

A Swift Breakaway – in a Little Swift Chalet

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Tuesday, 15 December 2009

Deciding to have 3-day breakaways over December, we decided on Little Swift Chalets (www.swiftchalets.co.za – 012 207 1391 – R500/night) in the Skeerpoort Valley, on the banks of the Magalies River. About 40 minutes' drive from Johannesburg, close to Hartbeespoortdam.

In the morning, I quickly had a haircut and came home to pack. Hein was already home, but soooo lazy to load the car. We left after 12 and in Broederstroom, we stopped at the Rusty Kitchen (right) for lunch. It's a huge barn filled with gifts, paintings, jams, tins, handbags, etc. I asked for a bunny chow, but they didn't have it that day. So I opted for a chicken burger, while Hein had a boerewors roll.

Has this ever happen to you? I would go to a coffee shop / restaurant. Look at the menu and order something. And so many times it has happened that only that one specific item I chose, isn't available. *If only I can remember to ask the waiter/waitress beforehand if something is out of stock.*



Armed with a chilli sauce and orange/lemon poppy seed rusks, we drove on to the chalet.



There are 8 chalets, sleeping 2 each. For small kids, they'll add beds in the lounge. Open plan kitchen and lounge (top left), with lovely Jetmaster and comfortable cane furniture. A wall divides the bedroom from the lounge/kitchen. There's a separate toilet, but the big corner bath is in the bedroom (top centre) – and looks out onto the river. Outside on the verandah there's a braai, picnic table-set (top right) and a shade made with thin poles. *(Not watertight, but luckily we had no rain.)*



About 100 m from the chalets, is a huge lapa. Complete with a whirlpool swimming pool, a larger (not too deep) pool, braai area, chairs and loungers. Driving past prune trees (with very small prunes), we saw zebras, emus and various small and bigger bucks.



Emus are the largest birds of Australia and 2nd largest in the world, after the ostrich. They are very fast (about 50 km/hour) and like water. On hot days they'll roll around in puddles with their feet in the air. I must admit, they're mighty ugly birds. We were quite cautious in approaching them; their feet looked kick-dangerous and their feathers were extremely matted and dirty.

Arriving at our chalet, I quickly took some photos of the inside and unpacked the groceries (*the bar fridge is just big enough for 3 day's food and drinks*) and a bit of our clothing, while Hein fetched some wood. There are only 4 hangers in the bedroom (yikes...) and no drawers for t-shirts, shorts and undies (*although later I did*

find a basket drawer-unit in the kitchen).

After unpacking everything, we had a short nap. *Now, for those who sneers at afternoon naps, in February 2007, BBC News had this to say about a study of naps: "Taking 40 winks in the middle of the day may reduce the risk of death from heart disease, particularly in young healthy men, say researchers. Experts said napping might help people to relax, reducing their stress levels."*

Lighting a fire, we had a cold one looking out over the river. Spotting a big lizard, we watched him slide over the river bank. (*One of our new year's resolutions is to buy a camera with a good zoom – that way we'll catch all these lovely moments.*) A big Songololo (*it's a millipede*) was also sliding/slithering around the grass.

Deciding to unwind further, Hein drew a big bubble bath and armed with a glass of red wine, sat back and watched the river. After a while, very cautiously and furtively looking around, I slipped into the bubbles with him. Pure heaven!!! The windows are made of Perspex and can't open, but the view ...

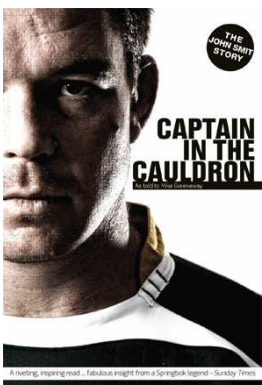


After our bath, Hein stoked the fire and we sat outside, listening to all the sounds. Guinea fowls were flying up high into trees for the night. Wanting to prevent smoke going into the chalet, we closed the glass sliding doors. A spider was busy weaving his web and to keep an eye on him, I stood up to switch on the outside light.

With an almighty bang I walked right into the closed glass sliding door. Frozen for a few seconds, I quite dazed and Hein shocked, I then gingerly felt my right-hand-side upper lip – I had half an Angelina Jolie upper lip ... and an egg on my forehead! Quickly grabbing some Arnica tablets, I stuck them under my tongue. I was not amused. (*Arnica tablets have*

been widely used as supplementary homeopathic treatment for bruises, strains and sprains, for pre- and post-operative care, for muscular pain, and for shock and trauma, among others – available in Dischem pharmacies, pharmacies or Clicks stores).

