

## **RUBY – an unexpected jewel...** **February 2010**

With no long holiday break over XMas, both Hein and I were starting to feel tired ... we needed a weekend away.

Deciding on the weekend, Thursday 18 Feb till Sunday 21 Feb, we booked ourselves in a double-storey Safari Tent at the Ruby River Resort. The resort is in the Limpopo area, between Middelburg and Groblersdal, about 2 hours' drive from Randburg, Johannesburg.

Excitedly, we packed up early Thursday morning and left by 9 am. Picking up toasted sandwiches and coffee on the way, we started our long weekend.

The Pajero was packed to the roof – all Hein kept asking was: how long are we going for? Tsk, tsk.

After a few stops along the way, we arrived at the resort just after 12. It's fabulous to book in that early and we eagerly took our key and drove to our tent. And stopped short ... why was there a staircase on the outside of the tent?

Exploring closely, the bedroom is upstairs with a double bed and 2 single beds, but to reach the bathroom and kitchen/dining area, you have to use the outside (without a roof) staircase. Very puzzled I phoned the reception. It seemed there was some miscommunication about the staircase info – or maybe I was so tired I didn't hear her mentioning it.



*(View of the Olifants River, from the balcony of our A-shape chalet)*

Within a few moments, she phoned back to say we can move to another chalet. For the same rate, but it's an A-shaped thatched roof chalet. Not right on the riverbank, but we could still see the river flowing by (quite fast!). It has a loft (only to be reached from the outside) with 2 single mattresses and a small balcony.

Downstairs it has a bathroom with toilet, basin and lovely big shower. A small open-plan kitchenette, double bed, basic doorless wardrobe, dresser with mirror and a desk with 2 chairs. Outside is a sunken bath under the roof, hidden behind canvas screens. No view from the bath. Then a built braai and pub table-cum-bench set.

All of a sudden, a Pointer dog joined us. He carried around a plastic pipe and fetched it every time anyone threw it. Everyone called him a different name, no-one seemed to know his real name.

Unpacking everything (or mostly everything), we had tinned Viennas and baked beans on toast. And relaxed on the bed for a while.

When we re-surfaced later the afternoon, the people opposite us were complaining heavily about their hot Safari chalet. These tents are right on the river bank, with a double bed and bunk beds, open plan to a kitchenette, bathroom and also with a sunken bath on the patio. But at least sitting in the bath you have the gorgeous view. When they walked into our chalet, they couldn't believe the difference. With our thatch roof and a fan in the chalet, it was a lot cooler.

Ruby is a big resort with numerous different accommodation options. I'll mention 4 that I think most appropriate:



*The camping terrain – lovely grass, not too many trees and some of them close to the river. During the week, the rates are R40pp, weekends*



*are R50pp and high season, R60pp. I didn't check the ablution blocks, but they looked fine from the outside. There are 2 swimming pools. (photo above left)*

*The Safari tents – there are 6 of them, right on the river bank. Sleeps 4. During the week they are R230/night, weekends R360/night and high season R420/night. Unless you take your portable aircon, its advisable to go when its cooler. They do say it gets very cold in winter, but at least one can put on a heater/jersey. (photo above right)*



*A-frame chalets – there are only 2. Sleeps 4. During the week they are R230/night, weekends R360/night and high season R420/night. (photo left)*



*Log Cabins –*

*there are only 2. They sleep 4. They are quite big, have 2 bedrooms (1 with double bed, other with 2 single beds), 2 bathrooms and a nice patio out front. I didn't see the inside though. During the week they are R420/night, weekends are R580/night and high season R620/night. (photo above right)*

With coffee in hand and a peaceful atmosphere all around, I read my book.

Do you remember Daisy de Melker? She was reportedly a serial killer, killing her 2 husbands and son with poison. From the library, I took out the book: *Daisy de Melker, Guilty or Innocent?* Written by Lènor Tancred. Lènor is from Pretoria and she recounted the story of Daisy and how she was found guilty and sentenced to a hanging. It is absolutely riveting material!!!! Lènor wrote: *What if ...she had not? This is not a plea for acquittal, an application for a belated reprieve, but a query whether there was not more room for reasonable doubt than was considered in 1932.*

For dinner, Hein braaied a steak for himself and chicken wings for me. We opened a tin of Denny Cheese Mushroom Sauce and also had some sweetcorn and peas.

