

REEDS RIVER LODGE - IMPULSIVE BREAK-AWAY

When Red Man Technologies (the company Hein started 4 years ago) sent out their Xmas function invitation, we were pleased to see that the venue was one of our favourites – Leopard Lodge, close to Hartebeespoort Dam.

Leopard Lodge (www.leopardlodge.co.za / 012 – 207 1130) is an exclusive, private four star function venue on a 248Ha game farm situated in the protected natural environment of the Magaliesberg Mountain range in the Hartbeespoort Dam area. It is just a short 55km drive from the hustle and bustle of Sandton and 60km from Pretoria. On Sundays you can book a table for lunch and have a drink on the grass overlooking the dam.

Not wanting to drive back home after the Xmas lunch on 29 November 2009, we searched for some overnight accommodation. Although Leopard Lodge had availabilities, their prices were ridiculous – R1000/couple/night. *If they had any business sense, they would have realised we're a party of 35 people and could have given us a room at a lower price.* In the end, their high prices proved to be our blessing.

Searching around, I found 'Reeds River Lodge'. They had a chalet available the Sunday night, not the Saturday. (www.reedsriverlodge.co.za – Adolf 083 303 1325) They have 6 chalets, 4 of them sleeping 3, 1 sleeping 4 and no. 6 sleeps about 8. Our chalet was R550/night, but will be R600 next year.

Two of the big wedding venues in the area, Leopard Lodge & Green Leaves, refer people to Reeds River Lodge for accommodation, thus on Saturday nights they're normally fully booked.

Hein immediately made an electronic transfer, but then we received a call from Adolf, the owner. They had a cancellation for the Saturday night – yes, yes, please, yes!!!



Saturday, 28 November 2009

Planning the menu for the 2 nights, we packed everything on Saturday morning. Arriving at Reeds River Lodge around 13:00, we walked up to our chalet and gazed in wonder ... right in front of us were the Crocodile River. (left) And Mulberry trees (right)– lots of them.



Unfortunately, all the lower mulberries were picked, but Hein managed to pick some for me. And quickly washed his hands. Mulberries stain like nothing! His feet were stained for 2 days!



(Above left) The chalet seen from the 'island'. (Above centre) Fireplace on patio. (Above right) Picnic table-set on patio.



(Left) This is the 'Island'. Its right across the river from the chalets. A lovely place (and the only place where you can use wood) for a big fire, braai or just socializing. (Right) A queen-sized bed. Everything is in one room, but there's more than enough space.



(Left) They also have another bed / daybed as well as chairs and small tables. A lovely bathroom with a big shower is separate.

The kitchen (right) is small, but extremely well equipped. I would like more space for groceries, though.



While I was unpacking the clothes and kitchen stuff (including our Uno coffee maker), Hein started the fire on the patio for our lunch. He called and showed me the smoke ... (right) then showed me the bag. Supposed to be smoke-less charcoal! Lovely Grabouw sausage and hot dog buns with a tin of Spanish style tomatoes for lunch.



The table was moved so that we can watch the river while eating. Heaven! While the river flows over the rocks, it made a lovely burbling sound. After lunch, I had a small bottle of Mozambique Nougat Liqueur given by a friend (*thank you Heleen*). It tastes quite similar to your other cream liqueurs, but I could taste the sweetness of nougat.



Our attention was suddenly caught by a small yellow bird – starting to build his nest (left) – ok, no yellow bird. My little camera's a bit too slow for movement ... but this is the beginning of his little house.

Feeling the peaceful atmosphere, we had a little nap with a breeze flowing through the chalet.

For the Springboks rugby, Hein went to a pub while I read 'The Innocent Man, by John Grisham'. *I'm still busy with it, but it's based on the truth and the legal system that sent innocent men to jail for murders. Quite riveting!*

Before sunset, I walked over to the Island. Do you know what wet leaves smell like? It's just amazing!



Hein arrived back with a bag of wood. We carried our camp chairs and drinks down to the Island and made a lovely fire (now that's how you're supposed to start a fire – photo top right).

Sounds surrounded us – lions (*ok, they were frogs*) and other small little insects. And then we saw it I cannot remember when last I've seen one ... A firefly!!! Both of us promptly broke out into song " 'n Padda wou gaan opsit by sy nooi in die vlei, ha-ham" (*a frog wanted to go on a date with his girl in the swamp...*) And the funny thing of the firefly – he/she dims and bright. The little light goes on and off as it flies.

By 8pm, we were quite hungry and walked back to the chalet for dinner. I was going to attempt a dish, Meatball Stew.

A month ago we had a family day at my cousin, Lizelle & Mark's home. We decided to have a bunny chow day. 4 Different pots were made the previous day, to be heated up on the Saturday. It worked splendidly. Hollowed out buns and 1/3 loaves of bread were filled with the stews. The stew I was fascinated with, was Lizelle & Mark's. It was a red-hot meatball stew.

I decided to make my own version. Adapting a Hungarian meatball stew recipe, I started our dinner. On a charcoal fire! Never again ... my arms were 'burnt' from the heat and the coals are too slow for me. You know me – I like things to be done 'chop-chop'.

