

McDOUGALLS BAY HOLIDAY

Since our Hondeklip Bay holiday in 2004, we knew we'll be back to that part of the West Coast. We decided on McDougalls Bay, just outside Port Nolloth – just south of Alexander Bay.

On Friday, 7 March, I took the kids to their hotel around 2pm. Around 2:30pm, Hein looked at me and said: "Why don't we pack and stay en route to Kuruman?" Well, no begging was needed. Had a look on the Internet, thought something at Lichtenburg would be nice. Phoned the El Gro hotel in Lichtenburg, packed and drive off after 4pm.

Arriving in Lichtenburg around 7pm, we were quite knackered. Drove down the main street past a few guesthouses, turned into the hotel's parking lot (not at all secure), walked in and had a look at the room. We turned around, said we would be back and couldn't leave fast enough. It wasn't scruffy or neglected per se, but there was just an atmosphere...

Drove back to a guesthouse in the main street, Sundown, looked at the cars parked behind a secure gate and fence and booked us in. Francien had a room available and we went to the Spur for a quick bite. By that time I nearly fell asleep – so tired!



After a hearty breakfast and a nice chat with Francien, we continued to Kuruman. We were booked in a bush camp, with the most extinguished feature that the 'chalet' only has 3 walls. www.soetvlakte.co.za We thought it would be an experience, although the inbred Joburg paranoia made us a bit apprehensive...

Soetvlakte Bush Camp is 124 km's outside Kuruman. We arrived there just after 2pm. No sign of the owners, but the workers expected us. Apparently someone had applied manure to the bush camp, so it wouldn't be suitable for us to sleep there.

Irritation thorn no 1...

The suggestion was that we could share the guesthouse with another couple. A couple that was suntanning in their undies! And the guesthouse is just a chalet with 2 rooms and a living area. I can't even remember now if there were 2 bathrooms...

Irritation thorn no 2...

With no cellphone reception, the worker managed on his phone (probably MTN) to get hold of the owner. Doreen. She had a different story. Because of the rain, they thought it would be uncomfortable for us to sleep in the bush camp. And they didn't think we would have mind sharing with the other couple...



We thought we'll go and have a look at the bush camp. On our way, the worker stopped his bakkie for no apparent reason and that's just where the Hein-Alma irritation kicked in with a vengeance. We backed up, shouted at them 'not to worry' and decided to drive to Upington. On our way back to civilisation, we saw this big lizard-iguana.

I was nearly devastated – we were looking forward to the experience. As soon as I got a signal, I phoned the owner and when she answered, told her in no uncertain terms that we would e-mail her our banking details and she can reimburse us. (We have paid for that night plus dinner & b.fast, as well as for 2 nights going back home).

And wouldn't you know – she had yet another story. Apparently, we should have made the effort of going to the bush camp, because it turned out not to be so bad after all! We nearly flipped our lids. Something fishy was going on, but we didn't care anymore.

Dialling 1023 I tried a few numbers in Upington. All of them either fully occupied or not open for business.

Now I was really getting depressed. We settled upon the Upington Protea Hotel and arrived there after 6. Lovely, wonderful hotel. We wanted a room on the river, so settled for a smoking room. Turned out a blessing, because after unpacking, I ordered a large G&T and had a nice cigarette. Yeah, yeah, so I stopped for a year. Big deal. Had a few on holiday and stopped again.



After a nice shower, we drove to Le Must Restaurant. It is a wonderful restaurant with the most amazing food.

For starters we had Kalahari Oysters (skilpadjies of lewer in netvet). Hein had a wonderful steak with green peppercorn sauce and I had mussels with bacon and Springbok carpaccio and delightful red wine.

We left Upington at 7. Just outside Kakamas we stopped at the Vergelegen Wine Farm for breakfast. A lovely coffee shop furnished in black and red leather with creative photographs on the walls. www.augrabiesfalls.co.za



We ordered omelettes and strong coffee – the food portions are big. We had to introduce the waitress to 'Americano Coffee', but she understood and made the coffee the way we like it!

