

South Africa



November 2022

Bob and Molly Hillery

Tuesday November 8

We were up at 7:30, went to vote and then met Elizabeth for breakfast at Half Day Café. Afterwards, we stopped home briefly to pick up our bags and turn off the water before driving to the airport. We dropped off the rental car and were soon through check-in and Security, so we spent about 1 ½ hours in the lounge.

Our 2:15 flight left on time, and we had an easy connection in Atlanta, giving us a little more time in the lounge before our 6pm flight to Johannesburg. This flight (an A350 with suites in Business Class) was a little late leaving but by 6:30 we were approaching the east coast before the long stretch over the Atlantic Ocean.

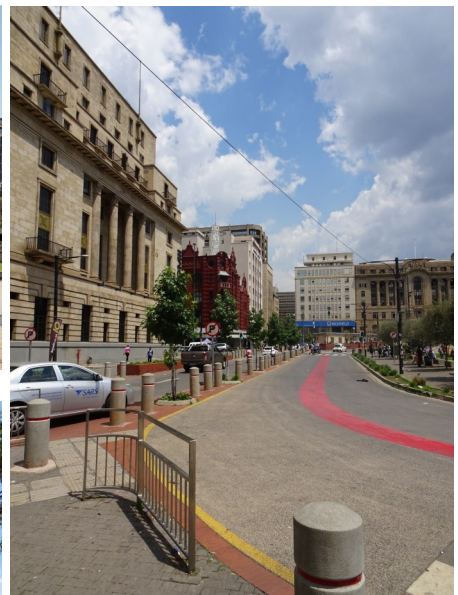
Dinner was good and I was able to get a decent internet connection to watch the first few hours of election results – during which the predicted Red Wave settled into a pink ripple! I slept for a few hours, watched election results some more and then slept again. Around 12:30pm local time we still had about 4 hours of flying time and we were still a couple of hours west of the coast of Namibia. At this point we hit a prolonged period of turbulence (there had been several bumpy spots earlier) and any more sleep was fitful at best.

After crossing Namibia, Botswana and the northwest corner of South Africa, we arrived in Johannesburg after a not-too-unpleasant 15-hour flight. We were about 30 minutes late arriving but, after a long walk, getting through Passport Control and retrieving our bags was a straightforward process. Similarly, picking up the rental car was easy, although I took the Hertz super waiver insurance when I don't think it was necessary. However, we were soon on our way on the motorway to Pretoria. The drive north was only about 35 minutes but our phone GPS was acting up so we were driving a little blind as we got into the center of Pretoria. We went on several roads repeatedly it seemed as we zeroed in on the hotel with the aid of a paper map and occasional bursts of help from the GPS. By this time, it was fully dark, so identifying street names was a challenge but eventually we recognized the Sheraton and pulled in about 7:30 after a dramatic start to the vacation.

We had an additional small challenge getting the upgraded room we had requested but at last we were unpacking and starting our well-needed showers. The evening ended on a brighter note with a very good (and very inexpensive) dinner in the hotel and we turned in about 11pm.

Thursday November 10 (My 81st birthday)

We had both had a somewhat restless night but were up about nine and walked along the hall to get breakfast in the Club Lounge. It was only a mini-Continental meal but sufficient for our needs. We were also able to talk to the Concierge and she made us a dinner reservation at a restaurant she recommended



Central Pretoria

It was about 10:30 before we started our day out – and by now the temperature was in the upper seventies with humidity to match. Molly was convinced that she could walk the 1 ½ miles to Church Square but it took a while and included several stops. By the time we got to this central square, all she wanted to do was to have a cup of tea and order an Uber back to the hotel. This we did, so by 2pm we were back, and Molly got her well-deserved rest. I repeated the walk (both ways) and then we both relaxed until the lounge opened for drinks!

It was a slow start to our sightseeing but, on reflection, it was a good way to get re-immersed in the culture and “feel” of South Africa, with its broken sidewalks and mounds of litter – and some very pleasant people.

Tonight, we took an Uber to Kream restaurant and had a super meal with excellent service. There was a saxophone/voice duo playing at times (a little loud) but that didn’t detract from a great evening and a special birthday treat. We enjoyed it so much that we booked to return tomorrow!

Friday November 11

We were up late again, and it was after 10:30 before we started our day out. It was considerably cooler and cloudier than yesterday and, as Molly was still feeling the after-effects of yesterday, we decided to travel by car. We drove to the Union Buildings and spent a very pleasant hour or more in the grounds. Unfortunately, the building itself is not open to the public, but the gardens and lawns are immaculately kept. Also in the grounds was a huge statue of Nelson Mandela.

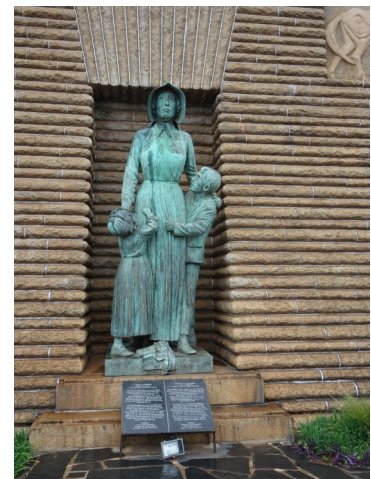


On a small patch of land within the gardens we saw an encampment – much like the one that has been in place for many years near the Australian capital buildings in Canberra. The somewhat smaller and tidier version here in Pretoria is basically following the pattern of Canberra, however, in that it is dubbed the “Aboriginal Embassy” and aims to get retribution for (or perhaps just recognition of) the lost lands of the native Africans. It would appear that they have been here since 2017 and don’t seem ready to move until at least some of their demands are met.

