

# To Camp – or not to Camp...

*If you enjoy camping, then good for you. My compromise? Hubby can braai 3 times a day, every single day – BUT I NEED TO STAY IN A SELF-CATERING CHALET WITH THE BASICS PROVIDED*

Those were my words after a horrible caravan-camping trip December 2006. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, there was no water for a shower or the toilets. And you had to run through mud to reach the ablution blocks.

Time mellowed me. Or is it age? Maybe it's my new exercise class – Tai Chi. A traditional Chinese mind-body exercise.

We planned a tent camping trip. With a twist though – the tent, bed & bedding, cupboard for clothes & food, gas fridge, 2 patio chairs, patio table and braai are provided. Nothing else. No electricity. No cellphone reception.

It's called the Borakalalo Nature Reserve ([www.borakalalo.co.za](http://www.borakalalo.co.za)), 60 km North of Brits. The non-electricity camp is called Moretele Camp. R266/night during the week – R327/night over weekends/holidays.

My camping-fundi sis in Perth sent me their camping list. (They really rough it – with spades, etc. If you know what I mean...) Hugo, Hein's brother, sent me his list. I combined them together and so the planning started...

The hardest planning part was the menu for 6 days, 7 nights. I worried about the meat, but went to a butcher and they vacuum-packed all the mince, chicken, steak & boerewors portions. That way it will keep for quite a while in your fridge. And it did! Also my menu planning was spot-on. Nothing wasted.

## Saturday, 14 June 2008

The cat-kids were already in their hotel. After coffee, we started to pack Rissiepit (our Mitsubishi Pajero.) We were apprehensive about the cold (our tent was right on the river bank) and packed extra duvets. Our water tank's tap was missing. Sent up a quick prayer – Hein found it in the hall cupboard – right in the front. Prayer answered. But there were no space for charcoal or wood. And the camp didn't sell wood/charcoal. Sent up another little prayer...

We arrived at the Borakalalo gate at 1 o'clock. They had 3 bags of wood – we bought all three. And they will organise for more wood and charcoal. Another prayer answered. At the tent, our gas fridge wasn't working, but they quickly fixed that.



(Left) Our tent. Quite big, with lovely flaps all over for ventilation. (Centre) 2 Single beds & bedside table with 2 paraffin lamps. (Right) Couldn't resist moving furniture around.

**Interesting fact:** Push 2 single beds together. Buy 2 king-size fitted sheets. Put them over the 2 single mattresses and VOILA! A lovely king-size bed! The fitted sheets keep the mattresses firmly together.

There are 10 tents right on the river banks. A few small ablution blocks contained 2 toilets and a shower. Each ablution area has a roof and the 'walls' were of reeds/bamboo and plastic. Not too flimsy and it have gaps between the roof and the walls. So if you shower, you can see the trees outside.

The showers have a rack for your shampoo and soap and quite a few hooks for towels & clothes.



(Left) That's taken from the inside of the tent. You can see the river. (Centre) The river right in front of our tent. (Right) Most mornings the river had a mist-veil.

Unpacked everything, took a shower. Sent up another quick prayer – to have quiet neighbours. On the one side was an elderly couple (quiet-ish, although they talked non-stop.) Other side was a German family, but they were mostly with their friends right at the other end of the camp. Another prayer answered... or so I thought ...

Hein made a lovely fire and we had boerewors rolls with a Chakalaka sauce. For left-over food, I didn't take Tupperware. But Ziploc bags. Takes up much less space.

Although we closed all the side flaps, there were 4 roof flaps left open during the night. I struggled to sleep, because my face was cold. But after we closed the 2 closest to us, we were cosy as bed-bugs.

### **Sunday, 15 June 2008**

Woke early, boiled water for coffee and then heard ... the fish eagle! It is one of the most amazing sounds – coupled with the mist on the river – unforgettable.

We had coffee in bed with rusks. Did some Tai Chi outside, which warmed me up considerable. Went to have a shower – no hot water. But being undressed already, I jumped around under the cold water, did a few soap strokes and that was that!