My version of Hungarian tomato-ish meatball stew

± 680 g mince
 ½ cup bread crumbs
 1 large egg
 Salt & pepper
 2 tbsp oil
 2 carrots, grated
 1 small onion chopped
 2 tbsp flour (optional)
 2 tbsp sweet paprika
 1 cup beef broth
 1 x tin Chakalaka – medium & spicy
 ½ tin Spanish style tomatoes
 Mixed herbs
 Dried chillies
 Soup powder (optional to thicken at the end)
 Paper towel



In a large bowl, combine the beef, bread crumbs, egg, 1 teaspoon salt, 1/4 teaspoon pepper and 2 tsp mixed herbs. Mix well and form into small meatballs.

In a large pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, add the meatballs and cook, shaking the pan often, until lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat in the skillet and add the carrots and onion. Cook, stirring constantly, until softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in the flour, chillies, herbs and paprika and cook for 1 minute. Pour in the beef broth, Chakalaka and tinned tomatoes and bring to a boil over high heat, season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the reserved meatballs, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer gently for 10-15 minutes. (original recipe from <http://penniesnpounds.blogspot.com>)

What I did 'wrong', was I cubed both the carrots and potatoes – but they took too long to cook, so we just ate around it. With the carrot grated, it should make a difference. The taste was scrumptious!!! And I didn't have to add the soup powder, the sauce was thick enough. I also simmered the meatballs only for a short while, because we were starving by then. But the meatballs kept their shape and was lovely and tender! Hein is quite intrigued with this recipe and is very keen to try it out. I will also make it again, but on the stove – thank you very much.

While we ate, a young couple passed our chalet on their way to the Island. One of the owner's dogs, a dachshund, appeared at the lady's side in the dark and she nearly jumped out of her skin. We just giggled. They then returned with another couple – both men carried huge cooler boxes with beer & coolers, the women carried the charcoal bags and meat. We went to bed.

Sunday, 29 November 2009



Waking just after 6, we had lovely coffee while sitting on the patio, gazing out at the river. By now the yellow bird was probably halfway with his little nest. Flying back and forth with long strips of grass to be weaved in.

Knowing we're going to have a big buffet lunch at the Xmas party, Hein lit the fire for BBQ sandwiches. Just tomato & cheese, enjoyed with some Habanero sauce (Hein) and sweet and sour sauce (me.)

Showered and dressed, we left the chalet by 10h30. It took us 5 minutes to reach the Leopard Lodge.

But on our way, we saw this huge field of ... cabbages!!!! Interesting enough, it wasn't fenced in. Maybe people don't really bother stealing cabbages? When I took the photos, I could actually smell them – phew!

Arriving early at Leopard Lodge, we had a lovely cold drink with Mike & John from the company. The Lodge provides reclining camp chairs on the lawn under the trees. It's just sooo peaceful gazing out over the dam.

People arrived in drips and drabs with children, babies, spouses and girlfriends. Kids were swimming, playing ball while the adults chatted away. At some stage there was a nasty wind, but it calmed down in the end.



Leopard Lodge has a splendid buffet meal. Starters were: cold meats, smoked chicken, smoked salmon, oysters, fried calamari, breads, patè, etc. Mains were: roast beef, roast lamb, cauliflower with white sauce, grilled potatoes, pasta with veggies, stir-fried veggies, rice, gravy, etc. Desserts were: choc mousse layered with whipped cream, baked pudding, ice cream with choc sauce, Pavlova with cream and fresh berries, cheesecake, etc. And then cheeses and biscuits.

After lunch, Red Man's Father Xmas arrived for the Red Man kids (left): they were ecstatic! One girl bargained with him to exchange her girly present with a plastic baseball bat – her brother got one, she wanted one too! Luckily Father Xmas had some spares.

With all the excitement over, everyone moved to the lawn again. The kids tried out their new toys, the adults sprawled on the chairs drinking red and white wine. After 6pm, the waiters have nearly packed away everything else, so we took the hint and said our good-byes. On our way out, we spotted these zebras. There were buck as



well.

Driving back to our chalet, Hein bought 4 bags of wood. While driving toward the chalet, we saw 2 of these river crabs quite a distance away from the river – where were they heading? Maybe they had their Xmas party as well ...

At the chalet, I quickly removed my make-up; we dressed in shorts and t-shirts and walked to the Island. Sipping our drinks, we saw the firefly again.





After burning most of the wood, Hein braaied chicken thighs and we enjoyed it with coleslaw and pasta salad. (And just in case you're wondering why we ate after a buffet meal for lunch – we were very good and had normal



portions. I even surprised myself by only choosing 1 slice of cheesecake.)

Tired from all the chatting at the party, we cleared up and from the chalet patio, took this lovely photo of the Island (top right) - read a bit, showered and went to bed.

Monday, 30 November 2009



Feeling refreshed, we woke up around 6 and had coffee. With our binoculars, we watched our yellow bird – we could see the little wife inside. Although he still brought her little twigs, he also brought her little leaves for the inside. Hopefully she liked the little house.

Deciding to leave at 9, Hein lit the fire for breakfast. Grabouw boerewors again with whole-wheat buns and left-over sauce from the 'Hungarian stew'. Oh yum, double yum!!!!!!



Packing up everything, we showered and left. It was such a lovely weekend and the venue is amazing. We'll definitely go back during the week, when they're normally not fully booked.

On our way back home, we stopped at '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. Just look at the colourful flowers outside! At the opposite is a new development – lovely new shops and restaurants, eg: 'Die Blou Vy' (*The Blue Fig*) – worthwhile checking out when next in the area.

Within an hour, we were back home. Isn't it lovely to have such 'break-aways' so close to home!

