

NATURE-BONDING WEEKEND



Standing under an outside shower is pure addictive, revitalizing, therapeutic bliss! Gazing up into the trees (trying to see snakes or spiders) while hot water splashes over your shoulders, is an experience not to be missed.



A bond with nature is formed, never to be forgotten.... although

heating the shower water is another story altogether! A donkey story.

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About a month ago, we decided to go away for a weekend. We found a lovely cabin in the Northern Drakensberg, called Ingwe Cabin. (<http://www.wheretostay.co.za/ingwecabin/> - R250 per person per night, minimum of 2 nights.) (George & Suzette Spies - 082 406 6271)

One lonely cabin looking onto the mountains sounded the perfect getaway. Phoning to book, I was told they were quite full; the only weekend open was 17-20 April. Well, since it was my birthday on the 19th and hubby's on the 20th, we booked it promptly.

During the 2 weeks before our mountain weekend, Hein had a big project to finish, so worked quite late some evenings, as well as over the Easter weekend. He looked forward to some rest.

Friday, 17th April, dawned crisp and clear - our alarm beeped at 05:00, we had some coffee and packed Rissiepit, our Pajero. We left home at half past 6 and stopped at the BP Garage on Beyers Naude to fill up with petrol and breakfast. At the McDonalds. Yeah, yeah, I know some people can't abide McDonalds, but honestly, we like their food. We each had an Egg Sausage McMuffin, Hashbrown and more coffee. With our tummies full and Rissiepit's tank full, we started the weekend.



At Harrismith, we turned towards Bethlehem, then towards Bergville and saw this guy (left) sitting on a traffic sign. We arrived at Little Switzerland's gate at 10h30. Booked in at the gate, bought some ice at the hotel and started the 7 km gravel road to the cabin. In serious 4x4 gear. No other kind of vehicle is allowed. And then we realised why ... the road is not earth-shatteringly bad but is filled with, actually the road is just loose stones (above right). The zebras just stood and

gazed at us.

A few serious up-and-down hills (I found the side of the road at that stage to be VERY interesting) but the Pajero yawned her way through. The going is very, very slow and when we reached the cabin, we were amazed to find it took us more than an hour! No quick 'hopping into town' or 'buying more beer'-stuff.

When we stopped at the cabin with George waiting for us, we saw huge baboons galloping over the 'golf green' next to a small dam. Quite a few of them with some tiny ones clinging for dear life. Sadly we didn't take photos and although I looked for them every day, didn't see them again.

George showed us around, explained the hot water process and left. After unpacking everything, Hein parked the car under a verandah and we decided she'll stay there till the Monday. This meant, severe chilling was in order!

Hein immediately went to feed the donkey ... he wanted to try the outside shower. OK, a 'donkey' is a concrete structure with a chimney (photo left) with 2 drums inside filled with water, via a pipe from a water source. Then a fire is lit beneath the drums (photo right), heating the water. There's then a pipe from the drums to the outside shower, enabling you to have hot water.



I just had a quick shower, filled with Joburg nerves, anxiously looking around for peering eyes. The combination of nerves and 'guilty pleasure' is quite a heady perfume.



Weigh-Less chicken

viennas in buns were lunch and then, of course, we had to test the queen-size bed. There are 2 rooms, 1 with the queen-sized bed, another with



2 single beds. There is also a bunk bed in the lounge. A single bathroom, complete with ball-and-claw feet, basin and toilet inside the cabin. Using camping storage units in all the rooms and bathroom, proved to be space-savers and quite ingenious.

The kitchen was well-stocked with everything you could possibly need. A lovely 6-seater table and chairs for dining, enough storage in a beautiful old sideboard for groceries and a gas stove. Solar-powered lights are all over, but we used them sparingly. Wrought-iron candle holders with candles were here and there, and provided us with ample light.

A lovely fireplace in the lounge for winter nights, although I must admit the seating on the furniture were a bit hard. Plumper cushions would be more comfortable.



Outside on the verandah was another pub-style table with seating, looking out onto the mountain and protected from the weather by a roof and side-windows.



The 'braai' area (photo left) around the corner had another table & seating with an umbrella. A few plastic chairs were provided.



On the other side of the 'braai' area, is the outside toilet. Very comfortable indeed. And with a lovely view down the valley. The 'cellphone corner' was this lovely spot (photo left) with a table and chairs. With the exception of the table on the verandah, this is the best spot for a signal.

Hein started to light a fire for ambience – but it didn't go so well. The wood (loads and loads of it) was a bit wet and needed nearly a packet of firelighters to get going. We did manage a fire in the end, but not for cooking. Peri-peri baby chicken was on the menu for dinner, but after struggling with the fire, it was already dark. And very very cold.

The sky was pitch-black and thousands and thousands of bright stars were studded all over. The Milkyway was right over our heads. We tried to take photos, but you need some special lenses for that.

Realising that a chicken will take too long, we fried onion, bully beef and baked beans in a cast-iron pan on charcoals. Real cowboy-style – and I even ate mine straight out of the pan. Wicked! In bed, everything was quite dark – the moon only a sliver. We fell asleep amidst the creaks and sighs of the cabin.



When we woke up on Saturday, it was already light. While I was making coffee (Pronto coffee bags in the flask with boiling water – pity about the chicory taste) and washing the dinner dishes,



Hein stoked the donkey. Smoke was escaping the chimney like they were on fire – hang on, they were!

Lighting charcoal for breakfast, we enjoyed our coffee, drunk on Nature's beauty. The mountains changed colour with the rising sun and the cows were grazing on grass.

After our boerewors rolls with tomato relish, Hein had a shower and then took a nap.