Driving around, we saw loads of birds, some Impalas and huge animal droppings. Rhino's?

Lunch was bully beef, eggs & onion on Portuguese rolls. Hein reported the shower problem and they worked till 8 at night trying to fix it. It worked.

On the food cupboard, they've posted a warning about monkeys. And by the afternoon, we knew why. I was on the bed, reading, when I saw a few of them. They came right to the tent opening and I had to shoo them away.

Dinner was chicken on the braai, cooked baby potatoes & kernel corn. (Tinned)

### **Monday, 16 June 2008**

After a nice hot shower, we went for a 3-hour drive. We saw a small jackal, warthogs, an ostrich, wildebeest, giraffes and fish eagles.

Back at the camp, we were starving and made Mince Mate. Our neighbours told us there was no water in the whole tented camp. DISASTER!!

After lunch, we saw an iguana swimming down the river. And then we suddenly realised ...

We were all alone in the whole 10-tent-camp! Oh boy ... maybe my prayer for quiet neighbours just backfired!!!

Although we had a lovely quiet evening around the fire, I must admit to being a teensy bit frightened.

That night, we locked the tent-flaps from the inside.

## Tuesday, 17 June 2008

It was a splendid morning! For breakfast, we had lamb chops, boerewors & 'samp & beans'. It's in a tin, although next time I'll scoop out the gelatine on top. It was a bit 'mushy'. And the whole time I sent up little prayers for the water to be fixed.

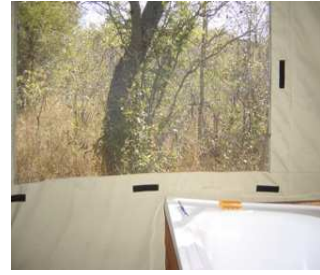
With still no water, we decided to shower at another camp and made a decision to go home. One can camp without electricity, but DEFINITELY not without water.

Just after breakfast, the camp attendants arrived. The water would only be fixed on Friday. But they could give us a key for another camp. One with electricity and in-between trees, not on the river bank.

When they left, I broke down and sobbed my heart out. This camping was a test for me – I wanted to make it work – I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it! WE SO DIDN'T WANT TO GO HOME BEFORE SATURDAY!!!

Hein accepted the key to the other camp, Phudufudu – but he demanded a luxury tent. One with a little kitchenette & en-suite bathroom. They didn't offer any resistance.

While Hein drove to check out the new tent, I packed everything. And waved a sad farewell to the lovely river.



Phudufudu Camp consists of 10 tents in all. (Left to right: The Luxury tent, the tiny kitchenette, double bed, clothes cupboard, fridge with small freezer compartment, cupboard for food with microwave on top and (Right) when you sit in the bath, you can have this view. Technically.. unfortunately, if you sit in the bath facing this flap, the bath plug is underneath your bum & the water outlet at your back. Not comfortable. If you face the other side, you can look out the flap, onto the camp attendants' house. The bath installer was clearly not thinking.

The camp is ideal for group bookings. Although the 4 luxury tents have tiny kitchenettes, there is a central fully equipped kitchen for the whole camp. Also a pool table, small swimming pool and central area with chairs & tables for meals or conferences. And electricity, as well as cellphone reception.

4 Luxury tents (small kitchenette & bathroom attached) – R484/night during the week – R660/night during weekends/holidays.

There are also 6 other tents – The Standard Tents are constructed on concrete plinths and are equipped with 2 single beds, linen, towels, clothing cupboard, side table and 2 chairs with a cocktail table on the patio.. Ablution facilities with showers & toilets are close by.

Standard tents – R327/night during the week – R497/night during weekends/holidays.

And from Tuesday till Friday night we had very quiet neighbours ... no-one. So be careful what you wish for...

Lunch was Minute steaks on Portuguese rolls. After all the excitement of packing up & unpacking again, we both needed a nap.

We had tea & Romany Creams and Hein was happy, because he had cellphone reception. At least he was in contact with his colleagues.

Dinner was Rice Mate with meat cubes, but the flavouring was way too subtle for us.