From the Union Building grounds we could see the massive Voortrekker Monument high on the hill on the opposite side of town. I had done a little reading about the site, so we decided to drive there and visit as the weather was more conducive to indoor activities. It turned out to be a great move.

The monument (a huge granite cube (130x130x130 feet) was built in the 1930s (opened in 1949) is dedicated to the Afrikaners (the descendants of the Dutch settlers) who had had enough of the persecution by the British when the Cape Colony fell. The Voortrekkers (literally “fore trekkers” or pioneers) decided to head north in search of new lands and along the way founded the Orange Free State, Natal and the Transvaal. They also suffered many hardships on the trek, including attacks by native tribes. Many of these battles were extremely bloody and heavy losses were suffered on both sides. In fact, something I read suggested that the Voortrekkers were responsible for the “elimination” of the Zulus.

Whatever the truth, the monument is a marvelous building which tells the story that is very similar to those of the pioneers in America (from the Oregon Trail to the Mormons) and covers many of the same difficulties, hostilities and ultimate outcome – and at almost exactly the same time (mid-1800s). When the Boers and the British settled for peace and the new Union was formed, Pretoria (in Transvaal at the time) became the presidential capital. South Africa has three capital cities, Pretoria, Bloemfontein (Justice) and Cape Town (parliament).



*The Voortrekker
Monument
And the
Marble Frieze*

The main room in the monument is essentially bare except for a stone frieze that tells the story of the trek in pictures. The rest of the monument includes a very well-done museum (not unlike many we have seen at home) and a dome roof that can be reached by climbing almost 200 steps (I did!) We also spent time in the wonderful museum beneath the monument and found it very similar to, and equally informative as, many of the Lewis and Clark or Trail Museums in America. Also in this large area is the Cenotaph (which can be viewed from the upper levels) and a relatively recent tapestry commemorating the role of the women in the Great Trek.



*The Museum with
The Cenotaph
(above) and a rainy
view across Pretoria*



The idea to build a monument in honor of the Voortrekkers was first discussed on 16 December 1888, when President Paul Kruger of the South African Republic attended the Day of the Covenant celebrations at Danskraal in Natal. However, the movement to actually build such a monument only started on 4 April 1931 when the Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (SVK; Central People's Monuments Committee) was formed to bring this idea to fruition. On 16 December 1938 the cornerstone was laid by three descendants of some of the Voortrekker leaders: Mrs. J.C. Muller (granddaughter of Andries Pretorius), Mrs. K.F. Ackerman (great-granddaughter of Hendrik Potgieter) and Mrs. J.C. Preller (great-granddaughter of Piet Retief. The main entrance of the building leads into the domed Hall of Heroes. This massive space, flanked by four huge arched windows made from yellow Belgian glass, contains the unique marble Historical Frieze which is an intrinsic part of the design of the monument. It is the biggest marble frieze in the world and consists of 27 bas-relief panels depicting the history of the Great Trek, but incorporating references to everyday life, work methods and religious beliefs of the Voortrekkers. The set of panels illustrate key historical scenes starting from the first voortrekkers of 1835, up to the signing of the Sand River Convention in 1852. In the center of the floor of the Hall of Heroes is a large circular opening through which the Cenotaph in the Cenotaph Hall can be viewed.

The Cenotaph, situated in the center of the Cenotaph Hall, is the central focus of the monument. In addition to being viewable from the Hall of Heroes it can also be seen from the dome at the top of the building, from where much of the interior of the monument can be viewed. Through an opening in this dome a ray of sunlight shines at twelve o'clock on 16 December annually, falling onto the center of the Cenotaph, striking the words 'Ons vir Jou, Suid-Afrika' (Afrikaans for 'We're for you, South Africa'), a line from 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika'. The ray of light symbolizes God's blessing on the lives and endeavors of the Voortrekkers. 16 December 1838 was the date of the Battle of Blood River, commemorated in South Africa before 1994 as the Day of the Vow.

The Cenotaph Hall is decorated with the flags of the different Voortrekker Republics and contains wall tapestries depicting the Voortrekkers as well as several display cases with artefacts from the Great Trek. Against the northern wall of the hall is a niche with a lantern in which a flame has been kept burning ever since 1938. It was in that year that the Symbolic Ox Wagon Trek, which started in Cape Town and ended at Monument Hill where the Monument's foundation stone was laid, took place.

The grounds around this central building contain many gardens and other features that we were not able to visit as a tremendous storm came through Pretoria just after we stepped outside. We made a slow (most traffic lights had been knocked out), wet journey back to the hotel, where we dried out and went for a late afternoon snack in the lobby bar. As mentioned, we ate at Kream again tonight and had another excellent meal – this time with birthday dessert!

Saturday November 12

We had another late breakfast in the hotel lounge and then finished packing and checking out. It was almost 11 before we were on the road south, headed for Bloemfontein, 430 km away. The weather was overcast, and we went through several drizzly patches as we skirted Johannesburg and then turned southwest along a road that alternated between two lane (with frequent passing lanes), four lane, divided highway and motorway. The speed limit was 120kph essentially the whole way and traffic moved well, although it was surprisingly busy until we were well south.

The terrain was pretty flat farmland (some cattle and some grain) and, once out of the Johannesburg area, sparsely populated, although there were a few small towns and villages (townships) at which point the road often became busy with pedestrians, regardless of its type. We went through several very heavy rain showers and judging by the flooded fields, there had been a lot of rain recently, including, presumably, the storm we had witnessed in Pretoria.