From there onward to Springbok. To stock up on groceries.

We arrived in McDougalls Bay just after 2. On our way to pick up the key (www.portindigo.co.za) we were a bit puzzled by the houses. You will find a nice, modern, big house with a shack next to it.



So, although I've seen a picture of our holiday house, after the Kuruman disaster I was a bit apprehensive. But totally ungrounded...



(Left) Lovely long patio with a braai.

(Below) View from the patio.



Although I didn't realise at first, the house is a prefabricated building. 3 Bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, lovely lounge/dining open-plan although the kitchen is a tad small. Gorgeous wooden floors, sturdy and well-cared-for old furniture. The rooms are all tastefully decorated. There are also 3 braais – 1 outside the kitchen, 1 on the patio and 1 in the lounge.

And the view – the view! The walking distance to the sea is about 100m.

McDougalls Bay is about 3kms from Port Nolloth. There are no shops. But they do have 4 estate agents – Seeff, Carit and 2 local ones.

In Port Nolloth you'll find a biggish Supermarket, a Spar, a hotel, 3 restaurants, 1 coffee shop, 2 liquor stores, 2 fish shops, Engen garage, Pep Stores, butchery, post office, museum... and a shop where they sell anything – from cars to cutlery to sweets to clothes to ANYTHING!

The butchery has the MOST AMAZING boerewors you've tasted! I've even phoned them to enquire if they don't supply a butcher in Gauteng – but alas!

We have however supported them faithfully for 8 days – every morning we had our coffee and then we lit the fire. Looking out over the ocean, the weather mild and sunny with the smoke tickling your nose ...

Wanting to support the local community, we looked for a restaurant. Mamma's Restaurant's décor looked uninviting; the hotel's dining room also lacked the atmosphere. Which left us with Anita's Tavern.



OK, so I'm a snob. The outside didn't really tempt me. But Hein reminded me of previous experiences – where the outside fail to reflect the true gem hidden inside.

So we ventured inside very cautiously ... and yes ... were VERY pleasantly surprised.

In fact, we had dinner there 3 times. The portions are HUGE (true West Coast style). Hein had a stunning steak, my prawns were huge and succulent and the service good.



The interior's cosy, rustic and filled with all kinds of memorabilia.



On the Wednesday, we decided to take a round-about trip of 240km. From Port Nolloth we drove North to Alexander Bay, then Kuboes, Lekkersing and back to Port Nolloth.

Alexander Bay (right) is very dull and brown.

We felt like a snack, so stopped at the 'Mall' (Pep Stores, Sentra Grocery Store, Borderline Coffee Shoppe and 2 other shops).



Walked into the Borderline Coffee Shoppe, enquired about lunch. We were told we could only order toasted sandwiches, since anything else only gets delivered on a Thursday (the following day). We settled for

toasted ham, cheese & tomato (Hein) and a toasted cheese (myself). While we had some Coke and coffee, I heard the ping of the till – and saw the girl walk out of the shop, across to the Sentra. Returned with a loaf of bread.

Our sandwiches arrived – uncut and every knife and fork a different style. Then she remembered serviettes – again we heard the ping of the till and she returned a few minutes later with some serviettes. My sandwich was a bit dull, so I asked for some tomato sauce.

I thought I heard the ping of the till – and I nearly fell off my chair thinking surely she's not going out AGAIN to buy tomato sauce? But she had some in the kitchen.

The temperature outside was 18 oC. We drove to the beach (temperature dropped to 16 oC) and decided to follow the 'road' (two tracks in loose sand) to the river mouth (where the Orange River flows into the sea.)



(Left) The water is so brown, that you can't clearly see the difference between the river and the sea. (Right) Those were some fishermen – on the Namibia side of the river.

The scenery on our way to Kuboes, consists of grey sand and shrubs. But every now and then when the Orange River is in sight, you see some amazing green orchards and trees on the river's edge (left below).