Buying groceries, I looked for a nicely marinated flat chicken (flattie). A Jalapeno one caught my eye. When Hein opened the bag onto the braai grid, he said it were wings attached to breasts. No problem. After a while though, the pieces separated and we realised it were all wings. It came out perfectly roasted and spicy. As a side dish, I microwaved a sachet of rice and veg. It came out a bit too dry, but luckily I brought along tins of peas, corn and sweetcorn.



Trying to open the can of sweetcorn with the chalet's can opener, we found it impossible. Hein tried with a knife and manhandling the lid, we managed to open the can.

Hein bought the biography of John Smit, rugby captain and started to read that. My library choices were 2 books by John Grisham – 'Skipping Xmas' (a comedy and also a movie, called The Cranks) and 'The Last Juror'. We read in bed and listened to the frogs outside. Just before we turned out the lights, I had more Arnica tablets for my Angelina lip.

Wednesday, 16 December 2009

By 3am, Hein was wakened by a missed phone call – we turned over and slept. I woke a bit later and was surprised to find it was only 6am. It was already fully light outside.

Hein made some coffee (our trusted Uno machine) and told me he had a funny dream: he was a policeman for the Queen of England. And her name was Mrs Ball. I asked him what uniform was he wearing – he just scowled at me and said: “don’t ask me details like that.” Haha. My lip, although still swollen, wasn’t noticeable at all.



Sitting outside with our coffee, we had some of the orange-and-poppy seed rusks. Yuck! No taste at all.

Remember the non-working can opener? For breakfast Hein braaied – you guessed it! – boerewors. But with no working can opener, the can of Chakalaka relish is no good ... Hein suddenly grabbed the car keys



and returned triumphantly with his Leatherman knife. And before you could say – can opener – the can was opened! My own handyman!

With boerewors sizzling on the coals, we toasted hot dog buns and with Chakalaka relish, had a lovely breakfast outside.

And then we heard it – a fish eagle! Aaah, one of the most amazing sounds of Nature.

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After breakfast, we read for a few hours. After a quick bath, we drove into Hartbeespoort area (Harties), looking for a pub. *For those who haven't been to Hartbeespoort dam – there's a one-way tunnel crossing the dam. While you wait for your turn to enter the tunnel, you can buy anything from perfume, handbags, glasses and cd's from the vendors.* Hein's window was open, so every single one said hallo and wanted to give us a good price for their goods.

Imagine this: if I had soooooo much money, I will hire a panel wagon. Put a fierce-looking armed guy in the passenger seat and 2 people in the back with cash. Then I will buy every single item from each and every vendor. Can you imagine the look on their faces??

There's a zoo and snake park in Harties, but we decided against it. With the 16th a public holiday, people were swarming around. At My Place opposite the zoo we had a drink, and then drove on towards the Jasmyn Windmill. With no parking space available, we noticed this lovely sky restaurant (right). SKYe Bistro had a Lavazza coffee sign outside, so I was hooked. At the bottom, you pass through a lovely mosaic-decorated door and up 3 flights of steps. Piano music was floating down. Halfway up, we started to get a bit apprehensive. White gauzy fabric was wrapped around the stair railings ... and sure enough, everyone in the restaurant was dressed very nicely. Asking if it was a private party the answer was 'yes'. Now why, why did the owner not have the common sense to put a sign to that effect at the bottom of the stairs??????? Why would we ever want to go back there to try their food?????





Driving on we decided to go to The Ring. (www.thering.co.za – 012 259 1506) *The Ring is a museum of 6 renovated ox wagons, authentically restored for accommodation. Each wagon has a double bed. Attached to each wagon is another room with 2 single beds and a shower/toilet/basin. It's bed &*

breakfast (R410 pppn) not self-catering. Breakfasts and lunches are eaten under a thatch roof or in another ox wagon. Lovely grass with picnic benches and hammocks are ideal for children, as well as a small splash pool.



As we drove into The Ring, we saw they offered lunch 'Ouma se Kos – R129.99 per person' (*Grandma's food – R129.99 per person*). The fence around the tables is made of whisky barrel slats (top left). The roof has been built around a tree and the bar chairs are made of tractor seats (top centre).