We stopped for lunch (actually, we both had breakfasts) about 2 hours north of our destination and then drove directly to the hotel. About 20 miles north of Bloemfontein, the terrain changed to rolling hills and there were a few steep climbs as we neared the city. We easily found the hotel, just ¼ mile from the motorway) and checked in around 4:30. We were greeted like Royalty due to our Marriott status (this is a Protea hotel which Marriott now owns) and there was even a welcome fruit, cheese and wine gift in the room.

By now, the weather had changed to sunny and mild (mid-sixties) so I went for a short walk near the hotel. Along the way, two young ladies asked if I lived in the “Old Age Home”, to which I said “No” and they laughed and apologized!

Tonight, we decided to eat in the restaurant in the hotel, rather than get the car out again or Uber into town. It was a good meal with very pleasant service and perfect for a hotel evening.

Sunday November 13

We had breakfast (late again) in the hotel and then drove to President Rand Street, which is claimed as the most attractive street in South Africa. Certainly, it has many fine buildings from the period when the Free State was formed and, later, when it became the Justice Capital of the country.



President Rand Street and the South Africa Supreme Court Building (left)





Unfortunately, the street and many of its buildings have not been kept up as well as they should, and it has an overall run-down feeling. Looking beyond the broken pavements and the unkempt gardens, however, one can see the former grandeur of a city that was founded as a result of the trek north and which ultimately became a capital for the Union.



We then drove to see the huge statue of Nelson Mandela which stands on Naval Hill, overlooking the city. It is a very pleasant park (and has some wild animals which we saw [wildebeest?]) and there are some great views in all directions. We returned to the hotel, I went for a 3-mile walk, and we then napped until dinner time. Tonight, we ate at the Ocean Basket seafood restaurant just five minutes from the hotel. It reminded me a little of Joe's Crab Shack in the US, with good food and service in a somewhat "rustic" setting. We finished the evening with a night cap in the hotel bar.

Monday November 14

After breakfast, we left for our day out in Kimberley. We followed the N8 road there (about 100 miles) and drove through some very pleasant countryside. The surrounding terrain was mostly flat (although I felt that we were climbing slowly all the

way) and was generally farming land – cattle, grain, ostrich, deer and cactus(!) with a few sheep and goats along the way. By far the most ubiquitous species – One that we didn't see – was the termite, judging by the large mounds (2-3 feet high) in the red soil. At a distance from the road in all directions were dozens of flat-topped hills and mountains (some perhaps 1000 feet high), much like the mesas of the American west – and, of course, like the big sister Table Mountain in Cape Town. The Western US feel was amplified in places by the almost desert-like brush and scrub, rather than the slightly lush fields that predominated.

When we reached Kimberley, we found our destination with only one minor misstep, and we were soon parked at the site of the Big Hole. Kimberley had been the center of the diamond mining industry and the mine here known as the Big Hole was the world's largest producer for fifty years prior to the early 1900s. The "Big Hole" is the largest man-made hole in the world and by the time the mine was closed in 1914 it measured an area of 170,000 square meters to a depth of 1,097 m and had yielded some 3 tons of diamonds.



The mine was just about spent (from an economic standpoint) when the Great War began and most of the miners left to fight. By the time they returned, the hole was filled with water to a depth of 40 meters and no further significant attempts were made to mine. Diamonds are still a big business in Kimberley (mining and cutting) and the De Beers name is still ubiquitous, although the mining was sold to the Anglo-American PLC some years back but still goes by the name of De Beers Consolidated Mines. The 150-year history is a fascinating story (opposite). After the tour of the mine (viewing the Big Hole, a short walk underground, and a visit to the diamond vault and museum), we had a cold drink, did a little souvenir shopping and started back to Bloemfontein.

We took a more northerly route back which gave us a somewhat different drive in which the farming was less obvious, but safari parks were frequently seen on both sides of the road. We caught an occasional glimpse of animals (mostly deer and ostrich) but, for the most part, this drive seemed more barren than the one we had taken west. There were only two small towns along

The name 'De Beers' was derived from the two Dutch settlers, brothers Diederik Arnoldus de Beer (1825–1878) and Johannes Nicolaas de Beer (1830–1883), who owned a South African farm named Vooruitzicht (Dutch for "prospect" or "outlook") near Zandfontein in the Boshof District of Orange Free State. After they discovered diamonds on their land, the increasing demands of the British government forced them to sell their farm on 31 July 1871 to merchant Alfred Johnson Ebdon (1820–1908) for £6,600. Vooruitzicht would become the site of the Big Hole and the De Beers mine, two successful diamond mines. Their name, which was given to one of the mines, subsequently became associated with the company.

Cecil Rhodes, the founder of the British South Africa Company, got his start by renting water pumps to miners during the diamond rush that started in 1869, when an 83.5 carat diamond called the 'Star of South Africa' was found at Hopetown near the Orange River in South Africa. He invested the profits of this operation into buying up claims of small mining operators, with his operations soon expanding into a separate mining company. He soon secured funding from the Rothschild family, who would finance his business expansion. De Beers Consolidated Mines was formed in 1888 by the merger of the companies of Barney Barnato and Cecil Rhodes, by which time the company was the sole owner of all diamond mining operations in the country. In 1889, Rhodes negotiated a strategic agreement with the London-based Diamond Syndicate, which agreed to purchase a fixed quantity of diamonds at an agreed price, thereby regulating output and maintaining prices. The agreement soon proved to be very successful – for example, during the trade slump of 1891–1892, supply was simply curtailed to maintain the price. Rhodes was concerned about the break-up of the new monopoly, stating to shareholders in 1896 that the company's "only risk is the sudden discovery of new mines, which human nature will work recklessly to the detriment of us all".

the route, but the speed limit was often reduced from 120 to 80 or even 60kph due to potholes in the roadway. At times, we had to use the “wrong” side of the road or slalom to miss the biggest of the holes! Despite that it was a pleasant drive on a beautiful day in which the temperature reached the mid-seventies and the sun shone brightly. We arrived back at the hotel around 5pm and I was able to take a short walk before getting ready for our evening meal. Tonight, we ate at the New York restaurant, about 10 minutes from the hotel. This was a very large, open restaurant which specialized in steaks. We both enjoyed our fillet and starters (snails and mussels) and a bottle of South African Sauvignon Blanc. We finished the evening with a nightcap in the hotel lounge.