### Wednesday, 18 June 2008



Made coffee at 6.30 and had some Muesli rusks from Woolworths. They are packed with seeds, almonds & raisins and are yummy! Did some Tai Chi & had a nice hot shower.

For brunch, we had boerewors rolls with a cheese sauce.

On our afternoon drive, we saw more bucks and an iguana at the dam. Warthogs were chasing some Impala.

We both love reading, so during the afternoon we immersed ourselves in adventure and intrigues.

Dinner was scrumptious sirloin steak on the braai, heated creamy mushrooms (tin) – very good, peas (tin) and cooked potatoes.

After dinner, we just relaxed and Hein started to get restless. He even asked me if we could go home a day earlier. When he gets restless like this, he actually only starts to relax at that moment. And definitely needs a few more days of holiday.

### Thursday, 19 June 2008



Up at 6.30 am. Made coffee in the flask, took rusks and dressed warm. It was 4 degrees outside. The car's bonnet had a light film of frost on it. We went to the dam, watched the birds and saw more bucks.

To fill up on petrol, we drove to a little town nearby (think it was Hebron). Complete with 3 atm's, a chemist, a Pep Stores, 2 clothing stores & a supermarket called Score. Quite similar to Checkers. We bought some lovely boerewors & a few snacks.

Lunch was boerewors and tomato, onion & cheese sandwiches on the braai. Yum!!!! We drove to the dam again and saw more giraffes, warthogs, monkeys & bucks.

After a nap, we had some tea and read again. Sometimes I would just gaze at the trees. I cannot express in words the absolute peace and quiet we experienced there.

Dinner was chicken pieces on the braai, some quick-boil Tastic Basmati rice mixed with a can of kernel corn & green peas. Absolutely delicious. The rice takes 4 minutes to heat up. It comes in a pouch. Well worth the money spent. I also heated up a tin of refried beans. Lovely taste, quite mushy.

By 8pm we were in bed, reading again.

Although the evenings and mornings were very cold, we weren't cold in the tent. During the day it was lovely and warm, but still required a long top at least.

### Friday, 20 June 2008

Once again, up at 6.30 am. Coffee in the flask, rusks for Hein & I took a leftover braai sandwich from the previous day. That tasted so good with the coffee.

Unfortunately, the camera's battery was flat. We stopped next to a cliff and saw 2 tiny klipspringers. They were at the bottom, but the next moment they were up halfway to the top of the cliff. They were so agile and dainty – it's just unbelievable. Also saw some fat dassies.

For lunch we braaied chicken pieces with bacon and boerewors. I also made some curry mince for dinner & added a tin of butternut stew. We wanted to pack most of our camp stuff in Rissiepit, so we used their pot, plates & utensils for dinner.

Apparently there are 70 rhinos in the camp. We just had to see them!

At 3 o' clock, we had a final game drive. My eyes were red from watching between the bushes and branches. And then.. yes!



3 of them! We were overwhelmed. Our camera doesn't have a great zoom option, so Hein looked through the binoculars and aimed the camera through the binocular lens. It worked. We are definitely saving for a nice camera.

We saw more giraffes, zebras, another jackal and also elande. They are huge animals. So much bigger than the rest of the bucks. While the sun was setting, we drove to the dam for some sunset photos. Can you see the fish eagle in the tree? Photo bottom right?



At 6pm we were back at the camp. Packed most of our things into the car, had the curry mince for dinner and went to bed early to finish our books.

Around 8:30pm, we heard some commotions outside. A tour bus arrived with some overseas people. They chatted & laughed till 11 o' clock.

### **Saturday, 21 June 2008**

After a quick bath, we loaded the final bags and drove to the dam for the last time - and took some photos of the new dawn.



On our way to the gate, we saw the giraffes for the last time. This little one posed nicely for me.

When we drove through the gate, raindrops started to plop down.

We left the camp with a heavy heart.

It was truly a most relaxing holiday.

In future, we will book into the Phudufudu Camp. Although it's not on the riverbank, the added luxury of an en-suite bathroom makes it worthwhile.

With recharged batteries, we headed home.