3 ½ hours start to finish. Marvellous.

### **Wednesday November 14**

Today we went on a two hour drive to Hermanus, situated on the Atlantic Ocean but east of the Cape Peninsula. We have stayed there at least twice on previous visits and have always enjoyed it.

Hermanus is famous as a good place to spot the Southern Right Whale as it migrates east. The best part of the season is over but we were lucky to see a couple quite close into the shore and we had a brief – but obvious – glimpse of a tail fin at one point and several spouting bursts. We had a leisurely tapas lunch sitting in the main restaurant area of town and then simply sat and watched the waves crashing on the rocky shore.





The drive there and back is motorway/divided highway just about all the way so is a relatively easy route. There is a spectacular pass (Sir Lowry's Pass) which, at 1500 feet, provides a spectacular view of the Cape Town valley and the mountains to the north. In addition, the weather was perfect – sunny and a high about 75F, so it really was a very nice day out.

We returned home and cleaned up in preparation for another meal prepared by Natasha – this time the featured dish was ostrich. It was very good and we were able to watch the sun set as we ate and then sat on the deck listening to the waves crashing on the shore – until we fell asleep and went to bed.



### Thursday November 15



Today we spent most of our time on the Hop on Hop off bus around Cape Town. Actually, there are several routes that are covered and we used three of them throughout the day. First, we drove about a mile to a parking area on the shore “below” Bantry Bay and there picked up the “Red Route” bus, which took us into town, passing the V&A Waterfront, the Central Business District and then up Strand Street, which a hundred years ago was the waterfront of the city – now much of the city is on reclaimed ground to the north of this street.

We got off this first bus and walked through the market as far as the Cathedral, where Desmond Tutu was the archbishop in the late 80s and 90s and, of course, he was one of the leaders of the anti-Apartheid move-



ment. We recall meeting him when he visited our church in West Chester and, although he is short physically, he is a very imposing figure and great speaker and, clearly, a leader. As we said earlier his statue sits with three other South African Nobel Peace Prize winners at the V&A, all of whom were instrumental in bringing about the end of Apartheid regime.





From the cathedral, we walked past a statue of Queen Victoria and through the Company's Gardens, an area originally set aside by the Dutch East India Company to grow supplies for their ships as they sailed between Europe and the Far East. Now the area is a beautiful park filled with indigenous and other trees but has a small area still dedicated to vegetable growing. To get to the Gardens we walked past the Parliament building,



thereby completing the three offices of government in South Africa on this trip: the administrative capital in Pretoria, the legal capital in Bloemfontein and now the parliament in Cape Town. We have since learned that there have been a number of attempts to move the Parliament to Pretoria on a permanent basis but so far the opposition has won the argument to stay. Perhaps we were here on one of the last opportunities to see the "Three Capital Country"??



At the top end of the Gardens, directly in front of the imposing Table Mountain, is the Mount Nelson Hotel where the rich and famous stay when in Cape Town and home to the "world's best afternoon tea" (Sunday Times), which Molly and I enjoyed on a previous visit to this city.

Also in the Gardens is a statue of Cecil Rhodes of Kimberley Diamond mines fame and who later gave his name to the country of Rhodesia and had the dream to bring the whole of Africa into the British Empire.