Tuesday November 15

After breakfast in the hotel, we completed our packing, checked out and started our drive southeast to our destination of Graaff-Reinet, 430 Km from Bloemfontein. As soon as we headed south on the N1, the terrain changed from the relatively lush farmland that we had seen yesterday to a much more arid land with very limited habitation and only sparse areas of farmland. Cattle grazed on the brush on either side of the road, and we saw occasional goats and sheep, but generally we were in more desert-like country which reminded us of the American West.

The only town of significance along the route is Colesberg about 220 Km south and the point at which we would leave the N1. Unfortunately, almost constant sections of roadworks meant several 10-to-20-minute waits (between short stretches of faster driving where the works were done or limited) and what should have been a two-hour drive turned into 3 ¼ hours. The weather was fine, however, and the scenery was interesting, so we didn't mind the delays.

In Colesberg we filled the tank and had a light lunch before leaving the N1 for another 200 Km drive along the N9, now headed more southerly. It was from this point that we realized that what we had seen so far was just a teaser for the “real American Southwest” as we drove through brush and small tree desert with flat-topped mesas and some sharper peaks visible in all directions. We went through three passes of 4500, 5000, and



5400 feet with higher land (perhaps another 1000 feet) around and many of the vistas could have been from Utah, Nevada, New Mexico or Arizona – albeit on a somewhat smaller scale. We were now in the Great Karoo. The two hours passed very quickly (no more roadworks and very little traffic) and we enjoyed the drive all the way to Graaff-Reinet.



We drove through the center of this beautiful town (with a magnificent Dutch-Reformed church—below) and easily found the hotel – which is a series of one storey blocks containing a handful of rooms around a swimming pool or in shady courtyards. The reception and restaurant building is separate and, of course, the whole complex is gated and guarded. We checked in, found a little water problem in the bathroom, which was fixed relatively quickly, and I was able to take a walk around the town. Hopefully we will be able to spend a little more time strolling before we leave tomorrow. Tonight, we ate in the hotel restaurant which had some great reviews. We both enjoyed our dinner and the service in a very nice ambiance.



Wednesday November 16

After a good breakfast in the hotel restaurant, we checked out and started our drive to Oudtshoorn but first spent about 30 minutes walking round the beautiful town center of Graaff-Reinet. This is one of the oldest towns in South Africa, formed by the Dutch after leaving the Cape Colony, and also a starting point for many of the voortrekkers that were commemorated in the monument we had visited in Pretoria.

*The beautiful Dutch Reformed Church
and the central section of Graaff-Reinet*



The drive southwest was in many ways a repeat of the one we had taken yesterday and again reminded us of the American West. Most of the higher mountains were to our right (north) but there was another significant range across the plain to the southwest. As we approached the halfway point on today's drive (near Willowmore) this range was now much closer, and we went over a few small passes just before we stopped for lunch in that small town. We had a very pleasant stop, sitting outside on another warm and sunny day and then proceeded to head a little north of west to de Rust and Oudtshoorn. Now we were in the Klein Karoo and the land had changed from essentially desert to a much more fertile state, with orchards, many (unfamiliar) green ground crops and some vineyards. We were now at the eastern edge of what I label The Wine Route which stretches all the way to Stellenbosch, Cape Town and to the Atlantic coast – a several hundred-mile corridor producing some of the world's best wines.



Our room

We arrived in Oudtshoorn before 3:30 and checked in at Riempie Protea, which is another where the individual rooms (most are circular from the outside with thatched rooves) and the reception, bar and restaurant are in a separate building. We have stayed here several times, although the last time (four years ago) we were moved to another property close by as the power was out in this location. Oddly, they are still experiencing periodic blackouts and we were informed that we would experience one overnight and early tomorrow morning. In fact, there was one in place at the time we checked in but the power was restored by 4pm

I took a walk into town and back (3 miles) and then we both relaxed until our 7:30 reservation at Jemima's, a restaurant we have enjoyed

several times in the past. Tonight was no disappointment and we both enjoyed our meals (lamb shank for me, ostrich for Molly) with excellent service in a lovely setting. We made another reservation for Friday evening!

Thursday November 17

After breakfast in the hotel, we decided to take the drive to Prince Albert, just over the mountain range to our north via the Swartberg Pass.

The Swartberg Pass on the R328 runs over the Swartberg mountain range (black mountain in English) which runs roughly east–west along the northern edge of the semi-arid area called the Little Karoo in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The construction of the Swartberg pass was started under the guidance of Jan Tassies who used 100 workers from Mozambique. After 13 months he went bankrupt and also only completed 6 km of the road! The rest of the pass was built between 1883 and 1888 by Thomas Bain, son of the famous Andrew Geddes Bain who built Bain's Kloof Pass and many more. It followed their earlier construction of another pass in 1858, the Meiringspoort, through the same mountains but further east. It was built using convict labor and opened on 10 January 1888. The dry-stone retaining walls, supporting some of its hairpin bends, are still in place and over 130 years old.