In the centre they normally build a huge bonfire (that's why the roof has the centre opening – top right) and on Saturdays they host up-and-coming Afrikaans singers. They only play Afrikaans music while you eat.

A wooden trough was filled with freshly baked bread loaves – R22 for a big one, R12 for a medium one and R3 for a baby size.

The buffet starters were three bean salad, greek salad, pasta salad and small individual beer breads. Mains were *Bobotie (Bobotie is a slightly sweet, curry-flavoured mince dish – proudly South African)*, lamb stew, roasted chicken, pumpkin fritters, samp, rice, wheat, roasted potatoes, veg and squash filled with corn. Desserts were Milk tart, apple tart, ice cream with chocolate sauce, Koeksisters (right), fudge and lamingtons.



(A **Koeksister** or **koesister** comes from the Dutch word *koekje*, the diminutive of *koek* meaning "cake". It is a South-African syrup-coated doughnut in a twisted or braided shape (like a plait). It is prepared by deep-frying dough in oil, then dipping the fried dough into cold sugar syrup. Best eaten cold, Koeksisters are very sticky and sweet and taste like honey – Hein took this picture of Koeksisters in England – his brother Deon made them with ginger syrup.) Followed by cheeses, biscuits and coffee.

Everything we ate (we couldn't possibly eat everything on the menu) was really tasty and yum, except the Milk tart – it needed a bit more umph! It's a nice drive out to The Ring from Pretoria or Johannesburg for a weekend lunch.

After a short afternoon nap, we had a swim in the pool. Another couple from Centurion joined us – or rather, the guy joined us into the pool, the girl was too shy and stayed on the side.

Reading our books outside, Hein made a fire and we enjoyed the silence. For dinner, Hein concocted on the hot plate stove a mixture of bully beef, green peppers, onions, baked beans and eggs. Served on fire toast with cheese. (*We didn't plug in the toaster properly, so thought it didn't work. Toasted the bread on the braai grid.*)

Thursday, 17 December 2009

Waking up just before 6 am, I heard this funny noise. When Hein said hot air balloons, I shot out of bed, grabbed the camera, unlocked the door and there they were ... we were right next to Bill Harrop's Balloon Safari's and the sight was lovely. As you watch the flame go up, you only hear the noise a few seconds after. A trip is quite expensive – R1900 per person. That includes hot chocolate & marshmallows on arrival, a 1 hour trip, sparkling wine and breakfast.

Leftover bully beef-mix sandwiches for breakfast and Hein finished his John Smit book.

Every time we're in the Harties area, we look for a pub/restaurant on the dam or river. And can never find any. Maybe it's a good thing though, cause the dam water does smell a bit.



Stopping at the Jasmyn 'The Windmill Restaurant' <http://www.thewindmillharties.co.za/> - It's a huge Dutch windmill close to Hartbeespoort Dam. It has a restaurant, delicatessen/shop and a lovely bookshop), we had some savoury pancakes and coffee. Asking for an Americano coffee, I had to explain what it is. Double espresso in a COFFEE CUP topped with boiling water. It came in a



coffee MUG. No, no, no – a cup! Then they charged me R18.50 – tsk, tsk. But just look at the cute windmill cookie!

At the deli/supermarket, we bought this chilli sauce, called Devil's Hot Sh*t. It has a really good taste with a fierce bite in it.

Driving back to the chalet, just after 1pm, we needed charcoal. At 2 small local stores, we stopped – they were all closed. We realised they were Muslim-owned. Luckily we found some charcoal and ice at the 3rd store.

Late afternoon we had a swim and was joined again by the Centurion couple. He swam, she just sat on the lounge. Weird. But although I splashed around, I waited till they left before leaving the pool.

Wors, steak and chicken thighs were braai'd on the charcoal fire - veggies inside on the stove. We had an early night.



Friday, 18 December 2009

I awoke before 6 with a clang and a bang. Saw quite a big grey-blue baboon/ape on our dustbin. Luckily he ran off. We saw some more balloons and had coffee outside.

Deciding to have breakfast at the Jasmyn windmill (Hein wanted to buy more of that chilli sauce), we packed, bathed and by 8 were on the road.

Around 10, we were back home.

It was a lovely 3-day holiday – close enough to home, but far enough to unwind.
