

## MABALINGWE – A CONQUERED WEEKEND

A few weeks ago, our friends, Johannes and Ina, invited us along to Mabalingwe for the weekend of 26-28 September. We were to be a group of 8.

Not in chalets, not in tented camps – but in tents. Needless to say, I was apprehensive – very apprehensive. And honestly? I nearly cancelled quite a few times.

Although we had most of the camping tools, we didn't have a tent – we didn't have a fridge – and we didn't have a bed.

We asked Hugo, Hein's brother, if we could use his tent. He said it was quite big and very easy to pitch. Although not so easy to pack up. We took his word for the 'easy pitching' – a bit scared for the 'not so easy to pack up' bit. So tent parked itself in my study. Fortunately, Hugo also had a canvas storage cupboard. What a bonus that turned out to be.

But we still didn't have a bed/mattress or a fridge. Chatting about the weekend, one of Hein's colleagues offered us his camp fridge. I bought a Queen-sized inflatable mattress. With a pump. But what Hein didn't know was that it was a hand-pump. After sweating for a few minutes, he converted our car pump (works through the car battery) to do the work.

Wednesday, 24 September (Heritage Day) and 'Barbecue Day' we went to Hennops Pride, (<http://www.hennopspride.caravanparks.co.za/> - (012) 659 0043) on the way to Hartebeespoort Dam. If you are early enough, you'll find a spot right next to the river. The lawns are lusciously green and well-kept, the bathrooms clean and with toilet paper, 6 sparkling swimming pools, trees and a few chalets. The entrance fees are R40/person + R10/vehicle.



We were at Hennops Pride's gates before 7:30 am. Chose a beautiful spot next to the river, (photo left), pitched the gazebo and pumped the 'camp mattress'. (photo right). Breakfast was a boerewors roll and coffee – lunch was braai'd chicken, corn & peas. A mid-morning nap tested the mattress – and we gave it the thumbs-up.

The weekend loomed ahead – I made a camping list. I now have a self-catering list (for chalets), a picnic list and a camping list. A very long camping list...

Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> September, I did the groceries, looked at prices for a roof rack – then asked Hein why don't we hire a trailer? Found a Venter hire-company close by and the rates were reasonable. I even got time to go for my first Spring pedicure. After our branch meeting, I made a potato salad, rice salad and marinated chicken pieces.

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September dawned. My plans were to go to Tai Chi at 10:30 while Hein packed the car and trailer. But I realised that everything will be too rushed, so we had a coffee in bed and slowly started to pack everything.

Ticking off items on my printed camping list, we slowly filled the trailer to the brim. Loaded the fridge and cooler box in the back of Rissiepit (my Pajero's registration number is RPS – Rissie Pit Stukkie – *Chilli Pip Piece*). We left Randburg around 10 o'clock.

The weather bureau forecasted cold weather, so we packed extra duvets, a small gas bottle heater and the waterproof gazebo. We were not taking any chances.

Driving through Warmbaths (Bela-Bela), we stopped for a pie and cold drink and arrived at Mabalingwe around 1 o' clock. With a temperature of 40 degrees.

Mabalingwe ([www.mabalingwe.co.za](http://www.mabalingwe.co.za)) is 26 km outside Bela-Bela, on the way to Mabula. It's a malaria-free game reserve with apparently the big 5 – we didn't see them. They have different accommodation options – lodges, timeshare chalets, bush camps and the caravan park.

The caravan park stands are a bit too close to each other. Each stand has a 5 x 7m concrete slab – housing 2 tents, or a caravan and a tent (or only 1 tent if you're on your own). For a very reasonable R200/night. So if you're 2 couples with 2 tents on 1 stand (like we were), it cost you R100/couple/night. Not too bad.

Pitching the tent was really quick and easy. It's a 'Turbo Tent 240 Standard'. The frame is part of the tent, so you just pick it up in the centre and the whole tent 'pops' up. Ingenious. Although the price tag is around R4000, I'll pay it with a smile. Just for the sheer pleasure of the pitching and 'un-pitching' (is that a word?)



(Photo left) Our tent in the front. You can see the concrete slab and Johannes & Ina's tent next to us. It's just a bit too close to each other – you have to either climb over all the tent ropes or walk around both tents. (Photo right) The inside is very spacious. The mattress went right at the back, with enough space in the front for the 4-shelf storage cupboard, the camp fridge and 2 plastic crates.



(Photo left) This cupboard really made things worthwhile for me. (Cost about R300 now at Outdoor Warehouse Stores). It folds up small, comes in a carrier bag but is nice and sturdy with net fronts to zip up. All our groceries, paper plates, serviettes, etc went in there.

When the groceries were unpacked from the 2 plastic crates, I unpacked our clothes in and on top of the crates. Shoes lined up along the tent side. Needless to say, the extra duvet and gas bottle heater stayed in the trailer...

Shortly after, Johannes & Ina arrived. Now this was also their first tent-camp trip. Their tent was not quite so easy to pitch, but with a few grunts and an ice-cold beer, it was managed quite well.

It was sweltering hot. I started to drink my iced tea – glass after glass. Which proved to be a bit of a problem for the rest of the day ... or maybe I picked up a small tummy bug. Although we had a full medical kit, I didn't want to drink Imodium, but luckily Ina had some generic alternatives, which sorted me out quick-quick.

The other 2 couples were Gerhard and Kleintjie & Eric and Naomi.



Eric and Naomi are veteran campers and bought themselves an Echo 4x4 camp trailer cum tent. (Photo left - in the front).

Quite spacious, loads of storage space and the bed on top of the small trailer.

Gerhard and Kleintjie (forgot to ask her name, but that's what everyone calls her) were in another tent (photo left, at the lefthand-side.)