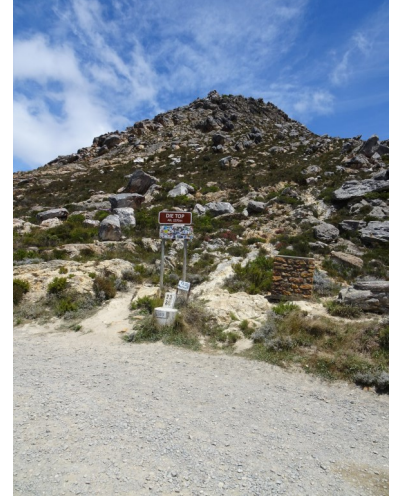
To the north of the range lies the other large semi-arid area in South Africa, the Great Karoo. Much of the Swartberg is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The pass runs between Oudtshoorn in the south and Prince Albert in the north. The pass is not tarred and can be a little treacherous after rain, but has views over the Little Karoo to the south and the Great Karoo to the north. The plant life along the pass is very interesting, many hundreds of species being found on the Swartberg

The Swartberg mountains are amongst the best exposed fold mountain chains in the world, and the pass slices through magnificently scenic geological formations. The contortions in the rock display astonishing anticlines and synclines, and the vivid coloration of the surrounding Quartzite is remarkable. The pass is especially known for the unusual geology that is exposed at its Northern end. Here, seven-hundred-meter-high quartzite cliffs of the upper Table Mountain Group can be seen, and these are often tilted through 90 degrees (sometimes even more). Arguably the most famous of all these cliff faces is the spectacular 'Wall of Fire'.



We have made this trip several times in the past and have always been surprised at how magnificent the scenery is – and how exciting is the drive. About 30 Km north of Oudtshoorn, the road becomes unpaved and stays that way for the next 27 Km (although it seems longer than that!) The road rises steeply on the south side and there are a number of hairpin bends. The surface is stone covered and quite rough in parts and is generally wide enough for one car – which makes for a little excitement when one meets someone coming from the north. There are passing places and often it is possible to squeeze by without using them, but it can be a little scary as the road falls away very steeply – either into bushes or a precipitous drop of several hundred feet. Fortunately, traffic is generally light, and we probably saw only about a dozen vehicles traveling in each direction.



The views over the valley are breathtaking and the viewing distance is immense on a clear day such as we experienced. The summit is only about 5000 feet above sea level but is 4000 feet above Oudtshoorn. Driving down the north side is, if anything even more exciting as there are many more hairpin bends and the drop-offs seem even steeper and higher than those on the upside we had traveled. In addition, the very high rock faces, particularly near the bottom, provide some interesting formations and present a much more “closed in” feeling. All told it is a drive to remember.



The road was planned and built by a Scottish engineer and completed in 1888 and is not only a National Heritage Site but a masterpiece of engineering and road building.

Once in Prince Albert, we found a coffee house on the main street and had a light lunch sitting on the verandah. The village is essentially one street but has some beautiful trees and plants which make it very colorful and prosperous-looking.

After lunch we took the paved route back to Oudtshoorn via the Meiringspoort Pass. This, too, is a magnificent drive through a narrow gorge in which the steep and high rock faces exhibit some unusu-

al striations and strata. It is a little further than the Swartberg Pass but the excellent road surface allows for a much quicker drive – though hardly any less scenic.

Once back at the hotel, we made dinner reservations, and I took a three-mile walk. Tonight, we ate at Nostalgie. This was a little less “fancy” than Jemima’s, but the food and service were once again excellent – at a much lower price. We both had ostrich.

Friday November 18

We were up about 9:30 and went for breakfast at Nostalgie (where we ate last night) and had a very good “English” breakfast at less than half the price of the hotel breakfast. We were also able to sit on the veranda on a warm, sunny morning. Afterwards we spent about 90 minutes doing souvenir shopping in the center of town, had a coffee sitting outside and then returned to the hotel for a while.



Oudtshoorn

We both went for walks in the afternoon and then we went back to Jemima’s for another very good meal – despite Molly’s main course being a little late.

Saturday November 19

We checked out of the hotel and went for breakfast again at Nostalgie. Then we set off for our drive south to Wilderness on the Garden Route. Rather than take the main road to George, we drove south across the coastal range to meet the N2 (the

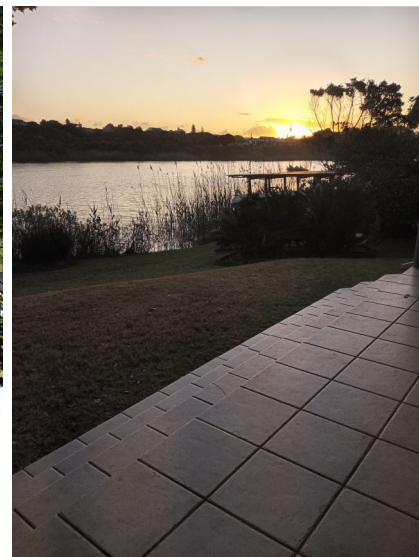


main coast road) at Mossel Bay. Again, we detoured a little west so that we could visit the aloe factory and shop in Albertinia. We had a light lunch here and did a little shopping before heading east again to Wilderness. This lush part of the country certainly earns its name as the Garden Route at this time of year and there are some magnificent views of the Indian Ocean (with its high surf) and the heavily forested country inland.