Reading *'Miss Chopsticks – Xinran'*, I was immersed in Chinese cultures and food. *'It is the story of 3 sisters, who, like so many migrant workers in today's China, leave their peasant community to seek their fortune in the big city. Sisters Three, Five and Six don't have much education, but one thing they know for certain: their mother is a failure because she hasn't produced a son, and they only merit a number as a name. Women, their father tells them, are like chopsticks: utilitarian and easily broken. Men, on the other hand, are the strong rafters that hold up the roof of a house.'*

Just before lunch, we saw some Eland (large antelopes) licking the cow's salt blocks. When we walked closer to take photos, they ran away.

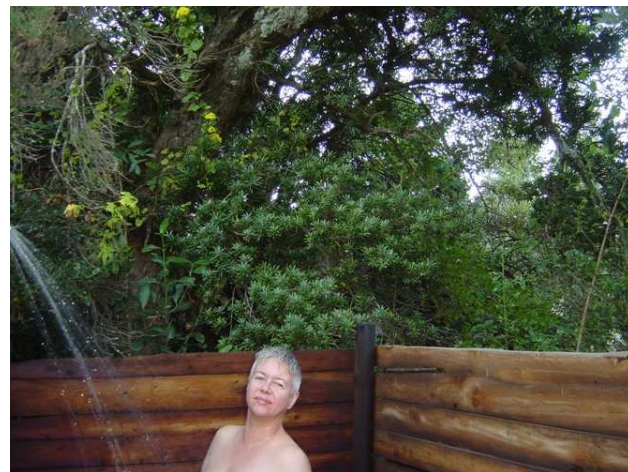
The lettuce was half-frozen, so I made a lunch salad with tomatoes, cucumber, cocktail onions, cheese and poached egg. Scrumptious. Hein was given a bug puzzle by a friend. 9 squares to be fitted together. It's a bit tricky and I was not allowed to touch it. When I pointed out wrong fits, he 'growled' and I left him alone. After a few tries, he succeeded and only then was I allowed to try. (I forgot to adjust the camera setting for a close-up photo.)



Leaving my city nerves behind, I went for a shower. Never before have I experienced this invigorating thrill. While shampooing and soaping, you turn in circles –



now you see the bare rock with the shower head, then the shrubs and leaves close by, then the pebbles on the floor, then the Bluegum treetops, then the mountains afar... The water is pleasantly hot, the breeze gives you goose pimples and you smell the wood smoke from the donkey ...



Chopping wood for a bonfire, we relaxed with our books. Hein had a real battle with drunken insects though. Every time he picked up his glass of red wine, 2 or 3 small insects were swimming around. As soon as the sun went down, we fetched our jackets and sheepskin slippers and took deep breaths of fresh evening air.

A peri-peri marinated chicken sizzled on the coals, while I prepared instant mash with sweetcorn and tinned peas. And then my blood nearly froze in my veins – we heard jackals and baboons. And I got a bit uncomfortable. Would the fence around the cabin keep them out? With only a few candles and a small moon, the darkness felt like a blanket... We ate at the kitchen table with the door closed. I adore nature, but am still scared of the wilder side.

On Sunday we woke up just after 6. Carla, my youngest sis from Perth, phoned me and we talked for a while. In-between coffee and rusks, I was busy with phone calls and sms messages.

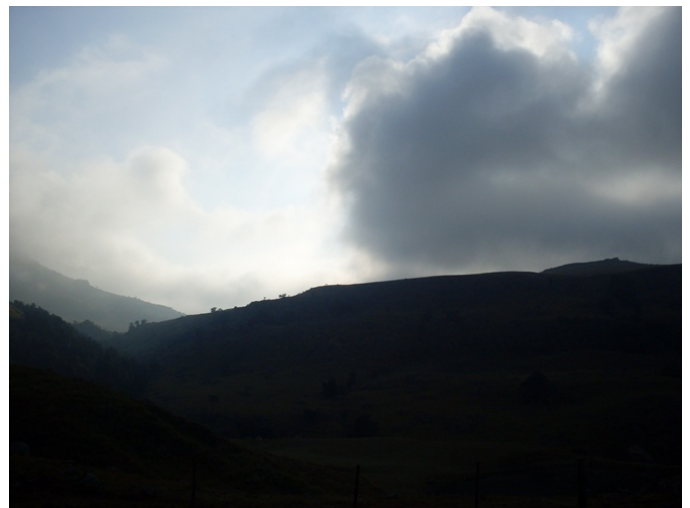
Preparing some lovely braai sandwiches with onion, tomato & cheese, Hein lit the fire for ...? Yes, boerewors!! It was just around 10 and the weather was mild, so we enjoyed our brunch outside in the sun.

After a short nap and tinned fruit cocktail and custard, we had some tea and relaxed outside. All of a sudden I spotted an eagle circling high up in the air. And then it disappeared again.

We should have stayed a bit longer, because it usually takes Hein 3 days to unwind. But spending most of his Saturday napping and snoozing, helped a lot.

Grilled steak and lamb kebabs for dinner, with baby potatoes, tinned Denny mushroom-pepper sauce and sliced beetroot. Hmm. Needless to say, half of the meat wasn't eaten.

With the popping sound of the gas lamp, we read our books and felt wonderfully relaxed.



Waking up on Monday, we found the weather changed – cloudy, misty and chilly.

After coffee we packed up, cleaned the kitchen and just before locking the door, Hein remembered his wallet in his bedside table's drawer.

Driving back on the gravel road to Little Switzerland's gate, we felt very sad leaving this beautiful scenery and weekend behind.

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With no outside shower planned for the future, I will have to glue branches and leaves onto our shower wall