It was lovely outside. We had decaf coffee (from our trusted coffee machine, yes) and looked at the stars.

### Friday, 19 February 2010

We woke at 5, but lazed in bed till 6. Then we made coffee and climbed the stairs to the small outside balcony. What a view! **(Photo on 1<sup>st</sup> page)**

With only a few people in the resort, we just sat outside and relaxed. And we heard some fish eagles! Hein opened a beer and had a closer look at the river. But not too close, since they warn you of crocodiles. Apparently one of their dogs were eaten by one. Ooooooaaaaay, then ...

In the resort, they have a restaurant, called Bike and Barrel. It's filled with bikes of all kinds **(photo's below)** and opens at 8 till late. Even the pub opens at 8 ... Holiday heaven! At the reception, an old Vespa is parked in the garden, with a flower sprouting from the 'seat'.



Breakfast beckoned and we decided to try the restaurant. It's quite big, with an inside pub, inside restaurant and a huge deck with outside seating



looking out over the river. There is also another swimming pool and a mini putt-putt. While gazing over the river, we saw this little fellow walking on the railing. **(photo left)** Their breakfast menu consists of 3 options. A small English breakfast, bigger English breakfast and a ham, mushroom, onion and cheese omelette. I chose the latter and it was absolutely smashing!!!! With tea (when I read the Daisy book, they all drink tea.) Hein chose an English breakfast and although a bit cold, it was good. No real coffee though – only Ricoffy.

At the entrance to the restaurant is a big sign advertising firewood and ice. No, they didn't have firewood. (Sigh).

After breakfast, we drove to Groblersdal (about 22 km) to buy firewood. I don't know what I expected of Groblersdal – probably just another small country town, but we were pleasantly surprised. All your big shops are there, even a Woolworths. And Pep Stores – 4 different stores!!!!!!!

But in the whole town only 1 traffic light. After buying the firewood and a few odds, we drove back – anxious to be out of the town hustle and bustle.



Eager to try his hand at fishing, Hein walked off with his gear. With a Leatherman knife, he made himself a forked stick (**photo left**) to rest the fishing rod on. After a while, he phoned me to say I should join him. Covered with suntan lotion (but not enough!), armed with my book and chair, another beer for him and a cold drink for me, I walked down in the sun. There was a lovely big tree with shade. I laughed at the Pointer, he nearly took out the forked stick, thinking he could play with it.

And when he was hot, he would walk through the shallow river waters, splashing around. He is obviously not too afraid of crocodiles. After a while, we packed up. Hein said the river is just too fast for fishing.

For lunch we lit the fire and had our trusted boerewors and buns with tomato relish. Yum, double yum! I suddenly spotted something in a small tree next to our braai – a tiny nest. (**photo right**) When I showed it to the neighbours, they said it was a Paradise Flycatcher's nest, but he didn't finish it. It was just soo small.



Surprisingly the camping terrain has not filled up yet ... new people moved in across from us. A lovely retired couple from Erasmia, Annemarie & Morris. They have family out from Holland and so everyone came to Ruby for the weekend. They also complained about the heat in the Safari Chalet. Also on the patio of the Safari Chalets facing the river, there's no hiding from the sun. They were actually sitting in the shade on the other side (our side) of their chalet.

With a Sharks game on at 18:00 that night, we first went for a swim in the big pool. For some reason everyone used the other smaller pool, but yikes – the water wasn't even cold! Its almost the temperature of bathwater.

Securing a table in the pub, we ordered a snack platter for R52. Wow, how delicious. A variety of calamari, fish fingers, chicken wings, samoosas, deep-fried cheese bites and chips.

An interesting décor aspect of the pub – countless Jagermeister bottles hanging from the ceiling. (**photo left**)

At halftime I ordered a waffle with ice cream and chocolate sauce. Delicious. Which is more we could



say from the game ... ooooh well, so it goes.