We arrived at Serendipity around 3pm to be greeted by the hostess who remembered us from previous visits and made us feel very welcome. Similarly, when we went to dinner, the waiters, the chef and her husband all did a good job of making us

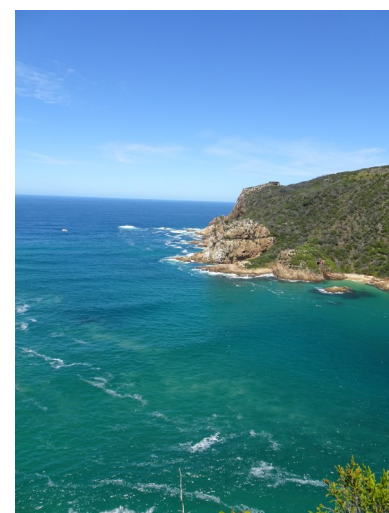
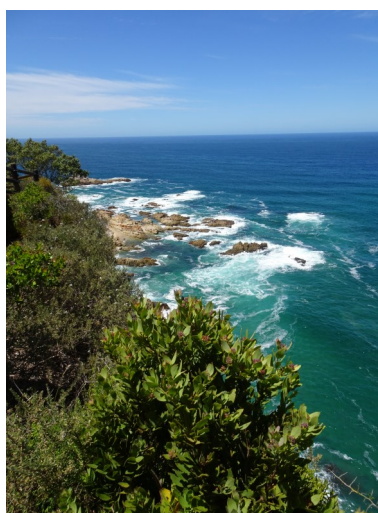
feel special and acknowledging our previous visits. As usual, the meal was superb – a five course culinary extravaganza by one of the top ten chefs in the country. She also happens to be the owner’s daughter and is married to the guy who hunts a lot of the meats and fish and also serves as sommelier. A great evening.

The view from our room and the restaurant



Sunday November 20

We had breakfast in the hotel and then drove about 40 miles to Knysna. First, we went to the Heads, a high point overlooking the entrance to the Knysna lagoon from the sea. It really is a superb viewpoint and one we have enjoyed on all previous visits.



Then we drove to the Knysna Quays, a modern shopping area right on the marina. Here we did a little more shopping and had a pizza lunch and had a nice chat with the waiter who had moved here from the mining town of Kimberley several years ago. I took a three-mile walk late in the afternoon and then (since the hotel restaurant is closed Sundays) we drove into Wilderness to a restaurant recommended by our hostess. It wasn’t the fine dining of Serendipity, but we enjoyed a six-piece tapas dinner with wine, dessert, and after-dinner drink with excellent service in pleasant surroundings.

Monday November 21



After breakfast we drove to Plettenberg Bay, about 25 miles beyond Knysna, and spent a lazy three hours strolling the streets, having a coffee, and watching the waves in the Indian Ocean. We also drove by the B&B that we had stayed at on our first visit to South Africa in 2005, and where we took our first swim in the Indian Ocean.

Back at the hotel, I went for a short walk and then we both relaxed until another fine dining experience in the restaurant. We also had a nice chat with two Canadian ladies who were traveling across the country much like us and with a German couple, also touring. It’s always interesting to meet new people and get their perspective on life in their country, the US and, of course, the country they are visiting.

Tuesday November 22

We checked out after breakfast and started our journey west towards Cape Town, although we had one more stop to make before reaching the capital. We retraced our steps of Saturday as far as Albertinia, having caught glimpses of the ocean before Mussel Bay and starting to veer inland. To our left was the vast farming area (grain, cattle sheep) and to our right was several miles of the same before the foothills of the Langeberg range of mountains. At Riversdale we stopped for a coffee and scone, sitting outside at a very nice coffee shop.

Our next stop was Swellendam, with its enormous Dutch Reformed Church and tidy main street, before starting north into the mountains. The road didn't rise to a very high elevation but there were some impressive vistas, especially as we neared our destination of Montagu. We arrived at our B&B just after 3pm, to be greeted by Mike. We have stayed here twice previously so we have got to know Mike and his wife May (away at the moment) and he gave us a 30-minute dissertation on what's wrong with South Africa and much of the rest of the world. He hails from Manchester so is clearly in a good position to make his pronouncements!

I went for a short walk (it was hot and humid) and then sampled the wine he had left for us before getting ready for dinner at a restaurant just up the street. Again, we have eaten here on previous visits and tonight was as good as we remembered. We commented that the food and service were at least comparable to that at several of our favorites at home. The ambiance was different (maybe not as "modern") but this could compete on everything – especially price!

Our room



Wednesday November 23



We had a lovely breakfast sitting outside in the garden of our B&B and then set out on our drive around the local Route 62 Wine Route.



The scenery is stunning, the vineyards seem to stretch for miles on both sides of the road and the mountains make a perfect backdrop. We stopped at one winery



and selected two different wine pairings – mine with cheeses, Molly's with cured meat, cheese, bread and dips. We



spent over an hour enjoying our selections before setting off back towards Montagu and our hotel. We stopped in a very nice layby for a while and were back “home” before 4pm after a great day out.



On our return, I went for another short walk around **Montagu**. Tonight, we ate again at 22 Church Street and had another excellent meal.

Thursday November 24 (Thanksgiving Day, Sammy’s Birthday)

We had breakfast and checked out, complete with a hand drawn map of a proposed route to Cape Town, courtesy of Mike. We drove west to Robertson and then south for a while before turning west again to go over the mountains to Franschhoek and Stellenbosch. Once again, the scenery was spectacular with wide valleys, high peaked mountains (very much like a half-sized Tetons) and the ubiquitous rows of vines.

Color was added by the jacaranda tree and many others that provided various blues, reds, purples and yellows. Today there were a few high clouds which only added to the overall beauty.



The View approaching Franschhoek—Amazing!



