

## **THE LODGE – DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS – AUGUST 2006**

About a month ago, Hein decided to trade in his BMW. It had too many km's on the clock and he got offered a nice price. So he took the new BMW 320 diesel for test drives, but wasn't quite convinced. Then one morning he woke me up and said we could look at a Jeep Cherokee. After breakfast we jumped into the BMW and head to Investment Cars in William Nicol Drive. Only to found out that they didn't have any Jeep Cherokees on the floor.

But the guy was good – asked us our budget and then showed us this little beast!



Well, we just fell in love with her. That was the Saturday – by Tuesday evening she was ours. We call her "Rissiepit", because her Registration no is RPS (Rissie Pit Stukkie – actually). She is not diesel however!!\*& The Wednesday Hein drove her to work and back and that evening he handed me her keys and told me, "she's yours!" So I get to drive her during the week – Hein can't wait for the weekends to get his turn. The 1<sup>st</sup> few weekends, we looked for breakfast places with dirt roads – 4x4, yippee! Anyway...

We booked a long weekend in August in the Drakensberg Mountains, in the Kamberg area and took Rissiepit on her "maiden 4x4 voyage".

The Kamberg area is close to Mooirivier on your way to Durban. You pass Rosetta (a 1-horse town). We were there last year, but the roads were so bad from the rain, we had to borrow the owner's 4x4 just to get to the lodge.

We left on Thursday, 3 August 2006. When we drove through Harrismith, I asked Hein to stop at a Mr Price. He forgot to pack his tracksuit pants (we were forewarned of a cold spell) and with only a jeans and shorts, I was sure he would suffer! Got a nice pair of grey pants for only R50 (what a bargain) and drove on. We arrived at Mooirivier around 3pm. Filled up Rissiepit with petrol and took the last leg. And then we saw it ... mountains covered in snow. The sight of them were breathtaking. But when we reached our destination, we couldn't see them anymore.

The Lodge, where we stayed, is booked through Drakensberg Excursions ([www.bergtrails.co.za](http://www.bergtrails.co.za)) and offers sleeping for 11 people. You can also hire horses and go on mountain trails.

As you can see, it is a stunning place! With its own trout dam right in front of it. On the left hand side there's a covered braai area, big enough for a cane lounge suite, as well as a cane dining room table and chairs!



The only "drag" is you have to take your own bedding and towels, which doesn't leave much space for the rest. (We folded Rissiepit's backseats to the front and had quite a big area for all the bedding and food.) One has to travel with all your food needs, because it's not just for jumping in the car and fetching milk or bread or such .... the nearest petrol station is 10 min away and only stock the very basics. For the rest, you have to drive at least 30-45 min.

The house has no TV, there's no cellphone reception – so one just read, eat, sleep and talk. Honeymoon bliss! (Well, we did celebrate our 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary!) For this stunning setting, you would expect to pay a lot – but no! A mere R100 per person per night is their charge. Try and beat that! And it's only about 5 hours' drive from Johannesburg.

Rissiepit took the bad road absolutely in her stride. While I unpacked (Hein normally packs everything – a task he's not very keen on, but hates unpacking more), we discovered the loads of firewood left for us next to the Jetmaster fireplace. Sadly, for some reason, we didn't take a photo. And when we left the Tuesday, there were still some left! (The firewood is included in the price.)

Every morning we took our coffee (always travel with our own coffee machine!) outside on the stoep, but believe me, you had to dress in windbreakers. While you sip your coffee, you listen to the silence ... and then you hear the little birds ... and the wind through the trees ... pure heaven!

On Saturday, we decided to "chase the snow". We drove to Loteni – a dirt road all the way and it took us about 1-2 hours. We drove past huts with children playing outside, screaming for sweets and goats blocking the road every so often.

We reached the Loteni Camping Site and took photo's from there.



Stunning, isn't it? Remember, Lesotho is just on the other side. Funny enough, it wasn't so cold where we took the photo's, but driving away, the temperature actually dropped. Now that was around lunchtime and we were starving! But with no pub or restaurant in sight, we drove on to Himeville, a quaint little town with a lovely pub. We caught the last disastrous 10 min of the rugby game and then had some lovely bacon and guacamole burgers! We didn't want to drive back on the dirt road again, so drove from Himeville on to Howick and then back to Mooiriver and The Lodge.

Sunday morning, the water was frozen in the pipes! Luckily, I had filled the kettle with water the previous night, so we were able to make coffee. (Thank goodness for that – we are lost without our morning cuppa!) Hein braaied us boerewors for breakfast and we ate it with toasted sandwiches and more coffee. We were only able to shower after 10.

Hein went fishing around 11 at the neighbours, Attie & Evol (that's love spelled in reverse), but the wind was a bit bad, so we made arrangements to fish in the afternoon. While we walked to the dam, we saw this little pond – completely frozen!



You can see on the right-hand side picture, the little twig Hein dropped on it.

After lunch, we drove to a picnic site called Highmoor. The road ascended to 1900m above sea level and the views were spectacular.

Around 4 we drove to the neighbours (I thought it might get a bit late and I definitely was not going to walk back in the dark!) By that time, the little pond was still frozen solid. Hein & Attie still didn't catch anything, but we had a few beers afterwards and had a nice chat. Evol also loves to watch SummitTV over the weekends, so we chatted about decorations and food. When we got home after 8, Hein made a huge fire in the fireplace and I made us some extra-hot chicken green curry to warm the insides.

Monday was our last day, so we just talked about Hein's business, sat around the fire and relaxed. By 5pm I was starving and I had something in mind... and it wasn't in our grocery cupboard! And those of you that know me well – when I have a "crave" for something, it doesn't fade away ... even if I have to wait for weeks, but I'll know get it in the end. And what I wanted on that Monday afternoon was a real English Pub Pie!

Rawdons ([www.rawdons.co.za](http://www.rawdons.co.za)) is a hotel situated in the Midlands Meander (a mere 40min drive from The Lodge – although a bit frightening at night with cows and dogs walking in the road.) At Rawdons, there's a Nottingham Road Beer Brewery with a Pickled Pig Porter (dark beer), a Whistling Weasle Pale Ale and a Tiddly Toad Lager.



The hotel has a cosy pub and I had the "Steak and Pickly Pig Pie". It was served in a pastry bowl with a pastry lid. (I suppose they line a small bowl with the pastry and bake it before spooning in the stew). Well, I couldn't finish my portion but it was everything I wanted on that cold winter night (besides my hubby, of course!)

The next morning we packed up, handed in the keys and went to greet Attie & Evol. We always make new friends wherever we go and next time hopefully Hein will catch a trout. We waved a sad goodbye to isolation and peace and headed for civilization.