We walked back to the chalet and decided to have another swim. Hein looked at the Kreepy and found it didn't work properly. When he felt around, he found a girl's red bikini bottom sucked to the Kreepy. How she got out of the pool ...

Afterwards, we stopped at our neighbours (in the other A-frame chalet) and had a chat. He's from the mines and she a housewife. The evening was quiet all around and very peaceful.

### **Saturday, 20 February**

Waking late, after 6, we made coffee and had it on the balcony. The sound of the river was just sooooo amazing – quite loud but very soothing.

For breakfast we lit the fire and talked to all the neighbours passing by. The Erasmia couple were having a party that night. *Ruby Resort also caters for parties, conferences and weddings.*

Feasting on our boerewors rolls and relish, it was just pure holiday. Children were splashing in the pool from early on and the adults didn't sit outside – they got in too. It was very very hot!!! I preferred to read inside at the fan, while Hein was chatting to this one and that one. In his element.

Deciding to have a light lunch in the restaurant, we were not too satisfied with our choices – I had chicken livers and Hein had a mixed grill. It was mediocre. Our waiter, August, had on some spiffy black long-toed shoes. But the soles of the one shoe was loose. So he just tied some elastic bands around the front of his shoe ... it looked soooo funny!!!



Driving out to Loskop Dam, we took some photos of the overflow. **(photo above left)** Absolutely amazing. But with the heat, we got back quickly into our aircon car and drove around some more. When we pass some fields with green plants, I became quite fascinated by it. **(photo above right)**



**Note to farmers: could you please! Please have notices on your fields next to the road – stating what you planted. It drives me craaaaaaaazzy not knowing something like that ...**

Guessing what it could be, I guessed tobacco. But when we stopped, I realised the leaves were too small for tobacco and the plants had small green pods. For some reason, Hein suddenly guessed Soy Bean Plants. When he googled it, it looked just like that.

When we got home on Sunday, I googled it again. In a Mpumalanga Agricultural Budget speech

([http://www.mpumalanga.gov.za/media/speeches/agriculture/11082009\\_budget.htm](http://www.mpumalanga.gov.za/media/speeches/agriculture/11082009_budget.htm)) the following were said:

### ***Soya Bean production for Bio Fuel:***

*The department assisted farmers who benefited from the Land and Agrarian Reform Programme to actively take part in the bio-fuel industry; we fenced 27 farms for the production of soya beans in Gert Sibande District. In addition, 19 tractors were purchased with implements and were used to plough over 8 000 ha and planted over 3 042 ha with soya beans, maize and sunflower on farms in Gert Sibande and Nkangala Districts. How interesting!*

Arriving back at the chalet, it was starting to cool down a bit. Hein went to watch the Blue Bulls rugby game with some of the neighbours. I relaxed and tried to meditate – floating in and out of wakefulness, it was great and left me invigorating.

While the neighbours dressed for their party, Hein started the fire while we had Cape Velvet on ice (me) and whisky (him). But after a while, he said he didn't feel like a braai and suggested we walk to the pub.

I had my eye on chocolate brownies, so I ordered the snack platter, but finished only half. Hein had a lovely T-bone steak with pap and sauce. It was another heavenly night. Kids were still swimming and everyone was just lazing around. We were quite shocked when we looked at the river level – it was steadily rising. Hopefully not too high, since the restaurant's basement is veery close to the river.

Our last night ...

### **Sunday, 21 February**

While I made coffee, Hein said he's not climbing the 'tower of Pisa' today for his morning coffee. We had it outside.

Annemarie & Morris came and joined us with their coffee. Most of the people around us were Afrikaans and we had such nice chats.

With heavy limbs, we got up and started to pack. It actually went very quick and just after 8, we said our goodbyes and left.

In Middelburg we stopped at a Wimpy for breakfast and headed off home.

It was just such a lovely, relaxing, winding-down weekend! Will definitely go back again.

Just look at how relaxed I'm on this photo ... almost in a trance.