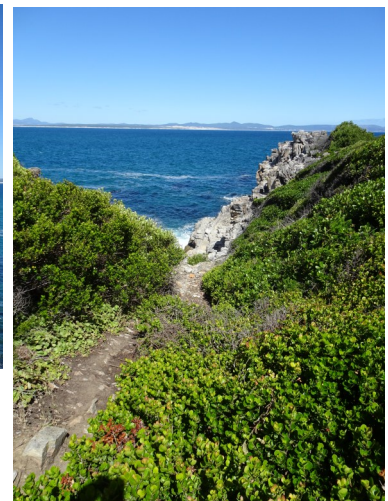
We stopped for a light lunch and a short walk in Franschoek and then drove around the edge of Stellenbosch towards Cape Town, with Table Mountain visible in the distance. Unfortunately, as we got into the capital city, the phone GPS was not working properly so it took us a long time to find our hotel. For perhaps 45 minutes it was often in our sight, but we couldn't find the right road to get us there. We eventually made it around 4:30 and thankfully checked in to our room – once again with a great view of Table Mountain.

We made dinner reservations and I went for a short walk before we got an Uber to an Italian restaurant in town for a relaxing (Thanksgiving) dinner. The place was less than half full, but we had a very good Italian meal with excellent service in pleasant, if not sumptuous, surroundings.

Friday November 25

We had breakfast in the hotel (fine, but nothing like the past several days!) and then started out for a drive to Hermanus. We easily found our way out of Cape Town and the first 40 Km of heavy traffic to Somerset West. After that, we were in beautiful scenery once again with mountains to our left and in front - and the ocean to our right. There are two passes between Cape Town and Hermanus, neither higher than about 1500 feet but both are spectacular, particularly Sir Lowry's Pass from the top of which is an amazing view back towards Cape Town with the surf of the Atlantic to the left, mountains to the right and Table Mountain in the far distance. All of this in a huge valley.

On the Hermanus side of the passes the land was rich farmland – grains, orchards and the ubiquitous vines. This is still a good grape-growing area and there are a number of tasting rooms along the route.



Hermanus



Once in Hermanus – settled in the 1700s and retaining a lot of old world charm – we had lunch sitting outside in the pleasantly warm sun. There was very little breeze, unlike the strong winds we had left in Cape Town. After lunch, we both went for a walk, and I followed the cliff path for about two miles. It's a lovely walk through lush plants and trees and rises and falls between the roadway and close to the ocean, with its constant waves crashing against the rocky cliffs.

We left Hermanus about 4pm and had a relatively easy drive back to the hotel, where we arrived soon after 5:30. Tonight, we ate at Dash in the Queen Victoria Hotel. While it wasn't quite what we had expected based on the website (the menu was quite limited) we both enjoyed what we had, and the ambiance was very pleasant. A bonus was that Old Fasioneds were on the menu!

Saturday November 26

We had a leisurely breakfast and then spent a very lazy day in the V&A Waterfront area. We people-watched, looked in the shops, had a long lunch sitting outside and watched a very good local group singing and dancing. The weather was perfect – warm, sunny, a nice breeze!



Tonight, we ate at Elgr in town. We had made a reservation online but somehow that had been lost so we had a moment of concern before the manager agreed that she could accommodate us. Obviously, we were grateful to get in on a Saturday evening but especially happy that it was such a good meal. Similar to a tasting menu but labeled the "Chef's Choice Sharing Menu". We had three courses, none of which were identified in language we could understand, but everything was great. The restaurant itself was unusual in design also but the food, wine and service were excellent.

Sunday November 27



After breakfast we drove to Stellenbosch to spend a little time in that beautiful village at the center of the wine country. We strolled around the central square, admired the Cape Dutch buildings (all painted white),

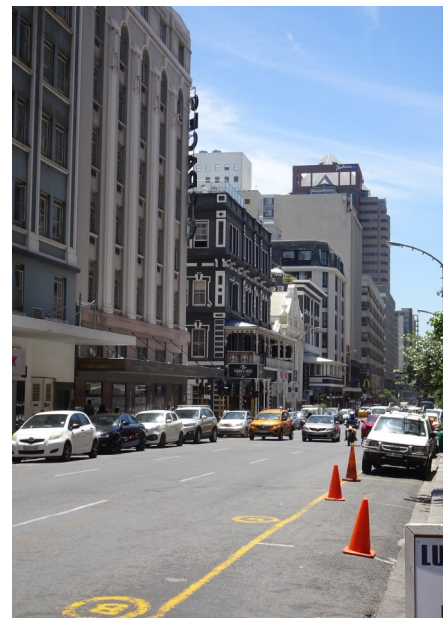
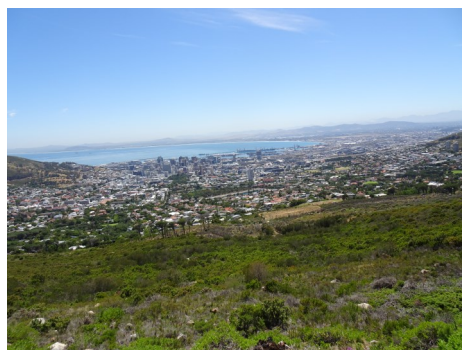
and had a light lunch sitting outside in the shade (it was over 80F) and, later, a Starbucks coffee before the drive home.



Stellenbosch

I had time for a 3-mile walk before getting ready for dinner at the Signal restaurant in the Cape Grace hotel at the Waterfront. This was an elegant room in a Victorian (?) hotel and, once again, had an unusual approach to the menu. There were five “classes” of meals (“Spicy”, “Salty”, etc) and each had selections from starter to dessert. Each dish was suitable for two and we could mix and match between the styles. Again, everything was delicious, and the service was excellent.