There were more grass in front of this stand, so we pitched 2 gazebos there for shade.

The ablution blocks are very clean, with showers, toilets and even 2 baths. Also with toilet paper and soap at the basins. Outside the ablution building, there's a dish wash area. Cleaners are seen throughout the day with brooms and mops.

With everyone unpacked and settled in, we lit the fires, cracked the cold ones and relaxed. The day has cooled down a bit and we heard birds all over the trees. An Inyala buck sauntered through the camp. Munching leaves and leaving behind his 'calling card'.

Dinner was some lovely lamb kebabs in a marinade (Woolworths) with boerewors (sausage) and potato salad. There are electric sockets and low-wattage lamps at every stand, but with a powerful gas light, dinner wasn't a feel-feel experience.

Over coffee, Gerhard and Hein were talking and then discovered something interesting - Gerhard was Hein's Matric Science teacher. We've met Gerhard once before, but when he mentioned that he was a teacher at Hein's school, the penny dropped. What a small world...

Our first night on the mattress. It went well. Hein and I had a lovely sleep. The mattress was firm enough and big enough to be comfortable.

Johannes, Gerhard, Kleintjie & Eric rose early on Saturday morning to play some golf. We made some coffee, had a rusk and then Ina joined us for a game drive. Naomi stayed behind to do some sketching.

Just outside the caravan park, we saw the ostrich family - dad, mom and 3 offspring. (The other one was just out of my view.)



Then we saw these warthogs, snuffling around for roots.

All the animals are quite tame.

But although Mabalingwe advertises the 'Big 5', we were quite disappointed in not spotting them.





In the Mabalingwe Nature Reserve, is the famous 'Kalahari Oasis Pub' – (from left to right) Ian Roberts, who played the crotchety, pipe-puffing Boet, alongside Moegae (Fats Bookholane) and Swaer (Norman Anstey). The Castrol Oil adverts as well as the comedy series 'Kalahari Oasis' was filmed here.

Hein took some stunning photo's here.



(Photo left below) They've taken a toilet seat cover and glued a bird on it. (Photo centre below) An old hospital bed. (Photo right below) How smart – they've taken tin baths, cut them in half and added legs for bar stools.



Fanie, the barman, at Kalahari Oasis Pub. There are also no glasses – only tin mugs.

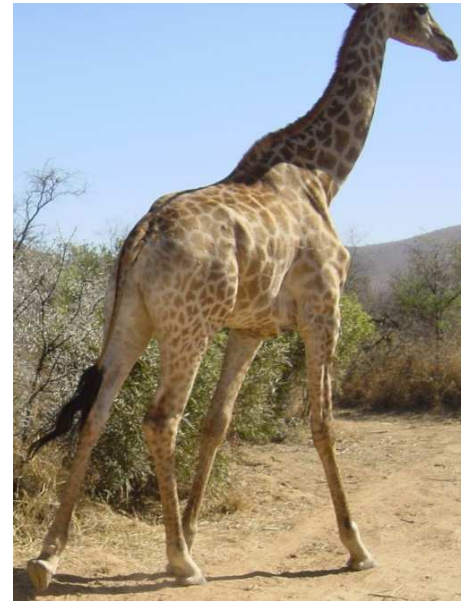


We only saw a few buck, zebras and giraffes.

Unfortunately, I cut off this poor fellow's ears when I took the photo.

This was taken at the Giraffe's Water Hole.

There is also an Elephant Water Hole.



This fellow was thirsty, but very wary.

'Look to the left, then to the right ..'

And then he bent down and drank.

Interesting that when he lifted his head, he did it with a jerk. With water spraying all over.

But we were not quick enough to capture that.

After our game drive, we braaied some boerewors, had some coffee and went for a nap. The tent was quite stuffy inside – maybe we should have taken a fan, not a heater.



Later the afternoon, we went to the Ingwe Camp for the Sharks Rugby on a big screen.

Just look at this gorgeous view from the deck. I had a lovely Strohrum Dom Pedro and after tasting it, Kleintjie also ordered one.

Ina had a glass of white wine, which she said only tasted better when it was nearly finished.

The rest of the group had beers.

After a winning victory, we returned to the camp. Another lovely evening for a braai.

We had marinated chicken pieces, boerewors and rice salad. It worked out so well, making the salads and marinating the chicken beforehand. (Of course, the camp fridge helped a lot.) There were also steaks, baby potatoes, carrot salad and garlic mushrooms.

We went to bed and had another good sleep on our mattress.

Sunday morning we had coffee, while Gerhard made French toast, Kleintjie made a fruit salad and everyone else pitched in with eggs, tomatoes and bacon for the breakfast.

Unfortunately, our tomatoes, onions and eggs were frozen solid, but we contributed bacon and a tin of baked beans.

After washing the dishes, everyone started to pack up. We approached our tent with a relaxed attitude and under 6 curious and watchful eyes, managed to 'un-pitched' our tent within minutes. We were applauded.

The rest were easily fitted into the trailer and off we went.

### **My fear for camping has been conquered.**

Although I must admit – without the storage cupboard and the camp fridge, it would have been so-so.

Buying the tent, storage cupboard and fridge will happen within the next few months. For the extra baggage, we'll just hire a trailer again.

I've been quite relaxed the whole weekend, took everything in its stride and enjoyed it immensely. Although I won't claim Mabalalingwe to be a 'hot and great' spot, there are loads of other camping sites with lovely grass, more trees and just a bit more space around us. Interestingly, even Hein commented on the 'space' issue.

On our way home, we dropped the tent and cupboard at Hugo, went with him for lunch at Irene Dairy Farm, got home and I'm pleased to say – around 4pm, everything was unpacked, packed away, washing done and I could sit back and enjoy the evening with hubby.

Can't wait for our next camping trip...