In Kuboes, there are only a few workers' houses. Hein stopped at this café for a Coke – but the fridge was empty. Their supplies arrive on a Thursday.



In Lekkering, another small workers' village, limestone is processed for stepping stones and the likes.

With no shortage of limestone, this owner thought it a good idea to decorate his house with it. (left).



(Right above) Another quaint little blue house in Lekkering – the temperature has now risen to 30 oC, so a tin house would be unbearable. We were back in Port Nolloth early afternoon.

On Saturday we drove down to Hondeklip Bay, to visit friends at Die Honnehokke. (www.hondeklip.co.za – self-catering chalets) We stayed there for 3 weeks in 2004 and had a blast. Collected mussels, braaied, partied, more mussels, braaied, partied...



We had arranged for a permit, driving through De Beers property, through Kleinzee, Koingaas and then Hondeklip bay – took us 2 hours. Although Koingaas used to supply fresh fruit and vegs at the Spar, under new management that option has ceased to exist.

Hondeklip Bay has developed a little bit since our last visit. New houses for the local workers, a tented camp & restaurant and quite a few artists have come to stay.

Elise & Ninette keep themselves busy with extraordinary pottery – created from black clay. Attie and Hein barbecued the meat for lunch and we caught up with news and gossip.



After 9 days, our holiday came to an end. We decided to have breakfast at Port Dump (Port Indigo's breakfast venue).

(Far Left) Port Dump

When you enter Port Dump, the floor is covered with broken shells (top). I think that's a very practical idea. No need to vacuum, no need to wash the floor, it's eco-friendly, it's cheap. Only thing is, barefoot will not be an option.

We headed for Kakamas, to book into Vergelegen B&B. (That's where we had the lovely breakfast on our way to McDougalls Bay.)

At Pofadder, we stopped at the service station.



Went to the bathroom – and had to pay R2 – to enter!

In the middle of nowhere, probably a 2-horse-town – one has to pay for the privilege of going to the loo.

Well, I do suppose it keeps out the ... grasshoppers? Mice?

At Vergelegen B&B (www.augrabiesfalls.co.za) we booked in and asked for a 'sundowner spot'. We were referred to Khamkirri, about 20kms away.

Khamkirri (www.khamkirri.co.za) is a 7500 ha Private Game Reserve on the Northern banks of the Orange River. Accommodation can either be camping, bungalows or a farmhouse.

We had some drinks – look at this amazing spot! Right on the river's edge.



Vergelegen's rooms are beautifully decorated and comfortable. We booked dinner for 7pm.



Dinner was outside next to the fountain. While we were having some wine and enjoying the balmy weather, I heard these strange little 'zap' noises. Turned out to be a blue fluorescent light for the bugs.

The menu reads like poetry. Unfortunately, the Afrikaans version sounds better than the English.

Blomme vanuit korale-prag Avoritz met eie gedaante. Vanuit koraalriwwe pluk ons 'n filoblom met 'n binnekroom van steurgarnale en geurige avopulp.

Meermin pante Doeksagte calarmariringe. 'n Huweliksvoltrekking tussen ons diepgebraaide ringe en wondersous.

Groot kokkedoor Hoenderlewer peri-peri op eie werf se toring. Ons eie der duivel van 'n hoenderlewer – vir watter vuur sien jy kans? Smeulend, aan die brand of siedend.

Oewerbos 'n Sampoenoës in 'n bakkie. Ons speel met kabouterhuisies, wanneer ons wit knoppiesampoene met kaas vul en dan bedien met ons tuisgemaakte mayonnaise.

We arrived home on Wednesday at 17h30. Peak traffic. And was actually shocked to see so many cars!

South Africa has many hidden vacation gems. It is well worth driving to remote, unheard-of 'dorpies', to experience the warmth of the people, the abundance of their cuisine and the beauty of God's Hand.