Monday November 28



Cape Town from the Bus

Today we did the Hop On/Hop Off bus of Cape Town. There are two main routes: the first took us through the city and to the Table Mountain cable car base station; the second went out of the city to Kirstenbosch gardens, Constantia, Houk Bay and the Atlantic coast before returning to the city center. We had lunch in a small café in Camps Bay and, by the time we were back at the hotel, we had been out over six hours and what was probably the hottest day we have experienced – a high of 88F. Tonight, we dined at the first of two restaurants we had picked out in Camps Bay. The Hussar Grill was on the hill leading down from the “mountain” and is a rambling series of open rooms in a building overlooking the ocean. There weren’t many low windows so views of the sunset were limited but the steaks we had (for which they are renowned) were very good, as were the starters and wine!

Tuesday November 28

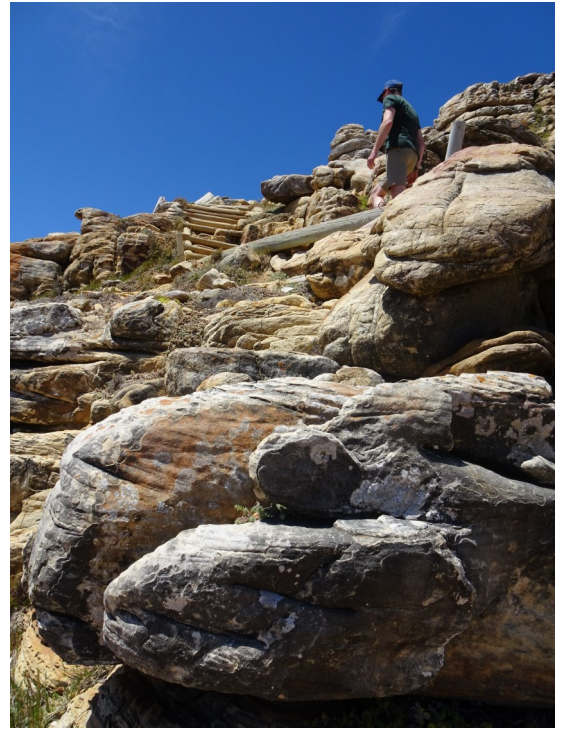
We spent today driving down the peninsula to visit the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Point, stopping at the historic Naval town of Simon’s Town on the way..



Once at the most southwesterly point of Africa, I tried to walk up the steep, rocky hill at the Good Hope viewpoint but the wind, the tricky terrain and some fear of slipping made me turn back after a period of hands and knees climbing. However, when we got to Cape Point, I was able to make it all the way to the lighthouse at an elevation of about 800 feet and after a climb of 211 steps and some very steep grades on a well paved path.

The scenery down the entire peninsula is absolutely fantastic. There are many mountains of 2000 feet or more (although their position rising straight from the sea makes them appear higher), sweeping wide, white beaches and a central high valley with numerous plant species of the fynbos varieties and is part of the Cape Floral Region. Baboons are a common sight along the roadways and, although we didn't

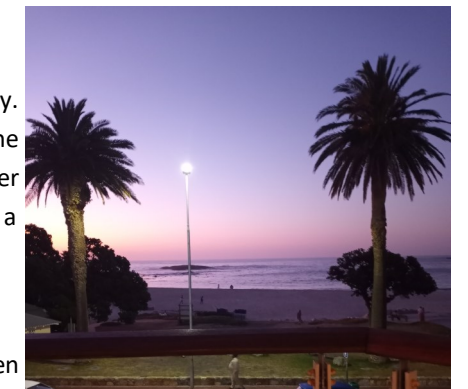




*Cape of Good Hope and the climb I didn't make....
and, Cape Point, the one I did!*



On our way back to Cape Town, we passed a large group of baboons on the road and saw more of the beautiful. Colorful flowers and plants that seem to epitomize South Africa. Throughout the three weeks, we had seen almost every color of plant imaginable, so we have included a sample here as our farewell to a beautiful country.



Tonight, we had our final dinner (for this trip) at another restaurant in Camps Bay. Bilboa sits right on the coast road, and we had a table on the veranda open to the elements on a very pleasant evening. We watched the sunset and enjoyed another great meal with excellent service – a great way to say farewell to South Africa after a fabulous trip

Wednesday November 30/Thursday December 1

We had breakfast in the hotel on a cloudy morning (the first in many days) and then did our packing and got ready to leave. I managed a short walk, and we checked out shortly after noon. The drive to the airport was uneventful and we soon found the check-in desk for our South African Airways flight to Johannesburg. We were “too early” to check our bags but could use the SAA lounge to relax – but that was through Security! So, we dragged our full-size suitcases through the screening process, spent two hours in the pleasant lounge – and then did it all again (sans bags) around 4pm. The one-hour flight was smooth (although there was a distant storm as we approached Johannesburg) and we were fed a full meal, in our case “fish and chips”.

Once in the airport, we collected our bags and re-checked them with Delta for our flight to Atlanta and on to Cincinnati. We were able to spend some time in the lounge before boarding for our 16 ½ hour flight. We had our very late dinner (we left at 11pm) and then both of us got a significant amount of sleep. Obviously, it was a very long flight (eighth longest of all commercial flights) but the experience wasn’t as bad as we had anticipated. Getting through Security and Customs in Atlanta was quick and easy, and we were soon on our way to the final leg.

We arrived in Cincinnati at 12:30 pm (December 1) and were home an hour later after a terrific visit to South Africa. We are already planning a return visit!

